

Samuel Fleisher—Philadelphia's "First Citizen!"

Rewarded After 25 Years' Work in the Interest of Art With the \$10,000 Bok Gift, the Founder of the Graphic Sketch Club Gives Away the Prize



Samuel Fleisher, Who Won \$10,000 and Gave It Away



Opened the Temple of Art to the Poor of the City

So it came about that in a small house on the south side of Catherine street, east of Eighth street, Philadelphia, the Graphic Sketch Club came into being in 1899. Like most big projects it didn't make much noise when it began. The fact is the handful of ambitious folk who worked there at night studying art in its various forms were too absorbed in what they were doing to let the world know about it before their own handiwork apprised Philadelphia that art which had been buried under social conditions had been released and brought into being by a man big enough and generous enough to act as patron.

Nor was it long before Mr. Fleisher felt in the latest part of the city.

By Joseph H. Appelgate

Illustrated by Marius Thomassen

SAMUEL FLEISHER of Philadelphia stood before a great assembly of his fellow citizens one evening not so long ago and heard himself extolled as the leading citizen of his community. He received from the hand of George W. Morris, president of the Philadelphia Forum, the \$10,000 award which Edward W. Bok gives each year to the citizen who has done the most for his city during the preceding twelve months.

Philadelphia, represented there in that gathering of Fleisher admirers, roared its approval. For minutes the recipient of the coveted prize could not make himself heard for the cheering. Out there in front of him were fellow human beings whose eyes were refulgent of the glory of art which this man Fleisher had first given to their vision. Out there were men whose names are now written in letter of gold on the scrolls where are inscribed the records of art. They were his boys, his girls, his people. He had permitted them to see and record the beauty of life in paint, in sculpture, in the graphic arts. If it had not been for his fine mind, his devotion to a section of Philadelphia where the language was polyglot and the peoples foreign still to each other, life to most of those in the audience would have continued as a drab and colorless existence.

This was his hour.

In his hand was the prize. It was his to do with as he saw best. His right hand held the money. So, with his left hand he took it and in a gesture of giving announced that every cent of it would go toward enlarging the scope of the very work in the performance of which he had won the award of merit.

Philadelphia did not expect, yet was not surprised, at this action. It seemed so fitting to her favorite son's great nature. His life has been one of sacrifice, of helpfulness. He seems to have made humanitarianism so integral a part of him that it is habitual for him to do something really noble.

To a mind keenly analytical of men and events the man who puts art within the reach of the poor is doing as much, perhaps even more, than he who puts food into empty stomachs. The effect of food is temporary. The effect of stimulation to the mind and heart is enduring. It results in the good government builded

on citizens with a vision. A vision comes to those who are permitted to study and to master the arts. Without art life often is a hand-to-mouth existence.

Men such as Samuel Fleisher turn the currents of youth into proper channels. Unless the rushing tide of life meets such a breakwater it remains a wild, untamed force, destructive at the slightest wind or whim.

Mr. Fleisher, twenty-five years ago, a man of thirty-five, carried in his mind a picture which to him was so terrible that its instant removal from life was desirable. The picture was that of the face of the street urchin, the laborer and the drudging clerk pressing faces against a show window and taking in with covetous glance the art objects there displayed for the benefit of those whose purses were lined with a more generous portion of the world's largess.

"I knew," he says, "that these people instinctively loved beautiful things. They merely lacked the opportunity to behold them. And I felt that if such an opportunity were given to them they would respond. All men and women love the beautiful, whether it be in the form of a picture, a poem, a bit of sculpture or an inspiring musical work. Naturally the younger they are the more readily they respond to the influence of these things. So, I thought, why not give them the chance to see these things of culture, of beauty and of inspiration, in their own neighborhood, and in the congenial atmosphere of a place of recreation, rather than in some cold and formal mausoleum of art, even though museums are a recognized necessity?"

Looking
Longingly
at Art
in Show
Windows



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Nor was it long before Mr. Fleisher's faith in the latent art of the foreign quarter of Philadelphia was justified. Lazar Raditz, Joseph Sacks, Robert Susan and Renzetti soon became well known names. Since its inception the club has won fifty-eight scholarships in the Academy of Fine Arts and twenty-eight scholarships in foreign institutions.

One of the secrets of the success of the club is the fact that it is a club without the formality of a fine arts organization. It is a recreation center, a recreation centre for the mind. Here lovers of art in the congested cosmopolitan section may gather any evening and freely discuss the latest in the art world. There are classes in painting and sculpture, in etching and designing and even in rhythmic dancing.

"All that I wanted to do," says its founder, "was to give every one a chance to express that inborn love of the beautiful which I know they possess. Every one has it. So why should it be crushed out of some or limited to a few? Is it not wrong to take a poor child, fresh from school, at the age of fourteen or sixteen, then send her, a frail, timid and shrinking wisp of humanity, into a mill that is absolutely devoid of beauty, teach her nothing of the finer things of life, give her no chance to observe them in such fashion as may lead her to love them more, and then count our work as done? Who could expect religion to succeed in uplifting man if church-going came only once a month? Yet allowing the workers to see artistic works and objects of beauty only infrequently in public galleries is comparable to that. Is it not better to bring that beauty into their lives, into the neighborhood where they dwell and then bring them up in an atmosphere where they can profit by it?"

The Graphic Sketch Club grew splendidly. Two years ago its founder purchased the Church of the Evangelist edifice next door and has since used it for the purpose of promoting social enjoyment among the boys and girls and the young men and young women members.

uniformed guards are constantly at elbow, and the art work itself under lock and key within heavy glass cases, where students may look but may not touch, the exhibits in the museum of St. Martin's College may be freely handled.

Mr. Fleisher, who is a manufacturer, is the third to be honored by the Bok Award. Leopold Stokowski and Russell H. Conwell have also been dubbed Philadelphia's first citizen.