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A Museum on the Verge: A Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1882-2000

Jeffrey Abt

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The Detroit Institute of Arts is one of America's largest and oldest municipal art museums. However, even as the museum grew into a distinguished collection, there were threats of closure. The DIA has walked a financial tightrope since it opened just over a century ago, and was nearly closed by government funding cuts in the 1970s and 1990s. Now Jeffrey Abt tells how the DIA has had to struggle to maintain its fine art collection with barely enough income to remain open.

A Museum on the Verge goes behind the scenes at the DIA to disclose the political, economic, and social forces that shaped the museum from its founding to the present day. Abt's account is supplemented by a wealth of material, including legal documents and numerical data taken at five-year intervals from the 1880s through 2000 that is presented in both tables and graphs. The data, which comprehensively survey vital statistics such as attendance, collections growth, and finances, provide a rich resource for comparative research on other museums.

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