

Museums in the US and UK pay tribute to Paul Mellon, collector and benefactor, in the centenary of his birth

Celebrating the greatest Anglophile of them all

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Philanthropy was Paul Mellon's birthright. His father, the Pittsburgh banker and industrialist Andrew W. Mellon, founded the National Gallery of Art in 1937 with a gift to the nation of his art collection and funds to build a museum. Four decades later, his son increased the family legacy by establishing the Yale Centre for British Art (YCBA) in New Haven, Connecticut, donating to his alma mater the largest collection of British paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, rare books and manuscripts outside the UK along with funds for a building by Louis Kahn—gifts today worth more than \$1 billion.

“I can't think of another private collector who individually amassed a larger collection of the history of visual culture of one nation,” says YCBA director Amy Meyers.

Although his father—secretary of the US Treasury (1921-31) and US Ambassador to the United Kingdom (1931-32)—did not live to see the National Gallery of Art (NGA) open in Washington in 1941, Paul Mellon picked up the torch, serving as founding president, then remaining a trustee until 1985 (except for his wartime service in the US Army) and donating more than 1,000 works of art, mostly French and American paintings.

With his sister Ailsa Mellon Bruce, he funded construction of the East Building designed by I.M. Pei that opened in 1978 on land that their father had earmarked for an expansion. “He never lost interest,” says NGA director Earl Powell III. “The gallery is so much him. Every time you turn around you are viewing or doing something he was responsible for,” he says. When Mellon died in 1999, he bequeathed another 100 works of art and \$75m to the gallery, the largest cash gift in its history. Yet, characteristic of his family’s modesty, there is not one thing in the NGA named for him.

Yale centenary celebrations

Paul Mellon was born a century ago this year, and institutions in the US and England have lined up a series of exhibitions and events to mark the occasion. Leading the celebration is the Yale Centre for British Art, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this spring.

“Paul Mellon’s Legacy: a Passion for British Art” (18 April-29 July), co-organised with the Royal Academy in London where it travels in October, presents 250 works, including paintings by Gainsborough, Turner, Constable, Hogarth and nearly every major British artist since the 15th century.

The works on paper include drawings and watercolours by Hogarth, Rowlandson, Blake and Turner, and manuscripts, colour-plate books, maps and atlases, travel guides and drawing manuals. The idea is to reflect themes in British culture represented in Mellon’s comprehensive collections.

Mellon was 53 when he started collecting seriously, advised initially by the British art historian Basil Taylor. “At that time British art was very underappreciated in England and there were many opportunities to get things,” recalls John Baskett, who served as Mellon’s private curator from 1961-63 before starting a London dealership and functioning as Mellon’s European agent. “His vision went beyond the Grand Manner portraits that were the taste of his father’s generation, to encompass British life in the broadest terms,” says Ms Meyers, noting that his collecting of Stubbs, Wright of Derby and others who were not household names reinvigorated scholarly and collecting interest in the field. Mellon bought from Leonard

Duke, Iolo Williams, Agnew's, Colnaghi's, Spink & Sons, and also at auction. He also purchased entire collections, including the watercolours of Thomas Girtin from a descendant of the artist, and the Thomas Lowinsky collection of figure drawings.

The range of his interests is explored elsewhere at Yale, at the Beinecke Library's show selected from the archive of the French nobleman and military commander Rochambeau who aided the American Revolution. Mellon bought the trove from H.P. Kraus in 1958 and donated it to Yale in 1992.

A permanent collection show at the Yale University Art Gallery includes Thomas Eakins's watercolour *John Biglin in a Single Scull* (1873), which Mellon gave in 1998, as well as paintings by Cézanne and Vuillard.

From Yale to Washington

Mellon loved Yale—the identification number of his private Gulfstream jet was “1929Y”—but the university shared his affections with the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

The NGA mounted a tribute exhibition after Mellon died in 1999, and for the centenary the gallery has produced a documentary film, “Paul Mellon: In His Own Words”, with footage of interviews and excerpts from Mellon's speeches and writings. An accompanying film includes commentary by John Baskett as well as his horse trainer Ian Balding. The gallery has also organised a Boudin survey (until 5 August) that includes 40 paintings and works on paper, most of which were gifts of Mellon and his second wife Rachel Lambert Lloyd (“Bunny”), Royan heiress to the Warner-Lambert (now part of Pfizer) fortune. Her taste for French impressionism and post impressionism led the couple, with the advice of the scholar John Rewald, to collect works by Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Seurat, van Gogh, Gauguin, Pissarro and the world's largest group of Degas wax sculptures—all of which were donated to the National Gallery of Art.

The Boudin exhibition will travel to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond, another institution that Mellon enriched. In a sense it was his local museum—his primary residence was a 4,500-acre farm in

Upperville, Virginia, where he raised horses and worked on his collections. He became the VMFA's longest serving trustee (1938-79) and donated more than 2,000 British, French, American and Asian works of art that today form around 10% of the museum's holdings. For the centenary, the VMFA will present 23 French paintings from the Mellon estate donated last year by Mrs Mellon.

An Anglophile at Cambridge

Mellon was born in Pittsburgh in 1907 where his father, the son of an immigrant from Northern Ireland, developed the Mellon bank. His mother Nora McMullen (whom his father divorced in 1912) was English, and the family summered near Windsor. It was there, Mellon recalled in his 1992 autobiography *Reflections in a Silver Spoon*, co-authored with John Baskett, that he "first developed a taste for the English countryside, for English houses, English rivers, English parks, English skies, English clouds... It is really in my blood."

Paul returned to England to study as an undergraduate at Clare College Cambridge where he later endowed lectureships and gave works of art and more than \$20m to the Fitzwilliam Museum.

For the centenary, Duncan Robinson, director of the Fitzwilliam and former director of the Yale Centre, has juxtaposed works from his museum with others borrowed from Yale to illustrate the philanthropist's ties to England.

Generosity on a grand scale

However, the various celebrations can only hint at the magnitude of this singular man's largesse. "He was left an enormous amount of money from his father and wanted to disburse it in a responsible fashion," says John Baskett.

His philanthropy ranged from the Bollingen Foundation, created by Mellon and his first wife Mary Conover Brown (who died in 1946) to translate into English the collected works of the analytical psychologist Carl Jung, with whom they had studied in Switzerland. He also built an art centre at his Connecticut prep school Choate, and supported Tate and the Royal Academy

in London. In 1970 he founded the Paul Mellon Centre in London, a research institute operated by Yale that awards fellowships and grants and publishes the majority of the world's academic titles on British art. And in 1969, he and his sister endowed the New York-based Andrew

W. Mellon Foundation which today has assets of nearly \$5 billion and is among the largest foundations in the humanities. "I doubt if anyone in the 20th century equalled him in terms of international philanthropy in the arts," says the Yale Centre's Ms Meyers.

But Mellon said his greatest passion was for country life, and specifically his love of horses. A skilled horseman, he became joint master of foxhounds of the Piedmont Hunt in Virginia and three times won the 100-Mile Ride at Hot Springs, South Dakota. His Rokeby Stables in Virginia bred thoroughbreds that were champions in the US and Europe. He once said that 100 years from now the only place his name will appear is in the stud books because he was the breeder of the European champion Mill Reef. Seven years after his death, there is little doubt that America's greatest Anglophile philanthropist is remembered for quite a lot more.

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