

# LIFE

THE DANGER-FILLED  
WEEK OF DECISION

# CUBA

IN BRILLIANT COLOR  
The Great Council in Rome



U.S. NAVY  
OFF CUBA



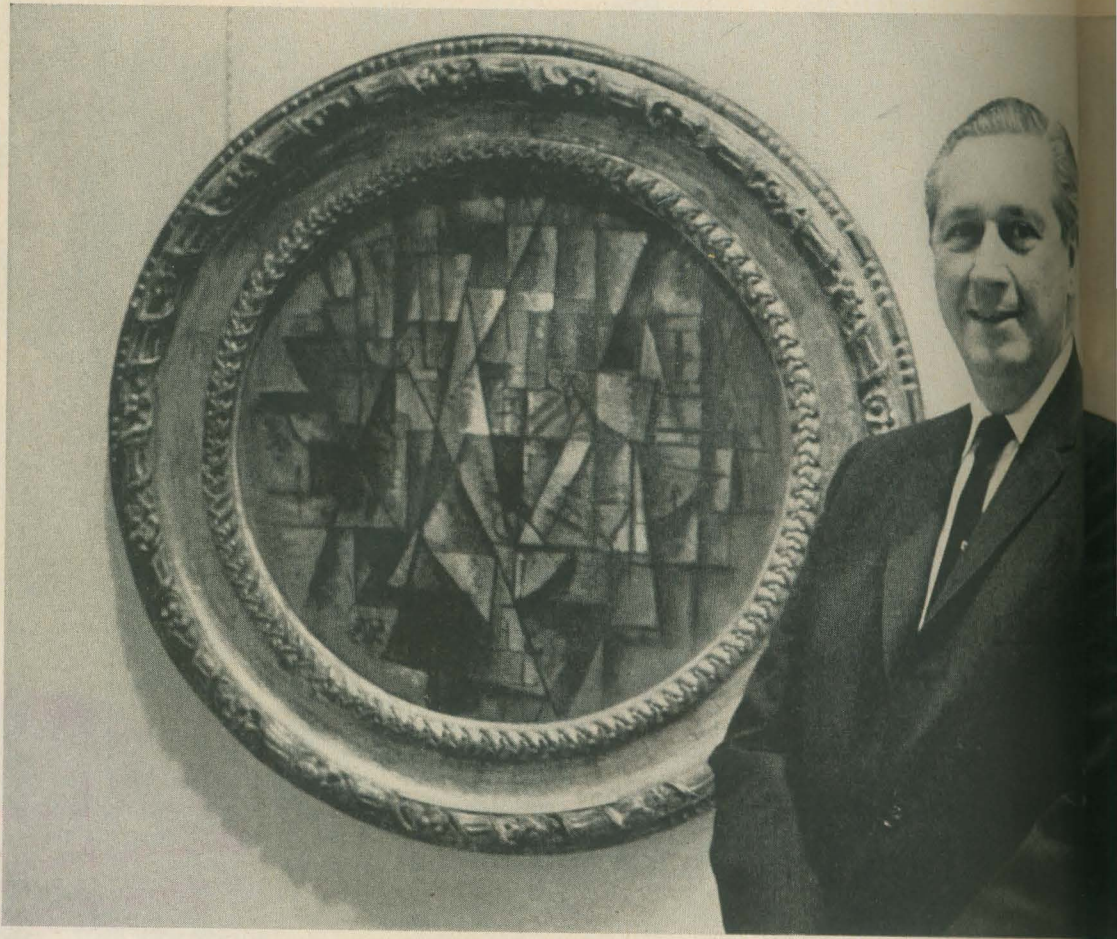
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# Strange Story of Walter Chrysler Jr. Art Scandal

## Colossal Collection

**T**he gossip that has been haunting the art world has now erupted into an international scandal. The scandal involves a gigantic cache of fakes which the celebrated collector, Walter P. Chrysler Jr., recently put on exhibition at Canada's National Gallery in Ottawa. Of the 187 Chrysler paintings displayed, nearly half are flagrant phonies masquerading as works by such masters as Cézanne, Renoir, Van Gogh, Degas. Some of the fakes are deliberate forgeries. Others are bad-to-mediocre works on which someone has put false signatures. All have been repudiated by experts.

Chrysler—who is not connected with the auto company which his father founded—unveiled this phenomenal cargo of fakes in a show entitled "The Controversial Century: 1850-1950" which hung during the summer in his own art museum in Provincetown, Mass. There they were spotted by New York Lawyer Ralph F. Colin, a knowing collector of art. Colin sounded the alarm to museum directors, scholars and dealers. On these pages LIFE compares the fakes with authentic paintings and reveals the assortment of strange elements behind the scandal.

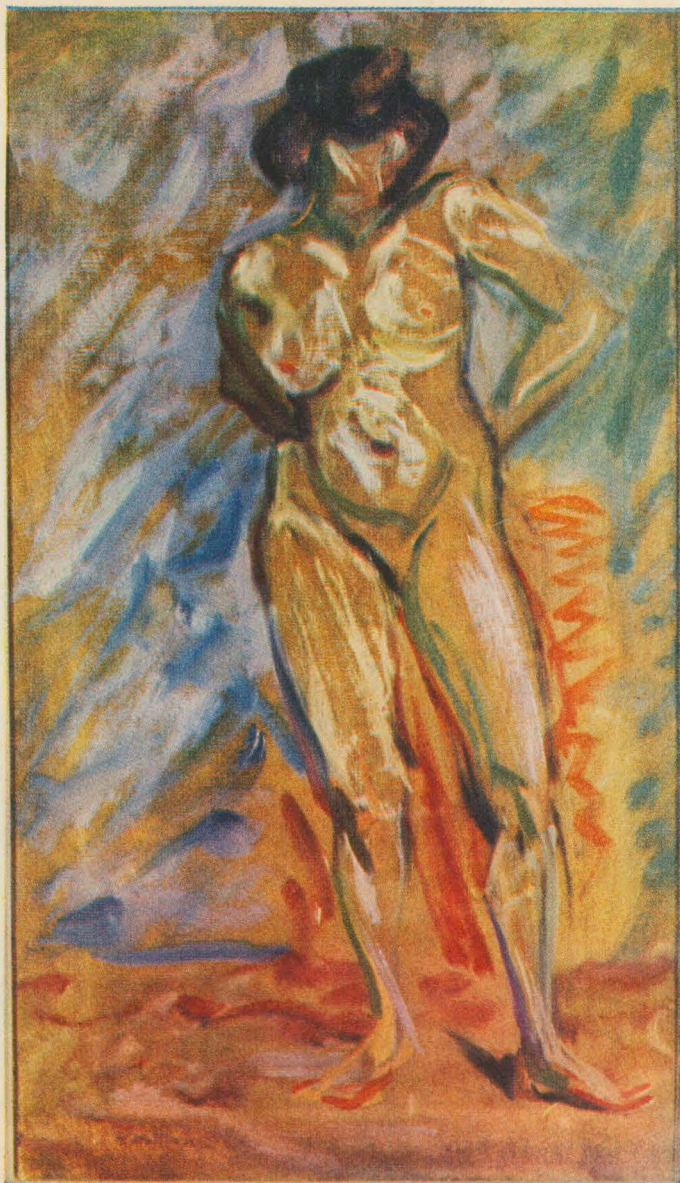
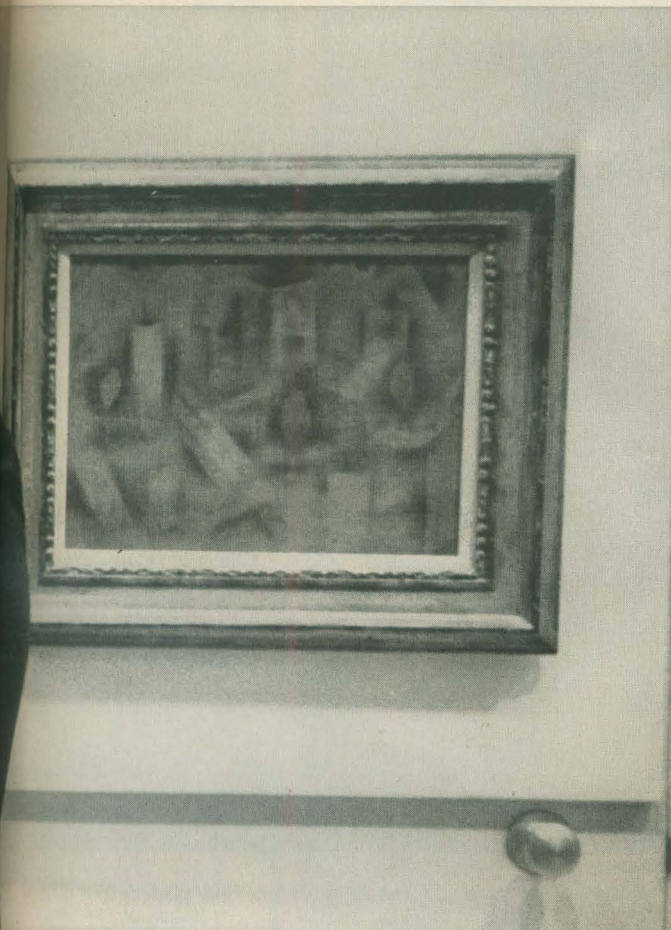


**A**t preview of his show in the National Gallery in Ottawa, Walter Chrysler Jr. (*above*) stands beside two paintings of doubtful authenticity. He claims pictures are by Braque (*left*) and Klee (*right*).

**A**t opening, Chrysler (*below, left*) listens to Gallery Director C. F. Comfort (*with beard*) who stands near real Picasso (*left*). Comfort declared the show was "one which will be remembered many years."



# of Fakes



## FAKE MATISSE

Nude (left), falsely labeled "H. Matisse," was hung in Ottawa show with an authentic Matisse called *La Danse* (below), which Chrysler bought in 1939. The fake, acquired from New York's Hartert Galleries in 1961, was done in slapdash manner to suggest Matisse's Fauve style of the early 1900s. But, says John Rewald, leading authority on impressionist and postimpressionist art, "the haphazard use of a few bright colors which are absolutely unrelated to each other is totally unlike Matisse's true Fauve canvases in which even strong oppositions of color are subtly balanced." In contrast to the fake's chaotic strokes *La Danse* shows Matisse's sure, controlled lines, his emphatic use of contrasting colors.

## REAL MATISSE



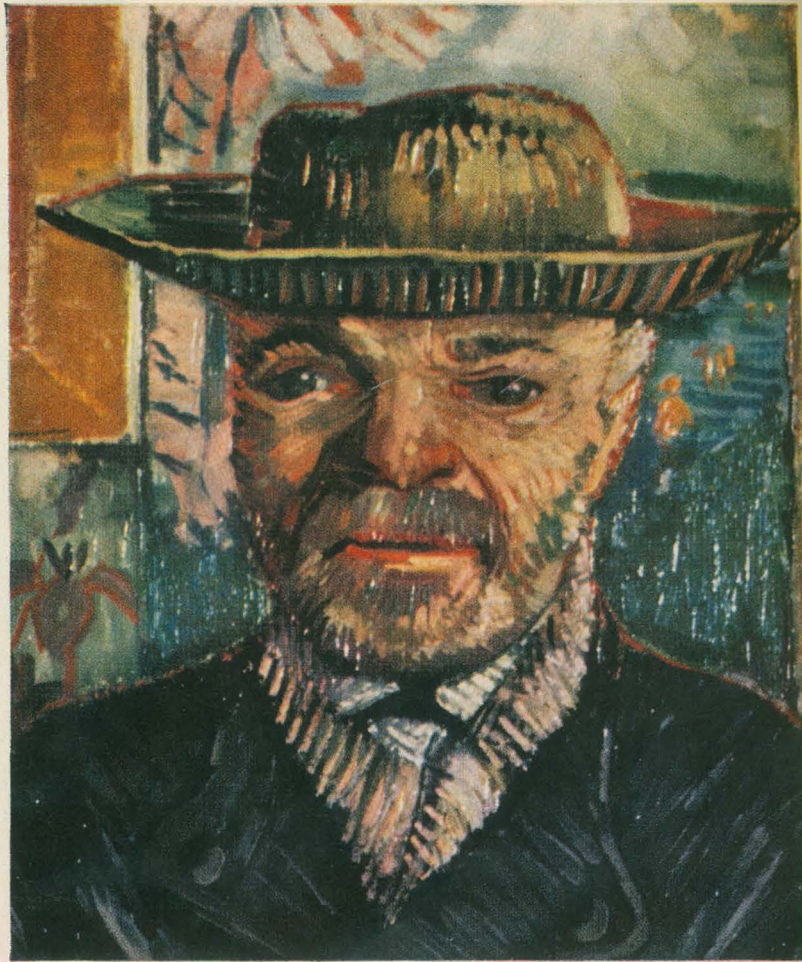
## FAKE VAN GOGH



Comparison of one of Chrysler's fake Van Goghs—four out of five in his Ottawa show are phony—with a well-known original by the Dutch artist reveals remarkable differences in painting techniques. The portrait of an unknown woman (*detail above, left*), which Chrysler got from New York Art Dealer

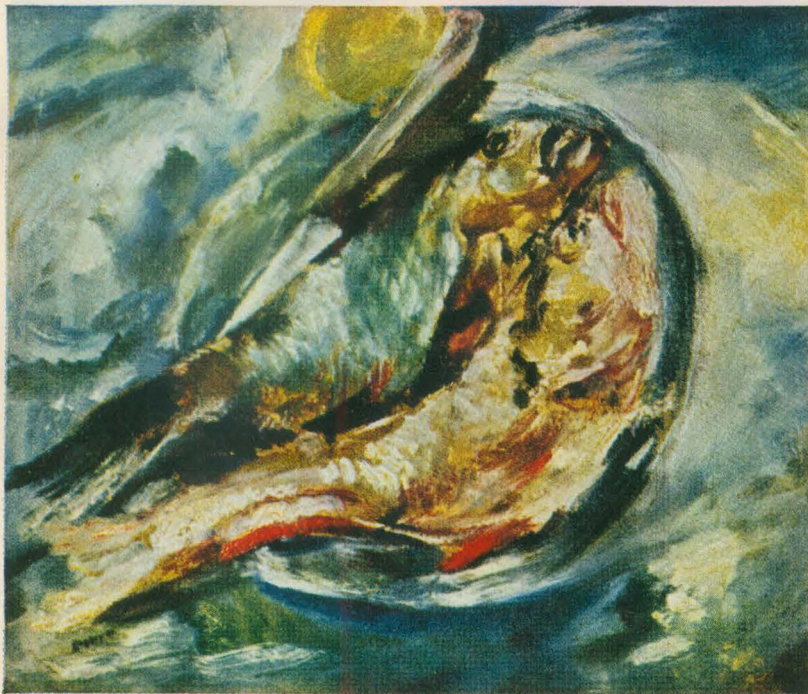
Harry B. Yotnakparian in 1962, makes use of thick, pasty colors, laid on with messy irregularity like icing on a cake. The authentic portrait of Van Gogh's friend, Péré Tanguy (*detail above, right*), owned by the Greek shipping magnate Stavros Niarchos, demonstrates Van Gogh's careful place-

## REAL VAN GOGH



ment of differentiated colors and his sharp delineation of features. According to John Rewald, "The colors, composition and execution of the Chrysler canvas are utterly alien to Van Gogh who drew incisively with his brushes instead of modeling features heavily and academically as has been done here."

## FAKE BONNARD



A still life of fish (*above, left*), which Chrysler says is the work of the late French painter Pierre Bonnard, presents a curious contrast to an authentic Bonnard still life (*detail above, right*) which is in a private New York collection. The loose, broad brush strokes of the Chrysler painting bear

no resemblance to the familiar style of Bonnard who built up his forms with small strokes of subtle color. "It is probable," says Rewald, "that the author of this still life did not even think of Bonnard when he painted it and that the clumsy signature was added by a later hand." How Chrysler came by

## REAL BONNARD



the fake remains a mystery for, in the exhibition catalogue, no dealer, collector, or any other source is listed to indicate who owned it before him. (Experts are amused by the fact that this fake Bonnard shows no similarity whatsoever to another fake Bonnard which Chrysler also put on view in the exhibition.)



Shadowy quarters of Hartert Galleries, now closed because building is to be demolished, display a modest portrait in the window. Hartert's lawyer describes him as a dealer with "no pretensions. He guarantees nothing."

## Dealers Who Sold Suspect Goods

Seventy of the suspect paintings were acquired by Chrysler in the past two years from two dealers, Joly Hartert who sold 56 and H. B. Yotnakparian who sold 14. Both specialize in works which they cagily declare to be "attributed to" rather than painted by noted masters. Where they get their wares is not easily discovered. When Chrysler's catalogue gives more than the name of Hartert or Yotnakparian as sources, it habitually lists collectors the art world has never known and sales of which no records exist. Hartert has had trouble with source material before. In 1958 his son Jack was arrested in Paris for sending his father some paintings done à la Matisse and other famous moderns. Young Hartert said he got them at the Flea Market and had no intention of selling them as originals. Police let him go, confident no connoisseur would give the paintings a second glance.



In Yotnakparian gallery, whose window appears below, the dealer's son sorts pictures for a visitor. Yotnakparian insists that Chrysler "has superb taste when it comes to modern art. . . . I adore his knowledge of art."



CONTINUED

# The Collector's Puzzling Path

by WILLIAM J. GILL

The art world got its first whiff of the scandal last spring when Walter P. Chrysler Jr. offered to lend a half-dozen of his Picassos to the artist's 80th birthday exhibition in New York. When photographs of these paintings were shown to Picasso in France, he immediately picked out two and, with a gesture of disgust, wrote "faux" (false) across both of them.

The committee, embarrassed and somewhat apologetic, asked Chrysler to withdraw the two paintings Picasso had declared to be fakes. Indignant, the collector refused.

The committee would, he said, take all of the pictures or none. The committee took none.

Most members of the small circle of art insiders who knew of this little byplay were inclined to feel a bit sorry for Chrysler. After all, he was stuck with two worthless fakes. Aside from that depressing fact, few attached much significance to the incident. But Attorney Ralph F. Colin was one of the few who did. Colin is the administrative vice president of the Art Dealers Association of America, which was formed to uphold ethical standards in the art market.

Colin's suspicions, however, were still somewhat vague when in

June Chrysler launched his exhibition at his museum in Provincetown. It quickly drew an enthusiastic review from John Canaday, art critic of the *New York Times*, who praised Chrysler for including "atypical" works by well-known artists. In the ensuing weeks thousands of visitors, quite a few of them professional artists, threaded through the museum's galleries, admiring the far-ranging show.

After the unsuspecting art pilgrims and tourists had departed Provincetown, the paintings were packed off to the National Gallery in Ottawa, whose staff was anything but unsuspecting. In August, at the instigation of the Art Dealers Association, a Montreal museum official had warned the National Gallery's director, Charles Comfort, of the fakes in the collection. Members of the Ottawa staff advised against hanging the dubious paintings. But with dogged cheer and official fanfare, Comfort unveiled the show. After turning up to take a bow, Chrysler retired to the peace of Provincetown.

Elsewhere in the art world things were far from peaceful. The Art Dealers Association had been busily alerting U.S. Customs officials, the Internal Revenue Service, fellow dealers and art experts. Colin also broke the news to Critic Canaday that the "atypical" works which had charmed him were phony. After a hurry-up visit to Ottawa, Canaday drastically revised his first judgment and the scandal hit the front pages.

The debasement of the Chrysler collection is particularly incongruous when viewed against the background of a life devoted to the arts. Although he has dabbled in many things in his 53 years, Walter Percy Chrysler Jr. has given most of his energies to the field he chose while still a youth. A prolific but not always selective collector, he is reputed to own more than four thousand paintings and pieces of sculpture, many of them stacked away in New York warehouses.

Chrysler's pursuits were always far removed from those of his father, a big, burly man out of Wamego, Kan., who was too preoccupied with building his auto empire to bother with art. But he suffered his wife's inclination to hang expensive paintings around the walls of the mansion on their Long Island estate and made no objec-

tion when she sent their two sons and two daughters off on tours of the art museums and galleries.

At 14, Walter was sent to a Connecticut prep school which he left a year later following a dispute with a master who objected to his hanging in his room a small Renoir showing a nude in a landscape. At Dartmouth a few years later he founded an arts magazine. In his freshman year, which by his own choice was to be his next to last at college, he launched the first of several short-lived business ventures, a publishing house devoted to turning out expensively illustrated editions of such classics as Dante's *Inferno*. (It later switched to whodunits, and then quietly expired.)

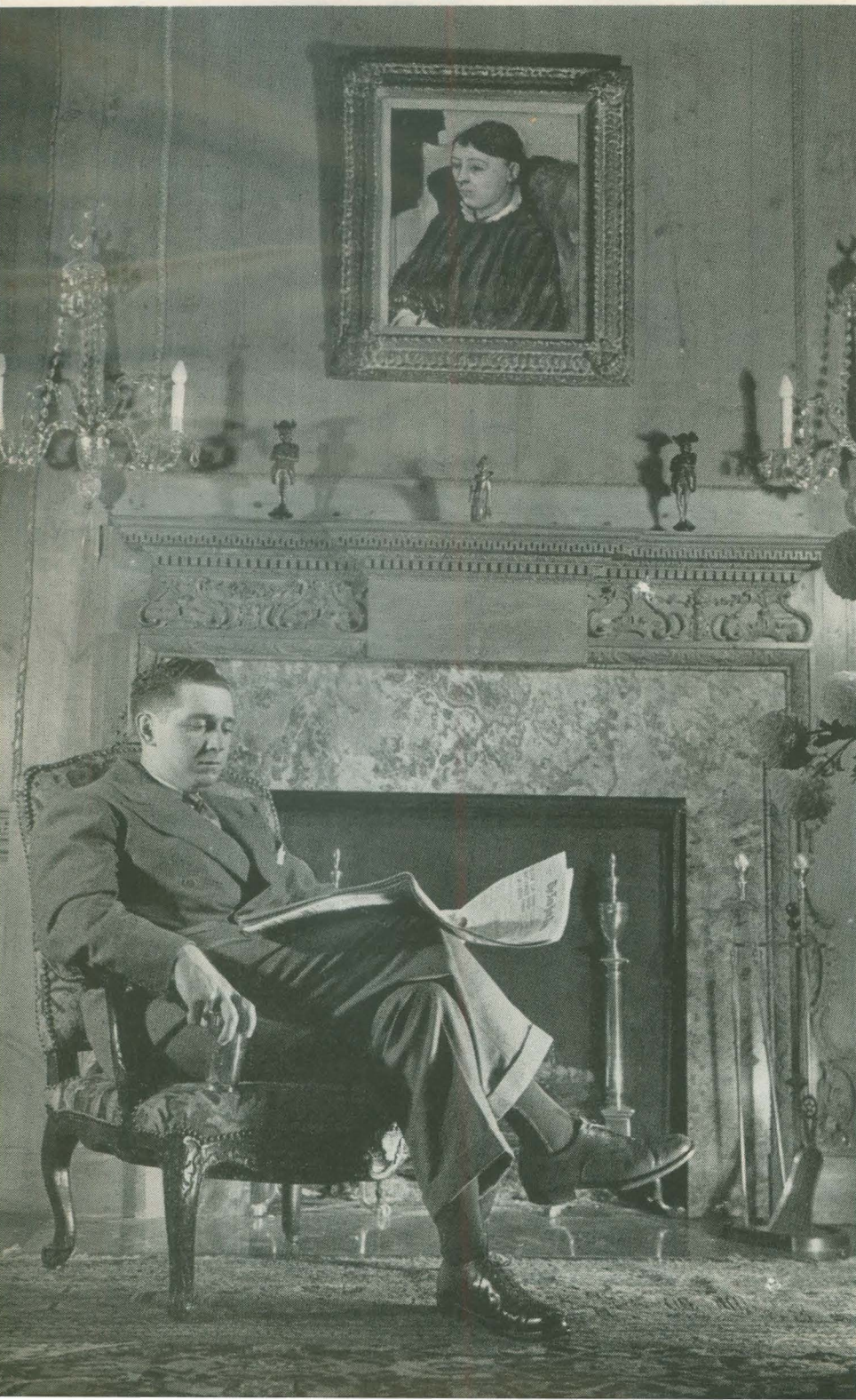
Walter took little interest in his father's work, candidly admitting that he was better fitted for the arts "than, say, the automobile business." His father tried to lure him into industry by making him president of the Chrysler Corporation's new air-conditioning subsidiary, but his interest did not last long.

"... There is a quirk in his nature that rebels from the accepted," observed Gove Hambidge in a *New York Herald Tribune* story 30 years ago; "and there is a peculiar intensity and force and a headstrong stubbornness. . . . Young Chrysler willfully turns his back on the broad road and wanders into a bypath of his own . . . clean off the main highroad."

Eventually he became president of New York's Chrysler Building, where he still maintains an office though he lost his corporate title in 1953 when the building was sold. Meanwhile, through the 1930s and '40s, Chrysler had his other interests. Soon after Dartmouth he popped up on Broadway as backer of a number of shows, many of them turkeys. After his father died in 1940, leaving him a quarter-share of an \$8,854,000 estate, he purchased an old Virginia plantation and began building a stable of race horses.

The war interrupted his bucolic plans, but only briefly. He entered the Navy as a lieutenant in 1942 and was based at the naval air station at Key West. In December 1944 he quietly resigned his commission. A few months later he married his second (and present) wife, a wartime gym teacher at Virginia's College of William and

At ease by the fireplace in his New York home in 1940, Chrysler sat in company of Cézanne's *Portrait of Mme. Cézanne*. Three years ago he auctioned the picture in London for \$112,000.



## ART CONTINUED

Mary, and settled down on his Virginia estate.

While assuming the role of a country squire, keeping his hand in as an angel of Broadway plays, producing at least one movie (*The Joe Louis Story*) and serving as a director of the Madison Square Garden Corporation, Chrysler never lost his devotion to art. He built up a fine collection of 16th and 17th Century paintings as well as works by impressionists and more modern masters. He would spend as much as five or six hours a day with a dealer, relying completely on his own eye and taste. "He was most independent," says one New York dealer. "It was horribly difficult to tell him anything." Though he often exploited "the soft spots in the market"—salon paintings of the 19th Century or huge canvases which most buyers shun—he was not just looking for bargains. But if he wanted a picture, "he would try to make it a good buy, like everybody. He was a pretty good bargainer." Going the rounds of studios in Provincetown, Chrysler often bought paintings in quantity, offering a cut-rate price for the lot. In 1959, to help finance his newly founded museum in Provincetown, he put 29 of his finest works of art on the block in London and collected \$613,256.

Curiously, for a person of his standing, Chrysler has earned a reputation as a collector from whom it is extremely difficult to collect. From 1955 to 1961 he was a defendant in at least 40 lawsuits ranging in amounts from \$40.50

to \$20,000. But Chrysler is conscientious about money when it comes to his Provincetown museum. He is often found seated beside the front desk tending to admission tickets and catalogue sales.

On Cape Cod, Chrysler lives quite simply, driving a black Plymouth station wagon and staying in a rented bungalow in nearby North Truro. His mode of living frankly puzzles his fellow townsmen. "He acts like a millionaire," says one oldtimer, "but he sure doesn't live like one."

**S**till unanswered is the question that gnaws the innards of art lovers everywhere: how could a collector of Chrysler's international reputation permit such a wholesale pollution of his collection?

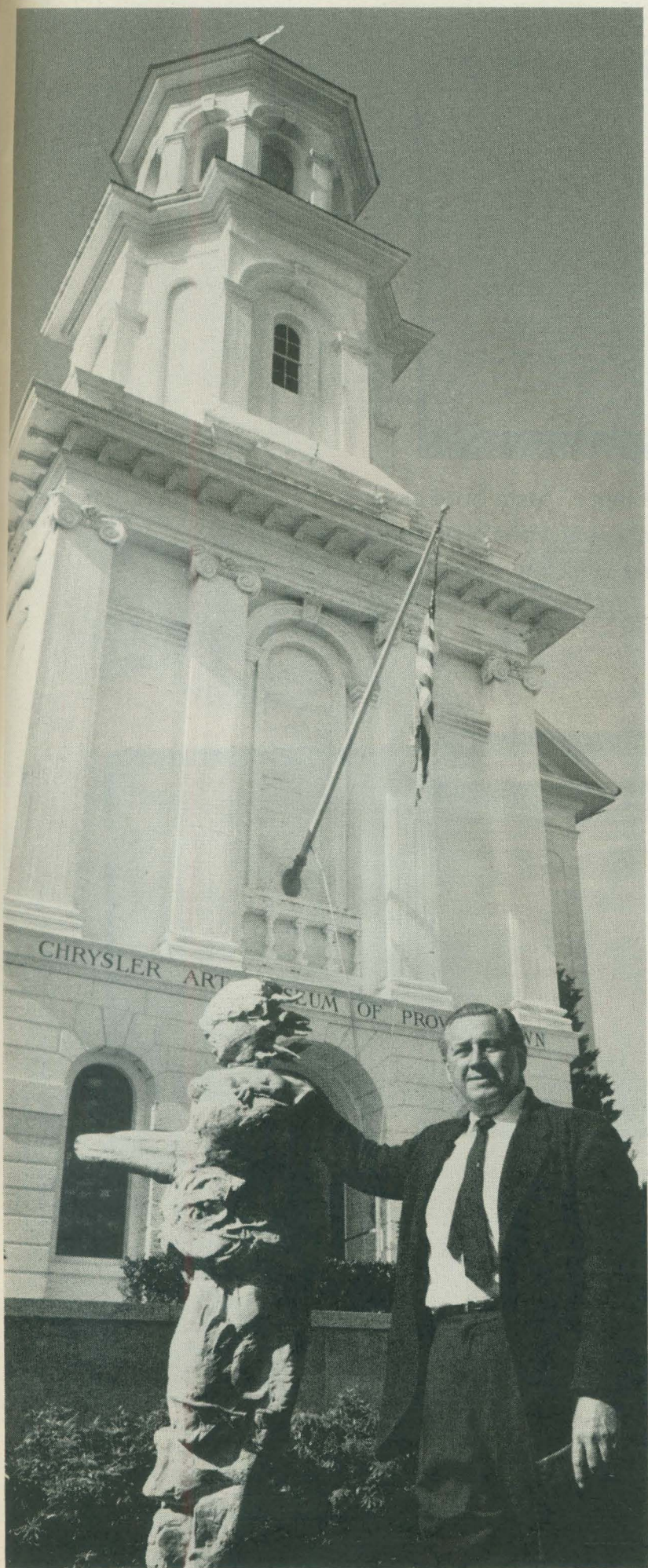
Only Chrysler can give the full answer. Dealer Harry Yotnakparian declares, "Whatever he done, he didn't do on purpose." But Ralph Colin has his own theory. "No collector of Walter Chrysler's long experience could possibly be caught unawares with so many fakes from such unreliable sources," Colin states. "Any collector can make a few mistakes. But to make that many mistakes innocently in the brief period he has been buying from these dealers is unthinkable."

Amid the hullabaloo Chrysler blandly defends his art: "I'm satisfied with all the pictures. I don't make any claim for their being the greatest examples of each artist, but we can't look at masterpieces all the time. I think that would be rather dull."



In a huddle over the Chrysler case, directors of the Art Dealers Association of America are shown photographs of the fakes by association president, Alexandre Rosenberg (seated, third from left), and Ralph F. Colin (next to Rosenberg). The organization, formed to protect the art market from fakes and misrepresentation, alerted U.S. Customs officials who may seize Chrysler paintings at the Canadian border on grounds that they are not what they purport to be.

# Churchly Headquarters for Chrysler's Art



**A** proud proprietor, Walter P. Chrysler Jr. stands in front of the century-old Provincetown Methodist church which he bought for \$40,000 in 1958 and converted into the Chrysler Art Museum. Beside him is a fountain figure by Italian Sculptor Roberto Ranieri—a bizarre work but an authentic one.