

MUSEUMS GO TO LAW FOR RIGHT TO A NAME

By ALINE H. SAARENEN

EVERY now and then, the art world, a world never too stably poised on its axis, gets shaken by one minor earthquake or another. The most recent rumbling concerns a suit instituted by the Museum of Modern Art against Huntington Hartford, which seeks to restrain the latter from calling his projected two million dollar museum on Columbus Circle "Gallery of Modern Art."

The Museum of Modern Art claims that the use of so similar a name would "dilute the distinctive quality" of the Museum of Modern Art, might divert goodwill and donations from the established museum and would surely confuse the public.

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way producer, a theatre owner, a model agency head, a garage operator and a self-appointed Messiah dedicated to correcting what he calls the "moral and artistic degeneration in modern art, contemporary theatre and in a general way among the intelligentsia in the U. S. A. and particularly in New York," maintains that the Museum of Modern Art has no restrictive and exclusive claim to the words "modern art" and that these words are descriptive of the kind of art he intends to show in his ten-story building.

Mr. Hartford, a well-heeled protector of both God (one of his pamphlets was entitled "Has God Been Insulted

Here?") and of the public (another diatribe was sarcastically called "the public be damned") maintains there is no possibility of confusion for the public between a Gallery of Modern Art and a Museum of Modern Art.

Question for Donors

Our own subjective opinion is that donors will not be misled into giving their tax-free donations to the wrong institution, for caution in money matters is one of the attributes of the rich. They are as little likely to buy A. & P. stock when they want Standard Oil stock as they are to give money to an institution whose head maintains that Picasso is responsible for single-handedly "wiping out all the gains that have been in the world of painting for the last 500 years" when they want to give it to one which displays Picasso as a great master of "modern art."

But we do believe that the similarity of the two names will indeed confuse the general public. The words "Gallery" and "Museum" are now used almost interchangeably. A New York Times headline above a story of the current contretemps said "What is a Museum of Modern Art? Two Galleries Fight Over Name." Mr. Hartford a while ago in an interview with a reporter of the same newspaper, explained that "he thought of his new venture in Columbus Circle mostly as a *Museum*, with a curator in charge. But paintings will be sold in the *Gallery*" (Italics ours).

The Museum of Modern Art, with its thirty-year record of crusading efforts and its 11,000,000 visitors, has so illustrious a reputation that it attracts vast numbers of out-of-town and foreign visitors. Some of these may, indeed, find themselves by mistake at Columbus Circle. (With the projected Lincoln Center nearby it is a potential new art area). If they are abashed by the difference in Mr. Hartford's version of modern art from what, through the reputation and publications of the established museum, they had been led to expect, they will have the wear and tear of a six-block walk to get re-oriented.

Old Dispute Revised

What is amusing to most of us in the art world, however, is to see the words "modern art" once again become a hornet's nest. How imprecise, undefined and forever elusive these words are—somewhat like beauty—existent only in the mind of the orator, and, like Alice in Wonderland vocabulary, able to mean what anyone wants them to mean.

For the Communists, "modern art" means "capitalist degeneracy"; for many of our conservative Congressmen it represents "a Communist conspiracy."

And we remember back in 1946 how these seemed to be reprehensible, dirty words to an "Institute" in Boston. That institute felt strongly that the Museum of Modern Art in New York had usurped these words unto itself and invested them exclusively with meaning the kind of art it championed. To the Boston group that art was extreme, experimental and tinged with chicanery. Then, with a great deal of fanfare, an expensive manifesto and maximum righteousness, it proudly changed its name from "Institute of Modern Art" to "Institute of Contemporary Art."

Critic of the "Modern"

Mr. Hartford has not been reticent about his own views on modern art. He explained to a United Press reporter that "it would cost him nothing" since these were educational and therefore tax deductible expenses, but he did spend an estimated \$25,000 in order to express his views in full page advertisements in six New York newspapers. He suggested that changes should be effectuated at "such intellectual magazines as Harper's, Saturday Review and the Atlantic Monthly" and Art News; that the direction of the Museum of Modern Art be altered; that the New York Times rid itself of drama critic Brooks Atkinson and art critics Stuart Preston and Aline Saarienen; and that the Pulitzer Prize Committee's award to Tennessee Williams was "a public scandal."

The Opposite View

No matter how many full-page advertisements or privately printed pamphlets Mr. Hartford produces, the fact will still remain that the professionally trained and experienced editors, museum men and critics of these organizations have been—and will undoubtedly continue to be—allied with the fresh, personal, imaginative, forward-looking creative expressions which the public has come to accept as "modern art." How odd that Mr. Hartford should want to risk any contamination from these sources or possible confusion with them!

A suggestion: Mr. Hartford stated that he "accepts the artist's right to distort nature as he sees it, but only up to the point where communication is cut off." Since the arbiter of that point is, presumably, Mr. Hartford, why not call the new gallery "The Huntington Hartford Museum" or Gallery? Is Mr. Hartford reluctant to do this out of modesty or because he fears it might stir the nation-wide tempest of a lawsuit by the Huntington Library and the City of Hartford?

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