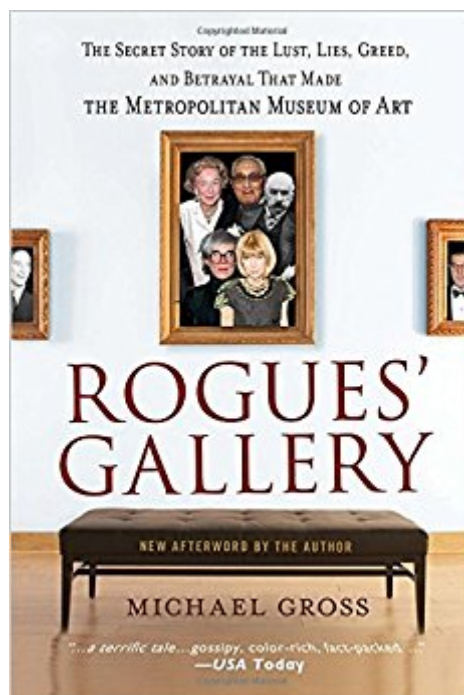




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Rogues' Gallery: The Secret Story Of The Lust, Lies, Greed, And Betrayals That Made The Metropolitan Museum Of Art



Synopsis

“Behind almost every painting is a fortune and behind that a sin or a crime.” With these words as a starting point, Michael Gross, leading chronicler of the American rich, begins the first independent, unauthorized look at the saga of the nation’s greatest museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this endlessly entertaining follow-up to his bestselling social history *740 Park*, Gross pulls back the shades of secrecy that have long shrouded the upper class’s cultural and philanthropic ambitions and maneuvers. And he paints a revealing portrait of a previously hidden face of American wealth and power. The Metropolitan, Gross writes, “is a huge alchemical experiment, turning the worst of man’s attributes—extravagance, lust, gluttony, acquisitiveness, envy, avarice, greed, egotism, and pride—into the very best, transmuting deadly sins into priceless treasure.” The book covers the entire 138-year history of the Met, focusing on the museum’s most colorful characters. Opening with the lame-duck director Philippe de Montebello, the museum’s longest-serving leader who finally stepped down in 2008, *Rogues Gallery* then goes back to the very beginning, highlighting, among many others: the first director, Luigi Palma di Cesnola, an Italian-born epic phony, whose legacy is a trove of plundered ancient relics, some of which remain on display today; John Pierpont Morgan, the greatest capitalist and art collector of his day, who turned the museum from the plaything of a handful of rich amateurs into a professional operation dedicated, sort of, to the public good; John D. Rockefeller Jr., who never served the Met in any official capacity but who, during the Great Depression, proved the only man willing and rich enough to be its benefactor, which made him its behind-the-scenes puppeteer; the controversial Thomas Hoving, whose tenure as director during the sixties and seventies revolutionized museums around the world but left the Met in chaos; and Jane Engelhard and Annette de la Renta, a mother-daughter trustee tag team whose stories will astonish you (think *Casablanca* rewritten by Edith Wharton). With a supporting cast that includes artists, forgers, and looters, financial geniuses and scoundrels, museum officers (like its chairman Arthur Amory Houghton, head of Corning Glass, who once ripped apart a priceless and ancient Islamic book in order to sell it off piecemeal), trustees (like Jayne Wrightsman, the Hollywood party girl turned society grand dame), curators (like the aging Dietrich von Bothmer, a refugee from Nazi Germany with a Bronze Star for heroism whose greatest acquisitions turned out to be looted), and donors (like Irwin Untermyer, whose collecting obsession drove his wife and children to suicide), and with cameo appearances by everyone from Vogue editors Anna Wintour and Diana Vreeland to Sex Pistols front man Johnny Rotten, *Rogues Gallery* is a rich, satisfying, alternately hilarious and horrifying look at

America's upper class, and what is perhaps its greatest creation.

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Customer Reviews

For more than a century, the coupling of art with commerce has made New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art the world's most glamorous whore, according to this sprawling history. Gross, a veteran chronicler of the rich and beautiful (*Model: The Ugly Business of Beautiful Women*), highlights the relationship between the directors and curators who amassed the Met's collection—fakes and questionably acquired antiquities included, he notes—and its patrons. In his telling, the exchange of money for prestige (contributor John D. Rockefeller wanted good publicity after striking workers were massacred at the family's Ludlow mine) is a tawdry business, with the museum's high-toned seduction of well-heeled egotists, who in turn felt betrayed when newer collections impinged on their own galleries. Not the best-curated of exhibitions, Gross's thematically unfocused chronicle is overstuffed with the details of fund drives, building plans and bequests; some figures feel like they were profiled mainly because there were juicy anecdotes about them—a rarity in tight-lipped Met circles—not because their doings are especially illuminating. Still, browse long enough and you'll find behind-the-scenes dirt and an intriguing look at the symbiosis of culture and cash. (May 12) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Rogues' Gallery

“Gross demonstrates he knows his stuff. It’s a terrific tale, with all the elements of a gossipy, color-rich, fact-packed Vanity Fair-style takedown.”

— Maria Puente, USA Today

“Provocative.”

— Reid Pillifant, New York Observer

“Any and all facts that I knew of personally, the author gets absolutely right, which makes me trust much else in the book—and there’s a great deal else, indeed an entire history of the museum beginning from its gradual birth in the 1870s, told as a kind of extended gossip dish, a dense and exhaustively factual one, about the powerful egos that drove it into prominence and kept it there. I am not particularly sympathetic to any view of the world as a gossipy chronicle. I didn’t expect to like the book’s tone, but I found a good 100 pages had gone by before I could even put it down. . . . The book is important, and what’s more, splendidly readable.”

— Melik Kaylan, Forbes.com

“Highly entertaining.”

— Manuela Hoelterhoff, Bloomberg

“Gross’s coup is not only in the vast amounts of information he has obtained but also in his ability to tell a story about the rich and powerful people of New York nearly effortlessly and without disdain.”

— Jillian Steinhauer, ArtInfo.com

. . . a pageturner that unravels like an elite whodunit, and is reaping encomiums from advance readers. Destined to be the talk of art circles in the U.S. and abroad. . . . Not only by art connoisseurs but by culturati hungry for a captivating, tattle-tale yarn, Rogues’ Gallery will spark a furor.”

— George Christy, The Beverly Hills Courier

Gross relishes every nefarious or audacious episode as he marches through the museum’s fascinating history of curatorial excellence, social climbing, and skulduggery. It’s a tale of elitists versus populists, of spectacular gifts and scandals, trustees refusing to consider art made by living artists and formidable innovators, especially Robert Moses and Thomas Hoving. Whether he is portraying the museum’s first director, the scoundrel Luigi Palma di Cesnola, John D. Rockefeller (the museum’s “greatest benefactor”), curator Henry Geldzahler, Diana Vreeland of the Costume Institute, or, in the most sordid chapter, vice chairman Annette de la Renta, Gross zestfully mixes factual reportage with piquantly entertaining anecdotes.”

— Donna Seaman, Booklist

Gross is a good reporter, ever-digging, fanatical about details and without cooperation from the Met, he has produced a fascinating history of the museum, its place in the world, its place in the New York social firmament and its ups, downs, ins, outs, plus the trajectories of its various directors. . . . a fabulous, realistic, well-researched book

— Liz Smith

Rogues’ Gallery: The Secret History of the Moguls and the Money that Made the Metropolitan Museum, has all of New York talking.”

— Style.com

. . . a must-read.”

— Rush & Molloy, New York Daily News

. . . destined to be a must-read amongst the cognescenti, not to mention the art world.”

— David

Patrick Columbia, New York Social Diary

“Michael Gross hangs the eccentric and dazzlingly rich characters behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Vanity Fair

“Sharp and well-constructed, the readers will marvel at how the institution transcended the bickering and backhanded power plays to become one of the largest and most prestigious museums in the world. A deft rendering of the down-and-dirty politics of the art world.

Kirkus Reviews

“For more than a century, the coupling of art with commerce has made New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art the world’s most glamorous whore, according to this sprawling history. . . . Behind-the-scenes dirt and an intriguing look at the symbiosis of culture and cash.

Publishers Weekly

“Michael Gross has proven once again that he is a premier chronicler of the rich. Rogues Gallery is an insightful, entertaining look at a great institution with all its flaws and all its greatness.

Gay Talese, author of A Writer’s Life

“The title alone tantalizes but once you pick up this book and start reading about the good and the great and the hijinks of high society, it becomes un-put-downable!!!

Kitty Kelley, author of The Family: The Real Story of The Bush Dynasty

Praise for 740 Park

“Tantalizing, intimate, engrossing, intriguing. A deeply researched book that deserves a prominent place among the social histories of 20th-century Manhattan.

Washington Post

“One building as [a] microcosm of life on a silver platter. The voyeurism is so giddy that 740 Park sometimes feels like an extended feat of free-association. . . . Outside the work of Edith Wharton or Jane Austen, it’s rare to find such brazen speculation about exactly what people are worth. Changing demographic and economic realities have made 740 Park a mirror of its times.

Janet Maslin, New York Times

“[A] great read . . . gossipy . . . revealing.

People

“This is social history at its finest.

Dominick Dunne

“740 Park is the home of some of the world’s wealthiest people. Gross takes readers inside its doorman-protected walls, exposing the shocking and sometimes tragic secrets the building has been guarding for nearly a century.

Star

“It took a reporter and storyteller like Michael Gross to lay out the epic tale truly, the story of American capitalism and 20th-century New York society that is 740 Park Ave. . . . This is the kind of heady terrain Gross knows well.

Hartford Courant

Like nearly everyone else, I found Rogue’s Gallery fascinating to read. I am an inveterate Met goer, and have been for 50 years. The stories Gross tells are delicious. But I’m not clear on the author’s real intentions. On the one hand, he criticizes the Met over and over again for being a private club.

(As though anyone but the truly rich could found and maintain a world-class museum.) When the Met takes public money, he complains that the Met remains secretive. But when public money is withdrawn, he criticizes the Met for commercializing itself to raise money on its own. It isn't the fault of the Met that donors are selfish or willful; it's not the fault of the Met that the people who come to help it are rich and self-interested. Many of the people who have worked there have had difficult personal lives or have behaved badly. (But that would be true of every great institution in the world.) A startling number have actually died in service to the museum. But it seems no matter what, the Met administration is always shown in a bad light. And while the gossip is delicious, most of it isn't relevant to what we see in the museum. Some of it (like the story of Jane Englehard's birth and first marriage, which could be a book in itself) seems to be there just because Gross had done the research and found a good story; it has no bearing on the Met at all. And while the book is very detailed, it is not always clear. As someone who is familiar with the Met's many changes, I would have appreciated a much clearer presentation of the Master Plan that has governed the Met's development for over 30 years. At the end, Gross confronts the chief problem the Met now faces: the truly rich are no longer much interested in the Met any more. And so Gross goes from demonizing the great donors of the past as difficult and selfish (and bad fathers!) to lamenting that they they have disappeared from the earth and will no longer endow the Met with their treasures. This book is deeply flawed, and the author is biased, but I recommend it to anyone who loves (or just visits) the Met.

First, Great Title!! This is an extraordinary account on the history of one of America's most important cultural treasures. Walking in the place and looking around gives no hint at the complex often dark backstory. The author says repeatedly that his efforts to get the historical material from the museum were rebuffed, so where did all this detail and dirt come from? The super-rich patrons named in the work certainly did not provide it, as most of them don't come off very favorably. Also the museum's collection has a checkered history of pillage, deceit and fraud that was carefully suppressed. The material is fascinating, although after a few chapters the book becomes a list of handouts from billionaires. Overall, I recommend it.

It is a while since I finished it. I found it historically interesting but also fairly depressing when one sees that the acquisition and maintenance of the country's greatest collection involves such horrifying amounts of ego, manipulation and downright dishonesty. The beauty that is art is often subjugated to the social and financial ambitions of some pretty unsavory characters. The answer, as

always, is that money talks loudest in New York City and gives the power that often trumps connoisseurship. I thought often of Oscar Wilde's remark about people who knew the cost of everything and the value of nothing. But a very good read, and the museum is as indisputably full of treasure as it sometimes is of duplicity. A great house of culture even if I would NOT want to sit down to dinner with most of the major donors.

This is a fascinating glimpse into an amazing museum and into a life that most of us would have no chance to ever be a part of. What strikes me most is not the incredible amount of money and privilege but the owning of paintings that I know and have seen at The Met- the stories behind many of them having once been hung in someone's apartment. It's just hard to take in. The fact that someone needs generations of connections to be part of this world. The politicking makes politics look like nothing. The details and stories are so rich. I can't imagine how long it took to research this book. Having just finished reading it last night I am dying to take a trip to NYC now. Now, the Kindle version is very disappointing. There are countless typos and information left out. A painting sold for "%&@"... what does that mean?? How much did it sell for? Or someone is worth "si^*%^" million dollars. Huh? Or a name will appear as characters I can't even find here on my keyboard. Or the new wing cost "-*^^" million dollars. It was incredibly frustrating.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of my favorite places, so this book interested me from the moment I saw it in the bookstore. I purchased the Kindle edition and dug right in. There is a lot of information in this book. It was clearly well researched and carefully written. There were some formatting errors, but I have since received a new version from and it looks like those issues have been resolved. Granted, there are some moments in the book with a lot of facts and it can get dry. But overwhelmingly, I was fascinated. I found myself wondering how the museum would have been different if it hadn't been so staunchly resistant to "modern art". Walking through the museum, I see names that I've read about which brings trips to the museum to a whole new experience. Anyone that loves the art at the Met should definitely get this book to learn more about how the museum came into existence.

Fascinating story about the inner workings of the Metropolitan Museum's esteemed B.O.D.

Sometimes long and tedious read, even depressing at times, but extremely informative.

non fiction...i found this book fascinating..intrigue, money, jealousy...its all there...some of my friends in all honesty didnt like it as much as i did..but if youre into bodice ripper fiction you might not find this to your taste

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