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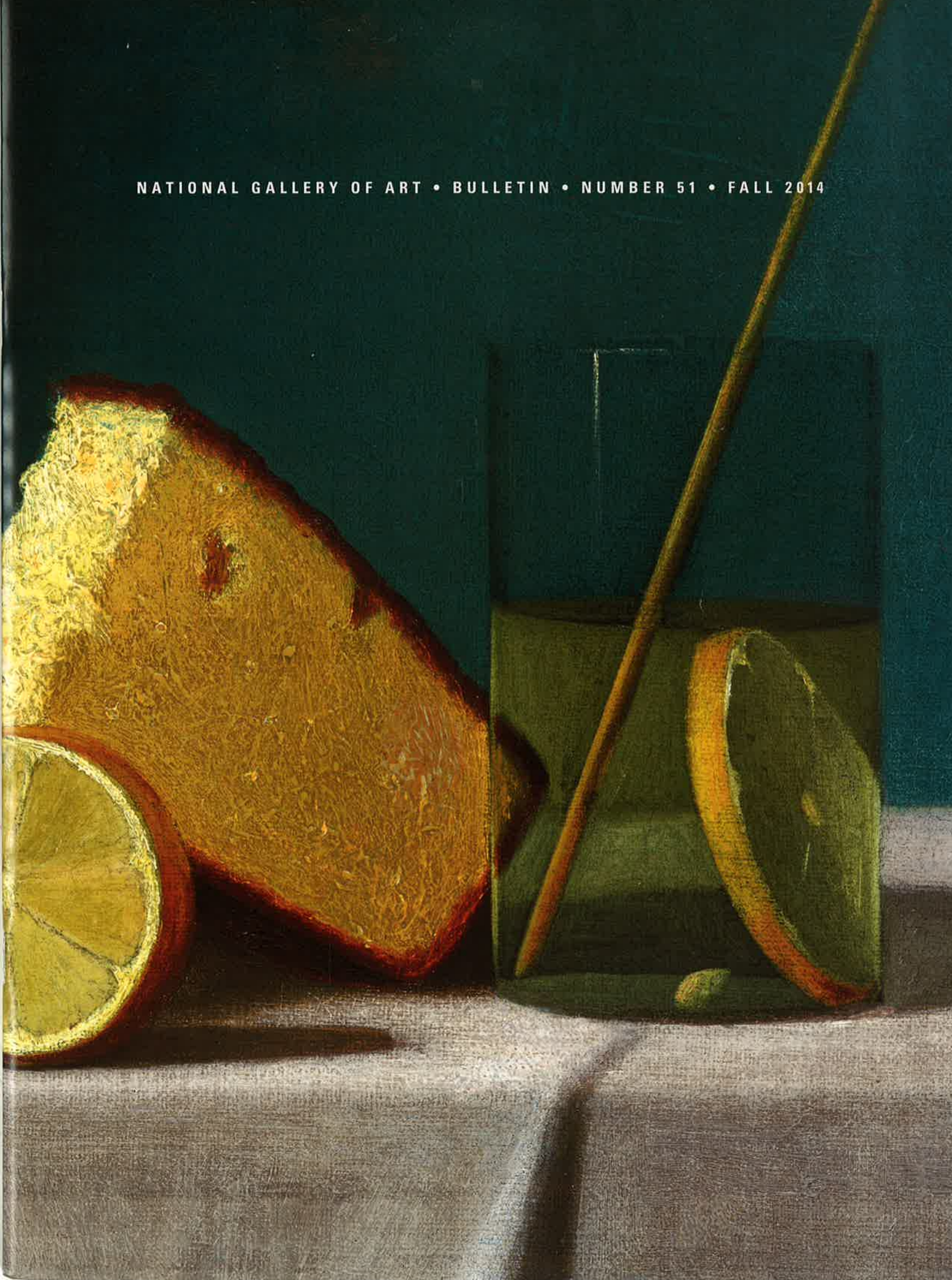

CASVA
Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

Paul Mellon and the Love of Learning

Fig. 1. Paul Mellon in the East Building, Gallery Archives, © Dennis Brack/ Black Star

Without Paul Mellon's generous commitment, the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts would be a very different place. The vision for the Center, inspired by the promised gift of the East Building by Mellon and his sister, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, was shaped and realized by a remarkable group of leaders from universities and museums, as well as by then Director J. Carter Brown. It was, however, the support of Paul Mellon (fig. 1) that launched CASVA's programs of fellowships, publications, meetings, and research. An original endowment grant was provided in 1979 by The A.W. Mellon Foundation, itself formed in 1969 through the amalgamation of Ailsa Mellon Bruce's Avalon Foundation and her brother's Old Dominion Foundation. Other gifts and grants, from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the J. Paul Getty Trust, and Robert H. and Clarice Smith, among others, continued to sustain special initiatives.

In 1986, with CASVA now gaining international recognition, Dean Henry Millon could see that only a larger permanent endowment could keep the Center competitive and maintain its appropriate prominence as part of the Gallery. He was especially concerned with supporting both predoctoral and senior fellowships and providing for shorter-term visiting senior fellowships. New endowment funds would also make it easier to plan symposia and provide some discretionary income to support research. The hope was that a Paul Mellon Fund would invigorate the study of the history of art while permanently attaching Paul Mellon's name to the Center in which he had an initial founding interest and a continuing concern. The A.W. Mellon Foundation responded favorably, and the Paul Mellon Fund was established in 1986.

Mellon's interest in supporting scholarship was lifelong and deep. Perhaps the most quoted statement in his autobiography concerns his status as an amateur in every phase of his life, whether as a poet, a scholar, a horseman, a farmer, a soldier, a connoisseur of art, a publisher, or as a museum executive. He explained that "the root of the word 'amateur' is the Latin word for love, and I can honestly say that I've thoroughly enjoyed all the roles I have played." Through his generosity, Paul Mellon made it possible for many others to share that enjoyment.

Yet if he saw himself as a true amateur, exploring a range of experiences far wider than that of many others of his generation and class, Mellon did not pride himself in being self-taught. He never forgot his own education. Characteristic of his philanthropy was his recognition of the needs of the educational and research institutions that had enriched his youth and his enlightened creation of new ventures for the dissemination and increase of knowledge, especially about art. The Choate School and Yale University provided the grounding; the misty and chilly beauty of Clare College, Cambridge (fig. 2), furnished opportunities for riding and rowing, as well as reading. At all three institutions, Paul Mellon subsequently supported museum buildings and programs in the history of art, as well as enriching opportunities for individual students. His commitment to learning and to the humanities was genuine, never framed in the language of specialists or the formulas of grants.

Paul Mellon the collector wanted works of art to stand on their own, and was sometimes skeptical of interdisciplinary approaches. Yet early in life he also acquired a breadth of interest in the study of human cultures and civilization. This can be measured by his involvement with Carl Jung, for whom he expressed real affection and deep respect. Paul Mellon and his first wife, Mary Conover Mellon, met the psychiatrist in New York in 1937, the year of Andrew W. Mellon's death. The couple visited Jung at his house in Bollingen, Switzerland, the following year, and created the Bollingen Series for the publication of translations of Jung's work in 1943, and then the Bollingen Foundation in 1945. Mellon always attributed the early success of the series to his wife, but after her death in 1946, it was his support that kept the foundation running until the late 1960s, as he watched over its publication of works on psychology, comparative religion, poetry, and art, and its hundreds of subventions to individuals for research and writing.

Among the most remarkable and influential of the publications relating to Mary's search for "the history of man's soul" were the translation of *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (vol. XIX, 1961), and D. T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture* (vol. LXIV, 1959). The very first Bollingen volume documented a Navaho war ceremony with text and paintings recorded by Maude Oaks (1943), and this was followed by others on similar topics. Gladys A. Reichard's *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism* (vol. XVIII, 1963) was a landmark study. When Paul Mellon presented more than three hundred paintings of American Indian life by George Catlin to the Gallery and the nation in 1965, his appreciation of their value was informed not only by their visual power but also by this long-standing awareness of the culture of the Southwest. The only part of the Bollingen Series to continue into the present is the subseries numbered XXXV, the Gallery's A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. The mission of the lectures is very much in keeping with the original Bollingen ideal to encourage and disseminate the best in scholarship concerning human civilization, in this case with special regard for the fine arts.

The Paul Mellon one-year senior fellowships, three-year predoctoral fellowships, and two-month visiting senior fellowships made possible by the 1986 endowment grant remain at the heart of the Center's programs. Among the former predoctoral fellows, several, including Jeffrey Weiss and Ronda Kasl, have taken up museum careers, while others, including Maria Gough and Hal Foster, have established themselves with distinction in university departments. The topics investigated by several recent Paul Mellon senior fellows would not have been out of place in the Bollingen Series, including Louise Burkhart's "Picturing Aztec Christianity," Sonya S. Lee's "Between Culture and Nature: Cave Temples of Sichuan," and Elizabeth Sears' "Warburg Circles: Toward a Cultural-Historical History of Art, 1929–1964."

Paul Mellon visiting senior fellows have come to the Gallery for intense periods of writing and research, and often to work on topics in British and European art that their benefactor would have especially enjoyed: Michael Gaudio studied the rare albums of collages snipped out of religious images in seventeenth-century England by the protestant Collet sisters at Little Gidding, over which King Charles I marveled, and Viccy Coltman advanced her analysis of the art history and historiography of classical sculpture in Britain. Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi's residency as Paul Mellon visiting senior fellow in 2010 coincided with the Arcimboldo exhibition at the Gallery, and her own contribution to the Arcimboldo exhibition in Milan the following year built upon work done at CASVA. Tongiorgi Tomasi also worked closely with Paul Mellon's widow, Rachel "Bunny" Mellon, for many years, and authored the third and fourth volumes of the catalog of the Oak Spring Garden Library.

Fig. 2. Paul Mellon with his father, Andrew Mellon, at his graduation in Cambridge, England, 1931, Gallery Archives

Paul Mellon's many loves were interrelated, and never exclusive. His legacy to the study of the history of art endures in part because it is linked so closely to his dedication to natural and human environments. His patronage of architecture, whether by I. M. Pei at the Gallery's East Building and at Choate, by Louis Kahn at Yale, or in the courtyard development and lighting scheme for the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, ran parallel with his love for art and for its study in ideal circumstances. The experience of collegial living and learning in a beautiful place that he had enjoyed as a student is one that he wanted others to share, just as he wanted to share his beloved collections with the public.

• Elizabeth Cropper, *Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts*