

Preface

The Arts have always travelled westward, and there is no doubt of their flourishing here-after on our side of the Atlantic, as the number of wealthy inhabitants shall increase, who may be able and willing suitably to reward them; since, from several instances, it appears that our people are not deficient in genius.

—*Benjamin Franklin*
to *Charles Willson Peale*, 1771

A volume examining the history of collecting American art in the United States during the long nineteenth century would not be complete without including a discussion of Charles Willson Peale: collector, museum founder, inventor, naturalist, and patriarch of an American artistic family. Peale served as a model for future munificent collectors, and themes occurring throughout his lifetime—the challenges of enacting a democracy while cleaving to the crown; creating an “American” school distinct from, yet rooted in, European tradition; and the trials of forming a publicly supported museum—reverberate throughout this publication. In his last self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum* (fig. 1), Peale dramatically lifts away a curtain, unveiling his collection, the remarkable accomplishments of a life’s work. His museum included portraits (Peale’s Gallery of Great Men), landscapes, specimens of flora, fauna (taxidermy and tools), minerals, and Indigenous art and artifacts, and revealed the abundant resources of the New World. Not only does the mastodon bone in the foreground highlight Peale’s paleontological triumphs, but for him, the scale of the fossil signified the potential power of the continent.¹

Born in a British colony, Peale formally trained in Boston and London, ultimately becoming a prominent portraitist. During and after serving in the Revolutionary War under George Washington (1789–1797), Peale documented its heroes in miniature and in large-scale paintings. In 1779, Peale was

1. Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), *The Artist in His Museum*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 263.5 × 202.9 cm. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection, 1878.1.2). Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.



commissioned to paint Washington's first official full-length portrait (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts).² Like many of his peers, he struggled with his British colonial roots while helping to form the new nation; together he and his compatriots sought to create a democracy freed from the apron strings of colonizing regimes. Nonetheless, for mainly social and financial reasons, in seeking to define an "American" cultural identity, Peale and his fellow nation builders (primarily wealthy white men) failed to untether themselves from colonial practices, among them slavery and the usurpation of land from its original inhabitants.

The Peale Museum (formally named the Philadelphia Museum), founded circa 1784, served as a platform for Peale to exercise his Enlightenment ideals—to educate visitors, instill happiness, and imbue "the common man" with morality, thus helping forge a more perfect society. His struggles with faithfully enacting Enlightenment ideologies in his museum mirror the complications encountered by the founders when forming the new nation.³ In 1794, Peale opened his museum to subscribers, another enterprise explored throughout this book. The paying members presented a solution he hoped would sustain the museum. Subscribers included founding fathers such as Washington and John Adams, among other elite and middle-income families. Moreover, Peale embraced the act of patronage within his own family. In particular, his sons Raphaele, Rembrandt, and Rubens, all successful artists in their own right, were apt protégés and perpetuated their father's ideals. They would ultimately oversee his Philadelphia Museum and establish branches in Baltimore, Charleston, and New York City.

Contemporaneous museums formed on Peale's principles included George Catlin's Indian Gallery based in St. Louis and James Reid Lambdin's Pittsburgh Museum of Natural History and Gallery of Painting. Catlin (1796–1872) and Lambdin

(1807–1889), like Peale, lobbied for the U.S. government to purchase their collections to launch a national museum.⁴ These three collections, some of which traveled, served as sites for the public to view works of art, natural curiosities, and artworks by Native Americans. Robert Gilmor, Jr., and William Wilson Corcoran, discussed in this volume, pursued the founding of national museums.⁵ At the same time, other collectors sought to form and enrich regional and local institutions; counted among them and featured in these chapters are Daniel Wadsworth, Nicholas Longworth, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, and William Preston Harrison.⁶

As demonstrated by Linda S. Ferber in her introduction, regional exhibits and international expositions, including those organized by private collectors, played a pivotal role in fostering a taste for American art over the course of the nineteenth century. Alternative early venues for art consumption existed in the form of auctions and temporary displays in taverns and repurposed cultural spaces—libraries, concert halls, social clubs, and bookshops. Concurrently, without an established art market—galleries and other intermediaries—artists sustained themselves by working directly with collectors.⁷ They employed conventional practices such as opening up their studios—where they would display their own work and sometimes work by others—and solicited support from patrons through commissions.

One of the earliest documented art dealers in New York City was Michael Paff (ca. 1773–1838).⁸ In the 1790s, with his brother John, he ran a music store where he expanded its inventory to include paintings. In 1810, the brothers dissolved their joint venture—John continued to sell musical instruments and publish music, while Michael opened a "picture gallery" where he sold artwork exclusively.⁹ In 1812, Michael published a catalogue of his inventory that numbered and described the paintings, including providing attributions to specific schools

when not naming individual artists such as “Hogarth,” “Rembrandt,” or “Titian.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, many of Paff’s attributions were spurious, driving early collectors like Gilmor and Luman Reed to the growing market for the work of living artists.¹¹ Other galleries supplemented their stock by selling prints, which were less expensive to produce and distribute. As is made clear in this volume, the circulation of prints fueled the taste for art more widely.¹² In general, dealers provided patrons with a selection of both American and European art, and many collectors did not prioritize one school over the other.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the growing prosperity and population of the nation allowed for and necessitated the expansion of transportation. New infrastructure aided in the establishment of art galleries in burgeoning cities across the United States, including the port city of St. Louis, which served as a gateway to the West. As Benjamin Franklin had earlier predicted, the “*Arts . . . travelled westward,*” where the simultaneous rise of affluent citizens created an audience and market for American art. Operations that would benefit directly from the development of the railroads included the Grand Central Art Galleries, which organized exhibitions in cities along the railroad lines across the United States (see fig. 94), and Fred Harvey’s Indian Departments, which took advantage of locations on the Santa Fe line in Chicago, Albuquerque, and the Grand Canyon.¹³ Additionally, in the last quarter of the century, galleries began to specialize, and some profited by dealing exclusively in American art, including the Vose Galleries in Boston (est. 1841) and the Macbeth Gallery in New York (est. 1892).¹⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century, a wealth of artistic styles flourished at home, and American artists had secured their place as competitors on the international stage of an increasingly cosmopolitan world. Key exhibitions, such as the Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art (1904) and the exhibition commemorating the Hudson-Fulton

Celebration (1909), compared American art with work by contemporary and Old Master European artists. At the same time, collectors and advocates such as Robert Weeks de Forest worked tirelessly to augment museum collections with contemporary and historical American art and craft. These concomitant factors, among others, aided in forming a market for American art in the United States and are addressed in the publication.

Tastemakers, Collectors, and Patrons is the sixth and final volume in the Penn State University Press series The Frick Collection Studies in the History of Art Collecting in America, and the first to focus exclusively on collecting the art of the United States.¹⁵ Readers may view it as a companion to the fourth volume in the series, *The Americas Revealed: Collecting Colonial and Modern Latin American Art in the United States*, edited by Edward J. Sullivan (2018). The current volume evolved from a symposium, *Made in the USA: Collecting American Art During the Long Nineteenth Century*, held at The Frick Collection in 2017. As was the Center for the History of Collecting’s tradition, symposia customarily closed with a conversation with one or more living collectors. On this occasion, Linda Ferber interviewed Alice Walton, founder of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

The symposium’s brochure featured Thomas Cole’s *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, After a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (see frontispiece). *The Oxbow*’s collecting history encompasses the nineteenth century, traversing the historical breadth of this volume. First, on the advice of his friend Luman Reed, Charles Nicoll Talbot (1802–1874), a prominent China trade merchant, purchased the painting in April 1836 from Cole at the National Academy of Design’s annual exhibition.¹⁶ Talbot later lent the picture to the Dunlap Benefit Exhibition of 1838, the Cole Memorial Exhibition in 1848, and the Artist Fund Society exhibition of 1862. Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage (1828–1918, fig. 2), founder of the Russell Sage Foundation and Russell



2. Nathan Lazarnick (1879–1955), Photograph of Mrs. Russell Sage (Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage), 1907. Library of Congress, Washington, DC (LCCN-95501118).

Sage College and second wife of the robber baron Russell Sage, acquired the painting directly from Talbot's estate.¹⁷ *The Oxbow* would be on view again for the public in 1908 after Sage donated it to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Like other women collectors in this volume, including Elizabeth Colt, Mary Barker Reed, Minnie Carl Untermeyer, and Helen Clay Frick, Olivia Sage is an example of a civic-minded woman art collector and tastemaker active at this time. The mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries ushered in many cultural female elites who established and contributed to museums, including Harriet Wilson High (High Museum, Atlanta), Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (The Whitney Museum

of American Art, NY), and the three founders of the Museum of Modern Art, Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.¹⁸ Though their exploits are not all examined in this volume, further research on American women, their collecting and civic practices, would be a worthwhile scholarly contribution.¹⁹

Intending to enrich the field of the history of collecting American art beyond that offered in the symposium, we have expanded this publication's scope both geographically and chronologically with additional contributions. While studies of individual collectors and collections of American art have been published elsewhere, a survey of collecting

American art in the United States has a shorter bibliography. *Tastemakers, Collectors, and Patrons* seeks to add to the disciplines of the history of collecting and art history more broadly. Within these pages, familiar and less-familiar subjects are approached with fresh perspectives, original research, and newly discovered archival findings. Each topic is contextualized and examined within the socioeconomic, political, and ideological fabric of its time and place. Together, these chapters form a tapestry of the

evolving taste and market for American art in the United States. Collectively, they serve as a platform for future scholarship, enabling the reader to consider the history of collecting American art from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries as more diverse and complex than previously considered.

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