



## PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Hispanic Society Museum & Library.

Philippe de Montebello was born in Paris and after the baccalauréat he attended Harvard College and the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. With the exception of four years as director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, he has spent his entire career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, first as curator in the Department of European Paintings and later as the Museum's Chief Curator and then, from 1977 until 2008 as its Director, when he retired after 31 years as the longest-serving Director in the Metropolitan Museum's 150-year-long history.

Following his retirement, Mr. de Montebello became the first scholar in residence at the Prado Museum in Madrid, and he launched a new academic career as the first Fiske Kimball Professor in the History and Culture of Museums at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University.

He has been elected member of the Board of Trustees of the Musée d'Orsay (2008), Honorary Trustee of the Prado Museum (2012), member of the French Académie des Beaux Arts (2014) and Chairman of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library (2015).

In 2003 President G.W. Bush awarded Mr. de Montebello the National Medal of the Arts and in 2009, President Barack Obama awarded him the National Medal of the Humanities. Mr. de Montebello is only the fourth person to have received both these awards.

Mr. de Montebello is an Officier de la Légion d'Honneur and among others, he has an honorary degree from Harvard University. In 1996, Philippe de Montebello was declared a Living Landmark by New York City's Landmarks Commission.

# The American Brief

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Designed and launched by the Fundación Consejo España - EE.UU., **The American Brief** releases a monthly series of transcribed interviews on current topics to American personalities from politics, business, culture and academics.

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## What was Archer M. Huntington's vision when he founded in 1904 The Hispanic Society of America (HSA)?

He sought to found an institution, a museum free to the public and a rare books and reference library dedicated to the preservation, study, presentation (exhibition), and promulgation of the arts, literatures, cultures, and aspects of daily life of ancient Iberia, medieval Iberia (including the Islamic and Judaic cultures), Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and all other areas of the world where Spanish or Portuguese have been spoken languages, including the Philippines. He was truly passionate about these cultures.

“Archer M. Huntington was truly passionate about the Spanish and Portuguese cultures.



### What is the institution's mission today?

The original mission has not changed, but it has been greatly expanded in terms of public education (for all ranges of age and target audiences from small children to university students and scholars). There is use of the new communication technologies (especially during the current crisis), and a much wider range of communities from which we draw audiences. To the lectures and

scholarly sessions that have always been a part of our outreach, we have added numerous concerts, programs in the schools, education workshops for school students, webinars, video programs, and extensive outreach to community groups, government organizations, and corporations, especially during “Hispanic Heritage Month” in September and October. The Hispanic Society Museum & Library (HSML) has also launched monthly tertulias for its members where curators present aspects of their research or the collections and I, as Chairman, engage in a Q and A session. We are also continually increasing the range of our website and putting more and more objects online as part of our “eMuseum,” accessible through the website (“Search the Collections”).

### How much of the philanthropist's soul and passion can we sense from the outstanding collection preserved by the HSML?

A great deal. There is in everything an interest in what we may call an ethnographic concern. He spoke, with regard to Spain, as wanting to capture “the soul of Spain in a museum.” Just in the paintings collections, we find many of our larger works illustrate ethnic types or regional costumes and activities as with the Sorolla Visions of Spain Gallery. However, his vision was extremely broad in terms of chronology (paleolithic to present)

and geography (literally globe-circling). Our acquisitions since his death have tended to underscore this while expanding the areas we represent, notably in Latin American art.

**How has the arts and culture sector in general, and particularly, the contemporary and modern art market in the United States been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Museums of course have taken a tremendous blow, especially those which had been relying on admissions income. The temporary lull in the pandemic did show museums reacting creatively to find new ways not only to reach out but also to admit visitors in safe ways. In the case of the Hispanic Society, which is currently largely closed for renovations but whose admission has always been free of charge, the pandemic has been challenging of course, notably in working protocols and inability to meet and engage with potential supporters. It has still been possible to make acquisitions either online or in person, observing strict protective rules.

**What are the HSML's expectations and main concerns for the upcoming months, especially regarding its programs and activities?**

We continue to do outreach – such as placing an exhibit of large, blown up images of our works

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on our Terrace, putting out programs virtually, including education workshops engaging students. We have hopes of re-opening our Sorolla murals gallery, but that is now contingent on the pandemic being controlled. The Gala, a major event for our supporters and our budget has been postponed to the Spring of 2021 (in a virtual format) and in the fall of 2021, ojalá in person.

As for the collections themselves, 200 of our finest pieces in all areas and all media are continuing their tour around the world. The exhibition *Visions of the Hispanic World. Treasures from the Hispanic*



*Society Museum & Library* started at the Museo Nacional del Prado and is currently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. We are actively looking for more venues for at least another 2 years pending the re-opening of the museum.

**Due to the pandemic, museums have adopted drastic sanitary measures, including capacity reduction and safety distance. Will these changes improve the visitors' experience? Consequently, are we facing a new model that shift away from overcrowded exhibition halls?**

For the present, the museum being closed, the matter of visitor experience is not relevant. As for the future, we are engaged in an effort to make our collections better known worldwide and look forward to crowded, albeit not overcrowded galleries.

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**The National Hispanic Heritage Month, held every year from September 15 to October 15 since 1988, celebrates the history, the culture and the accomplishments of Hispanic Americans. In your view, how important is this celebration nowadays?**

It is extremely important on a national basis in helping focus on the remarkable achievements of Hispanic Americans and on all aspects of Hispanic culture in its broadest sense. For us, it represents an opportunity to share both our expertise and our





collections. Since its inception, the concept has worked out in culture-affirming, celebratory ways. Our role in it has always been to provide as many programs as possible, often responding to requests, and to promote an awareness of how much all the Hispanic cultures internationally have in common, through all the areas in our mission statement.

### How did the HSML celebrate the Hispanic Heritage Month?

In addition to the exhibition on the Terrace which was timed for this period, there were dozens of virtual programs, including major video presentations for corporations and organizations, numerous educational outreach efforts, interviews with media, and enhancements to the eMuseum function on our website.

### In 2009, the Fundación Consejo España – EE.UU. bestowed The Hispanic Society of America with the Bernardo de Gálvez Award in acknowledgement of its outstanding contribution to foster cultural ties between Spain and the United States. How do you value this recognition?

For the Hispanic Society Museum and Library, the Bernardo de Gálvez Award was a source of great pride as it is a prestigious award and it was most welcome as the HSML is too little known both nationally and internationally and the award brought much needed and appreciated attention to this great institution with a world class collection.

