

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER AND ‘THE SPIRIT OF PLACE’: A SPIRITUAL
JOURNEY THROUGH THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
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ABSTRACT

Isabella Stewart Gardner and ‘The Spirit of Place’: A Spiritual Journey

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D.Litt. Dissertation by

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Isabella Stewart Gardner, world traveler and patroness of the arts in the Gilded Age, founded her own personal house museum on the Fens in Boston, Massachusetts in 1902. Upon her death in 1924, she left the museum to the city of Boston with specific instructions that nothing ever should be moved from the way she designed it. As specific as she was in her Will, she did not leave specific instructions for “how” her museum should be viewed.

Using the words of Mrs. Gardner’s first biographer, Morris Carter, as inspiration, when he wrote that the observations Mrs. Gardner made in her journals reflected her ability to “always [be] sensitive to the ‘Spirit of Place’” (35); this dissertation considers the idea that the museum can be experienced as a place of spiritual renewal.

The Introduction begins with the author’s personal epiphany at the Gardner Museum, and then explores some of Mrs. Gardner’s personal influences when building her museum emphasizing a specific connection to those who helped shape Mrs. Gardner’s own spiritual life. The body of the dissertation leads the reader on a room-by-room exploration of the museum applying an Ignatian spiritual lens to Mrs. Gardner’s historic Palace. One work of art from each gallery is explored in a biographical, historical

and spiritual manner. At the conclusion of each chapter, the reader is offered a prayer, or reflective exercise for the reader/viewer. All of the content explored in this dissertation has been researched by the author at various sites in Boston, most notably in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and in the Gardner Museum Archives.

This dissertation includes almost seventy images addressing significant pieces of art, architecture and major figures from Mrs. Gardner's life. Most images are provided courtesy of the Archives in the Gardner Museum. Several photographs have been taken by a friend of the author, and the author himself. Finally, one original watercolor by the author is included.

Dedication

To Jen – on the occasion of our ten-year wedding anniversary - I dedicate this little book to you for all your big sacrifices. You are the most loving wife, and extraordinary mother. I love you, and thank you!



Figure 1 – Kurt R. Kilanowski, Venetian palace, 2009, Watercolor.

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When I completed reading Humphrey Carpenter's biography of J.R.R. Tolkien as a young student at St. Pius X School, I knew then that I wanted to earn my doctoral degree. Going forward, many people, conversations, and events have inspired and have encouraged me to make my dream a reality. There are several people from whom I have garnered the necessary motivation along the way.

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Preface

*“The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.”*

- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (44)

“Lucy felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well. She looked back over her shoulder and there, between the dark tree-trunks, she could still see the open doorway of the wardrobe and even catch a glimpse of the empty room from which she had set out. (She had, of course, left the door open, for she knew that it is a very silly thing to shut oneself into a wardrobe.) It seemed to be still daylight there. I can always get back if anything goes wrong,” thought Lucy. She began to walk forward, crunch-crunch, over the snow and through the wood towards the other light.”

- C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (7)

Chapter 1: Introduction

PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The months following the September 11th, 2001 attacks were stressful and trying times for many Americans. As someone who lived and served in a Roman Catholic parish in a small Northern New Jersey town, I personally attended a dozen memorials for parishioners and friends who were victims of the terrorists' attacks. During these services, I witnessed many families torn apart both physically and spiritually. In some cases parents were lost; in others, children gone too early. So many people's lives were changed instantly and dramatically. In the days and months that ensued I was faced with the fact that my own father, who had worked only two blocks away from the World Trade Center on September 11th, had just narrowly escaped when the buildings fell from the airplane attacks. By the grace of God, he escaped the tragedy physically unharmed. When asked about that day, he identifies himself as one of those people who was running from the clouds of debris as the Towers fell. However, when he is asked to describe what he saw, the emotional scars will not allow him to verbalize the real horrors that he witnessed on the streets that day.



Figure 2 – Kurt R. Kilanowski, New York City Skyline from Route 80 East, April 2002, Photograph.

In the spring of 2002, after the Easter holiday had ended, I decided that it was time to process some of the events and emotions of the past six months. I had started a new job the week before 9/11; I had a personal relationship which was failing under the tension of the time; I was experiencing the confusion of a growing new relationship with someone who would become (and still is) the most significant person (my wife) in my life; and, I was grappling with the sadness that I felt over the losses that came with the 9/11 tragedy and the guilt I felt over the joy that my father had survived. Like taking a page out of a John Steinbeck book, I got in the car and headed out on a road trip. I left with no particular agenda at all. I was planning on spending time with some friends in New Haven and Providence, but passed the days wandering Southern New England. I traveled major highways and local roads, wandering through places about which I had

always heard, but had never seen: Sleepy Hollow; Greenwich; New Haven; Mystic Seaport (and Mystic Pizza!); Providence; Walden Pond; and finally, Boston.



Figure 3 – Kurt R. Kilanowski, Walden Pond, April 2002, Photograph.

While in Boston, I visited the Museum of Fine Arts; attended a Bruins game and spent an afternoon at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Of all people and places I encountered that week, the Gardner Museum was the most unsuspecting and, in the end, life-changing. My visit there provided me with a place to process the many emotions with which I had been living the previous six months. As it turned out, what I had originally planned as a quick visit to the Gardner Museum turned into a full-day experience. I took a guided tour of the museum; I had lunch in the Gardner Café; I sat in the Courtyard for hours and read. I talked with staff members about Mrs. Gardner and her vision. By the time I left the museum I was thoroughly emotionally exhausted. The atmosphere at the Gardner had not only stirred in me all of the emotions which I had experienced over the six months following 9/11, but most importantly, I feel that day helped me properly process and express those emotions. Following that first day at the Gardner Museum, I remember returning to my hotel and sleeping peacefully for the first time since the attacks. That evening I finished my epiphany at a hockey game at the Boston Garden;

and, when a Bruins fan two rows behind me yelled several expletives at a referee on the ice and hurled his beer at him, I remember feeling like I had been covered in the waters of baptism.



Figure 4 – Kurt R. Kilanowski, Boston Bruins vs New York Islanders at the Boston Garden, April 2002, Photograph.

I considered that perhaps all of the change and tragedy leading up to my first visit to the Gardner Museum romanticized my view of the place. However, the more I read about the Gardner Museum, the more I discovered how many other visitors to the Gardner Museum described their experiences as personally transformative too. In the end, I was convinced my experience had not been clouded by my personal emotions, but rather that I had come across a special place which drew out my emotions and provided an authentic personal and spiritual experience.

Soon after my visit to the Gardner, I entered the Masters of Letters program at Drew University where I began to explore all areas of the Humanities. My academic experience in the learning community at Drew encouraged me to delve deeper into my

experience at the Gardner Museum. I read spiritual writings beginning with the Early Church Fathers through C.S. Lewis and beyond; I studied the art and writings of J.M.W. Turner, the Pre-Raphaelites and the Cape Cod School; I explored literature of every age from Chaucer to A. S. Byatt. In each class, I was encouraged to find a connection to Mrs. Gardner. Some connections were obvious through basic content: for instance, I explored Mrs. Gardner's love of Venice in my Byzantine History class; and, I delved into her collection of religious art in my medieval literature class. Still other classes forced me to dig way below the surface and challenge myself in new ways. I returned to the Gardner museum several times and attended musical concerts because of the twentieth century music class in which I was enrolled. I visited a dozen small towns on Cape Cod where Mrs. Gardner had vacationed, because of a class entitled, "Provincetown: The Artist's Colony." The courses which moved me most definitively from my comfort zone were those which focused on the study and practice of painting. In those courses, I not only learned about famous artists such as John Singer Sargent, J.M.W. Turner, Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh (some of whom were friends of Mrs. Gardner), but I was encouraged to paint in watercolor, emulating some of their techniques. All of the courses I attended at Drew University, these Art courses especially, brought the Gardner Museum to life for me in so many new and exciting ways.

When it came time for me to construct a dissertation, this topic had already revealed itself. It had been evolving inside of me since the spring of 2002. It had been fostered by so many emotions and experiences in my life: it was wrought with the content of my course work; the experiences of regular visits to Boston and the Gardner Museum; my own faith; my marriage, and birth of my children; the love I have for my family and

my friends. These experiences have taught me to look beyond the surface in every aspect of life. They have taught me that God, above all, is love! And that wherever I am, God is there!

It is not enough though to say that because I encountered a transformative experience at the Gardner Museum standing in front of several paintings, or sitting in the Courtyard, that the experience is universal. I must first explore the qualities of the museum which lend themselves to a transformative experience, then present a lens through which we can explore the museum. Finally, just as I brought some personal experiences to the museum, each visitor to the Gardner brings with him or her a personal story which will have an effect on that visitor's experience. It is important to recognize that while what Mrs. Gardner set out to accomplish in constructing the museum may not be defined in any letter or book she left behind, undeniably, one of her goals was to evoke pleasure in the visitor. It is because of how the space is constructed, what content is present in the space, and how it is presented; the entire compilation helps reveal in the view what lies below the surface of the work of art and below the skin of the viewer. When we look at the history and purpose of such museum spaces, combined with a prescribed spiritual lens through which we can consider the Gardner space, we provide ourselves with a clearer focus through which we can obtain our opportunity for personal transformation.

In her book, *A Museum of One's Own*, author Anne Higonnet reveals the origins of all museum space. She says that all collection museums descend from Renaissance curiosity cabinets (3). These cabinets were often filled with wonders and gems (3). They advanced when by the mid-1600s in England, King Charles I assembled a great collection

of art which showcased the Old Masters with the Italians at the center (3). Following King Charles, many nobles started developing private collections of art, until the mid-1700s when civic museums began to form in Europe (3). Some of the earliest examples of civic museums include the Uffizi in Florence (1769), the Musée du Louvre in Paris (1793), and the Atlas Museum in Berlin (1830). At the end of the 1800s, the United States joined the Europeans by opening the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1872), the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1876), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1877) (5). The purpose of these collections was to form a sort of visual "encyclopedia" (5). They were to gather art from all places and all time-periods and display the art according to the latest trends (5). One fact which is important to note is that these museums did not just appear overnight. Many of these museums which we know now started as private collections which were dissolved and bequeathed to the people. Several famous Americans contributed their collections to larger civic collections: Andrew Mellon, Samuel Kress and Joseph Widener are three of them (5).

At the same time that these "encyclopedia" or large civic collections were burgeoning, several Americans were following their European predecessors by creating and maintaining their own private collections. The basis for these collections varied based on personal interest or taste. Also, the purpose for these collections was often discretionary. Very often what occurred with these collections, after the founder's or foundress's death, played a significant part in the collection's history. Six museums which share common traits in the United States include the Wallace Collection, the Musée Condé, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Huntington Art Gallery, the Frick Collection, and Dumbarton Oaks (Higonnet 10). These collectors shaped their collections

in a way which moved them away from the large, cold warehouses that were being constructed around the country to develop something more intimate and personal.

These new smaller places often included libraries, gardens and smaller gallery space which made the viewer's experience more intimate and played on more than one sense. For example, in the Frick Collection (see figure 6), a visitor can view a formidable collection of the Dutch masters, Rembrandt and Vermeer, while listening to the soft trickle of water and from a fountain and smelling the fresh flowers in the adjacent Garden Courtyard. This multi-sensory experience at the Frick Museum may trigger different feelings in a visitor, and will provide a different emotional experience as opposed to encountering several paintings by the same artist and his contemporaries in a rather non-descript, large, square gallery in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see figure 5) a few blocks away.



Figure 5 – Typical gallery space at the Met, N.d., Photograph, Metmuseum.org.



Figure 6 – Garden Court at the Frick Museum, looking northwest, 1976, Frick.org.

With a new design and a new purpose came new results from visitors. While it may be said that a visit to a large civic museum in Philadelphia, Boston and New York might yield a similar experience based on standard size rooms and similar artists, a visit to two different collection museums might yield different observations and emotions. The experience from small museum to small museum might also vary. For instance, one might experience serenity in the midst of austerity in the Garden Courtyard at the Frick Museum in New York; while a visit to the cloister at the Gardner Museum in Boston might yield the emotions akin to introspection which might lead to prayer and spiritual awakening. No matter what the purpose of the collector, the small museum stands in strong contrast to the encyclopedic museum and even its counterparts.

When we focus on the purpose of the Gardner Museum, we see that architecture immediately sets the backdrop for transformation. Mrs. Gardner chose to combine

elements from a cloister on the first floor with the stucco and architectural on windows of a Venetian Gothic building. Together, these elements surround a lush central garden which is filled with permanent statues and a rotation of seasonal plantings. When we examine Mrs. Gardner's personal life from birth to death, we can see the influences that led her to the design of her museum.

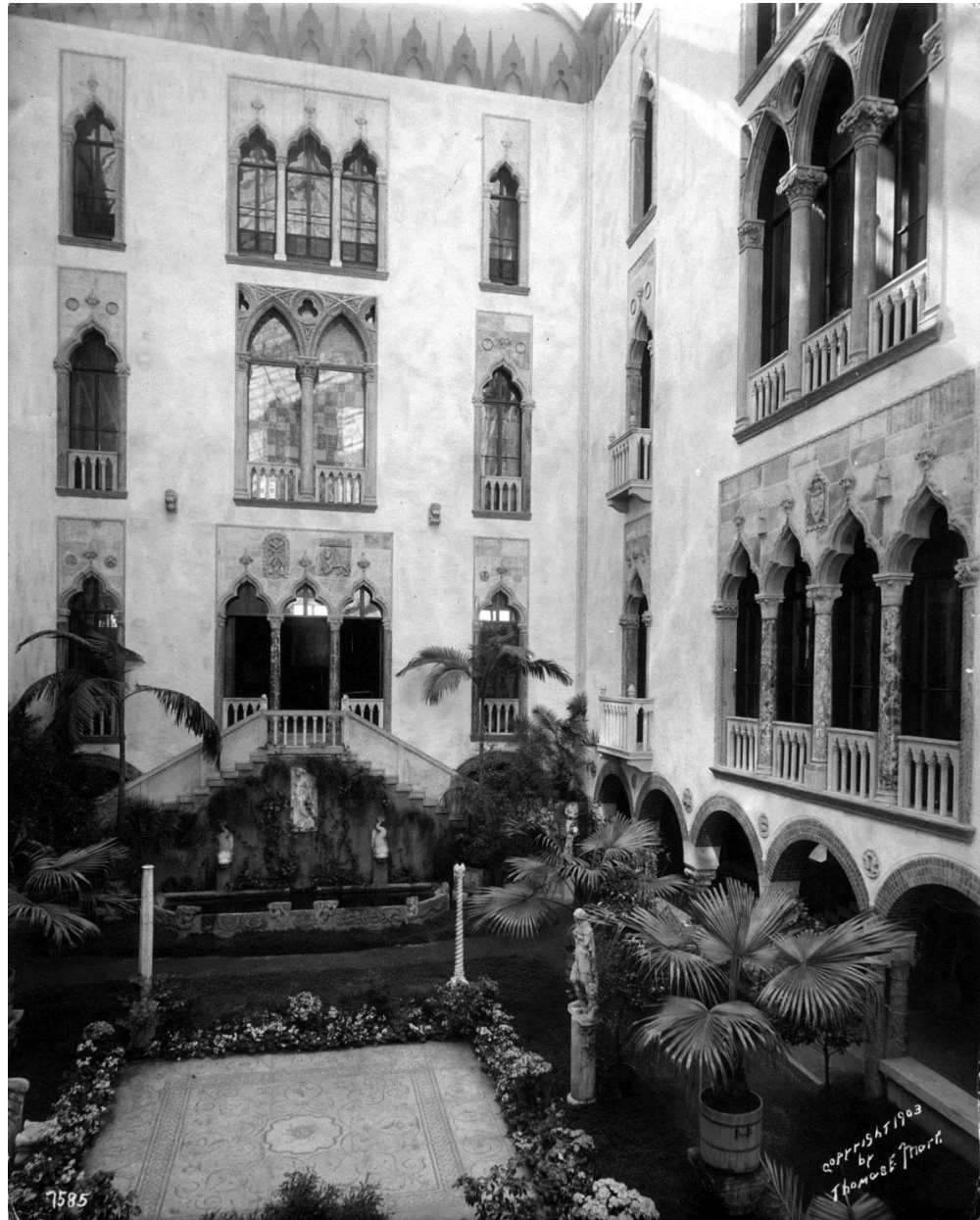


Figure 7 – T.E. Marr and Son, Boston, Courtyard, 1902, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

BACKGROUND

On April 14, 1840, Isabella Stewart was born in New York City, to David Stewart and Adelia Smith (Carter 10). Mr. Stewart was a man of pure Scottish descent who made a fortune early on as an “importer” and later as “president” of the “Stewart Iron Company near Uniontown, Pennsylvania” (Tharp 5). Isabella’s mother, Adelia, was the daughter of “a tavern and stable” keeper in Brooklyn (Tharp 5). Isabella’s family heritage was something in which she always took interest. Later on in life, when she was collecting art and antique books, she always took a special interest in items which had been owned by a member of the Stuart family of Scotland (to which she said she could trace her heritage), or of someone with her first name, such as Isabella de’ Este.

Because of her family’s money, Isabella had a variety of educational experiences. Growing up in New York, she was “educated at the sort of front-parlor school then so popular among the well-to-do of Manhattan” as well as at a “Roman Catholic convent school” (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 5). However, it was not until she traveled to Europe with her parents in 1857 that her life would really begin to take form. While in Paris, her parents enrolled her in a finishing school (Tharp 13). While there, she met and befriended her future sister-in-law, Julia Gardner. Likewise, the Stewarts and the Gardners spent time together touring the city and likely discussing business. Julia’s father, John L. Gardner, owned sailing ships like his father before him (Tharp 15). As a part of a small group of Americans abroad, it is apparent that the Gardners and Stewarts got along well enough that an introduction between John L. Gardner II and Isabella Stewart was made.

By all accounts Isabella was a spirited young woman, while John L. “Jack” Gardner II was sincere, intelligent, responsible, and had a good sense for business. After

a brief courtship back in the States, Isabella Stewart married Jack Gardner on April 10, 1860, at Grace Church, New York City (“About”). The two honeymooned in Washington D.C. before heading to Boston where they would establish themselves in the new Back Bay section of the city (Tharp 22). Their home at 152 Beacon Street was a wedding gift from Isabella’s father. In this permanent residence, she and Jack would begin collecting antiques, books and rare art which would become the foundation of the Fenway Court palace she would build after his death.

On June 18, 1863, Isabella Stewart Gardner gave birth to a son, John L. Gardner III, known as “Jackie” (“About”). According to her first biographer, Morris Carter, Mrs. Gardner was both enthused by the birth of her son, and grateful for the baby. She expressed her emotions through constant care for Jackie, and through expressions of her faith. “On April 10, 1864, her fourth wedding anniversary, Mrs. Gardner was confirmed at Emmanuel Church by Dr. Manton Eastburn, Bishop of Massachusetts. This was the devout expression of her gratitude to God for the gift of a son” (Carter 25). Mrs. Gardner was committed to her faith throughout her life. She performed many open acts of charity, in addition to other, more subtle, charitable efforts. Undoubtedly, she was confirmed as a sign reaffirming her marriage to her husband, setting an example for her son, and in appreciation for all that her God had given her. Sadly, one year later, at just two years of age, Jackie died of pneumonia on March 15, 1865 (Carter 27).



Figure 8 – J. Notman, Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner and her son John Lowell Gardner III ("Jackie"), 1864, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

During the two years that followed Jackie's death, Isabella Stewart Gardner endured depression and illness ("About"). History seemed to be repeating itself. Just as her parents had taken the family on a trip to Europe in 1857 after the death of her sister, Adelia, so did Jack and Isabella after the loss of their son, Jackie. As a 'prescription' for

her illness, Isabella's doctor suggested a vacation; therefore, the Gardners traveled through parts of Europe, seeing some of the greatest natural and man-made works of art (Carter 28 – 29). While in Europe, Isabella was bitten by the collecting bug. She returned home from this trip and countless others with antique books, furniture, sculptures, tapestries, paintings and many other forms of art, both sacred and secular.

In addition to collecting, Mrs. Gardner developed a habit of keeping detailed journals about her travels. These journals were not just written words, but more akin to today's scrapbooks. Mrs. Gardner filled these books with letters, postcards, photographs, original watercolors and personal commentary about the people she met and the places she visited. In describing her book on Egypt and the Middle East, her first biographer, Morris Carter, notes that the places she visited, the objects she collected from those places and the observations she wrote in her journals, reflected her ability to “always [be] sensitive to the ‘Spirit of Place’” (35). Whether she was writing about a Christian Cathedral in England, a Buddhist temple in Japan, or one of the great Egyptian pyramids on the Nile, Mrs. Gardner's observations reveal a young woman with a profound recognition, appreciation and understanding of God's hand in all creations.



Figure 9 – Page from Isabella's travel album for Japan, 1883 – 1884, Archives, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Upon their return home from each of these sojourns abroad, the couple decorated their first home at 152 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts with the art ‘souvenirs’ from their travels. As their travels became more frequent, so their purchases became more calculated and directed. When the Gardners ran out of space to display their

purchases, they developed a plan for a new home on the same site as their Beacon Street residence. Those plans were drastically altered in late 1898 when “Mr. Gardner was stricken with apoplexy at the Exchange Club” on December 10 and died later that evening (Carter 173). Mr. Gardner was well-respected in Boston: “He was a member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard College and treasurer of the Museum of Fine Arts” (Carter 173). He took care of Mrs. Gardner in life and in death, leaving her with the funds enough (combined with the money she inherited from her father) to begin construction of her home museum on the Fens in Boston. Based on written letters, recorded conversations, and collecting patterns before his death, the construction of a museum was a project which the two of them had been planning before Jack died. The one difference between their vision as a couple and what eventually emerged as Fenway Court was that together they were going to construct a museum on the location of their home at 152 Beacon Street. When Mrs. Gardner, however, met with architect, William T. Sears, to review the architectural plans, (only two weeks after Jack’s death), he was surprised to learn about some new changes (Tharp 211 – 212). “On January 31, 1899, Mrs. Gardner purchased a parcel of land at the corner of the Fenway and Worthington Street” with several other parcels added at later dates (Carter 174). This land at the edge of Frederick Olmstead’s Fens is where she built Fenway Court.



Figure 10 – Whipple, Boston, John L. Gardner Jr. around 1864, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Mrs. Gardner may have been depressed by the sudden loss of her husband, just as she had been years earlier after the loss of her son; however, this time she put her emotions into intellectual and physical work. Records, interviews and photographs reveal that Mrs. Gardner was heavily involved in each phase of the creation of her museum. Further research shows that from the drawing of early architectural plans to the hanging and placement of some 2,500 plus objects, Mrs. Gardner's hand and eye touched everything in the completed museum. Mrs. Gardner drew on her knowledge of architectural and artistic truths learned from scholars, artists and her first-hand travels around the world; and when it came to constructing her own museum, she showed no hesitation in relaying this knowledge to the American builders. A brief glimpse of her

knowledge can be seen in her journals and her personal library which is filled with books on classical architecture and building ideas.

Two years after Jack's death, in January 1901, she set Boston ablaze with gossip as she had done so many times before. It was at this time that she realized the results of her faithful Christian life, her love for her only son and husband, her education, her relationships with famous artists and writers, life's travels and all of her experiences, in her unique home and museum in the swampy Fens of Boston. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (she named it Fenway Court), which combines the prayerful serenity of a Christian monastery with the architectural and artistic grandeur of a Venetian palace, opened before the new Museum of Fine Arts located across the Fens and would come to stand in opposition in many ways to the warehouse style museums which were opening across the United States during this time period.

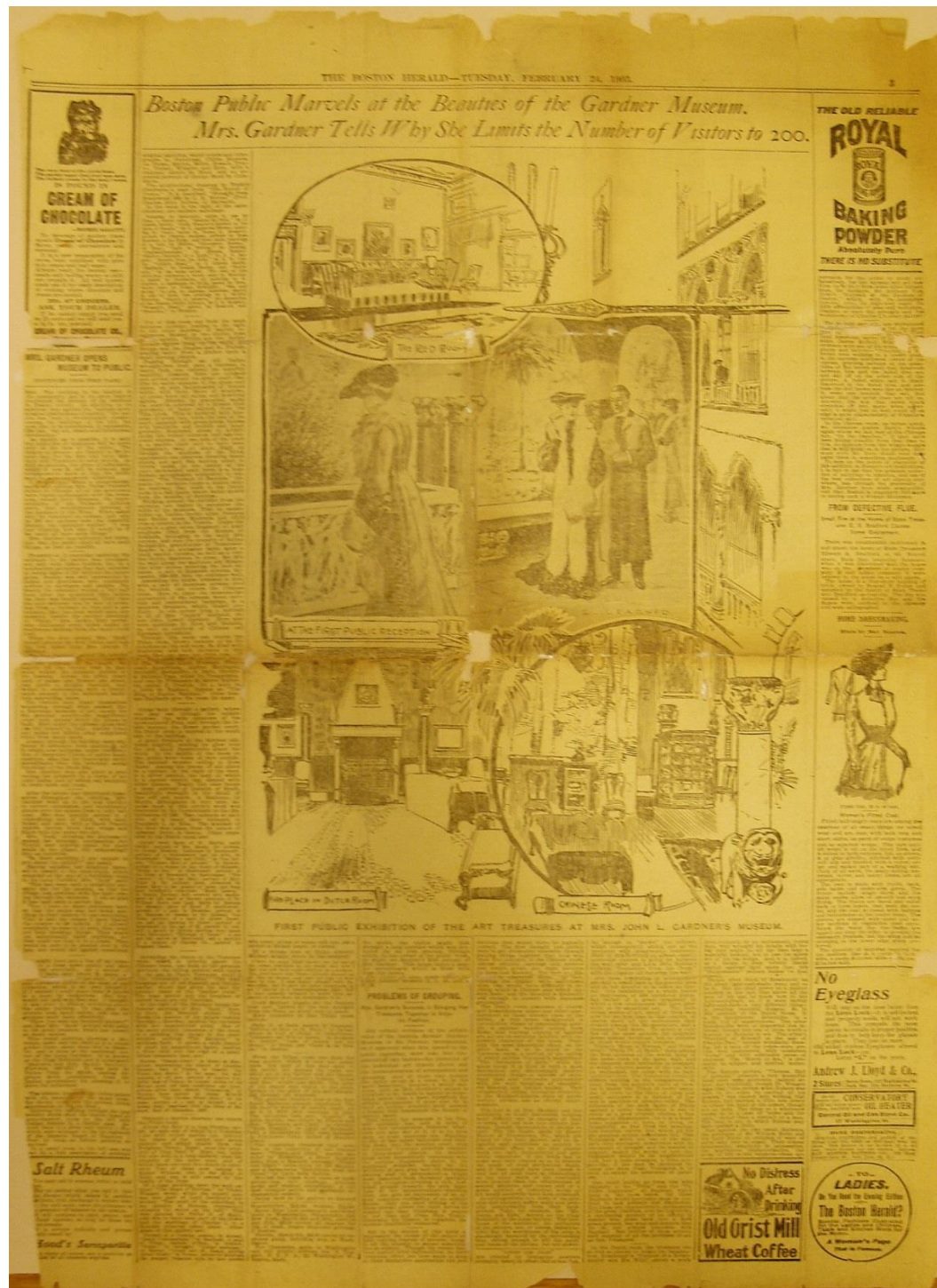


Figure 11 – Peter Cammarata, *The Boston Herald* February 24, 1903, 2013, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

In building her Venetian palace on the Fens, she was not only building a museum to house her growing collection of art and antiquities, but she was creating a space where

she would live for the last twenty-three years of her life; where she would hold concerts; where she would allow artists to come to create new art; where she would entertain friends and dignitaries; and, finally, perhaps even most uniquely, she would hold religious services. Above all, Mrs. Gardner was a person of strong faith. Her tastes in collecting show that to be true, her installations hold that to be true, and her actions in life and death associated with men and women across many faiths show that to be true.

Certainly, it is important to establish from where Mrs. Gardner had come: her distinguished lineage, her private and specialized education, and her upper class rearing, marriage and social circle, all of which certainly afforded her opportunities without which she never could have bought and established Fenway Court. However, the one aspect of Mrs. Gardner's life, which is critical to an understanding of her museum and her own life, is her commitment to her Christian faith and her dedication to her individual relationship with Jesus, Mary and the saints. By no means a "Bible-thumper," Mrs. Gardner was simply a devout Christian from birth to death; there are many areas of her life from her upbringing and education to her personal worship habits, interests in travel and exploration, art and antique collecting habits, and acts of charity which all stand as proof of this fact.

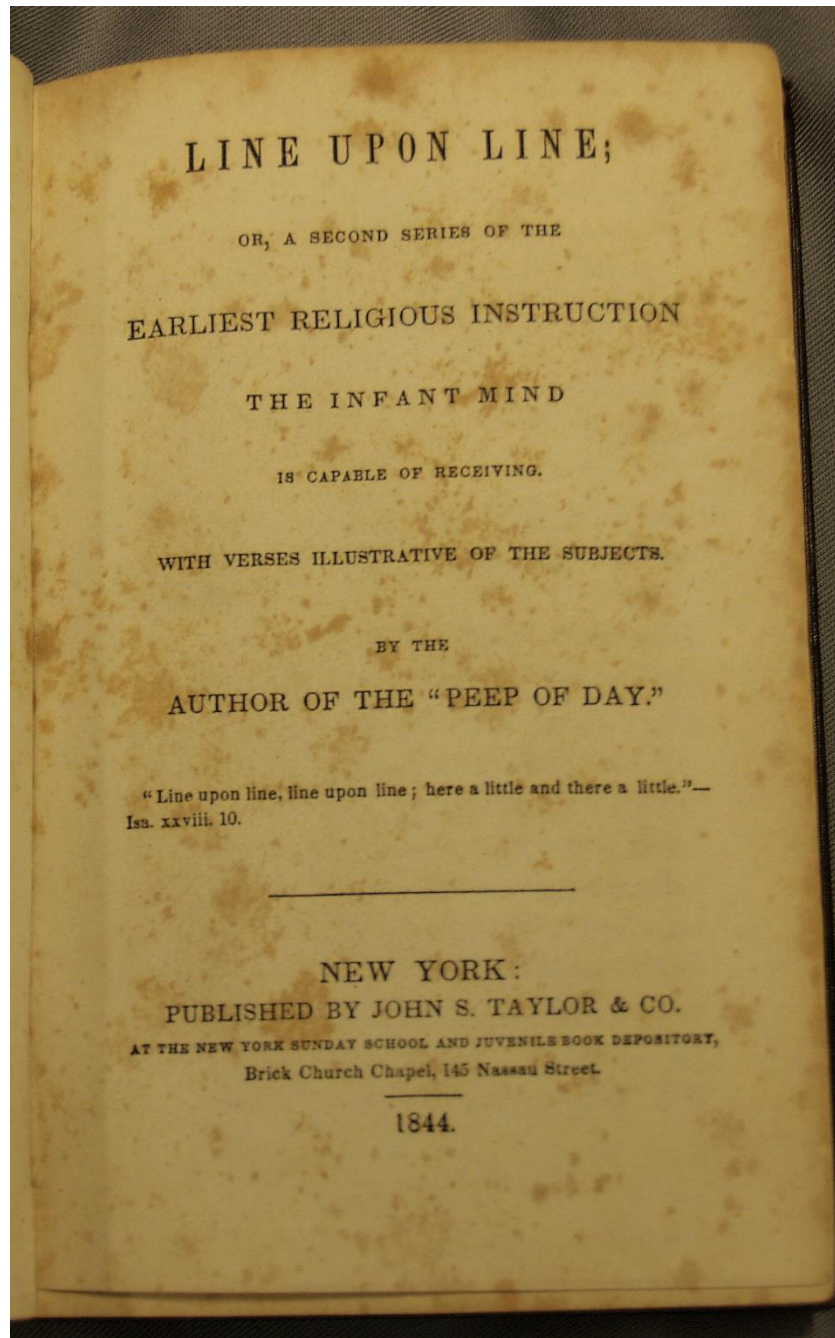


Figure 12 – Peter Cammarata, Title page of Mrs. Gardner's copy of *Line Upon Line*, 2013, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Mrs. Gardner's mother, Mrs. Stewart, is described as a woman who "was a practical woman with strict religious views" (Carter 10). She instilled a strong sense of discipline in Isabella from a young age, which, according to Mrs. Gardner's own recollections, included spankings (Carter 11). Among the books which Mrs. Stewart's

mother gave to young Isabella were *Line upon Line* and *Peep of Day*, which sought to educate the young child in ways of the Christian faith, ideal behavior and how to live a virtuous life (ISGMA). When examining the chapter titles from *Peep of Day* as an influence for Mrs. Gardner's museum collection, one chapter title immediately stands out: chapter twenty three, "The Storm at Sea" (ISGMA). While no concrete evidence of this direct connection exists, it is difficult to imagine that Mrs. Gardner was not familiar with the story from her earliest education when she collected Rembrandt's painting by the same subject matter and title.

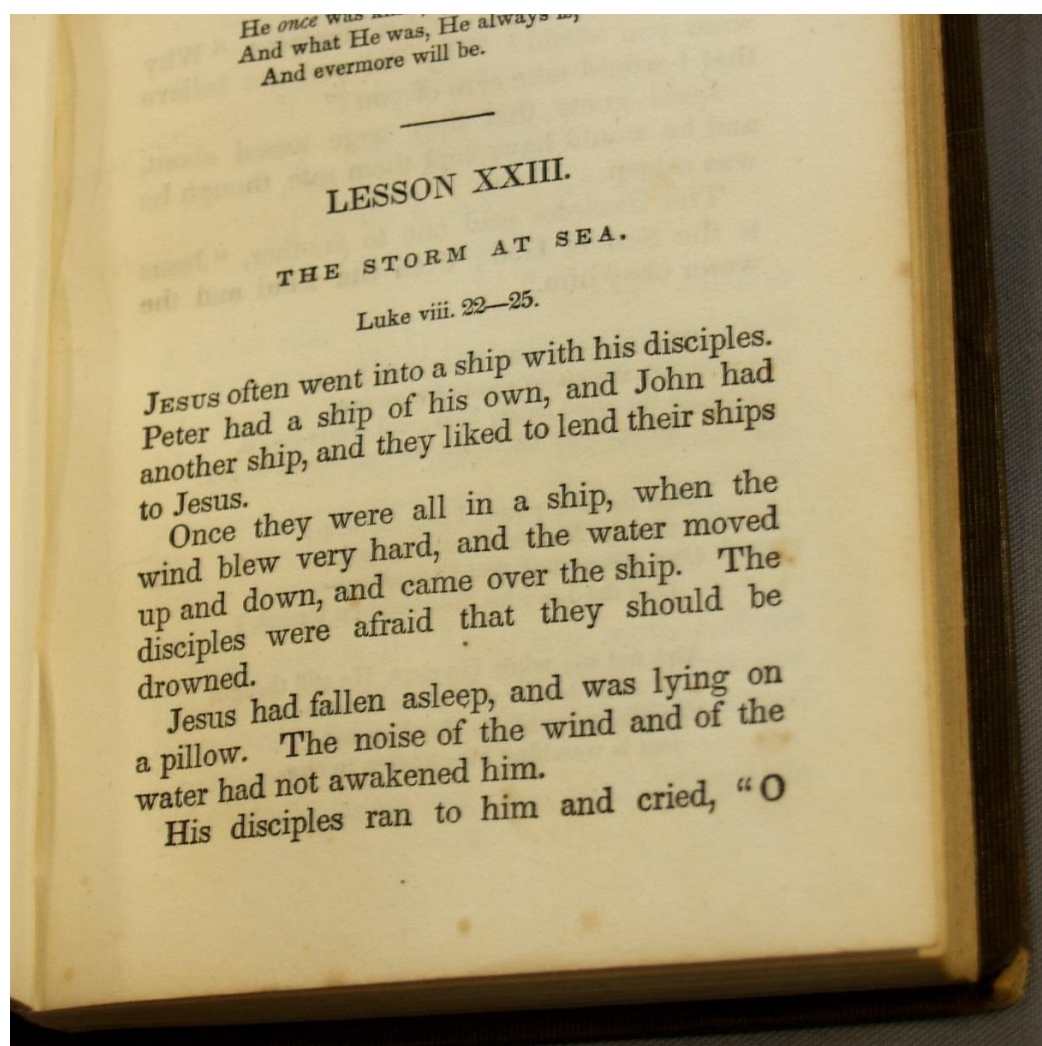


Figure 13 – Peter Cammarata, Page from Mrs. Gardner's copy of *Peep of Day*, 2013, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

In her youth, Isabella was afforded a variety of experiences. Early on, she had private teachers, and then in 1854 – 1855 she attended the school kept by Miss Mary Okill before finishing the year in a Catholic school at St. Mary's convent (Carter 11 - 12). Although Isabella's mother was not in favor of the Roman Catholic Church, when Isabella became an adult, she found her own sensibilities leaning toward Catholicism. A record of her correspondence shows communication to various members of the Catholic hierarchy, including Bishop O'Connell and Cardinal Merry del Val, secretary to Pope Pius X (ISGMA). Perhaps she was attracted to a faith which celebrates the work of ordinary men and women who did extraordinary things in their respective lifetimes, and were recognized for their sacrifices by the Catholic Church, because of the way she sought to live her own life. In the end, as Louise Hall Tharp points out, Mrs. Gardner, in her Will "ordained that on her birthday, 'the fourteenth of April in every year, the Trustees shall have a Memorial Service conducted by the Society of St. John the Evangelist, otherwise known as the Cowley Fathers, in the chapel at the end of the Long Gallery in the building occupied by the Museum established under this will...' As a rule, only saints, martyrs and royalty have prayers in perpetuity – but was not Isabella queen in her own palace forever" (Tharp 313).

Notwithstanding her connections to the Catholic Church, Mrs. Gardner actively celebrated her own faith. As previously mentioned, Mr. and Mrs. Gardner were married in Grace Church in New York City on April 10, 1860 (Carter 21). And following the birth of their only son, John L. Gardner III, Mrs. Gardner was confirmed in Boston (Carter 25).

Her travels took her around the world. She kept personal scrapbooks, some of which can be viewed on the Gardner museum's website. In them is the evidence that she sought out houses of worship in every land. Not surprisingly, after she and Jack took responsibility for the raising of their three nephews, they took the boys on a cathedral tour of England. While in England, among many places, they visited Chester Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral (ISGMA). When examining her scrapbooks from this trip (and many others) we can begin to see Mrs. Gardner forming a vision which she would execute later on in life in her museum. Photographs and postcards reveal her appreciation for religious art and architecture; and, the direct impact of this pilgrimage throughout England can be seen in the installation of many sculptures, friezes and even doorways which are installed throughout Fenway Court.

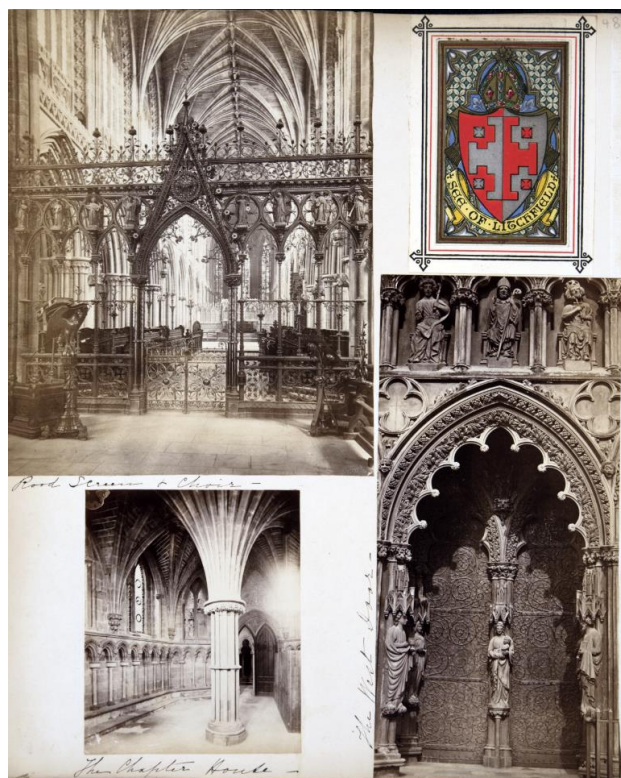


Figure 14 – Page from Isabella Gardner's travel album for Great Britain, 1879, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

On a trip to Egypt in 1875, Morris Carter notes that, upon reading Mrs. Gardner's journal, one can see that she was always sensitive to the 'Spirit of Place' (35). This observation describes what Mrs. Gardner did perfectly in applying the aesthetics of what she saw in her creation of Fenway Court. Visits to the Pyramids, the Coptic Church at Tehneh and ruined temples on the island of Philae in 1875, show that Mrs. Gardner was also sensitive to religious places beyond her own Christian upbringing (Tharp 51). However, "scenes in the Holy Land proved to be more than sight-seeing; they were a religious experience. She was often close to a state of exaltation" (Tharp 53).

When looking at examples of another aspect of her faith and character, Christian charity, we see that Mrs. Gardner was very generous when it came to responding to local needs as well as those around the world. In Boston, she publically supported the newly formed Boston Symphony and Museum of Fine Arts both with her time and her money. Privately, she supported many other organizations with the request that her donations be kept anonymous; sometimes she did so as a member of a group; for example, at the beginning of her collecting career, she supported the publication of a Concordance by the Dante Society without having her name included as the one to support the printing; sometimes, she did so from a distance. Her generosity was not only experienced by members of religious communities or the art community, but in athletics as well. With nephews at Harvard, she was a staunch supporter of Harvard football and ice hockey, as well as a lover of the professional baseball team, the Boston Red Sox. One of the charitable activities of which she was most proud was a contest which she sponsored among local groups for best horticulture display (ISGMA). From literature to athletics to flowers, there seemed no stone untouched in Boston by Mrs. Jack.

Outside of her own creation at Fenway Court, Mrs. Gardner's presence is still felt most palpably in Boston upon visits to the Church of the Advent in Back Bay and the Monastery of the Cowley Fathers across the Charles in Cambridge. When living at 152 Beacon Street, Mrs. Gardner celebrated her faith at a number of locations in the city. The most lasting (and interesting) was at the Church of the Advent, located first at Bowdoin Street, then at Brimmer Street. In the late 1880s and early 90s, Mrs. Gardner shared an interest in The Church of the Advent with the American Gothic scholar-architect Ralph Adams Cram (Shand-Tucci, "Ralph" 28). Although no documentation exists of the two working together, Cram acknowledges Gardner as among those who influenced his work in Boston (Shand-Tucci, "Ralph" 28). Where the two do create interest is in the fact that they each contributed significant works of art to The Advent, which they believed would enhance the liturgical experience.

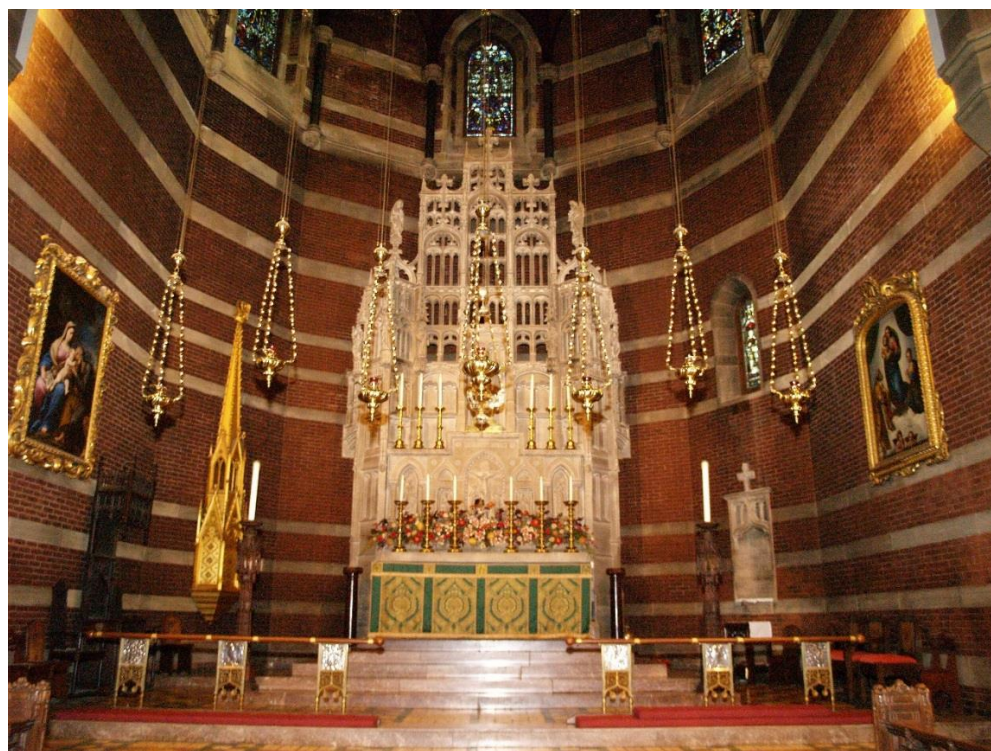


Figure 15 – Peter Cammarata, Reredos from Church of the Advent, Boston, 2013, Photograph.

In 1883, when the church was opened, Mrs. Gardner donated the high altar and reredos, or large stone-carved screen which backs the altar; then, “in 1890 – 91 she also gave the huge openwork reredos designed by Sir Ernest George and Harold Peto that was then added to the original reredos” (Shand-Tucci, “Ralph” 29). Today a visit to the church reveals the artwork as the crown jewel in a church filled with magnificent stained glass windows and other priceless works. In addition to her donation of the reredos, Mrs. Gardner also gave The Advent several items which are still used regularly in the liturgy. The most visible of these gifts are two seventeenth century chairs from the Palazzo Barberini, Rome, which sit on the altar flanking the bishop’s chair (*Parish* 193). Additionally, Mrs. Gardner donated an altar cloth which is specifically called “Mrs. Gardner’s lace” by the staff at The Advent (Wood). *Recently, I was afforded an opportunity to personally contribute to determining the provenance of this lace when I provided the Gardner museum staff with a photograph of the pattern. The hope is that the lace will match an existing piece in Mrs. Gardner’s collection.* The final donation, which is still a key part of the liturgy, is a set of liturgical vestments. These vestments recently underwent a refurbishment by a member of the New Advent congregation, and have been recreated for use in the liturgy (Wood). These works of art are quintessential examples of some of what exists in her own collection in Fenway Court, and further demonstrates how her faith shaped her collection and her generous spirit extended to her primary faith community.



Figure 16 – Peter Cammarata, Chairs from Church of the Advent, Boston, donated by Isabella Stewart Gardner, 2013, Photograph.



Figure 17 – Peter Cammarata, Refurbished vestments donated by Isabella Stewart Gardner to Church of the Advent, Boston, 2013, Photograph.



Figure 18 – Peter Cammarata, "Mrs. Gardner's lace" altar covering donated by Isabella Stewart Gardner to Church of the Advent, Boston, 2013, Photograph.

When Mrs. Gardner left 152 Beacon Street for Fenway Court, the frequency of her trips to the Church of the Advent seems to have decreased, but not the level of her faith. Carter, and other subsequent biographers, felt even though the distance between her new home at Fenway Court and her house of worship at the Church of the Advent had grown, her desire to stay close to God had not decreased; therefore, she was prompted to create a private worship space in the museum itself. Interestingly enough, the first Chapel which she created was on the third floor of the museum at the end of the Long Gallery and was not on display to the public until after her death. She did have a few services there throughout her lifetime; most notably the first being a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass in 1901, just a week before the unveiling of the museum which was led by the Father Frisbie, Rector of The Church of the Advent (Carter 192). After her stroke in 1919, consistent correspondence between Mrs. Gardner and Father Powell, the rector of the Brimmer Street church, who brought her communion every two weeks until her death, further illustrates that although she was physically restricted from leaving her home, she still had an active interest and participation as a member of her religious faith community (ISGMA).

In April 1919, while living at Fenway Court, Mrs. Gardner also supported the expansion of the Cowley Fathers' ministry when she donated the money they needed to buy the land on which to build their new monastery on the Charles River in Cambridge (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 293). The superior, Spence Burton, thanked her previously for the generous gift, and felt "that many generations of devoted Religious will venerate your memory as a foundress of their monastery" (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 294). Even with her donation, the building took more than a decade to complete; nevertheless, Burton was

right, no matter how much time would elapse, the Cowley Fathers would not forget Mrs. Gardner. As part of the term set forth in her Will, the Cowley Fathers continue to have a service said in Mrs. Gardner's honor on her birthday in the third floor Chapel at the Gardner museum; this is just another example of where her faith marked by a strong sense of charity intersected with her vision at Fenway Court.

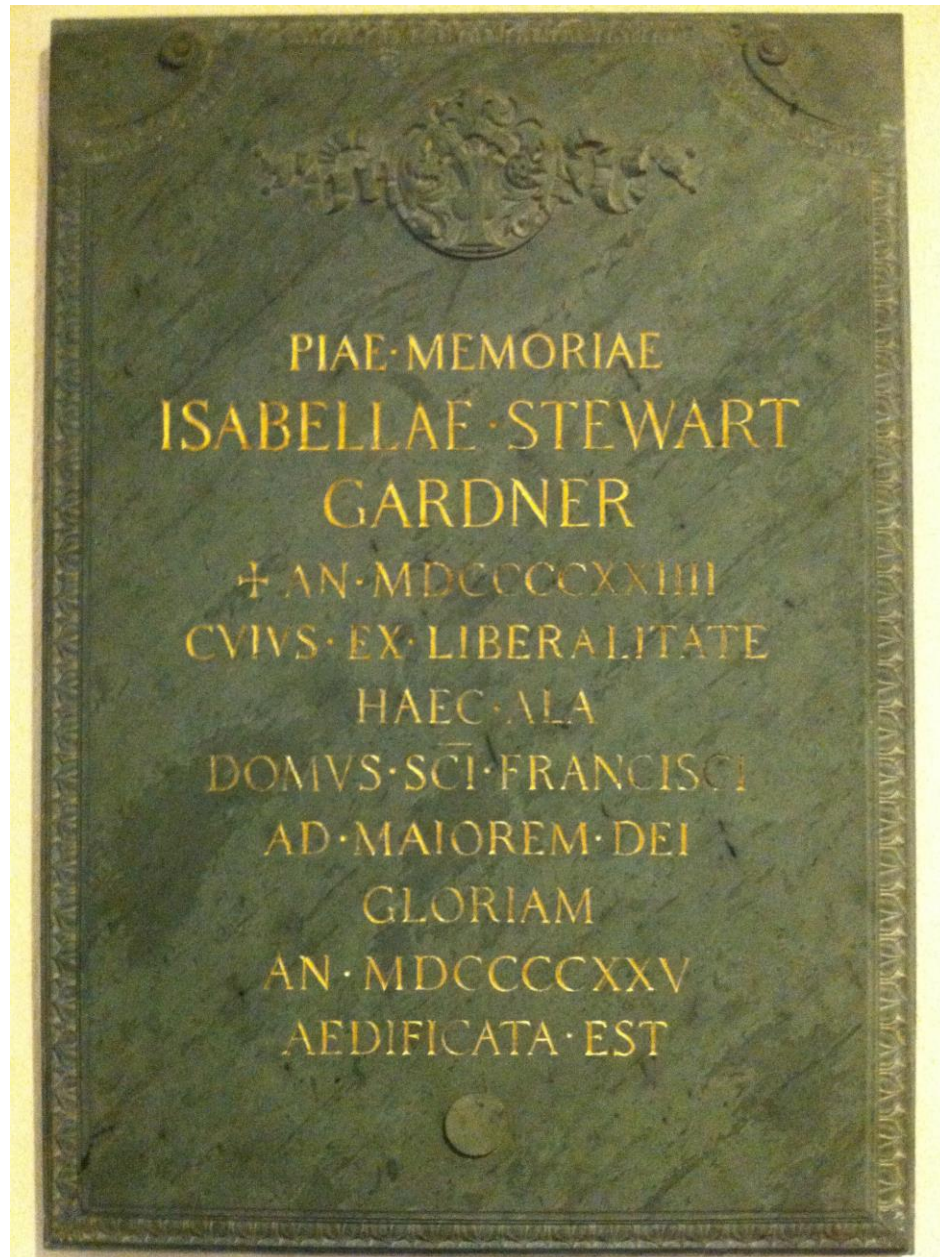


Figure 19 – Tom Marsan, Plaque honoring Mrs. Gardner at the Monastery of The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013, Photograph.

When it comes to collecting, Mrs. Gardner's faith is literally on display throughout the museum. Certainly, what she donated in the reredos to The Church of the Advent reflected her understanding of John Ruskin; however, she did not begin her journey there. Almost twenty years earlier, in the 1870s, she began collecting copies of the medieval Florentine masterpiece, *Divina Commedia*, by Dante. Under the close advisement and tutelage of Charles Eliot Norton, the first lecturer of art history at Harvard University, she acquired several volumes of the book; these are revered for being first edition printings from the 1400s, containing Botticelli illustrations and their intricate bindings. These were books which Mrs. Gardner collected, read and admired with close friends and new found scholarly-types such as Norton. These books and the people with whom she forged these relationships early on in her collecting days would shape her mind, her reputation, as well as her acquisitions (Carter 93 - 95).

When books proved to be only the beginning and Mrs. Gardner began collecting paintings, the first Old master she acquired was Zurbarán's *The Virgin of Mercy*. The painting, which focuses on the relationship between Mother and Son, a relationship which, with the loss of her own son Jackie, was so strong a part of Mrs. Gardner's memory, tells us just how personal her collection would become. She stood by this observation by hanging the Zurbarán painting in the most personal of places: first, her room at Beacon Street; then, her Chapel at Fenway Court; and, finally, in the Spanish Chapel at Fenway Court, where she was laid out before her burial. Of course, this painting is not the only religious image she purchased. There is hardly a space in the museum from which a painting of saint, a relief of a gospel writer, or an image of Christ cannot be seen. All in all, the most repeated religious image must be the Madonna and

child. The affinity for these images was not born from early upbringing or from her education; rather, one which was supported by the form of Anglo-Catholicism fostered by The Church of the Advent as well as the many Roman Catholic influences which she encountered throughout her travels, most of all in her favorite city: Venice, Italy.

It was in Venice where she really began to immerse herself in art. On a trip in 1884, with her husband Jack bedridden, she went to every corner of the city, gained entrance to every little church to view as many Tinterettos, Veroneses and Titians as possible. Venice, as a city, had the most obvious influence on her museum. This surface observation lies in the Moorish arches which she purchased from the Ca' d' Oro on the Grand Canal, which make up the décor for the upper story windows on the inside of the Courtyard. More importantly, and just as obvious as the arches, is the fact that in Venice Mrs. Gardner would have experienced the confluence of many cultures. Because of its strategic location on the North end of the Adriatic, Medieval Venice thrived as a place where crusaders came to commission ships on their way to the Middle East, or where they stopped on their return passage to Europe. For the city, this meant bringing together people from many cultures and accommodating them all, without sacrificing their own Christian identity.

Mrs. Gardner learned this lesson from the history of her favorite city, and executed it brilliantly in her museum. In Fenway Court, there are a plethora of Christian images; in addition, the Christian images are blended with images of Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods and statues of the Buddha. And not far off from these timeless works of art there are secular images related to politics and marriage and even rape. Just as in Venice, where from one street to another a visitor might walk from a Jewish ghetto, to a Catholic

Church before finding himself surprisingly in a Greek trading market, all without even noticing a clear difference in the height of homes in the ghetto, the circular dome of the church, or the Greek art on the façade of the trading building; so, in Mrs. Gardner's museum, one would experience the harmony between the Buddha, the Virgin Mary and Athena. And just as in Venice where there are over one hundred Catholic churches, Mrs. Gardner's Christian faith dominates her collection with hundreds of pieces on the subject. Both places invite new cultures in, but not at the expense of who they are in their hearts.

Besides creating her private Chapel on the third floor, and the Spanish Chapel in the redesign of the Music Room in 1914, Mrs. Gardner also had several other spaces which were specifically dedicated to her faith. The most cryptic of all is mentioned by Morris Carter, who identifies the closet-sized space between the Macknight Room and the Blue Room, which Mrs. Gardner referred to as the 'Vatichino.' Used as a public coat check for most of the museum's existence following Mrs. Gardner's death, the contents of the Vatichino are unclear. What is clear about the space is that it was filled with some of her most personal and important items. Connecting that fact to a name which echoes the home of the Roman Catholic Pope we see another confluence of ideas: perhaps a connection to a memory of the Vatican museum which she had once visited with the secretary of Pope Pius X, Merry del Val. The Gardner Archives contain communications with del Val, which show that Mrs. Gardner was grateful for their relationship; and, that the Holy Father was grateful for her donation to the victims of the 1908 earthquake in Messina (ISGMA). While life-long relationships with members of the Cowley Fathers and communications with Roman Catholic clergy in Boston and abroad are strong connections to the importance of Mrs. Gardner's faith in her life, the true lesson learned

from her time in Venice is an examination of her relationship with Okakura Kakuzō and his influence on her ideas and collection.

Mrs. Gardner met Kakuzō in 1904 when he was appointed to the staff of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Tharp 255). She had visited the Far East in 1883 and 1884, and her journals show how much she appreciated what she saw (just as in Egypt and the Holy Land). While Kakuzō was not a clergy member of any church, he did further educate Mrs. Gardner in the secular and religious practices of the East. During his time, in Boston, he spent considerable time at Fenway Court where he held lectures, wrote books and poetry, discussed art, and even put on a memorable Tea Ceremony under the moonlight. Although he never advised Mrs. Gardner on collecting, he certainly inspired her, and even contributed some personal items to her collection which were used in the Tea Ceremony (Chong and Murai, “Preface” *Journeys East* 12). Several of these items are on display throughout the museum.



Figure 20 – [photographer unknown] Okakura Kakuzō, N.d., Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Kakuzō's influence runs deep at the Gardner museum. Originally, Mrs. Gardner had created a Chinese Room where the current Early Italian Room is located. Here, she blended her portrait by Zorn, with the Chinese screens and Italian furniture. At first thought, the art of Sweden, of Italy and of China sound as though they would clash;

however, with Gardner's placement undoubtedly influenced by lessons on Eastern philosophy from Kakuzō, the results evoke harmonious intrigue.



Figure 21 – Joseph B. Pratt, Second Chinese Room 1914 – 1971, northwest wall, 1963, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

When Mrs. Gardner decided to take down the Music Room in 1914, she created several new spaces: the Spanish Cloister, the Spanish Chapel and the Chinese Loggia. These three spaces were all open to the public when the museum was opened, but one

additional space was kept private. A set of stairs on the West end of the Chinese Loggia descends down to a Second Chinese Room. According to photos in the Gardner Museum Archives, in this space, Mrs. Gardner displayed both important personal trinkets from her travels in the East, valuable Japanese screens, and a large ancient Buddha statue. Here she is said to have spent a tremendous amount of time in meditation and contemplation. In late 1970, early 1971, this room was determined to be outside the restrictions of Mrs. Gardner's will, was dismantled, and on April 17, 1971, 120 items were sold at auction by Parke Bernet in New York. The space was floored over and turned into a café and shop (Chong, "Introduction" *Journeys East* 46). With the opening of the Renzo Piano addition in 2012, the ramp over the staircase was removed, exposing the staircase again, but the Second Chinese Room has yet to be restored.

Spending time in meditation and contemplation was only natural for someone with Mrs. Gardner's Christian faith. Here is where we see another connection between her faith and her appreciation for collecting and displaying art. In addition to her friendship with Kakuzō, the creation and design of her museum is most certainly influenced by two other young men, Matthew Pritchard and Bernard Berenson. Each of these young men helped frame her collection with his ideas on aesthetics and sensibilities related to acquisitions.



Figure 22 – [photographer unknown] Matthew Stewart Pritchard, N.d., Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Matthew Stewart Pritchard was assistant director of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts from 1903 to 1906 (Chong, "Mrs. Gardner's" 214). Pritchard is most well-known for his clash at the MFA for his stance that plaster casts of great sculptures were not worth collecting. This stance would eventually cost him his position at the MFA, but not his friendship with Mrs. Gardner, who wholeheartedly agreed with him. Pritchard lived in

her museum while she was installing it in the summer and fall of 1902 (Chong, “Mrs. Gardner’s” 215). Pritchard wrote to Mrs. Gardner long after his departure from Boston, praising her display of art, telling her, “the only way to treat ancient pictures is the one you adopt, to employ them not as a collection but as ornaments, provided they happen to express your sentiments to your satisfaction. It is the only way to make them live, to allow them a continued lease of life” (Chong, “Mrs. Gardner’s” 216). Art, Pritchard felt, needed an atmospheric setting to give it life and emotional resonance:

In a museum these things are have-beens. To renew their benign vitality you would have to take them out of museums and graft them to their old life afresh. They are all very well where they are for the purposes of the intellect whose eyes, says Bergson, are ever turned to the rear. But though “we think backwards we live forwards,” and for purposes of life these things must be where they are attached to action. Mrs. Gardner’s attempt is a capital re-animating operation. (Chong, “Mrs. Gardner’s” 216)

Pritchard believed objects required an atmospheric environment where they could function as “artistic stimulants.” Pritchard saw feeling over intelligence, art over conceptual knowledge. This was a philosophy he shared with the American, John La Farge and, the Frenchman, Henri Bergson (Chong, “Mrs. Gardner’s” 216). It was also a philosophy which Mrs. Gardner put into practice in her museum, one which helped make the lesson on Venice concrete. She placed a painting of Christ near a painting of *The Rape of Europa*, which was hung above a swatch of a dress and some expensive antique furniture. All together, these objects evoke a sense of class. Although they are made by different artists at different time periods for different reasons, the installation in a

domestic setting offers a harmonious emotion. This setting, although different for every viewer, evokes a strong emotional response with no greater intellectual reason supplied. The concept of creating environs which house these works of art ultimately encourages greater thought by the visitor. Ultimately, the viewer becomes someone who contemplates or mediates on the scene more than a casual onlooker.

This outcome is supported by Anne Higonnet when she writes,

The challenge of the collection museum was to reinvent the curiosity cabinet in a way that retained the most basic concepts of the modern art museum yet felt radically different from the encyclopedic model. The distinctions between encyclopedic museums and collection museums are particularly evident because the two sorts of institutions often exist side by side: the Wallace Collection and the National Gallery or British Museum in London; the Musée Condé and the Louvre in Paris; the Gardner Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the Frick Collection and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; and Dumbarton Oaks and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., among others. (9)

Before Mrs. Gardner conceived Fenway Court, or any of these thought-provoking installations, she had to acquire the many works of art within her collection. Although she worked with many agents throughout her life, her art collection was guided by Bernard Berenson. She was introduced to Berenson during his youth, at Harvard, by Norton. She recognized great promise in him as a student when she supported him financially to go abroad in the 1880s (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 109). While abroad, he worked hard on his studies, eventually publishing several books on Italian paintings. During this time period, Europe

was in financial straits and great aristocratic families were selling off their art to the New World. In America, robber barons such as Frick, Rockefeller, Morgan, Vanderbilt, Chase and Ringling sent money across the Atlantic, buying up whatever they could find. Not having the kind of money that competed with the others, the Gardners entered an elite group in art collecting, for which they would need a strong, reliable, intelligent, trustworthy ally. Having seen eye to eye with Berenson in Boston, Mrs. Gardner trusted him time and again to negotiate and acquire most of the art works which she displayed first in her home at Beacon Street and eventually at Fenway Court.



Figure 23 – [photographer unknown] Bernard Berenson, 1899 inscribed "The Ramus, 1904," Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Literally, hundreds of letters exist in the Gardner Museum Archives which, when read together, offer a glimpse into the relationship Berenson and Mrs. Gardner shared over the years. These letters reveal great satisfaction (and even some dissatisfaction) during their 45-year partnership. When read together, the letters reveal Mrs. Gardner's voice. It is a voice which expresses its desire to create a place of beauty, a place of significance. That place of significance grew into an actual physical representation of her personal relationships; her personal interests in art and the world; and most of all, a place which demonstrated her personal relationship with her God.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning with Mrs. Gardner's first curator, Morris Carter, several authors (Louise Hall Tharp and Douglass Shand-Tucci) have focused their studies on Mrs. Gardner's biography. They have delved deeply into her family history, her collecting patterns, the creation of her museum, and even considered the legacy she has left through her museum. In my dissertation, I will use these authors' research as a departure point for an exploration of the *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* as a place for spiritual renewal. Using Carter's statement that Mrs. Gardner was "always sensitive to the 'Spirit of Place,'" I will explore Mrs. Gardner's life, museum and legacy to place the reader or visitor to the museum in a self-reflective place; thereby placing a new spin on a seemingly well-worn, static topic. (The Gardner Museum, at points, can literally be viewed as static, as Mrs. Gardner's will stipulates that nothing shall be moved or removed from the museum, or the museum and its contents will be forfeited to the Trustees of Harvard University.) Using Morris Carter's comments about Mrs. Gardner's connection to the 'spirit of place,' I will apply an approach by Jesuit priest and scholar,

Francis X. McAloon, which he used in his spiritual exploration, a “40-Day Journey with Gerard Manley Hopkins.” In his article from Fall 2008, *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, “Reading for Transformation through the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins,” Fr. McAloon describes his method of looking at Hopkins poetry through a three-pronged approach:

I propose an interdisciplinary methodology for the critical and existential interpretation of poems used in prayer, focusing upon (1) the world *of* the text, involving a close reading of the text as text, a literary investigation of textual structure, semantic content, sound and sense; (2) the world *behind* the text, pursuing an exegetical investigation into selected historical-critical influences imbedded within the text, including (among others) biographical, cultural, and religious contexts; and (3) the world *before* the text, a broad and deep consideration of the possible consequences arising from the reader’s prayerful engagement with a poem. (184)

Using McAloon’s approach, I will present and examine both sacred and secular works of art from Mrs. Gardner’s collection with the hope of guiding the reader on a journey of personal reflection and spiritual renewal, using Mrs. Gardner’s life and legacy.

Someone who views visual art in a similar way might be Sister Wendy Beckett. A cloistered nun from England who is self-taught in art, she works out of a small library filled with books on art theory, art catalogs and artists. She spends her time in intense study of all aspects of artwork. As a result of her studies, she produces television shows, articles, anthologies, and meditation books on the subject. What is important to note about her style is that it blends a variety of the historical details surrounding the artwork

with subtle details about the artist folded into an intense personal reflection. The length of these reflections for publishing and television is usually no more than a few paragraphs, or sometimes a few pages. What is so unique about this perspective is that what comes out of her reflections is an emphasis (just as both Pritchard and McAloon suggest) on the emotional response to the art. It does not matter that the artwork does not address a religious scene; she fully recognizes the *spiritual* in secular art, through careful study of the artist, the composition, and the beauty of the work: Sister Wendy reveals the transformative value in each piece of art which she examines.

In her tome *Joy Lasts: On the Spiritual in Art*, Sister Wendy describes how she can identify the *spiritual* in secular art when she explains the important difference between *religious* and *spiritual* art:

The terms *religious* and *spiritual* are often used indistinguishably. But they have very different meanings. The confusion arises from the possibility that a work may be spiritual but not religious, or else religious but not spiritual: the higher honor is always accorded to spiritual, and to it all works of art aspire. It is what we have in mind when we call a work of art great: it is what makes the encounter with such a work a life-enhancing moment. To be religious, though, a work of art must depict religious images. If the artist is not particularly gifted, he (or she) may paint a scene of very well-intentioned religious significance – a Crucifixion, say, or a Madonna – but what he shows us on the canvas sits there, dull and inert. If we find religious inspiration in it, it will come from our own faith, not the artist's vision. The work has merely acted as a springboard. We have used

it but not entered into it, as we are drawn to do with a spiritual work of art.

(Beckett, *Joy Lasts* 1 – 2)

Her definitions support my belief that spiritual transformation may occur when experiencing art at the Gardner Museum. Furthermore, Sister Wendy points out that what we bring to a work of art: life experience, faith, emotions, is also a part of what we take away from the art. Later on in her essay, she examines *Still Life with Apples* by Cézanne to further prove her point. She states that through careful examination and meditation upon Cézanne's painting that he has produced a work which is for her wholly spiritual:

This is pure image, moving us to our depths with its beauty and integrity, its passion for truth, its sense of wonder. The longer we look at *Still Life with Apples*, the more profoundly it will reveal to us our own potential for depth, perhaps our own need for integrity. There can be as much painful longing in our response as there is joy. (7)

Since the painting does not contain any symbolic meanings, nor depict any overt scene from the scriptures or lives of the saints, it is not religious, but it is transformative, it does offer a *spiritual* experience (6).

Furthermore, she contrasts the scene with an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which hung in her childhood home (8). She describes the image as one that was “of no aesthetic value at all – horrible in a way – but everything in it was alight with spiritual meaning. It took one straight into the presence of what it meant, the love of Jesus Christ, and so was a power for good. But all depended on one's own faith. The unbeliever stared, aghast!” (8). Therefore, she emphasizes her idea that “not all works of art are aesthetically powerful, yet their purely religious content may be very high indeed” (8).

If I contend in the **Personal Significance** section of this paper that I experienced a spiritual transformation during my first visit to the Gardner, then I must acknowledge Sister Wendy's explanation of experiencing the *spiritual* through art. However, it is also important to define the term "spirituality" as it applies to transformation. According to Ignatian scholar, Sandra Schneiders, spirituality is, "the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives" (684). So while a private journey through the Gardner Museum may seem an act of isolation or self-absorption, the goal is to leave the museum more self-aware so that one's relationship with self, God and others is transformed. The living of spirituality, as the experience of the transcendent, is connected to life because, "the invisible is embodied in, and mediated by, the visible," and therefore, the goal of spirituality is to "strive to see God in all things" (Armstrong 19). Like Sister Wendy, Karen Armstrong differentiates between religious beliefs and lived spiritual experience. All too often we focus on religious doctrine at the expense of good, practical exercises which demonstrate living out that doctrine in a daily, faith-filled way.

What I have proposed is a way which validates my own personal experience, and fulfills the definitions of "spiritual" and "spirituality" set forth by Sister Wendy and Sandra Schneiders. Rather than focusing on Christian doctrine, I have created a spiritual exercise which follows in the footsteps of Mrs. Gardner. Mrs. Gardner created her own guidebooks for the museum from 1906 until her death in 1924, highlighting a few important works of art from each room, which offer names to certain works and occasional details or origins of the works; I, too, have created a new guide, a spiritual

guide to the museum. As a foundation for my guidebook, I have examined Mrs. Gardner's original guidebooks now housed in the recently opened Gardner Archives in the new wing of the Gardner Museum. As I observed first-hand, Mrs. Gardner's handwriting on the drafts of these guidebooks proves that not only did she display her works with purpose, but that she had a prescribed order in which she wanted her collection viewed. Although many works of art hung in each of the rooms in the museum, she chose only a few works of art from each room to highlight in her guidebooks. Following Mrs. Gardner's lead, I have traced a path through the museum, and have further narrowed down her selections from several art works to one work per room for study, reflection and prayer. Examining her prescribed path through the museum, I have suggested a similar journey as Mrs. Gardner had in her day with a few deviations. The greatest difficulty in following directly in her footsteps is that she allowed for new spaces (such as the Macknight Room and the Gothic Room) to be opened following her death. With these new openings, the closing of the Second Chinese Room and the further addition of a new wing, I have created a unique path with the spirit of her ideas close in mind. At the end of the journey, the visitor should not only have been offered an opportunity to consider more about how and why Mrs. Gardner collected and created her museum, but about the how and why involved in his or her own spiritual journey.

I have tried to connect as much information about the creation of the painting by the artist (when identified) to Mrs. Gardner's acquisition and installation of the artwork. I have examined many of Mrs. Gardner's personal letters, family photographs, poems, financial records and donations, and scrapbooks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives (ISGMA) which I have used to further support my project. Following

the academic study of each work, I have included a personal reflection which focuses the viewer on a characteristic or two which I feel is evoked in the artist's work. These topics range from greed and jealousy to love and grace. Like the works of art in the museum, the topics they suggest are both diverse and genuine to the human experience. After each reflection is a small prayer, which moves the reader to action on a particular aspect related to the art and my reflection. These prayers are comprised in a variety of forms: original compositions; traditional verses (such as "The Peace Prayer of St. Francis"); poems from Mrs. Gardner's extensive book collection; excerpts from her Holy Books; and even, quotations which Mrs. Gardner had in her own Commonplace Book. No matter how familiar or how obscure, these prayers serve as an exercise at the end of each chapter to bring the reflection to a close and to move the reader to action, before moving on to a new chapter. The prayers are as essential to the chapters, as a period is to the end of a sentence, paragraph and page.

In addition to the academic text, the reflections and the prayers, my dissertation will contain reproductions of art and photographs from Mrs. Gardner's museum, her journals and her personal scrapbooks. In many cases, these images serve to guide the reader on a journey through the museum. In several places they illustrate an important connection in Mrs. Gardner's aesthetics and in her faith. And, finally, some images point out the people, personal relationships and motives which drove Mrs. Gardner's lifelong work, the creation of her museum at Fenway Court.

The goals of the dissertation, therefore, are two-fold. The first goal is to demonstrate that Mrs. Gardner herself had a strong connection to both her religion and the spiritual. The second goal is to demonstrate that it is possible to encounter a spiritual

transformation of one's own by journeying through the museum contemplating Mrs. Gardner's life, the relationships which she formed, the art she acquired and how she displayed it in the museum, which she personally created and designed.



Figure 24 – Baron Adolph de Meyer, Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1906, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Part One: First Floor

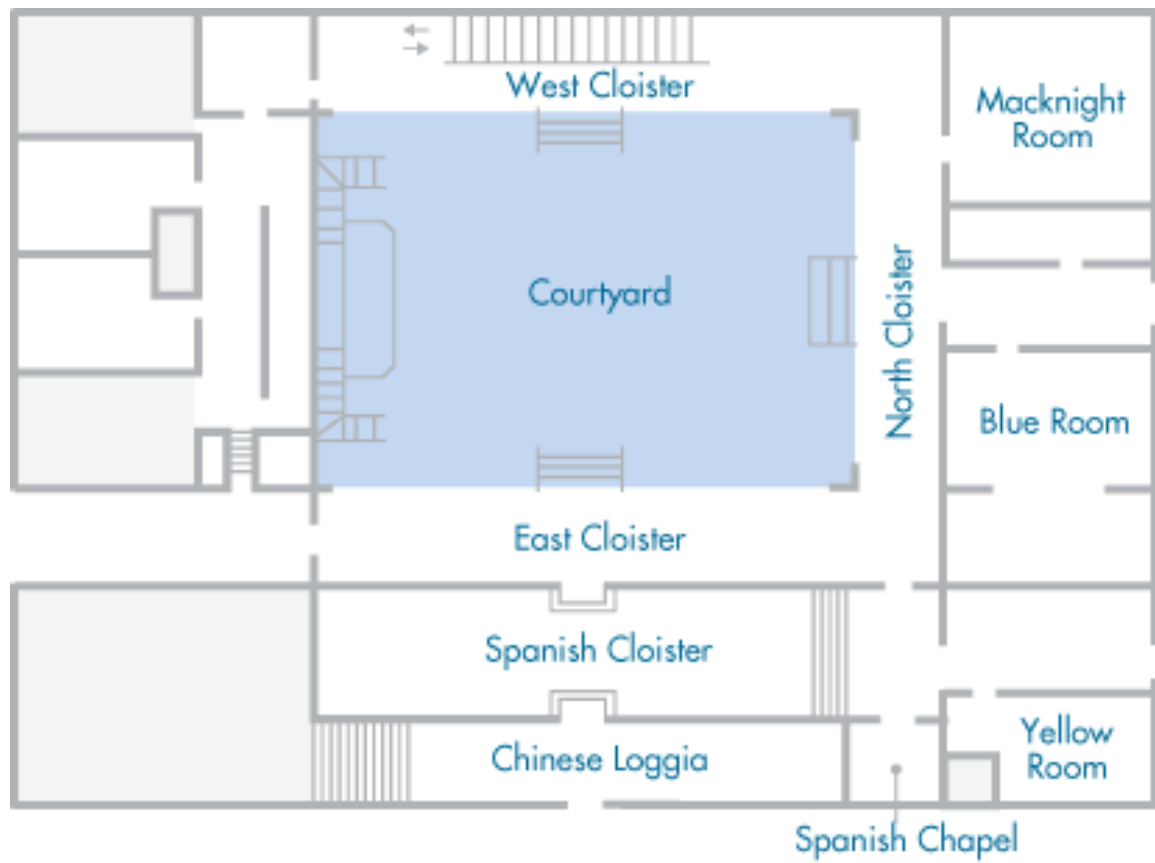


Figure 25 – First floor plan, 2014, Gardnermuseum.org.

Chapter 2: The Yellow Room



Figure 26 – James McNeill Whistler, *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, 1865, Oil on Canvas, 49.5 x 75.5 cm (19 ½ x 29 ¾ in.), Yellow Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Once inside Mrs. Gardner's museum, we begin our journey in the compact Yellow Room, aptly named for the color of the soft, patterned wall coverings. This room contains many American and European paintings, as well as furniture, reflective of the room's purpose as a waiting space for guests. Across from the entrance on the outer west wall, there are two paintings by James McNeil Whistler, flanking a portrait by Edgar Degas. Our focus for this room will be Whistler's *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, to the right of Degas's *Mme Gaujelin*.

The artist, Whistler, although he spent most of his life in Europe, was born thirty miles from Boston in Lowell, Massachusetts, USA, in 1834 (Prideaux 12). In 1855, Whistler arrived in Paris, the artistic capital of Europe, with the intention of becoming an

artist. As the art of Gustave Courbet (1819-77) attracted his attention and admiration, it is therefore no surprise that Whistler painted Courbet into this picture while the two were out painting together in 1865.

In 1879, Isabella Stewart Gardner and her husband's search for the proper education for their adopted nephews led them to London where Mrs. Gardner met James McNeill Whistler and liked him. As a result of a second visit to London, they became friends (Tharp 61 - 2). During their stopover in Paris in April 1892, the Gardners met the Whistlers, according to John L's diary, asked them to dinner, and promptly dined at a restaurant as the Whistlers' guests. They were soon seeing the couple frequently (Tharp 166 – 167). It was at this time, at Whistler's studio, Mrs. Gardner saw a painting she wanted: *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. Whistler had painted it in 1865 at Trouville, the small silhouetted figure in the foreground being Courbet – Whistler's teacher. Yet the picture was not for sale. Returning to Paris in the autumn, Mrs. Gardner saw *Harmony in Blue and Silver* again and still wanted it (Tharp 166 – 7).

Her first biographer and confidant, Morris Carter, quotes Mrs. Gardner as having ordered the painting be taken from the wall of the studio while she declared, "This is my picture; you've told me many times that I might have it, Mr. Whistler, and now I'm going to take it." Whistler protested that the picture was not finished, but he did join Mrs. Gardner for lunch the next day when (after more protesting) he added his signature (Carter 135).

And so the journey began for Mrs. Gardner. Having spent the 1880s collecting important pieces of literature, she was now steadily embracing the work of art collecting. During the same trip to Paris in December 1892, she acquired Vermeer's *The Concert*

whose story of acquisition is only outdone by the tale of its robbery in 1990 (see Chapter 15 on the Dutch Room). With the purchase of the Whistler and the Vermeer paintings, Mrs. Gardner was assembling a body of works which would span all ages.

REFLECTION

Just as Mrs. Gardner debated, discussed and searched for her jumping off point into the world of art collecting, so we begin here alone upon the beach contemplating our move. As the layers of electric and muted yellows stretch out across the canvas and invite us to become Whistler's solitary, contemplative figure upon the beach, we wonder what it will take us to board one of the boats, quietly sailing out into the horizon of adventure. Naturally, it is safer to stay put far from the surf. The sand is warm and comforting and there is no one around to disturb us. Out on the water, however enticing it may be, there could be swells, creatures in the sea; we might even get our jackets wet or lose our hats to the wind! Consider the reaction of the disciples of Jesus when they were called:

¹⁸ Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. ²¹ Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. (*New American Standard Bible*, Matt. 4: 18 – 22)

Of immediate notice is that the earliest disciples were called from the boat to join Jesus on land. However, no matter where we make our life's wages, we are called to follow Christ. Like the figure in the painting experiences, there is great beauty in the depths of the water, the vast expanses of the sky; and, we must decide if we will acknowledge the Creator of all good things by hearing the call of the Creator and leaving the comfort of our normal routine to get on the boat and set sail. Should we decide to stay upon the beach contemplating for too long, our lives will most certainly become stale. Perhaps the great problem is the catalyst itself: change! However, we need to remind ourselves that, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). So what are we waiting for? Get off the sand and get in the boat.

PRAYER

Dear God,

There are times when I feel alone. There are times when I am reluctant to make a move. I recall times at work when I struggle to take a risk; times at home, when I refuse to express myself; times when I turn away from your calling. Let the risk-taking ability and persistence that Mrs. Gardner so often displayed in creating her home be a reflection and reminder that, with your assistance, I can do anything. Help me off the beach and into the boat. Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Upon returning to the door of the Yellow Room, move across the hall into the Blue Room. Once inside, move to the other side of the room and stand before the large painting which hangs over the door of the small room within the room on the right.

Chapter 3: The Blue Room



Figure 27 – Ralph Wormeley Curtis, *Return from the Lido*, 1884, Oil on canvas, 74 x 142 cm (29 1/8 x 55 7/8 in.), Blue Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

This room is dominated by art and literature from the nineteenth-century. Many of Mrs. Gardner's close friends are represented in this close space: Henry James, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes appear alongside of John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn and Ralph Curtis (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 30). While here, we will focus on an under-scrutinized work: *Return from the Lido*; this oil painting was purchased by Mrs. Gardner from someone who would become one of her closest confidants: the young Ralph Curtis.

Ralph Wormeley Curtis (1854-1922) was born into a prominent Boston family, who were cousins of Jack Gardner. Due to a legal conflict, Ralph's father, Daniel, became disenchanted with life in Boston and moved the family to Italy. After graduating from Harvard in 1878 at the age of twenty-four, Ralph joined his family in Europe. They set up their primary residence in Venice on the Grand Canal purchasing part of the

Palazzo Barbaro. It would be here that Ralph would do most of his painting and would find himself involved in many artistic circles (“John”).

On their return from their voyage to China, India, Egypt and India, Mr. and Mrs. Gardner stopped in Venice where they stayed at the Hotel Europa and were led around the city by Ralph Curtis (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 12). As Jack had been sick for almost a month of their stay, it was Mrs. Gardner who spent most of the time with the young and handsome Ralph. With her guidebook, her Ruskin – and with Ralph Curtis by her side – Mrs. Jack saw every Tintoretto, every Bellini, every Veronese, whether starred as important or otherwise, that she could find in Venice. Ruskin said that Carpaccio was admirable, so Mrs. Jack mounted ladders to see some Carpaccios, reserving the right to call them “funny” (Tharp 102).

The relationship between Mrs. Gardner and Ralph Curtis, which began on that visit to Venice, would continue for the rest of their lives. The two exchanged letters and Ralph advised Mrs. Gardner on many important purchases for her museum, including the dazzling Mancini painting in this room (Turner 190), the famous (now stolen) Vermeer in the Dutch Room (Carter 134), and a set of Italian chairs (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 168). Ralph, also, introduced Mrs. Gardner to his cousin, John Singer Sargent (Honour 83). And later on, when he and his wife, Lisa Colt, would have a daughter, Sylvia, Mrs. Gardner would be her godmother (Tharp 201).

Curtis’s art is rarely given its due because of the world in which he grew up. He was a privileged young man, and, therefore, he circulated in elite circles. So, when could living a privileged life work against a person? Answer: when one is competing in extremely talented rooms with such greats as John Singer Sargent and Frank Duveneck,

and having one's work compared to theirs. If we are to embark on this journey with Mrs. Gardner, however, then we must place Ralph Curtis near the beginning.

When we examine *The Return from the Lido* closely, we find the best of what lies in both Duveneck and Sargent. We have a fresh perspective (Sargent) and the tonal beauty of the tranquil sky (Duveneck). Undoubtedly, as suggested by Richard Lingner in *The Eye of the Beholder*, this picture reminded Mrs. Gardner of the time she and Mr. Curtis spent in their gondola, exploring all of Venice in 1884 (111). But whether or not we have been to Venice ourselves, the painting still stirs our emotions.

REFLECTION

The water laps silently against the docks, while balancing the gliding gondolas along its surface in their travels towards who-knows-where. The birds in the right foreground add a familiar sound to the harbor scene as they rise and fall across the surface of the water, scavenging for their dinner. Venice is not the bustling tourist-city of today; there are no cruise ships and gas-powered motor boats to create unwanted noise, oil slicks and noxious fumes. There are no camera flashes, cheap souvenir stands or imitation Murano glass shops. Instead, Curtis has captured a Venice from which we are setting sail quietly with only the moon taking note of our disappearance as it tries to hide itself in the comfort of the purple haze of the far-off sky.

We are seated in the on-coming boat. For this moment, we can identify with the female figure as we did with the man on the beach in Whistler's painting. Hesitantly, we are sailing from our world of comfort into the world of adventure. We gaze upon the last familiar rows of homes; and, as we round the last church on our right, we head straight out to sea. Before we leave, however, we share one last glance at our neighbor in an on-

coming boat. This will be the last person who sees us before we set sail. The last person we see - what impression will we leave with him? Later on, will we even remember this person, or will the great Palladian church of San Giorgio Maggiore be clearer in our mind's eye?

PRAYER

Dear God,

As I cross this first threshold by leaving all that is comfortable and familiar behind, I ask you to bless my past. May those who have helped me come this far know how much they have helped me grow and how much I appreciate them. May I one day return to share further in your love with all of them.

As I prepare for new experiences, may I not forget the lessons I have learned. May I carry with me all of the tools needed for my journey.

Finally, Lord, prepare in me an open heart and mind to face the unknown. Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Return through the door from which you entered the Blue Room, and make a right. Proceed through the large opening and stop before reaching the stairs down to the Spanish Cloister. Look to left and the small chapel where The Virgin of Mercy hangs over the altar.

Chapter 4: The Spanish Chapel



Figure 28 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Spanish Chapel, 1926, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Just after the Yellow Room, on the left before reaching the stairs which descend into the Spanish cloister, there is a small chapel. This space, like all that appears before

us, was part of the Music Room when Mrs. Gardner first created Fenway Court. The Spanish Chapel was created when Mrs. Gardner began to think of Fenway Court more as a museum; therefore, she turned the Music Room into several new spaces (Tharp 297). If all spaces in the museum have a personal significance to Mrs. Gardner, then this one might be characterized as the Alpha and the Omega. It is here that her first old master painting hangs; and, it is just outside these gates where her body was laid in mourning before its final interment at Mt. Auburn Cemetery.



Figure 29 – Kurt R. Kilanowski, Gardner Family Mausoleum at Mr. Auburn Cemetery, Photograph, 2002.

Following John Singer Sargent's first portrait of Mrs. Gardner, and the controversial reaction it received at the St. Botolph Club exhibition in the winter of 1887 - 1888, the Gardners took a trip abroad to Spain (Tharp 134 – 135). (See Chapter 21 on The Gothic Room for an examination of this painting.) On this voyage, they visited the cathedral in Burgos and the Prado museum in Madrid before eventually landing in Seville at Easter time. In Seville, they attended a bull fight (which greatly upset the animal loving Mrs. Gardner); they took part in a religious ceremony (where Mrs. Gardner was

cured of angina); and, they bought their first important historic painting, the *Virgin of Mercy*, painted by the studio of Zurbarán (Tharp 136 – 138).

This painting was executed in the seventeenth century, and is representative of the Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán's early period (Tharp 138). Perhaps what interested Mrs. Gardner the most about this painting was the striking resemblance between the subject matter and a photograph which she had taken of her with her deceased son, Jackie (Tharp 138). Her creation of the Spanish Chapel as part of the Music Room make-over in 1914, with the words "In Memoriam," over the doorway, suggested to early observers that the room was dedicated to Mrs. Gardner's deceased infant son, Jackie (Chong, *Eye* 152).

In June 1863, three years after the Gardners married in 1860, Mrs. Gardner gave birth to John L. Gardner III ("About"). Mrs. Gardner's first biographer and museum director, Morris Carter, paints a picture of Mrs. Gardner as someone whose only true mission in life was to function as a mother (Carter 25). To support his claim, he details how she would show Jackie off to passers-by from the windows of her Beacon Street home and even to guests late in the evening at dinner parties. Finally, Carter points out that on April 10, 1864, her fourth wedding anniversary, Mrs. Gardner was confirmed at Emmanuel Church by Dr. Manton Eastburn, Bishop of Massachusetts. Carter says that this "was the devout expression of her gratitude to God for the gift of a son" (Carter 25).

So it is no surprise then that such a proud and loving mother was destroyed when almost two years after his birth, Jackie died on March 15, 1865 (Carter 27). Of course the connection between Carter's descriptions of Mrs. Gardner's relationship with Jackie and her tribute to her son resonates most obviously when viewing this painting as well as the

many other Madonnas throughout her museum. There is no doubt then when Mrs. Gardner first lay eyes on the Zurbarán *Virgin of Mercy*, she felt a bond between herself and the mother in the painting. A bond that no doubt would be renewed with every purchase of a new Madonna and Child; and most certainly, when she had this intensely personal picture hung in this very public space.

Until 1914, this *Virgin of Mercy* hung in her bedroom at Beacon Street and at Fenway Court above the Chapel window (Carter 107). However, when the Music Room was redesigned, Mrs. Gardner placed the painting in a prominent place over the altar, opposite from a large mirror which covers the wall over the stairs at the end of the Chinese Loggia down to the Chinese Room. Imagine her delight as she descended the stairs to enjoy her Asian art when she would get one final glimpse of the reflection with Mary, Jesus and the steele of the Buddha, which was placed in the newly-formed Chinese Loggia.

While the significance of this space and this painting as the Alpha are now clear, both also serve as a connection to the conclusion of her life as she directed that her coffin was to be “placed beside the Spanish Chapel and covered with her purple pall” (Tharp 323).

REFLECTION

Unlike the figure alone on the beach in Whistler’s *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus greet us face to face. In the face of the mother, we detect compassion and sympathy from within. The face of this woman says, “I understand.” Even amidst the heavenly beauty and grandeur emanating from the figures, we still sense stillness and intimacy. The placement of the Virgin’s hands, one over her son’s chest and

the other delicately supporting his foot, illustrate the connection between mother and son. This mother is trying to protect her son from the places where one day he will be pierced with nails. Her eyes tell us she understands; she embodies mercy.

Renowned Bible commentator Professor William Barclay explained this concept of mercy:

"The Greek word for merciful is *eleemon*. But as we have repeatedly seen, the Greek of the New Testament as we possess it goes back to an original Hebrew and Aramaic. The Hebrew word for mercy is *Chesedh*; and it is an untranslatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Chesedh*, mercy means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were from the outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, until we see things as he sees them and feel things as he feels them. This is sympathy in the literal sense of the word. Sympathy is derived from two Greek words, *sun*, which means together with, and *paschien* which means to experience or to suffer. Sympathy means experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through. (Barclay 118 – 119)

Having lost an infant son, Mrs. Gardner certainly appreciated this work of art, not only for its fame or beauty, but more for the Mercy which she must have realized. Even if we have not suffered so, we must continue to reflect on Mercy in our own lives. How do we hold ourselves with Mercy? Whom do we hold in Mercy? Who holds us in Mercy? How does God hold us in Mercy? To whom can we extend Mercy?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

PRAYER

“Prayer After The Death Of A Child”

O most sorrowful mother, Your only son was called the fairest of all the sons of men. You lost him in death on Calvary. Mary, my child is gone now too; in this earthly life I shall never see my dear one again. And still I would not have it otherwise, because I know that you and your Divine Son wished to take my child away young and pure and innocent before this world had cast the shadow of sin upon (mention name), I thank you, Mary, for the assurance that my child is safe with you.

Yet, dear Mother, I must carry on here below. I ask that strength and comfort which you alone can give. May I be worthy, like you, to be faithful to the end.

At the cross, your station keeping
Mournful mother, you stood weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.

Mother of love, of sorrow, and of mercy, Pray for us! (Haney Jr.)

MOVING FORWARD

Proceed down the stairs into the Spanish Cloister. About half way into the room, turn left and go up the stairs into the Chinese Loggia. Once there, make a right and move towards the staircase at the South corner of the museum. Position yourself to view the Japanese bell in the window alcove.

Chapter 5: Chinese Loggia



Figure 30 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Chinese Loggia, 1926, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Little has been written about the large Japanese hanging bronze bell located in the window niche just over the staircase to the Second Chinese Room. The *General Catalogue* of 1935 purely lists it as a “large modern Japanese hanging bell” (Longstreet 57) while the subsequent publications on sculpture, decorative arts and Oriental and Islamic Art do not even mention the object. A brief entry in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives describes the item and lists it as having been acquired from Mr. Tomita.

Nevertheless, it is an important part of a newly-restored area which leads to the Second Chinese Room located on the basement level. This space in the museum can be

said to begin just after a Graeco-Roman marble male torso preceding the window. The entryway then includes a Japanese garden lantern from the middle of the nineteenth century; a pair of wooden Koma-inu (“Korean dogs”), or guardian lions from fifteenth century Japan; a wood figure of Kuan-yin in a seated position symbolizing “royal pleasure”; a large mirror at eye level over the doorway; a wooden Rama, of chrysanthemums floating on waves, over the lintel of the doorway; a Japanese gong suspended from a wooden frame, on which are two Karakos (“Chinese boys”), carved in keyaki wood, with detachable heads from the early nineteenth century; and, a large Chinese carved stone stele from the period of the Six Dynasties in the Northern Wei style (Longstreet 57 – 58). While these items were acquired from all different locations and at different time periods, including the Matsuki sale in Boston in 1901, the Stele in 1914 in Paris, and the wooden statue of the god, Guanyin, in 1919 (Chong, “Introduction” *Journeys East* 38 - 39), the overall aesthetic is one of complete harmony.

As one approaches the scene, the figures speak to one another (and visitors) in a way which conveys the feeling that one is approaching a special place. The many symbolic purposes of the figures attest to this idea as well. The dogs, the wood carving over the lintel and the gong are all there to ward off evil spirits. The Buddha and stele remind us that the place is strongly connected to spiritual renewal. It is the beginning of a journey into a sacred space which may be dark and require the lantern at the left to help guide the way: a journey which must be marked by the ringing of the great bronze bell.

When examining the architectural plans for this area after the Music room was demolished in 1914, we see that the niche was carved out for the express purpose of placing this hanging bell (ISGMA). The design as created following the death of her

good friend, Okakura Kakuzō, who advised her on many traditions and customs of the East. While Okakura did not advise her placement of objects, his influence on Mrs. Gardner is felt throughout the museum, most of all in this area. Of course, this area changed drastically in 1971 when the staircase was covered over by a ramp, the mirror was removed and a passage way was created which leads to the café and bookstore. On one hand, these adjustments offered visitors an opportunity to view to the Japanese bronze bell from several angles; however, what was sacrificed in the changes were Mrs. Gardner's aesthetic ideas. By returning this area to Mrs. Gardner's design, her aesthetic ideas can be more readily observed and even felt. With the mirror on the wall now returned above the stairs, the *rama* over the staircase now visible, and all of the original art works surrounding this entrance situated as captured in the T.E. Marr and Sons photographs from 1926, the beauty and purpose for the Japanese bell now comes into a clearer focus.

Since the Second Chinese room was closed to visitors during Mrs. Gardner's lifetime, and only opened upon special request or occasion in the 1950s, emphasis has been placed upon the personal nature of the room. Even though other areas of the room were closed during her lifetime, those spaces were eventually opened, while this one was not. Only a few of Mrs. Gardner's close friends and personal guests seemed to have seen the room. Those people, who did have the experience, cited the experience as dark, haunting, magical and mysterious (Chong, "Introduction" *Journeys East* 40). It is believed that she would often descend the stairs to spend time in meditation or prayer in solitude. Therefore, the purpose of the bell must be one which calls the visitor to worship.

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Gardner would have seen many examples of these bells on her travels to the Far East in 1884. During her trip she created a detailed scrapbook which included a unique combination of her observations through daily written entries, photographs and postcards, plant clippings, and other trifles. Through this scrapbook and her letters home to her friends and family, especially Maud Howe, not only can we read and see what she saw, but we can see her true appreciation for the culture and the people whom she was observing. While some photographs in the collection show visits to famous landmarks such as ‘The Great Wall of China,’ most photographs picture the local customs of the people. A special emphasis seems to be on local dress and the worship habits of the people. Many pages are dominated by images of local worship spaces replete with images of the Buddha and temples of all sizes. Most interesting is an observation she records during a visit to Kyoto: “One day we happened upon a little service at a tomb. The priest saying the prayers and beating a bell, the father and child kneeling – an anniversary service” (Chong and Murai, *Journeys East* 156). While there is no photograph of the service, or of the bell, perhaps it is close to the one which is in front of us now.

When examining the bell, it is important to consider the many ways in which the Japanese view the bell and how the bell operates literally and symbolically in Japanese culture. According to the author in “Chapter 1: Bells of the Orient,”

[t]he Oriental attitude toward bells has always been one of deep reverence.

It was believed that bells could cast or remove a spell, increase fertility, or even house a spirit. According to traditional belief, bell ringing purified the holy place. In the Buddhist temple, as in the Christian church, there is

a consecration ceremony (in this case involving animal sacrifice), after which the bell becomes a sacred object. When placed on animals, the bell afforded protection against evil spirits, even as it did when hung at the door of a house. (Westcott)

When looking at Mrs. Gardner's bell, one can see that it has "a notched mouth and a double demon-face canon. The shoulder has a lotus petal motif in relief with the sides divided into three bands of rectangular panels of various sizes containing, respectively, Cocks, Dragons, and, Phoenixes. The lower part has two notched bands, one bearing the *pa kna* (eight trigrams), the other the wave (half ring) pattern" (ISGMA). With its placement at the entrance to this personal space once filled with large images of the Buddha, Japanese screens, and personal objects from Okakura used in a tea ceremony, this bell certainly was placed to ward off any spirits before entering the room. Not only is it purposed for a specific ceremony, but the animal and floral markings on the bell all contribute symbolically.

In Japanese culture, the lotus flower has several meanings, and is considered a sacred flower. Because the flower grows in muddy water, it literally rises above the murk to achieve enlightenment. It also symbolizes purification and faithfulness (*Buddhists.org*). All qualities are stirred by the sound of the bell at the start of a period of mediation. Closely tied to the flower and the spirit of change and enlightenment is the dragon. According to Okakura Kakuzō, in his *The Awakening of Japan* (1905), "the eastern dragon is not the gruesome monster of mediaeval imagination, but the genius of strength and goodness. He is the spirit of change, therefore of life itself" (77).

Universally, the phoenix is a symbol of immortality. Every one hundred years the bird sets itself on fire, dies in the flames, and then rises again from the ashes. However, when depicted in conjunction with the dragon, the phoenix stands for fellowship (Bruce-Mitford 31).

And finally, the rooster was a symbol across Europe and Asia, as a bird that heralded the dawn with its crowing, and that would dispel evil spirits as the light of day dispelled darkness. The rooster is best known today as the tenth of the twelve animal symbols in the Chinese zodiac (Bruce-Mitford 113). Furthermore, the rooster is depicted in a variety of roles: messenger of the gods, a sacred white rooster, a fertility symbol, and a funerary symbol (Williams 199 – 200).

No doubt, Mrs. Gardner placed this bell here at the entrance to this sacred space to follow along with what she had witnessed thirty years earlier. The cultural symbolism only adds intrigue upon what she may have been mediating in her visits to the room, and to the storytelling opportunities it must have offered her amongst close friends. No matter the purpose, it is one more piece of the museum which contributes to her overall spiritual aesthetic. When viewed from a Western perspective, the bell and the animal images have a variety of symbolic interpretations, but most often appear as signs related to death and resurrection. This only furthers connections between the East and the nearby West as reflected in the resurrection statues and paintings of Mary and Jesus.

REFLECTION

Although not mentioned often in Judeo-Christian Scriptures, bells have always had a strong presence in both sacred and secular Western culture. Perhaps the most famous association is evoked in the Ernest Hemingway's novel title, *For Whom the Bell*

Tolls, which draws inspiration from John Donne's "Meditation 17" on death. As we look at the bell here in the Chinese Loggia, we are reminded of Donne's most famous line from the meditation, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee" (1277). A line which often echoes the idea that for those who hear the bell, the end is inevitable. However, Donne spends most of the meditation exploring the connection between the tolling of the bell and the call to action as part of the faith community.

Regardless of the cause for the sounding of the bell – an alarm, the changing of classes, or even at a sporting event - the hope is for the larger group to respond with action. Many of these, our most intense personal moments, we evoke just like a bell, in one word, 'Help,' 'Fire,' 'Mom.' Donne explains the concept in a way that reminds us that since we are part of this larger community called to action that "no man is an island." When, as individuals, we hear the tolling of the bell, we are reminded of the individual connection to the Creator and thereby all other inhabitants on earth.

According to Sister Wendy Beckett, "Looking at art is one way of listening to God" (Beckett, *A Child's Book* 1). When you look at this bell in the Chinese Loggia, consider what sound you hear? To what type of action does the bell's sound call you? Is that sound a reminder of a beginning, or an ending? Does the bell evoke feelings of purity, courage or fertility as recognized in the symbols, or is there something darker? Are the stairs an invitation to face the darkness, or the Light?

PRAYER

When you pray, you don't need to add words, just one sound. One sound at a time, that sound evokes a response. Find a bench nearby. Once you are relaxed, focus on your breathing and repeat to yourself in as in the Eastern tradition:

Dona nobis pacem

MOVING FORWARD

When you are finished, return down the stairs and make a left. You are now in the Spanish Cloister. Situate yourself in front of John Singer Sargent's grand masterpiece, El Jaleo.

Chapter 6: Spanish Cloister



Figure 31 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Spanish Cloister, 1915, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The story behind the relationship between John Singer Sargent and Mrs. Gardner is one that weaves its way through every decade of their respective artistic lives. The first meeting came at the wishes of Mrs. Gardner who, having heard of Sargent's portrait of *Madame X* (1883- 1884), became certain that the master artist would paint her as his next great subject. Mrs. Gardner prompted her friends, Ralph Curtis and Henry James, to arrange a meeting between her and Sargent in London. The two instantly struck up a friendship, and late the following year Sargent came to America to paint portraits, most notably the one of Mrs. Gardner, hanging in the Gothic Room (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 68 – 69).

Perhaps even more than a portrait of herself, what Mrs. Gardner most desired was an earlier work by Sargent: *El Jaleo* (1882). The one problem was that the painting was already owned by a Mr. T. Jefferson Coolidge, a potential suitor of Mrs. Gardner, following the death of her husband, Jack. The story behind the acquisition of the painting and Mrs. Gardner's appreciation for it is well-documented by Carter:

At the time, the painting did not belong to Mrs. Gardner, but Mr. T. Jefferson Coolidge had said some day his painting should be hers. It had been lent by him occasionally for public exhibition, and each time, according to Mrs. Gardner, it had been ineffective because it had been lighted from above; the picture represents a stage lighted with footlights, and all of the shadows are thrown up. To express not only her conviction in regard to the proper installation of the picture, but also her high estimate of its worth, she prepared for it a more elaborate setting than for any other work of art in her collection; she built an alcove, marked off by a Moorish arch, giving the effect of a little stage, and placed a row of electric lights along the floor. When Mr. Coolidge saw these arrangements, he decided to give Mrs. Gardner the picture at once. People who had known it for years said they had never really seen it before, and that Mrs. Gardner had done as much for it as Sargent himself. (Carter 241)

Mr. Coolidge was not the only person of importance impressed by Mrs. Gardner's stage created for the painting. When Sargent saw the installation in 1916, he was entranced; and, in 1919, he presented Isabella Gardner with a tribute, a sketchbook he had created of his preparatory studies for the painting (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 36).



Figure 32 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Music Room, 1903 – 1914, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The acquisition of this painting demonstrates a good deal of the qualities mentioned about Mrs. Gardner in the introduction. First, she was a risk-taker. In 1914, she began a major renovation of this area, which, previous to that time, was a Music Hall with a ceiling open to the second floor. In closing the ceiling, she was able to create a gallery on the second floor to display a new cycle of tapestries, while providing a setting for Spanish art in this area. The floor and western wall, adjacent to the courtyard, are covered by Mexican tiles. Mrs. Gardner, herself, sorted and placed the 2,000 tiles throughout the space (Chong, *Eye* 151). What is most important to keep in mind, however, is that while Mrs. Gardner had been collecting Spanish art since she and Jack had first traveled to Europe, the centerpiece for this ‘Spanish Cloister,’ *El Jaleo*, was only

on loan to her while Mr. Coolidge was away for the summer. She took the chance in creating the space, hoping that it would find a permanent home in her museum. Not surprisingly, she was right!

The second aspect of Mrs. Gardner's personality that surfaces in Carter's story is that she was a visionary. Not only did she collect art, she understood what she was seeing. Carter recounts that she had seen the painting on display and was dissatisfied time and again with how it was lit. Mrs. Gardner took advantage of the fact that electric lighting was just being introduced to homes and, drawing on her conversations with theater and stage directors for her answers, she set footlights out to display the painting. Throughout this time of reconstruction, she continued to push Mr. Sears, her architect, to his personal capabilities and limits (Tharp 298).

Finally, Mrs. Gardner was patient, yet unrelenting in her search for the perfect pieces to adorn her museum. Her initial meeting with Sargent occurred in 1886 (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 68). Almost thirty years later, in late 1915, she had *El Jaleo* in her possession and hanging in her museum. She finally had Sargent's masterpiece and had constructed the perfect setting for it. Was it worth the wait? Undoubtedly, but why?

As Wayne Koestenbaum suggests, "with her long neck and flamboyantly outstretched arms, she is surely a woman who took performance seriously and who felt and affinity with the dancer in *El Jaleo*" (215). Perusing the portrait of *Mrs. Gardner in Venice* (by Zorn), Mrs. Gardner must have experienced more than just an 'affinity with the dancer,' but rather an intimate bond, a masterful connection. One can immediately *feel* the similarities between Mrs. Gardner's movements as she makes her way inside from the Venetian balcony and the alluring dancer in *El Jaleo*. The tension residing in

each of the paintings is created not only by the light radiating *on* its central female figure, but *from* each set of open arms, inviting the voyeur to reach out and join in movement with them. The graceful pose of each figure patiently awaits its desire, no matter how long it will take, just like Mrs. Gardner herself.

REFLECTION

The guitars strum, the singers howl, the hands clap, the symbols snap, and the dance begins. Altogether passionate and inviting, the dancer slowly sways to the rhythm of her native peoples' calling. There is something basic, primal, alluring and even spiritual being played out on this dramatic canvas. The great Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, seemed to address this "aura" in his famous 1922 lecture on *La Teoria y Juego del Duende* – "The Theory and Function of Duende":

The *duende*, then, is a power and not a construct, is a struggle and not a concept. I have heard an old guitarist, a true virtuoso, remark, "The *duende* is not in the throat, the *duende* comes up from inside, up from the very soles of the feet." That is to say, it is not a question of aptitude, but of a true and viable style - of blood, in other words; of what is oldest in culture: of creation made act. (49)

We are stirred to join in this "power" by the exotic invitation of the dancer and by our own natural response to the music. All at once, we are made aware of our own sexuality. We are *attracted* and *attracting*. We desire the arms of another.

With the sudden spark of our sexuality, we are invited to remember that this sexuality is a gift from God. We are free to express it any way we so chose. Now is the time to ask ourselves, "How are we expressing ourselves to others? Are we making the

choices which lead us towards God, or do we open ourselves to hurt and suffering? Are we fueled further along our journey, or this an area in which we struggle?” The Christian Gospels remind us just how crucial our dance can be:

⁶ But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before *them* and pleased Herod, ⁷ so *much* that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ Having been prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” ⁹ Although he was grieved, the king commanded *it* to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. ¹⁰ He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹ And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. ¹² His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus. (Matt. 14: 6 – 12)

When Salome dances for the King, she arouses in him a moment of weakness. He is not thinking lucidly and regrets his most powerful words. Our actions have consequences; and, our bodies should be used to celebrate the nature of creation, not for destruction. Perhaps a more concise and precise reaction to the painting is captured in “Psalm 150”:

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in His sanctuary;

Praise Him in His mighty expanse.

² Praise Him for His mighty deeds;

Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

³ Praise Him with trumpet sound;

Praise Him with harp and lyre.

⁴ Praise Him with timbrel and dancing;

Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

⁵ Praise Him with loud cymbals;

Praise Him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord! (Ps. 150: 1 – 6)

PRAYER

Dear God,

I am reminded of the beauty and grace of your love through the movements and sounds in this marvel before us. I feel your stirring presence in my essence. You are the Creator of all people and of all passions. In this scene, you arouse in me vitality, one which harkens back to the calling of your people of Israel. May I hear your voice through the music and song; feel your strength in the clapping and stomping of feet; and, experience your love in the dance. Continue to stir in me the inspiration and desire to express myself wholly and healthily in your name. Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Move out of the Spanish Cloister by ascending the steps towards the Courtyard. You are now in the Courtyard cloister. Proceed to the break in the cloister and step down on to the steps. Look to the left between the foliage and locate the statue of Odysseus in the corner archway on the magnificent South wall of the building.

Chapter 7: East Cloister



Figure 33 – East Cloister [Courtyard], Roman, *Odysseus*, About 25 BCE or AD 125, Parian marble, 65 x 113 cm (25 9/16 x 44 1/2 in.), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

As we move further within the cloister, we begin to feel at home with our surroundings. Each step we take changes our view of the Courtyard. With each new glance comes some new (and often rare) treasure from Mrs. Gardner's collection. This sculpture of *Odysseus* is a perfect example of a rare treasure. On a first glance at the Courtyard, the sculpture is barely visible. Try to locate it in full photographs of the Courtyard and it will undoubtedly be obscured by a plant, or overshadowed by the grand staircase on which it is hung. This sculpture is a rare Greco-Roman depiction of the theft of the Trojan talisman by the Greek hero, as related by Ovid. The sculpture was created for a pediment and dates to about 50 B.C. (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 45). Richard Norton acquired this piece of art for Mrs. Gardner in 1898 while he was living in Rome and directing the American School for Archeology.

Perhaps in order to better understand why the piece is obscured by foliage for most of the year, it makes sense to say a few words about the overall theme of the Courtyard. The Courtyard, while it has a true Venetian façade consisting of window frames and decorations from the famed Ca d' Oro on the Grand Canal in Venice, shares more Greco-Roman influence at the street level. At the center of the courtyard lies a fine second-century Roman mosaic. At its center is a Medusa head, a common motif in such pavements, intended to ward off evil spirits (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 45). Medusa had the power, through her hideous appearance, to turn anything that looked on her to stone; and, she is appropriately surrounded by stone figures. Among a diverse number of them stand: the Egyptian *Horus Hawk*; the Greco-Roman *Relief of a Maenad*; the Greco-Roman *Odysseus*; Roman *throne* and *enriched shafts*; several Roman *sarcophagi*; two *lion stylobates*; and built into the wall of the staircase, the *Madonna della Ruota della Carita* (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 45 – 46).

In Mrs. Gardner's rendition of the famous mythological tale of Odysseus climbing the wall at night to steal the Palladium from Troy, the great warrior is captured by Medusa's death stare. Just above the lower level wall, the hero eternally crouches in perpetuity just the way he is described as moving in the myth. Perhaps we are meant to think of the statue of Diana at the center of the Courtyard across from Mrs. Gardner's throne as the Palladium itself with Odysseus unsuccessful this time around. This subtle attention to detail in large scale is often what allows the visitor of the museum to appreciate otherwise obscure and smaller, lesser known works of art. In the case of the figures in the Courtyard, the visitors' appreciation of the art can also be enhanced by their knowledge of the mythology. This idea surely reflects Mrs. Gardner's ability to be

deliberate and clever, while at the same time showing off her knowledge of ancient literature. The overall effect is one of harmony by bringing together objects from several cultures which otherwise seem to have no real commonality.

REFLECTION

When studying the sources for the story of Odysseus sneaking into Troy to steal the Palladium, we see conflicting points of view. In some versions, Odysseus is viewed as the hero; in other versions, he is seen as the villain. So often in life, our personal vantage point dictates how we see someone or a situation. Sometimes our viewpoint is clouded by a personal bias which keeps us from seeing the truth about the person or the situation at hand. Other times we are so focused on what is wrong with the other person that we miss our faults.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus says:

³ Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matt. 7:3 – 5)

Here in the Courtyard garden, Odysseus is not easy to recognize. He is hidden by various fauna depending on the season. We must sit in a very specific area to get a clear view of him. Slightly obscured, what's glimpsed at is subjectivity. He slowly creeps in the shadows of the staircase. By virtue of the fact that he is hiding in a corner of the garden, he pushes us to search the garden for more. The garden as a metaphor for our soul,

Odysseus hidden in the corners says look further into the corners. Search the garden for more before looking out at others.

In the end, we must consider if we are witnessing the Truth, or a clouded version of it. What bias do we bring to a situation which must be overcome? When we say that there is room for all points of view, do we really mean it, or are we just open to people who see situations the way we do?

PRAYER

Dear God,

Help me to trust in those people whom You have placed in my life. Open my heart so that I may more readily receive them. Help me to recognize that I cannot pursue this journey alone. As part of Your creation, You have placed people in my life for a reason. Help me to recognize and accept them all. You have given me the tools to accomplish all that You have planned for me. Continue to fill me with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that I may continue to know You, and do your good work.

Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Following your prayer, make your way around the cloisters to opposite corner of the museum. Enter through the small recessed door on the right. Once inside, move to the right where you will find a watercolor portrait of Mrs. Gardner located on top of a bookshelf.

Chapter 8: Macknight Room



Figure 34 – John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Gardner in White*, 1922, Watercolor on paper, 42 x 32 cm (16 15/16 x 12 5/8 in.), Macknight Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

This small room was opened to the public in April 1915, having served earlier as a private parlor and guest room. It is named for the New England artist Dodge Macknight (1860 – 1950), whose art was influenced by Sargent. Macknight was a popular watercolorist and a favorite of Gardner; early in their acquaintance, in 1904, he wrote her, prophetically, that he did not seek her “to buy my pictures by the bushel to start a Macknight room at Fenway Court.” (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 33 - 34). A few of Macknight’s watercolors can be seen on display in high places on each of the walls in this room. The most immediate is a small grouping formed just to the left over Sargent’s final portrait of Mrs. Gardner.

Made just two years before her death, this watercolor depicts Gardner after she suffered a debilitating stroke (Chong, *Eye* 225). In fact, Sargent painted the portrait here in this room at Fenway Court on 14 September 1922 and presented it to her twelve days later (Chong, *Eye* 225). Mrs. Gardner was pleased with the painting, and demonstrated the appreciation by placing the portrait in its permanent home up on a bookcase where she could see it from her couch (Tharp 319).

On December 26, 1919 Mrs. Gardner suffered a serious stroke (Carter 245). From that point on, she spent her days reading and destroying old correspondence (Carter 247). Friends continually visited to talk, to play music, and to paint. One such friend was John Singer Sargent. It was his wish to paint Mrs. Gardner a third time. He had painted her, most famously, in 1888, then in 1903 heavily veiled in the garden at Fenway Court (Olson 142). The fact that she allowed him to paint her at 82, following her stroke, is a testament to both her personal confidence and her confidence in their friendship. How debilitated she was, yet she exposed that vulnerability to him. How gentle he was to paint

her almost in a Christ-like way. Body shrouded in white. This painting may be the most revealing in the museum.

In the painting, only slightly larger than the size of a coffee table book, Mrs. Gardner is seated on a chair once located in this room. Since this was Mrs. Gardner's boudoir (a bathroom existed behind the door to the right of the exit), a place where she only greeted her closest friends, it feels as though we have been invited into the inner circle to share in an intensely private moment. Allowing Sargent to paint her in this place, in this way, at this stage of life also shows how much she had changed. The once vivacious, never slowing, never sitting long enough to rest Mrs. Gardner is now painted as sedentary. The success of Sargent's watercolor can perhaps be seen through the failure of another artist to depict Mrs. Gardner in a similar position.

In 1894, when Anders Zorn sketched her seated "deeply sunk in a heavy Dante chair with her eyes directly focused on the viewer," he was sorely disappointed in himself (Tostmann 142). Mrs. Gardner seems to have been equally disappointed since she had originally ordered 45 proofs of the print after its completion, but she only distributed a few of them to close family members (Tostmann 143). Zorn more than made up for his inability to execute her personality in the etching when he captured her true essence in a portrait in Venice (one of his greatest successes), now located in the Short Gallery. One reason Mrs. Gardner may have not liked the etching is because of how stiff she appears. While the chair for the etching seemed to be an appropriate choice of setting, one which resonated with her passion for reading Dante and collecting art of the time, the result is too formal, too stiff. She appeals neither regal, nor intelligent, but more an aging woman

buried up to her neck in mounds of animal fur capped off by a dandelion, which appears to be in the process of germinating from her head.

Conversely, Sargent's 1922 watercolor successfully depicts Mrs. Gardner as a figure of great importance: one shrouded in holiness with a look which confronts the viewer straight on. Her eyes like the Medusa in the courtyard dare the viewer to look deeply into them, but challenge one about what one might find there. In her eyes we see someone who is near death; however, she appears strong willed, vulnerable yet resolute. Her stillness is depicted not only by her seated position, but by the tones of white, gray and blue which Sargent uses in her dress and the pillows around her. This woman can be still because she has accomplished so much, because she approaches the viewer from a point of wisdom, experience and knowledge.

REFLECTION

Almost a perfect metaphor for ourselves, we enter the Macknight room through a small (often guarded) entrance: but, once inside, the room expands to reveal some intensely personal belongings. In fact, if we move quickly enough around the cloister, or get caught up in the beauty and grandeur of the Courtyard, we might miss the Macknight room altogether. In many situations we find ourselves just the same, hidden in plain sight, leaving only a small opening to the outer world. No matter what treasures may lie on the inside, what great gifts we have to share, we keep ourselves guarded from those around us, even from God.

Had we skipped this room on our journey, we still would have viewed many of the Old Masters – Raphael, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Rembrandt and Titian - a full (but incomplete) experience for any one person. We would have missed an opportunity to

explore a truly personal side of Mrs. Gardner and ourselves. Here in the Macknight room, not only do we have a chance to view paintings by some of her closest friends and see objects which she used in her everyday life, but we come face to face with Mrs. Gardner herself for the first time. Ironically, it is at the end of her life that we first confront her.

In Sargent's painting, she is swaddled and seated. She reclines in peace. She is centered – still. Yet strangely, her eyes tell us that her mind is in motion. She is peering into our souls. She is speaking to us without words. She is quieting us before we go any further on our journey. She is telling us to prepare for our experience. Silently, she is inviting us to be open to the experience in front of us, wherever it will take us. She reminds us what Saint Paul writes to the Corinthians, ⁹ but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And *which* have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Even though we have much to experience ahead of us, since this portrait was painted near the end of her life, we are forced to confront the end of the journey even as we are just beginning it. Just as Mrs. Gardner prepared for her end, so must we prepare for our own death. Her quiet, resolute stare forces us to consider: “How do I quiet myself? What is my favorite place of silence? How can I create silence in my life? How does God speak to me without words and silence? What is God saying to me? Have I been listening? How have I been listening? How have my actions demonstrated my understanding of what I have heard? Will I be prepared when I am finally called home to glory?”

Perhaps Morris Carter, Mrs. Gardner's first director and biographer, described the end most clearly when he wrote about her in this painting: “Swathed in white, an ageless

spirit, sphinx-like, looks out of eyes that have plumbed human experience, a spirit that comprehends human nobilities and human frailties, and comprehending all pardons all, a spirit loves and has never known fear” (Carter 250).

PRAYER

“I will come to you in the silence
 I will lift you from all your fear
 You will hear My voice
 I claim you as My choice
 Be still, and know I am near
 I am hope for all who are hopeless
 I am eyes for all who long to see
 In the shadows of the night,
 I will be your light
 Come and rest in Me
 Do not be afraid, I am with you
 I have called you each by name
 Come and follow Me
 I will bring you home
 I love you and you are mine.” (Haas)

Dear God,

When You come to me, may I be as fearless as Mrs. Gardner.

Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Returning to the Courtyard make a right and a left. Pause immediately in front of the sarcophagus which stands on the edge of the Courtyard.

Chapter 9: West Cloister



Figure 35 – Sarcophagus: *Revelers Gathering Grapes*, 222 – 235 AD, Marble, 105.5 x 224 x 101.5cm (41 9/16 x 88 3/16 x 39 15/16 in.), West Cloister, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

This Courtyard is obviously the focal point of Mrs. Gardner's home; however, like Sargent's *El Jaleo*, if we spend too much time here we may become overwhelmed by its beauty and intricacy, thereby rendering our journey mute. Instead, we will focus on only one piece of art, this Roman Sarcophagus. According to Hilliard T. Goldfarb, Chief Curator of the Collection in the 1990s, this sarcophagus is the most important work of the ancient art in the collection (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 45). The sarcophagus was the first documented at the Villa Farnesina in Rome (1556), having supposedly been unearthed at Tivoli; from there, it was carried to the Palazzo Farnese, where it appears in drawings of approximately 1620 (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 46). Mrs. Gardner acquired it from her main dealer in this area, Mr. Richard Norton.

Richard Norton was the son of Charles Eliot Norton, a long-time friend of the Gardners from Boston. In the late 1860s, Charles Eliot Norton, then a Professor at

Harvard, opened Mrs. Gardner's eyes to the value of rare books and manuscripts, and is chiefly responsible for Mrs. Gardner studying and acquiring the works of Dante Alighieri (Tharp 61). Over twenty years later, in the late 1890s, Richard Norton resumed where his father had begun. While organizing and directing the American School of Archaeology in Rome from the second half of the 1890s through 1907, Norton also assisted the Gardners in acquiring most of their ancient domestic art by acting as an agent for them. Certainly his post at the American School in Rome must have given him a great knowledge of what was available to the Gardners, as well as the guarantee of authenticity of the art itself.

Besides Norton, Mrs. Gardner had three other young "gnomes" (Tharp 219) scouting art and making deals for her: they were Ralph Curtis, Joseph Lindon Smith, and Bernard Berenson. The relationships Mrs. Gardner had with them during her husband Jack's life, as well as after his death, has been fuel for those who sought to question Mrs. Gardner's faithfulness to her husband. Each time she was seen with one of these men, the mystique of her character grew greater among the already churning rumor mongers.

REFLECTION

Surrounded by the dramatic life thriving in the Courtyard, we purposely stop here in front of this box marked for death to remind ourselves about a key element of the journey: the refusal. We heard the call from the beach of Whistler's painting and as we previously reflected, it is easiest never to leave the beach. On the shore, we can bask in the comfort and security of the warm sand and never concern ourselves with the mysteries of the water. If we make the choice to maintain stagnancy, then the outcome is simple – death.

Other times we do move, initiate movement, but our fate remains unchanged: death. These are the times when we knowingly make poor choices. Examine the front of the

sarcophagus more closely; according to Goldfarb, the magnificently carved figures are maenads, satyrs, and erotes gathering the grapes for a feast. The feast is in honor of Bacchus, the god associated with grapes, wine- making, and fertility (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 45). These creatures are known throughout mythology for their over-indulgence in all of life's activities. By aligning ourselves with the maenads and satyrs of our day, we place ourselves in danger of living an immoral and empty life. In the end, immediate satisfaction gives way to long-term unhappiness. Perhaps a personal struggle with an issue of Bacchanalian proportions is why we are journeying today.

When we turn to the Bible we recall the drunkenness of Noah:

²⁰ Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard. ²¹ He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. ²⁵ So he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;

A servant of servants

He shall be to his brothers.”

²⁶ He also said,

“Blessed be the Lord,

The God of Shem;

And let Canaan be his servant.

²⁷ “May God enlarge Japheth,

And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;

And let Canaan be his servant.”

²⁸ Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood.

(Gen. 9:20 – 28)

While there are both short term and long term results to this story, the bottom line is conflict. Noah’s drunkenness leads to a conflict with his son, Ham, and a curse which some attribute to a permanent plague upon his descendants. Can we recall a time when our choice to overindulge hurt someone else? How did we react? Were we drawn quickly to anger like Noah, or did we apologize for our actions? Is it ever too late to seek forgiveness?

PRAYER

Dear God,

You have made me in Your image and likeness, but I must accept that I am not perfect. I often find it difficult to make positive choices in my life, the choices that will bring me closer to You. Send down Your Spirit upon me and renew my faith by empowering me to make healthy and positive choices. Help me to follow what Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Help me find my way. Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Climb the stairs to the second floor of the museum and enter into the first room in front of you. Once inside the doorway of the “Early Italian Room,” face the wall to the

right and look at the large fresco to the right of the next doorway. This is the subject of our next phase along the journey, Piero della Francesca's Hercules.

Part Two: Second Floor

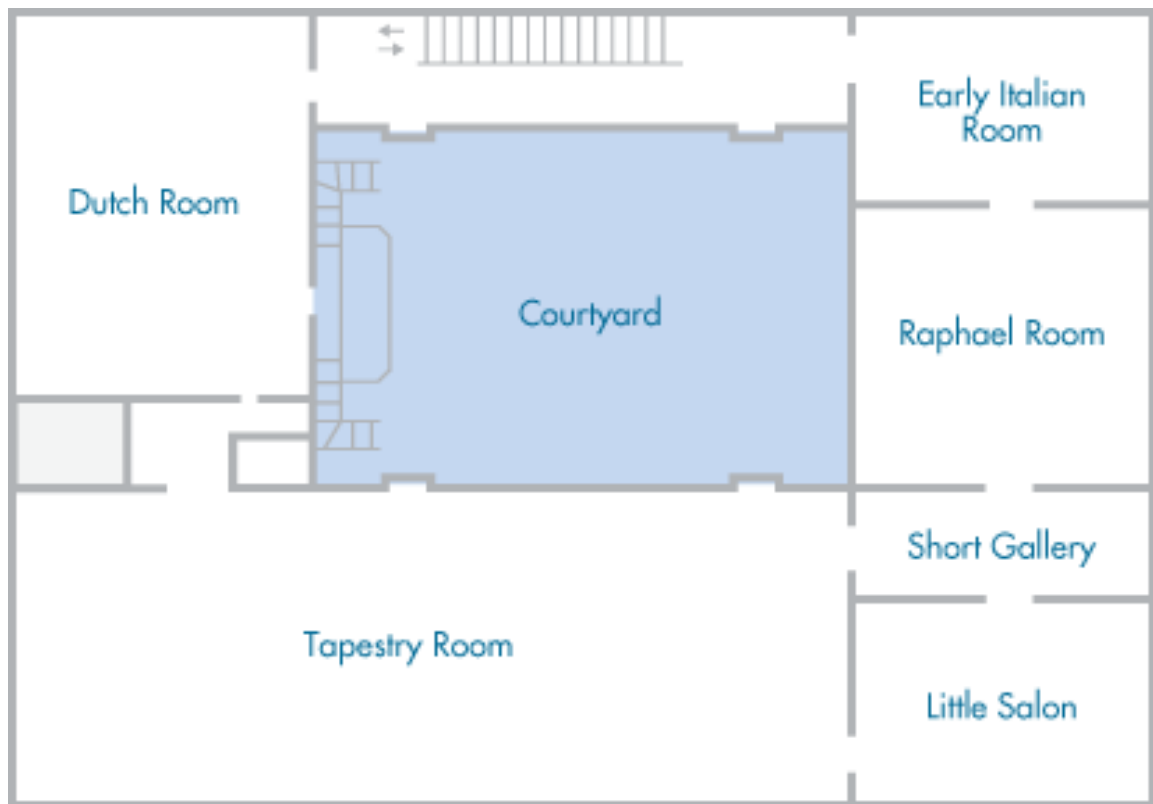


Figure 36 – Second Floor plan, 2014, GardnERMuseum.org.

Chapter 10: Early Italian Room

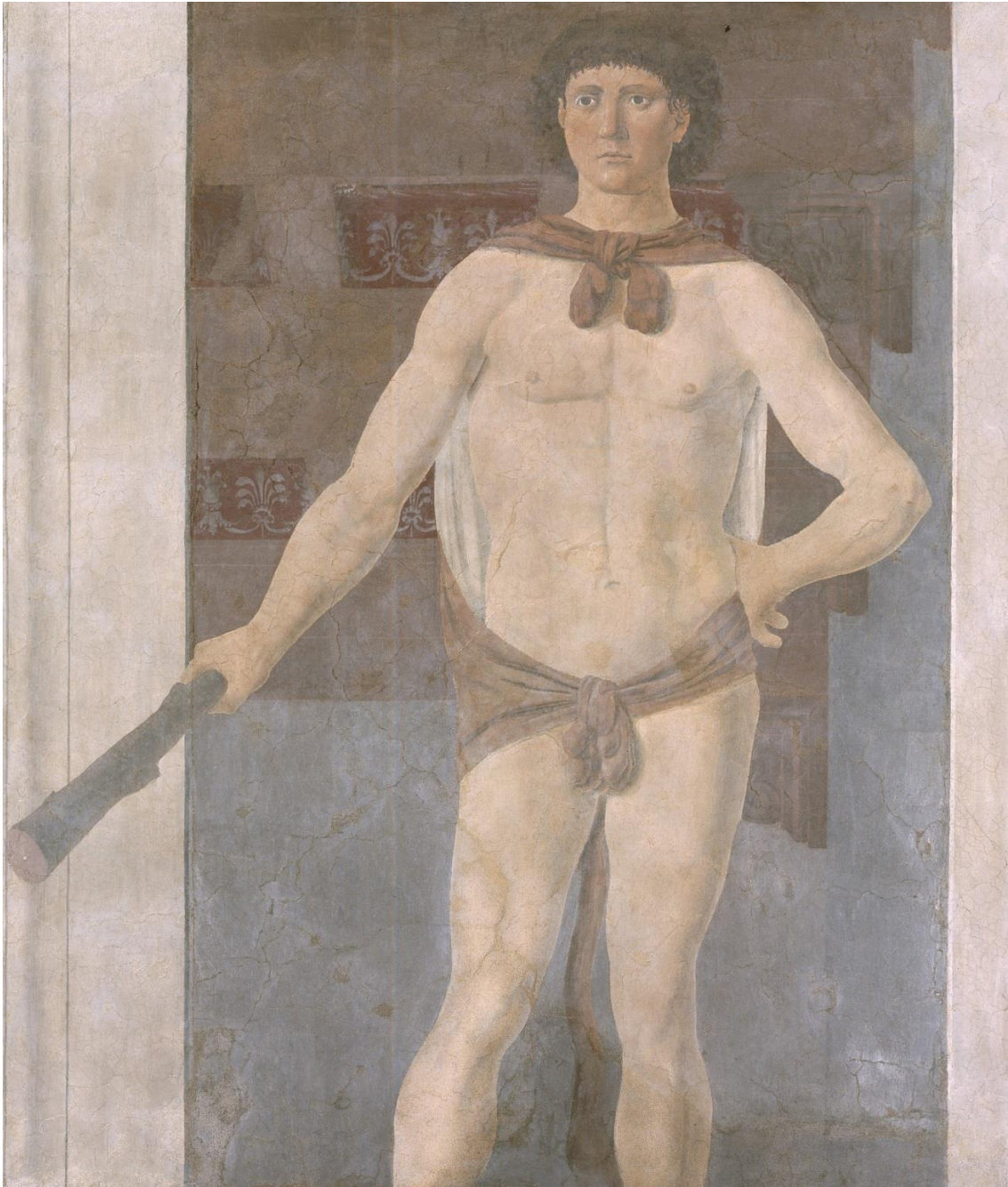


Figure 37 – Piero della Francesca, Hercules, About 1470, Tempera on plaster, 151 x 126 cm (59 7/16 x 49 5/8 in.), Early Italian Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

This work of art is the eighth piece we are contemplating; it was acquired through a friend of Mrs. Gardner in Italy, and is one of the most significant in the museum. As with several other works, it is notable as the only one of its medium by the artist in the

United States. The other work of art by Piero della Francesca in the United States is a panel piece called, *Triumph of Chivalry*, located in the New York Historical Society. Some new information was recently uncovered, thanks to a contemporary program inspired by Mrs. Gardner herself. In following with the hospitality Mrs. Gardner had shown artists and composers of the early 1900s, in 1992, the museum launched an Artists-in-Residence program. According to the Gardner Museum's official website, this is the goal of the program:

Through the innovative and highly regarded Artists-in-Residence Program, the Museum provides the opportunity for contemporary Artists-In-Residence to live, think and create within the extraordinary environment of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Visiting artists explore the Museum's galleries, collection, archives and other aspects to spark their artistic thinking and find new ways of looking at their art. The Museum then connects these artists with the public through contemporary exhibitions, performances and readings of their new works, or through creative community and school collaborations. A fundamental premise of the program is experimentation and access to the Museum, collection and scholarly expertise as a means to nurture and support artistic practice. ("Contemporary Art")

In 2002, one such artist-in-residence, Manfred Bischoff, was inspired by the della Francesco fresco while he was completing his work for a temporary Jewelry exhibit at the museum. When Bischoff first delved into the archives at the Gardner, he found "a wonderful sketch" of the fresco and a quote that read, "not wait to act if you are ready." It

can be found written on the façade of Piero's birthplace, in San Sepolcro, from where the *Hercules* fresco was taken (Harris). In an article originally published in *Metalsmith Magazine* in 2003, Bischoff explains the connection he sees between this quote, the della Francesca fresco, and his own contemporary art. "I am creating language. If I find a sentence or a theme I like, then the piece is done. I must only, search for how to do it...Not wait to act if you are ready – it's a very explosive idea," Bischoff explains. "To know if you are ready, you have to feel the tension within yourself – and then the gesture flows out." (Harris).

Bischoff executed the brooch in a flowing cursive script in gold wire. The composition follows della Francesca, divided in the center by a diagonal bar of coral that separates rising from falling motion, anticipation from execution. On close examination, the script spells out the title of the piece, Or-Son, which translates roughly as "central pedestal" (as in the centerpiece of the exhibition) and, in a bit of cross-linguistic legerdemain, "son of gold" (as in Hercules, son of Zeus) (Harris).

REFLECTION

"Not wait to act if you are ready." This quote, located over the grave of artist, Piero della Francesca, provides us with much food for thought. Having just climbed the first flight of stairs in the museum, we are physically at the end of the first stage of our journey, and ready to begin the second stage. Now is the time to consider serious action. We began safely on the beach with Whistler in the Yellow Room; before setting out on the water, we recognized the need for others to help us; we contemplated inactivity and stagnation and even death; and now, presented with a change, we must act!

Consider Hercules. As a pawn of the Greek goddess, Hera, Hercules went insane and killed his own family. When he awoke, he looked for a way to recover from the murders, and, as part of his sentence, King Eurystheus charged him with the task of accomplishing the “Twelve Labors.” These wild tasks included several arduous challenges:

1. To bring the King the skin of an invulnerable lion which terrorized the hills around Nemea;
2. To kill the Lernean Hydra;
3. To bring back the Hind of Ceryneia;
4. To bring back the Erymanthian boar alive;
5. To clean up King Augeas’ stable;
6. To drive away an enormous flock of birds which gathered at a lake, near the town of Stymphalos;
7. To dispose of the Cretan Bull;
8. To get the man-eating mares of Diomedes;
9. To bring back the belt of Hoppolyte;
10. To journey to the end of the world and bring back the cattle of the monster, Geryon;
11. To bring back golden apples, which belonged to Zeus, king of the gods;
12. To go the Underworld and kidnap the beast called Cerberus. (Howatson 286)

His struggles made Hercules the perfect embodiment of an idea the Greeks called pathos, the experience of virtuous struggle and suffering which would lead to fame and, in Hercules’ case, immortality (Howatson 286). This is the perfect statement to describe our journey. Joseph Campbell states in his PBS special with Bill Moyers entitled, *The Power*

of Myth: “Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence” (123).

We may not encounter any tasks as dangerous as Hercules’ “Twelve Labors,” but that does not diminish the struggles we experience. In our own lives, we encounter physical, emotional, and mental challenges. We come in conflict with ourselves, with one another, with God. What do we do to combat these issues? Do these issues require brute strength like Hercules, or mental cunning like Odysseus? (Perhaps a little bit of both.) Do we confront, with positivity, the obstacles placed before us, regardless of how impossible the tasks seem to overcome, or do we succumb to defeat before we begin?

In the Bible, in the First Book of Samuel, Chapter Seventeen, we read about the famous battle between David and Goliath. The Hebrew Scriptures tell us from the earliest days that even if we are not looking for conflict, a good fight may find us. When the odds seem stacked against us, we must find a way to emerge victoriously. In this case, David lacks the size and strength of Goliath, but levels a victory for the Israelites by implementing a weapon which allows him to attack his challenger from a distance. Here we have a mix of ingenuity and bravery. The task seems insurmountable for the Israelites, but with a little bit of thought, David creates a sling shot and knocks down Goliath. Although it is not easy to overcome our fears, we see in David a man who was able to think creatively while under pressure. In order for us to emerge, we must be brave like David, strong like Hercules, and cunning like Odysseus – all of which Mrs. Gardner certainly understood too.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Sometimes the weight of the journey is too much to bear. Continue to remind me that, with Your gift of fortitude; I can stay the course and see my purpose through. Fuel me with the strength of Hercules and the wisdom of David, no matter how daunting the obstacle.

In your name I pray.

Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Move through the door next to the Hercules fresco. This is the Raphael Room.

Head to the window, and look down upon the Courtyard.

Chapter 11: The Courtyard



Figure 38 – Italian, Rome, Mosaic Floor: Medusa, 117 – 138 A.D., Stone and glass, 500.4 x 1258.06 cm (197 x 495 5/16 in.), Courtyard, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

At the very center of Mrs. Gardner's aesthetic masterpiece is this Roman mosaic of the mythical gorgon: Medusa. This mosaic is believed to be connected to a mosaic in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. On March 5, 1936, a letter to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum recounts Miss Susan Dwight Bliss's accounts of authenticity and the original location of both the Met's and the Gardner's mosaics. This location was a villa just north of Rome, near the villa of Augustus's wife, Livia (Chong, *Eye* 11). During a trip to Italy in 1895, the Gardners visited Venice, Asolo, and Florence, buying architectural elements which they would eventually use in the museum, before finally landing in Rome (Carter 168). While in Rome they saw the mosaics, but the deal

fell through because the asking price was too high. (Tharp 185). Two years later, in 1897, the floor pavements became available from Ditto Pio Marinangeli in Rome, and the Gardners purchased them for several thousand dollars (ISGMA). The floor had to be split into small sections to be removed and sent to the United States.

Mrs. Gardner used the myth of Medusa to craft a feminine theme which would resonate throughout the museum (specifically in the next work of art, Botticelli's *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, and just upstairs in Titian's *The Rape of Europa*), and in this case occur literally at the center. Here is a place where Mrs. Gardner's intellectual wit and sense of humor are alive and on display as well. According to Ovid's myth, Medusa was turned into a gorgon by Athena for having had sexual relations with Poseidon in Athena's temple. Many heroes traveled to the temple to try to slay the horrid beast; yet with her snake-like hair, all who looked upon her were turned to stone, until the Greek hero Perseus, using this shield as a mirror, was able to avoid direct eye contact with the beast, and decapitate her without being turned to stone. Looking at the Courtyard as a whole from this elevated perspective, we can see Mrs. Gardner's wit as we gaze upon some of the remnants of Medusa's stone stare: a few goddesses; Odysseus; horus; a throne; and, a child's sarcophagus, a haunting reminder of her son, Jackie.

The dangerous contradiction of the Medusa myth has always resided in the tension struck between the allure of beauty and the dangerous reality of coming in real contact with it. Here that contrast produces glorious results as the stone statues are placed throughout a garden which, thanks to a monthly rotation of flowers by the hard working gardening staff, is always in bloom. By placing Medusa at the center, we feel the personal and powerful allure of beauty from every angle. From this second floor window, we are

able to look the gorgon in the eye without a shield, while seeing the beauty fully surrounding her.

If we were able to descend from our perch and examine the mosaic up close, we would more clearly see the wave-like rows of black, red, green and white tiles that characterize this kind of “opus vermiculatum” (ISGMA). In the center is Medusa’s head with wings and snakes in her hair. She is surrounded by a ribbon which is folded and twisted in black, red and green stones. Framing the central image is a series of patterns which are both complex and harmonious. These patterns are marked by a combination of scrolls, baskets, and birds which are enclosed by an ornamental band which itself is further contained by a black and white band of its own. Outside the band are more scrolls which start in the center and join at the corners (ISGMA).

In 1961, a serious conservation effort was mounted on the Courtyard, specifically the mosaic. Because the panels were separated into twenty-six separate panels for shipping purposes, and then assembled on an unstable surface of peat and clay, the mosaic as a whole was prone to separation and damage. In 1937, this sinking and separation was first detected and measurements of it were started (Stoudt, “A Roman” 166). By 1960, it was estimated that the mosaic had sunk more than three feet. (Stoudt, “A Roman” 166). The conservation was a complex undertaking which included removing the mosaic, stabilizing the ground, cleaning the mosaic, and placing the pieces back with a stable subsection. Efforts like this one have been taking place throughout the history of the museum. In 2012, the addition of the Renzo Piano Wing made the future of restorations at the Gardner a little easier while building on the aesthetic vision, which

Mrs. Gardner herself, started when she placed these tiles here at the center of the historic palace Courtyard.

REFLECTION

There is so much life to experience here in Mrs. Gardner's inner garden. Unlike any other spot in the museum, it can be enjoyed from almost every room. Each time we look at it, every angle we take on it, some new corner, some new plant, some new arrangement reveals itself to us. Mrs. Gardner had a great love of horticulture, which she demonstrated through the placement of fresh flowers throughout the museum in addition to the Courtyard displays. Currently, the landscape department changes the plantings nearly every month. Perhaps two of the most popular installations occur at Christmas and Easter with the great display of poinsettias and the nasturtiums which hang from the second floor Venetian balconies. Since Mrs. Gardner's first visitors lay eyes on the Courtyard on January 1, 1903, they were overwhelmed with the religious feeling induced when experiencing the Courtyard for the first time (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 212 – 214), directors have been changing the plantings as they have seen fit. Large Middle-Eastern palms trees have come and gone; a wild over-grown jungle oasis feel has been replaced with one of more classical untamed-organization.

So as we look down on this beautiful oasis in the middle of a concrete city, why spend our time focusing on the cold harden images in stone? Perhaps so we can further appreciate the beauty and harmony of the arrangement as a whole. In the Courtyard, there is no great lesson for our own personal growth. One way to illustrate the point is to look at the Bible story of Lot and Lot's wife:

¹⁵ When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.” ¹⁶ But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord *was* upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. ¹⁷ When they had brought them outside, one said, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away.” ¹⁸ But Lot said to them, “Oh no, my lords! ¹⁹ Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your loving kindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; ²⁰ now behold, this town is near *enough* to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved.” ²¹ He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. ²² Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar.

²³ The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴ Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, ²⁵ and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶ But his wife, from behind him, looked *back*, and she became a pillar of salt.

(Gen. 19: 15 – 26)

The Lord has told Lot to take his family away from Sodom and to never look back.

Sadly, while on the journey out of town (for one reason or another), Lot's wife turns back and is turned to a salt pillar. Just like those figures around the Courtyard who are caught in the gaze of the beautifully horrifying Gorgon, Medusa, Lot's wife meets her final form.

We have the tendency to focus too much on what is behind us. If we are going to continue on a path of spiritual growth and transformation, then we must continue to move forward. Too often we become stuck in the past. We focus on what we are leaving behind, what it is that we once loved; what it is that we could have done better; what it is that we should have done more of; or even, what it is we should have said with more precise articulation. When we get stuck on those "what ifs" and do not stop looking back on those feelings, we become paralyzed by them. When we begin to open our eyes to the future possibilities, it is then that we can see the beautiful flowers blooming all around us. When we make positive attempts at self-discovery, we blossom as if flowers ourselves. We reach towards Christ and all that he offers us. We turn confidently away from all that is destructive and paralyzing. And as we move forward, we become just like the flowers who are agents of change, not like Medusa – one who turns others to stone.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be more like the flower than the stone. Open me to your message which you have picked from the heavenly gardens, and have delivered to me here in this place. Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

*Just like the figures in the Courtyard, if we don't move forward in the museum, then we will be unable to explore our journey further. Move further through the room to wall opposite the entry door. In order to further unpack ourselves, it is time to look at Mrs. Gardner's arrangement of Sandro Botticelli's *The Death of Lucretia* and the chest displayed on the floor in front of it.*

Chapter 12: Raphael Room



Figure 39 – Sandro Botticelli, *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, About 1500 – 1501, Tempera and oil on panel, 83.8 x 176.8cm (33 x 69 5/8 in.), Raphael Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Like its counterpart on the floor above us, this room is named after a specific Italian painter. With regard to this space, Mrs. Gardner named the space for the famous Italian, Raphael. And, in this case, it is Raphael who has made Mrs. Gardner famous. She is credited with having imported the first of Raphael's works to the United States. This distinct honor is one of the many reasons why her legacy is firm among the art community, not only in Boston, but across the United States. At a time when men such as Rockefeller, Morgan, Chase and Frick were dominating the landscape of collecting, one woman stood toe to toe with them: Isabella Stewart Gardner. With a considerably smaller fortune to back her interests, it is surprising that she was able to acquire so many priceless works of art of so many famous artists. Not only are works by Raphael found here, but other famous Italians such as Michelangelo, Leonardo; and, the one we will be examining is by Botticelli. In the corner of the room opposite the Early Italian Room, and closest to the Courtyard, is an installation which paved the way for her collection. The painting was the first acquired by Bernard Berenson for Mrs. Gardner in December 19,

1894 from Lord Ashburnham for \$16,500 (Tharp 177). Although not purchased until after she was back in the United States, Mrs. Gardner decided to get into the business of art collecting during a trip to Europe in 1894. Most of these early paintings were acquired through Berenson; and, in fact, almost a million pre-1900 dollars were passed between Berenson and Gardner between 1894 and 1903 (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 172 - 174). Letters between Berenson and Mrs. Gardner suggest that he began acting on her behalf as a thank you for her support of his post-graduate year in Italy (Baskins, “Cassone” 65).

When considering this particular painting as part of Mrs. Gardner’s collecting history, it is easy to see how she moved from her early interests in collecting rare books to collecting rare paintings. When examining one of her most prized editions of Dante, located in the Long Gallery upstairs, it is no surprise to find the inclusion of illustrations by Botticelli. This connection provided a natural conversation on the work of the Florentines, and furthered to bridge the gap between books and paintings. Finally, photographs from her Beacon Street home show that she began to develop an aesthetic ideal which she created there and continued when she moved to the museum (ISGMA). The installation has always included the painting by Sandro Botticelli (1444/45 – 1510), hung over a cassone, or marriage chest from the same time period and Tuscan region of Italy.



Figure 40 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, *The Drawing Room*, 152 Beacon St., About 1900, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The painting, entitled *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, is one of a group of late, large paintings designed for decoration of private residences that includes *The Story of Virginia* in Bergamo; the dispersed series of *The Life and Miracles of San Zenobio* (1500 – 1505); and an unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy (Goldfarb, *Botticelli's Witness* 7). While most people imagine the large free flowing *La Primavera* when they hear the name, Botticelli, *The Lucretia* is an example of Botticelli's work late in life. Botticelli began this style during his work on the frescoes for the walls of the Sistine Chapel; he continued this style late into his life, and replicated it on wood which was hung in homes above wainscoting (Hendy 66 - 69). This style no longer

includes free brushstrokes; instead, we see a highly controlled style with lots of straight lines.

The picture itself is a series of events depicted on one wide panel; and, most likely, this was one of two panels which decorated a home of Guidantonio Vespucci (Stoudt, *Treasures* 120 – 121). Dominating the subject is a strong female who is persecuted for standing up for what she believed in:

This one concerns *The Tragedy of Lucretia*, as the story was told by Livy, by Ovid, and by Dante. The Roman King Tarquin (Tarquinius Sextus) during a military campaign was in camp with his princes. They bet on the preoccupations of their wives while these soldier-husbands were away. Only Lucretia, wife of Collatinus, was found to be innocent and chaste. Angered, inflamed by her modesty, perhaps envious and spiteful, Tarquin plotted her downfall. He left camp to carry out the plot. The picture is composed of three scenes: left, Tarquin forces himself on her with a dagger; right, she stabs herself to death in the presence of her husband and her father; center, over her corpse, Junius Brutus swears revenge and calls on Romans to revolt. This they did, and the Tarquins lost the throne in 510 B.C. Other reliefs on the buildings and arches tell of Judith and Holofernes, Marcus Curtius riding into a gap of fire, Achilles with the body of Hector, and a Roman knight trying to stab Porsena.

(Stoudt, *Treasures* 120 – 121)

Although not painted exactly as Livy's story goes, the painting is framed with political and classical images, and the theme of the persecuted woman is at the center of

the installation. This theme, which certainly resonated in Mrs. Gardner's personal life, is repeated in the room above us in Titian's painting of *The Rape of Europa*, and in the Courtyard, below us, in the central mosaic of the gorgon, Medusa.

The painting of Lucretia was not just a painting about a persecuted woman and the political male world in which she lived, but it also reflected strong ties to the world of marriage. We can only guess that Berenson must have known that the painting was created in honor of Vespucci's own marriage in 1500 (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 70). This fact provides a natural transition to a study of the marriage chest displayed on the floor in front of the painting.



Figure 41 – Italian, Siena, Cassone: A Procession, About 1470, Gilded and painted poplar, 69.2 x 170.5 x 57 cm, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Museum.

Cassoni, or marriage chests, were at their height of creativity and popularity in the 1400s and 1500s in Italy (Hawley VI). These chests were used by brides to store items:

linen, underclothes, purses, combs, belts, towels, and perhaps a few devotional books (Baskins, *Triumph* 1). They were very expensive, and therefore could only be afforded by the elite (Baskins, *Triumph* 1). They were admired for their dual purpose as both storage chests and beautiful works of art. Not only did they hold important objects, they were usually painted on the outside panels and on the inside lid. This tradition continues today with the gift of the Hope Chest, a box which is passed on from generation to generation, filled with important items for marriage and family heirlooms. As Mrs. Gardner collected and stored items to which she attached an important memory, it is no surprise that she identified with these cassoni. In addition to this one, she has two others in her collection, and five other panels on display throughout the museum (Chong, "American Discovery" 76).



Figure 42 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Raphael Room, 1926, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

When examining the installation as a whole, we might imagine it like that of an artist's studio, where the artist is staging an area to be painted in a still life. According to records we know that Mrs. Gardner visited the artist, William Merritt Chase's studio in New York, where one such displayed existed (Chong "American Discovery" 77). The connection adds to the understanding of her personal aesthetic as one which promotes the museum as a place of active creation just the way an artist's studio might be. With a few objects in and around the cassone, the idea of a small altar of significant objects is also evoked. Here one might stop to not only enjoy the view, but to seek it out as a destination to contemplate or celebrate a personal attachment or memory of the items.

This particular cassone was purchased on the advice of another one of her young male friends in Europe, Ralph Curtis. We have already seen his painting: “The Return from the Lido,” downstairs in the Blue Room. Now, further along the journey, we see the importance of his relationship in brokering a deal. Mrs. Gardner employed many people besides Berenson to assist her in acquiring her collection. This installation not only marries Renaissance visual and decorative art, but for anyone familiar with her story, it marries two important influences in her life in Curtis and Berenson (two men whose memories she undoubtedly kept close to her.) Mrs. Gardner eventually bought the piece in The Hague from the stock of a dealer named G. Teunisson, in August 1894 (Stoudt, *Treasures* 122).

The cassone is covered in a raised relief work, known as *pastiglia* (Stoudt, *Treasures* 122). The effect of giving an object the appearance of having been wrought in solid gold finds its roots in ancient Egypt and found its way to Italy via Byzantine icons (Stoudt, *Treasures* 122). The reality is that the standard panels are painted thicker, covered with a ground material with a glue type substance smoothed over and covered by gold leaf that was polished until it shone. On the front of the chest are the arms of two Sinese families carried by the heralds. The families have been identified as the Todeschini and the Piccolomini; and the archives of Siena record only one marriage between them, that of Laudomia Piccolomini to Nanni di Pietro Todeschini. The bride was the sister of Pope Pius II (in office 1458 – 1464). She was to become the mother of Pope Pius III. She was married in 1422 (Stoudt, *Treasures* 122). The fact that these items belonged to the family of a pope must have appealed to Mrs. Gardner’s Christian sensibilities.

The many layers of history, acquisition, creation and function add to the already interesting display. The fact that this chest would have been paraded around the streets on the day of the bride's move to her married home was not lost on Mrs. Gardner. To have such a magnificent and historical work of art in her collection undoubtedly was a great sense of pride for her. Imagine this one held high, the bright Tuscan sun radiating off of it. The effect would have been glorious; it would have highlighted the material wealth of the bride's family while providing a radiating light reminiscent of angelic halos painted in religious figures in Renaissance and Medieval paintings. Such associations with chastity and holiness would have added another layer of depth to the appreciation for the female figure in society.

REFLECTION

Looking at the painting and the chest in front of us, we are reminded of the things we carry into our relationships. We can consider this idea in two different, but equally important, senses: the literal and the figurative. Our past experiences often shape who we are when we approach others. In situations where we were received well in the past, we are able to draw on those experiences to more comfortably and confidently move through those situations in the future. Where we once stumbled, or got off to slow starts in the past, we move tentatively in the future. Our feelings from past experiences are often difficult to overcome; however, if we are going to advance in our relationships, we must overcome the negative experiences which we carry with us from our past. We must never forsake the rich value that experience has to offer; rather, we must strive to strike a balance between drawing on experience, and having experience debilitate us. We want to

protect ourselves from hurt, but not keep ourselves from taking positive risks to further ourselves and our relationships in the future.

Sometimes, as we move forward, we carry too much with us. It is difficult, almost hypocritical, to consider the subject of materialism in a personal art collection such as this one. One person collected everything we see. It seems as though the millions of dollars spent here could have been spent on feeding, housing or clothing the poor (all causes which Mrs. Gardner additionally supported), but her purpose here was for another kind of support of the human. She left this museum to the people of Boston, so that they might experience beautiful things. These things have material value for sure, but more importantly they have spiritual value. They have the ability to change the lives of those who view them. One hope may be that they inspire others to create more beautiful works of art; another might be that they would inspire intellectual conversation or a sharing or display of human emotion.

When we look at the items we own, we should consider what value they offer. Are they purely functional in property? Do they create aesthetic beauty? Do they remind us of others? Or are we frivolous in our spending? Do we buy to buy? Do we waste our resources while others in need go hungry, thirsty or cold? When we enter into relationships with others, do our personal belongings matter more to us than the human being with whom we are? If we strike a healthy balance, then our material goods must serve us, not the other way around.

As we conclude our reflection, it might be a good time to consider a few gifts that we carry in our own “chest;” those we carry along with us on our spiritual journey. Which of these God-given gifts that we carry with us propel us forward? How are those

gifts worth celebrating? Are there gifts in the people who surround us that are worth celebrating? Are there gifts which God has given us that we have never unpacked? Are there gifts that we have been given that we might like to return? Upon reflection, are these gifts worth keeping?

PRAYER

“The Peace Prayer of St. Francis”

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.” (Haase)

MOVING FORWARD

To view the next work on our journey, move through the door to the left of the painting into The Short Gallery. Look up and to the left to focus on Anders Zorn's portrait of Mrs. Gardner.

Chapter 13: Short Gallery

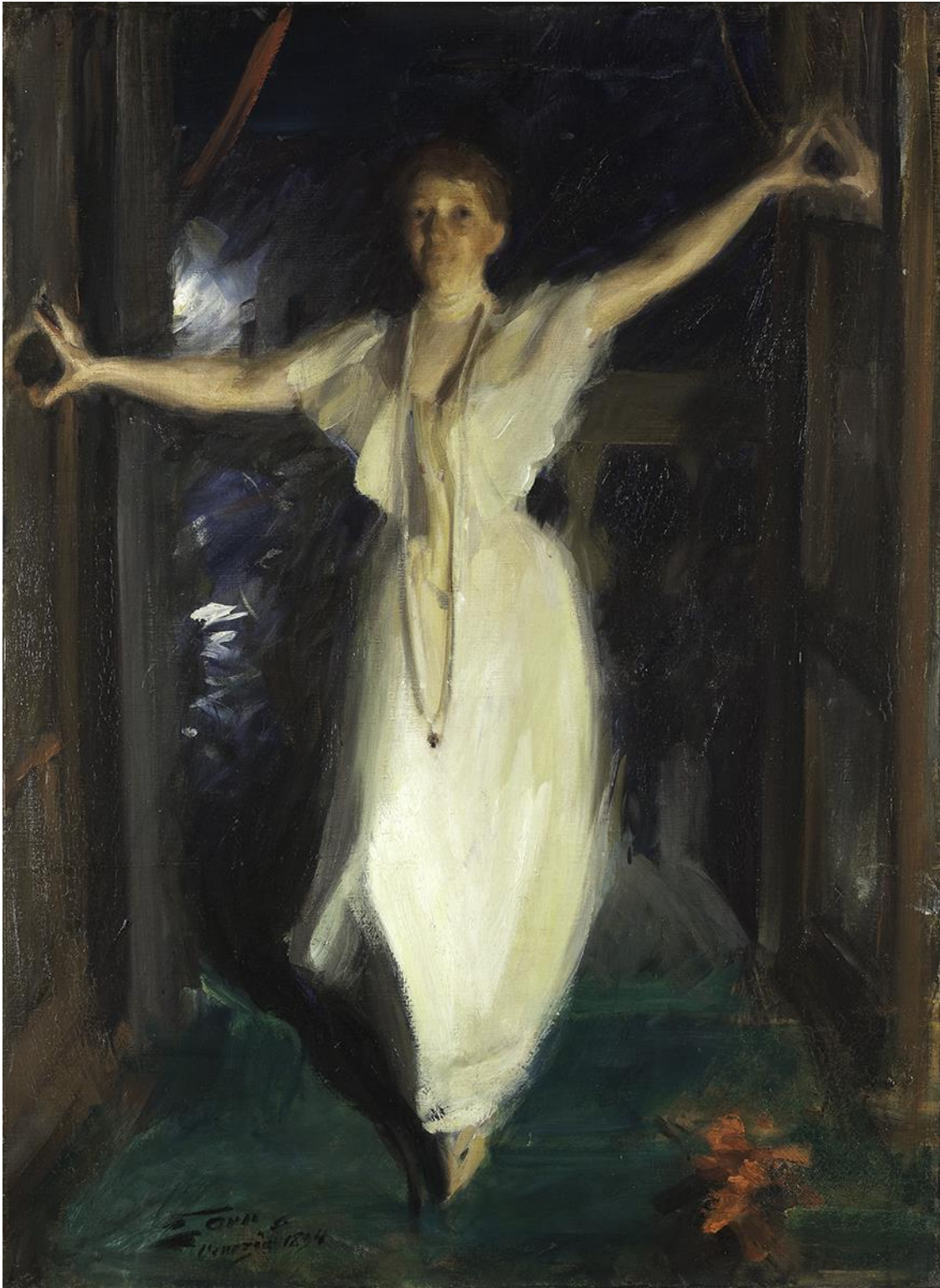


Figure 43 – Anders Zorn, *Isabella Stewart Gardner in Venice*, 1894, Oil on canvas, 91 x 66 cm (33 13/16 x 26 in.), Short Gallery, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Museum.

Geographically speaking, as we pass out of the Raphael Room, we are half-way through our journey. We have gained a tremendous, personal insight into the background of Mrs. Gardner's world. We have reflected upon a dozen pieces of art and have heard the many stories behind their acquisition, transportation and placement within the museum; and although we have seen a glimpse of her shrouded in the Macknight room, we now come face to face with the portrait of the vibrant Mrs. Gardner who constructed this palace.

In June 1894, the Gardners left Boston for Europe (Carter 144 – 146). After the spending the summer in England and Austria, they settled in once again at the Palazzo Barbaro in Venice. In early October, Anders Zorn and his wife arrived, just in time for a regatta festival (Tharp 180). In a letter dated 4 November, 1894 to Joseph Lindon Smith, Mrs. Gardner describes the atmosphere of the Barbaro at night as filled with great activity. Moore and Agostini played billiards, Tirindelli performed music, and Zorn painted art (Chong, *Gondola Days* 105). After a few attempts at a portrait of Mrs. Gardner, on October 20, Morris Carter explains, Mr. Zorn “found what he was seeking”:

Mrs. Gardner had stepped out into the balcony to see what was happening on the canal, and as she came back into the drawing-room, pushing the French window wide open with her extended arms, Zorn exclaimed: ‘Stay as you are! This is the way I want to paint you.’ He went instantly for his materials, and then and there the portrait was begun. (147)

According to Mr. Jack's diary, the portrait was finished two days later on October 22 (Tharp 181). An astounding feat for sure! Mrs. Gardner viewed the painting as a success. In the same letter to Smith she wrote: “The other is a portrait of me –

astounding! A night scene, painted at night. I am on the balcony, stepping down into the Salone pushing both sides of the window back with my arms raised up and spread wide! Exactly like me” (Chong, *Gondola Days* 105). Whatever Mrs. Gardner’s views, the critical reviews were mixed. According to Tharp, one critic called it, a mere sketch – just an impression, “impressionism” being at this time a scornful term. That Zorn finished this picture in two days was held against him (181). Carter chose to quote one newspaper man who wrote:

“The drawing is faultless, and if Mrs. Gardner’s arms have made her famous in Rome, as is the report, surely the painted ones will make her famous in Paris...the figure is so graceful, so full of life, girlishness’ – Mrs. Gardner was fifty-five at the time – ‘strength and beauty, the arrangement is so dashing and so original... that it is sure to make a sensation.” (147)

When the museum was opened, the painting was originally displayed in the present early Italian Room, then called the Chinese Room, and flanked by two large vases of yellow orchids which highlighted the color of her brilliant yellow dress (Tharp 265). This being the first room on the second floor, it seemed to welcome visitors to the museum (Chong, *Gondola Days* 109). However, in 1914, she reorganized the museum and created a Venetian alcove – a homage to the Palazzo Barbaro – where her portrait was placed next Antonio Mancini’s portrait of Jack Gardner, also made in Venice, with John Ruskin’s Venetian drawing on one side and Carpaccio’s drawing of a gondolier near the window (Chong, *Gondola Days* 109).



Figure 44 – P. Salviati, Venice, Image of the Palazzo Barbaro, pasted into Gardner's 1894 guest book, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

As we engage each new work of art, we discover a new friendship which in turn reveals a new aspect of Mrs. Gardner. Finally, through this brilliant portrait, we engage ourselves with the Creator, Herself! We can feel the energy illuminating her form as she enters the room. No wonder she could accomplish all that is around us. No wonder that a woman with her grace and charm could navigate the world of men so successfully. In this portrait, we can hear her voice calling, “Come out – all of you. This is too beautiful to miss” (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 75). We can understand why, novelist and friend of Mrs. Gardner, Henry James chose to immortalize her in the written word, pearls, rubies and all, as Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 75). We find ourselves

captivated by the glowing power and beauty of this extraordinary woman, searching within for our personal qualities which are most reflected in hers.

What has not been said (here) yet about this specific painting is that it is the ‘second-try’ at a difficult subject for Mr. Zorn. Earlier in 1894, Anders Zorn tried to capture Mrs. Gardner in an etching. However, the end result was “so completely unsuccessful that Mrs. Gardner meant to retain the whole edition. Zorn sent her forty-five proofs and kept six; when she learned that a proof had been offered for sale, she wrote to him in great displeasure” (Carter 138). A quick glance at his etching reveals Carter’s kindness in describing Zorn’s art. What Zorn managed to capture in his etching is nothing short of ugly. Although seated in an expensive piece of medieval furniture and decorated with her own coat-of arms, her black fur covering gives the appearance of an oversized-rat or vermin warming her shoulders. The interesting twist is that Anders Zorn is noted for one of the most captivating portraits of Mrs. Gardner, but only after one of the most horrific (Chong, *Gondola Days* 105).

REFLECTION

In the painting, Mrs. Gardner seems to float into the doorway with her angel’s wings fully extended and inviting. The scene outside is unclear, and as seen in the glow of her dress, those of us sitting in the inside room are warm and cozy. We are enchanted by her presence on this mini-stage and at once eagerly awaiting her message. Will she bring us glad tidings, or come to tempt us out onto the balcony? Is she calling us to a celebration outside? Or is there something dark and tempestuous? Before us, both beauty and temptation originate in one angelic face. The new sets of hands which extend softly to meet her delicate, liquid fingertips in the reflection of the window panes give us cause

for wonder of the origin of this beautiful creature. She is fluidity and grace, and her movements are calling her back to her glass-like origins. Ultimately, those fingers in the windows are ours and we extend our hand politely, inviting her to come in.

We remember the great news that the angel brought to a bewildered, Virgin Mary:

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you." ²⁹But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

(Luke 1: 26 – 33)



Figure 45 – [photographer unknown], Anders Zorn, Aged Sixty, 1920, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

PRAYER

Dear God,

As I come to the mid-point in my journey, allow me to forgive my own mistakes. Allow me to learn from the story of Anders Zorn, who did not focus on his errors, but worked hard to overcome them. Even when my first attempts are not successful, I must be determined and be open to the work of your Holy Spirit. Whatever the time frame, a

day, a week, a month or a year later, I must be patient and willing to embrace a new opportunity. Help me to recognize the lessons learned in my failures and use them to conquer my personal fears and anxieties. Strengthen the confidence in me to recognize and use the gifts you have given me to the greater benefit of your Glory. And like Mary, when I hear your angel calling, may I have the strength to respond, “may it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Take a few steps forward through the door to the west into the elaborately decorated Little Salon. Find the tapestry on the wall with fountains and pairs of lovers walking together.

Chapter 14: Little Salon



Figure 46 – Raphael de la Planche. *Chateau and Garden Tapestry: The Surprise*, 1625 – 1650, Wool 467.36 x 381 cm (184 x 150 in.), Little Salon, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Coming from the confines of the Short Gallery, where Mrs. Gardner's family was on display, we enter into The Little Salon. The difference between the two spaces is as striking as any two other rooms in the museum. Here we find a room which seems to have been extracted right out of the Rococo period. The primary inspirations come from eighteenth-century France and Venice. The walls are covered with an elaborate paneling and the large eighteenth-century mirror that covers the space between the windows comes

directly from Venice. It bears the coat of arms of the Morosini, a Venetian family who gave the city several rulers (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 82).

The major motif in the room is flowers. With only a few small windows to the front and side of the building, this room represents one of the only spaces which does not face directly onto the Courtyard; however, Mrs. Gardner cleverly found another way to surround herself by flowers. In fact, she may have placed more flowers in this room than in any one season in the Courtyard. Flowers appear to be growing from almost every object in the room; they cover the walls; they sprout from cabinets; they emerge from the wall sconces; they bud from the clocks; they flow from chandeliers; most of all, the tapestries which cover the walls contain garden borders and garden themes themselves.

Before being placed in this room, 'The Château and Garden Series' tapestries served as a backdrop on the stage in the original Music Room below. In fact, it was from this room that Mrs. Gardner first emerged and made her dramatic entrance on the opening night of the museum. During those early years of the museum, the door in this room and in the Short Gallery next door led to a stair case which descended in a sweeping and dramatic fashion into the Music Room. That staircase was in place until 1914 when the Music Room was destroyed, the tapestries were moved here, and new gallery spaces were created.

'The Château and Garden Series' tapestries were acquired in November 1903 from Charles M. Ffoulke (Carter 215). Two of them are Flemish, having been executed between 1585 and 1600; while the other two are Parisian and date from 1625 to 1650 (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 82 – 83). Before Mrs. Gardner owned them, they were in the Barberini collection in Rome, and according to Mr. Ffoulke were believed to have been

commissioned by Cardinal Antonio Barberini (Cavallo 70). All four tapestries contain scenes of courtship in the grand atmosphere of formal gardens in the foreground and majestic homes in the background. They are identified as *A Musical Party*, *Strolling and Seated Lovers*, *Boating and Hunting Parties*, and *Surprise Water Jets*.

In *Surprise Water Jets* we see a fine example of the lighthearted atmosphere evoked by the décor of the room. In this scene, two women, located to the left of a central fountain, are pointing and laughing at an unsuspecting man and his date who are about to be soaked by a water jet emerging from a fountain at the extreme right of the scene. One more figure, a young man, can be seen on left in the foreground standing on a lever which clearly triggers the water jet. An intricate design of laurel boughs frames the whole scene (Cavallo 71). The whimsical subject must have been a great catalyst for the many conversations which took place at the private teas or cocktail parties held at one time in this room.

In addition to Mrs. Gardner's love of flowers, in this room and in the next, we can really begin to see her appreciation for textiles. Throughout the museum, there are countless examples of silk wall coverings, lace table clothes, fine gowns and priestly robes, but the tapestries hanging in these spaces are the center pieces of the second floor. In this gallery where such time and money were given to the detail in the carvings on the wood paneled walls, to cover them with tapestries, truly highlights the importance of the objects. Since the subject for the tapestries is love and courtship we can only imagine the frivolity which was encouraged here amongst close friends. The idea of a personal Salon would be just for such conversations. Stop, have a drink, share a secret, move on.

Today, due to the fragile and crowded nature of the objects in this room, the space is rarely accessible. However, in order to truly appreciate this space, we must consider it as it was originally purposed. At one time, this room was a major gateway to the museum. In the first decade of the museum, after leaving one's coat in the Yellow Room, and passing into the Music Room, one would have ascended the grand staircase and come here first. You would have been brought here to wait for a private meeting with Mrs. Gardner. No doubt, since the 1914 renovation, the location of a Salon at this point in the museum might seem a little out of place. And while this room seems to be a place which invites lively discussion, in comparison to the many other spaces in the museum which promote quiet contemplation, one only need look into the cases to find objects of great personal importance to Mrs. Gardner, including a locket with her son's picture in it.



Figure 47 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Staircase in the Music Room, 1903 – 1914, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

REFLECTION

When examining tapestries, we see the intricate beauty of the scene on the outside pictorial side of the cloth, but what if we turned the cloth over? The scene would be indistinguishable. It would be an indescribable series of threads, knots and colors. This grand conglomeration would not only not form a clear picture of what was on the other side, but it might leave us questioning the purpose of this chaos. With reflection and contemplation, we can see the big picture come into focus. In Mrs. Gardner's case, her museum can sometimes seem like the back of the tapestry, but, after careful

consideration, the big picture begins to form more clearly. So too is the case in our own lives.

The metaphor of the weaver is one that is alive and well in our lives. There are days when we choose what kind of threads run through a situation; there are other days when we consider how we will color the threads. Some days we find ourselves connecting threads, other times, pulling them apart. We are often driven by the desire to tie up loose ends in the hopes of bringing a situation to a complete end. No matter which angle we take on the scene, our lives are a complex woven textile; one which, in the end, is guided by the hand of God, who is the only one who really knows how the completed work of art will appear on the front.

PRAYER

“The Weaver Prayer”

Weaver God, we come to you,

or more the truth- you find us,

disconnected and out of sorts.

We are disheartened by our failures,

discouraged by our weakness,

and little that we do seems worthy of your grace.

Restore our fortunes. Restore our future.

Weave for us the tapestry

of which our lives are stretched.

Give us patience with the endless

back and forth of shuttle, hand, and effort.

We look too closely, seeing only strands and knots
and snarled threads of too-much-trying
or none-at-all.

Grant us eyes to see the whole
of which we are a part.

In the end, we ask for gentleness with ourselves,
acceptance of our less than perfect ways.

We pray that what we do
and what you weave form patterns clear to all,
of mercy in the warmth of it,
and love throughout. (“The Weaver Prayer”)

MOVING FORWARD

*Move back through the Short Gallery, and straight ahead to the Tapestry Room.
Once inside this large gallery, walk to the far side of the palace at the South side of the
palace. Stop before the painting of the angel over the grand fireplace.*

Chapter 15: Tapestry Room



Figure 48 – Pedro García de Benabarre, Arch Angel Michael, About 1470, Tempera and gold on panel, 184 x 144 cm (72 7/16 x 56 11/16 in.), Tapestry Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Beginning with the large, dark and heavily ornamented doors which lead into the Tapestry Room, we develop of new sense of quiet. This austere hall with its thick wooden ceiling beams and atmospheric lighting, houses two notable collections of tapestries purchased in 1905 and 1906. They became part of this space in 1915 when the Music Room was demolished and made into two distinct floors (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 87). This space then housed concerts until the 2012 addition was completed, and this entire space was returned to its 1924 glory. One of the most painstaking restorations was of the French Gothic stone fireplace at the other end of the room. The painting we will examine, located above the fireplace, is the *St. Michael*, dated about 1450 and attributed to the Spanish artist Pedro García de Benabarre (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 92).



Figure 49 – Sean Dungan, *Tapestry Room*, 2012, Photograph, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston*.

While the attribution to García has come in to question by scholar, Eric Young, in his “Notes on the Spanish Paintings in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum” published in the 1979 Gardner Museum journal *Fenway Court*, several others have seen the painting as a work by García as it connects to several other major works by the painter. Sir Philip Hendy, in his second edition of the museum catalogue, identifies the painting as part of a whole retable, or framed altar piece, from the town of Benavente in the province of Catalonia, Spain (Hendy 150). More contemporary scholarship specifies the original church as that of Sant Joan del Mercat in Lleida, Catalonia (Chong, *Eye* 155). Other scenes are said to be *Saint Jerome with the lion* and scenes from the *Life of Saint John the Baptist* (Hendy 150). Hendy points to the gilded background, the outcrop among the similar costumes, the flat-surfaced throne and the tile floor as all elements which the *Saint Michael* shares with the other paintings. Mrs. Gardner purchased it from Mr. Paul J. Sachs at Demotte of Paris in 1916 (Hendy 150).

In the painting, Saint Michael is performing double duty. First, as warrior of heaven, he sits on the throne with his lance pointed at the demon under his feet; second, he executes his role as the assessor of souls. To his right, an angel helps raise up a monk who kneels in prayer on a scale; while on the other side, the devil attempts to pull the monk down. The depiction of the Archangel is both intimidating and awe-inspiring. With his full length armor embellished with *embutido* studs on the chest plate, we immediately recognize the great defender of the faith dominating the devil. After our eyes move from the chest plate, we notice the stunning wings and magnificent backdrop at the upper center section of the painting. A final detail to note is how strangely alien-like the web-footed bugged-eye demon at his feet appears.

Mrs. Gardner's collection always included art from throughout Spain. This picture is one of many paintings and artistic elements which she sought out with purpose. There is a story about it which was relayed by Mr. Sachs himself:

In 1916 or thereabouts she had considered the acquisition of a Spanish primitive but had not made up her mind. Meanwhile it was purchased by Paul Sachs, who had just moved to Cambridge from New York. Shortly Mrs. Gardner gave a highly select dinner party in his honor. Toward the close of the meal she remarked quietly: "Mr. Sachs, I understand you have just bought a Spanish primitive. Turn around. Don't you agree your painting would go very well over the fireplace?" Then she laid her right hand on the table and continued: "You know, this hand could hold a stiletto. If you tell me what you paid for your painting I will send you my check in the morning." Today it hangs over the fireplace and does look very well. (Coolidge 155)

Perhaps the reason for Mrs. Gardner wanting the painting was clear in this story; perhaps she had some other motive. Whatever the reason, her ability to persuade Mr. Sachs is one more example of power and beauty on display in the museum.

REFLECTION

While on this spiritual journey through the museum, we have considered many aspects of life: relationships with ourselves, with God and with others. We have looked at how we laugh and love, cry and die. We have considered a few fears, and considered a few mistakes. We have recognized a few gifts and talents we value coupled with few we

would like to give back. Here beyond the halfway point in the journey, it is time to consider confronting a few of our real demons.

Many people find images which surround the spiritual war between heaven and hell very real. They see their lives on earth as a battle ground where this war is played out in a struggle for their eternal souls. This battle is one in which we must constantly be on guard against the Devil. We must be prepared to conquer the Angel of Darkness before he claims us first.

These images can play themselves out in a variety of situations: addiction, codependency, or even abuse. Our lives can be wrought with trials. God tells us that how we respond to these trials is up to us. God is always there to support us, but God gave us free will to allow us to live and enjoy ourselves in the garden.

Here before the image of Saint Michael, the greater defender, we consider how we are confronting our demons. Are they dominating us? Do we seek counseling to help us process our demons? Do we pray to God for assistance? It is when we try to do everything on our own that we often find ourselves losing the battle. It is times like this when it is a comfort to remember:

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

PRAYER

“The Serenity Prayer”

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference. Amen. (“The Serenity Prayer”)

MOVING FORWARD

Take the door on the wall to the right of the fireplace. Work your way through the passage way around the elevator into the Dutch Room. Once inside, move across the room until you find yourself facing an empty frame on the wall.

Chapter 16: Dutch Room



Figure 50 – Dutch Room, 2008, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Upon entering the Dutch Room, we are immediately struck by a detail which does not noticeably exist in any other room in the museum: blank frames. Be sure to move all the way across the room until facing the blank frame which hangs opposite the self-portrait of a young Rembrandt. It is this space which we will now contemplate.

On March 18, 1990, two men, impersonating Boston police officers, stepped out of a car parked on the east side of Palace Road next to the Gardner museum and insisted entrance into the museum (Boser 5). After luring the two late-night guards at the museum to one location, they bound and gagged them in the basement and began an assault on the museum (Boser 6). According to investigations held after the crime, their rampage began by pulling Rembrandt's *Storm*, frame and all, from the wall on which it hung in this room (Boser 6). Unable to get the painting from its frame, one of the thieves cut the canvas

directly out of the stretcher, leaving behind the frame with frayed canvas and paint chips (Boser 7). Eighty-one minutes later, the two men had stolen thirteen masterpieces from the museum valued today at more than \$500 million (Boser 9). Tragically, over twenty years later, none of the works of art, which include this painting among them, has been recovered.

One of the factors that makes this particular painting so valuable is that it is Rembrandt's only surviving seascape. As Rembrandt is known mostly for his portraits, it represents one of the few historical and religious paintings he created. In searching for inspirations which the young Rembrandt may have drawn upon for the painting, the scholar, John Walsh, points to specific elements from the paintings of artists with whom Rembrandt would have been familiar, including Maerten de Vos, Adam Willaerts, Pieter Stalpaert, and Jan Porcellis (Walsh 8 – 13). He focuses his analysis on the turbulent sea, the style of the boat, or *hoeker*, and the behavior of the figures on board. He notes Rembrandt's painting for having served as an inspiration for Rembrandt's contemporary Simon de Vlieger in at least three of his paintings on the subject (Walsh 13). In the end, he acknowledges some scholarship which is searching for information to prove that Rembrandt covered the subject more than once on canvas.

Regardless of the evidence, the importance of this painting (and of the *Self-portrait* across the room) to Mrs. Gardner can be seen in her letters exchanged with Bernard Berenson at the time. Berenson's enthusiastic salesmanship, his true passion for art itself, and ultimately his understanding of Mrs. Gardner's vision for her collection, comes through when he writes on August 15, 1898:

The two Rembrandts are signed of course and were painted in the same

year, as attested by the dates 1633. They are therefore from the master's first full maturity, and being very different in subject yet painted at the same time, a glance at them together gives one a marvelous idea of Rembrandt's range – and for this reason they should if possible not be separated. The one picture represents, as you will see, a couple, quiet, refined people, limned in a dignified, distinguished way, and not scamped, and dashed off as so many of Rembrandt's pictures are. If in this canvas you see him at his height as a portrait-painter, in the other you see him as the profound interpreter and great poet. It represents Christ and the Disciples out on the lake when He is waked to still the storm which has arisen. You remember how anxious we were to get *The Mill* and how enormous a price you were ready to pay for it. Well, this *Storm on the Water* has much of the stirring depth of the feeling of *The Mill*, and has the figures to boot. In colour both the pictures are in the master's blond, golden tone. The Storm measures 5 ft. 3 in. by 4ft. 2 in. The Portrait measures 4 ft. 3 in. by 3 ft. 6 in. Together I can get them for you for nineteen thousand pounds (£19,000). Separately the Portrait will cost £13,000, and the *Storm* £6,000. (Hadley 149)

Since Berenson presented this painting to Mrs. Gardner as a single, or as part of a small lot, her direct enthusiasm for this piece is apparent in her written response to him on September 24, 1898:

Mr. Gardner has just got home...The first thing I did was to show him the photographs of the 3 Hope pictures...The one I like best is the Rembrandt

Storm-then the ter Borch-then and lastly the Rembrandt portraits. (Hadley 153)

Of the eight paintings she acquired from Berenson in 1898, this purchase is the one which she identifies as the cornerstone purchase for her future museum (Carter 169). Knowing the painting's importance to the museum and being able to read Mrs. Gardner's first-hand love for this painting only adds another layer to the now empty frame, one which makes its loss seem even more personal.

Like the success of so many of the portraits for which Rembrandt is famous, the success here in *The Storm* lies in the tension and mystery created between the dark shadows, which dominate the boat and the water; and, the powerful light, streaming in from the break in the clouds above. This technique, called chiaroscuro, a word borrowed from Italian ("light and shade" or "dark"), was made famous by Da Vinci and later Rembrandt (Delahunt). In the case of this canvas, which portrays the famous scene from Luke 8:22- 25, the complexity of the mystery may be heightened by the thought that God (not Rembrandt) is providing the light directly from heaven (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 97). In doing so, perhaps Rembrandt is creating a paradox by saying, here in the boat the Light of the Father is already present in the form of the Son. However, what may be more profound than the physical presence of the Son in the boat is the direct connection to the Father in Heaven created through Rembrandt's light. Ultimately, the viewer is reminded of the presence of the Father of the Old Testament who controls the weather, and the Son who will now command it in the New Testament.

Placing the subtle execution of the light and shadow as it relates to the spiritual - mystery aside, Rembrandt's most obvious expression of these qualities is seen through

the natural setting which dominates the canvas. The sudden tempest which causes horrific turmoil for the boat and its crew reminds us of both the tension and the mystery which surround both faith and miracles. It is at this point in our reflection that we are drawn into the canvas. As we become able to move beyond the awe-inspired by man's epic struggle with nature, we can then focus on the individual reaction to that struggle, all the while weighing the question, when will God react? In order to understand the full beauty of Rembrandt's work, as is the case with Mrs. Gardner's museum, we must carefully consider the emotional reactions of these individuals. As a matter of faith and reflection, we must not only consider the reaction of the Apostles, but then consider why we understand their reaction and what that understanding says about where we see ourselves in the painting.

In this reflection, unlike the others, I will ask us to envision the painting without having seen it first. Hopefully both, the image and lesson, will become clear by the end.

REFLECTION

We begin our detailed reflection with the Apostle who is crouched at the apex of the boat's bow, as if trying to personally be the glue between the front sail and its stay. At times of great turmoil in our lives, we can easily identify with his sheer desperation and determination. This disciple, like many of us, belongs in a category of 'doers.' He is not going to wait for someone else to save him; instead, he must do everything he can in his own power to save himself, his friends, and even their boat. In all likelihood, he has just seen and heard the stay snap from its rig on the boat's port side. Now, as this rope waves wildly in the tempest winds at the top of the painting, the Apostle in the bow works hard to 'do' his job. It is no matter that this disciple has just spent a full day listening to the

preaching of Jesus; now is the time for action. In reflecting upon the actions of this Apostle, we, the ‘doers’ of the world, do sympathize most with him because, after all, he *is* the first to get wet.

From this first disciple we move to the cluster four ‘doer’ disciples surrounding the base of the mast. At first glance we think they are going through the same journey as the first disciple; but, upon closer inspection, we can see each man’s individual battle with Nature and himself. The first disciple down from the bow has his identity partially hidden by the mast, making him even easier with whom to identify. Here we see ourselves with a strong, firm grip on the situation; however, like the sail that is beginning to fly wildly from the boom, he/we could be the first ones thrown from the boat. In the next instance, we are faced with the questions as to whether we will hang on and allow Nature to throw us, or will we let go and allow Nature to take the sail and the boat with our friends? In the position of this disciple, our actions seem to have a greater impact on the group as a whole, which is until we remember that Jesus is in the boat.

Just below the disciple with the sail in hand is one who is already being consumed by the sea. This disciple’s hands and feet are not visible, having already been claimed. He has moved into a reclined position that will lead to full head-first submergence. Like this disciple, we can easily become overwhelmed by our situation and surroundings, causing us to lie down amidst the struggles, while those around us continue to claw and fight to survive.

The fourth disciple is the one engaged in the most blatant physical struggle. He pulls hard on the end of the sail and stay with hopes of keeping the boat afloat. As a huge wave hits and consumes his friend in the reclined position, he wages war against the wind

by creating a solid lever against the base of the mast. His hair moves in the wind, his grip is the strongest; and, the muscle definition in his legs show the evidence of the one who is desperately working the hardest to keep this mess together. How often have we been the one pulling the hardest, even if, like this disciple, it is in the wrong direction? If he is successful, won't he wrap the square sail around the mast? What kind of further disaster might be caused by his actions? We know; we have been there.

The last disciple in the bow of the boat is port side, holding desperately to a stay while a wave smacks him straight in the face. Perhaps he was harpooning fish when this wave rose up and tossed the small vessel. Undoubtedly, we have been hit unexpectedly and directly with turmoil. The fact that he has his hand reaching up to keep the wave from crashing directly into his face proves futile, and truly reminds us of how powerless we are when confronted directly with forces so much greater than we. If anyone on the boat reminds us of the faith in Jesus we need to survive the storm, then perhaps this man provides the most obvious example.

The five 'doers' in the bow are divided from the back of the boat by the most hard-to-see figure in the painting, the disciple hiding in the cabin. Unable to identify his silhouette, we know he is there, but naturally it is the place where we might find ourselves in this situation as well. When a tempest such as this roars up in our faces, there are not many who could deny that our first move would be 'duck and cover.' Of course, when we are finally brave enough to look up to see directly into the face of one of our friends sitting plainly, calmly out in nature, how might we feel?

The disciple in plain light who sits solidly against the port side seems to be two sides of the same person. While certainly he focuses on the disciple in the cabin, the fact

that his back blends into the only figure who stares straight out at us leads us to believe that he is one half of one person; perhaps that person is the painter himself. If so, then by painting what appears to be both halves of himself, we are pushed further into personal reflection. Even though this non-descript side of Rembrandt sits calmly with his back to us (and to Jesus), we cannot avoid counting him amongst the numbers on the boat. In fact, with the amount of light from the sky coming down on him, he becomes a central figure in the drama. When reflecting on his placement in the boat and his lack of ‘movement,’ we are left to consider a rather two pronged complex question: is this disciple completely turning his back on Jesus in his greatest time of need? Or, by not moving at all, is he the one in the boat with the most faith?

In stark contrast to the disciple who has his back to us and to Jesus, Rembrandt paints himself as the one who is willing to take on the viewer. This head-on approach is a brave one. Perhaps Rembrandt’s presence here in the middle of the painting, and in the middle of our reflection, reveals how Rembrandt handles himself in such difficult times. Truthfully, whatever Rembrandt is saying by placing himself here, his presence captivates us and encourages us to inspect the painting even closer. Rembrandt the disciple hangs on to a stay and to his hat, as if to say to us, “Look at me! I am in for the ride!” What he does not do is face Jesus, nor the light from heaven streaming down upon the boat. What does this say about his faith in Jesus? His respect for God? Probably not more or less than what our own beliefs tell us.

As we move to the cluster of disciples in the stern of the boat with Jesus, our eye naturally moves towards the two men waking Jesus and trying to explain the situation to Him. We can hear them saying, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" How often have

we questioned Jesus directly? Where is their faith? Our faith? If we learn our lesson here in the boat, then we will not deny Jesus with Peter, nor doubt His resurrection like Thomas. If it were only that easy!

While those in front of Jesus try to convince Him to take action, a shadow of a man cowers in the deep background. Although the starboard side upon which he sits is safely high up out of the water, this man could be submerged on the rise and fall of the next wave. How often have we cowered in the background with others around us? This disciple's fear has paralyzed him. He is not part of the 'doers' in the bow, he is not a part of the pleaders in the stern; although still on the boat, his fear has isolated him. We can understand his predicament, and feel even worse for him than the man in the cabin, because his emotions are exposed.

Although the waters have not yet been calmed, the expression on the face of Jesus precisely echoes His words in the scripture, "Where is your faith?" In Rembrandt's version, these lines come before the calming of the sea, as opposed to Luke's Gospel, which has Jesus' words as a reaction to calming the storm. This slight change in the story, along with Rembrandt's presence in the boat, adds another layer to an already great test of faith.

The final two figures in the boat to consider stand in direct contrast to one another. First to consider is the man at the rudder. He is giving it everything he has, and just like the man holding on to the sail at the mast, he is battling directly against nature. He is one more example of man trying to take the situation into his own hands. Although he may physically be close to Jesus, he does not turn to Him for help; he does not even appear to listen in on the conversation between Jesus and the two disciples who wake

him. The disciple at the rudder just ignores everyone and goes right to work. He reminds us of how often we have Jesus right at our finger tips, so close that we feel we can reach out and touch Him, yet we ignore Him as a source of strength.

Finally, the shadow of the disciple, hanging over the port side vomiting, provides us with the best place to complete our reflection. Like the man hiding in the cabin, and the man cowering on the starboard rail, we get the most natural human reaction to the situation at hand. Quite literally, nature has run its course through this disciple's body. There is no greater natural reaction to the storm. This man feels that this is the end in no uncertain terms, and the rock of the waves coupled with the reality that he will die shortly has him vomiting back to the water. This disciple reminds us that, in the face of real terror, our bodies as well as our minds and spirits will react. Besides the cowering man on the starboard side, or the man hidden inside in the cabin, we hope that this retching disciple will be anyone but us.



Figure 51 – Rembrandt van Rijn, *Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, 1633, Oil on canvas, 160 x 128 cm (63 x 50 3/8 in.), Dutch Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

PRAYER

“Prayer of Saint Brendan the Navigator”

Shall I abandon, O King of mysteries, the soft comforts of home?

Shall I turn my back on my native land, and turn my face towards the sea?

Shall I put myself wholly at your mercy,

without silver, without a horse,

without fame, without honor?

Shall I throw myself wholly upon You,

without sword and shield, without food and drink,

without a bed to lie on?

Shall I say farewell to my beautiful land, placing myself under Your yoke?

Shall I pour out my heart to You, confessing my manifold sins and

begging forgiveness,

tears streaming down my cheeks?

Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach,

a record of my final prayer in my native land?

Shall I then suffer every kind of wound that the sea can inflict?

Shall I take my tiny boat across the wide sparkling ocean?

O King of the Glorious Heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?

O Christ, will You help me on the wild waves? (*Saint Brendan's Online*)

MOVING FORWARD

Exit via the door behind you, and begin to ascend the stairs. Stop at the first landing, and look at the fresco to the right.

Chapter 17: Second Floor Stairhall



Figure 52 – Giorgio Vasari, *Musicians*, About 1545, Tempera on clay, 105.5 x 167 cm (41 9/16 x 65 3/4 in.), Second Floor Stairhall, South, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Once leaving the Dutch Room, head up the staircase and stop on the first landing. Here we will pause for a just few brief thoughts and reflections. There on the wall, above the Gothic tracery windows from Venice, is a fresco from Naples, originally attributed to Felice Brusascorci of Verona. “In 2002, the attribution was changed to Giorgio Vasari by Hilliard Goldfarb (for an as-yet unpublished catalogue) after reviewing the evidence proposed by Pierluigi Leone de Castris in *Pitture del Cinquecento a Napoli: 1540 – 1573 Fasto e devozione* on page 108” (Reluga). Even though Bernard Berenson reconfirmed the fresco as a work by Brusascorci in a letter to Philip Hendy on March 10, 1930, the work does not stylistically match with Brusascorci. Instead, Hendy sees “the loosely painted, caricatured figures, with their flat hands with extended fingers, overhanging brows and spontaneous activity” without correlation to “the muscular, carefully posed and Venetian-influenced figures of Brusascorci” (Reluga).

This was not the first time that the attribution was questioned. In 1974, Philip Hendy noticed that Mr. and Mrs. Gardner had acquired a “heavy fragment” on their trip to Naples in April 1897 (Reluga). This was the same trip during which the Gardners acquired the Medusa mosaic (visible through the window below the fresco) before heading to Venice (Carter 168). However, because of the location of the purchase of the item, the supposed time period of the costumes of the musicians, and, the “Caravaggesque style” of the fresco, the argument that this is a work by Vasari is strengthened. Finally, many qualities in the fresco are also repeated in frescoes located in the church of Monteoliveto in Naples, and the Museo statale there too (Reluga). The fact that the Gardners were buying up tremendous amounts of architectural elements leads one to think that they had planned to more than remodel Beacon Street upon their return. Shipping records in the Gardner Archives show that these items were stored in a warehouse awaiting a large permanent place in the city of Boston, probably much larger than Beacon Street, all before Jack died and Isabella bought the property on the Fens. Since the architectural element, painted at the base of this fresco, is typical of an ornament that would appear over a doorway, it is supposed that the entire work itself was originally created for such a space. It is not surprising that they would have picked this piece up in Naples along with the many other architectural elements they bought on that trip.

REFLECTION

Besides the elongated features and glazed-over looks of the musicians, there is one detail which is, above all, most striking: the music. Several sheets of music rest on the ledge in front of the musicians, yet none of the artists are looking at them. One of the

sheets is so useless that it is being held up by the finger of the eldest character, but still not being considered. The active movement of the musicians' fingers on the various wind instruments tells us that they are playing in harmony. Perhaps they have abandoned the written notes because the tune comes from a personal place. Maybe it is a case of, as the Humanistic educator and author Robert Valett wrote in his book, *Spiritual Guides to Holistic Health and Happiness*, "The human heart feels things the eyes cannot see, and knows what the mind cannot understand" (123).

As we look closely at the musicians, we see that they represent all stages of life. However, they are living and playing in harmony. Most likely, they are all playing different notes, but the complete sound reflects one song, one life. When looking at our own lives, what tune do we play? What sounds please us? Displease us? If we were instruments, which one would we be? How does God use us as an instrument? What notes do we most often play in the world? How can we change our tune?

PRAYER

"The Musician's Prayer"

Oh Lord, please bless this music that it might glorify your name. May the talent that you have bestowed upon me be used only to serve you.

Let this music be a witness to your majesty and love, and remind us that you are always watching, and listening, from your throne above.

May your presence and beauty be found in every note, and may the words that are sung reach the hearts of your people so they will draw closer to

you.

May your Spirit guide us through every measure so that we might be the instruments of your peace, and proclaim your glory with glad voices.

Amen. (“The Musician’s Prayer”)

MOVING FORWARD

Continue up the stairs and enter the room straight ahead. Proceed to the door across the room, and look back into the room.

Part Three: Third Floor

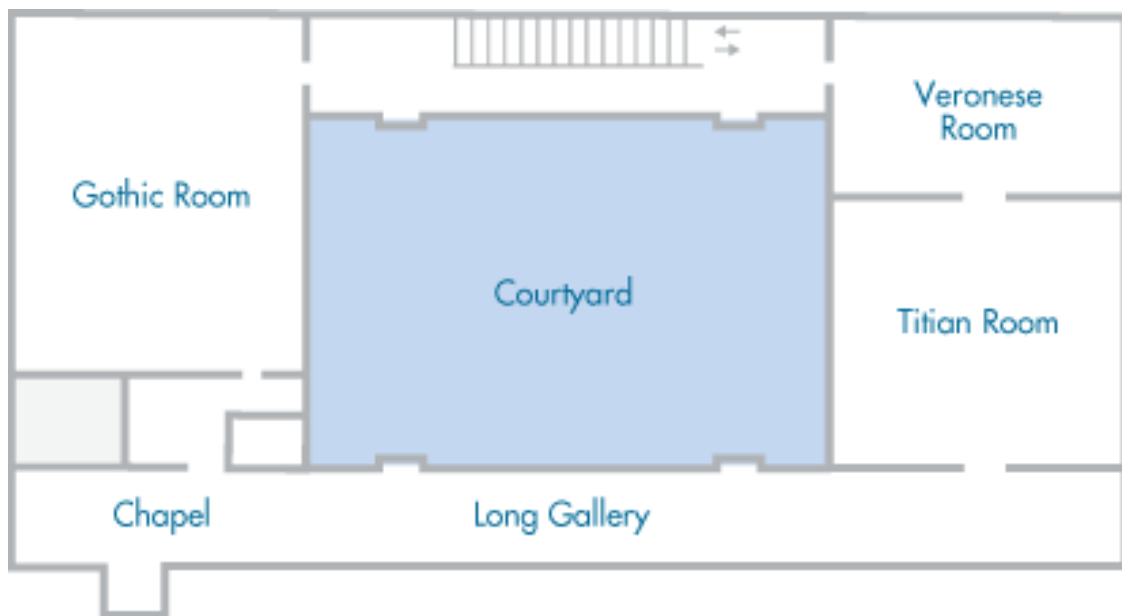


Figure 53 – Third Floor Plan, 2014, Gardnermuseum.org.

Chapter 18: Veronese Room



Figure 54 – Paolo Veronese, *The Coronation of Hebe*, About 1580 – 1589, Oil on canvas, 387 x 387 cm (152 3/8 x 152 3/8 in.), Veronese Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The walls in this room are covered by gilt leather acquired from various dealers between 1892 and 1901(Koldeweij 126). This is another example of Mrs. Gardner's interesting use of textiles in her museum. Like the Mexican tiles which she laid out in the Spanish Cloister, these strips form a unique artistic expression alone. Walk to the doorway which leads to the Titian Room, stop on the threshold, and gaze up to the ceiling

back inside the Veronese Room. This is the painting which gives the room its name, *The Coronation of Hebe*, by the Venetian Paolo Veronese.

Morris Carter tells us that after the death of Mr. Gardner, “Mrs. Gardner had, however, no thought of curtailing her expenditures for works of art. In December, 1898, Monsieur Robert [from Boudariat in Paris] undertook to buy for her the ceiling painting then attributed to Paolo Veronese representing ‘The Coronation of Hebe’” (Carter 176). On the advice of Ralph Curtis, the painting was sent to Brissan Frères for cleaning before being delivered to Boston (Carter 176). Before Mrs. Gardner acquired the painting, it is believed that the canvas was originally painted for a ceiling in the della Torre palace in Udine. From there it was sold to a couple of gentlemen who made it fodder for a lawsuit; eventually, it wound up in the Manfrin collection in Venice in the early nineteenth century (Hendy 411).

As Mrs. Gardner had explored many palaces, churches and museums in Venice, she undoubtedly saw many examples of Veronese’s paintings adorning all kinds of sumptuous walls and ceilings. The leather gilt decorations on the walls and the gold-framed ceiling are her personal recreations of such places. The palace in which she stayed the most, the Palazzo Barbaro, had rooms which looked just like this one on its third floor. The Barbaro was a place of intellectual and social stimulation. When she and Jack rented there, they hosted many notable authors and painters, including Henry James, Robert Browning and Anders Zorn: a custom she would continue when Fenway Court was built in Boston. Among those notable guests here include T.S. Eliot, Julia Ward Howe, John Singer Sargent and Henry James (ISGMA).

The whole painting is a typical Veronese construction with its multitudinous flurry of figures and activity swirling among the clouds. The picture has more than fifty figures in total; and, the subject includes the coronation of Hebe as cupbearer to the gods (Pignatti 31 - 32). In a veritable “Who’s Who” in mythology, Jupiter and Juno can be seen in the center with Mercury and Diana alongside of Hebe. On the clouds below which move diagonally up towards the center, we recognize Hercules in his helmet holding his club. Another familiar character from our travels in the museum is Bacchus, who is seated in the upper left hand corner with a rather large stein in his hand. A drawing held at Oxford details the whole composition, including the names of all of the figures and proof that the painting has been trimmed (Pignatti 35). The painting includes a final Venetian stamp as the lions of Saint Mark can be seen surveying the scene from several different cloud groupings.

REFLECTION

This scene filled with grandeur may be painted on a flat surface, but we can see that it is truly anything but flat. Veronese is famous for his ability to bring out the illusion of great depth and splendor by forming layers of characters among the clouds. Above us hangs a fine example of the success of just such an effect. This painting, in form and subject matter, also serves as a fine parallel to our own lives.

Our looking, seeking and reflecting on this journey through the museum is very much like this painting. If we are doing it truly alone, then it will lack depth. It will be flat and useless. However, when done within the context of the community, we can develop a rich and bountiful life. A quick glance at the painting illustrates the interconnectedness of everyone in the community. So is the same for our lives. One key

to transformation in our lives is our ability to figure out our place within the community. We hear this idea echoed in the scriptures as well as in famous reflections. The English priest, poet and author, John Donne, in his “Meditation 17” wrote the now-famous line: “No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (1278). How we respond to being part of that community is within our control.

As we continue our journey towards the heavens, we first must consider how we are faring amongst our community on Earth. What communities do we belong to in our lives? What role do we play with in the community? What sense of community do we create? How does our sense of community free us? How does community help frame our parameters? How do we respond to the idea of God as community?

PRAYER

“Prayer for the Community”

Heavenly God, you gather us together in our faith journey

Trusting in you, we join one another as a community

A community of faith on a journey

A journey to grow ever deeper in our faith...

In our Love...

In our Desire to long for you...

Along the way, remind us of your Love

Of your sacrifice for us

Of your ever mindful presence

Let us never lose hope along the way

Help us to be strong...

Strong in Faith...

Strong in Love...

Strong in our Desire to be ever mindful of your presence

For it is in your strength and Love and the Graces you bestow upon us,
that we can go out and share in your Love and Faith with all those in our
community.

It is in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Sprit one God For ever and ever.

AMEN. ("Prayer for the Community")

MOVING FORWARD

*Move across the next room to the large painting on the opposite wall to the left of
the door.*

Chapter 19: Titian Room



Figure 55 – Titian, Europa, About 1560 – 1562, Oil on canvas, 178 x 205 cm (70 1/16 x 80 11/16 in.), Titian Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

From the deep pilings she drove into the Fens to the bronze ornamental decoration at the top of the inside of the Courtyard, Mrs. Gardner's love of Venice is on display throughout the museum. As we have climbed to this highest point of public access in the museum, we have passed countless objects from and inspired by the city on water. These objects include paintings of herself in Venice, vedute of the city by Guardi, ornaments from gondolas, bas reliefs from churches; and, now before us, the most magnificent work of art of them all, perhaps Mrs. Gardner's favorite, and one of the most expensive in the

museum: a large painting by the famous sixteenth century Venetian, Titian, called *The Rape of Europe*.

Titian was born, Tiziano Vecelli, in the mountains of Friuli in the late 1400s (Stoudt, *Treasures* 180). When he was young, he traveled to Venice and apprenticed under the famous Giovanni Bellini. When Bellini died in 1515, Titian took over as Bellini's natural successor (Stoudt, *Treasures* 180). Gaining patrons from all over Europe, Titian painted both Christian and classical subjects in addition to many portraits (Stoudt, *Treasures* 180). Although his subject matter changed, his style stayed the same until late in life when it is supposed he may have been losing his eyesight. Titian died in 1576 at almost 100 years of age (Stoudt, *Treasures* 180).

The painting of *Europa* has a long, well-documented history leading up to Mrs. Gardner's acquisition of the painting in 1896, and its placement in this room around 1902. In the 1550s and 1560s Titian was commissioned by Philip II. The Spanish monarch asked him to paint six paintings which would be a mythological series that would decorate the royal palace in Madrid (Goldfarb, *Titian and Rubens* 12 – 15). Titian was given the freedom to choose the subject matter for these paintings; and, he developed a totally unique creation which he termed *poesie* (Marqués 77). These *poesie*, or paintings on poetry, were interpretations of themes of divine love which he derived from Greek mythology and Roman sources (Goldfarb, *Titian and Rubens* 12 – 15). In addition to *Europa*, Titian painted the stories of Danae and the golden rain; Venus and Adonis; Diana among her nymphs; all of which were said to hang in a private space just for the monarch.

The primary source for the paintings in the series was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Chapter 2 lines 833 – 75, Ovid writes that Jove summons Mercury and orders him to seek out the land of Sidon:

There you are to drive down to the sea-shore the herd of the king's cattle which you will see grazing at some distance on the mountain-side. He spoke, and quickly the cattle were driven from the mountain and headed for the shore, as Jove had directed, to a spot where the great king's daughter was accustomed to play in company with her Tyrian maidens...and took upon him the form of a bull. In this form he mingled with the cattle, lowed like the rest, and wandered around....His color was white as the untrodden snow....The muscles stood rounded upon his neck, a long dewlap hung down in front, his horns were twisted, but perfect in shape as if carved by an artist's hand, cleaner and more clear than pearls....His whole expression was peaceful....Presently Agenor's daughter drew near and held out flowers....Now he lays his snowy body down on the yellow sands, and....yields his horns to entwine with garlands of fresh flowers. The princess even dares to sit upon back....The god little by little edges away from the dry land and sets his borrowed hoofs in the shallow water, then he goes farther out and soon is in full flight with his prize on the open ocean. She trembles with fear and looks back at the receding shore, holding fast a horn with one hand and resting the other on the creature's back. And her fluttering garments stream behind her in the wind. (Goldfarb, *Titian and Rubens* 12 – 15)

This scene of deception, passion and control is one that inspired many painters and monarchs alike. Perhaps, the idea of dominating Europe made the subject a common one, perhaps the extremes one would have to go to was another contributing factor. In any case, Titian's highly charged version which was coveted through the ages and was passed down from monarch to monarch in Spain until the eighteenth century when it passed first into the hands of the French, then to the English, before Bernard Berenson outbid the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin on Mrs. Gardner's behalf in June 1896 (Stoudt, *Treasures* 130). The painting cost her \$100,000; and, according to a letter to Berenson in 1900, it was the first she had to "dip into the capital" (Hadley 217).

In fact, Mrs. Gardner so loved this painting that it is one of the few paintings which she discusses in a personal letter. The painting arrived in Boston in August 1896, and on September 19, 1896, she wrote to Berenson:

I am breathless about the *Europa*, even yet! I am back here tonight...after a two days' orgy. The orgy was drinking myself drunk with Europa and then sitting for hours in my Italian Garden at Brookline, thinking and dreaming about her. Every inch of paint in the picture seems full of joy." (Hadley 66)



Figure 56 – Thomas Marr and Son, Boston, Drawing Room, 152 Beacon Street, about 1900, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

At the time she received the painting she had hung it in a prominent place in the Drawing Room at her Beacon Street home. And when it came time to provide visitors with access to the museum, she provided the first few written guides. These small books were written beginning in 1903, and often only had a line or two describing a select object or two in the museum. However, when it came to *Europa*, she devoted a full paragraph, including the attribute and a small description of the painting (ISGMA). This detail, although a small one, furthers the idea that this was an important painting to her, and to the collection as a whole. Visitors should stop here and look for a while.



Figure 57 – Sean Dungan, Titian Room, 2010, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Here both the space in which the painting is hanging and what surrounds it is equally as important and as it is personal. Since her own apartment was located just above it and the Chapel and Gothic Room which lay ahead of us on our journey were closed off to the public during her lifetime, this room, named after Titian, is on the border of some of the most private spaces in the museum. By virtue of location, we are getting closer and closer to Mrs. Gardner herself. Her words to Berenson further reflect the importance of the painting. If she truly felt that kind of passion for this painting, then it would only make sense that she wanted to keep it close. With such a passion expressed in writing, it is hard not to imagine her coming down the stairs at night just to steal one more glance before heading off to bed.

The personal affection for the painting can be felt even more when considering a few of the objects which surround the painting. Mrs. Gardner had one of her Worth ball gowns created into a wall fabric which is attached to the wall beneath the *Europa*. This gown was one of the few she allowed her to be photographed. With such an intense personal connection, Director Anne Hawley wonders how closely Mrs. Gardner identified with Europa herself; “could Gardner be suggesting that she has left her dress and dissolved into the picture as *Europa*?” (Hawley, “Preface” x). While biographer Douglas Shand-Tucci takes a step further back and adds the Bellini “Christ carrying the Cross” to the installation to show how, “(i)n the same breath, however, she gives us perhaps the most striking evidence of her lifelong ease with coupling the sacred and the profane...” (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 176). When combining both of these keen observations, about the juxtaposition of religious and personal objects, with Mrs. Gardner’s own emotions and her financial sacrifice, we can truly appreciate the complexity of personal connections which she took time to design in the museum.

REFLECTION

While Mrs. Gardner’s words certainly prove how captivated she was by the painting, it would do us some good to consider not only the beauty of the execution, but the rival emotions caused by the subject matter. This painting is, after all, entitled, *The Rape of Europa*. The title suggests deception and dominance, but the painting illustrates somewhat of a conflict. Looking at her face, there is some question as she is about to be taken away by the bull if she is going willingly, or not. There is conflict; there is tension; there is excitement.

As we look at the painting, there is so much to take in. If we divide the canvas diagonally (as Pope suggests in *Titian's Rape of Europa*), from the upper right hand side to the lower left hand side, we can see Europa and bull in one space, and the putti, or little angels, and nature, in the other space. We begin to recognize how Titian might have constructed the painting with a grand landscape in mind and how he placed the figures within that landscape. However, even with this understanding, we are no closer to balancing our understanding of Europa's emotions.

Sometimes when we overanalyze a situation, we remove the joy from it. And while she provided her visitors with a paragraph of detail on this painting, few objects in the museum were marked. Her hope was to allow the viewer to bring no preconceived notion to the table. To allow one to take in what beauty one saw and experience one's own emotions in real time. So take a good look at the painting: the spray of the ocean; the angels; the scales of the fish; the natural sky; the innocent look of the bull; the emotion of Europa; the folds in the red garment; and then, close your eyes.

While your eyes are closed, focus on what image stays with you. See in your mind's eye what you remember about the painting. That image is beauty to you. No matter what is borrowed from the acquisition history, creation of painting, translation of Ovid, or even Mrs. Gardner's own words, what you see is your joy. What have you taken from here? What do you savor? What has this experience meant to you? Get lost in your experience, just as Mrs. Gardner did.

PRAYER

An Excerpt from William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

These beauteous forms,

Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:--feelings too 30
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world, 40
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (132 – 133)

Lord, with you as my guiding light, may I more readily experience “the deep power of joy, and see into the life of things.” Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Move through the door at the right of the painting. Once inside the Long Gallery, walk two thirds of the way down the gallery until you arrive at the last case of books on the left. Lift the curtains in front of the cabinets and locate Mrs. Gardner’s copies of Dante Alighieri’s Divine Comedy.

Chapter 20: Long Gallery



Figure 58 – Attributed to Baccio Baldini (Italian, 1436 - 1487) based on designs by Sandro Botticelli, Dante and Virgil with the Vision of Beatrice (canto 2), *Illustration to the Inferno by Dante* (Italian, 1265 - 1321), in: *Commento di Christophoro Landino sopra La comedia di Danthe Alighieri poeta Fiorentino* (Florence, 1481), Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

After exiting the Titian Room we enter a long corridor, aptly named the Long Gallery. This space seems to contain more of a diverse set of objects than any other room in the building. As we proceed towards the stained glass window at the opposite end from the entryway, we see a work by Botticelli to the right; furniture and decorative arts from Italy and Spain; and, a case with letters and autographs from thirteen United States presidents, from Washington to Taft. Passing through the Moorish archway from Venice, we encounter cases which contain many fine items representing Mrs. Gardner's rare book collection. Some of the most important items of the 1,500 plus items in the collection are in these cases. Moving towards the last case on the left, we find her finest books by the Florentine author, Dante Alighieri. These works are significant for both their historical and personal significance.

When Mrs. Gardner's sister-in-law died in child birth in 1865, it was decided that she and Mr. Gardner would adopt their three nephews (Carter 48). It was at this time that Mrs. Gardner felt it was time for her to develop a strong education for herself. This is one of the first instances in which we see Mrs. Gardner's willingness to be a first-hand example for setting high standards. She seems to realize that if she is going to have a high standard of education for her nephews, then she too must go through some of the paces herself. The museum can also be looked at as a great store house of knowledge and experience; and, with the rare manuscripts, books and letters, we can add library to the moniker alongside of art museum. In fact, before she collected any kind of art, her collection began with rare books, particularly Dante's.

In the spring of 1878, Mrs. Gardner met Charles Eliot Norton when she attended his lectures at Harvard University (Cunningham 19). In the previous year, Harvard had become the first university in America with a professorial chair in art history (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 38), and Norton held that place when the two met. Norton was in his fifties, while Gardner was in her thirties. He had traveled abroad in Egypt, Italy and France; and, he studied in Rome where he developed his interest in Dante (Tharp 61). When his wife died in childbirth, Norton came back to Cambridge, Massachusetts (Tharp 61), but not before striking up a rich and valuable friendship with his English counterpart in Italy, John Ruskin (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 38). His travels, his friends and his knowledge were undoubtedly all the things that made him a magnet for Mrs. Gardner.

In no time the two became friends. They were both members of the Dante Society, though with two very different roles. Norton was the most important intellectual figure in the Society, while Mrs. Gardner was one of the most important financial figures

(Cunningham 21). In 1886, when the Society set forward on printing its *Concordance of the Divinia Commedia*, by E.A. Fay, the cost of printing was too high; Mrs. Gardner anonymously offered to pay the costs not met by members' subscriptions (Cunningham 21). Years before Norton became president of the Society following Lowell's death in 1891, he was advising Mrs. Gardner on editions of the *Divine Comedy* for her collection. Many of which he took personal pride in as though they were his own (Tharp 61). The first acquisitions came in 1886 when he alerted her to the sale of the 1502 Aldine Comedy and a 1487 Brescia copy of the *Commedia* (Jacoff 72). In 1887, he advised her to buy the Landino Dante which we will consider here (Jacoff 72).

The Landino Dante is significant for several reasons: its age (according to several sources, it dates back to Florence in 1481); its Botticelli-inspired illustrations; and, its provenance. The book had come to her through the sale of the library of the Earl of Crawford, who had owned it sometime after the Duke of Grafton had it in the 1700s (Cunningham 22). More importantly, the book's printer was Nicolaus Lorenz of Breslavia, who worked in Florence from 1477 to 1484 (Jacoff 71). The most extraordinary feature of this text is that it contains all nineteen of the original engravings, while most copies only contain two or three (Jacoff 71). The reason for this relates to the difficulty of the printing and the binding process. It was not easy to keep the engravings and the text together. Very often the engravings had to be glued into the binding which made them fall out easily (Cunningham 22). Therefore, this copy is rare for having all of the Botticelli inspired pieces in one place. Additionally, the name "Landino" lends itself to the moniker because of the commentary contained within the text. Cristoforo Landino (1425 – 1498) was a major figure in Florentine cultural life with close ties to the Medici

family and to the leading intellectuals of their circle (Jacoff 71). His ideas mark the first time that someone from the Renaissance time period first analyzed the poem, and also the first instance during which a Florentine had commented since Giovanni Boccaccio had lectured on the poem in 1373 (Jacoff 71). Landino's commentary was commonly studied through the sixteenth century (Jacoff 71).

Even though Mrs. Gardner's book collecting took a back seat to the collecting of paintings, furnishings and textiles after the 1880s, it is interesting to note that Norton never stopped advising her. Almost fifteen years after her purchase of the Landino Dante, he directed her on the purchase of a rare manuscript which she acquired at the Ashburnham-Barrois sale of 1901 for £630 (Eze 82). This manuscript adds deep roots to a collection of already fine editions of the poem, as it dates all the way back to the 1390s (Eze 82). It proves that she held Norton in high esteem over the years, and shows that she saw Italian art of all kinds as most significant to her collection.

Finally, by Norton sparking Mrs. Gardner's interest in Dante, he not only put her on the collecting trail, but he placed her in a group of people who expanded her intellectual and social circle. In the 1880s, she shared a love of Dante with Frank Marion Crawford, who according to Carter, knew Italian as well as English (100). As Mrs. Gardner knew Italian herself, the two read Dante together. As Crawford's letters from 1893 to 1894 to his "Dearest Lady" illustrate, this was a truly personal activity. Personal enough that he had their personal copies of Dante bound together by Tiffany. As the design and execution process took almost a year, this truly became a labor of love, and a special gift from an intimate friend (ISGMA). Also, according to Louise Hall Tharp, "It was probably Norton who introduced a young man named Bernard Berenson, in 1886,

perhaps early in the year before the Gardners went to Europe with their nephew Joe” (Tharp 129). If true, then Norton’s influence runs much stronger through the museum; as it was Berenson who had such a strong influence on Mrs. Gardner’s choice of works of art for the museum.

REFLECTION

The placement of these rare books in an unlighted case, covered by heavy velvet to keep out the sun’s rays which would fade the coverings, makes it disappointingly difficult to view any of these texts easily. No matter whether or not we can see the text clearly, we understand the experience of being able to read. If we could open the case and read Dante’s *La Commedia*, we would see his chronicles of an imagined physical and spiritual journey undertaken by the author through hell, purgatory and heaven. Along the way he is guided by his mentor, Virgil, and his beloved unrequited love, Beatrice, who also serves as the subject of his *La Vita Nuova*.

As he passes through the various levels of these belief-driven Christian locales, he describes the terrain and the inhabitants. In many cases, the figures are familiar to the Florentine imagination, and become illustrations for a particular sin or kindness. Because of the controversy caused by placing several key governmental and church figures in places reserved for serious sinners, Dante is exiled from his hometown of Florence. Ironically, after the book becomes extremely popular, the officials of Florence petitioned his final resting place in Ravenna to have their native son’s remains returned home. Upon refusal, Florence agreed to provide the funds for an eternal flame at his tomb.

In Dante’s story we are reminded of our own journey here in the Gardner. We have wound ourselves up and up, seeking enlightenment to further our relationship with

ourselves, others and our God. With only three more rooms to go, we consider how we are reading the experience. Are we still protected from God's light like the heavy velvet, or the thick leather bindings of the text? Or, have we turned a page? Exposed our written story to the light? When opening the storybook of our journey, what do we find written there? Who has been guiding us? Who have we encountered along the journey? What have we realized about the place they hold in our story? About what place we hold in their story? How much is God guiding our story? How much are we telling the story by ourselves?

PRAYER

“A Reader's Prayer”

'May you be praised, Lord God, for the printed word, bread for our minds, light for our lives.

'We give thanks for the talent and dedication of all who serve the truth in love and for all whose administration and technical skills make possible the production of books, newspapers, magazines, and reviews....

'We celebrate the wonder of digital communications, manifesting a new iconography that can link people around the globe in solidarity of faith, hope, love.

'May the blind see, the deaf hear, the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them by all who rejoice in their God-given talents and their gift of creativity. Amen.' (Alberione)

MOVING FORWARD

For the next work of art, move a few steps further down the gallery towards the stained glass window.

Chapter 21: Chapel



Figure 59 – Sean Dungan, *Chapel*, 2010, Unknown artist, Soisson Stained Glass Window, 13th century, Glass, 366 x 157.5 cm (144 1/8 x 62 in.), Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

As you move North in the Long Gallery from the Dante case, take special notice of the head high partition bolted to the wall on the left. This partition represents how far a visitor to the museum could travel in Mrs. Gardner's day. Only after she died, did her will permit access to the Chapel, the Gothic Room and the Macknight Room on the first floor. This space still operates as an active chapel. Once a year on Mrs. Gardner's birthday (April 14), a Memorial mass is held here. The duties are split between the clergy at the Church of the Advent, Mrs. Gardner's long-time parish, and the Cowley Fathers who reside across the Charles River in Cambridge at their monastery to which Mrs. Gardner gave so generously. Step forward until you reach the rope where the prie-dieu blocks passage to the altar and the stained glass window in front of you.

This window, which is considered to be the finest example of early thirteenth-century French stained glass in America, is only one-third of the original from Soissons cathedral (Caviness 7). The remaining two-thirds of the window are located in the collection in Louvre in Paris, or have been lost. Letters in the summer and fall of 1906, from the historian Henry Adams (1838 - 1918), who was Mrs. Gardner's friend, recommended that she seize the opportunity to buy this window from the dealer, Bacri Frères. (Carter 216 – 217). At that time, Adams believed that the window came from the cathedral at Saint-Denis, and was made in the early 1200s (Stoudt, *Treasures* 198).

A study, in 1960 by the French scholar Louis Grodecki, reattributed the window to the cathedral in Soissons, based on three key ideas: the area's affinity for the Saints Nicasius and his sister Eutropia; the distinctive "antiquising" style of the window attributed to the area in France; and, the close stylistic comparison to a Jesse Tree window, still at Soissons (Caviness 8-9). In 1983 another study took place which built

upon Grodecki's ideas. This time, the scholars added to the evidence: an eyewitness account of the window; a recreation of the panels through an analysis of the lives of the saints; and, a new examination of both sides of the glass (Caviness 7-8). The results of the 1983 study solidified the 1960 attribution; and, further hypothesized that only sixty percent of the current glass is original. Much of the glass was probably destroyed by the Huguenots in 1567, a revolution blast from 1815, or a blast from the Germans during World War I (Caviness 9).

When looking at the window, we see a piece of art that was created either for the honor of Bishop Nevelon of Soissons, or under his direction. The panels tell the story of Saints Nicasius and Eutropia, who refused to acquiesce to the threats of the Vandals, and were made martyrs during the Vandals' attack on ancient Reims (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 133). The upper three sections are in their original positions; while the two lower right sections come from other parts of the window; and, the two sections at the lower left contain fragments from various places (Chong, *Eye* 27). The center of the windows illustrates the entombment of Saint Nicasaius, while several other sections below show Saint Eutropia's beheading. The overall piece as a decoration located behind the altar forms what Shand-Tucci aptly identifies as "a kind of reredos" (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 236).

Shand-Tucci recounts one of the few detailed accounts about experiencing an evening at the museum with Mrs. Gardner which comes to us from her friend, Nellie Melba, when she recalls:

a long Italian gallery, dimly lighted...[with] a hint of marvelous pictures in the dusk. We all gather...Mrs. Gardner...lights a taper. Very slowly, she walks down the gallery in silence, while we wait...and then we see

her gravely light two little candles in front of an altar at the far end...at night [Fenway Court] was lit with hundreds of candles, and the first effect one had on entering it was that of darkness so thick that none of the pictures could be seen. However, one had not been in [a] room five minutes before every picture became clearly visible in its smallest detail. (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 228 – 229)

Here we get a first-hand account of Mrs. Gardner's flair for the dramatic, and her ability to make an impression on her visitor's minds by offering a multisensory experience.

REFLECTION

When light shines through the clear opening behind this Gothic window in front of us, it causes beautiful patches of red, blue and yellow light to radiate through the glass and dance across the floor at our feet. In Medieval times there were several purposes which stained glass served. The most practical kept the worship space insulated from the elements of Mother Nature. Next, they were used as an opportunity to educate the illiterate masses about stories from the scripture, a veritable graphic novel in glass and paint illustrating the Bible and the lives of the saints. Sometimes drawings for these windows are still referred to as cartoons. However, the purpose of stained glass only began there. Most importantly was the idea that stained glass acted as lens through which people can grow in holiness and become disciples of Christ (Barron 26). As we can experience here, when the natural light refracts off of the window panes, the viewer can almost feel a holier light, a light from the heavens pour over him. The effect further enhances the sacred nature of the atmosphere thereby furthering the prayerfulness of the experience.

As we stand in God's light before the mosaic of beautiful colors, we are reminded of what kind of light we give off. Are we truly transparent in life? Are we genuine enough for God's light to pass through us clearly? If we could refract a color of light, based on who we are, what color would it be? Bright yellow? A low blue? A deep red? Or do we give off a dark, murky shadow? What color do others see when they view us in the light? Do we give off God's light, or something else?

PRAYER

"Prayer to be Filled with Holy Light"

Lord,

as daylight fills the sky,

fill us with your holy light.

May our lives mirror our love for you

whose wisdom has brought us into being,

and whose care guides us on our way.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever. AMEN. ("Prayer to be Filled with Holy

Light")

MOVING FORWARD

Pass through the door on the right and move around the elevator into the Gothic room. Move across the room to the portrait in the opposite corner.

Chapter 22: Gothic Room



Figure 60 – John Singer Sargent, *Isabella Stewart Gardner*, 1888, Oil on canvas, 190 x 80 cm (74 13/16 x 31 1/2 in.), *Gothic Room*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Like the Chapel and the passageway between these two rooms, the Gothic Room was closed off to the public during Mrs. Gardner's lifetime. It is supposed that one of the reasons for that closure is due to the portrait which rests on the easel in the corner of the room across from the entrance. The history behind the creation and first exhibition of the painting adds to the public celebrity of the Mrs. Gardner of her day.

Mrs. Gardner met John Singer Sargent through their mutual friends, Ralph Curtis and Henry James. Not surprisingly, the introduction occurred following the great scandal caused by Sargent's full length portrait of Madame Gautreau, known to the world as *Madame X* (1883 – 1994). The controversy surrounding the Gautreau portrait dealt primarily with the amount of pure white skin which Sargent exposed and the dress strap which he painted draped down, as opposed to over the shoulder in its conventional, conservative place. The insinuation was enough to force Sargent out of Paris to a studio in London hiding the portrait in his studio (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 68).

Besides Sargent's abilities, this kind of attention was just what attracted Mrs. Gardner to the painter. She wanted a portrait that would outdo the Gautreau portrait in beauty and scandal (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 69). Sargent painted many Boston Brahmins of the time, including: members of the Curtis family, the Sears family and the Lowell family. All of these particular families had ties to the Gardners. One painting stands out, *Mrs. Fiske Warren with her daughter*, because it was painted in this room in 1903 (McKibbin 49). However, Mrs. Gardner's portrait was painted well before Fenway Court was built between September of 1887 and March of 1888 at her house on Beacon Street. (Hendy 321). Sargent was paid \$3,000 for the painting (Chong, *Eye* 204). Accounts of the process itself paint Mrs. Gardner as a difficult model to say the least. According to Stanley Olson,

a Sargent biographer, the sittings were “trying” because of Mrs. Gardner’s temperament and her desire to prolong the work, she was unable to keep still (141). Sargent threatened to give up, but completed the portrait on the ninth attempt. A classical allusion never lost on her, Mrs. Gardner tied the symbolic nature of the number to Dante (Carter 105 – 106). Perhaps the process should have been a cleared sign of the reception.

When the painting was finished, it was exhibited at the St. Botolph Club in Boston (Carter 105). The most critical reception for the portrait praised the painting for capturing the complexity of the religious and feminine mystique for which Mrs. Gardner’s life was marked. It was the comments made around the gentlemen’s clubs in Boston that caused Mr. Gardner to be upset. In fact, his anger was so strong, that the painting was not shown publically again until both Mr. and Mrs. Gardner had died. Photographs show that it was kept in this private room throughout the existence of the museum. Perhaps the one comment which stands out the most is the one related to the neck line of her dress. There was a New Hampshire “artistic” resort which was known as “Crawford’s Notch.” And the comment was based on the fact that she had been painted all the way down to Crawford’s notch (Shand-Tucci, *Art* 71 – 72). The comment may have also had a second meaning. One which insinuated an inappropriate relationship between Mrs. Gardner and Frank Marion Crawford, a young male friend of Mrs. Gardner, with whom she shared a friendship and an affinity for Dante.

The portrait depicts Mrs. Gardner as she approached her forty-eighth birthday. She is bold; she is confident; she is facing the world head on. Posed in front of a Renaissance Italian textile (now located in the Long Gallery), a halo effect is noticeable around her head, which causes her to appear as Henry James so aptly observed as, “a

Byzantine Madonna” (Goldfarb, *Isabella* 145- 146). Her formal black dress, form-fitted, accentuates the curves for which she was well-celebrated; and her pearls and rubies (given to her by Jack to mark special events and distributed to family members late in life), are worn in a conspicuous place around her tiny waist. Her long arms flow down in front of her shawl around her waist, giving off the appearance that she is a ballerina poised for her next graceful movement. The tiny shoes that peep out from under the dress, adorned by rubies, not only support her small frame, but seem to propel her forward into action. Mrs. Gardner felt that this was Sargent’s best work, and over two hundred letters in the Museum Archives reference the kindnesses that mark a life-long friendship begun here. Even though he was unable to attend her funeral because he was out of the country, he was named as a pall bearer; a role, no doubt, with which he would have struggled at his own advanced age and health.

REFLECTION

Nearing the end of our journey, we come face to face with Mrs. Gardner one more time. This woman, in the middle of her life, is ready for action. She is reading Dante; she is beginning to collect art; she is traveling the world. Yet, here in her own hometown, she has been judged. She has been condemned. She has been criticized for being unconventional, worldly, for not following society’s norms.

What causes people to cast judgment upon one another? Sometimes we know that it is sheer jealousy. They have something that we want. If we can’t get that thing, material or immaterial, then by placing the person in a negative light, we place the object of our desire in a lesser place too. This allows us to more readily justify our inability to get what we want. Other times, we judge people over our own personal insecurity. We

make inappropriate comments to put someone else down. Every time we drag that person down, we feel that we raise ourselves up. In reality, this behavior just demonstrates an ugly side of our personal character. It is easy to put him down if he is foreign, or has foreign ideas. Without a track record behind them, little can be done to establish their credibility. This allows us to point out our own experiences and pass them off as better than the other person's ideas. Again, the only real result is us proving that we have a closed mind. Finally, we cast judgments upon others to alleviate our own fears. What if the other person is better than us? What if the other person will be better liked by members of my group? What if... what if... what if? Maybe it is just time to put our fears aside and turn the 'what ifs' around.

Rather than remembering this portrait of Mrs. Gardner for the scandal, what if we remembered it for its beauty?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to heed your Golden Rule:

“³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

Instill in me a humble confidence which will allow me to accept my own faults and weaknesses and grow beyond them. Help me to see others as a beautiful part of your creation, one which I am a part of, not the center of.

Amen.

MOVING FORWARD

Exit the room through the door nearest the staircase. Pause before reaching the metal screen, and observe the statue of Christ hanging on the wall of the Courtyard.

Chapter 23: Third Floor Stairhall



Figure 61 – Spanish, Catalonia, Crucified Christ (from a Descent from the Cross). About 1150 AD) Painted wood, 111 x 94 cm (43 11/16 x 37 in.), Third Floor Stairhall, South, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

We pause here briefly in this small gallery surrounded by religious images. From 1901 until 1914 Mrs. Gardner's catalogues to the museum propose a route that deliberately guided visitors through the Veronese Room, the Titian Room and the Long Gallery before suggesting that they double back and finish their journey here. Between 1914 and 1924, the tour extended to the Spanish Cloister where guests finished in front of Sargent's *El Jaleo*. In the first decade, once visitors approached the large metal screen to the left of the Christ (the screen would have been locked in Gardner's day), they were instructed to look through the screen and the open doorway to the Gothic Room to view the Giotto on the prie-dieu. The Sargent portrait was hung flat against the wall; and,

therefore, it was not visible (ISGMA). In 1917 the *Crucified Christ* on the wall was purchased from Joseph Brummer in New York and placed here, (Stoudt, *Treasures* 212) among the other articles which ended the tour of the third floor.

According to several sources, this *Crucified Christ* was created around 1150 in the Catalonia region of Spain, and was a central figure in a Deposition group (Chong, *Art of the Cross* 55). A report was made by David Rosen, who restored the work for Brummer, before he sold it to Mrs. Gardner in 1917, stated that the figure “had hair, a crown of dried thorns, an artificial beard and linen dress over the entire body” (Chong, *Art of the Cross* 58). David Rosen, recalled the restoration in a *Saturday Evening Post* article “Restorations and Forgeries,” on June 21, 1930. In which he pointed out that layers of paint had been removed from the figure to help reveal a magnificent twelfth century masterpiece. Although the figure has been compared to the Louvre’s Christ Courajod which is attributed to the South of France, with the assistance of Rosen’s report, more recent scholarship sees the Gardner corpus more comparable to Depositions from Spain.

Sadly, none of the other figures of the scene remain. Just as stained glass was important to the spiritual lives of the people who viewed them in France, so was the same for the people who viewed these carved scenes, particularly the Deposition. In the famous scene depicted in the Gospels of the Bible, Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ body down from the cross after his suffering and death. In many churches this scene was recreated during mass when the priest holds up the body of Christ during the consecration. These scenes could have also played a part in services honoring Good Friday (Chong, *Art of the Cross* 55).

REFLECTION

So concludes our journey through the museum. We end with this multi-faceted image of the body of Christ. With his left hand extended straight, it appears as if he is still attached to his cross, his instrument of torture and suffering. Holes are clearly visible where nails and thrones once pierced the flesh of his head and hands. These observations immediately remind of Christ's suffering for us. However, there is more than suffering here. With a bent right arm, closed eyes and dropped chin, we see that this statue was once part of a Deposition scene. This scene marks the end of the struggle, not a continuation. Instead of just the suffering represented by the traces of the cross, here we also have relief, resignation, and freedom from suffering. Standing here at the end of our transformative experience, we understanding the giving over, the dropping of the shoulder and chin albeit subtle becomes a powerful symbol. Just like us now, the journey here is concluding.

In the absence of the cross and other figures which typically dominate this scene we feel one more emotion coming from this Christ: hope. The outstretched right hand which projects forward from the wall must allude to the Resurrection to follow. If one images the left arm coming down in the same fashion, then it is easy to see the welcoming Christ: Jesus, our Savior, the one who will lead us into Eternal life. All we need to do is open ourselves up to Him.

Consider which image of Christ is strongest to you? The suffering Jesus? The one without suffering? The Jesus of eternal life? What does this image say about our view of God? Where is God in my pain and suffering? What suffering do I witness in others?

What do I do to bring hope to them? To myself? How are my actions like those expected of me by God?

PRAYER

“From An Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday Easter Eve”

“I ORDER YOU, O SLEEPER, to awake!

I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell.

Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.

Rise up, work of my hands, you were created in my image.

Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you.

Together we form only one person and we cannot be separated!”

(Rohr 187)

KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Figure 62 – Sean Dungan, Third floor Stairhall, 2010, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Conclusion: The Renzo Piano Wing



Figure 63 – Peter Cammarata, Renzo Piano Wing, 2013, Photograph.

On January 19, 2012 the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum opened a \$114 million addition to Mrs. Gardner's historic Fenway Court (Edgers 20). Although her will stipulated that nothing in her museum should be changed or moved, Anne Hawley, director, and the Board of Trustees, found a way, as some purists would view the situation, to circumvent the will. It is important to note that Ms. Hawley is not the first director to make adjustments to Mrs. Gardner's property. In 1933, Morris Carter built an annex off of the back of the museum to house the Administrative office and Conservation department; and, in 1971, Philip Hendy had the second Chinese Room dismantled, auctioned off and covered over to make room for business, educational and social meeting spaces. Just as with the previous situations, the 2012 addition (technically) does

not tamper with the Fenway Court Palace and her will. What differentiates this building project from the others is that it, in fact, restores some original spaces.

First, the second Chinese room has now been uncovered, exposing the stairway down to the basement level where Mrs. Gardner had her own private “Buddhist temple.” While the room itself has not been restored (it is still being used for security), there is still hope that some of the contents will be returned to their original home here, or maybe even donated, exhibited or repurchased for this purpose. Since Alan Chong’s 2009 exhibit *Journeys East: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Asia* and the Gardner’s weightiest catalog, tremendous awareness has been raised for the importance of Asian art in the collection. One other benefit that has come from that exhibit is the sense that while Mrs. Gardner didn’t leave a manual explaining the museum, she did leave herself on every book, work of art and in every space. In this one case, by just restoring the mirror over the staircase to the second Chinese Room, one can now see what Douglas Shand-Tucci pointed out in his book, *The Art of Scandal*, how the sculpture of the Buddha interacts with the Madonna and Child at opposite ends of the Chinese Loggia. Perhaps it is also the only way to consider too that while Mrs. Gardner was respectful of Eastern cultures and religions, she herself could see a reflection of her own faith in the mirror as she descended the stairs to the “little Buddhist temple.”

Second, the new addition afforded the museum an opportunity to restore the Tapestry Room to coincide with its original design and layout. Using T.E. Mahr photographs from the early 1900s, the conservation and restoration team worked hard on redoing the fireplace in the room. The tapestries themselves were cleaned and rehung, and the dinner table was returned to the room, set nearly as Mrs. Gardner left it when she

died. The effect is a greater appreciation for the size of the room and the beauty of the tapestries themselves. The new lighting system and climate control only further enhance the atmosphere of this grand and austere space. Previously, this level of appreciation was not possible due to the number of concerts which took place here. The room was often covered in chairs, or had piles of chairs stacked near some of the decorative arts along the walls. The placement of the concert materials, especially the giant permanently placed stage near the fireplace, made this room a gorgeous space for a concert, but less than originally planned as a gallery space. Would it not be safe to assume that since Mrs. Gardner herself demolished the Music Room in favor of this Tapestry Room, that she too would have been in favor of building a whole new space for concerts if it meant having visitors see all of the tapestries the way she installed them?



Figure 64 – Peter Cammarata, Renzo Piano Wing and Garden, 2013, Photograph.

Besides providing visitors an opportunity to appreciate the galleries in their original glory, the 2012 addition enhances the viewer's experience of the old palace by removing the business end of the guest experience from the palace itself, by providing a new space to purchase tickets, to check a coat, to buy a souvenir, to have some lunch, or to participate in a guided tour of the greenhouses, or even just a place to relax, to chat and to enjoy a view of the new gardens. The new extension was designed and built over a three-year period by famed architect, Renzo Piano. Piano sees the new building as a complement to the historic palace, connected by a glass corridor, or an umbilical cord, "a nephew to the grand aunt" ("Building"). At 64 feet in height, it does not compete with the stature of the palace, which measures in at 99 feet high, but it does offer 70,000 square feet of visitor and staff space, over 7,000 more feet to roam in comparison to the palace which is only 63,000 square feet (Marden 8). Previously, the activities which now take place in the new space were housed in every closet, hallway and stairwell of the palace, causing a wear and tear on Mrs. Gardner's building that it simply could not handle. The biggest issues surrounding the new wing certainly involved finances (the stock market crashed in the middle of fundraising), Mrs. Gardner's will, and creating the proper design to maintain the integrity of Mrs. Gardner's aesthetic vision.

With these issues at the forefront, the expansion did not go without opposition. Many people, including some staff members, felt that even the idea of a new wing violated Mrs. Gardner's image and purpose. One of the biggest reasons for opposition was that it called for a complete repurposing of the back of the property. This would mean that a 1933 addition would have to be demolished; a classic carriage house would have to be destroyed; gardens would have to be excavated and redesigned; and, even the

burial sites for Mrs. Gardner's dogs, Roly and Foxey, would have to be moved (this last charge was made with great efforts by members of the Archival staff). Many staff and members opposed the work enough to "lobb[y] board members, regulatory commissions, and even the state attorney general's office to stop the project" (Edgers 23).



Figure 65 – [photographer unknown], Isabella Stewart Gardner sitting on the steps of the Italian Garden at her summer home, "Green Hill" [with dogs Kitty Wink and Patty boy], 1905, Photograph, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

A strong part of the concern related to maintaining Mrs. Gardner's aesthetics and vision, besides the destruction of the aforementioned spaces, revolved around how the visitors would enter the palace. Since the first night that Mrs. Gardner opened the museum in January of 1903 until January 2013, the entrance to the museum was on the Fenway. This provided guests with a clear "Ah –Ha" moment when entering the garden. Mrs. Gardner, on the first evening, even closed off the Courtyard until after guests had

settled in and heard some music in the Music Room; then, after a reasonable duration of time, a mirror rolled away, exposing the Courtyard and the rest of the museum in the real dramatic style for which it has now become famous. Even though the Music Room was destroyed, the angle and effect was retained by having the guest entrance maintained off the Fenway. Because the new wing connects to the palace by a glass corridor at the South Cloister, guests no longer experience the Courtyard in the same way. Mrs. Gardner's aesthetic philosophy and her Christian faith, which I believe grounded the design of the museum and the layout of the collection, was what many feared would be lost.

Fortunately, Renzo Piano, Anne Hawley and the Board of Trustees seem to understand Mrs. Gardner's Palace in a way that has made them successful in undertaking such a bold risk with all that Mrs. Gardner's legacy has meant to the city of Boston. The result is a new building which complements and enhances the spiritual journey through the museum rather than one which detracts from it.

Not only does the removal of the administrative and guest relation areas to the new building allow visitors to immerse themselves even more so than before, the new space allows visitors to research, relax and further explore their experiences in a place of new comfort. New spaces for the public on the first floor include a new ticketing, coat check and indoor waiting area, new greenhouses and education space, a new bookshop, a new café and the highlight of the first floor, the Living Room. On the second floor there is a new temporary gallery space and the entrance of the multi-level Calderwood Hall for concerts and lectures. The administrative spaces begin here and include new apartments for the Artists-in-Residence, the Archives and Reading Room and Conservation Department. This new home for these important experiences takes a tremendous amount

of strain off of Mrs. Gardner's palace. Hopefully, these spaces will make it easier for the staff to preserve the Palace, thereby bettering the visitor's experience. In addition to indoor space, new gardens have been created between the new wing and the palace. These gardens have been designed by Michael Von Valkenburgh, and were completed in September 2013.



Figure 66 – Peter Cammarata, Monk's Garden, 2013, Photograph.

The new visitor's experience begins on Evans Way side of the building. This connects the visitor to Frederick Olmstead's park on Evans Way. The small park filled with benches, paths and shaded trees is the perfect transition from the harsh concrete and rush of cars around the Fenway. Once a visitor enters into the new glass doors just off the park, he or she can turn and look back of the endless walls of glass bringing the urban landscape in behind him or her. The ticketing and coat check area is decorated with

potted plants, warm wood benches and a throw rug which immediately softens all of the glass and hard metal lines and invites the visitor to sit, relax and talk. This theme of sit, relax and talk can be felt throughout the new space.

Even the greenhouses in the Southeast side of the ticket area running along Evans Way are open to visitors of the museum. Previously off limits to visitors, these greenhouses offer an opportunity to educate visitors and give them an opportunity to interact with the gardeners and the plants which fill the Courtyard and other personal places in the museum. The area is backed by educational research space for staff members, and a new, well-guarded entrance, a subtle reminder of the heist of 1990.

The new Café G continues the tradition which Mrs. Gardner began on the first evening she opened her museum: serving food. Even some of the recipes and menu items have been passed down from Mrs. Gardner. On opening night of the new wing, chef Peter Crowley, created an elegant menu which was capped off with champagne and warm cinnamon donuts, which is rooted in the testimony that Mrs. Gardner served them on the first evening to the museum (First 8). One other connection that can be felt to the old palace is through the glass. Just as in the previous location in the old palace, the new Café G is adjacent to gardens. In most cases, the expanses of glass would be viewed as harsh and overdone. However, the way the potted plants have been placed around the room, they bring the new gardens inside and the visitor outside. Throughout the year, Peter Crowley makes use of certain flowers which are grown for the Courtyard in his recipes, and not just for decoration! So, in the springtime, when the famous nasturtiums cascade from the Venetian windows in the Courtyard, visitors can find the same flowers accenting

their sorbet at Café G. Ultimately, the menu and the atmosphere invite the visitor to relax, enjoy some good food and share conversation with old friends, or new.

More often than not, museum bookstores are cold storehouses filled with postcards, catalogs, umbrellas and magnets capturing the top ten images from the museum. This has never been the case at the Gardner. In the old palace, the small bookstore was nestled in between the Café, the restrooms and the elevator, and felt more like an eclectic gift shop or world bazaar. The atmosphere mirrored Mrs. Gardner's style right into marketing. Of course, pictures, postcards and posters have always been available, but very few in comparison to handcrafted necklaces, pendants and pins. Silk scarves sold here reflect the sensibilities of the director and the creator. That style has not changed in the new space. The new Gift at the Gardner is still nestled in between major spaces, and thankfully hasn't sacrificed any of its charm or wares.

The new education space, tucked away at the end of the hallway behind Café G on the Palace Road side of the building, welcomes the many groups of young people who visit the museum daily from local schools. Continuing what Mrs. Gardner started through outreach to the local communities, the Gardner museum now hosts a place for young people to not only visit and learn about art, but a place to create art. Outside the classroom space, bulletin boards line the wall behind the café with art produced at the Gardner by young people. There is, perhaps, no better way to foster Mrs. Gardner's legacy and the future of the museum by offering a space to encourage artists of the future. While the space had "kid friendly" furniture, it is lined with the warm stone that connects it to the rest of the first floor of the museum. The same stone which lines the wall of the

entrance is also home to a large collection of art catalogs that I imagine would make even Sister Wendy jealous.



Figure 67 – Peter Cammarata, Renzo Piano Wing, Library, 2013, Photograph.

The crown jewel of the first floor, and some would say of the new wing, has to be the new Living Room. This space represents all that feels right about the new wing at the Gardner. With low back couches and modern chairs, the room invites visitors to sit and read any one of the many publications located on the fireplace-like space or in the low lying bookshelves. The bookshelves here hold catalogs and materials related closely to Mrs. Gardner and her museum. Many have been published directly by the Trustees or are related to temporary exhibits sponsored by the museum. When the Archives are not available, this space serves as a researcher's paradise. Besides being a comfortable space to explore the Gardner on the page or gather for a tour, this space offers a space of Zen-

like tranquility. The proximity of new gardens and exterior “gallery” space, like the Café G, offers the visitor a connection to the outdoors while being sheltered from the sometimes harsh New England weather. Certainly no one understood this better than Mrs. Gardner, who built an oasis in her palace Courtyard. The echo is here with the difference being the aesthetics. While often inexplicable, the palace Courtyard reflects a certain Western feel. Whether it is Christian or pagan, it does not matter. The wild seclusion and the explosions of color give one the feeling of England, Italy or even New England at any one turn. Inside (and outside) the new Living Room, the feeling is closer to the order of the Eastern garden; perhaps, offering an even more complete experience of the Western and Eastern art and philosophy which Mrs. Gardner so appreciated. Whether visitors are beginning or ending their experience at the Gardner, this space welcomes.



Figure 68 – Peter Cammarata, The Renzo Piano Wing, Living Room looking outside, 2013, Photograph.

A glass staircase that continues the theme of bringing the outside in, allows the viewer to ascend to the second and third floors without ever forgetting why he/she is really at the museum, to see the historic Palace. On the second floor, new apartments for the artist-in-residence program continue what Mrs. Gardner started when she invited artists such as John Singer Sargent and Okakura Kakuzō to create art in her museum. Unlike their small space previously located over the carriage house, these new spaces allow for several artists to stay at one time and not only to create their own art, but to share ideas. These apartments are located above the new greenhouses, which make them some of the brightest, most secluded and, with their views of the Evans Way Park, most inspiring in the new wing.

At the entrance to the apartments, the visitor finds the new temporary gallery space. In the Palace, the corresponding space was located in a small and limiting gallery in the rear corner on the Western side of the museum. Now, in the new wing, this exhibition space “boast[s] a ceiling that can be set at one of three heights: 12, 24, and 36 feet” (Kahn 28). This feature takes into account several aspects of mounting an exhibit. First, the museum can display works of art at a greater variety of sizes than the most temporary spaces. Second, the height of ceiling coupled with the amount of glass on the North wall allows for greater flexibility for sizes of art and varying intimacy levels in the exhibitions. The ability to control natural light and artificial light through a series of shades and track lighting further contributes to these important exhibitions. Since Mrs. Gardner’s Will restricts the movement of objects in the museum, this space is essential to promoting new scholarship on the museum and a big reason why guests continue to

return to the museum. If the exhibits mounted in the first year represent the future of this space, then there is much to anticipate from the Gardner.

Behind the scenes, the second and third floors boast brand new spaces for a variety of offices which make things happen at the Gardner. Thanks to this new wing, more meeting space is available to plan exhibitions, bring in new artists and run new concerts. Conservation labs have comfortable spaces where research and preservation of the historic Palace can occur properly. And, this writer's favorite glass room, the Archives, has a new home where scholars can research and write about Mrs. Gardner and the works of art in her museum. The Archives houses over 6,000 letters, journals and catalogs all related to its founder and collector. Here one does not only read and write about Mrs. Gardner, but can further delve into her personality through examination of rare objects owned and used by Mrs. Gardner herself.

Finally, the new Calderwood Hall used for concerts and lectures spans several floors of the new wing opposite the new gallery space. This space not only increased the capacity of visitors who could attend an event at the museum, but also took the wear and tear off the old palace. Where, previously, all concerts and lectures were held in the Tapestry Room, now these kinds of functions can be held in space which acoustically and atmospherically is more conducive to the purpose of the event.

Overall, the 2012 Renzo Piano designed addition to the Isabella Stewart Gardner adds new glory to Mrs. Gardner's timeless vision. In just one year's time the benefits have been many: some old spaces such as the Tapestry Room have been restored to their original glory, offering the hope that someday soon so too may several others follow suit. The return of the Vaticino, the second Chinese Room and even Mrs. Gardner's

apartments on the fourth floor would be welcomed glimpses into Mrs. Gardner's personal life. These spaces are valued by members and returning visitors. Perhaps, they are one donor away from being restored to their original purpose and glory.

New and expanded exhibition spaces, education spaces and music spaces all foster the sharing of new ideas, creativity and advancement in the community. At its very essence, this is what Mrs. Gardner had in mind when "she wrote in a letter to her friend Edmund Hill in 1917:

Years ago I decided that the greatest need in our Country was Art.

We are largely developing the other sides. We were a very young Country and had very few opportunities of seeing beautiful things,

Works of art, etc. So I determined to make it my life work if I could.

Therefore, ever since my parents died I have spent every cent I inherited (for that was my money) in bringing about the object of my life.

(Hawley, "Preface")

Truly, no matter where one is in the new wing, whether the greenhouse classroom, apartments for the Artists-in Residence, meeting rooms or even the new ticketing areas, people are gathering and sharing ideas. These spaces promote active, face-to-face conversation. In a day and age when texting via cellular phone and social interaction online (a place where the Gardner museum also has a strong presence) via handheld personal electronic devices dominates social interaction, the new space at the Gardner museum engages visitors in the real world, in real time and encourages them to do so with each other as well.

The aesthetic vision which Mrs. Gardner executed in the original palace which was such a diversion from the warehouse museums of the early 1900s in America continues in the new 2012 Renzo Piano addition. Even though the new wing is not Mrs. Gardner's vision, it is a place which does continue to inspire meditative and reflective, prayerful activity the way the original Palace does, while ensuring that Mrs. Gardner's legacy and her collection will continue to inspire new art for the next 100 years.

So, while the glass and patinated copper which make up the exterior design of the new Renzo Piano Wing do not reflect the building materials with which Mrs. Gardner created Fenway Court, the overall aesthetic experience expands her Christian vision into a multi-cultural future, one which during her lifetime she was ahead of the curve in appreciating.



Figure 69 – Peter Cammarata, The Monk's Garden and the Historic Palace, 2013, Photograph.

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