

Miss Stein tremendously, and I like to publish her books, although most of the time I do not know what she is driving at. That, Miss Stein tells me, is because I am dumb.”

Perhaps the secret to Stein’s continuing fame lies in the lingering idea that we’re just not getting it. More than 50 years after her death, she’s the subject of new

publications, websites, and academic conferences. Lexus ads make knowing allusions to Stein’s work, and journalists quote her—“Remarks are not literature,” she once quipped. “Legends endure because their meaning persists,” writes Toll. “Yet the Stein legend flourishes even though its meaning has always been a mess. Its point is pointlessness.”

## *The Art Museum Comes Home*

“A World Changed? Art Museums after September 11” by James Cuno, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences* (Summer 2002), 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Tom Krens, director of New York City’s Guggenheim Museum, thought he had a can’t-miss formula: “Great collections, great architecture, a great special exhibition, a great second exhibition, two shopping opportunities, two eating opportunities, a high-tech interface via the Internet, and economies of scale via a global network.” The museum opened flashy new branches in Bilbao and Las Vegas. Then came the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the Guggenheim was forced to lay off 20 percent of its staff. But the crisis for the Guggenheim and other museums is not just about money, argues Cuno, director of Harvard University Art Museums. The more significant issue is how museums “see their role changing as a result of those tragic events.”

The Guggenheim experienced phenomenal growth during the 1990s, but its ambitious global museum network eroded its endowment; more than \$23 million was shifted into its operating budget during 1999 and 2000. The New York museum relied heavily on tourist dollars to succeed, with more than 70 percent of its visitors coming from outside New York City, and 50 percent from abroad. When the terrorist attacks slashed those numbers by more than half, the museum’s finances suffered.

Many museums followed the Guggenheim model, embarking on major building expansions, opening restaurants and gift shops, and booking blockbuster exhibitions to attract more paying customers from out of town. There’s the problem.

They became ever more dependent on tourist dollars. More important, they started to forget what art museums really ought to be all about: the joy of art.

Cuno advocates the “better, surer strategy” of cultivating the museums’ “host communities.” By this he means developing life-long connections between the people who live closest to the museum and its permanent collections, connections that can lead to the kind of unrestricted donations that are the lifeblood of thriving museums. Curators would return to their more traditional roles as collection builders and researchers and move “away from the idea of the curator as ‘producer,’ as one curator recently described herself in a *New Yorker* profile.”

This strategy would take museums away from hunting for what Cuno calls “risky dollars” and making deals of the sort that have created an uproar over the nature of the sponsorship of the Brooklyn Museum’s *Sensation* exhibition and the since-aborted “hall of achievement” at the Smithsonian Institution.

While it may be too early to declare a universal victory for the “new, inwardly directed museum in place of the old, outwardly directed museum,” Cuno sees many hopeful signs. “Whereas one once heard museums described as contested sites, where ideas and social identities were in contest, one now hears museums described as sanctuaries, places of retreat, sites for spiritual and emotional nourishment and renewal.”