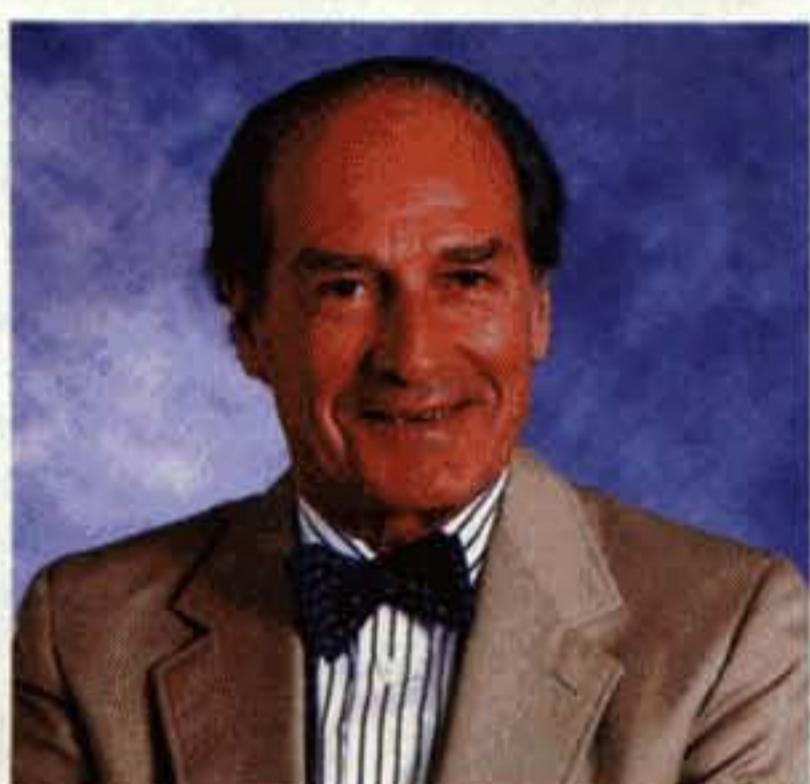


*A fiftieth-anniversary art exhibition honors a collector whose life has straddled the worlds of words and pictures.*

# PARALLEL TRACKS



SEZY GORMAN

*Media magnate Joseph Pulitzer, who has sought out "classics" of modern art.*

by JUDITH PARKER

In the spring of his senior year Joseph Pulitzer Jr. fell in love with a portrait of a girl by Modigliani. He made an appointment with Paul J. Sachs, the associate director of the Fogg Art Museum. Pulitzer recalls walking into Sachs's office, handing him a reproduction of the painting, and trembling as he waited for a comment from the great connoisseur. Sachs "asked me if I could afford it and I said, 'Yes, I think I can.' 'Well, then by all means buy it,' he said. So I did." In *Ekvira Resting at a Table* "were several threads woven together in a way to engage a young person who had been studying the entire span of art history," Pulitzer explains. "And I think I had instinctively—as many young people do—a strong feeling for the art of our own time."

This April the Fogg Museum's gala opening of "Modern Art from the Pulitzer Collection" reverberated throughout the art world. More important, it celebrated the collection's fiftieth anniversary and the Harvard publication of the fourth and last volume of its catalogue—two landmarks in an association that has continued over half a century. Since his graduation from

Harvard in 1936, Pulitzer's allegiance to its fine arts department and museums has taken many forms—chair and vice chair of their visiting committees, benefactor, consultant, and friend. Two previous exhibitions at the University, which subsequently traveled on, displayed substantial portions of his collection in 1957 and 1971.

Pulitzer remembers that the initial show, a benefit for the Fogg, "started the whole procedure of cataloguing private collections." Such books not only record American acquisition patterns but furnish scholarly documentation of art that might eventually pass into public hands. As early as the fifties Pulitzer was bestowing objects on the Fogg and other institutions—chiefly the St. Louis Art Museum, with which he has also been involved for five decades. "Private collections end up in the public domain, so I don't feel I'm doing anything selfish," he says. "You really act as a custodian or guardian, for a while, of things that are not necessarily exhibited publicly." Pulitzer says he intends to divide his collection between Cambridge, where his tastes were "shaped," and St. Louis, where he was born and has always lived.

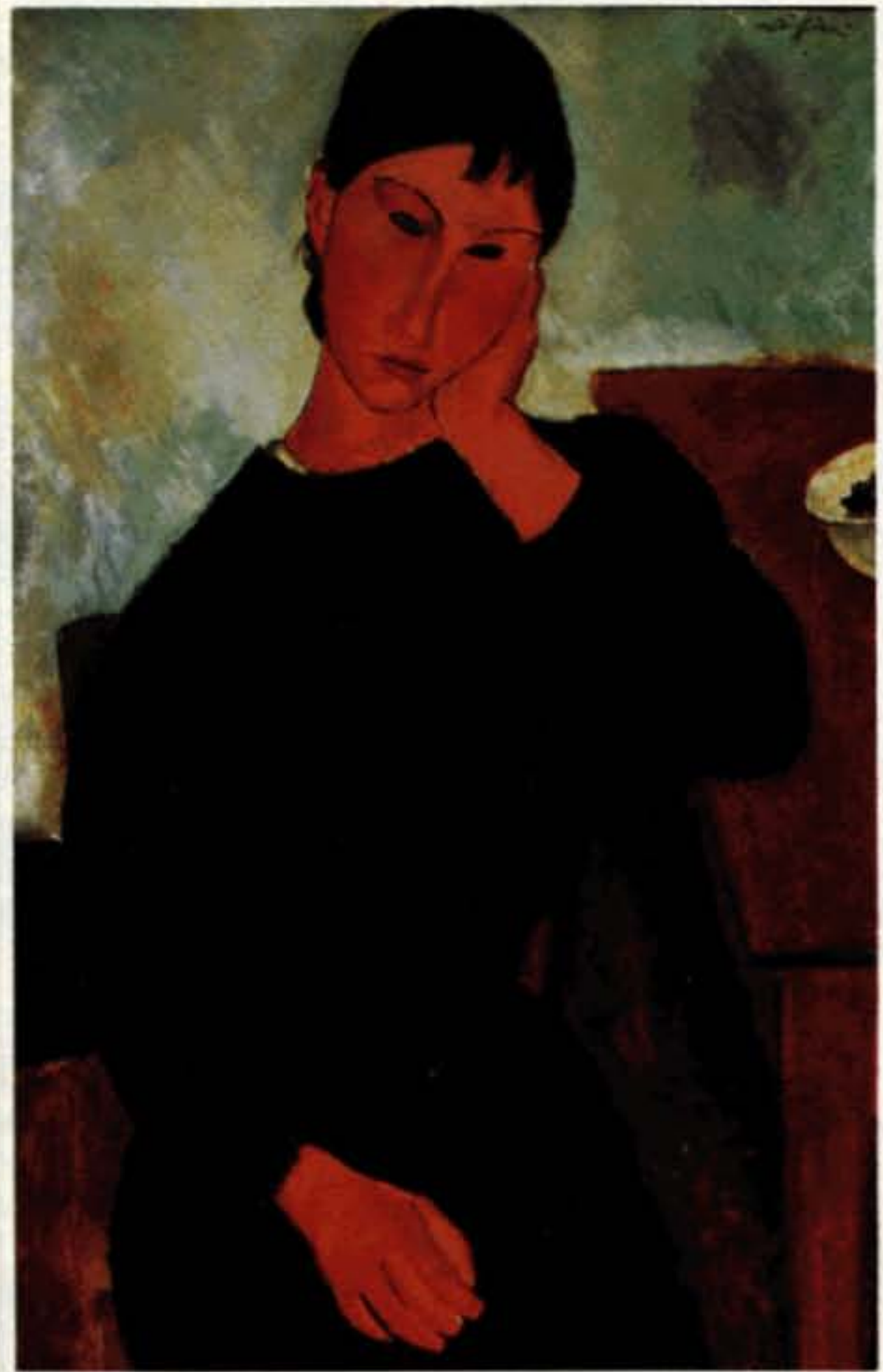
Of the adjectives one might use to describe a serious art collector—ambitious, resourceful, scholarly, aesthetic, adventurous, discriminating, acquisitive—Pulitzer willingly admits to the last. Then, too, the man who's assembled what *Arts Magazine* has called "one of the most brilliant and comprehensive collections of modern art" bears a name synonymous with the highest standards of journalism. A newspaper man, Pulitzer is used to telling stories, but he makes his own sound unremarkable.

As a boarder at St. Mark's School, his acquisitive instincts led him to collect, in rapid succession, first editions, cigar bands, stamps, coins, and Tobler chocolate seals. And he "found that on a gray New England day, a bright Van Gogh or Matisse reproduction was quite a nice thing to have in one's room." By graduation he had captured an English verse prize and a music prize. "I was rather pleased with myself as a little squirt," he says, though one younger student who coxed his crew remembers him as "thoroughly decent," one of the few upperclassmen who never took advantage of new boys at a time when fagging was still widely practiced. In 1932 Pulitzer began studying history, government, and fine arts at Harvard. He was "very clumsy putting pen to paper" in Arthur Pope's famed Fine Arts 1-A on color values, which offered freshmen the "very stimulating experience of trying to follow the path of an artist." Over the next four years he was profoundly influenced by the teaching of Benjamin Rowland, Denman Ross, and Frederick Deknatel, who brought undergraduates into direct contact with original works of art and cultivated their critical sense. Above all, Pulitzer was one of a generation of students who was galvanized by Paul Sachs's scholarship and zeal, and "his very dynamic and very committed attitude toward art as a human experience."

Both Deknatel and Sachs were themselves collectors. Before long Pulitzer "became aware that collecting was a way of testing your taste, your acumen, your judgment . . . a way of enriching your own life." Still, it never occurred to him to pursue a career other than journalism. The first Joseph Pulitzer, his grandfather, had moved to St. Louis in 1865 as a penniless Hungarian immigrant, who had served briefly in the Union army. In 1878, at 31, he had achieved enough success as a journalist, businessman, and political reformer to buy the bankrupt *Evening-Dispatch* for \$2,500. Later he was to trans-



Pablo Picasso, *Harlequin*, 1918. Oil on canvas. The Pulitzer Collection. Both the circus and the ballet, for which Picasso designed, offered him an inexhaustible storehouse of images. Here he uses such cubist devices as a profile superimposed on a full face, and a guitar and music. Each of the variegated shapes refers to some surface of the figure.



Amadeo Modigliani, *Elvira Resting at a Table*, 1919. Oil on canvas. St. Louis Art Museum. Pulitzer's first important purchase. Painted shortly before the artist's death, it shows African, Italo-Byzantine, Sieneese, and Cézannist influences.



Henri Matisse, *Bathers With a Turtle*, 1908. Oil on canvas. St. Louis Art Museum. This picture set the style of Matisse's figure compositions for the next few years.

form the *New York World* and give Columbia University \$2 million to establish its school of journalism (and the Pulitzer prizes). But to him a good newspaper was a means to a better society, not an end in itself, and he remained obsessed with the potentials of democracy. He educated his son Joseph to succeed him and died in 1911, two years before his grandson, Joseph Jr., was born.

"I always assumed I'd want to carry on a family tradition," says Pulitzer. "I discovered rather early that I could have an avocation of art and a vocation of journalism. I've been very comfortable with those two parallel tracks in my life, particularly since one is very current and one is very leisurely."

During the mid-Depression summer of 1935 Pulitzer worked as a cub reporter for the *San Francisco News*. The following year, after graduating from Harvard, he joined the staff of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. He had never studied journalism; his father didn't believe in it. "My father thought the way to learn was to practice and get started—to go into the field—and then be exposed to all the problems and all the tasks that a working newspaperman would be exposed to, rather than doing it academically." Pulitzer trained closely with his father until 1942, when the Navy intervened. Three years later he returned from a harrowing tour of duty in the Pacific, worked his way up to associate editor, and took control as editor, publisher, and company president after his father's death in 1955.

**M**eanwhile, on a parallel track, Pulitzer the collector had been gathering momentum with an interested partner, Louise Vauclain, whom he married in 1939. During the thirties and forties they acquired significant works by Picasso (the subject of Pulitzer's senior thesis), Braque, Rouault, Matisse, Gris, Klee, and Beckmann that would form the core of their collection. "I more or less consciously wanted to bring together a few examples that would have some meaning as a collection of twentieth-century artists . . . creative art that would have a validity and vitality that would transcend fashion," he recalls. "I wanted to do it seriously, not just frivolously, so I would naturally go to the people to whom I'd been exposed in college courses and about whom I'd been reading—people who were then getting the critical acknowledgment and acclaim."

In 1957 the Pulitzers' collection made its public debut at M. Knoedler & Company in New York before moving north to Cambridge. Glowing over its newest discovery, *Art News* told readers that Pulitzer was not a "prestige-collector" nor an "investment-collector" nor a "decorator-collector" but a "born-collector, to whom it would never occur to live without the daily companionship of works of art." So it seemed, although the development of his collection has continued to reflect his steadily widening knowledge and the intensification of his tastes. From a modern School of Paris his interests have extended back to drawings by nineteenth-century artists whose work foreshadowed it, and forward to certain postmodern movements. He has never been drawn to surrealist or neo-expressionist painting, preferring the more formal, rigorously disciplined approach of minimalist and conceptualist artists whose work "is so well established that it doesn't need any sort of defense from me."

*Classic* is the stamp critics tend to put on Pulitzer art. The collector himself says that he has searched for "art which is



Edouard Vuillard, *Woman in a Green Hat*, 1905. Oil on cardboard. The Pulitzer Collection. Madame Hessel posed for this portrait in the manner of a photograph.



Juan Gris, *Violin and Glass*, 1915. Oil on canvas. Fogg Art Museum. Polished patterns, undulating surfaces, and the use of color distinguish Gris's work from that of French cubists.



Jackson Pollock, *Number 3, 1950*. Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on masonite. The Pulitzer Collection. After 1947 Pollock gave numbered titles to his poured abstractions. "Numbers are neutral. They make people look at a picture for what it is—pure painting. Abstract painting is abstract. It

confronts you," he said. Alternative solutions to problems of figuration and lack of figuration preoccupied him. In 1950, his most productive year, he explored issues of medium and technique, line and color, and figure and ground in more than fifty completed paintings.



Pierre Bonnard, *Still Life With Fruit, 1936*. Oil on canvas. The Pulitzer Collection. Bonnard was labeled "the last of the Impressionists," though he cared little for the accidental effects of light. Instead he sought a structure for his paintings and to find in paint plastic equivalents for forms in nature. In this work, every brush stroke describes a passage of form while contributing tones to the sophisticated color orchestration.



Max Beckmann, *Portrait of Zeretelli, 1927*. Oil on canvas. Fogg Art Museum. Simplicity of color and form lends scale to a painting of a Caucasian prince—an actor and dancer. Beckmann's portraits from this period had strong psychological overtones.



Paul Klee, *Anchored*, 1932. Oil on canvas. The Pulitzer Collection. Ships were among Klee's favorite motifs, which he indicated in the simplest ideographs. Here he abstracts the idea of restful calm, of being moored for the night in a quiet sea under a setting sun.



Roy Lichtenstein, *Temple of Apollo*, 1964. Oil, magna, and pencil on canvas. The Pulitzer Collection. Lichtenstein's source was a postcard of the temple at Corinth, his inspiration a series of Parthenons stenciled on the wall of a Greek restaurant in New York. "Venerable ruins . . . are surprisingly resuscitated by the very commercial techniques that seem to have destroyed them," he says.



Pablo Picasso, *Plaster Head and Bowl of Fruit*, 1933. Oil on canvas. Fogg Art Museum. A mid-career Picasso combines classic and surrealist elements in a witty riddle. On the left, an abstract portrait bust of model Marie-Thérèse Walter, realistically presented, confronts a real bowl of fruit, rendered in linear abstraction. The painting can be seen as a celebration of Picasso's virtuosity as well as a metaphor for art itself.



Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Red, Dark Green, Green)*, 1952. Mixed media on canvas. The Pulitzer Collection. Rothko's large forms were intended as neither abstractions nor explorations of color but as "things" to express basic human emotions.

resolved and has achieved its objective, rather than transitional or experimental art." Referring to the large group of experts, dealers, and museum professionals whose friendship he has always enjoyed, he continues: "Perhaps I've been cautious about too much influence. But I don't buy things because someone tells me I must. It robs collecting of the sentiment and joy that goes into selecting and working toward achieving something." He emphasizes that private collectors, unlike museum people, have no outside obligation. "I've always bought things that were meaningful to me, hoping there would be a certain character, coherence, or personality to the collection. I've never tried to fill gaps or be encyclopedic—it wouldn't have been my style, nor would I have had the resources." Besides, he insists, "I'm the least systematic person in the world."

Louise Pulitzer died in 1968. Five years later Pulitzer married Emily Rauh, A.M. '63, the curator of the St. Louis Art Museum. (They had met once at the Fogg in the early sixties when Rauh was the assistant curator of drawings there.) Since their marriage collecting has become a stimulating joint enterprise. "We never buy anything of any consequence that we both aren't very convinced about," says Rauh. "We try to agree and almost always do," says Pulitzer. In cases where they don't respond in kind, "we think about it. Often that's a good red flag . . . some hidden hand that's pulling one of us back." He describes theirs as "a sort of moral agreement, a familial agreement. It's very nice to have it that way and that's the way it should be."

"Just living with the tremendous variety of art and his deep perceptions about the works has been enriching," says Rauh of her husband, who's also "training me to be more acquisitive." More than anyone else since Paul Sachs, Pulitzer's second wife has "aided and helped and encouraged me," he says, and "opened my eyes to art immediately being produced, whereas my tendency has been to wait until the dust settles." Rauh adds admiringly, "I don't think there are many collectors who continue past one generation. The three things that seem to me most extraordinary about Joe's collecting are the quality and the passion and the continued commitment he has had over a very long period of time."

**T**he garden of the Pulitzers' summer estate in Ladue, Missouri, designed by William Bernoudy, has become a creative setting for outdoor sculpture. For the last twenty years such artists as Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Mark di Suvero, and Dan Flavin have been given free rein in it—creating pieces that fit into the landscape as harmoniously as those Pulitzer placed there earlier by Maillol, Rodin, Lipchitz, and Arp. Although he and his wife travel frequently (he especially likes the mountains for skiing and reflection), their lives center around Ladue (where they're converting a fallow field into a prairie) and St. Louis, where they both play active parts in the city's cultural life.

Pulitzer turns 75 on May 13. He works at his Central West End home in the mornings and at the *Post-Dispatch* from noon on, generally returning home around seven. In his comfortable corner office Rodin's bust of his grandfather rests on a pedestal. On one wall hangs his grandfather's portrait by John Singer Sargent. The founder would have been pleased with him. During his grandson's 31-year tenure the *Post-Dispatch* has been repeatedly cited for liberalism and public service and has

## Fifty Years of Connoisseurship

Currently on display at the Fogg Museum are 87 master paintings, drawings, watercolors, and sculptures from the Pulitzer Collection. The exhibition telescopes the entire modern movement, marking significant stages in its development from the origins of Impressionism in the 1850s to the present day. On view are four works by Monet and four by Miró; three each by Degas, Braque, Matisse, Klee, and Gris; and major pieces by Cézanne, van Gogh, Rodin, Brancusi, Redon, Warhol, Oldenburg, and some 28 other major artists. The exhibition also features an exceptional group of Picassos, covering most of his career, from *Woman in Yellow* of 1904 to *Reclining Nude* of 1969.

Free docent-led tours of the exhibition are given from 10:30 to 11:30 on weekdays. Copies of volumes 3 and 4 of the catalogue of the Pulitzer Collection can be purchased at the Museum Shop, located in the Sackler Museum. The Harvard Art Museums are open from 10 to 5 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays; 10 to 9 on Thursdays; and 1 to 5 on Sundays. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$1.50 for students and senior citizens, and free for those under eighteen; there is no charge on Saturday mornings. For more information, call (617) 495-9400 or 4544.

After it leaves the Fogg on June 12, the exhibition will be shown at the St. Louis Art Museum from July 8 to August 28.

garnered four Pulitzer prizes. A company of three properties grew to one of thirteen; seven television stations in seven different states, two radio stations in Phoenix, and—besides the *Post-Dispatch*—the *Arizona Daily Star* of Tucson, and Chicago's *Southtown Economist* and Lerner Newspapers. In 1986, the year Pulitzer relinquished the presidency of the company to his younger brother Michael '51, he quelled an attempted takeover by minority stockholders, family members who had been joined by an independent investor. The company went public at the end of the year after Pulitzer and a number of close relatives had bought out the dissidents—"adamant," says his wife, "that the company not be destroyed."

Now chairman of the board, Pulitzer heads a group that retains about 98 percent of the votes on corporate policy, while his only child Jay (Joseph IV '72) serves the company as vice president-administration. Thoughtful and seclusive ("I don't like publicity; I don't want it and I don't need it"), he has managed to preserve his privacy and autonomy in the complementary spheres to which he remains passionately attached. It still troubles him that "so many educated people don't understand what independent journalism is . . . the moral and ethical obligations of the press to serve the public interest," he says of the occupation that sometimes challenges his idealism, so unlike the avocation that rewards it. "A significant work of art reveals a truth unknown up until then, intensifies the perception of the human condition, or provides a sign or symbol for a deeper comprehension of contemporary experience," he says, in gratitude. ▽

*Judith Parker is an associate editor of this magazine.*