

Collecting Asian art, defining gender roles

World War II, women curators and the politics of Asian art collections in the United States

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This paper explores collecting and collections of Asian art during World War II to illustrate how women temporarily assumed leadership roles in American museums. It details abrupt changes experienced by museums following the departure of men in these traditionally male-dominated professions. For example, understood to be the 'right man at the right place' at the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Ruth Lindsay Hughes was appointed Acting Curator of the Oriental collection in 1942 after Curator Laurence Sickman was called to active service. The chronicled museum activities, showing how Hughes fashioned the Asian art and acquisitions combined with how she utilized the collection in the home front's wartime efforts, illustrate changes in the ways collections were curated and interpreted. Within this framework, the lens of gender brings into focus the wider context of how American collections of Asian art were incorporated into the complicated international war effort involving politics, dealers and museums.

IN MARCH 1945, the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted a programme on behalf of the Chinese Art Society of America. Previous guest lecturers in this prestigious series included notable authorities on China and Chinese art, such as Hu Shih, Alfred Salmony, George Rowley, John Pope and Paul Pelliot.¹ The 1945 lecture presented Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) works from the tomb of Guo Qin Wang, particularly a textile group dated 1700–35 (Fig. 1).² The lecture's subject was significant since few Chinese textiles at that time could be dated to a particular tomb or period. However, what is more provocative to consider is that the lecturer, Ruth Lindsay Hughes (Fig. 2),³ then Acting Curator of the Oriental collection at the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art,⁴ was the first woman invited to address this distinguished society.

The following examines the history of Asian art collections during World War II in the United States. It highlights for the first time narratives of women in the development of Asian art collecting during the war by focusing on Hughes to provide new insights into the circumstances that have informed museum and collection histories and, ultimately, the formation and development of Asian collections and their influence on the redefining of the Western canon of Asian

art history after World War II. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the biography of Hughes affords a glimpse into the political intricacies that surrounded collections and collecting during the war period. Issues of gender and the roles of women in American art museums and collection development shed light on the complex relationships between curators, art dealers, politicians and international diplomacy via the collection and display of Asian visual arts. From the Hughes micro-history emerge important clues to further our understanding of collections in wider historical and contemporary contexts.

Asian art: collections, exhibitions and World War II

The years of the United States' involvement in World War II (1941–5) offer a fascinating period for the study of Asian art collecting and collection development in American museums. The European theatre had been involved in conflict since 1939, while East Asia had been in constant flux since the fall of the final Chinese imperial dynasty in 1911 and Japanese imperialist endeavours in the region – particularly in China. Gone were the great cooperative triumphs of earlier



Fig. 1. *One Hundred Cranes Imperial Robe*, late-seventeenth century to early-eighteenth century, from the Guo Qin Wang Tomb. Embroidered brocade. Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (35–275) and Royal Academy of Arts.

twentieth-century international Asian art exhibitions, such as those held in Amsterdam (1925), Cologne (1926), Berlin (1929) and London (1935–6).⁵ In fact, such an ominous and violent future was predicted as early as 1936–7 by exhibition organizers at the Royal Academy in London. As records indicate, the Academy, having just enjoyed one of its largest and most successful exhibitions with the Chinese show, had a genuine interest in hosting a similar Japanese display.⁶ However, with precursors of war on the horizon, the Imperial Japanese government delivered a calculated refusal to proceed with any further negotiations with the Academy due to irreconcilable differences – political, ideological and, eventually, military confrontations.⁷ Instead, the Academy turned its focus towards ‘Winter Exhibitions of British Art or of Works of Art from British collections’.⁸

In terms of collection histories, the direct involvement of the United States in the war in East Asia brought both interest in and access to Asian cultures, particularly works of art. As Warren Cohen attests, ‘There is no question but that the enormous expan-

sion of American contact with Asia during and immediately after the war intensified interest in the culture of that continent, not least its art.’⁹ China was, after all, an ally already pitted against Japan and the Axis. The art of China, therefore, was of particular significance to the public and was exhibited frequently in American museums during the war. Japanese art experienced an altogether different reaction, to the point that some institutions, such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, closed their Japanese galleries for the duration of the war.¹⁰

Along with the early enthusiasm enjoyed by Asian art exhibitions from the 1920s to the mid-1930s, many young curatorial professionals had already visited countries in the East. Enjoying what Erwin Panofsky termed the ‘Golden Age’ of art history in the United States (1923–33),¹¹ the formative years of many curators provided them with opportunities to acquire knowledge of Asian art, cultures and languages. Laurence Sickman (Fig. 3),¹² for example, travelled to China as Harvard’s first Harvard-Yenjing fellow in 1930 on a full scholarship.¹³ The intellectual drive,



Fig. 2. *Lindsay Hughes*, 1945. Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives.

fuelled by new funding and university training programmes, resulted in many scholars and specialists in Asian art. In less than a decade, this emerging generation would become sought after by the American military in their efforts in the Asian theatre. Asian art authorities and curators, such as Sickman at the Nelson Gallery and Howard Hollis at the Cleveland Museum of Art, were called to active service, as were Richard Edwards, Sherman Lee and James Cahill, all of whom would later become major curators and scholars in the field.¹⁴ As a result, the collections of many American museums – particularly of Chinese and Indian art – benefited greatly from the stationing of these men abroad.¹⁵

Curators were not the only employees taking leave from their positions at museums. As with nearly all employment sectors during the war, museums experienced losses in personnel at all levels. In addition, many, such as the Nelson Gallery, became sites where war-related activities as well as Red Cross and civil defence training classes took place. The Gallery's north mezzanine operated as a service lounge, and dances were held for servicemen and women in



Fig. 3. *Lawrence Sickman*, c. 1943. Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives.

Kirkwood Hall. Despite the changing atmosphere and role of the Gallery, the staff were 'determined to maintain consistent operations standards, public programming and accessibility to art'.¹⁶ Thus, during the war, museums were renegotiating their roles, becoming patriotic institutions as well as centres of art collection, appreciation and education. Though attendance and staff numbers dipped during the war years, many art museums attempted to pursue a policy of business as usual.

The absence of men from administrative roles in museums created opportunities for women, if only temporarily. As men entered the armed forces in large numbers, women – at least those who did not go overseas alongside men as military and Red Cross nurses – were informed, through popular images such as that of Rosie the Riveter, that their duty to the country was to either enter the workforce (if not already a part of it) or occupy jobs commonly held by men.¹⁷ In addition, women understood that when the war ended, men would resume their positions. In museums, as in institutions, factories and companies nationwide, women adjusted to wartime needs.

Female replacements in museums were often the assistants or wives of curators and administrators. At the Museum of Modern Art, when the Curator of Photography, Beaumont Newhall, was called to service, his wife Nancy took his place; similarly, at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, when the Curator of Asian Art and Museum Director Laurance P. Roberts took leave to join the Army, his wife, Isabel, oversaw his duties.¹⁸ At the Nelson Gallery, when the Director,

Paul Gardner, took leave to serve and was commissioned an Army major, he suggested to the Gallery's trustees that his Secretary, Ethlyne Jackson, be appointed as Acting Director; once Sickman was called to serve, he too recommended that his assistant, Lindsay Hughes, should assume the responsibilities as Acting Curator of the Oriental Art Department.¹⁹ Jackson served as Acting Director and Hughes as Acting Curator from 1942 until 1945.

By World War II, there was nothing new in the phenomenon of women working in or affiliated with museums: they had been involved since the initial stages of museum and collection development in the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.²⁰ Yet many of these women, though making significant contributions, were also exceptional in the American art world. Because of their financial standing and the access allowed to them due to class and race privileges, their experiences are not representative of those of most women in arts institutions. Many working in museums found themselves in jobs subordinate to men. Critics, such as Kendall Taylor, outline the history of women's involvement in American museums in the early 1900s, acknowledging the feminization of docentry and museum education and children's programmes, the masculinization of leadership roles such as those of curators and directors (often requiring more specialized training and advanced degrees, which were more socially acceptable – and more easily attainable – for men than for women), and the feminization of secondary, supporting roles such as office assistants, secretaries and registrars. Gendered tasks such as these eventually led to sharp divisions between the expectations of men and women employees in a museum setting.²¹ For example, as early as 1928, docentry was understood as women's work in museums. The docent's guidebook prepared by Louise Connolly, Educational Adviser of the Newark Museum in New Jersey, declared that docents were assumed to be women 'of good accent,' who possessed, among other qualities, tact and liveliness.²²

Similarly, in Asian art, women like Hughes were not new to the field by the time war broke out. Women such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, Helen E. Fernald and Wilma Fairbank led the establishment of Asian collections.²³ However, these were exceptions, as it was overwhelmingly men who held the leadership

roles in Asian art collections at American museums. Furthermore, Asian art history, like other fields, was established upon heavily masculinized canons and discourses, a structure that has tended to either overlook or marginalize women's roles and contributions to the field.²⁴ In addition, even if women were active in curatorial and art historical dialogues, their subjects were often confined to subsidiary 'traditional female specialties': travel writing, textiles, interior design, gardening, crafts, decorative arts and prints.²⁵ In effect, what changed with World War II was the access that women had to administrative and primary positions in the management and development of collections.²⁶

During the war, then, the gender definitions that affected the roles and expectations of individuals underwent a fundamental change.²⁷ Home and home front were rendered feminine by a discourse that regarded war and militarism as masculine. Masculinity and femininity are relational, as are the sociocultural shifts evident during the war. Although museum administration clearly did not stop with men's absence, it did change. The experiential and narrative shifts of those working in museums require revisiting. Among the questions that arise are the following: What were the roles of the museum during World War II? How did art function in these roles? Were curatorial exhibition narratives affected? How were female curators both shaping and being shaped by the politics of wartime museum administration? How were collections and collecting affected?

Lindsay Hughes at the Nelson Gallery

Hughes was not a new addition to the staff of the Nelson Gallery by the time that the United States entered World War II in December 1941. She had joined the Gallery as an employee two months before its grand opening in 1933. Reportedly, Hughes, 'who had been besieging Gardner [the Director] for eighteen months asking for a job, was hired in September 1933 at the munificent salary of ten dollars per week'.²⁸ Though Hughes had taken courses at Mills College in California, Lindenwood College in Missouri and received her Bachelor's degree in 1931 from the University of Missouri in the History of Art, she was immediately put to work cleaning and mending objects in preparation for the Gallery's opening. Thus, whether or not her employment was the result

of ‘besieging’ the director or ‘pure sparkling persistence’, her hiring was not the result of her academic background in art history; rather, she was hired because she could type and sew.²⁹

In 1935, when Sickman joined the Gallery as Curator of the Oriental collection, Hughes became his assistant. Before his arrival, Hughes’s work at the Gallery had developed into secretarial work as well as writing handbooks on the collection and lecturing on Indian and Persian art. She also assumed additional responsibilities, serving as librarian, producer of a radio art programme and magazine publicity coordinator.³⁰ With an interest in drama, Hughes wrote plays involving the collection. Her directorial debut at the Gallery in 1935 was marked with a marionette show for a newly developed children’s class. She remembered, ‘We had advertised a class for children and were completely overwhelmed when 150 appeared on a Wednesday. We had to do something! So I wrote a play by Thursday, cast the staff and presented it in costume by Friday.’³¹ Hazelle Hedges, the staff telephone operator, created marionette puppets, and this presentation marked the first of many that, ultimately, were instrumental in developing a children’s department at the Gallery.³²

Hughes’s interest in art history and languages intensified while working at the Nelson Gallery. She pursued graduate studies at Princeton, Harvard and the University of Chicago, focusing particularly on Oriental and Persian art, along with Chinese and Arabic languages. She was awarded a number of scholarships during this time, among them one from the American Council of Learned Societies to study Arabic and Islamic Arts at Princeton, a Carnegie Scholarship to work with the Fogg Museum collection at Harvard, and, later, a Chinese Cultural Scholarship awarded by the Chinese Government for the 1945–6 academic year to research at the University of Chicago, of which she was one of the five recipients nationally.

By December 1941, it remained rare to find a woman in a leadership role such as director or curator.³³ As Taylor notes, ‘The majority of women in museums played the same role as most women in the domestic sphere: supporters of male counterparts. Men were the heads of households and heads of institutions; they made the rules and set the tone at both home and work. Women fulfilled men’s directives, tidied up, kept the records ...’³⁴ Although the

expectations of men and women in the workplace, as well as in the domestic sphere, were not necessarily accurate reflections of the experiences of all Americans, what is difficult to deny is the overriding prevalence of gender ideologies in the media and through popular culture – in other words, the ways in which expectations of gender took no account of the lives of non-white, non-middle/upper class men and women.

An important vehicle through which gender expectations were marketed to women during the 1940s was popular women’s magazines.³⁵ Though publications such as *Glamour* and *Mademoiselle* targeted college and working women aged eighteen to thirty-four, they still reiterated the importance of femininity and the domestic in American women’s lives. These magazines presented images of ‘the working girl’ to their readers.³⁶ In October 1941, Hughes was featured in *Glamour*. The article highlighted her achievements in the museum world as assistant to the Curator of Oriental Art, a title noted by the magazine as ‘pretty impressive and learned ... to our ways of thinking’.³⁷ Hughes was introduced as a ‘gallery girl’ in this article: ‘not the kind that worships matinee idols from afar or follows golf stars from tee to green, but a genuine art gallery official and authority’.³⁸ Readers were informed:

It took Lindsey [*sic*] eighteen months of bi-weekly visits to convince the director of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in Kansas City that she really wanted a job there. And when she finally got it, it wasn’t because of her B.A. or her work in history of art but because she could sew and mend and dust and clean. Those are important jobs in a gallery.³⁹

The article briefly described some of Hughes’s projects and duties at the Gallery and concluded that although Lindsay ‘says modestly that the job is much more interesting than she herself’, the staff at *Glamour* ‘take our hats off to a girl who literally made her career and built it up into a really important job!’⁴⁰

The way in which this *Glamour* article marketed Hughes’s success to its readers both reinforces and complicates gender and work ideologies. First, it carefully acknowledged Hughes’s persistence and cited her hard work and dedication to the Gallery as the means by which she had received her notable position, while the article as a whole continued to enforce work roles along gender stereotypes. Through this ideological juxtaposition, women were

invited to look up to Hughes for her self-promotion and were encouraged to celebrate her position as support staff. For the readers of 1941, Hughes had attained a great achievement – she was a working girl who had become established at a museum by following the socially constructed parameters of gender expectations.

Acting Curator, 1942–5

With Sickman's call to service in 1942, Hughes assumed the title of Acting Curator of the Oriental collection. As such, she submitted the annual Departmental report from the Oriental art office for the years 1942–4. In her summaries, she outlined the duties that had been fulfilled. In 1942, she ensured that the Gallery's Wednesday Night Lecture Series, which had been initiated by Sickman, continued. Hughes delivered thirty-five lectures that year, including one entitled, 'The Preservation of Art Treasures in Wartime'. She outlined notable visitors with whom she met, object loans and acquisitions (four purchases had been made in 1942) with which the Department was involved, and arts institutions she, as Acting Curator, had visited. With the assistance of Mary Louise Clifton, who worked as a volunteer in the Oriental Department during the summer of 1942, Hughes saw to it that the department functioned as it would have done under Sickman.⁴¹

It is important to acknowledge that even though Sickman was not physically present at the Gallery and while he may have recognized Hughes as capable of filling in for him, he remained very active with the Gallery's collection and business from abroad. By maintaining correspondence with Hughes at the Gallery, Sickman continued to acquire Asian objects for the Gallery while overseas. He was stationed in India and England during the early part of the war and, as Cohen notes, 'Not surprisingly, the Nelson Gallery acquired a few items in London and New Delhi – and the Indian collection received more attention that it had previously'.⁴² One example of these acquisitions was a fifth-century Indian bronze Buddha sculpture (Fig. 4). Though the development of the collections did not cease during the war, it becomes evident that Hughes did not perform in the museum *instead of or in place of* Sickman; rather, she acted as his surrogate in acquiring objects as part of an international team.

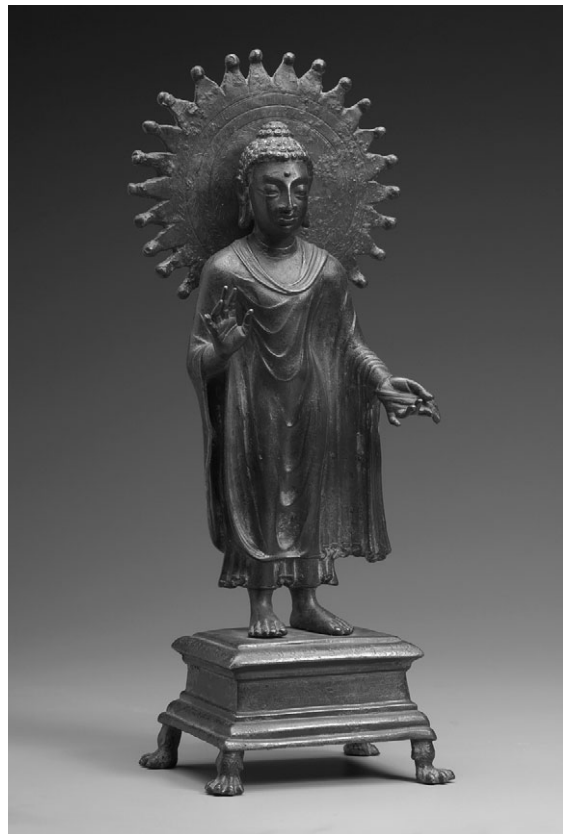


Fig. 4. *Standing Buddha*, c. AD400 (Gupta period AD 320–551), Dhanesar Khera (Uttar Pradesh). Bronze (37.16 × 13.34 × 10.80 cm). Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (44–13).

Hughes was acutely aware of this situation. Although she had been given the responsibility to perform men's work, to *act* as curator on the museum stage, she realized that the position was temporary. She never assumed the title of Curator – she identified herself and was continually cited by others as the Acting Curator. When notable art dealer C. T. Loo (Fig. 5), who had been working closely with the Gallery's Oriental Department for many years prior to the war, heard that Hughes had been appointed by Sickman to assume acting leadership of the department, he expressed his confidence in her ability to perform this task and acknowledged her as 'the right man at the right place' to oversee the Gallery's collection.⁴³

Thus, it is possible to gain insights into how Hughes interpreted what it meant to be a curator, as well as those of others, such as Loo. The role of curator – at



Fig. 5. C. T. Loo, c. 1940s. Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives.

least in the case of Oriental Art Curator at the Nelson Gallery – was reserved for and understood to be a man's job.

Hughes served as Acting Curator until 1945, and her development in this position through the directions and projects she assumed over the years may be traced. In the 1943 annual report, she noted that she was the only employee in the Department, though she stated that she functioned on the 'written encouragement and advice of Mr. Sickman'. Again, she reported that she delivered lectures (this year, there were in all fifty-eight), met with visitors, visited other museums' collections and oversaw loans and the acquisition of twenty-four objects, among them Chinese and Indian textiles, as well as paintings from Persia (Iran).⁴⁴ Here, particularly with the acquisitions of Persian works, Hughes appears to have personally led the drive to collect works she selected from the market (Fig. 6). She also noted that the Department hosted Chinese painter Chang Shu-Chi and a series of lectures in February

of that year, with proceeds going to the Chinese War Relief.⁴⁵ This benefit, which included a series of lectures by painter Alison Stilwell, F. St George Spendlove of the Royal Ontario Museum, and Langdon Warner, Curator of Oriental Art at the Fogg Museum, was coordinated in connection with the Chinese Women's Relief Association of New York and its work to raise money to help Chinese War Orphans. Hughes organized the lecture series and, working in connection with Tsuifeng Lin and Rose Loo, who served as president and second vice-president of the New York organization, raised money for the orphan fund.⁴⁶

This benefit serves as a multifaceted and complex area for analysis in the history of collections. Not only did the benefit involve global war issues, but it also illustrates how art dealers joined with museum collections to serve the public and build war relief funds. The war years in America saw an important re-evaluation of how collections might be redeployed for wartime activities and fund reliefs. First, it can be acknowledged how Hughes, though perhaps unconsciously, was fulfilling mainstream expectations of gender. Though acting in the masculinized role of curator, through her involvement with the Chinese War Relief fundraising, she reaffirms her femininity; she not only fills the masculine role associated with male museum curators, by being involved in wartime women's activities (such as benefit organization and fundraising, particularly in connection with a women's group acting on behalf of children) but also reasserts herself as a woman by fulfilling her feminine patriotic duty. That said, the ties that were made between the Nelson Gallery and Hughes's work with the Chinese Women's Relief Association offer much more to consider in terms of the art market and international politics. This women's organization, headed internationally by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (Mei-ling Soong), worked in connection with other Chinese relief organizations, such as United China Relief, Inc., founded in 1941.⁴⁷ Rose Loo, with whom Hughes corresponded in preparation for the Kansas City fundraising event, was married to C. T. Loo, the noted dealer. Thus, questions related to dealing in Chinese art and its use to legitimize and support national/international political and military goals during World War II can be raised while examining Hughes's and the Oriental department's connection



Fig. 6. *Birds and Beasts in a Flowery Landscape*, attributed to Master Muhammad Siyah Qalam (Persian, 1469–1525), late fifteenth century, ink on paper (16.51 × 24.77 cm). Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (43-6/2).

with this Nationalist Chinese organization through 1945.

In 1944, Hughes expanded her curatorial duties. In the annual report of that year, she continued to note public lectures, meeting with museum visitors and visiting other museums, and monitoring loans; however, there was a marked shift in the ways in which she described the projects of the Oriental department. First, she presented acquisition information in a new manner. In her departmental reports of 1942 and 1943, she acknowledged acquisitions; although they are not outlined in specific detail, it is implied that Sickman played a major part in coordinating most of the purchases. However, in the 1944 report, there was a significant distinction. Hughes certainly acknowledged Sickman's purchases of objects while abroad, but she also noted the acquisition of two limestone Chinese lions, *chimera* (Fig. 7). The pair of chimera, which now flank the doorway to the museum's Chinese Temple Room, was an immensely important addition to the Gallery's collection.⁴⁸ However, it was not until Hughes secured their purchase from Loo in 1944 that they were added to the collection. Shortly after the transaction's completion, Loo wrote to Hughes: 'I ... must not wait any longer without writing this to pay you compliments for your success in acquiring those lions. You know that although I got the money, it

seems something from my heart is gone, as you know how I loved those great monumental animals; they are certainly grand and will always be recognized as such in the future.'⁴⁹

The annual report of that same year also includes mention of the Oriental department's Special 'Chinese Fair' Exhibition, which Hughes coordinated with the assistance of Clifton. Held on the first floor of the Gallery, the exhibition, which was 'installed with considerable time and effort' opened on 4 October 1944 and was displayed throughout November.⁵⁰ The exhibition opened with an evening at the fair, featuring both a wide array of objects from the Gallery's Oriental art collection as well as items for sale by service agencies such as United China Relief, the Chinese Women's Relief Association and Service for America. Objects and booths were arranged together so that visitors could celebrate the collection as well as supporting organizations raising money for war relief. The atmosphere of the Exhibition and Fair, which assumed a bazaar-like feel, encouraged visitors to experience the wares of the service agencies with as much interest and intent as the Gallery's art objects (Fig. 8). A newspaper column announcing the Fair describes the atmosphere to the Kansas City community:

In the central gallery, [there] will be innumerable shops where ancestor paintings crowd cloisonné tea caddies, and



Fig. 7. *Chimera* (one of pair), Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25–220), limestone (130.81 × 175.26 × 45.72 cm). Courtesy of The Nelson–Atkins Museum of Art (44–26/1).



Fig. 8. *Chinese Fair*, 1944. Courtesy of The Nelson–Atkins Museum of Art Archives.

door gods flank bronze sacrificial vessels, lacquer screens show above tomb figures and wooden temples are alongside porcelain bowls. There will be sculptures, wood block

prints, rugs, books and rubbings, altar cloths and k'o-ssu robes, landscapes, pictures on glass and some of iron. Everything will be there ...⁵¹

The bazaar featured entertainment for visitors of all ages; art installations, theatrical performances, puppet shows, contemporary paintings, refreshments and shopping. New York artist Wilma Prezzi was invited to display her Chinese-style still-life paintings, reported to be 'her first 1-woman show'.⁵² C. T. Loo made a trip to Kansas City from New York as well, accompanied by the art dealer C. F. Yau,⁵³ who presented four watercolour paintings by Chinese artist Ching-chih Yee. Loo, who wrote to Hughes shortly after the opening, expressing his excitement and approval of the show and telling Hughes that, '[Y]ou are certainly wonderful in putting up this exhibition and give yourself such hard work in doing so.' He continues, 'I admire you more and more and I feel that you are not only a scientist but also a wonderful artist and very efficient for exhibition arrangement.'⁵⁴ For the 1,000 people who attended the exhibition opening, the Nelson Gallery became an active site of community building through art, where the collections and the public could come together to learn, appreciate, raise awareness and support.⁵⁵

Conclusions

After 1944, Hughes's term as Acting Curator drew to a close. In 1945, she was invited to address the Chinese Art Society at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, after the publication of two articles she had written on Chinese textiles appeared in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and created much interest.⁵⁶ Shortly after she delivered her talk, she was granted a leave of absence from the Nelson Gallery to accept a scholarship from the Chinese Government to study at the University of Chicago. She returned to Kansas City in 1946 and, by the time Sickman had rejoined the Gallery, she had resigned to marry Frank Morrow Cooper, though apparently her devotion to the Gallery was such as that she remained 'on the job at the Nelson until noon the day of [her] wedding'.⁵⁷

It is difficult to discern what this transition meant to Hughes. Having the opportunity to lead a department that comprised one of the most prominent collections of Asian art in the United States, to be asked to fill the wartime vacancy left by Laurence Sickman, and to be a woman doing all of this at a time when such responsibilities and opportunities were not gener-

ally accessible to women, must have been a complicated experience. Years later she wrote of this transition: 'When the war was over, it could have been a sticky situation. Ethlyne [Jackson] and I were used to shouldering responsibilities, making decisions and acting accordingly. Now we were giving the Gallery back to the men. At this time I think we showed great intelligence.'⁵⁸ Both Sickman and Gardner returned in 1945–6, and Hughes and Jackson returned to their supporting roles as assistants. Shortly thereafter, both women resigned and married. Hughes continues, 'Mr. Gardner returned and Ethlyne married Germain Seligman; Mr. Sickman returned and I married Frank Cooper, and we both went to live in New York.'⁵⁹ Yet she did not abandon her interest in working with Asian arts in Kansas City: once in the New York area, she was offered a position at the Metropolitan Museum of Art but was 'wooned away' from it by Loo, who asked her to be an associate in his New York gallery office of C. T. Loo & Co.⁶⁰

During American involvement in World War II, historical circumstances temporarily shifted employment demands and opportunities for men and women. The years 1941–5 raise broad issues concerning how Asian art collections and collecting were developed and defined in America. As illustrated in the experience of Hughes, the Nelson Gallery's Asian art collections continued to grow through communications between Hughes and Sickman. However, it is evident that there emerged marked differences in behaviour and self-awareness in the manner in which Hughes recorded curatorial activities and acquisitions. Over her brief curatorial tenure, Hughes developed from working in the echoes of Sickman to single handedly leading acquisitions of Persian and Chinese art, fields distinctly drawn from her own expertise. The temporary alteration of workplace gender roles during World War II helps to refine our understanding of the complicated junctures among Asian art collections and collection development with art dealers, wartime politics and the socio-political roles of museums.

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Notes and references

- 1 Hu Shih (1890–1962), cultural critic, philosopher and educator, served as Chinese ambassador to the United States from 1938 to 1942. Alfred Salmony (1890–1958) was a renowned Chinese art scholar of bronzes and jades. George Rowley (1892–1962) established the Far Eastern Art Studies at Princeton University. John Pope (1906–82) specialized in Chinese art at the Freer Gallery, serving as Director from 1962 to 1971. Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) conducted archaeological expeditions in China.
- 2 L. Hughes, 'The Kuo Ch'in Wang textiles', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 24 (1943), pp. 129–48, and L. Hughes, 'The Kuo Ch'in Wang brocades', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 27 (1945), pp. 65–82. Both were reprinted in *The Kuo Ch'in Wang Textiles* (New York, 1945). The Nelson loaned a Kuo Ch'in Wang robe to the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, *The International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (London, 1935), cat. no. 2659. See further J. Mailey, 'Ancestors and tomb robes', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 22 (1963), pp. 101–15. The authors thank Ling-en Lu, Assistant Curator of Chinese Art at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, for assistance.
- 3 Prior to 1946, Ruth Lindsay Hughes (1908–97) went by the name of Lindsay Hughes. After marrying in 1946, she is referred to in records as either Lindsay Hughes Cooper or Mrs Frank Cooper. Materials are located in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives, Kansas City, Missouri (hereafter Museum Archives), including Hughes archival files (1938–45) (hereafter LH Files) and Lindsay Hughes Cooper Vertical Files (hereafter LHCV Files).
- 4 In 1982, the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in Kansas City, Missouri, was renamed the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Here, it is referred to as the Nelson Gallery or as the Gallery, as it was known during the 1930s and 1940s. For a history, see M. Churchman and S. Erbes, *High Ideals and Aspirations: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1933–1993* (Kansas City, 1993). Also, the term 'Oriental' is used instead of 'Asian' to reflect early-twentieth-century usage.
- 5 For more on these exhibitions, particularly London, see J. Steuber, 'The exhibition of Chinese art at Burlington House, London, 1935–36', *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006), pp. 528–36; and J. Steuber, 'The 1935–36 international exhibition of Chinese art: contexts, narratives and canons', *Arts of Asia* 37 no. 3 (2007), pp. 126–30.
- 6 *Annual Report from the Council of The Royal Academy ... for the Year 1936* (London, 1937), p. 17. In addition, the Royal Academy was planning a similar exhibition for German art. The authors thank Mark Pomeroy for his assistance.
- 7 *Annual Report from the Council of The Royal Academy ... for the Year 1937* (London, 1938), p. 16.
- 8 *Annual Report*, op. cit. (note 6), p. 17. The Japanese and German exhibitions were cancelled prior to World War II and replaced with British-themed exhibitions.
- 9 W. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York, 1992), p. 130.
- 10 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *A History of the Asiatic Department: A Series of Illustrated Lectures Given in 1957 by Kojiro Tomita (1890–1976)* (Boston, 1990), p. 67. Curator Kojiro Tomita (1890–1976) emigrated to the United States from Japan in 1906 and remained a Japanese citizen. Though never threatened with deportation during the war, it was a time of 'great uneasiness' for him; see Cohen, op. cit. (note 9).
- 11 E. Panofsky, 'The history of art', in W. Crawford (ed.), *The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America* (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 82–111, especially p. 88.
- 12 Laurence Sickman (1906–88) was hired in the early 1930s to acquire objects for the Nelson Gallery's Oriental collection while in China. He served as Oriental Art Curator at the Gallery (1935–53) and as Director (1953–77).
- 13 See Churchman and Erbes, op. cit. (note 4), p. 29.
- 14 During the war, Sickman was commissioned first lieutenant in the Army, serving in England, India and China. Howard Hollis became Curator of Oriental Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1929. He served in Tokyo for the War Department as Chief of the Arts and Monuments Division, working with Sherman Lee, a naval officer during the war. After the war, the two worked together in Tokyo and 'watched over the restoration of museums and monuments, oversaw the disposition of confiscated art properties, and followed the course of collections that came on the market'; see Cohen, op. cit. (note 9), p. 132. Lee later was Curator of Oriental Art at both the Detroit Institute of Arts and, in 1953, the Cleveland Museum of Art. For more on Hollis and Lee, see E. Turner (ed.), *Object Lessons: Cleveland Creates an Art Museum* (Cleveland, 1991).
- 15 See Cohen, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 129–51, for an in-depth discussion.
- 16 Churchman and Erbes, op. cit. (note 4), p. 62.
- 17 For more on Rosie the Riveter, see S. Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston, 1987); P. Coleman, *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Homefront in World War II* (New York, 1995); S. Hartmann, *Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, 1982); and M. Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, 1984). The authors thank Sherrie Tucker, Professor of American Studies at the University of Kansas, for her suggestions.
- 18 K. Davis, *An American Century of Photography: From Dry-Plate to Digital*, 2nd edn (Kansas City, 1999), p. 253; A. Poster, *Journey Through Asia: Masterpieces in the Brooklyn Museum of Art* (Brooklyn, 2003), p. 17; and A. Poster, 'The first century of the Asian Art Department of the Brooklyn Museum', *Arts of Asia* 26 no.6 (1994), pp. 63–4.
- 19 Records of these announcements are in the Nelson Gallery's director's annual reports, 1942 and 1943, Museum Archives.
- 20 Lizzie Plummer Bliss (1864–1931) and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948) helped to found the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929. Rockefeller also worked with Edith Halpert to open the Folk Art Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia. Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942) and Juliana Force (1876–1948) established the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1930. Mary McAfee Atkins (1836–1911), a Kansas City schoolteacher, left \$300,000 to build a fine arts museum. Her resources, combined with those from William Rockhill Nelson, funded the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in Kansas City. For biographical studies of women and the arts, see C. Sherman with A. Holcomb (eds.), *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820–1979* (Westport, 1981).
- 21 K. Taylor, 'Pioneering efforts of early museum women', in J. Glaser and A. Zenetou (eds.), *Gender Perspectives:*

- Essays on Women in Museums* (Washington, 1994), p. 12. See also M. Schwarzer, 'Women in the temple: gender and leadership in museums', *Museum News* 86 no. 3 (2007), pp. 56–64.
- 22 L. Connolly, *Docentry* (Newark, 1928), p. 3.
- 23 Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) collected Oriental art between the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Helen E. Fernald (1891–1964) worked with the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology and published widely. Wilma Fairbank (1909–2002) wrote on Chinese art and archaeology and assisted with diplomatic issues between China and the US State Department.
- 24 In addition, as artists, women have been overlooked throughout the study of Asian art history. Only recently have women's pre-World War II artistic contributions to Asian art been recognized. Some of the earliest exhibitions to acknowledge the works of Asian women artists include *Japanese Women Artists: 1600–1900*, curated by P. Fister for the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, and *Views From Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300–1912*, curated by M. Weidner, E. Johnston Laing and organized by J. Robinson of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana. These exhibitions, which both opened in 1988, were the first critically to examine women as artists in Chinese and Japanese art. For more regarding gender and art historical canon formations, see L. Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?', *ARTnews* 69 no.9 (1971), pp. 22–39, 67–71.
- 25 C. Sherman, 'The tradition continues (1930–1979)', in Sherman and Holcomb, op. cit. (note 20), pp. 61–90, especially pp. 77–8.
- 26 Certainly there are exceptions. Before World War II, women working in Oriental art collections included Associate Curator Margaret Gentles (d. 1969) and Assistant Curator Helen Gunsaulus (1886–1954) at the Art Institute of Chicago; see Sherman and Holcomb, op. cit. (note 20), p. 79.
- 27 See M. Randolph Higonet, J. Jenson, S. Michel and M. Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987).
- 28 Churchman and Erbes, op. cit. (note 4), p. 38.
- 29 Ibid.; J. Helmers, 'Sustaining profile ... an interesting woman', *Kansas City Junior League* (October 1979), p. 40; LHCV Files, Museum Archives.
- 30 Churchman and Erbes, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 61–2.
- 31 Helmers, op. cit. (note 29), p. 40.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 For more on the subject, see Sherman, op. cit. (note 25), especially pp. 74–80.
- 34 Taylor, op. cit. (note 21), p. 12.
- 35 For discussion of 1940s and 1950s women's magazines, see N. Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (Jackson, 2000).
- 36 Ibid., p. xvi.
- 37 'Career Councillor [sic] and Curator', *Glamour* (October 1941), p. 22; LHCV Files, Museum Archives.
- 38 Ibid. Hughes was 33 years old when the article was published.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 This information is noted in the Director's annual report, 1942, Museum Archives, and in an article entitled 'Art Curator On Program', *Sedalia Democrat and Capital* (11 October 1942); LHCV Files, Museum Archives. After Frances Webb and Louise Nelson, who were staffing the Education Department at the Gallery, left for overseas service with the Red Cross, Clifton became head of the Education Department office, where she worked for three years.
- 42 Cohen, op. cit. (note 9), p. 131.
- 43 C. T. Loo to Hughes, 25 May 1942; LH Files, Record Group 02/01 Box 01, File 'C. T. Loo', Museum Archives. C. T. (Ching Tsai) Loo (1880–1957) was born in China and established an art dealership in Paris and New York. Loo was instrumental in the establishment of a number of Oriental collections in the West. The authors thank Holly Wright at the Nelson-Atkins Museum Archives for assistance. Also see E. von der Heydt, 'Cheng-Tsai Loo', *Artibus Asiae* 20 no.1 (1957), p. 186.
- 44 For more on the museum's Persian art collection, see L. Cooper, 'Genius and invention: artists and artisans of Iran', *Apollo* 97 no. 133 (1973), pp. 296–303.
- 45 Director's annual report, 1943, Museum Archives.
- 46 Correspondence between Tsuifeng Lin, Rose Loo and Lindsay Hughes is located in the LH Files, Record Group 02/01 Box 01, File 'China War Orphans', Museum Archives.
- 47 Another example is the 1943 China fundraising at Wellesley College for the Mayling (Mei-ling) Soong Foundation. It included an exhibition of Chinese art loaned from American museums and dealers Loo and Ton-Ying and Company; see Farnsworth Museum of Art, 'Exhibition of Chinese ritual bronzes and paintings', *The Art Museum, Wellesley College Bulletin* 3 no. 1 (1943), pp. 1–20; and J. Allen, 'Sirarpie Der Nersessian (b. 1896): educator and scholar in Byzantine and Armenian art', in Sherman and Holcomb, op. cit. (note 20), p. 337.
- 48 One of few existing pairs known to be intact, the sculptures, which date to the third or fourth century AD, are lion-like creatures that originally stood guard along a tomb pathway. As a pair consisting of one male and one female creature, their duty is to protect against evil. They had been intensely sought after following the appearance of Loo's sale advertisement in the Royal Academy's 1935–6 Chinese art exhibition catalogue; see *The International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (London, 1935), Advertisement Supplement, p. 5.
- 49 Loo to Hughes, 11 July 1944; LH Files, Record Group 02/01 Box 01, File 'C. T. Loo', Museum Archives.
- 50 Director's annual report, 1944, Museum Archives.
- 51 'An air of old China' (author, date and original source unknown); LHCV Files, Museum Archives.
- 52 'Gay at Chinese Fair', *Kansas City Times* (5 October 1944); LHCV Files, Museum Archives.
- 53 C. F. Yau was President of Ton-Ying & Co. (New York). Ton-Ying was started in Paris (1902) by Zhang Renjie (1877–1950), a successful financier, Chinese Government official and sponsor of Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. The authors thank Nick Pearce of Glasgow University for confirming Ton-Ying information.
- 54 Loo to Hughes, 10 October 1944; LH Files, Record Group 02/01 Box 01, File 'C. T. Loo', Museum Archives.
- 55 Director's annual report, 1944, Museum Archives.

- 56 See Hughes, *op. cit.* (note 2).
- 57 'My favorite thing at the Nelson' (author, date, original source unknown); LHCV Files, Museum Archives.
- 58 L. Cooper, 'A night of remembrance', Typescript, 15 November 1983, p. 12; see Churchman and Erbes, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 68.
- 59 Churchman and Erbes, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 68.
- 60 Helmers, *op. cit.* (note 29), p. 40. After living in New York, California, and for a short time in Iran, the Coopers returned to Kansas City in 1970. Lindsay Hughes Cooper took a job as special assistant to Laurence Sickman, who was then the museum's Director.