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THE EARLY YEARS OF THE AMERICAN ART ASSOCIATION, 1879-1900

by

Gerald D. Bolas

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1998

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE AMERICAN ART ASSOCIATION, 1879-1900

by

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Adviser: Professor William H. Gerdtz

In 1883 James F. Sutton, Thomas E. Kirby, and R. Austin Robertson founded the American Art Association (AAA) in New York City for the "encouragement and promotion of American art." The history of the AAA illuminates the changing fortunes of American artists, expresses the growing cosmopolitanism of the American art world, and delineates the establishment of a stable and broad-based market for art in the United States. This dissertation focuses on the AAA's birth and maturation in the context of late-nineteenth century art galleries, auction houses and institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Additionally, this study

reconstructs the physical appearance of the AAA and several other commercial art galleries.

Conceived as a commercial gallery devoted to American art, in its first year the AAA exhibited Thomas B. Clarke's collection of American pictures, the finest collection of native art in the country. The AAA's "Prize Fund Exhibitions" of American art, launched in 1885, were initially hailed as extraordinary shows. Later "Prize Fund Exhibitions" grew increasingly irrelevant as the Association moved into the auction business and expanded its exhibition program and inventory with European art. Most notable was the collaboration with Paul Durand-Ruel, who brought Impressionist pictures to New York in 1886 at the invitation of the AAA. The Association's 1889 exhibition to benefit the Antoine-Louis Barye Memorial Fund, which included some 450 of the sculptor's works together with one hundred oils and watercolors by his French contemporaries, was acclaimed the greatest show of French painting ever held in the country. Meanwhile, the AAA speculated in European art, stock-piling Barbizon and Impressionist pictures, and in 1889 paid a world record \$110,000 for Jean-François Millet's The Angelus.

At the AAA's sale of the Thomas B. Clarke collection ten years later in 1899, auctions records of \$10,150 for a George Inness landscape and \$4,500 Winslow Homer's Lifeline, though modest in comparison to the Millet's cost, were hailed as evidence of the rise in value--financial and cultural--of American art. Thus, the Association fulfilled its original aim of promoting American art by providing an exhibition venue and highly visible auction arena where collectors could buy, sell and appreciate American art within a cosmopolitan context.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For the advancement of American painting it [the American Art Association] gave exhibitions, fortunes in premiums to painters, and its time and labor. It was a Salon, an Academy, but independent of government, schools, classes, clubs and cliques. For its maintenance it is a dealer in paintings, sculpture, vases, objects of art; and an auctioneer of art-collections and libraries--the exhibitions of which are always artistic sensations and ever advance American appreciation of art. The galleries of the association are themselves a masterpiece of American art . . . . There are quaint curio rooms, picturesque passages, interesting corners . . . . There are carpets of Asia, rich rugs, magnificent paintings; in cases of ebony, vases of China, ivories delicate and complicated . . . ancient stuffs; impressive object-lessons in interior decorations . . . . At [auction] sales, when pass in review books bound for great collectors, paintings, or, on a little table covered with a cloth of Peruvian gold velvet, all the hallucinatory art of the extreme Orient, in marvellous forms of vases, jades and crystal, the American Art-Galleries are crowned with beautiful women and great men. Then, if the lights in the American Art-Galleries went out, all the artists and art-lovers of New York would be in the dark.

King's Handbook of New York City, 1892

Founded in 1883, the American Art Association was a distinctly American creation--a hybrid of commercial and educational aspirations, personal and corporate aesthetic agendas, and nationalistic and cosmopolitan ambitions. Functioning at various times as a retail art gallery, an educational and philanthropic enterprise, and an auction house, the Association's history illuminates the changing

fortunes of American artists, expresses the growing cosmopolitanism of the New York art world, and delineates the extraordinary expansion of a stable and broad-based market for art in the United States. Understanding why the organization's initial ambition to function as a gallery devoted exclusively to American art failed, and how the AAA (as the American Art Association was known) subsequently evolved over a decade and a half into the most powerful and successful auction house in the United States clarifies many of the dynamic relationships affecting the visual arts in late nineteenth-century America.

By 1892, when Moses King published the first edition of his Handbook of New York City, the AAA had evolved in a decade from the two-room "American Art Gallery" focused on American painting and oriental collectibles into a labyrinthine, three-level art center offering objects from around the world. Customers examined paintings, sculpture, furniture, books, decorative arts, and jewelry in a dozen exhibition rooms that variously offered the intimacy of a drawing room or the grandeur of a wealthy capitalist's private picture gallery. What is surprising about King's description is not the hyperbole but the accuracy of the

perceptions it conjures, verified by more impartial observations cited elsewhere.

Thomas Kirby, president of the AAA, contended around 1903 that "the advancement and appreciation of art in this country, and particularly in this city, the art center, has been brought about by the properly managed public sales and exhibitions, conducted through business methods, and not by the exhibitions of Institutions, Societies or Museums."<sup>1</sup> This study will test the truth of Kirby's assertion by identifying the AAA's contributions to the education of the American public about art from around the world through exhibitions, publications, and the professionalism of the art auctions.

To assess the significance of the American Art Association, this dissertation explores three general areas: the mission and early history of the organization; its physical appearance; and its maturation into the premiere auction house in the country. Fundamentally I have sought to answer three questions: How did the AAA function? Why did it function as it did? What was it like to visit? This led me to seek answers to questions regarding the mission of

the American Art Association to "promote and encourage American art." Why did this make sense in 1879 when the American Art Gallery, progenitor of the AAA, was founded? How did its founders set out to fulfill this mission, and in what ways did their strategies differ from those of other dealers, galleries, museums and academies in New York City? Why did the American Art Gallery close three years later in 1882, and why did its mission--perpetuated by the new American Art Association in 1883--mutate into a cosmopolitan agenda that embraced the panoply of treasures enumerated in King's Handbook?

Some answers are visible in the evolving physical structure of the organization. Thus I have endeavored to determine what it was like to visit the AAA's exhibition galleries. What did one see there and how was it displayed? How were its installations similar to or different from those of its predecessors, competing dealers, and clients? Just what were the "impressive object-lessons in interior decorations" applauded in King's Handbook?

The AAA is the organization most responsible for transforming American art auctions from modest sales of often questionable integrity into evening spectacles that

gathered "beautiful women and great men" into a commercial arena perceived as both fair and fashionable. How did a relatively modest, two-room retail outlet remake itself over the course of ten-to-fifteen years into the country's major venue for art auctions? What was it like to attend an auction during this exciting period?

Organized into eleven chapters including this introduction, the study begins with a survey of the commercial art world of nineteenth-century America, "Precursors and Precedents." My focus is New York. A comparative study of circumstances in other communities like Boston and Philadelphia would shed light on broader patterns, to be sure. But during and long after the era under examination New York is the center of the art world in the United States. The third chapter, "Contemporaries," introduces several art dealers who witnessed the birth of the AAA and eventually became clients for its programs and services and competitors for its clients. Chapter Four, "Rehearsal," characterizes the American Art Gallery--the direct predecessor of the AAA--founded by Rufus E. Moore and James Fountain Sutton in 1879. In 1883 Sutton reorganized the American Art Gallery and engaged Thomas E. Kirby and R.

Austin Robertson as partners in a new enterprise, the American Art Association. "The Inaugural Year, 1883" is examined in Chapter Five with special attention to the important exhibition of Thomas B. Clarke's collection of American art. "The Early Years, 1884-1886," the sixth chapter, explores important Association exhibitions during this period. A summary history of art auctions in the United States is presented in Chapter Seven, "Picturing American Art Auctions." The eighth chapter, "AAA Auctions," considers several of the Association's most interesting sales including those of George Seney in 1885, Mary J. Morgan in 1886, and A. T. Stewart in 1887. Association dealings during late 1880s with the art of four well-known foreign artists--the Hungarian Mihaly Munkacsy, the Russian Vasilii Verestchagin, and the Frenchmen Jean François Millet and Antoine Barye--are considered in the ninth chapter, "Preaching, Power, and Prestige in the American Art Market." The AAA's evolution into an auction house was completed during the late 1890s, the topic treated in the tenth chapter, "Transition from a Gallery to an Auction House." Finally, the "Conclusion" assesses the historical consequences of the AAA's activities in order to fully

understand and appreciate its unique and profound contributions to the art world of late nineteenth-century America.

Several reasons exist for ending this study at the turn of the century. One of the topics treated concerns how the AAA affected the market for American art during the late-nineteenth century. Although the AAA failed in its original aspiration to function exclusively as an exhibition-driven retail outlet for American art, by 1900 it had established a market for American art by very different means, as the premiere auction house in the land. Further, during the 1890s a new generation of collectors of American art as well as dealers such as William Macbeth and Newman Montross was emerging. By the end of the century the market situation had changed enough to warrant a separate study that treats the emergence of dealers such as Alfred Stieglitz, new auction houses like the Anderson Galleries (which eventually merged with the American Art Association), the maturation of museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Corcoran Gallery of Art, and new dynamics in collecting such as the appetite for old master painting.

This dissertation originated with a study of the American Art Association Papers, especially those related to

Thomas E. Kirby, located in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Given Kirby's role as a founding partner and eventual owner of the American Art Association, these papers constitute a vital primary resource. Comprising correspondence, catalogs, clippings, account books, ephemera, and Kirby's memoirs, though incomplete in many ways, the American Art Association Papers provide the armature for this history.

Among the AAA Papers, three sets of typescripts are especially important. The first is a group of Kirby's memoirs that he began preparing for publication by Doubleday around 1915. A second constellation of documents includes anonymous fragments of Kirby's biography, some of which were prepared for press releases and magazine articles, others of which were probably a Doubleday rewriting of Kirby's notes and memoirs. Finally, Gustavus Town Kirby, Kirby's son, commissioned Charles De Kay around 1924 to complete posthumously his father's biography. DeKay was a seasoned veteran of Kirby's generation, knew the auctioneer well, and had served on the AAA's Barye Exhibition Committee in 1889. Thus he was in a good position to convey something of Kirby's and the AAA's personality. Though DeKay's book,

"Art Under the Hammer," was never finished, his drafts constitute an informative, though undocumented and occasionally incorrect, presentation of Kirby's papers and memoirs.

Literature concerning the American Art Association is scarce. Kirby delivered a speech for the inauguration of the auction house's new facilities at Madison Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street in 1922. Published that year by the AAA, the thirty-two page Address of Mr. Thomas E. Kirby is the only first-person history of the AAA in print, though it is filled with numerous typographic and editorial errors. Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble's 1970 history of Parke-Bernet in the United States, The Elegant Auctioneers, offers a wealth of chatty information, much of which was assembled half a century ago in the 1950s when it was possible to gather oral history from the friends and competitors of Kirby and his partners. Lacking a bibliography and footnotes, this informal, non-scholarly history emphasizes social rather than aesthetic issues and provides entertaining and useful background.<sup>2</sup> At the other end of the spectrum lies Linda Henefield Skalet's 1980 Ph.D. dissertation for Johns Hopkins University, "The Market for American

Painting in New York: 1870-1915." Ms. Skalet's observations and plethora of data have contributed much to this study.

Finally, several recent studies like Peter Watson's From Manet to Manhattan<sup>3</sup>, Sarah Burns's Inventing the Modern Artist<sup>4</sup>, Martha Ward's examination of Impressionist installations,<sup>5</sup> and Patricia Mainardi's The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic<sup>6</sup> have aided me by suggesting methodological approaches and directions for future study.

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<sup>1</sup>"Biography: Thomas E. Kirby," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 1.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970). Towner died before completion of the manuscript. According to the "Publisher's Note," he drafted the chapters of the book that concern the AAA. Having started work on it in 1955, it is possible that he interviewed Hiram Parke, who had worked for Kirby. In any event, there are a number of unsubstantiated, if not editorially embellished details that defy verification.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Watson, From Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market (New York: Random House, 1992).

<sup>4</sup>Sarah Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," Art Bulletin 73 no. 4 (December 1991): 599-622.

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<sup>6</sup>Patricia Mainardi, The End of the Salon: Art and the State in the Early Third Republic (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

## CHAPTER TWO: PRECURSORS AND PRECEDENTS

## A. "The American Invasion of the Old World"

On July 4, 1866 a group of distinguished American patriots gathered in the fashionable Parisian restaurant, Pré Catalan, to toast the ninetieth anniversary of their homeland's independence and consider what they could do to foster the progress of American culture. There, John Jay (1817-1894), son of one of our country's founding fathers, proposed that they dedicate themselves to creating in their homeland a "National Institution and Gallery of Art."

Subsequently, many reassembled in 1869 at the Union League Club in New York and laid the foundations of an institution inaugurated the next year as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Jay's inspiring call to action, "The American Invasion of the Old World,"<sup>1</sup> articulated a distinctly post-Civil War ethos contrary to William Cullen Bryant's nationalistic 1829 "Sonnet--to an American Painter Departing for Europe" admonishing Thomas Cole to "keep that earlier, wilder [American] image bright" lest he be lead astray by the "light of distant [European] skies." Jay and his colleagues constituted an advance force of American cosmopolites in

Paris who would be followed by thousands of Americans fulfilling aspirations to experience the Old World and return home with as much of it as possible. Jay's confrères eschewed the rustic, "wilder image" of America and sought instead the refinement, elegance and erudition of European art and culture.

At the 1869 Union League Club meeting Bryant encouraged the "American Invasion" so that native artists might benefit at home from the importation of European culture and cease to be compelled to study abroad.<sup>2</sup> The Metropolitan Museum's first major purchase in 1871 of European old master paintings directly responded to this long-standing plea. Hence the new museum served American artists not by purchasing their work but by importing European culture.

At the 1880 opening of the Museum's new facility in Central Park, the Honorable Joseph H. Choate exhorted his fellow countrymen:

Think of it, ye millionaires of many markets, what glory may yet be yours if you only listen to our advice, to convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery, the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks--things which perish without the using, and which in the next financial panic shall surely shrivel like parched scrolls--into the glorified canvases of the world's masters, that shall adorn these walls for centuries. The rage of Wall Street is to

hunt the Philosopher's Stone, to convert all baser things into gold, which is but dross; but ours is the higher ambition to convert your useless gold into things of living beauty that shall be a joy to a whole people for a thousand years.<sup>3</sup>

The conception, growth and maturation of the American Art Association, as well as every significant late-nineteenth century American arts organization, must be located within the nexus of ideals and ambitions manifested in the creation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Jay, Choate, and their contemporaries.

To understand the mission and methods of the American Art Association we must locate it within the context of New York galleries, dealers, and auction houses that stood ready, willing, and able to aid in the transmutation of "useless gold into the things of living beauty." Establishing the place of American art in this landscape defines both the challenges and opportunities that inspired the idea of an art gallery devoted to American art.

Jay and Choate's peers enjoyed greater wealth and leisure time as well as more opportunities to convert their pork into porcelain than any preceding generation of Americans. In 1880 more than a dozen art merchants and

importers were well established in New York City, and a dozen or more would emerge in the following decade.<sup>4</sup> Downtown at Gaston Feuardent's Hanapaxion Gallery on Lafayette Place collectors could acquire "implements of the Stone and Bronze ages, the relics of the cave-dwellers . . . the coins and jewels that mark distant periods of growth and decadence in art."<sup>5</sup> At A. A. Vantine and Co., a dozen blocks north on Broadway at Eighteenth Street, or one of the other half dozen importers of Oriental goods, could be found porcelains, bronzes, textiles, paper goods: "High Class Objects of Art, just received from Japan, China and Turkey."<sup>6</sup> Nearby on Broadway New Yorkers could acquire at W. and J. Sloane "Ancient and Modern Oriental Rugs." Art dealerships managed by Samuel P. Avery, the Knoedler brothers, and William Schaus sold the "blue chips" of their day, the French salon masters esteemed for their classical learning, technical skill, and Parisian flair, while Daniel Cottier offered a few European paintings along with imported furniture and decorative arts.<sup>7</sup> On occasion, the same dealers offered a painting by a Dutch or Italian Old Master that might be verified as genuine, in contrast to putative works offered just a few years prior.

The wealthy of New York could acquire treasures in a variety of settings. Samuel Avery maintained a private gallery that enabled him to treat each client with the discretion, respect, and back room bonhomie they enjoyed at their private clubs. Roland Knoedler and his brothers maintained on the ground floor of their townhouse at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Second Street a low cost print emporium supplied by the Paris firm of Goupil, Vibert and Company that had launched their father Michael Knoedler. On the upper floors the Knoedlers entertained in private apartments that differentiated their clients into "upstairs-downstairs" economic strata. Through the Vantine oriental bazaar passed both mass-produced objects priced at a dollar or two--suitable for the well-informed, aspiring middle class homemaker--and expensive objets d'art worthy of gracing the Japanese-style parlors and bedrooms that were becoming a regular feature of wealthy collectors' homes. On Broadway just below Union Square, the geographic center of the New York art world into the 1870s, Leavitt's Art Rooms offered an ever-changing inventory of decorative and fine arts that ebbed and flowed through weekly auctions. Public sales there and elsewhere distributed thousands of American and

foreign paintings, decorative arts, and objets de vertu to conniving speculators and aspiring connoisseurs.

American art occupied a relatively small place in the panorama of art set before New Yorkers. In the decade following the Civil War few opportunities existed for American artists to exhibit and sell their work in the United States, except for the annual and special exhibitions of the National Academy of Design in New York and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and occasional special sales like those held to benefit the Artists' Fund Society. The founding in 1878 of the Society of American Artists provided an important opportunity for younger artists to exhibit and sell their work once a year. However, no organization flourished comparable to the pre-Civil War American Art Union that successfully marketed American art during the 1840s. In the early 1880s neither the fledgling Boston Museum of Fine Arts nor the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York mounted special exhibitions of contemporary American art with any regularity.

In New York Cottier, Avery, Knoedler, and Schaus occasionally showed works by Americans, particularly those

accepted into the Paris Salon.<sup>8</sup> Yet Schaus and Knoedler, launched in this country as agents of the Paris-based Goupil, Vibert and Company, increasingly capitalized on their European connections and America's thirst for foreign art. Though Avery initially handled American art, after 1867 he turned to promoting contemporary European art.<sup>9</sup> Linda Skalet notes that in New York in the 1870s, subsequent to Avery's decision to deal primarily in European art, only Gustav Reichard and John Senedecor made concerted efforts to exhibit and sell American art.<sup>10</sup>

Generally American artists acted as their own agents.<sup>11</sup> Occasionally they consigned a body of work to an auctioneer, and it is probable that many artists sold more work through individual and group auctions than directly out of their studios.<sup>12</sup> By mid-century auctions were starting to stabilize prices,<sup>13</sup> but they did little to enhance artists' reputations in public. Gentlemen's groups like the Union League and Century Clubs that numbered artists among their members mounted shows that led to occasional sales, but as with the auctions, club sales failed to promote the artists to a larger public.<sup>14</sup>

The limited visibility of American artists in the marketplace corresponded to the limited demand for their work. Neil Harris has noted that the value of art imported annually into the United States grew between 1850 and 1870 from less than \$40,000 to more than \$500,000.<sup>15</sup> Just as a rising tide raises all ships, so too, more American art was being acquired as more collectors entered the field in general; but the American art share of the market remained small. In 1881 George Sheldon summarized the attitude of American collectors as generally embracing "the creed the first and front article of which is 'I believe in the transcendent excellence of Parisian Art.'"<sup>16</sup> Thus Clarence Cook observed that an American artist had to make a "foreigner of himself" in order to find a place in the American marketplace.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, many post-Centennial American artists felt compelled to go abroad for training and opportunities to exhibit in competitive exhibitions sponsored by foreign governments.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, modest financial success might come from home after acceptance into the Paris Salon. Returning artists brought news and works by their European teachers and colleagues that further whetted the American

appetite for art from Paris, Munich, or one of the many picturesque artists' colonies on the French coast.

Dramatically increased travel abroad enabled Americans to see acclaimed European art in famous museums such as the Louvre and fashionable art galleries like those of Goupil, Vibert and Company in Paris, London, Brussels, Berlin, and the Hague. Wealthy Americans who experienced the private galleries of their moneyed European peers emulated foreign collecting models upon returning home, often erecting their own galleries and filling them with foreign art.

Meanwhile, the growing art press on both sides of the Atlantic fueled the fame of established art world stars-- artists and collectors--and created new ones. Improvements in the reproduction and mass distribution of art images nurtured those unable to travel abroad and enabled middle-class collecting of prints and reproductions.

Art became an important subject for deluxe collector's books as well as the popular press. Luxury volumes like Earl Shinn's Art Treasures of America, 1879, Shinn's Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection, 1883-84, and Artistic Houses, 1883-84 (attributed to George Sheldon though his name does not appear on the title page), testify to the

burgeoning wealth of the Gilded Age and concomitantly escalating number of collectors. These high profile publications demonstrated that the pursuit and appreciation of art, particularly European art, was an appropriate, even educational, use of the leisure time more Americans were enjoying. American newspapers joined the art press in spreading news of the arrival of European art on these shores and further popularized fashions in the taste.

The 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition presented the greatest international exhibition of art ever seen in this country. The huge art show enabled tens of thousands of Americans to see for the first time work by many of the most popular artists of Europe; with increased familiarity came increased demand. In Philadelphia Americans also encountered the first major domestic exhibition of Japanese decorative arts that, together with Chinese decorative arts, would increasingly take their place next to European and American art in tasteful drawing rooms.

Nationalism and cosmopolitanism were expressed in the market as preferences for art created by native or foreign artists, respectively. However, rarely did one preference work to the complete exclusion of the other. For example,

Lillian Miller notes that early in the nineteenth century works by John Singleton Copley, Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, and Washington Allston--all classical in ambition --hung beside the European old masters prevalent in most American collections.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the century it would have been difficult to find a private collection of American art that had not at one point or another co-mingled native art with work by contemporary European artists, particularly those academics favored as teachers. Further, virtually no American collection of either native or foreign art existed outside of proximity to Chinese and Japanese art. Thomas B. Clark, justly characterized by Barbara Weinberg as the late nineteenth-century's "Foremost Patron of American Art," opened his Art House in the early 1890s to sell not only American paintings but Greek vases and oriental and near eastern decorative arts. William Macbeth's gallery inaugurated in 1892 at 237 Fifth Avenue is often described incorrectly as the first devoted to American art--as we will see the American Art Gallery, if not an earlier establishment, deserves this acclaim (Macbeth's gallery might be characterized more correctly as the first *sustained* gallery devoted to American art). In any event, during his earliest

years Macbeth featured alongside his American pieces works by David Teniers, Jan Van Goyen, Jan Both, Nicholas Lancret, and Francisco de Zurburan, among others.

Though a few collectors sought only American art, they acted in the midst of a growing knowledge of the art of Europe as well as the Near, Middle and Far East. The prevailing ambition of American collectors was not for American art, but to follow Choate's call to "convert . . . railroad shares and mining stocks . . . into the glorified canvases of the world's masters" [emphasis added].

#### B. Salons, Art Shops, and Drawing Rooms

Examination of the physical attributes of exhibition galleries and installations of works of art in commercial spaces adds to our knowledge of the tastes of a given period; similarities and differences between commercial, institutional, and private displays of art; and relationships between artists, dealers, their clients, and the objects they market.<sup>20</sup> Analysis of printed and photographic views of commercial spaces helps establish the context in which the works of art were displayed, appreciated, and marketed. Reconstructing the wall colors, ceiling and floor

textures, and arrangements of art objects gives very direct evidence for understanding the tastes and aspirations of both art sellers and clients.

My study finds three basic types of commercial art spaces: the *salon*, the *art shop*, and the *drawing room*. The *salon* disposes works of art in an exhibition setting that evokes the institutional prestige and grandeur of European academic exhibitions such as those sponsored by the French government (Fig. 1) and the Royal Academy in London. In the *salon* art is organized into formal exhibitions. Furniture may provide rest as well as a place to read collateral publications. The scale of the *salon* implies institutional prestige and durability, and facilitates social activities such as receptions, fund-raisers and auctions.

The street-front *art shop* is a retail enterprise that utilizes windows to advertise the wares inside and induce customers to enter (Figs. 2 and 9). *Art shops* encourage window shopping and informal drop-in browsing of art.

Intimacy is the hallmark of the *drawing room*, which offers the privacy of a domestic residence or artist's studio. A more personal space, in the *drawing room* decorative arts are often intermixed with fine arts so as to

suggest that it is a commercial extension of the "amateur's cabinet" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Fig. 13).

Purveyors of art are self-conscious in manipulating this repertoire of stylistic types. On one hand, Winslow Homer, valuing the opportunity for his work to be seen at a distance by large numbers of people through the street front windows of the Knoedler gallery wrote to Knoedler's in 1907, "I prefer your show window for two days to any exhibition in America (with another mans hanging) of two months."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Lord Joseph Duveen, the great modern master of the private "power-deal," referred to those of his colleagues who conducted their businesses in street-front galleries as "mere shopkeepers."

Hybrids abound. Many nineteenth-century *art shops* and *salons*, like their successors today, housed *drawing rooms* to pamper clients and offer solitude for contemplating an acquisition. Indeed, the American Art Association will be shown to be a remarkably successful fusion of a retail *art shop*, a grand *salon* and a private *drawing room*.

C. Ante-bellum Antecedents:

Michael Paff and Parker Clover

Michael Paff (?- 1838?) opened in 1812 one of the earliest art galleries in America at 221 Broadway, relocating in 1814 to 126 Broadway at the corner of Cedar Street, opposite City Hall. His subscription-prospectus reminded Knickerbockers that

AMERICA though young, claims the honor of having given birth to several of the first Painters of age . . . WEST, and . . . TRUMBULL. Her pride however must be not a little humbled at the recollection, that those eminent Artists were not taught in their native country. . . . It was beyond the Atlantic, that their genius unfolded itself; that their minds were expanded; and that their well earned fame was acquired. In their native country, they experienced an inconveniencence (sic) incident to all American Artists . . . from the great scarcity of paintings, particularly those of the most distinguished European masters.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Paff sounded the theme reiterated a half century later by John Jay and the founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, that American art suffered from lack of proximity to European art and would be nurtured by the acquisition of significant works from abroad. Lillian Miller demonstrates that early nineteenth-century Americans believed the "knowledge of art and the development of Taste began with the Old Masters." As examples she cites the

advice of Joshua Reynolds, president of the Royal Academy in London, and Samuel F. B. Morse, who became president of the National Academy of Design in New York:

"Whoever has so far formed his taste, so as to be able to relish and feel the beauties of the great masters has gone a great way in his study," wrote Sir Joshua; and Americans who had learned about art from Reynolds agreed. "Taste is only acquired by a close study of the Old Masters," wrote Morse in 1814, and therefore he urged that "first-rate pictures... be introduced" into the country. Without "large supplies" of "really good specimens of European art, ancient or modern," Americans, it was generally believed, would never produce good artists.<sup>23</sup>

Paff's inaugural catalog, one of the earliest published in this country, numbers among 230 paintings three Rembrandts and works attributed to Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony Van Dyke, Tintoretto, Claude Lorraine, and Hans Holbein, as well as canvases by a few contemporary painters such as Thomas Sully, Thomas Birch, and Gilbert Stuart--an inventory that perfectly reflects Reynolds's and Morse's counsel.<sup>24</sup> The educational value of Paff's commercial initiative justified twenty-five cent admission fees, and the prospectus announced that annual tickets would range in price from \$4 for a single subscriber to \$10 for an entire family.

There was little distinction between Paff's personal and commercial holdings. His contemporary, William Dunlap, recorded that "Mr. Michael Paff has long possessed a valuable collection, which varies with the sales and purchases he makes; but he retains many that he justly values beyond the price which every day purchasers can give."<sup>25</sup> Dunlap further noted that Paff's collection of prints was equaled only by those of the architect Ithiel Town and a John Allen.

Undoubtedly "Old Paff's" clients learned something of the content, if not the forms, of the classical traditions of painting from his inventory, but even in his day the dealer was reputed to lack scruples. Philip Hone--art collector, auctioneer, and New York City mayor--recalled at his death:

[Paff] was the prince of pictures, statuary, medals, and knick-knacks. His house was a perfect museum. He bought, sold, exchanged, and jobbed pictures, and when required repaired, varnished, and reframed them, transforming many a dark mass of undefinable objects into the sunlit landscape of Ruysdael or Poussin, and recovering from the thick veil of antiquated varnish the graceful forms of Correggio and the rich tints of Guido [Reni].<sup>26</sup>

Painter Robert W. Weir reminiscenced to William Dunlap that he used to amuse himself by artificially aging his

paintings by "nearly obliterating" them with dirt and then showing them to a "would-be connoisseur" who would often declare it the work of an old master. Once Weir interrupted a colleague copying an "undoubted original of Annibal Caracci" lent him by Paff, who claimed it had cost him \$300 --a work Weir had created.<sup>27</sup>

Luman Reed, (1785-1836), the great patron of Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand, started his collection around 1830 with old master paintings from Paff.<sup>28</sup> For his 1867 Book of Artists Henry Tuckerman reconstructed the German dealer's pitch to Reed:

Ah, Mr. Reed," said he [Paff] . . . "der is a gem for you, but I don't think I sell it to you. I was cleaning a landscape I bought at auction, and I cleaned one corner a leetle hard and I thought I saw something underneath, and sure enough, some one has stolen an old master in Italy, and painted a landscape over it to prevent detection, and now I have him. I don't know, but I think it is a Correggio. I sell him now for one t'ousan' dollar. But come to-morrow." Well, he came to-morrow, and the picture was all cleaned and varnished, with a nice glass in front. "Ah, Mr. Reed, I can't sell him for one t'ousan'; it is a fine Vandyke, here is the original engraving of it; no doubt about it. I must have five t'ousan' dollars for it."<sup>29</sup>

John Durand's biography of Reed confirms that the New York merchant "commenced his education as an amateur in a practical way; his first lesson consisted of a course of

'old masters' at the end of this he realized the meretriciousness of counterfeit works, the hypocrisy and knavery of picture-dealers and the delusion of those who survived in darkness."<sup>30</sup>

Without knowing if Paff conducted his business out of his home, described by Philip Hone as a "perfect museum,"<sup>31</sup> it is impossible to determine whether his establishment was an *art shop* accessible to a broad audience or a more private *drawing room*.

At his death "Old Paff" left more than 1300 works that Aaron Levy auctioned in two sales at Platt's Art Store, No. 6 Spruce Street, across from City Hall. Levy's catalog offers the caveat that the attributions to many of the old masters are those of Paff.<sup>32</sup> The works returned to the auction market from which Paff originally acquired many of them, a market where differentiation between original, replica, copy and forgery was all but impossible for more than a handful of Americans. Indeed, artists like Morse who had studied abroad would have been the best equipped to make judgments of quality. Authentication was no easier for Paff than Reed in the era before photography, scholarship, and rapid communication enabled transmission across the Atlantic

of images and the experience of connoisseurship. The broadly-based shift in American interest to contemporary art from both sides of the Atlantic during the 1840s represents, among other ambitions, a collective thirst for authenticity lacking in the market epitomized by "Old Paff."

Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815-1878) offered an opinion of Paff in 1872:

The taste of the public, after the demand for family likenesses was satisfied, was for the "old masters," whose works were at that time shipped to New York by the thousands. The sales were conducted first by Gourlay, and subsequently by Levy and Harrison, who had their weekly auctions of an immense number of these ancient canvases, most of large size, and representing, with almost unvarying sameness, some religious or mythological subject; and all, with few extraordinary exceptions, most execrable daubs. This trade filled the houses of our ambitious citizens with time-dried and smoke-blackened "horrors," and furnished a precarious livelihood to those once famous "restorers," Marsiglia, N.A., and "old Paff," who had always on hand more genuine Raphaels, Correggios, and Da Vincis, than can now be found in all the churches and palaces of Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Thorpe reserved his nationalistic admiration for L. Parker Clover, who opened in 1818 a "looking-glass and picture-frame store" at 180 Fulton Street. At the age of 18 Thorpe was exhibiting at the American Academy in New York City, so he certainly knew both Paff and Clover's establishments. He writes: "[Clover's was a] modest three-story

wooden structure. The ceilings were low, and there was consequently very little opportunity for the display of the wares inside."<sup>34</sup> Thorpe provided a wood engraving of Clover's store (Fig. 2) showing a well dressed couple exiting while a mother and daughter window shop from the street.<sup>35</sup>

In Clover's front window were displayed canvases and engravings by his friends Colonel John Trumbull and Samuel F. B. Morse as well as other notable works like Gilbert Stuart Newton's Sleepy Lecture and Charles Robert Leslie's Anne Page and Slender and Shallow, which Philip Hone brought home from London. In 1830 John Quidor launched his career in the window with paintings inspired by Washington Irving's tales of Ichabod Crane and Rip Van Winkle. William Sidney Mount premiered in Clover's window with A Man in Easy Circumstances, 1832, which the agent acquired for \$30 and sold to Philadelphia collector Edward L. Carey for \$100.<sup>36</sup> Through the window, Thrope reports, Luman Reed first saw the work of Thomas Cole, with the result that Reed became Cole's greatest patron. And through the shop passed important European works such as an "undoubted" work by Raphael and a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds.<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, the art merchant mounted and framed engravings for subscribers to Trumbull's Declaration of Independence and other works, using prints as a vehicle into a broader market. Clover also installed art exhibitions for the American Academy of Fine Arts, including the collection of Joseph Bonaparte, former King of Spain, then resident in Bordentown, New Jersey. Thorpe opined that its display in the mid-1820s had been perhaps the last time many citizens saw "genuine" Murillos and Claudes.<sup>38</sup>

Clover's establishment was a multipurpose *art shop* where mirrors, frames, and works of art were sold, and a center for lively conversation between artists and collectors, but not, as far as we know, an art gallery for viewing exhibitions. Nor, it appears, was he an agent for any particular artist or a speculator assembling collections for auction. He was personally involved with American artists at a time when they were few. Thorpe enumerates the principle portrait painters--Trumbull, Morse, John Vanderlyn, John Wesley Jarvis, James Frothingham, Samuel Waldo, Charles Ingham, and William Jewett--and notes that there were in his view only four landscape painters at that

time, only one of whom, Thomas Doughty, made a living from his art.<sup>39</sup>

Considering what we know of Paff's and Clover's art businesses, we may conclude that the prevailing taste for the old masters must be associated, in part, with two characteristics evident in the marketplace. First, the quantity of the "immense number of ancient canvases" sold at auctions compared to the dearth of work by contemporaneous Americans made it easier to collect foreign art. Second, the accessibility of old masters at auction was an advantage, while the dependence of American artists on studio visits and word-of-mouth advertising was a liability. Finally, to the extent that Thorpe's report of the desire for religious and mythological subjects is valid, the many American artists painting portraits, landscape and genre scenes were failing to satisfy market demand. It remains unclear whether price affected the desirability of American work.

#### D. American Art-Union

The demand for old masters gradually gave way to that for contemporary art from Europe, and by the late 1840s a

new market was well established. Harold Lancour's index to art auction catalogs lists only eight publications for the 1830s, including two for the Paff estate sales; none are titled "modern" or "contemporary."<sup>40</sup> Frequency of auctions grew considerably during the 1840s, and at least eight of forty-three catalogs from that decade include "modern" in the title. But there were dozens if not hundreds of sales each year without catalogs. For example, no catalogs can be identified for the sales mentioned by Asher Durand in his February 19, 1840 letter to Thomas Cole:

The times are dark. . . . Still there are plenty of pictures in the City to see & to sell--Not less than five or six hundred mostly modern French pictures have lately been sold at auction & another sale of about three hundred more will take place tomorrow--they go off generally for a little more than they are worth--that is from five to twenty dollars.<sup>41</sup>

In New York City just the previous year John Herring had organized "The Apollo Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in the United States." Based on the model of a comparable organization in Edinburgh, Scotland, Herring's enterprise matured into the American Art-Union, which built a remarkably successful nationwide network of subscribers who paid five dollars each to receive their annual premiums of one or more engravings, copies of the Bulletin and other

publications, and a chance to win an original work of art. During the late 1840s the Union was attracting more than half a million visitors a year to its gallery at 497 Broadway, near Broome Street. At its peak around 1849 gross receipts reached \$100,000 in a single year from almost 19,000 subscribers who won 460 works of art through the lottery. Given its influence in nurturing the demand for American art, the Art-Union is immensely attractive to historians of American art, and its story has been thoroughly documented.<sup>42</sup>

Though the American Art-Union functioned as a "non-profit" organization while the American Art Association operated half a century later as a commercial endeavor, they share much common ground. Most fundamentally, both vigorously asserted the American belief that the arts are justified by their educational value. As an educational institution the American Art-Union developed "Taste" that expressed classical learning and standards, constituted an essential resource for building an "American" culture that included the visual arts, and promoted social intercourse and harmony.

These ambitions are visualized in Samuel Wallin's 1849 woodcut view of the Art-Union Gallery that the association published in its May 1849 Bulletin (Fig. 3). Here we are plunged into a crowded salon of pictures, one of the Union's two exhibition halls that totaled over 5,000 square feet. The Gallery appears as a lively center for social interaction. Men and women are seen singly and paired in various states of rapt contemplation, lively conversation, close examination of art, and study of catalogs. Numerous children are present, including a girl on the right that directs the attention of her father and a friend to an image of interest. As we shall see, thirty-five years later the American Art Association will be depicted similarly, with the same repertoire of characters--men, women, and children --engaged in the same actions--conversing, studying publications, and contemplating art.<sup>43</sup>

In 1850 the galleries became the most fashionable in the country when an arabesque design was painted on the wooden ceiling, perhaps in imitation of the baroque splendor of European salons (cf. Fig. 1). And the new floor, described by the New-York Courier and Enquirer, was state of the art as compared to European standards:

In the larger gallery has been laid a new . . . floor . . . of short and narrow pieces of Georgia pine, laid herring-bone wise. The extreme edge is bordered with a darker wood, in which the pine is again inserted: the effect is very fine, and the advantages secured in cleanliness and economy very material. The carpets formerly used collected dust, which was continually scattered through the rooms, to the great detriment of the pictures and their frames. Picture galleries in Europe are rarely or never carpeted, but have bare floors of ornamental or painted wood. That of the Louvre is quite similar to the new one in the Art-Union Gallery.<sup>44</sup>

Rachel Klein argues that in creating such a luxurious setting the Art-Union was, in effect, following "the example of Barnum's museum by tempting spectators with lavish display that extended out to the street."<sup>45</sup> Though the American Art Association never established a presence on the street (its facilities were accessed from the street up a staircase), its handsomest galleries were clearly designed to compete for admission-paying customers.

Another shared characteristic between the two organizations is the development of a national network of interest in the arts. Mary Cowdrey's annotated bibliography of Art-Union publications demonstrates that it was the most prolific publisher of art materials of its or any preceding generation in America.<sup>46</sup> This was an essential vehicle not only for fulfilling its educational purpose but also for

publicizing its activities across the country. Later, by the 1880s, civic associations in most major Eastern and mid-Western cities organized mechanics fairs and industrial expositions that often included art displays. The AAA established national prominence initially as the greatest single lender to these shows and as an organizer of traveling exhibitions at a time when many organizations lacked the capital necessary to circulate exhibitions.<sup>47</sup>

Miller notes that when the Art-Union was founded the National Academy of Design and American Academy of Fine Arts were the only arts institutions in New York City.<sup>48</sup> Though by the mid-1880s there were a dozen or more art associations and gentlemen's clubs in New York City that organized exhibitions, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, founded in 1870, was the only new public arts institution, and it offered little to those outside the metropolitan region. Freedom from civic affiliation coupled with civic scale enabled both the Art-Union and American Art Association to interest citizens outside New York in art and issues that transcended the parochial interests of regional museums and associations.

Miller reminds us that the Art-Union during its early years as the Apollo Association started by exhibiting

European old master paintings--reflecting early-century taste for classical learning. By the mid-1840s public patronage and broad-based distribution of American art became its raison d'être. The American Art Association's Prize Fund Exhibitions of 1885 to 1889 are direct descendants of this concept, modified by narrowing the patronage to the top echelon of collectors and channeling the distribution of prizes to art museums and clubs presumably collecting on behalf of the public. On the other hand, though the AAA initially positioned itself as exclusively promoting American art, it quickly expanded its agenda to embrace contemporary and old master European art.

Citing the impressive figures attained by the Art-Union--some 3 million are reported to have seen about 5,000 works of art exhibited during the organization's 13-year life--Charles Baker, writing in the era before "blockbuster" exhibitions, asserted that "the Art-Union galleries elicited a keener interest among a greater proportion of the population than has any other museum or gallery of art over an equal period at any time before or since, anywhere in America."<sup>49</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s the AAA exhibited more paintings than any other commercial or non-profit

organization in the country; though difficult to estimate, it certainly displayed 3,000 to 4,000 works of art each year during the 1890s, and its attendance undoubtedly ranked among the highest of arts institutions in the country.

Baker has analyzed the prices the Art-Union paid American artists for almost 2,500 works over the organization's 13-year history.<sup>50</sup> The average price paid to the 300 or so artists is around \$90, with low prices in the \$15-\$35 range, suggesting that American art was somewhat more expensive than the hundreds of cheap contemporary French pictures that sold for \$5-\$20 according to Durand. In contrast, in 1849 the Union managers paid the considerable sum of \$1,500 to Henry Peters Gray for The Wages of War, 1848 (it is visible over the door in Frank Waller's painting of the Museum, Fig. 26).<sup>51</sup> The price approaches those paid for works by the most popular contemporary European painters. For example, in 1859 Goupil auctioned The Mother by Eugène Verboeckhoven for \$2,200 and François Winterhalter's Florinde for \$3,100. Meanwhile, in the same sale, American works (undoubtedly many of which were sketches or smaller in size) went for less than \$100, while works by Frederic Church and John Casilear went for \$510.<sup>52</sup>

Declaration in 1852 that the American Art-Union was an illegal lottery compelled the public auction of the collection assembled for distribution to members the previous year. Over the course of the three-day sale, December 15-17, 1852, 126 buyers paid a total of \$35,743 for 198 paintings that had originally cost the Union \$38,127.<sup>53</sup> The variance of less than 7% from original price suggests that the auction market was closely synchronized with studio prices. George Daniels paid the auction-high \$1,300 for Church's New England Scenery, acquired the previous year by the Art-Union for \$500.

The organization mounted two more auctions in 1852 and 1853 in an attempt to maintain viability as a venue for exhibitions and auctions.<sup>54</sup> However, lack of capital from membership and localization to the New York market doomed its efforts at revitalization. The pictures remaining in its possession were donated to the New York Gallery of the Fine Arts, where they joined the collection of Luman Reed; both were eventually transferred to the New-York Historical Society.

### E. Düsseldorf Gallery and Cosmopolitan Art Association

So successful was the American Art-Union in fomenting interest in art that at least another half-dozen "educational" lotteries appeared during the 1850s in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Boston, New Jersey, and Chicago. Perhaps the most memorable was the Cosmopolitan Art Association, founded in 1854 at Sandusky, Ohio. Phenomenal financial success enabled its purchase for \$180,000 in 1857 of the entire inventory of New York's Düsseldorf Gallery of contemporary German paintings.<sup>55</sup>

The Düsseldorf Gallery was the creation of wine merchant John Godfrey Boker (d. 1860). A German émigré who had lived in New York since 1825, Boker was posted as American consul to Remscheid, Germany--his birthplace--Düsseldorf and Basel during the 1820s and 30s. Possibly concerned about the fate of a collection of paintings by Düsseldorf artists of anti-Prussian views after the failed German revolution of 1848, Boker brought the entire collection to New York. In 1849 he opened his gallery on the second floor of the Divine Unity Church at 548 Broadway (Fig. 4).<sup>56</sup> Boker replaced works that were sold with new arrivals from Germany. Lois Fink suggests that the nature

of the collection "encouraged the tendency of the public to consider Düsseldorf paintings as a corporate body of works, whereas French paintings became identified with individual French artists."<sup>57</sup> In 1851 Boker premiered a "blockbuster," Carl Friedrich Lessing's twelve by eighteen foot painting The Martyrdom of Huss, 1850, for which the dealer had paid an extraordinary \$7,500 before it was completed. The huge canvas is seen on the rear wall of the gallery (Fig. 5). The design and scale of this exhibition *salon*, with its central skylights and cove ceiling, is comparable to that of the American Art-Union.

Hiram Power's Greek Slave, 1843, was the most famous object displayed at the Düsseldorf Gallery by the Cosmopolitan Art Association. Having raffled the marble in 1855, the Association repurchased it at an 1857 auction for \$6,000 before a crowd of five thousand, an indication of the extent to which the display and acquisition of art had become a spectator sport (Fig. 6).

As compared to the images popularized by the American Art-Union, the Greek Slave is an essay in a cosmopolitan, Orientalist formula.<sup>58</sup> The sculpture is a stylistic and cultural contrast to native landscapes like Frederic

Church's New England Scenery, knocked down for an auction high \$1,300 at the 1852 American Art-Union sale. Carol Troyen characterizes the Art-Union Hudson River landscapes as celebrating "aspects of American life that had all but disappeared by 1851. . . . [R]ather than illustrating contemporary life in America, these pictures served to shore up a foundering ideal."<sup>59</sup> In contrast, the Greek Slave shares the orientalism of contemporary masters like Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and anticipates the burgeoning popularity of French and American orientalists like Jean-Leon Gérôme and Frederick Bridgman, whose work would be prominently featured in American Art Association exhibitions and auctions a quarter of a century later.

The success of the Düsseldorf Gallery and Cosmopolitan Art Association turning American eyes toward contemporary European art was reinforced by incursions into the American market lead by Goupil, Vibert, and Co. of Paris and the Belgian dealer Ernest Gambart.<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Johns argues that "The large presence in New York of European images of all kinds asserted to status-conscious viewers the authority of "vastly superior" European painters."<sup>61</sup> Collectively,

John Durand reminiscenced, these purveyors of foreign art adumbrated "the eclipse of American Art."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Winnifred Howe, A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913-1946), 100-101.

<sup>2</sup>Howe, 1: 109-110.

<sup>3</sup>Howe, 1: 200.

<sup>4</sup>Notable in 1880, in addition to the American Art Gallery, were: M. Knoedler and Co.; William Schaus; Cottier and Co; Thomas Kirby (partners with John Ortgies); Gustav Reichard; Adolph Kohn; Leavitt Art Rooms; John Snedecor; Miner Art Gallery; Duveen Brothers; and the importer A. A. Vantine and Co. Americans who set up business in the 1880s included: Theron Blakeslee; Frederick Keppel; C. Klackner; L. Crist Delmonico; Moore and Clarke; Julius Oehme; and Herman Wunderlich, while two Paris-based art galleries established branches in New York, Durand Ruel and Boussod, Valadon and Co.

<sup>5</sup>"Art Notes," Sun, 19 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Vantine advertisement reproduced by Cynthia A. Brandimarte, "Japanese Novelty Stores," Winterthur Portfolio 26 (1991): 1-25.

<sup>7</sup>Avery, Knoedler and Schaus will all be discussed below. For information on Cottier see Maureen C. O'Brien, "European Paintings at the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition: An American Revolution in Taste," in In Support of Liberty: European Paintings at the 1883 Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition (Southampton, NY: Parrish Art Museum, 1986), pp. 37-47, and Margaret Hobler, "In Search of Daniel Cottier, Artistic Entrepreneur, 1838-1891" (M.A. Thesis, Hunter College, City University of New York, 1987). In 1878 Cottier engaged Samuel P. Avery to manage an auction sale conducted by Robert Somerville for the Leavitt Art Galleries to close out his inventory of paintings and watercolors as Cottier was "intending to discontinue that branch of [his]

business," according to the sales catalog. Nevertheless Cottier continued to occasionally import works by Barbizon painters such as Corot, Millet, and Rousseau. See Fine Oil Paintings and Water-Color Drawings . . . Imported by Cottier & Co. (New York: George Leavitt, April 23-4, 1878), Lancour auction catalog no. 665. Note: Titles of auction catalogs will be presented two ways. Underlined title information I have taken directly from the sales catalogs in question. Titles in quotes are taken from Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944).

<sup>8</sup>For background on the sale of European art in the United States see Lois M. Fink, "French Art in the United States, 1850-1870: Three Dealers and Collectors," Gazette des Beaux Arts 6th series, 92 (September 1978): 87-99. Ms. Fink notes that Henry H. Leeds and Company, William Schaus, J. Senedecor, the Pilgram Gallery, and Avery were among the New York dealers that grew more involved in the sale of European art as a result of the success of European dealers in New York (p. 91). For a year-end review of European paintings and decorative arts imported into New York by Schaus, Knoedler, Cottier, and Avery see "Pictures and Statues," New York Times, 31 December 1882, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>I will discuss Avery at greater length below. For a general history of Avery see Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfield, and Jeanne K. Welcher, The Diaries 1871-1882 of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer (New York: Arno Press, 1979). Avery also authored a summary of auctions under his management and list of prominent collectors in New York that verifies his significance as a dealer of European works of art, in Benson J. Lossing, History of New York City, 2 vols. (New York: Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., 1884), II: 840-43. See also Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, "A Measure of Taste: Samuel P. Avery's Art Auctions, 1864-1880," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 6th series, 100 (September 1982): 87-89.

<sup>10</sup>Linda Henefield Skalet, "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870-1915" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 188.

<sup>11</sup>Skalet, ii, 39-40.

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<sup>12</sup>Skalet, 51-57. It is almost impossible to estimate the number and frequency of artist-initiated sales, as they were rarely accompanied by lists or publications. More will be said of these sales below.

<sup>13</sup>Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 392, footnote 7.

<sup>14</sup>Skalet, 73-125.

<sup>15</sup>Harris, 262, writes that the half million dollar plateau was reached by 1858.

<sup>16</sup>George William Sheldon, American Painters (New York: Appleton, 1881), 10.

<sup>17</sup>"A Promising Scheme," Studio new series 2 (30 August 1884): 15.

<sup>18</sup>This subject has received much attention of late. See for example, Lois Fink, American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons (Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution, 1990), and H. Barbara Weinberg, The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and their French Teachers (New York, Abbeville Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup>Lillian B. Miller, Patrons and Patriotism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 142.

<sup>20</sup>Today auction firms and commercial galleries conduct their businesses in ways very different from one another. However, during the nineteenth-century American galleries frequently hosted auctions and auction houses often functioned like art galleries and bought and sold property on a retail basis. Because the number of galleries and auction houses was small throughout most of the century, both operations tended to be general in nature and offer a broad array of material, foreign and domestic, old and contemporary. Thus nineteenth-century auction houses and commercial galleries share physical and programmatic attributes throughout most of the period that warrant similar treatment for the purpose of this discussion as a loosely unified generic category.

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My focus is on commercial gallery and auction spaces. Two important recent studies have addressed issues concerning how artists created studios and cooperative spaces to serve their own marketing needs: Annette Blaugrund, The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists (Southampton, New York: Parrish Art Museum, 1997); and Sarah Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup>Cited on an announcement for the exhibition at Knoedler and Company, "The Rise of the Art World in America: Knoedler at 150," December 5, 1996-January 12, 1997, n. p. Everett Shinn captured the view of Homer's Gulf Stream seen in Knoedler's front window at 355 Fifth at the corner of 34th Street in his pastel of about 1905, Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, now in the collection of Jan and Warren Adelson.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Paff, "Prospectus of M. Paff's Gallery of Paintings," 30 March 1812, broadside in the Knoedler Library, Knoedler and Company, New York.

<sup>23</sup>Miller, 141.

<sup>24</sup>Catalogue of M. Paff's Gallery of Paintings (New York: 1812), n.p. Curiosities of note included "A Chinese Junk, made entirely of Cloves [that] was presented to General Washington" and "A small Flower Piece cut out of Paper.

<sup>25</sup>William Dunlap, A History of The Rise and Progress of The Arts of Design in the United States, vol. 2 (New York: George P. Scott and Company, 1834; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), part two, 462 (page references are to the reprint edition).

<sup>26</sup>Philip Hone diary, 11 June 1838, in Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone: 1828-1851, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 331.

<sup>27</sup>Dunlap, vol. 2, part two, 388.

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<sup>28</sup>Ella M. Foshay, Mr. Luman Reed's Picture Gallery (New York: Harry M. Abrams in association with the New-York Historical Society, 1990), 16.

<sup>29</sup>Henry T. Tuckerman, Book of Artists (New York: Putnam, 1867; reprint, New York: James F. Carr, 1966), 20 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>30</sup>Cited in Foshay, 202, footnote 84.

<sup>31</sup>Hone diary, 11 June 1838, in Nevins, vol. 1, 331.

<sup>32</sup>Aaron Levy, Catalogue of the late Mr. Paff's Collection of Pictures (New York: A. Levy, March 25? 1838?), Lancour auction catalog no. 22.

<sup>33</sup>T. B. Thorpe, "New-York Artists Fifty Years Ago," Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art 7 (25 May 1872): 572.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Note that this is Thorpe's rendering of Clover's shop, not an authentic image from the 1830s.

<sup>36</sup>It is tempting to reconstruct the look of Edward Carey's collection from George Bacon Wood's Interior of the Library of the Late Henry Carey in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Carey (1805-1845) bequeathed his collection to his older siblings, Henry and Maria, upon his premature death in 1845. It is known that the collection remained intact, without additions, until Henry's bequest to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1879, the year Wood started the painting. However, the collection is shown installed in Henry's library at 1102 Walnut Street in Philadelphia, and apparently nothing is known of how it appeared in Edward's home. See Susan Danly, "The Carey Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts," Antiques 140 no. 5 (November 1991): 838-845.

<sup>37</sup>Thorpe reports that Clover sent both works to Paff for restoration, 575.

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<sup>38</sup>Discussions with Bonaparte are mentioned in Cowdrey and Sizer, pp. 33, 42. Bonaparte's collection was auctioned in two parts in 1845 and 1847; "Bonaparte, Joseph, Count de Survilliers. Paintings and statuary to be sold at the mansion at Bordentown, N. J." (Philadelphia: Birch, September 17, 1845), Lancour auction catalog no. 55, and "Bonaparte, Joseph Napoleon. Rare original paintings, engravings, elegant sculpture," (New York: Bleecker, June 25, 1847), Lancour auction catalog no. 59.

<sup>39</sup>The other landscape painters he noted were William Guy Wall, Jacob Caleb Ward, and an unidentified "Hoyle."

<sup>40</sup>Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944).

<sup>41</sup>Lillian B. Miller, Patrons and Patriotism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 281.

<sup>42</sup>Charles E. Baker, "The American Art-Union," in American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union, ed. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 95-240. See also Miller, 160-172. More recent studies include Maybelle Mann, The American Art-Union (Jupiter, Florida: ALM Associates, 1987); Carol Troyen, "Retreat to Arcadia: American Landscape and The American Art-Union," American Art Journal 23 no. 1 (1991): 20-37; and Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," Journal of American History 81 no. 4 (March 1995): 1534-1561.

<sup>43</sup>This congregation descends from the earliest visualization of Americans in a space with art, Charles Willson Peale's The Artist in His Museum, 1822 (Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts). There we encounter a gentleman lost in contemplation of natural history (birds), a father instructing a son with an open book, and a woman astonished by Peale's mastodon.

<sup>44</sup>Baker, 214-5

<sup>45</sup>Klein, 1547.

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<sup>46</sup>Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, "Publications of the American Art-Union," in American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 214-293.

<sup>47</sup>Chapter six briefly notes the activities of an unrelated Art Union organized by Charles M. Kurtz in 1883 to circulate exhibitions nationally.

<sup>48</sup>Miller, 163.

<sup>49</sup>Baker, 216.

<sup>50</sup>Baker, 160-162.

<sup>51</sup>It is interesting to note Gray's was the first American painting to enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 1872, as the gift of a group of patrons who raised \$5,000 for its acquisition.

<sup>52</sup>See "Collection of pictures by living artists of Europe and America," (New York: Goupil, March 16-17, 1859), Lancour auction catalogue no. 138. For reports on the sale see "Sale of Pictures," New York Times, 17 March 1859, p. 4, and "Close of the Auction Sale of Pictures," New York Times, 18 March 1859, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup>This sale is analyzed at length by Malcolm Stearns, Jr., "Sale of Art-Union Holdings, 1852," in Cowdrey, 295-311. See "American Art Union. Pictures and other works of art" (New York: Austen, December 15, 1852), Lancour auction catalog no. 90.

<sup>54</sup>The second sale was held two weeks later: See "American Art Union. Artists' sale," (New York: Austen, December 30, 1852), Lancour auction catalog no. 91. There is no Lancour listing for the third sale on December 15, 1853.

<sup>55</sup>Baker's study of the American Art-Union includes a section on "Relations with Other Art Unions," 132-147.

<sup>56</sup>For a comprehensive study see William H. Gerdts, "Die 'Düsseldorfer Gallery,'" in ViceVersa, ed. Katharina and Gerhard Bott, ex. cat. (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches

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Museum, and Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 1996), 44-61. See also R. L. Stehle, "The Düsseldorf Gallery of New York," New-York Historical Society Quarterly 58 no. 4 (October 1974): 305-314.

<sup>57</sup>Fink, 88.

<sup>58</sup>Joy Kasson, Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 51-55.

<sup>59</sup>Troyen, 21.

<sup>60</sup>For information on Gambart see Jeremy Maas, Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975).

<sup>61</sup>Elizabeth Johns, American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 90.

<sup>62</sup>Cited in Howe, 86, and Fink, 88.

## CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPORARIES

## A. Michael Knoedler and William Schaus

In 1846 Michael Knoedler (1823-1878) arrived in New York as an agent of the Paris-based Goupil, Vibert and Company, an international art sales and publishing concern with branches in London, Brussels, Berlin and the Hague. Goupil merchandised art supplies, prints and photographs of works of art, and European art from a large inventory of Dutch, Belgian, and French art by salon superstars of the day like Paul Delaroche and Ary Scheffer (Fig. 7). Knoedler opened the Goupil outlet in 1848 at 289 Broadway (between Duane and Reade Streets, two blocks from City Hall Park), where he established a "perpetual free gallery" like that of the innovative American Art-Union ten or so blocks to the north at 497 Broadway. William Schaus (1820-1892) had joined Knoedler the previous year to scout for American artists for Goupil to publish in Europe and launch the International Art-Union, an "educational" initiative to market Goupil prints and original works of art through a lottery-based system like the American Art-Union, the success of which undoubtedly had attracted the European

entrepreneurs. Both Knoedler and Schaus established independent galleries in the 1850s; together with Samuel P. Avery they were the first generation of New York art dealers to endure into the era of the American Art Association.<sup>1</sup>

Combining Knoedler's retail outlet with the International Art Union managed by Schaus, the Goupil enterprise at first aroused American anxiety. There were but a handful of art dealers in the country in the late 1840s.<sup>2</sup> Generally, artists sold directly from their studio, the concept of a professional agent to sell work by living artists remaining literally and figuratively foreign.

The American Art-Union in its November 1849 Bulletin sounded a particularly American suspicion of art dealers, motivated no doubt by self interest, as it considered Goupil's enterprise: "There is not enough money in this country to support art, without having to pay profits to individuals to procure foreign paintings."<sup>3</sup> Further, they argued that purchasers of foreign art would bear the additional costs of the 20% import tariff as well as supporting the Europeans' profitable "private lotteries."<sup>4</sup> Others, like the Courier and Enquirer, warned that Knoedler's and Schaus's efforts were "For the purpose of . . . disposing in

this country of a large collection of pictures which they cannot sell to good advantage in their own" as well as seeking "to divert to their own profit the popularity of the American Art-Union."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, it was admitted that Americans might possess inferior taste and lack the ability to judge quality. Thus, the Home Journal pointed out that the Goupil team constituted "professional" management as compared to the admittedly "amateur" status of the American Art-Union's board of managers.<sup>6</sup> For many Americans, the European pedigree provided a status lacking in the locally grown art world.

Other tensions grew as the market for old masters was challenged by contemporary European art. While experience of old master paintings might raise the level of taste (and it can be argued that continual exposure to the flood of replicas and forgeries earlier in the century had raised the discrimination of American collectors to the point where they would no longer collect such objects), contemporary French art might have the opposite effect, according to the competing American Art-Union:

In a great number of paintings and statues the *Lascivious* is openly aimed at by the artists. . . . The

principal part of the pictures exhibited by the so-called "International Art-Union" are faithful specimens of some one or more of these bad qualities of the modern French school. Some of them are impure in sentiment, most of them extravagant in action and exaggerated in color. The extensive circulation of such objects would stain the rising fountain of American art, of which the waters, although not yet abundant, are still, thank Heaven, pure and unpolluted.<sup>7</sup>

One of the missions of the foreign agents was to secure American art for distribution abroad. Schaus published prints after works by William Sidney Mount and George Caleb Bingham, among others. Very different from the contemporary academic history and Barbizon school paintings imported into this country, American genre subjects fascinated curious Europeans, and Mount's depictions of African-Americans were especially popular.<sup>8</sup> Alfred Frankenstein identifies William Schaus as responsible for establishing Mount's mid-career reputation through the publication of seven Goupil lithographs, starting with The Power of Music, and another three as an independent agent.<sup>9</sup> Distribution of the images through the Goupil network positioned Mount as the American artist best known in Europe at mid-century.

Knoedler inaugurated the Goupil Gallery in 1848 by featuring Ary Scheffer's Mary Prone on the Dead Body of Christ, which Nathaniel P. Willis called "the world's

highest instance of the pathos expressible by the pencil."<sup>10</sup> In 1852 Schaus left Goupil and started his own gallery, which endured after his death in 1892 until the death in 1911 of Herman Schaus, his nephew, who had assumed the business with A. W. Conover. An 1854 catalog of prints lists 3307 impressions organized under categories such as Costumes, Flowers, Panoramas and Views, Studies, Ornaments, and Architecture.<sup>11</sup> Knoedler relocated the Goupil art shop uptown in 1855 to 366 Broadway. Upon the death of twenty-four year old Leon Goupil, Jr., the firm's New York partner, Knoedler bought out Goupil's New York interest in 1857, though he continued to advertise affiliation with Goupil into the early 1880s, when the French firm became Boussod and Valadon.

Around 1859 Knoedler relocated to 772 Broadway, at the corner of Ninth Street, in the old A. T. Stewart townhouse (Fig. 8). Knoedler's proximity to the Tenth Street Studio building three blocks away, opened the year before, facilitated relationships with many well-known American painters. Display of Church's Icebergs inaugurated a newly renovated gallery in 1861, and over the course of the next two decades

the gallery exhibited work by more than thirty Tenth Street Studio residents.<sup>12</sup>

Knoedler cultivated markets for both European and American art and reached out to both well-heeled and modestly endowed collectors, as well as artists and others in search of art supplies and frames. A view of the exterior (Fig. 8) shows the Goupil affiliation prominently announced. A corner signboard advertises Kensett's Lake George while on the lower cornice one sees headlines for the International Art-Union (a pitch to former Art-Union subscribers?).

An 1859 auction sale conducted by Henry Leeds demonstrates how the dealer worked the market for art from both sides of the Atlantic. A reviewer of the presale exhibition noted that with works by Church, Kensett, Durand, and other Hudson River painters the presale show could "be regarded as a brief Academy exhibition open for 'two nights only.'"<sup>13</sup> At the sale no American picture went for more than \$530, while works by Belgian Eugène Verboeckhoven and German Franz-Xavier Winterhalter went for \$2,200 and \$3,100, respectively.

Knoedler aggressively marketed his French affiliation and European connections, distinguishing himself from his competitors. Visible on one cornice of the building (Fig. 8) is the caption "Salon des Beaux-Arts," emphasizing the French sophistication of the firm. The New York Evening Post described the setting:

Here Mr. Knoedler, in addition to a lofty and spacious store, has a handsome gallery, consisting of two apartments. . . . After passing through the spacious store, the walls of which are completely encrusted with interesting engravings, the visitor is ushered into the first exhibition room, containing . . . chiefly cabinet pictures--of French artists, of whom [Eugène] Fichel, [J. Victor] Chavet, [François] Compte-Calix, [Antoine] Plassan, E[douard] Frère . . . are represented. There is also a landscape by [John] Casilear and one of [Arthur] Tait's inevitable but charming little pictures of white fowl. The chief attraction of this apartment is, however, a remarkable painting by Gérôme, "The Dead Caesar". . . . The inner room is devoted to the works of Rosa Bonheur.<sup>14</sup>

A sampling of work exhibited during the decade following the move to Broadway includes: Jean-Leon Gérôme's Death of Caesar and paintings by Rosa Bonheur in 1859; replicas of Claude Marie Dubufe's Temptation and Expulsion and work by Felix Ziem in 1860; paintings by Hugues Merle and Andreas Achenbach in 1861; and in 1865 paintings by James Tissot, William Bouguereau, and Gérôme.

In 1869 the firm moved uptown to 170 Fifth Avenue, at the southwest corner of Twenty-Second Street, not far from the National Academy of Design at Twenty-Third Street and Fourth Avenue, where it remained until 1895. Two rare photographs show the gallery as it existed during the early years of the American Art Association. The exterior view (Fig. 9), which may have been taken to commemorate the 1869 opening, shows a large street-front art shop with windows in which are displayed a selection of works on paper as well as framed oils. The stereographed interior view (Fig. 10) reveals what must have been the most extensive art dealership in the country. The card probably dates close to 1876, when the firm occupied the entire building and undertook extensive renovations. On the ground level we see the inventory of Goupil prints, miscellaneous sculptures, and a rack of frame samples. Through the draped door atop the rear staircase we can look into the picture salon.

An adjacent gallery was fitted to display watercolors, while upstairs one encountered "a suite of handsomely-furnished apartments [for] the exhibition of pictures arranged as in a drawing-room."<sup>15</sup> The New York Tribune reported that Knoedler had fitted up rooms with furniture,

carpets, curtains, and wall decorations that were "properly suited to the best exhibition of paintings," and advised that the upstairs apartments, one olive and the other a dark red, "should be seen by everyone who has had time to make his money but not to cultivate his taste."<sup>16</sup> In 1877 the New York Times informed readers that additional apartments had been added where,

Pictures can be seen to the same advantage and with the same effects of light as in a private drawing-room. Many modern pictures are painted with especial reference to this point, the painter choosing a studio which has a side light corresponding to the windows of an ordinary room.<sup>17</sup>

Knoedler's *drawing rooms* entertained a new clientele who wanted to know how a picture would fit among the furnishings at home and contribute to elaborate decorative ensembles. The rooms reach directly into the market for expensive pictures sold on a private, personal basis, a trend synonymous with the burst of collecting that followed the Centennial. Collectively, the ensemble of spaces differentiates market segments into a multi-tiered, four-floor structure of "upstairs/downstairs" clients. Knoedler offered the first full-service art dealership that catered with equal ease to art students buying supplies and buyers like Charles Crocker, who snapped up eight paintings a month

after the Union Pacific made its first transcontinental crossing in 1869. Collectors like Crocker were not new-- they were just increasing in number and wealth. A few years later Jay Gould, the stock market king, acquired from the dealer twenty-two paintings in two days, while by the 1880s Vanderbilts, Astors, Flaglers, Rockefellers, and Havemeyers were also on the scene buying paintings and decorative arts in unprecedented quantities. At the same time, by 1882 the admission fee for entry into the picture salon was twenty-five cents; Michael Knoedler's "perpetual free gallery" in a much expanded form was now generating an income stream by taxing the growing number of art consumers that just wanted to look--a group nurtured in earlier years on reproductions disseminated by the American Art-Union and the Goupil Gallery. Its niche was well established. In 1882 it was observed that, in addition to prominence in French art, "As the agents . . . of Goupil the Fifth-avenue dealers [Knoedler] take a wider sweep than any of the others, embracing importations from Germany more liberally than Schaus, and taking from Holland as freely as Cottier and Co." <sup>18</sup>

Roland Knoedler succeeded his father as proprietor at the latter's death in 1878; he was joined by his brothers Edmond and Charles in subsequent years. Opinion varies regarding the extent to which their gallery supported American art. The New York Times observed in 1886,

The first dealer to arrive in Europe every year and the last to leave it is Roland Knoedler. His continuous efforts to secure the best and most legitimate work of foreign artists is equaled only by his earnest support of American artists. . . . Messrs. Bridgeman (sic), Ridgeway Knight, Marcius Simond (sic), Pearce, Walter Gay, Weeks, and many others are authorities for this statement.<sup>19</sup>

Still, the prevailing perception among the press and American artists seems to have verified the experience of painter Henry Ward Ranger, who wrote of visiting the gallery around 1880:

I remember going to the Goupil Gallery, where I gave my twenty-five cents to see the pictures, and finding nothing but foreign paintings, turned to a gentleman whom I afterward knew as Mr. Oehme, and asked: "Sir, haven't you any American pictures?" I can recall now the contemptuous way in which he replied: "No sir, we have no American pictures! all (sic) our paintings are imported."<sup>20</sup>

European blue-chips were an increasing specialty. A fire in the gallery in 1885 prompted an insurance evaluation of one million dollars.<sup>21</sup> The two most valuable pictures saved were Meyer von Bremen's The Young Mother, valued at

\$40,000, and Bouguereau's Venus, valued at \$20,000. The New York Times for March 14, 1880 reported that Knoedler, Schaus and Cottier all owned important works by Corot, who was probably the single most popular artist in this country, closely followed by Millet. While other artists such as Gérôme and Bouguereau were perhaps equally famous, their figure paintings were more exotic and, in some cases, specialized in appeal.<sup>22</sup> Millet, on the other hand, presented a palatable "Christian" message, while the "poetry" of Corot and other Barbizon landscapists spoke to a broad audience of Americans nurtured on native landscape painting. Although Schaus and Knoedler apparently kept American art in stock, the only American artists who might have approached the Europeans market appeal would have been George Inness, who worked in a Barbizon mode, or Frederick Bridgman, who could almost match his teacher Gérôme as an exotic figure-painter, but neither would have commanded more than a few thousand dollars for their most expensive paintings. So strong was the demand for Barbizon painters in the mid-1880s that Henry Ranger learned from French dealers who befriended him in Paris that "when a good Barbizon picture came into the market, it was held back for

an American customer at an American price."<sup>23</sup> Not only would Americans pay higher prices, but by the early 1880s the import tariff on foreign pictures had reached thirty percent. Thus, it was argued in 1882, "That the high prices paid by Americans for foreign work places that work beyond the means of many Europeans."<sup>24</sup>

In 1895 Knoedler moved uptown once more, to 355 Fifth Avenue (Fig. 11), opposite the Waldorf Hotel. A circa 1895 photograph of Charles and Edmond Knoedler in the new picture gallery shows considerably more wall between each work, suggesting that the dense hangings fashionable during the 1880s had started to yield more visual space for each object (Fig. 12). Now very much American dealers, in 1896 the firm simultaneously opened branches on Old Bond Street in London and the Place Vendôme in Paris, while broadening inventory to include old master paintings of high quality. From 1889 to about 1905 the firm also maintained a branch in Pittsburgh supported by heavy buying by the Frick family.<sup>25</sup> For example, between 1894 and 1919 Henry Clay Frick bought more than 225 paintings from Knoedler. The firm sold its first major old master to a museum in 1901, when the Boston Museum of Fine Arts acquired Velasquez's Don Balthazar and

His Dwarf. Knoedler's peak in the old master market was surely the acquisition of some three dozen old master pictures from the Hermitage between 1928 and 1931.

After the turn of the century American art was shown more regularly, examples being the 1898 show of Winslow Homer watercolors, the 1903 exhibition of William M. Chase portraits of society figures, and a 1909 show of eighty-three John Singer Sargent watercolors. The Gallery also inaugurated a series of summer exhibitions of contemporary and recently deceased American artists, such as John La Farge, George Inness, Winslow Homer, Theodore Robinson, J. Alden Weir, Frank Duveneck, and various of the Ashcan painters like George Bellows. Knoedler's full-fledged entry into the market for American art followed two decades of effort by the American Art Association, which can be seen as the pioneer in that frontier.

#### B. Samuel P. Avery

The man who contributed most to the development and professionalism of the American art market between the Civil War and Centennial was Samuel P. Avery (1822-1904). His career and business methods warrant analysis for several

reasons. Like Knoedler and Schaus, Avery established a business that was quite mature during the American Art Association's infancy. But unlike the European expatriate dealers, he was native born and his influence was magnified by intimate friendships with a network of American artists, civic leaders, and millionaire power brokers. Having started his career as an engraver, Avery was an artist who understood and commanded the respect of his creative peers. He rose to prominence in the art world through the power of his personality and ingenuity, initially fueled by the capital of William T. Walters (1819-1894), one of the half-dozen most significant American collectors of the era.

A United States commissioner to the 1867 Paris World's Fair, Avery collaborated in the founding the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In these civic endeavors, as well as his sizable contributions to the New York Public Library and Columbia University, he demonstrated a citizenship unequalled in the commercial art world. Hence the judgment by later historians that, "He established a new respect for the role of the art dealer by the esteem and confidence which he personally inspired--this in a era notable for its political corruption, graft, and materialism."<sup>26</sup> Further,

Avery demonstrated that expertise is learnable, not mystical. He matched art business with art philanthropy. . . . he set standards for the dealers and collectors of the 1890s and thereafter . . . who would scarcely have operated on their titanic scale without the groundwork laid by Mr. Avery's generation.<sup>27</sup>

Avery's gift to the Metropolitan Museum of Art of his papers and the subsequent publication of his diaries enable us to examine the personal relationships in this country and abroad that animated his art dealings. Further, we may visualize Avery through a half dozen paintings, drawings, and etchings that depict him in and out of his "Fine Art Room."

An engraver by training, Avery's earliest prints date to 1841. During the 1850s and early 1860s he published lithographs and engravings of leading Hudson River painters Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and Frederic Church, and photographs of works of art by friends such as George Boughton. He also started collecting American art in the 1850s, at least in part to acquire the rights to publish prints.<sup>28</sup> Thus, his early dealings as a publisher of prints and photographs, in their emphasis on reaching the broad market for mass-produced images, parallel the approaches of the American Art-Union, the Düsseldorf Gallery, and Goupil, Vibert and Company. He differs from those businesses in his

acquisition of an inventory of American paintings and development of a network of relationships that were more difficult for foreign agents or national organizations like the American Art-Union to establish.

Avery hosted evening salons in his Brooklyn home to discuss his growing collection. Sanford Gifford reminisced in an 1867 letter to Avery of "The Golden Age (when we had little money and less care), when good friends met in your house in Clinton Avenue, and looked at the pictures and books, and talked about them, and ate your cake and drank your hospitable ale."<sup>29</sup>

The December 1864 prospectus announcing the opening of Avery's gallery at 694 Broadway listed some forty-eight American artists, including Gifford, Church, and Durand, for whom he would serve as agent:

Samuel P. Avery respectfully informs his friends and the Art public that he has opened an Establishment for Engravings, Publishing and General Agency for the purchase and sale of fine Old Paintings and Other Works of Art. He has made arrangements to receive occasional consignments of superior Paintings and Drawings directly from distinguished foreign Artists. But he especially solicits orders to purchase on commission Works of Art from American Artists.<sup>30</sup>

Linda Skalet observes in "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870-1915" that Avery was the first

post-Civil War art dealer "to make a concerted effort in behalf of the American artist."<sup>31</sup> But we must note that he did so as part of a larger effort that included "Old Paintings and Other Works of Art" as well as "Paintings and Drawings directly from distinguished foreign Artists." He is therefore also the first American art dealer of the post-Civil War generation to promote a cosmopolitan inventory of contemporary foreign and domestic art with apparently equal enthusiasm. Although Knoedler and Schaus occasionally offered American art, the Goupil stable of European artists remained their focus as independent agents.

Avery's transformation during the late 1860s into a dealer of principally European art parallels the evolution two decades later of the American Art Association's nationalistic agenda into a broadly cosmopolitan program promoting European art. Friendships with William T. Walters (1820-1894) and George Lucas (1824-1909) were the catalyst in Avery's development. Avery helped Walters meet and commission work by American artists in New York City during the 1850s, when the Baltimorean acquired work by Durand and Church, among others.<sup>32</sup> Walters bought oils by Alfred Jacob Miller (one of his major concentrations) and acquired

Frederick Church's small oil Morning in the Tropics, which Avery had published as a lithograph, in 1858; the next year Walters purchased his first major European oil, Jean-Léon Gérôme's The Duel After the Masquerade. Southern sympathies in the face of the Great War compelled Walters to move to Paris in 1861, where he renewed friendship with fellow Baltimorean George Lucas, who had infiltrated the Paris art world establishment. Lucas attended to many of Walters' personal needs while introducing him to the heart of the Paris art world. As a result the capitalist embarked on forming a personal collection of international character and started sending salable works to New York, in his words, "to help Avery and his family who are poor but most deserving."<sup>33</sup> Walters's capital and Lucas's contacts coupled with Avery's New York base of operations opened another conduit like those of the Goupil-fueled businesses of Knoedler and Schaus through which European art flowed into America.<sup>34</sup>

Lillian Randall's study and publication of Lucas's diaries illuminates their working relationships. Walters probably employed Avery to supervise his first speculative sale, a two-day auction conducted by Henry Leeds at the

Düsseldorf Gallery on February 12, 1864 of 195 paintings, watercolors and prints that netted \$36,099 (an average of \$800 per object). Avery was already experienced with auctions, having purchased for John Taylor Johnston at least 13 lots for \$12,436 at the renowned sale of John C. Wolfe's first collection, held the previous December at the Düsseldorf Gallery.<sup>35</sup>

In Paris the next month Walters and Avery drafted a contract stipulating that Walters would provide capital for all their purchases of art in Europe and America and give Avery a third of the profit on purchases initiated by Walters and half the profit on purchases the dealer initiated. According to Randall, Walters "established the general policy of buying marketable paintings by medal winners at the annual Salons,"<sup>36</sup> and Lucas served as business agent in Paris.

In April 1864 Leeds and Miner offered at a sale managed by Avery a second consignment from Walters of about 100 European paintings. The sale netted \$36,515, an average of nearly \$360 per lot. Buyers included Israel Corse, who paid the sale high \$3,150 for Constant Troyon's Landscape, Coast of Normandy with Cattle; August Belmont, who spent \$2,500

for a Barend Koekkoek landscape; and John T. Johnston--an important Avery client and first President of the Metropolitan Art Museum--who acquired Pierre-Edouard Frère's Industrious Mother for \$2,000.

William Coffin reports in 1896, during Avery's retirement, that it was Walters's suggestion that Avery start dealing art, and that Walters, having been introduced to the Barbizon painters by Lucas, was one of the first Americans to "predict the success of Millet, Rousseau, Corot, Diaz, and others of the famous group."<sup>37</sup> Coffin observed with amusement that the first Corot brought to America some 30 years earlier was knocked down in one of the Avery/Walters sales for \$110--an inauspicious start for the artist who by the end of the century was one of the most sought after and whose name was ascribed to the greatest number of forgeries sold in this country.<sup>38</sup>

Doubtless, when Avery opened his gallery in December 1864 it was with Walters and Lucas that he had "made arrangements" to receive foreign work. His location at 694 Broadway at Fourth Avenue, down the street from the Düsseldorf Gallery, offered convenient access to that auction venue as well as proximity to other dealers like

Knoedler and Schaus, located at 772 Broadway (at Ninth Street) and 749 Broadway (between Astor and Eight Street), respectively.

Before departing for Paris to assume duties as Commissioner to the 1867 Exposition Universelle, Avery organized two auctions, a three-day sale of his books and a two-day sale of his American and European paintings at Leeds and Miner, 817 and 819 Broadway (at Twelfth). Avery's personal collection never again featured American art.

Residency in Paris confirmed the transformation of Avery's taste in favor of contemporary European art, as well as its profitability.<sup>39</sup> For example, he carried a commission from John Taylor Johnston to the eminent salon master Jules Breton. The Frenchman agreed to paint a two-figure composition, The Brittany Shepherdess, for 2500 francs (about \$500), inaugurating a series of almost yearly Avery commissions, two of which attained record auction prices at the American Art Association during the mid-1880s (a subject I will treat below).<sup>40</sup>

Upon returning from Paris Avery opened a new gallery at 86-88 Fifth Avenue (corner of Fourteenth Street), in a building owned by one or both of the Miner brothers (Henry

and Alan) and Robert Somerville, art auctioneers and dealers whose careers had developed during the Civil War. Miner had been a partner with Henry Leeds at 817-819 Broadway (at Twelfth Street, four blocks away) in selling Avery's personal collection before his departure for Europe. Somerville became the most famous auctioneer of his generation calling sales managed by Avery, among others, until his fame was eclipsed by Thomas Kirby at the American Art Association.<sup>41</sup>

Avery commissioned the British caricaturist George Cruikshank to etch a calling card that offers a view of his Fifth Avenue gallery (Fig. 13).<sup>42</sup> Avery's family lived adjacent the gallery, and the 1873 image projects the intimacy of a private drawing room quite distinct from the street-front *art shop* of Knoedler. The salon-scaled "machines" that so pleased Avery's wealthy clients like J. T. Johnston and William K. Vanderbilt are conspicuously absent--that market segment demanded a level of personal attention immune to advertising. Avery's Fine Art Room is a private, domestic space for personal transactions, not a public retail space.<sup>43</sup> We find the dealer holding a cabinet picture depicting female personifications of America and

either Europe or Britain greeting one another, the gesture of their hands reaching across the sea a tacit acknowledgment of Avery's role as a cultural broker.

Presumably Avery supplied Cruikshank with one or more sketches of his gallery and stock, and the art work in the etching appears relatively generic, encouraging multiple interpretations. Shakespeare gazes toward the viewer as if to say "English Spoken Here," while a classical head reminiscent of Marcus Aurelius lends stoic dignity to Avery's noble enterprise. Not necessarily an antique marble, the bust may have been one of the many plaster reproductions of famous sculptures marketed to museums and private collectors throughout the nineteenth-century.<sup>44</sup> The lion statuette on the left table is the virtual trademark of Antoine-Louis Barye (1796-1875), whose work Walters, Lucas and Avery all collected.<sup>45</sup> On the shelf to the right a closed portfolio hints at hidden treasures while reminding us of Avery's original calling as a printmaker and publisher. Easels conjure the creativity, freshness and excitement of an artist's studio and are common features of drawing rooms and grand picture galleries (see for example the A. T. Stewart Gallery, Fig. 35). The portrait on

Avery's easel may suggest to modern eyes one of the English or Dutch old masters--Reynolds, Romney or Van Dyke--that by the end of the century were avidly sought, but his clientele may have perceived instead a recent portrait commission such as they might order through the dealer from one of the many artists working in an "old master" style.

Putnam's Magazine in 1868 offered an inventory of Avery's current stock:

Drawings by [Gustave] Doré, on wood, in India ink, the originals of some of his illustrations to La Fontaine; a picture by Doré on canvas, a really clever landscape; drawings by Gavarni, and [Jean Louis] Hamon, and H. Vernet...three interesting pieces by [Paul] Delaroche; his "Nymph Bathing," which we knew by Goupil's photograph; a sketch in oil of the head of Philibert Delorme, for the Hémicycle, and the sketch in water-color for the picture "The Mob after the Taking [of] the Bastile (sic)," painted by commission for the French Republican Government, in 1848. . . .<sup>46</sup>

The Putnam's list of French painters continues with Gustave Brion, Theodore Rousseau, Charles Daubigny, William Bouguereau, Georges Vibert, and Eduardo Zamocois. Avery was also displaying the latest things from Paris: Gérôme's Death of Caesar, which he had purchased for Johnston out of the Paris Exposition.<sup>47</sup> The only American artist mentioned is George H. Boughton, who had emigrated as a youth from England.

Among Avery's clients were New York art dealers L. R. Menger, Adolf Kohn, John Snedecor, Sypher & Co., Charles Delmonico, George Leavitt, Jules Oehme (who had started out in the business with Knoedler), the Boston firm of Williams and Evertt, and Marcotte, a dealer and designer with offices in New York and Paris. Prominent collectors Avery supplied included John Taylor Johnston, John Hoey, William H. Vanderbilt, Israel Corse, Robert Olyphant, Louis Durr, Robert L. Stuart, and Robert Hoe.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas Nast's 1880 caricature Samuel P. Avery Transporting His Treasures Across the Sea (Fig. 14) portrays the dealer crossing the ocean perched atop boxes laden with Sèvres china, "old china," "oriental porcelains," and wine bottles as he raises the banner for Escosura, Vibert, Adolphe Schreyer, Alexandre Cabanel, Don Frederic Madrazo, Edouard Detaille, and Boughton, who is again the only American advertised.

Though forgotten today, Ignacio de Leon y Escosura was one of the better-known artists of his day. A pupil of Gérôme, the Spaniard was a close friend of Avery, who commissioned a number of works during visits to the artist's studios in England and France.<sup>49</sup> Escosura memorialized his

friendship with Avery in a canvas painted when the artist came to America to visit the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition (Fig. 15). On a Goupil stretcher purchased at Knoedler's, six blocks north of Avery's, Escosura documents a silent moment of contemplation as a woman examines through a magnifying glass a small picture presented by Avery. Light floods the center of the composition throwing the gilt picture frames into high chiaroscuro against the dark walls and corners of the Victorian interior. Highlights flicker across the fashionable decorative elements like the elaborate chandelier, door sconce, and porcelains flanking the drawn curtains.

It is interesting to compare the painting with the memoirs of James Edward Kelly (1855-1933), who recalled visits to Avery's Fine Arts Room while a student at the National Academy of Arts:

S. P. Avery . . . had his headquarters at 86 5th Ave., in an old-fashioned brick house . . . the basement of which had been converted into an art gallery. Descending a couple of steps into what had been the front yard, we boys entered the reception room and went through into the Gallery, built on the ground where the garden once bloomed; it had skylights, which gave a fine setting for Avery's collection of masterpieces. Avery had been a wood engraver in his younger days, with an office at 48 Beekman St.; he made a small collection of sketches, had a sale and then started in as a dealer. . . .

He revered art as a very serious business and always invited information instead of distributing it. But to customers he talked like a dictator, which inspired so much confidence in William H. Vanderbilt that he commissioned Avery to go to Europe and make a collection of modern masters. . . . Rumor said that his bill was \$300,000. . . .

We students used to cluster at Avery's and had every freedom; the only thing he objected to was the outspoken criticism of the know-it-all art students in the presence of prospective buyers. The dominant picture I can recall in that Gallery was the large painting now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of the CEDARS in the ENVIRONS OF ROME, by George Inness.<sup>50</sup>

Were Escosura's painting intended as an advertisement, like Cruikshank's depiction of the couple exuding the stiff formality of the day, we could interpret the oil as an invitation for women to exercise connoisseurship in Avery's Fine Art Room. Without discounting that possibility (perhaps it hung perpetually in Avery's gallery or personal collection), the image can also be seen, as a commentary on the growing role of women as educators, shapers of culture, and connoisseurs, as well as influences on the tastes of their husbands.

#### C. George A. Leavitt

That Avery marketed directly to women is demonstrated by a "Ladies Ticket" offering a "Ladies Private View" ("No

Gentlemen") to an 1870s exhibition cosponsored by George A. Leavitt at the Leavitt Art Rooms (Fig. 16).<sup>51</sup> Leavitt (1822-1885) was a leading auctioneer whose business dated to the early-1840s, when he launched a general auction business with his father, Jonathan Leavitt, and John F. Trow.<sup>52</sup> By the mid-1850s his subsequent partnership with Richard L. Delisser at 377 and 379 Broadway was, together with Bangs Brothers, one of the two preeminent venues for the public sales by which most newly-published books were distributed (Figs. 17 and 18). In 1867 Leavitt established sales rooms in Clinton Hall that were the site of many important vendues as well as the subject of another painting by Escosura to which we will return (Fig. 19). Around 1871 Leavitt opened his art gallery at 817 Broadway (at Twelfth Street), perhaps in the space formerly occupied by Leeds and Miner (Fig. 20).

The Leavitt Art Rooms to which the ladies were invited constituted a *salon* in which large scale canvases could be exhibited frame to frame, from floor or wainscot to ceiling, in the style used throughout Europe, as for example at the Louvre (Fig. 1) and in America in institutional settings such as American Art-Union (Fig. 3) and the Düsseldorf Gallery (Figs. 5-6), fairs like the 1864 Metropolitan

Sanitary Fair at the Fourteenth Street Armory (Fig. 21), exhibitions at the National Academy (Fig. 22), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figs. 23). Lacking such grand facilities, Avery occasionally rented Leavitt's to preview forthcoming sales.

James Sabin's etching of the Leavitt facility (Fig. 20) offers a fascinating desiderata of art objects that evoke the Dutch and Belgian marine painters (particularly Koekkoek on the bottom to the right of the portal), Flemish and British portrait painters like Van Dyck and Gainsborough (left of the portal), and American history painting seen in the canvas centered on the right wall of the salon. A placard proclaims Leavitt's stock to include paintings, coins, statuary, pottery, furniture, and objets d'art, examples of which are disposed about the portal, including armor and a carved Gothic-style clock very different from the ornately filigreed Beaux-Arts timepiece on Avery's calling card.

#### D. Metropolitan Museum of Art

Avery's collection of decorative arts included Russian bronzes, glass and silver; Elkington and Barbedienne

reproductions of medieval, Renaissance, East Indian, and Persian metalwork; and porcelain originals and reproductions from Deck and Minton. According to the 1868 Putnam's review of Avery's new gallery:

A good deal may be learned from this small . . . collection that Mr. Avery has imported, more with a view to stimulate the public mind than with any view to profit; for it is rather apart from his main purpose. The time will come when our manufactures will take a turn toward art and beauty. . . . It would be a real service to our young men if such a collection as Mr. Avery has here given a hint of--and a hint was all he had in mind to give--could be purchased by a few of our wealthy men . . . and placed on permanent exhibition, free, say in the rooms off the Reading-Room in the Cooper Institute. We should expect to date from such an opportunity a new era in art in America.<sup>53</sup>

Lillian Randall asserts that "As a result of Walters's personal collecting interests, Lucas was introduced to fields other than painting and sculpture. Commissions of Sèvres china, Oriental porcelains, furniture, and portrait miniatures progressively expanded his knowledge of the Paris art world."<sup>54</sup> It is probable that Walters and Lucas likewise expanded Avery's taste for the decorative arts.

But a broader agenda informed the dealer's activities, his role as a founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the planning for which accelerated in 1868 until the first facility opened its doors in 1872 at the Dodworth Dancing

Academy (681 Fifth Avenue between Fifty-Third and Fifty-Fourth Streets; Fig. 23).

Many forces contributed to the propagation of American art museums during the 1870s and 1880s, including the creation and consolidation of fortunes that concomitantly fueled expansion of the art market. One of the most compelling museum models was the South Kensington Museum, today known as the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 1852 the British Parliament initiated a "Museum of Manufactures" to display an international array of decorative arts purchased from the London World's Fair (Crystal Palace Exhibition) of 1851. In 1857 the collection moved to the newly opened "South Kensington Museum," which was rechristened the "Victoria and Albert Museum" by the Queen in honor of her husband in 1899. The South Kensington Museum displayed metalwork, carved wood and ivories, textiles of all sorts, porcelains, glass, and other objects in installations organized by media that mixed authentic pieces with reproductions (Fig. 25).<sup>55</sup> Intended to act in concert with a school of applied arts, its purpose was to stimulate the British economy by raising standards of industrial and domestic design, improving the technical skills of

craftsmen, and elevating the level of consumer taste and demand for quality goods. Recognition of the improvement of British manufactures at subsequent international expositions convinced Americans of the practical, economic value of this museum model that joined decorative arts collections with schools of applied and fine arts. South Kensington's influence was visible in New York's own "Crystal Palace Exhibition" of 1863, which Winnifred Howe identified as an precursor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>56</sup>

The rationale for the Metropolitan Museum of Art fueled the explosion of the decorative arts market "hinted" at by Avery in the late 1860s. Shortly after the Metropolitan was conceived at an 1866 dinner in Paris, John Jay was elected president of the Union League Club, a logical implementer of the proposal. The matter was referred for consideration to the Club's Art Committee, which included Avery, George Comfort, John Kensett, John Quincy Adams Ward, and Worthington Whittredge, among others. An organizational meeting convened in November 1869. Speakers included William Cullen Bryant, Richard M. Hunt, and C.C. Cole, the brother of Henry Cole, director of the South Kensington Museum.

George Comfort was probably the American best informed on museums in Europe, having spent six years abroad in their study.<sup>57</sup> His vision for the fledgling museum provided a framework that guided the Museum--and by extension, much of the art collecting community--throughout the 1870s and 1880s. He argued that metropolitan museums should develop collections to present,

The origin, the rise, the growth, the culminating glory, and the periods of decline and decadence of all the formative arts, both pure and applied, as they have appeared in all lands and in all ages of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Theoretically, at least, all works of art were appropriate for Comfort's museum. He noted that it was growing too late to collect great masterpieces of painting, though there were works of merit available. The solution was to commission copies of all the masterpieces in the world and to acquire plaster casts of every important sculpture, as well as casts of great coins, medallions, and architectural components. Photography, Comfort argued, made possible "perfect copies of all the valuable drawings in the different museums in the world," and watercolors and illuminated manuscripts could be reproduced as chromolithographs.<sup>59</sup>

Plaster casts might prove more desirable than originals, Comfort advised, for they were not disfigured by pollution and age, they were stronger and more durable, and their "soft and mellow" surfaces might be preferred to the originals. He cited the South Kensington Museum and Louvre as examples of museums possessing distinguished collections of casts and characterized the South Kensington Museum as "one of the most interesting and useful museums in the world."<sup>60</sup> In fact, in addition to acquiring plaster casts for an "Architecture Museum," the Metropolitan attempted to launch a casting studio, like those attached to museums in Paris and London, to create and market large-scale reproductions (an early harbinger of the Met's tremendously successful "replica" business of today).

Comfort also argued that another purpose of the art museum was to demonstrate the application of art to industry. Towards this goal collections should include furniture, candelabras, chandeliers, locks, hinges, tapestries, utensils, armor, instruments of war, and religious and civil garments. Progress in the applied arts, as seen in the industrial design of railroad cars, machinery and

tools, and fences could not be separated from advances in all the arts.<sup>61</sup>

Hence the Museum charter adopted in 1870 commands "the application of arts to manufacture and practical life," echoing Comfort and the South Kensington model.<sup>62</sup> Frank Waller's painting of the second-floor galleries of the Museum in its second home on Fourteenth Street (Fig. 26), based on sketches made during 1879 and 1880, exposes the influence of the British model. The "old master" canvases acquired by museum-founder William T. Blodgett while abroad in 1871 are intermixed with American paintings like Henry Peters Gray's Wages of War (visible over the door) without reference to country of origin or style; size and medium are the most important organizing principles for the installation of paintings. In the next room we see a classic "South Kensington collection" of decorative arts, some of which may be British-made electrotype reproductions of objects in the London museum.<sup>63</sup>

In 1887 the Museum opened an art school, according to the prospectus,

With the intention of furnishing superior opportunities (at moderate cost) for thorough instruction in Color; Design; Modeling; Free-hand, Architectural, Cabinet, and Mechanical Drawing; and such allied fields in Chased and Hammered Metals, Carved Work-tiles,

Textiles, etc., as harmoniously combine creative art taste with practical industrial skill, having in view the welfare of that large class of Practical Artists or Artistic Artisans . . . who . . . form the basis of the nation's artistic wealth.<sup>64</sup>

At this school students might draw a chair "posed" on a plinth as if it were a nude model (Fig. 27).

Avery's diversification beyond the picture market to decorative arts distinguishes him, again, from dealers like Knoedler and Schaus and aligns him with the Anglo-American museum movement in which he participated as a founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Putnam's assertion that Avery "imported [the decorative arts] more with a view to stimulate the public mind than with any view to profit" sounds the "education" theme that had informed earlier enterprises such as the American Art-Union, nurtured the growth of the Metropolitan Museum and would be played at a high pitch by the American Art Association fifteen years later.

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<sup>1</sup>The Knoedler Gallery and Vose Gallery in Boston share the distinction of being the two oldest, continuously operating art dealerships in the U. S. Joseph Vose (d. 1910) founded his gallery in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1850, when he bought an art business started in 1841 by Ransom Hicks; Vose initially marketed French Barbizon art. For a history of the Vose Gallery see Robert C. Vose, "Boston's Vose Galleries: A Family Affair," Archives of American Art Journal 21 no. 1 (1981): 8-20. A notable contrast between

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the two galleries is that the fifth generation of the Vose family manages its century-and-a-half old business while Knoedler has for many years been owned by non-family members, most recently the Armand Hammer family. Knoedler and Schaus tutored employees who subsequently launched businesses of their own. For example, William Schaus employed as a clerk Charles Kraushaar, who founded the Kraushaar Gallery after the turn of the century.

<sup>2</sup>During the late 1840s in New York we find Williams, Stevens and Williams at 353 Broadway and John P. Ridner at 497 Broadway (sharing the building with the American Art Union?), and half a dozen auction houses such as Henry H. Leeds at 290 Broadway and then 8 Wall Street, and Levy and Spooner at 72 Greenwich Street.

<sup>3</sup>Lois M. Fink, "French Art in the United States, 1850-1870: Three Dealers and Collectors," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 6th series 92 (September 1978): 88.

<sup>4</sup>In fact the American Art-Union interceded with customs officials in an attempt to prevent the importation of foreign art by Goupil.

<sup>5</sup>Cited in Charles E. Baker, "The American Art-Union," in American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union, ed. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 144.

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Baker, 144. Rachel Klein's analysis of the cultural politics of the American Art-Union offers a useful model of understanding the struggle for authority between various social groups in antebellum New York; see Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," Journal of American History 81 no. 4 (March 1995): 1534-1561.

<sup>7</sup>The International Art-Union, Bulletin of the American Art-Union, II, November, 1849, pp. 14-15, cited in Fink, 87-88. Fink notes that eventually even the American Art-Union acknowledged admiration for works by Ary Scheffer, Paul Delaroche, and Horace Vernet exhibited at the Goupil Gallery. However, controversy over the firm's display of nudes, (usually French nudes), would resurface for decades

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as evidenced by the notorious "Comstock affair" of 1887-88, when Knoedler and Co. was raided at the instigation of Anthony Comstock and compelled to defend the propriety of thirty-seven works of art before a New York Judge. After finding thirty-five of the works unobjectionable, the judge dismissed the case. See "Mr. Comstock's Censorship," New York Times, 24 March 1888, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Alfred Frankenstein, William Sidney Mount (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 160. In 1850 Mount was inquiring of Schaus: "Do you wish a negro man, or a white man as a companion to the picture "Just in Tune"?"

<sup>9</sup>Frankenstein, 13. For more on Schaus's and Mount's friendship and business transactions see pp. 152-169. The International Art-Union, perhaps in an attempt to diffuse criticism and signal its support of American art, proposed to send American artists abroad as part of its activities. Mount hoped for such a scholarship, and Schaus in 1849 offered to send the painter to Paris in exchange for four paintings, though Mount declined.

<sup>10</sup>Elizabeth Johns, American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1991), 90.

<sup>11</sup>The Rise of the Art World in America: Knoedler at 150 (New York: Knoedler and Company, 1996), 14.

<sup>12</sup>For more on the Tenth Street Studio building see Annette Blaugrund, The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists, ex. cat. (Southampton, New York: Parrish Art Museum, 1997).

<sup>13</sup>"A Sale of Pictures," New York Times, 16 March 1859, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>"Fine Arts," Evening Post, 28 October 1859. The article notes that "Small square apartments are found best, both for producing an effective light and for economising space. The Galleries of the Louvre at Paris, of the Uffizii (sic) and the Pitti Palaces at Florence, of the Vatican at Rome, and

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others, are thus arranged, and in following this plan Mr. Knoedler has the very best precedents."

<sup>15</sup>"Goupil's Gallery," New York Times, 19 November 1876, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>"The Goupil Gallery," New York Tribune, 19 December 1876, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>"New Galleries and Paintings," New York Times, 22 November 1877, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>"Pictures and Statues," New York Times, 31 December 1882, p. 5

<sup>19</sup>"Art and Other Notes," New York Times, 12 September 1886, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>Ralcy H. Bell, Art-Talks with Ranger (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 29.

<sup>21</sup>"Fine Pictures in Danger," New York Times, 24 June 1885, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Bouguereau's most notorious work in the country was undoubtedly his Nymphs and Satyr for which Edward S. Stokes paid a magnificent \$10,000 at the 1882 John Wolfe sale; he promptly installed it with a red velvet canopy at the Hoffman House, one of the most prestigious watering holes in Manhattan.

<sup>23</sup>Bell, 32.

<sup>24</sup>"Pictures and Statues: The Past Year in Art-Importations by Dealers," New York Times, 31 December 1883, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>See DeCourcy E. McIntosh, "Demand and Supply: The Pittsburgh Art Trade and M. Knoedler and Co," in Collecting in the Gilded Age: Art Patronage in Pittsburgh, 1890-1910, eds. Gabriel P. Weisberg, DeCourcy E. McIntosh and Alison McQueen, ex. cat. (Pittsburgh: Frick Art and Historical Center, 1997), 107-177.

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<sup>26</sup>Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfeld, and Jeanne K. Welcher, The Diaries 1871-1882 of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer (New York: Arno Press, 1979), ix.

<sup>27</sup>Madeleine Fidell Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, Samuel P. Avery: 1822-1904: Pioneer American Art Dealer, exhibition brochure (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), n. p.

<sup>28</sup>For Avery's early years as engraver and publisher see Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, The Diaries, x-xv.

<sup>29</sup>Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, xiii.

<sup>30</sup>Cited in Katharine Morrison McClinton, "Letters of American Artists to Samuel P. Avery," Apollo 120 (September 1984): 182-187.

<sup>31</sup>Skalet, 186.

<sup>32</sup>In 1860 Charles Loring Elliot presented Walters with a self-portrait "to express my admiration for your manly and consistent support of American art." Lillian Randall, The Diary of George A. Lucas: An American Art Agent In Paris, 1857-1909, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 11. For more on Walters as a collector of American art see William Johnston, "American Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery," Magazine Antiques 106 (November 1974): 853-861, and "The History of the Collection," in The Nineteenth Century Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1982), 12-28. Walters subsequently sold many of his European and America works in February 1864.

<sup>33</sup>Randall, 13.

<sup>34</sup>For more on the flow of European art into the U.S. during this period see Fink, "French Art."

<sup>35</sup>Leeds and Miner's "Report of the Sale" lists a fourteenth purchase at a cost of \$2750 by Johnston himself. John Hoey paid the sale high price for Thomas Couture's Day Dreams. Wolfe sold the collection of American, English, German, Belgian, Dutch and French art to start a new collection featuring newly fashionable Munich- and Paris-trained

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realists according to Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, Diaries, xvii.

<sup>36</sup>Randall, 13.

<sup>37</sup>William Coffin, "Souvenirs of a Veteran Collector," Century Magazine 53 no. 2 (December 1896): 231.

<sup>38</sup>Coffin, 232.

<sup>39</sup>It is important to note, however, that his personal collection--which eventually encompassed some 15,000 prints, including Edouard Manet and Cassatt--was very different in character from the Salon masters that he so successfully marketed in American. Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, Diaries, xxxii; Denys Sutton, "One Paris in the Universe," in Paris-New York: A Continuing Romance (New York: Wildenstein Gallery, 1977), 20.

<sup>40</sup>Johnston sold The Brittany Shepherdess for \$2,000 in the watershed auction of his collection managed by Avery in 1876. Madeleine Fidell Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, "Some Views of Art Buying in New York in the 1870s and 1880s," Oxford Art Journal 5 no. 1 (1982): 48-55. For more on Johnston's activities as a collector see Katharine Baetjer, "Extracts from the Paris Journal of John Taylor Johnston: First President of The Metropolitan Museum," Apollo 114, new series 238 (December 1981): 410-417, and Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of Painting, 1813 to 1913," American Art Review 3 (November-December 1976): 120-66.

<sup>41</sup>Somerville formed a partnership with Avery's son, Samuel Jr., as the Fifth Avenue Art Galleries after the elder Avery's retirement.

<sup>42</sup>The plate was proofed and printed by Auguste Delatre (1822-1907) in London in 1873 (Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, Diaries, 220.) Delatre's famous print shop is reputed to have been one of the sites of the discovery of Japanese art when Félix Bracquemond first encountered Hokusai's Manga in 1856. (Regarding Delatre and Bracquemond see Gabriel Weisberg and others, eds., Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art 1854-1910, ex. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), 3).

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<sup>43</sup>His son, who joined him as partner in the late 1880s, continued this tradition at the Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, 366 and 368 Fifth Avenue, where Samuel Avery, Jr., shared space with John Ortgies and Robert Sommerville: "The Avery galleries [on the second floor] are lighted from above, with broad sky-lights; and what may be called the domestic effect of pictures is shown also in the contiguous private rooms, where the paintings are exhibited in the side-lights from windows." King's Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 314.

<sup>44</sup>Virtually every museum founded in this country during the nineteenth century collected at one point or another in its early history plaster casts sold by the Louvre or South Kensington Museum, Elkington or Barbedienne.

<sup>45</sup>Barye is posed with a similarly sized lion in Leon Bonnat's posthumous portrait of the sculptor, reproduced in Randall, Fig. 39. More will be said of Barye below.

<sup>46</sup>"Fine Arts," Putnam's Magazine new series 1 (March 1868): 385.

<sup>47</sup>Sold at the Johnston sale in 1876 for \$8,000, now in the collection of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

<sup>48</sup>Fidell Beaufort, Diaries, xxi.

<sup>49</sup>Escosura memorialized his friendship with his teacher, as well as other popular French artists Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Jehan Georges Vibert, and Ernest Meissonier, in Gérôme Visiting a Pupil's Atelier; Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn] published Goupil's photogravure of the painting in a book well known to Americans, Etudes in Modern French Art (New York: Richard Worthington, 1882), plate 1. For details on Avery's relationship with Escosura see the numerous references to individual transactions in Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher, Diaries. Avery paid Escosura up to 10,000 francs for elaborate commissions. The diaries cover Avery's travels abroad, not his activities at home, and therefore include no mention of the painting of Avery in his own New York gallery. William Gerdts and James Yarnall's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues Through the

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Centennial Year (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), lists six Escosuras owned by Avery, as well as two more that probably passed through his hands. Johnston sold his Escosura, Quarrel of the Pets, for \$1000 in his famous sale of 1876.

<sup>50</sup>James Edward Kelly Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., 12-13.

<sup>51</sup>The year of the Ladies Reception is unknown. The date of the ticket, February 28th, may have been for a preview of an Avery sale at Leavitt, or, alternatively, a preview hosted by Avery for a sale assembled and managed by Leavitt. To date no Avery sale has been identified the preview for which would logically fall around a February 28th.

<sup>52</sup>For a summary of Leavitt's career see George L. McKay, American Book Auction Catalogues, 1713-1934: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1937; reprint, Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1967), 15-18 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>53</sup>"Fine Arts," Putnam's Magazine new series 1 (March 1868): 386.

<sup>54</sup>Randall, 13. Beaufort, Kleinfeld, and Welcher Diaries publishes photos of many decorative arts in Avery's collection including a Barbedienne silver clock, a glass cake dish and goblet in the Islamic style by Joseph Brocard, a bronze vase-lamp designed by Henry Cahieux, and Barbedienne.

<sup>55</sup>For more on the history of the South Kensington Museum see Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, eds., A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum, ex. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997); Julius Bryant, Victoria and Albert Museum Guide (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986); and Anna Somers Cocks, "A Short History," in The Victoria and Albert Museum: The Making of the Collection (Leicester, England: Windward, 1980).

<sup>56</sup>Winnifred Howe, A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913; reprint, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1946), 90 (page references are to reprint edition). For more

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information on the relationship between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other museum models see Gerald D. Bolas, "The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Nineteenth Century: Museum Models and Methods," unpublished paper for Barbara Weinberg, City University of New York, 1985. For an example of the penetration into the Midwest of the South Kensington model see Gerald D. Bolas, "One Hundred Years of the Washington University Art Collection, in Washington University Gallery of Art: Illustrated Checklist of the Collection (St. Louis: Washington University, 1981), 6-11.

<sup>57</sup>Howe reported that Comfort "attributed to . . . [the Crystal Palace Exhibition] his first impression of institutions of art," p. 90.

<sup>58</sup>George Comfort, "Art Museums in America," Old and New, 1 no. 4 (April 1870): 505.

<sup>59</sup>Comfort, 509.

<sup>60</sup>Comfort, 506.

<sup>61</sup>Comfort, 510.

<sup>62</sup>The culmination of this distinctly nineteenth-century vision of the art museum was the recruitment in 1905 of Sir Henry Purdon Clarke, director of the South Kensington Museum, to serve as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>63</sup>For more on the painting see Natalie Spassky and others, American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 2 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 577-78.

<sup>64</sup>Howe, 205. For more on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's school see Jay E. Cantor, "Art and Industry: Reflections on the Role of the American Museum in Encouraging Innovation in the Decorative Arts," in Technological Innovation and the Decorative Arts, Winterthur Conference Report 1973, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby and Polly Anne Earl (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974).

## CHAPTER FOUR: REHEARSAL

## THE AMERICAN ART GALLERY, 1879-1882

## A. Rufus E. Moore

Among the notable efforts to promote American art in the decade following the Civil War were those of Rufus Ellis Moore (1839-1918). Moore, who in 1857 had started collecting oriental works of art in Chicago, moved to New York in 1871 after the great Chicago fire destroyed his publishing business.<sup>1</sup> In July 1873 The [New York] World reported:

R. E. Moore, at 31 Union square [sic], has undertaken the duties of a picture agent with a special view to the interests of American artists. Goupil's and Schaus's rooms are more particularly devoted to foreign productions; and it is expedient that our own artists should have their rallying place, especially during the off seasons when the Academy is closed.<sup>2</sup>

The following year Moore published Notes on "What is Art" and Catalogue of American Paintings, arguing that Americans were "deficient in good taste, proved by neglect of our own art" and pointing out that many of the best American artists, for example George Inness and Elihu Vedder, lived abroad, sounding the refrain that inspired so many diverse attempts to launch art museums and galleries in this country.<sup>3</sup> Moore's Art Rooms, opposite the northwest

corner of Union Park Square, displayed a representative cross-section of National Academy artists including Frederic Church, Winslow Homer and Daniel Huntington, as well as younger and more independent artists like George Inness, Albert Ryder and John La Farge.

In March 1874 Moore sent to auction at Leavitt's Art Rooms (Fig. 20) a collection of "works fresh from the studios" by "almost every artist known to fame in this country."<sup>4</sup> The pre-sale exhibition at Leavitt's was notable because "With the exception of the Artists' Fund Collection, this is the first exhibition formed exclusively of American pictures which has been opened in New York in many years."<sup>5</sup>

A picture of Moore's working relationships with artists emerges from the diaries of the painter Jervis McEntee (1828-1891), who recorded that on March 3, 1875,

Moore came in this afternoon and was voluble in his praise of my pictures. He was meek and I was kind. He bought two little pictures for \$200. A winter twilight looking over Kingston from the Alms House road and a little Wallkill Valley sketch. He wanted me to promise to paint him two more pictures from two of my sketches but I was not willing now to do it. He is to pay me on Friday for these pictures. If he does not he will not get them.<sup>6</sup>

On May 27, 1875:

Moore came in and I let him have my little "Fisher Girl" to sell on commission. He to frame it at an expense of about \$20. but I am not to pay for the frame

unless I wish to. He is to sell the picture for \$300. netting me \$250. above frame and commission. I have repainted the "Wilderness" for him which he bought at auction for \$200. He is to send me the Gazette des Beaux Arts and the Portfolio for a year for what I did.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Moore was building his inventory by purchasing works at auctions and directly from artists as well as taking pictures on consignment. When buying from McEntee he may not have yet determined if the works would be held for stock or sent to auction, the latter being a useful mechanism for moving inventory and generating capital.

On March 11, 1879 McEntee recorded that the dealer was embarking on a new venture:

Moore came in today. He told me he had eight hundred dollars he would give me for my picture of Clouds. I told him twice that would not buy it. He bought my November 12 x 20 Hussy Hill for \$175. Says he had hired the Kurtz Gallery for two years and is going to have a permanent exhibition of American art. If he were a strong reliable man it would be the thing to do, but I have no confidence in him.<sup>8</sup>

Exactly why Moore choose that moment to launch a new enterprise devoted to American art is not known. Despite the general financial slump of 1873-78, the successes of the John Taylor Johnston sale in 1876, at which Frederic Church's Niagara Falls was knocked down for a record \$12,500, and the sale next year of Robert Olyphant's

collection of American paintings, certainly indicated that American art could be a good investment, even if the prices attained at both sales were considerably below the average attained for European paintings in general.<sup>9</sup> An 1878 review of the principal galleries in town (Knoedler, Schaus, Avery, Gustav Reichard, and Adolf Kohn) noted that,

The picture-dealers . . . all say that the present has been as prosperous a season as they have ever had, and seldom before have they disposed of so many expensive works of art. . . . and the best foreign masters can find a ready market here. Another interesting fact is that most of the pictures sold have been of the more expensive character.<sup>10</sup>

#### B. William Kurtz and the Kurtz Gallery

The site of Moore's speculative undertaking took its name from William Kurtz (1834-1904), a leading photographer and inventor of photographic processes. Kurtz was also an accomplished draftsman credited with developing a "new style" of portraiture--portraits glacés--in which he apparently altered photographic images with crayon highlights.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1871 the photographic gallery he had opened in 1865 at 872 Broadway (just off Union Park Square) was a venue for a sale of American paintings.<sup>12</sup> In 1874 he erected his own building at a cost of \$130,000 at 6 East

Twenty-Third Street on Madison Square South, where he established a studio with two sky-lit exhibition rooms on the upper floor (Fig. 28).

Kurtz's Gallery hosted a variety of special exhibitions and frequent auction sales. The Society of American Artists held their first two exhibitions there in 1878 and 1879, while the Palette Club, of which Kurtz was a member, also organized exhibitions and meetings in his gallery. Dealers, speculative collectors, lawyers liquidating estates, and groups of artists rented the facility for shows of European and American paintings and oriental objets d'art that were sold at the conclusion of the shows on the spot by independent auctioneers. Robert Somerville, who ran a gallery and auction business at 74 University Place (at East Thirteenth Street, a block south of Union Park Square), held many auctions at the Kurtz Gallery, including sales for the Knoedler brothers, whose showrooms were a block away at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Second Street.<sup>13</sup> In 1876 collector Adolf Kohn launched himself as a dealer by leasing the space to exhibit his assembly of contemporary European paintings and commissioning Somerville to sell the lots in the Gallery after a month-long show.<sup>14</sup> Auctioneer

Daniel A. Mathews worked directly with American artists to assemble group sales such as that at Kurtz's Gallery in April 1879, where he presented a collection of American pictures "fresh from the studios."<sup>15</sup> Philanthropic sales such as that in 1878 of Greek and Roman vases, Turkish costumes and antiques to benefit the Evangelical Aid Schools in Naples also found a welcome home at Kurtz's.<sup>16</sup>

### C. Asian Art in the American Market

Moore's interest in American art notwithstanding, he is said to have started collecting oriental art in 1857 and to have gone abroad to study art in 1861. His oriental collection, later shown for many years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was described as "one of the most complete in the world" at the time of his death in 1918.<sup>17</sup> Though he may have been a pioneer in collecting Asian art in the late 1850s, the Centennial Exhibition ignited an American passion for Asian art, especially Japanese art, that inflamed well into our century.

Ownership of Chinese art had conferred status on American collectors since before the Revolutionary War. Chinoiserie--western design influenced by Chinese art--had

migrated from Europe to America through imported decorative arts and pattern books, inspiring, for example, delightful fretwork patterns and exotic carvings on Philadelphia-produced Chippendale furniture. After the Revolutionary War, with the first American ship venturing to China in 1784, New England sea captains delivered Chinese goods directly to eager consumers.<sup>18</sup> Though the taste for things Asian waned during the early nineteenth-century, the series of World's Fairs inaugurated in London at mid-century revived the Romantic craving for exotic cultures. Commodore Matthew Perry's 1853 arrival in Japan opened a floodgate through which Japanese goods fed a seemingly insatiable appetite throughout the west and effectively co-opted part of the long-standing market for expensive Chinese goods.<sup>19</sup>

The Japanese displays at the Centennial Exhibition induced a collecting mania across a broad spectrum of American society. The "accumulation and display"<sup>20</sup> of oriental objects conferred sophistication on the owner by announcing an estimable pursuit of knowledge coupled with the cultivation necessary to appreciate the exotic surprises of stylistic characteristics unknown in the west (for example the asymmetry, bold coloring, and spatial ambiguity

typical of much Japanese art). Decorative arts from abroad were educational "object lessons" to be handled, studied, imitated, and eventually transformed by our own craftsmen following the South Kensington Museum model imitated by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

William Hosley characterized the appeal in The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America, quoting from a catalog published in the 1880s by A. A. Vantine & Co., an importer with offices in China, Turkey and Japan, as well as New York (at 831 Broadway between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets):

Opening with the now familiar boilerplate references to the "isolated conditions" of ancient Japan and the "originality of her works," Vantine contrasted the Japanese "love of nature" and their "unrivalled grace" to the "decline of handicrafts" and "loss of individuality" due to the "increasing use of machinery" in the West and concludes with the inevitable pitch that *you too* may join "the most cultivated, artistic people" by jumping on the bandwagon and embracing Japanese art.<sup>21</sup>

Although Japonisme--the Japanese influence on western art--has been treated as a French phenomena, the craze for Japan and its decorative arts was home grown in the U.S., nurtured by Boston traders who transported many of the goods that first left the island nation. Indeed, Bostonians like Edward S. Morse, William S. Bigelow, and Ernest F. Fenollosa

were among the first occidentals to study and in some cases apprentice themselves to Japanese culture. In fashionable New York townhouses newly arrived Japanese Satsuma and Hawthorne porcelains probably occupied places on mantles and sideboards next to old Chinese 'blue and white' vessels carried to this country by Dutch patroons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By the late 1870s decorators in New York City were composing Japanese ensembles and Clarence Cook, in his influential The House Beautiful of 1878, was sending tasteful consumers to outlets like Vantine to acquire Asian goods that might be juxtaposed with exotica from other cultures.<sup>22</sup> Japanese goods were available at all prices, from cheap, mass-produced fans and umbrellas, to costly and delicate porcelains; hence the line between low-brow consumer and high-brow collector of Asian art is blurry around the Centennial. At Vantine's common Japanese vases ranged in cost from eight cents to seventeen dollars (Fig. 29), while connoisseurs paid hundreds and even thousands of dollars to upscale dealers for rarer pieces.

D. James Fountain Sutton and R. Austin Robertson

It may be at Vantine's that Moore first met James Fountain Sutton (1842/3-1915), who supplied Moore with capital for the American Art Gallery.<sup>23</sup> A farm boy from Bedford Hills in Westchester County, Sutton was known as one of the first Americans to travel to China to collect objets d'art for sale in America. After working for Ovington and Co., a Brooklyn importer of Oriental antiques and bric-a-brac, he joined A. A. Vantine and Company in the late 1870s, leaving the firm in 1879 or 1880 to capitalize Moore's gallery.<sup>24</sup> Sutton assembled collections sold at whistle-stop "trunk shows" held up and down the Eastern seaboard and throughout the midwest (Fig. 30).<sup>25</sup> Leavitt's was the favored auction outlet in New York for the goods.<sup>26</sup>

The changing dynamics of the market for Asian decorative arts, especially porcelains, and Sutton's growing expertise in the field are demonstrated in a reminiscence from Thomas Kirby, who later joined Sutton in forming the American Art Association:

During one of Mr. Sutton's early visits to China he bought a number of specimens of antique Chinese porcelains of fine quality, including several single color vases, which when they arrived were inspected by Mr. Vantine, who when informed of the cost prices, declared that Mr. Sutton had been swindled, and that they could never be sold for any price near their cost,

consequently he had better charge the entire invoice to his personal account.

. . . at the time of the purchase . . . Vantine were importing thousands of modern single color Chinese vases costing a few dollars each, and supplying them to the house of Mitchell & Vance, manufacturers of gas fixtures, consequently when Mr. Vantine saw what he considered similar specimens costing hundreds of dollars, he was astonished.

It was not long before Mr. Sutton . . . meeting the late Mr. W. T. Walters of Baltimore . . . mentioned that he had just brought from China a number of fine old Chinese porcelains, which if they appealed to him, could be bought at costs prices. Mr. Walters inspected the specimens and without hesitation purchased all of the more important specimens.<sup>27</sup>

Sutton married Florence Mary Macy, daughter of the department store magnate, which accelerated his introduction into the upper crust of New York society and equipped him with capital for Moore's venture. Wesley Towner reports that Sutton leased space in the building adjacent the Kurtz Gallery (in what would become the Bartholdi Hotel, at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-Third Street) and broke through the walls to create additional exhibition space, sometimes referred to as "the Annex." There they displayed oriental goods collected by Sutton and R. Austin Robertson, a colleague of Sutton associated with Vantine.<sup>28</sup>

Richard Austin Robertson (1830-1891), born in Lynn, Massachusetts, had engaged in various manufacturing and

construction enterprises during his early years. As an amateur collector of oriental art and later a buyer for Vantine in the Orient, Robertson became well-known in the art circles of Japan, China and Paris.<sup>29</sup> Robertson was a 'Bedford Hills man' who maintained a country residence near Sutton in Westchester County that, together with his expertise in Far Eastern art, must have strengthened his friendship with Sutton.<sup>30</sup> Having established residence in Yokohama, Japan, Robertson supplied goods to Vantine for auctions such as those in November 1880 and December 1881 conducted by Thomas Kirby, of whom a great deal will be said below.

#### E. The American Art Gallery

Moore and Sutton's unprecedented enterprise, the American Art Gallery, opened its doors in the Kurtz Gallery on Madison Square on May 5, 1879. The New York Times applauded the effort:

Hitherto the painters here have been forced to send their work to a number of small auction sales distributed through the course of the year, for with the exception of the one or two annual exhibitions, and the occasional demand from visitors at the studios, there was no other way of rendering their wares marketable.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the Times noted that efforts to organize a continuous display of works for sale at the National Academy of Design--with 10% to go to the institution--had been unsuccessful; presumably such a commercial endeavor lay outside the institution's mission.

After noting that native artists regarded art dealers as "parasites who choke off and discourage struggling native genius," The Sun disclosed that the art works would remain the property of the artists until sold, at which point the artists would pay a fixed commission to the Gallery.<sup>32</sup> Some artists apparently "invested" a painting in the enterprise, in return for which they received free admission and the right to organize private receptions. Further, it was hoped that each season two prizes of \$250 for the best landscape and figure paintings would be sponsored by the management and philanthropic subscribers, an adumbration of the "Prize Fund Exhibition" concept implemented by the American Art Association from 1885-89 (discussed in the next chapter).

At the inaugural show the Times reviewer observed that the "Academy gave the tone to the whole," while the "younger men" such as Walter Shirlaw and Frederick Dielman also "had their hold on the walls."<sup>33</sup> Moore and Sutton appear to

have sought a juste milieu between the "old men" upholding the traditional values of the National Academy two blocks away while recognizing the "young men" of the Society of American Artists, many of whom had studied abroad in Germany or France.

But the American Art Gallery was more than just a luxurious, but small, sky-lit picture salon; New Yorkers could hardly be expected to pay a 25-cent admission to see only American art:

That Mr. Moore has taste was apparent from the happy way in which the pictures and bric-a-brac were arranged through the gallery and long room adjoining. For the plan of the gallery does not merely include pictures; it aspires to an educational position, and is intended to improve the taste of the public in art. . . . To this end, loan collections have been placed in the large gallery, consisting of specimens of Satsuma ware from the art treasures belonging to Samuel Colman, and a series of teapots, principally Japanese, owned by Mrs. J. F. Sutton. The idea seems to be to unite in one spot the advantages offered by the large loan collections on the one hand, and of the scattered auction sales of American paintings on the other. Here people are supposed to come to examine ceramics and bric-a-brac, and here are to lie in wait for the fond purchaser such paintings as may be sent in by American artists.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Sutton and Moore diversified their investment and broadened the appeal of the American Art Gallery by annexing to it their experience with, and personal collections of, Asian art.<sup>35</sup> This strategy undoubtedly enticed wealthy

collectors of oriental objects into an establishment they might never have visited had it featured exclusively American art.

Moore and Sutton were not the first dealers to argue the "educational position" of their business. We remember that Samuel Avery marketed his stock of decorative arts "more with a view to stimulate the public mind than with any view to profit,"<sup>36</sup> sounding the refrain trumpeted by the "South Kensington model" advocating the application of art to industry.

Connoisseurship was another, newer factor in the marketplace. Discrimination of quality in Asian art was difficult; few resources outlined qualitative criteria for serious collectors of Chinese and Japanese art before the 1890s. For example, Julia Meech evaluates the large Asian collection of the Harry and Louisine Havemeyer, who began to spend large sums on Chinese, Japanese and Korean art in the mid-1880s, as "With very notable exceptions . . . essentially decorative (Mr. Havemeyer's purchases were intended "to beautify his home") and sometimes downright mediocre."<sup>37</sup> Even the most sophisticated collectors were occasionally

deceived by knowledgeable Asian as well as inept American dealers.

Satsuma provides a good example of the problem. The Japanese ware takes its name from the location of the kilns where it had been produced for generations. As an educational service Vantine's catalog includes a glossary of technical terms that outlines stylistic characteristics of "old," "new," and "commercial" Satsuma. The colorful, highly decorated vases illustrated in the Vantine catalog are new "brocaded" Satsuma that appealed to the western taste for densely patterned and enameled surfaces and were expressly created in Japan as export ware (Fig. 34). "Old" Satsuma is often dark and lacks the organized patterns of the new.

Consider American painter Samuel Colman's "old" Satsuma. Some of those exhibited at the American Art Gallery may be among the vessels featured on his fireplace mantle published in the monumental 1883-4 Artistic Houses (Fig. 32).<sup>38</sup> The dark mottled surfaces were fired in the kilns of Satsuma before the export market encouraged Japanese craftsmen to modify their designs to please western eyes. Sutton and his friends like Robertson, Moore, and

Colman knew the difference. While they bought thousands of modest pieces for Vantine sales, Robertson and Sutton also acquired prime pieces for their own collections.<sup>39</sup>

Little evidence has been found regarding sales figures for the American Art Gallery. It did apparently stimulate interest in American art. McEntee records that Sanford Gifford brought to the 1879 inaugural reception "a Mr. Clark . . . a man owning many American pictures and liking them,"<sup>40</sup> presumably Thomas B. Clarke--one of very few collectors focused on acquiring American art. The following day Clarke visited the McEntee's studio, where he "took a decided fancy" to the landscapist's paintings.<sup>41</sup>

There is no doubt that McEntee would have felt free to sell Clarke work out of his studio. It is doubtful that any American artist established an "exclusive contract" with a dealer before George Inness entered into a short-lived agreement with the American Art Association in 1884. One reason why the "American art idea" failed, according to Thomas Kirby, was because for many years the artists continued to compete with the dealers by cutting deals in their studios that undermined gallery price structures.

But the American Art Gallery offered a new, highly visible opportunity for American artists. On January 7, 1880 an enthusiastic McEntee wrote to Moore to offer another painting for exhibition.<sup>42</sup> Moore bought two, and a fortnight later offered at least one in an auction at Leavitt's, an indication of Moore and Sutton's use of auctions to move inventory and maintain liquidity.<sup>43</sup> Sutton and Moore may have eschewed organizing their own auctions in order to maintain the continuous display of native art and avoid appearing speculative.

Among Moore and Sutton's innovations was a Christmas card competition sponsored by Louis Prang & Co., leading chromolithographers headquartered in Boston, that attracted more than 800 submissions. Jurors Samuel Colman, architect Richard M. Hunt, and Tiffany designer Edward C. Moore awarded prizes from \$200 up to \$1000. Publication of the fifty best designs coupled art making with art industry. We should not be surprised to find Japanese-inspired motifs prevalent (Fig. 38), though they may cause us to agree with the New York Times opinion that one of the shortcomings of the show was "The utter ignorance of some of the competitors concerning the purpose of a Christmas card."<sup>44</sup> A majority

of the participants were women, "Who would be glad to find a market for work like this, done in the safe and pleasant seclusion of their own homes."<sup>45</sup> Thus Moore and Sutton embraced an increasingly influential market segment very distinct from the clique of male collectors of American painting or upper middle-class men and women seeking refined Asian art. The Christmas card competition encouraged women to apply their artistic talents in "practical" activities--in line with the "South Kensington model"--like commercial design and publishing.<sup>46</sup>

In 1881 the American Art Gallery mounted a show of more than three hundred paintings of Near and Mid-East subjects by Frederick Bridgman. Having studied in Paris with the eminent master of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Jean-Leon Gérôme, so appealing was his skill and so cosmopolitan his outlook that the American painter was continually characterized as 'not far behind' Gérôme, high praise in the 1870s and 80s.<sup>47</sup> Bridgman described some background to the show:

About a year ago I sent three large pictures, Burial of a Mummy, Assyrian King, and Procession of Apis, to MR. AVERY'S gallery . . . that they might be seen together advantageously. I should have considered it almost an imposition to claim space and a favorable position for pictures of such large dimensions on the walls of the Kurtz Gallery, which were about that time devoted to the exhibition of the works of the Society of American Artists. . . . For these and still better and stronger

reasons I adhered to my arrangement with MR. AVERY and did not exhibit with the Society of American Artists. . . . I was looked upon as a kind of Paris Annex to this association.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps Avery capitalized on the Society exhibition by obligating the painter to an 'exclusive' showing calculated to generate publicity. Bridgman's Diversion of an Assyrian King (Fig. 34) was well known in its day, having premiered at the Paris Salon in 1878. Exhibited the next year at the Royal Academy, after Avery's 1880 showing it went to the Williams & Everett Gallery in Boston, and then to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts for the Second Annual exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists. At some point the American Art Gallery acquired the piece, and Moore included it in a group show in February 1882. However, it failed to find a purchaser during its peregrinations, as it was offered at the dissolution auction of 1882 discussed below.

The Society of American Artists had rented the Kurtz Gallery in 1878 at a cost of \$600 to mount their first exhibition just two blocks from the National Academy of Art (at Twenty-Third Street and Fourth Avenue), and it returned for its second annual exhibition. In 1882 the Fifth annual exhibition returned to the same space, now the American Art

Gallery. Lack of hanging space coupled with the Society's avoidance of skying and flooring paintings led to the decision to mount a two-part exhibition. At the first show James McNeil Whistler's Arrangement in Black and Grey received much attention, while Thomas Eakin's Crucifixion prompted mixed reviews when seen during the second exhibit.<sup>49</sup> The Society charged admission in order to cover rental of the Gallery, but offered free admission on Sundays to increase the accessibility of the show. Given the continuing controversy over Sunday closings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this move was perceived as "an effective protest against the bigotry that closes museums and libraries on the Sabbath."<sup>50</sup>

An exhibition of sketches mounted by the Society of American Artists during the summer of 1882 provided another departure from convention by featuring the work of Edwin Blashfield, Carroll Beckwith, Charles Sprague Pierce, J. A. Weir, Percy and Leon Moran, and other of the "young men," most of whom had studied abroad. The Art Journal noted that the show possessed the "merit of freshness." The review singled out for praise Edwin Blashfield's sketches for a dining room and found J. A. Weir's landscape study "suggests

the use of a pudding stick." Academicians also exposed a hitherto little-known component of their oeuvres. Sketches by William Hart and J. G. Brown elicited favorable comment, with the latter's study of an old man noted as "bolder, more spirited than his finished work as it is usually found on Academy walls."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps this exhibition presents early evidence of the influence of both the Society of American Artists and the American Art Gallery in stimulating a taste and market for the "sketch aesthetic."

In February 1882 the Art Journal reminded its readers that "the dealer in foreign pictures will very frankly admit that American pictures, as a rule, do not pay" and affirmed that "Mr. Moore is the first person who has made such a gallery [of exclusively American art] of permanent interest."<sup>52</sup> As innovative as its exhibitions were, particularly in the context of the traditions upheld by the nearby National Academy, the American Art Gallery failed as an economic endeavor. Certainly, the business lacked neither originality nor uniqueness of enterprise. But the market for American art was not yet strong enough to support such a venture. Sylvester Koehler's "Statistical Table of Exhibitions" for 1881 and 1882 reports that art valued at

\$4,000 was sold from the Fifth Society of American Artists Exhibition.<sup>53</sup> Though a respectable amount, it paled in comparison to sales out of the Academy annuals, which averaged about \$42,000 for 1881 and 1882, and \$4,000 would have only generated \$400-800 in commissions. In all probability American artists undermined the small market that existed for their work on Madison Square by selling out of their studios directly to buyers.<sup>54</sup> Then, too, in order to keep the prices reasonable, the quality of the American Art Gallery's inventory may have been over the long run relatively mediocre.<sup>55</sup> Sutton and Moore apparently did not issue catalogs or other publications; perhaps the character of their enterprise was too ephemeral to attract a large audience and long endure.

On November 1, 1882 Robert Somerville commenced a sale to liquidate the assets of Moore and Sutton's American Art Gallery. Three thousand, nine hundred and thirteen paintings, watercolors, Christmas card designs, furnishings, and oriental objects were auctioned for two weeks in reserved and unreserved sales at the Thomas Kirby's exhibition and sales gallery at 845 and 847 Broadway.<sup>56</sup> Koehler reported that the sale was one of the most important of the year.<sup>57</sup>

Purchasers paid a total of \$14,000 for 140 works, with the remainder bought in. The highest bid offered, \$2300 for Bridgman's Royal Pastimes in Nineveh (now known as Diversion of an Assyrian King, (Fig. 34), failed to meet the minimum reserve price. Somerville knocked down J. G. Brown's The Lost Child for the auction-high price of \$1550. Works by artists such as George Inness, William M. Chase, Sanford Gifford, and Seymour Guy went for \$200 to \$800.

The Art Amateur's report of the sale exposes the manner in which such auctions were conducted and the elusiveness of reliable information on results of sales:

The auction of the American pictures and Oriental bric-à-brac, lately in the American Art Gallery, belonging to the dissolved firm of Moore & Sutton, afforded unusual opportunities for the judicious buyer. I noticed Mr. Moore himself at Kirby's securing scores of valuable objects, sometimes at considerably less than half what they cost. Several paintings, which had been sold more than once before at much better prices without leaving the auction rooms, this time went in earnest at prices which, out of regard for the feelings of the artists, I refrain from giving.<sup>58</sup>

Again, thanks to Jervis McEntee's diaries, we can document the expectations carried aloft by the American Art Gallery and the deflations that must have accompanied its collapse. On April 25, 1879, the month after Moore told the painter of his new business, the dealer bought McEntee's The

Wings of the Morning [Cape Horn, Pacific Railroad] for \$600, with an additional \$200 due if he succeeded in selling it for \$1500. The New York Times reported that the painting received much attention at the Gallery opening two weeks later.<sup>59</sup> McEntee records on 20 January 1880 that he went to see the painting at Leavitt's, where it would shortly be auctioned. The painting was noted as a "phenomenal scene . . . not altogether unknown" in the February 1882 Art Journal when it was shown again at the American Art Gallery.<sup>60</sup> That it had been bought in at Leavitt's in 1880 and remained Gallery property is confirmed by reports of the 1882 dissolution sale, where it was finally knocked down at an unreserved auction for \$230, about a third of what Moore had originally paid for it in 1879.

To be divided among the highest bidders at an auction was an ignominious end for the American Art Gallery. At many art auctions of the period the provenance of paintings was either unknown or spurious, the identity of purchasers often secret, and verification of sales almost impossible. The Art Amateur complained in May of the following year: "There is hardly an auctioneer of pictures in New York of whom you can buy with absolute certainty of being fairly

treated."<sup>61</sup> Even though sales managed by Kirby (and Leavitt) had been identified by the same magazine as "probably the safest to attend,"<sup>62</sup> the public auction of the American Art Gallery's inventory symbolized failure: the end of a business conceived to promote American art at a less than respectable marketplace.

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<sup>1</sup>"Rufus Ellis Moore, Art Collector, Dies," New York Times, 30 March 1918, p. 13. Rufus Moore should not be confused with William P. Moore, an auctioneer at 290 Fifth Avenue from about 1882-1915, according to Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944), 23. William P. Moore was also a partner in the Moore and Clarke Company, at the same Fifth Avenue address, from about 1883-1884. Maureen O'Brien incorrectly identified Rufus E. Moore as a partner in the Moore and Clarke Gallery, probably based on an article ("The American Art Gallery," New York Times, 7 May 1879, p. 4) that misprinted Rufus Moore's name as "M. E. Moore; see O'Brien, In Support of Liberty: European Paintings at the 1883 Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition, ex. cat. (New York: Parrish Art Museum, 1986), 35.

<sup>2</sup>"Fine Arts," The [New York] World, 28 July 1873, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Rufus E. Moore, Notes on "What Is Art" and Catalogue of American Paintings (New York: R. E. Moore, 1874), 16-17.

<sup>4</sup>"Fine Arts," The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 9 March 1874, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Jervis McEntee Diaries, 3 March 1875, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., Roll D180. I am indebted to Garnett McCoy for access to his index to the McEntee diaries and for his helpful suggestions during the course of my research. For McCoy's assessment of the McEntee diaries see Garnett McCoy, "An Archivist's Choice:

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Ten of the Best," Archives of American Art Journal, 19 no. 2 (1979): 5-7.

<sup>7</sup>McEntee Diaries, 27 May 1875.

<sup>8</sup>McEntee Diaries, 11 March 1879.

<sup>9</sup>For information about both sales see Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of American Painting, 1813 to 1913," American Art Review, 3 no. 6 (November-December 1976): 120-66. Baekeland suggests that "Olyphant must have been disappointed with the results of the 1877 sale," (142) while a contemporary critic wrote in 1879 that "The success attending the sale of the late Olyphant collection demonstrated the financial wisdom of such investments and is of a nature to stimulate the patrons of American art." See "Mr. Clarke's Pictures," New York Evening Post, 22 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>"Easel Studies," New York Evening Express, 29 November 1878, p. 1. Four other galleries are mentioned: Sarony (photography); Miss S. J. Gibbons, "probably the only woman in the country who is a proprietor of a public art gallery"; Herman Wunderlich (prints); and H. Wood (chromos, prints, and photographs). For the other installments of the three-part series see 18 November 1878, p. 3, and 13 December 1878, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Benson J. Lossing provides a good biography of Kurtz in his History of New York City, vol. 1 (New York, 1884), 413-414. Regarding the photographer's portraits glacés see "Exhibition of Photography," The Evening Post, 5 October 1874, p. 4. Kurtz's sitters included distinguished New Yorkers William T. Blodgett and Samuel J. Tilden, among others.

<sup>12</sup>See for details "Sale of American Paintings," New York Times, 9 April 1871, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>See for examples "Modern Paintings," (New York: M. Knoedler and Company, April 14, 1875), Lancour auction catalog no. 497; "Water color drawings," (New York: M. Knoedler and Company, February 6, 1877), Lancour auction catalog no. 595; the sale managed by Knoedler of the James

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L. Claghorn Collection: "Paintings," (New York: M. Knoedler and Company, April 18, 1877), Lancour auction catalog no. 614,; and the sale managed by Knoedler of the Nathan Matthews Collection: "Paintings," (New York: M. Knoedler and Company, April 30, 1877), Lancour auction catalog no. 617. Note: Titles of auction catalogs will be presented two ways. Underlined title information I have taken directly from the sales catalogs in question. Titles in quotes are taken from Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944).

<sup>14</sup>"The Fine Arts," New York Times, 27 February 1876, p. 10; "Sales of Paintings," New York Times, 29 March 1876, p. 8; and "Easel Studies," New York Evening Express, 29 November 1878, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup>See Catalogue of The American Collection of Paintings, Contributed, In Every Instance, by the Artist Represented, Now On Exhibition Free, at the Kurtz Gallery . . . Daniel A. Mathews, Auctioneer, 8-9 April 1879, (not in Lancour), and "American Pictures," New York Evening Post, 4 April 1879, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>See "Fine Bronzes, Antiques, and Pottery," New York Times, 1 December 1878, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>"Rufus Ellis Moore, Art Collector, Dies," New York Times, 30 March 1918, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup>For an overview see Ellen Paul Denker, After the Chinese Taste: China's Influence in America, 1730-1930 (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1985).

<sup>19</sup>Japanese goods imported from Europe were being sold at auction prior to Perry's arrival. For example see "Magasin Japonais. Japan lacquered porcelain, old Dresden porcelain, fans of the 16th century, ebony wood chair arms," (New York: Levy, September 11, 1845), Lancour auction catalog no. 54.

<sup>20</sup>Deborah Federhen and others, Accumulation and Display: Mass Marketing Household Goods in America 1880-1920 (Winterthur, DE: Winterthur Museum, 1986).

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<sup>21</sup>William Hosley, The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America (Hartford, Connecticut: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1990), 44. The Vantine catalog includes a glossary of "technical terms" that reinforces the educational spirit of its market appeal.

<sup>22</sup>Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful: Essays on Bed and Tables Stools and Candlesticks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), 74.

<sup>23</sup>Though Sutton's participation eluded many reviewers, the Art Journal notes his involvement; see "The American Art Gallery," Art Journal new series 5 (June 1879): 191-2.

<sup>24</sup>"J. F. Sutton is Dead," Katonah Record, 26 November 1915, p. 1, and "James F. Sutton Dead," New York Times, 25 November 1915, p. 13. The New York Times assertion that Sutton did not become a partner of Moore until 1881 is belied by the 1879 Art Journal report cited above.

<sup>25</sup>The American Art Association papers at the Archives of American Art include another, similar handbill for a Vantine preview and sale in Washington, D. C.

<sup>26</sup>For an example of what Sutton imported for Vantine see "Japanese and Chinese Art Treasures Selected by James F. Sutton," (New York: Leavitt and A. A. Vantine and Company: October 23, 1877), Lancour auction catalog no. 631.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2, miscellaneous pages.

<sup>28</sup>Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 39.

<sup>29</sup>"Obituary. R. Austin Robertson," New York Times, 31 December 1891, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Gustavus Town Kirby, I Wonder Why? (New York: Coward-McCann, 1954), 111.

<sup>31</sup>"The American Art Gallery," New York Times, 7 May 1879, p. 4.

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<sup>32</sup>"The 'American Art Gallery'," The Sun, 18 May 1879, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>"The American Art Gallery," New York Times, 7 May 1879, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. For a detailed description of the orientalia followed by notes about the American pictures see "Among the Dealers," Art Amateur 1 (June 1879): 13, and Art Amateur 1 (July 1879): 24.

<sup>35</sup>Mrs. Sutton's collection of teapots was well known in her Bedford Hills community. Mrs. Wilhelmine Waller, granddaughter of Thomas Kirby, who grew up down the country road from the Sutton estate, remembers seeing the collection as a young girl during the late teens, close to forty years after their display at the American Art Gallery. Wilhelmine Waller of Bedford Hills, NY, interview by author, 9 October 1993, Bedford Hills, NY.

<sup>36</sup>"Fine Arts," Putnam's Magazine, new series 1 (March 1868): 386.

<sup>37</sup>Julia Meech, "The Other Havemeyer Passion: Collecting Asian Art," in Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 129. Meech's essay provides a good overview of the sources of Asian art as well as French and American approaches to collecting. She notes that during this era many collectors including Charles Lang Freer unwittingly acquired forgeries.

<sup>38</sup>Arnold Lewis, James Turner and Steven McQuillin, The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age: All 203 Photographs from "Artistic Houses" (New York: Dover, 1987), 53.

<sup>39</sup>Investment in the American Art Gallery probably placed Sutton in conflict of interest with Vantine. Therefore he may have been reticent to discuss it, which would explain why his partnership with Moore eluded more than one reviewer. In any event Sutton left Vantine by 1880.

<sup>40</sup>McEntee Diaries, 5 May 1879.

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<sup>41</sup>McEntee Diaries, 6 May 1879. According to Barbara Weinberg, Clarke acquired McEntee's Arch of Nero and Bridge of Constantine, Rome between 1872 and 1879 and sold it before April 1879 for \$140. Clarke subsequently acquired at least two more works by McEntee including November, for which he paid \$100 to an "E. K. Sutton," tantalizingly close to the name of James F. Sutton. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," American Art Journal 8 no. 1 (May 1876): 78.

<sup>42</sup>"I wrote a note to Moore asking if he did not want one of my Autumn pictures in his gallery. He came to see me this afternoon and offered me \$1000 for my 'Autumn Idyl' and the 'Falling Leaves' which I finally accepted. I want the money and if he can make some money he will want more." McEntee Diaries, 7 January 1880.

<sup>43</sup>McEntee Diaries, 20 January 1880. "Called on Charlie Coleman and did some errands, looking in at Leavitt's gallery where Moore has a collection to be sold at auction. He has there my 'Wings of the Morning' and the 'Autumn Idyl' which he bought of me." Linda Skalet points out that Wings of the Morning appeared in a Leavitt catalog for January 27, 1880, again in the catalog for a Thomas Kirby and Company sale on March 31, 1882, and yet again when Kirby disposed of the property of the American Art Galleries in November 1882. Skalet concludes that Moore and Sutton frequently sent paintings to auction with reserve prices that occasionally resulted in buy-ins on their behalf. Linda Skalet, "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870-1915" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 192, 218-219.

<sup>44</sup>"A Phase of Decorative Art," New York Times, 7 June 1880, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>The competition continued for several years. For a review of the 1882 cards published by Prang see "Art Notes: Prang's Christmas Cards," Art Journal 8 (December 1882): 380. Artists mentioned include Dora Wheeler, Fidelia Bridges, and Frederick Dielman.

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<sup>47</sup>"The Bridgman Pictures," Studio and Musical Review 1 (5 February 1881): 21.

<sup>48</sup>F. A. Bridgman, "The Art of Two Worlds," The Studio and Music Review, 1 no. 5 (26 Feb. 1881): 65.

<sup>49</sup>For details see Jennifer Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists: 1877-1884" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1983), 132-137.

<sup>50</sup>"The American Artists," New York Times, 9 April 1882, p. 3. The controversy over Sunday opening plagued the Metropolitan Museum of Art for several more years.

<sup>51</sup>"Art Notes," Art Journal 8 (December 1882): 377.

<sup>52</sup>"Art Notes," Art Journal 8 (February 1882): 61. That Sutton's involvement was once again overlooked suggests that he may have been a relatively "silent" partner who provided capital and expertise in Oriental goods and left the American end of the business to Moore.

<sup>53</sup>Sylvester R. Koehler, The United States Art Directory and Year-Book (two volumes in one), vol. 1 (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Company, 1882, and New York: Cassell and Company, 1884; reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), 136 (page references are to reprint edition). The second volume of Koehler appeared in 1884, in which he reported that \$4,200 of art was bought out of the November 1882 exhibition of "Studies and Sketches" (vol. 2, 34-5); however, as the dissolution sale preceded this show and Koehler listed it as held at the American Art Association, it is unclear who would have earned the commission.

<sup>54</sup>Skalet's study of the market for American art during this period demonstrates that the American artist was "both creator and principal marketer of his work throughout most of the nineteenth century"; see Skalet, 3.

<sup>55</sup>Establishing the full extent of the Gallery inventory remains problematic. Though the Gallery bought on occasion a major and expensive salon piece such as Bridgman's Diversion of an Assyrian King, the general price level appears to have been low. Many of the exhibitions, such as

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the sketch show and Christmas card competition, appear to have been intentionally modest as a strategy to attract purchasers.

<sup>56</sup>"Sale of Paintings," New York Times, 2 November 1882, p. 5. Kirby's career will be discussed in greater detail below. He established his business in New York in late 1878, initially as "Thomas E. Kirby, Auctioneer" according to an ad in the New York Times for November 9, 1878. While letterhead bearing the date February 18, 1880 (Fig. 37) retains that name, the catalog for a sale of that date is imprinted: Thomas E. Kirby and Company, Auctioneers. Like some of his colleagues in the art auction business, he may have also acted as an art dealer by acquiring objects for sale on his own account. By 1882 his galleries were apparently large enough to host relatively major sales like that of the American Art Gallery conducted on-site.

<sup>57</sup>Koehler, vol. 2, 11.

<sup>58</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 8 no. 1 (December 1882): 3.

<sup>59</sup>"The American Art Gallery," New York Times, 7 May 1879, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup>"Art Notes," Art Journal 8 (February 1882): 61.

<sup>61</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 8 no. 6 (May 1883): 122.

<sup>62</sup>"Hints to Novices in Picture-Buying," Art Amateur 5 no. 4 (September 1881): 68.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE INAUGURAL YEAR, 1883

## A. Thomas E. Kirby

James Sutton formulated plans for a new enterprise prior to the American Art Gallery's dissolution sale of November 1882. The preceding summer he had written Thomas Kirby, then vacationing in Paris, and suggested that they join with R. Austin Robertson to reconstitute the American Art Gallery.

Thomas Ellis Kirby (1846-1924; Fig. 43) was the son of a Philadelphia cabinet maker who also dealt in antiques. As a youth he had frequently attended auction sales with his father.<sup>1</sup> Young Thomas's middle name honored Thomas S. Ellis, a family friend and senior member of the distinguished Philadelphia auction firm of Moses Thomas and Sons located on South Fourth Street. Founded in 1812, the Thomas auction house was particularly noted for sales of books as well as real estate, wines, furniture, and art.<sup>2</sup> At the age of twelve Kirby launched his career at Thomas and Sons as a "trotter" delivering books to purchasers. He reminisced in his memoirs that during his thirteen years at

Thomas and Sons he eventually discharged all of the duties associated with the auction business.

In 1872 Kirby formed a short-lived partnership with J. C. Carncross at 706, then 812 Arch Street in Philadelphia, where he offered, according to his trade card: "The best and cheapest Furniture, &c., in the City, at Private Sale, at Auction Prices."<sup>3</sup> Two years later he joined Thomas Birch and Son to call sales at their Philadelphia auction house at 1110 Chestnut.

In 1876 Kirby moved his family to New York. From then until the formation of the American Art Association in 1883 Kirby worked, perhaps simultaneously, with several auction firms and importers in New York. He first called auctions during 1876 and 1877 for George A. Leavitt and Company at Clinton Hall, on Astor Place at Eight Street and 817 Broadway at Twelfth Street (Figs. 19 and 20).<sup>4</sup>

Certainly by the time of Leavitt's sale for Vantine of one thousand "Japanese and Chinese art treasures selected by James F. Sutton"<sup>5</sup> in October 1877 Kirby knew Sutton, who had arranged for the young auctioneer to join Vantine.<sup>6</sup> Kirby's son, Gustavus Town Kirby, reported that in 1878 the Kirby family started summering in Bedford Hills, New York, near

Sutton, and in 1881 the auctioneer purchased a home there from Sutton.<sup>7</sup> While at Vantine Kirby called auctions in Hartford, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and St. Louis, as well as crying sales of Vantine's "Recent Importations" at the Kurtz Gallery.<sup>8</sup> These public sales established Vantine as one of the preeminent purveyors of such goods throughout the country. Kirby also called auctions for several other importers of Oriental goods such as the Duveen Brothers and R. Austin Robertson.<sup>9</sup>

Kirby established an independent auction business, Thomas E. Kirby and Company, in late 1878 or 1879 at 831 Broadway (in the same building as Vantine), where he sold a diverse range of property including cattle and fishing rods.<sup>10</sup> Wesley Towner asserts that Sutton and Robertson supplied the capital for Kirby to move uptown in 1879 to 845 Broadway, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets near Union Square, where he established an outlet to dispose of the growing overstocks of oriental wares from the American Art Gallery.<sup>11</sup> John Ortgies joined Kirby as a partner in the Union Square shop.<sup>12</sup> Ortgies had previously assisted Samuel P. Avery at public sales and was the brother-in-law of the most famous auctioneer of the day, Robert Somerville.

Kirby's letterhead announces that he was prepared to give appraisals, conduct household sales on site, and publish and circulate catalogs; Asian porcelains and bronzes, furniture, paintings and statuary, and other decorative arts are depicted to suggest Kirby's broad expertise in objects from around the world (Fig. 37).

Kirby came to know many American artists through his auctions such as those on behalf of the Artists' Fund Society in 1880 and 1882. His most famed auction was probably the Sanford Gifford estate sale held in 1881 at Chickering Hall, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street (Fig. 38), where Kirby knocked down Gifford's last great painting, Ruins of the Parthenon Looking Southwest from the Acropolis over the Head of the Saronic Gulf, 1880, for \$5,100 to the Corcoran Gallery.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his flourishing business as an independent auctioneer, Kirby welcomed an invitation from Sutton to join him in a new partnership:

While I was in Europe [during the summer of 1882] Sutton wrote suggesting that I go into partnership with Sutton and Robertson and deal in American paintings only. I was to have an interest in the business which could be paid for whenever I desired. So I sold out to Ortgies. . . . I thought that that would be the end of the auction business. We would start an American Art Gallery and have as a side line fine Oriental art.<sup>14</sup>

Kirby proposed a name for the new venture, the American Art Association, and suggested the chrysanthemum logotype to evoke the Far Eastern component of the business (Fig. 39). The American Art Association opened its doors soon after the November 1882 dissolution sale in the same galleries where Sutton had formerly conducted business with Moore, in the Kurtz Gallery at 6 East Twenty Third Street on Madison Square South. Sutton was President, Kirby managed daily affairs, and R. Austin Robertson traveled to Asia to maintain a steady flow of quality imports. Exhibitions were advertised as occurring at either the American Art Galleries or the American Art Gallery "under the management" of the American Art Association; after 1883 the terms are used interchangeably.

It appears that the mission of the AAA was to remain unchanged from that of its predecessor: to provide a continuous display of American art for sale of sufficient quality to warrant a twenty-five cent admission fee. The auxiliary business in Asian decorative arts would likewise continue.

Although Kirby expected to leave the auction business after joining Sutton and Robertson, he did conduct several auctions in 1883 and 1884, including a sale in November 1883

of "An Extraordinary and Highly Interesting Collection of Japanese Art Treasures, Curios and Cabinet Gems, also, Elegant Chinese and Japanese Stuffs, Magnificently Embroidered Robes, Hangings, etc., the whole the property of Mr. R. Austin Robertson, Yokohama, Japan."<sup>15</sup> Kirby cried the sale "under the management of the American Art Association" at Ortgies' Gallery, where he had formerly been a partner. Wesley Towner argued that the AAA's use of the term "management" articulated a semantic strategy to distinguish their activities from those of disreputable auctioneers.<sup>16</sup> Sam Avery had pioneered the concept of auction "management," where he attended to all details such as arranging for a preview exhibition, publishing the catalog, commissioning an auctioneer, and securing an auction venue. This "management" not only assured him flexibility in assembling resources but implied distance from the corruptions typical of auctioneers: unscrupulous cataloging of property; including personal property in sales; inflating prices with 'bids off the chandelier'--that is, secret reserve prices--; and lying in reports of sales.

That professional standards were deplorable was suggested by the Art Amateur in May 1883:

There is hardly an auctioneer of pictures in New York of whom you can buy with absolute certainty of being fairly treated; and this has become so well known and the public has been so often bitten that it is afraid of the auction room. Was there ever, for example, a worse mock auction than the recent Carroll affair conducted by the new firm of Ortgies & Co., successors to Kirby & Co.?"<sup>17</sup>

We don't know if Sutton and Kirby wished to avoid public sales altogether, but we must presume that they wished to avoid such negative publicity. Undoubtedly auctions were necessary to liquidate inventory flooding in from Asia as well as turning over their stock of slow-selling American pictures. In any event, auctions "managed" by the AAA during 1883 and 1884 were exceptions to the regular program of exhibitions they undertook with increasing ambition.

#### B. Inaugural Shows, 1883

Initially, the format of AAA exhibitions was similar to that established by the earlier American Art Gallery. The management and groups of artists arranged shows, with the Association taking a fifteen percent commission on works sold and sharing income from the 25-cent admission fee. Within weeks of the November dissolution sale the first

annual exhibition of Artists' Studies and Sketches was opened to tempt holiday shoppers.

Late January and February 1883 saw a show of ninety-eight pictures by twenty Boston artists; six works sold. The Art Amateur singled out for praise J. Foxcroft Cole, J. Appleton Brown, and George Fuller, whose Dandelion Girl was the center of the show, and the magazine discovered in the show "the beginning of an American School of painting."<sup>18</sup> The Studio recognized a "Boston" style but complained, "It would be refreshing . . . to see a few more things that look like the transfer of an impression from nature to clean canvas."<sup>19</sup>

The New York Art Club, an organization of eighty-odd artists under the leadership of William Sartain and Bruce Crane, held its first annual exhibition at the American Art Association in February 1883.<sup>20</sup> The Society of American Artists mounted its sixth show at the American Art Galleries in March and April 1883, from which purchasers acquired nine works valued at \$3,400.<sup>21</sup> The Salmagundi Sketch Club held its exhibition the following November.<sup>22</sup> The majority of the artists seen in various exhibitions, such as George Inness, Frederick Bridgman, Samuel Colman, R. Swain Gifford,

Frederick Dielman, Thomas Moran, and William T. Richards, among others, had already exhibited under the Moore-Sutton management.<sup>23</sup>

Today, in an era when exhibitions large and small constantly travel around the world, it is difficult to appreciate how few special exhibitions were organized a hundred years ago. One solution the AAA adopted was to present exhibitions as they were being assembled by various groups in New York for international tour. Thus in the spring of 1883 the American paintings bound for the Munich International Exhibition were displayed at the AAA.<sup>24</sup> This offered the opportunity to aid in the presentation of American art abroad while letting others jury the content and organize logistics. In addition, the exhibition provided the opportunity to offer free admission for several days.

In October and November the Association capitalized on one of the former successes and opened "The Second Annual Exhibition of Sketches and Studies," a show of almost four hundred oil and watercolor sketches by native artists at which collectors spent \$1,370 on 27 works of art. Thomas Eakins exhibited in this show his Sketch in Plaster

(Pastoral) and "A most carefully painted study of an ugly Irishman in a racing boat" according to the New York Times. Noting that works came from artists in Chicago as well as the Paris and Munich "boys," the New York Times continued by suggesting what could be said of the new program in general, that the "American galleries seem . . . to aim at no narrow local patronage, but receive work from all quarters."<sup>25</sup>

#### C. Thomas B. Clarke Exhibition, 1883

Eighteen-eighty-three ended with a special exhibition of Thomas B. Clarke's collection of American art for the benefit of the National Academy of Design. Proceeds from the 25-cent admission went towards establishment of the "Clarke Prize Fund" to offer an award for the best American figure painting in the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition; admissions and subscriptions to the Clarke Prize Fund eventually totaled \$6000.

A New York manufacturer of dry goods, cuffs and collars, Clarke (1848-1931) possessed the most comprehensive collection of contemporary American paintings of his day. All but three of the 140 pieces by 116 artists shown were by living Americans. The first large-scale exhibition in this

country devoted to a distinguished private collection of American art, the Clarke show featured works by the "old men" such as Frederic Church and Daniel Huntington, as well as paintings by younger artists associated with the Society of American Artists. In fact the New York Times found that "[The] catholicity is a surprise, especially as the collector is young, and might be expected to take sides violently among the various polemics of the painters."<sup>26</sup>

For Clarke and the AAA, both dedicated to the encouragement of American art, the exhibition represented a great coup. Barbara Weinberg postulates that Clarke had a twofold purpose in displaying his collection: to encourage American figure-painters through establishment of the Clarke Prize Fund at the National Academy and stimulate other collectors to follow his example of patronizing American artists.<sup>27</sup> Yet his motivations were not without self-interest, as Clarke advised collectors such as George Seney and sold works to them from his own collection.<sup>28</sup> Between 1872 and 1879 he acquired around 185 paintings including 170 by American artists, while he simultaneously collected Greek vases, Oriental porcelains and bric-a-brac, rugs, and other decorative arts.<sup>29</sup> As will be discussed in the next

chapter, Clarke eventually took his collecting and dealing of art public with the opening of his Art House at 4 East 34th Street in 1891. Then, in 1899 the merchant sold off at great profit his entire collection of American paintings at the AAA. In any event, the recognition Clarke's 1883 exhibition received enhanced his collection's value and heightened prestige with fellow collectors and artists. According to the New York Times the show also stimulated the sale of at least six paintings out of artists' studios and demonstrated that the American Art Association's commercial efforts were "strongly tinged with public spirit."<sup>30</sup>

Clarke's collection was continually evolving in a highly personal manner. As a collector he was known for searching out new talent--painters recently arrived in New York or just emerging on the exhibition scene.<sup>31</sup> The merchant networked energetically through the New York art world, as evidenced by Jervis McEntee's recollections noted in the previous chapter. He referred fellow collectors to artists of particular interest, and sold work to friends. Often arriving at shows early to purchase work, he also frequently went directly to the studios of his artist friends, from whom he often commissioned work. He also

bought and sold at auctions or through dealers.<sup>32</sup> For example, Clarke's memorandum book notes that six works were sold to the Kurtz Gallery as of January 31, 1879, though the actual purchaser or auction sale that may have included them is not recorded. Clarke also sold sometime before April 1879 McEntee's Arch of Nero and Bridge of Constantine, Rome to an "REM," presumably Rufus E. Moore.<sup>33</sup> Typically Clarke paid small to moderate sums for his acquisitions--in the hundreds of dollars--and though he acquired some of the best work by his favorites artists Winslow Homer, George Inness and Alexander Wyant, his was not a "masterpiece" collection; he was not paying record prices at auctions.

One painter Clarke patronized was Louis Moeller (1855-1930), who memorialized Clarke's parlor in his 1884 painting Another Investment (Fig. 40).<sup>34</sup> An older gentleman (not Clarke) is poised hand in pocket, the newspaper having been cast aside, as he contemplates an array of imported bric-a-brac.<sup>35</sup> While the sitter's eyes focus on a large Chinese incense burner, it is unclear if he is putting his money away after the departure of an anonymous dealer, or perhaps reaching for or putting away a pair of glasses or a magnifying glass. The title suggests a meditation on forms

of investment--financial profit reported in the morning news--and aesthetic profit evident in the collector's quite reverie.<sup>36</sup> The chock-a-block matrix of paintings, piles of rugs, embroideries, portieres, and glistening porcelains seem the very incarnation of Joseph Choate's 1880 advice to the founders of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to "convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery . . . to convert your useless gold into things of living beauty."<sup>37</sup>

The painting undoubtedly depicts many works seen at the American Art Association the year before it was painted. Clarke's paintings are domestic in scale--appropriate for a drawing room, not the salon--comfortably disposed about the piano and furniture like a beautiful tapestry. The floor-to-ceiling columnar, patterned portieres balance the wainscot-to-cap molding stacks of framed canvases. The glittering colors and textures of the paintings, frames, decorative arts, and textiles create an "all over" decorative composition. The effect is as personal and touching as the gentleman's left hand is cradling his right hand.

#### D. William Henry Vanderbilt and American Art

Clarke's exceptional support of American artists and generosity displaying his collection prompted much discussion of the kind found in the Studio:

The people who were at Mr. [William Henry] Vanderbilt's art reception last week and . . . who have seen the pictures of Mr. Clarke at the American Art Gallery this week, will be very apt to make comparisons. . . . the one man dealing out his millions to the gain of the picture dealers of Paris and the other using his thousands to promote the interest of American art and American artists. . . . The one man opens his palace and calls the public in to admire his Pouncely grandeur . . . A motive of personal vanity. The other man takes his collection to a public gallery and exhibits it for the benefit of the public, the artists, and the art students. . . . This is a motive of personal interest in the welfare of mankind.<sup>38</sup>

The December 20, 1883 art reception to which the Studio referred was for the unveiling of renovations to Vanderbilt's picture gallery (Fig. 41). About three thousand guests attended, probably the approximate size of Vanderbilt's social world and the art world, including native artists, combined. In 1863 James Jackson Jarves foresaw the trend that culminated with Vanderbilt's generation: "Within a few months past, it has become the mode to 'have a taste.' Private galleries are becoming almost as common as private stables."<sup>39</sup> Twenty years later he might have written "private museums" to capture the

majesty of the country's two dozen most prominent collectors' residences.<sup>40</sup>

William Henry Vanderbilt (1821-1885), son of the famous Commodore, became the wealthiest man in America upon inheriting his fortune in 1877. The next year Vanderbilt commissioned Herter Brothers to design and furnish a sandstone palace at 640 Fifth Avenue, between Fifty-First and Fifty-Second Streets. His fifteen hundred square-foot picture gallery grew from its initial dimensions of thirty-two by forty-eight feet to encompass several rooms with an uninterrupted vista of some 140 feet; the complex doubled as a ball room for special occasions when the rugs and furniture would be removed and musicians were ensconced in the balconies. Vanderbilt constructed a special entrance on Fifty-First Street to facilitate access on Thursday afternoons to all who requested admission cards in advance.<sup>41</sup> The gallery was stately and public in scale, free of the domestic clutter evident in Clarke's parlor. Vanderbilt's Asian collection was segregated into its own spectacle in his "Japanese parlor," (Fig. 42), a grand collector's cabinet designed "to convince diners on their way back to

the drawing room that if he was familiar with the Renaissance he was also aware of the Far East."<sup>42</sup>

When Edward Strahan published the monumentally unique four-volume tribute to Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection in 1883 and 1884 Vanderbilt's collection included 207 oils and watercolors of which only two by George A. Baker were American.<sup>43</sup> His roster of famous Europeans echoed the taste of his wealthy peers for famed artists validated by the Salon and comparable European imprimaturs: stars like Jean-Léon Gérôme, Edouard Detaille, Rosa Bonheur, and Mihaly Munkascy, and Barbizon masters such as Jean-François Millet, Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, Jules Dupré and Constant Troyon. He was willing and able to spend huge sums of money and assembled a collection of entirely predictable names--indeed, he was expected to do so. It was rumored that he finally bought two Corots only because the lack of one was such a frequently noted lacuna in his collection.<sup>44</sup> Between 1879 and his death in 1885 Vanderbilt visited Europe four times, occasionally buying out of the Salon or artists' studios. On a pilgrimage to the atelier of his favorite painter, Ernest Meissonier, to sit for his portrait,

Vanderbilt spent almost \$190,000--a staggering sum--on seven works that caught his fancy.<sup>45</sup>

Judging from the prevailing opinions of his dependency upon Samuel Avery's guidance we may conclude that Vanderbilt was neither as independent nor as speculative as Clarke--quite the opposite--he invested in "blue chips." So closely did Vanderbilt follow Sam Avery's guidance that the dealer tactfully published denials of his own role in aiding the collector.<sup>46</sup>

Around the time of the Clarke exhibit Avery drafted an article on the New York art world wherein he listed the city's eighty most important collectors.<sup>47</sup> The dealer observed that conservatively estimating the average value of each collection at \$100,000 would yield a total of \$8,000,000 of art in the community (excluding the Metropolitan Museum).<sup>48</sup> Vanderbilt's art was the most valuable in the city--and therefore we may assume, in the land--worth over one million dollars. Avery's list does not distinguish between collectors of American and foreign art, but fewer than ten on his list of eighty, including Clarke, are notable as patrons of American art.

The tone of the Studio's comparison between the two collectors reflects a palpable sense of the discrimination American artists felt in the marketplace. Shortly after occupying his mansion Vanderbilt had invited 2,000 guests to a reception on March 7, 1882. Jervis McEntee wrote in his diary for March 3, 1882:

A card was sent me to an artists reception at Vanderbilt's new home. I will not go. When he was having the catalogue of his collection printed under Avery's supervision the latter went to Putnams and ordered all the American pictures to be left out. The whole affair seems to be managed by Avery.<sup>49</sup>

McEntee's story suggests that the presence of American art would have lowered the status of Vanderbilt's collection and that Avery and others would serve their clients needs by suppressing American art whenever necessary. The prevalence of this attitude would pose a dilemma for the American Art Association as it endeavored to promote an art--and an investment--that was not fashionable among those collectors with the greatest ability and desire to invest.

By the end of its first year the American Art Association had presented a diverse array of American art that included shows ranging from the progressive Society of American Artists to the greatest collection of contemporary American art in private hands, from shows of local art clubs

to the official United States presentation bound for the Munich International Exhibition. From a financial perspective the situation was less exhilarating. Sylvester Koehler's statistical survey of 1883 reports sales of \$3,400 from the Society of American Artists exhibition, sales of \$12,078 from the Sketches and Studies show, and \$1,500 in sales from the Salmagundi Sketch Club's exhibit, for a total of about \$17,000, a fraction of the \$41,000 spent at the National Academy's annual exhibition.<sup>50</sup> A twenty-percent commission rate would yield only about \$3,400 income.

Though there were undoubtedly other commissions during the year, as well as proceeds from a few auctions and profit on sales of orientalia, there was no great promise shown in the sales of American art that year. Distinctly American in its entrepreneurial merging of commercial and philanthropic interests, the American Art Association proceeded on its way towards achieving the admirable goals of "The Encouragement and Promotion of American Art" supported by an occasional auction handled by Kirby, profits on imports from Asia, and Sutton's capital.

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<sup>1</sup>For a brief history of Kirby see George L. McKay, American Book Auction Catalogues 1713-1934: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1937; reprint, Detroit: Gale

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Research Co., 1967), 19-21 (page references are to reprint edition). See also Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 34-40. I have drawn most of the details concerning Kirby's years prior to his association with Sutton and Robertson from two sources: his unpublished autobiography housed with the American Art Association Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., and from his personal scrapbook, lent to me by Wilhelmine Waller, Kirby's granddaughter.

<sup>2</sup>McKay, 29-31.

<sup>3</sup>The trade card is among the memorabilia included in Kirby's personal scrapbook, now in the collection of his granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas (Wilhelmine) Waller.

<sup>4</sup>For more information on George Leavitt and Company see McKay, 15-18.

<sup>5</sup>"Japanese and Chinese Art Treasures Selected by James F. Sutton," (New York: Leavitt and A. A. Vantine and Company: October 23, 1877), Lancour auction catalog no. 631. Titles of auction catalogs will be presented two ways. Underlined title information I have taken directly from the sales catalogs in question. Titles in quotes are taken from Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944).

<sup>6</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2. Kirby's autobiography notes that Sutton instigated his association with Vantine. However, there is some ambiguity in Kirby's memoirs as to whether or not he also may have worked for Vantine shortly after arriving in New York in 1876.

<sup>7</sup>Gustavus Town Kirby, I Wonder Why? (New York: Coward-McCann, 1954), p. 99.

<sup>8</sup>Kirby claims to have invented the "Private View" to which distinguished and promising clients were invited prior to sales. For examples of Kirby's sales at the Kurtz Gallery see "Vantine, A. A., & Co. (New York). Ancient and modern

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Oriental art objects," (New York: Kirby, June 3, 1878), Lancour auction catalog no. 670; "Vantine, A. A., & Co. Ancient and modern objects of art from China, Japan and Turkey," (New York: Kirby, August 19, 1878), Lancour auction catalog no. 673; "Vantine, A. A., & Co. (New York). A most valuable collection of Japanese and Chinese high class objects of art, ancient and modern," (New York: Kirby, November 12, [1878]), Lancour auction catalog no. 676.

<sup>9</sup>For examples of Robertson sales see "Robertson, Richard Austin; and Vantine, A. A., & Co. (New York). Rare and valuable Oriental art objects," (New York: Kirby, November 4, 1880), Lancour auction catalog no. 764; and "Robertson, Richard Austin (Yokohama). Chinese and Japanese art objects," (New York: Kirby, December 1, 1881), Lancour auction catalog no. 827. For an example of a sale for Duveen see "Duveen Brothers (New York & London). Oriental porcelains, antique furniture, bric-a-brac," (New York: Kirby, April 13, 1882), Lancour auction catalog no. 870.

<sup>10</sup>See "Fowler, Edward Philip Parsons. Jersey and Guernsey cows and heifers," (New York: Kirby, March 19, 1878), Lancour auction catalog no. 659, and "Norris, Thaddeus (Philadelphia). Prize medal trout and salmon rods, anglers' implements, etc.," (New York: Kirby, April 26, 1879), Lancour auction catalog no. 702. Like other independent auctioneers, Kirby presumably rented galleries and auction rooms on a temporary basis, perhaps from Vantine, where he conducted his sales at the conclusion of one-, two- or three-day "preview" exhibitions.

<sup>11</sup>Towner, 39-40. Towner dates the move uptown to 1880, but 845 Broadway is noted as Kirby's address in "Japanese Art Treasures," New York Evening Express, 11 December 1879, p. 3. Towner may have read that Robertson and Sutton joined Kirby in founding Thomas E. Kirby and Company in George McKay's American Book Auction Catalogues 1713-1934: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1937, and supplements 1946 and 1948), 19. However, I have not found any evidence of such a partnership. Kirby's autobiography states that John Ortgies was his partner in Thomas E. Kirby and Company. See Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography."

<sup>12</sup>Both partners signed the catalog for a sale on February 18, 1880: Catalogue of a Most Important Collection [of] French, Spanish, English, [and] Italian Aquarelles Extraordinary (New York: Thomas E. Kirby and Company, February 18, 1880), Lancour auction catalog no. 736. Kirby's obituary in the New York Times incorrectly asserts that John Ortgies was an original partner in the American Art Association, see "T. E. Kirby, Art Auctioneer, Dies," New York Times, 18 January 1924, p. 17. Ortgies retained the Union Square gallery and sales room at 845 and 847 Broadway when Kirby left in 1882 to join Sutton and Robertson at the American Art Association.

<sup>13</sup>See "Gifford, Sanford Robinson. [Artist's sale.] Paintings. Part 1," (New York: Kirby, April 11, 1881), Lancour auction catalogs no. 805-806; and "Gifford, Sanford Robinson. Paintings. Part 2," (New York: Kirby, April 28, 1881), Lancour auction catalog no. 813. Though Church's Niagara Falls had reached a record price of \$12,500 for an American painting in 1876, \$5,100 was an extraordinary price, a record for Gifford, and to my knowledge the second highest price to date for an American picture at auction.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography." It is unclear exactly when Kirby sold his interest to Ortgies, as he returned during the next year to call sales at 845 and 847 Broadway and reviewers continued to associate Kirby's name with the establishment; see for example "Coming Exhibitions," Studio 1 no. 5 (February 1883): 39 and "Art Notes," Art Amateur 8 (March 1883): 86.

<sup>15</sup>"Robertson, Richard Austin (Yokohama). Japanese Art Treasures," (New York: Ortgies, November 12, 1883), Lancour auction catalog no. 955. The next year Kirby called a sale at Ortgies of works by F. Hopkinson Smith and Arthur Quartley; see "Catalogue of art works by Arthur Quartley and F. Hopkinson Smith," (New York: Ortgies, April 25, 1884), Lancour auction catalog no. 993.

<sup>16</sup>Towner, 51. Towner pointed out that Samuel P. Avery used this strategy prior to its use by the AAA.

<sup>17</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 8 (May 1883): 122.

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<sup>18</sup>"Boston Art in New York," Art Amateur 8 (February 1883): 56.

<sup>19</sup>"Boston Art in New York," Studio 1 (27 January 1883): 29.

<sup>20</sup>For more information about the New York Art Club see Sylvester R. Koehler, The United States Art Directory and Year-Book (two volumes in one), vol. 2 (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Company, 1882, and New York: Cassell and Company, 1884; reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1975), 112-113 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>21</sup>Sales figures for this and other 1883 shows are from Koehler's "Statistical Table of Exhibitions," vol. 2, 34-37. For discussion of the Society of American Artists' 1883 exhibition see Jennifer A. Martin Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of The Society of American Artists: 1877-1884" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1983), 149-163.

<sup>22</sup>For information concerning the Salmagundi Sketch Club, see Koehler, vol. 2, 126.

<sup>23</sup>Excepting the case of George Inness discussed below, there is no evidence of any contractual arrangement between the American Art Gallery or the American Art Association and any American artist. Artists exhibited at both establishments and were probably selected on the basis of reputation, friendship, and availability, or were included in group shows organized by art associations or clubs. Kirby's biography implies that Rufus E. Moore may have continued to be involved in the selection of American artists for several years following the dissolution of his partnership with Sutton. "Biography: Thomas E. Kirby," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 1.

<sup>24</sup>See for a review "The Munich Exhibition," Studio 1 no. 21 (May 26, 1883): 216-220.

<sup>25</sup>"A Display of Sketches," New York Times, 11 November 1883, p. 6. For other reviews see "The Sketch Exhibition," Art

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Amateur 10 (December 1883): 8, and articles in the Studio 2 (27 October and 10 November 1883).

<sup>26</sup>"Mr. Clarke's Exhibition," New York Times, 28 December 1883, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup>H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," American Art Journal 8 (May 1976): 52-3, 58.

<sup>28</sup>Clarke's 1872-1881 diary of transactions notes that he bought pictures for his business partner Thomas King, and others including George Seney, for whom some nineteen works were provided. Thomas B. Clarke, "Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke 1872-1879. A memorandum book descriptive of a Collection of Oil Paintings belonging to Thomas B. Clarke (Representing American Art from 1860 to 1881)," pp. 131-151. The Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

<sup>29</sup>Weinberg, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup>"American Art Association," New York Times, 19 January 1884, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup>William Coffin offered observations on Clarke's behavior, based on Coffin's own experience as a newly arrived, unknown painter who received a visit that led to purchases by Clarke. See his introduction to Catalogue of the Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke New York (New York: American Art Association, 1899), 7-13.

<sup>32</sup>See Weinberg, pp. 71-83 for a detailed "Checklist of Paintings Owned by Thomas B. Clarke, 1872-1899" that notes sources, methods of disposal, and prices where known.

<sup>33</sup>Clarke, 51-52. The six works are Worthington Whittredge's On the Plain; Francesco Bensa's Wide Awake and Fast Asleep; Winmair's Marine and Moonlight; Pio Ricci's Love's Entanglement; and R. De Elorriaga's Papal Guard. It is perhaps noteworthy that Whittredge is the only verifiable American among the artists, suggesting that Clarke was pruning his collection of foreign artists.

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<sup>34</sup>For more on Moeller see William H. Gerdts, Louis Moeller, N. A. (1855-1930) A Victorian Man's World (New York: Grand Central Art Galleries, 1984). Gerdts points out that by the time of the AAA exhibition Clarke owned three paintings by Moeller, and was to become the artist's greatest patron, featuring the painter in shows at the Art House and eventually owning at one time or another two dozen of Moeller's canvases, pp. 6, 12-13.

<sup>35</sup>The sitter bears a general resemblance to Samuel P. Avery, who would have been about 62 when Moeller was painting the canvas; compare to Avery in his studio as depicted by Escosura about eight years earlier (Fig. 15).

<sup>36</sup>Gerdts, p. 9, observes that "The process of making art was not his subject, but rather the lives of those who lived with it, and who might make a judgment about it. . . . Moeller's painting was a cerebral art . . . concerned with the intellect rather than the emotion."

<sup>37</sup>Winnifred Howe, A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913): 200.

<sup>38</sup>"Editorial," Studio 2 no. 2 (29 December 1883), 1.

<sup>39</sup>James Jackson Jarves, "Art in America: Its Condition and Prospects," Fine Arts Quarterly Review 1 (London; May-October, 1863): 399-400.

<sup>40</sup>At least ten private galleries are illustrated in Artistic Houses, with many more described by Earl Shinn [Edward Strahan], The Art Treasures of America, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1879-82).

<sup>41</sup>Vanderbilt discontinued this practice in 1884.

<sup>42</sup>Arnold Lewis, James Turner, and Steven McQuillan, The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age: All 203 Photographs from "Artistic Houses" (New York: Dover, 1987), 116.

<sup>43</sup>Earl Shinn [Edward Strahan], Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection, 4 vols. (Boston, New York, and Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1883-84). Baker's The Blonde and Wild

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Flowers were included in the catalog, while his Vanderbilt family portraits were excluded.

<sup>44</sup>Lewis, 23.

<sup>45</sup>For information on Vanderbilt see Louis Auchincloss, The Vanderbilt Era: Profiles of the Gilded Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), and Jerry Patterson, The Vanderbilts (New York: Abrams, 1989).

<sup>46</sup>"In the account of Mr. Vanderbilt's collection of pictures in this morning's Times the writer gives me credit for what I am not entitled to, viz: that I "selected" them for him. Mr. Vanderbilt's collection is not a rapid accumulation. He has been a picture buyer for over 20 years and does not need the services of any person to "select" for him, willing as he may be to be advised by his friends." New York Times, 10 March 1882, cited in Lewis, 21.

<sup>47</sup>Avery's article was published as an extended footnote in Benson J. Lossing, The History of New York City, vol. 2 (New York: Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., 1884), 840-43. Avery's list is biased towards New York collectors of European art; for example Baltimorean Henry T. Walters is excluded as are Boston collectors like Quincy Shaw.

<sup>48</sup>An average value of \$1,000 per object in Clarke's collection would place him close to the \$100,000 average, but his collection was probably worth only half that given what we know he paid for many of the works from Barbara Weinberg's study. Sixteen years later Clarke's painting collection, much enlarged and more mature in character, brought about \$235,000 at auction, yielding an average of \$630 per object, suggesting, again, that a value under \$100,000 in 1883 is reasonable.

<sup>49</sup>Jervis McEntee Diaries, 3 March 1882, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., Roll D180.

<sup>50</sup>Koehler, vol. 2, 34-37.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE EARLY YEARS, 1884-1889

The show of the Thomas B. Clarke collection of American art was the first of many significant special exhibitions organized by the American Art Association during the 1880s. As compared to the exhibitions originated by the relatively moribund Metropolitan Museum of Art, the self-serving membership of the National Academy of Design, or the modest offerings of New York dealers, the AAA mounted a number of innovative, if not provocative, shows of American and European art. The AAA also circulated several of its exhibitions throughout the East and Midwest and thereby extended its influence. Collaterally, the Association published several catalogs worthy of critical notice. Judging from contemporary accounts the Association's exhibition galleries were the most luxurious and comfortable in New York and perhaps the nation. Several AAA shows attracted attendance over 100,000. Finally, the organization managed to package many of its efforts as educational and eleemosynary in purpose, as in the case of the Clarke exhibition, imbuing with dignity and social prestige the business of marketing art.

It appears that James Sutton was the impresario of the AAA's special exhibitions. As a son-in-law of Roland Macy he enjoyed social contacts that opened doors to the best drawing rooms and private salons in America, the majority of which were decorated with European and Asian art, and he was well-informed about contemporary American art from his previous collaboration with Rufus E. Moore. Sutton ultimately favored French art, eventually becoming one of the world's most prominent collectors of Claude Monet, and the increasing number of AAA exhibitions of French art mounted through the 1880s reflects both the prevailing taste in the community as well as Sutton's personal preference as a collector.

#### A. Special Exhibitions, 1884

A "Special Exhibition [of] Representative Pictures by American Artists" launched 1884 at the American Art Association. Among the artists shown were newcomers such as George De Forest Brush, who exhibited An Indian Camp in Winter, and John Enneking, in addition to regulars such as Frank Millet, Dwight Tryon, John Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, Thomas Eakins and Charles Ulrich, who had been seen at

previous shows of "Sketches and Studies" and the Society of American Artists.

In April the Association opened a major exhibition of George Inness. According to Kirby the idea for the show came from Roswell Smith (1829-1892), publisher of the Century magazine, whose daughter had married the artist's son.<sup>1</sup> Wesley Towner attributed the event to the influence of two of Kirby and Sutton's "cronies," Thomas B. Clarke and George I. Seney. Clarke was Inness's foremost patron, as demonstrated by the exhibition of his collection the previous year, and he had certainly persuaded Seney, president of the Metropolitan Bank, to invest in Inness landscapes.<sup>2</sup> The New York Herald published a third version of the events in 1889 wherein Sutton claimed authorship for the idea of an Inness show.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. George Inness Exhibition, 1884

The AAA issued its most significant catalog to date for this retrospective of fifty-seven paintings: "Special Exhibition of Oil Paintings, Works of Mr. George Inness, N.A. . . . including Niagara Falls and Mount Washington." Introduced by Ripley Hitchcock, the volume included excerpts

of reviews and articles from Century and other magazines. Inness's own "A Painter on Painting" was reprinted from the February 1878 Harper's New Monthly Magazine as were selections from a letter he sent to Hitchcock that exposed the painter's opinions of Pre-Raphaelitism and Impressionism:

While Pre-Raphaelitism is, like a measure worm, trying to compass the infinite circumference, impressionism is the sloth enwrapped in its own eternal dullness. Angularity, rotundity involving solidity, air and light involving transparency, space and color involving distance, these constitute the appearances which the creative mind produces to the individualized eye and which the creative mind endorses as reality. A representation which ignores any one of the elements is weak in its subjective and lacking in its objective force and so far fails as giving a true impression of nature.<sup>4</sup>

The exhibition was yet another coup for the organization. In addition to notable collectors like Thomas Clarke and George Seney, among the other twenty lenders to the show were Henry Ward Beecher, Smith College, and the Long Island Historical Society. Thus Inness was demonstrated to have been patronized by important civic and financial leaders as well as by educational institutions. The New York Tribune reported that, "Not to know Mr. George Inness argues one's self a benighted Philistine as regards our native art; and yet we fancy that the broad range of the artist's powers

illustrated in the remarkable exhibition . . . will surprise the confidence even of his friends."<sup>5</sup>

Though not a commercial success, the exhibition demonstrated the continuity of the painter's somewhat experimental approach to landscape. According to Nicolai Cikovsky the show "provided the most comprehensive view of Inness's art to date: a selection of paintings covering almost thirty years, an up-to-date and reliable biography, critical appraisals, and some of Inness's own writings," and may have accelerated Inness's subsequent rise to prominence.<sup>6</sup>

Inness announced in the catalog:

Having entrusted to the American Art Association all business matters relating to the disposal of my works, hereafter all negotiations for the purchase and exhibition of same will be transacted through them exclusively, and all settlements for Pictures, purchased either at my Studio or their Galleries, must be made through the above-named Association.<sup>7</sup>

This appears to be the only instance of the AAA having provided exclusive representation for an artist. Sutton reported details of the arrangement:

I made Mr. Inness a proposition to take all his works on sale for a year, to make him monthly payments . . . to pay all the incidental expenses, to charge no commission and to divide the net profits after the sums paid him had been deducted. . . . The contract was carried out for one year . . . and we came out just even, he paying for the frames we had put on the works unsold.<sup>8</sup>

It is unclear why the arrangement lasted only a year. Aspiring to present a broad range of American art, it may have been impossible for the Association to provide the institutional focus and personal attention the notably mercurial Inness may have demanded. And it is quite probable that Inness was encouraged by fellow artists not to break the tradition of selling out of the studio. It should be noted that this tradition was attractive for at least two reasons apart from any social benefit: it allowed artists to maintain some degree of control over their work while leaving the entire profit in their hands. A fascinating "Open Letter" to James Sutton presumably authored by Clarence Cook, editor of the Studio, appeared in successive issues of that journal during the fall of 1884. The editorial offers reasons why "our rich picture-buyers have for the most part, been all along unwilling to buy American pictures" including the technical weaknesses and pretension of American painting and the fact that "the picture-trade was almost entirely in the hands of foreigners."<sup>9</sup> The missives include a description of the French gallery system:

The system pursued abroad, by which the artist, in order that they may work without the necessity of thinking of a possible purchaser, disposes of the right to all his pictures as fast as they are painted, to a dealer who sells them, at whatever profit they will bear, to anybody who can pay for them, necessarily

deprives the artist of all control over the destiny of his work.<sup>10</sup>

If anything, Inness was the sort of artist who might have been quite willing to give up materialistic concerns and leave the business of selling art in the hands of a broker. But the AAA's relationships with artists were not without friction and Inness may have wished to separate himself from the organization for political as well as financial reasons.<sup>11</sup> In any event, Thomas Clarke assumed responsibility for the artist's professional affairs in 1891, when the merchant retired from business and opened his Art House.<sup>12</sup>

#### C. Facility Growth, 1884

The American Art Association expanded its facilities during the fall of 1884 by connecting the Kurtz building on Twenty-Third Street to the adjacent Bartholdi Hotel that fronted on Broadway; henceforth its address included 6 East Twenty-Third Street and 940-952 Broadway (Fig. 43).<sup>13</sup> Three new galleries more than tripled the exhibition space (Galleries B, C, and D on Fig. 31), and a department for the sale of artists' materials was opened under the management of F. W. Devoe & Company.<sup>14</sup> The Association crowded:

No cost has been spared in furnishing these galleries. The Wilton carpets were supplied by Messrs. Sloane. Messrs. Mitchell & Vance have executed the ornamental iron work--the candelabra, and the supports of the gas-burner frames--and Messrs. Laun & Saile have carved out the quiet but effective mantel-piece, and all the rest of the carved wood-work, from the designs of Mr. Ficken. The ornamental iron work at the main entrance is the work of Messrs. J. S. Conover & Co.<sup>15</sup>

Little is known of Henry Edwards Ficken (d.1929), architect of the expansion, but his design received high praise.<sup>16</sup> The New York Times called the luxurious facilities "the most picturesque locality for the exhibition of art work in the city."<sup>17</sup> The Studio commented:

We have here, for the first time in this country, an almost ideal picture gallery. . . . Ficken, has had a difficult problem to deal with; to unite the practical conditions required for a series of rooms intended exclusively for the exhibition of pictures and statuary, with the ornamental and even luxurious character of a private house. . . . all real pictures are decorative in themselves and need decorative companionship; the real objection to most of our American pictures is, that they are not decorative in themselves, and cannot be made to harmonize with the rooms into which we would like to put them. And we have no doubt that one reason why some of our rich people who spend thousands of dollars in decorating their apartments . . . cannot be persuaded to buy American work, is, they see that in nine cases out of ten, the American picture would knock their "decoration" into a cocked hat. It is, therefore, interesting to see the experiment tried . . . of a gallery where the pictures and their surroundings should make one harmonious whole . . . and where he who has in mind the purchase of a picture should be enabled to judge in some degree how it will look when it comes to be hung on his own walls.<sup>18</sup>

Here, then, the Association asserted the "impressive object-lessons in interior decorations" noted a few years

later in King's Handbook of New York City, which also published four views of the galleries.<sup>19</sup> The galleries were not just designed to display works of art, but to sell works of art by demonstrating how they would appear in a domestic setting.

With its low ceiling, bay window overlooking Broadway and fireplace mantle festooned with sculptures, Gallery C suggested a large parlor or living room (Fig. 44). A view published in Harper's Weekly in 1884 domesticates the 600 square-foot room into a "cozy corner" where two gentile ladies review the current exhibition catalog in light falling through the stained-glass window (Fig. 48).

Gallery D (Fig. 45) resembled the private galleries of the wealthiest picture buyers, precisely the clientele the Association was seeking. Compare, for example, William T. Walters picture gallery, which also opened in 1884 (Fig. 46). Only two, or at most three rows of pictures could be squeezed into the tripartite elevation of wainscoting, hanging zone, and embossed cove ceiling. While the Studio called the galleries of the nearby National Academy of Design "bare and barn-like,"<sup>20</sup> the magazine observed that

the Association's galleries were arranged so that "no picture can by any chance be "skyed."

Charles M. Kurtz, who joined the Association as a gallery manager shortly after the opening of the new galleries, gave his fiancé an idea of the overall effect:

The Art Galleries where I am are the handsomest in this country--if not in the world. . . . The main gallery here has a high, carved vaulted ceiling, with skylights in the center, concealed by a screen of light materials, so that the light, though strong, is soft. The sides are hung with crimson material, below which is a handsomely carved dado of dark wood. In the center of one side is a high chimney with an open fireplace, in which some logs of wood are kept burning, some antique brass and irons. The chimney is a reproduction of an old Dutch chimney from some old castle. . . . The floor is very richly carpeted, and there are a number of superb velvet covered seats here and there, besides several quaint old chairs of a variety of patterns. . . . The carpet and furnishings are of a brownish red, and harmonize splendidly with all the various decorations. The Art Association wishes to make the galleries a fashionable resort, and in this direction, the equipment of the establishment was made almost regardless of expense.<sup>21</sup>

To create this "fashionable retreat" the Association combined under one roof a retail drawing room (Gallery C; fig. 44)--not unlike the private room where Samuel Avery had entertained clients (Figs. 13 and 15)--with a new kind of commercial space (Gallery D; Fig. 45) that domesticated the institutional salon--as seen for instance at Leavitt's Art Rooms (Fig. 20) or the public galleries of the Metropolitan

Museum of Art (Fig. 24)--through interior decoration, furniture, and the psychological warmth of a fireplace.

Wood engravings published by Harper's Weekly (Figs. 47, 48, and 49)<sup>22</sup> advertised for admission-paying customers by depicting the galleries full of well-dressed couples, family groups, and single women. Three generations are spanned by the children, parents and elderly visitors shown in Gallery D (Fig. 47), a subliminal advertisement for family memberships that cost \$10 a season (regular admission 25 cents; individual season ticket \$1). No single men are seen. Women are shown as instructors of husbands and children and the principal readers of educational publications. In two of three images visitors rest on various seating furniture in a quiet, contemplative world-- a "fashionable retreat" far removed from the noise of Broadway and Madison Square below. Finally, we are left remembering the charm of the little girl warming herself at the massive hearth.

In the three new sky-lit galleries visitors found an exhibition of American works collected from New York studios, while downstairs in the old Gallery A was featured an exhibition of 45 works by Americans shown at the 1884

French Salon. Prominent among the Salon pieces shown were Frederick Bridgman's A Hot Bargain, Frederick Dellenbaugh's Encampment on the Sea, and Alexander Harrison's Graves of the Shipwrecked and Le Crépuscule.<sup>23</sup> However, many of the most notable of the sixty-odd paintings by forty-five Americans shown the previous May at the government-sponsored Paris Salon were missing from the New York show. The Studio noted that "the best of the American Salon pictures are bought by our enterprising dealers almost as soon as the Salon opens," and gave as examples the purchases of William Dannat's Quatuor, Bridgman's The Bath at Home, and Julius Stewart's A Five O'Clock Tea, bought by Schaus, Knoedler, and Reichard, respectively.<sup>24</sup>

#### D. Charles M. Kurtz

In mid-December 1884 Sutton hired Charles M. Kurtz (1855-1909) to manage the exhibition galleries. Kurtz had attended the National Academy of Design prior to establishing himself as an editor, art critic, and exhibition manager for various New York newspapers and artists organizations. During the early 1880s he wrote and published Art Academy Notes and managed the newly revived and short-lived American

Art Union, which maintained a gallery at 44 East 14th Street, circulated exhibitions and lent art work to shows around the country, and briefly published a periodical, the Art Union.<sup>25</sup> It is not a coincidence that the American Art Union and AAA both started circulating exhibitions in the 1880s. Among other reasons, the growth of the arts infrastructure, specially the proliferation of facilities like art museums and exposition halls throughout the midwest, coupled with reliable transportation, dramatically increased the flow of art from the east coast, particularly New York, into the rest of the country.

Later Kurtz assisted Halsey C. Ives in the art departments of the Chicago and St. Louis World's Fair, as well as working on the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900. From 1905 until his death he directed the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

Kurtz's letters to his fiancé, then wife, Julia Stephenson, now housed at the Archives of American Art, provide a look behind the scenes at the AAA.<sup>26</sup> After much negotiation Kurtz settled with Sutton on terms that paid him a five per cent commission on all sales while allowing him to continue his outside editorial work and occasional buying

and selling of pictures independent of the Association. Kurtz started his short career at the AAA managing the third annual exhibition of studies and sketches, which ran from December 17, 1884 to February 1, 1885. During the first four days of the exhibition his commissions totaled \$40 on \$800 in sales; as most of the pieces were priced in \$25-50 range two-to-three dozen works were probably sold. The enterprising agent bought a piece by Charles Harry Eaton for himself on speculation.<sup>27</sup> He proudly wrote his fiancé,

I have already introduced a new feature into the business that has found considerable favor in the eyes of the firm. Two parties admired pictures of E. L. Henry, --on exhibition, but not for sale. That same afternoon, I went to Henry's studio, and obtained several pictures of about the same values as those on exhibition. . . . So, you see I do not restrict the business of the gallery to what is on its walls, --but draw upon the studios for anything I have hope of selling. . . . when pictures are so brought in, they feel rather more under obligation to buy something.<sup>28</sup>

Sales decreased considerably after the holidays, and in general during the course of his eighteen months or so of employment Kurtz notes that business was slow.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile Sutton was considering having an orchestra play in the Gallery D once or twice a week, with invitations to "the fashionable schools, ladies seminaries" of Manhattan and Brooklyn."<sup>30</sup>

On January 6, 1885, proceeds from admissions and catalog sales for the sketch exhibition went to the Hospital Fund, a strategy that led to three sales totaling \$300, netting Kurtz \$15. The galleries were crowded during the last week of the show in late January, but he bought the only work sold that week. Ultimately Kurtz deemed the sketch exhibition "unprofitable."<sup>31</sup>

Sutton was apparently impressed by Kurtz and engaged him to visit local studios and organize the next exhibition (in ten days time!) at an annual salary of \$2,000 plus 5% of sales over \$50,000. Other opportunities were presenting themselves to the Association, and Kurtz would soon be working on both the Seney auction and the first Prize Fund Exhibition. By March Kurtz recorded that "Sutton now refers everything relating to picture matters to me, and I have my own way, pretty much."<sup>32</sup>

#### E. Facility Growth, 1885

In 1885 the Association opened a "Moorish" style gallery designed by Ficken of some 2,000 square feet (Fig. 50; Gallery E on Fig. 31). A departure from the generic European style of the grand Gallery D, with its Second

Empire encrustations, Ficken's orientalist essay was a fashionable, if not logical, choice for an organization aspiring to set trends.

The new gallery was reached via a flight of stairs that culminated in an undulating balustrade with dome-topped newel posts. An ornately carved trellis bisected one axis and trisected the other axis. The standard tripartite wall elevation was retained (wainscot, picture zone, and cove ceiling), while short diagonal end walls maximized hanging surface by transforming the rectangular space into an octagon. Vaguely mosque-like lanterns complemented a gas-lighting system that enabled nighttime viewing.<sup>33</sup>

An outgrowth of Orientalism initially pioneered by French painters like J. D. A. Ingres and Gérôme, the Moorish style was popularized in the U.S. during the late 1870s and 1880s by painters and interior design firms such as Tiffany's and Associated Artists. At his death in 1891 Edward C. Moore, president of Tiffany's, left the Metropolitan Museum of Art an impressive collection of Islamic glass and decorative arts that had inspired many designs. From 1879-1883 Louis Comfort Tiffany, Lockwood de Forest, Candace Thurber Wheeler, and Samuel Colman collaborated as

Associated Artists to produce a number of ensembles incorporating Moorish elements into larger decorative compositions that juxtaposed Japanese motifs, Tiffany's inventions in glass, de Forest's revivals of East Indian metalwork and wood carving, and Samuel Colman's refined and occasionally iconoclastic color harmonies.<sup>34</sup> All three visited North Africa in the 1870s, while Colman had also visited Spain and de Forest traveled to the Holy Lands as well as India. Their "Moorish" styles, like that of Ficken, were generic inventions and combinations of Islamic, Saracenic, and Moorish themes with little reference to specific monuments.

American painters had been featuring exotic North African and Near Eastern settings and motifs for some time.<sup>35</sup> At Olana, Frederic Church built a Victorian Moorish palace to accommodate his own painting as well as his old master collection. Frederick Bridgman's reputation rose as he turned his attention to contemporary scenes of Egypt and North Africa like those shown at the American Art Gallery in 1881. Samuel Clemens commissioned Tiffany and Associated Artists to modernize his Hartford mansion in the style in 1881.<sup>36</sup> He had written in Innocents Abroad, 1869, of the thirst for the exotic that possessed middle and upper class

America and virtually defined the late-century cosmopolitan impulse materialized in the AAA's new gallery:

We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign--foreign from top to bottom--foreign from center to circumference--foreign inside and outside and all around--nothing anywhere about it to dilute its foreignness--nothing to remind us of any other people or any other land under the sun. And lo! In Tangier we have found it. Here is not the slightest thing that ever we have seen save in pictures--and we always mistrusted the pictures before. We cannot anymore.<sup>37</sup>

Publication of the monumental Artistic Houses in 1883-84 promoted the Moorish style as fashionable among the rich and famous. Usually enhanced by Persian rugs, hanging lamps, and heavily stenciled walls and ceilings, notable examples included the George Kemp salon, with its "grand piano being made to assume a moresque garb."<sup>38</sup> Views in Artistic Houses of Metropolitan Museum of Art President Henry Marquand's extravagant summer retreat in Newport barely hinted at the splendor of his magnificent New York mansion that included separate rooms with Moorish, Japanese and Grecian themes. Tiffany's Moorish arrangements for his own home included weapons from the Islamic world--rifles, daggers, and swords--while Colman's Japanese ceramics are seen in his library amidst Moroccan-inspired motifs (Fig. 32). The grandest of the Moorish picture galleries was undoubtedly that of Harry and Louisine Havemeyer--a Tiffany

tour de force as well as tribute to endurance of the style into the early 1890s. That the style was deemed perfectly compatible with mainstream French painting was demonstrated in the library of Charles Smith, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose wife painted a copy of Jean-François Millet's best known work, The Angelus, onto the satin portiere hung across the Moorish archway of their library (Fig. 51). Thus the new gallery mimicked the style made fashionable by the rich and famous whose lifestyles were broadcast in Artistic Houses as well as European galleries seen abroad.

#### F. Prize Fund Exhibitions, 1885-1889

During the spring of 1884 the AAA announced plans for a "Prize Fund Exhibition" of American paintings to be mounted the following April, and American artists at home and abroad were encouraged to prepare their best work for the occasion. The Prize Fund was to accumulate from philanthropic subscriptions limited to \$200 per individual, deposited in the United States Trust Company to insure that no profit from the Prize Fund would accrue to the Association itself. Prize Fund subscribers would elect a jury of ten to select

the exhibition and award purchase-prizes of \$2500 for the best paintings; it was hoped six prizes totaling \$15,000 would be available. The exhibited artists would choose a committee of ten to select museums in cities represented by the subscribers to which the prize works would be distributed by lot. Once accessioned, the works would be labeled to indicate their acquisition was through the Prize Fund. An exhibition of the prize paintings and as many others as possible would be circulated to the cities receiving the award-winning paintings.

This scheme, not unlike public subscriptions common in Europe,<sup>39</sup> was immediately applauded for its philanthropic ambition to award American artists purchase prizes to enable donation of their work to American art museums. The Magazine of Art commented:

Hitherto the collections and museums of America, the Corcoran Gallery and the Pennsylvania Academy always excepted, have apparently been the willing receptacles of anything and everything, from an old pot to a modern statue, rather than of works of art produced in America or by American citizens. What few such works they own are unsolicited gifts, and of all the begging that has been done for these institutions, very little, if any, has been done in the interest of American art.<sup>40</sup>

Doreen Bolger has noted that the Prize Fund Exhibitions were a "forceful attempt to justify contemporary American art as a valid objective of museum collecting."<sup>41</sup>

The Prize Fund scheme was not without its detractors. Critics asserted that \$2500 was not sufficient to attract the finest American paintings given that prices at the National Academy of Art occasionally exceeded that sum and major American paintings at the Paris Salon not infrequently commanded \$5000 or more.<sup>42</sup> Of course the detractors looked for hidden profit schemes. That the Association would recoup some of its investment through admissions, catalogue sales, and a fifteen percent commission was clear, but that it would also profit from the circulating show was probably not well understood.<sup>43</sup> The Prize Fund was even suggested to be a plot to ruin the National Academy.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the show appealed to nationalistic values. A jury comprising subscribers promised a more democratic show selection than might be possible with a jury composed of artists. Circulation of the prize paintings established the competition as a truly national event. The Studio prophesied,

Next to the Old Art Union . . . this plan of the American Art Association . . . will be the most important movement yet made in the direction of encouragement to our young painters, and the awakening [of] an interest in the public mind in our native art.<sup>45</sup>

The New York Times verified the free enterprise spirit of the AAA plan: "[It] shows how ready Americans are to substitute co-operative private effort for the much less wholesome aid of European paternal Governments."<sup>46</sup>

This "promising scheme" attracted cash from no fewer than fifty-five individuals and organizations. The list of subscribers included a remarkably broad cross section of collectors and patrons from around the country. Many were associated with the Metropolitan Museum of Art such as successive presidents John Taylor Johnston and Henry Marquand. Others figured among the eighty distinguished collectors enumerated by Samuel Avery for Benson Lossing's 1884 History of New York: Cornelius Vanderbilt, Harry Havemeyer, Charles A. Dana, Samuel M. Barlow, J. Abner Harper, Collis P. Huntington, and Herbert R. Bishop.<sup>47</sup> Avery himself gave to the Prize Fund, as did fellow dealer Michael Knoedler. The opportunity to win a painting for the hometown museum stimulated contributions from the Courier Journal, the Evening Post, and the Southern Exposition Company, all of Louisville, Kentucky, as well as from dealer Henry B. Pettes in St. Louis (both cities received prize works). Baltimore was represented by William T. Walters and

Boston by Quincy A. Shaw. Indeed, as the Studio reported, the AAA "persuaded some of our richest men, men be it remembered, the most of whom have themselves been little in the habit of buying American pictures, to contribute to their scheme."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the subscription committee fell short of its \$15,000 goal, and the AAA had to contribute to bring the total Prize Fund up to \$10,000.

The First Prize Fund Exhibition opened in April 1885. Of almost seven hundred paintings submitted, 168 were accepted. The Magazine of Art confirmed that "It is all but universally agreed that this exhibition is one of the best, possibly the best, so far seen in New York, --referring to American art only . . . and that it contains much more ambitious work than the Academy exhibition,"<sup>49</sup> a judgment borne out by Charles Kurtz's anticipation in March, before the show opened:

"The Prize Fund Exhibition" at the Art Association will in every way be better than the Academy Exhibition this year. Nearly all the artists are holding their best pictures for our "show." We have much handsomer galleries than the Academy galleries, and I am sure our hanging will be done more intelligently--if it is a bit of egotism in me to say so, since I shall probably superintend it myself.<sup>50</sup>

"It may be said without exaggeration that no such complete representation of the work of contemporary American

artists has been seen as is now on view,"<sup>51</sup> reported the Studio. Before the show opened the magazine had commented on the European nature of much American art:

We have the doubtful honor at present of being the only people who will buy any picture rather than one painted by a compatriot, and to such an absurd length do we carry our prejudice that if we buy of an American at all he must first have made a foreigner<sup>52</sup> of himself, and hail from some Munich, Paris, or Rome.

Concern over the aesthetic postures of expatriate painters--especially their susceptibility to French and German influence--informed much of the criticism of the five Prize Fund exhibitions. In this respect the exhibitions precipitated much thought on the "Americaness" of native art of the 1880s.

The four \$2,500 prizes went to Alexander Harrison for Le Crépuscule, allotted to the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts;<sup>53</sup> R. Swain Gifford for Near the Coast, given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Henry Mosler for The Last Sacrament, awarded to the Louisville Exposition;<sup>54</sup> and Frank M. Boggs for A Rough Day, Entrance to the Harbor of Honfleur, sent to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Although every reviewer encouraged the enterprise, most saw fit to disagree with one or more of the jury's choices. Readers

were reminded that art amateurs--the subscribers--not art professionals--the artists--had selected the prizes.

Harrison's marine received unanimous support.

Exhibited at the Salon the previous year, it was expected to win a prize in Paris until it became clear that no Americans would be so honored due to French indignance over United States art tariff legislation.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the French government had tried to buy the painting for the Luxembourg Museum, but Harrison's price of \$5000 was too high.

Harrison was willing to take less for his painting in New York only because it was going to an American museum. The most controversial selection, Mosler's figure piece, was disparaged as too European and unoriginal, and not "at all remarkable except for such academic qualities as characterize hundreds of paintings of their class to be seen every summer in Paris or Munich."<sup>56</sup> All of the jury's awards went to artists who had studied abroad. Thus the choices reflected not only the increasingly cosmopolitan character of American painting, but also the cosmopolitan tastes of the subscribers, most of whom collected only European art.

The Art Amateur made note of William M. Chase's A Gray Day at Zantvoort, "the result of transitory experiments with

strange media;" Charles Sprague Pearce's Return from the Pasture; and the only portrait in the show, J. A. Weir's Portrait of a Lady: "the pale sensitive face of a lady in black, in profile, relieved against a gray green background of old tapestry."<sup>57</sup> Artists that the journal regretted not seeing in the show included Edwin Austin Abbey, Robert Blum, William Dannat, Daniel R. Knight, Charles Reinhardt, John Sargent, Winslow Homer, and James M. Whistler.

Three days after the show opened, Charles Kurtz confided to his finance:

The Prize Fund Exhibition is the best collection of American pictures ever shown in this country, without doubt. Thus far it has been exceedingly well attended, --the number of visitors almost equaling the number we had on some of the days of the Seneby picture exhibition. . . . Since we opened, on Saturday, we have sold about \$8,000 worth of pictures, and I have offers on several now. The present exhibition is a very hard one to sell anything from, on account of the large average size of pictures, and the exceptionally high prices asked for them.<sup>58</sup>

Within two weeks he had sold 19 pictures for some \$9,000.<sup>59</sup>

During the summer of 1885, while most of the paintings that were not sold went on tour to the cities allotted the prize paintings, the AAA organized a Prize Fund for Watercolors. Apparently the only such exhibition ever mounted, the Prize Fund for Watercolors opened in November 1885 together with an encore presentation of a few of the

spring Prize Fund pictures. Four prizes of \$250 were awarded to the watercolorists by popular vote, each visitor to the show casting a ballot. First place went to Henry Farny for an untitled watercolor depicting an Indian tribe torturing a hapless trapper. The choice proved again "the pleasure people take in works of art that tell a very definite story,"<sup>60</sup> reported the New York Times, and the selection certainly stands in marked contrast to those of the sophisticated cosmopolites that juried paintings the previous April. The consistency of popular taste for native subjects and home training was born out by awards for watercolors to George Smillie for September on the New-England Coast, Frank Knox Marton Rehn for An Off Shore Breeze, and Hamilton Gibson for Evening Red. The Critic found few of the watercolors to be of interest and bemoaned the French nature of much of the rest of American art:

There is Brittany in the air--not real Brittany, but the Brittany of Simmons, Grayson and others. American art *à la mode de Bretagne* does not interest us nowadays. We are tired of these peasant painter's-models, who are wooden in other respects than as to their shoes.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, Charles Kurtz supervised the circulation of the main Prize Fund show to Louisville, St. Louis, and Boston. In an October 1885 accounting of expenses and

profits from the display at Louisville's Southern Exposition, Kurtz reported ten pictures sold for a total of \$2010, with seven and a half percent commissions going to both the AAA and the Exposition. Only one of the ten canvases brought the price listed in the catalog; all others were apparently negotiated through Kurtz.<sup>62</sup>

Kurtz's report to Sutton and Kirby from Louisville hints at some contractual dissatisfactions on the part of the Southern Exposition Company and raises questions about his responsibilities for out-of-pocket expenses. Kurtz had many friends in Louisville, as he had directed the Art Union's presentation at the Southern Exposition in 1883 and 1884; in fact he had first met his wife at the 1883 Exposition. How the issues were resolved is unknown since Kurtz's return home to New York silences his correspondence on the matters.

The Second Prize Fund Exhibition was to be featured again the following summer at the Louisville Southern Exposition. However, sometime between October 1885 and May 1886 Kurtz broke with Kirby and Sutton, and the young manager set about organizing an independent exhibition while Louisville negotiated with the Association over the size of

their subscription (Sutton requested \$2,000) and unconditional acceptance of the picture awarded.<sup>63</sup> In May 1886 a series of telegrams from William Semple in Louisville anxiously inquired if Kurtz could curate a separate exhibition and reported that "Sutton said repeatedly that he could block the way for our getting pictures from the artists if we tried it on our own account thro' you."<sup>64</sup> In May Semple wrote that negotiations had collapsed and authorized Kurtz to proceed, adding, "Sutton and Kirby have trifled and "jockeyed" with us so long and have so often gone back upon their promises . . . Sutton, I am inclined to think, would if alone, be fair enough but he is influenced strongly by Kirby, who I think is a "skunk" and we don't want to have anything to do with him"<sup>65</sup>

By June Kurtz had commitments for 140 pictures, not counting those he expected to borrow from Clarke, Seney, and dealer Gustav Reichard.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately Edward Simmons' Mother and Child was awarded to Louisville and many of the Prize Fund pictures did appear at the Southern Exposition, though Kurtz apparently was responsible for organizing the show independently of the Association. Yet the situation was symptomatic of growing problems between the AAA and the

American artists they sought to promote, as observed by

Kurtz:

Sutton announces in the papers that the Prize Fund show will close August 5. That will enable us to get the pictures in time after all . . . The artists, as a rule, are becoming very much disgusted with the Association, --notwithstanding the many kind words I always have in its favor. Wyant today told me he was done with the institution; Inness is also through with it, and in fact there are few men (who didn't get prizes) who will have much to do with it in the future.<sup>57</sup>

These events help explain why, despite the critical success of the first Prize Fund Exhibition, the number of subscribers to the second show declined from fifty-five to twenty-four while the fund dropped to \$8,000.<sup>58</sup> The fall in subscriptions and critical attention would continue through the last three shows of 1887, 1888, and 1889.

The Second Prize Fund Exhibition of 302 paintings and sculptures opened on May 7, 1886. Four purchase awards of \$2000 went to Charles Ulrich for his Glass Blowers of Murano, given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Frank Millet for At the Inn, allotted to the Union League Club; Clifford P. Grayson for Midday Dreams, sent to the Corcoran Gallery, a new subscriber; and Simmons Mother and Child awarded to Louisville.

In informing the AAA of its choices, the jury wrote:

The most gratifying evidence of this advance [in American art promoted by the Prize Fund] is found in

the increased attention paid to the study of the human form in its noblest aspects and all its varying expressions. This has been emphasized in our choice.<sup>69</sup>

This emphasis on figure painting indicated a possible reaction to the previous year's awards, when three out of four prizes went to marines or landscapes. The incentive of the Clarke Prize for figure painting shown at the National Academy also may have stimulated interest in the genre.

Awards distributed at the Prize Fund Exhibitions and the National Academy annuals were frequently discussed together.

The Art Interchange offered a typical commentary:

That very many of the most successful of these works have been painted abroad, and by men whose themes and inspirations are not at all "American," is not to be wondered at; and it would have a ruinous effect to have narrowed the [Prize Fund] competition, as in the Clarke and Hallgarten prizes, to works strictly national in subject and locality. Art is cosmopolitan.<sup>70</sup>

The choice of four European figure subjects for prizes reiterated the consonance of values between the prize-winning American artists who studied abroad and the affluent, cosmopolitan jurors. Millet's British costume piece was a recognizable portrait of an English country inn that he and his friends such as Edwin Abbey frequented. Ulrich's picturesque composition of Italian glassblowers featured a challenging juxtaposition of interior and exterior light in an exotic setting, though there was some

agreement that another of his pieces, Lace-Makers of Burano, was more worthy of a prize. The Art Age said of Grayson's picture of a peasant woman who has fallen asleep against her child's bed from the fatigue of peeling potatoes: "It is seldom that an American painter succeeds in infusing into his work the proletarian idea on which an entire school of French art, with Millet at its head, is based."<sup>71</sup> In contrast, other critics questioned the award to Grayson for Midday Dreams, described as a rather poor French peasant painting. Due to the European character of the show, several critics shared with Mariana van Rensselaer concern over the dearth of "international" pictures by Americans, pictures combining the best of European style with American expression.<sup>72</sup>

The Second Prize Fund introduced another class of prizes, gold medals worth \$100 each, ten of which were awarded by a committee of exhibiting artists to their peers. This move acknowledged the need for the artists to speak out on the merits of their own work. Much to Kirby's chagrin, however, he discovered that the medals were occasionally converted to cash by melting them down.

The Third Prize Fund Exhibition opened April 30, 1887, and included 242 paintings and sculptures. The number of subscribers declined from twenty-four to twenty-two, and only two purchase prizes of \$2000 were awarded, one to Charles Davis for Late Afternoon, which went to the Union League Club, and one to Edward Gay for Broad Acres, sent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Perhaps the jury rewarded landscape painting since figure painting had swept all the prizes the year before. The Art Amateur suggested that the choices represented a compromise between those favoring the French school, represented by Davis, and those favoring American methods, epitomized by Gay (even though Gay had studied in Karlsruhe, Germany).

Notable among winners of the gold medals was Robert Blum, whose Venetian Lacemakers attracted much acclaim. Albert Ryder's Flying Dutchman was frequently noted, as were a flower piece by J. A. Weir and The Artist by Charles Ulrich. Olin Warner's Diana and Edward Kemeys's animal groups were esteemed by the Critic.<sup>73</sup> Yet, interest in the show waned; the reduction in the number of prizes was accompanied by a corresponding decline in critical attention, and the Art Amateur exposed problems with the show:

It will be surprising if the erratic awards by the anonymous Prize Fund committee this year do not affect seriously in [the] future the quality of the pictures to be sent in. Especially just now, when the subscriptions seem in danger of "petering out," affording the means only of two prizes instead of five. . . . The falling off of subscriptions . . . from \$10,000 to \$4,000 indicates dissatisfaction on the part of the subscribers . . . chiefly . . . those out of town, who may well doubt that all "the art museums or art institutions in the several cities represented in the subscription" have been fairly treated. It is generally known . . . that the New York Union League Club--which certainly cannot fairly be called either an "art museum" or "art institution"--was awarded last year one of the prizes, F. D. Millet's admirable "Inn Interior" . . . by a private bargain with certain members of the Union League, who subscribed on the express condition that this particular picture should go to their club. That the Union League Club is again this year awarded one of the prize pictures when there are only two . . . would indicate that the subscribers to the Prize Fund are narrowed down to this city and that there are not many of them even here.<sup>74</sup>

Private problems behind the scenes with Louisville the previous year were compounded by the public decision to award Millet's canvas to the Union League Club, neither an art museum nor art institution, but a private gentlemen's club. And favoritism in the choice of destination for a particular picture had apparently displaced the allocation process initially based on lot. That the award committee for the third show remained anonymous was yet another symptom of increasing controversy from which the Prize Fund exhibitions never recovered.

The Fourth Prize Fund Exhibition, which opened in May 1888, presented 338 pieces, a considerable increase over the

168 that filled the galleries for the first show in 1885. But the number of subscribers plummeted to ten. Julian Weir won the sole cash prize of \$2000 for Idle Hours, given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Perhaps the jury saw in this portrait of Weir's wife and daughter the "international" quality that Mariana Van Rensselear had sought in the Second Prize Fund show. Indeed, as the son of the distinguished American artist, Robert W. Weir, and a student of Gérôme, Weir manifested artistic ideals of both the Old and the New Worlds. Four gold medals were awarded, including one for the best sculpture to C. E. Dallin for The Indian Hunter.

The Fourth Prize Fund Exhibition continued to attract a scattering of large Salon paintings, but generally artists submitted smaller, more marketable work. Alexander Harrison, for example, whose seascape had won a prize in the first show, submitted two studies, one for In Arcadia and one of waves perhaps reminiscent of his salon-scaled prize winner. Birge Harrison received notice for his large In the Forest of Compiègne. William M. Chase's New York landscapes were highly praised. However, a decline in quality was visible to many reviewers.

The Fifth Prize Fund Exhibition, held in May and June 1889, was the last. No list of subscribers was published. As three gentlemen from Buffalo contributed the \$2000 award, the Buffalo Academy of Fine Arts was given H. R. Poore's prize-winning Night of the Nativity. Disappointment with Poore's painting matched enthusiasm for George de Forest Brush's Moose Chase. Here, the critics felt, was "an American picture--American in subject and feeling that is, not, we hope, in style."<sup>75</sup>

The Prize Fund exhibitions lasted five years, during which some \$30,000 in cash was dispersed together with \$2,000-3,000 of gold bullion. The dozen American paintings distributed to art museums and clubs insured notoriety for the artists and the AAA. Circulation of the shows stimulated discussion on American art around the country. George Sheldon wrote in his 1888 Recent Ideals of American Art, "That . . . the annual prize exhibition of the American Art Association has exerted a wholesome influence upon the rising school of national painters no competent observer is likely to deny."<sup>76</sup>

However, there were inherent problems in the concept as well as issues behind-the-scenes exposed for us by Charles

Kurtz. In addition to interpersonal relationships between Sutton and Kirby and the American artists they sought to represent, perhaps the fact that wealthy contributors of the prize funds--few of whom collected American art--awarded the prizes led to a decline of interest on the part of the artists. Two thousand dollars was certainly less than many artists received for their best work. Further, the desire to include more artists and more salable, smaller artworks worked against the general quality of the show. The Prize Fund Exhibitions possibly competed with the Society of American Artists for good pictures in 1886 and 1887; their shows probably had more in common than either had with National Academy annuals during these years. It is uncertain which group lost interest in the Prize Fund first: the subscribers or the artists. Without the commitment of both partners, the endeavor was doomed to fade away.

Ironically, the show failed to stimulate a clear notion of what was "American" about American art. In fact, the Prize Fund shows demonstrated the predominantly European taste of prominent collectors and correspondingly cosmopolitan aesthetic stances of most American artists; eleven of twelve prize winners in the five Prize Fund

Exhibitions had European training. The shows reflected cross-currents of "American" and "cosmopolitan" art, though the latter generally prevailed, except in the case of the popular vote for watercolors in 1885. In any event, in April 1886 the show that preceded the Second Prize Fund exhibition had signaled a decisive expansion of both the Association's mission and marketing strategy.

G. Paul Durand-Ruel and  
the Impressionist Exhibition, 1886

The AAA's collaboration with Paul Durand-Ruel in 1886 to present some 289 paintings as the "Special Exhibition of Works in Oil and Pastel by The Impressionists of Paris" resulted in one of the most extraordinary exhibitions mounted in New York during the nineteenth century. The story of the organization of the exhibition in Paris, its reception in New York, and its effects on American art and collecting addresses many of the issues central to understanding the dynamics of American taste as well as the business of its development. For the AAA the exhibition signaled the importance of three issues for its future: the market for French art; the impact on that market of tariff

legislation; and the personal entry of Durand-Ruel to the New York art world. From an artistic standpoint, "With the enormous impact of the Durand-Ruel exhibition of 1886," William H. Gerdtz confirms, "American art would never be the same."<sup>77</sup>

That Sutton was seeking new merchandise to sell on Madison Square, and that his personal preference for French art was eclipsing his taste for American cannot be doubted. Likewise, Paul Durand-Ruel, well known in this country for his support of the Barbizon School, was seeking new buyers for the Impressionists he had more recently taken on with little market success. In 1883 the Frenchman brought to Boston some eighteen Impressionist works for the "Foreign Exhibition," the largest American show of the French avant-garde to date. Durand-Ruel visited New York that year and may have then reconnoitered the AAA and met James Sutton.<sup>78</sup>

In Paris late in 1885 Sutton invited Durand-Ruel to present an exhibition on Madison Square the following spring.<sup>79</sup> Apparently near bankruptcy, Durand-Ruel welcomed the proposal.<sup>80</sup> Among the obstacles to be overcome was the thirty percent tariff on works of art imported into the United States, probably the most contentious issue in the

international art market in 1886.<sup>81</sup> Increasing the duty from ten to thirty percent in 1883 was the American response to the French ban on importation of American pork in 1881. While American collectors were estimated to have increased their purchases in Paris fivefold from 1878 to 1882, from three million to fifteen million dollars, the effect of the tariff was to diminish the annual value of French art imported to the United State between 1882 and 1884 from almost 9.6 million francs down to 3.4 million francs.<sup>82</sup> Amidst these international trade issues, protectionists argued that the ad valorem duty on imported works of art was in the best interests of American artists seeking to sell their art at home. Led by the Society of American Artists in New York and Congressman Belmont in Washington, D. C., "Free traders" opposed to the tax argued for the educational value and stimulus to competition that European works of art brought to the United States. Thus the tariff was enmeshed in a matrix of international political, economic, and aesthetic conflicts with direct effect on the New York art market.

Remarkably, Sutton managed to have Durand-Ruel's show brought to New York duty-free as an "educational"

exhibition, with the understanding that duty would be paid on any works of art subsequently sold in New York.<sup>33</sup> Given the philanthropic appearance of the previous year's Prize Fund Exhibition and the challenging nature of Impressionist painting which mitigated against the prospect of many sales, the duty-free exemption was plausible, though controversial.

Opening on April 10, 1886, the exhibition of Impressionists elicited both positive and negative criticism. However, Durand-Ruel asserted that, in fact, Americans were more supportive than his own countrymen:

Since I was almost as well known in America as in France for having been one of the first defenders of the great painters of 1830, the public came to examine carefully and without prejudice the works of my new friends. It was presumed that these works had some value since I had continued to support them.<sup>34</sup>

The educational values of exposing New Yorkers to the French avant-garde notwithstanding, the show constituted a threat to the financial interests of Manhattan dealers who specialized in the academic European masters and the Barbizon school that, ironically, Durand-Ruel already had helped promote in the United States. Wesley Towner paraphrased the dealers' growing animosities towards Sutton and the AAA:

Bringing all those subversive paintings into the country under bond [exempting them from duty] was a

shrewd trade trick. . . . The bonding privilege was intended for public institutions devoted to cultural advancement. The AAA, for all its high-sounding propaganda, was backed by R. H. Macy's son-in-law [Sutton]. Was it not therefore in reality the picture-dealing branch of Macy's? A very pretty and safe speculation it was indeed for Macy's, disguised as The American Association for the Promotion and Encouragement of Art, to import cargoes of expensive art works free of duty until they were actually sold.<sup>35</sup>

As a result of such innuendo as well as popular interest, the show, scheduled to be replaced at the American Art Galleries by the Second Prize Fund Exhibition, was transferred to the National Academy of Design in May and a revised catalog published. This move effectively neutralized the dealers' charges of abuse of the duty-free exemption, since the Academy was a duly constituted educational institution. At the same time, the change in venue enhanced the prestige of the show, the Academy, in effect, lending its imprimatur to the endeavor.

Americans already owned a few Impressionist pictures, as attested to by the loan of twenty-one additional works to the National Academy show by collectors such as Alexander Cassatt, Erwin Davis and Louisine Havemeyer.<sup>36</sup> Durand-Ruel eventually paid a total of \$5500 duty for about nineteen works sold at a value of approximately \$18,000, about a fifth of the \$82,000 total value of the exhibition.<sup>37</sup>

William K. Fuller, Erwin Davis, Alden Weyman Kingman, Albert Spencer, Cyrus Lawrence, Harry Havemeyer, and James Sutton all bought from Durand-Ruel's show.<sup>88</sup>

The show's biggest seller was Monet. Sutton soon began purchasing paintings both for himself and on behalf of the AAA, and he eventually held one of the most extensive collections of Monet's work in America, owning as many as forty at one time. According to Frances Weitzenhoffer, whose analysis of American collectors of Monet offers insight into American taste and character, after Sutton retired from active partnership in the AAA in the mid-1890s he devoted himself to dealing and collecting Monets.<sup>89</sup> Journalist and art historian Denys Sutton asserts that James Sutton (no relation) was the first American dealer to realize the commercial potential of the Impressionists and reports:

In September 1893 Camille Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien that Sutton owned 120 paintings by Monet and that he had turned into Durand-Ruel's competitor: 'they fight on our backs' he added. Confirmation of Sutton's appreciation of Monet was provided on 25 November, 1898 when Monet wrote to Durand-Ruel that the American had come to see him and made him an offer for some ten Cathedrals.<sup>90</sup>

In fact, there was eventually concern that Sutton was overstocked in Monets, as reported in the elder Pissarro's letter to son Lucien of September 15, 1893:

I was introduced at Chène's to an American dealer interested exclusively in the painters of 1830. He admitted to me that a great step had been taken forward since then. "Well then," said Chène, "get something before it is too dear.!" "Oh!" said the dealer, "we are not that confident. Sutton has too many Monets. If he doesn't make a good deal soon, it may turn out to be a poor investment."<sup>91</sup>

Wesley Towner discovered that "As long as the AAA continued in the retail porcelain and picture business, one of the rooms containing things for private sale was hung with the works of Degas and the impressionists."<sup>92</sup> Thus, as a result of the exhibition the AAA began working side-by-side with Durand-Ruel in the marketing of the French avant-garde art.

Impressed by the prospects offered by the American market, Durand-Ruel arranged for a second exhibition to be held at the AAA the following year, 1887. Discontent over the duty-free status Sutton sought had amplified. Charles Kurtz, by November of 1886 in the employ of Charles Sedelmeyer, one of the AAA's most ambitious competitors, confided to his wife that "Forman of the Met. Museum told me of some of their tricks with the Custom House, and I am going to have the matter investigated and written up."<sup>93</sup> The Association's next stratagem was to incorporate the "American Art Association for the Promotion and

Encouragement of Art" to post a bond for the show with the stipulation that works were imported for exhibition only, with no sales allowed.<sup>94</sup> Presumably duty would be paid on individual pieces as they were sold, rather than on the entire exhibition when it arrived in New York. However, the cabal of Manhattan dealers succeeded in convincing customs authorities to require the dealer to return all the works to France imported under the duty-free bond; thus paintings sold to Americans from the show would have to be imported twice. The constant struggle over the tariff undoubtedly encouraged Durand-Ruel to establish his own base of operations in New York.

Legal delays prevented presentation of the second exhibition at the Association. Instead the AAA previewed for a week in late April 1887 a group of Impressionist and other paintings Durand-Ruel was sending to William P. Moore's Art Gallery for auction. A clever effort to generate interest in the "educational" show that opened two weeks later at the National Academy and generate much-needed cash, the auction sale was a flop. The New York Times reported that few buyers were present and bidding was "sluggish,"<sup>95</sup> while the Art Amateur cautioned readers that

the newspaper reports of the sale were exaggerated, with few pictures sold.<sup>36</sup> Monets were alleged to have sold in the \$1250 to \$1500 range, while Renoirs and Boudins supposedly went for \$275 to \$370. At those prices, considerably below the thousands spent on Barbizon and French academic paintings, Sutton must have thought they were at least as attractive an investment as comparably priced American pictures.

The following year, 1888, Durand-Ruel opened his own gallery in New York. After temporary quarters a block west of the AAA at 28 West Twenty-Third Street, he decorated a series of apartments (*drawing rooms*) at 297 Fifth Avenue (Figs. 52 and 53). In 1894 he moved uptown to a building owned by Harry Havemeyer at 315 Fifth Avenue. Once established in New York the dealer certainly bought and probably sold paintings at AAA auctions, while Sutton continued to buy from him in New York and Paris.

As Durand-Ruel's network of American collectors and contacts expanded, so too did his artistic program in New York. It could be said that his first exhibition in New York, in 1886, presented the avant-garde in its most concentrated form. He seeded his 1887 show with more

Barbizon paintings as well as works by Delacroix and other historic figures. In the 1890s he presented exhibitions of old master paintings as Americans' connoisseurship expanded concomitantly with their breadth of interests. The French dealer also supported American art, giving John La Farge, Mary Cassatt, Robert Reid, and Philip Hale one-person shows during the 1890s, premiering *The Ten* in 1898, and mounting the first major exhibition of American painting seen outside the world's fairs and salon at his Paris Gallery in 1891.

Thus the AAA not only brought Impressionism to America, but stimulated Durand-Ruel to establish a foothold in New York, where the firm remained a presence until closing its gallery at 12 East 57th Street in 1960. And while Durand-Ruel's artistic program initially emphasized challenging contemporary French art, during the 1890s it accommodated itself, as did the AAA, to increasing interest in old master painting and exhibiting French and American artists together as colleagues.

One might ask if there was any negative response to the AAA's abandonment of its original mission to promote American art when it collaborated with Durand-Ruel to present the Impressionist exhibition, but there appears to

have been silence on this issue. Perhaps contemporary critics were not surprised by the AAA's engagement with European art because they knew Sutton and understood his ambitions. The internationalization of the program may have seemed logical.

The Impressionist show must also be seen in relation to AAA auctions; as will be discussed below, by 1886 the Association was managing auction sales that featured French and other European superstars. Profits from their growing auction business increasingly supported the continuation of the Prize Fund and other exhibitions of American art.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, Address of Mr. Thomas E. Kirby (New York: American Art Association, 1922), 7. Discussing Inness, Kirby also relates that Inness's A Gray Lowery Day [also known as A Gray Lowering Day] was removed from the artist's easel before he could 'spoil' it with continued revisions. The next year Inness's entry into the first Prize Fund Exhibition--which it was thought he might win--was abandoned after repeated revisions in Kirby's office (pp. 8-9). Nick Cikovsky has confirmed the likelihood of Kirby's reports; Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., interview by author, 13 November 1986, Washington, D. C.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 46-7. Clarke's memorandum book notes that he had acquired at least two paintings by Inness for Seney by 1881; Thomas B. Clarke, "Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke 1872-1879. A memorandum book descriptive of a Collection of Oil Paintings belonging to Thomas B. Clarke (Representing American Art from 1860 to 1881)," p. 151, The Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

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<sup>3</sup>"Home Artists' Paris Exposition Contributions . . . Mr. Inness Writes Another Letter," New York Herald, 10 March 1889, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>American Art Association, Special Exhibition of Oil Paintings, Works by George Inness, N. A. . . . including Niagara Falls and Mount Washington (New York: American Art Association, 1884), 13. Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. calls Inness's letter "the most important single surviving autobiographical document." See Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., George Inness (Praeger: New York, 1971), 42.

<sup>5</sup>Cited in Thomas Norton, 100 Years of Collecting in America: The Story of Sotheby Parke Bernet (New York: Abrams, 1984), 22.

<sup>6</sup>Cikovsky, 42. It is somewhat ironic that, as Trevor Fairbrother notes, the 1884 exhibition exposed Inness's affinities with the younger group of painterly artists influenced by Impressionism; see Trevor Fairbrother, "George Inness," in A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), 306.

<sup>7</sup>American Art Association, 15.

<sup>8</sup>"Home Artists' Paris Exposition Contributions," 16.

<sup>9</sup>"American Art. An Open Letter. I," Studio new series no. 4 (27 September 1884): 43-45; "American Art. An Open Letter. II," Studio new series no. 5 (11 October 1884): 55-57; "American Art. An Open Letter. III," Studio new series no. 6 (25 October 1884): 69-71.

<sup>10</sup>"American Art. An Open Letter. II," Studio new series no. 5 (October 11, 1884): 57.

<sup>11</sup>As I will discuss below, by 1886, as plans were underway for the Second Prize Fund Exhibition Sutton and Kirby's relationships with some American artists appear to have been deteriorating, which may have also affected their relationship with Inness.

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<sup>12</sup>H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," American Art Journal 8 (May 1976): 64.

<sup>13</sup>Edward D. Watson reports that the Bartholdi Hotel was not built until 1885; presumably the AAA availed itself of the opportunity to construct new space that may have opened before the hotel was ready for occupancy. Edward D. Watson, New York Then and Now (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976), 158.

<sup>14</sup>The original gallery in the Kurtz building was approximately 33 x 48 feet (1584 square feet); the three new galleries measured 16 x 38 feet (592 s.f.), 16 x 38 feet (608 s.f.), and 35 x 75 feet (2625 s.f.). The location of the art supplies department has not been determined.

<sup>15</sup>American Art Association, Inauguration of New Galleries: Works from the Salon of '84 and Other American Paintings Contributed by the Artists (New York: American Art Association, 1884), iii-iv.

<sup>16</sup>Born in London, Ficken studied in Europe until he emigrated to the U. S. in 1869. Ficken worked as draftsman for the firms of Potter and Robertson and then Charles Smith before establishing his own firm in New York in 1883. For more information see Eileen Michels, "Late Nineteenth-Century Published American Perspective Drawings," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 31 no. 4 (December 1972): 294-5, and "Ficken, Henry Edwards," Who Was Who in America, vol. 1 (Chicago: Marquis, 1968): 394,

<sup>17</sup>"American Art Association," New York Times, 16 November 1884, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>"The American Art Association," Studio new series no. 7 (8 November 1884): 73-74.

<sup>19</sup>King's Handbook of New York City, (Boston: Moses King, 1892): 282.

<sup>20</sup>"The American Art Association," Studio new series no. 7 (8 November 1884): 73.

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<sup>21</sup>Charles M. Kurtz Papers, Correspondence, 17 December 1884, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. More will be said of Kurtz later in this chapter.

<sup>22</sup>"The American Art Association," Harper's Weekly 28 (15 November 1884): 753 and illustrations.

<sup>23</sup>For reviews of the show see "The American Art Association," New York Times, 16 November 1884, p. 4; "The American Art Association. Inaugural Exhibition. II," Studio new series no. 8 (22 November 1884): 85-87; and "The American Art Association. Inaugural Exhibition. III," Studio new series no. 9 (6 December 1884): 100-102.

<sup>24</sup>"The American Art Association. Inaugural Exhibition. II." Studio new series no. 8 (22 November 1884): 85.

<sup>25</sup>For more on Kurtz's career see Arleen Pancza-Graham, "Charles Kurtz & the Glasgow School: An American Critical Response," Archives of American Art Journal 31 no. 3 (1991): 14-25. For details regarding the revived American Art Union see Koehler, 110-111.

<sup>26</sup>I thank Judy Throm at the Archives of American Art for calling my attention to the Kurtz papers at the Archives and for facilitating my access during their processing. Sandra Underwood, Professor at St. Mary's College of Maryland, provided transcriptions of many of Kurtz's letters and offered observations about the Kurtz's employment by the AAA. I am indebted to Underwood, whose recent article on Kurtz is drawn from her comprehensive study of some 350 of Kurtz's letters to his fiancé, then wife, Julia Stephenson: "Catching the Light," Archives of American Art Journal 32 no. 4 (1992): 25-29.

<sup>27</sup>Kurtz paid \$25 for C. Harry Eaton's Study for a Picture-- Winter because "it is worth at least twice as much, and I shall hold it until I can get that for it," an indication of how liquid he perceived the market at the moment. Kurtz Papers, letter of 18 December 1884, transcription provided by Underwood.

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<sup>28</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 21 December 1884, transcription provided by Sandra Underwood.

<sup>29</sup>Underwood in 11 August 1993 letter to author.

<sup>30</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 21 December 1884, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>31</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 5 February 1885, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>32</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 21 March 1885, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>33</sup>For a description of walking through the new galleries see "American Art Galleries," New York Times, 3 November 1885, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Wilson H. Faude, "Associated Artists and the American Renaissance in the Decorative Arts," Winterthur Portfolio 10 (1975): 101-130. Wheeler continued the business without Tiffany, Colman and de Forest under the same name from 1883-1907.

<sup>35</sup>D. Dodge Thompson, "American artists in North Africa and the Middle East, 1797-1914," Magazine Antiques 76 no. 2 (August 1984): 303-312.

<sup>36</sup>For details see Wilson H. Faude, "Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut," Magazine Antiques 106 no. 4 (October 1874): 634-641, and Faude, "Associated Artists."

<sup>37</sup>Thompson, 303.

<sup>38</sup>A. F. Oakley in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, April 1882, cited in Arnold Lewis, James Turner, and Steven McQuillin, The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age: All 203 Photographs from "Artistic Houses" (New York: Dover, 1987): 133.

<sup>39</sup>See for discussion "Art Matters. Means of Fostering American Art," Lippincott's Magazine 4 (August 1882): 211.

<sup>40</sup>"Monthly Record of American Art," Magazine of Art 7 (1884): xlv.

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<sup>41</sup>Doreen Bolger, "William Macbeth and George A. Hearn: Collecting American Art, 1905-1910," Archives of American Art Journal 15 (1975): 10.

<sup>42</sup>"Monthly Record of American Art," p. xlv. For the Academy figures see Lois Marie Fink, "American Renaissance: 1870-1917," in Academy: The Academic Tradition in American Art, ed. Joshua C. Taylor, ex. cat. (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>43</sup>That fees were paid is confirmed by a letter from Henry B. Pettes to Kirby dated 16 April 1885 negotiating for the arrival of the prize pictures in St. Louis around October 25, 1885, for which he agreed to pay the Association \$2500. Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2.

<sup>44</sup>"The American Art Association and The Prize Fund Exhibition," Studio new series no. 4 (27 September 1884): 37-39, and "Prizes Galore," New York Times, 16 November 1884, p.6.

<sup>45</sup>"A Promising Scheme," Studio n.s. 2 (30 August 1884): 13. The article also includes a list of thirty subscribers to date.

<sup>46</sup>"Aid for the Painters," New York Times, 28 August 1884, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Samuel P. Avery, "Untitled Note," in Benson J. Lossing, History of New York City, 2 vols. (New York: Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., 1884), II: 843.

<sup>48</sup>"A Promising Scheme," 17.

<sup>49</sup>"Prize Pictures," Magazine of Art 8 (1885): 53. The Studio also expressed the opinion that the best pictures had been sent to the Prize Fund Exhibition in "The National Academy of Design. The Sixtieth Annual Exhibition. I.," Studio new series no. 18 (11 April 1885), 205.

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<sup>50</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 21 March 1885, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>51</sup>"American Art Association: Prize-Fund Exhibition," Studio new series no. 19 (25 April 1885): 217.

<sup>52</sup>"A Promising Scheme," 15.

<sup>53</sup>Present location unknown.

<sup>54</sup>Now in a private collection.

<sup>55</sup>The Studio reported in 1884 that Alexander Harrison's Le Crépuscule "attracted much attention when exhibited in the year's Salon, and it was confidently expected that it would receive a medal. But there was not enough magnanimity in the [French] Council to permit the award of a medal to an American, no matter how deserving, after the display of small-minded demagoguery on the part of our Congress, in the matter of the tariff on foreign pictures; and, in fact, as is well known, no medals were given this year to Americans." See "The American Art Association. Inaugural Exhibition. III," Studio new series no. 9 (6 December 1884): 100-101. Regarding conflict over French acquisitions of American art see Susan Grant, "Whistler's Mother was not Alone: French Government Acquisitions of American Paintings, 1871-1900," Archives of American Art Journal 32 no. 2 (1992): 2-15. For a discussion of anti-American sentiment expressed as French outrage over John Sargent's Madame X, which debuted in the Salon of 1884, see Albert Boime, "Sargent in Paris and London: A Portrait of the Artist as Dorian Gray," in John Singer Sargent, ex. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum and Abrams, 1986), 93-94. See also footnote 81 below.

<sup>56</sup>"The Prize Fund Exhibition," Art Amateur 13 (13 June 1885): 6. For other reviews see "The Prize Fund Exhibition," New York Times, 18 April 1885, p. 5; "Art Notes and News," Art Interchange 14 (7 May 1885): 1; and "The Prize Fund," New York Times, 10 May 1885, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup>"The Prize Fund Exhibition," Art Amateur 13 (13 June 1885): 5-8.

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<sup>58</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 23 April 1885, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>59</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 1 May 1885, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>60</sup>"At the American Galleries," New York Times, 20 November 1885, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup>"The American Art Galleries," Critic 4 (7 November 1885): 223.

<sup>62</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter and account sheet of 31 October 1885. The prices ranged from a low of thirty-five dollars for a work by C. H. Eaton listed in the catalog at fifty dollars, to a high of three hundred and fifty dollars for a work by J. B. Bristol listed at six hundred.

<sup>63</sup>As will be discussed in Chapter 8, Kurtz ended up competing against the Association for the management of Mihaly Munkacsy's Christ Before Pilate. In a letter of 6 November 1886 regarding that dispute Kurtz mentions "the \$200 he [Sutton] stole from me," but no further details are known.

<sup>64</sup>Kurtz Papers, William Semple letter of 14 May 1886.

<sup>65</sup>Kurtz Papers, William Semple letter of 20 May 1886.

<sup>66</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 9 June 1886.

<sup>67</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 11 June 1886.

<sup>68</sup>New contributors to the Second Prize Fund included the Corcoran Gallery, Benjamin Altman, James Drummond, and the dealer L. Christ Delmonico.

<sup>69</sup>Undated letter to Thomas Kirby from the Second Prize Fund Jury. Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2.

<sup>70</sup>"The Second Prize Fund Exhibition," Art Interchange 16 (22 May 1886): 162.

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- <sup>71</sup>"Prize Fund Exhibition," Art Age 3 (1886): 179.
- <sup>72</sup>Mariana G. Van Rensselaer, "Pictures of the Season in New York," American Architect and Building News 19 (19 June 1886): 293.
- <sup>73</sup>"The Prize Fund Exhibition," Critic 7 (7 May 1887): 232.
- <sup>74</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur (17 June 1887): 2-3.
- <sup>75</sup>"The Prize Fund Exhibition," Critic 11 (4 May 1889): 224.
- <sup>76</sup>George William Sheldon, Recent Ideals of American Art (New York: Appleton, 1888), 34.
- <sup>77</sup>William H. Gerdtz, American Impressionism (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 51-53. For more accounts of the Durand-Ruel Impressionist exhibition see John Rewald, The History of Impressionism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 523-532 and John Rewald, "Durand Ruel: 140 Years, One Man's Faith," Art News 42 (1-14 December 1943): 23ff. For a lengthy discussion of the exhibition and earlier review of criticism see Hans Huth, "Impressionism Comes to America," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 6th series, 29 (April 1946): 225-252. For general information on Durand-Ruel see François Daulte, "Le marchand des Impressionnistes," L'Oeil no. 66 (June 1960): 54-61, 75; Lionello Venturi, Les Archives de L'Impressionnisme, 2 vols. (Paris: Durand-Ruel, 1939); and A Tribute to Paul Durand-Ruel (New York: Wildenstein Galleries, 1970).
- <sup>78</sup>Frances Weitzenhoffer, "The earliest American collectors of Monet," in Aspects of Monet, John Rewald and Frances Weitzenhoffer, eds. (New York: Abrams, 1985), 75.
- <sup>79</sup>For a summary of Durand-Ruel's career see Anne Distel, Impressionism: The First Collectors (New York: Abrams, 1990), 20-31, and Pierre Cabanne, The Great Collectors (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1963), 63-82. Cabanne reports that by 1884 the dealer was one million francs in debt, p. 78.
- <sup>80</sup>"The Association would pay all the expenses connected with the shipment and exhibition, in return for a simple sales

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commission. I accepted these arrangements with alacrity, the more delighted as it would have been impossible for me to make the huge investment necessary for such a project." Paul Durand-Ruel quoted in Wildenstein, A Tribute to Paul Durand-Ruel, no pagination.

<sup>31</sup>For a brief contemporary summary of the issues see Sylvester R. Koehler, The United States Art Directory and Year-Book (two volumes in one), vol. 2 (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1882 and New York: Cassell and Company, 1884; reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1975), 25 (page references are to reprint edition). Koehler notes that "the hot heads among the artists of France proposed to retaliate [against the recently increased tariff] by closing the Salon to American artists and excluding American students from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts." For an overview of French and American issues around the tariff see Albert Boime, "The Chocolate Venus, "Tainted" Pork, the Wine Blight, and the Tariff: Franco-American Stew at the Fair," in Annette Blaugrund, ed., Paris 1889: American Artists at the University Exposition, ex. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1989), 67-91. See also footnote 55 above.

<sup>32</sup>Grant, 4-5.

<sup>33</sup>The sole document concerning the exhibition in the American Art Association Papers at the Archives of American Art is a receipt dated 4 February 1886 for 10,000 francs sent from the Association to Durand-Ruel as an advance against sales of pictures in New York.

<sup>34</sup>Rewald, "Durand Ruel," 50. For Durand-Ruel's memoirs of this exhibition see Venturi, vol. 2, 214-220.

<sup>35</sup>Towner, 119-120.

<sup>36</sup>Huth, 241. For a look at the events from the perspective of the Havemeyers and Cassatts see Frances R. Weitzenhoffer, The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America (New York: Abrams, 1986), 38-43, and "The Creation of the Havemeyer Collection 1875-1900" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 55-68.

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<sup>87</sup>Huth, 244. Estimates regarding the exact number of paintings sold vary; it is likely that Durand-Ruel may have had additional works with him as well, the sale of which would be included in the \$5500. For access to information from the Durand-Ruel account books I am grateful to France Daguet, archivist, at Durand-Ruel & Cie., Paris.

<sup>88</sup>For profiles of Davis, Spencer, and Kingman see Weitzenhoffer, "The earliest American collectors of Monet," 79-82. Weitzenhoffer identifies Sutton as a buyer from the exhibition in The Havemeyers, 41.

<sup>89</sup>Weitzenhoffer, "The earliest American collectors of Monet," 88.

<sup>90</sup>Denys Sutton, "A Continuing Romance," Apollo 125 (February 1987): 127. The sale of James Sutton's wife's estate in 1933 included twelve Monets: see Paintings by Monet Purchased direct from the Artist . . . Property of Mrs. James F. Sutton (New York: American Art Association/Anderson Galleries, Inc., 1933). For letters to Durand-Ruel by Monet see Venturi, 1: 355, 360, 409, 445.

<sup>91</sup>John Rewald and Lucien Pissarro, Camille Pissarro Letters to his Son Lucien (Mamaroneck, NY: Paul P. Appel, 1972), 215.

<sup>92</sup>Towner, 121.

<sup>93</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 24 November 1886, transcription provided by Underwood.

<sup>95</sup>"The Durand-Ruel Picture Sale," New York Times, 6 May 1887, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 17 (June 1887): 2.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: PICTURING ART AUCTIONS

As significant as the 1886 Impressionist exhibition was for the evolution of American artists and collectors, the transformation of the American Art Association into the most important auction house in America had at least as great an impact on the marketing and collecting of art in the United States.

Thomas Kirby had more than twenty-five years of experience at auction houses in Philadelphia and New York when he joined James Sutton and R. Austin Robertson in forming the American Art Association. Reminiscing over the gestation of the partnership, Kirby confirmed that he had not intended to conduct auctions on Madison Square South. In leaving the auction business behind in 1883 he abandoned a livelihood few dared call a profession and most considered a shady, if not outright dishonest, racket. For example, in May 1883 the Art Amateur observed:

The picture market, native and foreign, has rarely been so demoralized as it is now. The recent absurd [tariff] legislation against imported paintings doubtless has something to do with it. But . . . the chief reason will be found . . . in the natural reaction against the instability of the entire business--the cupidity of the dealer and the dishonesty

of the auctioneer, and the ignorance of the buyer who so easily becomes the prey of both.<sup>1</sup>

Under Kirby's leadership AAA auctions came to epitomize American free-market enterprise democratically open to every man and woman with capital. By the mid-1880s the AAA incorporated under one roof an experienced auctioneer of integrity, grand exhibition galleries, the capability to catalog property, and a potent publicity machine. The first modern "full-service" auction house in this country,<sup>2</sup> it offered the expertise and facilities necessary to serve the needs of a growing clientele of Gilded Age fortune-builders, many of whom assembled art collections requiring dispersal at their death. They fueled a liquid art market where works of art could be bought and sold quickly and conveniently, while novices sought an entry point into the trade where they could test their eye for quality and their talent for investment.

While many collectors used New York dealers like Sam Avery, the Knoedler brothers, and William Schaus as agents at auction sales, the AAA offered an open market free of dependence upon middlemen, excessive government regulation, and dishonest manipulation by the art trade. These

attributes were understood as uniquely American during the 1880s and 1890s, especially as compared to the French and British art auction systems.

Thus the AAA is responsible for the incorporation of what I call the "American system" of art auctions. The gist of the American system was to inform potential bidders regarding sellers' reserves, provenance, and other useful information and enable them to participate in auctions on equal footing with art professionals (e.g., dealers, experienced collectors, artists, and institutions).

To be sure, both sellers and buyers found ways to subvert the system. Yet there is evidence that Kirby acted against such behavior when possible. Judging from the lack of explicit attack or veiled innuendo regarding his integrity at the Association's podium over forty years, it is fair to acknowledge Kirby as the auction professional who was able, with the capital and power of the Association behind him, to establish the system that endures in America to this day.

The AAA initiated one other noteworthy contribution to the American system of art auctions. Through clever manipulation of the burgeoning media industry as well as

fortuitous, publicity-generating scandals, AAA auctions became a source of popular entertainment, a spectator sport starring millionaires battling with one another for possessions deemed uplifting, educational, even poetic.

Charles W. Smith titled his sociological analysis of public sales Auctions: The Social Construction of Value (1989).<sup>3</sup> One need not be a social scientist, however, to appreciate the accomplishment of the AAA establishing art auctions as centers for the social construction of values in the American art world. Its role is adumbrated in assertions like that of the New York Times in 1874 that bidding at auctions "will unerringly indicate the level of popular education in art," and "the evidence of growth [in the taste of American collectors] is particularly apparent in the dissolving collections of American pictures."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, as American art gradually came to be seen in the public arena of art auctions as a good investment, something that millionaires were willing to fight over, its fortunes in the marketplace rose. That the 1899 sale of Thomas B. Clarke's collection was a watershed for the market for American art was confirmed by the sales that followed quickly on its heels and publicly demonstrated that American

art had finally established a position of desirability at home.

To understand the American Art Association's evolution into the country's leading auction house, it is useful to consider the state of the profession when Kirby, Sutton and Robertson mounted their first sales. Many of the practices common today were well established by Kirby's time, while others familiar to Kirby are now considered unethical and, in some circumstances, prohibited by law. American art auctions differed in character from contemporary French and British auctions. Understanding the differences sheds light on the "Americanness" of our own auction traditions--their character as a free market exchange of goods among arts professionals and novices trusting to their own judgment.

#### A. Hôtel Drouot

The center of the French auction market in Kirby's day was and remains today the Hôtel Drouot, a government-regulated syndicate of auctioneers with the exclusive right --a monopoly--to organize auctions in Paris (Fig. 54). Originally the auctioneers were appointed as agents of the French government to insure that taxes on estate sales would

be paid; today Drouot auction licenses--limited in number--are inherited or sold like seats on our stock exchange.<sup>5</sup>

As in this country, artists individually and as groups sent work directly to the Hôtel Drouot, as did the Impressionists twice, in 1875 and 1877. Dealers utilized Drouot to generate capital and move inventory, while most French collectors bought and sold work there through their agents. It was also common for artists' estates to go to the block at the Drouot, among the most notable sales being that of Manet's studio in 1884.<sup>6</sup> Observing the huge trade in contemporary art French critic and collector Philippe Burty observed in 1868 that the Drouot had become a "sort of permanent museum of the modern school."<sup>7</sup> In fact, the same could be said of the American Art Association by the mid-1880s: the difference is that initially the American school was principally seen in shows like the Prize Fund Exhibitions, while contemporary French art was visible in Association auctions.

In the French system art auctioneers, called commissaires-priseurs, work in partnership with the outside expert-appraisers, usually independent art dealers, who are responsible for assembling the property for sale, confirming

provenance and authenticity, authoring descriptive cataloging, and establishing minimum values that are publicly announced and at which the bidding may start. Attributions are guaranteed; in theory if a purchaser can prove the attribution wrong at a later date he may be reimbursed. This separation of organization and cataloging from the actual selling of objects provides, in theory, a system of checks and balances for the auction process. However, the expert-appraisers are free to manipulate the actual order of the sale without reference to the published catalog,<sup>3</sup> one of several ways in which the French system confounds outsiders.

In the nineteenth century newcomers to Hôtel Drouot vendues were typically prevented from participation not only by the complexity of the sales but also by the "Bande Noire," the notorious "Black Gang" of dealers who conspired to bid up prices to prevent bargain sales. To buy a work at Hôtel Drouot outsiders were compelled to either pay a high commission in advance to a "Black Gang" dealer who would purchase the work on the buyer's behalf or compete against the group, which would virtually guarantee that the buyer

would pay a very high hammer price. A French critic observed at the turn of the century:

The [French] public would . . . hail with delight the suppression of "The Black Gang," the contact with which alone often suffices to scare away the most courageous lovers of art . . . [the Hôtel Drouot] should, moreover, be regulated by . . . rules which place the private amateur on the same footing with the dealer, and render impossible the existence of monopolies in the hands of "Black Gangs," and the stifling of the voice of the private collector.<sup>9</sup>

In England the comparable group was known as "The Ring," or "Knock-out Ring," and, indeed, similar syndicates operate around the world today. In Kirby's day the existence of these dealer cabals in France and England was taken for granted, as was America's general independence from this manipulation of the art market.<sup>10</sup>

Physically, a relatively modern Hôtel Drouot stands today where its ancestor was established at the corner of rue Drouot and rue Chauchat in 1852.<sup>11</sup> Though an image published in Connoisseur in 1902 suggests an air of respectability (Fig. 55), the accompanying article states the case not only for regulatory reforms but renovation or replacement of the facility:

We deserve something better than this wretched, uncomfortable hole, a veritable rendezvous for vermin and microbes, where bronchitis lays in wait for victims in the draughty corridors and open doorways, and where

typhus hovers round in the nauseous, vitiated atmosphere.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, with Sutton's capital and Kirby's expertise the AAA incorporated the exhibition and management of sales of works of art under one elegant roof as it aspired to attainment of a vision as a "fashionable retreat." Though auctions were not yet its principal business, the 1884 Harper's Weekly image of the Association (Fig. 47) suggests by the inclusion of children and the elderly the notion that appreciation of art could be an educational family affair separate from the exchange of money for its acquisition.

#### B. Art Auctions in America

Very little on art auctions in the United States has been published; indeed, the vast majority of art auctions held before the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 are unstudied and poorly documented.<sup>13</sup> The principal documentary evidence for constructing an image of early sales, where it exists, are rare eye witness accounts and images of auctions, published reports, advertisements, reviews of

preview exhibitions, and sales results reported in periodicals of the day.

Throughout the Colonial era and early years of the Republic, in the era before department stores, auctions were essential mechanisms for bringing products to market. Most auctioneers sold a broad range of property and few before the Centennial focused principally on works of art. The redoubtable Sarah Kemble Knight, who recorded her trip between Boston and New York in 1704, attended an auction in Manhattan where she purchased Dutch paper and met a number of "the good women of the town." She further journaled,

They have Vendues very frequently and make their Earnings very well by them, for they treat with good Liquor Liberally, and the Customers Drink as Liberally and Generally pay for't as well, by paying for that which they Bidd up Briskly for, after the sack has gone plentifully about, tho' sometimes good penny worths are got there.<sup>14</sup>

A few early auctioneers attained great respectability, most notably, Philip Hone (1780-1851), who was mayor of New York in 1825 after retiring from a general auction and commission business he founded with his brother in 1797.<sup>15</sup> Through his hands passed Manchester woolens, India tea, Jamaican rum, and domestic products, as well as decorative and fine arts on occasion. Hone assembled an art collection

typical of the day featuring works by American artists like Thomas Cole, Gilbert Stuart, and Samuel F. B. Morse--all of whom ran in his circle--side-by-side with European old masters. The catalog for the 1852 sale of his collection at E. H. Ludlow's includes works attributed to various European masters such as Jacob van Ruisdael, Adrien van Ostade, and Canaletto.

The earliest sale noted in Harold Lancour's indispensable union list of art auction catalogs dates to the 1785 sale of Pierre du Simitière's American Museum in Philadelphia.<sup>16</sup> Lancour lists fewer than a dozen auction catalogs for any given year before 1852, yet his accounting must be presumed to be the tip of a gigantic iceberg of art auctions for which documentation is lost, judging from reports such as that published in the New-York Mirror in 1834:

There is nothing more worthy of laughter, as we think, than the strange passion which many otherwise sensible people feel or assume for 'undoubted originals;' . . . . This mania has taken deep root in our own city within the last six or eight years, and the business of making old original pictures for the New-York market is carried on very extensively and successfully in various parts of Europe . . . . There are auction sales every week, in which, if the catalogues may be believed, Murillos, Corregios [sic], Vandykes [sic], Morlands, and Raphaels are knocked down at about the rate of a dollar the square yard, including the frames."<sup>17</sup>

In 1872 T. B. Thorpe identified a few of the early auctioneers and confirmed that most art sales earlier in the century had offered works attributed to the old masters:

The taste of the public, after the demand for family likenesses was satisfied, was for the "old masters," whose works were at that time shipped to New York by the thousands. The sales were conducted first by Gourlay, and subsequently by Levy and Harrison, who had their weekly auctions of an immense number of these ancient canvases, mostly of large size, and representing, with almost unvarying sameness, some religious or mythological subject; and all, with few extraordinary exceptions, most execrable daubs. This trade filled the houses of our ambitious citizens with time-dried and smoke-blackened "horrors," and furnished a precarious livelihood to those once famous "restorers," Marsiglia, N.A., and "old Paff," who had always on hand more genuine Raphaels, Correggios, and Da Vincis, than can now be found in all the churches and palaces of Europe.<sup>18</sup>

One searches in vain for images of art auctions during the early nineteenth century. Two images convey, however, the more quotidian character of contemporary street auctions and give clues to some of the social problems with which auctions were associated. Both depict sales around 1840 of furniture and other personal property in the heart of the auction and commission house district, Chatham Square.<sup>19</sup>

Precariously perched atop the temporary, makeshift platform, the auctioneer in E. Didier's tableau is balanced by the hand on his coattail of an angry woman attempting to

interrupt his patter (Fig. 56). Is she trying to enter a bid or imploring him to stop selling her life's possessions? Amidst barefooted children in the dirt, upwardly mobile bargain hunters scramble to gain advantage; thus, the painting correlates auctions with the squalor of the lower class and alludes to the social upheavals they frequently accompanied, especially when used to forcefully settle debts. There is nothing glamorous about this sale.

Nicolino Calyo's watercolor rendering of the sale of "furniture and fancy articles" shows the back of a nicely framed painting leaning against the table on which the auctioneer stands (Fig. 57).<sup>20</sup> The image is especially noteworthy for including an African-American woman among the small gathering, another social commentary that reminds viewers that while she was able to participate in the sale as a free woman, her kinfolk were being bought and sold at auctions in the South. Association with slave auctions was one of several black marks against the profession.

From one perspective the images fall into the same generic category as the "Auction of Home Furnishings" that appeared in Harper's Weekly in 1870 (Fig. 58). Here we are transported to a parlor crowded with a higher class of

people variously eyeing property and each other while plotting purchase strategies. Three pairs of ladies offer alternative models of behavior. The central pair study the painting being auctioned, seemingly lost in contemplation while the men behind raise their hands to signal bids. Another pair assess the quality of a chair before it is auctioned out from under the one sitting on it. In the right foreground one shopper surreptitiously glares at a competitor for a sideboard, trying to read her mind in anticipation of the battle to come. As the recorder, pencil poised, looks on dispassionately, an irate woman threatens the auctioneer with an umbrella.

The commentary accompanying the woodcut tells us that "every New Yorker" would recognize the scene as either the "breaking up for the customary summer residence in the country" or the preparation for "moving-day." In one instance the upwardly mobile dispose of furniture preparatory to buying new; in the other, "as is the case with hundreds" that year, high rents compelled tenants to downsize as they sought smaller quarters.<sup>21</sup> Auctions reflect both sets of social instabilities.

As for the art sold at house sales, the New York Times cautioned in 1882:

The most complete system for selling modern old masters and bogus pictures is that of advertising an auction sale at a private house. The walls are "salted" with false pictures, and occasionally an old lady, who enjoys nothing so much as cheapening second-hand things and bidding at private auctions, finds herself the owner of a Raphael or a Michael Angelo which is not worth the cost of cartage.<sup>22</sup>

The Harper's Weekly visualization of a house sale and New York Times admonition help explain the outrage formalized in the third quarter of the century by the "New York Anti-Auction Committee," which proclaimed that auctions were leading respectable citizens to "death, dissipation, and bankruptcy:"

It will be in vain for the government to trust to the virtue of the people to resist the allurements held out to tempt them into the arms of some one of the numerous and increasing progeny of auction-marts. Already the respectable classes congregate by the hundreds before the knights of the hammer. Here they change into a sort of Ishamelites. Bad passions ascend and they are unfit for the society of other men . . . . There is little doubt that auctioneering will, unless returned to the hell which commissioned it, root out in the end every seed of intellectual polish from the mind and change us back to rank Barbarians.<sup>23</sup>

Neil Harris reports that the frequency of auctions increased four-fold between 1850 and 1880.<sup>24</sup> A survey of Lancour's list of art auction catalogs discloses that the

number of sales accompanied by catalogs increased from seven in 1850 to sixty in 1880. Catalogs published by about a dozen New York firms appear in his list for the Centennial year. Most prominent were Thomas Kirby, Samuel Avery, Bangs and Co., George Leavitt, Robert Somerville, and Henry D. Miner, successor to Henry H. Leeds. Auctions were not yet a glamorous business and often transpired in salesrooms like that of George B. Reed and Company visible in a stereopticon card from the 1870s (Fig. 59).<sup>25</sup> Auctioneers also knocked the lots down in their own exhibition halls or rented spaces like the Kurtz Gallery for preview exhibitions and public sales (Fig. 60).<sup>26</sup> When large crowds might be anticipated the recently opened Chickering Hall at Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street was engaged (Fig. 38). George A. Leavitt and Company, the largest New York firm in the mid-1870s, which sold books as well as art, maintained an art gallery at 817 Broadway at the corner of Twelfth Street and salesrooms in Clinton Hall at Eighth Street and Astor Place, four blocks south (Figs. 19 and 20).

That American artists used auctions to sell work is certain. However, calculating the actual frequency of direct participation in public sales and income gained is

difficult for three reasons. First, ownership of objects at auction was rarely advertised, so it is impossible to determine if an artist sent a specific work directly from the studio or if it was consigned by another party. Second, many works reported as sold were bought in, leaving us unsure to this day regarding subsequent provenance.

Finally, many sales are unrecorded. What we can see is the frequency of recorded appearance of a particular artist in the marketplace. For example, during 1878 Winslow Homer's work appeared in at least nine public sales at George Leavitt's, the Kurtz Gallery, Daniel Mathews Art Rooms, and George Barker Art Gallery. Around a dozen works probably sold, with prices ranging from \$30 for a work on paper up to about \$285 for oils. It is important to remember that Homer and his peers also sold work at exhibitions like the monthly Century Club shows and National Academy annuals.<sup>27</sup>

In 1876 the Spanish artist Leon Escosura left us a rare opportunity to observe an auction in progress, in this case an unidentified auction in Leavitt's Clinton Hall salesroom (Fig. 61). While a group of Asian porcelains are sold a well-dressed woman settles her account with the cashier as a man, perhaps her husband, gazes wistfully aside. In

contrast to their upper class dignity, a seedy-looking fellow dozes in the right foreground, suggesting that art auctions remained an intersection point between economic classes. The crowd offers a study in class diversity apparent in dress as well as demeanor.

### C. Samuel P. Avery's Art Auctions

In Escosura's painting we also see standing in the left foreground with his back to us, holding a red sales catalog, Samuel Avery, the most important native-born art dealer and respected organizer of auctions after the Civil War.<sup>28</sup> Avery's role in this sale is unclear, though he organized almost three dozen sales during the late 1860s, 70s and early 80s.<sup>29</sup> Avery's "management" of art auctions of both his own inventory and private collections he had helped assemble emulated the French "expert-appraiser" system. Separation of his responsibility for vetting the content, cataloging, exhibition of the art and employment of the auctioneer from the actual selling was an important step in the appearance of professionalization of art auctions by subordinating the auctioneer to a secondary role under the dealer's (i.e., "expert's") supervision.

Madeleine Fidell Beaufort's study of twenty-one of Avery's auctions in New York City between 1864 and 1880 has contributed much to our understanding of Avery's clientele and the role of auctions in his business.<sup>30</sup> She finds that at Avery-managed sales of his own inventory a total of 395 buyers spent about \$308,000 on works by 734 artists, about a fifth of whom were American.<sup>31</sup> The dealer summed up the utility of auctions as an outlet, as well as their particular appeal for certain American buyers in the preface to a catalog he published for a sale in May of 1873:

Failing to materially reduce my collection of paintings as I had hoped to do by private sale during my recent exhibition . . . I find myself almost compelled to offer the greater part of my paintings at auction.

I am encouraged to take this step by the promises of support from many persons who prefer to purchase in this manner.<sup>32</sup>

Americans loved to compete for pictures and to get a bargain in the process, two opportunities promised by auctions. In 1895 an anonymous writer verified these incentives to participation:

There are several reasons why there are so few pictures bought at the exhibitions. The principal one is the prevalence of auction sales. The desire for a bargain is an American characteristic. There is always associated with a sale under the hammer the idea of a sacrifice by the seller. A picture-buyer hesitates to pay a dealer or an artist his price. In one case he

fears that too large a profit will accrue to the dealer . . . . At an auction he feels more confident. If other bidders compete with him he has the satisfaction of knowing that his judgment and taste are confirmed. If no one disputes the work with him he consoles himself with the thought that he is getting something he likes cheap.<sup>33</sup>

Over the course of some two decades Avery organized sales using different gallery spaces and auctioneers. For his earliest sales in 1866 and 1867 he engaged Leeds and Miner to auction his property. After his return from Paris he established his gallery and residence in a house occupied by auctioneers Henry Miner and Robert Somerville. In 1873 Avery turned to Somerville, who became his auctioneer of choice, to knock down his stock after a preview exhibition at the former galleries of the National Academy of Design at 625 Broadway. On other occasions Avery arranged for preview shows at Leavitt's Broadway gallery and sales in their Clinton Hall facility depicted by Escosura.

Dealers bought about 21 percent of the lots offered in his sales,<sup>34</sup> an indication of the value of auctions for dispersing stock through dealer resale and verification of an important difference with European auctions where dealers predominated as buyers. One other statistic of note is that dealers paid an average of \$172 per lot, while financiers

spent about \$305, suggesting that dealers looked for bargains in a market where relatively low price levels encouraged participation independent of the involvement of millionaires.

Avery directed one of the most important auctions held in America, the sale in 1876 of railroad magnate John Taylor Johnston's collection of European and American art.<sup>35</sup> Johnston, the first president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was one of the first New Yorkers to build a private art gallery, which he opened to the public once a week. As manager of the disposal of the most important private collection in the country, Avery engaged the services of Robert Somerville to cry the vendue at Chickering Hall. The event was significant for the youthful Thomas Kirby, who, with his employer George Leavitt, witnessed Somerville knock down 323 lots, a third of which was American, for a total of about \$330,000. At the sale the Corcoran Gallery won Frederic Church's Niagara, which had been shown at the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition, for a record price for an American work, \$12,500. J. W. M. Turner's Slave Ship, which Avery had arranged for the collector to buy from John Ruskin, went for \$10,000. Johnston's profit reaped from the

sale amidst a general financial depression dramatically demonstrated that art could be a good investment.

Thomas Kirby witnessed the sale:

Mr. Leavitt and I sat down in the hall and a painting was placed on the easel to be sold, and Somerville, the auctioneer, said, "This is a rare, beautiful landscape. Now ladies and gentlemen, look at this great work of art. Look at the color scheme. Look at the painting of the trees. See the atmosphere. It is a truthful transcript of nature itself." A gentlemen sitting alongside of me said, "He thinks he knows it all, don't he?" That went right to my head and they never could get me to do anything like that . . . . When Mr. Somerville died I came into possession of some of his private sales catalogues and found that every one of these catalogues contained notes made by Mr. S. P. Avery. These were the origin of Somerville's profuse and at times uncalled for remarks.<sup>36</sup>

Somerville's florid commentary epitomized what one historian calls the "'genteel' style common in fiction and journalism."<sup>37</sup> It parallels the "puffs" describing works of arts in catalogs of the period. The year before the New York Tribune had complained of a Leavitt catalog:

[We] wish that the practice of commenting on the pictures might be given up entirely by the catalogue-makers. "A brilliant work," "A work of unusual interest," "The masterly charm of the artist is seen to advantage in this work" . . . vulgarized the whole affair, spoiling the respectable effect of the well-hung pictures, the cheerfully lighted gallery and the neat little catalogue with this impertinence of the counter-jumper.<sup>38</sup>

Newspaper accounts of Kirby's sales during the 1880s indicate that he did on occasion "puff" lots under consideration. By 1916 it was said that Kirby had "never been caught in the act of emitting a single adjective in public"<sup>39</sup> and was "growing grey in honesty . . . . He employs in the selling of works of art neither eloquence nor humor."<sup>40</sup> Though he exhorted bidders by name to raise their ante and once received a bid of \$80,000 with the retort, "Why, you haven't begun yet," Kirby's was a dry, imperious style of crying auctions.<sup>41</sup> Thus his podium style evolved over the course of his four-decade career at the Association in a manner leading to the contemporary practice of presenting lots with minimal verbal commentary.

#### D. Auction Practices

Some auction procedures common today such as pre-sale reserves--minimum prices below which a lot will not be sold --were well established by Avery and Kirby's time. Other practices were also common: misrepresentation of provenance; the inclusion by auctioneers of their own property in sales; the purchase of property for themselves by auctioneers

conducting a sale; and the publication of spurious sales reports.

Systems of establishing "reserve bids" to protect consignors of goods from unacceptably low prices was in place early on. During the Kirby era it was common for reserves to be established in advance and recorded prior to the sale coded in the auctioneer's bid book.<sup>42</sup> Reporting on the results of 1883 auctions Sylvester Koehler cautioned, "It is impossible . . . to give reliable details, as in many cases the pictures named [as sold] cannot be depended upon, owing to the custom of "bidding in," which is quite as prevalent here as elsewhere."<sup>43</sup>

The reappearance of bought-in lots in one or more subsequent sales--so-called "revolvers"--was occasionally noted in the press. For example, in December 1882 the Art Amateur exposed that at the dissolution sale at Kirby's gallery of Moore and Sutton's American Art Gallery: "Several paintings, which had been sold more than once before at much better prices without leaving the auction rooms, this time went in earnest at prices which, out of regard for the feelings of the artists, I refrain from giving."<sup>44</sup>

A related issue was disclosure of ownership of property. Dealers and auctioneers might "stuff" the sale of a reputable private collection with slow-moving inventory in an attempt to endow the less attractive lots with greater prestige through provenance. For example, an anonymous critic offered in 1877 regarding the sale of the Nathan Matthews collection at the Kurtz Gallery,

If Mr. Nathan Matthews, of Boston, is the owner of all the paintings of the collection now to be seen in the Kurtz Gallery . . . it has been very public spirited of him to leave some of them for long periods where they could be seen by New Yorkers. The example of Caesar de Cock . . . has been on exhibition in the Goupil rooms for a long while, notwithstanding that obvious merits might have been expected to find for it a purchaser.<sup>45</sup>

No less confusing were reports of the names of buyers at sales. The tradition of using imaginary names for phantom bidders and purchasers of bought-in lots is long-standing. Of course, as today, many legitimate buyers eschewed publicity and requested anonymity. After William T. Walters paid an extraordinary price for a Chinese vase in the AAA's 1886 Morgan sale he denied that he was the buyer, inciting the New York Times to charge that,

The public generally have been led by these [conflicting reports regarding purchasers] to think that the sale has partaken of the known character of many art sales and that the prices paid were fictitious and purchases not bona fide . . . . The whole trouble grows

out of the fact that the American Art Association, for its own purposes, kept as secret as possible from both dealers and the newspapers the names of actual purchasers. This was probably done with an eye to future negotiations regarding the pictures. Mr. Kirby on the first night of the sale announced that when purchasers sent their name to the desk he would give them to the press unless a cross was put upon the card. Purchasers of pictures who did not put a cross on their cards, or who told THE TIME'S reporters that they did not, did not have their purchases made public, although some of them would willingly have had this done.<sup>46</sup>

The practice of maintaining the anonymity of bidders and buyers coupled with the inherent deception of the reserve system enabled deceitful manipulation of the market. In 1873 the New York Times exposed H. W. Derby's scheme to sell "trash" at a Leavitt auction by "salting" his inventory with "first-class" pictures by artists like William Bouguereau and Ernest Meissonier. Derby capitalized on the enthusiasm that surrounded the masters by employing skills to bid up prices on the mediocre works; secret reserves assured that the good works would be bought in. Then he moved his operation to Philadelphia where the newspaper found that the bought-in works reappeared with new titles and ownership, only to be reported as sold again, though undoubtedly certain to resurface in another city.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout his career Kirby fought the system, even as he was sometimes compelled to participate in it. In advance of an 1881 sale of American paintings the New York Daily Tribune praised his efforts:

"Upset prices" will not be put upon the lots; they will not be "bid in" to the knowledge of the auctioneer or with his connivance, and after the sale...[they will not be found] once more in search of a purchaser whenever another "preemptory sale" of pictures is advertised, "the property of a private gentleman. This method of procedure, an every-day affair in our city . . . the Messrs. Kirby are doing what they can to break up . . . ."<sup>48</sup>

Kirby and the AAA advertised some sales "without reserve." At the same time, they regularly negotiated reserves. Omission of the phrase "without reserve" in the catalog might be understood as a signal that reserves were in effect. According to newspaper accounts, occasionally Kirby announced from the podium the reserve status of particular lots or attempted to start the bidding at the minimum, though there is no way to verify if he always followed this practice.<sup>49</sup>

In 1921 Arthur Swann, who eventually founded his own gallery, went to England on behalf of the AAA to encourage English dealers to consign work to auction in New York City. He reported that the English's dealers principle objections

to sending material to the Association were its commitment to unreserved sales that failed to guarantee prices sufficient to cover dealer costs.<sup>50</sup> Further, they objected to the high American sales commission that underwrote expensive catalogs and advertising that the foreign dealers found superfluous.<sup>51</sup>

So great was the number of fraudulent auctions that in 1843 New York City passed an ordinance requiring that all public sales occur between sunrise and sunset so that potential bidders would see clearly what they might otherwise miss under the shady gaslights that hid a multitude of misrepresentations.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, both contemporary observers and historians of the period have suggested that one of the reasons American collectors of the later nineteenth century preferred contemporary European or American art is that such acquisitions were safer in terms of authenticity. Still, even "modern" European art was forged on both sides of the ocean according to the Studio in 1885:

As is well known, the counterfeiters are not confined to the other side of the water . . . there are said, on good authority, to be two men now at work in our city whose time is taken up with nothing else but the making of Corots.<sup>53</sup>

Kirby was praised by the New York Times as early as 1880 for cautiously indicating attributions of authorship where other auctioneers would have rushed to proclaim authenticity,<sup>54</sup> though the New York Sun had occasion a month later to caution readers to "buy with much circumspection" at a Kirby sale.<sup>55</sup> To reassure buyers Kirby negotiated guarantees that could be advertised and announced at the beginning of the sale. For example, Henry Sheridan guaranteed a full refund on works purchased at Kirby's 1880 sale of his watercolor collection subject to a purchaser returning the work with the opinions of two experts from New York City.<sup>56</sup>

To encourage patronage of living American artists, as opposed to dead--or at least distant--European artists who were easily forged, the AAA posted placards in its offices alerting clients to the great number of fraudulent European works on the market.<sup>57</sup> But the Association's entry into the auction business coupled with the Durand-Ruel collaboration during the mid-1880s necessitated the abandonment of that argument in favor of a more cosmopolitan outlook that aggressively promoted contemporary European art.

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<sup>1</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 8 (May 1883): 122.

<sup>2</sup>It is difficult to directly compare the AAA with other auction houses because so little is known about other auction houses in general. George Leavitt appears to have operated the largest auction house prior to the emergence of the AAA. As discussed later in this chapter, Leavitt's business was divided between two facilities, both very modest in comparison to the those of the AAA by 1885 (compare Figs. 19, 20, and 61). Together with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Art Institute of Chicago, the AAA is a very good example of the incorporation of "infrastructure which monumentalized the presence of culture, of high art and learning, within society" during the 1870s. See Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 144.

<sup>3</sup>Charles W. Smith, Auctions: The Social Construction of Value (New York: Free Press, and London: Collier Macmillan, 1989). Smith has little to say regarding art auctions per se, and examines them from the perspective of the social sciences. For a review that notes the shortcomings of his approach to art auctions see G. Prescott Nuding, review of Auction: The Social Construction of Value, by Charles W. Smith, Apollo 131 (February 1990): 136-7.

<sup>4</sup>"Pictures and Picture Buyers," New York Times, 26 November 1874, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>For more on the history of the Hôtel Drouot see Paul Guillaumin, Drouot hier et aujourd'hui (Paris: Les Editions de l'Amateur, 1986).

<sup>6</sup>For an overview of the relationship between the Hôtel Drouot and market for Impressionist pictures see Anne Distel, Impressionism: The First Collectors (New York: Abrams, 1990), 53-55. Distel also discusses the Manet sale, pp. 61-64, as well as other sales. See also for a discussion of the Manet and Courbet sales Michel Beurdeley, Trois siècles de ventes publiques (Paris: Tallandier, 1988), 114-117 and 127-130.

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<sup>1</sup>Distel, 53.

<sup>3</sup>The "expert-appraiser" usually sold the most popular works first. If an object happened to go for an unexpectedly high price, the "expert-appraiser" was free to change the order of the sale in an attempt to capitalize on the enthusiasm of the moment and sell other similar works at higher prices than anticipated.

<sup>3</sup>Octave Uzanne, "The Hôtel Drouot and Auction Rooms in Paris Generally, Before and After the French Revolution," Connoisseur 3 (1903): 241.

<sup>10</sup>For a comparison with British and French auctions of the period and explanation of how knock-out rings operate see Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 52-55. Brian Learmount provides a recent history of British art auctions, focusing on Christie's and Sotheby's, in A History of the Auction (Iver, Buckinghamshire, England: Barnard and Learmount, 1985). Learmount's chapter on "The 19th Century Auction Wars in England and the United States" (pp. 81-99) reviews political and economic factors that, coupled with the unscrupulous activities of auctioneers, led to opposition to auctions of mercantile goods in both England and the United States (art auctions are not mentioned). Concerning the AAA, Learmount reports incorrectly, "It was one Thomas E. Kirby who in 1885 opened in New York the 'American Art Association'," (p. 157). For a look at the early years of Christie's' see Denys Sutton, "The King of Epithets: A Study of James Christie," Apollo 84 no. 57 (November 1966): 364-75. For a humorous look at the history of English auctions see J. W. Hodgson, "Romance and Hour of the Auction Room," Connoisseur 103 (June 1939): 329-335.

<sup>11</sup>For a look at the Hôtel Drouot today see Michael FitzGerald, "Demystifying Drouot," Art and Auction 12 no. 3 (October 1989): 123-43.

<sup>12</sup>Uzanne, 240.

<sup>13</sup>Samuel P. Avery published a brief survey of important auctions, including several he managed: "Untitled Note," in

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Benson J. Lossing, History of New York City, vol. 2 (New York: Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., 1884), 840-843.

<sup>14</sup>Sarah Kemble Knight, The Journal of Madam Knight (Boston: Godine, 1972), 28, 30.

<sup>15</sup>For more on Hone see Robert Nikirk, "Philip Hone: Auctioneer-Gentleman-Mayor," Auction 2 no. 4 (December 1968), 7-9, and Louis Auchincloss, ed., The Hone and Strong Diaries of Old Manhattan (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>16</sup>Harold Lancour, American Art Auction Catalogues: 1785-1942: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1944). Additional art auction catalogs have been located since Lancour published his list. For example, the Winterthur Library has added annotations to Lancour for another half dozen or so catalogs published during the 1820s and 1830s. I doubt, however, that the number of additionally located catalogs from the first half of the century will significantly change the general framework of our knowledge. Also useful is George McKay, American Book Auction Catalogues 1713-1934: A Union List (New York: New York Public Library, 1937, and supplements 1946 and 1948). The Knoedler Gallery has made available on microfiche an index of its library of auction catalogs: The Knoedler Library Auction Catalogues on Microfiche (New York: Knoedler, 1975). I am indebted to Ms. Cam Newell for access to this index and the Knoedler Library.

<sup>17</sup>"Original Paintings," New-York Mirror 12 (30 August 1834), p. 71.

<sup>18</sup>T. B. Thorpe, "New-York Artists Fifty Years Ago," Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art 17 (25 May 1872): 572. Lancour identifies under the house of "Gurley" a series of auction partnerships spanning the years 1831-1848, a "Levy" house active from 1834-44, but no "Harrison" is listed. Lancour located for Levy two catalogs in 1838, one in 1839, one in 1840, 1841, 1843, two in 1844 and one in 1845; he found only a single Gurley catalog from 1841.

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<sup>19</sup>For a description of the "bait and switch" techniques of "mock auctions" in Chatham Square see James Edward Kelley Papers, [photocopy], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Roll 1876, frame 1248. For a later (1868) image of a street auction of household furnishings see John Grafton, New York in the Nineteenth Century: 317 Engravings from "Harper's Weekly, 2nd edition (New York: Dover, 1980), 211.

<sup>20</sup>Calyo's image bears enough resemblance to Didier's that one suspects the possibility of a common prototype, perhaps from Europe. For an example of a street auction of presumably confiscated property during the French Revolution see Beurdeley, 63 (not a prototype for the Didier or Calyo images).

<sup>21</sup>"Auction Sales," Harper's Weekly (30 April 1870): 283.

<sup>22</sup>"The Year of the Artists," New York Times, 25 December 1882, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Towner, 37-8.

<sup>24</sup>Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790 - 1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 254.

<sup>25</sup>As Reed is not listed in Lancour we can assume that the firm only managed "general" auctions, as advertised on the card. The Centennial was the occasion many businesses to launch advertising campaigns that may included stereopticon cards like this one and the card for Knoedler (Fig. 9).

<sup>26</sup>The image, captioned "Life Sketches in New York City--An Evening Sale of Pictures at Auction"--is apparently generic. The accompanying text comments that "The auction picture sales that attract the passer-by in our down-town streets rarely exhibit superior works of art, and there are many tricks in the trade that we have not time to discuss here." "An Evening Picture Sale," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 4 December 1875, p. 209.

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<sup>27</sup>I am indebted to Margaret C. Conrads for information concerning Homer drawn from her forthcoming dissertation for CUNY on "Winslow Homer and His Critics in the 1870s."

<sup>28</sup>I suspect that Avery may be shown managing one of his 1876 sales. One of Avery's favorite artists, Escosura, was in the country to visit the Centennial Exhibition. Newspapers variously reported the artist's appearance in New York during the fall. For example, George Leavitt gave a party for the Spaniard at his Broadway gallery; William Schaus, Julius Oehme, and Roland Knoedler were among the art dealers present. Escosura was present to see his Quarrel of Pets knocked down for \$1,000 at the John Taylor Johnston sale discussed below. Avery included Chinese and Japanese decorative arts like those shown in Escosura's painting in sales at Clinton Hall, as for instance on May 11, 1876. However I have not yet matched the objects with a sale at which I can verify Escosura's presence.

<sup>29</sup>In Avery's "Untitled Note" on recent American art auctions the dealer takes credit for directing the sale of thirty-four collections between about 1864 and 1884, p. 841.

<sup>30</sup>Madeleine Fidell Beaufort has published studies of Avery's auctions to which I am indebted for this and subsequent details and analyses.

<sup>31</sup>Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, "A Measure of Taste: Samuel P. Avery's Art Auctions, 1864-1880," Gazette des Beaux-Arts Series 6, 100 (September 1982): 87-89.

<sup>32</sup>Samuel P. Avery, Catalogue of Sam'l P. Avery's Collection of Paintings Now on Exhibition at No. 625 Broadway and to be Sold at Auction on Tuesday & Wednesday Evenings, May 13th & 14th, 1873. Robert Somerville, Auctioneer (New York: Samuel P. Avery, 1873): n. p.

<sup>33</sup>"Art News and Notes," New York World, 6 May 1895, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfield, and Jeanne K. Welcher, The Diaries 1871-1882 of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer (New York: Arno Press, 1979), graph 4 between xxvi and xxvii.

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<sup>35</sup>For more on the Johnston collection see Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of American Painting, 1813 to 1912," American Art Review 3 no. 6 (November-December 1976): 138-141, and Madeleine Fidell Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, "Some Views of Art Buying in New York in the 1870s and 1880s," Oxford Art Journal 5 no. 1 (1982): 48-55.

<sup>36</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2.

<sup>37</sup>Nikirk, 9.

<sup>38</sup>"Fine Arts. Leavitt's Sale of American Paintings," New York Daily Tribune, 24 February 1875, p. 5. A few days later the paper was happy to report that Leavitt's latest catalog was "not defaced by so much of the comment we lately complained of"; see "Fine Arts. Auction of Modern Paintings," New York Daily Tribune, 4 March 1875, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup>"Who's Who in American Art: There is Only One Thomas E. Kirby," Arts and Decoration 6 (August 1916): 475.

<sup>40</sup>"About Thomas E. Kirby," American Art News 15 (18 November 1916): 4.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>See for example the New York Public Library's microfilm copy of Kirby's copy, with reserves annotated in his own hand, of the catalog for A Select and Important Collection of Superb Paintings by the Best American Artists (New York: Kirby, March 31, 1882), Lancour auction catalog no. 863.

<sup>43</sup>Sylvester R. Koehler, The United States Art Directory and Year-Book (two volumes in one), vol. 2 (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1882, and New York: Cassell and Company, 1884; reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1975), 11 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>44</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 8 (December 1882): 3.

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<sup>45</sup>"Paintings at the Kurtz Gallery," New York Times, 30 April 1877, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup>"Mr. Walters's Peachblow Vase," New York Times, 12 March 1886, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup>"Sham Picture Sales," New York Times, 27 January 1873, p. 5. See also "The Picture Business. A Card From Mr. Derby," New York Times, 3 February 1873, p. 2, and "Picture Auctions," New York Times, 12 January 1873, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup>"American Paintings," New York Daily Tribune, 26 January 1881, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup>The report of one Kirby sale suggests that he attempted to start the bidding at the reserves: "Tissot's "Ready for the Promenade" and Hamilton's fine marine were both withdrawn, no one being ready to start them at their respective upset prices of \$950 and \$500 . . . . Hugo Saemson's (Paris) "January and May," withdrawn on Tuesday evening at an upset price of \$1,000, was sold for \$275." "The Munich Collection. Some Good Pictures at Very Low Prices," New York Times, 29 January 1880, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>Arthur Swann memorandum, 13 October 1921, American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., Microfilm Roll 422, frame 26. "I think without question that there was not a single [English] dealer . . . who agreed that it was the correct policy to sell anything without reserves. . . . I told them that no reserves were the rock on which the Association's business had been built, and the very best evidence . . . was the success of the sales."

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. Swann reported that Christie's and Sotheby's charges did not exceed 12 1/2 percent including catalog costs and advertising, which was half or less than the American commission structure. He also noted, "they do not get out as fine catalogues as we do, nor do they advertise to the extent that we do." The American sales commission was undoubtedly negotiable, as it had been in the early years of the AAA.

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<sup>52</sup>"Troubled by Old Law," New York Times, 5 December 1887, p. 8. Rediscovery of the 1843 statute in 1887 forced temporary suspension of evening sales at the AAA and other auction houses until it was repealed by the city fathers.

<sup>53</sup>"A Queer Muddle," Studio new series no. 17 (28 March 1885): 193-4.

<sup>54</sup>See for example "Collection of Oil Paintings: Some Foreign and American Works -- An "Attributed" Turner, New York Times, 25 January 1880, p. 12: "The Turner is marked "attributed" with a cautiousness that does great credit to the Messrs. Kirby considering the usual recklessness of auctioneers of pictures in claiming infallibility in what passes under their hammer."

<sup>55</sup>"A Sale of Water Colors." New York Sun, 18 February 1880, p. 2. The article was a review of the presale exhibition; see Catalogue of A Most Important Collection, French, Spanish, English, Italian, Aquarelles Extraordinary . . . . 300 . . . . Examples . . . . To Be Sold By Auction, Positively Without Reserve, . . . . At Our Gallery, 845 Broadway (New York: Kirby, February 18, 1880), Lancour auction catalog no. 736.

<sup>56</sup>Henry Sheridan letter to Thomas Kirby, 18 July 1880, American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institutions, Washington, D. C., box 1, Correspondence 1876-1880.

<sup>57</sup>"A Queer Muddle," Studio, new series no. 17 (28 March 1885): 193.

CHAPTER EIGHT: AAA AUCTIONS: SELLING THE LIFESTYLES OF  
THE RICH AND FAMOUS, NOT-SO-FAMOUS, AND INFAMOUS

The Association's first forays in the auction business followed the "management" pattern set by Samuel Avery. For example, for a November 1883 preview and sale "under the management of The American Art Association, and conducted by Mr. Thos. E. Kirby" of "An Extraordinary and Highly Interesting Collection of Japanese Art Treasures" belonging to AAA partner R. Austin Robertson, Kirby engaged the gallery of his former partner, John Ortgies, at 845 and 847 Broadway. Likewise Kirby managed a sale at Ortgies for the AAA in April 1884 of about one hundred paintings and watercolors by Arthur Quartley and F. Hopkinson Smith prior to their departure for Europe.<sup>1</sup> Management of sales off-site was perhaps necessitated by the lack of space, but that approach also separated public auctions of Asian and other material from the focus on American art in the galleries.

A. George Seney Sale, 1885

Sutton, Kirby and Robertson probably considered with some reservations a proposal to liquidate at auction the art

collection of George I. Seney. As President of the Metropolitan Bank, Seney had witnessed the collapse of his financial empire when his railroad stock plummeted in 1884. Seney had bought a collection of the fashionable 'Men of 1830' and the esteemed contemporary French and German academic masters from the inventories of Samuel Avery, William Schaus, and Gustav Reichard, among others. Charles Kurtz, then in the employ of the AAA, wrote to his wife that Seney had paid "extravagant prices" for many of his pictures, eventually investing more than \$800,000 (they were pledged as security against a \$350,000 loan).<sup>2</sup> He also acquired works by Americans such as J. G. Brown, Frederick Bridgman, and George Inness, probably upon the advice of Thomas B. Clarke. Linda Skalet identifies Seney and Clarke as the subjects of a column in the 26 March 1885 Commercial Advertiser:

At the opening of the exhibition of the Academy last year a now prominent young enthusiast in our native art [Clarke] suggested to a gentleman [Seney] who was buying largely from the foreign dealers that his own countrymen had some meritorious works for sale and that they were to be found in the exhibition halls and studios and not in the Fifth Avenue and Broadway salesrooms. This generous and independent collector did not hesitate a moment but called for a cab and visited the Academy etc. This gentleman within the next few months purchased quite \$40,000 worth of our native art.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing in Seney's collection was particularly atypical or distinguished except for the fact that he owned both European and American paintings; most collectors concentrated in European art, while Clarke was relatively unique in focusing on American painting. Seney lived in Brooklyn and had lent many of his pictures to the Brooklyn Institute of Art as well as the Southern Exposition at Louisville; therefore his collection was rather well known.

Wesley Towner speculates in his undocumented history

The Elegant Auctioneers:

Sutton and Robertson were reluctant to turn the high-toned, if profitless, gallery into an auction hall. Kirby, on the other hand, wanted nothing so much as to put the fire into the bidders once more. Surrounded by so much money itching to be spent, the retired auctioneer was like an old fire horse pawing the ground at the smell of smoke and the sound of the bell.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, Kirby and the Association were already in the auction business, albeit as managers of modest sales previewed and sold off-site at Ortgies. More to the point is Thomas Norton's suggestion that,

Kirby realized that this was a golden opportunity for the Association to expand the business and at the same time to maintain their respectable and fashionable image by managing the auction as an important artistic, cultural, and social event far removed from the often questionable and shoddy practices of most auctioneers in the city at that time.<sup>5</sup>

Samuel Avery might have been expected to supervise the sale, especially since he had supplied Seney. But the dealer apparently managed his last sale about 1880, and though he continued to service long-standing clients, he was increasingly turning his attention to the fledging Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>6</sup> Kirby's assumption of the sale may have been a cause of friction between the two, and in any event, represents a passing of the gavel from Avery to the next generation.

In a move to establish the integrity of his sale, Kirby proposed an auction without reserve prices. Fear amidst a growing financial panic (and perhaps advice from Avery) motivated the Metropolitan Bank trustees to clamor for postponement of the sale or institution of reserves to protect the value of their collateral. With great effort Kirby convinced them that an unreserved sale would attract the best bidders and attain the highest prices, especially in a time of financial instability when bidders would anticipate bargains in the art marketplace.<sup>7</sup>

Charles Kurtz, then working on the Seney sale, reported to his wife that the "The Association aims to get up the handsomest catalogue--unillustrated, of course--that has

ever been published in this country. No expense is to be spared in paper, press-work, etc."<sup>3</sup> As the Association's publicity machine cranked up, Kurtz reported, "Particulars of the sale have been cabled over to London and Paris papers, and several foreign dealers and connoisseurs are expected over to attend it."<sup>3</sup>

The challenges to Kirby's ingenuity were just beginning. Shortly after the collection went on exhibition in the Association's galleries in mid-March 1885, William J. Stillman published an article in the Evening Post charging that many works were of dubious merit and that specific paintings by Jean-François Millet, Alexandre Decamps, Pierre Cabanel, Jean Léon Gérôme, and J. M. W. Turner were forgeries. Warning that there were certain pictures "a prudent purchaser would only buy with a guarantee of genuineness," Stillman's opinions contested the professional credentials and honesty of the local dealers responsible for selling the pieces to Seney and indirectly questioned the integrity of the AAA for perpetuating the attributions in the catalog and auctioning the works.<sup>10</sup> The Association immediately brought suit for \$25,000. Meanwhile, in a letter to the Evening Post Avery traced the provenance of

the Turner and verified that he had bought the Cabanel from the artist and the Decamps and Millet from the reputable Parisian dealer George Petit.<sup>11</sup> Michel Knoedler confirmed that he had acquired the Gérôme watercolor from Goupil, the artist's father-in-law.<sup>12</sup>

The ensuing debate pushed into the public eye discussion of connoisseurship including the importance of provenance, value of dealer guarantees, manipulations of signatures and dates (in the case of the Decamps), the presence of forgeries in the American market, and criteria for judgment of quality. Clarence Cook took Avery to task on all of the issues and, noting the dealer's influence at the Metropolitan Museum, continued his attack:

Not only is his [Avery's] bad advice shown in the pictures which Mr. Seney bought with his help . . . in his long connection with the Metropolitan Museum he has never, so far as appears, lifted his voice against the outrageous impostures that have countenanced that institution. He must know . . . that many of the drawings of the old masters, which Mr. James Jackson Jarves deluded Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt into buying . . . as impudent forgeries.<sup>13</sup>

During the two-week preview exhibition curious spectators jammed the American Art Galleries, each paying fifty cents for the privilege of seeing the slandered works of art. Kurtz reported that admissions averaged \$1,000 a

day and catalog sales totaled \$6,000, yielding the AAA significant income before their commission on the sale. On the first night of the sale, March 31, 1885, Chickering Hall filled with more than eighteen hundred spectators and bidders, including virtually every major dealer in the country.

Over three evenings Kirby knocked down 285 pictures by 126 foreign and thirty American artists for a total of \$406,910. The success of the sale precluded legal action against Stillman and the Evening Post, and the AAA dropped its suit. Jules Breton's Evening in the Hamlet of Finestère, which George Lucas had bought out of the Salon for Avery's inventory, brought \$18,200, the highest price ever paid for a painting at auction in America. Theodore Rousseau's On the Oise was knocked down for a substantial \$12,500, Franz Defregger's Arrival at the Ball for \$10,500. Seney's fifteen canvases by Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña went for prices in the \$1,000-5,000 range. The highest price for an American work was \$1,925 for Frederick Bridgman's An Interesting Game. Works by J. G. Brown and George Inness fetched \$850 and \$800, respectively. Kurtz opined:

"The Seney sale was a fair success . . . \$400,000. That was not nearly so much as Mr. Seney paid for them, but it was about what they were worth. . . . The particularly gratifying thing in the sale was that nearly all the American pictures brought more than Mr. Seney paid for them. . . . The publication of this fact will have a very good influence, I think, on American art."<sup>14</sup>

In retrospect Kirby saw the sale as a watershed event:

It was . . . at the George I. Seney collection . . . that the exceptionally high prices ruled, and [this] may be accounted for by the fact that it was the first time in the history of auction sales in this country that the management was a feature, that paintings were properly displayed in suitable galleries, and proper facilities offered for showing the pictures to advantage when placed before an audience. From this time on the interest in art increased.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly Samuel Avery must be credited with advancing the professionalization of art auctions. Yet Kirby, Sutton and Robertson picked up where Avery left off, further dignifying the auction business through the luxury of their exhibition galleries, quality of the catalog, and integrity dealing with the Metropolitan Bank and Stillman's charges. The influence of the sale is evident even in the activities of George Seney, who built and sold a second collection at the AAA in 1891, and left a third upon his death in 1893 which Kirby dispersed the following year (both will be discussed below).

The most important auction since the Johnston sale of 1876, the Seney sale marked the first major appearance of European art at the AAA and was but the first in a series of record setting auctions "managed" by the Association during the 1880s and 1890s. Writing on the art events of the next year, 1886, Mariana Van Rensselaer noted that the Impressionist show organized by Durand-Ruel and the AAA, "In popular attraction . . . has not even remotely rivalled the [exhibition of the] Morgan collection."<sup>15</sup>

#### B. Mary Jane Morgan Sale, 1886

The Association's February 1886 show of the collection of Mary Jane Morgan, the deceased widow of steamship magnate Charles Morgan, drew an average of 8,000-11,000 spectators a day, more than 100,000 over three weeks, necessitating the opening of an exit onto Broadway, while an admission charge again reaped a significant pre-sale profit for the AAA. With money no object, Mary Jane Morgan, a former school-teacher-turned-millionaire, had indulged a catholic taste for European and American paintings and decorative arts, Tiffany jewelry, Herter furniture, custom house wares, oriental vases and snuff bottles, and miscellaneous curios.

A rare photograph of the presale exhibition suggests the quality of her collection as seen in the Association's handsome galleries (Fig. 62). The fascination with her rags-to-riches story and the visible demonstration of her lavish lifestyle apparent in her art collection elicited media attention on the scale of recent modern sales of, for example, the Andy Warhol and Jackie Onassis estates. One newspaper even published an illustration of her famed \$50,000 bathroom.<sup>17</sup>

Morgan had spent about \$125,000 at the AAA, mainly on oriental objects.<sup>18</sup> Estimates varied, but it was thought that she had invested more than two million dollars in her collection of fine and decorative arts, including about \$1,200,000 for paintings, with at least \$500,000 going to William Schaus for French and German canvases.<sup>19</sup> Although a few Americans such as Frederic Church, Bridgman and Albert Ryder were represented, European artists predominated. Morgan had assembled what was called a "dealer's collection" of 240 paintings representing a deluxe "who's who" of established American taste.

The Archives of American Art holds a letter of agreement Kirby authored stipulating that the Association

would provide its services cataloging, exhibiting, publicizing, and selling the art for a 4% commission plus out of pocket expenses, with profit from admissions and catalog sales to be divided.<sup>20</sup>

Kirby produced three catalogs detailing the 2,628 lots: a routine octavo that was republished after the sale with prices and a luxurious commemorative volume in an edition limited to five hundred copies.<sup>21</sup> A gold letterpress title page of vellum graced the deluxe folio; magenta inks highlighted the artists' biographies, many of which were accompanied by etched, sepia-toned portrait vignettes. Twenty-four photogravures of the oriental and continental decorative arts were interspersed with twenty-nine full page etchings by artists such as F. S. Church, R. Swain Gifford, William Chase, and the Moran brothers of prominent European paintings. Having cataloged property in his youthful Philadelphia days, Kirby was personally responsible for the creation of a "collectible" that was both informative and classy.

Early arrivals to Chickering Hall on the first night of the ten-day sale, March 3, 1886, found a maroon curtain stretched across the stage, against which a large easel

displayed Emile Rénouf's Repairing the Old Boat, which Kirby knocked down as the sixth lot for over \$5,000.

The star of the picture show was Jules Breton's The Communicants (Fig. 63), which Morgan had purchased from S. P. Avery for \$22,500 in 1884. The picture was appealing on a number of levels. The Art Journal had hailed it "perhaps the finest work" in the Salon of 1884. Breton had characterized it as "supreme clarity emerging in the midst of mystery" and penned a lengthy poem for the Salon catalog that Kirby reprinted.<sup>22</sup> Not only did the painting convey great religious sentiment that endeared it, like so much of Millet's work, to Americans, but the large, 74" x 48" painting was also judged "a daring attempt on the part of the artist to handle a mass of white with no color to relieve it."<sup>23</sup> Bidding through Walter Watson against Avery, Charles Crocker, and Jules Oehme (from Knoedler representing railroad man James J. Hill), Canadian Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) won the painting for \$45,500, establishing a new record for a work bought at American auction, surpassing the record set the year before for Seney's Breton.<sup>24</sup>

The highest bid for an American piece was \$2,050 for Frederic Church's Al Ayn--The Fountain, while Kirby knocked

down Bridgman's Afternoon Hours--Algiers for \$1,750. Morgan had paid Knoedler \$12,500 for Jehan Georges Vibert's Missionary's Story (visible in Fig. 62); Collis P. Huntington won it for \$25,500. The Knoedlers purchased the greatest number of lots, including some thirty-five on behalf of California railway magnate Charles Crocker, who had opened his private exhibition gallery in Sacramento to the public the previous year. The Corcoran Gallery, the only American museum to regularly acquire works at auction in the 1870s and 1880s, bought Camille Corot's Wood Gatherers for \$15,000.

On the fourth day of the sale, devoted to Asian porcelains, enamels, bronzes, jades, and the like, William T. Walters, bidding through James Sutton, purchased for \$18,000 the famous "Peachbloom Vase" that Morgan had bought for a scandalous \$15,000 at the AAA (Fig. 64). The price for the diminutive, eight-inch high bottle seemed to epitomize the extravagant excesses of the idle rich and attracted tremendous, unwelcome publicity, especially as Walters, Kirby and Sutton became enmeshed in scandal by denying that the Baltimore collector was the buyer.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, the vase was never displayed in his gallery during Walters's or his son's lifetimes.<sup>26</sup>

The ten-day sale grossed over \$885,300 for 240 paintings and more than \$300,000 for the hundreds of decorative objects, establishing a record for a single sale of over a million dollars. Commentators reported that Morgan had paid top dollar for most of her objects--she had not sought out bargains--and therefore most of the objects in the sale were safe, but not great investments from a speculative point of view; the leverage to achieve large profit was lacking. The Sun published a complete list of the prices Morgan had paid for her paintings next to those achieved at her sale and advised, "No event that has occurred of a like nature was ever so full of instruction to amateurs of fine pictures."<sup>27</sup>

Suspicion over the high prices led the New York Times to ask if lots might have been bought in. It was understood that many dealers supported prices while seizing opportunities to capitalize on the glamour of the provenance:

Dealers, who are rivals of the Art Association, say that in the main the sales were to people who purchased for their own galleries, and that the, in very many instances, absurd prices paid were paid because of the unaccountable craze existing to possess some picture from this collection.<sup>28</sup>

At the same, the Art Amateur reported in June of the following year that seventeen paintings thought to have been sold for \$58,550 had been bought in, despite the proclamation on the catalog's title page that the sale was "without reserve."<sup>29</sup> The absence of media furor over this disclosure suggests that either the charge was unfounded, or, more probably, accepted as typical of the auction business.

#### C. William Aspinwall Sale, 1886

Though minor in comparison, the sale next month of William Aspinwall's collection is an instructive counterpoint to the Morgan spectacle. Kirby engaged Ortgies' gallery to preview the works. About two hundred attended the sale in Chickering Hall on April 6, 1886. One newspaper account describing the collection aptly summarized the changing patterns of collecting:

A quarter of a century ago the collection of paintings of the late William H. Aspinwall occupied much the same position among those of the city that is held to-day by that of the late William H. Vanderbilt. Mr. Aspinwall's pictures were, however, in great majority works of the old masters. . . . [His] gallery, adjoining on Tenth street his family residence . . . was opened once a month to visitors, and also on several occasions for the benefit of different charities. . . . Mr. Aspinwall bought his pictures

chiefly abroad and paid large prices for many of them. . . . While a few of the paintings now in the auctioneer's gallery do not present inherent claims to authenticity, the great majority are undoubted originals.<sup>30</sup>

That the best of Aspinwall's old masters, including a work given to Murillo, were sent abroad for auction throws into high relief the dramatic shift in American taste towards contemporary art after the Centennial. At Chickering Hall Kirby announced that the lots would be sold without guarantee, a reference particularly to paintings attributed to Da Vinci, Titian, and Rubens that he sold for \$230-515, less than Aspinwall had paid for them. Charles-Louis Muller's Our Savior at Emmaus won the sale high of \$2500. Another newspaper observed of the sale:

The chief of the "old masters" attributed to the more famous men fared rather badly, but a number of the others, of whose authenticity there is little doubt, did better. As a rule, however, the modern pictures brought by far the best prices.<sup>31</sup>

Buyers at the sale included Knoedler, Bostonian Samuel D. Warren, James Renwick bidding through Lawrence Aspinwall, and Samuel Avery, who was reported to have bought principally for his own inventory.

## D. Alexander Turney Stewart Sale, 1887

Of the great sales that launched the Association into preeminence that of Alexander Turney Stewart has been the most thoroughly documented. Assertions that the merchant amassed the greatest collection to date in America are disputable; Avery made a similar claim for his client William H. Vanderbilt, though the dealer credited Stewart with paying the highest price for a canvas ever imported in the United States, some \$67,000 for Ernest Meissonier's Friedland, 1807.<sup>32</sup> What the Art Journal observed of Stewart's collection applied equally to Vanderbilt:

The fact that an American millionaire put it together is significant of a choice stimulated rather than restricted by huge prices, and also significant of a certain modernity of taste and of an evident Gallicism.<sup>33</sup>

What Vanderbilt lacked was the status of having spent the most on a picture as well as having acquired one of the most famed works of the day, Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair. Well known through Sir Edward Lanseer's engraving, the immense canvas had made big money for Bonheur, Lanseer, and Ernest Gambart, the Belgian art dealer who had used it to propel the artist into stardom. Even William P. Wright, the New Jersey collector who bought it continued to earn income

while it toured under Gambart's direction.<sup>34</sup> In his "somewhat mercantile desire to 'get the best',"<sup>35</sup> Stewart commissioned William Adolphe Bouguereau to create his greatest painting, "and not a nude subject"; the artist subsequently proclaimed Return from the Harvest his masterpiece, though Stewart died before the work entered his gallery.<sup>36</sup>

A Scottish-Irish immigrant, Stewart parlayed his soft goods business into the leading department store in Manhattan. He built an immense Second Empire mansion at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street that included a specially designed art gallery to house his extensive collection of primarily European paintings and sculpture (Fig. 35).<sup>37</sup>

Kirby spent around \$45,000 preparing for the March 1887 sale: some \$15,000 on printing, \$6,900 on photography and etching, and \$5,900 on advertising. Admissions exceeded \$25,000 and catalog sales \$19,600. The four percent sales commission on the ten-day sale total of \$575,000 yielded \$23,000.<sup>38</sup> Three catalogs were published. Covered in white vellum to evoke Stewart's marble palace, the deluxe folio featured etchings by Leon Moran and photogravures on Indian tissue tipped onto Imperial Japan paper. But the more

modest volume was credited by the Studio with having played a role in the "enormous" attendance: "Too large for an ordinary pocket, impossible to hide in the fashionable muff, and too expensive to be thrown away, these catalogues had to be carried in plain sight of everybody, and certainly played an important part in advertising the show."<sup>39</sup>

On the first night of the sale,

It quickly became apparent that nobody wanted Mr. Stewart's pictures at anything like the prices which the millionaire merchant had paid for them. The bidding, in which Judge Hilton joined, was not spirited, and the chief paintings put up on the first evening went at considerably less than "half price."<sup>40</sup>

As executor and benefactor of the Stewart estate, Judge Henry Hilton, a crony of Boss Tweed, managed to squander Stewart's millions in short order. Images of art auctions are very rare; one shows Kirby in the midst of knocking down the Meissonier for a record \$66,000 to Hilton, possibly seen on the far right of the image (Fig. 65). Kirby had advised the judge that it was illegal for him, as executor, to buy Stewart's property, so Hilton sent his son to bid under an assumed name. When his unethical behavior became known, Hilton gave the painting to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair went for a high \$53,000 to Sam Avery acting on behalf of Cornelius Vanderbilt, who gifted it to the Metropolitan the next day. Nevertheless, many works, both European and American, brought less than Stewart had paid. As had been seen at the Morgan sale, the ability to spend top dollar did not guarantee profit. But profit was probably not on the merchant's mind as he conspicuously consumed paintings like Gérôme's Chariot Race for \$33,000 and Church's Niagara for \$15,000; Kirby sold each for about \$7,100.

Reports suggested that the auctioneer struggled to boost prices. Selling Gérôme's Pollice Verso,

Mr. Kirby appealed in vain to the fact that the work cost \$20,000 and could not be painted today for less than \$25,000. He did not get beyond \$11,000. . . . [Albert Bierstadt's Emerald Pool] had cost \$15,000 and was announced as his greatest work. It appeared to frighten off bidders with its immense display of canvas, 116 by 78 inches. A faint bid of \$500 was heard after much solicitation; the offers moved haltingly on to \$1,200. It began to be evident when \$2,000 was reached that there had been an attempt to get quietly away with the picture at a low price. When \$3,000 was reached, there was applause. The painting sold at \$3,100.<sup>41</sup>

Kirby insisted on selling Stewart's sculpture in the millionaire's marble palace, but agreed to Hilton's very high reserves.<sup>42</sup> Stewart had purchased a Greek Slave by

Hiram Powers in 1870 from Prince Anatole Demidoff for \$11,000. Failing to reach Hilton's \$5,000 upset price, it was bought-in for \$965. Eventually it was probably moved with other marbles into the Stewart-Hilton department store, where neither the shock of its nudity nor its popular attraction rivaled the notoriety accompanying its exhibition some forty years earlier (Fig. 6).

#### E. Duke de Durcal Sale, 1889

One effect of record-breaking sales was the risk of gaining "the reputation of being well-meaning but ignorant fools in art,"<sup>43</sup> an estimation, one reporter warned, certain to attract works of dubious quality to the New York art market. A case in point was the collection of about one hundred oils and 250 drawings by Spanish, Flemish, Dutch and Italian old masters belonging to His Royal Highness Don Pedro de Bourbon, the Duke of Durcal.

When the twenty-five year old Duke arrived with his Duchess and paintings, the sale was predicted to be "the sensation of the next season."<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately the environment was hostile towards old masters, and the New York press uniformly deprecated the collection for several

reasons. America's generally lukewarm interest in old master painting presented the first problem. More significant, however, was the impudence the Spanish Duke displayed in bringing his collection to New York with great fanfare, when numerous observers felt the collection contained, at best, many copies, at worst, numerous fakes. Mariana Van Rensselaer, one of several critics who effectively killed the sale, called attention to the dubious attributions in an extended discussion that hailed the advance of connoisseurship as a scientific discipline nurtured in an international context:

The critical student of art has lately taken the place of the once-paramount "elegant amateur;" the investigations of the new school of historical research have been placed at his service. . . . As a consequence, the whole science which he professes has been remodelled; or, to speak more accurately, it has been for the first time reduced to a science. Its results are now within the reach of every reader; and a comparison of the new catalogue of the Dresden Gallery, for example, with the one which was implicitly believed in for so long, would reveal them as results implying far more numerous and radical changes in nomenclature than twenty years ago would have been thought probable or even possible.<sup>45</sup>

Sutton initially announced that the sale would be conducted without reserve, but bad press compelled the Duke to establish what were considered insultingly high reserves that were published in advance of the sale and announced by

Kirby at the rostrum. Because "the public regards them with an indifference that verges on contempt," it was not surprising that the Duke acted to prevent a "slaughter" of his old masters at an unreserved sale.<sup>46</sup>

At Chickering Hall the evening of April 10, 1889, "Clearly the persons present had come there to see who it was who would buy an old master now when there were so many new masters to claim attention."<sup>47</sup> None of the best pictures met their reserves; the Murillo was bought in at \$30,000, Teniers at 8,000, Van Eyck at 8,000, and Van der Weyden at \$7,000.<sup>48</sup> Only thirty-six canvases sold for a total of about \$11,500 during the two-day sale, handing the Duke a loss of some \$5,500 in expenses.<sup>49</sup>

As a result the Duke arranged to sell pictures on consignment through the AAA. Happily, he enriched America with at least one distinguished work, Rogier van der Weyden's Saint Luke Painting the Virgin, sold to Boston collector Henry Higginson and now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Eventually the Duke took his collection to the Hôtel Drouot, where it was reported he didn't do much better, selling fifty-nine works for \$22,342.<sup>50</sup>

The Duke's debacle must have satisfied the expanding community of art collectors, critics, dealers, and auctioneers who were growing ever more proud of the strength, quality, and integrity of the New York art market. Americans were not, it seemed, as gullible as they had been in the days alluded to by T. B. Thorpe, nor were they the "ignorant fools" it was feared they might become. Yet the New York Times saw in the arrogance that accompanied the Duke-bashing a "crudity in matters of fine arts." Acknowledging that recently in New York close to \$80,000 had been spent privately for a Rembrandt, it continued:

At the public sale [in America] of paintings conducted like a spectacle in a theatre, it gives a connoisseur goose flesh to hear the applause that shakes the house when a picture is bid up above fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. . . . The applause is not for the picture, for what of emotion, of thought, or of marvelous handicraft it contains, but for the twenty thousand dollars.

If ever there was a confession of crudity in matters of the fine arts it is in the boast one often hears, that our people will only buy the very best. What it really means is that their only standard is the money standard; put for "very best" the "very costliest" and the boast is true.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See An Extraordinary and Highly Interesting Collection of Japanese Art Treasures, Curios and Cabinet Gems . . . the Whole the Property of Mr. R. Austin Robertson, Yokohama, Japan (New York: American Art Association, November 12-14,

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1883), Lancour auction catalog no. 955; and Catalogue of Art Works by Mr. Arthur Quartley and Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith . . . Fine Oil Paintings and Water Color Drawings (New York: American Art Association, April 25, 1884), Lancour auction catalog number 993. Quartley's salon-scaled Summer's Morning failed to meet its "upset" price of \$2,000 and was bought in according to "Selling Pictures at Auction," New York Times, 26 April 1884, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Charles M. Kurtz Papers, Correspondence, 7 February 1885, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Transcription by Sandra Underwood.

<sup>3</sup>Linda Henefield Skalet, "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870-1915" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 132.

<sup>4</sup>Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 50-51.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas E. Norton, 100 Years of Collecting in America: The Story of Sotheby Parke Bernet (New York: Abrams, 1984), 13.

<sup>6</sup>By the mid-1880s Avery was handing over his business to his son, Samuel, Jr. Lilian Randall reports that Avery retired at the end of 1885, The Diary of George A. Lucas, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 19.

<sup>7</sup>Charles De Kay, "Art Under the Hammer," TMs (photocopy), 40-g (De Kay's numbering), American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 3. Several different drafts of the manuscript exist including the 294-page manuscript at the Archives of American Art. Sections of that manuscript are also filed throughout the American Art Association Papers according to subject (e.g. De Kay's pages on A. T. Stewart are also found in the Association's A. T. Stewart file). I also possess a copy of De Kay's manuscript, for which I thank Kirby's granddaughter, Mrs. Thomas (Wilhelmine) Waller. De Kay numbered and renumbered sections as he added text to the manuscript; I have used his numbering here.

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<sup>3</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 7 February 1885. Transcription by Underwood. See Catalogue of Mr. George I. Seney's Collection of Modern Paintings (New York: American Art Association, March 31-April 2, 1885), Lancour auction catalog no. 1046.

<sup>9</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 22 February 1885. Transcription by Underwood.

<sup>10</sup>"The Seney Collection of Paintings," Evening Post, 19 March 1885, unpaginated clipping, American Art Association Papers. The New York Times wrote of Stillman's opinion of the Turner that he was acting under the influence of the "Turner-mad Ruskin" with whom Stillman had traveled in Switzerland, "Mr. Seney's Pictures," New York Times, 3 March 1885, p. 6. In fact, Stillman had met Turner in 1849. For a recent biographical sketch see May Brawley Hill, "William James Stillman," in The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1985), 277.

<sup>11</sup>Samuel P. Avery, "The Authenticity of Mr. Seney's Paintings," Evening Post, 21 March 1885, unpaginated clipping, American Art Association Papers.

<sup>12</sup>M. Knoedler, "An Item of the Seney Collection," Evening Post, 23 March 1885, unpaginated clipping, American Art Association Papers.

<sup>13</sup>Clarence Cook, "A Queer Muddle," Studio new series no. 17 (28 March 1885): 196. At the moment Gaston Feuardent, a dealer in antiquities who led the attack on Metropolitan Museum director Luigi Cesnola over questionable restorations of the Cypriote collection, was publisher of the Studio.

<sup>14</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 9 April 1885, transcription by Underwood. The Art Amateur published a report of what Seney paid and sold pictures for and confirmed that the American pictures did well compared to the Barbizon school; see "My Note Book," The Art Amateur, 12 no. 6 (May 1885): 120.

<sup>15</sup>"Biography: Thomas E. Kirby" American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 1.

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<sup>16</sup>Mariana Van Rensselaer, "Pictures of the Season in New York," American Architect and Building News 19 (19 June 1886): 293.

<sup>17</sup>"Mrs. Morgan's Gems," clipping with handwritten identification "Sunday Times," [not the New York Times], undated, unpaginated, in the American Art Association Papers, box 4, Morgan file. This article plays to public fascination with extraordinary wealth by including a woodcut of the daughter of William H. Vanderbilt admiring the \$15,000 vase and a view of Mrs. Morgan's \$50,000 bathroom. For more information regarding Morgan see Towner, 80-114.

<sup>18</sup>Kirby's reminiscences of Morgan and her first visit to the Association, when she bought several thousand dollars worth of oriental porcelains, is recounted by De Kay, 35a-35h. Kirby also notes that the heiress was duped by some vendors.

<sup>19</sup>"Mrs. Morgan's Gems." The article includes an illustration of Schaus showing Morgan a painting with the caption "Mr. Schaus Makes a Sale."

<sup>20</sup>Letter of agreement 29 September 1885, American Art Association Papers, box 4, Morgan file.

<sup>21</sup>See Catalogue of the Art Collection Formed by the Late Mrs. Mary J. Morgan (New York: American Art Association, March 3-15, 1886), Lancour auction catalog no. 1092.

<sup>22</sup>Hollister Sturgis and others, eds., Jules Breton and the French Rural Tradition, ex. cat. (Omaha: Joslyn Art Museum, 1982), 99. For a history of Breton collecting in America see Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, "Jules Breton in America: Collecting in the 19th Century" in the same publication.

<sup>23</sup>"The Art Sale Finished," New York Times, 6 March 1886, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>It was said Smith had to have the picture because one of the girls in it reminded him of his eldest daughter. For a transcription of an amusing French report of the sale conducted by "Sir Thomas Kirby" see "A French Account of the Morgan Sale," Art Amateur 17 no. 1 (June 1887): 11-12.

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This second record for work by Breton was the occasion of an interesting letter to the artist on the U. S. art market from Samuel Avery; see Madeleine Fidell Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, "Some Views of Art Buying in New York in the 1870s and 1880s," Oxford Art Journal 5 (1982): 48-55. A review of prices for Breton in both Benezit and Mireur indicates that the Morgan sale was the apogee for Breton prices. By the turn of the century prices had declined to \$25,500 (1900 Lyall sale) and \$36,500 (1902 Matthiessen sale), and rapidly fell thereafter. See Emmanuel Bénézit, Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, et graveurs (Paris: Librairie Gründ, 1976), and Hippolyte Mireur, Dictionnaire des ventes d'art faites en France et à l'étranger pendant les XVIII<sup>me</sup> and XIX<sup>me</sup> siècles (Paris: L. Soullié, 1901-1912).

<sup>25</sup>The scandal was precipitated by the Association's refusal to disclose the name of the buyer and Walters's refusal to admit his purchase; see pp. 22-23 above. For a synopsis of the embarrassing controversy and gossip it engendered see Michael Forrest, "The Peach Blow Affair," The Antique Collector (January 1986): 85-87.

<sup>26</sup>Robertson had acquired the piece in China. At the auction the trustees of the Morgan estate opened the bidding at \$10,000, having apparently accepted a check from Walters before the sale. Charles Crocker's entry into the fray not only shocked the trustees but pushed the price considerably higher. For an account of the battle see "Broadbrim's New York Letter," no. 918, undated clipping in the American Art Association Papers, box 19.

<sup>27</sup>"A Wondrous Art Sale," Sun, 7 March 1886, unpaginated clipping, American Art Association Papers. The list also includes the typical cost of comparable works in Europe before duty and dealer markups.

<sup>28</sup>"Mr. Walters's Peachblow Vase," New York Times, 12 March 1886, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup>"My Note Book," Art Amateur 17 no. 1 (June 1887): 3.

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<sup>30</sup>"Some Old Masters," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, box 3, "Notes" file.

<sup>31</sup>"The Aspinwall Sale," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, box 3, "Notes" file.

<sup>32</sup>Samuel Avery, "Untitled Note," in Benson J. Lossing, The History of New York City, vol. 2 (New York: Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., 1884), 842. Stewart negotiated the commission directly with the artist for 300,000 francs, about \$60,000, to which was added duty and transportation.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Isaacson, "Collecting Bouguereau in England and America," in Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, William Bouguereau, 1825-1905, ex. cat. (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1984), 108.

<sup>34</sup>For more on Gambart, Bonheur, and The Horse Fair, see Jeremy Maas, Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), 70-77; 93-94.

<sup>35</sup>"The Stewart Picture Sale," New York Times, 27 March 1887, p. 5. The article suggests that Stewart "seemed to have become a collector not because he cared about art, but because the kind of interest in art which a collection of picture testifies was demanded of him by public opinion."

<sup>36</sup>For information regarding American collectors of Bouguereau see Isaacson and Fronia E. Wissman, Bouguereau (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996), 103-9.

<sup>37</sup>For more information on the Stewart mansion and art gallery see Jay E. Cantor, "A Monument to Trade: A. T. Stewart and the Rise of the Millionaire's Mansion in New York," Winterthur Portfolio 10 (1975): 165-197. For an inaccurate account drawn from contemporary reports of the sale see Jerry Patterson, "The A. T. Stewart Sale of 1887," Auction 4 (October 1970): 45-49. Wesley Towner reprints an amusing account of sale, pp. 109-110.

<sup>38</sup>American Art Association Papers, box 4, A. T. Stewart file.

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<sup>39</sup>"Picture-Sales of the Month," Studio, new series 2 no. 10 (April 1887): 1.

<sup>40</sup>"The Stewart Art Sale," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, 2 April 1887, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup>Patterson, 47.

<sup>42</sup>Kirby's negotiations with Hilton are recounted in De Kay, 35-k-3 to 35-o. A list of the "Up-set prices" for the Stewart sculptures will be found in the American Art Association Papers, box 4, A. T. Stewart file.

<sup>43</sup>"The World of Art: Some Results of the Morgan Sale--A Magnificent Acquisition," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, box 4, Mary Jane Morgan file.

<sup>44</sup>"Coming Over to New York with his Duchess and his Spanish Gallery," unidentified clipping in the American Art Association Papers, box 5.

<sup>45</sup>Mariana Van Rensselaer, "The Duque de Durcal's Old Masters," Studio new series 3 no. 5 (April 1889): 59-70. See also for a discussion differentiating between replicas and copies "A Bourbon's Old Masters," New York Times, 16 March 1889, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup>"A Frightened Duke," New York Times, 4 April 1889, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>"Bids Were Sadly Lacking," New York Times, 11 April 1889, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>See "Upset Prices Duke de Durcal's Collection," manuscript, American Art Association Papers, box 5.

<sup>49</sup>"The Duc \$5,500 Out of Pocket," New York Times, 14 April 1889, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup>De Kay, 36-p.

<sup>51</sup>"The Money Gauge For Pictures," New York Times, 16 April 1889, p. 8.

## CHAPTER NINE: PREACHING, POWER, AND PRESTIGE IN AMERICA

The management of picture galleries in New York ever since the celebrated tour of [Mihaly Munkacsy's] "Christ Before Pilate" has largely been a matter of shrewd theatrical speculation.

By mid-1886 American art shared the limelight with European art in special exhibitions and auctions at the American Art Association. Further, the forms of AAA programs had evolved considerably. The Association had circulated both the first and second Prize Fund exhibitions and cash prizes and gold medals had been awarded to American artists and paintings to fledging American art museums. Special shows like the American contribution to the Munich International Exhibition had been presented in luxurious galleries that had expanded twice since 1883. Educational and beautiful catalogs--from a monograph on George Inness to deluxe, limited editions for the Morgan sale--had been published. Sketches hardly more expensive than the catalogs had passed through the Association, as had the most expensive paintings and porcelains sold in America. With the extraordinary successes of the George Seney and Mary Jane Morgan auctions and notoriety of the Impressionist show, the American Art Association had expanded its program well

beyond the retail American picture business initiated by Rufus Moore and James Sutton seven years earlier.

Still, there was more ground to be broken, and while the Association would continue to claim the prestige of having sold the most expensive painting at auction, it would soon buy the costliest as well. The Association's interactions with Hungarian Mihaly Munkacsy, Russian Vassili Verestchagin, and French Jean-François Millet illustrate the complex web of artistic, financial, social and cultural values that coexisted in the Association's galleries. All three stories share a common characteristic: Each sold a palatable Christian ideology in an exotic, cosmopolitan package mass marketed across the country. Acquisition of Millet's The Angelus epitomized the peak of the Association's purchasing power and prestige at home and abroad, while the 1889 Barye exhibition at which the painting premiered in New York was one of the best exhibitions the Association ever organized.

#### A. Mihaly Munkacsy, 1886

For the American Art Association the story of Mihaly Munkacsy's Christ Before Pilate (replica Fig. 66) is the

tale of "the one that got away." Thanks to a series of clippings in the AAA papers (an indication of the attention paid to the "competition") and the personal correspondence of Charles M. Kurtz, who had left the employ of the Association in anger sometime between October 1885 and May 1886, we can look briefly behind the scenes of one of the most famed exhibitions of the day. Review of this interesting episode in the history of what we now call "blockbuster" exhibitions presents an interesting foil to the story of Millet's The Angelus.

On several occasions I have cited Charles De Kay's manuscript for "Art Under the Hammer," undertaken for publication by Doubleday a year or two before Kirby died in 1924. De Kay worked directly with Kirby as well as with AAA accounts, records, clippings, and Kirby's autobiography.<sup>2</sup> In writing The Elegant Auctioneers Wesley Towner probably had access to De Kay's manuscript and other materials now in the Archives of American Art. His story was further enriched by interviews during the 1950s with sources who remembered Kirby and Sutton and could share reliable as well as apocryphal accounts of their dealings. In relying on De Kay for basic information Towner may have perpetuated

inaccuracies dating to Kirby's time, while in other cases revising De Kay's historical narrative.

De Kay's account of the Munkacsy affair, prepared with Kirby's version of the story some twenty-six years after the fact, is presented here as a caution against accepting De Kay's manuscript as an infallible resource.

When Fischhoff on the part of Sedelmeyer of Paris brought over the celebrated painting by Munkacsy "Christ before Pilate" he proposed that it be exhibited at the American Art Galleries. He had already caused thousands of complimentary tickets to be printed when Mr. Kirby discovered that Fischhoff intended to introduce a turnstyle [sic] at the entrance to the galleries. At once he put his foot down. For one thing it suggested a change in a matter always near his heart--a free entrance to the art loving public, for another it was clear that the turnstile which registered the number of visitors was to furnish statistics to boost and advertise the picture at subsequent exhibitions. This painting was widely sold in colored reproductions, was extensively advertised and after an exhibition in New York at the old Booth Theatre was sent about the country when it proved a very profitably drawing card.<sup>3</sup>

Today only a few in this country know Munkacsy's Milton Dictating "Paradise Lost" to his Daughters, found in the New York Public Library, but in the mid-1880s its presence in the Lenox Library collection was well-known and Munkacsy was a bonafide international star. Samuel Avery probably brought a dozen or more major Munkacsy canvases to New York with the aid of his Paris contact George Lucas, including the "Milton," which was one of several works that won for

the artist a Medal of Honor at the Exposition Universelle of 1878 (the retail price of the picture was a considerable 100,000 francs).<sup>4</sup> Lippincott's Magazine asserted in an 1882 article, "Means of Fostering American Art," that the painting was "worth more than an entire academy in imparting knowledge and forming correct taste."<sup>5</sup> Other Munkacsys had been publicized including The Last Days of a Man Condemned to Death in the collection of Philadelphian Mrs. William P. Wilstach, with which the artist had won acclaim at the 1870 Salon. In 1884 Harper's Weekly featured a self portrait in the artist's studio that Avery had just imported.<sup>6</sup> Two years later at the Association's sale of the collections of Beriah Wall and John A. Brown the painting sold for \$7,100, while another, formerly in George Seney's collection, went to the prestigious collection of Philadelphian H. C. Gibson for \$6,250.

Avery and Lucas saw Munkacsy's 12 x 18-foot Christ Before Pilate in Paris in 1881, when the New York dealer bought the Hungarian's pictures for both William H. Vanderbilt and New York Governor Edward Morgan from the artist's dealer, Charles Sedelmeyer (Vanderbilt's Munkacsy, Two Families, is visible at the lower left of Fig. 41). The

giant canvas arrived in New York under the auspices of Sedelmeyer in November 1886. It was logical that Sedelmeyer, negotiating through son-in-law Alfred Fischhoff, sought to present what was typically described as the Hungarian's greatest painting in the Association's well-fitted galleries.

However, on October 30 Avery wrote to Charles M. Kurtz that a "sudden disagreement" had upset plans, and though there was a possibility the painting might be displayed at the National Academy of Design, the New York dealer had recommended that Kurtz manage the American tour.<sup>7</sup> It is doubtful that the dispute revolved around a turnstile, as reported by De Kay. Advertising that thousands or millions had seen a particular work of art had been a common marketing strategy since before the famed tour of Hiram Power's Greek Slave in the late 1840s and 1850s (Figs. 5 and 6) and was a promotional tactic the AAA would employ with Millet's The Angelus. The issue was certainly not charging entry fees, as the AAA had been collecting general admission since it opened and would not discontinue the practice until after the Stewart sale in 1887. The dispute was probably over the

division of income. The value of the painting as a money-maker is suggested by Kurtz's November 6 report to his wife:

But I must tell you my greatest opportunity to drive the iron into Sutton's alleged soul: This morning, Sutton sent Mr. Sedelmeyer an offer of I think \$30,000 for the painting. . . . Later in the day . . . Sutton offered Mr. Sedelmeyer fifty thousand dollars for the picture, cash down! Mr. Sedelmeyer, when he came in, read the letter and said: "I will not sell my picture to Mr. Sutton;--please write and tell him so!"<sup>3</sup>

The painting premiered at a clergy preview on November 17 at the Twenty-Third Street Tabernacle. Dramatically gaslit against dark red drapery in the somber proscenium, Christ Before Pilate stimulated great critical discussion. Though many found the picture moving and "religious," some critics found it disappointingly small after the media hype orchestrated by Kurtz.<sup>9</sup> More problematic was the representation of Christ and recognition that the work was less an archaeological reconstruction of the specific event, as Gérôme might have created, and more a contemporary view of a secular event in the Orient. That perspective worked both sides of the fence: while clergy could preach the virtues of the painting and events it depicted, those less inclined towards Christian orthodoxy could enjoy an orientalist fantasy.

As part of his ten-year contract with Munkacsy, Sedelmeyer was empowered to commission specific subjects and suggest treatments of his work. At its worst this knowledge inflamed anti-Semitic bias. One critic noted that Sedelmeyer "might have sat for one of the Semitic types" in the painting.<sup>10</sup> After exclaiming that "the religious racket is being worked for all it is worth," and noting that the extravagant display boosted the value of works in the collections of William T. Walters, William H. Vanderbilt, and August Belmont, the New York Times asked:

Is it the time to hint that the Jews have crucified Jesus afresh, made a ferocious dynamiter [criminal] of him, given him the expression of a person escaped from a madhouse, and then dragged that picture from country to country as remorselessly, with as much vulgarity and greed of pelf,<sup>11</sup> as the mountebank drags a monster from fair to fair?

The controversy swelled the gate, where fifty cents admission was charged. A week after the premier Kurtz reported:

The "Moral Show" is doing splendidly. It is bringing from \$500 to \$750 a day--straight along, so far, and I trust it may "keep it up."--The Art Ass'n is sick over this thing. Kirby told Rehn, he understood I had something to do with turning Mr. Sedelmeyer against the Art Association. . . . I am going to have the Custom House get after the Ass'n some of these days, too. Forman of the Met. Museum told me of some of their tricks with the Custom House, and I am going to have the matter investigated and written up.<sup>12</sup>

Munkacsy spent six weeks in the United States, during which time he dined with Albert Bierstadt, among others, and painted portraits of publisher Joseph Pulitzer and Henry Marquand, who became president of the Metropolitan Museum in 1889.<sup>13</sup> In February of the following year, while the picture was still on display at the Tabernacle, department store entrepreneur John Wanamaker paid \$100,000 for Christ Before Pilate, a record that generated publicity for the work when it was sent on national tour after closing in May. Meanwhile Sedelmeyer rented the Tabernacle to display from October 1887 to March 1888 Munkacsy's Christ on Calvary, the second, even larger installment in the painter's Christological trilogy (an Ecce Homo eventually completed the cycle<sup>14</sup>). Wanamaker bought that, too, presumably for a comparable price, and sent it on the road. Eventually the two paintings traveled to at least twenty-nine separate showings in twenty cities including Topeka, Omaha, and Des Moines, as well as larger mid-western and eastern cities.<sup>15</sup> Though Wanamaker refused to display either canvas in his department store, his son Rodman established the Easter tradition of showing both paintings in the rotunda of the Philadelphia store.<sup>16</sup>

The New York Times saw in the response to the Christ Before Pilate a particularly American attitude: "The United States, which is the chosen home of Humbug . . . may still be counted upon to buy something not without merit, so long as its chief attractions are size and costliness."<sup>17</sup> Two years later, with Millet's The Angelus, the Association would market a work of art that played Christian themes more subtlety and perhaps more successfully, while the painting's cost and size would, once again, establish publicity-generating records.

#### B. Vasilii Verestchagin, 1889-1902

Ingenious advertising, claptrap, and humbug found their highest expression in the methods employed here on behalf of the Munkacsy pictures the past two winters, and it is due to the Verestchagin management to say that so far their ways have been much less objectionable. No "private view for the clergy," or anything of that sort has been announced, and the accessories of the exhibition are of a different kind from those which distinguished the Munkacsy shows, with their mysterious gaslight effects and their hired weepers and attendants with muffled tread.<sup>18</sup>

Two exhibitions of the Russian painter Vasilii Verestchagin in November 1888 and November 1891 do not today command much interest, but the first was an unqualified "blockbuster." Russian historians believe that "no other foreign artists had ever received as much attention and

praise in America,"<sup>19</sup> while today he is almost unknown in this country. Verestchagin studied with Gérôme in Paris but chafed under the French master's direction to study the antique, preferring contemporary "flesh and blood," which he became a specialist in depicting.

The American painter Francis David Millet suggested to Kirby and Sutton that the AAA introduce the Russian's art to America.<sup>20</sup> If not sooner, Millet undoubtedly met Verestchagin while covering the Russo-Turkish War in 1877 for several journals including the New York Herald. The Russian, who had enlisted in the navy and served as a staff artist for the Russian army in Turkestan, had volunteered as an artist for the Balkan campaign.

Famed for the alleged veracity of his gigantic reportages of the Russo-Turkish and other wars, alternately esteemed and defamed for the theological and religious content of huge Biblical tableaux, the artist was also notorious for his eccentric behaviour. It was reported that he escaped the customary student hazing at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts by brandishing his revolver,<sup>21</sup> and that an 1881 show in Paris was canceled after he and a fellow Russian drew guns on each other.<sup>22</sup> An outsider who built an inter-

national reputation without showing at the Paris Salons, Verestchagin gained fame through one-person spectacles.

Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers records:

At Berlin in 1882 the "oriental["] decoration of the gallery, the concealed harmonium and chorus of war songs, and the total exclusion of daylight in favour of electric lights, all added to the craze for his works. . . . His realistic picture of the Holy Family exhibited with others at Vienna in 1885 was designated by the Archbishop of that diocese "a blasphemous canvas."<sup>23</sup>

The installation on Madison Square was a monumental logistical effort:

In all, these pictures occupy 59 enormous cases, the largest of the lot being 37 feet in length. . . . The walls and ceilings will be completely covered with these paintings, draperies, and trappings of war. . . . the transportation from Paris to Havre . . . commanded the service of six complete freight cars, which were supplied with a special engine and sent through as a special train.<sup>24</sup>

The result might be considered an installation piece today. Interestingly, it is the nineteenth-century show for which the greatest photographic documentation exists in the American Art Association Papers (Figs. 67-70, 72). Every square inch of the Association's galleries were covered with paintings, rugs (sixteen men were required to transport one Persian rug measuring 39 x 30 feet), embroideries, laces, jewelry, hats, armor, and other bric-à-brac from his extensive travels. Gas fixtures were replaced with electric

lights to attain the effects achieved in Berlin. Over one hundred canvases were packed in, ranging from tiny sketches to gigantic canvases reaching 20 x 28 feet.

Clarence Cook, editor of the Studio, called the show "an intellectual feast, such as none other presented to the public for the past twenty-five years,"<sup>25</sup> and observed:

"The Entry of the Prince of Wales" [Fig. 67] has been amusingly reproached for being in perfection all that it pretends to be--a faithful representation of a pageant . . . nature carefully eliminated and artifice enthroned. . . . That all this artificiality should be so naturally conveyed is surely as much praise as the artist could have hoped for . . . the figures are well set in light and air, even a sense of slow movement is imparted by the rhythmic consent of the lines, and seen from the steps leading to the galleries above, the line of elephants seems to be endlessly advancing up the broad street."<sup>25</sup>

Across the gallery were installed six canvases depicting the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War in northern Bulgaria (Fig. 68). Verestchagin created the preparatory sketches at great risk and was severely wounded in the process. Crossed rifles in the corners of the gallery added additional touches of realism. Before the Attack at Plevna (visible in lower left) was one of General William T. Sherman's favorite paintings because it reminded him of his Civil War experience. Typical of the media hype surrounding the show was his oft-repeated opinion that Verestchagin was "the

greatest painter of the horrors of war that ever lived."<sup>27</sup> Hundreds of military officers and cadets elevated admission income in response.

Upstairs in Gallery C viewers were invited to pass a variety of props--hats, rugs, and weapons gathered throughout Europe and Asia--and approach through solemn draperies The Defeated; Funeral Service, another Bulgarian warscape of naked, mutilated corpses (Fig. 69). The historical accuracy of the painting was a source of controversy in Russia,<sup>28</sup> while the politics of this and others like one showing the soon-to-be Tsar, Alexander II, observing his troops being slaughtered in defeat, were not politically correct; the artist was accused in his own country of being a spy or a revolutionary.<sup>29</sup> From the American perspective his paintings graphically illustrated the moral dilemmas of war: violence and human suffering as a result of noble or ignoble politics. The passions unleashed by the paintings prompted comparisons to Russian literature; one critic applied to Verestchagin what had been said of Dostoyevsky: "A cruel talent the man has."<sup>30</sup>

Capital punishment was the subject of work banned in Russia; in New York the artist's Trilogy of Executions were

shown together on one wall in Gallery D. The Execution of Conspirators in Russia (Hanging in Russia), (visible on the left of Fig. 70), was inspired by the 1881 execution of the five assassins of Tsar Alexander II. The painting next to it (not visible), English Suppression of an Indian Rebellion (Shooting of Sepoys from the Mouths of Cannon), which depicted British officers about to fire cannons through rebellious Sikh peasants, had provoked angry commentary when seen in London the year before.

But it was undoubtedly Roman Execution (Crucifixion), 1887, the last in the series, that, together with paintings of the Holy Family and other religious scenes, caused the greatest discussion in New York (Fig. 71).<sup>31</sup> Verestchagin had traveled in Palestine in 1884 to make sketches and study the archaeology and ethnology of the Holy Land. Though filled with details supplied by rabbis, Russian monks, and other research, the compositional treatment of the subject was wholly unconventional. In contrast to the standard practice of locating Christ's cross near the center foreground of the picture, Verestchagin placed the crosses obliquely receding into the distance, with the effect that the facial expression of Christ was barely visible. The

approach was intended, in part, to secularize the subject by emphasizing the witnesses to the event and avoid identifying this common form of capital punishment exclusively with the Crucifixion. Verestchagin's commentary also walked a thin line between sacred and secular:

In the foreground . . . are seen people of every description. . . . Those are country folk or nomads, who, returning home from market, stopped over on their way for a moment in order to witness the event of the day--the execution of a man, the renown of whose deeds had reached even their huts and tents--a man whose arrest caused almost an insurrection in the city.<sup>32</sup>

His vision of the Holy Family depicted a teenage Christ studying the Hebrew texts amidst a half dozen brothers and sisters. To the astonishment of many, Mary nursed not the Christ child but a younger sibling while Joseph labored with the assistance of a brother (not Jesus), and children played, all absent traditional signs of divinity. For this, among other transgressions, the archbishop of Vienna had labeled Verestchagin blasphemous, sought to ban the work, and called for prayers to counteract the sinful visualizations.<sup>33</sup>

The Association's uppermost gallery (E) was arrayed with a variety of Orientalist scenes of Moslems and mosques that harmonized well with the Edward Ficken's Moorish

architectural fantasy (Fig. 72). After winding through the five main galleries one entered a room draped with oriental carpets to suggest a nomadic tent, inside of which Verestchagin might be seen sitting next to a charming pianist (whom he eventually married) singing classical Russian or folk melodies. To complete the set, through a door "gleam the eager, half-savage eyes of the moujiks [Russian peasants] who stand in attendance, dressed in their national costume of black and red," part of the entourage that accompanied the artist to New York.<sup>34</sup> Were it not enough, the moujiks also served five o'clock tea.

Critical controversy enflamed. A critic asked: "Is it art, morality, sermonism, painting or prayer?"<sup>35</sup> Another remarked:

The canvases have so many stories to tell. . . [observers may be] delighted with a painting which may be inept and an occasion for scorn among connoisseurs. . . . As a Russian, full of bright ideas and a tremendous power of accomplishing work, he comes . . . [with] a veritable Asiatic horde, composed of the good, the indifferent, and the bad."<sup>36</sup>

The AAA published both Verestchagin's tracts "On Progress in Art" and "Realism" and organized speaking engagements. Verestchagin preached a standard realism based on direct observation recorded on the spot in open air. Of

course, he finished his gargantuan efforts in his Paris, Munich, or Russian studios. Academic replication of the formulas of the old masters was an anathema, as demonstrated in his iconoclastic compositional and iconographic inventions. It was both Verestchagin's gift and curse to escape categorization into conventional stylistic schools. The breadth of criticism he endured was unusual, in part due to his vociferous critiques of his colleagues; his "realism" was compared to Manet, his treatment of landscape likened to the impressionism of Claude Monet, and his depictions of battles contrasted to academic specialists in military subjects like Ernest Meissonier, Alphonse de Neuville, and Edouard Detaille. His was not the sophisticated eye of the "average French battle painter, who strives mainly to give us theatrical poses and picturesque ensembles."<sup>37</sup> The commonest criticisms were Verestchagin's lack of compositional skill, failure to demonstrate an understanding of natural light, and evidence that he violated his own precepts and lapsed into traditional formulas. The Nation found regarding the Holy Family:

It is likely that Verestchagin's picture comes nearer to being a representation of facts than do those of the same subject by Raphael and other masters of the Renaissance, who merely painted comely Italian women in conventional robes of blue or red, and beautiful children. . . . Nevertheless, his "Holy Family" is

merely a picture of an Oriental family in a shady courtyard . . . in spite of his loudly heralded realism, [he] has adopted the conventional type of head for his figure of Christ. Herein he renounces his realistic principles . . . Of the other pictures in this series there is little to be said, except that "The Prophecy" . . . and "Jesus in the Desert" . . . are strikingly suggestive of Claude Monet in the treatment of the landscape.<sup>38</sup>

There was naturally a great deal of discussion comparing Verestchagin's battle pictures to those of the fashionable French militarists. William T. Walters, for example, owned at least three canvases by De Neuville and two by Detaille. Meissonier's Friedland, 1807, the costliest painting in America until Wanamaker's acquisition of Munkacsy's gigantic tableau of Christ on trial, was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The largest work in William H. Vanderbilt's collection was De Neuville's Defense of Bourget, displayed on an easel in the center of his picture gallery (Fig. 41). The Russian's heaps of decapitated heads, hacked bodies, and scenes of torture--perhaps instructive as moral lessons--were not genteel, but crude in comparison to the licked surfaces and calculated theatrics of the fashionable French painters. Technical skills aside, American critics and collectors generally preferred cool French flâneur to the impassioned sensationalism of the Russian.

The Association sent the show on the road, circulating it in 1889 and 1890 to the St. Louis Exposition and Music Hall Association, Philadelphia, Chicago, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In Chicago net profits of \$14,000 split with the AAA, together with an additional \$7,000 from seven hundred new memberships, stabilized the Art Institute of Chicago "for the first time since its establishment--on a self-supporting basis."<sup>39</sup>

In April 1891, after a lengthy stay in Pittsburgh, the exhibition returned to the AAA galleries in preparation for auction. Verestchagin also returned to New York but apparently had a falling out with Kirby and Sutton.<sup>40</sup> By now the New York Times was advising "it is a mistake to think of him as an artist," while acknowledging his talent as an "illustrator" and suggesting that his portraits of Russians, Jews, Indians, Tibetans, Hindus, and other "queer folk" might be bought as a group and presented to the Museum of Natural History.<sup>41</sup> Amidst rumors that the artist was insane he hastily departed the country and the sale was indefinitely postponed.<sup>42</sup>

Kirby finally conducted the sale in mid-November, when he was compelled to announce from the podium that nothing

had been heard recently from the artist.<sup>43</sup> All of the paintings, weapons, rugs, Russian jewelry, Hindu sculpture, religious paraphernalia, and miscellaneous bric-à-brac yielded a disappointing \$81,789. Roman Execution (Crucifixion) brought the sale high \$7,500. The 16 x 23 foot Procession of Elephants went to a New Haven collector for \$4,125, while the Agra carpet over the stairway went for \$1,300.

Angry that the Association had exhibited The Angelus in Boston in conjunction with his one-man show, and apparently in debt after the sale, Verestchagin cabled the New York press from Vienna that the AAA's dealings with the painting were fraudulent. The Association retorted that his exhibition had not paid for itself, and that "they were forced to put backbone into the venture by adding Millet's masterpiece to the [Boston] show."<sup>44</sup>

Remarkably, Verestchagin returned to New York in 1901, where he worked on Roosevelt's Capture of San Juan Heights with the aid of the President while he circulated an exhibition to Chicago, Washington, D.C., and St. Louis. He premiered his image of Roosevelt's Cuban victory along with other works in New York at the Astor Gallery in the Waldorf-

Astoria Hotel, and ended his stay with another sale in 1902 conducted by John O'Brien on Liberty Street. While in New York he learned that the Procession of Elephants, for which he had received about \$4,000 in 1891, had been resold for \$50,000.<sup>45</sup> Today he is famous in his homeland, and many of the pictures shown at the AAA hang in Russian museums. The presence of a number of works in the Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow suggests that in the New York sales many were bought-in and returned to the artist, who subsequently sold them to his most prominent patron, Pavel Tretiakov.

C. Millet's The Angelus and the Barye Exhibition, 1889

In the quest for modern masterpieces, Cornelius Vanderbilt offered the French dealer Georges Petit \$20,000 in 1881 for The Angelus (Fig. 73), one of the most famous paintings of Jean-François Millet (1814-1875). Petit refused to sell. Six years later Paris collector Eugène Secrétan (d. 1899), who had made his fortune in copper, declined to sell the painting to John D. Rockefeller for \$100,000.<sup>46</sup> James Sutton also tried to buy the painting, perhaps as Rockefeller's agent, for the AAA, or on his own account.<sup>47</sup> These attempts confirmed the long-standing

opinion that Millet was better appreciated in the United States than his native France, especially thanks to early patronage in Boston via William Morris Hunt. In fact, Bostonian Thomas Appleton had almost bought The Angelus while it was still on the artist's easel.<sup>48</sup> The work was well known through reproductions. Henrietta Caswell Smith, wife of Metropolitan Museum of Art trustee Charles S. Smith, painted in the early 1880s a replica on a gold satin portiere that was hung across the Moorish archway of their library (Fig. 51).

Announcement in 1889 that Secrétan's collection would be auctioned in Paris unleashed great hopes in America. Though reviled for his business maneuvers attempting to corner the world copper market, Secrétan's connoisseurship was esteemed. By now rumors had it that \$120,000 had been offered for the Millet--evidence of its increasing desirability--while the New York Times immediately began identifying Secrétan's Dutch and Flemish old master paintings that New York should have.<sup>49</sup>

The sale transpired at Charles Sedelmeyer's Paris gallery on July 1, 1889. Ready to compete for The Angelus James Sutton attended in the company of Isidore Montaignac

(1851-1924), a former employee of Petit, now independent, who acted as the AAA's French agent and bidder. The Corcoran Art Gallery had also determined to buy the picture, engaging Roland Knoedler as their representative. Antonin Proust, Minister of Fine Arts, was present on behalf of his countrymen, many of whom held the opinion that the painting should go to the Louvre, which lacked Millet's work. "At least one-half of the audience was from Yankeeland,"<sup>50</sup> including Andrew Carnegie, and dealers Sam Avery, Hermann and William Schaus, and Theron Blakeslee. Paul Durand-Ruel was buying for the Harry Havemeyers, who eventually won a dozen works by Alexandre Decamps, Théodore Rousseau, Felix Ziem, Millet, and a pair of portraits by Frans Hals.<sup>51</sup>

That the Secrétan sale was one of the most fully reported of the era<sup>52</sup> enables us to understand the spirit as well as manner in which the great auction was conducted:

Nothing can describe the frenzy, the emotional passion of the hour. Yes, perhaps one picture may--the vision of the gambling table at Monte Carlo when a lucky player bids fair to break the bank. When smiling M. [Paul] Chevalier took up the hammer and M. Sedelmeyer rose to permanent station on the right of the tribune, and M. Etienne Boussod to the left, the silence was intense. Sales are conducted here with the most profound secrecy as to the purchasers. When the deed is done a card is handed in to the auctioneer, and mum is the word. . . . In the sales the regular numbers of the catalogue were not followed, and this confused note-taking very frequently. . . . The water colors and drawings were sold first, just to steady the crowd.<sup>53</sup>

Next a group of Meissoniers were sold, including several to the Vanderbilts bidding through Athanase Bague; Montaignac bought Narcisse Diaz de la Peña's Diana, bidding on order from Sutton for Collis P. Huntington. Then the fighting commenced. Both Avery and the Corcoran bid The Angelus up to \$98,000, but it turned into a contest between the French government and the American Art Association.

It was a moment of intense satisfaction for every American to see so young a nation as our own . . . coming breast to breast with old Europe for the acknowledgment and purchase of a work of art. . . . So great was the excitement that M. Proust came to the battlefield with his own shout of onward and upward, and the bidding men looked angry and defiant. An American stepped up to M. de Montagnac [sic] and said quietly: "If you haven't money enough, I'll stand by you." Frenchmen cried the same to M. Proust. . . . Women broke their fans and men threw their hats in the air, and down came the hammer just on the bid of M. de Montagnac (sic). It was for a thousand francs, and M. Chevalier had not waited! To be fair, even the French protested and the picture was put up again.<sup>54</sup>

Whether or not Chevalier, one of the most respected auctioneers in France, intentionally tried as some asserted to knock the picture down for the Louvre<sup>55</sup> or simply failed to hear the American bid of 504,000 francs remains unclear. American critic Alfred Trumble alleged of what he called "the greatest artistic mock auction known to history,"<sup>56</sup>

It is now pretty generally conceded in expert circles abroad that M. Proust and the thimble-rigging managers of the Secrétan sale were in a combine to fictitiously advance the prices of the pictures on foreign bidders. I am told that, though the sale was advertised as being without reserve, an almost prohibitory price was

privately set on every picture over which any competition was expected . . . based on the highest prices recently obtained for works by these artists in American sales. . . . When it dawned on Mr. Sutton from the progress of the sale that this was the programme he coolly stopped bidding. . . . [the French] had, literally, fallen into their own trap.<sup>57</sup>

Proust won the picture a second time at 553,000 francs, about \$110,000. One reporter foresaw Proust's dilemma:

I happened to be surrounded by Conservatives who did not lose the opportunity of saying that one must be a Communist to be so honored by the republic. . . . This is a hint of politics versus art.<sup>58</sup>

Proust's patriotic supporters backed out and the French government refused funding. Sutton offered to buy the picture at cost plus an additional \$10,000 for the poor of Paris,<sup>59</sup> and the French minister of culture capitulated and delivered The Angelus to the Americans with a letter expressing "in the name of French art the gratitude of my friends and myself for the homage that the United States of America has just rendered by your attentions to one of the greatest artists of this century, whose genius has been so long unrecognized."<sup>60</sup>

With the acquisition the AAA proclaimed itself an international force prepared to speculate with its own capital, able to compete with both wealthy collectors and foreign governments, and powerful enough to win world class

treasures for America. Laura Meixner has published provocatively and extensively on the Millet and The Angelus as well as the reception of French realist painting in America.<sup>61</sup> She has revealed how the subject of the painting, reputation of Millet, and accomplishment of its acquisition spoke to American moral and social values, and further demonstrated how competing cultural groups successfully appropriated the image of The Angelus for conflicting ideological purposes. She also argues what this chapter demonstrates, that "Art, commodity, and religion long had proved the ideal for American mass-cultural enterprises, and The Angelus was no exception."<sup>62</sup>

The painting also exacerbated controversy regarding the thirty-percent tariff on imported works of art while demonstrating the wisdom of the AAA's positioning of itself as an "educational" institution.<sup>63</sup> Only works of art imported for temporary, educational exhibitions by bona fide art associations were exempted from duty. If a painting imported under the exemption were sold, duty had to be paid immediately. (Henry Marquand, who collected old masters, convinced the Treasury Department in 1886 to classify paintings created before 1700 as "antiques" exempted from

the tariff). Sutton gained an exemption from immediate payment and imported the painting duty-free in mid-October 1889 for six months after posting a \$65,000 bond. A coalition of New York dealers including William Schaus, Roland Knoedler, L. Christ Delmonico, Gustav Reichard, Theron Blakeslee, and Sam Avery, Jr., immediately lodged protest, arguing that Sutton had disguised his true purpose --the sale of works of art--under the tax-exempt veneer of art education.<sup>64</sup> Public sympathies favored the exemption as Sutton announced that the Association intended to circulate the painting around the country to encourage its acquisition by an American art museum. Ultimately the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury upheld the exemption because the AAA had distributed money to artists through its Prize Fund Exhibitions and its activities had promoted art across the country.<sup>65</sup>

The Angelus first appeared at the American Art Galleries as the featured star of the exhibition "The Works of Antoine-Louis Barye, his Friends, and his Contemporaries," organized to raise funds for the Barye Monument in Paris. Inspired by the French initiative to raise funds in the animalier's honor through a special exhibition at the

Ecole des Beaux-Arts, plans for the show had been underway since spring.

William T. Walters, the country's leading Barye collector, led the American project. George Lucas had acquired a bronze by Barye (1796-1875) for Walters in 1861, and conducted him the following year to the artist's studio. On February 1, 1885 Walters opened a Barye Room in his personal gallery comprising some seventy to eighty works of various media. In conjunction he installed in Baltimore's Mount Vernon Park the Seated Lion and gave the city four other Baryes: War, Peace, Order, and Force. The collector eventually owned well over a 125 Barye bronzes as well as paintings, watercolors and drawings.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, as Chair of the Corcoran Art Gallery's Acquisitions Committee in the early 1870s, Walters had commissioned through Lucas a cast of every available subject, establishing a comprehensive collection in Washington that further spread the fame of the French artist in this country and was, with Walters's, a principal source of loans to the 1889 exhibition.<sup>57</sup>

Walters headed an American committee that included Cyrus J. Lawrence, Henry Marquand, James Welling, and Charles De Kay. In addition to lending works from their own

collections for the benefit show, they secured loans from Jay Gould, W. T. Blodgett, Charles A. Dana, George I. Seney, and William Rockefeller, among others. The American Art Association contributed use of all its galleries and commissioned Alfred Trumble to author a 58-page catalogue on The Painter of "The Angelus." Meanwhile the Barye Monument Association published a deluxe limited edition with an essay by Charles De Kay and "artotypes of monuments, statues, and statuettes, printed on Holland paper in colored inks . . . [and] at least thirty woodcuts of statues and groups by Barye . . . printed on India or Japanese paper."<sup>68</sup>

Thousands contributed a 50-cent admission to pay homage to the poetic and religious sentiment of The Angelus, marvel at its cost, gloat over the surfeit of Barye sculptures, and enjoy what was considered by many the best show of modern European art in the country's history. The exhibition was really three shows in one: the Barye sculptures in the entry hall and related works on paper upstairs in Gallery B; one hundred modern French paintings in Galleries C, D, and part of E; and The Angelus shown in splendid isolation against a waterfall of crimson plush velvet at the farthest reach of the top gallery.

The catalog aggrandized owners listing objects by lender, rather than in chronological or thematic order. In effect the show was organized around personal collections, and presented numerous examples of individual pieces as an opportunity to study the connoisseurship of patination and casting nuances. Walters lent 114 sculptures plus more drawings and watercolors, the Corcoran sent ninety-five Baryes, Sutton lent fifty-one of his own, Sam Avery twenty-nine, and R. Austin Robertson twenty-two. All told more than 450 Barye bronzes, waxes and plasters were displayed around Léon Bonnat's portrait of the artist (lent by Walters) in the center of the room, materializing the observation of Henry James:

To have on one's mantelshelf or one's library table one of [his] business-like little lions diving into the entrails of a jackal, or one of his consummate leopards licking his fangs over a lacerated kid, has long been considered the mark, I will not say of a refined, but at least of an enterprising taste.<sup>59</sup>

Upstairs, in Gallery B, another fifty or so works on paper by Barye and prints after his work illuminated his creative process, eye for anatomy, and popularity seen in the prints.

In the remaining three galleries--C, D, and E--were shown one hundred works by Millet and nine of his and Barye's contemporaries: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Charles

Daubigny, Alexandre Decamps, Eugène Delacroix, Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, Jules Dupré, Théodore Géricault, Théodore Rousseau, and Constant Troyen. Modeled on the famous 1884 exhibition of modern and old masters at Georges Petit's Paris gallery, "Cent Chefs d'Oeuvre," the Barye/Millet exhibition was proudly acclaimed as evidence of America's attainment of superiority in amassing masterpieces of French painting. If anything, it seemed to present an embarrassment of riches to some:

There can be no doubt--it is the universal testimony--that it was a great mistake . . . to make the Barye collection so large. The labor of looking over such a mass of objects is ruinous to the visitors' pleasure, and the contrast between the confusion and repetition of the Barye rooms, and the large tranquillity of the upper galleries, where a comparatively few pictures selected with great<sup>70</sup> care, and judgment, are hung, is very instructive.

Naturally, the Association's most recent acquisition garnered greatest attention. Displayed opposite Quincy Shaw's Millet, Harvesters--one of several Millet's in the show discretely judged superior by some critics--The Boston Sunday Herald reported:

The Angelus is here exhibited with theatrical pomp and ceremony. The upper galleries of the American Art Association are richly draped with dark red velours but in the last gallery the draping has been carried to an extreme at the end where the Angelus is enshrined. It is the only picture at that end where it appears like a small island on a sea of red. It is enthroned against a canopied backdrop with heavy fringes and tassels above. The plush covered rope keeps the impious at a

distance. A niche at one side contains a touching emblem of aestheticism--a cluster of lilies in a bronze vase. At the 'press view' two uniformed firemen were on guard beside the picture which remained for a long time covered with a white cloth.<sup>71</sup>

The French painter Benjamin Constant agreed to share his thoughts on the show while in New York:

I may be allowed first of all to praise the general arrangement, such as the distribution of objects among places of honor, the selection of pictures that hang side by side, the architectural moldings, the lighting, the comfortable and even luxurious appointments of the galleries. . . . Solitary, like a sovereign who sits before the big rich folds of hangings of crimson velvet, this famous painting shows itself thus to the public. . . . Have not the decorations even surpassed the proper mark? Is not this picture, with its small dimensions, too much exposed? Moreover, is not the light insufficient? Well, it makes but little difference.<sup>72</sup>

At the close of the Barye exhibition in January 1890 some \$9000 was sent to France, where the monument was completed by Stanislas-Louis Bernier on the Ile Saint-Louis in 1894. Thus, the Millet/Barye spectacle manifested American esteem for French art, success collecting French art, and commitment to a cosmopolitan philanthropy that extended across the Pacific Ocean. At home the influence of the Barye show was recognized in the increasing presence of animal sculptures at the National Academy of Design, while "in small towns the iron dog and the deer of painted zinc

are being laughed away from the front lawns of citizens who are groping for the aesthetic."<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile the famous painting went on national tour. More than \$20,000 was netted in admissions and sales of catalogues and reproductions in Chicago alone. A Detroit entrepreneur sent a confidential agent to the windy city to investigate the extraordinary claims made not only for the picture but for its ability to generate income. The agent confirmed that its commercial potential equaled its artistic significance. The businessman calculated that even if bought for an incredible \$125,000, The Angelus could pay for itself if kept on the road in the U. S. and Europe, with the added benefit that it would end up in the Detroit Institute of Arts. Therefore the painting could be bought through a private bond issue requiring no personal or institutional outlay; however, not enough guarantors could be found for the scheme.<sup>74</sup>

As the six-month tariff exemption neared expiration The Angelus was sent to Canada, where it arrived in mid-April 1889. The press wrote of the painting's peripatetic travels as if it were an orphan separated from its new foster

parents, forced out of the country by the duty that would have to be paid if the work remained in the United States.<sup>75</sup>

It was said that more than 400,000 saw the picture, and the AAA eventually grossed close to \$200,000 on the New York show and tour. But Sutton and Kirby found no American museum or collector willing to buy it, even at a discount. In the fall Montaignac cabled an offer of 750,000 francs, a profit of about \$40,000 over what it had cost. Kirby and Sutton apparently made a last ditch effort to raise funds for the Metropolitan or Corcoran to acquire the painting. The Met's campaign stalled at \$100,000 without President Henry Marquand's support. An agent for the Corcoran Gallery also had bid for the work in Paris, and there was hope that they might purchase it. When the Corcoran trustees discovered that the work was disappointingly small they agreed that spending so much for it in Paris would have been outrageous.<sup>76</sup> By November the famous canvas was repatriated to France, where it joined the collection of Alfred Chauchard, director of the Magasins du Louvre. Chauchard bequeathed it to the Louvre; The Angelus now hangs in the Musée d'Orsay.

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<sup>1</sup>"Coming Over to New York with his Duchess and his Spanish Gallery," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 5, Duque de Durcal file.

<sup>2</sup>Though much of the material to which De Kay had access remains at the Archives of American Art, I believe a good deal of it was subsequently lost or discarded.

<sup>3</sup>Charles De Kay, "Art Under the Hammer," TMs (photocopy), 37k-1, American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

<sup>4</sup>Sedelmeyer offered a ten percent trade discount to Avery when he was in Paris on July 16, 1878. Avery's diaries do not record the final price. Madeleine Fidell Beaufort, Herbert L. Kleinfield, and Jeanne K. Welcher, The Diaries 1871-1882 of Samuel P. Avery, Art Dealer (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 488.

<sup>5</sup>"Art Matters. Means for Fostering American Art," Lippincott's Magazine 4 new series no. 14 (August 1882): 210.

<sup>6</sup>"Michael Munkacsy," Harper's Weekly 28 (12 July 1884): 445, 447.

<sup>7</sup>Charles M. Kurtz Papers, Correspondence, Samuel P. Avery letter of 30 October 1886, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Transcript provided by Sandra Underwood, to whom I am indebted for information about the Munkacsy affair.

<sup>8</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 6 November 1886. Kurtz continues with an explanation of his enmity: "The \$200. he [Sutton] stole from me isn't a circumstance to the losses he has actually sustained through my efforts."

<sup>9</sup>"Nearly every one was disappointed in the size of the picture. So much has been written about it that something unusually big was expected." See "Munkacsy's 'Christ Before Pilate'," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, box 4. Kurtz himself seems to have been taken in by hype prior to the paintings arrival: "The picture--28 feet

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long if I remember rightly--will occupy the whole proscenium front! It is the greatest painting of the century--was visited by millions of people in Europe." Kurtz Papers, letter of 5 November 1886, transcription by Underwood.

<sup>10</sup>"Munkacsy's "Christ Before Pilate"," unidentified clipping, American Art Association Papers, Box 4.

<sup>11</sup>"Christ Before Pilate," New York Times, 18 November 1886, p. 5. The paper further attacked the artist on the grounds of what modern conservators characterize as "inherent vice:" "Munkacsy's pictures as a rule do not last more than ten years at the outside, owing to the Munichy pigments which he employs in order to obtain those rich, fact effects, that extraordinarily beautiful texture in stuffs and draperies. . . . "Milton Dictating to His Daughters" has lost its beauty of coloring already . . . the studio interior with the artist and his wife is but a pale image of the splendor it showed when Mr. Avery first brought it over."

<sup>12</sup>Kurtz Papers, letter of 24 November 1886, transcription by Underwood.

<sup>13</sup>William R. Johnston, The Nineteenth Century Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1982): 171.

<sup>14</sup>The Ecce Homo from this cycle of paintings resides today in the Deri Museum, Debrecen, Hungary.

<sup>15</sup>For insight into Wanamaker and his use of the painting as well as an image of the Christ on Calvary displayed at Wanamaker's Philadelphia store see William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1993): 213-14, 222-23, and plate 18.

<sup>16</sup>In 1962 the Sunday School Times reported in an untitled article that public display of the paintings during the season of Lent had been a tradition since 1928, Sunday School Times 104 no. 14 (7 April 1962), no pagination. Presently, the paintings are presumed to remain in the Wanamaker family. I am indebted to Sandra Underwood for this citation and information.

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<sup>17</sup>"Christ Before Pilate," New York Times, 18 November 1886, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>"The Verestchagin Exhibition," Nation no. 1221 (22 November 1888): 423.

<sup>19</sup>A. Lebedev, V. V. Vereshchagin. Zhizn i tvorchestvo 1842-1904 (V. V. Vereshchagin. His Life and Art 1842-1904) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972): 235, cited in Vahan D. Barooshian, V. V. Vereshchagin: Artist at War (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993): 119. Barooshian draws on Russian sources and is the most comprehensive study in English. I have generally used his titles (with alternatives in parentheses) for most of the paintings cited in the text.

<sup>20</sup>De Kay, 37b.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Whiteing, Scribner's Monthly 22 no. 5 (September 1881): 674.

<sup>22</sup>Barooshian, 91-2.

<sup>23</sup>Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers (New York: Macmillan, and London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), vol. 5, 284.

<sup>24</sup>"The Verestchagin Pictures Arrive," New York Times, 14 October 1888, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup>Cited in V. Gribayedoff, "A Russian Apostle of Art," Cosmopolitan Magazine 6 (1889): 311. It is interesting to note that Kirby and Sutton were lending Cook money to keep the Studio solvent. A letter from Cook to Kirby date 30 November 1888 solicits a loan while advising that he is hard at work on the Verestchagin issue of the journal.

<sup>26</sup>Clarence Cook, "The Verestchagin Exhibition," Studio new series 3 (November 1888): 10.

<sup>27</sup>Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 130.

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<sup>28</sup>Barooshian, 73.

<sup>29</sup>Barooshian, 65-66; 94. According to Barooshian Verestchagin's Biblical pictures, which will be discussed below, were banned, p. 188.

<sup>30</sup>B. Macgahan, "Verestchagin and His Work," Lippincott's Magazine 44 (1889): 232.

<sup>31</sup>"His paintings of religious subjects have, at all events, aroused more discussion than all the rest put together." Gribayedoff, 316.

<sup>32</sup>Barooshian, 100.

<sup>33</sup>Barooshian, 105-110.

<sup>34</sup>"The Verestchagin Exhibition at the American Art Galleries," The Critic no. 255 (17 November 1888): 247.

<sup>35</sup>"The Verestchagin Exhibition at the American Art Galleries," 246.

<sup>36</sup>"Verestchagin the Humanist," New York Times, 25 November 1888, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup>Gribayedoff, 318.

<sup>38</sup>"The Verestchagin Exhibition," 424.

<sup>39</sup>"Chicago's Art Education," New York Times, 1 April 1889, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Barooshian, 122-23.

<sup>41</sup>"Pictures and Bric-a-brac," New York Times, 4 April 1891, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup>"Verestchagin not Insane," New York Times, 28 April 1891, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup>"Verestchagins at Auction," New York Times, 18 November 1891, p. 2.

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<sup>44</sup>"No Fury Like an Artist Scorned," New York Times, 27 December 1891, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup>Purchaser unknown. Barooshian, 147-8.

<sup>46</sup>Laura L. Meixner, "Jean-François Millet's Angelus in America," American Art Journal 12 (Autumn 1980): 79.

<sup>47</sup>See untitled note, Studio new series 7 no. 5 (2 January 1892): 52-3. It was reported that Sutton had "an unlimited command of cash personally, outside the resources of his Association" by Alfred Trumble, "The Note-Book of a New Yorker," The Bulletin, undated clipping (signed with date of 12 August 1889), American Art Association Papers, box 5, folder 4.

<sup>48</sup>Samuel Avery reported that Appleton had agreed to buy The Angelus for 4,000 francs, about \$200, but Millet could not locate the purchaser to consummate the deal when the picture was done. Avery continued that his client, William H. Vanderbilt, owned a superior Millet, Sower. "Millet's Great Work," New York Times, 3 July 1889, p. 2. Lois Fink suggests that Appleton commissioned The Angelus; see Lois Fink, "French Art in the United States, 1850-1870: Three Dealers and Collectors," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 6th series 92 (September 1978): 97, 100. For more on Appleton see Carol Troyen and Pamela S. Tabbaa, The Great Boston Collectors: Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, ex. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1984): 18-19. For more on the Boston patronage of Millet see Susan Fleming, "The Boston Patrons of Jean-François Millet," in Alexandra R. Murphy, ed., Jean-François Millet, ex. cat. (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1984): ix-xx.

<sup>49</sup>See "Secrétan's Great Gallery," New York Times, 5 June 1889, p. 4; "Secrétan's Old Masters," New York Times, 16 June 1889, p. 4. Later the Times reported the rumor that \$1,250,000 had been offered for the entire collection, about what the sale brought in total. See an untitled editorial, New York Times, 3 July 1889, p. 4. Note that De Kay's report that The Angelus was said to be a commission by Bostonian Quincy Shaw is presumably confusion some thirty-five years after Avery's account; De Kay, 43d.

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<sup>50</sup>"At the Secrétan Sale," New York Times, 14 July 1889, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup>For details of the Havemeyer purchases see Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen and others, Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection, ex. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), 208-9.

<sup>52</sup>For an entertaining, undocumented summary of the sale and The Angelus in America see Towner, 124-29.

<sup>53</sup>"At the Secrétan Sale," p. 5.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>"[The] auctioneer took upon himself to be guilty of unprofessional conduct" according to "The Costliest Modern Painting," New York Times, 11 August 1889, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup>Because the sale was held to satisfy Secrétan's bank creditors, it had been advertised as rent judiciaire, which would prevent the seller from buying-in or canceling the sale. See "Secrétan's Great Gallery."

<sup>57</sup>Trumble, "The Note-Book of a New Yorker."

<sup>58</sup>"At the Secrétan Sale," New York Times, 2 July 1889, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup>Kirby reported that the additional \$5,000 (50,000 francs) was a tax on purchases at auctions levied by the French government. De Kay, 41b, 43d.

<sup>60</sup>De Kay, 42.

<sup>61</sup>In addition to Meixner's above cited "Jean-François Millet's Angelus in America," see also: Laura Meixner, "'The Best of Democracy': Walt Whitman, Jean-François Millet, and Popular Culture in Post-Civil War America," in Geoffrey M. Sill and Roberta K. Tarbell, eds., Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 28-52; Laura Meixner, French Realist Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865-1900 (Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Laura Meixner, "Popular

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Criticism of Jean-François Millet in Nineteenth-Century America," Art Bulletin 65 no. 1 (March 1993): 94-105.

<sup>62</sup>Meixner, French Realist Painting, 82.

<sup>63</sup>Meixner is incorrect in reporting that the duty was 10 percent of value, "Jean-François Millet's Angelus in America," 80, footnote 13.

<sup>64</sup>"Art Dealers Protest," New York Times, 20 October 1889, p. 11. See also an undated clipping from the New York Tribune, American Art Association Papers, box 5, folder 4.

<sup>65</sup>"Recent Decisions of the Government with Regard to the So-Called Art Associations. A Letter from the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury," Studio new series 5 (17 May 1890): 241. In the same ruling the Assistant Secretary disallowed exemptions for the New York office of the Paris-based art dealers Boussod, Valadon and Company, and the Eden Musée-Grevin American Company, which charged 50 cents admission for a show of wax figures, stage performances, and picture gallery.

<sup>66</sup>William R. Johnston, "The Barye Collection," Apollo 100 (November 1974): 402-9.

<sup>67</sup>Walters's commission inspired Barye's observation "My own country has not done this much for me," Johnston, 403. Corcoran first collected European art in 1849 and started collecting American art the following year, paying, for example, \$5000 for his replica of Hiram Power's Greek Slave in 1851. A Southern sympathizer like his friend Walters, Corcoran removed to Paris during the Civil War. Upon his return he remained dedicated to American art perhaps as much to assuage questions of his patriotism as well as satisfy his own taste. Walters went to Europe to aid the Corcoran in expanding its collection to include foreign art. For more on Corcoran see Corcoran, (Washington, D. C.,: Corcoran Art Gallery, 1976), and Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of American Painting, 1813 to 1913," American Art Review 3 (November-December 1976): 132-136. For more information regarding Barye collecting in the United States and the memorial exhibition see Lilian M. C. Randall, The Diary of George A. Lucas: An American Art Agent in Paris, 1857-1909,

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vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 14-18.

<sup>68</sup>"For the Barye Fund," New York Times, 8 November 1889, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup>Cited in Thomas E. Norton, 100 Years of Collecting in America: The Story of Sotheby Parke Bernet (New York: Abrams, 1984): 32.

<sup>70</sup>Clarence Cook, "The Eighth Autumn Exhibition at the National Academy of Design," Studio new series 5 no. 3 (21 December 1889): 25.

<sup>71</sup>Meixner, "Jean-François Millet's Angelus in America," 81.

<sup>72</sup>Benjamin Constant, "Two Masters at the Barye Exhibition," New York Times, 2 December 1889, p. 4. See also "The Genius of Barye," New York Times, 24 November 1889, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup>"The Zoo as an Art Educator," New York Times, 8 December 1890, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup>See Fred W. Seymour's (illegible) letter to W. H. Brearley, undated, and W. H. Brearley, confidential prospectus, 14 March 1890, both in the American Art Association Papers, box 5, folder 2.

<sup>75</sup>For example, the Studio reported in March that the painting was going back to Europe because the United States government was demanding \$35,000 duty, "American Notes," Studio new series 5 no. 16 (22 March 1890): 160; in April that the painting had slipped out of the country to Canada just in time to avoid the tariff, "American Notes," Studio new series 5 no. 20 (19 April 1890): 203; and later in April that the painting was as good as sold to an English collector, which was further evidence of the power of the tariff to keep great works of art out of the country, "American Notes," Studio new series 5 no. 21 (26 April 1890): 209-210.

<sup>76</sup>De Kay, 42-43a.

CHAPTER TEN: TRANSITION FROM A GALLERY  
TO AN AUCTION HOUSE

A. George Seney Sales, 1891 and 1894

Inspired in part by the unexpected success of his 1885 bankruptcy sale and in part by newly regained prosperity, George Seney created a second collection of European and American paintings, apparently as a speculative investment, that he consigned to the AAA in 1891. With few exceptions the collection was similar to that which had initiated the AAA's plunge into leadership of the New York art market in 1885, when Seney sold 285 lots by 126 foreign and thirty American artists. In 1891 Seney offered 307 lots by eighty-five European and twenty-eight native artists. The Barbizon School still predominated with nineteen works by Constant Troyon, fourteen by Charles Daubigny, fourteen by Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, a dozen by Camille Corot, and nine by Jules Dupré. Seney's investments in American paintings had broadened to encompass eight canvases by Inness (there had been only one in 1885) and a host of new artists, most of whom were associated with the Society of American Artists, including Charles H. Davis (three works), R. Swain Gifford

(two works), and Alexander Harrison (one work), all winners in the Prize Fund Exhibitions (Seney had subscribed to the Third and Fourth Prize Funds in 1887 and 1888). There were also four canvases by Eastman Johnson as well as works by J. G. Brown and Frederick Bridgman.

Seney had discerned how visibility could boost prices at auction. He publicized his collection for several years prior to the sale by exhibiting work at various institutions and clubs. He lent work to the Brooklyn Institute in 1887, the same year he donated two works by George Inness, three by George Fuller, and one each by Francis David Millet and H. Bolton Jones to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He sent twenty works to the St. Louis Exposition and Music Hall Association in 1888, and some of his collection was shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art just prior to the 1891 auction. The AAA assisted in advance publicity and arranged for a laudatory seventeen-page article on the collection in the Illustrated American the week before the auction.<sup>1</sup>

Kirby initiated the sale on February 11, 1891 at Madison Square Garden. The top price, \$40,500, went for Millet's Blind Tobit, undoubtedly capitalizing on the Millet market the AAA had hiked up two years before. Jules

Breton's Brittany Washerwoman went for only \$5,000, but it was certainly a lesser work than the Evening in the Hamlet of Finistère knocked down for a then-record \$18,200 in 1885. Ernest Meissonier's Playing at Bowls in the Fosse at Antibes brought \$15,000, maintaining his strong American market.

In general the prices for the American paintings had not risen significantly in the intervening years since 1885. Alexander Harrison's Le Crépuscule, another version of his Prize Fund award-winning seascape, fetched the best price, \$3,650. Seymour Guy's Making a Train went for a respectable \$1,975, and the Innesses brought between \$700 and \$2,100.

By the 1890s more dealers were supporting their artists at auction by bidding up the prices in the public eye, and many more vendors were in the market. In addition to every major New York dealer, others at the sale included representatives from Doll and Richards, Williams and Everett, Noyes, and J. Eastman Chase from Boston; Seth Vose from Providence; James Earle from Philadelphia; and dealers from St. Louis, Chicago, Hartford, Baltimore, and Springfield, Massachusetts. Many dealers and collectors were now buying works for investment--to send back to auction as the market

strengthened--adding an increasingly speculative character to the sales.

According to contemporary commentary Seney himself was speculating. He was not commissioning great works as had A. T. Stewart, nor was he paying top dollar for important pieces as had Mary Jane Morgan. The Studio saw in the sale "simply a collection of pictures made by a business man of some sagacity for a business purpose . . . it would be natural to suppose that this was an exhibition made up by contributions from the stock of the principle dealers in the city."<sup>2</sup> And indeed the Sun reported that Seney had acquired most of his pictures from William Schaus and Gustav Reichard, who bought back their own pictures at the sale at "greatly advanced prices."<sup>3</sup> The New York Times announced that the successful auction launched Seney as a professional art dealer.<sup>4</sup>

The 1891 Seney sale further established New York City's credibility as an international art auction center. The World announced at the sale's conclusion: "Back to Paris Marts. France Rebuying Her Masterpieces of Art from America."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Kirby and Sutton's French colleague Isidore Montaignac purchased twenty-six French paintings for

\$92,300 at the Seney sale, fully one-seventh of the sale's total of \$665,550. Comparing French and American buyers Montaignac observed that: "'Average' pictures do not sell for nearly so much money in France as in America. Masterpieces, however, bring higher prices in Paris than in New York."<sup>6</sup> Montaignac also told interviewers that the Barbizon masters were coming to rank with the old masters and verified that Meissonier was without peer (probably a case of preaching to the converted). He did not feel that the Impressionists were taken very seriously yet, but did believe that Monet was a great painter. Three American painters whom he noted as interesting were Inness, Dwight Tryon, and Alexander Harrison. In any event, his purchases at the New York auctions confirmed its growing prominence as a center for French art.

By the time of his death in 1893 Seney had built a third collection that reflected changes in taste from his collections sold in 1885 and 1891. He had diversified his European investments to include two Monets, probably due to Sutton's influence, five works by the Swedish landscapist Alfred Wahlberg, and five by the Russian Ivan Pokitonow. His commitment to American artists had strengthened,

undoubtedly under the influence of Thomas B. Clarke, who probably sold the banker pictures and certainly collected the same artists who appeared in Seney's estate: Inness (thirteen works); Alexander Wyant (seven works); Alexander Harrison (five works); Winslow Homer (one painting and three watercolors); and Ralph Blakelock (two works). Seney also left two paintings by William Merritt Chase and one by Childe Hassam. The most expensive painting at the February 7-10, 1894 estate sale was Ludwig Knaus's Coffee Hour, which brought \$8,200--no great advance over the \$5,300 paid in 1891 for the German artist's Thoughts of Better Days. The conspicuous lack of publicity for the last Seney sale and absence of reports on results suggest that it did little to stimulate market interest in any particular artist, European or American.

That profit had motivated George Seney in the formation of his second and third collections is suggested by his dependence upon knowledgeable dealers for his acquisitions, the relatively conservative and safe nature of his investments, the rapidity with which he built and sold his second collection, and the testimony of his contemporaries. Not a connoisseur, Seney never again attained the notoriety that

works by Jules Breton and others brought him in his first sale in 1885. More significantly, Seney stands as an example of a new type of American collector-speculator whose acquisition of objects was a hobby that might bring profit, an opportunity enabled by the liquidity of a predictable auction market. In this respect Seney is a paradigm of his era, both influenced by and influencing the art market. The record price paid for his Breton in 1885 raised market demand for the French artist's work. Seney's increased investment in American paintings revealed the influence of his friend, Thomas B. Clarke, who was, in comparison, relatively independent of market fashion. Seney's growing interest in American art also signaled the emergence of a new generation of collectors of native art who included William T. Evans, George A. Hearn, Alexander Humphreys, and John Gellatly. The maturation of these collectors in the 1890s was nurtured by a new generation of dealers such as Clarke, Newman Montross, and William Macbeth.<sup>7</sup>

B. AAA Reorganization Sales, 1892 and 1895

R. Austin Robertson died in 1892. In order to settle his estate and reapportion partnership in the business Kirby

auctioned the Association's total inventory, the main part in a seventeen-day sale that included 155 paintings and some 2,600 oriental porcelains and curios. The sales catalog proclaimed the preview show as "probably the most comprehensive display in oriental art . . . that has ever been made in New York or anywhere else."<sup>8</sup> In any event, the death of Robertson and sale marked the end of the AAA's retail porcelain trade. Sutton had bought many of the best paintings for inventory while others had been acquired at bargain prices after being bought-in at public sales. Of course the Barbizon School and "Men of 1830" predominated. None set astonishing records, though Collis P. Huntington paid \$27,000 for Constant Troyon's Le Paysage du Bac and bought two Monets for \$550 and \$1,550. Potter Palmer purchased two canvases by Eugène Delacroix, including a Lion Hunt for \$13,000. Prices for the few American pictures sold, such as \$1,250 for an Inness, were not noteworthy. Though property was to be "absolutely sold" it was reported that a group of Barye sculptures were bought-in, suggesting that perhaps the charm of owning one had diminished with recognition that there were 500 more on the East Coast.<sup>9</sup>

In 1895 Sutton, owing to ill health, withdrew from active partnership in the American Art Association.<sup>10</sup> Once again Kirby auctioned the entire inventory of the AAA. The property acquired between 1892 and 1895 revealed a diversification of stock into both old master and American works. For example, in 1893 Sutton bought for the AAA from the second Earl of Caledon for a reported \$100,000 Van Dyck's portrait of Marchesa Spinola with her daughter. The purchase reflects increasing interest on the part of American collectors in old master paintings, a growing demand that was being met by firms like Boussod, Valadon and Company (successors to Goupil), William Schaus, and Paul Durand-Ruel, who were characterized in 1891 as "in the field" with works by Rembrandt, Franz Hals, Jacob van Ruisdael, Peter Paul Rubens, and other old masters.<sup>11</sup>

The AAA's 1895 dissolution sale included paintings by Rubens, Luca Della Robbia, Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence. The Van Dyck was knocked down for \$50,000 to Knoedler, reportedly acting on account for Charles Sedelmeyer in Paris. Subsequently, J. P. Morgan bought the canvas, which stayed in his family until sold to the Cleveland Museum of Art.<sup>12</sup> The AAA's acquisition of

these revered masters both followed and nurtured the emerging taste for British and continental old masters that would shortly evolve into an obsession among extremely wealthy American collectors under the influence of the Duveen brothers. In addition to the obligatory Barbizon School, (eight canvases by Charles Emile Jacque, four by Jules Dupré, and seven by Jean-Charles Cazin, who had been featured at the AAA in 1893), the 1895 sale of AAA property offered a broad selection of Impressionist paintings including eleven paintings by Claude Monet, five by Alfred Sisley, and examples by Paul Besnard, Edouard Manet, and Jean-François Raffaëlli. The Association had also acquired more American works: four paintings by Chase, two each by Julian Weir and John Twachtman, as well as works by Alexander Harrison, Inness, and Charles H. Davis; none, however, apparently sold for more than \$1,000.

Montaignac, as he had for several years, continued to purchase Barbizon works for repatriation to France. Harry Havemeyer bought two Monets, establishing a high price of \$4,250 for Melting Ice. Meanwhile Durand-Ruel supported the market for his stable buying seven Monets, two canvases by

Edgar Degas, and works by Sisley, Stanislas Lépine, and Armand Guillaumin.

The 1895 dissolution sale marked the end of the AAA as originally constituted in 1883. Henceforth, Kirby would reign as sole director and his commitment to auction sales would intensify as his interest in special exhibitions waned.

Among the special benefit exhibitions mounted by AAA were shows in aid of the "Herald Free Ice Fund" and the "Tribune Fresh Air Fund" in 1895 and 1896, respectively. Other noteworthy exhibitions included a group show of Claude Monet, Albert Besnard, John Twachtman and J. A. Weir in 1893;<sup>13</sup> an exhibit of Raphael's cartoons for the Vatican tapestries in 1894 and 1895; the exhibition of Edwin Austin Abbey's Quest of the Holy Grail series in 1895 and 1901; and a show of the "Marvelous Paintings of Rouen Cathedral by Claude Monet" in 1896. One-man shows of American artists were occasionally mounted (as for example, Alexander Harrison in 1894 and Frederic Remington in 1895), and art clubs continued to schedule the American Art Galleries for annual shows. Exhibitions of European art tended to

increase in number towards the end of the century as did presale shows that featured European art.

#### C. Thomas B. Clarke Sale, 1899

Although the number of dealers and collectors of American art increased in the 1890s, its viability in the marketplace was not decisively established until 1899. Kirby's sale of Thomas B. Clarke's collection of 372 American paintings and watercolors in February of 1899 constituted more than a foothold for American art. The success of Clarke's example delineated a new era for collectors of contemporary American art by establishing a place in the art market for the generation of artists that matured after the Civil War. Not since Luman Reed had an American collector personally influenced the prestige of native art to as great an effect; Clarke's patronage of the "Young Men" as well as independents such as Inness and Homer distinguished him as their strongest promoter and steadiest supporter. In contrast to Reed, Clarke aided American artists not by the altruistic assembly of a 'museum' open to the public, but by sending his collection at a timely moment to the public marketplace where it received a noteworthy

affirmation in the public eye: record prices. Charles De Kay suggested many years after the sale that one reason for its success was because Clarke had won recognition as both a connoisseur and as a business man; this was a case where "the reputation of the seller is an advertisement stronger than that of the press."<sup>14</sup>

Clarke had long supported American art.<sup>15</sup> No fewer than one thousand works by American artists had passed through his hands since he began collecting in 1872, including about four hundred pieces he bought for friends like George Seney and organizations such as the Union League Club, for which he served as chairman of the Art Committee from 1889-1891.<sup>16</sup> Although he occasionally bought at auction, (for example he bought a canvas by R. Swain Gifford from the 1891 Seney sale), unlike most of his contemporaries he purchased the majority of his collection directly from artists. Clarke introduced many fellow clubmen to his artist-friends, as when he brought Seney and Benjamin Altman to Jervis McEntee's studio.<sup>17</sup> He helped artists in many ways, including endowing a prize for figure painting at the National Academy of Design through the benefit exhibition of his collection held at the AAA in 1883 and subscribing to

the Third and Fourth Prize Fund Exhibitions in 1887 and 1888.

After retiring from his soft goods business in 1891, Clarke opened the "Art House" at 4 East Thirty-Fourth Street, where he exhibited oriental porcelains, antique Greek vases, and objets d'art. According to Barbara Weinberg, whose comprehensive study of Clarke illuminates his role in the New York art world, rumors that he would deal in paintings at the Art House prompted speculation that Clarke had been less than altruistic in his collecting over the previous two decades. However, George Inness was the only living artist shown at the Art House, and he passed away in 1894. Nevertheless, Clarke acted as a private agent for several American artists including Louis Moeller and Homer D. Martin, whose works he consigned for sale to William Macbeth and Sam Avery, Jr.<sup>18</sup>

In 1893 and 1894 Clarke presented special summer exhibitions at John Ortgies' Fifth Avenue Galleries at 366 Fifth Avenue near Thirty-Fourth Street. Thirty-six Innesses, as well as works by John LaFarge, J. G. Brown, and Charles C. Curran were among some two hundred American oils and watercolors exhibited.<sup>19</sup>

Without a doubt the 372 lots of Clarke's collection that Kirby dispersed in 1899 constituted the most comprehensive collection of contemporary American art ever sold. The sale totaled about \$235,000, bringing an average price of about \$630 a work. Though small in comparison to average prices attained for European works of art, the average price per lot represented an estimated profit of sixty-to-seventy percent over cost, a visible demonstration that investment in American paintings did, in fact, pay, and that one could enter the market with a good deal less capital than European art required.<sup>20</sup> Clarke said of the sale:

It vindicated my judgment in every particular. It has been extraordinarily profitable for me. It should persuade American artists that they need not fear prejudice or failure of appreciation.<sup>21</sup>

Kirby established a new record for an American work of art when he knocked down Inness' Gray, Lowering Day (Fig. 74) for \$10,150 to Henry Sampson. It is noteworthy that Henry Marquand, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, authorized curator George N. Story to compete at Chickering Hall. Story bought Inness' Delaware Valley for \$8,100 and Charles Sprague Pearce's Meditation for \$510, and he apparently tried unsuccessfully to capture Homer's Life Line.<sup>22</sup> The Corcoran Gallery took home Douglas Volk's

Accused of Witchcraft for \$560. The presence of both the Met and the Corcoran among the purchasers further confirmed the desirability of American art in the marketplace. Sizing up the results of the sale the New York Times announced that "there is no more hopeful sign of and for the future of American art than its support by the art museums and institutions of America."<sup>23</sup> Winslow Homer wrote the collector a week after the sale: "I owe it to you to express to you my sincere thanks for the great benefit that I have received from your encouragement of my work & to congratulate you. . . . Only think of my being alive with a reputation [sic] (that you have made for me)."<sup>24</sup>

In view of his plunge into professional art dealing after two decades of collecting as an amateur, it is difficult to judge fully Clarke's motives.<sup>25</sup> Though he assembled numerous collections, after his 1899 sale Clarke never again patronized living American artists as he had before. Instead he created and sold collections of antique plates and velvets in 1916, antique vases in 1917, early American portraits in 1919, and the furnishings of his home in 1925.<sup>26</sup>

## D. William T. Evans Sale, 1900

One immediate result of the Clarke auction was probably the sale of William T. Evans's collection of American paintings the following year, 1900.<sup>27</sup> Evans, with typical American taste, had started in the 1870s collecting European art, particularly the Barbizon School. He sold his European collection in 1890 at the AAA in order to concentrate on American works. Exactly why he sent 270 American paintings to auction in 1900 remains unclear, but subsequently he started building a collection of higher quality American art. Between 1907 and 1915 Evans donated 150 American paintings to the Smithsonian Institution, evidence of a philanthropic commitment that distinguishes him from Clarke and most other collectors of his era. Certainly the Clarke sale had indicated that the timing was right, prices were on the rise and buyers would be found. Although the total of \$158,500 for 270 pictures yielded an average of \$583 per lot, slightly lower than Clarke's average of \$630, Evans's collection was of lower quality and the prices verified the strengthening market for American art. George Hearn paid the sale high \$6,300 for Alexander Wyant's In the Adirondacks, while the Corcoran Gallery took George Fuller's

Lorette for \$3,000 and Theodore Robinson's Valley of the Seine from Giverny Heights for \$600. The Carnegie Institute bought Henry W. Ranger's An East River Idyl for \$1,350. Robert Minor, whose Close of Day fetched \$3,050, particularly benefited from notoriety generated by the Evans sale.<sup>28</sup> The appearance of William Macbeth and the Carnegie Institute among the buyers, as well as the prominence of Hearn, Emerson McMillin, and Alexander Humphreys among the purchasers, demonstrates the expanding number of collectors, museums, and dealers participating in the market for American works.

A number of purchasers at both the Clarke and Evans sales followed their examples in patronizing native artists and, not incidentally, in reaping sizable profits. Dr. Alexander Humphreys started collecting American art with nine purchases at the Clarke sale, including works by Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Frederic E. Church, and he bought more the following year at the Evans sale.<sup>29</sup> In 1917 he consigned to the AAA what the New York Times called "the greatest one-night sale of pictures of American artists that has ever been held."<sup>30</sup> Emerson McMillin, bought fourteen Clarke pictures and fifteen Evans pieces.<sup>31</sup> In 1913 Kirby

knocked down his collection of 238 Barbizon and American landscapes. Inness's Autumn Tints at Tenafly, that McMillin had purchased at the Clarke sale for \$635, brought \$16,500. Humphreys and McMillin are but two of several collectors who perpetuated Clarke's and Evans's examples into the twentieth century, a period beyond the scope of this study.

By 1923, when Kirby retired after forty years at the AAA, he had sold some \$60,000,000 of art, more than any other man in America. Thomas B. Clarke, who had nurtured the nascent American Art Association in 1883 by lending his collection for a benefit show, was present at Kirby's last sale.

The art world had changed in forty years. While it may be true that American artists had lost their single greatest patron in 1899 when Clarke sold his collection of contemporary American art, it was also true that the market had changed in such a way that they were no longer dependent upon a single collector. Within a decade American artists were enjoying the attention of more collectors, greater visibility in the auction market, and the active participation in their careers of at least half a dozen well established art dealers like William Macbeth, Newman Montross,

Alfred Stieglitz, Roland Knoedler, and Paul Durand-Ruel's sons Joseph and George, who managed the gallery in New York.

Kirby's career had evolved. In 1886 he was called a "skunk" privately by colleagues of Charles Kurtz, who accused the Association of cheating him. By 1923 "integrity" was the attribute most often associated with the auctioneer in the press.

Public views of the American Art Association and its clientele had also transformed. In 1883 Harper's Weekly showed at the AAA the standard cast of genteel men, women, and children seeking knowledge, taste, and aesthetic pleasure (Figs. 47, 48, and 49). This repertoire had appeared at mid-century in similar roles in views of the Düsseldorf Gallery and American Art-Union (Figs. 3, 4, 5, and 6). Two decades later, in 1905, John Sloan gave an updated view in his etching Connoisseurs of Prints, which the artist sketched at an AAA presale exhibition (Fig. 75).<sup>32</sup> Gone are the children, elderly and others seeking what Kurtz had described as a "fashionable retreat." Instead we encounter a crowd pressing in from left rear, a gentleman whose obesity exudes excessive consumption, a woman who rudely backs into the right foreground of the

composition, and a gentleman perhaps showing off with his magnifying glass. Sloan's image suggests in Daumier-like fashion that while some of these connoisseurs may be drinking from a font of enlightenment, others are feeding at a trough of commodities.

This is to the AAA's credit. Unlike the art market in Europe, where access to the auction market was restricted, here the pearls are cast before the public--come one, come all. In the early 1880s a room full of connoisseurs would probably not have been imaginable outside of a meeting of one of the gentleman's clubs or private party at the Vanderbilts and their ilk. Sloan's "connoisseurs of prints" may not qualify as experts in the eyes of the professionally-trained. But they epitomize the accomplishment of the AAA in filling its galleries with Americans who, with typical independence and self-confidence, have become self-taught connoisseurs connected to the art world through an auction market matured by the American Art Association.

#### E. Sotheby's

The year Kirby retired, 1923, he and his son, Gustavus, sold the American Art Association to Cortland Field Bishop

(1870-1935). Bishop subsequently bought the competing Anderson Galleries and in 1929 merged them to form the American Art Association--Anderson Galleries, Inc. In 1937 "Major" Hiram Parke (1873-1959) and Otto Bernet (1882-1945), who had both worked with Kirby at the original AAA and risen to the positions of president and vice-president of AAA-Anderson Galleries, left to create Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc. A year later they purchased the assets of the AAA-Anderson Galleries and subsumed them into their business.<sup>33</sup>

In 1964, with Bernet dead and Parke retired, the London-based Sotheby and Company, founded in 1744, acquired Parke-Bernet and added its name to the masthead.<sup>34</sup> American businessman Alfred Taubman (b. 1925) bought Sotheby Parke Bernet in 1983, rechristening it "Sotheby's." Presently the largest auction house in the world, the New York headquarters of Sotheby's is the direct descendant of Sutton, Kirby, and Robertson's American Art Association, founded more than a century earlier on Madison Square South.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Seney Paintings," Illustrated American 5 (31 January 1891): 455-480.

<sup>2</sup>"The Seney Collection," Studio new series 6 (7 February 1891): 96.

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<sup>3</sup>"The Sale of the Seney Collection," Sun, unpaginated clipping, American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 5.

<sup>4</sup>"Art Notes," New York Times, 15 February 1891, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>"Back to Paris Marts," World, undated clipping, American Art Association Papers, box 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>William Truettner presents an introductory review of collectors of American art during the 1890s and early 1900s in "William T. Evans, Collector of American Paintings," American Art Journal 3 (Fall 1971): 50-79. Macbeth opened his gallery in 1892; see Doreen Bolger [Burke], "William Macbeth and George A. Hearn: Collecting American Art, 1905-1910," Archives of American Art Journal 15 (1975): 9-15; [William Macbeth], "1892-1917," Art Notes 63 (April 1917): 1016-1034; and Linda Henefield Skalet, "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870-1915" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 201-212. Montross began as a supplier of artists' materials. From 1887 he held annual auctions of American paintings and from 1906-1910 he presented annual shows of The Ten.

<sup>8</sup>American Art Association, Catalogue of the Collections of the American Art Association (New York: 1892), n. p.

<sup>9</sup>"Bronzes and Enamels Sold," New York Times, 12 April 1892, p. 8. Another article reports that "At one time the [American Art] association bought pretty much everything in the way of bronzes by A. L. Barye that was offered in Paris:" see "Sale of Bronzes and Porcelains," New York Times, 11 April 1892, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Sutton remained a silent partner, as attested to by letters from Kirby in 1902 enclosing \$22,500 profit and in 1903 enclosing \$40,000 profit from the previous fiscal year. Kirby letters dated 4 May 1902 and 12 May 1903 to James Sutton, American Art Association Papers, box 1, Correspondence 1902-05. It is not clear if Sutton was still a partner at his death in 1915.

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<sup>11</sup>"Old Masters by All Means," New York Times, 9 February 1891, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>The painting is now known as A Genoese Lady with Her Child, c. 1627.

<sup>13</sup>For more information see William H. Gerdts, American Impressionism (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 106, 128-129.

<sup>14</sup>Charles De Kay, "Art Under the Hammer," TMS (photocopy), 60b (De Kay's numbering), American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

<sup>15</sup>For background on Thomas B. Clarke see H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," American Art Journal 8 (May 1976): 52-83; Linda Henefield Skalet, "Thomas B. Clarke, American Collector," Archives of American Art Journal 15 (1975): 2-7; and Skalet, "Market," 131-146.

<sup>16</sup>Skalet, "Thomas B. Clarke," 5. Skalet reports that Clarke bought at least eighteen paintings for Seney, half of which cost more than \$1000; see "Market," 132.

<sup>17</sup>Skalet, "Market," 89-93, 137.

<sup>18</sup>Weinberg, 65.

<sup>19</sup>For reviews of Clarke's shows at the Fifth Avenue Galleries see "Masters of Color in Oils," New York Times, 10 June 1893, p. 13, and "Art for Hot Weather," New York Times, 1 July 1894, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup>For commentary on the profitability of American art as demonstrated by the Clarke sale see "The Week in the Art World," New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art, 18 February 1899, p. 102.

<sup>21</sup>Weinberg, 67.

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<sup>22</sup>The Pearce has apparently since been deaccessioned and its location is unknown.

<sup>23</sup>"The Week in the Art World," p. 102. For another commentary see "American Art," New York Times, 19 February 1899, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup>Weinberg, 59.

<sup>25</sup>As Barbara Weinberg notes (p. 70), accurate evaluation awaits the discovery of more information.

<sup>26</sup>It is a sad postscript to Clarke's career of contributions to the art world that subsequent to his 1899 sale he started dealing in American portraits, many of which were overly attributed, heavily restored, and in some cases, forged, leading to the charge that he became a "charlatan." See Richard H. Saunders, "The Eighteenth-Century Portrait in American Culture of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in The Portrait in Eighteen-Century America, ed. Ellen G. Miles (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993): 138-152.

<sup>27</sup>For information on Evans see Truettner, "William T. Evans," and Skalet, "Market," 146-155.

<sup>28</sup>Concerning the sales effect on Minor see "Robert C. Minor's Success," New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art, 10 February 1900, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup>For information on Humphreys see Skalet, "Market," 156-159.

<sup>30</sup>Skalet, "Market," 159.

<sup>31</sup>For information on McMillin see Skalet, "Market," 168-171.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Morse, John Sloan's Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings, Lithographs, and Posters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 135.

<sup>33</sup>For more on Bishop, Parke and Bernet see Thomas E. Norton, 100 Years of Collecting in America: The Story of Sotheby Parke Bernet (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 18, and

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Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble, The Elegant Auctioneers  
(New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 349 ff.

<sup>34</sup>For more on Sotheby's see Frank Hermann, Sotheby's:  
Portrait of an Auction House (London: Chatto and Windus,  
1980) .

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION

The American Art Association started out as a two-gallery art shop with an unprecedented premise as its foundation: devotion to the exhibition and sale of American art. In effect, the AAA abandoned its initial mission twice, first with the abrupt dissolution of the partnership of James Sutton and Rufus Moore in 1882. Then with the sale of George Seney's collection of European and American art in 1885, the AAA initiated its evolution into an auction house for art from abroad as well as from home. In 1886 American art was subsumed into a dramatically broadened, cosmopolitan exhibition program as a result of the collaboration with Paul Durand-Ruel to bring Impressionism to New York.

The AAA proved to be an extremely effective weapon in support of the "American Invasion" of Europe mandated by John Jay at the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Not only did it provide an arena in which battles for property could be fought, but also the AAA supplied artistic vision and capital to import everything from avant-garde Impressionist art to the most conservative academic painting, from the cheapest bric-à-brac to the most expensive

oriental porcelains, from eccentric visions like those of Vasilii Verestchagin to enduring icons like Millet's The Angelus.

Physically the AAA presented salon-scaled American art in luxurious galleries that imbued objects with sufficient prestige and power to warrant the attention of the wealthiest collectors in the country. At the same time the Association retailed Asian decorative arts and marketed cabinet paintings in domestically scaled spaces to appeal to entry-level, upwardly mobile collectors. In this the Association effectively integrated elements of retail art shops, private drawing rooms, and publicly-scaled salons into an unprecedented facility for selling and buying art.

During the late nineteenth century the American Art Association's activities affected artists, dealers, and collectors throughout the country. Before the Civil War American artists depended upon personal relationships with collectors to sell their work. The AAA epitomized the post-Centennial era which witnessed the emergence of a body of commercial intermediaries--agents, dealers, art press, and auction houses--that provided specialized expertise, mass exposure, and market liquidity for all types of art. The

American Art Association became the nexus of the American art market.

In addition to its numerous exhibitions of art clubs and artists' groups, the AAA promoted the cause of American art through the Prize Fund Exhibitions that both expanded opportunities for American artists to exhibit and sell work and legitimized their creative endeavors by placing their art in American museums.

During the late nineteenth century American art was not a profitable venture for the AAA. According to Kirby, sales of American art from exhibitions during the 1880s and 1890s totaled about \$265,000--a respectable sum that went directly to American artists, less the Association's fifteen percent commission of about \$39,000.<sup>1</sup> At the same time Kirby also calculated that the organization lost a total of \$53,000 on American art. Not yet convinced that art dealers constituted the best means for marketing their work, native artists continued selling out of their studios, through exhibitions at the National Academy of Design, the Society of American Artists, and various men's clubs, as well as through auctions. Kirby reminisced,

The American art idea failed. . . . [During the Prize Fund Exhibitions] the American end of the business was losing money and the Oriental end was making big money.

None the less we bought two galleries to have American pictures on sale and on exhibition. But at the same time while we had sales of a man's pictures in our gallery and were sticking to the price we asked, the painter himself would sell his pictures to customers outside for lower prices. So finally we gave it up.<sup>2</sup>

In the end, lack of public demand for native art matched the reluctance of American artists to market their work through the American Art Association.

It is tempting to conclude that the emphasis on European art by the immediately preceding generation of dealers in America, represented by Michael Knoedler and William Schaus, is a natural extension of their international networks as émigrés, but Samuel Avery's career path suggests otherwise. Having started out representing living American artists almost exclusively, Avery found the most lucrative and stimulating market to be centered on European, especially French, art. Not only was market demand higher, but European art undoubtedly offered a much higher profit margin. Many, if not most, established European artists were comfortable collaborating with agents and dealers to support higher-profit price structures; they did not undersell their agents as did American artists. Further, European artists enjoyed the patronage of extraordinarily wealthy Americans like A. T. Stewart and William H.

Vanderbilt, who were not only willing but sometimes proud to pay record prices for European art.

Given the failures of Sutton and Moore's American Art Gallery and the Association's subsequent expansion into French art in collaboration with Paul Durand-Ruel, it appears that no major art dealer was able to focus exclusively on American art before William Macbeth in the late 1890s, and even he sold Dutch old masters alongside native art.

Through its auctions and acquisitions, the AAA helped establish the United States as a formidable player in the European art market. It may be argued that whatever prominence America had in the international art world at the end of the century depended less on its artists, museums, or arts organizations, and more on its collectors and art market, the critical mass of which was centered on Madison Square South.

As managed by Kirby and Sutton, public sales attracted collectors and captured the attention of Americans by expressing the American ideal of capital and goods exchanged in a marketplace free of artificial market restraints and governmental regulations. Kirby and Sutton brought dignity

and authority to a profession previously plagued with mystery and fraud. Further, they imbued auctions with social cachet and prestige that encouraged the participation of respectable citizens. Under their management, public sales opened a window on the American dream of capitalism, free enterprise, and entrepreneurial spirit by publicly exposing the history and possessions of philanthropists, enlightened patrons, reckless speculators, and robber barons alike.

Unlike the unionized, government-sanctioned monopoly perpetuated at the Hôtel Drouot, the "American" art auction system developed by the AAA enabled citizens to enter the marketplace without fear of the European cartels and free of the requirement to hire an agent or dealer. Assessing Kirby's influence at his retirement in 1923, the Sun noted that "In most auctions abroad the dealers make up the audience. Here the private collector, rich man or comparatively poor man, rubs against the professional."<sup>3</sup> The system encouraged an American independence coupled with the opportunity, if not responsibility, to exercise personal expertise in an open market place. The American Art Association was not able to prevent abuse of art auctions,

but under Kirby's leadership it did rise to a position of preeminence based on his expertise, experience and integrity.

The 1899 auction sale of Thomas Clarke's collection established the viability of American art as an investment and stimulated new interest in collecting American art. Thus the American Art Association fulfilled its original aim of promoting American art, not as a gallery devoted exclusively to retail sales, but as an auction house where collectors could easily buy and sell American art appreciated in a cosmopolitan context. Ultimately, the AAA best served American art by democratically integrating it into an auction market where it attained high visibility on a par with European art.

The AAA became the most important center for contemporary art in the country, presenting the most stimulating and diverse range of contemporary European and American art seen during the late nineteenth century. The First Prize Fund Exhibition may have been the finest show of American art during the 1880s; the AAA's collaboration with Durand-Ruel brought to New York the first comprehensive and perhaps the greatest show of Impressionist art ever presented here.

Some shows, such as the Millet/Barye exhibition, aggrandized established tastes. Others were more risky, such as the Verestchagin spectacles. The First and Second Prize Fund Exhibitions and the Impressionist show demonstrably affected taste. Collectively, the exhibitions accelerated the upwardly spiraling demand for, and supply of, art of all types in the United States during the 1880s and 1890s.

During the 1880s AAA auctions became a spectator sport starring millionaires competing for coveted prizes. Tens of thousands of middle and upper middle class spectators viewed pre-sale shows reflecting the "lifestyles of the rich and the famous." These pre-sale exhibitions provided "object lessons" in taste while published accounts of the auctions disseminated news of the art market, introduced issues of connoisseurship, and popularized canons of taste across America. In these regards the AAA established the model perpetuated in the gala preview parties, blockbuster presale exhibitions, spectacular evening sales, and publicity machines orchestrated by auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's today.

The AAA expressed uniquely American beliefs that private enterprise, not governmental efforts, best nurtured

the arts, and that arts organizations of all types, commercial and non-profit, should also be instruments of education and altruism. Through its exhibitions, auction sales, publications, and attendant publicity, the American Art Association of James Sutton, Thomas Kirby and R. Austin Robertson became the single greatest art educator in late-nineteenth century America. Though Christie's and Sotheby's today no longer introduce art to mass audiences, nor do they educate on the scale or with the potency of the AAA, contemporary sales catalogs have evolved into scholarly tools for arts professionals and aspiring collectors.

The American Art Association Papers at the Archives of American Art are a treasure trove of materials for those interested in the American art during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The ledger books and financial records are a rich source of data regarding provenance and patterns of buying and selling art, while the exhibition and auction files supply resources for studies undertaken from diverse methodological standpoints. Those interested in cultural politics will be gratified, as will those seeking better understanding of the development of art auctions in America, the return of old master art to the

American art market in the late nineteenth century, or the integration of decorative and fine arts in the market place, among other topics. There is much work to be done.

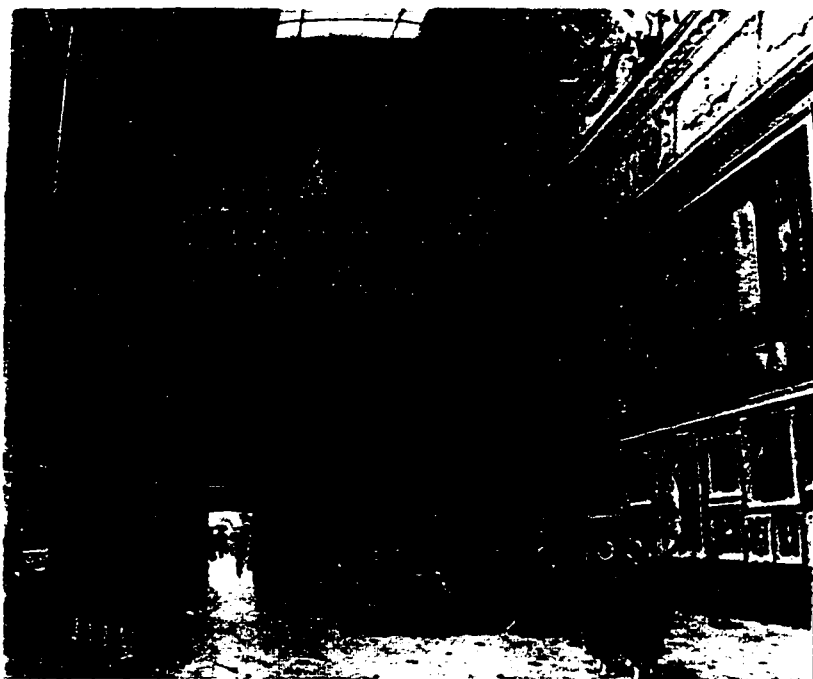
Hopefully, my work will prove to be a useful armature for the more complete and broad-ranging studies that must follow.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, Address of Mr. Thomas E. Kirby: Senior Partner of the American Art Association: At the Opening Ceremonies of the New American Art Galleries (New York: American Art Association, 1922), 11. It is unclear exactly what time span is covered by Kirby's figures.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas E. Kirby, "Autobiography," American Art Association Papers, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., box 2.

<sup>3</sup>"Art Auctions in America," Sun, March 29, 1923, unpaginated clipping in Thomas Kirby's "Retirement Scrapbook," in author's possession.

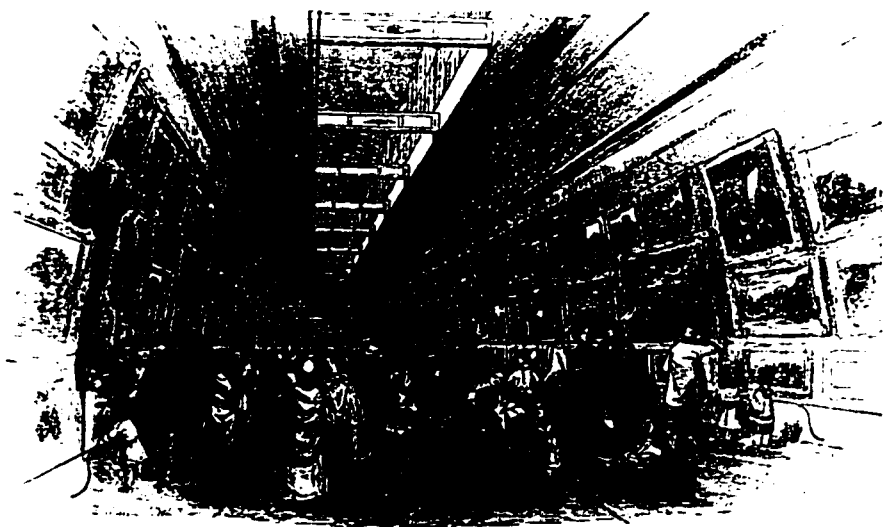


1. Giuseppe Castiglione, The Salon Carré in the Louvre, 1861. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Louvre.



FIRST ART-CENTRE IN NEW YORK.

2. Parker Clover's Art Shop, 180 Fulton Street, New York. From T. B. Thorpe, "New York Artist's Fifty Years Ago," Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science, and Art 7 (25 May 1872): 573.



3. American Art-Union Gallery, 497 Broadway, New York, 1849. Wood engraving after a drawing by Z. Wallin.



4. Divine Unity Church in which the Düsseldorf Gallery was located, 548 Broadway, New York, c. 1845. Lithograph by Penwork after a drawing by David H. Arnot. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

### PLAN OF THE COSMOPOLITAN ART ASSOCIATION.

This new ART ASSOCIATION, organized June, 1854, is designed to encourage and popularize the Fine Arts, and disseminate wholesome Literature throughout the country. It is under the direction of a Council of Managers, whose services are honorary, and who receive no compensation. To accomplish a truly national object, meeting great public and vast private prejudices, as well as individual caprices, in a manner best suited to the wants, habits and tastes of the people, the Association have adopted the following plan:

Every Subscriber of three dollars is a Member for one year, and entitled to all its privileges. The money thus obtained, after paying necessary expenses, is applied—

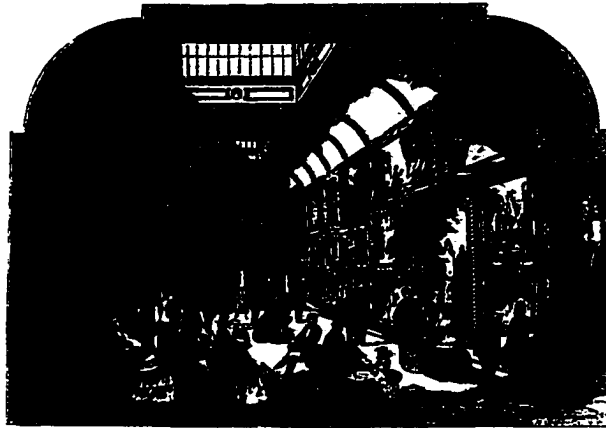
First—To the publication of a large and costly Steel Engraving, a copy of which is furnished to the Member for every three dollars paid by him.

Second—To the purchase of Paintings, Sculptures, Engravings, etc., which are annually awarded among the Members, free of charge.

Third—To the publication of the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal*, which is furnished gratuitously to members during the year.

The great success attending the Association during the past three years, has made it extremely popular, wherever its plan and objects are known. It cultivates and encourages the Fine Arts, and disseminates sound Literature throughout the land; thereby leads to the general improvement and better of the American people, and affords both rich and poor to make their homes pleasant and attractive, by the aid of Sculptures, Paintings, and the best reading matter which the wide range of American and Foreign Literature offers.

**NOW IS THE TIME TO SUBSCRIBE!**



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Purchase of the Farnes Dusseldorf Gallery of Paintings! Repurchase of Powers' Greek Slave!

Last Managers have great satisfaction in announcing the purchase of the above celebrated GALLERY OF PAINTINGS, as a part of ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY THOUSAND DOLLARS' worth of stock, together with the world-renowned Statue of the GREEK SLAVE, re-purchased for six thousand dollars, and several hundred other Works of Art, in Painting and Sculpture, are designed for Presentation to be awarded to Subscribers, in January next. Persons can subscribe any time between July, 1857, and the 31st of January, 1858.

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Every Subscriber of THREE DOLLARS is entitled to the large and costly *Steel Engraving*, "MARIYET DESTINY," also, a copy of the beautifully illustrated *COSMOPOLITAN ART JOURNAL* ONE YEAR; also, in a *CERTIFICATE* to the ANNUAL AWARDS OF PREMIUMS; also, in a *SEASON TICKET* to VISIT the GALLERIES of the ASSOCIATION, FREE.

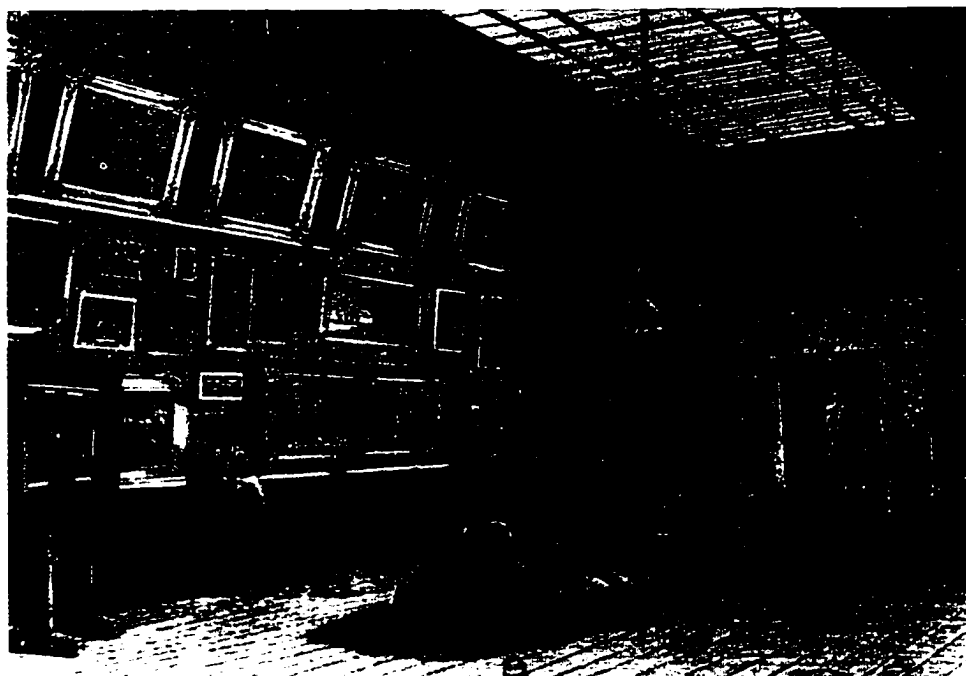
Thus it will be seen that for every three dollars paid, the Subscriber not only receives a Splendid Three Dollar Engraving, but also the beautiful, celebrated *Two Dollar Art Journal*, one Year, together with a Certificate to the Annual Award of Premiums, by which a valuable Work of Art in Painting or Sculpture, may be received in addition, thus giving to every Subscriber an equivalent to the value of Five Dollars, and a Certificate to the Award of Premiums, gratis. Specimen copies of the *Art Journal*, giving further particulars, sent by mail, on receipt of four Postage Stamps. ADDRESS

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5. Interior view of the Düsseldorf Gallery when managed by the Cosmopolitan Art Association, 548 Broadway, New York, 1857. Wood engraving by Nathaniel Orr. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



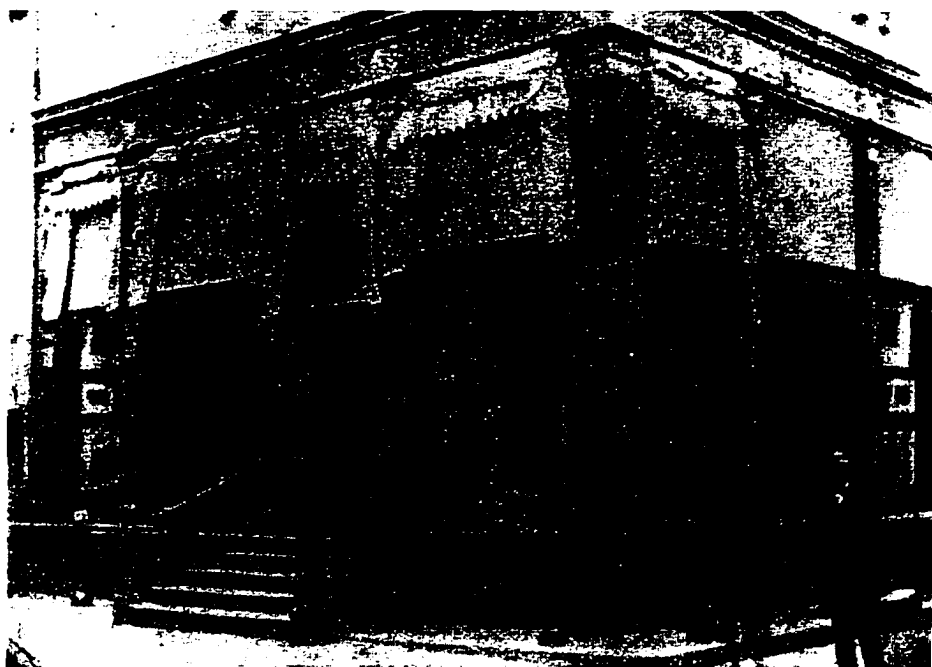
6. Hiram Power's The Greek Slave exhibited at the Düsseldorf Gallery by the Cosmopolitan Art Association, 548 Broadway, New York, 1857. Engraving by Robert Thew published in the Cosmopolitan Art Journal 2 (December 1857): between 40 and 41.



7. Painting salon at Goupil, Vibert and Company, Paris, c. 1860. Wood engraving. Collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



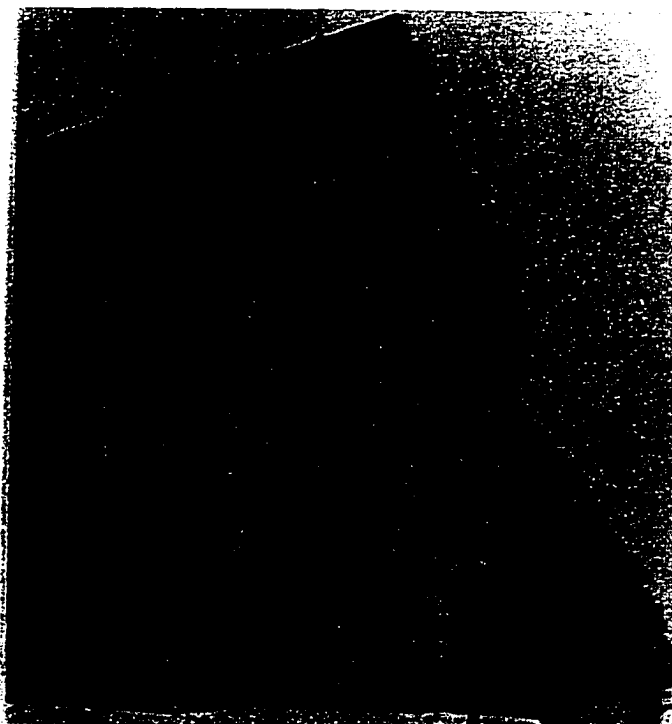
8. M. Knoedler and Company (successor to Goupil, Vibert and Company), 772 Broadway, New York, c. 1864. Photograph courtesy of Knoedler and Company, New York.



9. M. Knoedler and Company (Successor to Goupil, Vibert and Company), 170 Fifth Avenue, New York, c. 1869. Photograph courtesy of Knoedler and Company, New York.



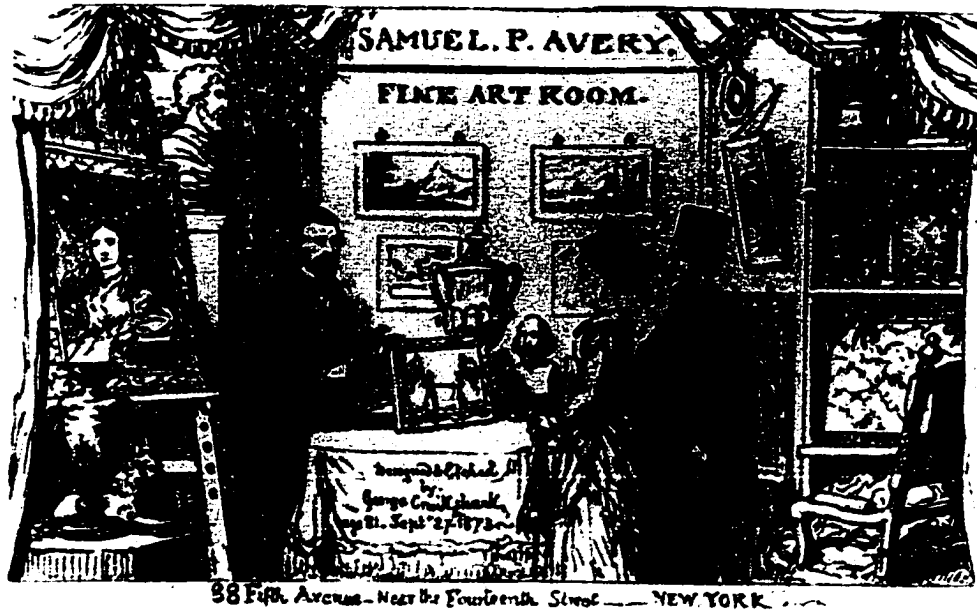
10. M. Knoedler and Company (Successor to Goupil, Vibert and Company), interior of ground floor retail shop, 170 Fifth Avenue, New York, c. 1876. Stereopticon photograph. Collection of the New York Public Library.



11. M. Knoedler and Company, 355 Fifth Avenue, New York, c. 1895. Photograph courtesy of Knoedler and Company, New York.



12. M. Knoedler and Company, 355 Fifth Avenue, New York. *Left to right:* Charles Knoedler, unidentified man, and Edmond Knoedler. Photograph courtesy of Michael Sterner.



13. George Cruickshank, Samuel P. Avery: Fine Art Room, 1873. Etching. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



14. Thomas Nast, Samuel P. Avery Transporting His Treasures Across the Sea, c. 1870s. Black wash and graphite heightened with white on toned paper. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



15. Ignacio de Leon y Escosura, Samuel P. Avery in His Gallery, 1876. Oil on canvas. Collection of the New York Public Library.

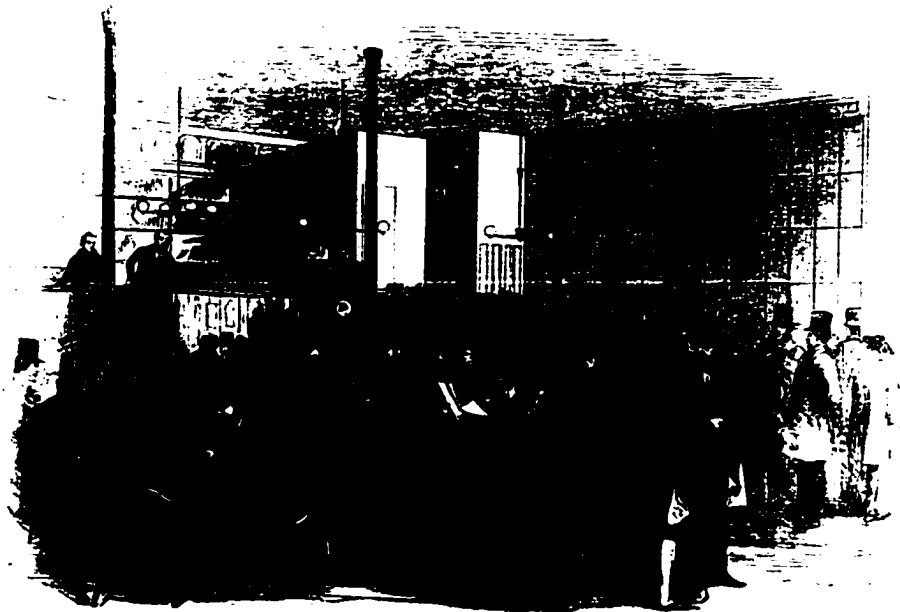


*Wednesday, February 28th.*  
*Ladies' Private View*  
 From One to Five o'clock.  
*817 Broadway,*  
*Cor. 12th Street.*  
 ADMIT TWO—NO CHILDREN.  
 Geo. A. Leavitt & Co.  
 S. P. Avery.

16. "Ladies Ticket" for an exhibition cosponsored by Samuel P. Avery and George Leavitt at 817 Broadway, New York, c. 1870s. Print. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



17. Leavitt, Delisser and Company trade card, c. 1856. Wood engraving by Howland. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



INT. VIEW OF MESSRS. LEAVITT AND DELISSER'S SALES-ROOM, BROADWAY, N.Y., 1856.

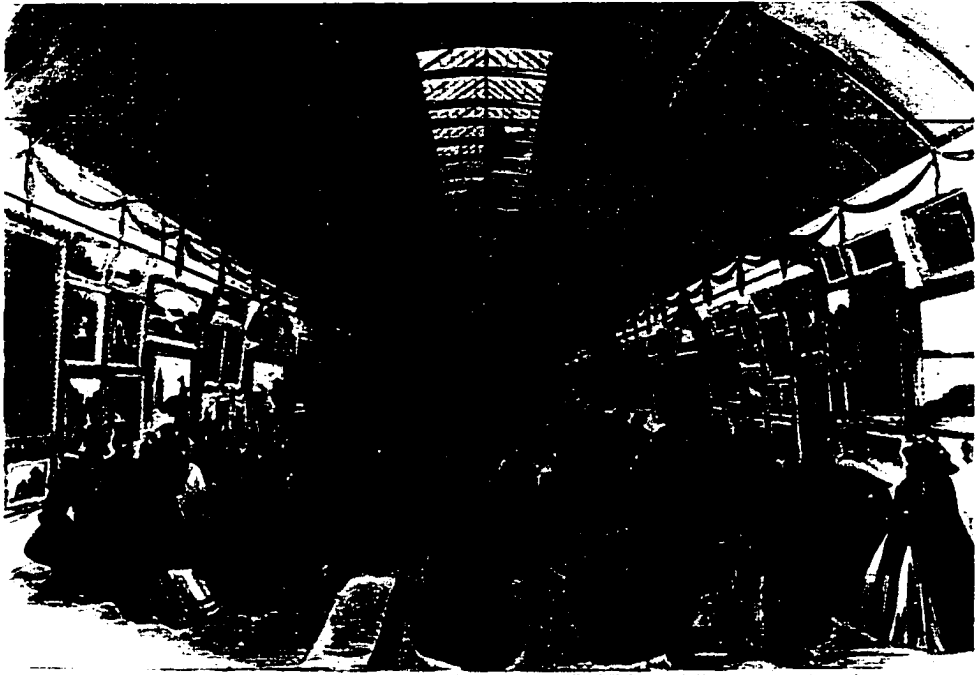
18. "Interior of Messrs. Leavitt and Delisser's Salesroom, Broadway, New York." Wood engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 5 April 1856, p. 264.



19. Clinton Hall at Eight Street and Astor Place, c. 1870s. Photograph. Collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



20. Leavitt Art Rooms, 817 Broadway, New York, c. 1882-3. Etching by James F. Sabin. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



21. Metropolitan Sanitary Fair. Wood engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 23 April 1864, p. 69.



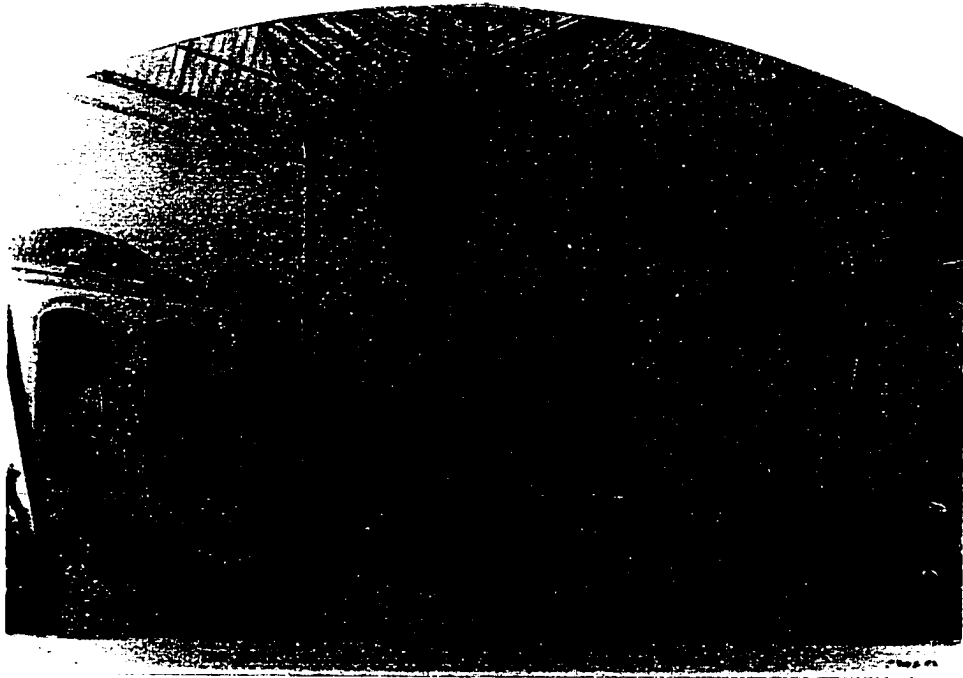
22. Varnishing Day at the National Academy of Design. Wood engraving from Harper's Weekly, 7 May 1870, p. 292.



23. Opening reception at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 20, 1872, 681 Fifth Avenue, New York. Wood engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 9 March 1872, p. 405.



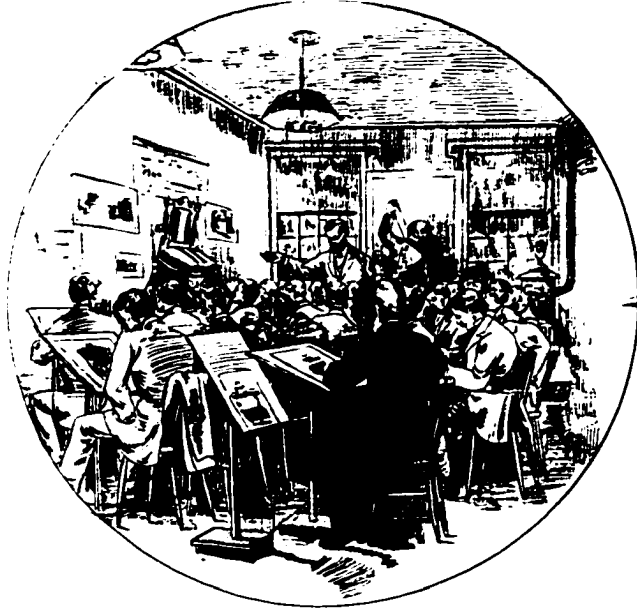
24. Metropolitan Museum of Art, painting gallery in the Calvert Vaux building, c. 1887-1902. Photograph. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



25. South Kensington Museum, the North Court, 1862. Wood engraving from The Builder, 3 May 1862.



26. Frank Waller, Interior View of the Metropolitan Museum of Art when in Fourteenth Street, 1881. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



27. Metropolitan Museum of Art's Free Industrial Art School, 31 Union Square, 1880. From an illustration in the Daily Graphic, 1880.





28. Kurtz Building, 6 East Twenty-Third Street, New York, c. 1876. Print after a drawing by Schimpl.

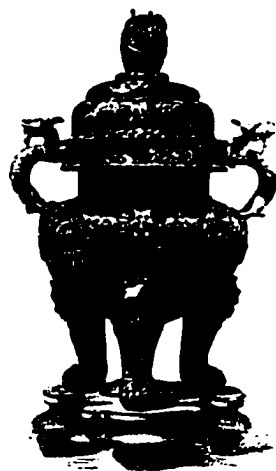
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VASES.		Porcelain.	VASES.	
<b>OWARI HAWTHORN.</b>				
Height.	Each.	Height.	Each.	
3 inch.	60	3 1/2 inch.		
4 "		4 "		
5 "		5 "		
6 "	25	6 "		
7 "	30	7 "		
8 "	35	8 "		
9 "	40	9 "		
10 "	50	10 "		
12 "	1.25	12 "		
14 "	2.25	14 "		
<b>REDZ.</b>				
				
3 1/2 inch.		3 1/2 inch.		
4 "		4 "		
5 "	10	5 "		
6 "	15	6 "		
7 "	20	7 "		
8 "	25	8 "		
9 "	30	9 "		
10 "	35	10 "		
12 "	50	12 "		
14 "	1.25	14 "		
	2.25			
<b>REDZ AND GOLD.</b>				
				
<b>SANSURA.</b>				
				
Price Subject to Change without Notice.				

A. A. VANTINE & CO. BROADWAY & 14th ST., N. Y.

VASES.		Porcelain.	VASES.	
<b>REDZ.</b>				
				
Height.	Each.	Height.	Each.	
4 inch.	1.00	5 inch.	1.75	
5 "	1.50	6 "	2.00	
6 "	2.00	7 "	2.50	
7 "	3.00	8 "	3.50	
8 "	4.00	9 "	4.50	
9 "	5.00	10 "	5.50	
10 "	6.00	12 "	7.00	
12 "	8.00	14 "	10.00	
<b>TURK-Colored Ground.</b>				
4 inch.	1.00			
5 "	1.50			
6 "	2.00			
7 "	2.50			
8 "	3.00			
9 "	3.50			
10 "	4.00			
<b>CHAWAGH CRACKLE.</b>				
7 inch.	2.00			
8 "	2.50			
9 "	3.00			
10 "	3.50			
12 "	5.00			
<b>OWARI.</b>				
				
Height.	Each.	Height.	Each.	
4 inch.	1.00	5 inch.	1.75	
5 "	1.50	6 "	2.00	
6 "	2.00	7 "	2.50	
7 "	3.00	8 "	3.50	
8 "	4.00	9 "	4.50	
9 "	5.00	10 "	5.50	
10 "	6.00	12 "	7.00	
12 "	8.00	14 "	10.00	
<b>KAGA.</b>				
4 inch.	1.00	5 inch.	1.75	
5 "	1.50	6 "	2.00	
6 "	2.00	7 "	2.50	
7 "	3.00	8 "	3.50	
8 "	4.00	9 "	4.50	
9 "	5.00	10 "	5.50	
10 "	6.00	12 "	7.00	
12 "	8.00	14 "	10.00	
Price Subject to Change without Notice.				

29. A. A. Vantine and Company catalog, c. 1895. Collection of the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum.



*Yourself and friends are cordially invited to A PRIVATE  
View of High Class Objects of Art, just received from  
Japan and China, the selection of Mr. Jas. F. Sutton  
(of the firm of Messrs. A. A. Vantine & Co., New York)  
and to be shown for the first time in this country.*

*On Wednesday Evening, March 20th,*

*between the hours of Eight and Eleven O'clock, at No.  
25, North Fifth Street.*

*Respectfully,*

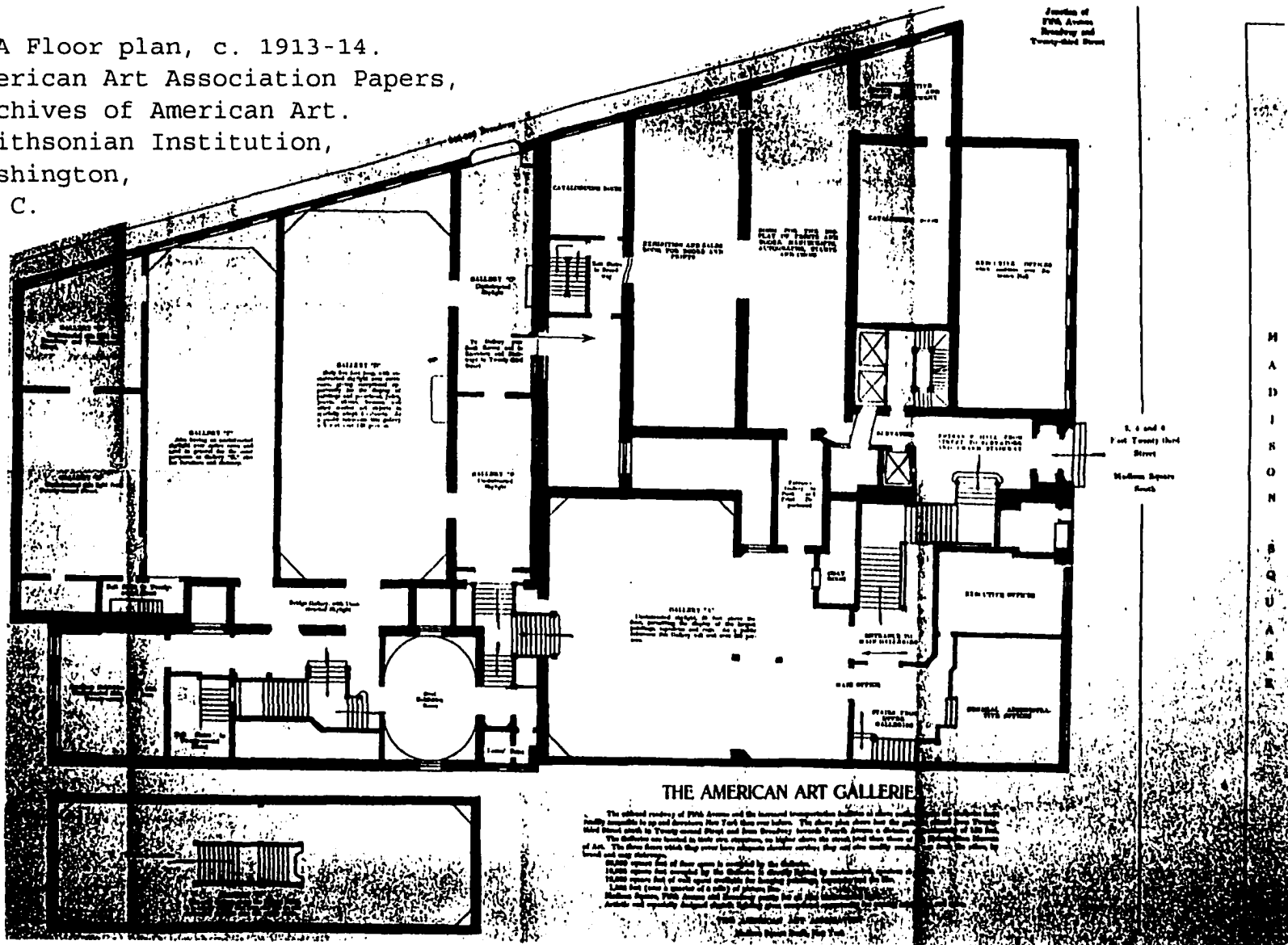
*M. STERN & CO.*

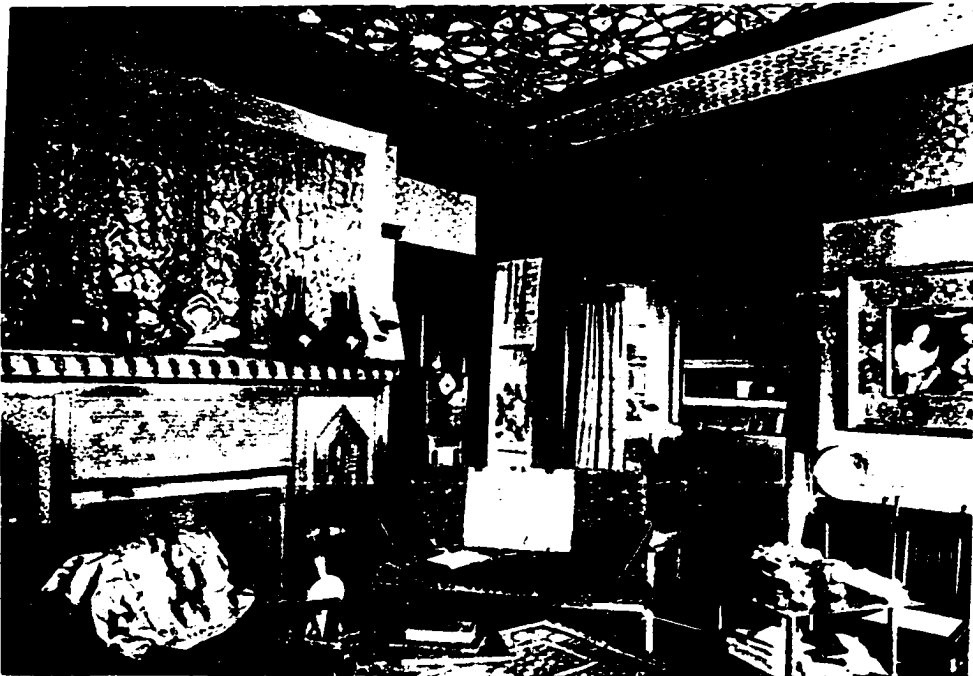
*THOMAS E. KIRBY.*

*St. Louis, March 21, 1879.*

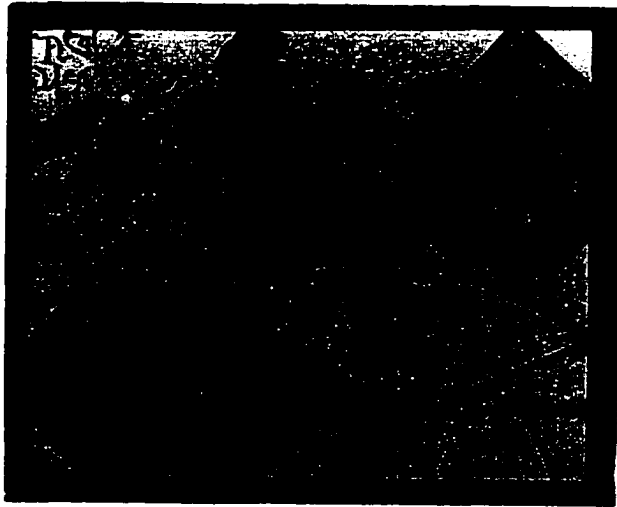
30. Announcement for a St. Louis showing of "A Private View of High Class Objects of Art, just received from Japan and China, the selection of Mr. Jas. F. Sutton. . .," for A. A. Vantine and Company, New York, 1879. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

31. AAA Floor plan, c. 1913-14.  
 American Art Association Papers,  
 Archives of American Art.  
 Smithsonian Institution,  
 Washington,  
 D. C.

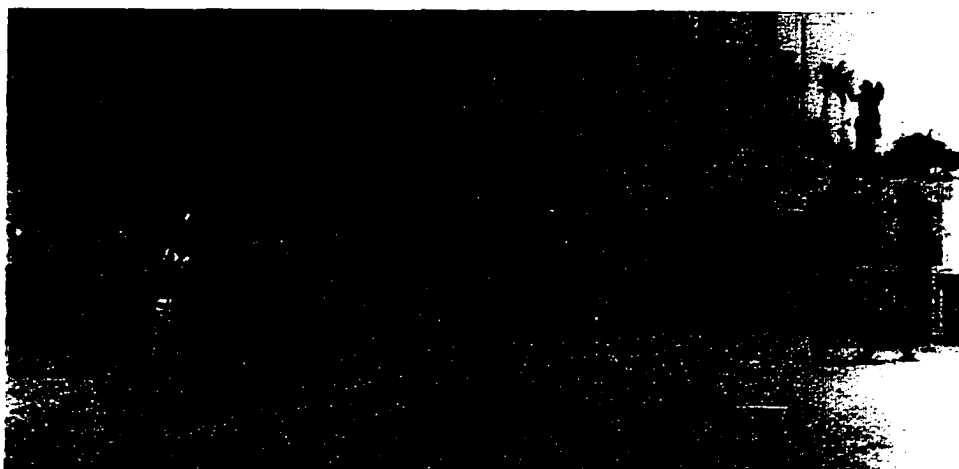




32. Samuel Colman Library, Newport, Rhode Island, 1882-83. Photograph from Artistic Houses, vol. 2 (D. Appleton and Company, New York: 1883-84).



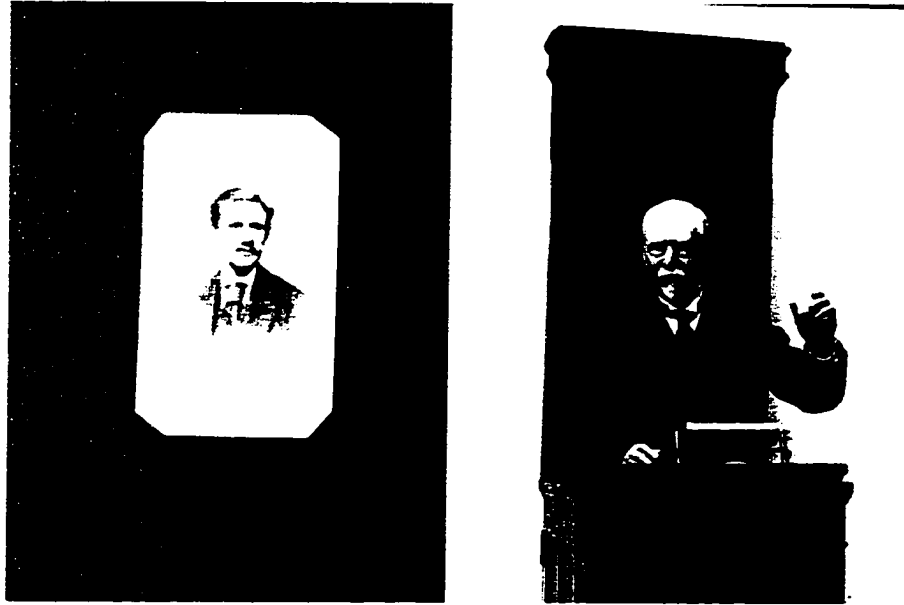
33. New Year's Greeting Card and Christmas Greeting Card published by L. Prang and Company, Boston, 1880. Lithographs. Collection of the Concord Museum, Massachusetts.



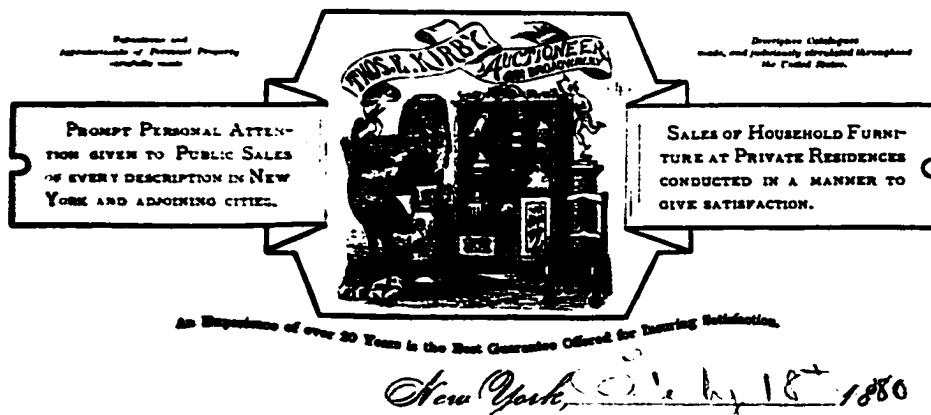
34. Frederick Bridgman, Diversion of an Assyrian King, c. 1877-78. Oil on canvas. Location unknown.



35. Alexander Turney and Cornelia Stewart Art Gallery. Photograph from Artistic Houses, vol. 1 (D. Appleton and Company, New York: 1883-84).



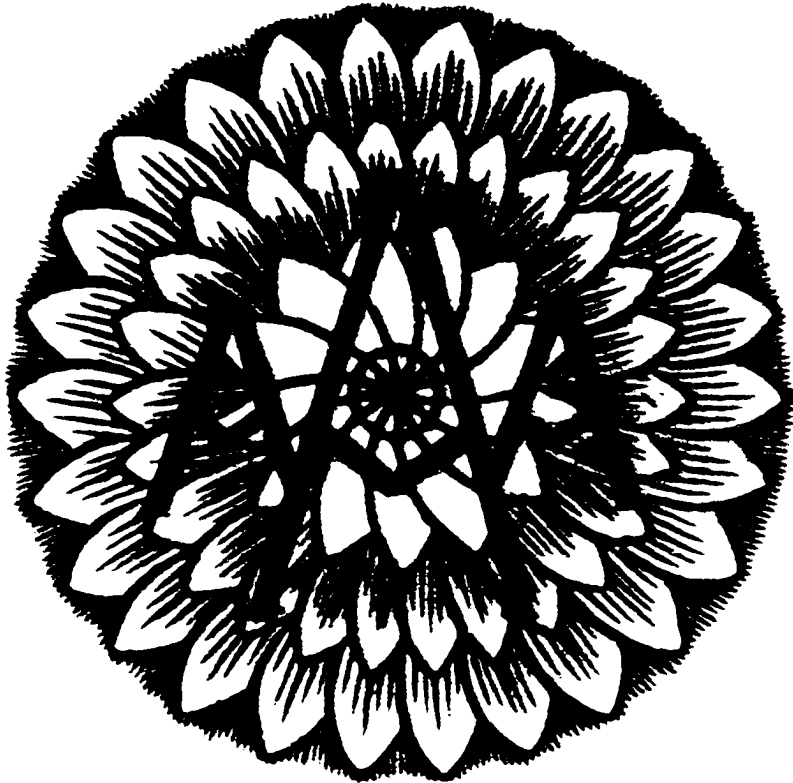
36. Thomas Ellis Kirby at about age 24, c. 1870, and at the American Art Association podium at about age 75, c. 1921. Photographs. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.



37. Thomas E. Kirby letterhead, 1880. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.



38. Chickering Hall, corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street, c. 1880. Photograph. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



39. American Art Association logotype.



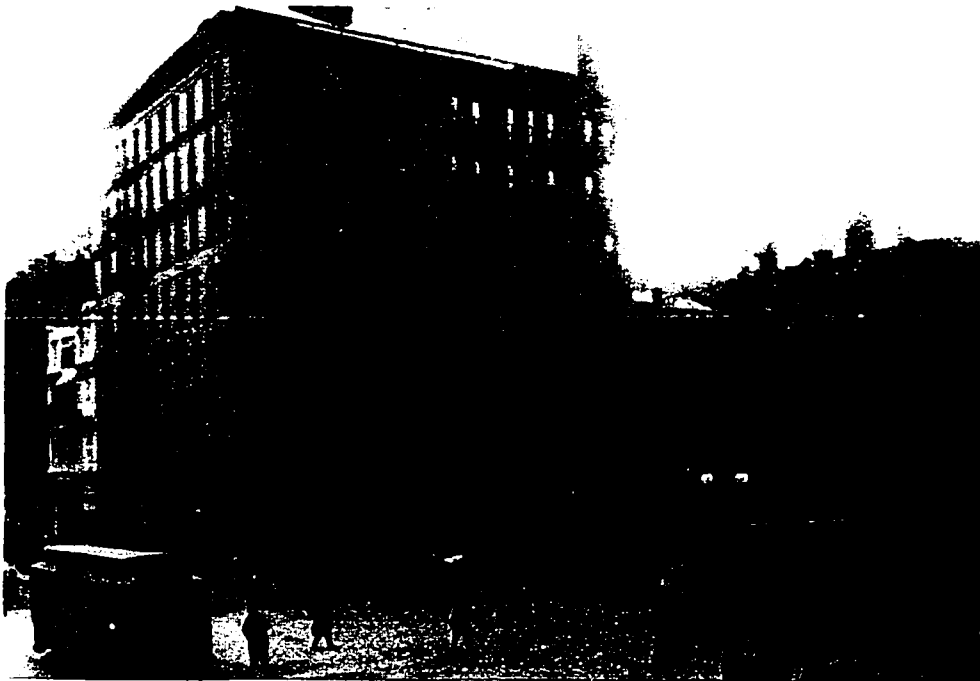
40. Louis Moeller, Another Investment, 1884. Oil on panel. Private Collection.



41. William H. Vanderbilt's Picture Gallery. Photograph from Artistic Houses, vol. 1 (D. Appleton and Company, New York: 1883-84). Mihaly Munkacsy's Two Families is visible at the lower left; Alphonse De Neuville's Defense of Bourget is the largest painting in the room, displayed on the easel at center left.



42. William H. Vanderbilt's Japanese Parlor. Photograph from Artistic Houses, vol. 1 (D. Appleton and Company, New York: 1883-84).



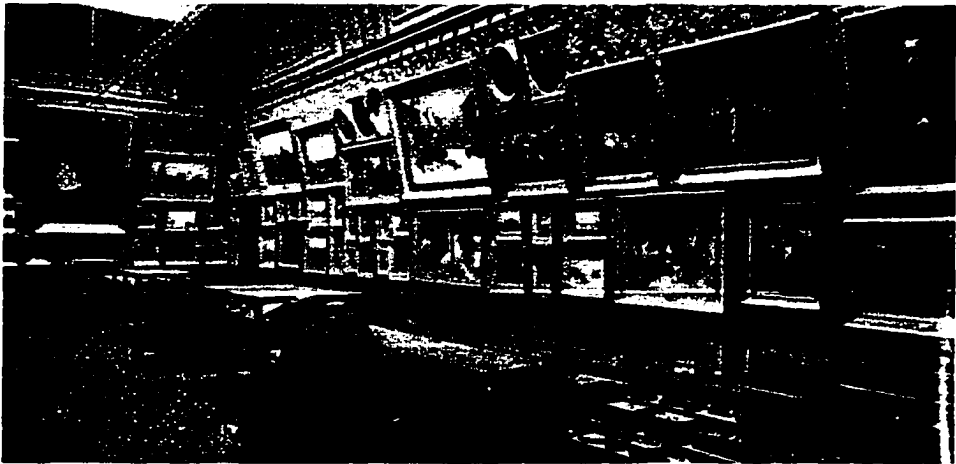
43. Southeast corner of Broadway and Twenty-Third Street showing the Bartholdi Hotel, 1911. The adjacent Kurtz Building is visible to the left of the hotel while the structure into which the AAA expanded in 1884 is shown on the right.



44. American Art Association, Gallery C, 1891-2. Photograph from King's Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1892), 283.



45. American Art Association, Gallery D, 1891-2. Photograph from King's Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1892), 283.



46. William T. Walter's picture gallery, 1884. Photograph. Collection of the Walters Art Museum.



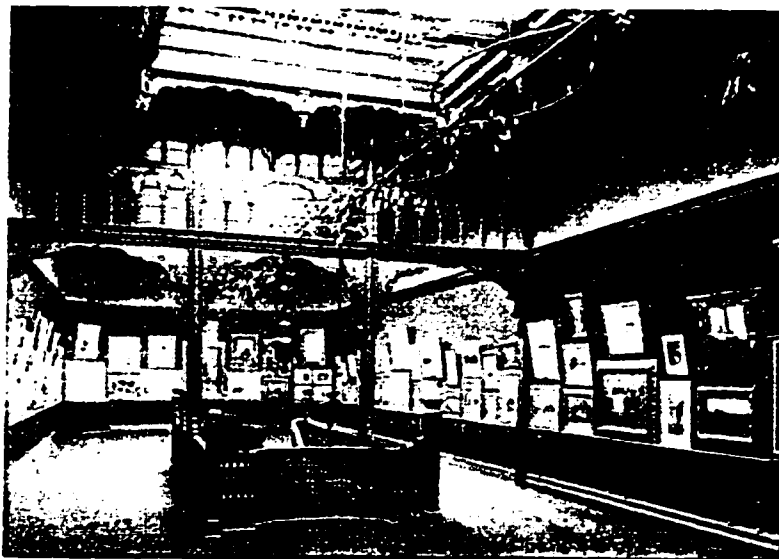
47. American Art Association, Gallery D. Wood engraving from Harper's Weekly, 15 November 1884, p. 750.



48. American Art Association, window nook in Gallery C.  
Wood engraving from Harper's Weekly, 15 November 1884,  
p. 750.



49. American Art Association, Gallery C looking into Gallery D. Wood engraving from Harper's Weekly, 15 November 1884, p. 750.



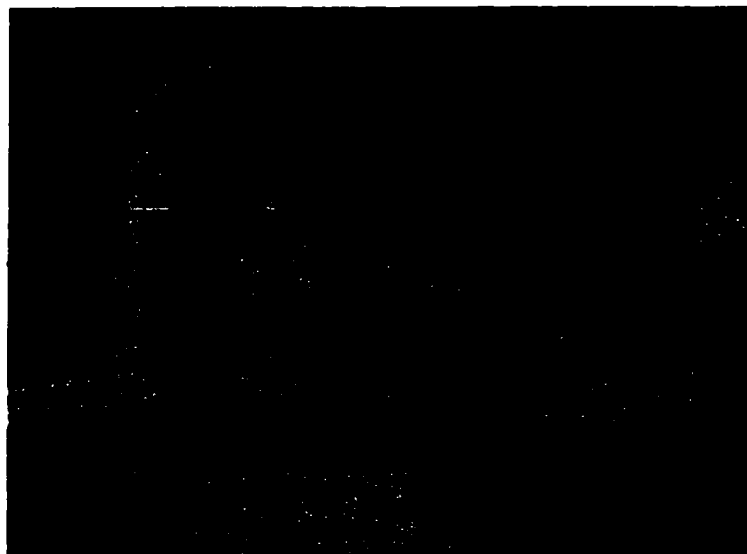
50. American Art Association, Gallery E, 1891-2. Photograph from King's Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1892), 283.



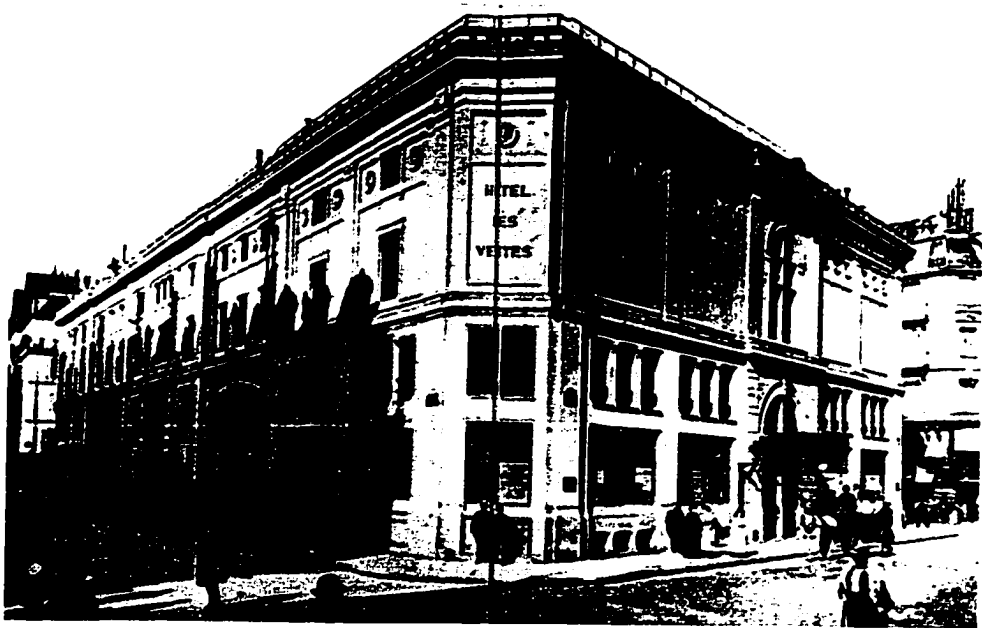
51. Charles S. Smith Library. Photograph from Artistic Houses, vol. 1 (D. Appleton and Company, New York: 1883-84).



52. Durand-Ruel Gallery, 315 Fifth Avenue, New York.  
Photograph. Durand-Ruel Archives, Paris.



53. Durand-Ruel Gallery, 315 Fifth Avenue, New York.  
Photograph. Durand-Ruel Archives, Paris.



54. The Hôtel Drouot in 1867, at the intersection of rue Drouot and rue Chauchat, Paris.



55. A Sale at the Hôtel Drouot. From a sketch by Pierre Vidal published in Connoisseur 3 (1902): 236.



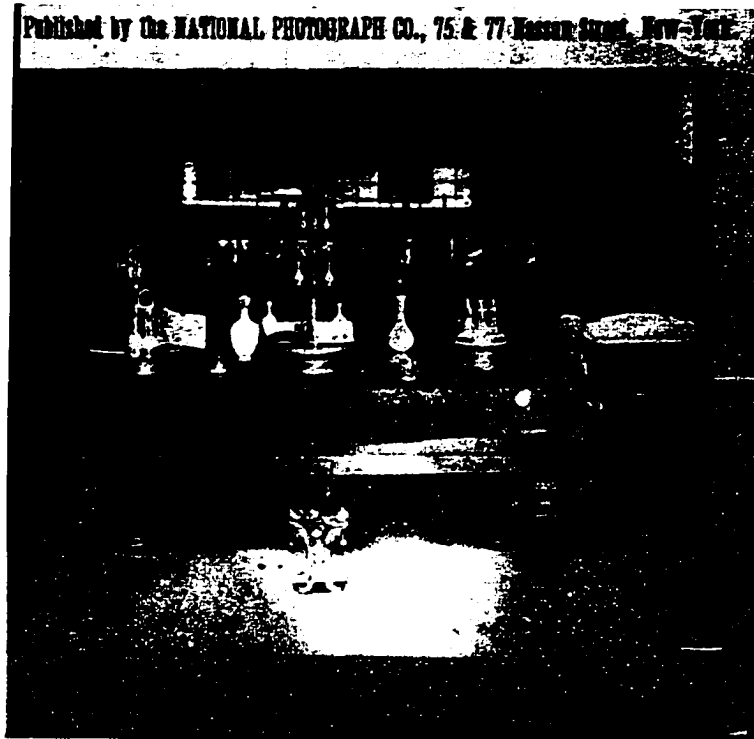
56. E. Didier, Auction in Chatham Street, c. 1840. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



57. Nicolino Calyo, Auctioneer in Public Streets, c. 1840. Watercolor on paper. Collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



58. Auction of Home Furnishings. Wood engraving from Harper's Weekly, 30 April 1870, p. 280.



59. Salesroom at George B. Reed and Company, 84 Cedar Street, New York City, 1870s. Stereopticon card. Collection of the New York Public Library.



60. Picture Auction. Wood engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 4 December 1875, p. 208.



61. Ignacio de Leon Escosura, Auction Sale in Clinton Hall, 1876. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



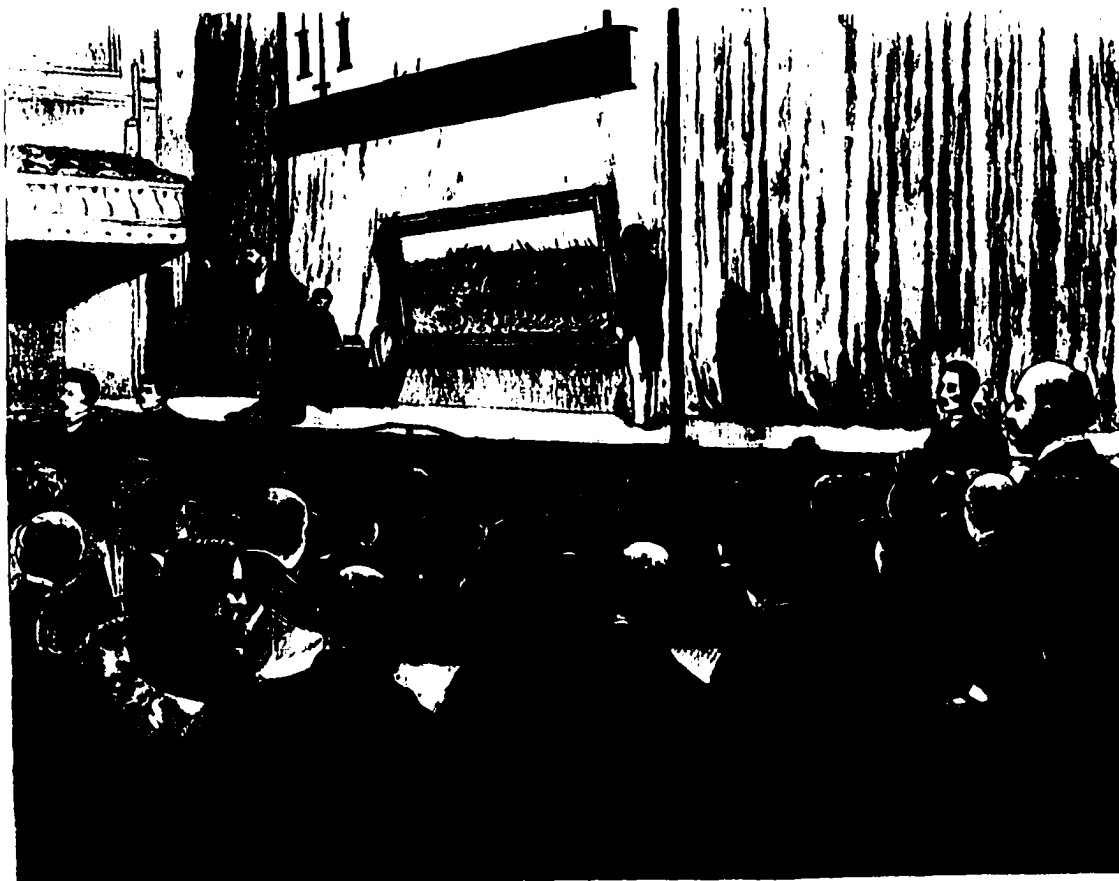
62. Installation of the presale exhibition of the Mary Jane Morgan collection at the American Art Association, February, 1886. *Top left to right: Pierre M. Beyle, Fishing for Sole, sold for \$1,050; Bernard Koekkoek, Winter in Holland, \$1875; Florent Willems, The Music Lesson, \$1,250. *Bottom left to right: Jules Dupré, Morning, \$8,050; Jehan Georges Vibert, The Missionary's Story, \$25,500 (Metropolitan Museum of Art); J. B. C. Corot, Landscape, \$9,000. Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.**



63. Jules Breton, The Communicants, 1884. Oil on canvas. Location unknown (sold at Sotheby's 24 May 1996).



64. The "Peachbloom Vase," Chinese, late seventeenth-century, now in the Walters Art Gallery. Photogravure used for the Mary Jane Morgan auction catalog published by the American Art Association, 1886.



65. Sale of the Alexander Turney Stewart collection at Chickering Hall, March 25, 1887. Ernest Meissonier's Friedland, 1807, 1875, is on the block. Wood engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 2 April 1887, p. 109.



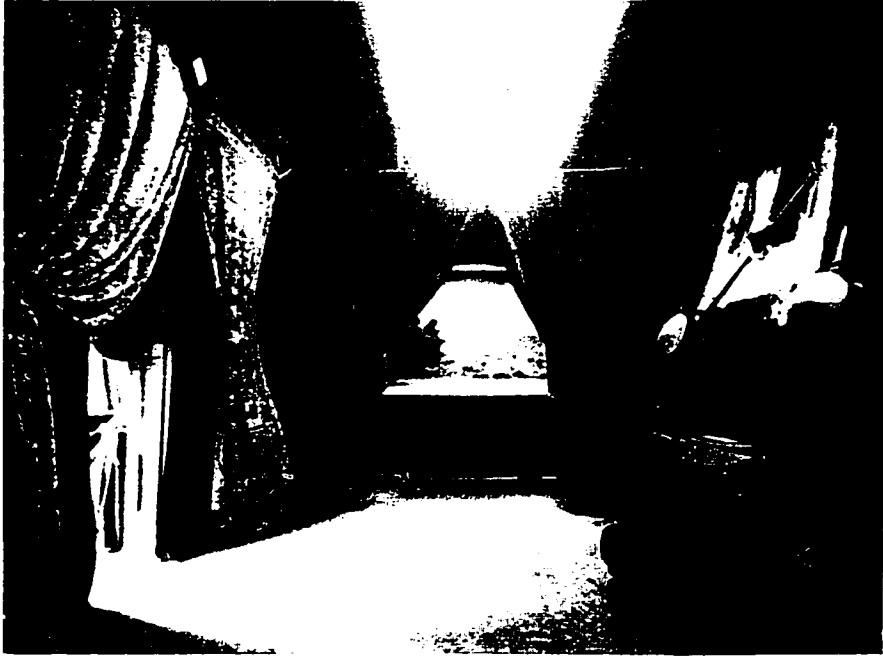
66. Mihaly Munkacsy, Christ Before Pilate, 1880-81 (replica). Oil on canvas. Collection Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.



67. Vasilii Verestchagin Exhibition, Gallery A, 1889. Procession of Elephants (Entry of the Prince of Wales into Delhi), 1874-5 (location unknown). Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.



68. Vasilii Verestchagin Exhibition, Gallery A, 1889. *Lower left: Before the Attack at Plevna, 1881 (Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow); upper center: Shipka-Sheinovo (Skobelev at Shipka), 1883-88 (Russian Museum, St. Petersburg); upper right: The Road of the Prisoners of War, (The Road to Plevna), 1878-9 (Brooklyn Museum); lower right: After the Attack; Dressing Station at Plevna, 1881 (Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow).* Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.



69. Vasilii Verestchagin Exhibition, Gallery C, 1889. *On end wall: The Defeated; Funeral Service, 1877-79 (Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow). Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.*



70. Vasilii Verestchagin Exhibition, Gallery D, 1889. *At left: Execution of Conspirators in Russia (Hanging in Russia) (Museum of the Great October Revolution, St. Petersburg) from Trilogy of Executions (Eye for an Eye, Tooth for a Tooth), 1884-5. Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.*



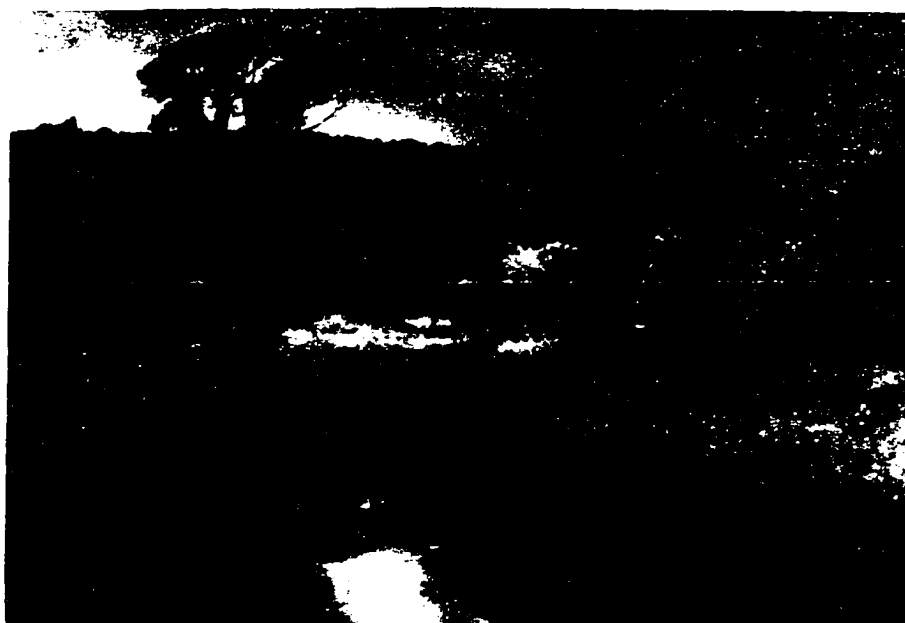
71. Vasilii Verestchagin, Roman Execution (Crucifixion), 1887. Oil on canvas. Collection Brooklyn Museum.



72. Vasilii Verestchagin Exhibition, Gallery E, 1889. Photograph. American Art Association Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.



73. Jean-François Millet, The Angelus, 1858-59. Oil on canvas. Collection Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



74. George Inness, A Gray Lowery Day, c. 1877. Oil on canvas. Collection Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College.



75. John Sloan, Connoisseurs of Prints, 1905. Etching.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

I have organized this bibliography into five parts: manuscript collections; books and dissertations; periodicals; newspaper and periodical articles regarding art auctions; and exhibition catalogs. With the exception of the Address of Mr. Thomas E. Kirby published by the American Art Association in 1922, an important first-hand account of the organization, I have excluded the dozens of exhibition and auction catalogs and pamphlets the AAA published. To do otherwise would compel me to create a type of catalog raisonné of Association publications and ephemera, a project that would require an effort disproportionate to the value such a list would provide. Those interested in a chronological list of AAA activities, many of which were accompanied by publications, should consult Susan William's 24-page "User's Guide" to the American Art Association Papers at the Archives of American Art, which provides an chronological inventory of the AAA papers.

In section four, newspaper and periodical articles regarding art auctions, I have included only the few articles that pertain to art auctions in general and related

practices during the period of this study, as there is to my knowledge no such list of citations elsewhere. Newspaper articles regarding specific sales or exhibitions are foot-noted throughout the text.

I direct attention to section five, exhibition catalogs. Several that reconstruct exhibitions of the late nineteenth century are especially useful for visualizing how art was displayed in homes, galleries, and museums, and for tracing the provenance and prices of specific works of art.

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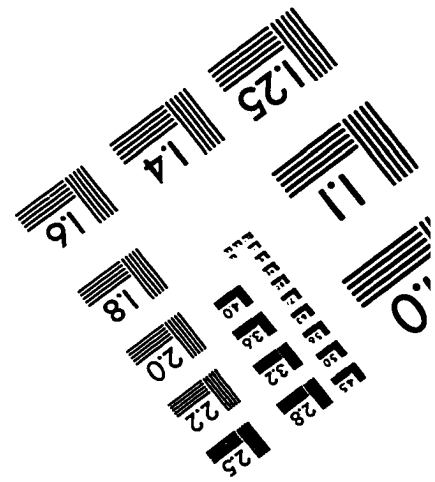
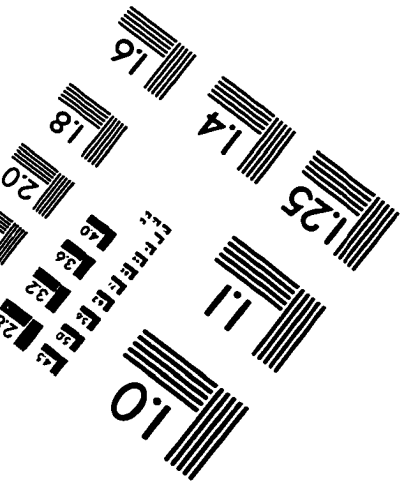
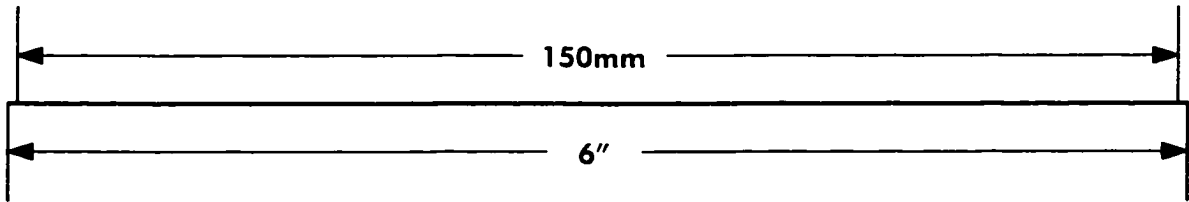
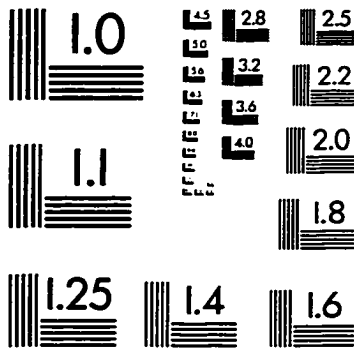
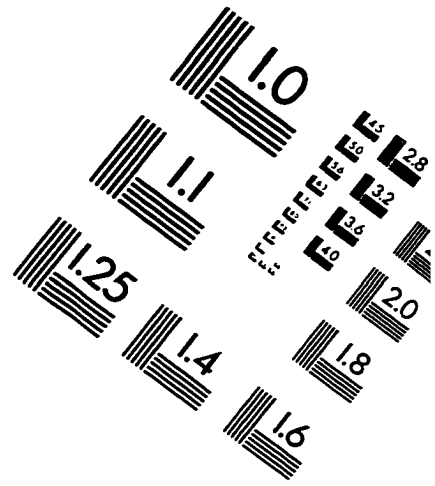
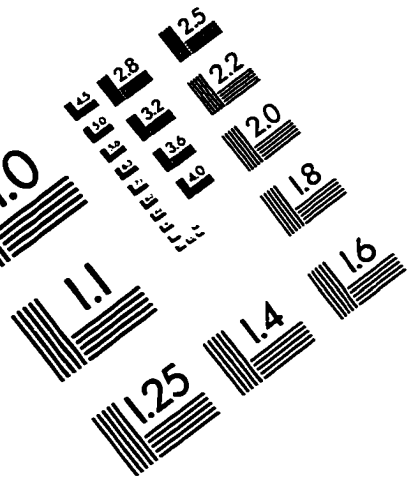
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