

Inside Art

Carol Vogel

MoMA Increases Its Braque Holdings

The Museum of Modern Art may focus more energy on contemporary art now that it has promoted Ann Temkin, who is well versed in what artists are producing today, to chief curator. But that does not mean it is passing up opportunities to strengthen pivotal holdings from the early 20th century.

Its latest acquisition in that area is Georges Braque's "Homage to J. S. Bach," a Cubist painting made in the winter of 1911-12. It will be on view at the museum later this month.

Even though the Modern has the richest Cubist holdings in the world, John Elderfield, now the museum's chief curator emeritus, said the purchase would help rectify a shortcoming. While "we can do a month-by-month account of Cubism," he said, "in that story Braque comes out second to Picasso. I always felt he didn't get a fair shake."

The canvas is one of the first in which Braque used words and letters in the composition, along with a trompe-l'oeil motif of wood. It was owned by the celebrated Paris dealers Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Henri-Pierre Roché, and later by the New York dealer Sidney Janis.

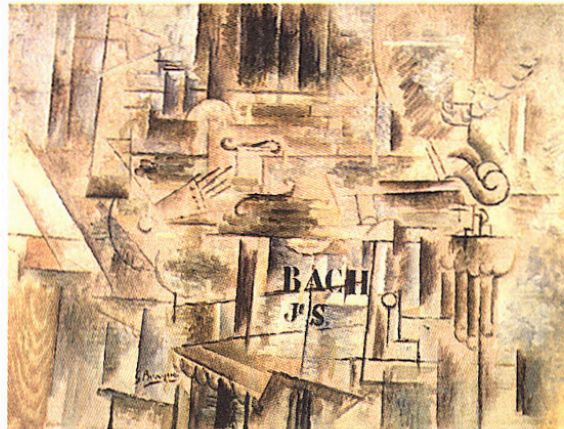
In 1967 Janis donated 103 works by major European and American artists to the museum, but "Homage to J. S. Bach" was not part of the gift.

"He didn't want to part with it," Mr. Elderfield said.

The painting was included in MoMA's landmark exhibition "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism," in 1989, but has rarely been exhibited otherwise.

Then last year it appeared on the walls of the PaceWildenstein Gallery in Manhattan as part of its exhibition "Picasso, Braque and Early Film in Cubism."

It was after spotting it at PaceWildenstein that Mr. Elderfield approached Carroll Janis, a son of Sidney Janis, about the possibility of acquiring it for



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The Modern has acquired Braque's "Homage to J. S. Bach."

MoMA. After more than a year of discussion he was finally able to make it happen with partial financing from a trustee who wants to remain anonymous. Experts say it could be worth about \$15 million in today's market.

A year and a half ago the museum managed to scoop up another Braque that had appeared in the "Pioneering Cubism" show. That 1910 canvas, "The Table (Still Life With Fan)," belonged to Ralph Colin, a prominent New York lawyer who founded the Art Dealers Association of America and died in 1985. When Sotheby's auctioned Colin's Modern art collection in 1995, the painting went to an unidentified bidder for \$1.8 million. (Today at auction it could sell for \$6 million to \$8 million.)

About a year and a half ago the Manhattan dealer William Acquavella sold it to MoMA for an undisclosed sum. With a background in browns and grays, it has a pleated shape in the center that resembles a fan.

"These are landmark pictures," Mr. Elderfield said with some pride. "Cubist Braques are hard to find because even scholars aren't sure where they all are, and those that are known are mostly in museums."

Lights in New York . . .

Starting Sept. 26 the facade of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Mu-

seum's Frank Lloyd Wright building will be illuminated every Friday at dusk with words. They will range from comments about terrorism and the Iraq war to poems about loss, grief and love.

To honor the completion of the Guggenheim's three-year restoration and the project's biggest benefactor, the Cleveland philanthropist Peter B. Lewis, the museum commissioned the conceptual artist Jenny Holzer to create the site-specific illuminations.

"The shapely building always provides inspiration," Ms. Holzer said in a telephone interview. Her characteristic epigrams as well as poems by Wislawa Szymborska and others will cascade down the facade in a flurry of white lettering.

Asked why she chose white rather than neon colors, Ms. Holzer replied, "It just plain looks good."

It is the first time the museum has commissioned a work that uses the facade of its celebrated Wright building. Not that Ms. Holzer is a stranger to the Guggenheim: in 1989 the museum organized a major show of her work.

The installation will become part of the Guggenheim's permanent collection. Ms. Holzer said she planned to keep adding sayings and poems to the piece throughout the fall and even later, creating what she called a

growing "library."

On Sept. 22 at about 6:45 p.m. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg will switch on the illumination in a prequel to the weekly viewing. After that it will be shown from sunset to 11 p.m. through December, with a special showing on New Year's Eve, which falls on a Wednesday this year.

Given that it is entering the Guggenheim's permanent collection, Nancy Spector, the museum's chief curator, said she thought it would be shown regularly in years to come.

. . . And Washington

The fascination with white lights seems to be contagious. The National Gallery of Art in Washington has commissioned the New York artist Leo Villareal to create an installation in which 40,000 programmed LED nodes will run the entire 200-foot length of the walkway between its East and West Buildings.

The optical installation will be on view for a year beginning Monday. It is the museum's first site-specific light commission.

"I've tried to create something that maintains the integrity of the space while adding an ephemeral layer," Mr. Villareal said. The concourse is traversed by thousands of people each day.

Using custom-designed software Mr. Villareal said he plans to program sequences of abstract configurations of trailing lights.

Molly Donovan, the museum's associate curator of modern and contemporary art, asked Mr. Villareal to create the piece after seeing his "Light Matrix," a permanent installation for a black-windowed wall that overlooks the sculpture garden of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo.

"We've long been interested in doing something with the concourse," Ms. Donovan said, "and this seemed like an exciting, viable match. The effects are quite constellar as well as hypnotic and mesmerizing."