

ARTS & LETTERS

at all. In the 16th century, Hans Holbein drew designs on wood blocks, which were carved by his assistants and then printed by others. Sculptors today routinely make models in clay, wax, or plastic to be cast at foundries, often in sizes different from the original.

Two groups are responsible for the resistance to creating and showing high-quality reproductions, says Banfield. Art historians teach the public to value art "relics" as part of history, rather than as "something to be responded to aesthetically." And private art collectors make purchases for the same reasons they buy stocks—to see them go up in value. If museums began showing reproductions instead of originals, he suggests, "the multibillion dollar art business would fall into an acute and permanent recession."

Some museum administrators think the public would accept reproductions as a *supplement* to originals, but not as a substitute. Museumgoers want the glamor of originals. As Banfield notes, many of the people waiting in line to view Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, which cost the Metropolitan \$6 million, "would as willingly have stood to see the \$6 million in cash."

Borges's Fiction

"The Borges Phenomenon" by James Neilson, in *Encounter* (June-July 1982), 59 St. Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4JS England.

"Glory is a form of incomprehension," wrote author Jorge Luis Borges in the early 1940s, "and it is perhaps the very worst." Until 1961, when he shared the Prix Formentor with Samuel Beckett, "glory" did not touch Borges personally. Now that it does, observes Neilson, editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, he seems to find the hubbub congenial. He should: It could well be one of his own stories.

Since 1961, Borges (born 1899) has been the focus of a still-growing cult. His followers range from academics, whom he has mocked throughout his life, to those fellow Argentines "who rarely read any books but who are infuriated" that he has not won the Nobel Prize, says Neilson. Last year, Borges, who "professes to regard the nation-state as an anachronism," was hailed by an Argentine general as a "national monument."

Borges has always believed that the writer is created by the reader and that "reading is just as creative as writing." His "The Circular Ruins," for example, is about an Indian mystic who tries to dream another man into existence only to discover that he is himself the dream of someone else. Similarly, everyone has his own Borges.

Latin American writers such as Octavio Paz and Gabriel Garcia Márquez see Borges as liberating them from traditional realism. Indeed, Borges has broken away from standard Western genres (he pens no dramas, novels, long poems). He refrains from developing his characters, and he ignores the details of everyday life. Borges's work resembles the writings of Taoist monks and Zen masters: The world is

ARTS & LETTERS

transient and dreamlike and human personality impossible to fathom.

Borges's independence from cultural tradition is characteristic of Argentines, writes Neilson. Unlike Anglo-Americans, who maintained close cultural ties with the "mother country," Argentines rejected their Spanish forebears. Nor do they feel a part of the Western literary world generally. Latin American writers "pick and choose, gathering the best the world has to offer for incorporation into the new civilisation they are trying to construct," notes Neilson. Borges's interest in Eastern literature may signal an important new development in that process.

Corporate Art Hounds

"Confessions of the Corporate Art Hunters" by Valerie F. Brooks, in *ARTnews* (Summer 1982), 122 East 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10168.

Public art museums may be strapped for cash today, but corporate art buying is on the rise. Chase Manhattan Bank's collection, begun in 1959, is worth \$7.5 million, and its art purchaser is looking for more—which is good news for contemporary artists, writes Brooks, assistant managing editor of *The ARTnewsletter*.

Since the mid-1970s, corporate buyers have been aggressively seeking art they can display where employees work. Most of them want some compromise between quality and quantity—not high-priced historical "classics." Of the 935 works bought by Chase Manhattan in 1981, at least a third were created in 1980 or 1981; many represented young artists' first sales. Some corporations try to support local artists. Los Angeles Security Pacific National Bank boasts a 6,000-work collection, 70 percent of which is by Californians. General Mills buys many works by Minnesota artists.

Corporate art collections tend to be eclectic, but some have a clearly defined identity: Ciba-Geigy, the agricultural company, focuses on abstract impressionism, while General Mills's holdings, first acquired in the 1960s, are strong on 19th- and 20th-century prints—from Toulouse-Lautrec, Braque, and Picasso to Frank Stella, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns.

At present, most corporate art remains in cafeterias, hallways, and offices, out of sight of the American public and "off-limits to the critics." (Some subjects tend to be taboo: "anything sexually, politically, religiously or morbidly explicit.") But, Brooks notes, more companies are now launching public exhibits. Security Pacific's collection is on view *only* in public areas. BankAmerica, which started buying art in 1979, is beginning to show more of its 3,200-piece private collection in its three public galleries in San Francisco.

According to Tamara Thomas, a purchaser for Security Pacific, "It's a common misconception that corporations collect for investment." In fact, once a corporation buys a work of art, it rarely sells it. What these firms do want, Brooks says, is to improve both their public image and their employees' working environment.