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## Eclectic collector's show raises questions at Boston Museum of Fine Arts

Visitors are confused and staff suggest that museum is neglecting its artistic mission

**Jason Edward Kaufman**

30 September 2005

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### **Boston**

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has been criticised for its current exhibition of the eclectic collections of William I. Koch. Mr Koch is the founder of the energy company the Oxbow Group and a former trustee.

“Things I love: the many collections of William I. Koch” (until 13 November) includes classical sculpture, Impressionist and Modern paintings, Native American and Western art and artefacts, as well as antique firearms, vintage wine bottles, ship models, and two yachts with 90-foot masts which have been installed on the museum's front lawn.

Museum patrons have been quoted in the local press expressing their confusion with the nautical display, and employees have voiced concerns that the museum is bartering its artistic

mission in pursuit of profit.

Mr Koch has made a “generous” but unspecified contribution to the museum’s current \$425 million expansion campaign. A museum spokesperson says he is a “distinguished benefactor”, a term used to describe patrons who have donated between \$1 million to \$2.5 million.

But Malcolm Rogers, the museum’s director, says the exhibition is within the ethical boundaries of museum practice and fulfils an aim for which he was appointed, to make the museum “more approachable.”

“The point of the exhibition,” says Mr Rogers, “is for the public to see some very beautiful and rarely seen works and also to learn about the personality and range of the collection. It clearly is not the same type of show as a scholarly monographic exhibition.”

“There is more than one type of exhibition satisfying different standards”, he says.

“Rembrandt’s Journey [a 2004 show] is the classic scholarly monographic exhibit that adds a great deal to the field, and other exhibitions may be new to Boston audiences but not necessarily to scholars. [The Koch show] wasn’t primarily intended for a scholarly audience. God forbid all exhibitions should be mounted primarily for the interests of a scholarly audience!”

Originally appeared in The Art Newspaper as ‘*Visitors are confused and staff suggest that museum is neglecting its artistic mission*’

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