

copy

John Spargo  
Old Bennington  
Vermont

June 29, 1938

Mr. Stefan Hirsch  
Chairman, Art Division  
Bennington College  
Bennington, Vermont

Dear Mr. Hirsch:

You were most thoughtful and kind to write me such a gracious letter, and I greatly appreciate it. Such contacts as I had with the sculpture students, like the all too few contacts I had with students in other lines, were entirely delightful. I am sure that, weighed in any just balance, I was the greater gainer from the exchange of ideas and views. Always I find that association with students in our colleges renews my faith and confidence in the future of this nation and mankind.

I am more delighted than I can tell you by your understanding and appreciation of my general viewpoint in connection with the Historical Museum. The assignment of one of the cases in our present building to the Art Division of the College, under its entire control, is more or less of a gesture and pledge. Perhaps I had better say that it was the best means I could perceive of establishing a precedent. When we get around to the remodeling and enlargement of our buildings, which will give us much ampler exhibition facilities, I want to work the problem out in cooperation with you and others in charge of the Art Division of Bennington College. Especially do I want to have your expert knowledge and experienced judgment brought to bear upon the designing of the additional wing, so as to be sure of securing a maximum of efficiency for its major purposes. After all, a museum that is simply a repository for things, no matter how well they are ticketed and arranged on shelves, is no better than a glorified attic. As against such a conception of the museum I am bold enough to set the conception of a living and vibrant service institution. In so far as it can be done, I want to avoid the great mistake of permitting anything to monopolize important and valuable space, as a fixed and permanent exhibit, so that it will exclude the possibility of using that space for the proper display of current work of value and interest, even though its significance warrants only a temporary exhibition. In other words, the entire wall space that is available for pictures, for example, must be so arranged that anything or everything can be taken down and laid aside for a few days or weeks, as the case may be, to afford opportunities for the display of significant current work. Similarly, the cases we install need to be planned with the same insistence upon their flexibility of use. This means that the cases themselves call for some special planning,



June 29, 1938

equally with their placing and arrangement. Given proper facilities for storage, this will not be nearly so difficult as most people imagine. For example, I have an idea that with the installation of very simple hanging rails of chromium, or something of the sort, the removal of pictures and the installation of others in their places can be made very easy and simple. We can get a maximum of hanging facilities with a minimum of trouble and no disorder. I have an idea, also, that, for comparatively little money, a special type of exhibition case for small things, such as sketches, woodcuts, etchings, cartoons, photographs, and the like, can be provided, giving adequate plate glass protective covering during temporary exhibitions, without permanently mortgaging the space.

The plan that I have in mind will also enable us to cut off the new wing from the rest of the Museum, whenever we find that to be necessary. Our present conditions are such that we must per force have a somewhat elaborate doorway into the new wing, even serve as an architectural ornamentation. Speaking generally, for the ordinary purposes of the Museum it might just as well be a sham door. But we shall not make it a sham door. We shall make our limitation serve as a splendid advantage. By the simple expedient of installing a sort of bronze grill that can be drawn across the corridor, whenever we desire, we shall be able to cut off the new wing from the old building and the connecting corridor. This will enable us to use the new wing--which for the sake of clarity I will call the art wing, without intending so to limit it--as an entirely self-contained unit. If, therefore, we had an exhibit of the work of Bennington College students for two or three weeks, let us say, it would be possible to have it kept open evenings, under College management, regardless of the fact that the Museum proper was closed. And if it should be thought desirable to hold conferences or lectures in connection with such exhibits that likewise could be managed.

In addition to cooperation in the planning of the wing and its equipment, I hope to have the cooperation of the Art Division of the College in the general management of it. Perhaps it will be possible to set up something in the nature of a standing advisory committee with representatives from the College as well as individual artists participating.

Finally, I hope that we may be able to devise a simple plan providing for a sort of corporate membership embracing the entire faculty and student body of Bennington College. What I have in mind is that through the device of such a corporate membership it could be made possible for everyone at the College to have the right to go in and out of the Museum without having to pay the



Mr. Stefan Hirsch

June 29, 1938

Page 3.

modest admission fee every time. Of course, there are some difficulties to be solved, but I do not believe that the solution will be nearly so difficult as it may first appear.

With many thanks for your good letter and fine encouragement, and with kindest personal regards, believe me

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) John Spargo