

# ART

## Growing Pains

The Barnes Foundation prepares for change.

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By now, it's old news: The Barnes Foundation is moving from Merion to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The highly publicized (and highly controversial) relocation has been making headlines since the 1990s, but little has been said about what will happen to the old building once the move is complete and what will happen to the Barnes' educational mission now that the organization is in a more updated space. How will Barnes on the Parkway update its time-honored methods to fit with the new high-tech digs? *PW* sat down with Blake Bradford, the Barnes' new director of education, to discuss the future of the Barnes Foundation—both in Philly and in the suburbs.

Bradford, 39, is a member of the Gang of Five, the committee charged with studying the idea of creating a Barnes Research Institute, an experimental arm of the foundation that would upgrade the Barnes' offerings through residency programs and public-education programs. The group is "very much in the pondering stage," studying program models at places like the Rosenbach Museum, Bradford says.

The Barnes Research Institute might be a separate entity under the Barnes umbrella, he speculates, adding that this type of programming is in keeping with the philosophy of founder and namesake Albert Barnes.

Including a research institute would revive the institution's core idea that educating the public about the arts will enrich our democratic society. Also, an experimental research institute will help break stereotypes of what the Barnes is, says Bradford. The Barnes is not a museum; it's not just a place to see the Renoirs and Cezannes. It's a living institution whose core mission is the betterment of society through dialogue about the arts.

The creation of this education program will only enhance the Parkway Barnes. The three-year Barnes certificate program, which uses the Barnes method of teaching about art, will continue at the new Parkway location. "Barnes pedagogy is rooted in the Barnes experience. It's a function of the collection—how the work is arranged. There is something inevitable about that," says Bradford.

In the new location, there will be hand-held electronic devices for self-guided tours, he says. But there will be docents also and other trained educational staff. They don't want people staring down at their audio guides and missing the quiet experience of looking at the works themselves. According to Bradford, "Our goal is to meet people at their need and to be considerate about that."

"The hang [installation of the paintings and objects] is going to be the same; the galleries are going to be the same. It won't be the mosh pit, blockbuster experience. We're not going to turn this place into Disneyland," he says of the new Parkway building. "The integrity of what we do is really important."

Adult classes will be expanded to focus on contemporary art, social history, Freudian analysis of art and other topics. "All our teachers bring in supplemental resources to enrich the firsthand experience in the galleries," Bradford says.

In all cases, Bradford says, the focus will be true to Barnes' original idea of "giving people simple tools to deal with the unknown." Art was a means to an end for Barnes who saw it as a tool to educate and uplift the general populace. And that will continue, regardless of where the foundation is located. ■

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