

IN MEMORY
OF
DR. WALTER W. S. COOK

TRIBUTES DELIVERED AT A GATHERING
AT THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
ON
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1962

Walter Cook died on board the *Leonardo da Vinci* last Thursday, the night before it docked in New York. He had been about the ship during the day and in conversation with various people. His steward found him resting in his cabin about five minutes of eight and talked with him briefly. He died sometime within the next five minutes. As his good friend Erwin Panofsky said, it could not have been a better way.

But the feelings of shock, sadness, and loss at his death are not mitigated by the circumstances. He would have been living upstairs this fall and giving a series of lectures on Arabic Art in Spain, for which, as he wrote enthusiastically, he was bringing back much new material. Last year he gave a similar series on Romanesque Art in Spain, and I, who had never studied with him or heard him lecture before, will not forget it. He did not go in much for analyzing style, but he marshalled the monuments in such an admirably clear and complete way, he spoke of them with such familiarity and told of discovering or publishing some of them for the first time so vividly that he gave pleasure in the subject and a strong invitation to pursue it, in full reliance on his lucid organization. No wonder he was successful in bringing students into the Spanish field and leading them to research and publication.

Teaching from his incomparable store of knowledge was only one of his services to his subject. He contributed to knowledge of it in his many publications. And he was passionately concerned with making the material for studying Spanish art available, especially Spanish medieval art. Hence the photographic campaigns in Spain that he inspired and hence the leading role he played over many years in building the photographic archive of Spanish manuscripts at the Frick Art Reference Library. Partly from this same concern for the study of Spanish art came his ceaseless efforts to provide opportunities for American graduate students to study in Spain and for Spanish scholars to visit collections in the United States.

But his efforts to help scholars and students extended to those in all fields and stemmed as much or more from an extraordinary concern for the welfare of others that pervaded everything he did. It touched students and faculty, colleagues elsewhere, friends, and mere acquaintances. Often their lives were changed by it and on some occasions virtually hung upon it. I have asked several people to speak about the aspects of Walter Cook's life that they knew best, this among them.

There are two aspects that I myself should like to mention particularly, since I am in a position to know something more about them than most.

Dr. Cook stands out above all for his accomplishment as head of the Institute of Fine Arts. It was he, quite simply, who brought the Institute as we know it into being. It exists because of his vision, his energy, his tenacity, and his courage in the face of opposition and obstacles of every sort. Before I took over from him, he spent many hours telling me what he thought I should know about the early days. But it was only gradually, in going back into the files as this or that problem required, that I got the picture of what it really meant to found the Institute—in strength, in effort, in thought, and in endless concern for detail. Miss Wolf, the department's secretary, was at his right hand, as he was the first to say. It is prodigious what they did alone. To mention only one thing, money raising, Walter Cook liked to recall how he used to pass the hat. We should remember that to this day some of the Institute's staunchest supporters are those whom he first interested in making gifts.

What I know best of Walter Cook at first hand is his behavior to me as his successor. The relationship of predecessor to successor is not apt to be an easy one. He managed his part of it superbly. He gave indispensable advice without ever interfering. He was always encouraging, always ready with a word of approval. I think he was incapable of anything approaching jealousy, and I can only describe what I saw of him in this relationship as saintly. The same was surely true in many other facets of his life that I know less well. It is difficult to imagine a more straightforward, direct, and selfless man. He was truly altruistic, he was incapable of bearing a grudge, and he was without guile.

CRAIG HUGH SMYTH
INSTITUTE OF FINE PARTS

It is difficult to think or speak or write about Walter Cook without a feeling best described by another of his students, William Crelly, simply as "He gave us pleasure."

When we began our studies, he was always ready to find enough money for us to continue. In due time he made it his business and his pleasure to get every one the best job available. Whenever he was abroad or on the road, he kept up with us all by letters and by cards attesting that we historians of art are engaged in an agreeable profession of which travel, study, and teaching are the coordinates. He said long ago in the hearing of many of us that he hoped and wanted to die on the road rather than in his bed.

We mourn Walter Cook, and we mourn him with the lively grief we give to the most active and happy members of each generation.

His scholarly work was consistent, exact, and useful. His books and articles were almost always on Spanish painting and sculpture. Once in a great while he wrote on Spanish architecture, but in the main, he limited his writing to medieval questions, and to Romanesque painting by preference.

He belonged to that generation who blocked out the main outlines of the grand catalogue of medieval art, and his devotion to Spain never wavered. The precision and the completeness with which he made the inventory of the Catalonian altar frontals will in all likelihood never be improved.

Similar qualities of excellence mark his administrative work. His long participation in the life of the Institute of Fine Arts, for which he worked to realize the present form during long years of patient assembly, was a labor among human resources which recalls the perseverance of his books and articles.

We shall all miss him, in the Mediterranean ports and cities, as well as in the cities from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, where his presence continues in the grateful memories of those many students who became his colleagues.

GEORGE KUBLER
YALE UNIVERSITY

At any hour, any season, everywhere, anywhere, Walter Cook worked on behalf of his students. He never failed them, in need or in plenty, he felt their welfare as his personal concern. He and I were friends from my first arrival in New York after college and it was he who insisted I continue my studies by attending New York University night classes at the Metropolitan. The next year we traveled in Spain together for months. May I recall to you some of the things about Walter which were implicit in his devotion to his work, which you all have experienced, but which I like to think about as an expression of tribute to characteristics which are all too rare.

When Walter was convinced of the value of a thing he insisted, and insisted incessantly, without regard for his personal inconvenience or hard work. He insisted that the Metropolitan buy the Arlanza frescoes for the Cloisters; when there was hesitation, he brought representatives from another museum to take a second option on them lest we fail to exercise our first option and lose Spanish frescoes for America. For thirty years he hammered away at the importance of New York having frescoes from San Baudelio de Berlanga; and last year he was overjoyed when the idea finally had fruition and some of the frescoes were presented to the Museum by old friends of his and ours. In the early days he shook with indignation that only the Frick was building up photographic collections of paintings in which he was an active catalyst for photographers, archivists, librarians, professors. He wanted to see more Spanish photographs at the Metropolitan; so he impaled me in Barcelona until I had gone through drawer after drawer of photographs. Finally he said we had gone through 190,000 and could feel some satisfaction at our progress.

His efforts and the results in establishing the Institute of Fine Arts in the Munn House at 58th Street opposite the Plaza Hotel recall the early days when modern art was finding its surest supporters; music, which he dearly loved, came from his piano, and he brought in such conductors and players as Harold Bauer, and Arbos of the Madrid Symphony Orchestra.

Walter was always insistent about the quality and accuracy of scholarship. He made trips of his own arranging to Cambridge, Princeton and Chicago to make certain that an article would be well published by the Shapleys, or that Kingsley Porter, or Chandler Post, might have the correct footnote in a new tome. In Spain he routed me from bed at midnight to announce

triumphantly, "I've found it!"—He had been searching for a long time for the photograph which no one else could find and which was needed to document a find. He was unfailingly generous with the material he found and constantly pursued subjects which he knew would be of use to a colleague or student. Last week my wife received a postal card from Walter from Naples of a Pompeian fresco connected with a problem she had been interested in as a student at the Institute. It bore on it the note, "Down in Naples for a week before taking a boat for Barcelona, where I saw this painting of the three Graces. I remember that you worked on this subject in 1934 and Panofsky helped you." His mimeographed lists of information—some yellow with time but carefully kept current—information about collectors, scholars, dealers, bibliography, objects, were handed out wherever they might serve a purpose. These are but a few details. Anyone who came in contact with him dare not fail his enthusiasm. He must have helped thousands. He advised Archer Huntington, Robert Lehman, Jimmie Munn and his fellow scholars at New York University and throughout the United States, and the world.

The Institute in the James B. Duke House would never have had its present superb following if he had not recognized the importance for America of befriending the great scholars and art historians from Europe. I cannot look around this room without thinking of the John Coolidges, the Millard Meisses—there are too many alumni to single out. The files here are a testimony to the powerful influence of Walter Cook on the History of the Fine Arts and on the lives and careers of many of America's finest scholars.

Walter Cook always had the deepest interest in his students, and incessantly encouraged them to continue to their PH. D's, and employed every means to make it possible for them. He was one of the most selfless people I have ever known, and working and traveling with him I came to realize over the years that he was one of the few completely dedicated people, constantly concerned for the welfare and progress of the people and institutions he loved.

JAMES J. RORIMER
DIRECTOR, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

I am deeply moved that I was asked by Professor Smyth to speak in this solemn memorial hour for Dr. Cook.

I want to mention a special action of his widespread activities which concerns the Institute's faculty and also other American universities.

There was, as you still remember, in Germany a group of art historians who lost their positions at German universities through the insane laws of the Hitler regime.

Looking backwards to those mad years of the 30's and knowing today all that happened then, and in the years which followed, one can say without exaggeration that all of them with their families were in mortal danger. It was Dr. Cook who saved their lives by calling them to the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University.

I personally was just dismissed from the notorious Buchenwald Concentration Camp and put under pressure to leave Germany as quickly as possible, when Dr. Cook's call opened to me the way to 17 East 80th Street and to a new life. Life and liberty he gave to this group of refugees; and still more: not only to live in liberty, but, what was still *more* important: to work in liberty in the beloved field of Art History.

In Germany all work had been cut off for us. We could not go to any museum anymore or to any library or institute.

Now here in New York we had the Institute, the Metropolitan Museum, the Cloisters, the Morgan Library, the Frick, the Public Library, *all thanks* to Dr. Cook!

This was a contrast like Hell and Heaven.

Therefore, whatever we could do for the Institute in teaching or any other work, was *intensified* and *tinged* by a deep *feeling of gratitude* for the man whose memory we are honoring today and will always honor!

We shall never forget Dr. Cook!

GUIDO SCHOENBERGER
INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS

It is an honor to speak in the name of the students of the Institute of Fine Arts, both past and present, but I am sure I can never express the deep affection we felt for Dr. Cook, or our gratitude for all he did, or the sadness that he is gone.

What we have around us here, in this great mansion and the art historical institution it houses, the lectures, chairs, or scholarships that have been or may some day be named for him, these will be the lasting monuments to his energy and devotion. But we, his students, are the mortal monuments to his selfless personality. Dr. Cook was the most selfless man I have ever known. And it is a pity that the students who come after us will never know his unique presence.

Somehow, he always seemed to be on the student's side, even against his own faculty at times, impatient with administrative regulations or concerned with our financial problems. He was, perhaps, not the one we turned to for inspiration, but he was the one we leaned on for all the practical things like getting a degree or a job. His patience with us and his understanding of our problems was limitless, his willingness and ability to maneuver to get us out of difficulties was something we counted on. One could come to him with a hopeless problem and discover that there was a loophole, which he had made. I don't think we ever thanked him enough, if at all. But I do remember that all he gave was given with what appeared, in a curious way, to be an absence of emotion or sentiment, so that one somehow never felt a sense of impossible obligation. I suppose that is how he really wanted it to be. There are so many stories I could tell of his generosity, which never had the appearance of charity, or his goodness, which never masqueraded as virtue. But those stories would all be about me, and most of you have memories of your own.

Let me at least tell one one which means a great deal to me. I came to the Institute first during the depths of the Depression. The going was difficult for many of us, but I managed to work my way through to a master's degree in what I thought was a fairly anonymous manner. But then, one day, Dr. Cook called me in and asked if I wanted to go on to a Ph.D. I was anxious but did not know whether I could make it financially. He admitted that he did not know me, which was the truth because I had not taken a course with him, and in fact never did in all the years I was at the Institute, but since several of my professors had said I had promise, that was enough for him. All he wanted to know was whether I would stick it out to the end. He promised

to see me through and he did. It took me a long time, partly because of the war and Institute requirements, but he never failed me when I needed help. Some of it turns up coldly in the record as fellowship or scholarship or tuition and some of it never appears in the record at all. He never told me where the money came from and I never knew. They used to say that when money was needed that he put on his derby hat and made the rounds on Park Avenue until he raised it.

Getting a Ph.D. is not easy, and believe me it was no easier in those days. There were periods of frustration and periods of failure, but I cannot remember his ever once saying or doing anything that was discouraging. He was, perhaps, even more pleased than I was when it was over. He was proud of all our achievements from the greatest to the slightest, and the achievements of all his students from the most brilliant to the ordinary. Everyone at the Institute was his student, whether you studied with him or not, and although some of us were closer to him than others, or knew him longer, I think we were all alike to him, all his foster children as he was our *almus pater*. Those postcards he sent us were testimony to the all-inclusiveness of his interest as well as poignant records of his own loneliness.

These are some of the things he meant to us. But for him we were first of all part of the Institute, which was his life, all of his life. What exists today as the Institute of Fine Arts is comprehensible as his monument only if you can see it in relation to its total history and the role he played in its evolution. You have to go back to the archaic period of the three-room apartment on 83rd Street with the filing cabinets in the bathtub and professors and students sharing the long tables in the large room. He was like a worried magician juggling a staggering array of scholars he could not hire, a student body which was usually in need of financial aid, a budget which must have been infinitesimal, no building, no equipment, and a staff that consisted of Miss Wolf. But the fanaticism that kept us all in motion gyrating in a breathtaking equilibrium from the seminar room at 83rd Street to the classrooms in the basement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Morgan Library and the Frick, is the spirit which finally produced the enduring institution we know today.

Of course, those of us who were students in the early days, think of them with nostalgia as the Golden Age, but those who came later, I am sure, have memories of their own. Dr. Cook and his mode of operation never changed, neither during our period in the wilderness at the Carlyle Hotel nor that of classical serenity in the Warburg House. He always understood that what makes an institution of learning are the teachers and students, and to all of us he dedicated himself. There is no question that somehow or other he gathered the finest group of art historians who ever worked together, and for that, we as students, owe him an endless debt.

What he gave us will endure in the tangible form of the Institute and in those less tangible qualities which we as individuals will pass on to future generations. But only those of us who knew him carry in our memories something which will always be uniquely ours, the image of a burly man in a derby hat who gave so much of himself.

MILTON BROWN
BROOKLYN COLLEGE

WALTER WILLIAM SPENCER COOK

April 7, 1888 — September 20, 1962

EDUCATION: Phillips Exeter Academy, Harvard University AB, AM, Ph. D (1924)

- 1920-21: Fellow in Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies, Archaeological Institute of America, for travel and study in Europe.
- 1926-28: Research Associate and Assistant (then Associate) Professor of Fine Arts, New York University for one semester each year.
- 1927-29: Research Fellow for Spanish Art, College Art Association of America, for six months each year.
- 1929-30: Professor and Chairman, Department of Fine Arts, New York University.
- 1930-32: Research Fellow for Spanish Art, College Art Association of America.
- 1932-51: Professor of Fine Arts, Head of Department of Fine Arts and Founder of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.
- 1951-53: Professor of Fine Arts on leave of absence for research and study in Spain and France and lecturing on Spanish Art.
- 1953-54: Fulbright Lecturer on Spanish Art in Italy.
- 1953-62: Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts, New York University.

HONORS AND MEMBERSHIPS

- Spanish Government award of the gold order as Knight Commander of the Order of Isabella the Catholic.
- The Hispanic Society of America medal of Arts and Literature.
- President of the College Art Association of America (1938).
- Honorary Director of the College Art Association of America (1947-62).
- Patronato del Instituto Amatller de Arte Hispánico, Barcelona.
- Fellow of the Mediaeval Academy of America.
- Member of the Hispanic Society of America.
- Directorial Board of the Spanish Institute, New York.
- Associate Member of the New York Historical Society.
- Corresponding Member, Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona.
- Corresponding Member, Real Academia de Buenas Letras, Barcelona.
- Académico correspondiente, Real Academia de Córdoba, Córdoba.
- Corresponding Director, Centro de Cultura Valenciana, Valencia.
- Corresponding Member, Sociedad Arqueológico Luliano de Palma de Mallorca, Palma Mallorca.
- Socia Correspondiente, Academia Senese degli Intronati (Siena).
- Membre-Correspondant Etranger, Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France, Paris.
- Corresponding Member, Real Academia de San Fernando, Madrid.
- Corresponding Member, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid.
- Corresponding Member, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de Santa Isabel de Hungría de Sevilla, Sevilla.
- Corresponding Members, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Jorge, Barcelona.
- Corresponding Member, Real Academia de Nobles y Bellas Artes de San Luis, Zaragoza.
- Director, Research Fund of Art and Archaeology in Spain of The Spanish Institute, New York.