

George Aristedes Eumorfopoulos

1863–1939

Collector, Businessman, and Philanthropist



George Eumorfopoulos was an influential collector of Chinese art during the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in Liverpool to Aristides Georges Eumorfopoulos (1825–1897) and Mariora Eustratius Scaramanga (1840–1908), who came from the Greek island of Chios in the early nineteenth century. He joined the Baltic Exchange in 1880. Four years later, in 1884, Eumorfopoulos entered the firm of Scaramanga, Manoussi, and Company before he moved to the maritime trading and financial firm of Ralli Brothers in 1902. He was made a vice president of the firm after it became a limited company in 1931. Eumorfopoulos married Julia Scaramanga (1864–1944) in 1890 and lived at 7 Chelsea

Embankment, London, where his collection was also displayed.

Eumorfopoulos began collecting Chinese art in the late 1890s and was part of a group of collectors who, during the early decades of the twentieth century, took advantage of the numerous works of Chinese art that were coming out of China after the Boxer Rebellion and during the period of political instability and civil war that followed. His collection of Chinese objects consisted primarily of newly discovered archaeological objects, such as ritual bronzes and jades and early burial ceramics, sculpture, paintings, and ceramics now recognized as classic wares of the Song dynasty. A member of the Karlbeck Syndicate, Eumorfopoulos acquired works from major dealers, including John Sparks and Bluetts, as well as S. M. Franck and Yamanaka. He lent objects to the City of Manchester Art Gallery Exhibition of Chinese Applied Art in 1913 and was an organizer and lender to the 1935–36 International Exhibition of Chinese Art at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In addition, he was the founding president of the Oriental Ceramic Society, London (1921), and a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Club. Eumorfopoulos also collected Korean, Near Eastern, and European art and was a patron of many young artists.

Intending to bequeath his collection to the nation, Eumorfopoulos was forced to sell the majority of his collection, albeit at a reduced market value, due to financial setbacks following the 1929 financial crash and the Great Depression. His collection of Chinese art was divided between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. A public subscription was launched in 1934 to raise the required £100,000 to acquire the collection. Duplicate items were sold through the art dealer Bluetts, and some 800 pieces were donated to the Benaki Museum in Athens, Greece. The remaining collection was sold at auction after Mrs. Eumorfopoulos's death in 1944.

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