



Museum of Art Fact Sheet

- European travel had kindled in the Ringlings a passion for art. John Ringling sought out the advice of savvy art dealers such as Julius Böhler and became a regular at the New York and London auctions.
- He purchased masterpieces by Rubens, van Dyck, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Velázquez, El Greco, Tiepolo, Gainsborough and Reynolds and whole rooms, like the Astor Salon and Library from the great New York Astor mansion when it was about to be demolished. He also purchased a collection of Cypriot antiques from the Metropolitan Museum of Art among other fine works.
- Ringling's wealth came primarily from the circus, but also from smart investments in oil, real estate and the railroad.
- Ringling dreamed of building his own museum, in the spirit of Morgan and Frick, to transform Sarasota into a cultural destination.
- In 1925, Ringling engaged architect John H. Phillips to design a palace for his treasures, a museum that would emulate the look and feel of Florence's Uffizi Gallery, echoing its graceful colonnades and opening onto an Italianate garden.
- Construction began in 1927, but was slowed almost immediately by the collapse of Florida's land boom and later, Wall Street's stock market crash. Financial misfortune and Mable's death in 1929 might have ended the dream, but John Ringling instead gained a new resolve to complete the museum, borrowing money as needed, knowing that it would perpetuate the memory of his beloved Mable.
- In October 1931, "The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art" was officially dedicated and opened to the public.
- The Courtyard features cast-molds of original statues including the towering *David* by Michelangelo.
- The two fountains in the Courtyard are the **Fountain of Tortoises**, one of three replicas of the Piazzini Mattei in Rome, and the **Oceanus Fountain**, copied from the 16th century original by Giovanni Bologna in Florence's Boboli Gardens.
- Today the Museum's 21-galleries feature internationally-renowned European, American and Asian art with masterpieces from the Renaissance and Baroque periods.
- John Ringling's collection included a small treasury of books. This part of Ringling's collection has developed into one of the most important art history collections in the southeastern United States, now numbering 70,000 holdings. The Library is an enduring testament to Ringling's passion for collecting.

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