

September 11th: Art Loss, Damage, and Repercussions

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THE ART LOST BY CITIGROUP ON 911

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As curator of the Citigroup Collection, my responsibilities are similar to that of a museum curator. I oversee the development of the art collection and its management. However, unlike a museum, the primary purpose of the corporate collection is not to educate and preserve, but rather, and more importantly, to enhance the corporation's image and environment while providing visual stimulation for both staff and customers. Of course, the corporate curator is responsible for setting standards for the preservation of the collection, as the collection is always considered to be a valuable corporate asset.

In October 1998, an historic merger took place—Citicorp and Travelers Group merged to form Citigroup. Citigroup is today the preeminent global financial services company offering a range of services from investment banking, insurance and asset management, to consumer banking, credit cards, mortgage loans, and consumer finance. Among the companies that became one were Citibank N.A., Travelers Insurance, Salomon Smith Barney, Primerica, and Commercial Finance Corp. Soon after the merger, I requested that copies of all existing records for artwork, including any photo documentation, be sent to my office so that I could better understand the scope of the merged collection. On September 11th, Citigroup lost over one million square feet of office space when Seven World Trade Center collapsed in late afternoon. Fortunately, all of our employees (as well as all other occupants) in the building had been evacuated earlier, but unfortunately, all our furnishings, records, and artwork was lost.

Seven World Trade Center originally served as the corporate headquarters of Salomon Brothers, an investment bank founded in 1910, and the predecessor of Salomon Smith Barney. Investment banks handle big deals; in other words, their clients invest millions of dollars with the company. Because investment banking is about client relationships, investment banks have traditionally had offices characterized by an

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upscale ambience, suitable to their business needs. Salomon Smith Barney occupied close to twenty floors. Seven World Trade housed executive dining rooms, back office facilities and very dignified and conservative (but not luxurious) offices to conduct business. These offices were enhanced with art, with the most valuable works installed in dining rooms and executive offices.

As I mentioned, we lost all art and archival records relating to Salomon's history. Losing the history of this old banking firm is a real tragedy. Fortunately, there had been a history written for Salomon's seventy-fifth anniversary. But, while copies of the history still exist, future historians will be left with scant original sources for the history of one of the most important American financial institutions.

Although Salomon's rivals, such as Goldman Sachs, had well-established art programs, Salomon did not have a comprehensive or focused art program. The collection's mission was to decorate the offices in a way that set a comfortable and conservative tone for business; the art challenged neither the clients nor the employees. The design department, headed by a very talented designer, selected some of the art for the premises and handled the art collection. A number of other people were involved in the purchases, and, as I researched the history of the collection, one man's name was mentioned over and over again: Charles Simon. Mr. Simon was a managing partner of Salomon Brothers, an art collector, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art, and a supporter of the Museum of the American Indian. His taste was instrumental in many of the significant artworks that were purchased for the Salomon collection. I am pleased to report that many of his purchases have survived, and here is why:

A year before 9/11, the executive dining rooms at Seven World Trade Center were refurbished and a number of the artworks were placed in storage. Subsequently, Citigroup's corporate headquarters were being relocated in Manhattan and so accordingly, I, as curator, removed some of these Salomon pieces from the warehouse and placed them on the new executive floor. Among the artworks "rescued" in this way were a Robert Henri portrait of a young Irish girl from 1924 (Fig. 1), a 1911 William Glackens landscape, an Ernest Lawson painting titled New York Bridge, a 1926 Else Driggs painting of St Bartholomew's Church, an Andrew Wyeth watercolor titled My Dog, and a Ralston Crawford painting titled Electrical Energy Number Two. These were among the important American paintings in the collection. There was also a small collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century marine paintings purchased by Mr. Simon. Among the gifts given to Mr. Simon were two Frederick Remington bronzes and a wonderful Edward Curtis platinum print (Fig. 2) of Chief Joseph, Nez Perce dated 1903, which he donated to the Salomon collection. These artworks would have been welcomed in any museum, and it is just pure luck that they were not in the building when it fell.

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Property of Citigroup

Figure 1. Robert Henri. *Alice Malley*, 1924.
Oil on canvas, 31" x 27".



Photo: Citigroup.

Figure 2. Edward Curtis, *platinum print*, 1903. *Chief Joseph, Nez Perce*.

But to return to the works that were lost. The dining rooms had, in addition to paintings and prints, some first-rate English and American antique furniture and Asian porcelains. (We are fortunate that a Tang Dynasty camel was among the works relocated.) The most expensive painting in the collection was a large mural that was installed in one of the dining rooms. This mural had been relocated to Seven World Trade from Salomon's previous offices. The mural depicted Wall Street, including some Salomon bankers. The work, purely decorative, by an unknown designer, was commissioned from a famous wallpaper company. This mural was very beloved by the employees, so its loss is deeply regretted.

Among lost paintings were some good works by artists such as Carl Schrag, Louis Bouche, John Heilker, William Thon and a number of paintings by American Realists painted in the 1980s. Like most corporate collections, three-quarters of the artworks consisted of prints, both nineteenth-century decorative American prints and contemporary works. In fact, over half the print collection consisted of decorative American prints purchased from the Kennedy, Hirschl & Adler, Graham Arader and Donald Heald galleries. Among the prints lost were a number of plates from Hudson River Portfolio, John Backman's *Bird's Eye View of New York and Brooklyn*, 1851, George Caleb Bingham's engravings of the *Country Election* and *Stump Speaking*, and a number of Currier and Ives lithographs. Most of these prints were originally printed in large numbers, many are replaceable, but their loss is very sad.

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Among the contemporary prints lost were works by Alex Katz, Bryan Hunt, Wolf Kahn, and a wonderful Jim Dine series (Fig. 3) that decorated the cafeteria. There had been no effort to create a collection of contemporary prints, and the collection had not been expanded until 1999, when I placed five Jacob Lawrence (Fig. 4) and two Romare Bearden prints in the executive area. These, too, were lost.



Photo: Pace Editions.

Figure 3. Jim Dine. *Pink Strelitzia*. Etching on black paper, 1980. Edition of 12.



Photo: DC Moore Gallery. Artwork

Figure 4. Jacob Lawrence. *The Builders*, 1974. Screenprint on wove paper, 30" x 22" 1/8". © 2002 Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, courtesy of the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation.

In the private offices there were the expected inexpensive corporate office prints by artists that are known to corporate curators but not to art historians. Every corporate collection seems to have some of these landscapes and floral images done in etching, lithography, and screenprinting, and they serve their purposes in the offices.

Altogether, one thousand one hundred and thirteen works of art were lost by Citigroup on 9/11.

The lessons learned were very simple: keep good records and keep them off site. I am fortunate that we are in the process of getting an up-to-date imaged-based system, so that tracking the collection will be easier. I initiated upgrading of our database and 9/11 has made the upgrade urgent. One always anticipates for thefts

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and fires, but there was never any thought that one terrorist act would result in the loss of the whole building.

A final note: Since the IFAR Symposium, the rare and wonderful Edward Curtis photograph that I showed in my talk has been donated by Citigroup to the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. The initial contact for this donation was made at the Symposium.