COLLECTING THE "OTHER AMERICAS"

Ancient Americas Collections in American Art Museums

MAYER CENTER SYMPOSIUM XXII | READINGS IN LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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Ancient Americas Collections in American Art Museums

Ellen Hoobler and Victoria Isabel Lyall

MAYER CENTER FOR ANCIENT AND LATIN AMERICAN ART
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The Denver Art Museum is located on the homeland of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute people, along with many people from other Indigenous nations that call this place home. Learn more about our commitments to better represent, elevate, and support Indigenous cultures and people, past and present, on our website.

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Director's Foreword

Christoph Heinrich
Frederick and Jan Mayer Director
Denver Art Museum

Generally, museums offer a public platform for the presentation and exploration of cultural narratives, memories, and aesthetics. Increasingly, as these institutions grapple with their complicated colonial pasts, curators have begun investigating their collections' origins to better understand how they were formed, who contributed to their formation, and how the objects were used to represent cultures, countries, and identities. "Pre-Columbian" art once described the material culture produced in the Americas prior to the arrival of Europeans. Now, museums across the US typically use art "of the Americas" or "of the ancient Americas" to describe these objects produced south of the US-Mexico border. The shift in terminology reflects the continuing effort to confront the changing meanings and import of what collector Nelson Rockefeller once described as the "other Americas."[1]

This volume captures the history of collecting and the display of ancient American works in art museums across the United States. Beginning in the early to mid-twentieth century, the frame of the art museum shifted the interest of these objects from their ethnographic and anthropological context to their status as works of art. Now, such art is frequently displayed in conjunction with modern and contemporary Latin American art—an acknowledgment of the Latine heritage woven into the fabric of many of the cities in which the museums are located—and a testament to the enduring relevance of ancient cultures in contemporary life.

This history lays bare the sometimes questionable means by which collectors and museums built their collections of ancient American art. In September 2022, the Denver Art Museum created a new Department of Provenance Research to expand its commitment to ethical collecting practices. Provenance research has always been an integral part of the museum's curatorial purview, and we are one of only a few US museums with a department dedicated to guiding us in this ongoing work. During 2023, the department and curatorial staff increased accessibility of the museum's collections by prioritizing and posting more artwork and provenance histories online. The museum's provenance research web page was created to provide a forum to regularly educate and update the community on the progress of our work and document our past and current repatriations to countries of origin. The following papers are from the twenty-first symposium of the Frederick and Jan Mayer Center for Ancient and Latin American Art. The Mayers played a crucial role as benefactors to and supporters of the ancient Americas collection. Their generosity went beyond donating objects and included endowing the department and its activities to ensure the

continued vibrancy of the field. Established in 2001, the center's purpose is to increase awareness and promote scholarship about Latin America, including through exhibitions, conservation, fellowships, and a rigorous schedule of symposia.

I applaud Victoria Isabel Lyall, Frederick and Jan Mayer Curator for Arts of the Ancient Americas, and Ellen Hoobler, William B. Ziff, Jr., Curator of Art of the Americas at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, for organizing the 2023 symposium and for their dedication to advancing knowledge in this field. I also recognize Jan Mayer, who, with her late husband, longtime museum trustee Frederick Mayer, has provided unwavering support to the department since 1968. On behalf of the staff at the museum, I offer my deepest gratitude.

NOTES

1. In a letter dated September 29, 1944, to René d'Harnoncourt, who was the vice president in charge of foreign activities at the Museum of Modern Art, Nelson A. Rockefeller referred to Latin America as the "other Americas." The letter is part of a longer correspondence that makes clear the intended reason for d'Harnoncourt's travels was to assess and report back the progress of communism in the "other Americas." Record group: III 4 L, Box 135, Folder 1325, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

The Ancient Americas, Curated: Developing Institutional Collections

Ellen Hoobler
Victoria Isabel Lyall

The field of the ancient Americas, both as a discipline of art-historical study and as a collecting department within art museums in the United States, is comparatively young. Initially grouped with the social sciences, the study of ancient American aesthetics and culture emerged gradually. While it is beyond the scope of this introduction to trace the full history of the acquisition and display of these collections within US art museums, this volume is the first to bring together intertwined and local histories. Through the lens of twelve art museums, this volume offers a broad introduction to some of the key events, exhibitions, historical context, and, particularly, the people from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day that shaped this history. While recent initiatives and volumes have brought new focus on individual collectors of ancient American works, the story of their acquisition and public display within art museums is almost completely untold.[1] There is not even a comprehensive list, as exists in other fields, of all the institutions that hold works in this area.[2]

The ancient Americas collections discussed here represent the material output of communities living *south* of the US-Mexico border, made prior to the arrival of Europeans. Within the United States, this material has always been temporally and geographically defined, rooted in the past, and interpreted through a European lens. Previously referred to as "primitive," "Indian," "pre-Columbian," "prehispanic," or "New World," the preferred term today for this material is "ancient American."[3] This is admittedly imprecise, as the term "ancient" for the European past refers to a period ending about 400 CE, whereas the "ancient Americas" encompasses works made prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, over a millennium later.

The following essays describe how ancient American art has been collected, exhibited, and, more broadly, how American *art* museums constructed, and shaped, public perception of its meaning from the nineteenth century to the present.[4] Even though the formation and functions of art museums have changed over time, here we think of art museums as having "a basic skeleton of three principal functions: collection, research, and public programs."[5] In very general terms, museum personnel was

responsible for prioritizing the works' aesthetic qualities over historical importance and other factors, for making those works available to scholars (and, occasionally, to the general public) for study and artistic inspiration, and for organizing exhibitions, publications, and lectures aimed at general and scholarly audiences. Like libraries and archives, museums serve as memory institutions, sites where cultural and historical memories are preserved through a distinct interpretive lens. Yet this framing has shifted many times over the late nineteenth century through the twenty-first. Recently, scholars have reevaluated the processes of narration and the resignification of objects in museum exhibitions.[6] As interdisciplinary scholar James Clifford has remarked, museums are "contact zones . . . as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull."[7]

That push and pull extends even to the terms used to refer to this art. In this volume, authors use different terms to describe museum collections, a reflection of this material's marginalized status within the field of greater art history. One of the more popular terms has been "primitive art." The term has no inherent meaning, rather as anthropologist Shelly Errington makes clear, the word "primitive" acts as a foil for the progressive nation-states of Western society. Anything, or anyone, falling outside the narrative of progress is interpreted as lesser than: underdeveloped, unsophisticated, unambitious.[8] The literary theorist Marianna Torgovnick has noted that the term "primitive" implies an acceptance of "the West as norm and . . . the rest as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate, and subordinatable."[9] Initially, art historians applied the term to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century European art, before the height of the Renaissance; however, by the late nineteenth century, it would refer exclusively to non-Western peoples, societies, and their aesthetic creations. Within the art market, the term became nearly codified as referring to people and works from Africa, Oceania, and the ancient Americas, sometimes including Native American peoples of the US but rarely including Asia. In other words, the term became a shorthand for subjects, peoples, and territories colonized by European imperial powers.

The term "primitive" and its associations proved remarkably durable, despite the fact that the cultures and communities referred to rarely shared any geographic, cultural, or linguistic connections. Academic institutions have long since disregarded the fictive unifying principles of primitive art; however, the concept has persisted in the museum organizational structure because of the existence of departments stewarding collections representing the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Ancient Americas (AOAA) were often called Primitive Art departments.[10] A trope that unites the collections of these departments, parodied by Errington in her book, is that of the "discovery narrative," a tale that recounts how people of note (she cites the case of the artist Pablo Picasso) "discover" primitive art, "rescue" it from obscurity, and "elevate" it so it can be celebrated within the realm of "fine art."[11] Art historian Susan Vogel and artist Fred Wilson similarly have addressed and poked fun at the supposed transformation of a primitive art object from artifact to art.[12]

While African and Oceanic (and at times Native American) art have been called primitive, ancient American art has held a unique place within this rubric. At different times, it has been seen as primitive but also as the important production of hemispheric neighbors, a uniquely American inspiration for industrial design, and, in more recent years, an ancestral source of inspiration and encouragement. Every museum's collection reflects these tensions and many other considerations, including its financial resources, geographic location, the historical moment(s) when it was collecting, personnel working at a given time, and mission. The ten chapters in this volume show how historical and cultural factors

have affected ancient American art's inclusion and framing within art museums and, ultimately, within the field of art history. Not previously synthetically described or analyzed, these four overarching factors include: the rise of modernism, the use of ancient American motifs and techniques for industrial design inspiration, *Indigenismo* in Latin America and the United States, and Pan-Americanist policies.

The Role of Modernism in the Acceptance of Ancient American Art

By the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth centuries, there was a broader understanding of what constituted fine art. The rise of photography meant that mimetic realism no longer had to be the goal of art. Accordingly, many artists began looking elsewhere for inspiration and artistic goals. Many European modernists, notably Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and his circle, sought inspiration in African art, but others also looked to ancient American models. Art historian and archaeologist Barbara Braun points to a range of international artists who were inspired by these works for reasons of heritage, intellectual curiosity, or aesthetic preference.[13]

The leap from artifact to *objet d'art* resulted from fundamental shifts in signification that occurred during the nineteenth century when ancient American collections ceased to be the exclusive province of natural history museums. A 1912 exhibition of Maya works at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has long been assumed to be the first presentation of these works *as art* in an American art museum.[14] Although it included approximately one hundred items from Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, the notice of the exhibition was only one-and-a-half pages long and was situated between longer articles that enthused over the acquisition of a single Chinese artwork.[15] The notice was written by the exhibition's curator, Alfred Marston Tozzer, a Harvard anthropologist. Tozzer closed the notice by explaining that the exhibition would "show visitors ignorant of the field of American archaeology that there was something in this country in pre-Columbian times worthy of the name of art."[16] As anthropology museums became popular with modern artists, the works they contained became sources of artistic inspiration. For example, American artist Max Weber (1881–1961) composed an ode to a Chac Mool figure at the American Museum of Natural History.[17] British critic Roger Fry, who was a champion of European modernism, was also cited by Braun and others as key to changing attitudes about ancient American works. Fry greatly influenced artist Henry Moore (1898–1986) to embrace ancient American forms, particularly through his essay "American Archaeology" that first appeared in November 1918. Here, Fry observed that "it is only in this century that, after considering them from every other point of view, we have begun to look at [ancient American objects] seriously as works of art."[18] In the 1920s, as Mexican Muralism, fed by ancient American sources, gained popularity, Fry's was one of the few available essays by an art critic that was available to English-speaking readers.

These readers could also become collectors. Though there was no cultural affinity or connection between works from Africa, Oceania, and the ancient Americas, they were often shown together, and dealers of African art, including many mentioned in this volume—Charles Ratton, Pierre Matisse, the Brummer Galleries—sold works from the ancient Americas as well. These merchants also often sold modern art and catered to those who were interested in it. Indeed, it was these dealers, and later curators, who promoted ancient American art within modernist circles. Errington locates the emergence and institutionalization of "authentic Primitive" art in the years between 1935 and 1984.[19] At the beginning of this period, in 1935, curator James Johnson Sweeney organized the exhibition *African Negro Art* at the Museum of

Modern Art (MoMA). He wrote of the vitality of the "plastic forms" of African art, a term that would be applied over and over again to ancient American works as well.[20] Those works that hewed closest to the ideal of the primitive were often those with great formal simplicity. The more stripped down and abstracted, the better. Those who created such works could also be imagined to have extremely simple, harmonious lives, to have lived in a former paradise as "noble savages."[21] Sweeney would go on to an illustrious career, with his final role as a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where he curated art of the Ancient Americas (see Koontz, this volume.) Other modernist curators were also some of ancient American art's strongest champions. As Elizabeth Pope discusses in her essay on the Art Institute of Chicago, curator Katherine Kuh moved from organizing shows on José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) to collecting the ancient art that had inspired him and other Latin American artists.

By the 1930s, some US museums were codifying the concept of primitivism with the creation of curatorial departments that oversaw these culturally unaffiliated regions of Africa, Oceania, Ancient Americas (and sometimes including the addition of Native American art). The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection began as part of the Museum of Primitive Art (see Pillsbury, this volume), and both the Cleveland and Baltimore Museums of Art had departments known as "Primitive art" (see Bergh and Hoobler, this volume). And while they did not use the term "primitive" in their department names, the Brooklyn Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as many other US museums, used similar structures (see Rosoff and Pope, this volume).

Despite the increasing interest in ancient American art among the promoters of modernism, it never exactly epitomized what most considered primitive art. William Rubin, former director of MoMA and curator of celebrated and reviled exhibitions on this topic, felt that pre-Columbian art was more properly called "courtly" or "theocratic" art along the lines of ancient Egyptian and Persian art.[22] According to Rubin, ancient American works' odd position within primitivism was due to their naturalism, workmanship, and fine finish, particularly the Maya carved stone stelae, which exceeded what modern artists sought in primitive art.[23] That is, although west Mexican ceramic figurines were embraced by artists in Mexico and the US, other art traditions in the Indigenous Americas, like Maya sculpture, were "too polished" for collectors of primitive art. Despite its uneasy status as primitive art—or maybe precisely because of it—many institutions, including the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and, surprisingly, the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, actively sought Maya stelae for their collections in the mid-twentieth century with an aim to present them precisely as exquisite examples of artistic and aesthetic achievement (see Bergh, Koontz, and Pillsbury, this volume).

Ancient Indigenous Motifs as Source for American Industrial Design

In fact, this aesthetic achievement was key to the collecting and acceptance of works from the Indigenous Americas from the late nineteenth to about the mid-twentieth centuries. The term "ancient American art" includes work from a huge geographic region, across thousands of years, and from numerous cultures. Some works, like west Mexican figures, were ceramics that did not seek to convey mimetic realism and whose details, to the modern eye, appear imprecise and broadly painted. However, many other art traditions, such as Colombian and Panamanian gold, Andean textiles, and Mixtec and Nasca ceramics, exemplify the highest virtuosity in their craftsmanship. Some of the earliest collections of ancient American art chronicled in this volume, including at The Metropolitan Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Baltimore Museum of Art, were amassed

with the idea that they would serve as sources of inspiration for US fashion, textile, and industrial design (see Pillsbury, Rosoff, and Hoobler, this volume).[24] Herbert Spinden, the curator at the Brooklyn Museum, observed that national industrial design should "take its inspiration from the materials, designs, and craftsmanship of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and with which Americans could identify and be proud."[25] As Lauren Whitley has written, the conclusion of the First World War stimulated the interest in an American design identity independent from Europe, prompting scholars such as Morris de Camp Crawford to research museum collections and create the textile industry's "Designed in America" campaign in conjunction with The Met, the American Museum of Natural History, and *Women's Wear* publications. The campaign proved a training ground for young designers who took inspiration from ancient Americas textiles, among other cultural designs, housed at these institutions.[26]

Indigenismo in Latin America

The Indigenous peoples of the Americas became an inspiration to the newly minted republics across Latin America. As boundaries were redrawn and independent economies developed, the nascent formation of national identity and consciousness took place simultaneously. How to represent the nation on the world stage? How to reconcile the many communities living therein: Indigenous (Native ethnic groups), mestizos (mixed-race peoples), and *criollos* (mostly white descendants of Spanish colonists)? As the nineteenth century progressed, criollos across Latin America began to see the "Indian" as the "bedrock of a nation."[27] Art historian Natalia Majluf's critical examination of Francisco Laso's *oeuvre*, for example, demonstrates how Indigenous imagery became integral to the forging of a national identity rooted in the Indigenous communities of Peru, heirs to the ancient peoples of that land.[28] Eventually, this focus on Indigenous peoples of Latin America evolved into *indigenismo*, an ideology that focused on "describing, explaining, and designing public policies for [Native] ethnic groups."[29] Indigenismo took many forms across the region, even within a single country.[30] Sociopolitically, policies ranged from beneficial reforms promoting greater participation of Indigenous members to full-scale assimilation into a modernized society. Culturally, indigenismo valorized Indigenous artisans and their materials, techniques, and style. By celebrating and aestheticizing Indigenous-made objects and textiles, Latin American intellectuals and artists characterized these works as the singular legacy of the intellectual and technological achievements of the prehispanic peoples, giving visibility to oft-ignored communities.[31]

A single definition of indigenismo cannot be offered because its expression within sociopolitical and cultural realms diverged greatly. [32] Over the course of the next eight decades, this nuanced, and often fraught, ideology would undergo various evolutions, especially between 1920 and 1930 and again in the 1950s.[33] Latin American artists would play a critical role in disseminating the perceived importance of ancient American culture within their own countries and transnationally, eventually making an impact on their northerly neighbor, the United States. The indigenismo that would be exported, however, would bring with it the many inherent contradictions and paradoxes that developed alongside it.

Following the Mexican Revolution, artists like Orozco, Diego Rivera (1886–1957), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) promoted Indigenous visual imagery from the ancient Americas as an integral part of Mexico's national identity. Siqueiros memorialized this idea in his 1923 manifesto, asserting, "The art of the Mexican people is the most important and vital spiritual manifestation in the world today, and its Indian traditions lie at its very heart."[34]

Similarly, Colombia's Luis Alberto Acuña (1904–1994), who published the first monograph of Colombia's "Indian" art, promoted a Native art history rooted in Colombia's pre-Columbian past.[35] Peru's José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930), founder and editor of the periodical *Amauta*, and his collaborator, artist José Sabogal (1880–1956), promoted Indigenous heritage as that which distinguished Latin America from Europe. When asked about his preference for Indigenous inspiration, Sabogal responded, "Why yes we are cultural *indigenistas* because we look for an integral identity with our soil, its humanity and our time."[36] *Amauta*, a Quechua word that translates to *maestro* or counselor, exemplifies Mariátegui's privileging of the Indigenous perspective as he simultaneously forged a pan-American space for the avant-garde.[37] Artists, poets, and intellectuals of the 1920s and '30s mined the iconography and visual imagery of pre-Columbian cultures to depict the glories of their regional, ancient pasts and at the same time to signal their new nations' unique modernity.

Despite its brief life (1926–30), Mariátegui's journal presaged an interest in forging transnational connections.[38] Politically, this was realized during the first Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán. Its principal objectives were "to comprehensively improve the life of the indigenous groups of America" and to "uphold and defend their cultural particularities."[39] At the conference, Mexico founded the Instituto Indigenista Inter-Americano (IIIA) and named Moisés Sáenz its inaugural director. Sáenz promoted cultural plurality and integration and advocated those representatives from Indigenous communities be present at the conference; however, after Sáenz's sudden death, anthropologist Manuel Gamio replaced him. Gamio instituted an "apolitical and scientific" approach to indigenismo: in other words, a modern ethnography that excluded Indigenous voices from the conversation.[40] Despite the desire to preserve and promote Indigenous culture as part of a modern, national dialogue, the actual material conditions of contemporary Indigenous communities did not see similar support and modernization.[41] The IIIA would go on to found its own periodical, *América Indígena*, whose imagery and graphics would be foundational in creating an "an inter-American indigenist imaginary."[42] As anthropologist Deborah Dorotinsky has argued, the nature of the editorial design, logo, and the choice of illustrative woodprints created a certain uniformity in the depiction of Indigenous peoples across the Americas, counteracting the supposed objective of the larger indigenismo movements in both the political and cultural sphere.[43] This would have ramifications in continental policies, and as other scholars have noted, this would influence the display and presentation of ancient American- and Indigenous-made art within the museum space.[44]

The embrace of Indigenous cultures by modern Latin American artists furthered the link between ancient American art and modernism. Not only did they adopt the visual vocabularies of the ancient past, but they also began collecting works for their own artistic inspiration and enjoyment. As works by the Mexican muralists became desirable for collectors and influential for the burgeoning abstract artists in the US during the mid-twentieth century, ancient American objects became even more attractive to collectors and institutions outside of Latin America.

Leading proponents of indigenismo such as Miguel Covarrubias (1904–1957) would have an outsize influence on the presentation of ancient American material in the United States both through publications—content as well as editorial design—and in museum exhibitions such as *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at MoMA. They imparted their pride for the Indigenous-made materials of their homelands but conversely brought an idealized, and falsely

homogenized, understanding of what Indigenous community life was like.[45]

The Rise of Pan-Americanism

The final development that influenced the popularization of ancient American art in US art collections was the political movement known as Pan-Americanism. The embrace of ancient American art by Latin Americans, and then by US artists, coincided with several geopolitical trends that turned the United States' attention toward Latin America. Pan-Americanism saw two periods of popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, corresponding to greater US interest in strategic alliances with Latin America. The term was first used in reference to the independent nations of the Americas in the context of the First International American Conference of American States, held in Washington, DC, in 1889–90.[46]

Part of this first wave, which reached its apogee with the end of World War I, was an interest in Latin American antiquities. It encompassed the belief that the societies of ancient Latin America might offer a more peaceful and beautiful alternative to recent experience. British critic Roger Fry (cited above) championed this view, as well as art historian Walter Pach (1883–1958). One of the organizers of the 1913 Armory Show, also known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art, Pach was an important champion of Indigenous American art from the United States and particularly from south of the US border.[47]

Another important driver of this early version of Pan-Americanism and accompanying interest in the arts of the ancient Americas was a series of World's Fairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These represented opportunities for countries to share their visual culture with the public and with US museums, which sometimes bought or accepted examples of ancient American art at the conclusion of the fair. The fairs' visitors experienced authentic works of art and material culture as well as replicas, such as the plaster casts of the Labná arch, a monumental Maya gateway from western Yucatan that was a star attraction at the 1893 Chicago World Columbian Exposition.[48]

But it is the Pan-Americanism that became politically, and later aesthetically, institutionalized in the 1930s through the 1950s that is much better known. Pan-Americanism intertwined with modern art by the early 1930s, as certain major exhibitions, notably MoMA's 1933 *American Sources of Modern Art*, juxtaposed ancient and modern works to highlight formal and subject-matter similarities.[49] Beginning in the 1930s, some US politicians began to cite an ideal of Pan-Americanism related to the unity of the nations of the Western hemisphere. In the same year as *American Sources*, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy espoused ideals of nonintervention and legal equality among these nations to promote cooperation.[50]

Even as many resisted accepting a broader hemispheric past or cultural unity, there were strategic interests at work. By the late 1930s, Mexico and Latin America were becoming of greater strategic importance as the winds of World War II began to blow. The Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), originally the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA), was active between 1941 and 1946 and headed by Nelson Rockefeller (see Pillsbury, this volume). Rockefeller's curator, René d'Harnoncourt, directed the Art Section of the CIAA and coordinated a large number of exhibitions that sought to show Latin American nations as worthy allies with sophisticated and intriguing cultures.[51] These smaller Pan-American exhibitions contained folk art, modern art, even toys and utilitarian objects, but they often also included ancient art.

One of the most successful such exhibitions, much larger and more complex than the ones described above, was jointly organized between MoMA and the Mexican government—*Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* in 1940. [52] As its title

suggests, the show brought together art from four categories: pre-Spanish, colonial, folk, and modern art.[53] It was co-organized by archaeologist Alfonso Caso (1896–1970) and the artist Covarrubias, whose illustrations, cartoons, and paintings of heroic Indigenous peoples of the Americas would fill popular books he authored on the subject.[54] Both he and Roberto Montenegro (1887–1968), curator of the folk art section, frequently depicted and drew inspiration from ancient American art, which they also collected and occasionally sold.[55] The exhibition was held at a nadir of US-Mexico relations in the wake of the expropriation of Mexico's oil resources and played a key role in smoothing strained relations between the two nations. It also pointed to how Pan-Americanism could help with the commercialization of the ancient American past—the New York department store Macy's sold works of modern art by Orozco and Siqueiros, as well as replicas of ancient Mexican gold, of the kind shown in the exhibition.[56] They were, however, bested by Gimbel's, a few blocks away, which sold actual ancient works from Peru in the same year.[57]

While *Twenty Centuries* marked a highwater mark of Pan-American exhibitions, it was far from the last. Shortly after, Herbert Spinden, of the Brooklyn Museum, embarked on a six-month speaking tour through Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. Spinden took the occasion to collect and accession about 1,400 objects from eight Latin American countries. Many of these were immediately included in the 1941–42 presentation *America South of U.S.* at the Brooklyn Museum, while others were included in six exhibitions that Brooklyn organized for the CIAA (three on ancient American themes and three on colonial and folk art). According to curator Diana Fane, "These exhibitions toured schools and public institutions throughout the United States for more than a decade starting in 1942."[58] While these exhibitions can be read as a barometer of the rising status of ancient American art within museums at the time, they also signal its falling. As the Brooklyn Museum's Chief Curator Kevin Stayton mused about Spinden, "It's not an accident that we sent an expedition in 1941. This was a last-ditch effort to weave together the Americas and ignore Europe during World War II, at a time we thought we could still get away with that. . . . And it is also no accident that the collection disappeared into our storerooms when achieving hemispheric unity receded in importance."[59]

During 1944–45, Rockefeller sent d'Harnoncourt on a two-and-a-half-month tour of Latin America that included visits to Mexico, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil in order to "undertake a careful survey and prepare a report for this Office on propaganda activities being carried out by foreign powers in the other American republics."[60] The OIAA was concerned about developing trends and how best to prepare for the postwar political landscape. But by the 1950s, the US-Mexico relationship had irrevocably changed, and the spirit of Pan-Americanism began to wane. Postwar US power on the world stage had become great enough that it did not need to seek the same strategic, cultural alliances with Mexico that it once had. Interest in organizing international traveling exhibitions focused on the ancient Americas would diminish until the mid-1980s and '90s, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began to be drafted and ultimately passed, and major Latin American exhibitions were mounted with cooperation and support from nations of the region.

In response to the important trade relations in the American continent as well as the burgeoning Latine population in the United States, several notable large-scale exhibitions have resulted from international collaborations in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) stands out as having organized the lion's share of exhibitions, including *Lords of Creation: The Origins of Sacred Maya Kingship* (2006), *Olmec: Colossal Masterworks of Ancient Mexico* (2010–11), *Contested Visions in the*

Spanish Colonial World (2011–12), *Children of the Plumed Serpent: The Legacy of Quetzalcoatl in Ancient Mexico* (2012), *The Portable Universe: Thought and Splendor of Indigenous Colombia* (2022), and most recently, *We Live in Painting: The Nature of Color in Mesoamerican Art* (2024–25). Perhaps because of its position on the West Coast, a region, and specifically a city, with deep ties to Latin America, or because of the strength and vision of its curators—Virginia Fields (1989–2011), Ilona Katzew (2000–present), Diana Magaloni (2013–present)—or support by its director, Michael Govan (2006–present), LACMA-organized exhibitions challenged the field of Ancient Americas to grow beyond its original parameters. By far the most complex and ambitious exhibition of the ancient Americas to date was *Golden Kingdoms: Luxury and Legacy in the Ancient Americas* (2017–18), a collaboration between the Getty Museum and The Met, curated by Joanne Pillsbury, Tim Potts, and Kim Richter, that involved numerous Latin American countries. Today, the ability to mount such ambitious international collaborations going forward is in doubt. The financial and diplomatic resources necessary for such undertakings are in increasingly short supply.

History of the Project

This volume arose from our own shared interest in the history of collections and a desire to understand the threads, both personal and historical, that connected institutions and collections to one another. As curators, we were interested in the modes of display and the interpretive frameworks applied to ancient material from Latin America. We asked ourselves why collections on the West Coast looked so different from those on the East Coast. What determined the nature and character of different institutional holdings?

Inspired by published histories on the development and representation of other "non-Western" collections that considered both the acquisition and display of Native American and African art, we sought a similar synthetic treatment for the ancient Americas.[61] We found none. In 2017, no volume on the origins of ancient American art in US art museums existed. Interest in the connections between collections, museums, and diplomacy appear in Elizabeth Hill Boone's edited volume, *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past* (1993), specifically Holly Barnet-Sánchez's pivotal essay on the 1940 exhibition at MoMA, and in Shelly Errington's *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (1998). Errington addressed key periods of collecting and exhibition design, especially the impact of display techniques and the national rhetoric around pre-Columbian cultures and their political role for US-Latin American relations during the interwar and postwar periods.

We had each begun investigating specific collections and institutions and saw how the histories of these collections might be held as a mirror to broader institutional and regional histories. Our growing interest in the topic happily coincided with two key recent developments in pre-Columbian art history: the appointment of Mary Miller as director of the Getty Research Institute and her development of the Pre-Hispanic Provenance Initiative (PHAPI) and several art museums across the United States deciding to reinstall their ancient Americas collections.[62] This confluence of events provided a moment to reflect and reconsider the institutional histories of these collections: both the lives and representations of objects as well as the ways in which these works have been used to represent Latin American national identity historically and the Latine communities' growing interest in these collections.

In 2019, the Walters Art Museum invited a number of ancient Americas curators from US art museums, who were in different phases of reinstallation, to workshop ideas and/or report

on their approaches. The success of those conversations resulted in the 2023 symposium at the Denver Art Museum. All symposium participants hold or have held positions in curatorial departments in the museums whose history they describe. Thus, their essays reflect both their knowledge of the field and their specific institutional experiences. The organization of the essays follows both a chronological and geographic arc beginning with Nancy Rosoff's saga of the Brooklyn Museum's diverse holdings and ending with Kristopher Driggers's history of the Tucson Museum of Art's collection. Mary Miller provides a coda of sorts, exploring the business ventures of gallerist Earl Stendahl and his family, which impacted so many of the collections discussed here. While not all of the most important collections of ancient American material in the United States are represented within this volume, including those at LACMA, the de Young Museum, the Detroit Institute of Art, and the Dallas Museum of Art, the histories detailed here represent a substantial overview of the evolution of the field itself and collecting practices. Additionally, tracing the shifting position of the ancient Americas within US art museums offers crucial insights into museums' own existential struggles as we come to terms with our colonial histories and make room for other perspectives and voices.

If museums are memory institutions, the keepers of national, cultural, and even global histories, curators are carriers of living memory for those institutions, communicating published and unspoken norms and standards that have shifted radically over the past few decades. In a specialty that has such a short history, retirement or death means the loss of ephemeral knowledge, memories about collection histories, donors, and the vicissitudes of institutional histories. The recent losses of pioneering curators Julie Jones at The Met, in 2021, and Diana Fane at the Brooklyn Museum, in 2024, made the need to capture the histories of these collections, remembered and known by the current generation of curators, all the more pressing. Jones began at the Museum of Primitive Art (MPA) in 1960 as an intern and was eventually promoted to curator in 1974. After the MPA collection was given to The Met, she stayed with the collection and shepherded its transition, overseeing the building and installation of the Rockefeller Wing, which opened in 1982. Fane was one of the first professionally trained curators in pre-Columbian art history, having received her doctorate from Columbia University. After working for three years at The Met with Jones, she began her career at the Brooklyn Museum in 1979 and served there twenty-one years before retiring. With their passing, the field has been deprived of a fuller accounting of their memories and wisdom and their perspective on the field's origins and evolution. They were the last generation to have personal reminiscences of the field's earliest influencers—the first professional scholars and dealers in this field, such as Gordon Ekholm, Junius Bird, and John Wise. This volume represents our attempt to reconstruct and preserve the memories of these collections and honor the work of those who came before us. May the book provide a pathway forward for the next generation.

NOTES

1. Until recently, the most important source for this area was the volume edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks 6–7 October 1990* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1993). Subsequently, there have been more publications in this vein, including Ellen Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones: The Changing Role of Pre-Columbian Art in the Arensberg Collection," in Mark Nelson, William H. Sherman, and Ellen Hoobler, *Hollywood Arensberg: Avant-Garde Collecting in Midcentury L. A.* (Getty Research Institute, 2020), 342–98; Julie Jones, "*Curiosités* at Brummer's," in *The Brummer Galleries, Paris and New York: Defining Taste from Antiquities to the Avant-Garde*, Yaëlle Biro, Christine E. Brennan, and Christel H. Force, eds. (Brill, 2023), 299–316; Joanne Pillsbury, "The Panamerican: Nelson Rockefeller and the Art of Ancient Latin America," in *The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: Arts of Africa, Oceania,*

and the Americas, Alisa LaGamma, Joanne Pillsbury, Eric Kjellgren, and Yaëlle Biro, eds. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 18–27; Joanne Pillsbury, "Recovering the Missing Chapters," in *Making the Met, 1870–2020*, Andrea Bayer and Laura D. Corey, eds. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020), 209–15; Joanne Pillsbury, "Aztecs in the Empire City: 'The People Without History' in The Met," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 56 (2021): 12–31; and Andrew W. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil, eds., *Collecting Mesoamerican Art Before 1940: A New World of Latin American Antiquities* (Getty Research Institute, 2024).

2. Major collections not discussed in this book include those at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Dallas Museum of Art, Worcester Art Museum (Massachusetts), de Young Museum in San Francisco, and others, in addition to numerous smaller museums that hold works, which are almost unknown to the public and understudied by academics because of the difficulty of accessing them.

3. Today, Mexican academics and institutions refer to contemporary Indigenous communities as *pueblos originarios*, or original peoples, a term akin Canada's "First Nations." For a longer discussion of the term, see Itzel Vargas Plata, "Los Huecos del agua: arte actual de los pueblos originarios," in *Los Huecos del agua: arte actual de los pueblos originarios* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2021). Similarly, some American institutions have adopted the term "Ancestral Americas" to connect these collections to present-day peoples. See Diana Magaloni, Davide Dominici, and Alyce de Carteret, eds., *We Live in Painting: The Nature of Color in Mesoamerican Art* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art and DelMonico Books, 2024). The term "ancestral" blurs the temporal division that the term "ancient" underscores: the ancient past as separate from the present. Furthermore, it can serve as a more inclusive term that welcomes descendant communities on both sides of the border who cannot trace a direct line back to their Indigenous ancestors.

4. There have been previous attempts to consider the display of ancient American works in anthropology and university museums. See Curtis M. Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981) and Matthew Robb, "Lords of the Underworld—and of Sipán: Comments on the University Museum and the Study of Ancient American Art and Archaeology," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (2019): 115–20.

5. Smithsonian Institution, "Art Museums and the Public," October 2011, https://soar.si.edu/sites/default/files/reports/01.10.artpublic.final.pdf. For more on how museum formation and functions have changed over time, see Joni Boyd Acuff and Laura Evan, eds., *Multiculturalism in Art Museums Today* (Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2014); Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (University of California Press, 2008); Mike Murawski, *Museums as Agents of Change: A Guide to Becoming a Changemaker* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021); Laura Raicovich, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (Verso , 2021); and Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Art Museum in Modern Times* (Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2021).

6. Jens Andermann and Silke Arnold-de Simine, "Introduction: Memory, Community and the New Museum," *Theory, Culture and Society* 29, no. 1 (2012): 3–13.

7. James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 192.

8. Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (University of California Press, 1988), 5.

9. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 21.

10. Notably, the study of Afro-Latine and Asian Latine culture and cultural production in the colonial period stands outside of these categorizations. Museums such as The Met and the Baltimore Museum of Art, for example, continue to have these collections housed under a single departmental umbrella, but they maintain specialized curators.

11. Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, 49.

12. For more on this transformation see the accompanying exhibition catalogue by Arthur C. Danto, *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (Center for African Art, 1988). This transformation, even in 2024, is not a complete one. While many ancient American works are now in art museums, others remain in natural history or anthropological institutions, including the American Museum of Natural History (New York), National Museum of Natural History (Washington, DC), Field Museum (Chicago), and Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, among others.

13. Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993). Latin American modernists, including the Mexican muralists, Joaquín Torres-García, Francisco Lazo, and others, were much more likely to look to ancestral sources rather than to African masks and objects for inspiration.

14. Both Hoobler and Pillsbury have mentioned the MFA, Boston, show as one of, if not the first, exhibition of this material framed as art in an American art museum. See Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones" and Pillsbury, "Aztecs in the Empire City."

15. A. M. T. [Alfred Marston Tozzer], "Exhibition of Maya Art," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 10, no. 56 (1912): 13–14.

16. Ibid., 14.

17. Max Weber, "Chac-Mool of Chichen-Itza," in *Cubist Poems* (Elkin Mathews, 1914), 23–25.

18. Roger Fry, "Ancient American Art," in *Vision and Design* (Chatto and Windus, 1920), 71.

19. Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, 70.

20. James Johnson Sweeney, *African Negro Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1935), 11, cited in ibid., 92. An earlier exhibition, *American Sources of Modern Art*, held at MoMA in 1933, admitted on the first page of its catalog, "There is no intention here to insist that ancient American art is a major source of modern art. Nor it is intended to suggest that American artists should turn to it as the source of native expression." Yet, the exhibition is filled with artists, including Mexican artists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros and US artists Max Weber and William Zorach, who had indeed "turned to" this art. Holger Cahill, *American Sources of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 5.

21. Errington covers this throughout her book, but she delves into it in the context of Sweeney. Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*, 70–71.

22. William Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction," in *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol. 1 (Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 3.

23. Ibid.

24. See, for example, Ann Marguerite Tartsinis, *An American Style: Global Sources for New York Textile and Fashion Design, 1915–1918* (Bard Graduate Center and Yale University Press, 2013). Holger Cahill, curator of *American Sources of Modern Art* (see footnote 22) came from the Newark Museum of Art, founded by John Cotton Dana in 1909, who espoused a democratic approach to museology and art that became a defining quality of that institution, located in one of America's foremost manufacturing cities.

25. Herbert Spinden, "As Revealed by Art," quoted in Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiance: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* (University of California Press, 2015), 177.

26. Lauren D. Whitley, "Morris De Camp Crawford and the 'Designed in America' Campaign, 1916–1922," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* (University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1998), https ://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1214 &context=tsaconf.

27. Natalia Majluf, *Inventing Indigenism: Francisco Laso's Image of Modern Peru* (University of Texas Press, 2021), 19

28. Ibid.

29. Deborah Dorotinsky, "*América Indígena* and Inter-American Visual *Indigenismo*, 1941–1951," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2022): 448.

30. Ibid., 449.

31. Ibid., 448. See also Mary R. Dickson, "Exhibiting *Indigenismo*: Identity Creation in the State-Organized Exhibitions of Post-Revolutionary Mexico" (master's thesis, Pratt Institute, 2023), 1.

32. Maria Belausteguigoitia, "From *Indigenismo* to *Zapatismo*: Scenarios of Construction of the Indigenous Subject," in *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories*, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and María Belausteguigoitia, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23–36.

33. Ibid.

34. David Alfaro Siqueiros, quoted in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820–1980* (Yale University Press, 1989), 324.

35. Luis Alberto Acuña, *El arte de los indios colombianos* (Ediciones Samper Ortega, 1942).

36. Alfonso Castrillón Vizcarra, quoted in Giovana Montenegro, "Indigenismo and Futurism in Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui

and the Peruvian Avant-garde," *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies 7* (2017): 36n24.

37. Ibid., 36.

38. For more on the periodical, see Beverly Adams and Natalia Majluf, eds., *The Avant-Garde Networks of Amauta: Argentina, Mexico and Peru in the 1920s* (Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima [MALI] and Blanton Museum of Art, 2019).

39. Laura Giraudo and Victoria Furio, "Neither 'Scientific' nor 'Colonialist': The Ambiguous Course of Inter-American 'Indigenismo' in the 1940s," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 5 (2012): 13.

40. Ibid., 15.

41. Ibid., 27. As Mary Dickson has aptly noted, this contradiction would be made visible in the presentation and displays of the National Museum of Anthropology's collections, which presented the splendors of the ancient past on the first floor and contemporary material of Indigenous people on the second floor, entirely disconnected from the ground floor collections. Furthermore, the objects presented on the second floor were "employed as accessories for posed mannequins rather than singular objects presented for study or appreciation." Dickson, "Exhibiting Indigenismo," 35.

42. Dorotinsky, "*América Indígena* and Inter-American Visual *Indigenismo*," 465.

43. Ibid., 466.

44. Ibid., 458. See also Harper Montgomery, "From Aesthetics to Work: Displaying Indian Labor as Modernist Form in Mexico City and New York," *Modernism/Modernity* 21, no. 1 (2014): 231–51.

45. Dickson, "Exhibiting Indigenismo," 30; Dorotinsky, "*América Indígena* and Inter-American Visual *Indigenismo*," 466; Laura Giraudo and Emilio J. Gallardo-Saborido, "Staging *inidanización*/Staging Indigenismo: Artistic Expression, Representation of the 'Indian' and the Inter-American *Indigenista* Movement," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 17, no. 4 (2022): 392; Montgomery, "From Aesthetics to Work," 244.

46. Joseph B. Lockey, "The Meaning of Pan-Americanism," *The American Journal of International Law* 19, no. 1 (1925): 104.

47. Walter Pach, "The Greatest American Artists," *Harper's Magazine* 143 (January 1924): 252–62.

48. Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World*, 33–34; Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (University of California Press, 1996), 185. For an image of the Labná arch on the causeway surrounded by other Maya architectural replicas, see The Werner Company, *Ruins of Yucatan*, World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 from the Field Museum (Illinois Digital Archives), accessed February 11, 2025, http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/fmnh/id/313.

49. See "American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)," Museum of Modern Art, Exhibitions and Events, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2932.

50. Holly Barnet-Sánchez has written cogently about the promise, reality, and perils of Pan-Americanism in the world of museums of the 1930s and '40s. See Holly Barnet-Sánchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States: Appropriations and Transformations of Heritage, 1933–1945," in Boone, *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, 177–208.

51. See Pillsbury, "The Panamerican"; Gisela Cramer and Usula Prutsch, *¡Américas unidas!: Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs, 1940-46* (Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert S.L. 2012); Claire Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Barnet-Sánchez, ibid.; Fabiana Serviddio, "Exhibiting Identity: Latin America Between the Imaginary and the Real," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 481–98

52. This exhibition has been interpreted extensively by, among others, Barnet-Sánchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States"; Kathleen Berrin, *Exhibiting the Foreign on U.S. Soil: American Art Museums and National Diplomacy Exhibitions Before, During, and After World War II* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 60–65; Megan E. O'Neil and Mary Ellen Miller, "An Artistic Discovery of America: Exhibiting and Collecting Mexican Pre-Hispanic Art in Los Angeles from 1940 to the 1960s," in *Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985*, Wendy Kaplan, ed. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 162–67; Khristaan D. Villela, "Miguel Covarrubias and Twenty Centuries of Pre-Columbian Latin American Art, from the Olmec to the Inka," in *Miguel Covarrubias: Drawing a Cosmopolitan Line*, Carolyn Kastner, ed. (The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and University of Texas Press, 2014), 49–75; Ellen Hoobler, "An 'Artistic Discovery' of Antiquity: Alfonso Caso, the Archaeologist as Curator at the New York World's Fair and MoMA's *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, 1939–1940," in *Visual Culture of the Ancient Americas:*

Contemporary Perspectives, Andrew Finegold and Ellen Hoobler, eds. (University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 119–34.

53. To see installation photographs, various publications, and press releases, see "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art," Museum of Modern Art, Exhibitions and Events, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2985.

54. Covarrubias envisioned a triumvirate of books, of which he completed two, published by Alfred A. Knopf: *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent: Indian Art of the Americas: North America: Alaska, Canada, and the United States* (1954) and *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America* (1957).

55. Ellen Hoobler, "*Animateurs* Across Borders: Essential Interlocutors Within the Midcentury System of Dealing in Ancient American Art," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art, 1940–1968: Forging a Market in the United States and Mexico* (Getty Research Institute, forthcoming 2025).

56. Hoobler, "An 'Artistic Discovery' of Antiquity," 131, 133.

57. Gimbel's ad, *The New York Times*, January 14, 1942, p. 9.

58. Diana Fane, "From Precolumbian to Modern: Latin American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, 1930-50," in *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Latin America*, Diana Fane, ed. (Brooklyn Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 16–17.

59. Kevin Stayton, quoted in Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances*, 74.

60. Nelson A. Rockefeller to Rene d'Harnoncourt, September 29, 1944, Record group: III 4 L, Box 135, Folder 1325, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

61. Janet Catherine Berlo, ed., *The Early Years of Native American Art History* (University of Washington Press, 1992); Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke, eds., *Representing African Art in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display* (University of Washington Press, 2011).

62. The Art Institute of Chicago and Cleveland Museum of Art opened their reinstalled galleries in 2011 and 2017, respectively. The Dallas Museum of Art (2023), Denver Art Museum (2021), Brooklyn Museum (2024), LACMA (2026), The Met (2025), Tucson Museum of Art (2022), and the Walters (2025) also all reinstalled their permanent collection galleries of ancient American art.

Nineteenth-Century Rambles in Mexico, an Itinerant Peruvian Textile, and Pan-American Cooperation at the Brooklyn Museum, 1930–50

Nancy B. Rosoff

Fig. 1 Herbert Joseph Spinden (1879–1967). Brooklyn Museum Photograph Collection, Series: Staff, Folder: Spinden, Herbert, Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives.

The Brooklyn Museum began actively collecting the ancient arts of the Americas in 1929 with the appointment of Herbert Joseph Spinden (1879–1967), who succeeded Stewart Culin (1858–1929) as the institution's second Curator of Ethnology (fig. 1). The four case studies presented in this essay foreground Spinden's central role in the acquisition of some of the institution's most iconic works.[1]

Before coming to the Brooklyn Museum, Spinden was already well known for his pioneering work on ancient Maya art and held curatorial positions at the American Museum of Natural History, Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, and the Buffalo Museum of Science. Born in Huron, South Dakota, in 1879, Spinden studied anthropology and archaeology at Harvard University, culminating in a PhD in 1909.[2] Upon his arrival at Brooklyn, he reinstalled Culin's Rainbow House Gallery of Ethnology and commenced building the museum's collection of prehispanic, Spanish American, and ethnographic objects from Mexico and Central and South America (fig. 2). Despite being an archaeologist, Spinden focused on the aesthetic qualities of Indigenous art and called for the desegregation of museum categories such as ethnology and fine and decorative arts.[3] He rejected the word "primitive," insisting that prehispanic traditions such as Andean weaving and Maya monumental architecture were superlative art forms.[4]

Fig. 2 Rainbow House Gallery of Ethnology, 1930. Brooklyn Museum Photograph Collection, Series: Gallery Views, Folder: AON, Gallery of Ethnology, Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives.

From 1931 until his retirement in 1950, he acquired almost eleven thousand works for the museum and went on at least seven collecting expeditions.[5]

New-York Historical Society

The first case study highlights one of the earliest collections of prehispanic works in the United States. Initially owned by the New-York Historical Society (now the New York Historical) in New York City, the collection was a product of donations from antiquities collectors during the first half of the nineteenth century and consisted of approximately 385 works from Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and the United States.[6]

In 1936, the New-York Historical Society began an expansion of its Central Park West building. Philip Youtz (1895–1972), the director of the Brooklyn Museum, and Alexander J. Wall (1884–1944), the society's librarian, were in frequent communication about the society's need for temporary storage of its Egyptian, prehispanic, Native American, and Assyrian relief collections. Youtz, a trained architect, was appointed assistant director in 1933 and full director in 1934. During his brief tenure

Fig. 3 Huastec sculptures adjacent to Egyptian sarcophagus, New-York Historical Society, 170 Second Avenue, New York, NY, late 1800s–1908. NYHS-RG5, Box 1, Folder 3, New-York Historical Society (NYHS) Pictorial Archive.

Fig. 4 Mexican Hall, 1937. Brooklyn Museum Photograph Collection.

(through 1938), he initiated sweeping changes, such as removing the building's deteriorating front stairs, creating an entrance hall, and reorganizing and reinstalling the galleries with a new focus on cultural history and the social and industrial implications of art.[7] Youtz introduced to Wall the idea of a loan in May 1936, and Wall was receptive, acknowledging

Fig. 5 B. M. Norman, "Drawing of a Rattle of a Priestess or Woman Impersonating a Deity," in *Rambles in the Yucatan, or, Notes of travel through the peninsula, including a visit to the remarkable ruins of Chi-Chen, Kabah, Zayi, and Uxmal*, 3rd ed. (J. & H. G. Langley, 1843), plate no. 1.

Fig. 6 Rattle of a Priestess or Woman Impersonating a Deity, Campeche, Mexico, 500–850. Ceramic, 6 × 2⅝ × 1⅝ in. (15.2 × 6.7 × 4.1 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Frank Sherman Benson Fund and the Henry L. Batterman Fund, 37.2904PA.

that there was no space in the new building's plans for these collections.[8]

Youtz asked Spinden to examine the society's prehispanic collection.[9] Spinden may have been familiar with some works, especially if he saw the Huastec sculptures on display at the society's previous location on Second Avenue and 11th Street (fig. 3).[10] Given the breadth and quality of the collection, Spinden was likely enthusiastic.

In January 1937, the agreement was finalized, and the collections, with their display cases, were transferred to the Brooklyn Museum and installed in the galleries (fig. 4).[11] As part of the loan agreement, museum curators were required to submit biannual reports. In December 1938, Spinden wrote, "All of the large and important Mexican sculptures have been placed on exhibition, as well as the pottery from Campeche, Tampico, etc. collected by B. M. Norman; also a cylindrical Maya vase with painted design, a tripod bowl from the highlands of Guatemala . . . and several of the finer examples of Peruvian pottery."[12]

Collector Benjamin Moore Norman (1809–1860) grew up in Hudson, New York, and took over his family's bookstore after his father's death. He eventually settled in New Orleans, Louisiana, in

Fig. 7 Huastec Relief Carving of a Human Face, ruins in the vicinity of Rancho de las Piedras, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 900–1250. Sedimentary rock (probably sandstone), 7¾ × 13½ × 11½ in. (19.7 × 34.3 × 29.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Frank Sherman Benson Fund and the Henry L. Batterman Fund, 37.2895PA.

1837, where he opened a bookstore on Camp Street. Inspired by the success of John Lloyd Stephens's 1841 book, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán*, Norman decided to travel to the Yucatan in 1842.[13] During the four-month expedition, he visited archaeological sites and towns and later documented his travels in the book *Rambles in Yucatan*, published in 1843.[14] Norman illustrated the travelog with his own drawings, including sketches of twenty Maya ceramic figurines and vessels collected during the trip (figs. 5 and 6).[15]

Norman acquired the Maya Jaina figurines from the Camacho brothers, Presbyterian priests who lived in the port town of Campeche.[16] Leandro (1792–1849) and José María (1796–1854) Camacho were passionate collectors and established what may have been the first museum in the republic of Mexico to house their vast and eclectic collection.[17] In *Rambles in Yucatan*, Norman describes visiting them and writes, "They were extremely kind; and presented me many interesting antiquities of their country."[18]

Norman's second expedition to Mexico occurred in 1844 and lasted a little over four months. He

Fig. 8 Huastec Life-Death Figure, possibly found at the site of Chilitijú, near San Vicente Tancauyalab, San Luis Potosí, Mexico, 900–1250. Sandstone and traces of pigment, 62⅜ × 26 × 11½ in. (158.4 × 66 × 29.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Frank Sherman Benson Fund and the Henry L. Batterman Fund, 37.2897PA.

documented the trip in another travelog, titled *Rambles by Land and Water, or Notes of Travel in Cuba and Mexico*, which was published in 1845. After a few weeks in Cuba, Norman traveled to Mexico's Gulf Coast, arriving in the port city of Veracruz. He then traveled north by boat up the Pánuco River to the town of Tampico in the state of Tamaulipas. There, he met Franklin Chase (1807–ca. 1893), the US Consul of Tampico, and his wife, Ann (1809–1874).[19] The three became friends, with Ann Chase even nursing Norman back to health when he had malaria at the end of the expedition.[20] Norman's explorations around the Pánuco River were

productive. There, he collected his first Huastec sculpture: a human face carved in relief on an irregular stone block from the site of Rancho de las Piedras (fig. 7). In addition, he collected two small ceramic vessels at Cerro Chacuaco, near the town Pánuco, and several ceramic figurine fragments in the countryside around the Tamesí River.[21]

Norman also procured three monumental Huastec stone sculptures: a Ritual Vessel (37 .2896PA), a Standing Male Figure (37.2898PA), and the Apotheosis or Life-Death Figure—considered the most complex and exquisite Huastec sculpture outside of Mexico (fig. 8).[22] It is likely that, while he was recovering from malaria in Tampico, Ann Chase coordinated the acquisition. Though the exact timeline is unclear, we know she was the source because of an undated document titled "The Idols" that, while unsigned, was likely authored by Norman.

It reads: "Those interesting relics were discovered several years ago by an American, whilst exploring the Country of the Sierra Madre, near San Vicente, State of San Luis Potosi, Mexico. Much labor was required before they could be cleared away from the ruins under which they were buried. They were brought away from the mountains on wooden sleds to the river San Juan, from thence to the river Pánuco, in canoes, down to the town of Tampico, and were presented to B. M. Norman by Mrs. Ann Chase."[23] The effort of unearthing and transporting three sculptures weighing approximately one thousand pounds through jungle, down two rivers, and across the sea to New York was a monumental undertaking in 1844.

Surprisingly, the New-York Historical Society's record of the 1844 donation only includes the items collected by Norman himself and not the sculptures gifted to him by Ann Chase.[24] Spinden speculated that they may have been transported on a different ship and reached New York City too late to be included in the society's proceedings, however, they are not recorded in any subsequent acquisition records.[25]

The Brooklyn Museum's loan arrangement with the society went smoothly for twelve years until

June 1949, when the society informed the museum that the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) had made an offer to purchase the three Huastec sculptures and a Maya vase.[26] An alarmed Spinden warned of the proposal's dire consequences, "Let me be frank in stating my considered opinion: if we fail to obtain these pieces we will never find their like again . . . [and] we will lose by far the finest original pieces in our Mexican collection."[27] The museum's Governing Committee was swayed by Spinden's pleas and approved the purchase of the Society's entire prehispanic collection in 1950.[28]

Minor C. Keith Collection

Spinden's commitment to building the ancient Americas collection is exemplified by the second case study involving a large collection of Costa Rican antiquities. In 1931, two years after her husband's death, Cristina Castro Keith (1861–1944) contacted the Brooklyn Museum to donate over nine hundred prehispanic works in memory of her husband, Minor Cooper Keith (fig. 9). Spinden made an appointment to see the collection in her Babylon, Long Island, home. Immediately impressed, the following day he

wrote to a moving company to arrange the packing and transport of the donation to the museum.[29]

Born in Brooklyn in 1848, Minor Keith made his fortune in Costa Rica during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, first by constructing a rail line from the Caribbean coast to the capital of San José and then as the country's first producer and exporter of bananas on a commercial scale. He was cofounder of the United Fruit Company, which covered the Costa Rican countryside with plantations, later

expanding into other Central American countries.[30] Keith introduced bananas to the American diet, using the new railroad to transport them from inland plantations to the coast for export. His financial success was solidified when he married Cristina Castro Fernandez, the daughter of a former Costa Rican president, in 1883.[31]

Keith caught the archaeology bug when an uprooted tree on his Las Mercedes plantation exposed over thirty gold ornaments that had been deposited in a burial around 500 to 1,200 years ago.[32] From that moment on, he employed a crew of excavators at Las Mercedes and other ancient sites disturbed by his many environmentally destructive, land-clearing projects.[33] During more than twenty-five years in Costa Rica, Keith amassed a collection of over sixteen thousand objects, which he gradually brought to the United States and kept in his Long Island home.[34] The carefully cataloged, but poorly documented, collection came primarily from Limón province on the Caribbean coast, particularly around the site of Mercedes and the Las Mercedes plantation, but Keith also purchased smaller collections from the central highlands, the southern area near the Panama border, and the northwestern region of the Nicoya peninsula.[35] In 1882, he began making donations to US museums, and in 1914, he placed about seven thousand objects on long-term loan to the AMNH, where Spinden was an assistant curator. At the time, Spinden wrote that the collection was unrivaled in its beauty and richness.[36]

The 908 works donated to the Brooklyn Museum in 1931 included prehispanic pottery, carved stone sculptures, metates, and tools (fig. 10).[37] More objects from Keith's collection would soon follow. In 1934, the administrators of Keith's estate decided to sell the entire collection that was on loan to AMNH. The enterprising American art dealer John Wise (1901–1981) bought the collection and negotiated with AMNH and Brooklyn to split it in half. Brooklyn

Fig. 9 Minor Cooper Keith (1848–1929) and Cristina Castro Keith (1861–1944), in *Keith Watt Stewart and Costa Rica* (The University of New Mexico Press, 1964), n.p. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Museum director Philip Youtz handled the negotiations with Wise. Contracts specified that George Vaillant of AMNH and Spinden, now at the Brooklyn Museum, would take turns selecting single objects until the whole collection was equally divided—about 3,500 items per institution (fig. 11).[38]

"The Paracas Textile"

The Brooklyn Museum's iconic Nasca mantle, also known as "The Paracas Textile," presents an interesting third case study because its itinerant history intersects with several prominent individuals and illustrates the influence of

Fig. 10 Central Caribbean Seated Male Figure, probably Las Mercedes, Costa Rica, 1000–1550. Volcanic stone (andesite), 11¾ × 7 × 5½ in. (29.8 × 17.8 × 14 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Minor C. Keith in memory of her husband, 31.1692.

Fig. 11 Central Caribbean Human Figure Wearing Crocodile Mask, Jiménez River near site of Las Mercedes, Costa Rica, 700–1000. Vesicular andesite, 61 × 24½ × 20 in., 631 lb. (154.9 × 62.2 × 50.8 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Alfred W. Jenkins Fund, 34.5084.

prehispanic art on modernism in the 1920s and '30s (fig. 12).

The textile, renowned for the ninety needle-knitted figures around its border, was discovered sometime before 1924 by the *huaquero*, or grave robber, Juan Quintana at the Paracas cemetery of Cabeza Larga in southern Peru.[39] Quintana sold the mantle to collector Domingo Canepa, a grocery store owner in Pisco.[40] French scholar Jean Levillier (1893–?) examined the textile when Canepa's archaeological collection was in Lima around 1924 and published the first detailed description in 1928.[41] Elena Izcue (1889–1970), a Peruvian artist and future textile designer, illustrated the book's frontispiece and produced two detailed watercolors of the border figures.[42] In her publication, Levillier reported that the mantle was one of three textiles found in a mummy bundle of an old man whose head was adorned with gold ornaments.[43] Canepa had brought his collection to Lima in the hope of selling it to the Museo de Arqueología Peruana, but the director, Julio Tello (1880–1947), decided against it, even though he acknowledged that the textile was "the gem of the collection."[44] Tello, instead, recommended that Rafael Larco Herrera (1872–1956), a Peruvian politician, businessman, and philanthropist, purchase it for his museum at Hacienda Chiclín near Trujillo, which he did sometime after 1926.[45]

Fig. 12 Nasca Mantle, Cabeza Larga, Ica, Peru, 100–300. Cotton and camelid fiber, 24⅝ × 58¾ in. (62.5 × 149 cm). Brooklyn Museum, John Thomas Underwood Memorial Fund, 38.121.

In the 1910s, Izcue was teaching drawing in Lima's schools and had begun incorporating ancient Nasca pottery motifs into her graphic designs for art-school textbooks (fig. 13).[46] She and Larco Herrera met in 1921 and bonded over their shared interest in Peruvian archaeology and prehispanic art, which they viewed as central to the country's national identity.[47] Larco Herrera mentored the young artist and, in 1927, helped her win a two-year, government-sponsored fellowship in Europe. That year, Izcue and her sister, Victoria, moved to Paris to study interior design and graphic arts.[48]

Remaining there for ten years, the Izcue sisters established a successful business of hand-printing contemporary fabrics with prehispanic motifs that were used for garments and accessories. Sometime after 1927, Larco Herrera sent the Nasca textile to Paris, where it was placed on loan to the Museum of Decorative Arts in the Marsan Pavilion of the Louvre. It was possibly at this time that Elena Izcue designed a fabric pattern reproducing the abstract faces of the mantle's interior panel (fig. 14).[49]

During a 1935 visit to Paris, the American philanthropist Anne Morgan (1873–1952) became enamored with the Izcues' fabrics and designs. She invited the sisters to show their work, in a special exhibition in New York's Fuller Building on East 57th Street in December of that year. Planning began the month before, and it was decided to display the Izcues' modern designs in conversation with ancient Andean textiles and pottery. Two exhibition committee members, M. D. C. Crawford (1883–1949), a textile scholar and editor of *Women's Wear Daily*, and Philip Ainsworth Means (1892–1944), an anthropologist specializing in the ancient Andes, played prominent roles, selecting loans that included six Paracas and Nasca textiles from the Brooklyn Museum's collection.[50] Crawford appealed to Youtz, writing, "My personal vanity is largely engaged in this project. I want the Brooklyn Museum, of which I

Fig. 13 Anne Wassell, Elena Izcue y su libro *El arte peruana en la escuela*, 1935. Gelatin silver print on paper. Museo de Arte de Lima. Gift of Elba de Izcue Jordán. Archivo de Arte Peruano. Fondo Elena Izcue.

Fig. 14 Elena Izcue, Textile Design, c. 1928–36. 16 × 10⅛ in. (40.5 × 25.5 cm). Museo de Arte de Lima. Gift of Elba de Izcue Jordán. ARCHI. Archivo Digital de Arte Peruano.

regard myself as a part, to be adequately represented. . . . [I]n reading over the memorandum from Paris of the documents that are to be sent to this exhibition, I find that they are going to include, among others, the Paracas shawl which is, in my judgment, the greatest textile in the world. Therefore, I want the exhibits from the Brooklyn Museum to be [of] the highest distinction."[51] Crawford's persuasion worked, and Spinden and Youtz approved the loan.

In 1935, Larco Herrera sent the Nasca mantle to New York for inclusion in the Izcue exhibition. The sisters transported it themselves from Paris, and Larco Herrera sent an additional twelve textiles from his museum.[52] After the exhibition closed, Means convinced Larco Herrera to lend the mantle to the Brooklyn Museum.[53] The spontaneity of the loan is indicated by a hastily handwritten note from Means to Spinden stating that he had the textile in his charge and was delivering it to the museum on December 19, the day after the exhibition closed.[54] Spinden likely put it immediately on display in the recently renovated ancient Americas galleries.[55]

In 1937, Larco Herrera recalled the loan so the mantle could be exhibited in the Peruvian pavilion at the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life, held in Paris's Trocadero Museum from May to November of

that year. Elena Izcue was commissioned to design the pavilion, and Larco Herrera shipped the textile to her in Paris.[56] While the textile was on display, negotiations regarding its purchase began between Rafael Larco Hoyle (1901–1966), Larco Herrera's son and director of the Larco Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum's director. Larco Hoyle instructed Izcue to ship the textile back to Brooklyn at Youtz's request, so it could be examined by the museum's Governing Committee. Letters went back and forth negotiating the price. In one, Larco Hoyle expressed ambivalence about selling such a rare piece to an institution outside of Peru but conceded that he needed funds to support his museum and archaeological work.[57] The textile returned to the Brooklyn Museum on December 23, 1937, and after months of fraught negotiations over the price, which almost scuttled the sale, the mantle was finally acquired on May 12, 1938.[58]

National Museum of Anthropology and History, Mexico City

The last case study takes us back to Mexico with the acquisition of forty-six prehispanic works in a 1948 exchange with the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, hereafter referred to as the National Museum. The transaction took over ten years to accomplish and was the first of two collection exchanges between the institutions.[59]

The idea for an exchange was proposed in 1934 by Youtz, who desired monumental prehispanic sculptures to "give us an entrance hall that was unique" and would appeal to visitors.[60] Spinden began discussions with officials at the National Museum in 1937 when he was in Mexico.[61] After a pause during World War II, Spinden returned to Mexico in 1944 and resumed discussions with Eduardo Noguera (1896–1977), the director of the National Museum, and Ignacio Marquina (1888–1981), the director of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. The

Fig. 15 Aztec Seated Figure of Ehecatl, Orizaba, State of Veracruz, Mexico, 1440–1521. Volcanic stone, 11½ × 7⅛ × 6¾ in. (27.1 × 17.9 × 17 cm). Brooklyn Museum, By exchange, 48.22.6.

exchange was of interest to both directors because they wanted to expand into other collecting areas.[62] Due to his knowledge of Mexican archaeology, the artist Miguel Covarrubias (1904–1957) served as an independent advisor on the project.

In June 1945, Brooklyn Museum Assistant Curator Nathalie Zimmern wrote to Covarrubias at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel in New York City, enclosing a list of Brooklyn objects he had selected for the exchange.[63] Covarrubias also assisted in the selection of archaeological material from the National Museum's collection, provided values for all objects proposed by both institutions to ensure an equitable exchange, and served as a neutral, bilingual liaison between both parties.[64]

Fig. 16 Aztec Year Bundle, Valley of Mexico, Mexico, 1440–1521. Volcanic stone, 20½ × 11 in. (52.1 × 27.9 cm). Brooklyn Museum, By exchange, 48.22.10.

Fig. 17 From left to right, Miguel Covarrubias, Herbert Spinden, and Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla, Brooklyn Museum, January 1948. Brooklyn Museum Photograph Collection, Series: Staff, Folder: Spinden, Herbert. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives.

In 1946, the new director of the National Museum, Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla (1907–1990), and Brooklyn Museum's new director, Charles Nagel (1899–1992), corresponded regarding conditions for the exchange. Rubín de la Borbolla included photographs of the proposed National Museum objects except for a group of Monte Albán funerary offerings that were recently excavated by Alfonso Caso (1896–1970) and were still being studied; these would be added later. He also wrote that the National Museum accepted the objects offered by the Brooklyn Museum but requested the addition of a Costa Rican stone stele and a gold ornament either from Costa Rica or Panama.[65] Nagel responded that the museum's Governing Committee approved the conditions but requested that the period for making changes be limited to six months. He added that he and the Governing Committee were completely satisfied with the objects proposed by the National Museum (fig. 15) and that if the Brooklyn Museum's offerings were acceptable, "I see no reason why this mutually advantageous exchange cannot be put into effect."[66] With Nagel's letter in hand, Spinden immediately wrote to Rubín de la Borbolla, emphasizing the rarity of the Costa Rican stone stele and wondering if the Brooklyn Museum might obtain a large exhibition-quality piece in exchange.[67] The Aztec Year Bundle, which did not appear on the preliminary list, was likely added at this time (fig. 16).

Rubín de la Borbolla agreed to the six-month period, approving the exchange on March 4, 1947.[68] The remaining correspondence relates to packing and shipping and final approval by Mexican President, Miguel Alemán Valdés. On December 24, 1947, Spinden received a Western Union telegram from Rubín de la Borbolla saying that the crates were on their way, and on March 10, 1948, they arrived at the museum.[69] After the Governing Committee approved the acquisition, Nagel wrote to Covarrubias and Rubín de la Borbolla, expressing how pleased the committee was and thanking Covarrubias for his assistance.[70]

The project represented a significant early exchange between the National Museum and a foreign institution. In January 1948, Spinden celebrated with his Mexican partners at the Brooklyn Museum and the international exchange was announced in the spring 1948 *Brooklyn Museum Bulletin* (fig. 17).[71] Spinden also organized a special exhibition *What Cortés Saw in Mexico*, which opened in September of that year and featured the new Aztec

Fig. 18 Installation view, *What Cortez Saw in Mexico*, September 24–November 11, 1948. Records of the Department of Photography, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

acquisitions (fig. 18). The completion of this transaction must have been truly gratifying for Spinden, who was winding down his long and productive career at the Brooklyn Museum.

The preceding case studies illustrate the diverse ways Spinden acquired prehispanic works during the '30s and '40s. From initiating purchases and courting donations to brokering exchanges with peer institutions, he took advantage of every opportunity to build the collection. His vanguard curatorial practice of presenting anthropological and archaeological collections as art put the Brooklyn Museum ahead of the curve compared to other fine art museums. Finally, Spinden was a man of his time who recognized the importance of the Pan-American relationships he developed during frequent trips to Latin America. His passionate advocacy of presenting prehispanic art in an encyclopedic art museum promoted the understanding and appreciation of the rich artistic traditions of the ancient Americas in New York and the United States more broadly.

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NOTES

1. The Mexico case studies are also included in the author's forthcoming essay "Herbert Spinden and the Acquisition of Prehispanic Arts of Mexico" (working title) in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art*, vol. 2, ed. Andrew D. Turner and Megan O'Neil (Getty Research Institute).

2. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya: Some Archaeologists of Yesterday* (University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 94–95.

3. For Spinden's democratic approach to art, see Nancy B. Rosoff, "As Revealed by Art: Herbert Spinden and the Brooklyn Museum," *Museum Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2005): 47–56.

4. This philosophy is ironically presented in Herbert J. Spinden, "Primitive Arts of the Old and New Worlds," *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1935): 165.

5. "Dr. Herbert J. Spinden. Conference and Field Trips, 1929–1950," undated typescript, Folder: Herbert Spinden, Brooklyn Museum Employee Vertical File, Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives (BMLA).

6. Inventory list of works lent by the New-York Historical Society, May 1937, Folder: Jarvis Collection (New-York Historical Society), 1938–1961, Series: Objects, Records of the Department of the Arts of Africa, the Pacific Islands and the Americas, RG-04.03, BMLA.

7. Biography of Philip Newell Youtz (1895–1972), Philip Newell Youtz (PNY) records, Brooklyn Museum, accessed November 4, 2024, https ://archives.brooklynmuseum.org/repositories/2/archival_objects/5; Philip N. Youtz, "Report of the Director," *Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Report for the Year 1934* (Brooklyn Museum, 1935), 5.

8. Minutes of May 8, 1936, special meeting, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the New-York Historical Society, 1932–1936, 346, New-York Historical Society Digital Collections, accessed November

4, 2024, https://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/nyhs%3A242695#page/346/mode/1up; Alexander J. Wall to Philip N. Youtz, September 11, 1936, Box 9, Folder: Museums: New-York Historical Society, 1936–37, Records of the Office of the Director Philip Youtz, RG-02.01, BMLA.

9. Philip N. Youtz to Alexander J. Wall, September 14, 1936, Box 9, Folder: Museums: New-York Historical Society, 1936–37, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

10. The building on Second Avenue was the society's seventh location from 1857 to 1908. R. W. G. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday: A Sesqui-Centennial History of the New York Historical Society, 1804–1954* (New-York Historical Society 1954), 101.

11. Draft agreement between New-York Historical Society and Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1937, Box 25, Folder 26, Records of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts & Sciences, RG-01, BMLA.

12. Ibid.; Herbert Spinden to Alexander Wall, December 15, 1938, Folder: Jarvis Collection (New-York Historical Society), 12/1938–6/1961, Records of the Department of African, Oceanic & New World Art, RG-04.03, Series: Object Inquiries, BMLA.

13. Raúl E. Casares G. Cantón, *Yucatán en el tiempo: enciclopedia alfabética*, Tomo IV (Inversiones Cares, S.A. de C.V., 1999), 363.

14. B. M. Norman, *Rambles in Yucatan, or Notes of Travel Through the Peninsula, Including a Visit to the Remarkable Ruins of Chi-Chen, Kabah, Zayi, and Uxmal* (J. & H. G. Langley, 1843).

15. Norman, *Rambles in Yucatan*, 248–61. The author has matched eleven works in Brooklyn's collection with Norman's drawings; however, NYHS has no record of his 1842 donation.

16. Mary Miller believes that these figurines are among the earliest prehispanic works in the United States. Mary E. Miller, "Introduction: The Art of Ancient Mesoamerica, Collections Forged Before 1940," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art Before 1940: A New World of Latin American Antiquities*, vol. 1, ed. Andrew D. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil (Getty Research Institute, 2024), 14–15.

17. Adam T. Sellen, "Los Padres Camacho y su Museo: Dos Puntos de Luz en el Campeche del Siglo XIX," *Península* 5, no. 1 (2010): 53–54.

18. Norman, *Rambles in Yucatan*, 267–68. Sellen's research confirms that the Camacho brothers were the source of the figurines because Norman spent only three days in Campeche, which was not enough time to unearth the antiquities himself. Sellen, "Los Padres Camacho," 60.

19. The Chases had a successful mercantile business, which made them among the most influential and powerful residents in Tampico. Kim N. Richter, "Imperialist Ambitions, Black Gold, and Stone Figures: Collecting Huastec Sculptures before 1940," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art before 1940*, 264–65; B. M. Norman, *Rambles by Land and Water, or Notes of Travel in Cuba and Mexico; Including a Canoe Voyage Up the Panuco, and Researches Among the Ruins of Tamaulipas, etc.* (Paine & Burgess, 1845), 97, 108.

20. Norman, *Rambles by Land and Water*, 197–98; Herbert J. Spinden, "Huaxtec Sculptures and the Cult of Apotheosis," *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1937): 180.

21. The Huastec relief panel (37.2895PA), two vessels (37.2777PA, 37 .2779PA), and figurine fragments (37.2809PA, 37.2865PA) are illustrated in Norman, *Rambles by Land and Water*, 127–30, 150, 165, 169–70, 178.

22. Spinden, "Huaxtec Sculptures," 179; Kim Nicole Richter, "Identity Politics: Huastec Sculpture and the Postclassic International Style and Symbol Set" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 1.

23. The American referenced is unidentified. "The Idols," no author, no date, General Correspondence, NYHS-RG2, Box 3, Folder 4, New-York Historical Society Archives. This document may have accompanied Norman's donation letter. B. M. Norman to the New York Historical Society, November 1, 1844, General Correspondence, NYHS-RG2, Box 3, Folder 4, New-York Historical Society Archives. Spinden speculated that the actual site was Chilituju, located between San Vicente Tancuayalab and Tamuin. "Huaxtec Sculptures," 180. Joaquin Meade identifies Chilituju as Cerro de Agua Nueva or Tzitzin-tujub or Xiil-tujub in Huastec. Joaquín Meade, *Arqueologia de San Luis Potosí* (Ediciones de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, 1948), 33, 35.

24. New-York Historical Society, "Mr. Norman's Donation," in *Proceedings of the New York Historical Society: For the Year 1844* (Press of the Historical Society, 1845), 46–47.

25. Spinden, "Huaxtec Sculptures," 180.

26. R. W. G. Vail to Charles Nagel Jr., June 22, 1949, Folder: New-York Historical Society, 1948–1949, Records of the Office of the Director Charles Nagel, Series 1948–9, BMLA.

27. Herbert J. Spinden, "Report on a Situation Affecting Ancient American Art," September 27, 1949, Folder: Jarvis Collection (New-York Historical Society), 12/1938–6/1961, RG-04.03, Series: Object Inquiries, BMLA.

28. Memo from Department of Primitive and New World Cultures to Mr. Nagel, January 15, 1950, Folder: Director [4] 01/1950 –12/1953, RG-04.03, Departmental Administration; William J. Conroy to Charles Nagel Jr., February 1, 1950, Box 25, Folder 26, RG-01; Charles Nagel Jr. to R. W. G. Vail, February 23, 1950, Folder: Objects Offered for Sale/ Purchases by Museum, 1950, RG-04.03, Series: Objects 1949–1981, BMLA.

29. Secretary of Dr. H. J. Spinden to Mrs. Minor Keith, December 7, 1931; Spinden to John H. Arink's Sons, Inc., December 11, 1931, Series: Objects, Folder: Gifts: collectors [01] (05/1929 –12/1947), RG-04.03, BMLA.

30. Watt Stewart, *Keith and Costa Rica*: *A Biographical Study of Minor Cooper Keith* (University of New Mexico Press, 1964), 1, 19.

31. Alexander Benítez, "Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company," in *Revealing Ancestral Central America*, ed. Rosemary A. Joyce (Smithsonian Institution, 2013), 73.

32. Herbert J. Spinden, "Ancient Gold Art in the New World," *The American Museum Journal* 15, no. 6 (1915): 307–8

33. Benitez, "Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company," 72.

34. Keith's collection totaled 16,308 works: 15,527 specimens were recorded in the main catalog, and 881 were listed in a special catalog of gold and jade ornaments. J. Alden Mason, "Costa Rican Stonework: The Minor C. Keith Collection," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 39, part 3 (1945): 201.

35. Mason, "Costa Rica Stonework," 199

36. Ibid.; Spinden, "Ancient Gold Art," 307.

37. Original Accession Record, Museums of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, December 1931, Brooklyn Museum's Registrar's Office; William Henry Fox to Mrs. Minor Keith, January 20,1932, Folder: Spinden, H. J. (Part 1), 1929–1933, Records of the Office of the Director William Henry Fox, 1913–1933, BMLA.

38. George C. Vaillant to Philip N. Youtz, June 13, 1934; American Museum of Natural History Contract with John Wise, February 27, 1934; J. H. Morgan to Edward C. Blum, June 18,1934, Folder: John Wise 1934–1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

39. Julio Tello and Toribio Mejía refer to the huaquero as José Quintana. Richard E. Daggett, "Paracas: Discovery and Controversy," in *Paracas Art and Architecture: Object and Context in South Coastal Peru*, ed. Anne Paul (University of Iowa Press, 1991), 57n11.

40. Ricardo D. Salvatore, *Disciplinary Conquest: U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900–1945* (Duke University Press, 2016), 275n75. Julio Tello claims the textile was sold to Canepa in 1921. Julio César Tello, *Paracas: Primera Parte*. Publicación del Proyecto 8b del Programa 1941-42 de the Institute of Andean Research de Nueva York (Empresa Gráfica T. Scheuch S.A., 1959): Lamina LXXIX.

41. Jean Levillier, *Paracas: A Contribution to the Study of Pre-Incaic Textiles in Ancient Peru* (Librería Hispano-Americana, 1928).

42. Ibid., frontispiece, 9, and 33.

43. Ibid., 18.

44. Tello, quoted in ibid., 3n4.

45. Daggett, "Paracas," 39.

46. Natalia Majluf and Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, *Elena Izcue: Lima–Paris, années 30* (Musée du Quai Branly and Flammarion, 2008), 12.

47. Ibid., 13.

48. Ibid., 28.

49. Ibid., 13, 32.

50. Philip Ainsworth Means, "Elena and Victoria Izcue and Their Art," *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* 70, no. 3 (1936): 253; "Peruvian Collection for Izcue Exhibition," November 14, 1935, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935; Anne Morgan, "Report on the Izcue Exhibition," 1935; Means, "The Archaeological Aspect of the Peruvian Exhibition," 1935, 3–4, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

51. M. D. C. Crawford to Philip N. Youtz, November 7, 1935, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

52. Philip A. Means, "The Archaeological Aspect of the Peruvian Exhibition," Report on the Exhibition of Modern Peruvian Art by Elena and Victoria Izcue, no date, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

53. Philip N. Youtz to Philip A. Means, December 13, 1935, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA. The unplanned nature of the loan is indicated by the absence of an incoming receipt or internal memo in the Registrar's Office; however, a 1935 loan number (35.286L) was assigned to the textile. Brooklyn Museum Registrar's Office closed files for 38.121.

54. Philip A. Means to H. J. Spinden, December 19, 1935, Folder: Peruvian Exhibition (Izcue Exhibition), 1935, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

55. "Annual Report of the Department of Primitive and Prehistoric Art, 1934"; "Annual Report of the Department of Primitive and Prehistoric Art, 1935," Folder: Departmental Reports, 1929–1942, RG-04.03, Series: Departmental Administration, BMLA.

56. Rafael Larco H. to Miss Anne Morgan, April 9, 1937; Rafael Larco H. to Philip N. Youtz, April 11, 1937, Folder: Objects Offered for Sale: Miscellaneous, 1937–1938, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA; Laurance P. Roberts to Edgar Weber, January 25, 1938, Brooklyn Museum Registrar's Office closed files for 38.121; Rebeca Vaisman, "Iconos del diseño latinoamericano del siglo XX: Al encuentro de Elena Izcue," *Architectural Digest México y Latinoamérica*, May 31, 2022, https://www.admagazine.com/articulos/elena-izcue-icono-del-diseno-latinoamericano-del-siglo-xx.

57. Raphael Larco Hoyle to Philip Youtz, September 7, 1937; Philip N. Youtz to Raphael Larco Hoyle, September 17, 1937; Rafael Larco Hoyle to Philip N. Youtz, October 11, 1937, Folder: Objects Offered for Sale: Miscellaneous, 1937–1938, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

58. Laurance P. Roberts to Herbert Spinden, May 12, 1938, Folder: Objects Offered for Sale: Miscellaneous, 1937–1938, RG-02.01, Youtz Series, BMLA.

59. The second exchange occurred in 1959. *The Annual Report of The Brooklyn Museums, January 1, 1947–June 30, 1948* (Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1948), 39.

60. Philip N. Youtz to Herbert Spinden, July 20, 1934, Folder: Director 1930–1938, RG-04.03, Series Departmental Administration, BMLA.

61. Letter from Herbert Spinden to Antonio Mediz Bolio, March 29, 1937, Folder: Exchanges with National Museum of Mexico, 06/1959–04/1964, RG-04.03, Series: Objects, BMLA.

62. Herbert Spinden to Isabel Roberts, October 22, 1944, Box 1, Folder: Depts: American Indian Art, 1944–1945, Records of the Office of the Director Isabel Spaulding Roberts, BMLA.

63. Nathalie Zimmern to Miguel Covarrubias, June 28, 1945, Folder: Exchanges with the National Museum of Mexico [2], 03/1937–03/1948, RG-04.03, Series: Objects, BMLA.

64. Hebert Spinden to Charles Nagel Jr., October 8, 1946, Box 1, Folder: Depts: American Indian Art, Records of the Office of the Director Charles Nagel Jr., RG-02.01, Series: 1946–47, BMLA.

65. Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla to Charles Nagel Jr., December 23, 1946, Folder: Exchanges with the National Museum of Mexico [2], 03/1937–03/1948, RG-04.03, BMLA.

66. Charles Nagel Jr. to Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla, January 23, 1947, Box 1, Folder: Depts: American Indian Art, RG-02.01, Nagel Series, BMLA.

67. Herbert Spinden to Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla, January 24, 1947, Folder: Exchanges with the National Museum of Mexico [2], 03/1937–03/1948, RG-04.03, BMLA.

68. Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla to Charles Nagel Jr., February 10, 1947, Box 1, Folder: Depts: American Indian Art, RG-02.01, Nagel Series; Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla to Herbert Spinden, March 4, 1947, Folder: Exchanges with the National Museum of Mexico [2], 03/1937–03/1948, RG-04.03, BMLA.

69. Western Union Telegram from Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla to Herbert Spinden, December 24, 1947; memo from Department of Primitive Culture, March 10, 1948, Folder: Exchanges with the National Museum of Mexico [2], 03/1937–03/1948, RG-04.03, BMLA.

70. Charles Nagel Jr. to Miguel Covarrubias, March 23, 1948; Charles Nagel Jr. to Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla, March 23, 1948, Box 1, Folder: Depts: Primitive & New World Culture, RG-02.01, Nagel Series, BMLA.

71. *The Brooklyn Museum Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (1948): 18–19.

Ancient American Art In and Out and Back In Again at The Met

Joanne Pillsbury

"Tomorrow I must see you—somewhere where we can be alone. . . ."

"There's the Art Museum—in the Park," he explained, as she looked puzzled. . . .

Avoiding the popular "Wolfe collection," whose anecdotic canvases filled one of the main galleries of the queer wilderness of cast-iron and encaustic tiles known as the Metropolitan Museum, they had wandered down a passage to the room where the "Cesnola antiquities" mouldered in unvisited loneliness.

They had this melancholy retreat to themselves, and seated on the divan enclosing the central steam-radiator, they were staring silently at the glass cabinets mounted in ebonized wood. . . .

"It's odd," Madame Olenska said, "I never came here before."

"Ah well—. Some day, I suppose, it will be a great Museum."

Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence

Fig. 1 Old Park Entrance of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. In foreground: Wing B, designed by Theodore Weston and constructed in 1888. Behind to the right: Wing A, central core designed by Calvert Vaux, completed in 1880. Behind: Wing C, designed by Arthur Tuckerman and built in 1894. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

With the return of peace after the dislocations of the US Civil War, The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 by businessmen, civic leaders, and artists in New York. Unlike its European counterparts, the institution had no royal collections on which to build and no dedicated space. Yet the founders had noble, and ambitious, intentions: The Met was to represent the world's art history—of all periods and all places. In 1880, the museum opened to the public at its current site at 82nd Street and Fifth Avenue. The scene described by Edith Wharton in her 1920 novel should be imagined as being set shortly after this. Positioned on the edge of

Central Park, the museum was linked with other currents of improvement in New York, including the park itself (fig. 1). The museum grew quickly, as vastly increased wealth of the economic elite in the city was translated into rapidly expanding art collections, both private and public.

Nearly two thousand works of pre-Columbian art were acquired as gifts and purchases by 1900, including gifts from the Hudson River School painter Frederic Church, a trustee of the museum and an enthusiastic early supporter of ancient American art, and the purchase of a collection of Mexican antiquities (and pseudo antiquities) from Luigi Petich, an Italian diplomat.[1] Hailed in the nineteenth century as American antiquities for an American museum, the pre-Columbian collection was seen as essential to the young and still inchoate organization establishing its institutional identity.[2] Yet this interest waxed and waned, only to wax again by the last quarter of the twentieth century.

After a brief overview of The Met's early presentation of ancient American art and its subsequent reversal—the half century in which the museum largely turned away from the field—this essay addresses The Met's later embrace of the arts of ancient Latin America. The Met eventually returned to the field in the belated wake of modernism, most impactfully via Nelson A. Rockefeller and the 1969 transfer of the collections of the Museum of Primitive Art to The Met. This essay focuses largely on the period after 1914 and before 1969—a time when The Met's ambivalence about the place of ancient American art within its walls reveals changing conceptions about what constitutes the history of art and the place of ancient American civilizations in world history.

Ancient American Art at The Met at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The collection of "American antiquities" was initially displayed in the basement hall of The Met's first Central Park building, alongside arms and armor and the collection of casts and other reproductions, including photographs and copies of Maya murals created by photographer-explorers Désiré Charnay and Augustus Le Plongeon.[3] After the museum's expansion in 1888 (see figure 1), the pre-Columbian collection, which was to increase substantially in the next decade, was moved upstairs, adjacent to the paintings galleries and, later, musical instruments (fig. 2).[4] In the late nineteenth century, the museum visiting experience was often a cold and dark one: The large gallery initially was lit only by skylights—the museum was not yet electrified—and dependent on inadequate steam heat. The sizeable number of objects from the permanent collection was augmented by loans on occasion, and the works were carefully mounted and laid out by type (fig. 3).[5] As John Taylor Johnson and Louis P. di Cesnola, the museum's first president and director, respectively, wrote in 1882, appealing to the museum's membership to establish a department of "old American art": "The history of the ancient American civilizations can and will be recovered and read if we gather and arrange in order their works of art."[6]

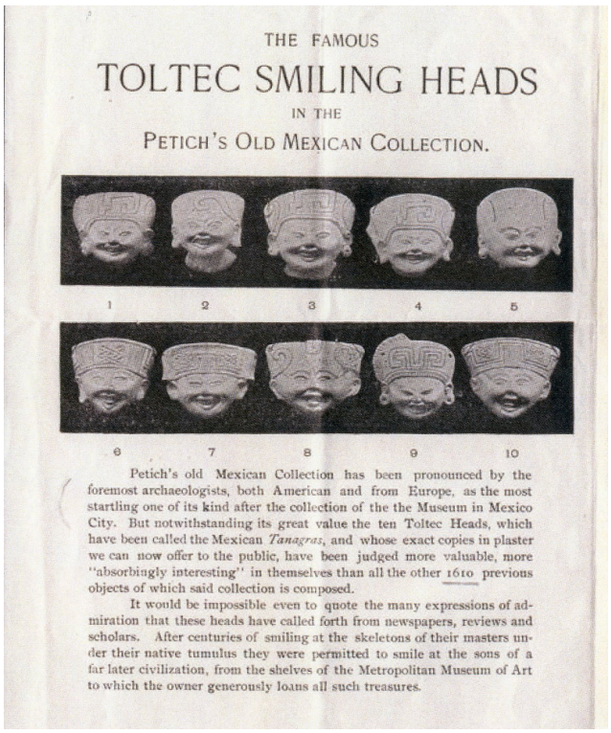
Assessments of the ancient American art at the time were often quite positive. The guidebook to the museum's collections notes that "the accounts of the Spanish Conquerors as to the high civilization of the old Peruvians find abundant corroboration in these remains."[7] The stars of the collection were what were then called "Toltec Smiling Faces," a type of sculpture that was largely unknown until that time (figs. 4 and 5).[8] Made in Veracruz in the seventh or eighth century in a style now called Remojadas, these enigmatic figures would go on to capture visitors' imaginations for over a century.

Despite the initial interest in ancient American art, the museum began to reconsider it in the second decade of the twentieth century, as new leadership at the museum questioned whether such objects belonged in an art museum.[9] In 1914, most of the ancient American works were sent across Central Park to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), losing

Fig. 2 Gallery of American antiquities, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wing C, 2nd Floor, 1907. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 3 Gallery of American Antiquities, with a view to Musical Instruments, 1907. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 4 Remojadas heads, 1907. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.


THE FAMOUS

TOLTEC SMILING HEADS

IN THE

PETICH'S OLD MEXICAN COLLECTION.

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

Petich's old Mexican Collection has been pronounced by the foremost archaeologists, both American and from Europe, as the most startling one of its kind after the collection of the the Museum in Mexico City. But notwithstanding its great value the ten Toltec Heads, which have been called the Mexican *Tanagras*, and whose exact copies in plaster we can now offer to the public, have been judged more valuable, more "absorbingly interesting" in themselves than all the other 1610 previous objects of which said collection is composed.

It would be impossible even to quote the many expressions of admiration that these heads have called forth from newspapers, reviews and scholars. After centuries of smiling at the skeletons of their masters under their native tumulus they were permitted to smile at the sons of a far later civilization, from the shelves of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to which the owner generously loans all such treasures.

Fig. 5 Detail of an advertisement for a set of casts of the "Toltec Smiling Heads," L. Castelvecchi & Company, 1898. The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing Archives, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

their designation as "art" as part of that transition. Some works, especially items of gold or silver, were retained a bit longer, but those, too, were eventually sent on long-term loan, this time to the Brooklyn Museum.[10] The art of ancient Latin America would go on to have only a spectral presence at The Met for the next half century.[11]

There were some interesting exceptions to the mass relegation of ancient American objects to other institutions, however. Some twenty Maya and Mixtec items collected by the businessman and philanthropist Heber R. Bishop remained in the museum along with the Asian jades that formed the bulk of his collection. Indeed, a reproduction of a Mixtec figurine in that collection was reportedly one of the most popular items in the museum's book shop in the 1950s.[12] Ancient Peruvian textiles, which The Met began to collect as early as 1882, not only remained in the museum but continued to be collected, at least sporadically. Following the model of London's South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), The Met adopted a similar guiding principle that museums could positively influence industrial design. The garment business was New York's largest industry; the creation of The Met's Textile Study Room in 1910 was fueled by the idea that the study of the decorative arts would lead to better design in factories and workshops (fig. 6).

The textile collection grew over the years, eventually becoming the subject of a special exhibition in 1931, complete with a catalog intended primarily for "students of ornament," a reminder of the abiding influence of Owen Jones, the nineteenth-century architect, designer, and theorist, whose sourcebook *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856) was intended to make design principles in the decorative arts, viewed globally, more widely available.[13] By the 1950s, however, textiles were collected not simply for study purposes but as works of art in their own right. As modern art became more

Fig. 6 Textile Study Room, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1918. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

widely embraced, the path was laid for seeing ancient Andean textiles in a new way. In 1959, John Phillips, a curator in the Department of Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Art who had worked on the 1931 exhibition, recommended the purchase of eight Peruvian textiles. Perhaps signaling a changing attitude at the museum, Phillips noted, "In our day, when highly conventionalized forms have become familiar through the agency of contemporary painting and sculpture, these textiles seem far less *outré* than they once did."[14]

It should be noted, however, that The Met was hardly an early adopter of what we now think of as modern art. Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was born in part out of frustrations with The Met's obdurate refusal to entertain contemporary art. Later in the century, it would be MoMA, and its neighbor the Museum of Primitive Art, that would mount important exhibitions of ancient American art. One interesting aspect of this change was that The Met's move was strikingly at odds with some broader currents in the United States at the time. While The Met remained quiet for decades, other institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and even the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC,

Fig. 7 Ambassador Eduardo Zuleta Ángel of Colombia (third from left) with Elizabeth Easby (center) and Dudley Easby (far right) at the opening of the exhibition *Masterpieces of Pre-Columbian Gold*, National Gallery of Art, 1954. Photograph courtesy of the National Gallery of Art Archives (26B5_57_014).

Fig. 8 Ancient Peruvian Ceramics: The Nathan Cummings Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1965. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

were doubling down on collecting and exhibiting pre-Columbian art, if only, as was the case with the National Gallery, for a limited time.[15]

By 1952, leadership at The Met began to think that perhaps it had been a mistake to relegate its pre-Columbian collection to other institutions.[16] The museum began to reenter the field largely through the efforts of Dudley Easby Jr., who joined The Met after World War II. He had previously worked with Nelson A. Rockefeller in the Office of Inter-American Affairs, the US governmental agency promoting hemispheric solidarity during the 1940s to counter German and Italian propaganda in Latin America.[17] From his post as the museum's General Counsel, Easby was a tireless advocate for the return of ancient American art to The Met. At the invitation of the museum, Elizabeth Easby—Dudley's wife and a noted scholar of ancient American art—prepared a report of The Met's holdings of pre-Columbian art, "forgotten treasures" that by now had long been on loan to the AMNH and the Brooklyn Museum and featured in exhibitions and publications internationally.[18]

The return of ancient American art to The Met progressed in fits and starts, however. In 1954, the museum hosted an exhibition of pre-Columbian gold organized by Dudley and Elizabeth Easby, an exhibition also shown in Washington and San Francisco (fig. 7).[19] A gallery dedicated to "pre-Columbian" art was first suggested in 1956, but in that same year, Easby noted emphatically in correspondence that the museum was not exhibiting pre-Columbian art and that it did not have plans to do so in the future, perhaps in light of the imminent opening of the Museum of Primitive

Art (see below).[20] Yet, by 1962, the tide had definitively turned. With the support of James Rorimer, the director, Easby orchestrated the return of the Brooklyn loans and initiated a campaign of acquisitions.[21] These included select purchases of monumental stone works, textiles, and the cultivation of specific collectors, such as Nathan Cummings, who eventually divided his collection of Peruvian ceramics between the Art Institute of Chicago and The Met. A selection of works from his collection was shown at The Met from 1964 until 1969 (fig. 8).[22] These works were nominally cared for by the American Wing at this time, in what a curator in that department described as a "weird marriage of American decorative arts with pre-Columbian art."[23] The ancient American collection became a source of contention within the museum, as American Wing curators were increasingly resentful of having to accommodate hundreds of new works over which they had no say.

Easby and Rorimer persisted, however. Beginning in 1966, they persuaded Alice K. Bache to donate a significant portion of her collection of ancient American art. Trained as a sculptor and painter in New Orleans before moving to New York to study philosophy, Bache stands out against the sea of male collectors and other women who collected in conjunction with spouses or other family members. She worked closely with archaeologists at the AMNH, including Junius Bird and Gordon Ekholm, who advised her on purchases. She gave and bequeathed numerous works to the AMNH and the Museum of the American Indian (now the National Museum of the American Indian), but she reserved the most important objects for The Met. Primarily works of art in gold, the Bache gifts were transformative for the collection. Indeed, the fine quality of the works surely paved the way for the museum's trustees to consider returning to the field in earnest. At this point, plans were underway for a permanent gallery for ancient American art.[24]

These plans were vastly expanded in 1969, however, when the museum agreed to accept Nelson A. Rockefeller's collection, which included ancient American, Native American, African, and Oceanic art—a grouping of disparate traditions by then referred to under the rubric of "primitive art." Appointed a trustee of The Met in 1930, Rockefeller tried repeatedly over the years to entice the museum to return to the field of ancient American art. In 1939, he proposed that The Met join with the AMNH to support archaeological expeditions in Latin America to collect primitive art, a plan thwarted by Herbert Winlock, The Met's director at the time and an Egyptologist determined not to let new interests distract the museum from building up the Egyptian collection.[25] Continually rebuffed by The Met, Rockefeller turned to MoMA, offering to establish a department of primitive art there in 1942.[26] But Alfred H. Barr Jr., MoMA's founding director, while happy to host exhibitions of other-than-Western art, was adamant that MoMA refrain from collecting in this area.[27] With his plans rejected by both The Met and MoMA, Rockefeller decided to create his own museum, following in the footsteps of his mother, who, in similar circumstances, helped found MoMA when The Met refused to collect or exhibit contemporary art.

The Museum of Primitive Art

Rockefeller began planning the new institution dedicated to the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Indigenous Americas in the late 1940s with the assistance and advice of René d'Harnoncourt, who would later become the director of MoMA. The Museum of Primitive Art (MPA), as it became known, opened to the public in 1957 in a Beaux-Arts townhouse adjacent to Rockefeller's boyhood home on 54th Street, directly across the street from MoMA (fig. 9). There was a clear synergy between MoMA and the MPA, not surprising given that the two museums shared governance, projects, and support from the Rockefeller family. The gray stone facade was

Fig. 9 The Museum of Primitive Art, c. 1970. Museum of Primitive Art Records, Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

left unchanged, but the interiors were converted into simple, minimalist spaces. Still smarting from The Met's decision decades earlier to exclude pre-Columbian art from its holdings, Rockefeller was deliberate in defining the purview of the MPA as "the important art forms not included in The Met's cognizance of the past."[28]

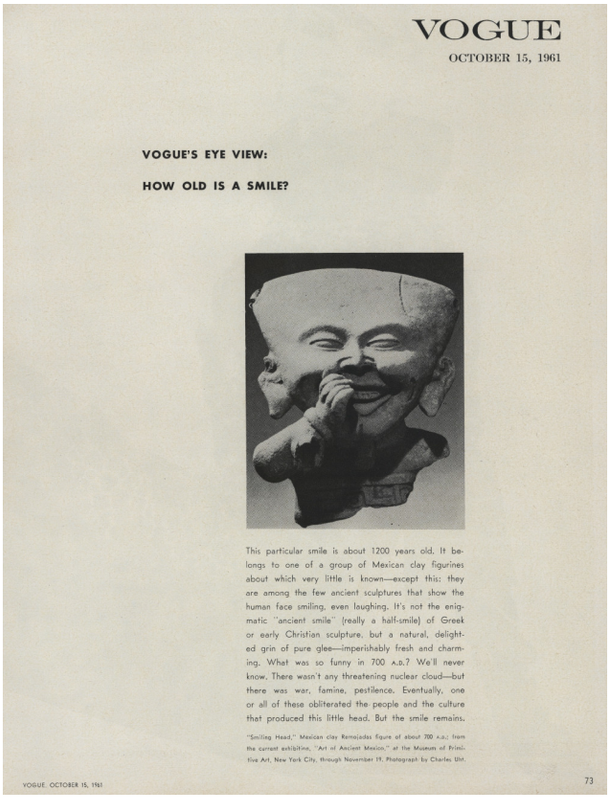
The MPA's foundation documents, prepared in 1954, stress that the MPA's acquisitions and exhibitions would be limited to objects of artistic excellence and would in no way attempt to be representative in terms of anthropology.[29] Works were to be presented as *fine art*, displayed in a manner that was resolutely *modern*. Most works were on open display—not in cases—a decision that, while aesthetically striking, proved problematic at times (see below). In the foundation documents, the institution is called the Museum of Indigenous Art, but by the time the museum opened three years later it had become the Museum of Primitive Art. Rockefeller only reluctantly changed the name—his Mexican friends did not like the new name at all—but "Indigenous" apparently created confusion. In one account, Rockefeller noted that the institution got mixed up with a new museum of contemporary craft; elsewhere he recalled that people confused "Indigenous" with "indigent."[30]

D'Harnoncourt was deeply influenced by a starkly modernist installation of a 1935 MoMA exhibition on African art initiated by Barr and organized by James Johnson Sweeney (see Koontz, this volume). The exhibition was one of a series of what Barr called "primitive" exhibitions at MoMA, encompassing *American Sources of Modern Art* in 1933 (fig. 10)—which included works from The Met's collection—as well as *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* in 1940 and *Ancient Art of the Andes* in 1954. Robert Goldwater, a noted historian of modern art with a strong interest in African sculpture, had also worked on the 1935 African exhibition (fig. 11). Brought in to be the first director of the MPA, Goldwater expanded his concept of "affinity" for gallery installations: Objects should be grouped by visual form, not necessarily by subject matter or locale. Goldwater was unapologetic about the decontextualization of works in the MPA installations: "To put any of the world's art in a museum is to take it out of its intended environment." No matter the source, works possess inherent qualities "of skill, of design, of expressive form and concentrated emotion that make it *art*"—that render it accessible.[31] The goal was to make the installations inviting and relevant to modern tastes and interests.

Fig. 10 Installation view of the exhibition *American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)*, May 8, 1933 through July 1, 1933. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gelatin silver print, 7 × 9½ (17.7 × 24.1 cm). Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Photo: Wurts Brothers (1895–1979), The Museum of Modern Art/New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 11 Robert Goldwater (left) and Nelson A. Rockefeller, with a Peruvian feather tabard (MMA 1978.412.20), The Museum of Primitive Art, Spring 1958. Projects, Series L (FA348), Box 164, Folder 1662, NAR personal papers, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Fig. 12 Museum of Primitive Art, opening exhibition. The Olmec figure is on the table, 3rd object from left, Spring 1957. Photograph by Charles Uht. Projects, Series L (FA348), Box 164, Folder 1662, NAR personal papers, Rockefeller Archive Center.



VOGUE

OCTOBER 15, 1961

VOGUE'S EYE VIEW:

HOW OLD IS A SMILE?

This particular smile is about 1200 years old. It belongs to one of a group of Mexican clay figurines about which very little is known—except this: they are among the few ancient sculptures that show the human face smiling, even laughing. It's not the enigmatic "ancient smile" (really a half-smile) of Greek or early Christian sculpture, but a natural, delighted grin of pure glee—imperishably fresh and charming. What was so funny in 700 A.D.? We'll never know. There wasn't any threatening nuclear cloud—but there was war, famine, pestilence. Eventually, one or all of these obliterated the people and the culture that produced this little head. But the smile remains.

"Smiling Head," Mexican clay Remojadas figure of about 700 A.D.; from the current exhibition, "Art of Ancient Mexico," at the Museum of Primitive Art, New York City, through November 19. Photograph by Charles Uht.

VOGUE, OCTOBER 15, 1961

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Fig. 13 "Vogue's Eye View: How Old is a Smile," *Vogue* 138, no. 7 (October 15, 1961): 73. Vogue © Conde Nast.

The MPA exhibitions, all relatively small in comparison with those at MoMA, were similarly minimalist in character, with limited didactic information. The exhibitions were minimalist in security matters as well. Perhaps not surprisingly, a small Olmec figure went missing at the time of the first exhibition (fig. 12). The paperwork surrounding the theft is fascinating. The letter from Goldwater to Rockefeller apprising him of the incident described the theft as likely the work of a "crackpot" who left a note with the words "American degenerate religious figure," conjuring the specter of idolatry.[32] The initial security report, however, says something slightly different. The note had been placed next to the gallery's thermostat, and in a label-like format said, "AMERICAN, DECADENT, probully [*sic*] of religious significance," echoing the label of the Olmec figure. It seems like an almost Dada-esque joke on the pretensions of museum displays of other-than-Western art.[33]

Although admittedly small—attendance at the MPA in 1964, one of its peak years, was 18,365, while its neighbor across the street received one million in the same year—it was influential, and for the most part it enjoyed great critical success.[34] The *Art of Ancient Mexico* exhibition in 1961, for example, was reviewed widely and enjoyed a spot on the *Today* show on broadcast television. *The New York Times* described the aesthetic value of the works "demonstrably great," while still holding on to ideas that these civilizations were "baffling" and "mysterious."[35] Remojadas sculptures, with what many took to be their seemingly overt expression of joy—a rarity in ancient American art—continued to be favored in media oriented to the general public (fig. 13).

The staff of the MPA, and Rockefeller himself, paid great attention to design, from installations to invitations. The publications in the early years were essentially elegant checklists; it is only later that the exhibitions were accompanied by serious scholarly contributions. Julie Jones, the MPA's first (and only) full-time curator for the arts of the ancient Americas, produced *The Art of Empire: The Inca of Peru* (1963); later, working with Yale anthropologist Michael D. Coe, the museum published *The Jaguar's Children: Pre-Classic Central Mexico* (1965). These exhibitions were also the two most-attended ancient American shows at the MPA.[36] About half of the exhibitions at the MPA included works from at least two, or usually all three, areas represented by the museum. Of the single-area shows, a little over a third of the exhibitions were dedicated to the arts of the ancient Americas. In the later years, the idea was to have one show from each area per year.

In the end, the MPA was open for seventeen years, during which time the staff mounted some seventy exhibitions and published nearly sixty books, catalogs, and gallery guides. By the late 1960s, however, the future of the MPA was in doubt. Rockefeller's son Michael, whom he had hoped would take over as director, was lost on a collecting expedition in 1961. Some four months after Michael's death, d'Harnoncourt wrote to Rockefeller about the future of the MPA, including questioning who would be its director when Goldwater retired.[37] Some scholars have suggested that Rockefeller wanted to close the MPA for financial reasons, and indeed, parts of the collection were put up at auction in 1967, ten years after the museum had opened.[38] The African works fetched robust prices, but many of the ancient American works sold for well less than their initial purchase price.[39] While Rockefeller had hoped the MPA would become more self-sustaining financially, money was not the impetus for the dissolution of the institution.

Other factors influenced Rockefeller's thinking. In 1966, he was running for a third term as governor of New York, and he was increasingly seen as too rich and too removed from the average New Yorker. The optics of art collecting surely did not help in the opinion polls. Public opinion about collecting archaeological material was also beginning to shift in the mid-sixties, and this surely had a significant impact on

Fig. 14 Nelson A. Rockefeller viewing Maya objects at the press conference announcing the transfer of the Museum of Primitive Art collections to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: Michael Fredericks, Projects, Series L (FA348), Box 164, Folder 1662, NAR personal papers, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Fig. 15 Pre-Columbian Art from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Primitive Art, 1970. One of the Toltec panels given to the Met by Frederic Church in 1893 (MMA 93.27.1) can be seen on the left. Museum of Primitive Art Records, Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rockefeller's decision. The MPA received a letter in May of 1966 informing them that the Department of State had received a diplomatic note from the Guatemalan embassy regarding the return of Piedras Negras Stela 5, a work purchased from a New York gallery in 1963.[40] The subject of the art market's relationship to the destruction of archaeological sites was becoming an increasingly important topic of public debate, and it undoubtedly had an impact on Rockefeller's impulse to collect antiquities from Latin America, especially in light of what he considered to be his very close relationship with that region of the world.[41]

Moving Uptown

The reasons for MPA's closure were ultimately overdetermined.[42] Whatever the reason, or reasons, by the mid-1960s, it was clear to the staff that Rockefeller had run out of enthusiasm.[43] In the spring of 1967, d'Harnoncourt, Rockefeller, and Thomas Hoving, who became director of The Met in April of that year, gathered at Rockefeller's Fifth Avenue apartment to discuss a transfer of the MPA to The Met.[44] This was a moment when The Met, led by an energetic new director, was embarking on a massive expansion, including the construction of new wings to house the Temple of Dendur and the Lehman Collection. The proposed Rockefeller Wing would become the final major expansion. Although The Met had been cautiously reentering the field of ancient American art under the previous two directors, Francis Taylor and James Rorimer, Hoving made the decisive move, and on a grand scale.

The agreement was signed in 1969, and the announcement of the transfer was made at a preview of an exhibition of some one thousand works from the MPA that year (fig. 14). A considerable critical and popular success, the exhibition received over 170,000 visitors: about half the number the MPA received during its lifetime.[45] Accompanied by a catalog and a *Bulletin*—the cover graced by a Remojadas figure—the exhibition was one of three celebrating Rockefeller's gifts of art to major institutions, including MoMA.[46] Rockefeller had finally triumphed at The Met, some forty years

after he first attempted to persuade the museum to return to the field of ancient American art. In the following year, the MPA celebrated The Met's own collection of ancient American art—a collection almost completely ignored by the uptown institution for over half a century (fig. 15).

Easby stepped down as The Met's General Counsel to become chair of the newly formed department in 1969. Already in ill health, however, his retirement from that post ("on or before January 1, 1971") was agreed upon by Rockefeller and The Met in August of 1969.[47] Goldwater and Douglas Newton, an MPA curator who was to become chair of the new department at The Met, moved uptown shortly after the transfer was announced in 1969. The MPA closed in 1974, and the remaining staff—including Julie Jones—library, and collections also moved uptown.[48] Of the 1,731 of works of African, Oceanic, and ancient American art that were accessioned by The Met in 1979 (the year Rockefeller died), nearly one thousand were from the Americas—largely, but not exclusively, of the pre-Columbian era.

By the time the MPA moved uptown, however, The Met had been engaging with ancient American art for nearly a decade. With the help of Elizabeth Easby, a consultant at The Met for the Nathan Cummings exhibition in 1964 and acting curator at the Brooklyn Museum between 1965 and 1968, the museum organized several small exhibitions in the 1960s, as well as *Before Cortés: Sculpture of Middle America*, an ambitious project that included some three hundred works and was seen by over three hundred thousand visitors (fig. 16). The exhibition was part of a recent agreement between the museum and Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia to exchange loans, the beginning of the museum's attempt to reckon with the growing concerns about how the art market's demand for antiquities was destroying archaeological sites in Latin America.[49]

Fig. 16 *Before Cortés: Sculpture of Middle America*, one of The Met's centennial exhibitions, 1970. Exhibition designer Stuart Silver bathed some cases in the colors of the Mexican flag. The Teotihuacan Water Goddess from the Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, is on the stepped platform in the center of the gallery. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, named in memory of Nelson's son, opened on January 19, 1982, three years after Nelson himself died. Nearly half a million people visited the wing in its first year, and critical reception was largely positive.[50] Covering some forty thousand square feet on the museum's south side, the wing mirrored the glass enclosure of the Temple of Dendur on the museum's north side. The inaugural installation drew from the spare installation style of the MPA, albeit with more works behind glass (fig. 17). The theatrical lighting, however, was perhaps the most striking feature of the new galleries. Finished in a uniform beige, the galleries had little ambient light, making the spotlights on sculpture quite dramatic (fig. 18). Julie Jones became the first fulltime curator of this field at The Met, a post she continued to hold for almost forty years.

Fig. 17 The Andean gallery, with a view to Piedras Negras Stela 5; The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 18 The Mesoamerican gallery, The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982. Piedras Negras Stela 5 is on the left; a pair of Toltec reliefs given to the Museum in 1897 is on the wall; and the ceramic figure on the right was later determined to be a fake. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

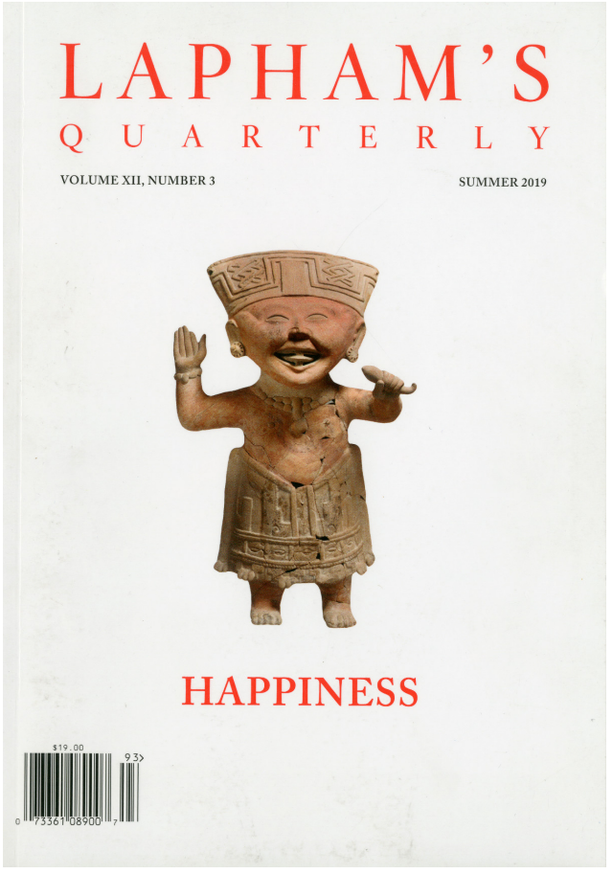

Fig. 19 *Lapham's Quarterly* (Summer 2019). The "cover being" is a Remojadas figure, formerly in the collection of Nelson A. Rockefeller (now MMA 1979.206.1211).

Ancient American Art at The Met: The First Hundred Years

Although we often slide past this fact, most museum collections are formed more through start-and-stop processes rather than slow-and-steady ones. But, even if we recognize that, the history of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's engagement with the arts of the ancient Americas is marked, perhaps more than most, by periods of enthusiastic embrace followed by stunning rejections. Initially celebrated as American antiquities for an American museum in the nineteenth century, only to be largely expelled from the institution for much of the twentieth, pre-Columbian art returned to The Met as *modern* in the 1960s.[51] The Met's decision to reenter this field in the 1960s was ultimately driven by multiple factors, including currents in contemporary art and broader social issues, reminding us of the complex interplay between specific individuals, institutions, and shifting ideas about what is appropriate for an American art museum.

As we embark on the first major renovation of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing in its forty-three-year history, my cocurator, Laura Filloy Nadal, and I, along with our team, continue to wrestle with this legacy. The place of works created in the Americas prior to the European invasion within museums continues to be the subject of debate. At the heart of these debates is the question of what art *is*—in many ways, a question that has been asked over the entire course of The Met's history. Do these objects belong in an art museum, and if so, where? Increasingly, the debate centers on whether these collections even belong in a museum, outside of the lands in which they were made, a question that must also be framed by a recognition of the rich constellations of cultural heritage represented in New York's social fabric. The Met's own history of ancient American art initially in, then out, and then in again, as disconcerting as the history is at times, should also serve as a reminder that museums are living, evolving institutions, and that this capacity for change should give us hope (fig. 19).

I thank Victoria Lyall and Ellen Hoobler for the kind invitation to participate in this volume and for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay. This research would not be possible without the help of many archivists and colleagues. At The Met Archive, this includes Jim Moske, Melissa Bell, and Sarah Rappo, and Stephanie Post in the Digital Department. In The Met's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, I thank Matthew Noiseux and Paige Silva for their help with the archives of the Museum of Primitive Art. I am grateful to Natalie DeJesus, formerly of The Met, for research assistance. I owe particular thanks to Jack Meyers, president of the Rockefeller Archive Center, and his staff, especially Michele Hiltzik Beckerman, Assistant Director for Reference at the Center. Kelly Schulz, Archivist, National Gallery of Art Archives, and Jennifer Jolly, Ithaca College, were very helpful with my questions about Dudley and Elizabeth Easby. Steve Odenheimer was generous in sharing information about his aunt, Alice K. Bache. Alicia Boswell, Ellen Hoobler, Rex Koontz, Victoria Lyall, Mary Miller, Megan O'Neil, Matthew Robb, and Andrew Turner have all kindly shared documents and ideas over the years, for which I am very grateful. Most of all, I am in debt to Ned Harwood, for everything.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Unless otherwise indicated, archival sources for The Metropolitan Museum of Art are available via the Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives, with the exception of documents pertaining to the Museum of Primitive Art, which are held in the Museum's Michael C. Rockefeller Department. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Nelson A. Rockefeller papers (abbreviated here to NAR) are to those held at the Rockefeller Archive Center (abbreviated to RAC) in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Accession numbers refer to works now in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, unless otherwise noted. The collection, with provenance as far as is known by the museum, is available online (www.metmuseum.org).

NOTES

1. Joanne Pillsbury, "American Antiquities for an American Museum: Frederic Edwin Church, Luigi Petich, and the Founding Decades of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870–1914)," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art Before 1940: A New World of Latin American Antiquities*, ed. Andrew D. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil (Getty Research Institute, 2024), 235–58.

2. Joanne Pillsbury, "Aztecs in the Empire City: 'The People Without History' in The Met," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 56 (2021): 12–31.

3. *General Guide to the Museum Collections, Exclusive of Paintings and Drawings*. Hand-book No. 10 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1881).

4. *General Guide to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Exhibition of 1888–89* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1888–89).

5. "Opening of the New Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The Art Amateur* 48, no. 2 (1903): 47.

6. John Taylor Johnson and Louis P. di Cesnola, "To the Members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, no. 13 (1882): 242.

7. *General Guide to the Museum Collections, Exclusive of Paintings and Drawings*, 8. Often, however, ancient civilizations were elevated at the expense of present-day Indigenous inhabitants. Very few historic or contemporary Native American works entered the collection at this time.

8. *New York Mail and Express*, September 10 and 17, 1898.

9. See Pillsbury, "Aztecs," for a longer discussion of this transfer.

10. The first group of loans to Brooklyn, in 1935, was for one year; this was extended to "indefinite" the following year. A pair of Toltec architectural panels (93.27.1-2) was on loan to Brooklyn from 1939 to 1962.

11. Pillsbury, "Aztecs."

12. MMA Archives, 02.18.313. Also see the unpublished reports of Elizabeth Easby from 1952 and 1956, mentioned below in note 18.

13. Joseph Breck, *Peruvian Textiles: Examples of the Pre-Incaic Period* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1930).

14. John Goldsmith Phillips, "Peruvian Textiles: A Recent Purchase," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 19, no. 4 (December 1960): 104.

15. Joanne Pillsbury and Miriam Doutriaux, "Incidents of Travel: Robert Woods Bliss and the Creation of the Maya Collection at Dumbarton Oaks," in *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks*, ed. Joanne Pillsbury, Miriam Doutriaux, Reiko Ishihara-Brito, and Alexandre Tokovinine (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2012), 1–25.

16. Francis Henry Taylor to the Members of the Board of Trustees, October 23, 1952, MMA Archives.

17. Joanne Pillsbury, "The Pan-American: Nelson Rockefeller and the Arts of Ancient Latin America," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 72, no. 1 (2014): 18–27.

18. Elizabeth Easby prepared two reports: The first, in 1952 ("Summary Report on M.M.A. Collection of pre-Columbian Art"), was followed by a more formal, illustrated report in 1956 ("Works of Art in the Pre-Columbian Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art"). Her reports built on an earlier report by "Miss Gash," prepared in 1942, in response to a request from the Department of State in Washington for an inventory of Latin American holdings in US museums.

19. On the Easbys as collectors, see Jennifer Jolly, Gabriella Jorio, Sarah McHugh, and Kenneth Roberton, *As They Saw It: The Easby Collection of Pre-Columbian Art* (Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca College, 2015).

20. D. Easby to Antonio Orlandini, January 24, 1956, MMA Archives.

21. Easby also organized the return of three objects from the AMNH in 1963; a larger number of the AMNH loans were recalled in 1980. Memo from Julie Jones to Douglas Newton, August 21, 1978, MMA Archives.

22. Flora L. Phelps, "Masterpieces from Peru: The Nathan Cummings Collection at the Metropolitan Museum," *Américas* 16, no. 12 (1964): 7–16.

23. Memo from James Biddle to James Rorimer, March 19, 1963, MMA Archives.

24. Memo from James Rorimer to Dudley Easby, January 9, 1956; René d'Harnoncourt to Nelson Rockefeller, December 8, 1967, Projects, Museum of Primitive Art, RG III 4L, Box 164, Folder 1665, NAR, RAC. See also a 1967 report on the AMNH loans prepared by Malcolm Delacorte, commissioned by Rorimer, complete with a ranking of the relative quality of the some 1500 works on loan there in the MMA Archives.

25. John Canaday, "Governor Gives His Collection of Primitive Art to Metropolitan," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1969.

26. Nelson A. Rockefeller to Stephen Clark, December 16, 1942, Projects, Folder 1642, Box 161, NAR, RAC.

27. Alfred H. Barr Jr., Letter to the editor, *College Art Journal* 10, no. 1 (1950): 57–59.

28. "Rocky Road to Art," *Newsweek* 68, no. 3 (July 18, 1966): 90.

29. Draft, Museum of Indigenous Art Acquisitions policy, June 11, 1955, Projects, Series L (FA348), Folder 1679, Box 165, NAR, RAC. The museum changed its name to the Museum of Primitive Art in 1956.

30. Nelson Rockefeller to William Kelly Simpson, November 7, 1956, Projects, MPA, Folder 1642, Box 161, NAR, RAC. See also "Rocky Road to Art."

31. Robert Goldwater, "Introduction," *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1969), n.p.

32. Robert Goldwater to Nelson Rockefeller, April 26, 1957, Projects, Series L [FA348], Folder 1679, Box 165, NAR, RAC; Robert Goldwater to Gordon Ekholm, May 3, 1957, MPA Archive, MMA.

33. Memo from Vera de Vries to Robert Goldwater, April 22, 1957, MPA Archive, MMA.

34. MPA Archive, MMA; Interview with René d'Harnoncourt, WNYC, May 6, 1965. For a less positive assessment, see, for example, John Bernard Myers's critical review of "René d'Harnoncourt: The Exhibitions of Primitive Art," presented at the Museum of Primitive Art in 1970. "Exercises in Taste," *Craft Horizons* 30, no. 3 (1970): 51–53. Attendance at MPA ancient American exhibitions averaged between three and five thousand visitors.

35. The exhibition received three notices in *The New York Times*, September 17, 22, and 24, 1961.

36. *Art of Empire*: 5,424 visitors; *Jaguar's Children*: 5,576 visitors, MPA Archive, MMA.

37. D'Harnoncourt to Rockefeller, March 21, 1962, personal papers, Art, Series C [FA340], NAR, RAC; Carol K. Uht Reference Files, Subseries 3, Folder 183, Box 24, MMA Archives.

38. Oral History Project Interview with Julie Jones, April 21–22, 2015, transcript, p. 25, MMA Archives; Michael Gross, *Rogues' Gallery: The Secret Story of the Lust, Lies, Greed, and Betrayals That Made the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Broadway Books, 2009), 330; Nancy Lutkehaus, "The Bowerbird of Collectors: On Nelson A. Rockefeller and 'Collecting the Stuff That Wasn't in the Metropolitan,'" *Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences* 42 (2015): 133. Jones, Gross, and Lutkehaus cite d'Harnoncourt's death as another factor in Rockefeller's desire to close the MPA; plans to transfer the MPA to The Met, however, began over a year before d'Harnoncourt died.

39. Projects, Museum of Primitive Art, Folder 1656, Box 163, NAR, RAC.

40. Projects, Museum of Primitive Art, Folder 1654, Box 163, NAR, RAC. Title to the stela was transferred to Guatemala in 1970.

41. Pillsbury, "The Pan-American."

42. A memo from Robert Goldwater to Thomas Hoving (May 26, 1970) outlines four reasons why the MPA could not stay on 54th Street, including lack of space, but the memo has the tenor of prepared talking points for the director prepared after the fact.

43. Oral History Project Interview with Julie Jones, transcript, pp. 25–26.

44. This meeting is referenced in a letter from d'Harnoncourt to Rockefeller, November 1, 1967, Projects, Series L [FA348], Folder 557, Box 60, NAR, RAC. I am grateful to Ellen Hoobler for calling my attention to Thomas Hoving's memoir, which contains an alternative, and more self-serving view of the transfer, placing the "coup" of landing the Rockefeller collection later in time. Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Simon & Schuster, 1993), 182–4, 193–5.

45. Hoving exaggerated the success of the exhibition in comparison to MPA visitorship at times, stating that The Met's show received more than the total number of visitors to the MPA in its lifetime. The MPA received 329,890 in the seventeen years it was open. Hoving records, Box 33, Folder 10, MMA Archive.

46. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art: An Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1969); Robert Goldwater, "Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 9 (1969): 397–410.

47. Rockefeller to Arthur Houghton, president of The Met, August 15, 1969, Projects, Folder 1665, Box 164, NAR, RAC.

48. Originally named the Department of Primitive Art, it became the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas in 1991; it is now known simply as the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing.

49. On the agreement, see Milton Esterow, "Mexican Art Due at the Metropolitan," *The New York Times*, January 31, 1968.

50. William B. Macomber, "Report of the President," *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, no. 112 (July 1, 1981–June 30, 1982): 4–7. See also, Grace Glueck, "A Spectacular New Wing," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1982.

51. Joanne Pillsbury, "Making the Ancient Modern: Nelson Rockefeller and René d'Harnoncourt," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art, 1940–1965: Forging a Market in the United States and Mexico*, ed. Megan E. O'Neil and Andrew D. Turner (Getty Research Institute Publications, in press).

Dealers, Donors, and Directors: Shaping Mid-Atlantic Collections of Ancient American Art in the Twentieth Century

Ellen Hoobler

In the present day, nearly every curator of ancient American art in a US art museum has a strategic plan for their exhibitions, for acquisitions, and perhaps for programming and artist collaborations. Thoughtful collecting, display, and interpretation, directed by curatorial staff knowledgeable about their subject area, are hallmarks of twenty-first century museums. But things were quite different just a few decades ago. Many museums in the Mid-Atlantic region, like their New York and Boston counterparts, began to be formed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, a time when both curatorial training and study of the ancient Americas were in their infancy. This essay will show how collections at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore Museum of Art, and Philadelphia Museum of Art were shaped, not by curatorial concerns and strategy but by the actions of dealers, donors, and directors. Even as the study and knowledge of the ancient Americas expanded, few museums have had the luxury of full-time, permanent curators trained in this area. Of the institutions mentioned here, only the Walters has engaged a full-time, permanent curator for its collection (the author of this essay) and only in 2017. So, for decades, it was dealers, donors, directors, as well as fellows, conservators, registrars, and administrators who stepped in to help form, expand, and interpret collections and to organize exhibitions featuring art of the ancient Americas. Although this essay discusses museums of the Mid-Atlantic region, the pattern of other-than-curatorial administration can be extrapolated to a range of other museums that could not be covered by the 2023 Mayer Center symposium and this volume.

The Walters Art Museum

The influential dealer George Kunz (1856–1932) encouraged Henry Walters (1848–1951), the founder of the Walters Art Museum, to buy a range of works from Tiffany & Co., where Kunz was the first gemologist.[1] While not a typical dealer with his own gallery, Kunz worked in various facets of Tiffany's business for decades, but his role in marketing works of the ancient Americas, to Walters and other collectors, is still little-known. Kunz is recognized in this field only in connection with a jadeite figure held by the American Museum of Natural History in New York. One of the first works to be identified on a stylistic basis as Olmec, it is still known as the Kunz axe.[2]

Fig. 1 George Frederick Kunz (1856–1932), c. 1890. Century Association Archives Foundation, Member Photograph Albums Collection, Album 11. Courtesy of the Century Association Archives.

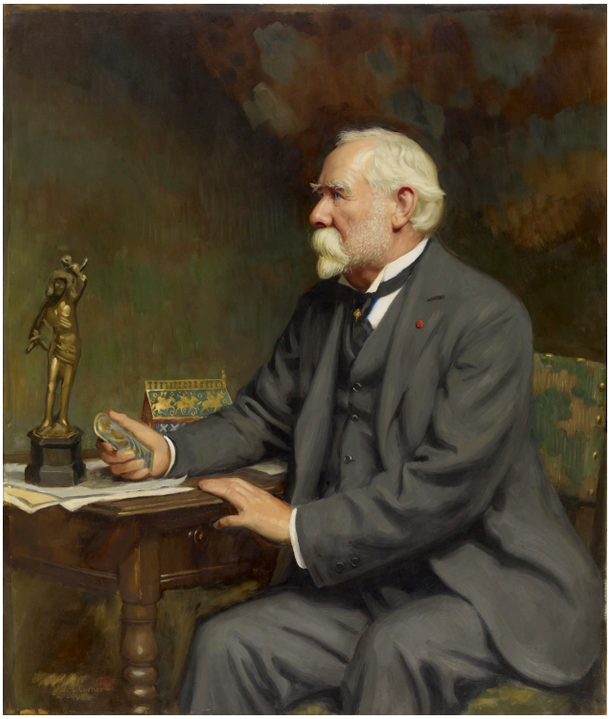

Fig. 2 Thomas Cromwell Corner, *Posthumous Portrait of Henry Walters (1848–1931)*, 1938. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum, 37.1682. Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum.

Born in New York, Kunz became very interested in stones from a young age, after a formative visit to the mineral specimens at the Broadway Barnum Museum (fig. 1). Shortly after, he moved with his family to Hoboken, New Jersey, and began forming collections of the many rock types he was able to acquire there. He eventually sold a collection of minerals to the University of Minnesota, which gave him the confidence, at just twenty years of age, to offer a tourmaline for sale to Charles Louis Tiffany of Tiffany & Co. jewelers. At that time, only diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, along with pearls, were typically used for jewelry. Kunz encouraged Tiffany to market a broader range of gemstones to a growing middle class. Tiffany hired him in 1876, and three years later, at just twenty-three years old, he became the company's youngest vice president.[3]

At Tiffany, Kunz was able to form close relationships with many high-profile collectors of the period, such as J. P. Morgan and the Walters family of Baltimore. The founding patriarch was William Thompson Walters (1820–1894), but Kunz was especially close to William's son Henry (1848–1931) (fig. 2). The family amassed great fortunes in a number of industries, particularly railroads. As Confederate sympathizers, though, they left Baltimore during the Civil War and lived in France where Henry was exposed to art from a young age. Over his adult life, he would make enormous additions to the modest collection begun by his father.[4]

Fig. 3 Objects with snake imagery purchased from Tiffany & Co, c. 1900. Walters Art Museum Library and Archives (146697). Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum.

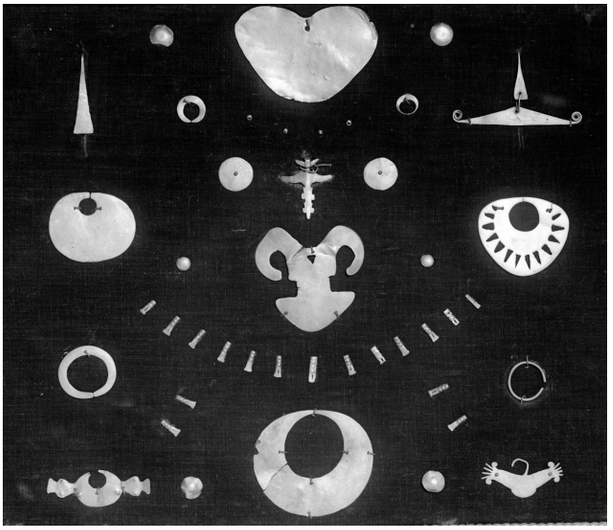

Fig. 4 Ancient American objects made of gold, purchased from Tiffany & Co., New York, ca. 1910. Walters Art Museum Library and Archives (146797). Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum.

It is not known how the paths of Henry Walters and George Kunz first intersected, but they certainly would have met by the time that Walters attended the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where he purchased items including at least one vase and a ring from Tiffany.[5] As a plum marketing opportunity, it's likely that Kunz would have also been present at the firm's pavilion there. And Henry was not only a wealthy Baltimorean but maintained a residence in New York and served on the Executive Committee of The Metropolitan Museum of Art beginning in 1903, becoming a second vice president there in 1913, a position he would hold until his death in 1931.[6]

While Henry Walters's extensive patronage of Tiffany & Co. has been documented, less well known is that Walters also bought about 120 works of ancient American art from Tiffany, likely through Kunz's efforts.[7] Unfortunately, none are as large or unusual as the Kunz axe, but the mere fact that Walters was purchasing such works for his own art collection was unusual for the time. Most of his acquisitions were jades or gold works from Colombia or Central America, objects that the gemologist acquired in his travels in search of new semiprecious stones to be marketed to US audiences. Kunz wrote about Colombian gold in an 1887 article for *American Antiquarian* magazine, at least a decade before Walters bought some of his first ancient American works.[8] Walters's first invoice from Tiffany for an ancient American work dates to October 1897, for a single silver "Peruvian chalice," almost certainly WAM 57.977, followed by six Colombian gold works in November (figs. 3 and 4).[9] After his 1897 purchases, Walters's collecting slowed down, but in late 1910, he purchased from Tiffany five jadeite pendants from Central America and sixty-seven gold ornaments, which were shipped to his Baltimore home along with European *objets d'art* and gems.[10] A letter of late 1910 from Tiffany clarified that these gold works were from the Chiriquí region of Panama, on the Costa Rican border.[11] In late 1911, Walters purchased an additional twenty-eight gold works, said to be from Colombia.[12]

Kunz and Tiffany's connection to this material is important in part because, although many museums are known to have Chiriquí gold

objects acquired around this time—the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, National Museum of Natural History, Heye Foundation, Harvard's Peabody Museum, and Yale University Art Museum, as well as several non-US museums—no one has yet traced their histories carefully to determine which of these works may have originated with Kunz.[13]

In that same year, Walters bought two Mexica (Aztec) central Mexican sculptures from the dealer Dikran Kelekian (1868–1951), who had galleries in Paris and New York.[14] These are the only known ancient American works handled by Kelekian, but it is likely that he moved to profit from Walters's interest. William Johnston, Walters's curator emeritus and biographer of the Walters family, asserts that Walters's curiosity was piqued by the French *Exposition retrospective* in the Trocadéro in 1878, at which "early Mexican terra cottas and sculptures captured the public's imagination and conjured up such concepts as the lost content [*sic*] of Atlantis and prehistoric connections between Europe and America."[15]

Johnston was probably correct in asserting that Walters's interest in Central American gold and jades lay largely in their origins and craftsmanship as well as a desire to form a universal survey collection similar to that of The Metropolitan Museum.[16] It is notable that during Walters's term on The Met's Executive Committee, the museum sent its own ancient American collections on long-term loan to the American Museum of Natural History, issuing a message that such works were not part of the "art" canon, as Joanne Pillsbury has noted.[17] Yet, the two central Mexican stone statues purchased by Henry Walters, and to a lesser extent the golden works from Tiffany, continued to reverberate over the decades. The two stone works depict a rattlesnake knotted into a ball (fig. 5) and a seated figure with a tall, feathered headdress, likely the deity Macuilxochitl. Both had been part of the storied Pingret collection of ancient American art.[18] Both were also included in Pál Kelemen's *Medieval American Art* (originally published 1943), a key source when there were few published resources, particularly in English, available for scholars.[19]

Fig. 5 Knotted Rattlesnake, Mexica (Aztec), Central Mexico, 1100–1520. Basalt, 11¼ × 16 in. (28.5 × 40.64 cm). Walters Art Museum, 29.2. Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum.

Fig. 6 Installation view, *4000 Years of Modern Art at the Walters Art Museum*, 1953. Walters Art Museum Library and Archives (456064). Courtesy of the Walters Art Museum.

The basalt rattlesnake became one of the museum's most popular objects. It was shown with gold works in the 1953 Walters exhibition, *4000 Years of Modern Art*, which was linked to the Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *Timeless Aspects of Modern Art*. It was part of a teaching portfolio of images chosen by curator René d'Harnoncourt, which were said to be related to each other on the basis of "affinity and resemblance" (fig. 6).[20] The snake was also lent to a 1968 exhibition on ancient and modern Latin America at what was then the Isaac Delgado Museum, later the New Orleans Museum of Art, and was part of a 1971–72 exhibition, *World of Wonder*, at the Walters.[21]

From these rather unprepossessing beginnings, the Walters Art Museum's ancient American collections and program were revitalized in the early 200s by significant gifts and loans, including a long-terms loan from the Stokes family of Nyack, New York; and, particularly, by a large gift from John Gilbert Bourne, given in 2009. The Walters engaged Matthew Robb (whose chapter on the St. Louis Art Museum is included in this volume) as a Visiting Assistant Curator between 2000 and 2003, and Khristaan Villela was a Consulting Curator of Arts of the Ancient Americas from 2010 to 2011. Conservator Julie Lauffenburger also played an important role in maintaining a focus on these works in the 2010s. I was hired as the first permanent Curator of the Art of the Americas in 2017, and dedicated galleries for the collection will open in 2025, finally enshrining in the twenty-first century a part of the collection that began to be formed in 1897.

The Baltimore Museum of Art

The Walters's history stands in stark contrast to the situation at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA), an institution in the same city with strikingly different conditions. The museum was formed by a range of individuals who came together to form a municipal museum. The driving force behind the collection was not a visionary dealer like Kunz, who created enthusiasm for a new collecting area, but the patrons themselves. While the director, Adelyn Breeskin (Acting Director 1942–47, Director 1947–62), and Chief Curator Gertrude Rosenthal, who worked at the BMA in various capacities from 1945 to 1969, were helpful, the main impetus for a major collection of ancient American art came from the donors themselves and was part of a larger push for a diverse "primitive" art collection at the museum, a common interest at midcentury. Real estate investor Alan Wurtzburger (1900–1963) and his wife, Janet (1908–1973), were the source of the BMA's most significant collection of primitive art (figs. 7–9).

Before it began seriously collecting primitive art, the BMA presented several of the Pan-American exhibitions that were circulated by the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) in the 1940s.[22] It is interesting that these exhibitions were designed with broad audiences in mind—the 1944 *Art in the Countries South of Us* exhibition was held in the Junior Museum of the BMA and included toys, although the BMA *News* noted that this gallery, "though designed to familiarize children with our Latin American neighbors, will include material of general interest to adults as well."[23] The 1944 exhibition paled in comparison, though, to the 1950 *Folk Arts of the South American Highlands* exhibition, organized by the American Federation of Arts and shown at several museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago. It included about 160 works of ancient, colonial, and popular arts from Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru.[24] From the images available, this was clearly a lush and costly show to mount, with mannequins in one corner and weavings on backstrap looms on another pedestal (fig. 10).

Fig. 7 Adelyn D. Breeskin, Alan Wurtzburger, Janet Wurtzburger, and Paul S. Wingert in *Wurtzburger Collection of African Negro Sculpture*, 1954. Exhibitions Photographs Collection, Box 6, Folder 15, PCEX_06_15_001_recto, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Fig. 8 Catalogs of Wurtzburger collections: *African Art* (1954), *Oceanic Art* (1956), *Pre-Columbian Art* (1958). Photo by author.

Fig. 9 Installation view, *Wurtzburger Collection of African Negro Sculpture*, 1954. Exhibitions Photographs Collection, Box 6, Folder 14, PC_EX_06_14_004, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Fig. 10 Installation view, *Folk Art of the South American Highlands*, 1950. Exhibitions Photographs Collection, Box 5, Folder 13, AN008_010, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

Additionally, a 1952 exhibition featured a bequest of approximately six hundred Native American works from Maryland resident Florence Reese Winslow, who later lived in the US Southwest. A *Baltimore Sun* article suggested that Frederic Douglas, curator of Native arts at the Denver Art Museum, and an important impetus in the founding of that ancient Americas collection, simply happened to be in in Baltimore when the bequest was announced and was immediately pressed into service cataloging and classifying the works in the gift. He is pictured in the *Sun* article surrounded by dozens of baskets.[25]

The Wurtzburgers' gifts, then, bolstered and enhanced the BMA's forays into exhibiting and collecting primitive art. As Frederick Lamp, former African art curator (1973–2004), described it: "In 1953, Adelyn Breeskin . . . and . . . Gertrude Rosenthal, were invited to lunch at Timberlane, the Baltimore home of Alan and Janet Wurtzburger. Their meeting was to result in the first significant formation of an African collection at the museum, and the basis of the collection today." He continued, "At this luncheon [Alan] took Breeskin and Rosenthal out to a separate lodge on the grounds, where he showed them his new collection. They immediately decided to mount a loan exhibition, which was produced in 1954 with a catalogue introduced by Paul Wingert. A year later, the Wurtzburgers donated the entire collection to the museum and went on to begin other collections, first in Oceanic and then in pre-Columbian art, with the express purpose of forming a Wurtzburger Gallery of Primitive Arts at the BMA."[26] Lamp further recounted that the Wurtzburgers became interested in collecting primitive art when they were enlisted by their friend, the department store owner Stanley Marcus, to select African works for him to purchase when they were on a trip to South Africa in 1950.

While the couple didn't find anything for the Marcus collection at that time, they were entranced by primitive art. They became friends with Douglas Newton, the curator of African art at the Museum of Primitive Art, who introduced them to experts, including Paul Wingert and Douglas Fraser, who were also influential in the formation of the collection of New York's Museum of Primitive Art. Yet even with this guidance, according to former Native American arts curator at the BMA Katharine Fernstrom (1987–2002), the couple "restricted their collecting to purchases from other collectors and art dealers, rather than collecting 'in the field,' because they could obtain the best pieces from these sources."[27]

After their gift of African art, by 1956 they had similarly donated a collection of more than two hundred Oceanic works. They also began purchasing Native American works: A 1956 profile asserted they were beginning their next collection in Russia seeking to "uncover choice works of Pacific Northwest Indian art collected by Russian seal hunters in Czarist days."[28] Yet, two years after the Oceanic gift, they then donated a collection of ancient American art, which was accorded its own catalog, with collection notes by Yale scholar George Kubler. In that same year, 1958, the Oceanic and African collections plus 105 works of ancient American art were among the approximately five hundred works exhibited in a new permanent primitive art gallery. At least one journalist asserted that "it is the new pre-Columbian section of the gallery that compels the greatest interest at the present moment. While neither so extensive as the Oceanic section, nor so rich in major objects as the African, it is of greater antiquity than either and entirely unfamiliar to art lovers."[29]

Because of the breakneck speed of their collecting, the Wurtzburgers were learning as they went. Their lack of knowledge of and experience with much of the art, especially the pre-Columbian works, meant that they had to depend heavily on experts for guidance, and they bought from some of the most established dealers of the era. Some works may have come from Earl Stendahl on the West Coast, and one Zapotec effigy vessel (BMA 1960.30.26) still has a dealer's sticker from the Galerie Charles Ratton of Paris affixed to it. The couple may have leaned toward works that had been published or promoted as particularly strong in quality. One small Mixtec or postclassic maskette of stone that ultimately ended up in Wurtzburger collection passed through the inventory of the influential Pierre Matisse Gallery of New York (fig. 11). An advertisement of 1939 shows it was offered for sale by Matisse in the year leading up to the monumental *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.[30] Perhaps most importantly, like the Walters'

Fig. 11 Maskette, Mixtec, Mexico, 1200–1400. Serpentine, 3⅜ × 2¾ × 2¼ in. (8.5 × 7 × 5.5 cm). Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, 1960.30.25. Photo by Mitro Hood.

rattlesnake and deity figure, it was published by Pál Kelemen in his monumental *Medieval American Art* (1943), demonstrating yet again how tightly woven is the web of exhibitions, objects, publications, scholars, and dealers that connect our different institutions.[31]

The Philadelphia Museum of Art

Pierre Matisse was also instrumental in restarting the collecting of ancient American works by another pair of husband-and-wife collectors, Louise (1879–1953) and Walter (1878–1954) Arensberg. Walter was the son of an owner of a Pittsburgh steel crucible, and Louise was the daughter of a family that owned textile mills in Massachusetts. Once married, the couple lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, then moved to New York around 1911. They began collecting modern art from the Boston iteration of the Armory Show in 1913, and it quickly became a driving passion in their lives. While they were buying works by French modernists and actively participating in the creation of the New York Dada movement, they also bought at least three pre-Columbian works from the Mexican dealer Marius de Zayas during the 1910s while living in New York.[32] But most of the almost five hundred ancient American works were acquired after they moved to Los Angeles in 1921. Walter Arensberg took his last trip to New York in 1937 and purchased a red stone coiled serpent (PMA 1950-134-215) from Matisse, as well as a number of works from the Brummer Gallery.[33] The fact that Arensberg spent so much money on ancient American works was either spurred or inspired by the Los Angeles art dealer Earl Stendahl's foray into this area; around this time, he began selling works to the Arensbergs almost weekly. I have previously written extensively about the genesis and formation of the Arensbergs' collection of ancient American art.[34] Here, I will focus on how their collection ultimately ended up in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA).

In 1940, the couple had agreed to donate their holdings to the University of California, Los Angeles, as long as the university's museum created a new wing for them. When those plans fell through, the gift was pulled. A few years later, in 1945, Katherine Kuh and Daniel Cotton Rich of the Art Institute of Chicago visited. Kuh was a specialist in modern Latin America.[35] But Kuh and Rich drastically reduced the number of pre-Columbian works that were to be shipped to Chicago for exhibition in juxtaposition with their modern works. This greatly irritated the Arensbergs, and they severed their agreement with Chicago by 1946. A few years later, Fiske Kimball, the director at the PMA, stepped in to seal the deal.[36]

Kimball and his wife, Marie, made several visits to the Arensberg home and were in frequent contact with Sturgis Ingersoll, president of the PMA's board, to strategize how to complete the gift (fig. 12). Marie Kimball and Louise Arensberg seem to have formed a bond, and perhaps by 1950, the Arensbergs, entering their

seventies, were simply tired of "shopping" the institutions that courted them. Although the dissolution of the agreement with UCLA had been known for some time, when the collection was to be shipped to Philadelphia, it was apparently a surprise to the Los Angeles community, as a 1951 newspaper cartoon illustrates (fig. 13). The bespectacled East Coasters are shown carting off the small Teotihuacan goddess (PMA 1950-134-282) the couple owned. Reporter Kenneth Ross lamented the loss of the Arensbergs' "two and a half million dollar collection of pre-Columbian and Modern art which every major city in America except LA asked for."[37]

How, then, did Fiske Kimball succeed where Katharine Kuh and Daniel Catton Rich failed? This story is one of triumph after failure. Originally, the Arensbergs were quite insistent that they wanted the fruits of all their lives' labors to stay together. Walter Arensberg, in particular, had three main passions in life: modern artworks, particularly conceptual ones made by Marcel Duchamp; ancient American sculpture, especially large stone works of the Mexica; and proving that Francis Bacon was the true author of the works commonly attributed to Shakespeare. During his early attempts to find a home for his art collection, Walter wanted all three parts of the triumvirate to stay together in a given location.

But by the time Kimball came to visit, Walter had been forced to relax his standards. Although there were some early discussions of merging the Francis Bacon Library, as his research center was called, with the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, these went nowhere, and the Bacon Library ultimately stayed on the campus of the Claremont Colleges near Los Angeles, while his art collections went east.[38] As curator Matthew Affron has recently described in his account of how some of the

Fig. 12 Fiske (1888–1955) and Marie (1889–1955) Kimball, c. 1940 (PM284DE). Fiske Kimball Papers (FKP), Box 62, Folder 12, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 13 "L. A. lays golden egg, but Philadelphia takes it back home to hatch," *LA Daily News*, January 20, 1951 (PM244OA). Arensberg Archives (WLA), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

world's greatest modern art was gifted to the PMA between 1943 and 1950, landing the Arensberg collection was a success for Kimball only after a series of missteps. Kimball had organized large temporary exhibitions of the Chester Dale and Alfred Stieglitz collections, which ultimately went, in part or in whole, to other institutions, so by about 1950, he was highly motivated in his wooing of the couple.[39]

The PMA has had a complex construction history: A huge outer shell opened in 1928, but only fifteen interior permanent galleries were open to the public. Given that the Great Depression began shortly after the exterior was complete, it took decades to fully flesh out the permanent collections necessary to fill the museum. However, the empty spaces meant Kimball could be more nimble than other institutions in expanding the collections. In the case of the Arensbergs, Kimball used all his charm—and his drafting skills—to win their collection for his museum.

The PMA archive holds a small drawing of the central hall of the Arensberg galleries that Kimball promised the couple, with Brancusi's *Bench* sketched out, next to what appear to be renderings of smaller Mexica deity figures and west Mexican ceramics (fig. 14). In correspondence with his board chair, Kimball revealed that his master stroke to seal the deal was producing detailed sketches, including this drawing, planning for "building your collection its dream house," as Marie explained to Louise. Kimball telegraphed his board chair in excitement on February 7, 1949, when he succeeded in getting Louise and Walter to initial this drawing, which they did at bottom left—in essence formally accepting his proposal for their collection.[40] Although it would take many more months to hammer out the final details of the agreement, Kimball and the PMA did not flinch from the challenges—or the shipping costs—of transporting a collection that included a large-scale corn goddess, a stone basin, and, particularly challenging, a greenstone Mexica calendar stone 33 inches across, nearly

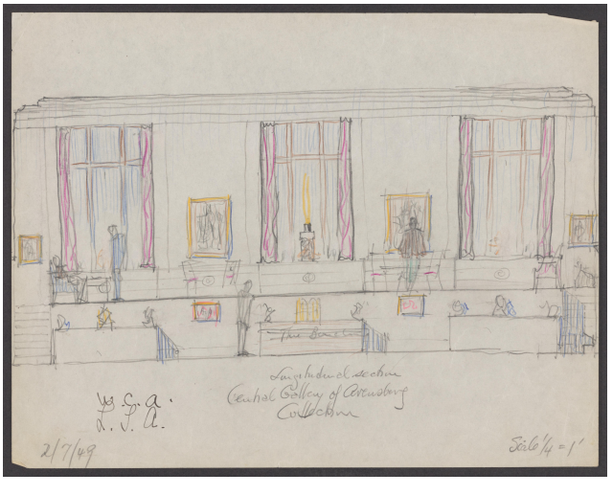

Fig. 14 Fiske Kimball, drawing of the central gallery for the Arensberg collection, with the Arensbergs' initials, February 7, 1949 (PM231IT). Fiske Kimball Papers (FKR), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

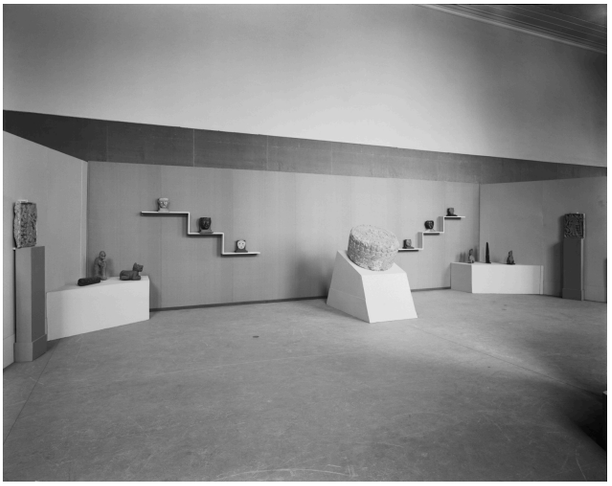

Fig. 15 Installation view, *Pre-Columbian Sculpture from the Arensberg Collection*, October 3–December 5, 1953 (PM2164Q). Arensberg Archives (WLA), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

20 inches high, and weighing some 1,380 pounds (PMA 1950-134-403).[41]

Kimball recognized the extraordinary power of these works, particularly the calendar stone, and centered them in the first exhibition of the Arensbergs' collection, which included only their ancient American collection. It was installed in 1953 in a small special exhibition space, not yet the galleries that had been expressly designed for their collection (fig. 15).

While the spacing and lack of casework in this exhibition can be odd for twenty-first century tastes, Kimball and his designers were guiding a pre-Columbian installation that felt very streamlined and contemporary, even before the Arensbergs' modern works were added. The tilted platform is echoed by zigzag shelves, which seem to riff on the Mesoamerican pyramidal form. Also, the stone works are displayed on pedestals, consciously marking them as art. I have not found information as to the paint scheme for this gallery, but color blocks would have set off the gray and brown of stone and ceramic objects, with physical blocks elevating them to different heights. Unfortunately, we do not have the Arensbergs' thoughts on this exhibit, for they did not see it: Louise died in November 1953 and Walter in January 1954.

In 1954, once the Arensbergs' modern works arrived at the museum, Kimball put the masterworks of the collection, both modern and pre-Columbian, into the central gallery that he had sketched out five years earlier (fig. 16). The Teotihuacan mural fragment, dominated by reds, must have been startling against the white walls. In this gallery, there was an equilibrium of ancient works, mostly stone, and the modern paintings and sculpture, all enclosed within the grid and arched spaces of the gallery.[42] Kimball really had created a "dream home" for the Arensberg collection.[43]

Fig. 16 Opening of *Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection in Twenty-Two New Galleries*, 1954 (PM2165O). Arensberg Archives (WLA), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Unfortunately, the PMA's strategy of pairing ancient American works with European modern paintings and sculpture resonated with only the most cerebral visitors. Despite the PMA out maneuvering the Art Institute of Chicago for the Arensbergs' collection, the PMA ultimately abandoned the original vison. The museum complied with its agreement to keep modern and ancient art displayed together for twenty-five years, but then it quietly removed much of the ancient American material from view. Perhaps this had to do with an informal agreement with the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn) that stipulated that the PMA would accept gifts of Asian art, while Penn would be home to African, Oceanic, and ancient American art.[44] Whatever the reason, there has never been a dedicated curator who specializes in art of the ancient Americas. In recent years, major works from the PMA's ancient American holdings have been on view, though, on loan to the Princeton Museum of Art and Penn.

Conclusion

The three museums discussed here all have drastically different origin stories: One founded by a single man heavily influenced by a single dealer to showcase craftsmanship and luxury materials; one formed in just two years by husband-and-wife donors looking to complete their collection to fill a gallery of "primitive" art; and one developed by a director willing to accession and ship thousands of pounds of stone to avoid losing out on a major collection of modern art. The legacies of these collections have also developed unevenly, but there is a growing sense that there is a new-found relevance and import to these collections of ancient American art. In the twenty-first century, the Latino populations in both Philadelphia and Baltimore, as well as the country as a whole, are growing quickly and are eager to see their history and heritage represented in US museums. As institutions seek to make heritage more accessible to descendant communities, there likely will be dedicated curators who have knowledge and expertise in ancient American art to engage these communities. And many such communities may be surprised that those collections do exist, for it was not only large institutions and those in largely Latino cities that amassed works of ancient American art. Smaller museums and those outside the major cities for art (New York, Chicago, and later the West Coast and Texas) were also essential to the network of dealers, donors, and directors that connected them to larger museums and larger trends in the history of collecting. Still by lending works, by keeping dealers afloat through (sometimes smaller) acquisitions, by offering venues for traveling Pan-American exhibitions, by making avant-garde installation design choices, and by making their collections available for key early publications, such as Kelemen's *Medieval American Art*, these museums helped to create, expand, and make viable the web of ancient American art on public view at midcentury.

I am very grateful to Victoria Lyall for extending the invitation to work on this symposium and volume with her, and for her patience as I juggled too many activities. I am grateful as well to all the symposium participants for expanding my knowledge of the history of this field. For their assistance in various ways, thanks are also due to Matthew Affron, Lisa Anderson-Zhu, Kendra Brewer, Anna Clarkson, Elena Dammon, Sarah Dansberger, Angie Elliott, Carlee Forbes, Patricia Lagarde, Julie Lauffenburger, Earl Martin, Payton Phillips-Quintanilla, Ani Proser, Rona Razon, Kristen Regina, Edgar Reyes, Ana Salas, Ariel Tabritha, Michael Taylor, Kevin Tervala, René Treviño, Khristaan Villela, and Brynn White. This volume represents my thanks to my advisors, Diana Fane, James Oles, and Esther Pasztory.

NOTES

1. Throughout this entire section, I am indebted to the research of former Bard Graduate intern Alice Winkler, whose article, "'A Triumph of Detail': George F. Kunz and the Promotion of American Gemstones and Design at the Walters Art Museum from 1876–1932" (forthcoming from the *Journal of the Walters Art Museum*), was extremely helpful for understanding Kunz's marketing of ancient gold. He has been profiled in a number of articles and on websites as being a ground-breaking gemologist and not in his role art from the ancient Americas.

2. For more on the Kunz axe, see "Kunz Axe," American Museum of Natural History, accessed October 21, 2024, https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/permanent/mexico-central-america/kunz-axe; and "Kunze [*sic*] Axe," Blackburn Art History, November 7 2018, https://blackburnarthistory.blogspot.com/2018/11/kunze-axe.html.

3. Much of this information comes from a series of interviews in 1927 and 1928 that Kunz gave to *The Saturday Evening Post*, which are reprinted at Pala International, accessed October 31, 2024, https://www.palagems.com/kunz-reminiscences1.

4. More information about the Walters family and their collecting activities can be found in William R. Johnston, *William and Henry Walters: The Reticent Collectors* (Johns Hopkins University Press, in association with the Walters Art Gallery, 1999).

5. The Walters's vase (57.1055) and nautical ring (57.1123) are known to have been purchased at that time. Kunz and Walters could have also admired the replicas of ancient American temples shown at the fair. See Sven Schuster, "The World's Fairs as Spaces of Global Knowledge: Latin American Archaeology and Anthropology in the Age of Exhibitions," *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 1 (2018): 69–93.

6. See Johnston, *William and Henry Walters*, 212–17; Mitch Noda, "George F. Kunz and Tiffany and Co.," *Meteorite Times Magazine*, January 1, 2024, https://www.meteorite-times.com/george-f-kunz-and-tiffany-and-co/.

7. Many, but not all, of these objects (accession numbers 57.262–57.352 and others) can be viewed in the Walters Art Museum's online collection, accessed December 6, 2024, https://art.thewalters.org/search/?q=tiffany+%26+co.&era-to=bce&era-from=bce&category[]=AME.

8. George F. Kunz, "Gold Ornaments from United States of Colombia," *The American Antiquarian* 9 (September 1887): 267–80.

9. Invoice, October 1, 1897, Walters Correspondence with Tiffany & Co., Walters Art Museum Library and Archives.

10. A journal entry dated December 14, 1910, states that two jadeites and sixty-seven gold ornaments were received. Anderson Journal records, vol. 1, p. 40, Walters Art Museum Library and Archives. The Anderson Journal is named after James C. Anderson, superintendent of Henry Walters's Baltimore art gallery and collections. The journal has two volumes that encompass the years 1908–32. For more on this source, see Elissa O'Loughlin, "Our Mr. Anderson," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 70–71 (2012–2013): 137–42.

11. George Kunz to Henry Walters, December 29, 1910, Walters Correspondence with Tiffany & Co., Walters Art Museum Library and Archives.

12. Anderson Journal Records, vol. 1, p. 41, entry dated January 11, 1911.

13. Karen Holmberg did attempt to trace different works sourced from Highland Chiriquí in the mid-nineteenth century but was not as interested in Tiffany's presumptive role in marketing some of those works. See Karen Holmberg and Internet Archaeology, "The Archaeology of Highland Chiriqui, Panama—Documents, Images, and Datasets," The Digital Archaeological Record, accessed October 31, 2024, https://core.tdar.org/project/4243/the-archaeology-of-highland-chiriqui-panama-documents-images-and-datasets.

14. "Kelekian Purchase Book for 1911," n.p., last two pages, Walters Art Museum Library and Archives.

15. Johnston, *William and Henry Walters*, 190.

16. Ibid., 335.

17. Joanne Pillsbury, "Recovering the Missing Chapters," in *Making the Met, 1870–2020*, ed. Andrea Bayer and Laura D. Corey (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020), 209–15.

18. Marie-France Fauvet-Berthelot and Leonardo López-Luján, "Édouard Pingret, un coleccionista europeo de mediados del siglo XIX," *Arqueología Mexicana*, no. 114 (March–April 2012): 66–73.

19. See Pál Kelemen, *Medieval American Art*, 2 vols. (Macmillan Company, 1943), vol. 1, 110, 112; vol. 2, plates 60a and 62b.

20. René d'Harnoncourt, *Teaching Portfolio No. 3: Modern Art Old and New* (Museum of Modern Art, 1950), n.p.

21. *The Art of Ancient and Modern Latin America: Selections from Public and Private Collections in the United States* (Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, 1968), cat. no. 35; Walters Art Gallery, *World of Wonder: 1971–1972* (Walters Art Gallery, 1971), cat. no. 322.

22. The Walters, as a former private collection, does not seem to have exhibited these same kinds of shows.

23. *Baltimore Museum of Art News*, January 1994, 5. Quoted in description for *Art in the Countries South of Us*, BMA Building and Exhibition Lantern Slides, Archives and Manuscripts Collection, The Baltimore Museum of Art, accessed October 31, 2024, https://cdm16075.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15264coll5/id/59/rec/1.

24. See "Gallery, *Folk Arts of the South American Highlands* exhibition," Exhibitions Photographs Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Collection, The Baltimore Museum of Art, accessed October 31, 2023, https://cdm16075.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15264coll7/id/597/rec/2.

25. "America's Native Art," *The Sun* (Baltimore), December 7, 1952, Mg16.

26. Frederick Lamp, "African Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art," *African Arts* 17 (November 1983): 38.

27. Katharine W. Fernstrom, "The Alan Wurtzburger Oceanic Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art," *Pacific Arts*, nos. 15/16 (July 1997): 89.

28. "Oceanic Art: Masks of Beauty," *Time* 67, no. 9 (February 27, 1956): 82.

29. Kenneth B. Sawyer, "Art Notes: The Wurtzburger Collection," *The Sun* (Baltimore), March 16, 1958, A23.

30. Advertisement in *Parnassus: A Publication of the College Art Association* 11, no. 4 (1939): 2. On the importance of the Pierre Matisse gallery in marketing ancient American art at this time, see Megan O'Neil "The Changing Geographies of the Mesoamerican Antiquities Market circa 1940: Pierre Matisse and Earl Stendahl," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art Before 1940: A New World of Latin American Antiquities*, ed. Andrew Turner and Megan O'Neil (Getty Research Institute, 2024), 299–324.

31. Kelemen, *Medieval American Art*, vol. 1, 301–02; vol. 2, pl. 247a.

32. For more on the Arensbergs' collecting activities, see Ellen Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones: The Changing Role of Pre-Columbian Art in the Arensberg Collection," in Mark Nelson, William H. Sherman, and Ellen Hoobler, *Hollywood Arensberg: Avant-Garde Collecting in Midcentury L. A.* (Getty Research Institute, 2020), 342–98. And on specific works sold by De Zayas, see ibid., 357–59.

33. Invoice from Pierre Matisse to Walter Arensberg, May 14, 1937, Financial Records, Art collection, Arensberg Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library & Archives, accessed October 31, 2024, https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/WLA_B028_F022_001/.

34. Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones."

35. See Elizabeth Pope's essay in this volume and Mark Nelson and William H. Sherman, "The King and Queen Surrounded: The Arensberg Collection in Context," in Nelson, Sherman, and Hoobler, *Hollywood Arensberg*, 58–59.

36. Hoobler, "Smoothing the Path for Rough Stones," 384.

37. Kenneth Ross, "L. A. Lays Golden Egg, But Philadelphia Takes It Back Home to Hatch," *LA Daily News*, January 20, 1951, in Arensberg gift, Clippings, Arensberg Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library & Archives, accessed October 31, 2024, https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/WLA_B041_F039_012/.

38. "Collection Overview, Description," Bacon (Francis) Library Archive, Online Archive of California, accessed October 31, 2024, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8cj8g5h/.

39. Matthew Affron, "Introduction: How Modern Art Came to the Philadelphia Museum of Art," in *Le Avanguardie: capolavori del Philadelphia Museum of Art*, ed. Matthew Affron (Skira, 2023), 13–24. English translation provided by the author.

40. George and Mary Roberts, *Triumph on Fairmount*: *Fiske Kimball and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Lippincott, 1959), 254–66, 267–76.

41. George Kubler, *The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection: Pre-Columbian Sculpture* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1954), pl. 51.

42. It is interesting that there seem to have been a cluster of exhibitions around the early 1950s that juxtaposed ancient and modern works, from this Arensberg gallery to the shows at MoMA, the BMA, and the Walters, mentioned above, in connection with the Walters' rattlesnake.

43. Kimball also agreed to publish a catalog dedicated to the ancient American works only, which was authored by noted scholar George Kubler, who also wrote the Wurtzburger catalog.

44. Matthew Affron, personal communication, 2023.

"The art of those who lived here before the white man came": Collecting the Ancient Americas at the Cleveland Museum of Art

Susan E. Bergh

An Early Resolution: Frederic Whiting (1920–30)

In 1920, four years after the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) opened, its Board of Trustees resolved that it would display "the art of primitive Americans, such as Peruvian, Mexican, and North American Indian . . . which would be the first attempt of an American museum to show in a constructive way [that is, not as archaeological artifact] the art of those who lived here before the white man came."[1] The impetus for the resolution, unrealized until 1926, probably stems in part from the background of its author, Frederic A. Whiting (1873–1959), the museum's first director (fig. 1). Prior to his arrival in Cleveland, he had been deeply involved in the Arts and Crafts movement in New England, serving as secretary of Boston's nationally influential Society of Arts and Crafts for a dozen years, among other things.[2] The Arts and Crafts movement embraced handcraftsmanship and precapitalist forms of society, such as those of the aboriginal Americas, as antidotes to the impacts of industrialization.[3] In line with these ideas, Whiting and at least some trustees conceived of the museum's collection above all else as an educational resource for the immigrants who worked in the industries that were a source of Cleveland's early-twentieth-century wealth.[4]

Fig. 1 Director Frederic A. Whiting, 1929. Cleveland Museum of Art Archives 09631. Photo by Edd A. Ruggles.

It is a measure of Whiting's ambition in the field that in the 1920s he considered acquiring two ancient Andean collections, one valued at a respectable $29,000 (today, over $500,000).[5] That acquisition had been recommended by Philip Ainsworth Means (1892–1944), an Andean specialist and one of the many archaeologists with whom the CMA would eventually consult about authenticity and related matters. Neither purchase came to fruition, however, and during the first few decades, the collection consisted

almost entirely of modest gifts from the city's prosperous citizens, among them the first of several women who played strong roles in the formation of the museum's Indigenous American holdings.

Thus, Whiting's greatest contribution to the field was not building the collection but rather advocating for Indigenous arts as worthy of an art museum's attention. In 1929, in one of his last acts before resigning, he named the art historian and artist Charles F. Ramus (1902–1979) "In Charge of Primitive Art," a designation that bundled together and singled out Indigenous American, African, and Oceanic arts while falling short of a curatorial appointment. In doing so, he was likely encouraged by Mary Gardiner Ford (d. 1959), a museum supporter who in the same year created a fund dedicated to the acquisition of primitive art, especially from the ancient Americas, in memory of her late husband.[6]

During Ramus's brief employment (he resigned in early 1935), he made the museum's first nontextile ancient American purchases—three bowls winnowed from a large group of Andean (Nazca) ceramics offered by the Argentine dealer Mauro Enrique Pando y Pomar.[7] He also organized several temporary installations of primitive art for both the general public and children, the latter because, like some other early curators, he divided his time with the Department of Educational Works (fig. 2). His efforts in this vein included what may have been the museum's first ancient American exhibition based on loans, *Comparative Pottery and Peruvian Textiles*, in 1931.[8] It is worth noting here that in the early years, educators played a strong role in promoting primitive arts in Cleveland, especially after the hire of Thomas Munro (1897–1974), an internationally noted aesthetic philosopher, as Curator of Education in 1931.[9] From the start, the department had its own funds to purchase objects for use in public outreach programs, and the education art collection, which includes Indigenous American arts, eventually grew to be substantial.

Fig. 2 Charles F. Ramus, In Charge of Primitive Art (and children), 1928. Cleveland Museum of Art Archives 08094.

Beginnings of the Collection: William Milliken, Emery May Norweb, and John Wise (1930–58)

In 1930, after Whiting's departure, the trustees promoted William M. Milliken (1889–1978), who had been hired as the museum's first decorative arts curator in 1919, to become its second director (fig. 3). Like Whiting, Milliken had no formal arts training, though he took art history courses during his studies at Princeton University. It was through his experience in museums—first on the curatorial staff of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he worked with J. Pierpont Morgan's medieval collection, and then in Cleveland—that he developed interests in the medieval and the French Gothic and Baroque periods, distinguishing himself in acquisitions through his taste for small, finely wrought objects made of precious materials.[10] During his directorship, he continued in his curatorial role, apparently assuming responsibility for primitive arts after Ramus

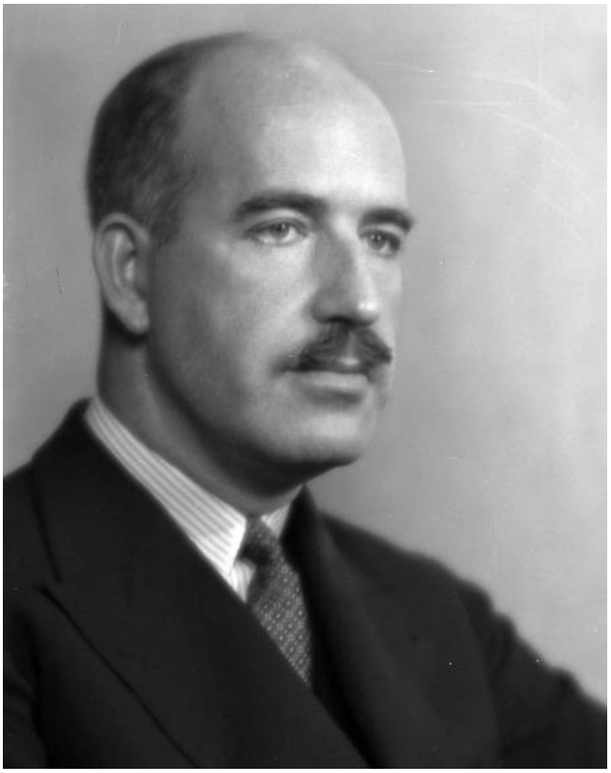

Fig. 3 Director William M. Milliken, 1930. Cleveland Museum of Art Archives 10761. Photo by Edd A. Ruggles.

Fig. 4 Trustee Emery May Holden Norweb, 1958. Cleveland Museum of Art Archives 32872.

departed. Though the Great Depression withered the museum's budget throughout the 1930s, Milliken went on in the 1940s and 1950s to amass the core of the CMA's ancient American collection. Crucially, he did not do so alone but rather with the collaboration of an important trustee, Emery May Holden Norweb (1895–1984), and the help of an ambitious art dealer, John Wise (1901–1981).[11]

Norweb was a member of Cleveland's economic and social aristocracy whose family, the Holdens, had been involved in the museum as trustees from its inception (fig. 4).[12] Following suit, she joined the Advisory Council in 1940 and soon became a member of the board, serving as its sixth president during the 1960s—the first of only two female board leaders so far. She was undoubtedly aided in her accomplishments on the board not only by her family ties but also by her long experience as the wife of a diplomat, R. Henry Norweb, who served in posts primarily in Latin America, including ambassadorships in Peru and Cuba and lesser positions in Mexico, Bolivia, and elsewhere.[13] It was in Chile, in 1930, that she recalled having started to collect in the field, saying that her eyes "were opened to pre-Columbian art, and people who were experts in the field began to bring me things. It was a gorgeous opportunity because no one was buying it then."[14] The unnamed experts may have been some of the archaeologists who, like Means, routinely conferred with collectors, curators, and dealers at the time.[15] Ten years later, in 1940, she began to make a series of gifts that transformed the CMA's collection and helped open the ancient Americas as a collecting area.

Fig. 5 Cloth with Procession of Figures, Central Andes, Nazca, 170 BCE–70 CE (radiocarbon date). Cotton and camelid fiber worked in plain weave with pigment, 27½ × 110½ in. (69.8 × 280.7 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: The Norweb Collection, 1940.530.

Fig. 6 Pectoral, Isthmian region, Panama, Sitio Conte, 400–900 CE. Gold, 9⅞ × 10½ in. (25.1 × 26.7 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. R. Henry Norweb, Mrs. Albert S. Ingalls, with additions from the John L. Severance Fund, 1952.459.

Fig. 7 Dealer John Wise. John and Nora Wise Papers (SC-025), Dallas Museum of Art Archives.

The Norweb Collection of ancient American art comprises about seventy objects, most from the Andes, a focus that continued early interest in the region.[16] Among her gifts are a group of South Coast textiles that remain anchors of the collection, including the magnificent lower half of an early Nasca mantle regarded as the greatest painted cloth to have survived from the region (fig. 5). These textiles seem to have helped to convince the young director that ancient American arts, which he had disparaged as archaeological, possessed artistic merit.[17] She also donated or contributed funds to purchase key objects from Mesoamerica and the Isthmian region (fig. 6). It may be that she acquired some of the works in her collection while living in Latin America, though there seem to be no records identifying them; she also purchased material in the United States.[18]

One of her US sources was John Wise, the Virginia-born, Harvard-educated, New York–based stockbroker, who, having been financially ruined in the crash of 1929, began selling family heirlooms (fig. 7). He went on to become a major ancient American arts dealer—the king of midcentury East Coast dealers, in the words of Michael Coe, a contemporary and Yale University anthropologist and curator.[19] It seems that neither Milliken nor Norweb were acquainted with Wise when, in 1939, he visited Cleveland and offered the museum an Isthmian gold pendant that Milliken found "extraordinary" (fig. 8). Lacking funds, Milliken contacted Norweb, who agreed to purchase it for the museum.[20] Years later, Wise recalled this as his first sale of an ancient American object to a museum dedicated to art and a turning point in the appreciation of ancient American art.[21]

Fig. 8 Pendant, Isthmian region, Panama, International Style, 400–700 CE. Gold, 3 × 2⅛ in. (7.4 × 5.2 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: The Norweb Collection, 1939.509.

Fig. 9 William Milliken (seated at right) and John Wise (in glasses), with unidentified women, in Venice, Italy, July 1970, after Milliken's retirement. John and Nora Wise Papers (SC-025), Dallas Museum of Art Archives.

The encounter seems to have begun a long friendship between Milliken and Wise that Coe singles out for mention and is discernible in the warm, joking correspondence preserved in Milliken's papers (fig. 9).[22] During the period of Milliken's stewardship, Wise was by far the most common source of ancient American objects that entered the collection, whether by direct purchases or as gifts from donors or Wise himself.

In addition to Norweb, Helen Humphreys was the most notable member of the ancient American collecting community centered on Milliken and the museum. A Spanish teacher in Cleveland's public school system, she wished to create a memorial to her late parents and originally considered focusing her attention on objects of peninsular Spanish origin to do so. But she turned instead to the ancient arts of the Spanish colonies, one suspects with Milliken's encouragement, and over two decades donated forty-six works, about half of them Isthmian gold ornaments but also others (fig. 10).[23] Milliken thought that her donations came from her teacher's salary, but she may have had family money: In one five-year period in the 1940s, her cash contributions for acquisitions totaled at least $43,500 (well over $700,000 today). As this implies, she regularly gave funds to the museum and allowed Milliken to negotiate and finalize purchases on her behalf, but she also bought directly—in both cases, usually from Wise, when the source is recorded.[24] Her process for selecting objects is not known, but Milliken's guiding hand may be betrayed by her collection's emphasis on small-scale objects made of precious materials.

Aside from Norweb, several other trustees, two of them also women, supported ancient American acquisitions during Milliken's years, though more episodically: Jane Taft Ingalls (1874–1962), niece of William Howard Taft; Roberta Holden Bole (1876–1950), Norweb's aunt; and Leonard C. Hanna Jr. (1889–1957), heir to a Great Lakes industrial fortune and by far the

Fig. 10 Ornament with Figure, Central Andes, Wari, 600–1000 CE. Shell, stone, and metal, 2⅝ × 1½ in. (6.6 × 3.6 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Humphreys, gift of their daughter Helen, 1944.291.

museum's most important donor. His collecting focused on European art, but he was interested in the ancient Americas and is said to have spent many hours in Wise's gallery.[25]

Apart from acquisitions, Wise was also very involved with *Art of the Americas,* an important exhibition, discussed below, that Milliken organized in the mid-1940s. Wise's contributions included lending objects and donating funds for an exhibition publication. Perhaps most notable from today's perspective, however, is the fact that he also stepped in when, three months before the show opened, one of Milliken's brothers died suddenly, and Milliken, describing himself as stunned and desolated, went to

Wyoming for two months of rest.[26] In letters to lenders, he deputized Wise as his representative in loan affairs—not Helen Foote, a junior decorative arts curator who assisted Milliken on the project—and Wise seems to have visited museums and negotiated loans on Milliken's behalf.

There can be no doubt that Wise was a businessman whose activities were calculated to advance his commercial interests. But Coe, who knew him well and advises caution in judging activities that occurred in a climate radically different from today's, describes Wise as a benefactor and good friend when it came to the CMA and Milliken.[27] Wise's motivations for being so may be revealed in a conversation he had in 1945 with Natacha Rambova, an American Hollywood costume and set designer interested in tracing designs that appear in art across cultures. She related the conversation in a letter to Milliken, writing that Wise "feels about that Museum as you do. In a way he feels it is also his baby and would do anything he can to help your pre-Columbian wing. Apparently, he has been fighting for this early American art for years and seems to want to leave something worthwhile, to feel he has been able to accomplish something of real value."[28] Milliken left no explanation of his own reasons for pursuing the ancient Americas so avidly except to say that it was a matter of opportunity following a lucky coincidence—the meeting that involved the Isthmian pendant (see figure 8).[29] His report of his first encounter with Norweb's Andean textiles, during which he described himself as "breathless" and "transfixed," suggests that, at least at the beginning, the area may have been one of the intense enthusiasms for which he was known, this one reinforced by Norweb's and Wise's mutual interest.[30]

In CMA publications, Milliken's effort with the ancient American collection is usually said to be among his greatest achievements—and one he shared with Norweb.[31] They were abetted by the other donors discussed here and probably also by wartime disruption of European and Asian markets, competitive pricing of ancient American arts compared to those of many other places and periods, and interest in Pan-Americanism that was widespread at the time.[32] When Milliken retired in 1958, he left the museum's Andean holdings about twice as strong numerically as those from either of the other two regions, though the collection is also said to have been noted for its Isthmian gold, thanks in part to Humphreys.[33] Besides textiles, holdings were also strongly focused on the small, precious, three-dimensional objects that were Milliken's predilection.

Art of the Americas Exhibition (November 9, 1945–January 6, 1946)

As noted above, in 1945, with Helen Foote's and Wise's help, Milliken organized *Art of the Americas*, which, strikingly, was one of the few largish exhibitions the museum staged in the postwar period.[34] His intention for the show seems to have been, in part, to celebrate new acquisitions, which, in his opinion, had boosted CMA's ancient American collection into the first rank. Above all, however, was his nationally noteworthy ambition to prove that the "art of the Western Hemisphere can stand on its own feet."[35] It follows that the exhibition made no pretense of being comprehensive, instead embracing quality and beauty as the sole criteria for object selection—borrowing a phrase from Milliken, an *ARTnews* review valorized the "strange beauty" of ancient American art.[36] The result was an unsystematic sampling of all three ancient culture areas that brought together works from twenty-seven institutions, private collectors, and dealers around a core of CMA objects. The show, which is documented in a series of black-and-white photos, was laid out in geographic clusters in two galleries, with Andean textiles ranged along the walls to encircle large cases containing objects of clay, metal, and other media.

Certain design features seem to have advanced Milliken's goal for the show. For instance, cases were divided internally by panels in an arrangement that, according to *ARTnews*, showed each object in its "most felicitous aspect"—in other words, as a work of art.[37] Also, other three-dimensional objects were placed individually on pedestals against the walls, perhaps to emphasize their sculptural qualities and silhouettes, in addition to calling them to visitors' attention. Finally, though the old installation photos are grainy and often difficult to decipher, texts and other interpretive materials seem to have been minimal, as though to reduce distractions that would compete with the artworks.

In the *Bulletin* and many letters to lenders and donors, Milliken exulted that the show was "one of the most successful and popular" in the museum's history and that it drew enthusiastic, appreciative visitors from both the East and West Coasts.[38] One was M. D. C. Crawford, a self-taught expert and champion of ancient Andean textiles, consultant to major museums, and trustee of the Textile Museum in Washington, DC, among other things. His reaction appears to have been representative: "I think it is, barring none, the finest exhibition of its kind for choice and presentation I have ever seen."[39] Local response was no less rapt; for instance, after seeing the show, N. R. Howard, editor of the *Cleveland News,* wrote to a board member, "That durn show moved me more than anything I have seen for a long time."[40] Perhaps due to this reception, after the show closed the museum invested an amount of money that today is surprising—$5,300 (now, over $70,000)—in a small, fifty-eight-page booklet to create a pictorial record of the effort (fig. 11).[41]

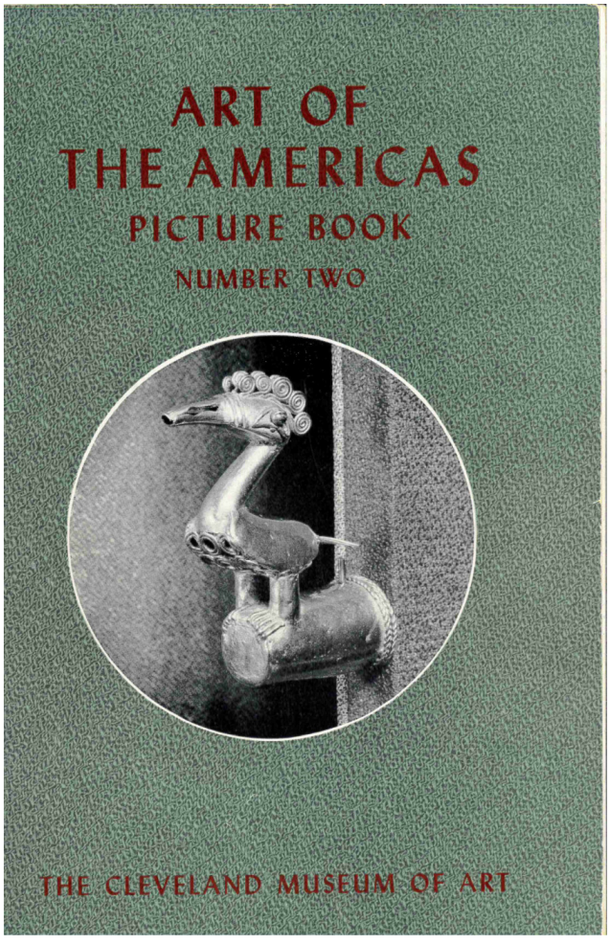

Fig. 11 *Art of the Americas: Picture Book Number Two*, produced on the occasion of the exhibition of the same name, 1946. 58 pages with 45 plates, 5 in color, 9 × 6 in. (22.86 × 15.25 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art.

The Monuments Men: Sherman Lee and Henry Hawley (1958–89)

When Milliken departed, Sherman E. Lee (1918–2008) soon succeeded him to become the institution's third director. Familiar with the museum through his service as Curator of Oriental Art since 1952, he lost no time in expressing his "strong feeling" that the ancient American collection required "larger sculptures and . . . other items . . . not already represented in the collection." He made this stipulation in a letter to Wise that accompanied the return of three dozen small objects that apparently had been at the museum for Milliken's consideration.[42] Also, an analysis revealed that the decorative arts had received the lion's share of acquisition funds since the museum's founding, while Western paintings languished. Thus, Lee and the trustees, soon to be led by Norweb, agreed in the future to devote no more

Fig. 12 Curator Henry H. Hawley, 1968. Cleveland Museum of Art Archives 38827B.

Fig. 14 Head Fragment, Mesoamerica, Olmec, 900–300 BCE. Jadeite, 3 × 2½ in. (7.4 × 6.2 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1961.31.

Fig. 13 Front Face of a Stela, Mesoamerica, Guatemala, Waka' (El Perú), 692 CE. Limestone, 108⅛ × 71¾ in. (274.4 × 182.3 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1967.29.

than 15 percent of the budget to the decorative arts, including ancient American art.[43] Another decision, unspoken in memos but clear in acquisition records, was to diversify the sources from whom material was purchased. Supplanted by a variety of other sellers, Wise placed only a few more works with the museum before he died in 1981.[44]

Despite constraints, a number of the collection's most iconic works were purchased over the next decade under the guidance of Henry H. Hawley (d. 2019), another European decorative arts specialist who assumed responsibility for the Indigenous Americas when he was hired in 1960 (fig. 12). He arrived at the CMA fresh from the University of Delaware Winterthur Program,

where he wrote a master's thesis about Euro-American decorative arts. No doubt responding to Lee's imperatives about collection development, with which he may have agreed, in the 1960s, Hawley bought four of the museum's largest ancient American objects (excluding textiles), most obviously the nine-foot-tall front face of a Maya stela, together with several smaller works (figs. 13 and 14). All but a few are from Mesoamerica, perhaps due in part to an interest in correcting the collection's Andean tilt.

Also, the Mesoamerican art market more frequently offered the large-scale works that were of interest at the time, a decade during which the illicit removal of monumental and architectural art from Mexico and Guatemala reached a crescendo.[45] Aesthetically, Hawley leaned toward the region's realistic styles, especially Maya.

During the 1970s, Hawley remained in charge of the ancient American collection, purchasing a few more of its best-known works. Except for a handful of gifts, however, acquisitions stopped after 1973 due to increasing sensitivities about collecting that culminated in the 1970 UNESCO convention on cultural property and its guidelines for diminishing the illegal traffic in antiquities.[46] By the early 1980s, Hawley seems to have transferred care of the ancient Americas to Virginia Crawford, an assistant decorative arts curator. During his stewardship, he presided over a dramatic decline in acquisitions caused by the shifting milieu and a thinning of the ranks of the group of donors who had clustered around Milliken. But Hawley's contributions, characterized by their great beauty and refinement, had a considerable impact on the collection.

Over the next sixteen years, the museum purchased only one ancient American object, an Aztec gold warrior figurine (1984.37), during the directorship of Evan H. Turner, Lee's successor. A modernist and self-described "paintings man" whose interests lay outside the Americas, Turner nevertheless seems to have masterminded the CMA's 1986 participation in an important ancient American exhibition organized by the Kimbell Art Museum: *The Blood of Kings: A New Interpretation of Maya Art*, one of the CMA's most successful exhibitions of the decade and one that gave rise to a local community of Maya enthusiasts.[47] Its popularity may have encouraged Turner to undertake the museum's first attempt to recruit a curator trained in the ancient American specialty when Crawford, who shepherded the exhibition through its Cleveland appearance, resigned her position.[48]

The Creation of a Department: Margaret Young-Sánchez (1989–99)

Margaret Young-Sánchez arrived in 1989, as she was finishing a doctoral dissertation about Andean textiles in Columbia University's art history program. Apparently coincidentally, the following year saw the arrival of the largest gift in the collection's history—149 objects from the estate of James and Florence Gruener (1903–1990; 1908–1982), long-time Clevelanders and museum supporters who had retired to California. During the 1930s, the Grueners began to travel widely in Mexico, where they became fascinated by folk and ancient art traditions alike. Her attraction appears to have been aesthetic while his interest was in the perceived similarities among the religions of Native America and other parts of the world, and he eventually self-published a book on the topic.[49] Most of their collection is Mesoamerican, representing a relatively complete sampling of the region's major styles (fig. 15).

Once Young-Sánchez had processed and organized an exhibition of the bequest, she embarked on a very active acquisition campaign during the brief directorship of medievalist Robert Bergman (1993–99).[50] Concerned more with quality than with filling gaps or balancing regional representation, she collected with a

Fig. 15 Figural Vessel, Mesoamerica, Zapotec, 500–150 BCE. Ceramic, 11⅜ × 8⅛ in. (28.9 × 20.6 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James C. Gruener, 1990.276.

Fig. 16 Two Artisans, Mesoamerica, Maya, 250–600 CE. Ceramic, 22¼ × 8¾ in. (56.5 × 22 cm) and 23¼ × 10¼ in. (59 × 26 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: John L. Severance Fund, 1994.12.

Fig. 17 Lidded Bowl with Iguana, Isthmian region, Costa Rica, southern Nicoya, 600–1100 CE. Ceramic, 17¾ × 15 in. (45 × 38 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art: Norman O. Stone and Ella A. Stone Memorial Fund, 1995.72.

relatively even hand across the three ancient culture areas, buying to both strengths, especially the Maya collection, and weaknesses, including Isthmian region ceramics, as objects of high caliber became available (figs. 16 and 17).[51] A notable exception to her collecting practice was Andean textile holdings, which had been static since Norweb's foundational gifts of the 1940s and remained so in the 1990s due to the textile curator's interest in other traditions.[52] A few patterns established during Hawley's tenure continued. First, acquisitions came from a range of dealers. Also, apart from the Gruener bequest, few other gifts arrived, the most significant of which was from Clara Taplin Rankin, a veteran of the Milliken era, long-time trustee, and supporter of the ancient Americas. Frances (Franny) Prindle Taft (1921–2017) also

contributed to building the collection via her decades-long trusteeship rather than donations.

Records of Young-Sánchez's activity during the decade—not only acquisitions but also publications, reinstallation, and exhibitions (both realized and proposed)—create the impression of a determined effort to amplify the voice of the Americas within the museum after a long period of relative quiescence and to improve national awareness of the collection, which she described as "one of the finest in the US."[53] She had been hired as an assistant curator of decorative arts. Before resigning in 1999, she had succeeded in establishing a department independent of the decorative arts that included not only the arts of the Americas but also the arts of Africa and Oceania, which had been part of her portfolio.

Back to the Future: Susan Bergh and Renewed Commitment (2000–23)

The next director—the deeply sympathetic Katharine Lee Reid (1941–2022), daughter of Sherman Lee—created separate curatorships for Indigenous American and African arts under the sensible rationale that the areas have little to do with each other.[54] In 2000, I assumed the Americas position, also shortly after completing a doctoral thesis about Andean textiles at Columbia University, and served in it for over two decades. I will leave to a future curator the task of summarizing my collection development activities except to say that, as in the museum's early days, efforts focused most strongly on Andean arts, including textiles, now in an attempt to put them on more equal footing with the Mesoamerican holdings that had come to dominate the collection (fig. 18). I did so in the belief that, when possible, fine objects with pre-1970 provenance should be safeguarded and made available for study in museums while collecting standards, relationships with source countries, and guidelines for repatriation continue to evolve. A major loan exhibition that I organized, *Wari: Lords of the Ancient Andes* (2010), also concerned the central Andes.

Fig. 18 Plate with Supernatural Being, Central Andes, Cupisnique, 900–600 BCE. Stone, probably steatite (soapstone), 6½ in. dia. (16.4 cm dia.). Cleveland Museum of Art: J. H. Wade Trust Fund, 2021.131.

During my tenure, another full-circle moment occurred in 2022, when the museum adopted an "Indigenous Peoples and Land Acknowledgment" that, without explicitly intending to do so, renewed the museum's 1920 resolution to foster appreciation of Indigenous American arts and the alternative ways of thought they embody.[55] Importantly, the acknowledgment also updated the early resolution by orienting attention as much toward people as toward art, especially building collaborative relationships with Indigenous artists and communities. In this spirit, I wrote the acknowledgment, my last official act, following the directions of a committee of local Native North American advisors, some of whom belong to historic Ohio tribes, such as the Haudenosaunee, who were driven from the state after the 1830 passage of the Indian Removal Act. The families of others, including members of Pueblo and Lakota nations, had moved to Cleveland under the auspices of the federal

urban relocation programs in the 1950s through the 1970s. Since the acknowledgment was adopted, and in contrast to a decades-long pattern of neglecting Indigenous North American arts, the CMA has added several contemporary works to its collection—the first was *Survival*, a suite of color lithographs by the Salish, Shoshone, and Métis artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith.[56] It remains to be seen whether this refreshed and reoriented commitment will transform into an acquisition program that bypasses the world of the archaeological past to focus on the realm of the living and the present throughout the Indigenous Americas.

Final Thoughts

The Cleveland Museum of Art's ancient American collection is the result of early aspirations concerning the Indigenous Americas that did not begin to be realized until the mid-twentieth century. Efforts often reflected preoccupations not unique to Cleveland.[57] Most centrally, from the outset, CMA directors and curators joined a broader, well-known struggle to improve these arts' respectability and appeal to Euro-American audiences, including academics whose interest would promote further study. They did so through attempts to validate the material as art rather than archaeological artifact. This endeavor was among the many factors that led to a livelier interest and market in ancient American arts, which, in turn, fed midcentury collecting peaks in Cleveland and elsewhere. In the 1970s, ancient American collecting declined at the CMA, as it did at other institutions.

In contrast to some other museums, Cleveland's collection is largely the result not of gifts, with obvious exceptions, but rather of purchases that were matters of curatorial discretion. In terms of its sources, the collection may be unusual in its midcentury dependence on a single dealer and the friendship to which that dependence owed. It also may be unusual in the involvement of so many women in its formation, Norweb first among them but also Bole, Ford, Humphreys, Ingalls, Rankin, Taft, and others. The motivations for their engagement with ancient American arts are not recorded but may have had to do, in part, with affordability, as Norweb once implied. Their interest could also have had roots in the Euro-American tendency to affiliate women, as well as the racialized Other, with material that the West pejoratively classified as decorative arts, or crafts, including the elaborate ceramics, textiles, and personal ornaments of the Americas.[58] It is hoped that the present volume, the first of its kind, will shed more light on these and other factors that have shaped US museum collections over the last century.

Addendum: Other Ohio Collections of Ancient American Art

Among other collections in Ohio, the largest and finest is at the Dayton Art Institute. In round numbers, permanent holdings comprise 170 works of art that are supplemented by 120 objects on loan since 2000 from the foundation of the late Dayton philanthropists Harold W. and Mary Louise Shaw. The permanent collection, the result of gifts and purchases since the 1930s, incorporates a range of styles from both the Andes, including a rare Wari inlaid conch shell trumpet (1970.32), and Mesoamerica, with strength in the Maya, notably a carved stone panel depicting an enthroned couple (1970.37). The Shaw collection, which is said to have been assembled by the early 1970s, focuses first on Mesoamerica, again especially the Maya—another stone panel features a standing couple (L8.2001.105)—followed by the Isthmian Region.[59]

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio, accepted several ancient American donations that have not been described but are made up at least in part of Andean ceramics. Information about the Cincinnati Art Museum's collection is likewise limited, but holdings seem to comprise about one

hundred ancient Andean objects, one-third of them acquired in an early purchase, in 1883, and the rest by subsequent gifts.[60] Most of the 150 ceramic works at the Columbus Museum of Art represent Mesoamerican styles, especially west Mexican, some purchased in the 1980s and earlier; among several gifts are fifty works from the collection of Eva Glimcher, cofounder with her son, Arne, of New York's Pace Gallery. The styles of the seventy objects at Oberlin College's Allen Memorial Art Museum range from Mexican to Peruvian; half, including many fragments, belong to a study collection. The Toledo Museum of Art's principal ancient American holdings are some eighty ceramic vessels from Panama's Chiriquí region; the majority were donated in 1907 and come from Yale University's Peabody Museum, which deaccessioned them as duplicates, a common early practice.[61] This summary omits Latin American ethnographic collections.

I thank Amanda Mikolic, former curatorial assistant, and CMA archivists Leslie Cade, Susan Hernandez, and especially Rebecca Tousley for their cheerful assistance with research for this essay.

NOTES

1. Evan H. Turner, "Overview: 1917–30," in *Object Lessons: Cleveland Creates an Art Museum,* ed. Evan H. Turner (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1991), 22.

2. Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of New England* (Harper & Brothers, 1949), 281–94; Bruce Robertson, "Frederic A. Whiting: Founding the Museum with Art and Craft," in Turner, *Object Lessons,* 32–59.

3. Monica Obniski, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America," in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, June 2008, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acam/hd_acam.htm.

4. Robertson, "Frederic A. Whiting," 38. It is curious that Whiting claimed pride of place for the CMA in the 1920 resolution since the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where he had lived, acquired its first ancient American textiles in 1878.

5. Accessions Committee minutes, May 17, 1923, and March 24, 1925, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives (CMA Archives).

6. "In Memoriam," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 46, no. 8 (1959): 181.

7. Accessions Committee minutes, December 9, 1930, CMA Archives.

8. C. F. R., "Ancient Peruvian Pottery," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 18, no. 2, part 1 (1931): 35–38.

9. See Neal Harris, "Thomas Munro: Museum Education 1931–67," in Turner, *Object Lessons*, 126–35.

10. Henry Hawley, "Directorship of William M. Milliken," in Turner, *Object Lessons*, 101–22.

11. Milliken reflects on Norweb and other donors in William Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," unpublished manuscript [1960s?], CMA Archives.

12. "Holden, Liberty Emery," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, accessed September 5, 2024, https://case.edu/ech/articles/h/holden-liberty-emery.

13. Mary Strassmeyer, "Norwebs Mark 50th Anniversary," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 15, 1967, p. 18-E.

14. Wilma Salisbury, "The Flamboyant Collector," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 11, 1970, 1, p. 8-E. Norweb collected widely, but her main interest was numismatics.

15. In the 1950s, Samuel K. Lothrop, archaeologist at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, agreed to have Peabody staff survey Norweb property on Panama's Azuero Peninsula with the understanding that the CMA would receive any exhibitable ancient objects that might result. The property, however, could not be accessed. See 1951–52 letters among Lothrop, Norweb, and Milliken, Administrative Correspondence of William M. Milliken, R. Henry and Emery May Norweb, 1930–1958, CMA Archives.

16. The count overlooks twenty-four necklaces made of restrung Andean beads.

17. Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," 146, and Salisbury, "The Flamboyant Collector," for the story of Milliken's first, enthralled encounter with Norweb's textiles.

18. CMA records for her gifts are spotty, and her papers, in the library of Cleveland's Western Reserve Historical Society, contain no information about her collection.

19. Michael Coe, "From *Huaquero* to Connoisseur: The Early Market in Pre-Columbian Art," in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, Elizabeth Hill Boone, ed. (Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 271–90.

20. Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," 144–45.

21. John Canaday, "Behind Exciting Art Show: A Little-Known Collector," *The New York Times*, January 2, 1969, p. 34.

22. Wise's papers at the Dallas Museum of Art, which I have not examined, likely have more light to shed on his relationships in Cleveland.

23. Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," 147; also see Turner, *Object Lessons*, 123.

24. Administrative Correspondence of William M. Milliken, Helen Humphreys 1943–1957, CMA Archives.

25. Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," 150. In his final days, Hanna asked for the loan of five ancient American gold objects the museum had purchased from Wise so he could enjoy them at home. Board of Trustees minutes, January 17, 1957, 5, CMA Archives.

26. Exhibition Compendium, Milliken to Wise, January 19, 1946, and Milliken to A. E. Parr, August 18, 1945, among others, CMA Archives.

27. Coe, "From *Huaquero* to Connoisseur," 271, 286.

28. Exhibition Compendium, Rambova to Milliken, December 15, 1945, CMA Archives.

29. Milliken, "The Cleveland Museum of Art Collection," 144.

30. For Milliken's mood extremes, see Hawley, "Directorship of William M. Milliken," 101; for the textiles encounter, see note 17.

31. For instance, Henry Hawley, "Pre-Columbian Art at Cleveland," *Apollo* 78, no. 22 (1963): 489–93; Sherman Lee and William D. Wixom, "In Memorial: William Mathewson Milliken, 1889–1978," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 65, no. 4 (1978): n.p.

32. Evan H. Turner, "Overview: 1945–58," in Turner, *Object Lessons*, 96–100; Hawley, "Directorship of William M. Milliken," 113.

33. Katharine Lee Reid, personal communication with the author, ca. 2004.

34. Hawley, "Directorship of William M. Milliken," 115.

35. William Milliken, "Exhibition of the 'Art of the Americas,'" *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 32, no. 9 (1945): 155–71, 175, and "Part II. Annual Report Issue for the Year 1945," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 33, no. 6 (1946): 107.

36. "Before Columbus: Gold, Stone, and Wool at Cleveland," *ARTnews* 44, no. 16 (1945): 20–23; Milliken, "Exhibition of the 'Art of the Americas,'" 155.

37. "Before Columbus," 20. See exhibition photos on the CMA Archives' website, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.clevelandart.org/ingalls-library-and-museum-archives/historical-exhibitions?search=Art+of+the+Americas&page=0.

38. For instance, Milliken, "Part II. Annual Report Issue for the Year 1945," 107.

39. Exhibition Compendium, Milliken to Norweb, December 5, 1945, CMA Archives.

40. Exhibition Compendium, Howard to Harold T. Clark, December 17, 1945, CMA Archives.

41. Exhibition Compendium, Milliken to Robert Woods Bliss, January 6, 1947, CMA Archives. The booklet seems to omit some of the objects that appeared in the exhibition.

42. Administrative Correspondence of Sherman E. Lee, Series 1, Lee to Wise, September 6, 1958, CMA Archives.

43. Sherman E. Lee, "The Cleveland Museum of Art: 1958–1983," in Turner, *Object Lessons*, 163–81. However, acquisition funds greatly increased in 1957 after half of Leonard Hanna's $34 million bequest was devoted to art purchases.

44. In retirement, Milliken remained in touch with Wise (see figure 9) and wrote the foreword to the catalog for an exhibition, *World of Ancient Gold*, that Wise organized at the New York World's Fair in 1964–65. Wise bequeathed his collection and papers to the Dallas Museum of Art. According to the late, long-time Dallas curator Carol Robbins, however, the Wises had always anticipated that their collection would find a home in Cleveland (personal communication with the author,

June 12, 2007). The shifting wind that followed Milliken's retirement in Cleveland likely explains their change of mind, at least in part.

45. Clemency Coggins, "Illicit Traffic of Pre-Columbian Antiquities," *Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (1969): 94, 96, 98, 114.

46. Hawley memo, ancient Americas departmental files, 1970s, CMA.

47. Exhibition Compendium, Turner to Mary Miller, Linda Schele, and lenders, late 1986 and early 1987, CMA Archives. The collaboration may have been prompted by the fact that the CMA and the Kimbell have companion stelas from the Maya site Waka' (see figure 13, Kimbell AP 1970.02).

48. Margaret Young-Sánchez, personal communication with the author, 2024.

49. Margaret Young-Sánchez, "The Gruener Collection of Pre-Columbian Art," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79, no. 7 (1992): 234–75; James C. Gruener, *The Olmec Riddle: An Inquiry into the Origin of Pre-Columbian Civilization* (Vengreen Publications, 1987). The education art collection contains 104 additional Gruener objects.

50. Young-Sánchez to Diane De Grazia, "Collecting Philosophy" memo, March 3, 1998, Ancient Americas departmental files, CMA.

51. Young-Sánchez, personal communication with author, 2024.

52. Young-Sánchez, "Collecting Philosophy" memo.

53. Ibid.

54. Katharine Lee Reid, personal communication with the author, ca. 2000.

55. The acknowledgment can be found on the museum's website, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.clevelandart.org/indigenous-peoples-and-land-acknowledgment.

56. In the mid-1950s, during Sherman Lee's directorship, scores of Native North American objects in the permanent collection were transferred to the education art collection, over Henry Hawley's objections. Memo from Hawley to Gabriel Weisburg, October 1974, ancient Americas departmental files. That trend was reversed in the 2000s; also, Young-Sánchez acquired several North American objects in the 1990s.

57. For instance, Martin Berger, "Introduction" and "Between Canon and Coincidence," *Journal for Art Market Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023), https://fokum-jams.org.

58. For instance, see Elissa Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction, and Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg," *Oxford Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (2004): 339–64.

59. Harmer Johnson, "Introduction," *Dayton Art Institute, Pre-Columbian Treasures: The Harold W. Shaw Collection* (Dayton Art Institute, 2003). My thanks to Sally E. Kurtz, the institute's registrar, for kindly supplying information about Dayton's collection.

60. This estimate comes from an unillustrated spreadsheet provided by the museum. Tamara Bray determined that most of the Ecuadorian objects at the University of Cincinnati's Langsam Library are replicas. Personal communication with the author, 2024.

61. "Chiriquian Pottery," a notice of acquisition in Toldedo Museum of Art files.

Art Not Artifact: The Aesthetic Recognition of Ancient and Indigenous American Works at the Art Institute of Chicago

Elizabeth Irene Pope

Fig. 1 Art Institute of Chicago entrance, c. 1910. Art Institute of Chicago, 1893–1916. Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. Commission on Chicago Landmarks Photograph Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Art and Architecture Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago. Digital file #201606_170201-231.

The Art Institute of Chicago's building is a remnant of the city's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage to the Americas. Columbus's arrival in the "New World" was framed as a decisive moment within an overarching vision of a uniquely American cultural and industrial progress (fig. 1). The organizers sought to reveal the foundation of modern America through the scientific study of its "Native peoples."[1] The Exposition offered many their first engagement with ancient and Indigenous Americas through archaeology and ethnographic displays, as well as replicas of ancient sculpture and architecture recently discovered in Mexico and Central America (fig. 2).

The artifacts gathered for the Exposition became the founding collection for the new Columbian Museum of Chicago (later the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago Natural History Museum, and finally the Field Museum), while the Art Institute would move into the headquarters of the World's Congress Auxiliary in the heart of Chicago. Manifesting the ideal "White City" presented by the Exposition, this Beaux-Art building has a facade etched with the names of Western history's most important painters, sculptors, and architects—asserting

itself as an art institution in the classical European model. The collections of the Art Institute long reflected this perspective, with no interest in works from the ancient or Indigenous Americas. Exhibiting pre-Columbian and North American objects in natural history or anthropological institutions, rather than an art museum, was the standard practice of the day; it would take several decades until these "artifacts" were regarded as "art" and displayed alongside other celebrated artistic traditions.

Modest Gifts and Industrial Inspiration

Few ancient or Indigenous American objects entered the Art Institute's permanent collection during the fifty years after its founding in 1879. They typically were modest gifts from civic-minded local philanthropists, such as the assortment of broken clay figures, earflares, and spindle whorls from ancient Mexico given in 1907—the first works from Mesoamerica acquired by the museum (fig. 3). With no curatorial department dedicated to the collection and display of these works, most were placed within the Decorative Arts department, "all but forgotten in various storerooms."[2]

One of the Art Institute's earliest displays of ancient American objects was the addition of Andean textile fragments to a "History of Textiles" installation in 1930. Bessie Bennett—then curator of Decorative Arts—explained that including textiles from "our own hemisphere" would be "of great service not only to art students but to manufacturers who seek inspiration for new patterns and color schemes."[3]

Fig. 2 "Relics of a Nameless Race," in *Photographs of the World's Fair* (The Werner Company, Chicago, 1894), 153. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.5479/sil.817405.39088013421441.

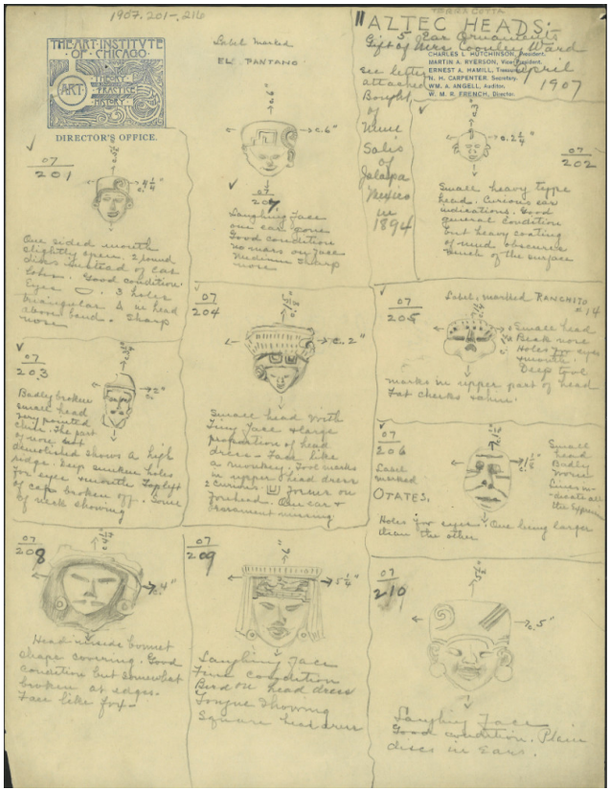

Fig. 3 Record of donation from Lydia Ames Coonley-Ward to the Art Institute of Chicago, April 1907. Department records, Arts of the Americas, Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 4 Katharine Kuh in her office at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1951. Photograph by Stephen Lewellyn. Katharine Kuh papers, 1875–1994, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Digital ID: 9865.

Fig. 5 Installation view, Katharine Kuh Gallery, George Fred Keck watercolors and Oceanic sculpture, November 1940. Katharine Kuh Papers, 1875–1994, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Digital ID: 9951.

Katharine Kuh and the Aesthetics of "Primitive Art"

Although the introduction of modern art to Chicago was fraught, it was through early-twentieth-century modernism—specifically the interest in the aesthetics of "primitive art"—that ancient and Indigenous American works of art gained their place at the Art Institute.[4] Katharine Kuh (1904–1994) was essential to bringing modern avant-garde artists and non-Western art to the attention of the city and the museum (fig. 4). Kuh's desire to be a pioneer led her to a career as a gallerist, art educator, curator, art consultant, and critic, specializing in modern art.[5] She learned about a new approach to teaching and displaying art through Alfred H. Barr Jr., with whom Kuh took an art history class during college. Barr, the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA; 1929–40), would become Kuh's mentor and collaborator.[6] His advocacy of art of the day, visually focused methods for teaching art, explorations of the aesthetic connections between modern and non-Western art, and formalist approach to art installation were fundamental to Kuh's own practice.[7]

In 1935, Kuh opened the first commercial gallery in Chicago devoted to avant-garde artists (fig. 5). Contemporary works were often juxtaposed with "various kinds of primitive art," reflecting a modernist perspective in which non-Western art was embraced as a source of visual inspiration and authenticity.[8] Kuh's gallery opened just two years after MoMA's influential exhibition *American Sources of Modern Art*, which presented pre-Columbian objects as works of art in an art museum through a formalist, aesthetic appreciation.[9]

Kuh found it difficult to find buyers for the avant-garde in conservative Chicago, and with World War II limiting her access to the European artists she promoted, she was forced to close her gallery in 1942. Kuh's creative engagement with modern art was widely recognized, and she was hired by the director of the Art Institute, Daniel Catton Rich (1904–1976). Initially working in public relations, she was soon appointed to lead the Gallery of Art Interpretation, which Kuh transformed into an experimental museum space whose primary objective was to teach adult audiences about contemporary art.[10]

Following Kuh's intention "to teach art visually," labels and texts were eliminated as much as possible, encouraging direct, uninterrupted, visual engagement with individual works of art.[11] The Gallery of Art Interpretation also "focus[ed] on the art of the present and recent past and [related] it not just to the history of western art but to that of other cultures (oriental, pre-Columbian, African, folk, etc.)."[12] Audiences were introduced to visual vocabularies different than traditionally used in Western art, inviting consideration of color, texture, and space.

Kuh's first installation in the Gallery of Art Interpretation was an "explanatory exhibition" that complemented the Art Institute's 1944 exhibition on José Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913), the first large-scale presentation of the artist's work in the United States (fig. 6).[13] Described as a "condensed introductory show to familiarize patrons with the background and technique of the artist represented in the main exhibition halls," Kuh's exhibition provided a foundation for the general public to approach the work of Posada, a largely unknown artist.

Kuh's exhibition posed the question: "Who is Posada?" To answer, Kuh created a free-flowing space—designed with Bauhaus architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—organized around a series of explanatory ideas. The installation visually engaged with the audience using "blow-ups, photographs, actual objects, diagrams, and, of course, original prints" and included a variety of objects from Mexico's past and present.[14] Highlighting Posada's engagement with Mexican culture, the exhibition included works of art from the country's popular and ancient traditions; however, because the Art Institute did not have a collection of significant pre-Columbian works, several objects had to be borrowed from Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, including an Aztec *Coiled Rattlesnake* (48126).[15]

Fig. 6 Installation view, *Who Is Posada?*, Gallery of Art Interpretation, at the Art Institute of Chicago, April 13–May 14, 1944. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

The Eduard Gaffron Collection

With her experience working with non-Western objects, Kuh understood the significance when she learned of an opportunity for the museum to acquire one of the largest collections of ancient Andean art in private hands: the Eduard Gaffron Collection. In late 1948, Kuh met Dr. Hans Gaffron, then an associate professor at the University of Chicago, who told her about his father's collection, which he and his sister, Mercedes Gaffron, had inherited upon his death in 1931. Informed of the family's desire to determine the future of the collection, Kuh encouraged Hans to write to Rich, the Art Institute's director. This was the catalyst that led to the museum's purchase of the famed Gaffron Collection and, ultimately, the establishment of a new department dedicated to primitive art.[16]

Eduard Gaffron was a German doctor who lived in Peru from 1892 to 1912, during which time he actively collected ancient

Peruvian works (fig. 7). Most of his collection likely was purchased through an informal market of looted objects; some may have been acquired during unofficial excavations or by

Fig. 7 Dr. Eduard Gaffron, Lima, 1905. From Schmitz and Deimel, *Geschenke der Ahnen* (Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 2001), 14, fig. 1.

Fig. 8 View of Eduard Gaffron's private collection, Berlin, 1917. Folklore collections in the Reiss-Museum Mannheim, Gaffron correspondence, 1917. From Schmitz and Deimel, *Geschenke der Ahnen* (Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 2001), 15, fig. 2.

exchange in lieu of payment for his medical services.[17] While ancient Peruvian art and culture was generally overlooked at the time, Gaffron's interest would have suited his status in Peru where, by the mid-nineteenth century, "the display of antiquities in parlors and salons was confined to the highest strata of Lima society . . . to own and to display antiquities, to bring them out and show them to one's guests after dinner, appears to have constituted an element of elite sociability in the city of Lima."[18]

Gaffron returned to Berlin in 1912 with his collection, which he continued to refine through sales, purchases, and exchanges, ultimately numbering in the tens of thousands.[19] The Eduard Gaffron Collection was widely known among scholars and fellow enthusiasts and was published several times in German, English, and French, initially in 1924 by Walter Lehmann and Heinrich Ubbelohde-Doering.[20] Gaffron donated and sold large portions of his holdings to museums and private collectors in Europe and the United States so that at the time of his death, the collection numbered approximately 1,300 objects, mostly ancient Andean ceramics but also textiles, metalwork, and stone. Because of the upheavals in Germany and restrictions placed on the export of art, when Hans left the country in 1931, the bulk of the collection remained in Germany, stored at Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich, where it had been under the care of Ubbelohde-Doering since 1912 (fig. 8).

Following Kuh's suggestion, Hans wrote to Rich, asking for advice and help in getting his father's collection out of Germany.[21] Rich was receptive to the message, not only as a supporter of modern art but also a collector of primitive art.[22] With help from Ubbelohde-Doering, the Gaffron Collection was shipped to Chicago and placed on long-term loan with the museum. Because none of the Art Institute's existing curatorial departments oversaw pre-Columbian works, the loan was arranged through the department of Decorative Arts, led by curator Meyric R. Rogers, and Alan R. Sawyer, then the assistant to the curator.

The Art Institute introduced the Eduard Gaffron Collection to the public in a series of special exhibitions beginning in April 1952 (fig. 9). The news release referred to the works as "treasures," emphasizing their aesthetic qualities and artistic excellence.[23] A typescript description of the exhibition asserts the Art Institute's role as an art museum in its presentation of this previously overlooked area: "The current exhibition is designed to bring out the artistic significance of the material rather than its historical or archaeological meaning."[24]

These objects were regarded as art and installed as such: Photographs of the exhibition show simplified casework and minimal didactics, allowing for the audience to visually engage with individual works. Furthermore, the vessels were generously spaced, with many elevated on small lifts, signaling their special status. It is also of note that these pre-Columbian works were not placed in juxtaposition to modern paintings or sculptures but were instead presented on their own.

In 1953, Hans and Mercedes Gaffron explained their decision to sell to the Art Institute in a letter to Rogers.[25] Both wanted to keep the collection together, hoping that by doing so it would continue to have a connection to their father. In a letter to her brother that Hans

Fig. 9 Installation view, *Treasures of Ancient Peruvian Art: The Eduard Gaffron Collection* at the Art Institute of Chicago, April 1952. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

shared with Rogers, Mercedes also responded positively to the Art Institute's art-focused installation, stating: "It would please me particularly if the collection remained in Chicago with Dr. Rogers who exhibited it so prettily instead of collecting dust in a museum of natural history."[26]

Purchasing the Eduard Gaffron Collection was a major undertaking for the museum. If successful, the museum would need to create a new collecting area dedicated to the acquisition and display of primitive art. Rogers and Rich were aware of the increasing interest in non-Western art in the US and abroad by museums and private collectors, that prices for these works of art were rising, and opportunities to enter the field were limited.[27] They advised that the purchase be finalized quickly.[28]

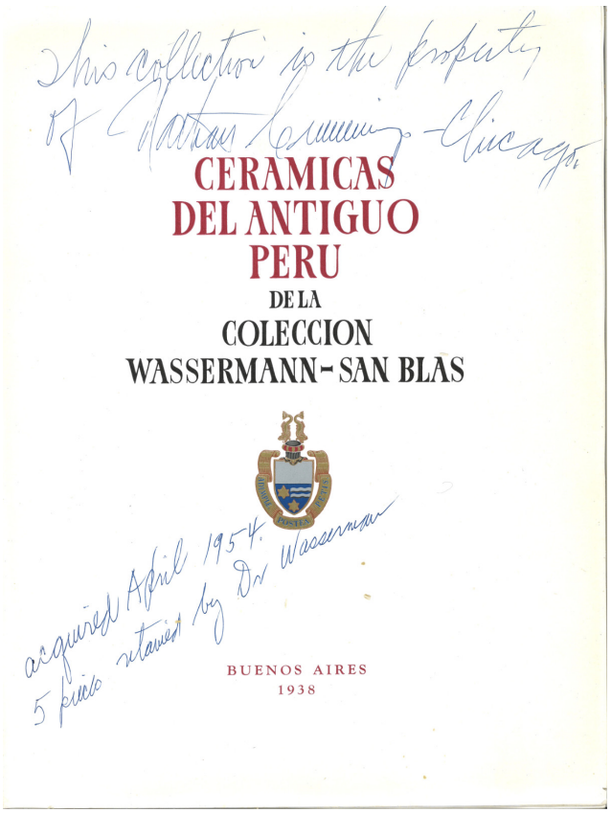

Fig. 10 *Ceramicas del Antiguo Peru de la coleccion Wassermann-San Blas* (1938), title page. Department records, Arts of the Americas, Art Institute of Chicago.

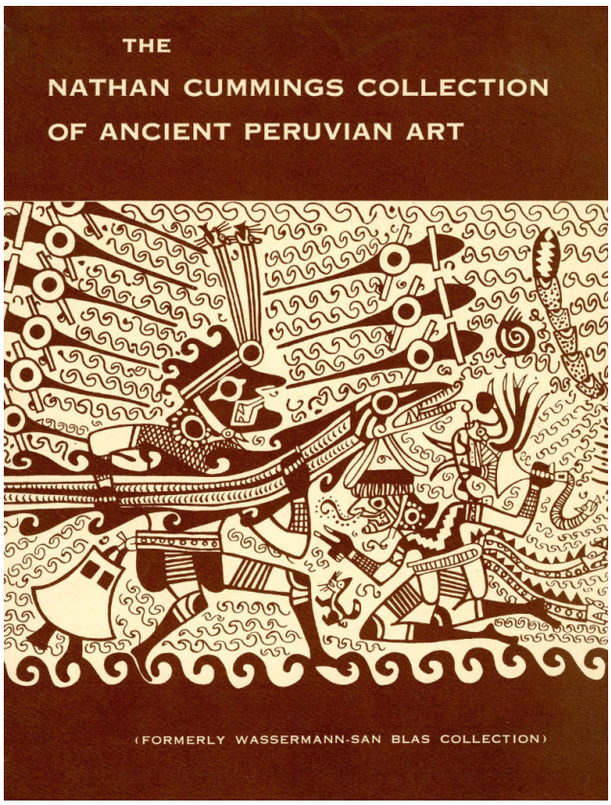

Fig. 11 *The Nathan Cummings Collection of Ancient Peruvian Art* (Nathan Cummings, 1954), cover.

Nathan Cummings and Chicago Collectors

One influential group encouraging the Art Institute to establish a new department for primitive art was Chicago collectors, particularly those with an interest in modern art and collections that included non-Western works. While the Art Institute was pursuing the Gaffron Collection, Nathan Cummings, a Chicago businessman who had an important collection of paintings and sculptures from the mid-nineteenth century to contemporary works, purchased another major private collection of ancient Andean art, the Wasserman-San Blas Collection (fig. 10). As B. J. Wassermann-San Blas explained in the preface to his 1938 catalog, his collection—totaling approximately 1,500 objects—was begun by his maternal grandmother during a visit to Peru a century before, to which he added through unauthorized excavations and purchases on the open market.[29] In 1954, Wassermann-San Blas offered the works for sale to several private collectors, including Cummings. Cummings had known the seller for years and—after some consideration and a drop in price—he purchased the collection that spring.[30]

Later that year, Cummings lent nearly two hundred ancient Andean ceramics to the Art Institute for a special exhibition that would later travel to museums in the US, Canada, France, and Italy. Cummings worked with Sawyer—then the Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts—to produce "a handbook" of his newly acquired collection, rebranding it as *The Nathan Cummings Collection of Ancient Peruvian Art* (fig. 11). In the introduction to the small catalog,

Cummings stated that his interest in ancient Andean works was as a collector of modern art: "Although most of the pottery was made more than a thousand years ago, by Indians whose tribal names are strange to our ears, it is so pleasing to the modern eye that it stands as a challenge to the work of today's artists."[31]

A New Department for Primitive Art

The purchase of the Gaffron Collection in April 1955, along with a promised gift from the Nathan Cummings Collection, were envisioned as a "cornerstone on which to build a new division of Primitive Arts."[32] In the *1954–1955 Annual Report*, Rich explained the rationale for the founding of a new department dedicated to a collecting area previously ignored by the museum: "One of the great discoveries of the twentieth century is the fascinating series of interlocking cultures broadly called Pre-Columbian. Regarded as mere curios by their discoverers, and later crowded into the cases of ethnographic museums, these ancient sculptures, ceramics, and textiles are now being studied seriously, and are recognized as works of art worthy to rank with many of the greatest expressions of the Orient and Europe."[33]

At this time, questions were being raised—mostly by anthropologists—asking if art museums should be collecting these works at all. In a 1958 essay, Harry L. Shapiro, chair of the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, rejected efforts by US art museums to acquire non-Western works, arguing, in part, that the aesthetic approach of art museums removed context: "Primitive art belongs with its culture and should be exhibited in reference to it. Such a task belongs in the anthropological field."[34]

The Art Institute responded to this opposition by differentiating itself from the Chicago Natural History Museum. At the first meeting of the Committee on Primitive Art held on April 29, 1957, Rogers addressed concerns over "future relations" with the Chicago Natural History Museum and other scientific institutions, asserting: "There will be no conflict in the field of Primitive Art since scientific museums are interested in collecting ethnographic materials, whereas the Art Institute will stress only the esthetic side and exhibit primitive objects for their artistic value."[35]

Sawyer—who was selected as the first curator of the new Primitive Art department in 1958 despite having little training in non-Western art—asserted that the two "sister institutions" had qualitatively different approaches to the same material. In an essay promoting one of the first exhibitions presented by the Primitive Art department—an exhibition of Oceanic art—Sawyer hailed the Chicago Natural History Museum's Oceanic collection as one of the finest and most extensive in the world; yet, through "careful selection and presentation [the Art Institute] sought to emphasize the great artistic achievements of the Oceanic peoples, so that they can be appreciated in relation to the great creative expressions of European and Asiatic peoples on view in our other galleries."[36]

Growing a Collection of Primitive Art

One difficulty faced by the new department was the collections' lack of depth and breadth, with approximately 1,500 ancient Andean ceramics and textiles supplemented by fewer than one hundred works from other culture areas. At the first meeting of the committee, members recognized that the ancient Andean works numbered far in excess of what could be displayed and decided that "only the finest objects were to be retained, the balance traded or sold to dealers, collectors, and museums in order to acquire additional objects of top quality."[37] Over the course of subsequent meetings, Sawyer and the committee reviewed the Gaffron Collection holdings, identifying works for possible disposal.

Fig. 12 Installation view, *Primitive Art from Chicago Collections* at the Art Institute of Chicago, November 16, 1960–January 2, 1961. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 13 Installation view, Primitive Art permanent collection gallery at the Art Institute of Chicago, summer and fall 1960. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

Sawyer would leave the museum in 1959, so the final dispersal of "surplus" Andean works would fall to Allen Wardwell, who was appointed as the Assistant Curator of the Primitive Art department in 1960. Although trained in decorative arts, Wardwell's master's thesis focused on Polynesian art, and he previously had worked on an African sculpture exhibition at the Museum of Primitive Art. In 1961, the committee authorized the exchange of ancient Andean ceramics, gold, and featherwork with the Denver Art Museum, Milwaukee Public Museums, Field Natural History Museum, and the New York dealer Henri Kamer for works of art from Oceania, Africa, and North American works in their collections.[38]

As the department continued to seek opportunities to expand its holdings, it continued to rely on loans from local private collectors and the Chicago Natural History Museum. This arrangement was made explicit with the first major exhibition organized by the department, *Primitive Art from Chicago Collections*, which opened at the end of 1960 (fig. 12). In the exhibition catalog, Wardwell remarked that more than 250 objects had been loaned from fifty-three sources, demonstrating "the widespread interest in the so-called 'primitive arts' in Chicago," yet most lenders had only a few pieces in their collections.[39] He also acknowledged "the most important collection of primitive art in Chicago is the vast amount of material collected from an anthropological standpoint by the Chicago Natural History Museum."[40]

Emphasizing the aesthetics of the works, the installation of *Chicago Collections* was stark, with wide open spaces. This allowed works from different cultures, regions, and time periods to be seen in a single glance, which reinforced the assumption of a cohesive category of primitive art. Discreetly placed area maps and minimal didactic texts offered little distraction to visual engagement with the objects, but they provided only minimal guidance for the audience.

The focus on individual works of art and their formal qualities was also the design approach in the early permanent collection galleries. A photograph from the 1960s shows a decontextualized, modernist display, featuring simple casework, a small selection of works, and minimal text (fig. 13). A later description of the early primitive art installation suggests that, due

to the limitations of the space allocated to the collection, artwork was displayed according to size rather than style or place of origin, prioritizing visual and formal inquiry over contextual.[41]

Even with limited funds, the young department made purchases to better present the breadth of its collecting areas, selecting singular masterpieces that would act as keystones for the collection. In the 1960s, works from across the ancient Americas were acquired, including the Teotihuacan *Mural Fragment* (1962.702), Coclé *Pedestal Bowl* (1963.389), Chimú *Tumi* (1963.841), and Maya *Ballplayer Panel* (1965.407). In 1965, the department published its first collection catalog, *Primitive Art in the Collections of The Art Institute of Chicago*, a small book featuring eighty works from across non-Western cultures (fig. 14). In his introduction, Wardwell acknowledged that "these collections will never attain the wealth and depth of those in older and better endowed institutions," however, he hoped that, in some small way, "representation of the great artistic achievements of these exotic cultures can be imparted to those who visit the Art Institute of Chicago."[42]

The succeeding curator of the department, Evan Maurer, fundamentally transformed how the collection was presented, reflecting increased specialization in academia and research in the field.[43] Although Maurer was trained as a modernist with little experience with primitive art, his 1978 reinstallation of the permanent collection galleries moved away from generalized and formalist displays. Instead, he offered a deeper understanding of the works of art by situating them within their specific cultural contexts. The collection also was relocated to larger galleries, allowing for separate installations of the three primary culture areas: Americas, Oceania, and Africa. Each was further organized according to region, style, and medium. Juxtapositions of artworks were used to highlight similar motifs across media within a single culture and to demonstrate differences in regional art styles. To further emphasize the vast diversity of the department's holdings within the distinct collecting areas, Mauer changed the name of the department to Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

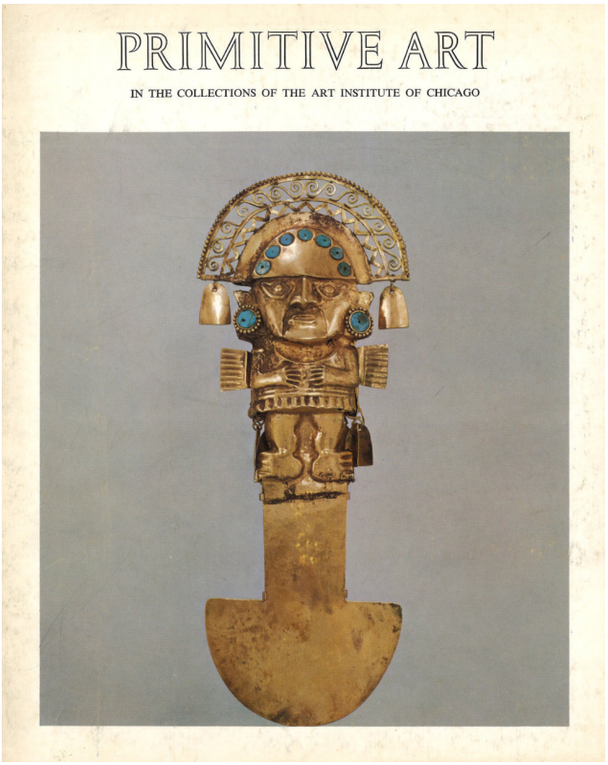

Fig. 14 Allen Wardwell, *Primitive Art in the Collections of The Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1965), cover.

Following the departure of Maurer in 1981, the museum hired Richard F. Townsend, the first curator of the department trained in anthropology and art history whose expertise was in the arts of the Americas, having conducted fieldwork and studies in the US Southwest, Mexico, and Peru. However, two principles of Townsend's work resonated with earlier approaches to ancient and Indigenous American objects at the museum: the prioritization of aesthetic excellence and visual engagement with individual works of art and the concept of a unifying sacred world view shared by the diverse cultures of the Americas.

Fig. 15 Installation view, Ancient Americas permanent collection gallery, Gallery 125 at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1985. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 16 Installation view, *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes* at the Art Institute of Chicago, October 10, 1992–January 3, 1993. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

With a career at the Art Institute lasting thirty-five years, Townsend had a profound impact on the museum, including organizing two major permanent collection reinstallations and six special exhibitions. At the outset, Townsend refined the collection by deaccessioning lesser quality and redundant material, including Oceanic works, an area that had never been actively acquired.[44] He then reinstalled the collection within three adjacent, yet separate, galleries that underscored the newly defined collecting areas: arts of Africa, the ancient Americas, and Indigenous North American Indian (fig. 15). Recognizing the advancements of academic fields of study and the need for specialized training, a separate curatorial position was established to oversee African arts in 1987.[45]

The 1992 special exhibition *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes* reflected Townsend's approach to the arts and cultures of the Americas (fig. 16). This exhibition explored the essential integration of human society with the sacred natural world. As Townsend explained: "The gallery presentation was designed to show that art, architecture, and ritual were engaged in religious dialogue with the deified forms of earth, sky, and water. We intended to show that the visual arts played an active role in the ritual cycle of natural and social renewal."[46]

Held during the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in North America, the exhibition did not address European impact on the Americas; instead, it showcased the great diversity and artistic accomplishment of the pre-Columbian past. The installation presented 280 objects from twenty-four cultures, contextualized by large-scale photographs of natural environments and man-made structures—the "sacred landscapes" of the exhibition theme. Although some argued that the conceptual underpinning was lacking from the exhibition, others observed that the installation invited aesthetic appreciation of the works: As one reviewer noted, "Those who put quality first can also rejoice, for there is little in this exhibition . . . that does not rivet the eye."[47]

Fig. 17 Installation view, Indian Arts of the Americas permanent collection gallery, Gallery 136, at the Art Institute of Chicago, 2011. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

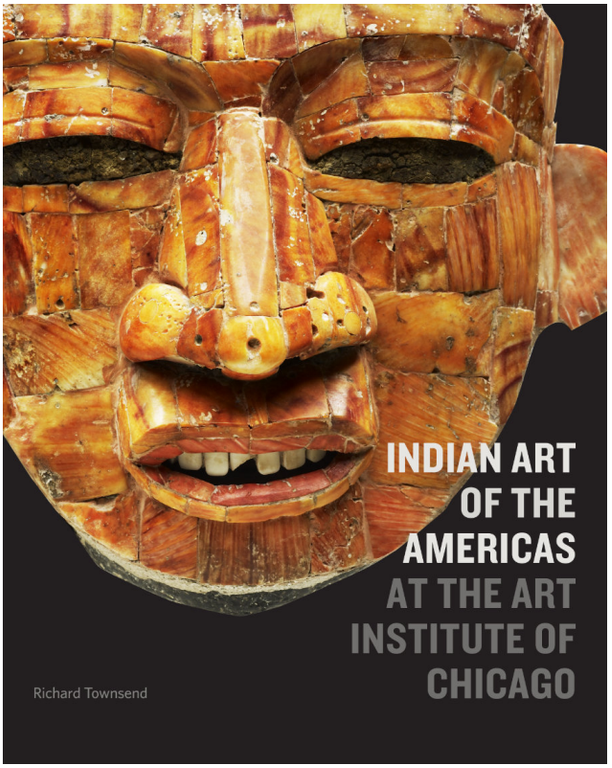

Fig. 18 Richard F. Townsend with Elizabeth Pope, *Indian Art of the Americas at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), cover.

I joined the department in 2005, working alongside Townsend until his retirement in 2016. One major project during this time was the 2011 reinstallation of the permanent collection into much larger galleries (fig. 17).[48] Renamed "Indian Arts of the Americas," the collection included traditional works of art founded in ancient and Indigenous customs and practices united by a shared world view. The galleries presented a wide range of works in a large open space, loosely divided into three sections, one for each of three major culture areas. A centrally placed text explained the connection between communities and the sacred world—a theme reinforced by a video displaying landscapes, ritual, and architecture—while a map of the hemisphere noted the location of the diverse cultures: North American, Mesoamerican, and Andean.[49] Although organized by geographic region and culture, open passages between each section allowed visitors to see the broad scope of the collection, encouraging audiences to make visual connections across culture, time, and space.

Casework was designed to be unobtrusive, and didactics were kept to a minimum and separated from the objects, removing distraction and distance between the visitor and the artwork. Townsend stated: "Our emphasis here is rather to bring out the masterpieces . . . and to display these in a way that they can speak for themselves in terms of their formal qualities—form, color, and shape."[50]

The culmination of Townsend's work at the museum was the publication of a collection catalog, the first since Wardwell's in 1965 (fig. 18).[51] Although the book presents over 350 individual works of art, each discussed within their specific cultural context, Townsend's vision of a unified American sacred worldview connects them all.

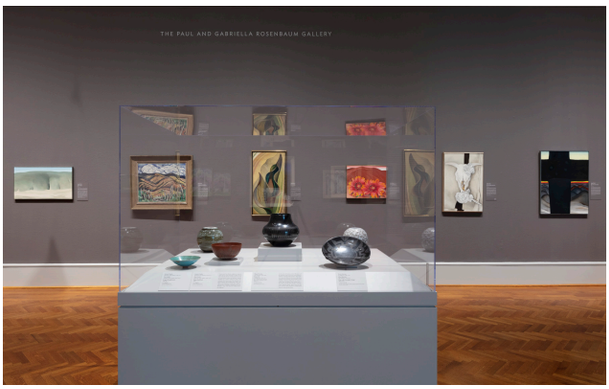

Fig. 19 Installation view, Arts of the Americas permanent collection gallery, Gallery 265, The Paul and Gabriella Rosenbaum Gallery, at the Art Institute of Chicago, March 2022. Courtesy Institutional Photography Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

A New Perspective: Arts of the Americas

In 2020, one of the last traces of the departments' "primitive art" origins was ended, as the arts of Africa and the arts of ancient and Indigenous Americas were separated and placed in different curatorial departments. The American objects joined with what previously was known as American Art—works made in the US from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries—in a newly conceived Arts of the Americas department. Currently, under the curatorship of Andrew Hamilton, the museum has also broadened its collecting of Indigenous American art to include contemporary artists and their works. This reorganization and expanded definition of American art has resulted in the integration of Indigenous arts into the American art galleries, offering dialogue among diverse works in the collection from across the hemisphere and enabling new and more complex narratives (fig. 19).[52]

The changing assessment of ancient and Indigenous works at the Art Institute of Chicago demonstrates how external perceptions determine their place in the museum. Initially, objects were disregarded as "artifacts" better suited for natural history or anthropological institutions; later, they were incorporated into the collection as decontextualized "primitive" works within a modernist framework. Today, through a deeper understanding of the artists and communities in which objects were made and used, ancient and Indigenous works are valued as unique and compelling artistic expressions. Objects do not change, but through reconsideration, the Art Institute offers a space for more meaningful engagement with the distinctive visual traditions of the ancient and Indigenous Americas.

I would like to thank Victoria Lyall and Ellen Hoobler, the staff of the Denver Art Museum and the Mayer Center for Ancient and Latin American Art for organizing such an important symposium, and the other contributors for generously sharing their knowledge. I also want to recognize my exceptional colleagues from the Art Institute of Chicago's Archives and Research Center: J de la Torre, Dave Hofer, Alexandra Katich, Nathaniel Parks, and Bart Ryckbosch; and Kylie Escudero, who expertly assisted with acquiring images and rights.

NOTES

1. Trumbull White and William Igleheart, *The World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893: A Complete History of the Enterprise* (P. W. Ziegler & Co., [1893]); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fair: Crafting a Modern Nation* (University of California Press, 1996).

2. Allen Wardwell, *Primitive Art in the Collections of the Art institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1965), [i].

3. Bessie Bennett, "Some Ancient American Textiles," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 24, no. 7 (1930): 90; see also, Ann Marguerite Tartsinis, *An American Style: Global Sources for New York Textile and Fashion Design, 1915–1928* (Bard Graduate Center, 2013).

4. Judith A. Barter and Brandon K. Ruud, "'Freedom of the Brush': American Modernism at the Art Institute of Chicago," in Judith A. Barter et al., *American Modernism at the Art Institute of Chicago: From World War I to 1955*, (Art Institute of Chicago, Yale University Press, 2009), 11–40; Andrew Martinez, "A Mixed Reception for Modernism:

The 1913 Armory Show at the Art Institute of Chicago," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 30–57+.

5. Avis Berman, "An Interview with Katharine Kuh," *Archives of American Art Journal* 27, no. 3 (1987): 6. See also Susan F. Rossen and Charlotte Moser, "A Primer for Seeing: The Gallery of Art Interpretation and Katharine Kuh's Crusade for Modernism in Chicago," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 6–25+.

6. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman, ed., *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.* (Harry N. Abrams, 1986); Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (MIT Press, 1998).

7. Rossen and Moser, "A Primer for Seeing," 8.

8. Ibid.

9. Holger Cahill, *American Sources of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1933).

10. In 1954, Kuh became the Art Institute's first curator of modern painting and sculpture.

11. Katharine Kuh, "Explaining Art Visually," *Museum* 1, nos. 3–4 (1948): 148–55+.

12. Rossen and Moser, "A Primer for Seeing," 8.

13. Katharine Kuh, "Posada of Mexico," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 38, no. 3 (1944): 42-44; Fernando Gamboa, Carl O. Schniewind, and Hugh L. Edwards, *Posada: Printmaker to the Mexican People* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1944).

14. Kuh, "Posada of Mexico," 44.

15. The Field Museum acquired the Aztec Coiled Rattlesnake (catalog no. 48126) in 1897 as a gift from Allison V. Armour.

16. For a discussion of the history of the department from the perspective of African Art, see Kathleen Bickford Berzock, "Changing Place, Changing Face: A History of African Art at the Art Institute of Chicago," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, ed. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (University of Washington Press, 2011), 150–67.

17. Claudia Schmitz, "Eduard Gaffron und das Schicksal seiner archäologischen Sammlungen aus Peru," *Mitteilungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 22 (2001): 73–78; Claudia Schmitz and Claus Deimel, *Geschenke der Ahnen: Peruanische Kostbarkeiten aus der Sammlung Eduard Gaffron: Konstruktion und Wirklichkeit einer* Kultur (Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 2001).

18. Stefanie Gänger, *Relics of the Past: The Collecting and Study of Pre-Columbian Antiquities in Peru and Chile, 1837–1911* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 115.

19. An article announcing the acquisition stated the Gaffron Collection originally numbered about forty thousand objects. See "Gaffron Collection Acquired," *The Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1956): 3. However, Schmitz and Deimel suggest it was approximately eleven thousand works (*Geschenke der Ahnen*, 8).

20. *Kunstgeschichte des Alten Peru* (E. Wasmuth, a.g. 1924).

21. H. Gaffron to D. C. Rich, June 3, 1948, Institutional Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.

22. Joanne Behrens, "A Short History of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas," unpublished report, October 1985, Arts of the Americas research files, Art Institute of Chicago; Transcript interview with Katharine Kuh.

23. "Treasures of Ancient Peruvian Art," *The Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1952): 28–29; News release, "Arts of Peru—The Edward Gaffron Collection on view at the Art Institute," April 28, 1952, Institutional Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.

24. Art Institute of Chicago, Typewritten description "Art of Ancient Peru: The Eduard Gaffron Collection," 1952, Institutional Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.

25. H. Gaffron to M. Rogers, January 11, 1953, Arts of the Americas research file, Art Institute of Chicago.

26. Mercedes Gaffron, translated by H. Gaffron and shared with M. Rogers, December 10, 1952, Arts of the Americas research file, Art Institute of Chicago.

27. Daniel Catton Rich, Minutes for Report, Committee on Buckingham Fund, December 8, 1954, Institutional Archive, Art Institute of Chicago.

28. This sense of urgency likely was, in part, due to the failed negotiations with Walter and Louise Arensberg for their collection of contemporary

and pre-Columbian art. Rich and Kuh worked closely with the Arensbergs for years; Kuh developed the 1949 exhibition of their modern art collection, shown exclusively at the Art Institute. Rich and Kuh were hesitant to include pre-Columbian works in the exhibition, which Kuh did not feel experienced enough to evaluate. Ultimately, the Arensberg's donated their collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. See Berman, "An Interview with Katharine Kuh," 28; Mark Nelson, William H. Sherman, and Ellen Hoobler, *Hollywood Arensberg: Avant-Garde Collecting in Midcentury L. A.* (Getty Research Institute, Getty Publications, 2020); and Ellen Hoobler, in this volume.

29. Bruno John Wassermann San-Blas and Heinz Lehmann, *Céramicas del Antiguo Perú de la colección Wassermann-San Blas* (S. A. Casa Jacob Peuser, 1938), preface. Translated by the author.

30. Memo from Alan R. Sawyer to Daniel C. Rich, March 18, 1954, Arts of the Americas department records, Art Institute of Chicago.

31. Alan R. Sawyer, *The Nathan Cummings Collection of Ancient Peruvian Art* (Nathan Cummings, 1954), 1.

32. "Gaffron Collection Acquired," 3. Cummings gave just over three hundred ancient Andean works to the Art Institute between 1956 and 1960; he donated much of the remainder to The Met. In 1963, Cummings agreed to an exchange between the two institutions to better balance out each's holdings.

33. Daniel Catton Rich, "Report of the Director," *Art Institute of Chicago Annual Report 1954–1955* (1955).

34. Harry L. Shapiro, "Primitive Art and Anthropology," *Curator* 1 (1958): 51. The popular interest in non-Western art at midcentury also influenced anthropological institutions. In 1957, the Chicago Natural History Museum established a new division of primitive art within the Department of Anthropology to highlight this area of his holdings and installed a new installation entitled *What is Primitive Art?* founded in "an anthropological approach to the study of primitive art." Clifford C. Gregg, *Report of the Director to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1957* (Chicago Natural History Museum, 1958), 42; Clifford C. Gregg, *Report of the Director to the Board of Trustees for the Year 1958* (Chicago Natural History Museum, 1959), 26, 52.

35. Minutes for a meeting of Committee on Primitive Art, April 29, 1957, Institutional Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.

36. Alan R. Sawyer, "The Primitive Arts Department Features Oceanic Art," *The Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (1958): 36.

37. Minutes, April 29, 1957.

38. Minutes for a meeting of Committee on Primitive Art, May 24, 1961. Institutional Archives, Art Institute of Chicago. The department's practice of exchanging and selling "surplus" ancient Andean works to museums, dealers, and private collectors in order to augment its other collecting areas largely ended in the early 1970s.

39. Wardwell, *Primitive Art from Chicago Collections*, [i].

40. Ibid.

41. Evan Maurer, "The Primitive Art Collection in New Quarters," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 72, no. 3 (1978): 15.

42. Allen Wardwell, *Primitive Art in the Collections of the Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1965), [i].

43. Maurer, "The Primitive Art Collection." For an insightful review of Maurer's impact, see Berzock, "Changing Place, Changing Face," 159–60.

44. As early as 1965, the museum determined it would not pursue Oceanic art—an area where the Chicago Natural History Museum of Chicago excelled; instead, it identified opportunities for growth in African and Mesoamerican art. See Wardwell, *Primitive Art in the Collections*, [i].

45. The first African art curator was Ramona Austin, hired in 1987; she was followed by Kathleen Bickford Berzock in 1995 and Constantine (Costa) Petridis in 2016.

46. Richard F. Townsend, ed. *The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1992), 112.

47. Virginia Miller argued that the theme "sacred landscapes" was not expressed in the exhibition; however, it was more fully articulated in the catalog. "Exhibition Review: *The Ancient Americas*," *Art Journal* 52, no. 3 (1993): 84, 87; Roberta Smith, "Review/Art: Before the New World Met the Old," *The New York Times*, December 31, 1992, p. C11.

48. The 2011 Arts of Africa reinstallation was led by Kathleen Bickford Berzock; in 2019, these galleries were reinstalled under the current curator of the collection, Costa Petridis.

49. These features would be removed in a 2020 gallery update.

50. Richard F. Townsend, quoted in Kyle MacMillan, "Bring out the Masterpieces," *ARTNews* 110, no. 2 (2011): 46–47.

51. Richard F. Townsend, with contributions by Elizabeth Pope, *Indian Art of the Americas at the Art Institute of Chicago* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2016).

52. Elizabeth McGoey et al., "Multiple Modernisms in the Americas: Old Favorites and New Stories," The Art Institute of Chicago, May 24, 2022, https://www.artic.edu/articles/993/multiple-modernisms-in-the-americas-old-favorites-and-new-stories.

Ancient American Art in the Gateway to the West

Matthew H. Robb

"Central American Antiq."

From its establishment within the Cass Gilbert–designed pavilion in Forest Park, originally made for the 1904 World's Fair, the institution known today as the Saint Louis Art Museum (SLAM) provided a space for the "other" Americas.[1] Its architecture and spatial design defined and constrained the museum's curatorial organization, with its Beaux-Arts galleries that privileged Western-style sculpture and painting.[2] A 1914 plan demonstrates porous disciplinary, cultural, and chronological boundaries between and among archaeology and art history based on collection availability and institutional circumstances (fig. 1).[3] Art historian Khristaan Villela's research indicates that Gallery 12, dedicated to "Central American Antiq." was in place by 1912.[4] Most of the objects on view came from Edgar Lee Hewett's excavations at the Maya site of Quirigua, partly underwritten by the Saint Louis chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA). As Villela has documented, though the AIA was unhappy with Hewett's results, it nonetheless lent the objects to the museum. The chapter also assisted in organizing loans of Mississippian material from well-known collector Henry M. Whelpley, whose collection eventually went to the Saint Louis Academy of Science.[5] With these small forays, Saint Louis belonged to the small club of municipal American art museums that displayed pre-Columbian art and archaeology

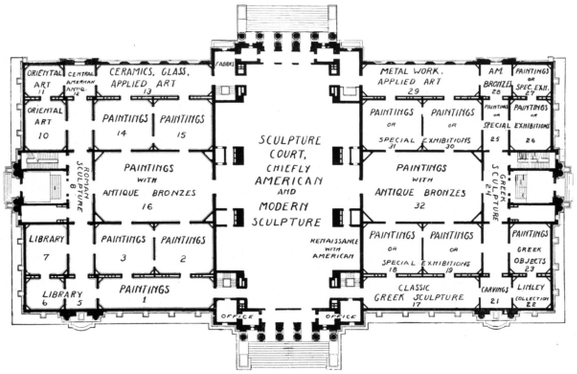

Fig. 1 Main Floor Installation Plan, c. 1914. Saint Louis Art Museum, After (Anonymous 1914): 16.

(including, for a time, the archaeological heritage of the ancient Midwest) in the early twentieth century.[6]

From "Antique" to "Primitive"

By 1944, the museum had one gallery dedicated to the "primitive" arts, now located in the museum's basement alongside the decorative arts period rooms, perhaps a subtle suggestion that these objects were décor for a modernist period room instead of art in their own right. Until the 1950s, the museum's administrative and curatorial staff was quite small, and the directors of this period (always male) were assisted by a supporting cast of (usually female) curators and assistants. The museum did not have a dedicated curator for the primitive arts

collection, but for thirty years, it had one curator reappointed on an annual basis, Thomas Hoopes, assisted by Catherine Filsinger. Hoopes had a background in arms and armor and became the kind of broad specialist one might expect. Filsinger seems to have provided the basis for future curatorial record keeping and correspondence. Hoopes and Filsinger, along with directors Perry T. Rathbone and Charles Nagel, fielded a few intriguing pre-Columbian acquisitions: a Teotihuacan mask (5:1948) in 1948 from little-known antiquities dealer Charles L. Morley, one of the blue-and-yellow feather textiles (285:1949) discovered in Corral Redondo, Peru, from Walram V. von Schoeler in 1949, and a pair of Mixteca-Puebla ceramics (85: 1950 and 86:1950) from the Stendahl Galleries in 1950. Additionally, they purchased a group of Paracas textiles from dealer John Wise in 1956.[7] The AIA collections remained on loan until December 1961, when the chapter held a public sale in the museum's Sculpture Hall.[8] One of the few items that did not sell, a vase from Hewett's excavations at Quirigua, remained on loan until 1990 when the chapter declined to donate it.[9]

The scattershot nature of these acquisitions underscores Saint Louis's reluctance to develop an ancient American collection either because it lacked the resources or the sustained interest, or both. Rathbone described an environment where, perhaps as a result of the museum's funding from a local property tax, the institution lacked robust financial support from the donor class, when compared to neighboring Kansas City, Chicago, and Cleveland.[10] Eventually, a single collector with dedicated passions and deep pockets would drive the establishment of entire curatorial departments and become the largest single donor to the museum: Morton D. May.

Morton D. "Buster" May

Morton D. May, also known as "Buster," collected art of all kinds so voraciously that his donations from the 1950s until his death in 1983 transformed the Saint Louis Art Museum into the encyclopedic institution it is today. Although he is most famous for his relationship with and avid support for the expatriate German painter Max Beckmann (1884–1950), he donated major works to almost every curatorial department in the museum.[11] His donations created what is now the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (AOA), constituting about 65 percent of the accessioned objects.

His fortune came from the family's chain of department stores, which May steadily expanded in the 1950s and '60s. He bought well-established local chains like Kauffman's in Pittsburgh, D&F in Denver, Meier & Frank in Portland, and Hecht's in Washington, DC, among others, steadily expanding the reach of May Company stores across the United States through the 1970s.[12] While his business acumen is clear, his interest in art is less easy to explain. His archives, donated to the museum at his death and meticulously maintained and organized, do not include the kind of correspondence that describes great aesthetic passions, though May clearly had them. Instead, they are usually documents one might expect from a businessman accustomed to moving merchandise. His reflections, laconic though they are, indicate an awareness of the broader trend of collecting so-called primitive art alongside modernist design and architecture.[13]

Noting the presence of west Mexican sculpture in the home of the modernist architect (and May's uncle by marriage) Samuel Marx, May decided he wanted some of his own.[14] Marx designed May's residence in Ladue, a wealthy Saint Louis suburb, though sadly the structure was torn down in 2005 (fig. 2).[15] May's acquisitions and loans in the 1950s focused on west Mexican material, readily available from West Coast dealers Edward Primus, David Stuart, and, of course, the Stendahl Galleries.[16] African and Oceanic art came from Julius Carlebach, and it is in this mercantile relationship that we glean something of how

May understood the intersection of collecting for himself and selling art commercially to a broader public. Carlebach's Madison Avenue display "caught his fancy"—but not just for May's own collection. He purchased some $20,000 worth of Carlebach's Oceanic inventory—some placed on consignment at May Company stores and some sold privately.[17] Similar exchanges for African art with Carlebach followed, alongside organized touring sales that visited multiple cities and involved multiple suppliers. It is tempting to connect May's interest in Oceanic art with his service in the Pacific theater during World War II, but similar personal connections to his other art collecting areas is lacking. More likely he was participating in a broadly understood sense of the businessman as a humanist and philanthropist.[18]

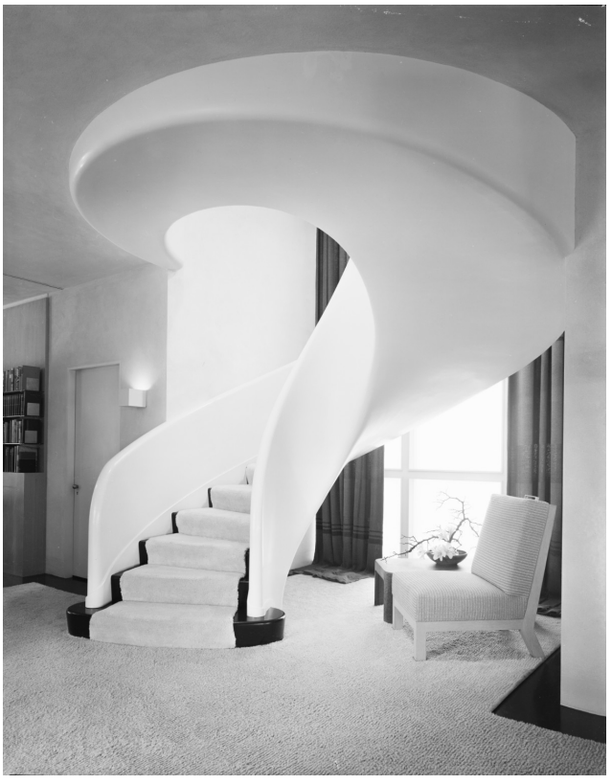

Fig. 2 Central staircase in May residence, 2222 South Warson Road, Ladue, Missouri, 1940–2005. Samuel Marx, architect; Hedrich-Blessing, photo. Courtesy of Chicago History Museum.

Most of May's objects were on anonymous loan to SLAM for many years. He gave small numbers of objects until the late 1970s when he began to make larger donations, including the final bequest in 1983. All gifts eventually carried his name. During his lifetime, May gave nearly 3,500 objects to the museum. Beyond the donations that established the AOA department, he also gave the museum nearly one hundred paintings and sculptures by German artists or artists living and working in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. His donation of Beckmann paintings makes Saint Louis's holdings the largest public collection in the world. From Russian religious garments to paintings and sculpture by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Jean Arp (1886–1966), the breadth of May's donations places him among the great mid-twentieth-century collectors whose interests spanned the cultural production of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the South Pacific.

In the 1990s, figures in the world of pre-Columbian art—Gillett Griffin, John Stokes, Julie Jones, David Joralemon—described May to me as someone who bought in quantity rather than quality and—in that most damning of connoisseurial judgment—someone who lacked

Fig. 3 Cache of fifty-eight obsidian eccentrics, said to be from Cuauhtitlan, Mexico. Classic period, c. 300–500 CE. Saint Louis Art Museum 135:1980.1-.58, Gift of Morton D. May. Courtesy Saint Louis Art Museum.

"an eye."[19] While May bought some clunkers, in my experience going through the collection, as well as in conversations with colleagues at SLAM, it's clear that May cultivated a different eye. He wanted to assemble a comprehensive collection of a given artist, or a given period, or a given region. He didn't care if tastemakers thought late Beckmann wasn't as good as early Beckmann. He wanted the full scope of an artist's output over their career. In the case of May's interests in Mesoamerica, that focus led to some purchases that seem prescient in retrospect, including a cache of small-scale obsidians, purchased from Valetta Malinowska in 1970, that is unlike almost anything known at the time but is very similar to material excavated from the Moon Pyramid almost fifty years later (fig. 3).[20]

Administering the Collection

As May's loans and donations increased, so too did the museum's curatorial staff, in an effort to accommodate the massive influx of objects and to steward the relationship between the donor and the institution. Emily Rauh succeeded Hoopes as a full-time curator in 1964.[21] Her laser-like focus on contemporary art brought in major works. She later married Joe Pulitzer Jr., who like May, was a major donor of art and funds to the museum. Emily Pulitzer has since become a cultural philanthropist in her own right.[22]

In her time at SLAM, Rauh also hired and supervised curatorial staff in other areas, essentially creating one-person curatorial departments. She hired Philippa "Pippa" D. Shaplin, who had come to Saint Louis as a Washington University "faculty wife" and started working at the museum for a pittance despite her degrees from Smith College, Harvard University, and Wellesley College.[23] Rauh promoted her to a full-time position in the wake of a bitter divorce that left Shaplin a single mother. In 1968, Shaplin left to become the registrar at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and, later, held a distinguished teaching career at Tufts University.[24]

Shaplin's most significant responsibility during her tenure at SLAM was managing and documenting May's numerous incoming purchases and loans. Complicating matters, May had a habit of buying objects from dealers, having them sent directly to the museum, and leaving them on loan without much of a commitment to donations or financial support.[25] This could have led to chaos but for Shaplin's assiduous organization and correspondence, still evident in SLAM's curatorial files. She regularly communicated with experts at other institutions and added comments to object files. Aside from her own published work on Zapotec material, she has never been recognized for her role in shaping SLAM's collection and doing the curatorial due diligence—politely cajoling the donor for more information, diplomatically coaxing dealers for confirmation, savvily gossiping with trusted colleagues and academics—that make the collection and its records such a valuable resource today.[26] All of this likely helped solidify May's loyalty to the institution. I was fortunate to exchange some letters with Shaplin before she passed away in 2011. She described herself as largely self-taught on the subject of pre-Columbian art, leaning on the 1957 text of that other autodidact Miguel Covarrubias.[27] She developed an eye for what the collection needed and what might be available on the market, occasionally suggesting that dealers could usefully show plumbate ceramics to May, for example.[28] Shaplin recalled May's personal generosity with fondness, but perhaps because of the ephemeral nature of phone calls and day-to-day conversations, there's little evidence that May consulted her opinion on acquisitions. Instead, the archive reflects his dependence on the expertise of specialists like Gordon Ekholm at the American Museum of Natural History. It was not unusual for May to go to a dealer, buy something, have it shipped to Saint Louis, send pictures to Ekholm, and

Fig. 4 View of Gallery 100, c. 1966–71. Courtesy of Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

finalize the purchase based on Ekholm's evaluation and opinion.

A special pre-Columbian exhibition—drawn from "an extensive private collection" as well as the museum's permanent collection—opened in the summer of 1965.[29] Thereafter, the primitive art galleries, which opened in 1967, were split in two, with African art on the north side and pre-Columbian on the south of the museum's lower level. The modernist presentation included cork squares as an accent material on the walls, perhaps meant to evoke blocks of *tezontle* (fig. 4). Ignacio Bernal, the director of Mexico's Museo Nacional de Antropología (National Museum of Anthropology), came to give a lecture for the opening in February 1967, perhaps based on the existing relationship he had with May.[30] May and Bernal had corresponded as the latter planned the new Museo Nacional, which Bernal hoped would encompass more than just the art of Mexico, as his request for Oceanic material from May's collection suggests.[31] May did sell Oceanic material for use in the new museum, even as the objects became part of the Museo de la Culturas instead. Mexican officials continued to approach May as a possible source for other archaeological and ethnographic objects. May suggested that they visit one of the many sales of African or ancient Mediterranean material then touring May Company stores. He also suggested that he would happily trade this material for "surplus items" of Mexican archaeological material.[32] Though this never came to pass, it was not immediately dismissed. May was indeed recognized as one of the donors to the Museo de las Culturas del Mundo.[33]

Moving Merchandise

As May and Bernal's correspondence suggests, archaeological and ethnographic objects had a much more fluid status in the 1960s than we might expect. For May, this is perhaps easiest to understand. He moved in a world of merchandise and shipments and thought nothing of selling objects as art and/or as decor in his stores. May (and the May Company) even gave objects away at the museum, as happened during an Association of Art Museum Directors meeting in Saint Louis in May 1964 and again in January 1968 at a College Art Association and Society of Architectural Historians meeting.[34]

As I have described elsewhere, May and James "Jimmy" Economos, the May Company's fine arts curator (who had started out working for Carlebach), organized a pre-Columbian sale that opened at the Famous-Barr store in January 1966.[35] It traveled over the next two years to several cities, including Los Angeles, Portland, Denver, Cleveland, and Washington, DC (fig. 5). The majority of the inventory for both the Clayton, Missouri, and Los Angeles sales came from the Stendahl Galleries to whom the May Company paid $95,000 for 2,350 objects (about

Fig. 5 From left, Marian Kolisch, Morton D. May, and Mary Hamblett at the opening of the Meier and Frank Co. Pre-Columbian Sale, Portland, Oregon, February 22, 1967. Courtesy of Amy Clark.

Fig. 6 May Company, Wilshire and Fairfax Avenues, Los Angeles, 1948. AC Martin / Samuel Marx, architects; Julius Shulman, photo. Job 367, Julius Shulman photography archive, 1936–1997. Series II. Architects, 1936–1997. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10).

$940,000 today).[36] And when the sale-cum-exhibition opened, it included special letterpress invitations with RSVP cards for a lecture from one of the nation's experts on pre-Columbian art, Alan Sawyer.[37] Local press reported there were more than two thousand objects, with the most expensive being a $12,000 "clay Maya Figure with sun god headdress incised on a metal design."[38]

An accompanying photo shows a Huastec sculpture (270:1978) that May had purchased in 1964 from the Carlebach Gallery (and that he donated to Saint Louis in 1978).[39] May did record the inclusion of about fifteen pieces from his collection in the sale, and it seems he would have happily parted with this sculpture for $8,000.[40] It may have helped encourage loss-leader shopping—if you won't buy the $12,000 ceramic, perhaps we can interest you in a $5.00 ceramic stamp. Similarly extravagant pricing took place at the sale's next stop, the glamorous May Company store in Los Angeles on Wilshire and Fairfax, designed by Samuel Marx (fig. 6).

There was ample advertising and reporting in the local press anticipating the LA show—perhaps because May Company staff knew that the sales numbers for the Famous-Barr presentation had been disappointing.[41] The accounts mention the quantity of objects as well as the scholarly expertise of Economos, Sawyer, and H. B. Nicholson that went into vetting the material. Economos worked for the Carlebach Gallery before working with May. Sawyer, as mentioned, was a well-known specialist in Andean art from the Textile Museum in Washington, DC. Nicholson, a professor of Aztec art at the University of California, Los Angeles, lent authority to evaluations of the Mesoamerican objects. This gives a sense of how small and closely knit this network of academics, dealers, and collectors was (figs. 7 and 8). Out of some three thousand objects, prices ranged from $7.50 to $50,000.[42] The more of something there was, the cheaper the price was. These valuations both paralleled and helped reinforce aesthetic hierarchies that continue to prompt scholars who evaluate objects: What makes a Maya object more valuable than a west Mexico object as a rule? Or a Teotihuacan vase a study piece rather than a masterpiece?

Fig. 7 From left, Morton D. May, Allan Sawyer, and James Economos at the opening of the May Company Pre-Columbian Sale, Los Angeles, California, June 1966. Mayer Center Archives, Denver Art Museum. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

Fig. 8 Morton D. May at the opening of the May Company Pre-Columbian Sale, Los Angeles, California, June 1966. Mayer Center Archives, Denver Art Museum. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

May told some of his correspondents that the LA sale was not successful, suggesting, in my opinion, that he did not recoup his costs.[43] But the sale and others like it impacted museums across the US. Their collection databases include references to donations from the May Company in the years following, and it's also possible that other donations from private individuals included objects purchased at the May sales without noting that provenance in their collection histories.[44]

Naranjo Stela 8, a large stone sculpture, brought drama and scale to the Wilshire sale. May purchased it from Everett Rassiga for $18,000 before directing his LA team to set its price at $50,000.[45] Rassiga was one of May's consistent suppliers, a significant dealer who consistently placed major and minor objects in private and public collections. Judging from letterheads, he, along with his wife Eugenia Álvarez, ran antiquities shops out of Dallas, Cuernavaca, and New York City. A decorated World War II pilot, who transitioned to commercial aviation after the war, he may have worked for American Airlines.[46] This would explain his presence in Dallas and his affiliation with the Black Tulip gallery there in the late 1950s.[47] By the mid-1960s, Rassiga had set up an eponymous gallery in New York. He lent nearly a third of the objects in *The Jaguar's Children*, curated by Michael Coe for the Museum of Primitive Art.[48] Rassiga's most infamous role may be the looting of the Las Placeres facade, but that is not the only instance of his direct participation in large-scale, quasi-commercialized looting.[49]

Fig. 9 Unidentified group of men and woman, probably Morelos, Mexico, c. 1966. Henry B. Nicholson Papers, UCLA Library Special Collections.

In October 1966, Rassiga sold about one hundred objects to May, mostly ceramic, all Early Formative, and all traceable to one likely location: an area near San Pablo, Morelos, and adjacent to the local cemetery.[50] Shortly thereafter, David Grove, then a graduate student at UCLA working under Nicholson, worked at San Pablo as part of his dissertation. Grove focused on the complex and then still poorly understood relationship between Olmec sites on the Gulf Coast and central Mexican sites like Las Bocas and Tlatilco that showed "Olmec influence."[51] Grove characterized his San Pablo excavations as salvage archaeology because of the evident looting and concluded that the cemetery mound had contained upwards of 250 burials.[52] For Grove, tracing what had happened at the site involved a fair amount of ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico and the United States to understand the nature of local looting and international collecting.

As it happened, May and Nicholson were in regular contact. Following radiocarbon tests on a wooden Aztec sculpture, May wrote to Nicholson wondering if he would be interested in "carbon testing" bones May had as part of the purchase of "the entire contents of a Pre-Classic burial mound." He enclosed twelve photos of some of the objects and the environs.[53] One of the photographs shows a group of men clad in cowboy hats grouped around a pickup truck as a woman selects a vessel from a group lying on the ground (fig. 9). Others show single objects that eventually ended up in May's collection, including one with a handwritten note: "There are several of this type and better too!" The handwriting is not May's, nor does it seem to be Grove's. I suspect that it is Rassiga's and that the photos originally came from him.

Early in 1968, Grove wrote to Shaplin, referencing the material from San Pablo: "Most of the pot-hunting was instigated by the local San Pablo farmers, who sold to anyone interested. However, I think there may have been one instance of paid looting at the mound, and you may have received that material. I would estimate you may have 20% of the material from the mound."[54] Shaplin put two and two together later that year in a letter to Rauh: "I think Rassiga must have been fairly cooperative with the American archaeologisys [*sic*]. I believe they must have traced the illicit digging to him, and then he told them where the stuff was. . . . 'I'll tell you who has the stuff if you don't tell the Mexiacn [*sic*] Museum that I was the digger' etc."[55]

Some of the objects May purchased from Rassiga appear in Grove's 1970 article, without naming May (much less Rassiga).[56] Grove estimated the looted objects from San Pablo to number around five hundred. It is an alarming reminder of the long-term damage done to the archaeological record and to our understanding of a still relatively contentious point in Mesoamerican studies. All of this information was an open secret to the dealer, the collector, his academic consultants, and even the staff of the museum that received the objects. For a variety of reasons, ranging from professional discretion to personal preference and institutional inertia, the knowledge lay scattered across multiple locations within multiple archives. Comparable stories could be told many times across all institutions that hold pre-Columbian objects.

End of an Era

Lee Parsons arrived at Saint Louis in 1974 after getting his doctorate at Harvard, conducting fieldwork at Izapa and Cotzumalhuapa, and working as the curator at the Milwaukee Public Museum.[57] He began working on May's collection leading up to a major reinstallation in 1980 and the publication of a collection catalog.[58] Like other institutions, SLAM's AOA department asked one curator to straddle three fields. Parsons's first publication was on May's Oceanic collection.[59] In contrast to Shaplin, Parsons left behind very little correspondence at the museum. And May's buying days were largely over, likely because of the growing pressure against pre-Columbian collecting in the early 1970s.[60] Parsons left shortly after the pre-Columbian catalog was published in 1980.[61] He became a freelance curator for hire, working on the Zollman collection and then the Kislak collection, before passing away in 1996.[62]

Parsons's reinstallation includes some marvelously dated detailing like the space-age dome vitrines (fig. 10). A section of Colombian gold objects had a timed, motion sensitive light. There's a greater use of context photos throughout the installation, and the division of two galleries was internally understood as "masterpieces" on one side and a "survey" on the other. The collection became static after May's death in 1983. Without a significant patron applying pressure, the galleries completely installed, as well as the existence of a useful collection catalog, the museum moved its attention elsewhere, particularly to the African collection.[63] Unfortunately, the saga of Mexican artist Brígido Lara and his forgeries of Veracruz ceramics that populate numerous American collections impacted how the museum and the community understood May's collection.[64] Three days of coverage in the local press took May's reputation—and the museum's—down a few pegs. The museum didn't have a dedicated Americas specialist for the next twenty-six years.

Fig. 10 View of Gallery 100, c. 1980s. Courtesy of Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

I joined the museum in the summer of 2007 and worked toward a complete reinstallation of the ancient American collection that was completed in 2013. It included a more generous presentation of the Mesoamerican collection, small galleries for the Andes and the Isthmo-Colombian region, and the institution's most notable Caribbean object, a Taíno *duho* collected in the nineteenth century.[65] The new presentation incorporated North America and featured Southwestern pottery (some purchased in the 1940s from the notorious archaeologist Fain White King of Kentucky) and a selection of Mississippian material from local collections curated by Amy Clark.[66]

Conclusion

In 1916, Cass Gilbert proposed a plan to expand the Saint Louis Art Museum in the Beaux-Arts style.[67] Such unrealized proposals can offer a glimpse of an alternate timeline—a history where Edgar Hewett didn't have a falling out with funder Charles Bowditch, where the Saint Louis AIA chapter received magnificent objects from Palenque, which in turn created a nucleus of interest for pre-Columbian art such that director Perry Rathbone was able to persuade Saint Louis native Vincent Price to endow a curatorial chair for pre-Columbian art that Julie

Jones later occupied, with David Grove as a colleague at the University of Missouri–Saint Louis. All of these alternatives are present in the archive. Their possibilities remind us that the collections we have are highly contingent entities, despite all our best attempts to smooth out their rough edges. We sort out the "fakes" from the "real" and curate cases of ceramics and jades, whose individual histories are fragmentary at best, in order to create representative selections of a distant past in an attempt to turn them into cohesive narratives for a museum-going public. But, in fact, the most cohesive narratives we have are the overlapping and intersecting stories that emerge from close examination of institutional and individual archives. If we are to understand these collections and the individuals who made them in all their complexity, we have to not only continue to collaborate but also find ways to ensure that these connections persist for future curators, museum staff, and members of the public so that they can make informed decisions about what happens to these objects next.

I thank former and current Saint Louis Art Museum staff members as well as many colleagues who offered their assessment of individual objects and the collection as a whole, including Amy Clark, Jason Gray, Jenna Stout, Norma Sindelar, Lynette Roth, Charlotte Eyerman, Ella Rothgangel, John Nunley, Brent Benjamin, Andrew Walker, Adam Sellen, Emily R. Pulitzer, Pippa Shaplin, Megan O'Neil, Mary Miller, Victoria Lyall, Rex Koontz, Joanne Pillsbury, John Pohl, Simon Martin, Virginia Fields, Sue Scott, Jeanette Bello, Janet Berlo, and Michael D. Coe. The opinions expressed in this paper are my own and do not represent the Library of Congress.

NOTES

1. Founded in 1879 as the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, it was known as the City Art Museum after 1914 and formally changed its name to the Saint Louis Art Museum in 1971. See "Front Matter," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 1, no. 1 (1914): 15–19
2. Osmund Overby, "The Saint Louis Art Museum: An Architectural History," *Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* 18, no. 3 (1987): 1–41.
3. The fair had included a pavilion house sponsored by Mexico, but there is little evidence to suggest this had any long-term impact on the museum's interest in what would come to be known as pre-Columbian art. Marshall Everett, *The Book of the Fair: The Greatest Exposition the World Has Ever Seen* (P. W. Ziegler, 1904): 273, 444; Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (University of California Press, 1996), 187–89.
4. Khristaan D. Villela, "Viajes Pintorescos y arqueológicos: The Case of the Quiriguá Vase," *Pasatiempo*, March 27, 2015, 32–35.
5. Leonard W. Blake and James G. Houser, *The Whelpley Collection of Indian Artifacts. Transactions of the Academy of Science of St. Louis* 32, no. 1 (1978).
6. Richard F. Townsend, ed., *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2004).
7. Catherine Filsinger, "Recent Pre-Columbian Acquisitions," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 35, no. 3 (1950): 39–43. In 1950, Rathbone attempted to persuade local hero and actor Vincent Price to endow an acquisition fund for pre-Columbian art. Price, sadly for future credit lines, demurred. Perry T. Rathbone to Vincent Price, October 25, 1950, Director's Office General Correspondence (RG-001-001). Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.
8. "Sale Announcement—Archaeological Institute of America," December 3, 1961, File E3051, Registrar's Office General Files (RG-003-002). Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.
9. The chapter sold it at auction in 2014, where it was purchased by the Dallas Art Museum (Dallas Art Museum, 2014.42). See also, Margaret Gillerman, "St. Louis Archaeological Group Faces Revocation of Its Charter After Vote," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 15, 2015. Contrary to claims from the AIA–Saint Louis chapter at the time, the objects were not offered to the Saint Louis Art Museum, at least during my tenure at SLAM from 2007 to 2012.
10. Oral history interview with Perry Townsend Rathbone, 1975 Aug. 8–1976 Sept. 24, 39–41, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
11. Lynette Roth, *Max Beckmann at the Saint Louis Art Museum: The Paintings* (Saint Louis Art Museum and Prestel, 2015); Lindsey Gruson,

"Morton D. May Dies In St. Louis; Headed Department Store Chain," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1983, p. B14.

12. Edna Campos Gravenhorst, *Famous Barr: St. Louis Shopping at Its Finest* (History Press, 2014). See also Lyall, this volume.

13. Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (University of California Press, 1998).

14. Lee A. Parsons, *Pre-Columbian Art: The Morton D. May and the Saint Louis Art Museum Collections*, Icon Edition (Harper & Row, 1980), ix. See also Liz O'Brien, *Ultramodern: Samuel Marx: Architect, Designer, Art Collector* (Pointed Leaf Press, 2007).

15. Paul Hohmann, "The Ghost of Christmas Past: The Fall of the May Legacy in St. Louis," *Vanishing STL*, December 19, 2008, https://vanishingstl.blogspot.com/2008/12/ghost-of-christmas-past-fall-of-may.html.

16. Matthew H. Robb, "The Pre-Columbian as MacGuffin in Mid-Century Los Angeles," in *L. A. Collects L. A.: Latin America in Southern California Collections*, ed. Jesse Lerner and Rubén Ortiz-Torres (Vincent Price Art Museum, 2017), 49–59; Michael D. Mathiowetz, "A 'Cocktail and Buffet Supper': The Social Networks of Archaeologists, Institutions, and Pre-Columbian Art Dealers and Collectors in Mid-Century Los Angeles," April 26, 2024, paper presented at the symposium "Collecting Mesoamerican Art in the Twentieth Century: Revealing Histories of the International Art Market," at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

17. "Playing the Art Market," *Business Week*, January 11, 1964, pp. 28–29.

18. David Brown, "Man of the Year: Morton D. May," *Globe-Democrat Sunday Magazine*, December 27, 1959.

19. Michael D. Coe, "From Huaquero to Connoisseur: The Early Market in Pre-Columbian Art," in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 271–90.

20. See Helena Wayne, "Bronislaw Malinowski: The Influence of Various Women on His Life and Works," *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 3 (1985): 529–40.

21. "The Year in Review," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 48, no. 3/4 (1964): 20.

22. "Advancing Art," *Harvard Magazine*, January–February 2009, https://www.harvardmagazine.com/node/3849.

23. "Back Matter," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 1, no. 1 (1965): 12.

24. "Philippa Dunham Shaplin," *Burlington Free Press*, February 24, 2011, https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/burlingtonfreepress/name/philippa-shaplin-obituary?id=10089295.

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26. Frank H. Boos and Philippa D. Shaplin, "A Classic Zapotec Tile Frieze in St. Louis," *Archaeology* 22, no. 1 (1969): 36–43; Philippa D. Shaplin, "Thermoluminescence and Style in the Authentication of Ceramic Sculpture from Oaxaca, Mexico," *Archaeometry* 20, no. 1 (1978): 47–54; Adam Sellen, "Ancient Zapotec Material Culture and the Antiquities Market," in *The Market for Mesoamerica: Reflections on the Sale of Pre-Columbian Antiquities*, ed. Cara G. Tremain and Donna Yates (University Press of Florida, 2019), 136–49.

27. Philippa D. Shaplin to Matthew H. Robb, November 26, 2011.

28. Philippa D. Shaplin to Alfred Stendahl, May 11, 1967, Box 1, Folder 13, Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38.

29. "Current Exhibitions," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 1, no. 2 (1965): 5.

30. "Schedule Museum Events," *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis* 2, no. 5 (1967): 15.

31. Megan E. O'Neil and Matthew H. Robb, "Building Museums, Building Collections: International Art Exchanges in Mid-Twentieth-Century Mexico City and Los Angeles," May 11, 2017. Paper presented at the symposium "The Birth of the Museum in Latin America" at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

32. "Mexican Museums, 1963–1967; 1974," n.d., Box 11, File 407, Morton D. May Papers (MSS-006). Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

33. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, *El Museo de las culturas: 1865-1866, 1965-1966* (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1967).

34. Sue Ann Wood, "Museum Directors Dig Into Grab Bag Valued at $50,000," *Globe-Democrat*, May 28, 1964.

35. Robb, "The Pre-Columbian as MacGuffin in Mid-Century Los Angeles."

36. Morton D. May, "[May Company Purchase]," August 17, 1965, Box 4, Folder 8, Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38.

37. Famous-Barr Photograph Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

38. George McCue, "2000 Art Items in Store Exhibit," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 6, 1966.

39. Parsons, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 182.

40. "Items Belonging to Morton D. May Entered into Pre-Columbian Show," n.d., Box 11, File 396, Morton D. May Papers (MSS-006). Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

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42. May Company, "Display Ad 32—'Pre-Columbian Art,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1966, sec. PART ONE, p. 32.

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44. See for example, National Museum of the American Indian, 24/3402 or Denver Art Museum, 1969.308.

45. Matthew H. Robb, Daniel E. Aquino, and Juan Carlos Meléndez, "La Estela 8 de Naranjo, Petén: medio siglo en el exilio," in *XXIX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala*, ed. Barbara Arroyo, Luis Alberto Méndez S., and Gloria Ajú Álvarez (Museo Nacional de Arquelogía y Etnología, Guatemala, 2016), 629–38. For a parallel case, see James A. Doyle, "The Odyssey of Piedras Negras Stela 5," in *The Market for Mesoamerica*, 87–111.

46. "War Decorations," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1944.

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48. Michael D. Coe, *The Jaguar's Children: Pre-Classic Central Mexico* (Museum of Primitive Art, 1965).

49. David A. Freidel, "Mystery of the Maya Facade," *Archaeology* 53, no. 5 (2000): 24–28.

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51. David C. Grove, "The Morelos Preclassic and the Highland Olmec Problem" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1968).

52. Grove, "The San Pablo Pantheon Mound," 62.

53. Henry B. Nicholson and Rainer Berger, *Two Aztec Wood Idols: Iconographic and Chronologic Analysis*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology, no. 5 (Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1968); Morton D. May to Henry B. Nicholson, April 26, 1967, box 50, folder labeled "Pre-Classic," Henry B. Nicholson papers (Collection 1863), UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. The photos are in an unmarked envelope in box 16, folder 15.

54. David Grove to Philippa Shaplin, January 2, 1968, Saint Louis Art Museum Archives.

55. Philippa Shaplin to Emily Rauh, September 9, 1968, Object File 351:1978, Saint Louis Art Museum.

56. Compare for example figure 5f in Grove, "The San Pablo Pantheon Mound" and figure 21 in Parsons, *Pre-Columbian Art* (SLAM, 1978).

57. Lee A. Parsons, *Pre-Columbian America: The Art and Archeology of South, Central and Middle America* (Milwaukee Public Museum, 1974).

58. Parsons, *Pre-Columbian Art*.

59. Lee A. Parsons, *Ritual Arts of the South Seas: The Morton D. May Collection* (Saint Louis Art Museum, 1975).

60. Robert Reinhold, "Traffic in Looted Maya Art Is Diverse and Profitable," *The New York Times*, March 27, 1973; Karl E. Meyer, *The Plundered Past: The Story of the Illegal International Traffic in Works of Art* (Hamish Hamilton, 1974). Copies of Reinhold's *New York Times* articles were included in the object file for Naranjo Stela 8, along with May's

correspondence with his lawyer that negotiated the terms of the return of title of Naranjo Stela 8 with Juan Asensio Wunderlich, Guatemala's ambassador to the United States.

61. For more on Parsons, see Becky Cooper, *We Keep the Dead Close* (Grand Central Publishing, 2020).

62. Lee A. Parsons, John B. Carlson, and Peter D. Joralemon, *The Face of Ancient America: The Wally and Brenda Zollman Collection of Precolumbian Art* (Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1988).

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64. Martha Shirk, "Making History in Clay," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 28, 1987; Martha Shirk and Christine Bertelson, "Art Collectors' Risks Grow," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 14, 1987; Martha Shirk, "Mexican's Art Is Legal, Lucrative," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 15 1987; Martha Shirk and Christine Bertelson, "'Endemic' Problems,'" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 16, 1987.

65. Parsons, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 217; Joanna Ostapkowicz et al., "Chronologies in Wood and Resin: AMS 14C Dating of Pre-Hispanic Caribbean Wood Sculpture," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39, no. 7 (2012): 2238–51.

66. Matthew H. Robb and Amy C. Clark, "The Ancient American Installation at the Saint Louis Art Museum," *Tribal Art*, no. 69 (Autumn 2013): 74–82.

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James Johnson Sweeney and the Discovery of the "Other Americas" in 1960s Houston

Rex Koontz

Fig. 1 James Johnson Sweeney on the steps of Cullinan Hall, 1964. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG35-068-001.

Although what would become the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), was established early in the twentieth century and found a permanent home in a neoclassical building by 1924, the MFAH was not early to the collecting or display of ancient American art. The museum's initial relationship with that art began in earnest in the early 1960s, under the guidance of the recently appointed director of the museum, James Johnson Sweeney (1900–1986; fig. 1).

Although central to the creation of an ancient American collection, Sweeney was not a scholar of the ancient Americas but a seasoned curator of modern art who had amassed a significant reputation in that area. Well before his arrival in Houston, Sweeney was committed to a view of non-Western art that highlighted that art's utility to the contemporary project of constructing a modernist visual vocabulary. The initial impulse to collect and exhibit seriously in this area was shaped to some extent by Sweeney's modernist commitments, certainly, but it was also as a way to garner national attention for the museum as the decade of the 1960s opened and Sweeney arrived from New York. These institutional goals drove the initial collecting of ancient American art as much or more than any scholarly concerns such as wide coverage of ancient American regional traditions or building deep collections in specific areas.

Before Sweeney: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 1961

Before 1961 and Sweeney's arrival as director, the MFAH's ancient American collections consisted of a donation of one west Mexican ceramic sculpture given by John (1904–1973) and Dominique (1908–1997) de Menil along with a number of small ceramic and stone figures

from Mesoamerica. By the time Sweeney left the director position in 1967, the ancient American collection included several hundred objects, mostly from Mesoamerica, including a handful of what would be considered masterworks. The museum also held one major international exhibition of ancient American art, *The Olmec Tradition*, discussed below, as well as an extensive exhibition highlighting the growth in the permanent collection. Sweeney achieved this remarkable growth in ancient American art collecting and display without the aid of a curator in the area. The first curator of ancient American art at the MFAH wouldn't arrive until twenty years later.

What gave Sweeney the cachet—if not the expertise—to transform the ancient American collections at the MFAH? James Johnson Sweeney was considered a major force in the New York art world for decades before his arrival in Houston. He had done extensive curatorial work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in its early years, creating important exhibitions between 1935 and 1946. He was briefly the head of painting and sculpture at MoMA in 1945–46. More important for this context, however, was his long run as the director of the Guggenheim Museum, beginning in 1952 and ending in 1960, shortly before he took up the directorship of the MFAH. It was Sweeney who oversaw the construction of the Frank Lloyd Wright building for the Guggenheim, and he installed the first exhibitions in that new, idiosyncratic space. Soon after the Wright building opened in late 1959, it became clear that Sweeney was unhappy with the new space and other institutional constraints and would be leaving.[1] Sensing an opening, important MFAH trustees John and Dominique de Menil, who moved in similar New York circles, invited Sweeney to consider the MFAH directorship. Sweeney would soon assent, although it took almost a year for him to put things in order and move to Houston, arriving only in 1961.

After a long director search that seemed to be going nowhere, the trustees were excited to have found someone of Sweeney's stature. John de Menil later called Sweeney "one of the most famous museum directors, nationally and internationally."[2] He and other trustees felt that the MFAH was in the midst of significant change. The trustees were clearly in favor of a much larger role for the museum on the national stage. The search committee chair, S. I. Morris (1914–2006), framed Sweeney's hire as an "energetic plan to establish Houston as a national center of the arts."[3] As the museum press release on Sweeney's hiring stated: "[MFAH] should take its place as one of the significant museums of the United States and of the world."[4] Sweeney's charge, reiterated in no uncertain terms in correspondence to the incoming director, was to put the MFAH in the national and even international media discourse. In sum, Sweeney was considered a cosmopolitan and a giant in the US art world at a time when the MFAH trustees, led by John de Menil, wanted to increase Houston's notoriety in the larger art world.

While trustees saw Sweeney as a national figure in museum administration that would increase the museum's visibility and prestige, Sweeney saw himself as much more than simply an effective museum director. He was also a tastemaker.[5] Sweeney was first and always an advocate for what he considered the best, most advanced modern art—*The New York Times* described him as "the arbiter of Modern Art" in a profile they did on the eve of his move to Houston.[6] He viewed the role of the museum as an elevating experience for the viewer and was loath to focus on more purely didactic opportunities with his exhibitions.[7] The visual experience of the best modern art should be the central focus of the museum, in Sweeney's view.[8] Elevating taste, which was about developing discernment in the viewer, was more important to Sweeney than art-historical facts and sequences. Sweeney's privileging of the cultivation of taste over more pedagogical

concerns was the deciding factor in the split between the Guggenheim and Sweeney, with the Guggenheim wanting a more robust education program and Sweeney decidedly against such a development.[9] Sweeney was also against the ideal of the encyclopedic museum, insofar as the optimal museum experience should consist of seeing "not more than 150 paintings" and institutions should be "as big as a bistro . . . and no bigger."[10] In sum, Sweeney's ideal museum was focused on an elevated visual experience that moved the modernist discourse forward. Much of the activity around ancient American art collecting and display may be seen in this context.

A Maya Panel and *The Olmec Tradition*: The Emergence of Ancient American Art at the MFAH, 1962–63

In 1962, or within a year of settling in Houston, James Johnson Sweeney used his discretionary fund—a newly created fund that was a prerequisite for his coming to Houston—to acquire a Classic Maya stone panel (fig. 2). There was nothing remotely like this large and expertly carved low relief in the museum collection, but such an acquisition at this time was not unusual on a national level. The early 1960s saw other Classic Maya pieces of similar quality enter various US public collections, including Nelson Rockefeller's Museum of Primitive Art and a comparable stone panel from the same region acquired by Dumbarton Oaks.[11] In the context of the MFAH, the acquisition of the Classic Maya panel was the beginning for Sweeney's activities in this area.

In the following year (1963), the museum mounted a major special exhibition focused on Olmec art entitled *The Olmec Tradition*. The show was one of the earliest museum exhibitions

Fig. 2 Seated Lord from a Relief Panel, Late Classic Maya, 702–764. Limestone with traces of paint, 39⅛ × 26½ × 1¾ in. (99.4 × 67.3 × 4.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: Museum purchase, 62.42.

in the US or Europe to focus on this singular and fundamental Mesoamerican art tradition.[12] Figure 3 shows the facade of Cullinan Hall during the run of that show, when an original Olmec colossal head (San Lorenzo Monument 2) stood immediately outside the new modernist hall. The interior of the hall was filled with Olmec stone sculpture, much of it borrowed from the Museo de Antropología in Xalapa, Mexico (fig. 4).

Fig. 3 Cullinan Hall facade and San Lorenzo Monument 2, 1963. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG05-119-181.

Fig. 4 *The Olmec Tradition*, MFAH Cullinan Hall, curated by James Johnson Sweeney, 1963. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG05-119-153.

Focusing on one region of Mesoamerica in an exhibition was an unusual strategy for a US (or European) museum at this time. One reason for this approach might be Sweeney's known preference for focused shows as opposed to sprawling blockbuster exhibits.[13] There were important countervailing forces to the idea of focused exhibitions of ancient American art, however. Large museum exhibitions featuring Mesoamerican art in the US and Europe up to this point had insisted on stitching together a Mexican national tradition, as seen in MoMA's foundational *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* in 1940. The nationalist story is not just a MoMA or even a US penchant: The MFAH archive reveals that, as late as March 1962, Mexican officials were requesting that Sweeney widen the scope of the show to include "other aspects of the development of Mexican art through the Colonial Independence and Modern periods of our country."[14] For these correspondents, the nationalist frame had not changed substantially from 1940 and the *Twenty Centuries* exhibition to the early 1960s. To search for a consistent nonnationalist message in recent ancient American exhibitions (those of the 1950s and early '60s), one would have to look at smaller, market-driven touring exhibitions like those organized by Stendhal Galleries of Los Angeles.[15]

The blockbuster *Masterworks of Mexican Art* exhibition traveling in Europe in the years immediately preceding Sweeney's *The Olmec Tradition* is a relevant case in point. This show used the same nationalist (Mexican) lens seen in the earlier MoMA exhibition to circumscribe the many ancient American cultures in a larger national narrative. Instead of exploring a specific Mesoamerican tradition in depth, the nationalist show surveyed all pre-Conquest traditions found on Mexican soil and then appended the post-Conquest traditions, creating an all-encompassing national art-historical narrative. An ultimate iteration of *Masterworks of Ancient Mexican Art*, in Los Angeles, also included an Olmec colossal head, San Lorenzo Monument 5, that garnered much attention in the press and with attendees in the same year as Sweeney's exhibition (1963).[16] Instead of an exclusive focus on Olmec monumentality and the primacy of Gulf Coast civilization as seen in Sweeney's show, the head was framed in the LA version of *Masterworks* as a founding moment in a larger national narrative of Mexican art.

In 1964, the year after the Olmec exhibition, Sweeney again deployed his director's discretionary funds to acquire important ancient American stone sculptures (MFAH 64.38-39). These pieces were related to the Maya panel bought two years earlier in general glyphic style,

Fig. 5 Teotihuacan Tripod Vase with Blowgunner and Quetzal Birds in Cacao Trees, Teotihuacan, 150–650. Earthenware with painted stucco, 6⅛ × 6½ in. (15.6 × 16.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: Gift of Mrs. Harry Hanszen, 65.70.

Fig. 6 Frog Yoke, Classic Veracruz, 300–1200. Stone, 5⅛ × 17¼ × 14⅜ in. (13 × 43.8 × 36.5 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: Gift of Mrs. Harry Hanszen, 65.164.

and it is very likely that all three came from the western Maya region, abutting the Gulf Coast and directly adjacent in space (but not in time) to the material displayed in the Olmec show.

In the following year, the art of the ancient Americas takes an important place in the museum's permanent collection with the gift of approximately two hundred Mesoamerican objects. The donation of Mrs. Harry C. (Alice Nicholson) Hanszen (1900–1977) included the Teotihuacan tripod vase (fig. 5), a Classic Veracruz yoke (fig. 6), and a number of other important pieces. The Hanszen donation contained fine examples of ancient Gulf Coast art but was not limited to that region. With the Hanszen gift as a sort of culmination, it is no exaggeration to say that, after the first four years of Sweeney's tenure, the ancient American collections of the MFAH had been completely transformed and that this transformation had been driven by the director's collecting habits and exhibitions.

While the Hanszen collection included objects from across Mesoamerica, the most important initiatives involving ancient American activities during Sweeney's directorship revolved around the Gulf Coast region of Mesoamerica. It is difficult not to see a strategy of collecting and exhibiting what were viewed at the time as the finest ancient Gulf Coast objects, given the location of Houston and its rising regional prominence. By 1961, the city of Houston was touted in the popular press as one of the Gulf Coast's largest ports and was soon to be the largest city on the Gulf.[17] Although the institutional logic of a Gulf Coast thrust is appealing, the archive and Sweeney's public statements do not indicate that such a regional focus played an important role in his strategy in the early 1960s.

While there is little archival evidence of a Gulf Coast strategy, there is more evidence for a strong interest in the larger category of ancient American art by Sweeney and the museum. Sweeney left an alluring but somewhat vague set

of public statements on why ancient American art was such a key part of his strategy to improve the profile of the museum. In *The Olmec Tradition* catalog, Sweeney stated that "because of the closeness of Mexico to Houston, their historical links, their present, close financial associations, as well as Houston's considerable Mexican population" the museum should focus on the art of the region.[18] The art critic Dore Ashton wrote in 1963 that Sweeney thought the pre-Columbian tradition of the Southwest ought to be highlighted in Texas (but leaves "Southwest" undefined).[19] A prominent trustee even raised the possibility of the MFAH becoming an "inter-American" museum, quoting Sweeney in this, although little of substance seems to have come of this idea.[20] The archive does little to clarify these statements on collecting and exhibiting ancient American art. To better understand Sweeney's strategy, it may be helpful to see his ancient American strategies in the light of the larger transformations under way at the museum.

Factors at work in the MFAH's shifting identity in the early 1960s include Sweeney's sense of the future of museums and important exhibitions outlined above and the new architectural envelope that he was called to work on while in Houston (more on this below). Although these factors may be seen as largely extraneous to a knowledge of Mesoamerican art and its regional traditions, they are important to our story because they were of fundamental importance to many of the key actors.[21] The incorporation of complex institutional histories into the emergence of ancient American collecting and display requires a larger frame of analysis, one that encompasses prestige competition among museums, contemporary tastes in display strategies, and art market considerations, among other variables. Scholars have long justified this larger frame for the study of early collecting and exhibition strategies in major institutions.[22] Museum collections of ancient American art were (and are) often "situated as much in the nexus of the chaos and energy of cultural production as they are representative of rigidly controlled hierarchies of aesthetics and taste," in the words of Matthew Robb, speaking of the construction of ancient American collections more generally.[23] In this case, the ambition for a larger national profile for the MFAH as understood by the director and key trustees, none of whom were versed in the ancient American art-historical discourse, was crucial to the emergence of ancient American art collecting and display in Houston.

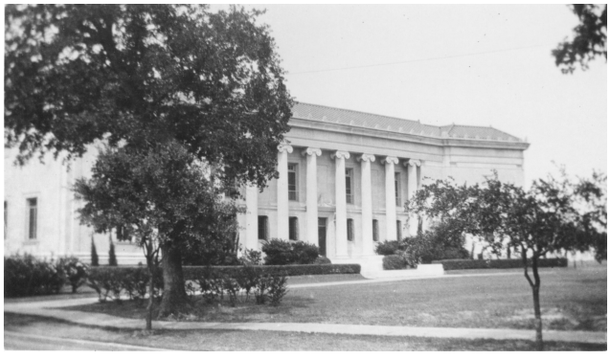


Fig. 7 Original facade of MFAH (1924–26), c. 1926. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG08-022-002.

Cullinan Hall

The construction of Cullinan Hall, opened in 1958 and seen above in figures 3 and 4, gave trustees and other stakeholders the feeling that the museum was ready to take its place on the national stage. In relation to earlier construction, the Cullinan was a bold modernist move. The original museum building, finished by 1926, featured a stately neoclassical facade and traditional interiors for the time (fig. 7). An extension of the building in 1953 did little to change the basic architectural character of the museum. Just three years before Sweeney's arrival, however, Mies van der Rohe's Cullinan Hall had been added to the original building, adding a soaring interior space along with the modernist facade.

Fig. 8 *Recent Acquisitions*, curated by James Johnson Sweeney, 1963. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG05-118 01-002.

It is difficult to exaggerate the radical nature of Cullinan Hall's architecture in Houston at this time. The hall was one extended volume of approximately 10,000 square feet. The ceiling was anchored by steel plate girders that were 5 feet deep and 82 feet long, fanning out to bridge a 30-foot-high interior ceiling. The north facade featured dramatic floor-to-ceiling windows, and a Venetian terrazzo floor effectively grounded the interior space.

Before Sweeney's arrival, the critic Eleanor Munro, writing in 1959, in *ArtNews*, distilled the situation for any curator bold enough to step into the space: Cullinan was a "grey-glass walled cell of empty space set as a kind of haughty challenge by architects to the arts of painting and sculpture."[24] Sweeney was well aware of the architectural challenge before accepting the director position. On arriving in Houston, Sweeney himself wryly noted, "I have had a little experience with difficult buildings." This was surely a reference to his recent time at the Guggenheim, overseeing the building and installation in Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic space, which Sweeney ended up detesting. Sweeney continued about Cullinan Hall: "I admire Mies and find his hall inviting by comparison."[25] Heroic modernist paintings would enliven the space, alongside the monumental non-Western works that also played well in the hall's enormous confines. A photograph of the *Recent Acquisitions* show mounted around the time Sweeney was planning *The Olmec Tradition* shows the combination of heroic modernist painting (hung from the ceiling by wire!) conversing with recently acquired large-scale Oceanic and African works (fig. 8). Each sculpture was given its own substantial space in the van der Rohe interior. Text was minimized, and each monumental artwork was left to speak for itself.

This is the same basic museological approach seen in *The Olmec Tradition* (see figure 4). We will let the exhibition photograph guide us to an understanding of the basic characteristics of Sweeney's display strategies: 1) The great plastic sculptural statements of the Olmec are placed on pedestals and plinths; 2) Each object is isolated from the rest and set away from the wall, enhancing the ability of the viewer to experience the works in all their sculptural fullness; 3) Sweeney used no wall text and kept label text to a minimum. The absence of text was, for Sweeney, a point of pride and a call to use one's critical visual faculties to make sense of the show. Here, Sweeney reveals his program most clearly: Much like his African sculpture exhibition at MoMA almost three decades earlier (*African Negro Art*, 1935), Sweeney focused exclusively on the formal aspects of the non-Western sculpture and eschewed the cultural history surrounding the pieces in both his curatorial strategies and in the catalog that accompanied the exhibition.[26] Almost thirty years earlier, each large piece was already put on a plinth and given a significant amount of space, and text was minimized. As MFAH curator Alison Greene has noted about Sweeney's Cullinan installations, "Sweeney celebrated the vastness of the space" in his most

important modernist exhibitions.[27] The same celebration of monumental works in the vastness of Cullinan is no less evident in *The Olmec Tradition*. Looking at Sweeney's program through the lens of earlier twentieth-century modernist discourse, we can make more sense of Sweeney's idiosyncratic essay in the exhibition catalog as well, which also eschews any art historical analysis for a tale of the movement of the colossal head and its resurrection against the Cullinan facade—a monumental work worthy of the monumental architectural statement behind.[28] Inside, Sweeney deployed the smaller but no less monumental Olmec stone sculptures in dialogue with the grand modernist confines of the hall's interior, with few textual or other impediments to experiencing this visual dialogue. For Sweeney, the single soaring space of Cullinan Hall supported the most emancipatory and heroic modernist painting and sculpture—as well as monumental non-Western sculpture.

The architectural historian Stephen Fox has argued that the construction of Cullinan Hall was a bid for a younger generation of the Houston elite to imprint a new emancipatory modernism on the city.[29] In Fox's view of this architectural statement, Miesian modernism eschewed decoration for more transparent construction. It also traded concealed and closed spaces for vast open spaces. In short, the new generation offered a democratically accessible space compared to the exclusion and intimacy of many older museum spaces, including the earlier MFAH building. One can overplay these dichotomous juxtapositions, but there is little doubt that the architect and his Houston patrons felt that Cullinan's new sense of space was a transformative move for Houston that the new cosmopolitan director was charged with enlivening.

Cullinan Hall had already hosted a museological coup not long before Sweeney's arrival: the 1959 show of mainly African art entitled *Totem Not Taboo*. With an innovative display strategy by Jermayne MacAgy (1914–1964), the favored curator of John and Dominique de Menil, this show was the first to show the possibilities of non-Western sculpture in the space, less than a year after it was completed.[30] Particularly prescient in relation to *The Olmec Tradition* was the use of stark white pedestals to display large-scale sculpture—in this case, largely African sculpture in wood. However, as Greene observed, "MacAgy subtly tamed the scale of Cullinan Hall" by creating paths and well-defined subareas, while Sweeney celebrated the vastness of the space and the monumental qualities of the art inside, as alluded to above.[31]

Indigenous American Art

In addition to the usefulness of monumental Olmec sculpture to Sweeney's modernist project of enlivening Cullinan Hall, there were also considerations of cultural diplomacy at work in early 1960s Houston. Sweeney is clearest on his diplomatic motivations for collecting and exhibiting ancient American art in his contribution to *The Olmec Tradition* catalog. He begins with a list of elements that bind Houston with Mexico, as noted above. He then lays out a program of exhibitions that will follow: an exhibition of colonial-period objects followed by one on contemporary Mexican art. In his larger hypothetical program, then, Sweeney has returned to the traditional nationalist art-historical paradigm that regulated the exhibition of this material from 1940 onward. He was, however, unable to realize either of these exhibitions while in Houston.

After his programmatic statement on a series of Mexico-focused exhibitions, he turns to a dream of his: to show an Olmec colossal head, like the one he could have seen in the traveling Mexican art shows of the late 1950s in Europe, in relation to the modern facade of Cullinan Hall. Sweeney realized this dream with this exhibition, mixing monumental non-Western art and modern architecture. The rest of his catalog contribution focuses on the voyage of an Olmec head from

Fig. 9 Sweeney and San Lorenzo Monument 2 in situ in Veracruz, 1963. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives Collection RG05-119-041.

southern Veracruz to Houston for the opening of the show.

Spectacle of the Colossal Head

In his catalog essay, Sweeney recounts the movement of the head to Houston from Veracruz as a colorful narrative, full of drama.[32] Here, Sweeney would allow his long-cultivated literary instincts some play. He describes the letters of support from both the president and vice president of the United States as well as his own voyage into the south Veracruz jungle to inspect the colossal head (fig. 9). He includes his meetings with imminent Mexican archaeologists Alfonso Medellín Zenil and Eusebio Dávalos Hurtado and the subsequent construction of a road more than thirty kilometers long in the region of San Lorenzo for the extraction of the colossal head—a road that also provided robbers with an escape after stealing a key object from the San Lorenzo site museum, as Sweeney notes. Other adventures involved helicopter flights to remote villages as well as the heroic efforts needed to get the head to Coatzacoalcos and onto a ship bound for Houston. Sweeney and the trustees also arranged for the movement of the head from Veracruz to Houston to be filmed and made into a short feature. Photographs from the voyage of the head are featured in Sweeney's catalog essay. In the catalog and on film, the movement of the head was treated as a heroic coup for the museum.

Sweeney's Masculinity and Primitive Art

One may ask what a veteran modernist museum director was doing traipsing through the jungles of southern Veracruz and personally overseeing the movement of multi-ton ancient monuments. It would have been easier, one could reasonably argue, to simply ask the Mexican authorities to deliver the head to Houston. The spectacle of discovery in the jungle, however, suited Sweeney's persona and pleased his MFAH supporters. By this point, Sweeney had spent a lifetime cultivating the trope of the muscular, tenacious modernist critic, from his days on the rugby pitch for Jesus College in the University of Cambridge to the description of the inhuman energy he was able to muster in pursuit of his curatorial and writing projects. The director-as-explorer fit this persona well, and the media had a field day with the journey. The attention certainly raised the profile of the museum, especially in Houston but elsewhere in the country as well, which as we have seen was an important goal for the director and trustees. It is indicative of the importance of this event in Sweeney's life story that more than thirty years later *The New York Times* gave considerable column space to the travels of the colossal head and its importance to Sweeney's public profile in his obituary.[33]

Sweeney's cultivation of this persona may be seen as part of his critical rhetoric as well. The art historian Marcia Brennan has parsed Sweeney's rhetoric for gendered values and found that for Sweeney, good modern art was robustly plastic and coded masculine, while weak modern art was "decorative" and coded feminine. This gendered coding continued in his approach to art outside the Euro-American tradition, where an appreciation for the right formal qualities—the robust three-

dimensionality evident in the Olmec sculptural corpus—allowed modern artists access to the intensity of intuitions that they needed to realize advanced modern works.[34] For Sweeney, then, these non-Western objects (including ancient American objects) were instrumentalized: They helped modernists develop appropriate and productive (male) plastic conceptions. His was a decidedly formalist approach to the emergence of ancient Mesoamerican art at the MFAH, as it had been for African art earlier at MoMA.

Emergence of Sweeney's Interest in Mesoamerican Art History (1965)

Sweeney's deeply formalist approach to curating *The Olmec Tradition* goes back to his MoMA African art show and his early and important narratives of modernist history. The largely formalist appreciation held for the early Mesoamerican acquisitions as well. There is no record of his sustained interest in the historical context of the Maya panels or other early acquisitions. This situation changes in 1965, with the donation of the Hanszen collection of more than two hundred Mesoamerican objects mentioned in the museum's collecting chronology above. It is in 1965–66 that Sweeney began corresponding with Michael Coe on San Lorenzo Olmec and Gordon Ekholm and Tatiana Proskouriakoff on the meaning and provenience of the Palenque region panel (his first Mesoamerican purchase—see figure 2).[35] Sweeney also commits to a more historical approach in his 1966 exhibition *Pre-Columbian Art*, which used a geographic organizational scheme based on traditional Mesoamerican cultural divisions and chronologies for the 160 pieces displayed, with a catalog essay by Ekholm.[36]

With the installation of the Hanszen collection exhibition, Sweeney declares in the catalog preface that Houston now stood as one of the premier sites for the appreciation of Mesoamerican, or as he liked to put it, ancient Mexican art, in the United States.[37] The de Menils rewarded these efforts with the donation of a large stone Aztec figure (MFAH 66.8) during the same year as the Hanszen exhibition. Not long after this donation, it became clear that Sweeney and the trustees were no longer in accord as to the future of the MFAH, and Sweeney stepped down from the directorship in the following year.

Conclusion

The transformation of ancient American collecting and exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, under James Johnson Sweeney was swift and dramatic. The museum went from a place practically devoid of ancient American objects to one which had a wide collection of Mesoamerican objects, with a number of works of international significance. The museum also mounted one of the earliest focused investigations of Olmec art as a major sculptural tradition in its own right. It is likely that the impetus for this transformation was not driven solely or even mainly by the desire to develop excellent collections in this area but instead served institutional desires far beyond Mesoamerican art history. The focus on ancient American art, while new to Sweeney, was originally part of a larger plan of cultural diplomacy between Texas and Mexico. Furthermore, Sweeney saw the development of Mesoamerican collections and especially *The Olmec Tradition* as a way to highlight the grand exhibition space of Cullinan Hall and activate its exterior. The monumental stone Olmec sculptures worked very well in the hall, as Sweeney knew they would. The spectacular movement of San Lorenzo Monument 2 (the colossal head) through the jungles of southern Veracruz and the waters of the Gulf Coast to the front of Cullinan Hall's glass and steel facade created a heroic narrative that served to boost the museum's regional and national profile.

Studying the rise of pre-Columbian collecting and exhibition in Houston through James

Johnson Sweeney's tenure as the director at the MFAH is an exercise in placing ancient American art amid "the chaos and energy of cultural production" of a museum on the move in the early 1960s. The social lives of these ancient American objects may be seen to take on more breadth as they are allowed to circulate in other conversations, some well outside ancient American art history. Such narratives help illuminate the myriad aesthetic and social forces that ran through these conversations that eventually created the US collections discussed in this volume.

NOTES

1. "A Museum Director Resigns," *The New York Times*, July 22, 1960, p. 22.
2. Marcia Brennan, "Seeing the Unseen: James Johnson Sweeney and the de Menils," in *A Modern Patronage: De Menil Gifts to American and European Museums*, ed. Josef Helfenstein (Menil Collection and Yale University Press, 2007), 35n7.
3. S. I. Morris, quoted in Toni Ramona Beauchamp, "James Johnson Sweeney and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: 1961–1967" (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1983), 88.
4. S. I. Morris, "1961 Sweeney Hire Press Release Draft," Director's Records, James Johnson Sweeney, Box 14, Folder 21, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives Collection (MFAH Archives Collection).
5. James Johnson Sweeney, "Tastemakers and Tastebreakers," *The Georgia Review* 14, no. 1 (1960): 90–100.
6. "Arbiter of Modern Art: James Johnson Sweeney," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1959, p. 40.
7. James Johnson Sweeney, "The Artist and the Museum in a Mass Society," *Daedalus* 89, no. 2 (1960): 354–58, especially 356.
8. James Johnson Sweeney, "Some Ideas on Exhibition Installation," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 2, no. 2 (1959): 151.
9. "A Museum Director Resigns," *The New York Times*.
10. James Johnson Sweeney, quoted in W. G. Rogers, "Art Shows 'Too Big and Safe,'" *The Sun* (Baltimore), December 11, 1955, p. A26
11. See James A. Doyle, "The Odyssey of Piedras Negras Stela 5," in *The Market for Mesoamerica: Reflections on the Sale of Pre-Columbian Antiquities*, ed. Cara G. Tremain et al. (University Press of Florida, 2019), 93.
12. Luis M. Castañeda, "Doubling Time," *Grey Room*, no. 51 (2013): 14–15.
13. Beauchamp, "James Johnson Sweeney and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston," 137.
14. Miguel Guajardo to James Johnson Sweeney, March 28, 1962, Registrar's Records, Exhibition Files March–June 1963, Box 25, Folder 9, MFAH Archives Collection.
15. See Alfred Stendhal, *Pre-Columbian Art: A Loan Exhibition of Objects Illustrating the Cultures of Middle American Civilizations Before Their Conquest by Cortez* (Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1950) and the many iterations of this show, often with a similar title in different venues throughout the 1950s. For a larger context of these exhibitions, see Megan E. O'Neil and Mary E. Miller, "Stendahl Art Galleries in Europe: Expanding the Market for Pre-Hispanic Art at Mid-Century," *Journal for Art Market Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023), https://www.fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/143.
16. Castañeda, "Doubling Time," 12–39.
17. Stanley Walker, "The Fabulous State of Texas," *National Geographic* 119, no. 2 (1961): 149–95.
18. Alfonso Medellín Zenil and James Johnson Sweeney, *The Olmec Tradition* (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1963), n.p., quote found at the beginning of the section "A Head from San Lorenzo."
19. Dore Ashton, "Sweeney Revisited," *Studio International* 166, no. 845 (1963): 110–13.
20. S. I. Morris, "Inter-American Museum," August 22, 1962, Trustee Records; Trustee Committees 1959/60–1963/64, Box 02, Folder 51, MFAH Archives Collection.
21. S. I. Morris, "1961 Sweeney Hire Press Release Draft," January 4, 1961, Trustee Records; Trustee Committees 1959/60–1963/64, Box 2, Folder 41, MFAH Archives Collection. Sweeney in a quote related in this document gives wide latitude to possible collecting strategies for the MFAH: "It should not look for its acquisitions and displays merely to the United States and Europe, but also to the Orient and to the Americas south of the Rio Grande."

22. Holly Barnet-Sánchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States: Appropriations and Transformations of Heritage, 1933–1945," in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 182.

23. Matthew H. Robb, "Lords of the Underworld—and of Sipán: Comments on the University Museum and the Study of Ancient American Art and Archaeology," *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (2019): 118.

24. Eleanor Munro, quoted in Michael Grogan, "Texas Two Step: Ludwig Mies van Der Rohe's Addition(s) to Houston's Museum of Fine Arts," *Arris: The Journal of the Southeast Chapter of Architectural Historians* 31 (2020): 106.

25. Ann Holmes, "Now, Sweeney's Slam on Houston," *Houston Chronicle*, January 11, 1961.

26. For exhibition installation images and other documentation, see "African Negro Art, Mar 18–May 19, 1935," Museum of Modern Art, accessed September 11, 2024, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2937?. For Sweeney's curatorial strategy, see James Johnson Sweeney, *African Negro Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1935).

27. Alison de Lima Greene, "Modernism in Houston," *Art Lies* 41 (2003): 22.

28. Zenil and Sweeney, *The Olmec Tradition*, n.p.

29. Stephen Fox, "Cullinan Hall: A Window on Modern Houston," *Journal of Architectural Education* 54, no. 3 (2001): 159.

30. Lynn Herbert, "Seeing Was Believing: Installations of Jermayne MacAgy and James Johnson Sweeney," *Cite*, no. 40 (1997–1998): 32, https://repository.rice.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/57a23361-dfac-4fbd-9311-2e97c7700281/content.

31. Greene, "Modernism in Houston."

32. Zenil and Sweeney, *The Olmec Tradition*, n.p.

33. Grace Glueck, "James Johnson Sweeney Dies; Art Critic and Museum Head," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1986, p. B8.

34. Marcia Brennan, "The Multiple Masculinities of Canonical Modernism: James Johnson Sweeney and Alfred H. Barr Jr. in the 1930s," in *Partisan Canons*, ed. Anna Brzyski (Duke University Press, 2007), 190.

35. For example, see Sweeney to Michael Coe, October 20, 1966, Director's Records, James Johnson Sweeney, Box 4, Folder 19, MFAH Archives Collection.

36. Gordon F. Ekholm, *Pre-Columbian Art from Middle America: Gift of Mrs. Harry C. Hanszen* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1966).

37. Ibid.

Collecting the Ancient Americas at the Denver Art Museum

Victoria Isabel Lyall

> *Comparatively few art museums are so fortunate as to be regarded as ministering in a real way to the requirement of their communities, and yet, under the conditions of modern life, it is only upon these terms that an art museum can, in the long run, justify its existence.*—George Eggers, Denver Art Museum director (1921–26)

The Denver Art Museum (DAM) came into being decades after The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Art Institute of Chicago. First founded as the Denver Artists' Club, it would become the Denver Artists Association in 1893, a scant seventeen years after the Colorado territory had become a state. A place to "cultivate a general interest and promotion of the arts," the museum was powered by volunteers who imbued it with an independent spirit it retains today.[1]

Denver's location within the broader geography of the United States plays an outsize role in the institution's identity and its approach to its collections, audiences, and patrons. Located at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, it is surrounded by a vast expanse of land: About eight hundred miles separate it from the next largest global art museum (fig. 1).[2] The city sits spitting distance from the center of the country. Because of its geography, the DAM felt a responsibility beyond its immediate surroundings: "What the Metropolitan Museum is to New York, the Art Institute to Chicago, the Louvre to Paris, and the British Museum to London, the Denver Art Museum is to Denver and the whole Rocky Mountain region."[3] Today it stands as the largest encyclopedic art museum between Chicago and Los Angeles. Like the other institutions discussed in this volume, early directors, curators, and collectors played an essential role in assembling and shaping the ancient Americas collection. But I would also argue that the museum's geographic location played an equally significant role. This essay is an exercise in retrieving and reconstructing an often invisible and forgotten history that I hope will remind us of the very human aspect of museums.

A map of the United States with museums and their locations marked. Denver is located far away from comparable collections.

Fig. 1 Map of US museums with comparable ancient American collections to the Denver Art Museum. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

In 1968, then-director Otto Bach (1909–1990) formed the New World Department, which brought together existing Latin American and pre-Columbian material under one umbrella. A collection of southwestern santos donated by an early patron, Anne Evans, and the several

hundred works of pre-Columbian objects were recategorized as "New World." This designation, a phrase borrowed from the writings of European explorers, described the "discovery" of new lands, territories claimed for European empires. Its use was unique within American art museums; at the DAM, it would refer to the territory of the Americas south of the US-Mexico border. Today, the term reminds us of the five-hundred-year colonization and subjugation of American peoples and, rightfully, has been abandoned. The decision in 1968 to use the term to describe a disparate collection of objects united only by their shared geography, however, represented a groundbreaking perspective. It conceptually connected the makers of southwestern santos to the ancient artists of Mexico, Guatemala, and beyond. In fact, Bach's foresight and those of subsequent curators is what distinguishes Denver's holdings today: It stands as one of the most expansive and comprehensive collections of the Americas within the United States, capturing the history of the region from the beginning of agriculture to the formation of nineteenth-century republics.

Anne Evans, Frederic H. Douglas, and the Creation of a Regional Collection

Although the department came into being during the midcentury, the heyday of pre-Columbian art, its history begins much earlier. The youngest daughter of Colorado governor John Evans, Anne Evans (1871–1941) was born in London and educated between the mountainous landscape of Colorado and the rarified art collections of Europe and the American East Coast. She studied art at the New York Art Students League and summered at the Evanses' Colorado ranch.[4] Evans and her mother

Fig. 2 Installation view, Anne Evans collection in the Gio Ponti–designed North Building, 2017. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

devoted themselves to developing Colorado's cultural sphere, and she would ultimately play a pivotal role in the founding of the Denver Art Museum, serving as the executive secretary, interim director, and ongoing consultant. As the museum took shape, Evans herself began to collect southwestern santos and American Indian art, becoming one of its most ardent promoters. She encouraged the DAM to fund acquisitions, exhibitions, and finally, in 1925, to hire a full-time curator of American Indian art. Upon her death, she donated her entire collection of santos and bultos to the museum (fig. 2). This collection, which showcases the mastery of southwestern wood carvers and painters, draws on both Catholic and Native American imagery, reflecting the region's and the artists' own multicultural backgrounds. Through her efforts, Evans ensured the Denver Art Museum's place as a groundbreaking institution that valued American Indian culture and history.[5]

It's difficult to consider Anne's identity as a collector and promoter of American Indian and southwestern art separate from her father's legacy. Dr. John Evans, the second territorial governor of Colorado, appointed by Abraham Lincoln, was a physician and railroad titan who would play a hand in the founding of both Northwestern University and University of Denver; however, the Sand Creek Massacre would become his lasting legacy. On November 29, 1864, hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapahoe

Fig. 3 Eleanor Roosevelt and Frederic H. Douglas at *Indian Art of the United States* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1941. Gelatin silver print. Photographer: Albert Fenn. Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

people were murdered by the US Army. Evans was out of the state on business, but as several studies have concluded, his lack of enforcing Indian treaties and habitual neglect of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe peoples contributed to this tragedy.[6] His daughter's efforts to uplift and validate the material culture and aesthetics of Native communities from this region and beyond resulted in the creation of three separate departments at the museum: Native Arts, Ancient Americas, and Latin American Art. One hundred and sixty years later, these collections continue to amplify the stories and voices of Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Frederic "Eric" Douglas (1897–1956), a native Coloradan, joined the museum in 1929 as curator of American Indian art. He would go on to serve the institution for three decades as curator and interim director until his death in 1956.[7] Douglas was perhaps most well-known for his role in organizing *Indian Art of the United States*, the 1941 Museum of Modern Art exhibition he cocurated with René d'Harnoncourt, but his true contribution was the establishment of a singular curatorial perspective at the DAM that integrated Native American art into the museum's fine art collection (fig. 3).[8] Unlike contemporaries around the United States that categorized Indigenous art as "decorative," Douglas advocated tirelessly for viewing these works on par with that of the great masterpieces of Europe and for the living artists who produced them as individuals possessing a rare skill and expertise.

His attitude and character are most clearly captured in his correspondence with the newly appointed director Otto Bach while Douglas was stationed overseas in 1944. Douglas vehemently objected to Bach's application of the term "primitive" on two accounts. First, by applying the term to the Department of Indian Art, in Douglas's opinion, Bach lumped the DAM with other museums that had similar departments. Douglas noted that among American art museums, only Denver had "postulated that the American Indian had arts worthy of serious esthetic consideration."[9] This objection captures Douglas's zeal and dedication to the department he had almost single-handedly created and what today we may refer to as his legacy. To his credit, his second objection was: "The use of the word primitive has a connotation of condescension and snobbery both artistic and social. . . . It is a very poor thing to look down our noses however politely at the works of other than our own race, especially if that other is not what is laughingly called white. . . . It's the wrong use of the word however you look at it and I'll have no part of it."[10] In addition to clarifying Douglas's position, this exchange also provides insight into the fraught relationship between the two men.

While Douglas's extraordinary vision and open-mindedness resulted in the creation of a singular department, he largely ignored historical and contemporary Indigenous peoples living south of the US-Mexico border. Eleanor Roosevelt penned the foreword to *Indian Art of the United States* and pointedly referenced the

interchange of goods and ideas north *and* south, perhaps a nod to her husband's promotion of inter-American cooperation; however, Douglas's correspondence clearly indicates that, in his mind, a bright line separated the two Americas, and he collected exclusively *north* of the US-Mexico border.[11] But when the museum received several gifts of ancient American material, they were administered by the Native Arts department until 1968.

Otto Bach: Building a New World

Denver Post journalist Bill Hornby wrote an appreciation of Otto Bach after his passing in 1990 and noted: "The man who really put our Art Museum on the world cultural map was Dr. Otto Karl Bach, its director and guiding spirit from 1944–1974. Whether it was in acquiring renowned collections, buying land for expansion, insisting on developing the museum education program for all the people or instilling the tradition that Denver was going to have a world class art collection, Otto and Cile Bach were the driving spirits of the modern Denver Art Museum."[12] Bach's thirty-year tenure would transform the museum from a local, provincial institution to one of national renown. Moreover, it would be through Bach and his ministrations that the ancient Americas collection would take shape.

Bach moved to Denver with his wife, Cile, and their young son from Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1944. In a letter to Douglas introducing himself, Bach explained that his training was in European art, but he had served as a museum administrator for twelve years, first in Milwaukee and later in Grand Rapids.[13] His goal, clearly laid out in 1944, was to build a new permanent home for the DAM, which he would achieve in 1971 with the opening of the Gio Ponti–designed building.[14]

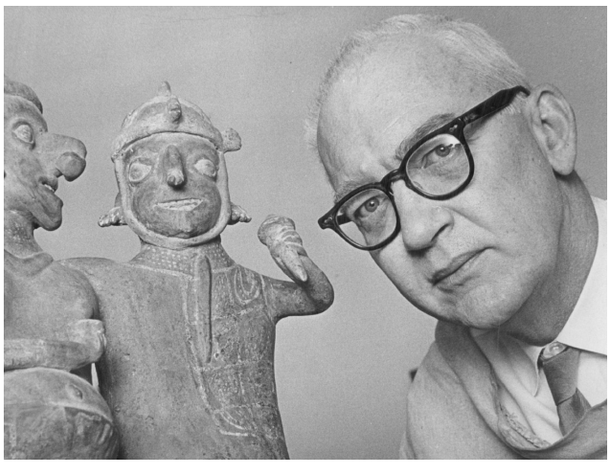


Fig. 4 Otto Karl Bach shown with a pair of Nayarit figurines (1952.203-4) purchased from the Stendahl galleries, February 2, 1965. *Denver Post* photo by Bill Johnson.

Somewhere along the way, Bach developed a love for art of the ancient Americas (fig. 4). From his first acquisition in 1951 until 1974, when he retired, Bach almost single-handedly built the ancient Americas collection that came to number over one thousand pieces. A museum built on volunteerism, the DAM remained people rich and dollar poor. As a result, Bach would cajole dealers and trade, exchange, buy on credit, and deaccession objects to get the works he wanted.

In 1956, three months after Douglas's passing, Dr. Karl Arndt, board president, asked Bach to review the collections in the Native Arts Department with recommendations for culling, keeping, exchanging, and lending.[15] Bach explained that the American Indian collection consisted of thousands of objects with scores of duplications—some identical: "Mr. Conn and Mr. Bach believe that each category of material should be checked carefully, in small units, with an eye to weeding out duplicates and sub-standard material and replacing it with objects which are of better quality or more uniqueness, or filling in gaps in pre-Columbian, Mexican pre-historic, Mound Builders or other areas which are lacking in representative material."[16] As Lewis Story, DAM's assistant director at the time, observed, Bach's decision to further

Fig. 5 Otto Karl Bach and Mrs. Murray McComas shown with a sculpture acquired through contribution of the Women's Committee, 1959. 1959 Annual Report, Denver Art Museum Archives.

Fig. 6 Mr. and Mrs. Chandler Weaver in *Pre-Columbian Art* (January 7–February 18, 1952) at the Schleier Memorial Gallery, February 6, 1952. *Denver Post* photo by Dean Conger.

develop collections of African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian holdings allowed him to serve "a multicultural constituency more effectively."[17] Over the next several years, Bach would work to drum up support via the museum's various affiliated committees specifically to acquire ancient Americas objects. Here, in this image from a 1959 board report, Bach proudly stands with the chairwoman of the Women's Committee, who contributed funds to acquire the ceramic head (fig. 5).

As other authors in this volume note, America at midcentury was captivated by the ancient Americas (see essays by Rosoff, Koontz, and Robb). A steady stream of exhibitions traveled around the country, or were organized locally, to showcase the wonders of "lost" or "mysterious" civilizations.[18] Beginning in 1950, Bach worked to bring many of these shows to Denver. Exhibitions featuring Middle American gold, ancient Peruvian artwork, and "Pre-Columbian and Contemporary Art" began appearing in the Schleier Memorial Gallery with some frequency between 1950 and 1960 (fig. 6).[19] During the run of the exhibitions, Bach befriended the dealers and collectors who lent work to the shows, ultimately securing one or two pieces for the DAM's growing collection. The museum's annual reports began featuring names such as Julius Carlebach and Earl Stendahl.[20] Additionally, Bach, ever the promoter, penned short articles for *The Denver Post*, celebrating the acquisition of pre-Columbian objects at the museum.[21] While Bach acquired these works through trades and exchanges, these acquisitions provoked the ire of the board.[22] These transactions became so prevalent that, during one contentious board meeting in 1967, a trustee lamented the number of times he went to the gallery and realized a beloved piece was missing.[23] He called for greater transparency for trades and exchanges. Unfortunately, his words were not heeded.

Bach continued growing the collection of art from the Americas incrementally. By 1967, there were 153 pre-Columbian works in the DAM's collection.[24] In 1968, he decided to join the pre-Columbian objects from Mexico and Central and South America with Anne Evans's southwestern santos collection to officially create the New World Department. With this new arrangement, the story of the art of the Americas could now be

Fig. 7 Robert Stroessner in the Pre-Columbian art gallery, c. 1970s. Mayer Center Archives, Denver Art Museum.

Fig. 8 George Biddle, *Leadville*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 48½ × 48½ in. (123.2 × 123.2 cm) Denver Art Museum: Funds from Nancy Doran Petry, 2022.159. © Estate of George Biddle.

seen sequentially, connecting the ancient with the more recent past.[25]

Forming the Collection: Robert Stroessner, Morton May, and the Mayers

Bach hired Robert Stroessner (1942–1991), who received a degree in interior design from the University of Denver, as the inaugural New World curator (fig. 7). An assistant curator in Native Arts under Norman Feder, Stroessner had been Bach's student and protégé and, like Bach, understood the history of the Americas as part of a single continuum.[26] He took pride in Denver's regional approach, writing to donors that the museum's decision to include both ancient and colonial art from Latin America under the same umbrella was unusual. In a 1974 letter to the new director, Tom Maytham, Stroessner underscored the New World Department's unique approach: "We have tried to systematically select representative examples to form a chain of pieces which link as many historical connections as possible through the entire history of Latin America."[27] In a separate letter to collector and patron Olive Bigelow Pell, he lamented that the most important collections of this material live in natural history or folk art museums, underscoring the uniqueness of the DAM's approach and the importance it played modeling an innovative approach for its peers.[28]

Noted for his charm and panache, Stroessner forged relationships across the United States and Latin America. Though 1968 was late to be assembling a collection of pre-Columbian art and with few funds at his disposal, Stroessner, like Bach before him, relied on partnerships, museum exchanges, and creative funding. Three collectors played significant roles in building the pre-Columbian holdings: Morton "Buster" May and Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Mayer.

The grandson of David May, a German Jewish émigré who settled in Colorado in 1877, Morton, known as "Buster," assumed the chairmanship of the May Company department store

conglomerate in 1951. While Morton May was born in St. Louis, his roots were in Leadville, Colorado. David May moved his family from Ohio to Leadville for health reasons and established a dry goods supply for the region's miners. [29] Two years after his arrival, the Leadville mine struck silver, and by 1880, the town had grown to nearly thirty thousand people. Eventually, May would purchase another store in Denver in 1887, and by 1911 the May Department Stores would be a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange. Despite the family's relocation to St. Louis, the Mays remained a part of Colorado's Jewish community.[30] David May helped found the Hebrew Benevolent Association in Leadville and maintained the town's synagogue (fig. 8).

In 1957, the May Company purchased the Daniels and Fischer store on 16th Street in downtown Denver. Known locally as May D&F, the store became a city fixture. Located on Zeckendorff Plaza, the campus included a pavilion shaped like a hyperbolic paraboloid, designed by architect I. M. Pei and an artificial ski slope during the winter months (fig. 9). The structure was destroyed to make way for a pedestrian street mall.

A collector of primitive art, May arrived in Denver just as Otto Bach was trying to rally support for a world-class collection of pre-Columbian art. Indeed, the entirety of May's documented relationship with the DAM transpired during the course of Bach's tenure: His earliest gift happened in 1946 and his last in 1971.[31] May donated extensively to the Native Arts Department, corresponding with the department's curator, Norman Feder, and connecting Feder with other collectors and dealers that reached out to May but were not of interest to him.

As Matthew Robb's essay in this volume makes clear, May's formation as a commercial businessman influenced how he viewed his collections: as commodities that would be bought and sold. This prompted the development of a

A newspaper clipping from the Rocky Mountain News dated November 10, 1964. The headline below the image reads, May D&F Inaugurates World of Winter Show. The photograph depicts a ski slope attached to the outside of a building with a crowd of people watching a skier descend. The caption reads, The wonderful world of winter officially was opened in downtown Denver Monday during colorful ceremonies at the May-D&F Plaza at 16th st. and Court pl. Noted skiers spent the day performing on the 80-foot ski ramp built for the 2-week program.

Fig. 9 The ski ramp built at May D&F plaza in downtown Denver, November 10, 1964. *Rocky Mountain News* photo by Mel Schieltz. Courtesy of Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection Archive.

touring art sale that would visit May Company stores in Saint Louis, Denver and, ultimately, Los Angeles (fig. 10). James Economos, May's curator and consultant for the art sale, corresponded with curators at institutions nationwide. Economos, May, and the Textile Museum's curator, Alan Sawyer, were photographed in the courtyard of the May Company's Wilshire Boulevard department store, and the brazier in Economos's hand (DAM 1990.70) ended up in the DAM collection via the Los Angeles dealer Earl Stendahl (see figure 7 in Robb).[32] In 1969, Morton May gifted the DAM thirteen pieces of Mesoamerican art in honor of David S. Touff, who retired as the May Company board chairman that year.[33] Between 1968 and 1971, May and the Denver branch of May D&F were frequent donors to the DAM's nascent New World Department, directly gifting the museum over fifty individual works.[34]

Fig. 10 Advertisement produced by May D&F presenting a pre-Columbian art sale/exhibition at their downtown store, April 9, 1967. Courtesy of *The Denver Post*.

In fact, in Bach's obituary, then board chair Frederick Mayer recalled how he, May, and Bach worked together to build the ancient Americas collection and create the New World Department: "Buster May of the May Co. department stores had a large collection of Peruvian pre-Columbian pieces and Otto pestered him for years to get the collection for DAM. . . . Buster always told him the pieces were for sale not donation. . . . Finally, the store decided to get rid of the collection and Bach negotiated a price of 30,000 for 800 Peruvian pots and textiles."[35] The acquisition was more complex than this and included a substantial gift by Frederick and Jan Mayer to the museum. May's collection numbered 1,300 works of ancient Peruvian art. May was willing to sell the collection to the DAM at a discounted price, but the museum lacked the necessary funds. Frederick Mayer purchased the entire collection and gifted sixty-two pieces, selected by Bach and Stroessner, to the DAM. Forty-four pieces went to a Texas collector, and the remaining objects were gifted or sold.[36] The Andean material included in this acquisition may have come from the enormous Peruvian collection assembled by Dr. Edouard Gaffron and acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago (see Elizabeth Pope, this volume), parts of which had been deaccessioned and purchased by Morton May.[37] This complicated transaction, which began in 1969 and was completed in 1970, became one of the New World Department's foundational collections.[38]

By 1969, the New World collection had grown sufficiently to occupy dedicated galleries in the new Ponti building, which opened to the public in 1971. Stroessner used his background in interior design to present the newly enlarged collection in dramatic installations, winning over patrons and visitors alike. Large-scale maquettes of Uxmal's Magician's Pyramid (fig. 11) and a Maya-period room (fig. 12), complete with painted moss, evoked the magnificence of the material for Denver audiences.

Stroessner's greatest contribution, however, would be the cultivation of a young couple from Texas, Frederick and Jan Mayer, who would go on to endow the department (fig. 13). The Mayers were early supporters of Stroessner and eventually became the department's most significant donors. From an early age, Frederick had collected Costa Rican stamps and had been interested in Central America.[39] In 1966, he and his wife vacationed in Costa Rica. "In those days," he recalled, "there were stores that sold pre-Columbian artifacts."[40] The couple focused

Fig. 11 Installation view, former Pre-Columbian galleries, c. 1971. Mayer Center Archives, Denver Art Museum. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

Fig. 13 Frederick and Jan Mayer, c. 2000. Photograph by Jim Harvey, courtesy of Jan Mayer.

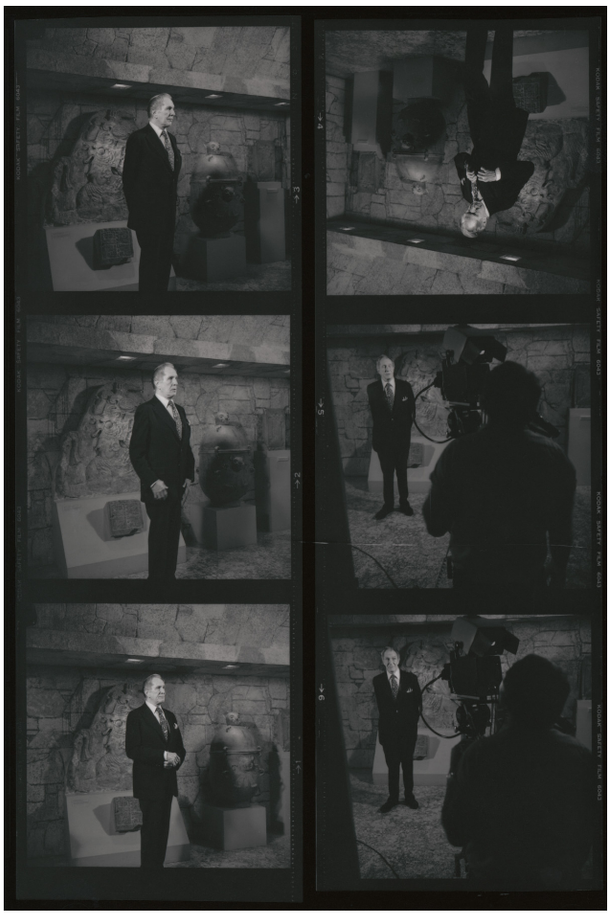


Fig. 12 Vincent Price filming in the Denver Art Museum's Maya-themed period room within the former pre-Columbian galleries. Detail from photo contact sheet, February 1983. Mayer Center Archives. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum, permission courtesy the Estate of Vincent Price.

their collecting on art from this region in an effort to assemble a comprehensive collection of ancient Costa Rican art. Mayer would enlist the help of archaeologists and students to not only find works but to promote the investigation and understanding of the region's development. Mayer's intellectual curiosity knew no bounds, and he collected with almost scientific precision. Like May, he amassed all examples of a given style, period, or type, in this case, ceramics, greenstone, and metallurgy from the Costa Rican region. The size and comprehensiveness of the collection gave it an inestimable educational value for scholars of Central America. During the 1980s and '90s, the Mayers funded numerous studies, symposia, and exchanges between Costa Rican and American students and scholars. Frederick served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for many years, and his generosity was not limited to the department or even to the DAM.[41]

The Mayer Center for Ancient and Latin American Art

Beginning in the early 1990s, a large portion of the Mayers' collection of three thousand pieces were placed with the museum on long-term loan and were featured prominently in the

Fig. 14 Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Study Gallery of Pre-Columbian Art, 2017. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

department's re-installed galleries, which opened in 1993 in time for the museum's centennial.[42] The new installation, geared toward scholars, dedicated nearly half of the floor space to study storage. Seven cruciform-shaped glass cases displayed nearly 90 percent of the ancient Americas collection. Arranged from Inca to the Olmec, the cases displayed many of the works flat on shelves with maps and other didactic material available on the perimeter walls (fig. 14). The arrangement permitted the viewing and comparison of pieces often relegated to storage that the public could not access.

The Mayers funded the creation of a Center for Pre-Columbian and Spanish Colonial Art in 2001, the second and successful iteration of such a center. The earlier version, the Center for the Study of Latin American Art and Archaeology, had been staffed by archaeologists, Gordon McEwan, an Andean specialist, and Fred W. Lange, an assistant professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder, who focused on Mayer's region of interest, Central America. McEwan had been appointed New World curator after Stroessner's passing in 1991 and oversaw the 1993 reinstallation; he left the museum in 1997. Dorie Reents-Budet served as interim curator for two years, overseeing the restitution of a wooden Maya lintel from El Tzotz to the National Museum of Guatemala. Finally in 2001, the DAM decided to split the New World Department into two separate collections overseen by dedicated specialists. Margaret Young-Sánchez became the curator of pre-Columbian art and Donna Pierce the curator of Spanish colonial art.

Young-Sánchez and Pierce, together, shaped what would become the Mayer Center. Both curators added significantly to their respective collections, enhancing the breadth and quality of the New World Department.[43] While both organized impactful international exhibitions, *Tiwanaku* (2002) and *Painting a New World* (2004), arguably their greatest contribution was shaping the identity and vision of the Mayer Center and its associated activities. The Center's purpose was, and remains, to increase awareness and promote scholarship in these fields by sponsoring academic activities, including symposia, fellowships, conservation, and publications. The generosity of the Mayers ensured that the symposia could bring together scholars from across the world, galvanizing conversations across disciplines and institutions.

By 2017, the DAM hired two new curators to succeed Young-Sánchez and Pierce, Jorge Rivas Pérez and myself. Together, we decided to revamp tradition by considering the relevance of our respective collections to present communities.[44] As we entered the museum's next phase, the reinstallation of the permanent collection galleries, we reevaluated the antiquated terms used to describe our collections and reaffirmed our commitment to promoting art of the Americas, replacing "pre-Columbian" and "Spanish colonial" with "ancient American" and "Latin American." While the ancient Americas collection primarily focuses on objects produced during the four thousand years of civilization preceding the Spanish, its expanded scope includes works by contemporary artists whose practice or technique resonates with those of ancient artists.

Fig. 15 Reinstallation of the Arts of the Ancient Americas gallery, 2022. Photograph courtesy of Denver Art Museum

The reinstallation, completed in 2021, no longer includes the study storage cases (fig. 15). The glass shelves that showcased so many objects intimidated visitors and were replaced with a color-coded presentation structured around geography (Mesoamerica, Central America, and South America) and three central ideas: land, legacy, and trade. The question of "land" addresses the impact that environment, geography, and landscape have on our understanding of the world and our place in it. From volcanoes to mangroves and coastal deserts, the varied landscapes of the Americas played a powerful role in the narratives and cosmovision of peoples across the continent. "Legacy" considers how the past continues to shape the present. The images, shapes, forms, and materials of ancient artists persist in the work of contemporary artists and the visual vocabulary of descendant communities on both sides of the border. Finally, the concept of "trade" addresses the continual exchange of goods and ideas that linked ancient communities across time and space. Recent scholarship has underscored the sophistication of ancient navigation and technological innovation that permitted connections to be made across vast, previously unimaginable, distances.[45]

Today, the department continues to embrace the groundbreaking approach of the early curators who respected and regarded in the highest esteem the works of Indigenous artists from the Americas. Bach and Stroessner's vision for a holistic approach that presented the historical and artistic complexity of the region across time has likewise left an indelible mark. But perhaps the strongest influence for the ancient Americas collection at present is the relationship to the descendant communities locally, nationally, and internationally that seek solace and connection in the works of ancient artists.

I am indebted to Paula Michelle Contreras, Ancient Americas Curatorial Assistant, for extraordinary research skills and to the members of the Provenance Team, Lori Iliff, Renée Albiston and Mac Coyle, for their investigative efforts. Additional thanks to Andrea Hansen, Denver Art Museum's librarian, and Maura Pasquale, former Executive Assistant to the Director, for their guidance on navigating both the department and executive archives. Additional thanks to Renée Miller and Christina Jackson for their help tracking down and resizing hard to find newspaper and magazine images.

NOTES

1. Neil Harris, "Searching for Form: The Denver Art Museum in Context," in *The Denver Art Museum: The First Hundred Years*, ed. Marlene Chambers (Denver Art Museum, 1996), 60.

2. Saint Louis Art Museum: 847 miles; Art Institute of Chicago: 1,006 miles; Dallas Museum of Art: 796 miles; Phoenix Art Museum: 863; LACMA: 1,025 miles.

3. *Municipal Facts* (1929), quoted in Marlene Chambers, "First Steps Toward an Art Museum: The Artists' Club," in *The Denver Art Museum*, 25.

4. Elizabeth Duncan, "Anne Evans," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, History Colorado, accessed September 2024, https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/anne-evans.

5. Ibid.

6. Ned Blackhawk et al., *Report of the John Evans Study Committee* (Northwestern University, 2014), https://www.northwestern.edu/

provost/about/committees/study-committee-report.pdf; Richard Clemmer-Smith et al., *University of Denver John Evans Study Report* (2014), https://digitalcommons.du.edu/evansreport/1.

7. Douglas served as director of the DAM from 1940 to 1942 before being sent to fight on the Pacific Front.

8. Frederic Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (Museum of Modern Art, 1941).

9. Frederic H. Douglas to Otto Karl Bach, writing from New Hebrides, September 9, 1944, Folder 5, Otto Karl Bach 1944–, Correspondences, Native Arts, Denver Art Museum Archives.

10. Frederic H. Douglas to Otto Karl Bach, writing from New Hebrides, October 31, 1944, ibid.

11. Frederic H. Douglas to Otto Karl Bach, writing from New Hebrides, November 25, 1944, ibid.

12. Bill Hornby, "A Fine Art Museum Does Not Just Happen," *The Denver Post*, June 26, 1990.

13. Otto Karl Bach to Frederic H. Douglas, writing from Denver, September 18, 1944, Folder 5, Otto Karl Bach 1944–, Correspondences, Native Arts, Denver Art Museum Archives.

14. Now known as the Martin Building, the edifice underwent an extensive renovation from 2017 to 2021, and the permanent collections were completely reinstalled.

15. Meeting of the Board of Trustees Minutes, July 23, 1956, Board Minutes 1956–59, D12.FB5, Denver Art Museum Archives.

16. Ibid. Richard Conn replaced Douglas as Curator in charge of the Native Arts Department.

17. Lewis Wingfield Story, "Building a Collection" in *The Denver Art Museum*, 99.

18. Otto Karl Bach, "'Lost' Cities Exhibit Opening," *Rocky Mountain News*, March 20, 1960, p. 26A.

19. Otto Karl Bach, "Early Gold Creations Placed on Exhibit at Denver Museum," *The Denver Post*, January 30, 1951; Otto Karl Bach, "Peruvian Art Forms on Display," *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1952. The exhibition was presented in the Schleier Memorial Gallery from September 16 to October 4, 1960.

20. An accession report mentions Mexican art purchases from Julius Carlebach (Olmec-Totonac incense burner) and Earl Stendahl (Tarascan pottery dog, Colima, Mexico), for example. See Accessions Report, February 16, 1955, Board Minutes 1949–55, D12.FB4, Denver Art Museum Archives

21. Otto Karl Bach, "Ancient Mexican Ceramics Acquired by Art Museum," *The Denver Post*, June 21, 1959.

22. In the director's report delivered during a 1967 April board meeting, Bach discussed recent museum accessions, all in the field of pre-Columbian art. Since accession funds were zero and had been since the Development Fund campaign started, the only way to keep the collection alive was to trade or exchange material. In this case, Bach traded or exchanged duplicate prints from the museum's collection in order to acquire an early Peruvian cup (1967.107), a rare Nayarit village Dance (1967.109), a small and costly Maya figure (1967.108), a Costa Rican incense burner representing the crocodile god (deaccessioned), a Costa Rican animal effigy jar (deaccessioned), a snake-headed jar (deaccessioned), and a ceremonial metate in the shape of a jaguar (deaccessioned). Board Meeting, April 26, 1967, Board Minutes 1966–1967, D13.FB1, Denver Art Museum Archives.

23. Mr. Billmyer, a member of the board, offered "random thoughts and questions" regarding the museum's Accession Committee during the meeting held on May 24, 1967. He asked whether the DAM should continue to be a collecting institution, "since it is always suffering from a lack of acquisition funds." And he personally deplored the idea of "trading," so he asked for a published statement regarding the museum's policy and purpose of acquiring art objects. Board Meeting, May 24, 1967, ibid.

24. This figure was compiled by reviewing the annual reports and inventory of objects included for each department. Because of the chaotic nature of trades and exchanges that did not always leave a legible trace in the collections record, we found these lists to be more reliable. In the 1967 Annual Report, New World appears as one of the departments, but no specific works are listed.

25. Lewis Wingfield Story, "Building a Collection," in *The Denver Art Museum*, 103.

26. Ibid. A memo listing museum staff in March 1968 notes that the institution employed thirty-three people as staff and lists Robert Stroessner as Assistant Curator of American Indian Art. Annual Meeting Minutes 1968–69, D13.FB2, Denver Art Museum Archives.

While born in Colorado, Robert Stroessner's family had connections to Latin America. A part of Stroessner's family emigrated from Germany to Colorado, while another branch moved to Paraguay. Alfredo Stroessner, Paraguay's longtime dictator, was Robert's granduncle. The family remained in contact with their South American relatives. Stroessner visited Paraguay, and on at least on one occasion, his granduncle visited the US. See La Hay Wauhillau, "Denver's Stroessner Rub Shoulders with President," *The Denver Post*, March 21, 1968. It is not known, however, how much Robert or his parents knew of his granduncle's activities in the country. See also "Remembrance of Robert Stroessner" by Teddy Dewalt sent to Anne Tenant, Mayer Center Archive, Denver Art Museum. The Mayer Center Archive encompasses archival material for both Arts of the Ancient Americas and Latin American Art as well as the previous New World Department.

27. Robert Stroessner to Tom Maytham, October 15, 1974, Stroessner Files 1974, Correspondence, Mayer Center Archive.

28. Robert Stroessner to Olive Bigelow Pell, November 12, 1968, Stroessner Files, 1968, ibid.

29. "David May: Pioneer Jewish Merchant, Founder of May Company and His Family," Jewish Museum of the American West, May 16, 2014, https://www.jmaw.org/david-may-may-co/. See also The May Company/David May, 1952–1979, Box 1, Mercantile, Beck Archives Businesses Collection, B112.03.0001.0010, University of Denver Special Collections and Archives.

30. Ibid.

31. The first piece gifted to the DAM was Joe Jones's painting *Departure* (1938; 1946.20) on August 5, 1946. The last piece would be a Papuan New Guinea Gulf Table on January 31, 1971 (1971.719).

32. Thank you to Matthew Robb, who helped identify James Economos and the context of the photograph. The May Company store would ultimately become part of Los Angeles County Museum of Art's campus and was known as "LACMA West." It housed various museum departments including publications and education. Other floors would become storage for unused vitrines and museum furniture before the museum leased the building to the Academy Museum.

33. Morton May to Otto Bach, August 26, 1969, Morton May files, Saint Louis Art Museum, copy of letter housed in the Mayer Center Archive, Denver Art Museum.

34. Stroessner notes the generosity of Morton May and illustrates a number of his gifts in the 1968 Annual Report, Board Minutes 1968–69, D13.FB2, Denver Art Museum Archives.

35. Joanne Ditmer, "Otto Bach and His Enduring Legacy," *The Denver Post*, December 2, 1990.

36. Meeting of the Board of Trustees Minutes, February 18, 1970, Board Minutes 1970–71, D12.FB5, Denver Art Museum Archives. A letter from Robert Stroessner to Morton May, March 12, 1970, acknowledges the details of the sale (May Archives, Saint Louis Art Museum). And a letter from Robert Stroessner to Frederick Mayer, December 7, 1970, expresses his gratitude to Mayer for the gift of sixty-two pieces and includes the inventory of works (Stroessner Files, 1970, Correspondence, Mayer Center Archive, Denver Art Museum). Thank you to John Buxton, who helped track down material from the Texas collector. Alan Sawyer, director of the Textile Museum in Washington, DC, and former curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, provided the valuations of the Andean material. Morton May files, Saint Louis Art Museum, copy of letter housed in the Mayer Center Archive.

37. See "Bach years, 1944–1974," in *Denver Art Museum*, 294fn47.

38. In this history of the Mayers' involvement with the DAM, this gift stands out for its financial complexity. It is worth noting that there is no evidence that the Mayers ever performed such fiscal feats again to bring a collection to the museum. Given the timing of the exchange, I would speculate that May, a successful businessman fourteen years Mayer's senior, may have exerted a certain influence on the nature of the purchase and the eventual gift.

39. Margaret Young-Sánchez, "Introduction and Acknowledgments," in *Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Frederick R. Mayer*, ed. Margaret Young-Sánchez (Denver Art Museum, 2013), 7.

40. Richard Johnson, "Art Experts Maintain a Low Profile," *The Denver Post*, March 4, 1991.

41. Mayer supported both of his alma maters, Phillips Exeter Academy and Yale University, contributing significantly to capital campaigns for museums at both institutions.

42. Mary Voetz Chandler, "A Denver Showpiece," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 31, 1993.

43. Young-Sánchez broadened the collection geographically and materially by acquiring a group of Marajoara works from Brazil, including a funerary urn (2006.14), and several extraordinary textiles, including an Intermediate period textile from southern Peru (2013 .448). Pierce added significantly to the department's holdings of viceregal Mexican material, including notable works such as *De Español y Negra Mulato* (From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto; c. 1760; 2014.217), *Saint Rose of Lima with Christ Child and Donor* (c. 1700; 2014.216), and *Young Woman with a Harpsichord* (1735–50; 2014 .209).

44. *ReVisión: Art in the Americas*, a traveling exhibition co-curated by Rivas and Lyall, inaugurated the newly renovated Martin Building in October 2021 and showcased masterworks from both collections in dialogue with contemporary Latin American and Latinx artists.

45. For example, see Christopher S. Beekman and Colin McEwan, ed., *Waves of Influence: Pacific Maritime Networks Connecting Mexico, Central America, and Northwestern South America* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2022).

Ancient American Art in a Borderlands City: Collections and Community at Tucson Museum of Art

Kristopher Driggers

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Tucson Museum of Art found new clarity in defining a vision of its future. After decades of operating without a permanent collection, doing business under various organizational names, and mounting an eclectic range of exhibitions in rented quarters, the museum began to push for a building of its own and to plan for an art collection, and what was then called "pre-Columbian art" was foregrounded as central to its purpose. Reporting on a gift of funds to construct the new galleries, the *Arizona Daily Star* noted that "the new museum is expected to feature permanent collections of pre-Columbian, Spanish Colonial, and contemporary Western art," observing the special relationship between the museum's collection-to-be and Tucson's identity as a place of Mexican heritage.[1] Museum leadership believed that Tucson's history should guide their acquisitions, and the art of the Americas—and especially ancient and colonial art from Mexico—became the institution's foremost priority.

This plan and mission for a new museum, however, were born within a complex political and social reality. Tucson in the 1960s was a city in transition. Policies were enacted that would fundamentally change the identity of downtown, where the museum's campus would ultimately be built. An urban renewal plan, approved by Tucsonans in the mid-1960s, would condemn and clear the neighborhood known as *la calle*, where Mexican Americans and Mexicans had built a busy and culturally connective commercial and residential district. In its place, city leaders envisioned that new cultural spaces would "modernize" Tucson, reconfiguring city blocks to eliminate these homes and businesses and displace their residents. In short order, the new museum, with its mission of collecting Tucson's Mexican past, would come to occupy a space within that urban renewal footprint.

Tucson is a Borderlands place, and because of this, new initiatives can only intervene within a landscape that has been multiply reinscribed across the region's deep history.[2] Tucson is on the ancestral territory of Indigenous Sonoran Desert communities. Southern Arizona was not part of a US state but a territory until 1912, remaining so for more than sixty years after California's statehood, and it was Mexican territory until the Gadsden Purchase of 1854. The city is only an hour's drive north of the border, and its built environment and visual culture through the mid-twentieth century were defined by Tucson's relationship to Mexico. The Presidio, built to house New Spain's armies, once anchored the city center, and in the surrounding neighborhoods, Sonoran-style adobe structures housed downtown Tucson residents and businesses. For all these reasons and more, Arizona historians suggest that in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tucson was largely perceived as Arizona's "Mexican" town—unlike Phoenix, where Spanish and Mexican armies never settled and where anti-Mexican attitudes precluded what one scholar described as Tucson's unmatched "bicultural vitality."[3]

Today, many art museums across the country are increasingly attentive to amplifying the resonances between the objects that they steward and their local contexts. For institutions that collect ancient American art, collections are increasingly activated in collaboration with local Latinx and Indigenous communities and their histories. At the time of the collection's founding, Tucson Museum of Art leadership imagined that they would build a collection tied to regional histories, acquiring works intentionally for their ties to local people and place. Even so, closely attending to the historical conditions in which that collection was formed traces a more nuanced story about the relationship between the museum and community. Most recently, this history also includes initiatives in which the museum has sought to chart a path forward in new, inclusive relationships with communities.

Turning momentarily to the first person: I worked at Tucson Museum of Art as curator of the Latin American collections from 2019 to 2024, where my colleagues and I were sensitive to both the unique circumstances of the museum and the distinctive relationship of the institution to its local context. The museum is different in key ways from the other institutions whose histories are studied in this volume. Its collecting began relatively late, with the first acquisitions of ancient American art coming only in 1965. It has never been an encyclopedic museum, and so the ancient American collections have never been asked to justify their importance relative to other global ancient traditions. There are also operational differences: The museum's campus is small, its staff lean, its resources modest. Yet even given these differences, the Tucson Museum of Art's history is important to the broader picture of how ancient American art has been collected and exhibited in art museums in the United States. Its history tells how stewarding ancient American art became entangled in a city's broader renegotiation of its own identity as a place of Mexican history, heritage, and culture.

Ancient American Art in Tucson Before the Tucson Museum of Art

Long before the Tucson Museum of Art began acquiring objects for its permanent collection, Tucsonans maintained broad popular interest in the ancient Americas and in their city's relationship to the Mesoamerican past. The origins of the connections between southern Arizona and Mesoamerica run deep. Iconography from historical pottery of the Southwest shows that by the 1300s, Indigenous artists of southern Arizona created imagery representing ideologies shared with Mesoamerican peoples, with common ideas and images circulating beyond the delimitations of contemporary national borders.[4] Today, Indigenous collaborators in Tucson Museum of Art curatorial projects continue to affirm ties between southwestern heritage and ancient American visual cultures, recognizing a common heritage in Mesoamerican art.

Newspaper records of the early twentieth century show that English-language audiences were interested in Tucson's ties to Mesoamerica—though the most spectacular account in this early history was rooted in an archaeological fraud. In 1924, a trove of lead crosses, swords, and other artifacts was discovered by the city's deputy sheriff while he explored a lime kiln near a wash a few miles from downtown. Dozens of additional objects were soon uncovered, several of which were inscribed with Latin texts that were later proven to be haphazard copies lifted from the classics. For years, local authorities speculated that the artifacts might prove that Tucson was the

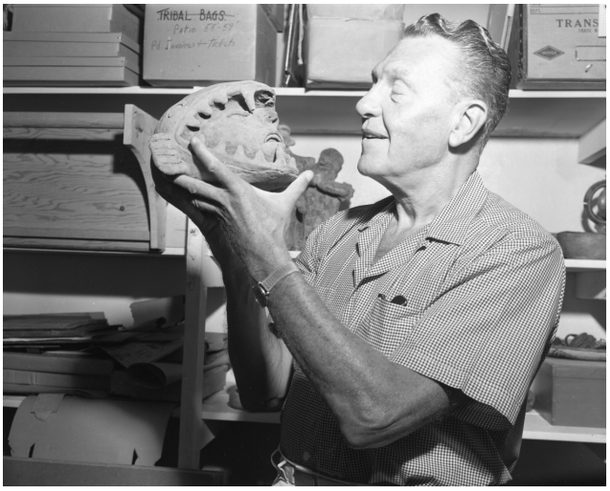


Fig. 1 Ralph Bellamy bought pre-Columbian sculpture at Clay Lockett's Indian Arts and Crafts Shop during a visit to Tucson, September 18, 1962. Photo by Jack Sheaffer. The Jack Sheaffer Photographic Collection (MS 435), 20668. Courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

meeting place for ancient Toltec and Roman soldiers, and no less a figure than George Vaillant (1901–1945), then curator at Harvard's Peabody Museum, was brought to inspect the find site.[5] The question of their authenticity was at last debunked by 1930, but the forgeries effectively generated years of local interest in Tucson's ties to Mesoamerica and the broader world.

Indeed, Americanist archaeology played a significant role in defining the regional identity of Tucson in the 1930s. In the words of one reporter writing in the *Tucson Daily Citizen* in 1937, "One of the strongest lures of the Southwest is the historically fascinating field it offers to the archaeologically minded. Not only does this region provide limitless resources to the scientist, but the layman is ever conscious of the 'great discoveries' as is demonstrated by the many bones, pieces of pottery and other objects which are turned into the State Museum for inspection."[6] Popular media brought news of excavations carried out in Pueblo archaeology in northeastern Arizona, while the Arizona State Museum in Tucson processed accumulations of scientific and informally excavated materials.

While Tucsonans' interest in the archaeology of the ancient Americas is clearly attested in the early decades of the twentieth century, sources on ancient art's commercialization during the same years are relatively quiet. By midcentury, however, several galleries that specialized in ancient American art operated in the city. Sheep rancher Clay Lockett (ca. 1906/1907–1984) opened his Indian Arts and Crafts shop in 1942, marketing ancient American art and works in other collecting categories to a Hollywood clientele. A photograph documents a visit by actor Ralph Bellamy (1904–1991), who is shown holding an ostensibly pre-Columbian ceramic work that he purchased at the gallery (fig. 1). Oral histories recall that noted collector Vincent Price (1911–1993) also paid a visit to Lockett in search of ancient gold objects in the early 1960s.[7]

Lockett was not alone in selling pre-Columbian art in midcentury Tucson. Promotional announcements for galleries now long defunct evidence the active trade in ancient American artworks in the city. At a gallery called Shearman-Sierk, photographs from 1962 document an installation in which west Mexican sculptures hung alongside paintings by local artists in the gallery's inaugural exhibition, designed by the University of Chicago–trained art historian Richard Pelham-Keller.[8] Another gallery, America West Primitive and Modern Art, sold pre-Columbian art under the direction of Tucson-born Princeton graduate Kelley Rollings (1927–2018), who also offered works in other categories to meet local interest.[9] Also in town was Catherine Noble's Mexican Shop, where 1956 saw a sale of "effigies and bowls recently brought back from the Nayarit district."[10] Decades later, the proprietors of several of these local galleries would play a pivotal role in growing the museum's collection: Both Lockett and Rollings would donate to the museum's Latin American holdings, with

Rollings gifting Mesoamerican works to the growing collection in the 1970s.[11]

Cumulatively, available sources suggest that in midcentury Tucson, ancient American objects were largely marketed and displayed as part of a cross-category decorative collecting practice, bought and sold alongside what today we distinguish as colonial Latin American art, Indigenous southwestern works, Latin American folk art, and even art of the American West. Interior photographs of Tucson homes suggest how consumers in this market displayed these works together. Images show ancient American objects like Nayarit figural sculpture displayed alongside Mexican silver in colonial styles and Indigenous historic pottery from the US Southwest.[12] The cross-category mingling of ancient American objects reflected in such collection photos mirrors their movement through the market.

In the same years when Tucson dealers and purchasers shaped a collecting practice for the region, Tucson-area institutions were also defining serious scholarly commitments to scientific study of ancient Mexico. New learnings from these projects identified scientific bases for shared histories between Mesoamerica and the Southwest. East of the city, the Amerind Foundation's director, Charles Di Peso (1920–1982), was engaged in excavations at Paquimé, Chihuahua, from the late 1950s into the 1960s in partnership with Mexico's INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia). Di Peso's excavations established that Paquimé was a point of high-volume trade between Mesoamerica and the Southwest, a place where scarlet macaws from Mesoamerica were husbanded in the Chihuahua desert.[13] More broadly, the Amerind's projects were staking out a vision in which Arizona and New Mexico might be posited as Mesoamerica's northernmost expression.

The local conditions described thus far—gallery sales of pre-Columbian art, a decorative style incorporating ancient American objects,

Fig. 2 Frederick R. Pleasants, Ica, Peru, date unknown. Courtesy of the Tucson Museum of Art.

extensive local reporting in the popular press on Arizona Americanist archaeology, and archaeological excavations tying the Southwest to Mesoamerica—all had a part in defining Tucson's relationship to the ancient Americas. Yet none of this might necessarily have led to the creation of a local museum collection of ancient American art. There was, after all, no clear space for such a collection. The University of Arizona Museum of Art had been energized in 1951 by a gift of Renaissance paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation; meanwhile, its civic analog, the Tucson Fine Arts Association, which would later become the Tucson Museum of Art, would not begin collecting in any category until 1959. But that first gift would come from Frederick Rhodes Pleasants (1906–1976), a prodigious collector, curator, and heritage worker who became a leading force in the city's cultural sector (fig. 2). Singly, Pleasants would become the figure most responsible for the institutionalization of ancient American art history in the city.

Frederick R. Pleasants and the Founding of the Tucson Museum of Art Collection

Before arriving in Tucson, taking a position at the University of Arizona to enjoy the health benefits of the desert, Pleasants had developed a multifaceted career in museums and heritage

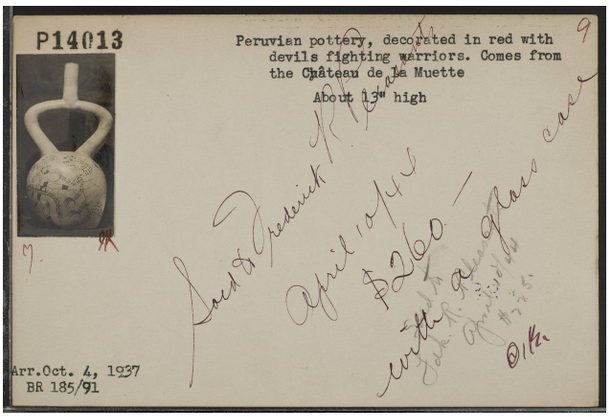


Fig. 3 Inventory card of Moche vessel from Brummer, 1937–44. Inscription reads, "Sold to Frederick R. Pleasants, April 10, '44." The Brummer Gallery Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

work. Trained at Princeton University as a specialist in Maya art and archaeology, Pleasants organized exhibitions at Harvard's Peabody Museum in the 1930s, where a report from the institution states that one display on the Americas emphasized "the effect of environment on culture."[14] World War II brought Pleasants to issues of restitution: As a Monuments Man, he was appointed to head the Central Collecting Point in Munich in 1946. His return from the war also brought him back to the Peabody, and then to the Brooklyn Museum, where he succeeded Herbert Spinden (1879–1967) as Curator of Primitive Art from 1949 to 1956.[15]

During the Brooklyn years, Pleasants organized exhibitions that perhaps best speak to his vision of the field. In a short bulletin published by the museum, he laid out a plan for the department that distinguished between what he termed "objects of art" and "objects of anthropology." Brooklyn would pay most attention to art, with the purpose of working to "demonstrate the special contribution of primitive art, its closeness to technical processes, and its strongly motivated social background as well as showing the best from an aesthetic viewpoint."[16] In his galleries, Pleasants grouped Aztec works with African and Oceanic objects to suggest that all works had social motivations. Visually, he pursued what he described as "experimental display techniques" with modern lighting and harmonious color schemes. A bibliographic note tells us that in 1954, Pleasants spoke at a Wenner-Gren Foundation Supper Conference alongside Alfred Kidder (1885–1963) and Linton Sattherthwaite Jr. (1897–1978) where the topics included, among other things, "The Role and Function of Museums," "Problems of Exhibition," and "The Potentialities of Television."[17]

Alongside his museum work, Pleasants was also building a personal collection. By his own account, he was motivated to collect "primarily for teaching purposes," an assertion that aligns with his relatively pedagogical approach to presenting museum galleries.[18] The timeline and methods of his acquisitions, however, remain obscure. By 1938, Pleasants's name would be recorded as a purchaser in the Brummer Gallery records, and in 1944, Brummer sold Pleasants a Moche vessel now in Tucson's collection (fig. 3). A textile in a hybrid Moche-Wari style (2001.23 .1), also now at the museum, was almost certainly owned previously by one of Pleasants's Brooklyn contacts, the German Peruvian dealer Guillermo Schmidt Pizarro (1880–1964), who sold a related work to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in the 1930s.[19] Later in the Brooklyn years, Pleasants would also make his most significant purchase, acquiring in 1950 a monumental stone sculpture from Veracruz from gallerist Pierre Matisse (1900–1989), who had been one of Pleasants's contacts during his years at the Peabody (fig. 4).[20] Similar in style to the Lápida de Tepatlaxco, itself created in the first millennium CE in an area near Orizaba, Veracruz, the sculpture sourced from Matisse has now been identified as among the first works to be sold by artist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) on the international art market.[21] Matisse may also have been the source for another Pleasants work, a stone *palma* from Veracruz that was previously owned by governor of Veracruz Teodoro Dehesa Méndez (1848–1936; fig. 5).[22]

Fig. 4 Veracruz artist(s), Stela, Mexico, 300 BCE–100 CE. Stone, 47 × 8⅝ × 2¼ in. (119.4 × 21.9 × 5.7 cm). Collection of the Tucson Museum of Art: Gift of Frederick R. Pleasants, 1965.32.

Fig. 5 Veracruz artist(s), Palma, Mexico, 700–800 CE. Volcanic stone (basalt), 14⅝ × 10 × 6 in. (37.1 × 25.4 × 15.2 cm). Collection of the Tucson Museum of Art: Gift of Frederick R. Pleasants, 1971.28.

Fig. 6 Olmec artist(s), Spoon in the Shape of a Bird Monster Profile Head, Costa Rica, 800–300 BCE. Jade, 1¾ × 4¼ × ¼ in. (4.4 × 10.8 × 0.6 cm). Collection of the Tucson Museum of Art: Gift of Frederick R. Pleasants, 1968.11.

Today, we know that Dehesa's relative had entrusted a number of sculptures to Matisse for sale, suggesting that he could have been the source for the Pleasants palma as well.[23] This collection of details about specific acquisitions surely underlies a broader picture of Pleasants as a collector, although that picture remains to be further clarified.

While Pleasants's collecting patterns are only beginning to emerge, what is better documented is the sensational impact of the collection once its owner moved to Tucson in 1958. Soon thereafter, the Arizona State Museum mounted a 1962 exhibition of his holdings. The show was accompanied by a published catalog with listings of many of the definitive works from his collection, suggesting that by that year, most of the major acquisitions had already been made.[24] In the wake of the exhibition, Pleasants began transferring his collection to museums, and the Arizona State Museum received several important objects, including important Andean weavings. However, Pleasants evidently determined within a few years that many gifts from his collection should be routed toward an art-focused institution instead.

In 1965, Pleasants transferred the Veracruz sculpture that he purchased from Matisse to the Tucson Art Center, where he had taken a position on the board. This donation was a remarkable vote of confidence for an organization that at that point had a collection of fewer than forty artworks, almost all of which were works on paper. Even so, Pleasants envisioned that the center might become a serious place for the study of regionally significant art from periods before Arizona statehood. In his words, he saw "a great opportunity to develop a distinguished collection of both pre-Columbian and Latin American Colonial art and to have both permanent and temporary exhibitions of the finest examples of those arts characteristic of Tucson and the Southwest."[25] Loans of additional objects, and then additional gifts, followed: In 1972, Pleasants donated jades that had just been published by the Emmerich Gallery (fig. 6), a Chocholá-style vessel, and a Wari tapestry-woven tunic.[26] Pleasants also donated the foundations of a research library, giving the young institution over two thousand scholarly volumes and thousands of slides.

To exhibit the Veracuz sculpture and other Pleasants objects, the Tucson Art Center quickly established a Primitive Art Room in its rented quarters at the historic Kingan House in downtown. Pleasants's pieces were joined there by other loaned works from Tucson collectors, including dealer Rollings and Costa Rican art collector Frank Appleton. Because the gallery was small, Pleasants planned a quickly rotating exhibition to display a sequence of selected objects. For a few weeks, the gallery highlighted works from what he called "nuclear America," which were then replaced by Costa Rican antiquities, followed thereafter by Andean textiles, and so on.[27] These years saw the Art Center's director, E. F. Sanguinetti (1917–2002), photographed in the *Tucson Daily Citizen*, posed in a near-embrace of the Veracruz sculpture to which he looked, in the words of the reporter, with "obvious pleasure."[28] As the institution's collecting and exhibitions of ancient American art built momentum, subsequent directors expressed their elation at the prospect of making Tucson a center for ancient American art. One interim director, Gerrit C. Cone, remarked that the donation had inspired "a new faith in the Art Center, its program and its staff."[29]

In those years, the Art Center's leadership was clear about its commitment to forming what was envisioned as a "distinctive regional museum featuring the legacy of pre-Columbian and other primitive art, Spanish Colonial, Western, and folk art."[30] Rather than form an encyclopedic collection—an impossibility—the museum chose to foreground local relevance, focusing on areas important to the history of southern Arizona. Such a regional focus would still allow for international reach and collaboration. One hope

was that when the museum managed to secure a permanent building, it might include a "Mexican Room," a gallery for showing exhibitions organized by Mexican museums.[31] Little more than a decade later, the museum's board would back away from its regionalist focus.[32] But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ancient American and colonial Latin American art centered their vision for the future. Though it did not yet have a building, the institution had an identity: It would define itself by its commitments to Mexico and the Americas, conserving histories that made Tucson distinctive.

Enthusiasm for the Art Center's mission and its formalization as a museum was helped along by observers from the outside. Dudley Tate Easby Jr. (1905–1973) and Elizabeth Kennedy Easby (1925–1992), then at work organizing The Metropolitan Museum's monumental *Before Cortés* exhibition, came to Tucson in 1969 and spoke approvingly of the institution's intention to focus on the ancient Americas. In Dudley Easby's flattering comments to Tucson press, by prioritizing this area, "the center here would be doing what the Metropolitan Museum should have been doing for the past 97 years." He did not hesitate to opine, though, on the intractable problem of financing the center's transition into a professional museum, criticizing city government for failing to "face up to whether or not they want an art center and start planning how to support it."[33]

A few years later, the Veracruz monument was photographed in the news once again, this time as it was uncrated following its return from *Before Cortés* (fig. 7). The loan was heralded as a triumph: A piece from Tucson's new collection had shown alongside works from major international museums.[34] The enduring question, though, was how the Art Center might grow into a more mature institution in its own right and secure a new, fixed home. True to its institutional identity, the museum would look to the ancient American collection as part of the strategy that promoted its growth. That growth, however, meant intervening in a downtown environment where Tucson's identity as a Borderlands place was being renegotiated.

Fig. 7 Grace Sternberg and Chris Carroll unpack Tucson Art Center's Veracruz stela, returned from loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, January 25, 1971. Photo by Jack Sheaffer. Courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, #293 41507.

Urban Renewal and Tucson's Ancient American Collection

The years when the Tucson Art Center's attention turned decisively to ancient American art were also pivotal years in the story of downtown's changing identity. Until the mid-1960s, Mexican American and Mexican communities made downtown Tucson a busy urban center, alongside Indigenous and Chinese immigrant communities. In the district that residents called la calle—located around one of Tucson's main thoroughfares of the time, Meyer Avenue—Mexican American Tucsonans ran businesses in mixed-use structures, some of which were built during the city's Mexican period in the first half of the nineteenth century. Community spaces offered places to gather. La Placita, the community's public square, hosted celebrations for patron San Agustín, and the nearby Plaza Theater screened Spanish-language films produced across Latin America.[35]

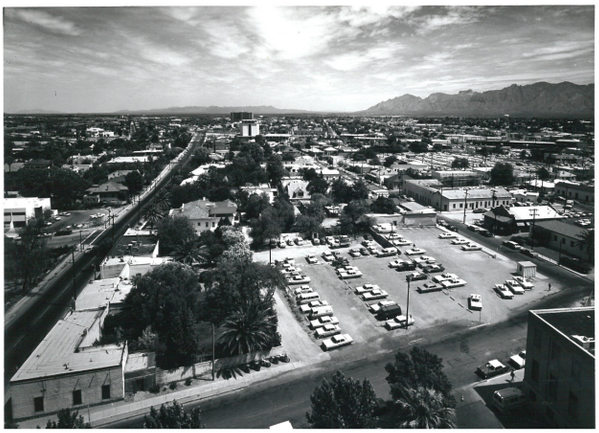


Fig. 8 Arial view of old Presidio, future location of Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block, early 1970s. Courtesy of the Tucson Museum of Art.

Fig. 9 Cordova Brothers Smoke Shop and Abe's Bail Bonds, late 1960s. Courtesy of the Tucson Museum of Art.

In 1964, however, the city of Tucson began working on an urban renewal plan that would displace most of the residents of la calle. In a meticulous study of the fate of the district, historian Lydia Otero noted both the process and rhetoric of this project. A decades-long effort had labeled the homes and businesses of downtown's Mexican Americans as "slums," preparing the way for their condemnation and removal. Cultural institutions were implicated in this plan; period documents suggest that the plan was that once the existing district was cleared, Tucson could rebuild with a "good cultural base," in the words of the Commission on Municipal Blight.[36]

A number of influential voices opposed this plan. Otero has shown, for example, that the publisher of the *Arizona Daily Star* urged caution, writing: "Must the people of Tucson destroy this remaining area of former Mexican life just because the streets are too narrow and buildings old? . . . Maybe someday Tucsonans would look back at urban renewal and wonder why they authorized such a project which wiped out at one stroke what remained of Mexico in Tucson."[37] These concerns notwithstanding, voters approved the plan, and la calle fell to urban renewal. The essential votes passed in 1966, just months after the Art Center acquired its Veracruz sculpture.

The private Art Center's need for a new space to meet its ambitions intersected with the city's interest in building up a "cultural base" downtown, and director Sanguinetti began expressing his wish to benefit from the project to the press in 1965. If given a square block within the urban renewal footprint, he noted, the museum could "enrich community life and would provide a historical, psychological, and cultural focus around which the whole city might pulse."[38] Ultimately, for a rent of a dollar a year, the museum would be allowed to build within the boundaries of Tucson's historic Presidio, dating to 1775 when Tucson was part of New Spain, at a site that had once held an ancestral pit house nearly two millennia ago (fig. 8).

The most visible architectural embodiment of Mexican history at the new museum's site was the home occupied by María Navarrete Cordova (1896–1975) and Raúl Cordova (fig. 9). A Sonoran-style structure with architecture that partly predated the Gadsden Purchase, the Cordova House was the living home of a notable family of la calle. Through eminent domain, the city condemned the home, a decision that the

Cordovas tried for years to reverse in court.[39] As the museum took its place at the site, it would lease the Cordova's home, becoming responsible for caring for the structure for the next one hundred years and planning gallery construction for the lot immediately adjacent.

The Tucson Art Center was thus set on a path to build a home for its new collections at a place central to the Mexican identity of the city. Seeking funds to advance the project, ancient American artworks became the visual icons of the building fund, aligning the construction that would take place near the Cordova House with the image of a future home for the "pre-Columbian." Pleasants's Veracruz sculpture was the image selected for the poster soliciting financial support (fig. 10), and a drawing of the palma appeared on the sign that stood in front of the Building Fund's downtown offices. The campaign's iconography underscores that highlighting the museum's ancient American collection was seen as the way to secure its future within the urban renewal footprint.

The new museum opened at last in 1975, and with it came a name change to the Tucson Museum of Art (TMA). Galleries featured artworks from Mexico, including works from the ancient Americas, and next door, the Junior League funded restoration to the Cordova House, converting it from a contemporary Mexican American home and commercial space to a period room of nineteenth-century Mexican Tucson, effectively erasing the experience of the home's most recent residents.[40]

Urban renewal's effects on Mexican American communities in Tucson were deeply felt, and the memory of this displacement is still articulated by community members today. Otero documents a sentiment often expressed in the city: Downtown left behind its Mexican American community, choosing to invest instead in an idea of an economically vigorous center that in reality failed to compete with the city's suburban expansion.[41]

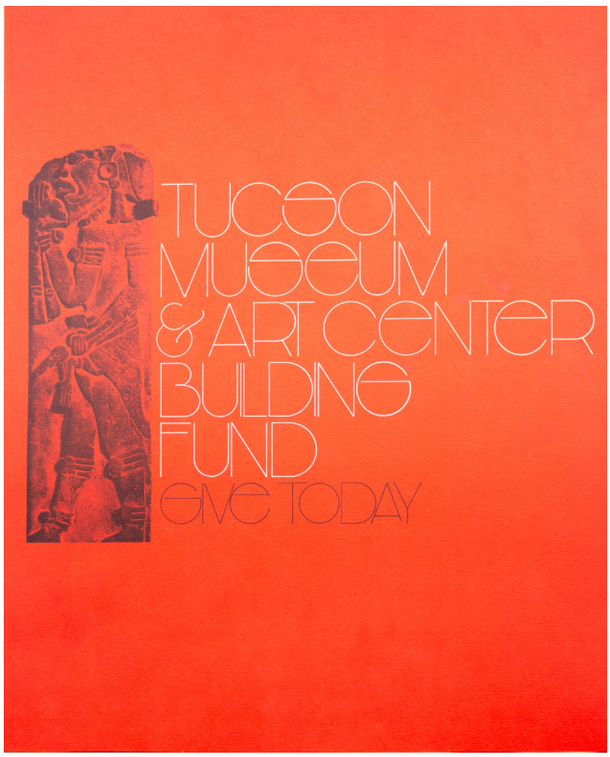


Fig. 10 Poster for Tucson Museum and Art Center Building Fund, early 1970s. Courtesy of the Tucson Museum of Art.

No single narrative neatly encapsulates the museum's role in downtown's changing identity. While the museum's galleries and collecting looked to preserve material histories of Tucson's relationship to Mexican identities and the ancient American past, that narrative was presentable only because the museum had benefitted from the urban renewal project. Conserving historical and ancient Latin American arts was, and remains, a meaningful project for communities of the Southwest, but the environment in which the spaces for the permanent collection were born broadly displaced Mexican American communities from participation in many aspects of downtown's vitality. These conditions make showing ancient American art in the Borderlands distinctive: The collection resonates with the identity formation of local communities, but its presentation could only be possible through intervention into a landscape of layered histories and conflicting interests.

Fig. 11 Installation view, *Selections from the TMA Pre-Columbian Collection*, 1983. Courtesy of the Tucson Museum of Art.

The museum early on sincerely embraced and played a role in fostering local Mexican American traditions, taking on projects that gave it a role in preserving the heritage of la calle alongside ancient American and colonial Latin American artworks. From its early years, it imagined itself as a place for Mexican Americans to gather. Every year beginning in the 1970s, Tucsonan María Luisa Tena and members of prominent Mexican American Tucsonense families organized a nativity scene, *El Nacimiento*, in the Cordova House, welcomed with a community procession. Tucson mounted exhibitions in its first decades of works by contemporary Chicano artists, and in 1992, it hosted the landmark exhibition *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA). These kinds of activities became part of a new image of cultural identity in Tucson, in which the ancient American collection played a part, though spatial tensions endured.

Later Years and Now

Over time, the museum's relationship to its ancient American collections changed. By 1983, it appears that some board members had already begun to feel that the museum's vision of a "distinctive regionalism" might have been too restrictive. An attempt to formalize the collecting policy to limit the museum to what it called pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, and western art evidently met with displeasure, as an appetite was growing for the museum to embrace contemporary art. Director Andrew Maass was compelled to negotiate the identity of the museum in the press. He said, "I think we are a regional museum with a responsibility to present its collections and its exhibitions with a regional focus. . . . Here's a regionalism for the West. I don't think it's anything to be scared of."[42] A new gallery for the ancient American collections was installed that year to great acclaim, expanding to a roomy new presentation in the finally finished building (fig. 11).[43]

In 2001, the museum installed a new presentation of ancient American art, positioning the field within a new conceptual frame, along with a historical architectural one. Artworks from Latin America, ancient to contemporary, were newly brought together and reinstalled in another of the Presidio's historic houses, an adobe structure built in 1865. Reconceived by Joanne Stuhr, Americas curator from 1993 to 2003, the Latin American galleries emphasized Mesoamerican heritage as part of the Arizona-Mexico regional identity. The following year, Stuhr led TMA in originating an exhibition of Casas Grandes ceramics, *Talking Birds, Plumed Serpents and Painted Women*. The exhibition was a collaboration with INAH archaeologists and the Amerind Foundation that again emphasized the regional relevance of ancient Mesoamerican traditions. Latin American art projects were advanced in the following years by curators Stephen Vollmer (2004–06), Fatima Bercht (2007–09), and Anna Seiferle-Valencia (2010–12).

The end of the 2010s brought new approaches to the ancient American collection, as well as a reckoning with the history of the Cordova House. New galleries were planned for TMA's ancient American collections, the first expansion of the museum's physical footprint since 1983. Around the same time, the Cordova House was newly reinterpreted—this time, with the

Fig. 12 Installation view, *La Casa Cordova’s Tucson Changing Landscape*. Didactic panel featuring María Navarrete Cordova developed by TMA staff with the support of Lydia Otero, 2017. Original image source: Arizona Historical Society. Quote source: “150 Years Live Vividly In Memory Of Pioneer” by Martha Buddecke, *Tucson Citizen*, February 1963. Photo: Willo Art.

Fig. 13 Installation view, *Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling*, featuring Maya vessels and mural by Justin Favela, 2023. Photo by Julius Schlosburg. Project supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

collaboration and cooperation of descendants of the Mexican American community affected by the urban renewal and with didactic panels explaining how urban renewal changed downtown Tucson. For the first time since its displacement, María Navarrete Cordova’s portrait returned to the Cordova House, reinserting the family and the memory of la calle into its narrative (fig. 12).[44]

From 2019 to 2024, I was responsible for TMA’s Latin American collections. The museum’s commitment to art from the region grew in those years with the construction and opening of the Kasser Family Wing of Latin American Art in 2020, a project that expanded galleries for the collection and focused exhibitions. Ancient American collections were foregrounded in the project, now expanded with gifts from I. Michael and Beth Kasser and Paul L. and Alice C. Baker. At the project’s outset, the museum’s approach to objects of heritage had already begun to evolve in light of the experience of reinterpreting the Cordova House and recontextualizing the Indigenous North American arts collections. Curating new ancient American galleries meant developing a project that created community participation, collaboration, and a polyvocal approach. Texts authored by community members with heritage relationships to the ancient Americas appear alongside exhibited objects, and curatorial interpretations have sought to amplify connections between works and the specific histories of Latinx communities in Tucson.

This approach has also characterized temporary exhibitions of ancient American art pursued in recent years. To take one example, the city became home to many Guatemalan refugees in the 1980s, and a 2023 exhibition *Popol Vuh and the Maya Art of Storytelling* presented ancient objects in light of the words of community members, who shared ideas about the relationship of narrative arts to heritage, alongside commissioned art by contemporary artist Justin Favela (fig. 13). A large-scale feature exhibition of Andean cloth, *CUMBI: Textiles, Society, and Memory in Andean South America* (2023–24) looked at weavings across time (including many donated by Pleasants) and displayed the work of contemporary textile

artists of Andean heritage who practiced in or had ties to the Southwest. Today, the museum works to fulfill a vision of connecting ancient American art with Tucson's community that was intended at the collection's founding but with a new commitment to inclusion that charts the way forward.

In addition to thanking the editors of this volume and my fellow curators, I am grateful to my Tucson colleagues for generously sharing ideas or leads, including Marianna Pegno, Jennifer Saracino, Joanne Stuhr, Rachel Adler, Christine Brindza, and Erika Castaño, as well as the students in my University of Arizona course Aztecs and Incas for a lively discussion about this project. Special thanks are due to Deb Zeller, longtime steward of Tucson Museum of Art's memory, for invaluable assistance in the archives. Any errors are my own.

NOTES

1. Cathryn McCune, "New Museum Receives Gift of $500,000," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, June 7, 1970, Top of the News section.

2. In using the term "Borderlands" to describe the context of Tucson's cultural politics, I invoke the work of theorist and poet Gloria Anzaldúa, with particular reference to her reflections on existence in this region in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute, 1987). Anzaldúa's work addresses the identity of subjects in relation to the geographic boundaries of national borders, as well as the shifting and emerging psychological and creative space of the region as informed by its intersecting, multiple histories.

3. Thomas E. Sheridan, *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854–1941* (University of Arizona Press, 1986), 42–43.

4. Kelley Hays-Gilpin and Jane H. Hill, "The Flower World in Material Culture: An Iconographic Complex in the Southwest and Mesoamerica," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 55, no. 1 (1999): 1–37; Andrew Turner and Michael D. Mathiowetz, ed. "Introduction. Flower Worlds: A Synthesis and Critical History," in *Flower Worlds: Religion, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest* (University of Arizona Press, 2021), 3–33.

5. *The New York Times* reported that "the inscriptions have been interpreted as describing the conflicts of the prehistoric Roman-Jewish kingdom in the Southwest with the Toltec Indians, forerunners of the Aztecs." "Puzzling 'Relics' Dug up in Arizona Stir Scientists," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1925, p. 1. See also Don Burgess and Wes Marshall, "Romans in Tucson?: The Story of an Archaeological Hoax," *Journal of the Southwest* 51, no. 1 (2009): 45.

6. Betty McGrath, "Cummings' 30 Years Research Results in Many Discoveries," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, March 30, 1937, p. 7.

7. Medicine Man Gallery, "Beverly Miller: Daughter of Trader Clay Lockett," Episode 241, host Dr. Mark Sublette," April 26, 2023, YouTube, 1:29:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SukNoyjTWY.

8. "A New Gallery and New Shows," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, January 20, 1962, p. 25.

9. Charlotte Lowe, "America West's Mix Is Eclectic," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, April 11, 1991, p. 17.

10. Beatrice Edgerly, "Center's Show Traces Evolution of Hopi Indian Art and Crafts," *Arizona Daily Star*, March 4, 1956, p. 31.

11. Rollings's donations included a painted Maya bowl (1976.212), Colima figurines (such as 1976.215), and Mezcala lapidary objects (including 1971.30), among other works.

12. Barbara Smith, "The Dentons Chose a Perfect House for Their Indian Art," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, October 29, 1960, p. 49.

13. Charles Di Peso, *Casas Grandes: A Fallen Trading Center of the Gran Chichimeca*, vol. 2 (Amerind Foundation, 1974), 620–33.

14. *Seventieth Report on the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology* (Harvard University, 1937), 4.

15. Anna Seiferle-Valencia, "Frederick R. Pleasants: A Curator and Steward of Pre-Columbian Art," in *Pre-Columbian Art: Selections from the Tucson Museum of Art Permanent Collection* (Tucson Museum of Art, 2014), 23–31.

16. Frederick R. Pleasants, "New Developments in the Department of Primitive Art," *Brooklyn Museum Bulletin* 12, no. 2 (1951): 13.

17. Evon Z. Vogt, "Anthropology in the Public Consciousness," *Yearbook of Anthropology* (1955): 370.

18. Frederick R. Pleasants, "Foreword," in *Primitive Art from the Collection of Frederick R. Pleasants* (Arizona State Museum, 1962), n.p.

19. Kristopher Driggers, *CUMBI: Textiles, Society, and Memory in Andean South America* (Tucson Museum of Art, 2023), 73–77. On Guillermo Schmidt Pizarro, see Carolina Orsini and Anna Antonini, "Life of a Peruvian Art Collector: Guillermo Schmidt Pizarro and the Fostering of Public Collections of Pre-Hispanic Art in the First Half of the 20th Century," in *PreColumbian Textile Conference VII,* ed. Lena Bjerregaard and Ann Peters (Zea Books 2020), 258–77.

20. Megan O'Neil, "'Good Pieces in Sight:' The US Market in Mesoamerican Antiquities circa 1940," Gett Research Institute, June 15, 2022, YouTube, 1:25:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM4WNudRCBA.

21. Megan E. O'Neil, "The Changing Geographies of the Mesoamerican Antiquities Market Circa 1940: Pierre Matisse and Earl Stendahl," in *Collecting Mesoamerican Art Before 1940: A New World of Latin American Antiquities*, ed. Andrew D. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil (Getty Research Institute, 2024), 310.

22. Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Certain Antiquities of Eastern Mexico* (US Government Printing Office, 1907), plate 119; Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *Varieties of Classic Central Veracruz Sculpture* (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1960), fig. 8. On Dehesa's collecting and role in early studies of Veracruz sculpture, see Andrew D. Turner and Payton Phillips Quintanilla, "Collecting and Constructing Classic Veracruz: Earl Stendahl, Guillermo Echániz, and the Market for Mesoamerican Stone Ballgame Objects," *Journal for Art Market Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 5.

23. O'Neil, "The Changing Geographies of the Mesoamerican Antiquities Market Circa 1940," 310.

24. *Primitive Art from the Collection of Frederick R. Pleasants* (Arizona State Museum, 1962).

25. McCune, "New Museum Receives Gift of $500,000."

26. Elizabeth Kennedy Easby, *Pre-Columbian Jade from Costa Rica* (A. Emmerich, 1968).

27. Charlotte Cardon, "Pre-Columbian Culture Shown at Art Center," *Arizona Daily Star*, November 7, 1965, p. 21. Unfortunately, no further archival materials are conserved that would suggest how Pleasants's works were exhibited or what texts or supporting materials accompanied them.

28. "Pre-Columbian Stele," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, February 4, 1966, p. 19.

29. "As Skyline Changes, So Does Life in Tucson," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, January 1, 1974, p. 17.

30. "Rare Carving Returned After New York Exhibit," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 26, 1971.

31. "Architect Wilde Engaged to Design New Art Center," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, February 17, 1970.

32. An early mention of the board's discontent with the museum's regionalism of the institution appears in J. C. Martin, "Tucson Art Center: Its Beginnings. What Direction? At What Pace?" *Arizona Daily Star*, May 20, 1973, Section D, p. 3.

33. Cathryn McCune, "City Owes Aid to Art Center," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 13, 1969, p. 11.

34. "Rare Carving Returned After New York Exhibit," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 26, 1971, p. 17; Julie Sasse, *Tucson Museum of Art: A Centennial History, 1924–2024* (Tucson Museum of Art, 2023), 77.

35. Lydia R. Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City* (University of Arizona Press, 2010), 127–52.

36. Ibid., 112.

37. Ibid., 105.

38. "Museum Sought in Renewal Area," *Arizona Daily Star*, August 27, 1965, p. 5.

39. Lydia Otero, "New Directions for La Casa Cordova: Recentering the Latinx Past and Present in Tucson," *History News: The Magazine of the American Association for State and Local History* 73, no. 3 (2018): 8–13.

40. Ibid., 10–12.

41. Otero, *La Calle*, 184.

42. Kenneth LaFave, "Western Art Saddled by Its Own Reputation," *Arizona Daily Star*, October 30, 1983. The conflict over the scope of collecting would ultimately lead to Maass's departure. See Sasse, *Tucson Museum of Art*, 109.

43. Kenneth LaFave, "Museum Remodel Worth the Wait," *Arizona Daily Star*, October 30, 1983.

44. Otero, "New Directions for La Casa Cordova," 12.

All in the Details: The Stendahl Art Galleries and the Business of Prehispanic Art in the United States (1954–65)

Mary E. Miller

During the symposium, works sourced from the Stendahl Art Galleries were referred to in almost every presentation, from museum collections in New York to Denver. Particularly before 1970, no other single art gallery or art dealer had such impact in the formulation of museum collections in the area of prehispanic art. At the symposium, scholars evaluated individual institutional histories in the United States, especially those of art museums, with respect to the civic responsibilities shouldered by institutions and the opportunities that different curatorial departments undertook, sometimes with the engaged interest of individual collectors, who sought to bring an institution in line with their own passions.

But none of these collections could have been formed without the leadership of an extraordinary salesman: Earl Stendahl (1888–1966). Stendahl invented the business of prehispanic art. Before 1940, acquiring prehispanic art was often a more touristic and haphazard entrepreneurial endeavor, with little substantial difference between anthropology and art history. Such blurriness was indeed the case once one stepped anywhere outside of European and American collections of painting and sculpture, including the arts of Africa and Oceania. Stendahl marketed to collectors and to museums, and early on, he saw the market value of securing venues that would drive other sales, whether in the permanent collection of the Seattle Art Museum or in the temporary exhibitions he organized locally in southern California and internationally. And eventually there would be other attendant effects: Acquisitions by museums would become core works in survey texts and classroom instruction.[1] Stendahl could have taught a course in market development.

We can learn today a great deal about how this market took shape from the letters the family exchanged with one another from the late 1940s until his death in 1966. Stendahl, his son, Alfred (Al; 1915–2010), his wife, Enid (1889–1979), and his son-in-law, Joe Dammann (1922–1971), all participated in the family business and wrote letters to one another, especially when conducting business away from Los Angeles. The Getty Research Institute (GRI) has 357 of these family letters in its holdings in box 105, part of the comprehensive archive of the Stendahl Art Galleries (SAG) business documentation, an archive that comprises stock books, photographs, and extensive correspondence with dealers (e.g., Guillermo Echániz [1900–1965] in Mexico), collectors (e.g., Nelson Rockefeller [1908–1979], founder of the

Museum of Primitive Art), and museums (e.g., Dayton Art Institute and its director Thomas Colt [1905–1985]). Held in folders at the end of the archive, and many written on aerograms and other very lightweight paper, these letters have rarely been consulted.[2] The information in the letters sheds light on family life, competitors, Los Angeles, and much more. Most of all, this archive underpins the work conducted by the Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative (PHAPI), dedicated to examining and interpreting the business of selling ancient art of Latin America in the United States and elsewhere.[3]

Explicit business correspondence was always important to Earl Stendahl and the SAG, and starting in 1940, the gallery grew to become the largest volume seller of prehispanic art in the 1960s in the United States. In 2021, the GRI published eight letters between Earl Stendahl and Guillermo Echániz, written over a period of fifteen months, from October 1940 until January 1942.[4] The shipping lanes to Europe and Asia from the United States had closed at the beginning of the period of this correspondence, and by January 1942, the United States was at war with the Axis powers and mail was under federal scrutiny, if not censorship. The SAG was just finding its way to extensive business in Mexico and was dependent on Echániz. These eight letters show the development of the business, cultivating buyers Ambassador Robert Woods Bliss (1875–1962), who had established the museum and research center Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, DC, with his wife, Mildred Barnes Bliss (1879–1869), and Walter and Louise Arensberg (1878–1954; 1879–1953), who collected modern and pre-Columbian art, as well as the slippery tactics undertaken to remove objects illicitly from Mexican archaeological contexts and move them across the border to the United States. Perhaps because of the nature of the business or perhaps because of the censors, Stendahl and Echániz often wrote in coded references.

The family letters, though, are different—unfiltered and uncoded correspondence written a generation later, when the business was in full swing. But "full swing" did not mean that financial success was certain, even when the Stendahls had developed multiple sources across multiple countries and a worldwide clientele. They established a New York beachhead for the business, and Earl and Enid became well-known at the best hotels in Europe. Mail—and frequently international mail—was the means by which the extended family worked, played, criticized, and supported one another. Although on the surface the family letters are the means of exchanging pleasantries regarding weather, home maintenance, and notes of outcomes from the racetrack, this correspondence is often revealing in the private comments regarding the sales process and the opinions of potential buyers. "I now feel strongly that Jan or February sale is in order. Get what we can out of as much junk as we can sell," wrote Al to his father, probably in 1957, describing the possibility of some high-volume, low-value sales.[5] On paper, Earl was tough on his son, Al, and son-in-law, Joe, grousing about their failure to get accounts paid and paid off. At home in Los Angeles, the gallerists could have registered their complaints in person: From the road, the letter was the recourse.

As revealing as such comments may be, these letters are even more important in their documentation, no matter how oblique, of business practices. The focus of PHAPI is to reveal and link these practices: While stock books and inventories document the formal side of the practice, the family letters point to the ways that three principals—Earl, Al, and Joe—shared different responsibilities, from navigating works across international borders to paying gardeners at the gallery and expressing ire at unpaid invoices with frank comments about friends and competitors. They also kept an eye out for the opinions of archaeologists and art historians. Because the SAG was the single largest vendor of prehispanic art in its heyday,

understanding the practices also helps reveal the picture of the many routes by which such works entered art museums. In many ways, working through the SAG archive is akin to discovering a complete archaeological stratum, one known only through the occasional trade object encountered hither and yon. With these records the big picture, year by year, can start to come into focus.

Unlike the data of the stock books, the content of the family letters cannot be summarized: Their level of granular detail resists the big picture, yet no big picture can be drawn without them. The family letters show how Earl was always on the hunt for more and better business, with private collectors and museums across the world—and while cryptic, the letters also show that Earl kept an enormous number of details in his head, juggling purchases in Mexico with sales and purchases in Europe. Failed business deals, rarely noted in the stock books, are a regular feature of the family letters. In these accounts, Earl kept an eye on his two younger partners (who were more typically in Los Angeles) and the competition emerging both nearby and in New York. He kept his "frenemies" close: cajoling and collaborating with them. He expressed bitterness at those sellers abroad, particularly in Mexico, who gave a better deal or first choice to his US competition. And he sought new avenues of promotion—from local exhibitions to what became a Stendahl grand tour of European institutions from 1958 to 1963. For a man who had once been poor, who would turn time and again to his background as a candymaker when times were tough, he had arrived both at home in Los Angeles and beyond.[6] By the time of his death in 1966, Earl penned letters home on stationery from glamorous hotels in New York and abroad.

The rest of this essay includes portions of family letters. My glosses and their specific focus point to a larger picture of the SAG practice. The family letters are most dense and interlocking from 1954 until just before Earl's death in 1966, and so small selections of these letters will be drawn from those years, ending with a letter from December 1965 that reveals a deal the SAG failed to make. Dozens of letters document the five years between 1958 and 1963; addressed briefly elsewhere, those letters focus on developing new markets and new inventory, often of classical antiquities, with much of the business conducted in Europe.[7] To keep this essay focused on the prehispanic market in the United States, the letters selected here date from 1954 to 1956 and from 1963 until 1965. Letters from Earl, Al, Joe, and Enid all point to different aspects of the business, and each has a very specific voice, from brusque to chatty, and when speaking of the young children in the family, even tender. Spelling and punctuation rarely meet the standards of the day and are retained here. Dates have been reconstructed, by and large, by the PHAPI project. Full transcriptions of the letters can be found in the Appendix of this volume. The selections that follow have been taken from larger contexts, as seen in the illustration of the original letter in the GRI archives.

Al Stendahl, in Los Angeles, to his father, Earl Stendahl, in New York, 1954 (month and day uncertain)

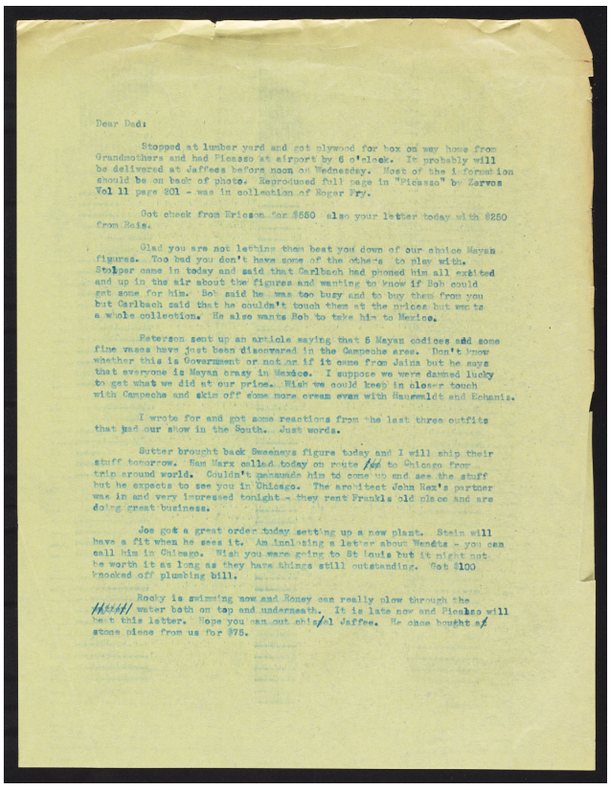
Dear Dad: Stopped at lumber yard and got plywood for box on way home from Grandmothers and had Picasso at airport by 6 o'clock. . . .

Stolper came in today and said that Carlbach had phoned him all excited and up in the air about the figures and wanting to know if Bob could get some for him. Bob said he was too busy and to buy them from you but Carlbach said that he couldn't touch them at the prices but wants a whole collection. He also wants Bob to take him to Mexico.

Peterson sent up an article saying that 5 Mayan codices and some fine vases have just been discovered in the Champeche area. Don't know whether this is Government or not or if it came from Jaina but he says that everyone is Mayan crazy in Mexico. I suppose we were damned lucky to get what we did at our price. Wish we could keep in closer touch with Campeche and skim off some more cream even with Hauswaldt and Echaniz.

Threaded through the family letters are sales of works by European artists. Here, Al apparently shipped a Picasso out of the Los Angeles International Airport. Did he build the crate for the artwork? The letter is vague on that point.

Robert (Bob) Stolper (1920–2013) worked closely and competitively with the SAG from 1950 until 1970 or so. He sold prehispanic and other works of art in Los Angeles, New York, and London and is the nonfamily member most widely referred to in the family letters. He kept an apartment in Mexico City in the 1960s, perhaps principally for making purchases. He seems to have also kept an apartment at 11 East 68th Street in New York (The Marquand, built in 1913), perhaps adjacent to the Stendahls' place in the same building. This letter was presumably written in Los Angeles. What seems to have happened is that Julius Carlebach (1909–1964) had called Stolper by telephone from his home and gallery in New York, and Stolper then dropped by the SAG. Al was eager to get it all down on paper to his father. Carlebach sold a diverse "primitive" inventory and purchased extensively from the SAG, as evidenced in the stock books. Given the date of 1954, Carlebach (whose gallery was at 943/937 Third Avenue) would have known the 1952 exhibition *Ancient Tarascan Art* at the Sidney Janis Gallery, which consisted of loans or works on commission from SAG. There is no known surviving archive of Carlebach today, but he was one of the principal dealers to sell to Fred Olsen (1891–1996), whose prehispanic collection is now at the Yale University Art Gallery.



Dear Dad:

Stopped at lumber yard and got plywood for box on way home from Grandmothers and had Picasso at airport by 6 o'clock. It probably will be delivered at Jaffees before noon on Wednesday. Most of the information should be on back of photo. Reproduced full page in "Picasso" by Zervos Vol 11 page 201 - was in collection of Roger Fry.

Got check from Ericson for $550 also your letter today with $250 from Reis.

Glad you are not letting them beat you down of our choice Mayan figures. Too bad you don't have some of the others to play with. Stolper came in today and said that Carlbach had phoned him all excited and up in the air about the figures and wanting to know if Bob could get some for him. Bob said he was too busy and to buy them from you but Carlbach said that he couldn't touch them at the prices but was to a whole collection. He also wants Bob to take him to Mexico.

Peterson sent up an article saying that 5 Mayan codices and some fine vases have just been discovered in the Campeche area. Don't know whether this is Government or not or if it came from Jaina but he says that everyone is Mayan crazy in Mexico. I suppose we were damned lucky to get what we did at our price. Wish we could keep in closer touch with Campeche and skim off some more cream even with Hauswaldt and Echaniz.

I wrote for and got some reactions from the last three outfits that had our show in the South. Just words.

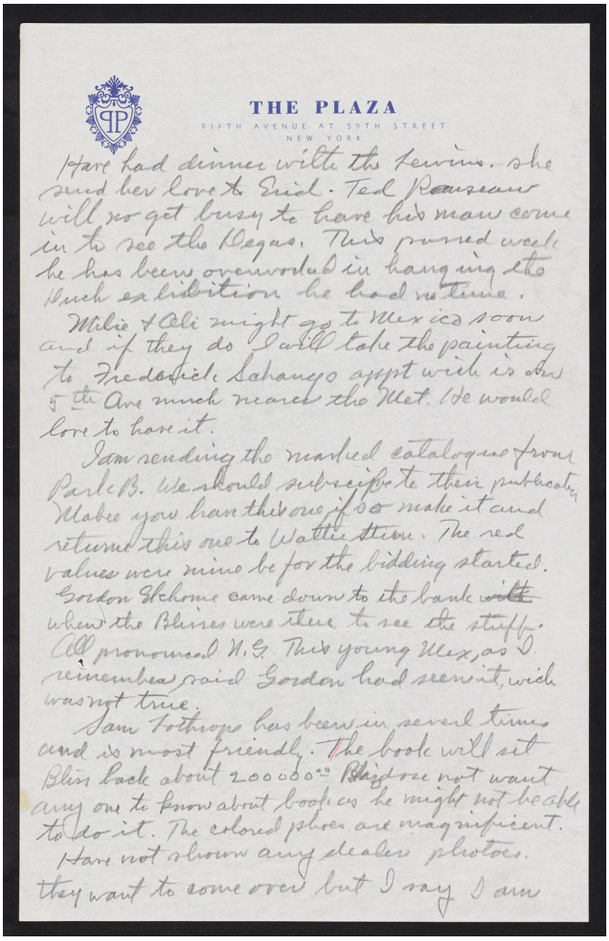
Sutter brought back Swanberg's figure today and I will ship their stuff tomorrow. Sam Marx called today on route /66 to Chicago from trip around world. Couldn't persuade him to come up and see the stuff but he expects to see you in Chicago. The architect John Rex's partner was in and very impressed tonight - they rent Frankl's old place and are doing great business.

Joe got a great order today setting up a new plant. Stein will have a fit when he sees it. Am including a letter about Wendts - you can call him in Chicago. Wish you were going to St Louis but it might not be worth it as long as they have things still outstanding. Got $100 knocked off plumbing bill.

Rocky is swimming now and Nancy can really slow through the water both on top and underneath. It is late now and Pickles will beat this letter. Hope you can out obtain Jaffee. He once bought a stone piece from us for $75.

Fig. 1 Al Stendahl to his father, Earl Stendahl. From Los Angeles to New York, 1954 (month and day uncertain). Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

And who was Frederick Peterson (1920–2009), addressed next in this letter? The author of *Ancient Mexico* (1959), Peterson was a long-standing faculty member at the University of West Virginia, who had documented thousands of prehispanic objects in both public and private collections in the 1950s; one copy of his documentation survives today at the University of New Mexico.[8] He was well connected in both Mexico and the United States, and fake Maya codices, as discussed in this letter, circulated both in 1954 and today.[9] In what might seem to be a non sequitur, the letter connects the codices to Jaina Island (an unlikely origin, all in all), and April Dammann has recounted how Earl secured permission to film on Jaina Island in 1952.[10] He and his crew then proceeded to loot


THE PLAZA
FIFTH AVENUE AT 59TH STREET
NEW YORK

Have had dinner with the Levins. She send her love to Enid. Ted Pousseau will not get busy to have his man come in to see the Degas. This pressed week he has been overworked in hanging the Ruth exhibition he had no time.

Milie & Abi might go to Mexico soon and if they do I will take the painting to Fredericke Sahagun apt with is down the Ave much nearer the Met. He would love to have it.

I am sending the marked catalogues from Parke B. We should subscribe to their publications. Make your loan this one if so make it and return this one to Wattis Stein. The real values were mine be for the bidding started.

Gordon Ekhome came down to the bank ~~with~~ when the Blises were there to see the stuff. All pronounced N. G. This young Mex, as I remember, said Gordon had seen it, wich was not true.

Sam Lothrop has been in several times and is most friendly. The book will set Bliss back about 200000.00 Bliss dose not want any one to know about book as he might not be able to do it. The colored phoes are magnificent.

Have not shown any dealer photoes. they want to come over but I say I am

Fig. 2 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al. From New York to Los Angeles, Friday, October 29, 1954 (dated by Earl). Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

the island for a month, filling oversized cases with dozens, if not hundreds of figurines—so he was "damned lucky" with his timing, as Al noted in the letter, especially as interest in Maya art ramped up: Robert Woods Bliss and Nelson Rockefeller had both made significant acquisitions of Maya objects by then. "Campeche" is probably a shorthand reference to one of the Stendahl's Mexican partners operating in Yucatan, probably Alberto Márquez or less likely José Maria Palomeque, to stay ahead of other buyers, particularly Jorge Hauswaldt, a German émigré in Mexico, and Echániz, Earl's principal Mexican partner.

Earl Stendahl, in New York, to his son, Al Stendahl, in Los Angeles, Friday, October 29, 1954 (dated by Earl)

(On page 4 or 5 of what appears to be a six-page letter)

> *. . . Gordon Eckholm came down to the bank ~~with~~ when the Blisses were there to see the stuff. All pronounced N. G. This young Mex, as I remember, said Gordon had seen it, wich was not true.*
> *Sam Lothrop has been in several times and is most friendly. The book will set Bliss back about 200000.00. Bliss dose not want any one to know about book as he might not be able to do it. The colored phoes are magnificent. . .*

Several advisers and authenticators played key roles with respect to the quality and integrity of the Stendahl inventory. One of the most important individuals to dealers and collectors in New York was Gordon Ekholm (1909–1987), Mesoamerican curator at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), who also advised Ernst Erickson (1893–1983) on building the collection Erickson would donate to the AMNH.[11] Presumably written in New York, this six-page letter, written over multiple days, noted that Robert and Mildred Bliss came to examine works in a bank vault with Ekholm and perhaps a "young Mexican," although it is hard to follow the timing. The "young Mexican" might be Jose Luis Franco, the Mexican authenticator with whom Ekholm was friendly and who may have been involved in the export of antiquities at some point. Although dated 1954, at this point, Bliss was already planning the book that would be published in 1957, *Pre-Columbian Art: Robert Woods Bliss Collection*, written by Samuel K. Lothrop, Joy Mahler, and William Foshag, a spectacular coffee table book featuring the Bliss collection. Earl has this book in mind as he

begins to plan the publication *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America*, published posthumously by Harry N. Abrams (1968).

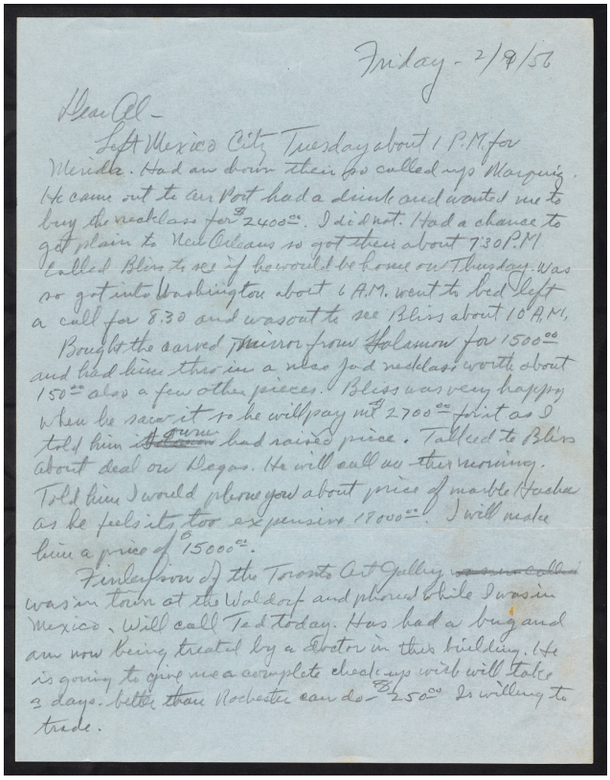
Earl Stendahl, in New York or Washington, to his son, Al Stendahl, in Los Angeles, February 9, 1956

Dear Al –

Left Mexico City Tuesday about 1 P.M. for Merida. Had an hour their so called up Marquez. He came out to the air port had a drink and wanted me to buy the necklace for $2400.00. I did not. Had a chance to get plain to New Orleans so got there about 7:30 P.M. Called Bliss to see if he would be home on Thursday. Was so got into Washington about 6 A.M. Went to bed left a call for 8:30 and was out to see Bliss about 10 A.M.

Bought the carved mirror from [indecipherable, possibly Hauswaldt or Solamon] for 1500.00 and had him thro in a nice jad necklass worth about 150.00 also a few other pieces. Bliss was very happy when he saw it so he will pay me $2700.00 for it. . . . Talked to Bliss about deal on Degas. He will call me this morning. Told him I would phone you about price of marble Hacha as he feels its too expensive 18000.00. I will make him a price of $15000.00. . . .

Earl continued to pursue Maya art, using a short layover in Merida, Mexico, to meet with Alberto Marquez, a source for him there (Earl declined to purchase a necklace), en route to New Orleans and up to Washington, DC, to see Robert Woods Bliss, perhaps his most significant client. The Degas painting at Dumbarton Oaks today (HC.P.1918.02.(O)) was not acquired from Stendahl, so this sale evidently did not take place. The items that Earl showed to Bliss were things he had presumably brought from Mexico City in his luggage, acquired from someone whose name cannot be easily deciphered. He quickly made $1,200 on


Friday - 2/9/56

Dear Al –

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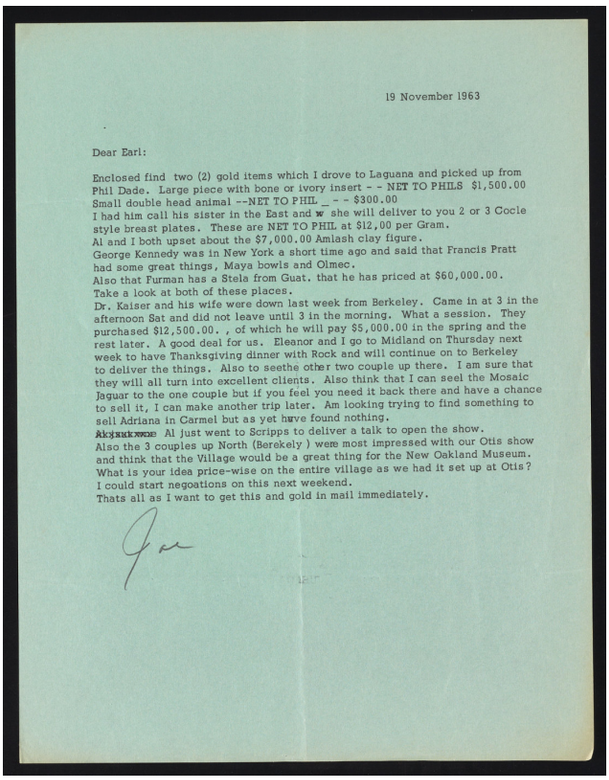
Bought the carved mirror from Solamon for 1500.00 and had him thro in a nice jad necklass worth about 150.00 also a few other pieces. Bliss was very happy when he saw it so he will pay me 2700.00 for it as I told him ~~it seem~~ had raised price. Talked to Bliss about deal on Degas. He will call me this morning. Told him I would phone you about price of marble Hacha as he feels its too expensive 18000.00. I will make him a price of 15000.00.

Finlayson of the Toronto Art Gallery ~~was called~~ was in town at the Waldorf and phoned while I was in Mexico. Will call Ted today. Has had a bug and am now being treated by a doctor in their building. He is going to give me a complete check-up which will take 2 days. Better than Rochester can do – B 250.00 Is willing to trade.

Fig. 3 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al Stendahl. From New York or Washington to Los Angeles, February 9, 1956. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

the deal, selling Bliss the carved mirror (also not a work at Dumbarton Oaks today), and although he told Bliss he would consult Al on a price reduction, he simply informed Al that the price on a "marble" *hacha* (presumably PC.B.038) would drop by $3,000.



19 November 1963

Dear Earl:

Enclosed find two (2) gold items which I drove to Laguana and picked up from Phil Dade. Large piece with bone or ivory insert - - NET TO PHILS $1,500.00
Small double head animal --NET TO PHIL _ - - $300.00
I had him call his sister in the East and w she will deliver to you 2 or 3 Cocle style breast plates. These are NET TO PHIL at $12,00 per Gram.
Al and I both upset about the $7,000.00 Amlash clay figure.
George Kennedy was in New York a short time ago and said that Francis Pratt had some great things, Maya bowls and Olmec.
Also that Furman has a Stela from Guat. that he has priced at $60,000.00.
Take a look at both of these places.
Dr. Kaiser and his wife were down last week from Berkeley. Came in at 3 in the afternoon Sat and did not leave until 3 in the morning. What a session. They purchased $12,500.00., of which he will pay $5,000.00 in the spring and the rest later. A good deal for us. Eleanor and I go to Midland on Thursday next week to have Thanksgiving dinner with Rock and will continue on to Berkeley to deliver the things. Also to seethe other two couple up there. I am sure that they will all turn into excellent clients. Also think that I can seel the Mosaic Jaguar to the one couple but if you feel you need it back there and have a chance to sell it, I can make another trip later. Am looking trying to find something to sell Adriana in Carmel but as yet have found nothing.
Al just went to Scripps to deliver a talk to open the show.
Also the 3 couples up North (Berekely) were most impressed with our Otis show and think that the Village would be a great thing for the New Oakland Museum.
What is your idea price-wise on the entire village as we had it set up at Otis?
I could start negoations on this next weekend.
Thats all as I want to get this and gold in mail immediately.

Joe

Fig. 4 Joe Damman to his father-in-law, Earl Stendahl. From Los Angeles to New York, November 19, 1963. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Joe Dammann, in Los Angeles, to his father-in-law, Earl Stendahl, in New York, November 19, 1963

. . . George Kennedy was in New York a short time ago and said that Francis Pratt had some great things, Maya bowls and Olmec.

Also that Furman has a Stela from Guat. that he has priced at $60,000.00. Take a look at both of these places.

Dr. Kaiser and his wife were down last week from Berkeley. Came in at 3 in the afternoon Sat and did not leave until 3 in the morning. What a session. They purchased $12,500.00., of which he will pay $5,000.00 in the spring and the rest later. A good deal for us. Eleanor and I go to Midland on Thursday next week to have Thanksgiving dinner with Rock and will continue on to Berkeley to deliver the things. Also to seethe other two couple up there. I am sure that they will all turn into excellent clients. Also think that I can seel the Mosaic Jaguar to the one couple but if you feel you need it back there and have a chance to sell it, I can make another trip later. Am looking trying to find something to sell Adriana in Carmel but as yet have found nothing.

Al just went to Scripps to deliver a talk to open the show.

. . . Thats all as I want to get this and gold in mall immediately.

Written four days before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, this letter elucidates how Earl's son-in-law, Joe Dammann, is thinking about the SAG's new inventory and new competition. Regardless of the context, the SAG picked up useful intelligence from their clients. Noted in this letter is George Clayton Kennedy (1919–1980), who bought from the SAG but also from other dealers, especially in New York, including Frances Pratt (1913–2003), a dealer at 31–33 West 12th Street in Greenwich Village.[12] But the big news was about Aaron Furman (1900–1975), who probably sold more African and contemporary art than prehispanic art in his gallery at 46 East 80th Street: In this letter, he had a Maya stela from Guatemala for sale for $60,000. An increasing number of dealers were working from New York in the 1960s and focusing on Maya and Olmec inventory.

The key new client here is Dr. William F. Kaiser of Berkeley, who spent $12,500 in twelve hours. One can only imagine the party that ended at 3 a.m. Joe described how he would seal the deal by delivering the acquisitions to Dr. Kaiser in person in a few days. He also had plans to visit other new clients. Works from the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Kaiser are periodically sold at

auction; a notable Zapotec urn from the collection was drawn by Adam Sellen.[13]

Joe also describes a plan to sell the Mosaic Jaguar, a work eventually published in *Saturday Evening Post* on February 8, 1964, to accompany the article "Art from Nobody Knows Where" that detailed the rampant looting in Mexico that was feeding prominent collections in the US despite Mexican laws prohibiting it. The Mosaic Jaguar was actually a blatant forgery, and its location is not known today.

Earl Stendahl, in New York, to his wife, Enid Stendahl, in Los Angeles, December 12, 1964

Dear Enid– Somebody cut off our telephone B4 I had finished so I am writting the news as of the passed week. Ernest just left after a lovely steak dinner and I have just finished the dishes.

I deposited the check from Tomayo 400.00 also the 500.00 check from the woman in Cleveland of the Sasanian ring. Also a check from Heeramanic of 500.00 for the little Islamic bracelett wich was stolen from us.

Was walking home with Ernest one evening and he meet a friend of his a Mr Dr Arthur Sackler. We took him up to the appartment and he had a very exciting evening looking at our treasures. He liked the larg Amlash bull. The next day he had Frank Caro come in to pass on it. Caro and his son were as much excited as he was. Today Dr Sackler came in and bought it for 12000.00. . . . He also reserved the small gold cup from Persia for $6000.00. He woud rather have the larger cup for 15000.00 but this is the one Rothchild of Paris reserved. . . .

Evidently the Dr Sackler will put up the money for these as he give the Museum of American Indian money for purchases-so you see we have been pretty busy and I am just a little tired.

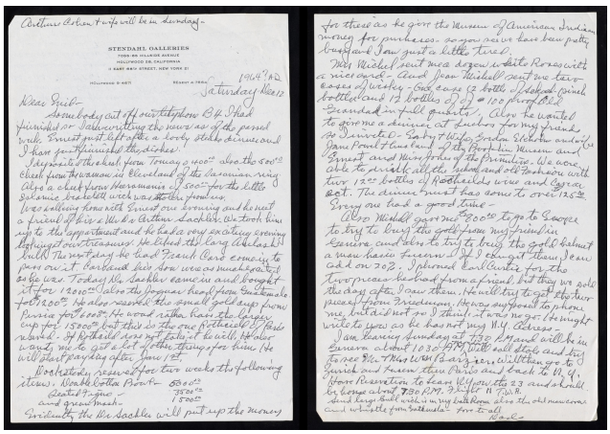


Fig. 5 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his wife, Enid. From New York to Los Angeles, December 12, 1964. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Mrs Michel sent me a dozen white Roses with a nice card–and Jan Michell sent me two cases of wiskey–one case 12 bottle of scotch pinch bottles and 12 bottles of of 100 proof Old Grandad in full quarts. Also he wanted to give me a dinner at Luchos for my friends so I invited Easby & wife, Gordon Ekholm and wife Jane Powel & husband of the Brooklin Museum and Ernest and Miss Jones of the Primitive. We were also to drink all the schoch and Old Fashion with two 12.00 bottles of Rothchilds wine and caviar ect. . . .

. . . Will then go
to Zurich and Lucern there Paris and back to N.Y. Have Reservation to leave N.Y. on the 23 and should be home about 7:30 P.M. Flight 11 T.W.A
Send large Bull wich is in my bath Room also the old man cover and whistle from Gotemala–Love to all
Dad

A year later, things were on the up and up; Lyndon B. Johnson had been elected president in his own right, and the economy was booming. Earl wrote to Enid from New York, in the

apartment the SAG leased at 11 East 68th Street. He had just had dinner, apparently in his own apartment, with Ernest Erickson, the single greatest patron of prehispanic art in this period at AMNH.[14] The woman in Cleveland may be Mrs. Emery Norweb, a trustee at the Cleveland Museum of Art (see Bergh, this volume). This letter is further evidence of the SAG relationship with the Heeramanecks, major dealers in Los Angeles and New York, particularly of South and Southeast Asian art. Today the Heeramaneck collection of prehispanic art is in the National Museum, New Delhi, India, the sole such collection in that nation.

The story that Earl went on to relate to his wife is downright picaresque, a litany of key New York players in the art world: Erickson introduced Earl to Dr. Arthur Sackler (1913–1987), and they had a fine time examining works in the Stendahl apartment, particularly an

Amlash Bull. Sackler subsequently brought his own art consultant, Frank Caro, a Chinese specialist, to advise him. What follows points to, without fully explaining, fuzzy documentation at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).[15] Frederick Dockstader (1919–1998), director of the Museum of the American Indian, came to see Stendahl, ordered up $10,000 worth of objects, and Dr. Sackler was said to be footing the bill. Earl considered himself lucky, especially in the gifts that his clients also sent him, suggesting the exchange economy between gallerist and collectors: Mrs. (Daniel) Michel of Chicago sent him a dozen roses, and Jan Mitchell sent him two cases of whiskey.[16]

Mitchell then threw a dinner party at Lüchow's, his famous New York establishment near Union Square, with the Easbys and Ekholms in attendance, as well as Jane Powell (and husband) of the Brooklyn Museum, Julie Jones, curator of pre-Columbian art at the Museum of Primitive Art, and Ernest Erickson. Dudley and Elizabeth Easby (1905–1973; 1925–1992) were important figures in New York; Dudley was a Metropolitan Museum trustee, and Elizabeth would be one of the curators of *Before Cortes: Sculpture of Middle America* (1971), a signature exhibition of prehispanic art in New York. Jane Powell (1930–1993) left the Brooklyn Museum after a short stint there and is better known as Jane Dwyer from her days as director of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology at Brown University. Julie Jones (1935–2021) would go on to become the head of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at The Met for twenty-one years and curator emeritus until her death in 2021.

The letter concludes with Earl's travel schedule for the next ten days or so in Europe and a request to Enid to ship Los Angeles inventory on to New York.

Earl Stendahl, from his travels to Los Angeles, to his son, Al Stendahl, and son-in-law, Joe Dammann, February 22, 1965

Dear Al & Joe –

Arrived in Minnapolis and was only able to see Mr. Samuel Sacks II-as the director was busy. Sacks II is the top man any way so everything was O.K. Interested in stone panels in Large Room – No-8560 the standing Astec figure top of stairway – 2000.00 and the Bronze vase we got in Biblos. I will send the photos from here.

In Chicago Raymond Wielgus wants the Mayan Bowl with face ~~and~~ we had at the Primitive. He just about committed himself $2000.00. I will send this to him. Wardwell of the Art Institute just about committed himself on No 10015 the blond incised Mayan Cylinder Bowl - $3000.00.

Phoned Detroit and the curator Francis W. Robinson requested bill for the two Amlash pieces 1000.00 less than what we quoted. I gave him an option of one week on the Maya stone of wich they have the blow up. Quoted him 28000.00 down from 35000.00. If they don't buy

he will send blow up on to Minneapolis. He will send to me in N.Y. the gold plate.

Jan Mitchel was in today with inshuckon about the gold and painting in Europe. He is hot. Hope you and Joe can do something on an exchange with the Mex Museum. . . . The people from Toronto – Mr. and Mrs. Noah Torno 146 Bloor Street West, Toronto 5 – Canada. Send them a group of catalogues. They are hot. The Cohens will come in about middle of week and I know they will buy. Mr. Arthur Sackler was to come in late today but left B.4. I phoned him at 4:30. Glad you got a check from Dayton. Hope Tom will do likewise. Will also phone Cleveland. and Leff. Heramanac is in hospital from a stroke.

. . . [Mitchell] would like to have us send the Egyptian box with the polychrome figure inside but I am afraid he would not buy after seeing the condition it's in. Love to all Dad

A few months after his letter to Enid, in early 1965, Earl took a trip to Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, and then returned to New York. Business was booming, and the SAG was selling all sorts of antiquities.

In Minneapolis, Earl met with Samuel Sachs II (b. 1935), the deputy director, later to be director, at the Detroit Institute of Art (and then briefly at the Frick Collection), and was able to propose numerous sales. In Chicago, he visited more clientele: Raymond Wielgus (1920–2010), whose collection is now in the Eskenazi Museum at Indiana University, and the Art Institute of Chicago, where Alan Wardwell (1935–1999) was the first Curator of Primitive Art.[17] In Detroit, Earl worked with curator Francis Robinson, selling Amlash works that the SAG purchased during the European tour. But the expensive object on offer in 1965 was a "Maya stone," optioned for $35,000, then reduced to $28,000, which Earl indicated would be offered to Minnesota if Detroit took a pass. Detroit did pass; it is possible that the monument Earl

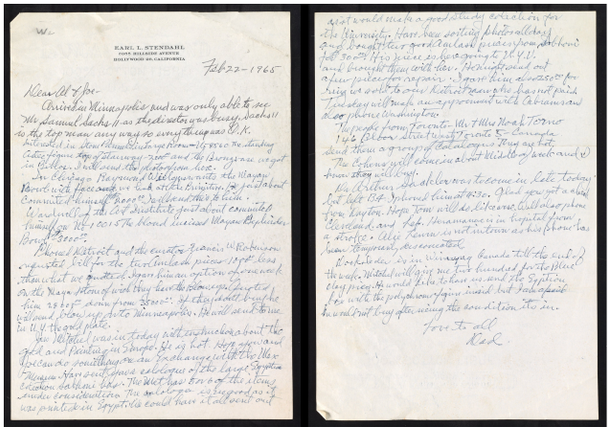


Fig. 6 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al, and son-in-law, Joe Damman. From his travels to Los Angeles, February 22,1965. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

referred to is Stela 2 from Piedras Negras, now at the Minneapolis Museum of Art.[18]

Back in New York, Jan Mitchell was considered "hot" by the SAG, which is to say "ready to spend money." A paragraph below, Mr. and Mrs. Noah Torno of Toronto are also "hot," and elsewhere in the letters and invoices, they are serious shoppers. The Cohens, Dr. Sackler, "Cleveland," Jay Leff—Earl stayed on top of potential buyers, and by spelling them out in this letter, he reminded Al and Joe to do the same.

There was news for Earl to share as well: Another client Nasli Heeramaneck (1902–1971) had had a stroke. And then Earl waffled on shipping an object to a potential buyer, given its condition and worried that, if the client actually saw the work, the sale would fall through.

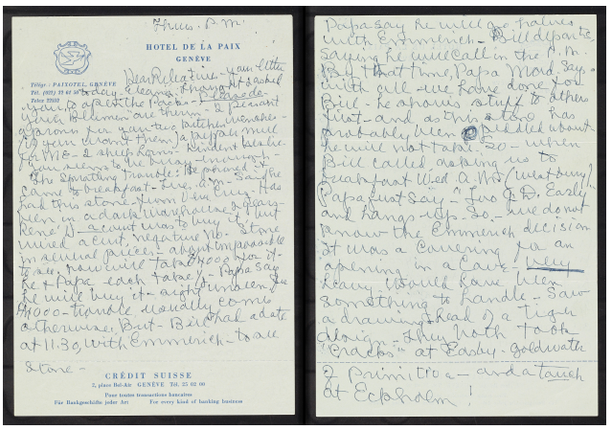


Fig. 7 Excerpt from Enid to the family. From New York to Los Angeles, December 1965. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Enid, in New York, to the family, in Los Angeles, December 1965

Dear Relatives-

. . .

The Spratling Trouble: He phoned – & came to breakfast – Tue a.m. – Said he had this stone – from Vera Cruz. Has been in a dark warehouse 2 years – René D_ _a count was to buy it, but wired a curt, negative No. Stone in several pieces – about impossible to see. now will take $4000 for it – he & Papa each take 1/2 – Papa say he will buy it – sight unseen, for $4000 – trouble usually comes otherwise. But – Bill had a date at 11.30, with Emmerich – to see Stone-

Papa say he will go halves with Emmerich – Bill departs, saying he will call in the P.M. By that time, Papa Mad. Says with all we have done for Bill – he shows stuff to others first – and as this stone has probably been peddled about – he will not take. So – when Bill called, asking us to breakfast Wed. A.M. (Westbury) Papa just say – "Too G.D. Early" and hangs up – So – we do not know the Emmerich decision. It was a Covering for an opening in a Cave – <u>very</u> heavy. Would have been something to handle – Saw a drawing – head of a tiger design – They both took "cracks" at Easby – Goldwater of Primitive – and a <u>touch</u> at Eckholm!

From time to time, Enid's letters—generally fewer in number—make astonishing revelations. In a letter written in December 1965, Enid recounted how Earl failed to close a deal with William Spratling (1900–1967).

As Matthew Robb and I have discussed elsewhere, this is the first known notice of Chalcatzingo Monument 9 in New York and the earliest specific attribution to William Spratling as the agent of its removal from Mexico to the United States.[19] No other member of the Stendahl family made note of the aborted transaction with Spratling. Enid indicated that René d'Harnoncourt (1901–1968), director of the Museum of Modern Art and often consulted by Nelson Rockefeller, who founded the Museum of Primitive Art in 1957, turned it down with a "curt, negative, No." From this letter it is difficult to determine whether $4,000 was the full price or half of the price; eventually gallerist André Emmerich (1924–2007) would sell the monument to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Museum of Art in Utica, New York, for $20,000. From other correspondence that Robb and I have consulted, it is clear there was some doubt about the work's authenticity, and perhaps that is the source of the dig at the end of the letter, making fun of curator Elizabeth Easby, Robert Goldwater, director of the Museum of Primitive Art, and Gordon Ekholm, whose opinion the SAG was so often soliciting. Today Chalcatzingo 9 is back in the state of Morelos, having been repatriated to Mexico.

Conclusion

In this selection from the family letters, we see the arc of about a decade at the SAG. The SAG

took an apartment in New York at the beginning of this period, so they were on the scene as prehispanic business developed there with Frances Pratt, Aaron Furman, and André Emmerich, noted in this selection of letters, and also when Eleanor Ward, Alphonse Jax, and Ed Merrin entered the trade. The Stendahls successfully conducted business with art museums nationwide, from Cleveland and Detroit to St. Louis, as well as sustaining relationships with private collectors, many of whom were building collections that would be foundational for museums. Robert Woods Bliss is the best-known of these collectors and Raymond and Laura Wielgus played an important role at the University of Indiana. By the time of Earl's death, prehispanic art had permeated most US museums with encyclopedic aspirations, and encyclopedic aspirations were the rule of the 1960s and 1970s.[20]

The SAG successfully created a business with inventory that could be acquired for a few dollars or several thousand dollars. They launched exhibitions across the United States, particularly in southern California and often at colleges, but also at the Texas State Fair, and extensive catalogs document SAG offerings.[21] They learned from collectors, museums, and other dealers, constantly adjusting to capture new business. In the letters cited here, Earl was very interested in Bliss's plan to publish a lavish coffee table book of his collection, noting the handsome photographs and a $200,000 price tag and the uncertainty of pulling it off. This 1957 book inspired Earl to make plans with the publisher Harry N. Abrams for his own monumental book project, the 1968 *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America*, a compendium of works sold by SAG over nearly thirty years, establishing new areas of study and organizational principles for the field. Earl died in 1966, before he could see the project come to fruition, but the plans were well under way. His son, Al, wrote the introduction and curator Hasso Von Winning wrote the text, an opportunity he might not have had without Earl's death. This book quickly became an indispensable reference, and the publication catapulted Von Winning from a little-known researcher in Los Angeles into a national figure.

The Stendahls, too, became national and international figures. At the beginning of the decade addressed in this suite of letters, they had a substantial number of regional clients, especially from the motion picture industry, as well as key national collectors such as Bliss and Rockefeller, but during this decade they expanded their clientele dramatically, building greater resilience into their business model. But letters from 1963 onward address a new side of the business, in which monumental works of stone were being stolen from Mexico and Guatemala. Sales of works such as Piedras Negras Stela 2 or Chalcatzingo Monument 9—and the attendant high prices and their visibility—would attract international attention of archaeologists and national governments alike. The Stendahl Art Galleries would not see the picture emerging for many years, but the 1970 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export, Import and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property as well as the 1972 bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States would mark the beginning of the end for the SAG. The family letters were filed away, carefully preserved historical documents that today yield exquisite details of a unique Los Angeles business.

I would like to thank the PHAPI team, Megan O'Neil and Matthew Robb, Kim Richter, and April Dammann.

NOTES

For her book, *Exhibitionist: Earl Stendahl, Art Dealer as Impresario* (Angel City Press, 2011), April Dammann did not consult the family letters. Megan O'Neil and I consulted the family letters extensively

for our article, "Stendahl Art Galleries in Europe: Expanding the Market for Pre-Hispanic at Mid-Century," *Journal for Art Market Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023), https://www.fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams.

1. Pál Kelemen's 1943 *Medieval American Art* featured many works from the Brummer Gallery, and several of these objects would pass through Stendahl Art Galleries (SAG). Both Michael Coe's 1966 books, *Mexico* and *The Maya*, included SAG objects, as did George Kubler's 1962 and 1975 editions of *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America: The Mexican, Maya, and Andean Peoples*. Not only did I follow these pioneers in my own work, but many of the designations, from "Nayarit" style to "Remojadas," devolve from market practices established by the SAG.

2. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38, box 105 (henceforth, SAG records). The family letters were scanned in early 2020, at the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members across the GRI signed up to transcribe the family letters using the Zooniverse crowdsourcing program. The handwriting of the letters (they are rarely typed) is difficult to decipher, and the spelling is erratic and nonstandard, making transcription difficult. Using the Zooniverse transcription as a basis, Getty staff have begun the process of confirming transcriptions and assigning identities to individuals named in the letters. Few letters bear full dates, and most are indicated only by "Thursday" or "March 3," but the transcription team has nevertheless been able to anchor most dates. I am grateful to the Stendahl/Dammann family for their careful retention of nearly eighty years of records and their generous donation of these records to the GRI.

3. PHAPI staff and advisers, including Andrew Turner, Payton Phillips Quintanilla, Alicia Houtrouw, Kylie King, Megan O'Neil, Matthew Robb, Michael Mathliewitz, and Henna Khanom, have analyzed the data and contents of the archive since 2019.

4. Guillermo Echániz Correspondence, SAG records, accessed September 9, 2023, https://getty.libguides.com/Stendahl/Echaniz.

5. Al to Earl, 1957, SAG records.

6. For more on Stendahl's biography, see Dammann, *Exhibitionist*.

7. O'Neil and Miller, "Stendahl Art Galleries in Europe."

8. Peterson's work is little known and less studied today. Frederick A. Peterson Papers, 1701–1977 (bulk 1950–1977), University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research & Special Collections, MSS-518-BC, https://nmarchives.unm.edu/repositories/22/resources/1696.

9. Michael Coe and Stephen Houston, "How to Identify Real Fakes: A User's Guide to Mayan 'Codices,'" Maya Decipherment, December 12, 2017, http s://mayadecipherment.com/2017/12/12/how-to-identify-real-fakes-a-users-guide-to-mayan-codices/.

10. Dammann, *Exhibitionist*, 140–42.

11. N. C. Christopher Couch, *Pre-Columbian Art from the Ernest Erickson Collection at the American Museum of Natural History* (The Museum, 1988).

12. Some Kennedy works are in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) collections today. La Mar Stela 3, which he owned and which had been on long-term loan to LACMA, was returned to Mexico in 2021.

13. This urn was published in *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America* by Hasso Von Winning in 1968 (fig. 238). Adam Sellen drew it (KAISER 1), and it may be seen online in the "Catalogue of Zapotec Effigy Vessels," FAMSI Recursos, 2005, http://research.famsi.org/spanish/zapotec/zapotec_list_es.php?search=glifo C&title=Vasijas Efigie Zapotecas&tab=zapotec.

14. Rita Reif, "Antiques: A Treasure Goes Public," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1987, Section 2, p. 37.

15. The collections of the Museum of the American Indian formed the foundational collections of the National Museum of the American Indian in 1987. Maria Galban, "Searching Heye and Low: Reconstructing MAI Collections Histories Through Documentation," paper delivered at "Collecting Mesoamerican Art in the Twentieth Century: Revealing Histories of the International Art Market," at the Getty Center, April 26, 2024.

16. Mitchell made a major collection from various dealers. See Julie Jones, ed., *The Art of Precolumbian Gold: The Jan Mitchell Collection* (Little, Brown, and Co., 1985).

17. Earl only mentioned Raymond Wielgus, but he built the collection with his wife, Laura. "Raymond J. Wielgus," University Honors & Awards, accessed September 10, 2024, https://honorsandawards.iu.edu/

awards/honoree/1037.html. The work that Earl described may be 73.10.2 or 73.10.3 at the Eskenazi Museum.

18. Stela Fragment, c. 800, Maya, limestone, 76½ × 24 × 2¼ in. Minneapolis Institute of Art: Gift of the Morse Foundation, 66.10.

19. Mary E. Miller and Matthew Robb, "Spratling Troubles," paper delivered at "Collecting Mesoamerican Art in the Twentieth Century: Revealing Histories of the International Art Market," at the Getty Center, April 26, 2024.

20. Mary E Miller, "A Historiographic Afterword," in *The Encyclopedic Museum*, ed. Donatien Grau (Getty 2019), 230–41.

21. There were many different catalogs; one of the most comprehensive is *Pre-Columbian Art: A Loan Exhibition of Objects Illustrating the Cultures of Middle American Civilizations Before Their Conquest by Cortez* (The Museum [Dallas], 1950).

Appendix: Letters from the Stendahl Art Galleries Archive

Fig. 1 Transcript

Dear Dad:
Stopped at lumber yard and got plywood for box on way home from Grandmothers and had Picasso at airport by 6 o'clock. It probably will be delivered at Jaffees before noon on Wednesday. Most of the information should be on back of photo. Reproduced full page in "Picasso" by Zervos Vol 11 page 201 – was in collection of Roger Fry.

Got check from Ericson for $550 also your letter today with $250 from Reis.

Glad you are not letting them beat you down of our choice Mayan figures. Too bad you don't have some of the others to play with. Stolper came in today and said that Carlbach had phoned him all excited and up in the air about the figures and wanting to know if Bob could get some for him. Bob said he was too busy and to buy them from you but Carlbach said that he couldn't touch them at the prices but wants a whole collection. He also wants Bob to take him to Mexico.

Peterson sent up an article saying that 5 Mayan codices and some fine vases have just been discovered in the Campeche area. Don't know whether this is Government or not or if it came from Jaina but he says that everyone is Mayan crazy in Mexico. I suppose we were damned lucky to get what we did at our price. Wish we could keep in closer touch with Campeche and skim off some more cream even with Hauswaldt and Echaniz.

I wrote for and got some reactions from the last three outfits that had our show in the South. Just words.

Sutter brought back Sweeneys figure today and I will ship their stuff tomorrow. Sam Marx called today on route ~~fom~~ to Chicago from trip around world. Couldn't persuade him to come up and see the stuff but he expects to see you in Chicago. The architect John Rex's partner was in and very impressed tonight – they rent Frankls old place and are doing great business.

Joe got a great order today setting up a new plant. Stein will have a fit when he sees it. Am inclosing a letter about Wendts – you can call him in Chicago. Wish you were going to St Louis but it might not be worth it as long as they have things still outstanding. Got $100 knocked off plumbing bill.

Rocky is swimming now and Roney can really plow through ~~watter~~ water both on top and underneath. It is late now and Picasso will beat this letter. Hope you can out chis~~s~~el Jaffee. He once bought a~~t~~ stone piece from us for $75.

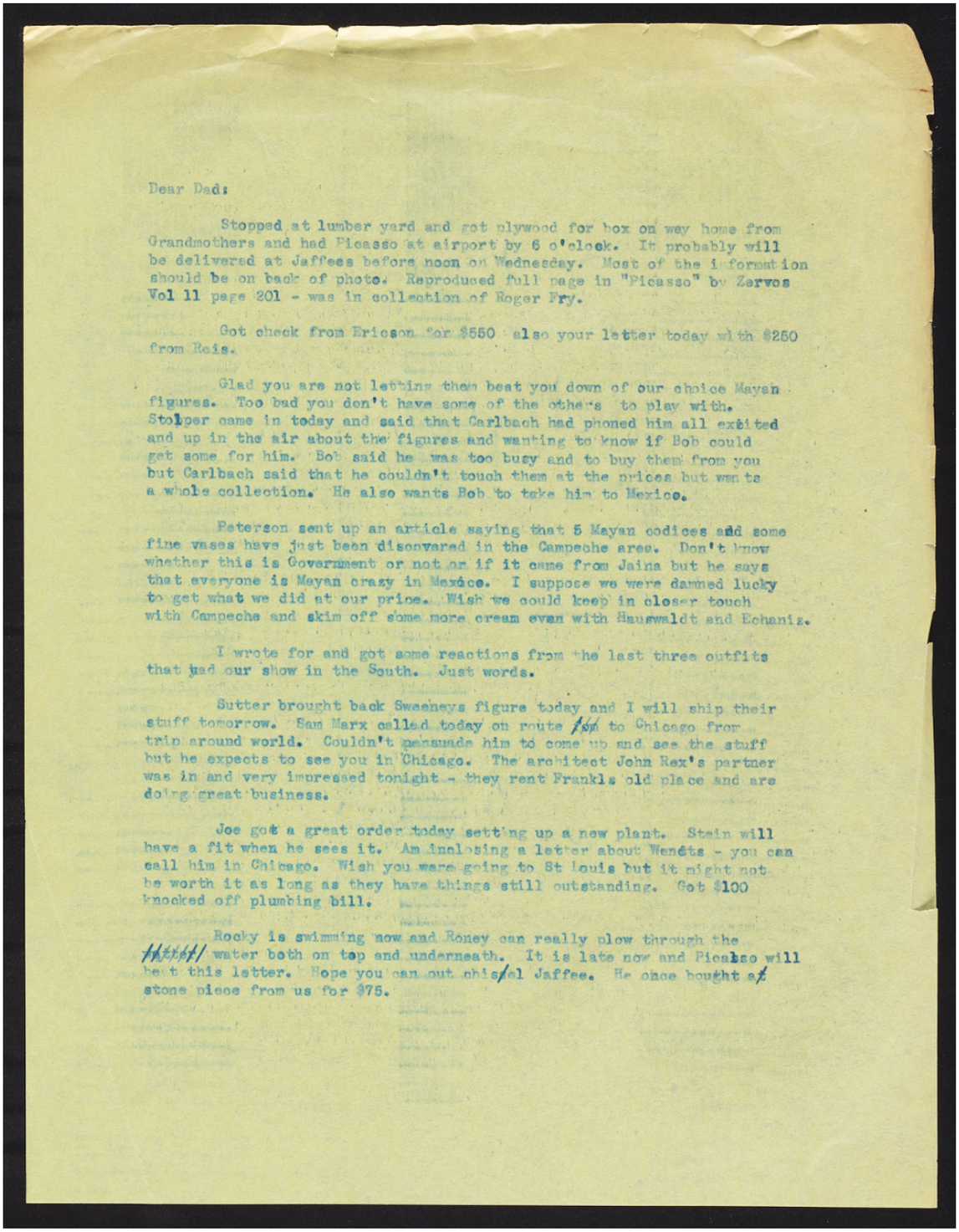


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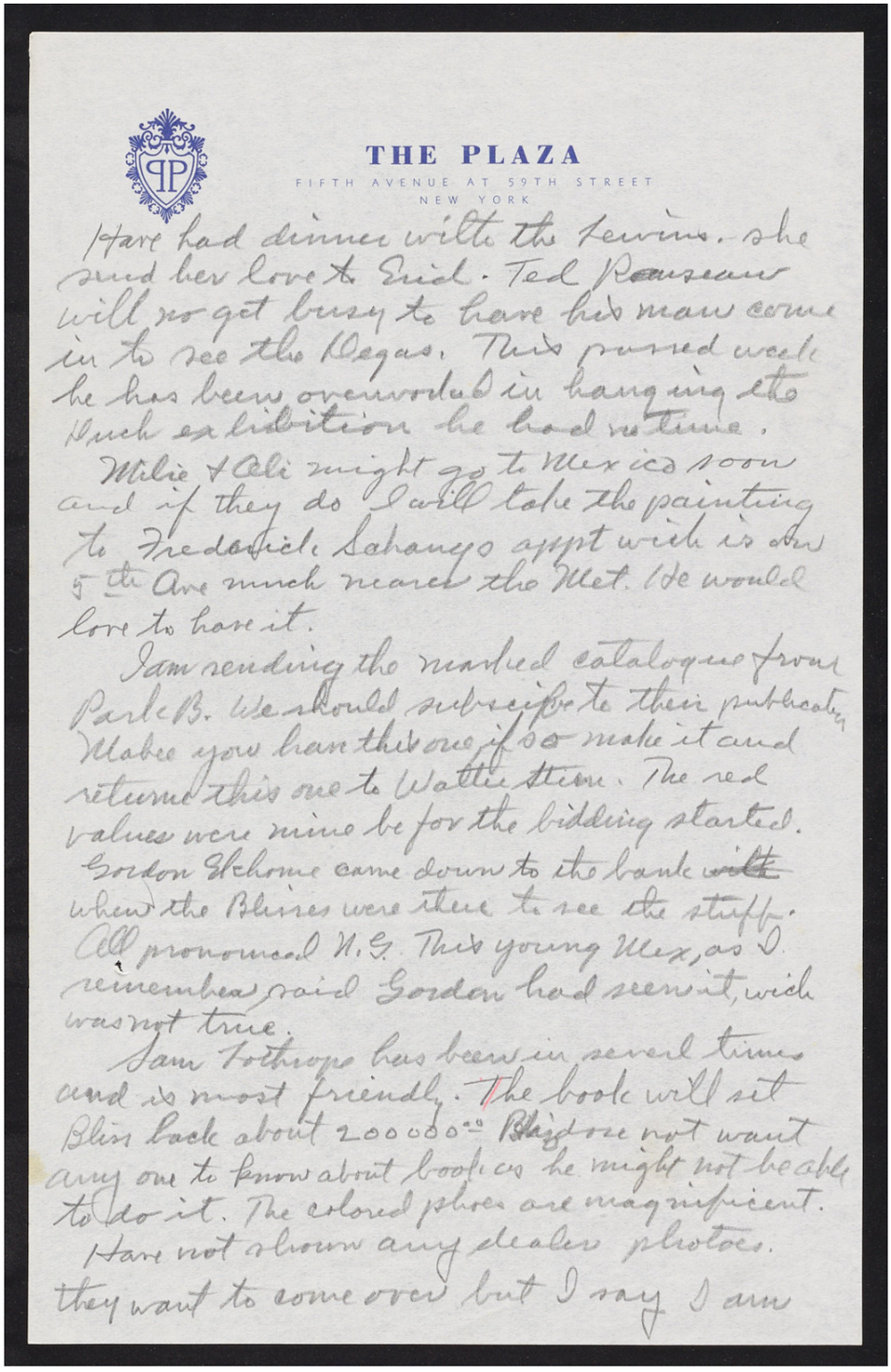
Fig. 1 Al Stendahl to his father, Earl Stendahl. From Los Angeles to New York, 1954 (month and day uncertain). Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.



THE PLAZA
FIFTH AVENUE AT 59TH STREET
NEW YORK

Have had dinner with the Levins. She send her love to Enid. Ted Rousseau will no get busy to have his man come in to see the Degas. This pruned week he has been overworked in hanging the Buck exhibition he had no time.

Milie & Ali might go to Mexico soon and if they do I will take the painting to Fredericks Sahanys appt with is Nov 5th Ave much nearer the Met. He would love to have it.

I am sending the marked catalogue from Park B. We should subscribe to their publications Make you loan this one if so make it and return this one to Wattis Store. The red values were mine before the bidding started.

Gordon Ekhome came down to the bank with when the Blines were there to see the stuff. All pronounced N.G. This young Mex, as I remember, said Gordon had seen it, which was not true.

Sam Tothrop has been in several times and is most friendly. The book will set Bliss back about 200000.00 Blair one not want any one to know about book as he might not be able to do it. The colored shoes are magnificent.

Have not shown any dealer photoes. they want to come over but I say I am

Fig. 2 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al. From New York to Los Angeles, Friday, October 29, 1954 (dated by Earl). Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

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Have not shown any dealer photoes. They want to come over but I say I am

Fig. 3 Transcript

Friday – 2/9/56
Dear Al –
Left Mexico City Tuesday about 1 P.M. for Merida. Had an hour their so called up Marquiz. He came out to air port had a drink and wanted me to buy the necklass for $2400.00. I did not. Had a chance to get plain to New Orleans so got there about 7:30 P.M. Called Bliss to see if he would be home on Thursday. Was so got into Washington about 6 A.M. Went to bed left a call for 8:30 and was out to see Bliss about 10 A.M.

Bought the carved mirror from Halsmon for 1500.00 and had him thro in a nice jad necklass worth about 150.00 also a few other pieces. Bliss was very happy when he saw it so he will pay me $2700.00 for it as I told him source had raised price. Talked to Bliss about deal on Degas. He will call me this morning. Told him I would phone you about price of marble Hacha as he feels its too expensive 18000.00. I will make him a price of $15000.00.

Finley son of the Toronto Art Gallery ~~was in called~~ was in town at the Waldorf and phoned while I was in Mexico. Will call Ted today. Has had a bug and am now being treated by a doctor in this building. He is going to give me a complete checkup wich will take 3 days. better than Rochester can do – $250.00 Is willing to trade.

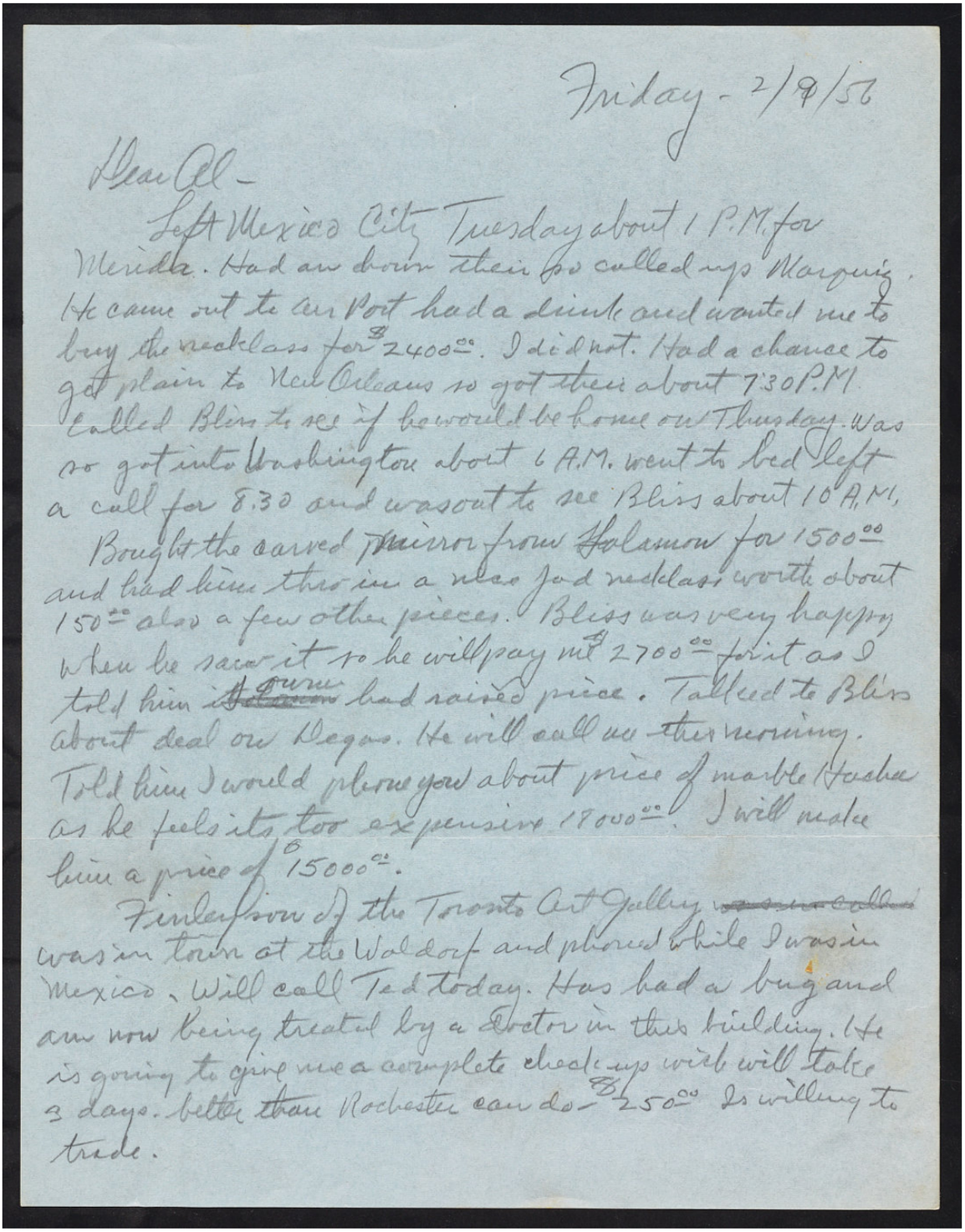

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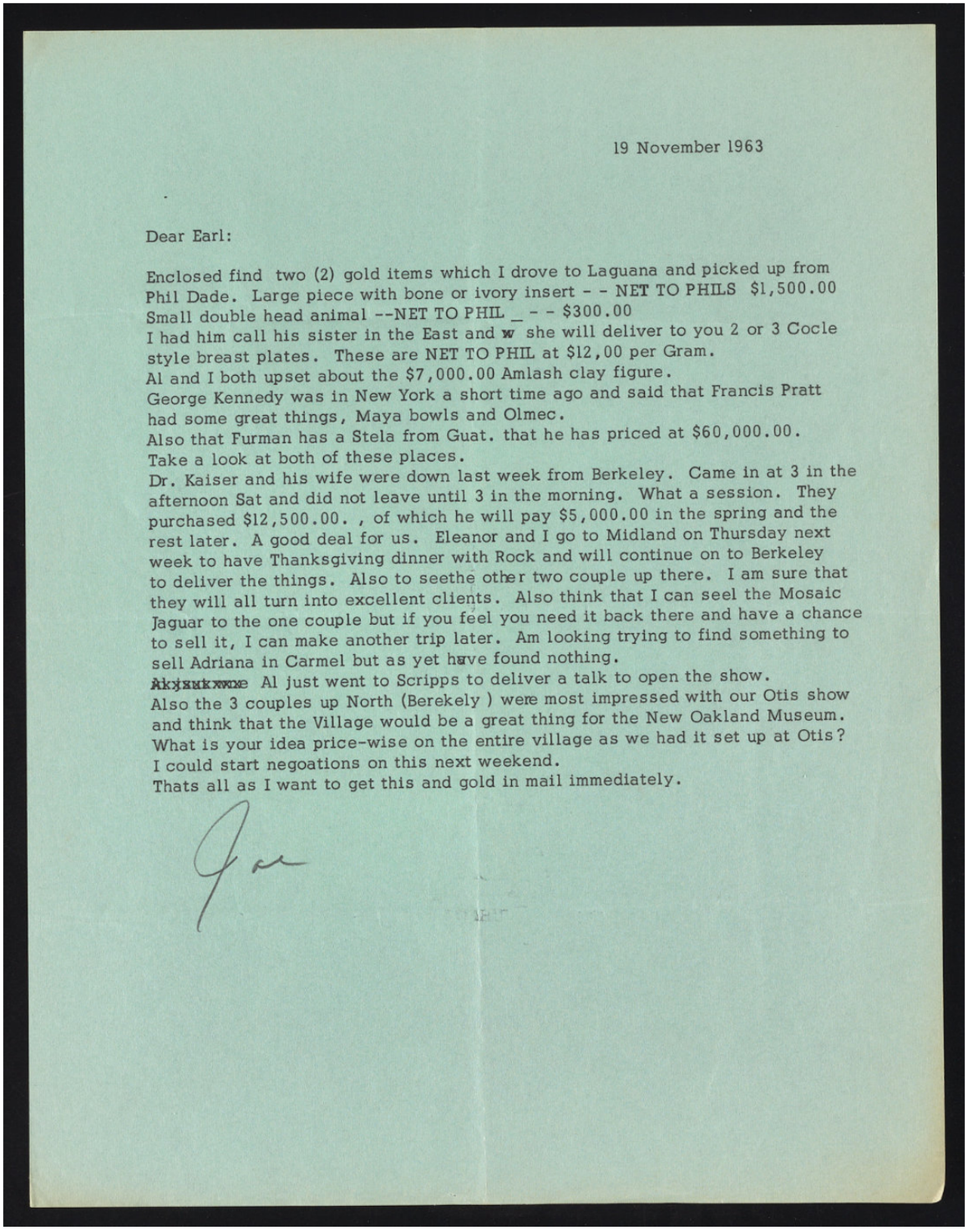
Fig. 3 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al Stendahl. From New York or Washington to Los Angeles, February 9, 1956. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.



19 November 1963

Dear Earl:

Enclosed find two (2) gold items which I drove to Laguana and picked up from Phil Dade. Large piece with bone or ivory insert - - NET TO PHILS $1,500.00
Small double head animal --NET TO PHIL _ - - $300.00
I had him call his sister in the East and w she will deliver to you 2 or 3 Cocle style breast plates. These are NET TO PHIL at $12,00 per Gram.
Al and I both upset about the $7,000.00 Amlash clay figure.
George Kennedy was in New York a short time ago and said that Francis Pratt had some great things, Maya bowls and Olmec.
Also that Furman has a Stela from Guat. that he has priced at $60,000.00.
Take a look at both of these places.
Dr. Kaiser and his wife were down last week from Berkeley. Came in at 3 in the afternoon Sat and did not leave until 3 in the morning. What a session. They purchased $12,500.00. , of which he will pay $5,000.00 in the spring and the rest later. A good deal for us. Eleanor and I go to Midland on Thursday next week to have Thanksgiving dinner with Rock and will continue on to Berkeley to deliver the things. Also to seethe other two couple up there. I am sure that they will all turn into excellent clients. Also think that I can seel the Mosaic Jaguar to the one couple but if you feel you need it back there and have a chance to sell it, I can make another trip later. Am looking trying to find something to sell Adriana in Carmel but as yet have found nothing.
Akjsakxxxe Al just went to Scripps to deliver a talk to open the show.
Also the 3 couples up North (Berekely) were most impressed with our Otis show and think that the Village would be a great thing for the New Oakland Museum.
What is your idea price-wise on the entire village as we had it set up at Otis?
I could start negoations on this next weekend.
Thats all as I want to get this and gold in mail immediately.

Joe

Fig. 4 Joe Damman to his father-in-law, Earl Stendahl. From Los Angeles to New York, November 19, 1963. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Fig. 4 Transcript

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[illegible words crossed out] Al just went to Scripps to deliver a talk to open the show.

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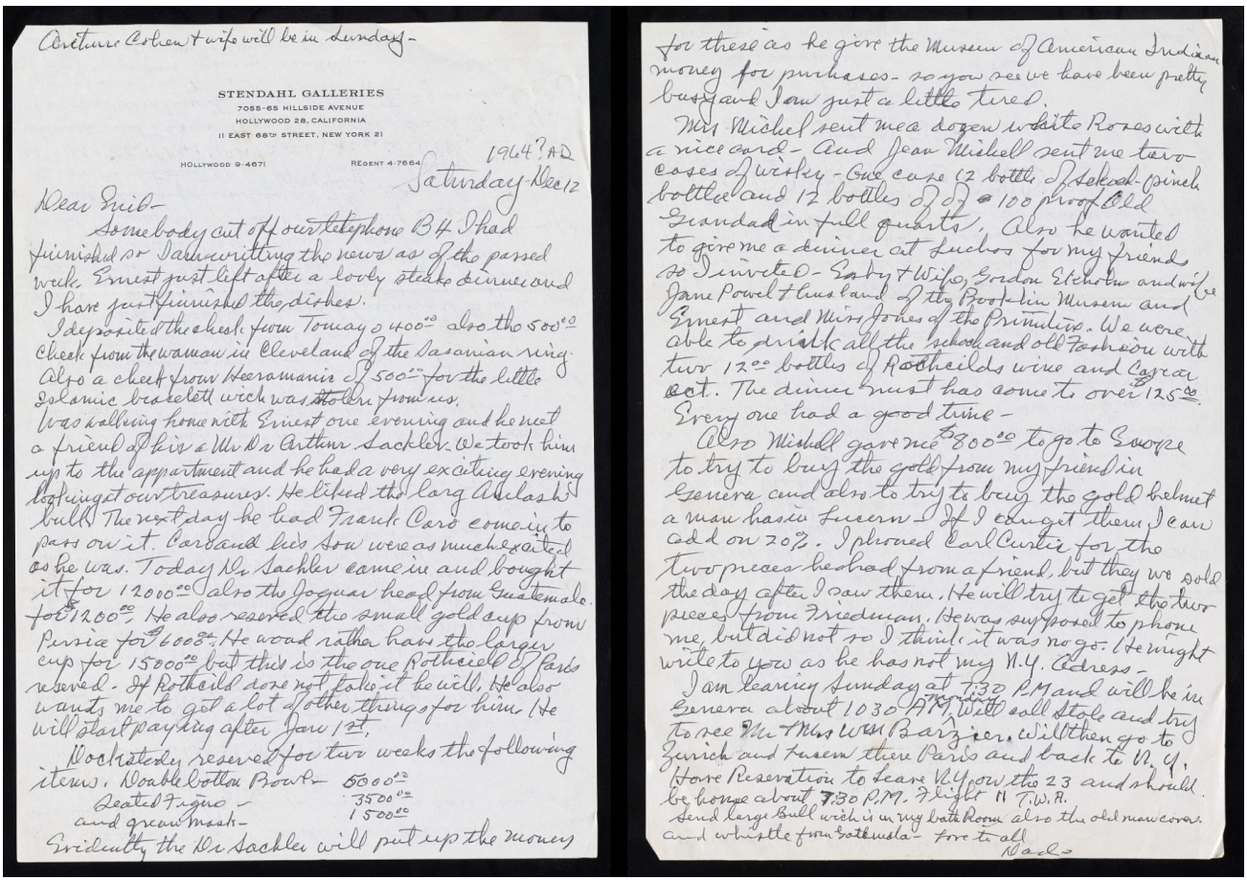

Arthur Cohen & wife will be in Sunday -

STENDAHL GALLERIES
7055-65 HILLSIDE AVENUE
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA
11 EAST 68th STREET, NEW YORK 21

HOLLYWOOD 9-4671 REGENT 4-7664

1964?AD

Saturday-Dec 12

Dear Enid-

Somebody cut off our telephone B4 I had finished so I am writing the news as of the passed week. Ernest just left after a lovely steake dinner and I have just finished the dishes.

I deposited the check from Tomayo 400.00 also the 500.00 check from the woman in Cleveland of the Sasanian ring. Also a check from Heeramanic of 500.00 for the little Islamic bracelett wich was stolen from us.

Was walking home with Ernest one evening and he met a friend of his a Mr. Dr. Arthur Sackler. We took him up to the appartment and he had a very exciting evening looking at our treasures. He liked the larg Amlash bull. The next day he had Frank Caro come in to pass on it. Caro and his son were as much excited as he was. Today Dr. Sackler came in and bought it for 12000.00 Also the Jaguar head from Guatemala for 1200.00. He also reserved the small gold cup from Persia for 6000.00. He would rather have the larger cup for 15000.00 but this is the one Rothschild of Paris reserved - If Rothschild does not take it he will. He also wants me to get a lot of other things for him. He will start paying after June 1st.

Yesterday reserved for two weeks the following items. Double bottom Bowl - 5000.00
Seated Figure - 3500.00
and green mask - 1500.00
Evidently the Dr Sackler will put up the money for these as he give the Museum of American Indian money for purchases - so you see we have been pretty busy and I am just a little tired.

Mrs Michel sent me a dozen white Roses with a nice card - And Jean Michell sent me two cases of whisky - One case 12 bottle of Schenley pinch bottles and 12 bottles of 87 @ 100 proof Old Grandad in full quarts. Also he wanted to give me a dinner at Luchos for my friends so I invited - Gaby + Wife, Gordon Etcheverry and wife Jane Powell + Husband of the Brooklin Museum and Ernest and Miss Jones of the Primitives. We were able to drink all the schenley and all Jackson with two 12.00 bottles of Rothschilds wine and Cognac ect. The dinner must has come to over 125.00. Every one had a good time -

Also Michell gave me 800.00 to go to Europe to try to buy the gold from my friend in Geneva and also to try to buy the gold helmet a man has in Lucern - If I could get them I can add on 20%. I phoned Earl Curtis for the two pieces he had from a friend, but they we sold the day after I saw them. He will try to get the two pieces from Friedman. He was supposed to phone me, but did not so I think it was no go. He might write to you as he has not my N.Y. Adress -

I am leaving Sunday at 7:30 P.M and will be in Geneva about 10:30 P.M. With all Stole and try to see Mr. Miss Wm Barzier. Will then go to Zurich and Lucern then Paris and back to N.Y.

Have Reservation to leave N.Y on the 23 and should be home about 7:30 P.M. Flight 11 T.W.A.

Send large Bull wich is in my bath Room also the old man corvas and whittle from Guatemala - Love to all

Dad -

Fig. 5 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his wife, Enid. From New York to Los Angeles, December 12, 1964. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Fig. 5 Transcript

Arthur Cohen & wife will be in Sunday

[Stendahl Galleries letterhead]

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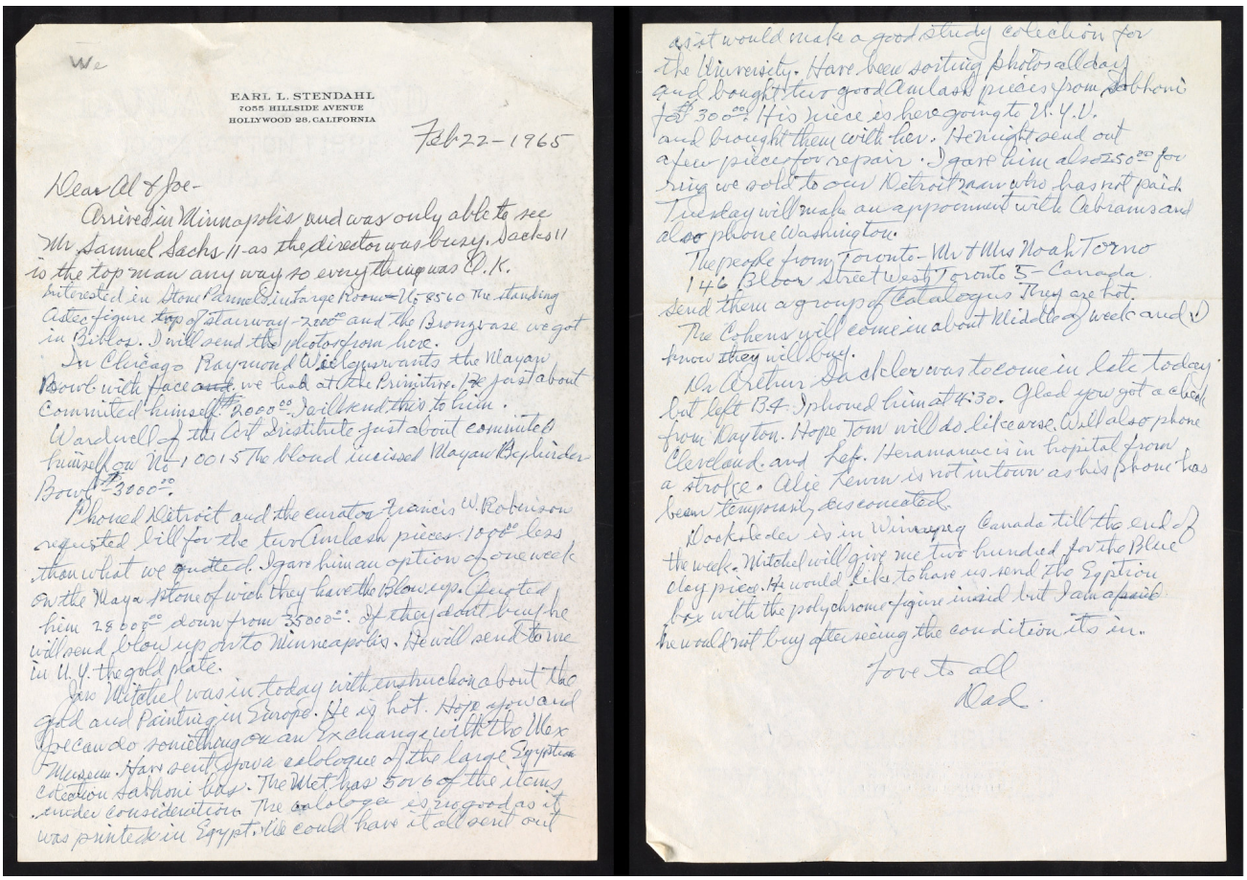

EARL L. STENDAHL
7055 HILLSIDE AVENUE
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

Feb 22-1965

Dear Al & Joe-

Arrived in Minnapolis and was only able to see Mr Samuel Sacks II-as the director was busy. Sacks II is the top man any way so everything was O.K.

Interested in Stone Panels in Large Room – No-8560 the standing Astec figure top of stairway – 2000.00 and the Bronze vase we got in Biblos. I will send the photos from here.

In Chicago Raymond Wielgus wants the Mayan Bowl with face ~~and~~ we had at the Primitive. He just about commited himself $2000.00. I will send this to him.

Wardwell of the Art Institute just about committed himself on No-10015 the blond incised Mayan Cylinder Bowl - $3000.00.

Phoned Detroit and the curator Francis W. Robinson requested bill for the two Amlash pieces 1000.00 less than what we quoted. I gave him an option of one week on the Maya stone of which they have the Blow up. Quoted him 28000.00 down from 35000.00. If they don't buy

Fig. 6 Excerpt from Earl Stendahl to his son, Al, and son-in-law, Joe Damman. From his travels to Los Angeles, February 22,1965. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Fig. 6 Transcript

We

[Earl L. Stendahl letterhead]

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he will send blow up on to Minneapolis. He will send to me in N.Y. the gold plate.

Jan Mitchel was in today with instruction about the gold and painting in Europe. He is hot. Hope you and Joe can do something on an exchange with the Mex Museum. Have sent you a catalogue of the large Egyptian Collection Sathoni has. The Met has 5 or 6 of the items under consideration. The catalogue is no good as it was printed in Egypt. We could have it all sent out

as it would make a good study colechon for the University. Have been sorting photos all day and bought two good Amlash pieces from Sabhoni for $300.00. His niece is here going to N. Y. U. and brought them with her. He might send out a few pieces for repair. I gave him also 250.00 for ring we sold to our Detroit man who has not paid. Tuesday will make an appoinment with Abrams and also phone Washington.

The people from Toronto-Mr & Mrs Noah Torno 146 Bloor Street West, Toronto 5-Canada. Send them a group of catalogus. They are hot.

The Cohens will come in about Middle of week and I know they will buy.

Dr Arthur Sackler was to come in late today but left B4 I phoned him at 4:30. Glad you got a check from Dayton. Hope Tom will do like wise. Will also phone Cleveland and Lef heramanac is in hospital from a stroke. Alie Lewin is not intown as his phone has been temporarily disconected.

Docksteder is in Winapeg Canada till the end of the week. Mitchel will give me two hundred for the Blue clay piece. He would like to have us send the Egption box with the polychrome figure insid but I am afraid he would not buy after seein gthe condition its in.

Love to all
Dad.

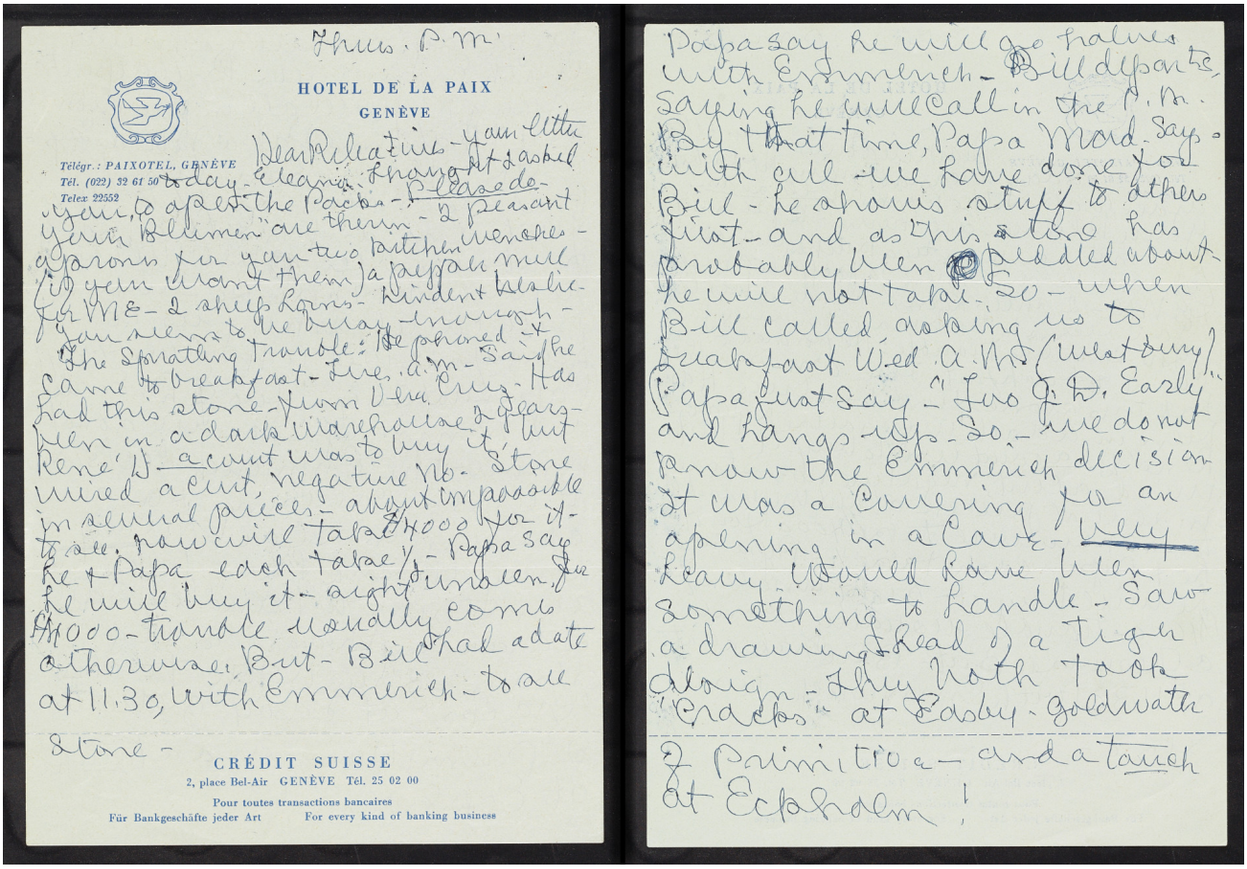

Fig. 7 Excerpt from Enid to the family. From New York to Los Angeles, December 1965. Stendahl Art Galleries records, circa 1880–2003, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 2017.M.38. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2017.M.38), Gift of April and Ronald Dammann.

Fig. 7 Transcript

Thurs. P.M.

[Hotel de la Paix letterhead]

Dear Relatives –Your letter today. Eleanor thought I asked you to open the packs – please do – your "Blumen" are therin – 2 peasant aprons for you two kitchen wenches (if you want them) a pepper mill for ME – 2 sheep horns – Linden & Leslie– You seem to be busy enough – The Spratling Trouble: He phoned – & came to breakfast – Tue a.m. – Said he had this stone – from Vera Cruz. Has been in a dark warehouse 2 years – René D__ a count was to buy it, but wired a curt, negative No. Stone in several pieces – about impossible to see. Now will take $4000 for it – he & papa each take 1/2 – Papa say he will buy it – sight unseen for $4000 – trouble usually comes otherwise. But – Bill had a date at 11.30, with Emmerich – to see Stone-

Papa say he will go halves with Emmerich - Bill departs, saying he will call in the P.M. By that time, Papa mad. Says with all we have done for Bill - he shows stuff to others first– and as this stone has probably ben peddled about–he will not take-So– when Bill called, asking us to breakfast Wed. A.M. (Westbury). . Papa just say–"Two g.D. Early" and hangs up-So-we do not know the Emmerich decision- It was a covering for an opening in a Cave - very heavy- Would have been something to handle - saw a drawing-head of a tiger design. They both took "cracks" at Easby - Goldwater of Primitive— and a touch at Eckholm!

Acknowledgments

Victoria Isabel Lyall
Ellen Hoobler

In 2023, Ellen and I realized a dream long deferred: We brought together in Denver many of our dearest curatorial colleagues to consider the ways that American art museums built their collections of ancient American art. People built these collections. Curators, collectors, and directors around the country influenced the choice of objects and their frame.

We are grateful to all the symposium participants for diving into the histories of their collections and expanding our knowledge of the history of this field: Susan E. Bergh, Kristopher Driggers, Ellen Hoobler, Rex Koontz, Mary E. Miller, Joanne Pillsbury, Elizabeth Irene Pope, Michelle Rich, Matthew H. Robb, and Nancy B. Rosoff. In addition to their participation in the symposium, we are grateful to these colleagues for the conversations and insights they shared beyond that weekend. This symposium and subsequent volume bear the imprint of our past mentors who worked in the museum space or considered the impact of the museum space on the development of the field: Diana Fane, Virginia Fields, Julie Jones, Cecelia Klein, Esther Pasztory, and James Oles.

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The term “pre-Columbian art” once described the material culture produced in the Americas, mostly south of the US-Mexico border, prior to the arrival of Europeans. Museums across the United States now refer to these departments as art of “the Americas” or “the ancient Americas.” Stewards of these collections in American art museums have begun confronting the changing meanings and import of what Nelson Rockefeller once described as the “other Americas.” This symposium volume captures the history of collecting and display of ancient American works in US art museums, a history surprisingly poorly documented until now.

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