

Gardner Museum

Celebrating centennial with special exhibits and concerts

By NANCY RABINOWITZ
Associated Press Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Isabella Stewart Gardner opened her museum on New Year's night 1903, marking the occasion with a performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and plying her guests with the unusual combination of champagne and doughnuts.

A century later, the museum is marking its birthday with a series of celebrations that include artist Joseph Kosuth's neon creations, special exhibits, concerts and lectures.

Born in 1840, Gardner was one of the foremost female patrons of the arts. She founded the first art museum in the United States created solely from a personal collection, says Cathy Deely, the museum's director of marketing.

She was a supporter and friend of leading artists and writers of her time, including John Singer Sargent, James McNeill Whistler and Henry James.

Over three decades, Gardner, also known as "Mrs. Jack" in reference to her husband John L. "Jack" Gardner, traveled the globe amassing a remarkable collection of master and decorative arts. In 1903, she realized her life's dream, unveiling "Fenway Court," a neo-Renaissance palace on Boston's Back Bay Fens that made the collection available to the public.

Museum director Anne Hawley hopes the special 100th anniversary events over the next 18 months will keep bringing people to the museum, even after the next year.

"In Gardner's time, she says, America is a very young country and people don't have much

chance to see beautiful things," Hawley says. "Today we have so many museums in America, but they all struggle terribly."

"We're hoping this centennial will lift people's appreciation of the museum," she says.

Gardner had the museum designed around a central flowering courtyard, a reflection of her love of flowers. In April, 8-foot-long nasturtiums are hung from the balconies in honor of her birthday on April 14.

When concerts are held in the Tapestry Room, the music can be heard wafting through the museum. In May, Vivaldi concerts, which are already sold out, will be performed in the courtyard.

Others just choose to read or relax in the courtyard.

"It's a place of contemplation. You often see people sitting on the edges of the courtyard gazing. Sometimes people are reading there," Deely says. "In the dead of winter when you come in from that gray cold outside and you see that gorgeous garden, it's really a special treat. You can transport yourself to a Mediterranean sculpture garden," Deely says.

Anchoring the centennial exhibit is Kosuth, a contemporary artist described as a "pioneer of the conceptual arts movement."

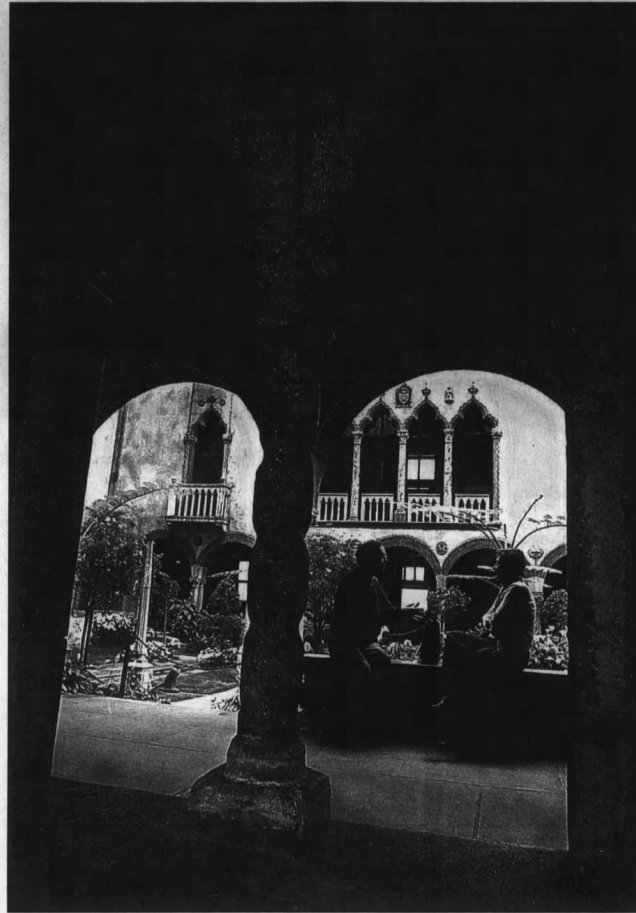
On an exterior wall of the museum's Monk's Garden is a white neon installation, "Whistler's Warning," based on a lecture by Whistler in which he fired back at his critics.

Kosuth's other contributions include "Guests & Foreigners: Three Faces of a Correspondence," a series of timelines about and surrounding the creation of the Gardner Museum.

For the piece, Kosuth, the museum's artist-in-residence, pulled phrases drawn from the documents inside exhibit cases and embroidered them onto protective cloth coverings. Visitors are allowed to lift up the covers to reveal the treasures hidden underneath.

One cloth conceals a copy of Beethoven's death mask, given to Gardner by her friend Clayton Johns, a composer and pianist who taught at the New England Conservatory of Music. Another covers a Viola given to her by musician Charles Loeffler.

From April 23 to Aug. 21 the museum will feature an exhibit entitled, "The Making of a Museum: Isabella Stewart Gardner as Collector, Architect & Designer." This exhibit will feature photos of the museum's construction, as well as the diary of architect Willard T. Sears. It marks the first time



AP Photo/Lisa Poole

Visitors to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston sit in the east cloister overlooking the courtyard. The museum is celebrating its 100th birthday.

these items will be on display to the public.

Also included will be a blueprint of the museum's rear interior courtyard wall, a charcoal John Singer Sargent sketch and a journal Gardner kept during her travels to Japan.

Unfortunately, visitors don't get to appreciate all the museum once had to offer. In March 1990, two thieves posing as police officers brazenly entered the museum and made off with 13 art works, including three Rembrandts, a Vermeer, a Manet and five works by Degas, the costliest theft in U.S. history.

Museum executives say

there are no new leads, but they are focusing on the future rather than dwell on this black mark in its history.

"The centennial is a time for us to tell the story of the museum today. The theft therefore doesn't play a role in it," Deely says. "We're confident that the pictures will return."

In honor of the anniversary, the museum will also continue its yearlong concerts into the summer months for the first time.

The concerts will include classical chamber music, jazz and Latino music played in the museum's courtyard and in the Dutch Room, recalling Gardner's love of music.

"She commissioned work and presented music here," Hawley says. "It was just lively here, beyond belief. It's hard to envision a place that was a center for culture in 1903."

If you go ...

GETTING THERE: The address is: 280 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115.

On public transportation, take the Huntington Avenue No. 39 bus or the Green Line E-train to the Museum of Fine Arts stop. Cross Huntington Avenue (toward the Texaco Gas Station) to Louis Prang Street. Walk down Louis Prang two blocks. The museum is on the left.



AP Photo/Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum handout

This handout photo from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston shows the 1888 painting of Isabella Stewart Gardner by artist John Singer Sargent.



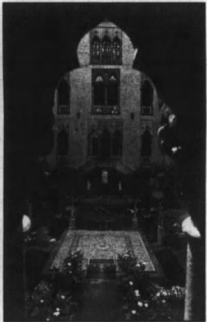
AP Photo/Courtesy of Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

This undated photo from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston shows the 1894 painting of Isabella Stewart Gardner at her home in Venice, Italy, by artist Anders Zorn.

PARKING: Paid parking is available at the Museum of Fine Arts garage or lot on Museum Road, two blocks from the Gardner. Metered street parking is also available.

HOURS: Daily, Tuesday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$11 on weekends; \$7 for senior citizens; \$5 for students with ID. Free for members and children under 18.

INFORMATION: Call (617) 566-1401 or visit www.gardner-museum.org



AP Photo/Lisa Poole

The courtyard at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is viewed from the Raphael Room in Boston. A combination of special exhibits, concerts and lectures will help the museum celebrate its 100th birthday.