

Minute on Professor  
Emeritus Sachs  
continued

## PAUL JOSEPH SACHS

BORN NOVEMBER 24, 1878

DIED FEBRUARY 17, 1965

Paul Joseph Sachs was born in New York City on November 24, 1878, and died in Cambridge on February 17, 1965. He went to the Sachs School, founded and run by his uncle, and then to Harvard College, graduating in 1900. Immediately thereafter he entered Goldman, Sachs & Co., the family bank. Distinguishing himself at once, he became a partner in 1904 and was confidently expected to assume the leadership of the firm. Instead he abandoned banking for a post that was, as he told his incredulous father, without precedent, without specific duties, and without salary. In 1915 he moved to Cambridge to become Assistant Director of the Fogg Art Museum.

His wife encouraged the change. Meta Pollak Sachs, whom he had married in 1904, came from a background as respected among critics and scholars as his own was among bankers. She at once found this community more sympathetic than the world of Wall Street ever had been.

What drew Paul Sachs to Cambridge was his respect for Edward Forbes, the Director of the Fogg, and his admiration for the vision he invariably attributed to Forbes of what that museum might become. Together they made the Fogg the largest college art museum in this country, and the liveliest anywhere. Meanwhile, Paul Sachs taught. Before his time, to work in an American art museum had been a casual avocation for the rich or a cruel sacrifice of the dedicated. After his teaching, it became a recognized profession. Lowell called Sachs "an exuberant mendicant." As such he collaborated in raising the money that made possible most of the material expansion of Harvard during the first third of the twentieth century. From the Depression until his retirement in 1948 his sphere of activity widened. As a negotiator he was trusted equally by patrons and by successive Harvard administrations. He played a major role in the ultimate incorporation into the University first of Dumbarton Oaks and then of I Tatti.

Yet, these activities were only the trappings of Paul Sachs' career. Fundamental to his real achievement was an exceptional combination of personal qualities — passion for works of art, love of human beings, and loyalty to institutions.

On the day of his birth, his frugal grandfather Goldman established a savings account in his name and added to it regularly over the next twenty-one years. The whole accumulation was turned over to Paul Sachs when he came of age. Within a week he had spent the entire sum buying prints. Joyously, and with startling improvidence, he continued to collect all the rest of his life. At his death he had given or bequeathed to Harvard some twenty-seven hundred works of art, four thousand books, and an unnumbered profusion of photographs. Most important are his drawings. He was the first American to buy seriously in this field, and his is a classic collection. It covers every school from the fourteenth century to the present day and presents a balanced representation of the greatest artists. Paul Sachs had his prejudices; he bought few landscapes. Equally he had his favorites: among the Old Masters, Dürer and Rembrandt; among French draughtsmen, Corot and Millet; among living artists, Picasso; and among them all, Degas.

These preferences were unconscious but by no means arbitrary. They reflect Paul Sachs' enjoyment of people, his tolerance, his profound sense of tragedy, his concern for individuals. A dominant trait was modesty. He never admitted, let alone considered, the extent of his own knowledge. He constantly deferred to the opinions of others, and sought the company of those he believed were

well informed. Few men were more hospitable. Few men have had so many or such close friends.

His exhilarating lectures won him teaching appointments in Paris, Bonn, and Berlin, as well as at Wellesley and of course at Harvard. Even more remarkable was the enthusiasm with which in his seminars he encouraged students to make their own discoveries. By his teaching he was able to transform the Harvard tradition of instruction in his field. Charles Eliot Norton had never discussed objects. For Paul Sachs, the study of art began with the object. Most of his students made the pursuit of objects an integral part of their careers, and many went to work where objects would be all about them, in art museums.

But although the enjoyment of the object was the beginning of the study of art, it was only the beginning. Sachs demanded scholarship of his students, required and supported it in the staff of the Fogg Museum. More than anything else, it is his continuing influence, through the example of his pupils, that is responsible for the tradition of scholarly publication in American art museums today.

But Sachs' greatest influence was exerted outside his lectures and seminars. A remarkable connoisseur himself, he had a unique capacity to inspire others to collect with discrimination. Equally he made them aware of the responsibilities that connoisseurship implied—the responsibility of the scholar to identify, of the curator to preserve, of the teacher to make available. Paul Sachs believed that art museums were the only instrument through which art could be permanently preserved and made widely available. It was unthinkable that his own collection should be sold or left to his descendants. Not one of the collections formed under his influence has been dispersed or handed down in the family. All have gone, or are going, to public institutions.

Fundamental to Paul Sachs' whole life was his loyalty to institutions. It never occurred to him that these might be great, bureaucratic machines. He always saw them as an insider, as a small group of devotees selflessly giving expression to collective ideals. And so he pursued yet one more career. He was a general practitioner for institutions; creating, directing, advising, criticizing and, above all, inspiring. As such, he was always in demand as a trustee and served on the boards of at least twenty museums, colleges, and charities. His wide acquaintance, his confident judgment of people, and his understanding of the needs of organizations made him uniquely useful in recommending personnel. He came to be a one-man employment agency. The ultimate tribute to the diversity of his helpfulness are the Paul J. Sachs Galleries at the Museum of Modern Art. Surely never before has one museum named a prominent group of rooms in honor of a man who spent his whole professional life directing another.

Meta Sachs was his inseparable companion. Her affectionate laughter and an occasional gentle, "Now Paul," was the one force that could restrain his impetuosity. Along with everything else, they shared a devotion to their three daughters, a delight in their nine grandchildren, and an astonishment at their thirteen great-grandchildren.

Paul Sachs was an exceptionally vivid personality. Few who met him ever forgot him. Yet as the image of his presence inevitably recedes, three memories survive: his ability to comprehend the deepest messages conveyed by things and by people, his determination to transmit the qualities of the objects he so passionately loved and of the people he so profoundly admired, and his conviction that to dedicate one's life and one's substance to institutions was the best way to perpetuate the values that matter.

William George Constable  
Agnes Mongan  
Jakob Rosenberg  
John Coolidge, *Chairman*