

The Frye Founding Collection

The Frye Founding Collection was established by two of Seattle's earliest patrons of the arts, Charles and Emma Frye. The collection, which celebrates primarily late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century German art, has remained intact since its inception and is to the present day housed in a museum established for this purpose, the Frye Art Museum.

In its content and structure, the Frye Founding Collection bears similarities to other collections of German art established around the same time, most notably those belonging to the American art collector and merchant Hugo Reisinger and to Josef Stránský, who had been appointed Gustav Mahler's successor as Conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1911. It is therefore not surprising that some important works in the Frye Collection were originally owned by either Reisinger or Stránský, or by both. It is also not surprising that the Frye Collection celebrates many of those artists whose work was included in important exhibitions of German art which took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, and the Art Institute of Chicago between 1906 and 1909.

The Frye Collection was probably intended from the time of its inception to be the basis of a public collection dedicated to German art of the turn-of-the-last-century. Its other distinguishing characteristic is that it was curated on the advice of artists. In other words, the Frye Founding Collection and the subsequent Frye Art Museum have always been—to use contemporary parlance—artist-centered.

Charles Frye (1858–1940) was a first generation American of German descent. Unlike Hugo Reisinger and Josef Stránský from New York, he was a self-made man, the son of German immigrants who had moved to America in 1846 to farm in Iowa. In 1888, Frye moved to Seattle, where he astutely purchased land and quickly established a successful business. Charles and his wife Emma (1860–1934) were avid philanthropic supporters not only of the visual arts but also of music in Seattle. The Fryes' key advisors in the purchasing of art were the German-born American artist Henry Raschen (1854–1937) and the Dutch-born artist Pieter van Veen (1875–1961) who, according to information from van Veen, acted as his agent at various times and traveled to Europe with the Fryes. Another advisor whose judgment Charles Frye was to later value was the American-born artist Eustace Paul Ziegler (1881–1969).

Charles reputedly saw his first oil painting at age thirty-five in 1893. By 1909, however, it seems that he and Emma were already avid collectors, having lent a French painting to Seattle's Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, a World's Fair celebrating the development of the Pacific Northwest. The Fries' collection hung in their private quarters and in a purpose-built exhibition space, which they made available to special groups and charitable events.

Among the many highlights of the Frye Founding Collection is one of the icons of European Symbolism, *Sin* by Franz von Stuck, a founding member of the influential artists' association, the Munich Secession. Indeed, with the exception of a number of fine French works the collection maintains a careful balance between important works by the generation of artists belonging to the *Künstlergenossenschaft* (Franz von Defregger, Franz von Lenbach, Wilhelm Leibl, Friedrich August von Kaulbach) and exemplary works by the generation of young painters who founded the Munich Secession (Ludwig Dill, Hugo von Habermann, Otto Hierl-Deronco, Franz von Stuck, Fritz von Uhde, and Heinrich von Zügel). Members of the Munich Secession, corresponding members such as Max Slevogt and Hans Thoma as well as artists such as Gabriel von Max who bridged both generations are also represented in the Frye Collection.

The Frye Art Museum

Charles and Emma Frye were committed to the idea of building a new wing for the Seattle Art Museum, which would eventually house their collection. To this end Charles Frye bequeathed funds to the Seattle Art Museum for the construction of such a wing, on the condition that the entire collection would be shown in perpetuity. When this bequest was rejected by the Seattle Art Museum, the Estate of Charles Frye used the funds (as he had instructed) to construct a new museum to display the Frye Collection, which opened in February 1952.

The Munich Secession and America

In 1909, Hugo Reisinger had been instrumental in the organization of a highly successful exhibition of contemporary German painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Copley Society of Boston, and the Art Institute of Chicago. The following year he had been responsible for organizing and financing a major exhibition of contemporary American art in Berlin and in Munich. His intent was "to prove to German artists and art lovers that the modern American school of painting is the peer of any of its European contemporaries." Among the two hundred

American paintings and etchings were loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Reisinger's commitment to German art is evident in several exhibitions with which he was involved between 1907 and 1909. The first of these, which opened in January 1907 at the National Arts Club in New York, included works from Reisinger's own collection. Shortly before the opening Reisinger, in an interview with *The New York Times*, confirmed his commitment to German art of the period, and especially that associated with the Munich Secession. He made it clear, however, that his curatorial efforts were not being directed at Americans of German descent: "Appreciation, if appreciation is found, will come from Americans without a hyphen who admire art wherever found and whencesoever it may originate."

As a descendant of Germans he was "naturally inclined" to study German art, which he came to understand, admire, and purchase, but "as an American I think my fellow-countrymen should have a chance to see what Germany, as well as France and England, is doing." Like any collector he was "anxious to find sympathizers" and had therefore become a "propagandist for German art." But, as he pointed out, he was equally "a propagandist for American painting in Germany."

When asked what key schools of art were to be found in Germany at that time Reisinger answered,

First in all respects, to my thinking at least, is Munich as an art centre. Since the death of Lenbach [in 1904] the one who occupies the highest position in the esteem of Bavarian artists, if not of the entire German public, is Franz von Stuck [...] Berlin may be given second place, then Karlsruhe, where Hans Thoma leads. Perhaps Weimar, where Lenbach und Boecklin once worked, may be placed fourth in order of importance.

Exhibition of Contemporary German Painting, Albright Art Gallery, December 26, 1906–January 20, 1907

Only weeks before Reisinger's exhibition at the National Arts Club, one of the most ambitious exhibitions of contemporary German painting opened at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo. It began as a collaborative project of the St. Louis Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the John Herron Art Institute of Indianapolis, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art of Washington, D.C.

The guiding spirit behind the exhibition was the American-born Director of the Albright Art Gallery, Charles M. Kurtz, who, in his own words, had spared no expense of time or of effort “to present the most praiseworthy expression of contemporary German painting, in the hope of arousing in America interest in phases of artistic effort considered in the highest degree worthy of attention.” Like Reisinger, Kurtz was an enthusiastic supporter of the Munich Secession, which he described as:

the most advanced and artistically influential artists' organization in Germany. [...] The Secession Exhibition stands as about the best annual exhibition in the world in which the works are selected by artist-jurymen. It never is a very large exhibition [...] The Secession galleries are of agreeable proportions and are decorated in an extremely simple and most artistic manner. The coloring of the walls, of the floor--coverings, etc., is soft, harmonious [...] The paintings are hung with rare skill—usually a single row of works ... and these with liberal space between them. The general effect of the Secession galleries this year surpasses anything of the kind which the writer hitherto has seen.

Exhibition of Contemporary German Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Copley Society, Boston, and the Art Institute of Chicago, 1909

As early as 1905, Reisinger had met with numerous artists and officials in Germany regarding the possibility of exchange exhibitions between Germany and the United States. The result was a “magnificent” exhibition of German art which opened in the new wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on January 4, 1909. *The New York Times* noted the

impulsive, energetic, and extremely various art [...] [which shows] how far individualism may be carried without losing the strong grasp of ancient truth necessary to any extraordinary accomplishment in art.

The article continues:

The movement of the Secessionists away from the path of their forerunners was not

unlike that of the Impressionists in France in many respects, but in one important particular it was different. The Impressionists worked together toward a common end, the solution of problems of light and air, the Secessionists have been from the beginning individualists, each with a *personal* goal in view. [...] Liebermann's work involves the closest study of light; certain canvases by Stuck might have been painted in the interior of a tomb. We have idealism, naturalism, fantasy, ardor, and movement, gravity, and repose, decorative and artificial color schemes, the closest reproduction of natural color, brilliant analysis of form and rich tonal quality, and in each of these kinds, good art. [...] the German art of to-day is a force to be reckoned with in universal culture.

Only five years before the outbreak of World War I the future of German art and the Munich Secessionists in the New World had seemed extraordinarily promising. With the death of Kurtz in March 1909, and of Reisinger in September 1914, German art and literature lost two of its two key interpreters and supporters in America. What was more, cultural figures and institutions associated with German culture were about to be swept up in a wave of anti-German sentiment.

In April 1918, shortly after Reisinger's widow was questioned by the FBI, the New York conductor Josef Stránský found himself under attack for being "pro-German." Previously the German-born conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Dr. Karl Muck, a renowned interpreter of Wagner, had been forced to resign his post and was to be interned until the end of the war.

The Germanic Museum, Harvard University

The idea of a Germanic Museum at Harvard University (today the Busch-Reisinger Museum) was first raised in 1897. Dedicated in November 1903, the museum was forced to close during World War I due to anti-German sentiment. Although the Museum's Busch Hall was completed in 1917 "it remained closed for four years, officially because of 'a lack of coal'".

Once again, during World War II, the Germanic Museum was forced to close its doors. After the war, in 1948 and 1949, Edmée Greenough, the re-married widow of Reisinger gave more than \$200,000 to the Germanic Museum to ensure its survival.

Until the present day the Busch-Reisinger Museum and the Frye Art Museum recall a singular

moment one hundred years ago when a number of influential American collectors and museum curators sought to establish close cultural ties between Germany and America. These men and women (Charles and Emma Frye, Adolphus Busch, Hugo and Edmée Reisinger, Josef Stránský, Charles M. Kurtz, and many others) pursued their endeavors with extraordinary passion and commitment.

Excerpted from Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "The Munich Secession and America: The Collections of Hugo Reisinger, Josef Stránský, Charles and Emma Frye," in *Secession, 1892-1914*. Munich: Edition Minerva, 2008. © Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and Museum Villa Stuck.