

Things Amiss

Posted on Jun 22, Posted by [Kimberly Camp](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

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I don't mean to be critical, because I think everything was done to ensure that the Barnes Foundation in its new location would be perfect in every way. But, there were things that disquieted me that I would be remiss to not mention. The greatest being the absence of Dr. Albert C Barnes' name anywhere in the building, except for its being on a small strip of metal on the ground that lines the reflecting pool inside of the entry alcove of the building. The strip is about 2 inches thick and includes a quote by Dr. Barnes and his name. That's it. There is no bust, no plaque, no image of Dr. Albert C Barnes. I was told that once the changing exhibition is taken down, the de Chirico portrait of Albert Barnes would be moved into the entrance hall. That exhibition will be in place for 10 months. But what would have been wrong with including some permanent memorialization of the founder of this great institution?

There was a glaring omission that makes me cross. It has to do with Dr. Albert Barnes' views about African art and its place in understanding classic aesthetic elements. Dr. Barnes wrote passionately about the importance of African art to the development of European painting. We're not talking about African art and modernism. Barnes said that were it not for the arts of Africa, the art of Europe would have died in the 15th century. He made his views apparent in the original building in Merion.

On either side of the entrance to the building were ceramic re-creations by the Enfield pottery works of African masks from the Barnes' collection. It was the only place in this country where you entered a major collection of European and American art through an African aesthetic lens. Derek Gilman assured me that African masks were being etched into the metal doors, but were not yet ready. But there was more.





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