William Walters: A Pioneer American Collector of Asian Art

With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, William Walters (1819–1894), a Baltimore whisky merchant and railroad investor, faced a conundrum shared by many of his fellow citizens. Although a Pennsylvanian by birth, his financial interests lay in both the North and the South. Having publicly expressed his sympathies for the secessionists, he decided to flee the city, taking his family to Europe for the four years of hostilities. Accompanying him were his wife, Ellen (1822–1862), and their children, Henry (1848–1931) and Jennie (1853–1922). They chose Paris as their destination; there a Baltimore expatriate, George A. Lucas (1824–1909), guided them to the museums, historical monuments, various artists’ studios and exhibitions. A permanent resident of Paris, Lucas would subsequently represent the Walters family abroad in various capacities including as an agent for purchasing art. While in Europe, William Walters continued to explore the contemporary French art market, a field in which he had become interested before his travels, but, in addition, he developed a keen enthusiasm for the arts of China and Japan and would become one of the first Americans to collect in those areas.

Paris provided ample opportunity to encounter Asian objects. The Louvre Museum displayed Chinese porcelains and Japanese lacquers, which had been imported during the ancien régime and were often either mounted in ormulu or set into furniture. Also, in its ethnographic galleries, it flaunted the spoils of French imperialism, including, most notably, objects that recently had been presented by Théodore de Lagné (1800–1862), France’s negotiator for the Treaty of Whampoa in 1844, and by
Admiral Rigault de Genouilly (1807–1873), a participant in the Anglo-French occupation of Canton in 1857. These objects included such items as junks, bedsteads, objects of worship and household utensils—among them numerous porcelains. Elsewhere, on the outskirts of the city, they could have seen at the Sévres Manufactory the Chinese and Japanese porcelains acquired by its former director, Alexandre Brongniart (1770–1847). Among the private collections that were accessible at this time was that of Count J.-A. Pourtalès-Corgier. Walters’ friend George Lucas recorded in his diary their visits to the count’s hôtel on the rue Tronchet, which housed a vast array of Old Master paintings as well as objets d’art, including Japanese lacquers, Chinese and Japanese bronzes and Ming porcelains.

William and Ellen Walters took a brief side-trip to the International Exhibition held in London in 1862. Neither China nor Japan had officially participated, but both countries were represented by works borrowed from British diplomats and military personnel who had served in East Asia. Among the twenty-five entries in the paltry Chinese section were a carved screen presumably looted from the Old Summer Palace in 1860 and a skull “richly set in gold” reputed to be that of Confucius; also included were a few porcelains, carved ivories, jades and bronzes. Credit for the far more ambitious Japanese display was owed to Sir Rutherford Alcock (1809–1897), a British physician turned diplomat, who had served as “H.M. Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of the Tycoon” from 1838 to 1864. Among the 623 Japanese entries in the exhibition’s industrial department were examples of lacquers, woods, specimens of straw and basketry, ceramics, bronzes, metalwork, ivories, prints and books (7).

William Walters returned to Baltimore without his wife, who had succumbed to pneumonia during their stay in London. Perhaps it was in compensation for his loss that he nurtured a particularly close relationship with his son, Henry, who would share his passion for collecting and eventually inherit both his collection and his financial enterprises.

In the spring of 1867, William attended the opening of the Paris Exposition Universelle. For the first time the Empire of Japan officially participated in such an occasion presenting re-creations of a Japanese farm and a “pavilion of repose for a daimyō”. Several thousand artefacts representing every aspect of Japanese life were displayed in the main building. After the exhibition ended, many of these items were dispersed in Paris. On October 31st, the closing day, William asked his friend Lucas to buy a Japanese carved ivory, a small purchase that confirmed the beginning of the Walters Asian collection.2

The next World’s Fair was held in Vienna in 1873. William spent six months abroad that year travelling in a dual capacity: as “chairman of the committee on works of art” for the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and as honorary United States commissioner to the Weltausstellung. On this occasion, the Chinese empire presented displays of furniture and porcelains, which were enthusiastically received by the Western press. Walters admired in particular “Ming” porcelains set in Persian metal mounts and said to date from before 1630. These had been lent by “Prince Ehtezadesaltanet”, the shah of Persia’s uncle. Although it was actually made during the 18th century, Walters likely bought a brown porcelain hookah base with a Qajar metal cover from the Persian prince (8).

Three years later, at Philadelphia’s Centennial International Exhibition, William Walters set out on a major buying campaign accompanied by twenty-eight years old Henry who recorded in a small notebook their more than four hundred Japanese and one hundred Chinese purchases. They were competing with several large institutions, among them the South Kensington Museum and the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art, forerunners of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In addition, they were among a significant pool of individual collectors, most notably Henry O. Havemeyer (1847–1907) of New York and General Hector Tyndale (1821–1880) of Philadelphia. Likewise, the British designer Christopher Dresser (1834–1904), acting on behalf of the jewellery firm Tiffany & Co., bought heavily that year; his selections were subsequently auctioned in New York.

Japan’s commission, headed by Okubo Toshimichi (1830–1878), a leader of the Meiji Restoration and interior minister, and Lieutenant General Saigō Tsugumichi (1843–1902), was responsible for a particularly impressive presentation in Philadelphia. It again featured two reassembled buildings, a residence for the delegation and a bazaar with a teahouse set in a garden. Shown in the exhibit-

Cabinet (kō-awase dōgu-dana), Japan, Edo or Meiji period, 18th–19th centuries, black, gold and silvery lacquer inlaid with raden (mother-of-pearl) and coral, height 25.8 cm. Collection of the Walters Art Museum (67.254)

Box for documents (ryōshi-bako), Japan, Meiji period, 19th century, black, gold and silver lacquer, height 10.9 cm. Collection of the Walters Art Museum (67.126)

Less is known about his Chinese acquisitions that year, but Henry cited four sources: Hu Kwang Yung and Ho Kan Chen, both dealers, Huang-li Chen and a Westerner named Esmondhouse. In his notebook, he mentioned porcelains, describing them by colour and referring in particular to a large example of crackle ware.

Before attending the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1878, William Walters toured the Low Countries and Germany, visiting sites noted for their Asian holdings. His itinerary included stops in Brussels to see the Paul Morren collection of porcelains from which he eventually acquired at least one piece (13); the famous “Japanese Museum” in the Hague; Leiden, where Philipp Franz von Siebold had opened his Japanese collection as a museum in 1837; and Dresden, the site of the Johanneum, in which ninety thousand examples of European and Asian ceramics, originally amassed by Augustus II the Strong (1670–1733), had recently been reinstalled. That July, he returned to Paris for the Exposition. Surviving invoices indicate that Walters patronised the Grande Compagnie Kōchō-Kouaūcha, a firm dealing in both Japanese and Chinese artefacts headed by the industrialist Matsuo Gi-suke and Wakai Kenesaburo, which had already opened a branch in New York. For US$2752.50, Walters bought 130 items, among them Japanese lacquers; Satsuma, Imari, Kutani and Hirado wares; as well as Chinese porcelains. The latter were usually listed as “Nankin” wares, referring to Nanking, their port of export.

By this time, Paris offered a number of outlets for Asian artworks. George A. Lucas recorded in his diary their visits to several dealers including Wakia (sic) (Wakai Kenesaburo’s Paris branch on the Boulevard des Capucines), Philippe Sichel (1839 or 1940–1889) and his brother Au-
13 Hexagonal hanging lantern decorated with medallions enclosing six Daoist immortals, China, Qing dynasty, Qianlong reign, 1736–1795, enamelled porcelain, height 20.6 cm. Collection of the Walters Art Museum (49.2245)

14 Photograph of Chinese and Japanese ceramics and metalwork in the “Bridge Gallery” connecting William Walters’ residence to an art gallery erected behind his residence, circa 1884, the Walters Archives

gustave, who began importing goods after a visit to Japan in the late 1860s, and Siegfried Bing (1838–1905) whose brother-in-law, a German diplomat in Tokyo, supplied him with Japanese artefacts before he himself travelled to the Far East in 1880.

Meanwhile, William Walters transformed his Baltimore residence into a private museum. An inveterate proselytiser who believed in sharing his interests, he opened his house to the public three days a week every spring, charging 50-cents a head with the proceeds being contributed to charity. By 1884, his holdings of both Western and Asian art had grown to such an extent that he was obliged to devote his dining room to displaying his Asian holdings and to erect a separate gallery behind his residence (14). He now owned 1400 examples of Chinese porcelain and pottery; 400 Japanese wares; 500 lacquers, among them many inro; 500 ivories, including netsuke, 200 bronzes, and 1300 other objects such as swords, sword guards and related implements, bronzes, and mixed-metal objects.

In conjunction with the 1884 opening of his house and gallery, Walters printed a small handbook with a brown cover embossed in gold with the title “Oriental”.3 It was intended to serve both as a useful guide to the collection and a reference tool. The texts were devoted to various aspects of Asian art and brief summaries of the history of Western ceramics from antiquity through the 18th century. In his introduction, Walters awarded the “palm” to the Chinese for their ancient ceramics, but he maintained that the “Japanese excel them as to their modern work”.

3 Oriental Collection of W.T. Walters, 65 Mount Vernon Place, Baltimore, 1884, Baltimore, 1884.
Noting the Chinese preference for monochrome wares, he praised in particular the colours sang-de-beouf, coral and peach, and enthused over the “Chow” pieces in which the whiteness “surpasses the whiteness of snow and whose sonority is more plaintive than the wind that whispers amongst the reeds on a sunless day”. Most of the guide was composed of transcriptions and condensations of earlier texts, translated in part by Henry Walters, beginning with Jesuit Pére d’Entrecolles\(^6\) (1664–1741) early account of the manufacture of Chinese porcelain, followed by excerpts from later sources such as Stanislas Julien’s study of the imperial factory at Jingdezhen and Sir Augustus Wollaston Frank’s publications including the 1876 catalogue of his own collection (now in the British Museum).\(^4\)

After 1884, Walters continued to expand the collection, but rather than attending the 1889 Exposition Universelle, he sent his son to Paris in his stead. Henry returned with two earthenware sake cups personalised with the initials of William and Henry, and a third bowl inscribed “Wm. T. Walters Esq. 1889”. They were signed by Okumura Shozan (1841–1905) of Kyoto (15). Likewise, at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, Henry represented his now ailing father, acquiring his first examples of Hirado wares, a field in which the collection would eventually excel (16).

To his acute embarrassment, William Walters found himself the centre of a very public imbroglio in 1886 when, quite out of character, he paid an astonishing US$18,000 for a small porcelain vase (17). Its former owner, the late Mary Jane Morgan, had set out on a seven-year shopping spree for orchids, diamonds and art following her husband’s death in 1878. In the lavish catalogue for the estate auction, Thomas E. Kirby of the American Art Association, described the vase as “perfection in form, color and texture”, and as coming from the collection of “I Wang-ye, a Mandarin Prince”. He also noted that the vase had “a world-wide reputation of being the finest specimen of its class in existence”. Known as the “Morgan Peach-Bloom Vase”, the piece was distinguished by its subtle, variegated pink glaze and by the raised rings around its neck. The press was sharply divided about its merits: Charles A. Dana, owner of the New York Sun and a porcelain collector himself staunchly defended the vase, whereas the New York Times published vituperative editori-
als ridiculing the sale and questioning the moral character of a purchaser who would indulge in such a frivolity when people were going hungry.

William Walters’ ultimate contribution to the study and appreciation of Asian art was the publication of Oriental Ceramic Art: Illustrated by Examples from the Collection of W.T. Walters. The author, Stephen W. Bushell, a physician for twenty-five years at the British Legation in Beijing, had two advantages, over earlier scholars; as a sinologist he could draw upon original Chinese documents and he benefitted from the privilege of having visited private collections in China. The illustrations, particularly the 116 chromolithographs printed by Louis Prang (1844–1908) of Boston, represented the outstanding feature of this publishing venture. So concerned was Prang about capturing the subtle nuances of colour that he used as many as thirty-two stones for each plate. These large-scale images, now regarded as a major achievement in the history of American lithography, were mounted in covers of imperial yellow and enclosed in pasteboard portfolios covered with green damask woven with Chinese characters (18). The prints had been based on watercolours painted by James Callowhill (1838–1917) and his family. For this project the artists spent seven years in the Walters residence. So exact were the paintings that even the buildings across the street can be discerned in the light reflections on the surfaces of the porcelains. This mammoth undertaking was not completed until 1897, three years after William Walters’ death. The publication of the text volume in 1899 serves as a terminus ante quem (the latest possible date) for determining when the ceramics cited entered the collection.

Nothing is known regarding the source of a particularly beautiful teapot of a type formerly known as Gu Yue Xuan (Old Moon Pavilion) other than that it entered the collection before 1899 (19). It bears the seal of the Yongzheng emperor (1723–1735) and is, in fact, identical to a piece in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Over a lustrous milky white ground, two panels of landscape have been painted in overglaze blue. These are accompanied by inscriptions of half stanzas of verse painted in black identifying the subjects: “A cottage smoking far off on the Northern Islet” on the obverse, and on the reverse: “The echo-resounding Southern Mountains”. Exceptionally rare for this period is the vivid mille-fleurs decoration on the lid and on the bands circumscribing the top and bottom of the teapot. It too is composed of countless blossoms and buds in overglaze enamels. Such porcelains, now generally described as falang cai (“foreign work”), reflected the Chinese ceramists’ response to imported European enamel wares.

As a pioneer collector of Asian art, William Walters belongs in the company of such individuals as Charles Stewart Smith (1832–1900) and George Walker Vincent Smith (1833–1922) whose holdings eventually reached public institutions in New York, and Springfield, Massachusetts, and also with Thomas E. Waggaman of Washington, DC, who acknowledged that he had been inspired by the Walters collection, and with General Brayton Ives (1840–1914), former president of the New York Stock Exchange. These early collectors of Asian art never travelled to the Far East, but relied instead on dealers and international exhibitions. The next generation of collectors, particularly those in Boston, all benefitted from travel or residence in the Far East; these included Edward Sylvester Morse (1838–1925), Ernest F. Fenollosa (1858–1908), William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1923) and Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924), as well as Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), the founder of the museum that bears his name in Washington, DC.


6 Translated by Bushell, op. cit., p. 60. The accompanying seals read: “The Rivers Are Long” and “The Hills Are High”.

Henry Walters and the Second Generation of American Collectors

Henry Walters was forty-six years old when he inherited the collection, a responsibility for which he had been groomed since youth. Thoroughly educated and far more sophisticated than the self-taught William, Henry’s ambitions as a collector far exceeded his father’s. As president of the Atlantic Coast Line, a major railroad serving the southeastern and central portion of the country, he had greater financial resources with which to realise his objectives. By nature very reserved, Henry never divulged his intentions to the public, and he went to exceptional lengths to guard his privacy in matters pertaining to prices and sources of objects. Though never stated, it appears from the outset that Henry had intended to assemble an encyclopedic collection that would eventually constitute the basis for a public museum. What remains unprecedented was the scope of his interests, which extended worldwide comprising over five millennia of artistic endeavour.

The Baltimore public’s curiosity must have been aroused in 1900 when the press reported that Henry, now residing in New York, had bought several adjoining properties behind his father’s house in Baltimore. His purchase of the Don Marcello Massarelli collection of Roman antiquities and Renaissance and Baroque paintings in 1902 necessitated the erection of a building that was completed on the site seven years later. The exterior of the two-storey, Renaissance-style gallery (3, see Director’s Foreword), ironically, was modelled after the same hôtel on the rue Trochet, Paris, that his parents had visited over half a century earlier to see the Pourtalès collection of European and Asian art.

Over thirty-seven years, Henry Walters added at least two thousand examples of Asian art to the collection. He usually travelled abroad every spring, patronising shops in Paris and occasionally London. New York, at that time, afforded opportunities to buy Asian art as dealers opened establishments or sold their wares at auction. Like his father, Henry attended the major international exhibitions, although he was more discriminating than his father in selecting individual items. He was quite conservative in his taste, disdaining most contemporary Western paintings, but he displayed remarkably avant-garde taste in decorative arts, whether Asian or European.

What little documentation survives suggests that Henry, in choosing works for his collection, initially relied on his own taste and intuition or drew on the advice of a few trusted dealers. If anyone were to be identified as his consultant, it would have been his father’s friend William M. Laffan (1848–1909). Henry and Laffan could have met as early as 1870 when the Irish-born journalist and art connoisseur moved to Baltimore to become editor of the city’s newspaper, the Evening Bulletin. Seven years later, Laffan joined the staff of the New York Sun and eventually succeeded Charles Dana as the newspaper’s publisher. He vehemently defended William Walters’ purchase of the “Mary Morgan Peach-bloom Vase” in 1886 and became Henry’s close confidant, accompanying him to Rome to purchase the Massarelli collection in 1902. Although he served principally as Henry’s consultant for European paintings, Laffan’s personal passion was for Chinese porcelains, a field in which he was acknowledged to be an expert. He provided the preface to Bushell’s catalogue of the Walters ceramics and also collaborated with this English specialist in the publication of the James A. Garland collection of porcelains that J.P. Morgan presented to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1902.

During his travels in 1900, Henry Walters bought several major pieces from Tiffany & Co., the House of Fabergé, and the Christofle firm, but he also selected some equally significant examples of Asian art. His purchases at the Paris Exposition included a Japanese ceremonial sword, several ivories, some Chinese jades and a tour de force in translucent enamel: a bowl from the studio of Namikawa Sōsuke (1847–1910). Rather than being constructed of a wire framework as in most plique-à-jour enamelling, the silver bowl was either cast or pierced with an extremely delicate openwork design of floating chrysanthemum blossoms and stylised waves, in which the voids were filled with translucent enamel (20).

At the next World’s Fair, the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition held in St. Louis in 1904, Henry was equally zealous in collecting contemporary works. The international exhibitions were no longer just occasions for nations to display their wares, but now provided opportunities for artists to compete with one another for prizes. Henry took pride in purchasing some of the highlights of the exhibition, including the first cast of Auguste Rodin’s The Thinker to come to America, some masterpieces of Art Nouveau jewellery by René Lalique and some prize-winning works by Japanese craftsmen. These included a porcelain flower vase with plum tree and nightingale motifs by Miyakawa Kozan (1842–1916), a large bronze urn by Okazaki Sessei and, at the significant cost of US$6000, a silk tapestry woven in the workshop of Kawashima Jimbei II, the president of a textile firm that had been established in Kyoto in 1843 (21). In 1886, Kawashima Jimbei II had visited the Gobelins Manufactory in France where he learned to adapt artists’ paintings to textile designs.

In this instance, the composition was derived from a work by Morizumo Yügō (1854–1927). Depicted in the tapestry is a 13th century battle in which the Kikuchi daimyō, resplendent in Kamakura period armour and abetted by a sudden typhoon or kamikaze, successfully
repulses the Mongolian troops of Kublai Khan (1260–1294). In its composition, the tapestry, with its Western-style foreshortening, echoes such European battle paintings as Lady Elizabeth Butler’s *Scotland Forever* (1881) and Richard Caton Woodville’s *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1895), which had been popularised through engravings. Given Japan’s engagement in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the tapestry must have struck a patriotic note.

The extraordinary technical virtuosity of the Meiji artists is demonstrated by a Satsuma-style bowl also bought in St. Louis in 1904. It bears the seal of Yabu Meizan (1853–1934), a stoneware decorator from Osaka (22). Painted on its exterior in gold and various colours of enamels are minuscule women engaged in a multitude of activities including dancing, painting, spining thread, reading, playing cards and blind man’s bluff, and arranging flowers. Equal attention was given to floral panels near its base and in the bowl’s interior that include an array of blossoms.

The emerging market for Asian art in America in the course of the late 19th century had attracted two individuals from Japan who would become major purveyors in the field. Bunkio Matsuki (1867–1912), a former Buddhist priest from Kyoto, immigrated to America in 1882, arriving in Boston with only US$67.00 in his pocket. Over the next six years he graduated from school, married an American, and opened a Japanese department in a shop on fashionable Boylston Street. On the same street, Yamanaka Sadajirō (1866–1936) established a shop in 1899. The adopted heir of an international antique business based in Osaka, he arrived in Vancouver with his stepbrother four years earlier, carrying 50,000 yen worth of merchandise. The brothers used these funds to open their first shop in New York before expanding the business to Boston. Both Matsuki and Yamanaka discovered that rather than relying exclusively on their shops’ clientele, they could profit more by occasionally auctioning their stock in New York.

Henry Walters appears not to have patronised Bunkio Matsuki in Boston, but when the dealer held an auction in New York in February 1906, the collector bought a range of goods. Among the highlights was a pair of wooden door panels finely carved with peacock designs and painted in bright colours and gold. Although Matsuki did not provide the provenance for the doors, identical pairs had appeared in a sale in 1903 which were thought to have come from Hōnon-ji, a temple founded in 1609 in Kai province (Yamanashi prefecture). At the same time, bidding under the pseudonym “Harrison”, he bought a number of helmets, various examples of sword furnishings and several suits of armour. Among the highlights of this sale was a folding suit with an iron cuirass embossed with a kirin, a horse-like guardian creature covered with scales. It is thought to have been worn by a daimyō (provincial governor) and to date from the Edo period. The helmet, however, is later and may have been intended only for ceremonial purposes.

Prior to 1908, Henry demonstrated his commitment to historical ceramics by purchasing a large polychrome guan or wine jar. Painted on its surface are plump carp

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9 Terry Hiener in correspondence with Kathleen Emerson Dell, February 15th, 1991, identified this suit of armour.
10 There are two such wine jars in the Walters collection, one of which has been restored, but it is not known whether they were acquired at the same time.
swimming lazily amongst bubbles, lotuses, water fern, duckweed and eelgrass (24). The brilliant *wucai*, or five-coloured, overglaze enamelling technique, used in conjunction with underglaze blue, represented a major achievement of the potters at the imperial factory at Jingdezhen during the reign of the Jiajing emperor (1521–1566). This magnificent work, replete with a richly symbolic set of decorations wishing the owner good fortune and abundance is one of a very few surviving jars of this type.

Extending the breadth of his interests, Henry made a successful bid for a ceremonial headdress said to have been woven of human hair and to have been worn by the Manchu Empress Dowager Cixi, the last effective ruler of the Qing dynasty (25). It was sold at the Auguste F. Chamot sale held in New York in 1907. Chamot, a French citizen, had been the proprietor of the 400-room “Hotel de Pekin” in Beijing. He anticipated the Boxer Rebellion of 1900–1901, and stocked his establishment with sufficient supplies to last his guests for the seventy-eight days of the siege. Failing in all his subsequent business ventures, Chamot, who died in 1909, eked out a living selling the art works that he had obtained while in China. At the much anticipated 1907 sale, the principal item was a gold seal said to have belonged to the last emperor’s brother, which only realised the upset price, but one of the auction’s highlights according to the *New York Times*’ headline was the headdress which was sold to an anonymous buyer for US$1000. It has since been identified as a type worn by Tumut (a Mongolian people) or Manchu women (25). Attached to a wire and silk frame woven in a lozenge pattern are phoenixes, butterflies, peaches and a boat on a background of cloud scrolls rendered in gold inlaid with
dazzling blue kingfisher feathers. Additional ornamentation includes an incrustation of pearls and precious stones.

At the dispersal of his friend Laffan’s estate in 1911, Henry acquired twenty-four Chinese celadons and monochrome porcelains, areas for which they had both shared a particular interest, but perhaps the rarest item in the sale was a Ming blue and white carafe with a flared neck that had been made in Jingdezhen in 1552 (26). It is decorated with fu-dogs joyfully playing with balls of ribbons. Painted upside-down around the neck is a Portuguese inscription difficult to decipher, reading: JORGE ANRZ N EGEO MAN DOV FAZER / A ERA DE 1552 REENA (“Jorge Alvarez ordered this to be made in the year 1552 of the reign of [King João III]”). This porcelain is one of six surviving examples bearing that inscription. Alvarez, a merchant and adventurer, was a close friend of the Jesuit missionary Saint Francis Xavier, who died in 1552 on Shangchuan, an island on which Portuguese merchants were known to have conducted their commerce at that time.

In 1915, with World War I precluding European travel, Henry Walters attended the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco and focused on the arts of Asia. The highlights of Japan’s participation included a garden planted with 1300 trees and 4400 smaller plants and a temple loosely based on the Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, but the country’s arts were displayed in

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12 Martha Boyer, Mongol Jewellery, Nationalmuseets Skrifter, Etnografisk Forlag, V, Copenhagen, 1953, p. 73.
the “Palace of Manufactures”. Readily apparent in many of the entries was a dichotomy that had developed in Japanese decorative arts between the artists who closely followed traditions and those who, responding to Western styles and techniques, strove to be more innovative.

Henry sought out prize-winning works. His gold-medal purchases included a statue labelled “The Storm King in Peace”. Representing a wind god or Fujin holding a deflated wind bag, it was rendered in hammered iron, an amazing technical feat in itself (27). The sculptor, Yamada Chōzaburō (1873–1916) came from a family of armourers that had been forced to find other professions after the carrying of weapons was banned. Another gold medalist was Sobei Kinkosan, who came from a long-standing family of potters in Kyoto. His white porcelain vase was carved in relief with floral motifs and decorated with panels enclosing traditional views of landscapes and temples.

Among the silver-medal recipients was Tomioka Hōdō, a carver of okimono, or small decorative statuettes, who entered a pair of carved ivories, entitled Rest, showing a fisherman and a mother with her infant carved with exceptional naturalism. The same verisimilitude appears in another sculpture purchased at this time—a wooden statue of a schoolgirl enigmatically titled Condoling Speech of Classmates carved by Yamazaki Chōun (1867–1954) (28), one of the most progressive artists at that time. Faithfully rendered are such details as the girl’s school uniform, the ribbon in her hair, and her laced shoes, but at the same time the sculptor has exploited the grain of the wood in the traditional Chinese manner. Although it did not receive a medal, Henry Walters’ most perspicacious Japanese acquisition was probably an exceptionally large vase by Itaya Hazan (1872–1963), a sculptor turned po-
ter who, in 1954, would become the first Japanese ceramist to receive the Bunka Kussho, the Order of Cultural Merit. His vase is covered with bamboo leaves modelled in low relief with a stained rather than glazed surface, creating a highly naturalistic effect.

Because of the severely strained relations between China and Japan in 1915, the Chinese department was separated from the Japanese and housed in the “Palace of Varied Industries”. For the first time, Henry Walters focused on Chinese painting and endeavoured with only modest success to assemble a representative collection. He acquired sixty-four books, hand scrolls, and hanging scrolls. Among his more astute purchases was a scroll showing a towering mountainous landscape (29) painted by Lan Shen (active 1658–1691), the grandson of the illustrious artist Lan Ying (1585–after 1664). Rather than painting like his forebear, Lan Shen followed other early Qing artists in basing his style on Northern Song (1127–1279) painting, scrupulously recording the textures of the rocks and the quality of the light. The inscription by a contemporary, Chang Tsai, notes that the man seated in the pavilion has been moved by the sight of the twisting and thrusting mountains, the thick overgrowth of trees, and the winding streams.

One of the books that Henry chose was an album of sixteen leaves each of calligraphy and paintings by the leading artists of Shanghai in the 1860s. Among the most attractive is a scene by Zhao Deng’ao of a young woman gathering water chestnuts while her attendant paddles the punt across a pond under a leafless tree limb. The tranquility of the scene is interrupted only by the chatter of a small bird that swoops over the water capturing for a moment the young women’s attention (30).

Henry Walters’ next opportunity to upgrade and diversify his Chinese holdings came in 1916 at the sale in New York of a collection formed by Dr John Calvin Ferguson (1865–1945). As early as 1887, Ferguson had moved to China, where he became thoroughly immersed in Chinese society and held a number of positions in the government. When the auction was held, he was serving as counsellor to the Republic’s foreign affairs ministry. Walters seized this opportunity to acquire more paintings, bronzes, some pottery and twelve carved jades. The latter included a ritual cong (31) assigned to the Liangzhu culture of the Neolithic period (3500–2000 BC). It is essentially a rectangular block of stone with hollowed cylindrical interior and horizontal divisions on its exterior. From the same culture, Walters also obtained a bi, a perforated disk. These early jades, actually nephrites, had been excavated from tombs.

In his later years, Henry Walters increasingly relied on Yamanaka & Company in New York. He also concentrated on Chinese rather than Japanese art, seeking out works that were of historical significance, particularly in the field of Buddhist sculpture. In 1917, the firm provided a gilt bronze statue of the Bodhisattva Guanyin whose worship had been introduced into the kingdom of Nanzhao, Yunnan province, during the middle of the 7th century (32). The statue, which has been dated either 9th or 11th century, holds a jar of sacred water and a willow branch with which the water can be sprinkled upon the faithful; set in his head dress is a figure of Amitābha, the Buddha of Western paradise. His purchases from Yamanaka three years later were even more spectacular. They included a late 6th century statue nearly 200 cm high of a standing bodhisattva, probably Guanyin, dressed as a
Bodhisattva Guanyin from Yunnan province, China, Song dynasty, 9th to 11th century, gilt bronze, height 43.5 cm. Collection of the Walters Art Museum (54.1345)

Buddha from Hebei province, China, Sui or Tang dynasty, 610–630, painted lacquer over wood, height 105.4 cm. Collection of the Walters Art Museum (25.9)

prince, which probably came from a shrine known as the “Temple of the Stone Buddhas”, in Yungang, Shanxi province. At the same time, Henry Walters bought a larger than life-size wooden seated Buddha in a meditative pose, which is thought to have been removed from a temple founded in 586 in Chengting, Hebei (33). Since the hands have been broken off, it is not possible to determine whether the sculpture represents the historical Buddha Sakyamuni or, more likely, Amitābha, the Buddha of Western paradise. The statue was carved from twelve pieces of wood and laboriously lacquered five times before being painted; the eyes are black and white and the garment, which flows in graceful, stylised folds, is red. A date of about 610–630, shortly after the emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty had begun to promote Buddhism, has been assigned to the piece, making it the earliest surviving wooden sculpture of its type.

In retrospect, Henry Walters was more circumspect than his father in acquiring Asian art, which represented only a fraction of his holdings of more than 22,000 works. He was less interested in the size of his collection than in its scope, and his achievements should be measured in terms of what was available in the Western market during his life. Three years after his death in 1931, the Walters Art Gallery opened as a public museum. Modest efforts were made to strengthen the holdings in the earlier historical periods, but acquisitions were limited by financial restraints. Only in 1986 was a full-time curator appointed for Asian art. Through gifts and purchases, Hiram W. Woodward, Jr, oversaw the expansion of the collection in the arts of India, the Himalayas and Southeast Asia, fields that had not been readily accessible to either William or Henry. A separate building adjoining the museum, known as “the Hackerman House” was dedicated to the Asian collection in 1991. Its capacity has long since been exceeded and now plans are under consideration for more ambitious accommodations.

References


