

Thomas Hoving

January 15, 1931 – December 10, 2009

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

April 5, 2010

WELCOME

Trea Hoving

Moments With Tommy, a video

REMARKS

Philippe de Montebello

Director Emeritus, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Fiske Kimball Professor, The Institute of Fine Arts

Harry Parker III

Director Emeritus, Dallas Museum of Art
Former Director, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Both Sides Now, Judy Collins

The Honorable Henry J. Stern

Former Commissioner, New York City
Department of Parks and Recreation
Founder, New York Civic

Donovan B. Moore, Jr.

Former Producer, ABC, *20/20*
Managing Director, Bessemer Trust

Amazing Grace, Judy Collins

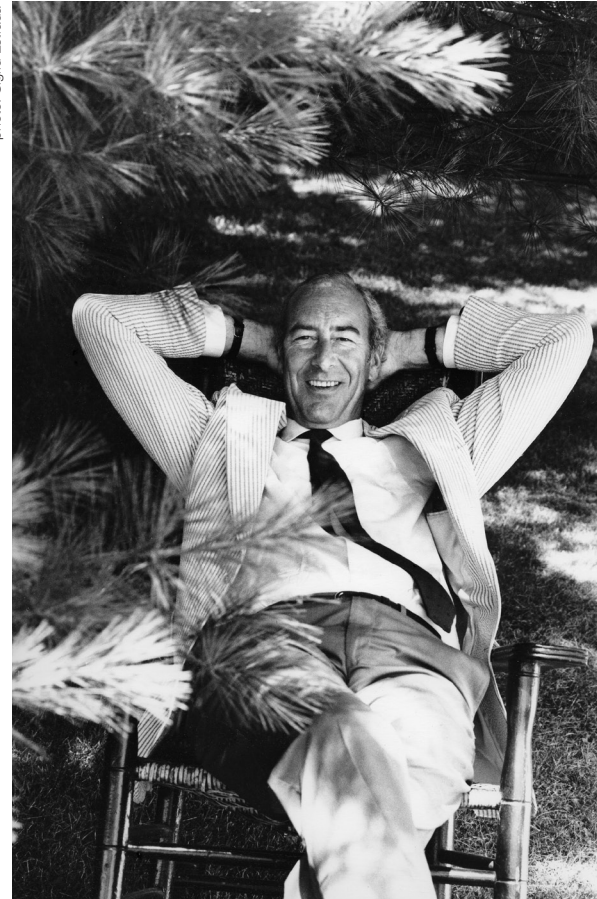
IN CLOSING

John Hoving

A RECEPTION WILL FOLLOW

Remembrances

photo: Sigrif Estrada



It was hard not to be overawed by the swath Tom Hoving cut through the world. He had the energy of a fourteen-year-old (but not always the judgment, as his wife, Nancy, once quipped). He was brilliant, profane, restless, informal, open, a connoisseur but not a snob, self-centered but not self-absorbed. He seemed unafflicted by doubt, brimming not just with contempt for convention, but with aesthetic confidence, curiosity, a craving for adventure. I still feel liberated by his advice to forget the mincing bit-by-bit approach to museum-going; the best way, he said, was to blitz the galleries until you found one prepossessing work of art that halted you in your tracks because it had touched something boundless and profound in your being.

“I’m fifty-seven years old,” he said once, swatting away a swarm of dull story ideas. “I want my time to count.” It was hard to reconcile the

man with an encyclopedic grasp of art, the man who had hung on every note of a performance of Shostakovich's 6th Symphony at Tanglewood, with the man who would commandeer the TV and hook up his portable 8-mm video-recorder so he could watch *Robocop* from his collection of illegally taped movies. Or the man who, when he was sightseeing above the Berkshires in his Falcon Experimental Ultralight—an aircraft that looked like a giant wimple that had escaped from the head of the Flying Nun—would dive at the house where his wife and daughter were having tea and pretend to be strafing a meeting of the Axis high command. *Robocop* notwithstanding, I think making his time count was connected to his almost pathological aversion to boredom, his desire to be entertained and the even more pressing desire to entertain. He was a gifted raconteur, and, like many storytellers, I suspect he was sometimes not above embroidering the facts to enhance the tale. At a dinner party in East Hampton on the last day of 1988, he had vied for center stage with the distinguished American novelist Joseph Heller until Heller bowed before Tom's antic account of squiring Jackie Onassis around Moscow and an impromptu discourse on the mysteries of Ancient Egypt. Mummies, Tom told the group of us, were so numerous in the 19th century that the Egyptian railroad used them for fuel. "Think of it!" he said. "Mummies by the thousands tendered into boilers of locomotives." And, he added, "some of them were wrapped in shrouds on which the five lost plays of Euripides had been batikked." "Now wait a minute," said a young literal-minded banker named Rick. "If they were loading the bodies, why wouldn't they save the shrouds?"

There was an awkward silence in which the enchantment of the story began to dissipate. "Am I the only one who has a problem with this?" Rick asked.

Tom looked miffed until someone said, "I don't think the rest of us are following as closely as you are, Rick," which made everyone laugh, Tom loudest of all, and prompted our host to freshen the champagne.

To this day I don't know whether the shrouds of mummies burned by Egyptian trains were batikked with the lost plays of Euripides, but I can imagine why Tom might have added that boggling and unlikely detail. The story, as embroidered, had everything that mattered to him: relics, mystery, priceless texts, the heedless fire of modernity, and that little touch of artistry that can reach across time and preserve an ancient night. In this case, one of his.

—Chip Brown

There are a few real iconoclasts who blow up the dusty status quo with their imagination. One was Tom. He had a grand vision for closing the park on weekends, staging concerts there, creating vest pocket parks and then, at the Met, advertising megashows with banners, transforming the museum into the beautiful, inviting place it is. On top of all that, he taught me how to ski—not quite to Hoving standards but good enough that I'm still grateful to him when people compliment me.

The only people I have ever loved lived out of the box. Tom not only lived out of the box, he trampled it, stomped on it, shredded it and then told a grand tale about it. Which is my way of saying that I really loved him a lot.

—Lacey Williams

photo: Sigrid Estrada

I hope Tom knows how very much those who worked most closely with him admired what he achieved in his tenure as Director. I was witness to all of his remarkable initiatives and achievements, which were the outline for many—if not most—of the great achievements that followed under Philippe's leadership. Tom's brilliance about the master plan was only one of the things he will be long remembered for. I also loved working for him—there was no one I ever met who could equal his humor, enthusiasm and profound understanding of what the Met was and needed to become.

—Ashton Hawkins



Tom was my boss at the Met and my friend for 35 years. My fondest memory is of the time I joined him in Egypt during his negotiations for the King Tut exhibit in 1975. Here his audacity, exquisite taste, competitive spirit and ability to adjust to circumstances—a necessity in the Middle East—all came into play.

Our meeting was with Gamal Mokhtar, president of Antiquities at the Cairo Museum, at his dreary office on Ramses Street. It was a large room stuffed with files and crowded with people waiting to see Mokhtar. We joined a line with a dozen other supplicants. Mokhtar



At the Temple of Dendur, 1975

did not even acknowledge our presence. Every half hour a small boy would appear with a tray of strong Egyptian coffees. (Tom would later call this meeting “a three cupper.”) Finally, it was our turn. Tom started to outline his proposal when Mokhtar interrupted and said, “Meet me tonight at the Top of the Sheraton for dinner—say about 11:30 p.m.” He then dismissed us.

Just before midnight Tom and I arrived at The Top of the Sheraton. Platters heaped with food and bottles of Scotch, vodka and wine covered our table, which was right next to the dance floor—we had the best seats in the house. Mokhtar was in high spirits. Najah Fouwad, the most famous belly dancer in the Middle East,

was performing that night. Dressed in silk and jewels, Najah finally appeared. A hot white spotlight beamed on her as she writhed and gyrated. Perfume was pumped throughout the room. Taking advantage of his relaxed and delighted host, Tom suggested that a King Tut show in America just might rival this one. Mokhtar loved the idea.

That wasn't the end of what Tom called the “epic comedy of the Tut show.” But a year later, the show opened and became what has since been called the first blockbuster exhibit. Tom certainly did have a way of “making the mummies dance.”

—Christine Roussel

I think Tom's most memorable characteristic was his boundless enthusiasm. He loved what was new and emerging—buildings, technologies, artists, music, film. He also had a great appreciation for what was classic and should be remembered. In my eyes Tom was a true Renaissance person—he could talk on virtually any topic. In his life he was part artist, part businessman, part writer and editor, part pilot, part television journalist. He fulfilled his own promise on many fronts. Tom asked us all to be more connected, more learned, more opinionated, more active. He loved a great verbal or intellectual joust. With the relentless eagerness of a five-year-old making a discovery and, simultaneously, the gravitas of an accomplished man, he left a strong and positive mark on everything he undertook. Tom put us all on our toes and at the ready in the best possible way.

—Matthew Penn



At the Brooklyn Bridge, on assignment for ABC, 20/20, 1977

In 1980, Tom and I were asked by President Sadat and the Egyptian Ministry of Culture to head up a team to plan and design a new museum at the site of the Sakkara Pyramid, which had been designed about 2700 BC by Imhotep, the first recorded architect in history. We invited I.M. Pei to join our team. He was delighted and flew to Cairo to meet us.

Following a meeting with President Sadat and later with Ministry officials, we were taken to the Sakkara site to find a suitable location for the new museum. We spent several hours walking around in the hot desert sun, marveling at the finesse and beauty of Imhotep's work. Finally, I.M. found what he thought would be the perfect site. But the officials accompanying us told us no, we might disturb tombs beneath the surface.

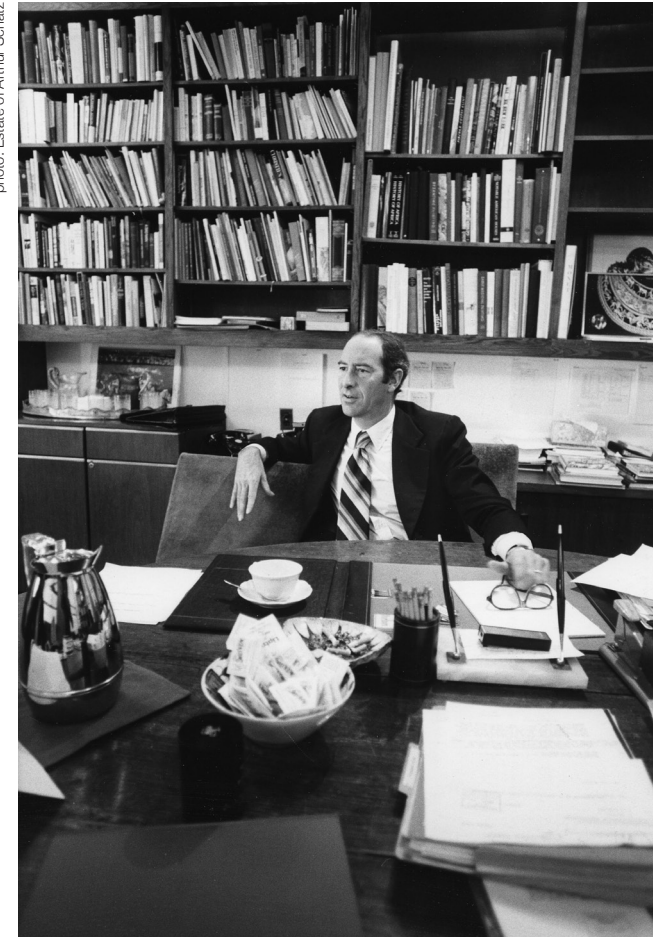


With I.M. Pei at Sakkara, Egypt, 1980

After the officials turned down several more locations, I.M. asked where we *could* put the museum. Reluctantly, they found a site nearby, which I.M. promptly declared “perfect.” Sadly, the following year President Sadat was assassinated and the project came to an end. But I.M. Pei was not to be denied his pyramid. Tom and I were convinced that his concept for the Sakkara site was realized some years later in the magnificent entrance he designed for the Louvre.

– Jerry Lawton

photo: Estate of Arthur Schatz



In the Director's Office, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975

What Tom let me accomplish in the ten years of our association set the course for the rest of my career. When he returned to the Met as Director in 1967, he plucked me out of obscurity in the Design Department and put me in charge of turning his first show, *In the Presence of Kings*, into what he called “a dazzling success.” His confidence and encouragement allowed me to experiment in ways most designers only dream of. Tom demanded that the design and presentation of art become an art in itself. In doing so, he transformed the Met. Every other self-respecting museum here and abroad followed his lead. After I left, I was known as “the guy from the Met.” I gained client after client based on the reputation I’d made so early on.

– Stuart Silver

Over the years, Tom and I had many adventures, but somehow it always came back to flying: Low on fuel, over Charlotte. Glancing a deer while landing on the grass on Shelter Island. Dodging thunderstorms over the Bahamas. Watching the moonlight reflect on the snow during a cold winter's night flight over Vermont. Sitting in little airport cafés, drinking coffee and eating homemade pies while chewing the fat with local pilots and mechanics and waitresses and National Guard pilots. They didn't know who Tom Hoving was, and, it may surprise you to know, he liked it that way.

A little over a year ago, Tom and I flew his Cessna 206 across the country to California. It was September and the weather was challenging as a result of a hurricane that was moving up the coast. We spent much of the first two days in the clouds, monitoring our instruments and catching up. The final morning of our trip, we took off in crisp, clear air and climbed to 17,000 feet. As we crossed the wilderness of Wyoming, where the sheer magnitude of the void is breathtaking, we talked for a while about Lewis and Clark. Then Tom turned on his iPod and the two of us sat up there, high in the sky, listening to Vivaldi, as we watched our country unfold before us.

—John MacWilliams

Thank you, Tom, for being such a good friend to me. For years I watched you soar above Quaker Hill, wanting to do the same. You would always fly when the air was still and the sun was low. It was the closest thing to heaven I could imagine, and I wanted a taste of it myself. Finding you by the hangar one day, I was hoping for some advice about becoming a pilot. A light seemed to go off in your head as you pulled open the crooked door of a long-ignored old flying machine. I climbed in. My life changed forever that day. You became my copilot, my mentor and, most important, my friend. You gave of your time and knowledge and wanted nothing in return. I knew you were an important public figure, but to me you were simply a good friend, one I could count on in the middle of winter to help start the old J-3 when she was being cranky.

—Jordan Lewis



With his Falcon Experimental plane, 1980s

I could never have imagined from my visit with Tom six months ago, when he flew into Great Barrington with all of his dashing bravado, that it would be the last time I would see him. Tom regaled me with his stories about being a dashing rogue prankster in Stockbridge during his student days. He told me about traipsing through Europe with you, Nancy, looking, looking, looking at art. He loved you dearly.

That day, as he took off down the runway, then lifted off, he dipped his wing as he sailed off into the sunset, a poetic farewell.

—Laurie Moffat

It was at the ski resort in Jasper, Quebec, when I was 13 that I first met Tom. After dinner my sister Sheila and I often played ping-pong. I had not yet taken French in school but had a longing to fit in. Sheila and I were quite familiar with the radio show *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, and any time either of us missed a shot or had a great one, we'd exclaim, "Sacre bleu!" Finally, one evening, Tom came over and tactfully explained the meaning of "sacre bleu" (it is the sacred blue color associated with Mary, mother of Jesus) and why it might be offensive to a French Canadian. I think he may have suggested we substitute "zut alors!" As I recall, he also explained in a similar context that "zounds" referred to Christ's wounds, and that too wouldn't be something we'd want to say. Later on I got quite a bit of mileage out of these tidbits of erudition.

–Susan Miller



Lunch with Nancy and Trea, Cloisters, 1960s

I suspect Tom is relieved to be onwards and upwards. He was such good fun when I was little and was always the quickest and the brightest in conversation. Tom was an amazing character: impossible to live with and equally hellish to live without.

–Liz Bonham

photo: mkecarsley.co.uk



Grandchildren Amelia, Katie and Matilda, 2009

I got my inspiration to be an Egyptologist from Popop, and if he is in heaven, I hope he has a great time there. For the nine years he's been around for me, he has taught me a very special lesson: always be your own person.

–Katie

I love Popop's laugh and his funny way of talking.

–Amelia

I miss his funny faces game.

–Matilda



On the tractor, Quaker Hill, New York



For me the most magical moment in the preparation for that profile ["A Roomful of Hovings," *The New Yorker*, May 20, 1967] came when Tom and I were in the museum one Monday. The place was empty, of course, "dark," most of the lights quite literally off, and room after room, collection after collection, was in twilight. At one point, we walked into a roomful of Rembrandts—a couple of dozen portraits surrounding us. While Tom was describing them, the thought occurred to me that I could structure a profile of him as a group of freestanding pictures, dealing thematically with various aspects of him and his experience, and letting the chronology just gather in the mind of the reader. I had grown weary of the tension between theme and chronology in writing biographical sketches, and for me that moment in the dark museum reversed the usual dominance and set me off in a new direction. Of course, I didn't mention any of that to Tom. He was talking—what else—and I was scribbling notes.

—John McPhee

As a little girl I clearly remember meeting Tom and being amazed by his love and passion for both my grandfather and his work.

Tom taught me the importance of listening to what my grandfather had to say about his work, rather than accepting what art historians said my grandfather was thinking.

I am certain that Andy and Tom are up in heaven raising hell.

The Wyeth family will miss Tom dearly.

—Victoria Browning Wyeth



In many ways, Tom molded my life. He encouraged the things I loved. Maybe because I considered him family, I trusted everything I learned from him. I wish I were with you today, but I'll be going to the mountain to ski hip-deep powder with Tom

in my heart and his heart abounding everywhere around me. I will call him and laugh down the mountain with him.

—Lili Ruane

photo: Neal Boenzi/The New York Times



With Guidi's *Andromeda and the Sea Monster* in 1967

Tom had one of the most creative and positive minds I encountered during my career. He didn't just have good ideas, he put them into effect. I was one of the first curators hired by Tom at the Met, and so I had the pleasure of working for him throughout his directorship. He not only made my activities there possible, he made it a pleasure to be on staff during those magical years. It was sometimes dangerous traveling in his wake, but it was never dull and was

almost always a lot of fun. I recall particularly the numerous raucous after-work gatherings in Dick Dougherty's office where we would razz Tom about his handling of the day's events. He would give it back to us in spades. Those were happy times that I treasure in memory.

—Jock Howat

The first moment I heard from Tom was an unexpected phone call in 1988 that began: "Well, John Russell finally got something right!" Tom had been to my first one-woman exhibit at the Forum Gallery and had read a lucky rave review in the *New York Times*. His opening made me laugh, it was so funny and direct. Then he continued, "All the good ones were gone. Next time I want first pick!"

From then on, Tom was my enthusiastic supporter as well as my best critic. He had a great eye and, on his frequent visits to my studio, took time with my work, paying close attention to the details. Over time, Tom wrote thoughtful and perceptive introductions to three books I collaborated on with poets and other writers. He also introduced several of my exhibitions and even flew to Washington once for an opening.

His support of my work was a great gift to a young artist.

—Wendy Mark

I was always a fan of Tommy's. I admired him and loved how he used art history—my own field—for purposes far beyond connoisseurship. He was heroic in his enthusiasm, nerve and risk-taking, flying in the face of stuffy, old worn-out American traditions. He shook up the pot with flair and humor. Tom's work on the park system alone was original beyond our wildest dreams. It sent ripples of inspiration to society, leading to new ways of thinking about cities, nature, the environment, and just plain having fun. Its effect is all around us forty years after Tommy hit the streets.

—*Consie Martin*

photo: Steve Shapiro



With Mayor John Lindsay, 1966

My late father was a childhood friend of John Lindsay and worked on his New York mayoral campaign in 1965. When Tom became Lindsay's Parks Commissioner, Dad would curse him at dinner nightly. "That bastard Hoving is ruining the tranquility of Central Park!" Yet thanks to Tom, I got to see numerous Jefferson Airplane and Grateful Dead concerts there, march in dozens of peace demonstrations, and canoodle on the Sheep Meadow with Chapin girls.

—*Charlie Finch*

Hoving took me on board at *Connoisseur* to write about the smuggling of ancient treasure, the worldwide trade in tomb-robbing and contraband antiquities. He liked the young, and he particularly liked anyone who was ready to take a leap. He opened a dazzling empyrean window for me onto a world of ancient sites, far-flung cities, murderous gangs, exquisitely carved objects swathed in history—a life of adventure.

—*Melik Kaylan*



Digging in Sicily, 1957

When I was eight years old, I spent the summer in Sweden with my great-aunt, and on my return, my father gave me a book that he had composed, photographed, art-directed, and cut and pasted himself. At the time, I don't think I was particularly impressed, but over the years, as the construction paper faded and began to crumble and the old black-and-white Polaroids turned sepia, it became one of my

prized possessions. I take it out once a year, read and remember and consider the great effort my father made that summer to construct this witty and sweet book about my beloved cat Mopsey.

—*Trea Hoving*

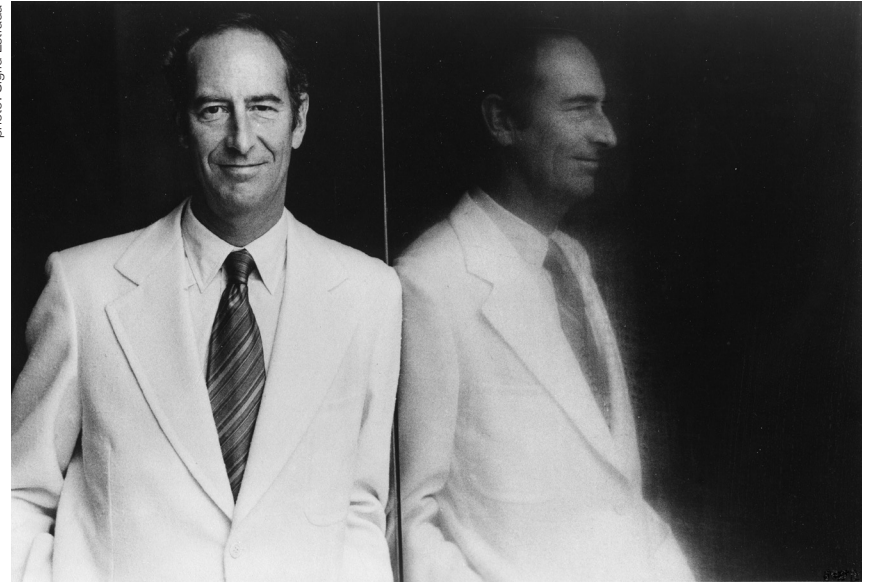
photo: Steve Shapiro



At Wollman Rink, with Trea, 1966

In His Own Words

photo: Sigrild Estrada



I still consider myself a revolutionary and am as suspicious of the establishment—in whatever form the establishment exists—as I always have been. □

There was nothing in the world like the feeling of peace and tranquility, floating around in the Falcon over the fields of Quaker Hill, seeing spring bursting forth or the leaves changing in October. On a quiet evening, I'd jump in the plane—tied down a minute's walk from the house—fire it up and have a serene hour's trip, gently wafting up and down and making slow, lovely turns. I flew it all year round and bought a pair of electric socks for warmth on freezing winter days. Flying is better in the winter because the cold air supports the plane more and the air is far more still. □

When you consider a work of art, what do you do? The process is basically intuitive, but it is good to have a guideline. Write down that absolutely first impression, that split second. Write anything. "Warm." "Cool." "Sacred." "Strong." In six years of studying hundreds of items for the Museum, I never ended up feeling warm about something I had written "Cool" about, or the reverse.

You peel a work of art like an onion. Shred every layer from it. Is it in the style of the time? How many styles exist within it? Study the iconography and the manner in which it is handled. What does it intend to say? Parallels, parallels, always seek parallels. Your eye is king.

It may be an error to buy a work of art and discover it is a fake, but it is a sin to call a fake something that is genuine. Nothing in art history is more glorious than bringing something back from the shadow of being thought fake. □

photo: Steve Shapiro



Bury St. Edmunds Cross, 1966

I once had a secret wish to become Director of the Museum of Modern Art, but I really couldn't be happy in any museum but this one. I couldn't stand being categorized into one era. □

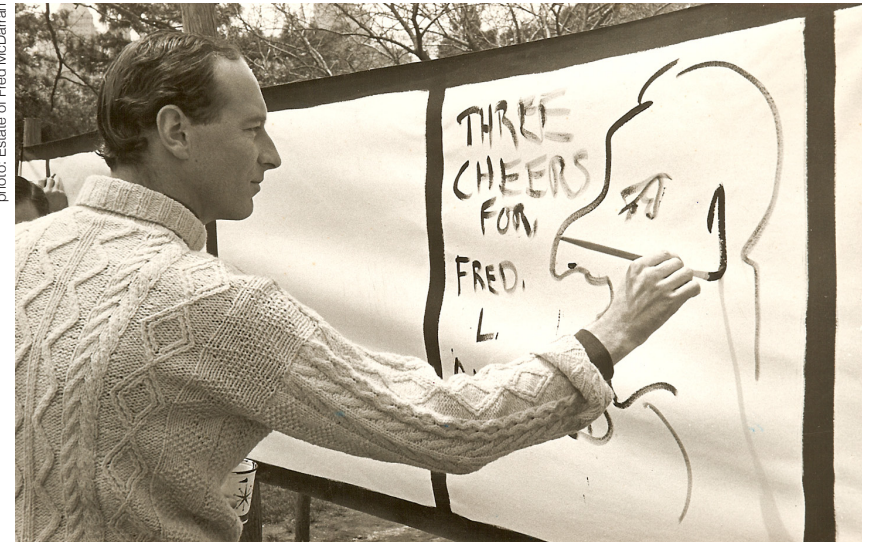
The notion that we're supposed to collect only masterpieces is a little bit false. Concepts of masterpieces change. We're collecting for five hundred years from now. We're after the top quality, but since the Museum is a great encyclopedia of man's achievement, we also collect backup material—footnotes and appendices to great chapters in art history. □

A museum can lose that sort of knife-edge. It's a matter of attitude. If you lose that one day of going for the great thing, you lose a decade. □

Phyllis Yampolsky, an artist Nancy and I had met on the way over to Europe in 1956, asked if she could organize some outdoor events in the park. One of her ideas was to take a series of four-foot square blank canvases and staple them from tree to tree, the canvases stretching out like a cartoon strip for over 105 yards. Brushes and paint would be available to kids and grownups, too, to paint whatever

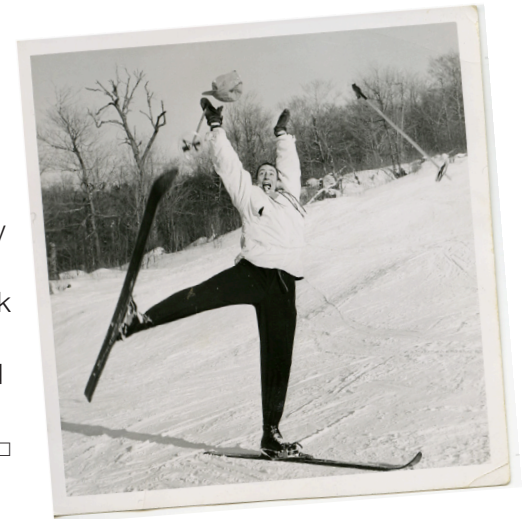
they wanted. We put it up on the lawn near 79th Street in Central Park with a squad of recreation parkies supervising. It was a splendid all-day controlled riot of the visual arts resulting in a marvelously crazy canvas palimpsest. From then on, anything I did that seemed unstructured and spontaneous was called a Hoving Happening. □

photo: Estate of Fred McDarragh



Self-portrait, drawn at the original Happening in Central Park, 1966

I have to admit that I've never given much of a damn for clothes. Some people are emotionally moved by clothes; others think of them only as something with which to ward off the elements. I am among the latter. I spend minutes purchasing a business suit but days to acquire a powder suit for heli-skiing. Has it got the right number of pockets, placed correctly? Are there Velcro fastenings? To my ears, Gore-Tex is a name sweeter than Fortuny. I can pick apart foul-weather suits for ocean racing the way Bernard Berenson dissected Florentine paintings for the Renaissance. □



Andrew Wyeth asked me to sit for a portrait that he wanted to call *The Director*. The sitting lasted for four days over two weekends in June during a vicious heat wave down in Pennsylvania. I sat in his father's old studio in Chadds Ford, dressed in shorts and a short-sleeved shirt. Andy sat on a low stool and shed his entire clothing over the hours because of the heat. "I thought the model, not the painter should be getting naked," I joked.

"Your face has always reminded me of some Medici prince," he said. "And I want to execute a profile portrait like that Italian who did the profile medal and lion drawings and the strange animals—you know, Pisanello."

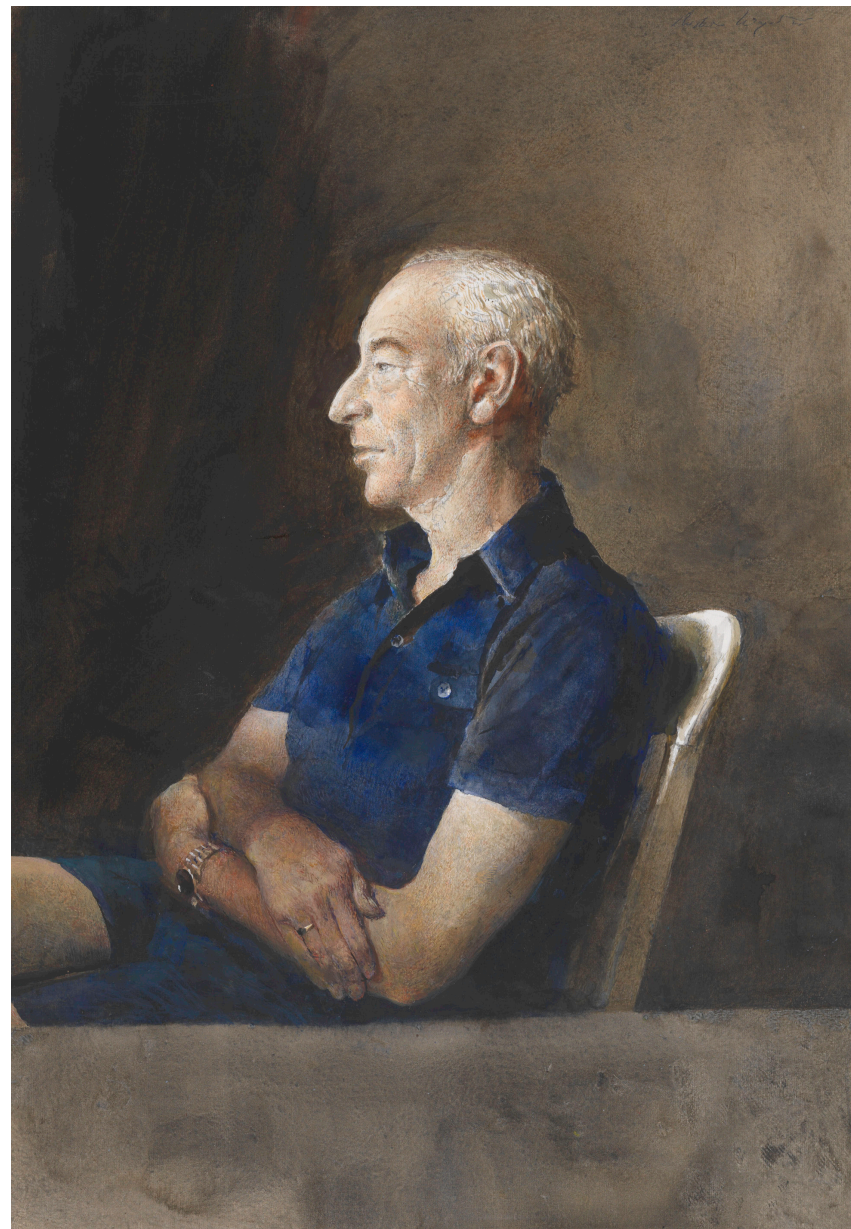
He began in pencil for the dry-brush watercolor, and when he'd gotten the feel and the proportions—which he measured from my nostrils—he took his paint box out. The tubes were mashed and scattered around as if a twister had hit. He poured water into a pair of enameled tin cups and started to wash and scratch and tip in all sorts of angles as he worked for three hours until the light changed.

After the first weekend I asked to see the results. I was astonished to see in the incomplete image not me but my father. Andy had simply captured the common bone structure. I saw the portrait again on the second week of posing. I beheld a vision of a strong presence, not a likeness but someone to be reckoned with. It was a portrait of a type I'd never seen him do before—not a formal one but a piece of energy, ugly in a sense, dominating and ready to explode. It was powerful and disturbing.

The last day it was hot as hell. I was perspiring like mad and had continually to blink my eyes for sweat was streaming into my eyes. I got a leg cramp. I asked him if it'd be okay to try to set up my small video camera and shoot the final dickerings he planned to do.

I placed the camera on a nearby garbage can and sighted through, started the tape and regained my seat of pain. It turned out by chance that if a professional filmmaker had set up the shot it could not have been better. It is the only time in his life that Andy has ever been filmed or recorded while working.

Nancy's first impression was dismay at the sight of a man she wasn't sure she knew after so many years of marriage. Andy thought she didn't like it, but he had misinterpreted her: She admired it as a work of art, something far more significant than just a portrait. □



Andrew Wyeth, *The Director*, 1993

