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Beyond 'Boola, Boola': Yale's New Art Gallery Scores a Winning Touchdown

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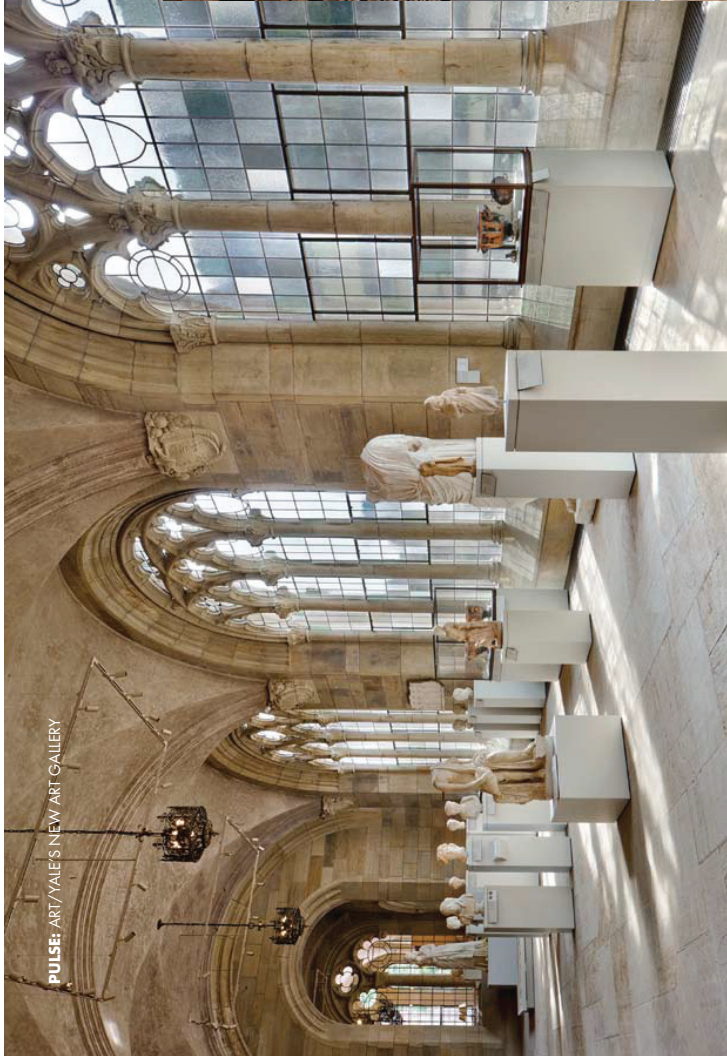
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PULSE: ART/YALE'S NEW ART GALLERY

BEYOND 'BOOLA BOOLA': YALE'S NEW ART GALLERY SCORES A WINNING TOUCHDOWN

Written by PHILIP ELIASOPH, Senior Arts Editor

The Gallery is located at 111 Chapel Street, New Haven. Open to the public, admission is free. For information and visitor details call 203.432.0600 or go to www.artgallery.yale.edu



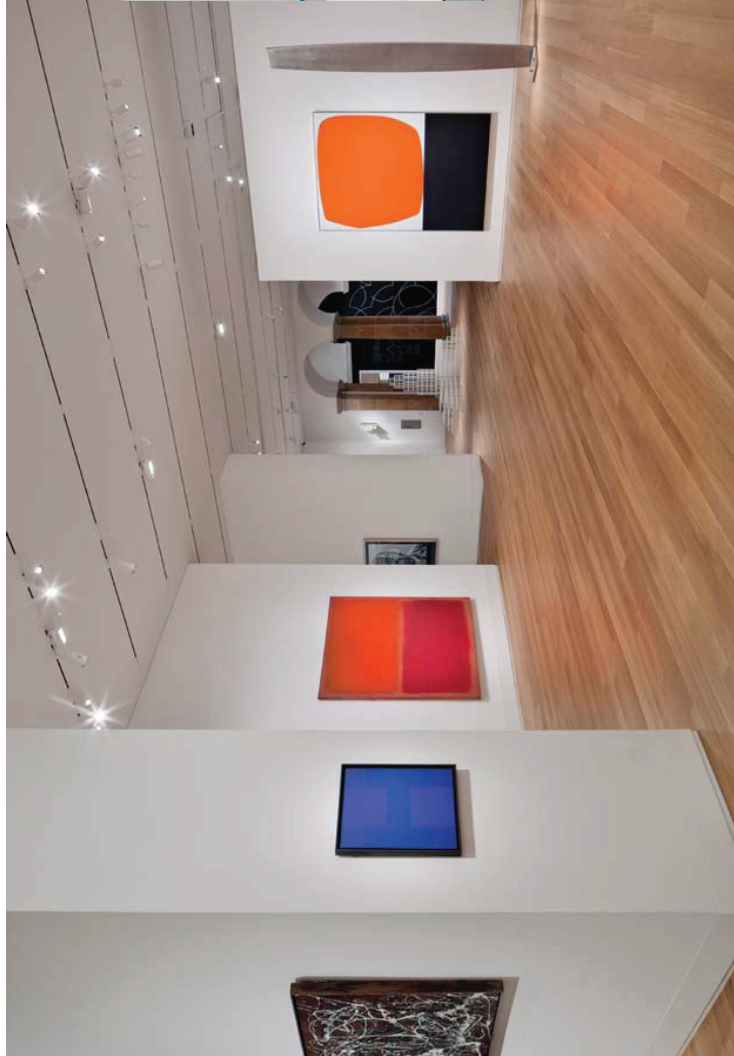
Remarkable in "American Notes," published in London in 1842 about his recent visit to Yale College, Charles Dickens expressed a tinge of nostalgia for his native shore. "The effect is very like that of an old cathedral yard in England...seeming to bring about a compromise between town and country."

Admittedly New Haven was somewhat less urbanized in the horse-and-buggy era than today – but the irresistible lure of cultural placemaking endures. In celebration of the recently expanded and renovated Yale University Art Gallery, a new page is turned to its "never-ending story." It takes boldness of vision and exquisite architectural sensibility to synthesize an ensemble of distinctively period structures into a new coherence. I had anticipated a slightly tweaked configuration of historically inchoate spaces. Instead, an entirely

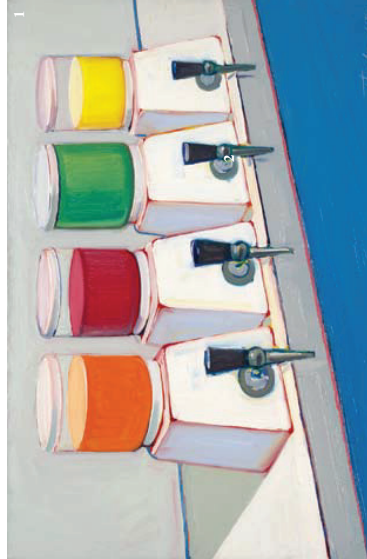
new arts plaza along Chapel Street transforms the museum into a world-class internal promenade.

In one glance along Chapel Street we now discover the impact of a \$135 million make-over. It's all suited into a freshly toned visage like a Park Avenue plastic surgeon taking a sagging dowager, doing some nips and tucks, bulking up the décolletage for some eye-candy appeal, and transforming her into a rejuvenated debutante queen.

Take the 1928 neo-Gothic "Hollywood/Florentine" gallery, add Louis Kahn's iconic modernist landmark, and then, astonishingly, contemporize a Hitchcock-esque Gothic academic hall into a light-filled nirvana, and Ovid's "Metamorphoses" is complete! Like Bernini's peaty white "Apollo and Daphne," sculpture, the transformation is nothing less than magical. The multi-year project was designed



1. **Wayne Thiebaud, Drink Synops**, Wayne Thiebaud, *Drink Synops*, 1961, Oil on canvas, Yale
 2. **Lichtenstein, Thinking of Him**, Roy Lichtenstein, *Thinking of Him*, 1963, Oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Richard Brown Baker, B.A., 1995
 3. **Hopper, Western Motel**, Edward Hopper, *Western Motel*, 1957, Oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Stephen Critch, C.M., B.A., 1995



and led by Duncan Hazard and Richard Olcott, in association with New York's Ennead Architects.

It was October, 1832 when **“The Connecticut Journal”** announced that tourists were arriving by steamship from New York and Philadelphia to marvel at Colonel John Trumbull’s eyewitness depictions of the heroic events of America’s Revolutionary era. Since there was no CNN or CBS Evening news to document just how colonial insurgents Franklin, Jefferson, Madison and Hancock were positioned at Independence Hall in 1776, Trumbull (ahem, who graduated rival Harvard at a tender age of 17) mythologized this moment for posterity.

We rely upon its historical authenticity like a sepia-toned photograph of President Lincoln (not to be confused with Daniel Day Lewis) reading by a flickering oil lamp. In truth, the compositional narrative in Trumbull’s painting is loosely and fictionously based on Jefferson’s vague memory sketched on a scrap of paper years later while serving as our first ambassador in Paris. But then again, it’s just art. And Marcel Duchamp’s deadpan snow shovel upstairs follows the continuum.

Fast forward to the present- as the newest and perhaps most memorable latest chapter in Yale’s artistic heritage rockets into the 21st century. For Connecticut residents, still recovering from the battering of Superstorm Sandy followed shortly by unspeakably violent tragedies at Newtown, Yale offers uplifting excitement with inspirational solace. One wonders if enough Numegeers appreciate the extraordinary width and depth of our world-class institutions available at Hartford’s Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, equally distinguished as the nation’s oldest public institution of art opening its doors in 1844.

You didn’t have to be a striving, but perhaps less than brilliant high school student with respectable A- average or flimsy SAT scores to know how nearly impossible it is to actually “get into” Yale. An official Fact Sheet from their Admissions office x-rays the recently arrived class with these bone-crushing numbers. Nearly 29,000 applicants from across the USA and abroad competed for 1,356 seats in the Freshman class. When only 7.1% of those who dreamed about achieving a Yale education will fulfill their wishes, be assured the rest of us have not been left out in the cold. With its warm open embrace – and



1. African Installation *Terracotta and Stone Figures*, Bura, Katsina, Nok, and Sokoto, 900 B.C.E.–800 C.E. Terracotta. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of SusAnna and Joel B. Grae

2. Trumbull, George Washington John Trumbull, *General George Washington at Trenton, 1792*. Oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the Society of the Cincinnati in Connecticut

3. Curran Charles Courtney Curran, *At the Sculpture Exhibition, 1895*. Oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903

4. Van Gogh, Night Café Vincent van Gogh, *Le café de nuit* (The Night Café), 1888. Oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903



smiling front desk staff welcoming all – the new Yale Art Gallery bridges the gap from an elitist bastion to an Everyman’s paradise.

With the wisdom of a King Solomon, the architectural vision of a Roman Baroque cardinal, and the showmanship of a very savvy P.T. Barnum for the smart-set, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, Jock Reynolds has outdone himself in overseeing this multi-year project. Reynolds, who knows how to get paint under his fingernails, is equally cordial with visiting elementary school students stepping off yellow school buses and high-powered, pin-striped clad captains of industry or financial titans on Yale’s Board of Trustees. Like Chick Austin at the Wadsworth, or Philippe de Montebello at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with this triumphant feather in his cap, the Reynolds era will forever be etched in stone.

Reynolds’ touch is spot-on when describing how the “new galleries are superb places for viewing art, with space for generous installations in which recently acquired works provide new perspectives on longtime favorites.” And one suspects some gentle

intervention with his deft installation of many problematic galleries. Corners turn nicely, visual axes flow effortlessly, and surprises await with little nooks and crannies which allow pauses like airy cadences in a Vivaldi concerto. The Muhammad Ali knock-out moment is a stunning double punch hanging of two Mark Rothko’s. Hovering in an eerie silence like Kubrick’s 2001 monolith, the Rothko shrine opens to an ethereal contemporary gallery giving MoMA’s fourth floor a run for their money.

With over 4,000 artworks on display including textbook examples of the arts of classical antiquity, Asia, Africa, Indo-Pacific, and of course the entire western canon from Pollaiuolo to Pollock or Lippi to Lichtenstein, a visit to the Yale Art Gallery is not an optional “do it when I get a chance”. Re-arrange your calendar, cancel that unnecessary waste of time visit to the mall, or take a mental health day off from your job, but make time to relish what awaits. Yes, Yale has proudly displayed its artistic treasures for centuries – but trust me - there’s nothing “old school” about the new art museum. □