

NEW DIRECTIONS

The Director Writes

An important—perhaps too important—way of judging a museum's success or failure is to look at the number of its visitors. Attendance figures can be boosted in all sorts of ways, for example by the special exhibitions I wrote about last time, but it is just as vital "who" visits the museum as "how many."

I want to write about the different kinds of museum visitor in this and the next issue, and here to consider what may be the least visible user, the university student. As a university museum we have a very special responsibility towards the student, and not, I would say, just Pennsylvania students, but also the whole student community in the Museum's area. The undergraduate and the graduate should be able to find here a demonstration of human achievement which complements the classroom and the library, the concert hall and the art gallery, and which is just as vital as these in broadening the mind and in increasing understanding and experience of the human voyage. No one knows what sparks may be struck by the confrontation between the learning mind and the awesome range and variety of the past, or by the impact of a single object which reaches across ages and cultures to illuminate in a moment a dawning perception of the essential unity of human experience. What we do know is that a university museum has the chance and duty to offer this opportunity, and that the University of Pennsylvania, by reason of the very existence of the University Museum, offers to its students at every level and in every discipline an opportunity unequalled on any other campus of this or any nation to experience, to enjoy, to learn from the past of man.

In the years ahead the University Museum seeks to build a special bond between the Museum and the students at Penn. This is their museum. It is here to serve them and wants their interest and their support. One of the most important activities of the Membership Department, under our new Membership Manager, Gaior Davis, will be to develop strong links with our students, to establish programs specially for them, and to form with them an association which will last long after they have left Penn, and will always remain one of the central benefits of a Pennsylvania education.

MARTIN BIDDLE