

World War II about the Nazi Final Solution.

Céline's admirers, such as Frédéric Vitoux, author of *Céline: A Biography* (1988), see the writer's style "as a kind of grace that somehow redeems all." But does it? Winegarten asks. "Can this steady outpouring of bile, this blinkered self-righteousness and self-concern, this unwavering baseness and nihilism be accounted great? Where are the moments of joy in nature, the counterweight of decency, the deeds of supererogation that can be found in common experience? In an age when such French writers as Malraux, Montherlant, [and] Camus were seeking a ground for humanism and human values, Céline stands aloof."

Art Attacks

"Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union" by Rachel N. Klein, in *The Journal of American History* (Mar. 1995), 1125 East Atwater Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47401-3701.

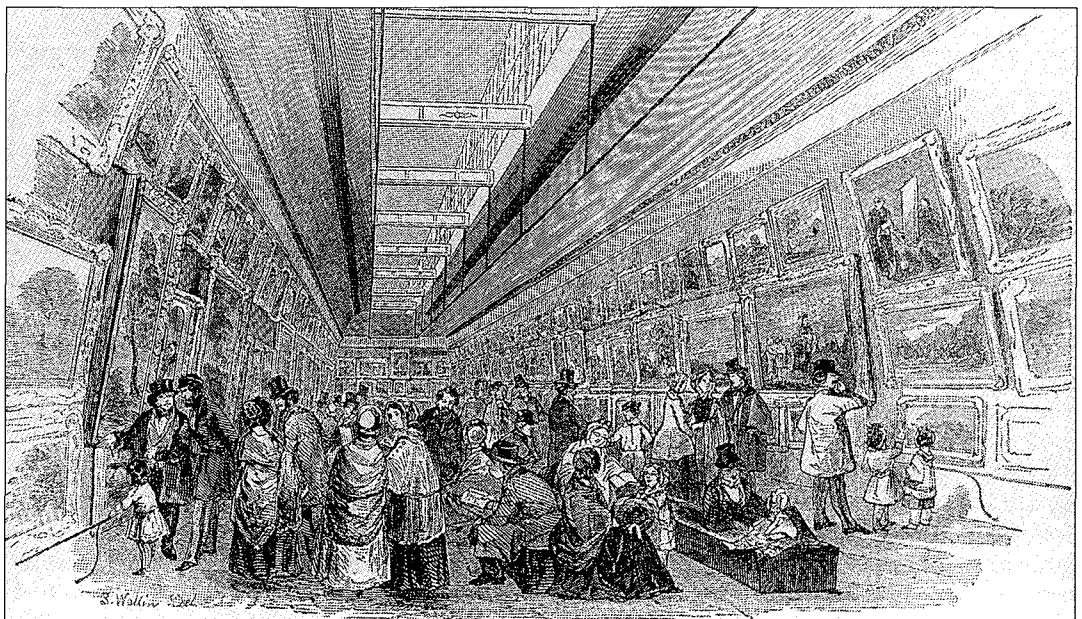
The National Endowment for the Arts is not the first institution to aid American artists,

promote appreciation of art—and become embroiled in controversy. In the case of the American Art-Union, founded in New York City in 1839, the storm proved fatal.

The Art-Union, writes Klein, a historian at the University of California, San Diego, "represented a particular adaptation of a general transatlantic phenomenon. Early European art unions sought to liberate artists from dependence on private patrons while enlisting art in the reformation of public life. Rather than serving the pleasure of the few, art would foster moral improvement among the many." The American organization added a patriotic dimension, aiming to create "an uplifted, unified sense of national identity."

In return for \$5 a year, the nonprofit Art-Union offered subscribers its publications, at least one engraving, and a chance to win a work of art in the lottery it sponsored. With the subscription funds, the union bought paintings by American artists and displayed them in its gallery; then, at the end of each year, it distributed the art works by lottery to the subscribers.

By the late 1840s, the Art-Union boasted



The popularity of the American Art-Union public gallery is evident in this 1849 depiction.

some 19,000 subscribers, a slight majority of them from New York State, and had become the primary market for American paintings (other than portraits). During its existence, the union bought 2,481 works of art from more than 300 American artists; in its heyday, from 1847 through 1851, it purchased an average of almost 400 paintings a year. The union helped to support many artists associated with the Hudson River school, as well as genre painters such as George Caleb Bingham, noted for his representations of Midwestern river life.

But the Art-Union came under attack from several quarters. Expressing the view of the genteel press, Nathaniel Parker Willis, editor of the *Home Journal*, contended that true artistic taste was the property of only the enlightened few. Willis scorned the union's managers as "'mere tradesmen' whose lack of discrimination and inadequate appreciation of quality demoralized art and artists," Klein writes.

Many artists shared Willis's view. In 1851, a year the union passed over his landscapes, Thomas Doughty denounced the organization

for expending "[its] means in a most prodigal manner on some half-dozen or so of pet artists" while refusing to give "even a crumb for others."

The "penny press," particularly James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, became the Art-Union's principal antagonist. Purporting to speak for the "public" (and amplifying the grievances of disgruntled artists), the penny press "reviled the alleged duplicity of the managers" and insisted that the Art-Union "promoted private, selfish interests." Managers, the *Herald* charged, "were manipulating the lottery in their own interest."

With critics attacking the Art-Union's lottery, the New York Supreme Court ruled it illegal in 1852, effectively killing the organization. The Art-Union's fall "signaled a decisive change in the patronage and exhibition of American art," Klein concludes. Henceforth, she says, in such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the emphasis would be less on educating the broad public than on preserving the best art for the enlightened few.

OTHER NATIONS

Adieu, Quebec?

A Survey of Recent Articles

For more than three decades, the threatened secession of Quebec has disturbed Canada's domestic tranquillity. With a referendum promised for later this year, the issue may be settled once and—if not for all, at least for a long time.

"From the early 1960s," David J. Bercuson, a historian at the University of Calgary, writes in *Current History* (Mar. 1995), "the Canadian federation has been akin to a marriage in which one partner has his or her bags perpetually packed in the vestibule, in full sight of the other partner, as a constant reminder of how tenuous the marriage really is. No marriage can go forward on

that basis; nor can a political union."

"Because the rest of Canada is no longer prepared to make concessions to appease Quebec," Canadian media magnate Conrad Black points out in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1995), "Quebec will finally have to decide whether it really wishes to be part of Canada or not."

Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau, whose separatist Parti Québécois narrowly won the provincial election last fall and pledged to hold a referendum on independence this year, said in April that a spring vote, which had been widely anticipated, would be too "hasty." Instead, he announced, "We've de-