

PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO

After 31 years as the eighth and longest-serving Director in the 135-year-long history of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philippe de Montebello recently announced that he would retire from his position on December 31, 2008. Under Mr. de Montebello's leadership, the Museum nearly doubled in size, vastly increasing its exhibition space. It also acquired significant collections and masterpieces, mounted acclaimed international loan exhibitions, developed wide-reaching educational programs, and reinstalled much of its permanent collections in new and refurbished galleries. In fall 2008 the curators of the institution paid tribute to Mr. de Montebello's tenure by mounting an unprecedented tribute exhibition of some 300 major works that entered the collections under his leadership: *The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions*.

In 2009 Mr. de Montebello will take up duties as the first Fiske Kimball Professor in the History and Culture of Museums at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, and as a special advisor for NYU's Abu Dhabi campus. He will also serve as co-host of the WNET/Channel 13 weekly culture series, *SundayArts*, and continue to lecture throughout the world on museum and other cultural issues.

During his storied tenure at the Met, Mr. de Montebello was acknowledged throughout the museum world as one of the field's most influential and articulate champions of integrity, authority, education, and public access. As one magazine declared: "Met presentations now set the world standard for scholarly excellence and glamorous display." Noted the *New Yorker* of Mr. de Montebello: "He has won the ungrudging respect of the curators, the support staff, and the trustees." The *Financial Times* acknowledged that he has "successfully achieved a fusion of the curatorial and fiscal management streams." And *Newsweek* called him "a personification of the Met's grandeur."

During Mr. de Montebello's tenure as Director, the Met mounted such critically lauded and widely visited shows as: *The Vatican Collections* (1983), *Manet: 1832-1883* (1983), *Van Gogh in Arles* (1984), *India!* (1985-1986), *Degas* (1989-90), *Velázquez* (1989-1990), *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* (1990-91), *Seurat* (1991-92), *Origins of Impressionism* (1994-95), *Splendors of Imperial China* (1996), *The Glory of Byzantium* (1997), *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (1999-2000), *Vermeer and the Delft School* (2001), *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (2002), *Leonardo da Vinci: Master Draftsman* (2003), *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (2003), *China: Dawn of a Golden Age* (2004); *Van Gogh Drawings* (2005) and *The Age of Rembrandt* (2007).

Under Mr. de Montebello, the Metropolitan focused much of its resources on reinstalling, conserving, and publishing its permanent collections, and pursuing an active acquisitions program through purchase-ranging, in recent years, from the ancient Egyptian sculpture of an Old Kingdom Recumbent Lion to Caravaggio's *The Denial of Saint Peter* to Jasper Johns' *White Flag* to the widely reported 2004 purchase of Duccio's 14th-century masterpiece, *Madonna and Child*. The Met has also enhanced its collections through gifts and bequests, including the Annenberg Collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces and the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of 20th-century art.

Among Mr. de Montebello's recent initiatives was the renovation, expansion, and reinstallation of the Metropolitan's Greek and Roman Galleries, including the Museum's Roman Court and Etruscan Galleries. Earlier, he oversaw the reinstallation in 1993 of the 19th-century European paintings and sculpture collection in handsome Beaux Arts-style galleries, now being expanded further and scheduled for re-opening in December 2007. Other recent renovations include: the expansion of the galleries for English furniture and decorative arts; the conservation and installation of the Renaissance studio from Gubbio; the installation of Coptic art in a crypt-like gallery beneath the Great Hall staircase; new galleries for drawings, prints, and photography; the new Menschel Hall for Modern Photography, and new galleries for Byzantine art, Cypriot art, and ancient Near Eastern art. Recently opened, too, are new galleries for South and Southeast Asian art, Korean art, and Chinese art, and the Antonio Ratti Textile Center.

More recently, the Met re-opened the Wrightsman Galleries for French Decorative Arts, newly reconfigured galleries for Oceanic Art, the new Galleries for 19th-century and early 20th-century European Paintings and Sculpture including the H. J. Heinz Galleries, new galleries for the Native

American Art of North America, and the new and vastly expanded Ruth and Harold D. Uris Center for Education-at the same time as it launched the reconstruction, expansion, and reinstallation of the American Wing.

Stressing that the presentation of the collections remain the institution's primordial responsibility, Mr. de Montebello also committed the Metropolitan to a policy of amelioration, rather than growth, focusing on such marked improvements as the redesigned Tiepolo gallery, refinements to the areas surrounding The Temple of Dendur in The Sackler Wing, and the ongoing reinstallation of much of the Museum's Egyptian collection, including the temples of Perneb and Raemkai.

To the millions of people who visit the Museum each year, Mr. de Montebello's was also its signature voice, guiding visitors in special exhibitions and installations through the audio guides that he has narrated throughout his tenure as Director.

Born in Paris, Mr. de Montebello attended French schools through the baccalaureate. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 1958, and after serving as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, received an advanced degree from New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. Mr. de Montebello became an American citizen in 1955.

With the exception of four-and-a-half years as Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas (1969-1974), Mr. de Montebello spent his entire museum career at the Metropolitan. He joined the Met as a curatorial assistant in 1963, rising to Associate Curator in the Department of European Paintings. In 1974, Mr. de Montebello was appointed Vice Director for Curatorial and Educational Affairs, a post he held until he became Director in July 1977.

Among his professional affiliations are membership on the Board of Trustees of New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, and membership on the Columbia University Advisory Council of the Departments of Art and Archaeology. He is also a Trustee of the American Federation of Arts, and a member of the editorial board of the International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship. In addition to his lecturing, Mr. de Montebello is the author of several influential op-ed pieces in the New York Times and other publications, and is a ubiquitous commentator on art and museological matters in the broadcast media.

Mr. de Montebello has been awarded many honors, including Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1991; Order de Isabel la Catalina, Encomienda de Numero; Spanish Institute Gold Medal Award; Knight Commander, Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great; the 2002 Blérancourt Prize for his contributions to the cultural bond between France and America; the 2004 Amigos del Museo del Prado Prize; C.I.N.O.A. Prize (Confederation Internationale de Negociants en Oeuvres d'Art, 2005); Officier dans l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur, 2007; the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver and Gold Star from the Government of Japan (December 2007); Honorary Degrees of Doctor of Laws from Dartmouth College (2004) and Harvard University (2006); and a number of honorary degrees and fellowships from New York University, Lafayette College, Bard College, and Iona College.

In March 2003 The President of the United States awarded him The National Medal of Arts, noting that by "promoting wide-reaching programs that bring art to the American people, he has helped to preserve, protect, and present the cultural and artistic heritage of our world."

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