

The AMAM Collection: Major Donors

The strength and importance of the AMAM's collection is a result of the generosity of many donors—both Oberlin College alumni and others unaffiliated with the college. Below are some of the museum's major benefactors from before its founding in 1917 to 2000. We thank Stephanie Wiles, AMAM director from 2004-11, for her research and compilation of this information.

Charles Fayette Olney

Inspired by Oberlin College's educational ideals, Cleveland educator Charles F. Olney (1831–1903) bequeathed his collection of nearly 8,000 paintings, ivories, and bronzes to the college in 1904 to aid in the teaching of art. As a public-school teacher, founder of the New York Teachers Association, and vice president of the Cleveland School of Art, Olney knew his collection had great educational value. Importantly, since the gift came without restrictions, only the very best works were retained. The remaining objects were sold off over the following decades, with the proceeds used to purchase objects of superior quality to which Olney's name was attached. Olney's collection included many important Asian objects, an area of collecting that the college continued to emphasize.

Charles Lang Freer

Oberlin College's desire to develop its collection of Asian art led it to solicit a gift from Charles L. Freer (1856–1919). Freer was a celebrated Detroit collector whose 1904 offer of important works of Asian art to the Smithsonian Institution—the first major bequest of art by an individual to the U.S. government—eventually became the Freer Gallery of Art, which opened to the public in 1923. Freer also made a number of generous gifts of art to institutions across the U.S. In 1912, he personally chose from his collection a group of Asian works, including paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts, for the AMAM.

Charles Martin Hall

Chemist Charles M. Hall (1863–1914), a member of Oberlin College's class of 1885, discovered an inexpensive method for the isolation of pure aluminum and went on to found Alcoa, the Aluminum Company of America. His estate included a gift to the college of Asian textiles and Chinese porcelains.

Elisabeth Severance Allen Prentiss

Along with funds that helped not only to build the Allen Memorial Art Museum in 1917 in memory of her first husband, Cleveland surgeon Dudley Peter Allen (an Oberlin College alumnus of the class of 1875), but also to expand the museum 20 years later, Elisabeth Severance Allen Prentiss (1865–1944), daughter of Standard Oil magnate Louis H. Severance, made several other transformational gifts to the AMAM. She continued to support the museum throughout her life with funds for acquisitions and periodic gifts of individual artworks.

Aaron Augustus Healy

A. A. Healy (1850–1921), a Brooklyn leather merchant and for 25 years the president of the board of trustees of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, gave the AMAM a small

trove of paintings in 1919, a gift intended to help give the fledgling museum a start on developing its collection. These gifts include Dutch 18th- and early 19th-century paintings and late 19th- and early 20th-century American paintings by Arthur Davies and Ernest Lawson. Later works were purchased for the collection on the A. Augustus Healy Fund. Healy's gift honored his wife (and cousin) Mary Theodosea Currier Healy (c. 1871–June 19, 1940), daughter of Rev. Albert Henry Currier, a professor emeritus of theology at Oberlin Theological Seminary. Mrs. Healy worked for a number of years as a reference librarian in the Oberlin College library.

Romanta Tillotson Miller, Jr.

The quality and breadth of the AMAM collection changed dramatically after 1940, when Chicago businessman R. T. Miller Jr. (1867–1958), a member of the Oberlin College class of 1891, made the first of his annual gifts. Miller founded the American School in Boston in 1897 and moved it to Chicago in 1902; the school offered high school correspondence courses to students who were unable to engage in resident study. Miller believed that “young men and women could rise, through a significant educational experience, to an attainment and self-realization otherwise impossible for them.” He felt that Oberlin provided the ideal atmosphere for such an educational experience, which led him to embark on a program of annual giving to the college. For the next 18 years, until his death, he gave the museum funds to purchase art—with the critical stipulation that they be spent within a year or two at most. During his lifetime, these donations earned him the distinction of being the greatest living donor to the college. His final gift, a major bequest, remains the AMAM's most important endowed fund for acquisitions.

Mary Andrews Ainsworth

Mary A. Ainsworth, a member of the Oberlin College class of 1889, bequeathed to the AMAM her superb collection of more than 1,500 Japanese prints upon her death in 1950. She also bequeathed her books, which included many fine editions illustrated with woodblock prints, to the Oberlin College library. Assembled in part during her many trips to Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Ainsworth collection is widely recognized for its many rare and beautiful impressions.

Enid and Joseph Bissett

Twenty-four paintings given by Enid Bissett (died 1965), co-inventor in 1922 of the Maidenform bra, and by her husband Joseph (died 1968), transformed the AMAM's holdings of modernist paintings. The Bissetts made their gift at the urging of their nephew, Jay Richard Judson, a member of the Oberlin College class of 1948 and a distinguished historian of Dutch art. In 1955, the couple made their first gift, with life interest retained, of Modigliani's 1917 *Nude with a Coral Necklace*. In each of the following years, to 1966, they gave the AMAM one or more paintings, donating works by Chagall, Dubuffet, Matisse, Miró, Picasso, Pippin, and others.

Samuel H. Kress Foundation

Ten Italian paintings from the 15th-18th centuries were given to the AMAM by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in 1961. Among these are Neri di Bicci's *Five Saints* of about 1445, a wing of an altarpiece from SS. Annunziata, one of the most prominent churches in Florence; a

painting of Cleopatra by Giampietrino, a student of Leonardo da Vinci; and *Double Portrait of a Boy and Girl of the Attavanti Family*, a work by Sofonisba Anguissola.

Gustave Schindler

A small group of high-quality African artworks was given to the AMAM in the 1950s by the art dealer Gustave Schindler (died 1988). Among these objects is a late 15th- or early 16th-century Afro-Portuguese ivory lidded saltcellar attributed to the Foliage Master, one of a select group of this type of work carved by Sapi artists from what is today Sierra Leone.

Max Kade Foundation

The AMAM's collection of works on paper grew substantially beginning in the 1960s, aided in large part by a distinguished collection of more than 100 Old Master woodcuts, engravings, and etchings by Dürer, Schongauer, Rembrandt, and others given to the AMAM by the Max Kade Foundation, which since 1944 has promoted the study of both German and German-American history, including the Max Kade Writer-in-Residence program at Oberlin College, founded in 1968. Max Kade (1882–1967) immigrated to New York from Germany in 1905 and became a successful pharmaceutical researcher and entrepreneur.

Helen Hesse Charash

Beginning in 1977, the AMAM was given gifts of drawings and archival material associated with the German-born American draftsman and painter Eva Hesse (1936–1970) by the artist's sister, Helen Hesse Charash, and the artist's friend and dealer Donald Droll. Today, the Eva Hesse Archive at the AMAM comprise nearly 1,200 items, including drawings, collages, and photographs, as well as diaries, datebooks, and letters.

Ellen Hulda Elizabeth Johnson

Legendary Oberlin professor of art history Ellen H. Johnson (1910–1992), a member of the Oberlin College class of 1933, gifted and bequeathed more than 300 works of art from her personal collection to the AMAM. Included are important contemporary works by Oldenburg, Dine, Kline, LeWitt, and Warhol. Numerous artists and other donors additionally made gifts to the AMAM collection of works in her honor and memory.

George Schlenker

Through a combination of a gift and purchase, the AMAM in 1997 acquired an important collection of 18 Chinese paintings – including hanging scrolls, handscrolls, album leaves, and a fan – from Dr. George J. Schlenker of Piedmont, California. The works, selected by his stepson James Cahill, a respected professor of Chinese art history at the University of California at Berkeley, range in date from the 14th to the 20th centuries and include representative examples of the most important schools of Chinese painting during that crucial 600-year period.