What is this special exhibition of drawings, Mr. Schniewind?

It represents the Art Institute's best European and American drawings, and for that matter some which rank with the best of their kind in the United States. We are showing them at this time because during the last year or two we have added richly and substantially to our drawing collection.

Has the museum been collecting them for long?

Yes, on and off since the early 1920's. The first drawing in this exhibition was given in 1923 by Robert Allerton, who, by the way, was one of the first Chicagoans to become actively interested in drawings. He, along with another pioneer collector, Chicago's famous former Mayor Carter H. Harrison, helped to encourage the Art Institute in this direction.

How many drawings are there in the show?

Sixty—the largest number of which come from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Not mainly old masters then?

No, but I wish they were more evenly divided chronologically.

Why aren't they?

Because good drawings by old masters are perhaps even scarcer than their paintings.

How do you account for this?

Drawings are usually a part of an artist's working equipment. Anyone who has ever been in a studio knows only too well how casually artists let their drawings trail around on the floor. They drop paint on them, wipe their brushes with them, and even, in dire necessity, use them as fuel for the studio stove. Often the artist does not intend his drawing to be a finished work of art; rather it is his working study. Once he has used it, he loses interest.

I see. How many early drawings are included?

About twelve or thirteen dating before 1800.

Which do you consider the most important?

Undoubtedly The Letter by Fragonard. I have known this drawing for years and admired it deeply. I consider it one of the finest Fragonard drawings in existence because of the brilliance and dash of its execution and because of its extraordinary state of preservation. There are other brilliant Fragonard drawings in this country but we must always mentally reconstruct their original intensity, because Fragonard's washes have faded badly through exposure to the light.

Then how do you explain the fact that this particular drawing has not faded?

It has a curious history. This we know—that it belonged to the Duc de Montesquiou and his family for nearly a century and was fortunately tucked away in a portfolio where it remained unseen, unframed, and shielded from the light. Incidentally we are exhibiting another Fragonard drawing, Head of Benjamin Franklin, which shows only too well the results of fading. This is doubly sad because it is a superb drawing.

By the way, Mr. Schniewind, how did the Art Institute acquire The Letter?

From Mr. and Mrs. Tiffany Blake. Carrying on with great enthusiasm an interest of her late husband, Mrs. Blake has done everything possible to help build our drawing collection. With Mrs. Potter Palmer she started a recent serious program for the avowed purpose of increasing and develop-
ing the Art Institute's group of drawings. The three of us, Mrs. Blake, Mrs. Palmer, and I, studied the most important museum collections in this country and visited innumerable galleries, always searching for drawings of the highest quality. About half of the drawings on exhibition are the result of our work during the last two years.

When buying, what did you keep in mind?

Primarily quality! But quite frankly we also wanted drawings which would look well on the wall. After all, we purposely avoided the small postage stamp variety, even when rare and fine, because these are lost in a museum exhibition. We could have acquired a tiny Leonardo da Vinci, but we felt it was wiser to invest our money in objects large enough to be successfully hung on a wall and looked at by all, rather than studied with a magnifying glass in the private offices of a specialist. On the whole you know, people see fewer drawings than the other forms of pictorial art such as paintings, water colors, and prints.

*When you say quality was the determining factor in your buying campaign, what do you mean?*

I mean that we did not just buy drawings by important artists but *important* drawings by *important* artists, drawings which show the full stature of the artist's talent. Take the Toulouse-Lautrec, for instance. The clown, drawn with pointed, sarcastic, almost cynical contours, is seen in a circus arena suggested by a few masterly curved lines. Compare this drawing with the dis-

*Van Gogh: Tree in a Meadow*
Fragonard: The Letter
passionate analytical handling of Degas' Gentleman Rider and you see the fundamental difference between the two artists.

Was quality always the sole reason for buying?

Well, there were other considerations. When we had a number of drawings by one artist, we consciously tried to complete the development of his style by picking examples from various periods in his life. But of course when we come right down to it, any purchasing program is artificial. Opportunity is the main factor. Once I went to a New York gallery specifically to look for old masters and left having found a Van Gogh. In fact this particular drawing, Tree in a Meadow, happens to be among my top favorites in the entire collection.

I notice a number of very modern drawings in the exhibition. Were you by any chance trying to discover new talent?

No, even the modern drawings are all by well known artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Léger, Chirico. The purpose of this collection is not to explore the field for new talent. However we do have plans to establish a fund with which we may experiment and try out the work of new and unknown artists. Of course this will probably be the most difficult part of the whole program, immediately involving, as it does, controversial questions.

I also notice, Mr. Schniewind, that you accept Tahitian Woman by Gauguin as a drawing, although from a traditional point of view this might be justifiably questioned, because of its strong use of color.

It is practically impossible to draw a sharp line between a drawing, a watercolor, or even sometimes a painting. The predominance of linear work allows us to classify this Gauguin as a drawing, although it is also a pastel. Incidentally there was quite an exciting little incident connected with this drawing. It came to us securely attached to a heavy piece of cardboard which obviously had been glued there for years. When we carefully removed the cardboard in our workshop we found
a fine large charcoal drawing of another Tahitian woman on the back of the original drawing. The same thing happened with the Géricault Horses. There was such a superb drawing on the back of this that it became difficult to decide which of the two should be exhibited.

I see that the gallery in which the exhibition is being held has been completely redesigned architecturally.

Yes, as a matter of fact, we would have liked to do more rebuilding. It is difficult to arrange a successful modern installation in an old building. The drawings which we are showing come, as you know, from completely different periods. We could not very well show a Fragonard in the same setting as a Picasso. We therefore erected partitions which subdivide the gallery and logically lead the visitor from one period to another. Furthermore, in placing these partitions we gave serious thought to the fact that certain drawings must not be exposed to natural light. I spoke of that

quite frankly, Mr. Schniewind, do you feel that this collection has any serious lacks?

Of course it has. We have only touched the surface of the 18th century, and the previous centuries are almost completely unrepresented.

What are your future plans for the collection?

To watch for every possible opportunity to obtain fine examples, and above all else to uphold our present standards.

Lachaise: Sculptor of Maturity

Imperious, powerful, mature, poised—all these adjectives can be used, but words of more definitive acid are needed for Gaston Lachaise's Standing Woman. This great bronze figure, modeled with lavish curves, suggests more than the accepted feminine clichés of womanhood and fertility. Today, ten years after the sculptor's death, his first life-size female nude is accepted as one of the masterpieces of American sculpture.

You will find the statue on exhibition for the next few months in the Gallery of Art Interpretation, acting as the pivotal motif in an explanatory show called Looking at Sculpture. Recently purchased by the Art Institute, Standing Woman is making her debut, as it were, under happy circumstances. She stands alone against a rich green background which suggests, with poetic license, the out-of-doors, where ideally the heroic figure should be seen. Sky, space, and green shrubbery are her logical setting.

To American eyes, drugged by an aesthetic philosophy of eternal youth, the first view of Lachaise's heavy sculpture may cause surprise—even shock. Though the artist was born in France, he emigrated to the United States when he was twenty-four years old and, because he remained here the rest of his life, he considered himself and is considered an American artist. Be that as it may, he retained to the end and even went so far as to exaggerate the European admiration for amplitude and abundance. Accustomed to stylish calorie-counting figures, Americans have made a religion of youth, and Hollywood, if not a mirror at least a symptom of our taste, enshrines baby-faced undeveloped beauty as a national ideal. For this reason, prejudices must be scratched in order to understand and enjoy Standing Woman.

In 1912 when Lachaise was thirty years old he moved to New York after six years of arduous grubbing for a livelihood in Boston. Immediately he set to work modeling Standing Woman, his first important life-size statue. Burdened with the inevitable difficulties of too little money, inadequate space, and constant insecurity, he poured all of his energies into this first great concept, which was not fully completed until 1927, fifteen years later. His wife, an American woman, was his original model for the statue, but as the years...