

## FEATURED WOMEN

### Untold Stories: Women and the Asian Art Trade

From the series

#### *Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art*

**Lindsay Hughes Cooper** (1908–1997) played a valuable role in the development of Asian art collections in the United States and in the increase of scholarship on Asian art between the 1930s and 1970s. Perhaps best known for her work as an assistant to curator of Asian art Laurence Sickman at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Cooper was a noteworthy scholar, author, and lecturer in her own right. She also spent time in the commercial trade in the late 1940s, when she worked for dealer C. T. Loo in New York. Cooper’s life and work are represented in the Nelson-Atkins Archives, which holds much of her correspondence from her years in Kansas City as well as research notes, diaries, and oral histories.  
(MacKenzie Mallon, Specialist, Provenance, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)

**Frieda Fischer**, born Bartdorff, (1874–1945) was one of the early female pioneers of the German East Asian art collectors scene. She built up her expertise during her honeymoon to China and Japan with her first husband, Adolf Fischer, between 1897 and 1899; even longer stays in East Asia followed between 1901 and 1912. In her published travel diaries, Fischer reveals details of art discoveries and acquisition strategies during her trips. During their trips to Asia, the couple built up a joint collection and was deeply involved in the discussion of the establishment of a German museum of East Asian art that eventually opened in Cologne in 1913, with Adolf Fischer as the first director. When Adolf suddenly died in April 1914, Fischer took over his position and became the second female museum director in Germany, establishing her as an expert in the field. In 1937, she married her second husband, Alfred Ludwig Wieruszowski; because of his Jewish heritage, Fischer had to leave her director position to flee Cologne with her husband. Fischer died in Berlin in 1945.  
(Christine Howald, Deputy Director, Zentralarchiv, and Provenance Researcher Asia Collections, Staaliche Museen zu Berlin)

**Isabella Stewart Gardner** (1840–1924) was an American art collector, patron, and philanthropist who founded Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, which opened in 1903. Born in New York City, she moved to Boston after her marriage to Jack Gardner. Starting in the late 1880s—after traveling extensively throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia—Gardner became a serious collector of fine arts. These acquisitions accelerated in the 1890s, when she inherited a significant fortune from her father. Gardner is best known for her pioneering collecting of Italian Renaissance art and for supporting the work of nineteenth-century artists like John Singer Sargent and Anders Zorn. These acquisitions form the permanent and famously idiosyncratic installations of her pseudonymous museum. Less well-known is that Gardner acquired several significant works of Chinese art during the last decade of her life  
(Diana Seave Greenwald, Assistant Curator of the Collection, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” sums up **Julia Krentz**’s (1882–1971) engagement with Chinese textiles. At a time when women rarely remained in the work force past age thirty, Krentz held positions of increasing responsibility in Washington, DC, offices. In

1918, she was appointed financial clerk to the military attaché at the American Legation in Beijing, where she met and married a former marine, Henry Ferdinand Krentz. Disaster struck in 1927, when Henry pleaded guilty to embezzlement and was sentenced to prison stateside. Krentz and her three children returned to the United States, and by 1928, they were living in a rented house in Washington, DC, where the 1930 federal census lists Krentz as the proprietor of an imported goods shop operated from her home. Krentz and family (sans Henry) returned to Beijing by 1931. Most of what we know about Krentz's business involves her interactions with museums in the United States and Canada.

(John E. Vollmer, Independent Scholar)

**Mary Andrews Ladd** (1859–1941) of Portland, Oregon, together with her husband William Mead Ladd, assembled two sophisticated collections of the graphic arts of Europe and Japan. The couple purchased almost exclusively domestically and is believed to have acquired their first etching in 1885; by the time the European prints were sold in the wake of the financial panic of 1907, the Ladd collection was considered one of the finest in North America. Ladd's record of activity as a collector is elusive, appearing only at the fringes of museum records. However, newly examined sources reveal her interest in Japanese prints by at least 1903, and the display of the Ladds' collection of *ukiyo-e* at the Portland Art Museum by at least 1905. The collection would be repeatedly loaned to museum exhibitions over the course of the next three decades. By 1932, ownership of the Japanese print collection had passed to Ladd's daughter-in-law, who offered it to the museum under the stipulation that it be known as The Mary Andrews Ladd Collection.

(Jeannie Kenmotsu, Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Asian Art, Portland Art Museum)

**Helen Dalling Ling** (1901–1982) forged her career as a dealer and collector of Asian art from 1938 to 1982 in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. How she found success in this cliquish, male-dominated field is particularly relevant, as is how she negotiated her hybrid social position as a white American woman married to a Chinese scientist. Ling also had close involvement with famed dealer and connoisseur Edward T. Chow, especially in connection with her evolution as a dealer and with some rare pieces of ancient Chinese pottery she acquired, now housed in the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art.

(Martha Bari, Assistant Professor of Art History, Hood College)

**Alma Maximiliana Karlin** (1889–1950) was a traveler, writer, journalist, and collector from Slovenia who embarked on an eight-year journey around the world in November 1919. During her travels—which took her to at least forty-five different countries—she supported herself mainly through work as an interpreter and journalist, but she was often compelled to take on other jobs in order to make ends meet. She amassed many diverse objects, most of them from East Asia. In addition to typical collectibles such as lacquerware, *ukiyo-e* prints, and fans, Karlin's collection also includes a wide range of everyday objects and souvenirs. The collection she built during her world voyage clearly reflects her desire to pursue knowledge beyond the confines of provincial society. The objects were put on display in the living room of her small house on the outskirts of the Slovenian provincial town of Celje, while in the local newspaper, Karlin published an invitation to her “dear fellow citizens” and all who were “thirsty for knowledge” to visit her house and see her collection.

(Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana)

**Stella Kramrisch** (1896–1993) deepened the world’s understanding of the arts of South Asia in myriad ways. With a doctorate from the University of Vienna, she taught in India and England for three decades, primarily at the University of Calcutta. She traveled throughout the subcontinent, especially to visit historic temples and to collect art. In 1950, Kramrisch moved to Philadelphia to teach at the University of Pennsylvania and soon became curator of Indian art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She is best known for her groundbreaking work on the structure and symbolism of India’s temples (*The Hindu Temple*, 1946); for legitimizing folk art (*Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, 1968); and for organizing the first South Asian blockbuster, *Manifestations of Shiva* (1981). Kramrisch donated her extensive personal collection, including Nepalese masterpieces, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Among many tributes, she was awarded one of India’s highest civilian honors, the Padma Bhushan. (Darielle Mason, Stella Kramrisch Curator of Indian and Himalayan Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art)

**Agnes Meyer** (1887–1970) was a journalist, a philanthropist, an education activist, and a discerning collector. From 1908, she was a member of the avant-garde circle surrounding photographer Alfred Stieglitz. She contributed to the avant-garde publishing initiatives and avidly collected modern European and American art. By 1910, Meyer expanded her collecting interests to Asian art. Over the next decade, she and her husband, Eugene, assembled a collection comprising Chinese paintings, sculpture, ceramics, metalwork, jade, and calligraphy as well as Japanese paintings and prints. Meyer’s initial intuitive approach to collecting Chinese art evolved with her studies of Chinese language and history and through her friendship with Charles Lang Freer, the founder of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. In 1923, she published her first book, *Chinese Painting as Reflected in the Thought and Art of Li Lung-Mien, 1070–1106*. After Freer’s death in 1919, Meyer remained closely involved with the Freer Gallery of Art and eventually donated her and her husband’s collection to the museum. (Dorota Chudzicka, Assistant Curator of Modern European Art, Detroit Institute of Arts)

**Dorothy Shepherd** (1916–1992) was born in Welland, Ontario, and emigrated to Michigan in 1918. She earned a BA (1939) and an MA (1940) in oriental civilizations from the University of Michigan and later worked toward a PhD at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts. From 1942 to 1944, Shepherd was assistant curator of decoration at what is now the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Shepherd was a Monuments “Man” during World War II, and in mid-1947, she became associate curator of textiles at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Shepherd remained at Cleveland (becoming curator of textiles and Near Eastern art in 1954 and chief curator of textiles and Islamic art in 1979) until her retirement in 1981. She taught Near Eastern art at Case Western Reserve University. Shepherd retired to Asheville, North Carolina, where she died in 1992. In 2017, NYU established a fellowship in her memory. (Robin Hanson, Associate Conservator of Textiles, The Cleveland Museum of Art)

**Marie-Madeleine Wannieck**, born Perrault, (1871–1960) was a French Asian art dealer and a collector of Chinese Ming and Qing porcelains. She married the Chinese art dealer Léon Wannieck in December 1916. After her marriage, she lived in Paris and contributed to the

success of the L. Wannieck Gallery. She was involved in Asian art associations such as the Society of Friends of the Cernuschi Museum and traveled to China with her husband. She also held court in her apartment to display her personal collection. After the tragic death of her husband, Wannieck managed the gallery and sold to the Louvre Museum the famous Liyu bronzes. She died in 1960 after a lengthy career, but for a long time, her work had been attributed to her husband due to confusion surrounding the dates of their deaths.  
(Julie Robin, École du Louvre)