



## ART & CULTURE

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# MUSEUM

BY DON HUNTINGTON

PHOTOS BY DAVID ART WOOTEN

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When he was seven years old Professor Lanier Graham paid his first visit to a museum. Like a first kiss, cell phone call, or taste of wine, Graham said that the experience left behind an indelible memory. The museum was at Riverside, California's Mission Inn. His parents took him into the mysterious downstairs spaces, called The Catacombs, that featured richly detailed historical dioramas including, as he clearly recalls, such things as the throne-room-like opulence of a renaissance pope and the turmoil of a turn-of-the-century art studio.

## BACK STORY

Even though his father was involved in developing military aircraft, Graham had no interest in planes and technology. What captured his interest was the amazing museum located at the nearby Dayton Art Institute. For seven years, from age 12 to 18, he says that he hung around the

museum, continually fascinated by the depth and breadth of the beautiful art that hung on the walls and graced the display tables in that place.

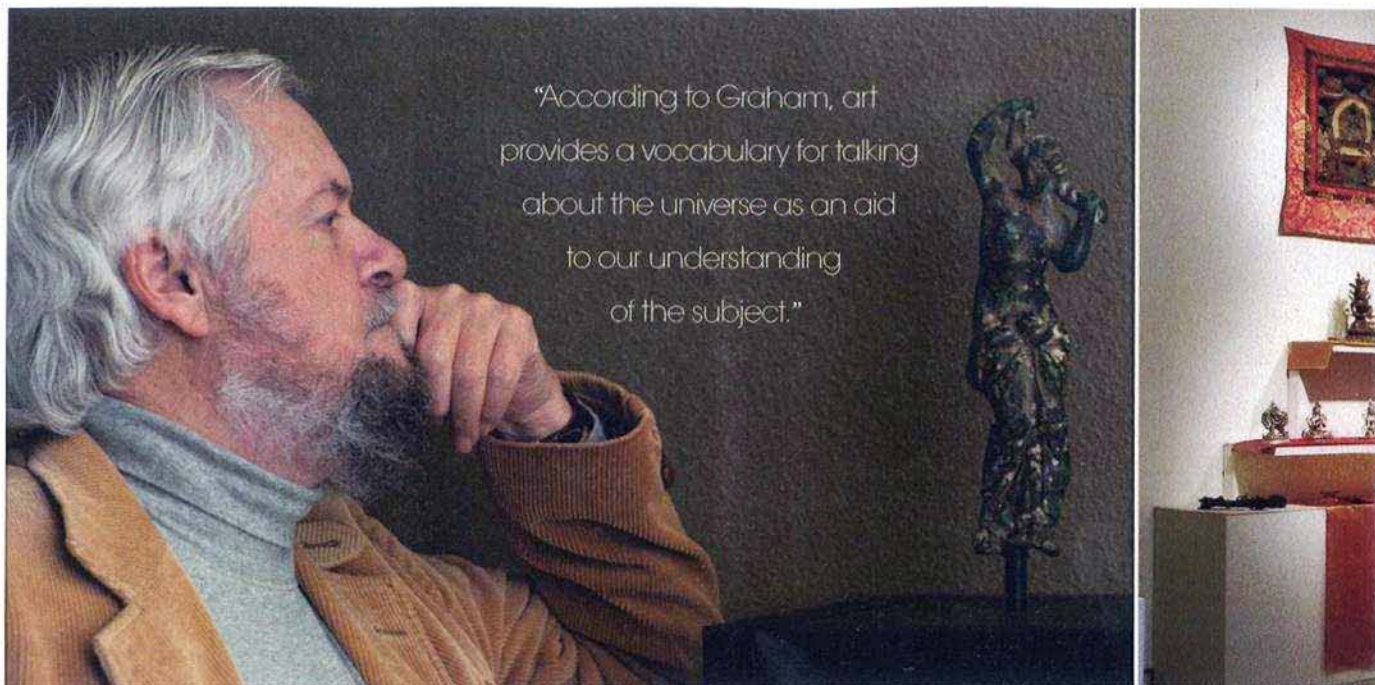
Graham graduated from Columbia University in 1965 with a double major in both Renaissance Art and Modern Art, two periods with which he had been carrying on a decade-long love affair. Graham said that it was wonderful to study with some of the world's leading authorities.

Following graduation, Graham spent five years on the staff of New York's Museum of Modern Art and, when he was only 29 years old, became chief curator at San Francisco's The Legion of Honor. He was responsible for supervising the other members of the staff — curators who were in charge of graphics, textiles, paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, and decorative arts.

Graham said that it was a challenge to manage creative people of that caliber,

especially since most of them were older than he — some of them decades older — but his track record had earned their respect. "They held the success of the museum as the most important matter," Graham said, "and were glad to pitch in and help make it successful."

Graham helped manage the process through which the Legion of Honor merged with the De Young, creating of the two a facility that could take its place as one of the world's premier museums. He supervised the merging of all the exhibitions, acquisitions, and publications. The merger was completed in 1973. He and his team were able to secure grant money to refurbish and revitalize both properties. They also constructed a Tribal Wing at the De Young, which was an important addition, because the museums were sadly in need of some ethnic diversity to help offset the overwhelmingly Euro-centric collections. The new space permitted them



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finally to put on display the Africa, Oceania, and Americas collections that had been gathering dust in cabinets and cupboards for 50 years.

Graham began feeling the need of more human interaction rather than the community of dead artists that he had been working with, so he decided to teach. A friend mentioned the vibrant art program at the Cal State Hayward campus. Mr. Graham was immediately attracted to the university’s Art Department because they regarded art as being more than media, colors, styles, and trends. They viewed each piece of art in terms of its relationship to the social/cultural milieu in which it had been created, searching for core cultural values that the art embodies, expresses, and in many cases promotes. He heartily agreed with the holistic emphasis, so he began teaching there and, two decades later, is still there.

#### SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE LENS OF ART

Graham’s methods of art instruction differ from those found in traditional schools in which the professor might put up a slide of a cave painting, for example, and then lecture briefly about the shape of the animal and pigments that were used — possibly noting the manner in which the ancient artist incorporated textures and irregularities on the surface of the underlying rock to help depict the figure being illustrated.

Usually missing from such a lecture, however, would be any attempt to describe the mystical purpose the artists might have made of the cave art in acknowledging a connection that existed between themselves and nature.

Graham believes that such multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional examination of any art uncovers hidden values that might inform our own lives in a positive manner. In the case of the cave paintings, for example, a keen observer might deduce the manner in which the acknowledged connection between humans and animals protected those people from any urge to ravage nature — and might protect us from doing so, as well, if only we would reaffirm the connection illustrated by those ancient drawings.

Cave art occupies no special category; every piece of art from every epoch of human existence contains equivalently rich sources of meaning and significance. As another example, China’s Tenth Century A.D. Sung Dynasty provided an extraordinary contribution to world art. Art lecturers will traditionally note the exquisite proportions and compositional balance of a piece, while tracing the object’s pleasing curves. In Graham’s opinion, they conclude the lecture just at the point where they might have begun searching for deeper meaning and significance.

The Sung Dynasty was a rich era that witnessed advances in philosophy, particularly

by integrating traditional Taoism with Buddhism. Such art pieces often serve as physical representations of a transcendent dialectic — integrating the finite with infinity, material with void, and sacred with secular. Chinese philosophers invented the yin/yang symbol that takes its place in the company of a group of other symbols with similar meanings found in every important culture including Buddhism’s circle-and-square mandala, the interpenetrating triangles of Judaism, and the vertical element incorporated with the horizontal of the Christian cross.

According to Graham, art provides a vocabulary for talking about the universe as an aid to our understanding of the subject. When intelligent informed exploration combines with a receptive teachable attitude, every piece of art becomes a potential source of instruction, challenge, and intellectual growth.

When teaching about history, Graham has students look at real art, not pictures of art. They go to San Francisco to see the thing itself rather than a picture of the thing.

#### A New Museum to House Ancient Art

Graham has been the curator of the departmental gallery for a dozen years and has recently been promoted to Curator of the Art Collections of the University Library. He is now helping to create an on-campus art



museum that will bring art to the UC Hayward students. The facility will provide a permanent resource for enriching the cultural experience of all the students in the university, as well as East Bay residents. The project began ten years ago when the Art Department requested a planning study.

The museum will be designed to reflect the university's awareness of the inter-disciplinary role that art plays in influencing society and culture. His colleagues in the History and Anthropology Departments share Graham's value-based, holistic perspective. The university's cultural historians and archeologists together with experts from other parts of the Bay Area educational community are collaborating to ensure that museum displays will embody and reflect the humanistic values of our diverse heritage. The members of the team are enthusiastic about the realization that the displays they are creating will continue to awaken visitors to these important lessons and values long after the current generation of professors have passed away.

When finished, the Library/Museum will serve as the equivalent of a giant reference book — one that people will be able to walk through as they follow the course of humanity, beginning with the most primitive Stone Age art, such as cave paintings, and progressing to the most modern examples.

The museum will provide artifacts and explanations of all the major cultures, describing the cultural mores and spiritual

values that a particular art object was created to celebrate and reinforce. The project was stalled while searching for the millions of dollars required to construct a new building, until the University President, Professor Mohammad Qayoumi, came up with the creative idea of locating the museum inside the library. An old reference section had fallen into disuse with the rise of online reference resources. The change in plans has lowered construction costs to about \$500,000. The dynamic technology-savvy new University Librarian, Linda Dobb, is working with the space and arranging for the donation of hundreds of objects. A charitable trust, called The Institute for Aesthetic Development, has donated a highly respected teaching-collection of world art that it has accumulated.

The project is pioneering in a number of ways. It will be the first East Bay art museum to be located inside a library, and the first museum in history to compress the whole range of World History in a modestly size easily accessible space.

Graham says that he is looking forward to the great day when collections of beautiful art can be rescued from their dusty storage areas and brought into the light of day so that any student or Bay Area resident will be able to admire and be inspired by the beauty that for so long lay hidden from the world. The relatively short trip that thoughtful visitors will make through the museum will enrich

their appreciation for the warp and woof of human history. They will leave the place with a deeper appreciation for what it means to be a citizen of the world.

In this information age, we commonly learn about the world through books and electronic media, but a museum provides opportunities to actually be in the presence of objects that artists created in order to communicate their feelings, philosophies, and beliefs. A picture might be worth a thousand words, but in Graham's opinion, the direct experience the museum will provide might be worth 10,000 pictures. 86



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