



## REMEMBERING WILLIAM JORDAN AT SMU

### Adventures in Art Procurement

*William Jordan on fakes, international art dealers and how the Meadows Museum came to be one of the finest collections of Spanish art in the world, thanks to benefactor Algur H. Meadows*

**DALLAS (SMU), January 23, 2018**—On July 1, 1967, William Jordan was named director of the Meadows Museum and chairman of the division of fine art at what was then the School of the Arts at SMU. The announcement in *The Dallas Morning News* quoted then-dean Kermit Hunter as saying Jordan would “take charge of authenticating the more than 300 works of art donated by Dallas oil man Algur H. Meadows.” The desire for authentication came from Mr. Meadows on the heels of a forgery scandal that rocked the art world that year.

In a personal recollection about Algur Meadows written in the late 1990s titled “Algur Meadows: Un recuerdo personal” (*Goya Revista de Arte*, No. 273, 1999, pp. 343–52), Jordan recounted what happened.

“I first met Algur Meadows in 1967 when I was 26 years old, just finishing my doctorate in art history, and he was 67. I had the good fortune to work closely with him for the next 11 years on building the collection that today forms the major part of the Meadows Museum.”

Meadows had acquired a number of Spanish paintings in the late 1950s and had donated the collection to SMU in 1962, along with funds to construct the Meadows Museum. Unbeknownst to him, a number of the works were fakes. Then, in the mid-1960s, Meadows was swindled by two unscrupulous art dealers from Paris who sold him dozens of paintings for his personal collection, purportedly by major French artists such as Gauguin, Dufy, Chagall and Bonnard.

Having bought more than he had room for, Meadows approached a well-reputed local art dealer about selling some of them. “Only then, and in the follow-up investigation, did he discover that virtually all of them were fakes painted by the now infamous, but then unknown, Elmyr de

Hory,” Jordan wrote. “This disclosure, which appeared in newspapers around the world in the spring and summer of 1967, was the biggest international art scandal of the 1960s, because Meadows was not the only victim of the scam, and it became the focus of Clifford Irving’s best-selling *Fake*.”

Jordan continued, “It was around this time, shortly after I had agreed to become the first director of the Meadows Museum, with [Meadows’] guarantee to begin the collection anew, and while Al Meadows was suffering a humiliation that would have driven a lesser man in the opposite direction of the art world, that I began to know him and to appreciate the measure of the man” (“Algur Meadows: Un recuerdo personal”).

According to Jordan, Meadows “resolved to rebuild the Meadows Museum and to rebuild his private collection. And he resolved to deal henceforward with only major galleries.” Jordan described this process:

As we began anew in 1967, the first step was to close the museum for several months over the summer, to begin the process of evaluating the existing collection. Even before the scandal about the French fakes in his home, Meadows had accepted that many of the Spanish paintings he had given to the university were unexhibitible and had asked that I determine which were worthy of retaining. The responsibility for doing that was too great to be borne alone by the inexperienced and very young man that I was then, so the task was shared with José López Rey, who had been my professor at New York University, and Diego Angulo Iñiguez, then director of the Prado Museum, both of whom were to remain close advisers and good friends of the museum over the years. Their evaluation became the basis for future decisions as to which paintings would be sold. In 1969 approximately 35 of the paintings were sold at auction in New York, realizing a total of only about \$35,000. A few of the better ones were eventually traded to dealers as partial payment for new acquisitions. The remaining paintings that were not deemed exhibitible were retained for study purposes and for use in the teaching of connoisseurship, and these remain in the reserve collection today. (“Algur Meadows: Un recuerdo personal”)

Jordan said that for Algur Meadows, “a great part of the pleasure of collection was the deal he could make in acquiring a given picture, or a group of pictures, as the case might be.” Jordan wrote:

In the dizzy days of scandal in 1967, when I hardly knew him and had not yet bought a single thing for the collection, we visited the Wildenstein Gallery in New York, accompanied by López Rey. We were shown nine Spanish paintings that morning (including works by Zurbarán, Murillo and Goya), some of them extraordinary. After examining the paintings for a couple of hours, we adjourned for lunch. While walking to the restaurant, I told him I was sure we could choose several of them that would be a credit to the collection he wanted to rebuild. Whereupon he informed me that, in a private word with the gallery's director, he had actually just bought them all. I was stunned, not just by his largesse, but mostly because I knew I did not want them all, and I thought the director was supposed to have some say in the matter. In the end, after a brief talk about the role of the director and about how we needed to deliberate over each acquisition, we did not buy them all, but we did buy most of them. He knew that if he bought more than one thing from a dealer, he could get them at a better price, and that mattered to him. In the end, no harm was done — far from it! — for among the paintings bought that morning was Goya's recently rediscovered masterpiece *Corral de locos (Yard with Madmen)*. Nothing so rash was ever done again, because Meadows quickly learned that the process of acquiring art for a museum is very different from doing so for oneself and that the role of patron has to be exercised in partnership with museum professionals. From that moment on, he was the exemplary partner. Rarely initiating any acquisition himself, he left the search to me, and gave me the necessary time to research and vet each potential purchase, while — especially at the first — reserving for himself the role of negotiator. (“Algur Meadows: Un recuerdo personal”)

Jordan said that Meadows “placed his trust in me, often buying the painting we decided to acquire without ever having seen it. On one important occasion that I recall, he stood behind me when no one else would do so. In 1976 I saw in Manuel González's gallery in Madrid the awesome *San Sebastián* by Fernando Yáñez de la Almedina, which González had bought outside of Spain. Although no one knew it then, the painting had been acquired in the 1830s by King Louis Philippe of France and was displayed as a Yáñez in his Galerie Espagnole at the Louvre between 1838 and 1848. But the painting was unpublished and there was no record of it in the literary sources of Spanish art.” Experts he consulted told Jordan that “it was too good to be Spanish and must be Italian.” He said, “I could find no one willing to support the attribution to Yáñez. But, convinced in my own mind that it was by him, I urged Meadows to buy it despite the lack of consensus. He did, and for a considerable sum. ... Today the Yáñez is universally regarded as one of the artist's masterpieces and is among the most esteemed works in the Meadows collection” (“Algur Meadows: Un recuerdo personal”). The trust established between

Jordan and Meadows was evident in a letter dated June 24, 1974, in which Jordan wrote to Meadows saying, “No benefactor that I can imagine would be as fine to work with. I consider this my life’s work and I consider myself very lucky.”

Jordan recalled the last acquisition for the museum purchased during Meadows’ lifetime:

Just a month before he was tragically killed in an automobile accident in 1978, at the age of nearly 79, I recommended to Meadows that we buy Velázquez’s *Portrait of Queen Mariana* from Edmond de Rothschild (through the intermediary of the London dealer Colnaghi). Although we already possessed two paintings by Velázquez, [Meadows] could not resist the freshness and immediacy of this sensitive portrait from life, which had been painted to record the change in the queen’s hairdo. Uncharacteristically, he asked for no concession in the price, only for two years to pay it out. He did not live to see the painting, which went directly from the seller to New York to be cleaned before coming to Dallas, but the obligation to buy it, of course, was honored after his death. The loss of Algur Meadows was an enormous blow to the city of Dallas.

Jordan remained at SMU for three more years after Meadows’ death, leaving in 1981 to become deputy director of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. The announcement at the time in *The Dallas Morning News* noted that, during his tenure at the Meadows, Jordan acquired about 75 works of art for the museum, including important paintings by Velázquez, Murillo, Ribera and Zurbarán. It also noted that he “purchased six important 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century canvases by Goya and key 20<sup>th</sup>-century pictures by Picasso, Miro and Juan Gris.” In addition, he “built the Elizabeth Meadows Sculpture Garden collection, which includes works by Maillol, Lipchitz, Rodin, Henry Moore, David Smith and Claes Oldenburg.”

Jordan also served as chair of the Division of Fine Arts in the Meadows School from 1967 to 1973. He became a full professor at the Meadows School in 1975, teaching courses in the history of Spanish art as well as a course in connoisseurship, “Museums and Collecting.”

He remained a friend and advocate of the Meadows School and Meadows Museum in the ensuing decades. He was also a member of the Meadows School executive board, until resigning in early January 2018 due to illness. His involvement, vision and dedication to the field of Spanish art has left a lasting legacy. An internationally known scholar and authority on Golden Age Spanish art, he published major contributions to art history and curated important exhibitions on El Greco, Ribera and Juan van der Hamen, a still-life painter who was the subject

of a major exhibition he curated at the Meadows Museum in 2006. His passing on January 22, 2018 is a sad loss for Dallas and all admirers of Spanish art.