

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

"Mother's Musuem": The Emancipation of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller through Modern Art Matronage and Museum Building

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/99x566tv>

Author

Condas, Jennifer L.

Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

“Mother’s Museum”: The Emancipation of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
through Modern Art Matronage and Museum Building

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in History

by

Jennifer L. Condas

Thesis Committee:
Professor Alice B. Fahs, Chair
Professor Jon Wiener
Chancellor’s Professor Cécile Whiting

2014

DEDICATION

To my beautiful twin girls,
for inspiring their mother to be the best she can be

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS	vii
INTRODUCTION: New York Ushers In Modernism	2
CHAPTER 1: The Rockefeller Marriage: “It’s Complicated...” Reconciling Junior’s Rejection of Modern Art and MoMA	9 16
CHAPTER 2: Partners and Promoters of American Modernism: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Edith Halpert The Downtown Girl and Her Gallery Recovering a Useable Past: “American Ancestors” MoMA and the Negotiation of Folk Art American Art and MoMA’s Regret	24 33 52 65 68
CHAPTER 3: Motherhood: Abby’s Training Ground for Modernism Motherhood as a Site of Power Nelson Rockefeller: The Partner Abby Longed for in Museum Building Nelson’s Training in the Visual Arts David Rockefeller: Abby’s Most Powerful Financial Partner David’s Own Training The Big “Bucks” for MoMA Finally Roll In Corporate Art Collecting on an Unprecedented Scale	75 78 79 83 94 95 99 102
CONCLUSION	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

		Page
FIG. 1:	Photograph of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, ca. 1890-1900 George Grantham Bain Collections of the Museum of the City of New York http://collections.mcny.org	1
FIG. 2:	Photograph of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., undated Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center	10
FIG. 3:	Abby and John D. J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., with children in Seal Harbor, Maine (1921) Courtesy of Rockefeller Archive Center	15
FIG. 4:	Photograph of Edith Halpert (ca. 1930) Man Ray (Downtown Gallery Records of the Archives of American Art) Courtesy of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution	33
FIG. 5:	Photograph of the Entrance to the Downtown Gallery and The American Folk Art Gallery (ca. 1938) Reginald Marsh Collections of the Museum of the City of New York	35
FIG. 6:	Abby Aldrich Rockefeller’s Seventh Floor Gallery (ca. 1933)	62
FIG. 7:	Photograph of Nos. 4 and 10 West 54th Street, Townhouses of John D. Rockefeller and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1937) By Samuel Herman Gottscho Collection of the Museum of the City of New York http://collections.mcny.org	71
FIG. 8:	Photograph of Museum of Modern Art, birds-eye view from 41 st floor of Rockefeller Center (December 6, 1941) By Wurts Bros. (New York, NY) Collections of the Museum of the City of New York http://collections.mcny.org	71

	Page
FIG. 9:	74
Photograph of Edith Halpert and Unidentified woman <i>\$50 a Month Buys a Big Little Art Collection</i> (1949) Stanley Kubrick Collections of the Museum of the City of New York http://collections.mcnyc.org	
FIG. 10:	80
Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller (undated) Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center	
FIG. 11:	90
Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller looking at a portrait of his mother (undated) Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center	
FIG. 12:	96
John D. Rockefeller and his grandson, a young David Rockefeller http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/rockefeller/jdrdavid.htm	
FIG. 13:	102
David Rockefeller shaking hands with Jawad Hashim, President of the Arab Monetary Fund Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Unported License	
FIG. 14:	104
David Rockefeller's office, Chase Manhattan Bank (Nov. 12, 1969) Jan Jachniewicz Collections of the Museum of the City of New York http://collections.mcnyc.org	
FIG. 15:	107
Photograph of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (undated) Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center	

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Alice B. Fahs, who has guided me throughout this project, encouraged me every step of the way and, in doing so, completely changed the course of my academic career. For her belief in me and in this project, I will be forever grateful.

I would also like to thank Professor Jon Wiener, who guided me in directions in this research process I never would have considered. His influence was invaluable and I am so glad we met “through Marx” four years ago.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge Chancellor’s Professor Cécile Whiting, whose encouragement and excitement about my work is so deeply gratifying and has enriched this project.

To all of you, my heartfelt thanks.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Mother’s Museum”: The Emancipation of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
through Modern Art Matronage and Museum Building

By

Jennifer L. Condas

Masters of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Alice B. Fahs, Chair

So much of the time, the significance of non-artists in making modern art possible is all too rarely acknowledged, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller is no exception. The crucial role Abby played and the obstacles she overcame are significant, and my research considers the far-reaching impact she had on the institutionalization and legitimization of modern art in New York in the 1920s and 1930s. Without her involvement, New York’s premier museum for Post-Impressionist, progressive, and modern art, the Museum of Modern Art, would not have been founded or even succeeded. Abby’s efforts were often hampered by both her husband’s outright rejection of the art she so loved, as well as by constraints on women in an era in which cultural, societal, economic, and political pursuits were still dominated by men. Thus, Abby’s “matronage” – her support of progressive and modern artists, her personal collecting of their work, and her museum

building efforts - all contributed to an emancipation, of sorts, from her husband, and from traditional mores of the era.

This project will also consider the important partnerships Abby entered into that facilitated the fulfillment of her vision for MoMA. Particular attention will be paid to gallery owner and collector, Edith Gregor Halpert, as well as to Nelson and David Rockefeller, who ensured their mother's legacy and helped make New York the epicenter for modern art that Abby always hoped it would be.



FIG. 1
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874-1948)
(ca. 1890-1900)
by George Grantham Bain
Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

Introduction – New York Ushers in Modernism

There is an exhibition coming, which is the most important public event that has ever come off since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, & it is of the same nature . . . The academy are frantic. Most of them are left out of it . . . I am **all** for it . . . there will be a riot & a revolution & things will never be quite the same afterwards.

- Mabel Dodge, in a letter to Gertrude Stein, dated
January 24, 1913, three weeks before the Armory Show¹

As wealthy Greenwich Village salonist and modern art patron Mabel Dodge correctly predicted, the International Exhibition of Modern Artists in 1913 (more commonly referred to as the Armory Show) was a revolution for modern art, a rallying cry against existing academic tradition, and an attempt to participate in the exhilarating freedom and exploration of entirely new, previously forbidden, horizons of artistic creativity. The Armory Show is one of two seminal events considered by historians to be the most important in the United States regarding the introduction of modern art, the other being the establishment by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874-1948), and her two female co-founders of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1929, a permanent museum to house modern art. If the Armory Show ushered in the avant-garde, MoMA attempted to institutionalize and legitimize it.

The Armory Show was initially conceived by Arthur B. Davies, Walt Kuhn, Elmer Macrae, Jerome Myers, Allan Tucker, William Glackens, and other like-minded artists (who all formed the Association of American Painters and Sculptors) as an event to fight the widespread apathy toward progressive American art by presenting to New Yorkers a major, non-juried

¹ Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, January 24, 1913, in *Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein*, Donald Gallup ed. (New York, 1953), 71.

display of contemporary American and European art.² Originally intended to exhibit the work of progressive American artists, the exhibition instead gained notoriety for featuring the work of contemporary European artists, including Cubists, Post-impressionists, and Fauvists. More than three hundred artists, including Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Edouard Manet, and Paul Cézanne were featured, most of whom were unknown in the United States.³

The Armory Show was a revolution for modern art, a rallying cry against existing academic tradition imposed by the National Academy of Design (the NAD), the country's most important art institution and the primary reason that New York dominated the American art scene. Although the NAD operated a popular art school, its real power was vested in its bi-annual exhibitions, modeled after those sponsored by the Royal Academy in London and the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris.⁴ Indeed, it was widely considered a career milestone when an artist exhibited their painting at the NAD, and those artists whose work was rejected had a greatly reduced chance of commercial success, simply because there were few other exhibition spaces to show their progressive work in New York, and certainly no venues that offered the NAD's prestige, respectability, and popularity. The alternative environment created by the Armory Show was crucial in providing recognition for emerging artists, and was an opportunity for both artists and exhibition attendees to participate in a revolutionary cultural event in New York, one which mapped new territory onto an emerging modernist horizon.

The Armory Show of 1913 may have been the catalyst that first propelled Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's early interest in progressive, avant-garde, and contemporary art movements. Although there is no official documentation of her involvement with the exhibit, author and artist

² Christine I. Oaklander, "Clara Davidge's Madison Art Gallery: Sowing the seed for the Armory Show," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 36, no. 3-4 (1996), 29.

³ Jerry Saltz, "Cubes! The Horror! Chaos at Armory Show," *New York Magazine* (April 9, 2012), 39.

⁴ Oaklander, "Clara Davidge's Madison Art Gallery," 20-21.

author and artist Bennard B. Perlman contends that Abby was one of the many women who contributed financially to the pioneering exhibition.⁵ Her close friendships with both her museum co-founder and avid art collector Lillian Bliss, and artist and leader of the show, Arthur Davies, could have been contributing factors in her support. Abby's purported financial donation is an intriguing prospect because it would confirm a much earlier interest by her in progressive and modern art than previously thought, well before what is considered her unofficial indoctrination in 1923, under the tutelage of her friend, noted art historian and Director of the Detroit Museum, William Valentiner.

During the interim between the Armory Show and the founding of MoMA, the display, promotion and interpretation of progressive, Post-Impressionist, progressive American, and European art fell to independent artist societies and clubs, gallery owners, dealers, and collectors, largely supported through organized, systematic support networks created by women. They methodically and intentionally promoted modern art in New York through their own matronage by owning galleries, fundraising for exhibitions, personal art collecting, publishing, and through their financial and emotional support of struggling artists. Included in this progressive group was Mabel Dodge, Greenwich Village salonist and collector, Clara Potter Davidge, owner of the Madison Art Gallery, Lillian Bliss and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, both philanthropists and collectors, and Katherine Dreier, artist, author and founder of the Société Anonyme.⁶ All of

⁵ Bennard B. Perlman, *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), 216. Although Perlman does not note his source information for Abby's financial donation which could be problematic, particularly because her participation in the Armory Show is not documented in other historiography or her own archived files, Kimberly Orcutt, the Henry Luce Foundation Curator of American Art at the New-York Historical Society, relies on Perlman's research for her own work on the Armory Show and its founder, Arthur B. Davies and she confirmed with the author of this project that Perlman's work can be relied upon for its accuracy. Additionally, with respect to Abby's financial records in which a listing for her Armory Show donation may have been found, her ledgers stored at the Rockefeller Archive Center begin in 1927, fourteen years after the purported financial contribution.

⁶ Katherine Dreier's lasting efforts as an artist, patron, museum director and educator were so vital to the promotion and development of modernism in America, that an argument can be made that her Société Anonyme

these women made significant contributions in propelling progressive or modern art in New York and played strategic roles in implementing organized networks that helped to define, create, and foster modernist dialogue and the consumption of progressive and avant-garde painting and sculpture.

These forward-thinking women endeavored to overthrow the academic, binding formal traditions of art in the early twentieth century and were integral in shaping the future of modern art in America, paving the way for Abby. Their interpersonal relationships with American and European progressive and avant-garde artists not only afforded them the opportunity to witness the genesis of groundbreaking modern art movements, but provided the foundation they needed for the successful establishment of their own structured organizations to propel those movements. Katherine Drier had close personal and professional ties with progressive and avant-garde artists both in the United States and in Europe, and co-founded the Société Anonyme with Marcel Duchamp, who became her lifelong friend, and facilitated her entrée into avant-garde circles.⁷ Clara Davidge was married to painter Henry Fitch Taylor and her Madison Art Gallery was the first space to feature American art exclusively and served as the meeting space where Arthur Davies and the other members of the AAPS planned the Armory Show.⁸ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller inherited the mantle of these progressive women by continuing to situate modernists as cultural figures of legitimacy, significance, and standing.

(Museum of Modern Art) and its vast collection was actually New York's first museum devoted exclusively to the display and promotion of modern art, rather than MoMA. Its holdings comprised one of the few contemporary collections available at the time for public viewing, albeit on an irregular basis, since the collection had no permanent home. Even Alfred H. Barr, Jr., MoMA's first executive director, acknowledged Dreier's vital role: "No one has done more for the advancement of the more experimental movements in modern art than you, so far as New York and the country at large is concerned." Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to Katherine Drier, The Katherine Dreier/ Société Anonyme Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/katherine-s-dreier-papers-société-anonyme-archive>.

⁷ Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-23* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 156.

⁸ George Bellows, D. Putnam Brinley, Walt Kuhn, Ernest Lawson, Elmer Livingston MacRae, Allen Tucker, Editorial, *New York Times* (New York, Nov. 10, 1921).

Abby and her co-founders Lillian Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan made their plans for a museum in New York to showcase the “art of their time,” in 1929, not an easy task in an era when the business of art was dominated by men, as collectors, donors, dealers, museum directors, curators, painters and sculptors were overwhelmingly male. As Abby recalled when recounting the museum’s development in a letter to MoMA’s first president, A. Conger Goodyear, she sought out people who shared her unique vision for modern art in New York:

I began to think of women whom I knew in New York City, who cared deeply for beauty and who bought pictures, women who would be willing, and had faith enough, to help start a museum of contemporary art. Miss Lizzie Bliss and Mrs. Cornelius Sullivan were outstanding in this group; I asked them to lunch with me and laid the matter before them. I suggested that we form ourselves into a committee of three and that we find a man to be president of the museum that was to be.⁹

Although Abby pursued museum building in an era when feminism was beginning to take root, she determined that in order for MoMA to succeed, a man needed to be at its helm, despite the fact that plan was devised by three women. Abby’s suggestion of a male president for MoMA demonstrated her belief that she and her female co-founders had to work within existing gender parameters in order to get MoMA underway, despite the fact that other women who also built museums in the United States attempted to retain tight control, like Isabella Stewart Gardner did at her own museum in Boston.

Abby was encouraged by the sentiment expressed in many Manhattan newspapers about the stodgy direction of the traditional Metropolitan Museum of Art, much of which was directed at the Metropolitan’s lack of French Post-Impressionist work and its disinterest in living painters. A real call for a museum in Manhattan featuring contemporary art (comparable to the Luxembourg museum in Paris) was being heralded. The idea was to build a museum that could

⁹ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to Conger Goodyear, March 23, 1936, Folder 105, Box 8, Correspondence, RG 2, Series I, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

buy and exhibit modern paintings rather than another institution that pursued and preserved eternal masterpieces for the ages, like The Metropolitan. There was a call to have a museum so that the public could see what living artists were producing.¹⁰ However, World War I prevented attempts to launch any kind of organizational effort to build a modern museum until the early summer of 1929, when the founders collaborated to create, according to MoMA's first manifesto, "a permanent museum which will acquire collections of the best modern works of art."¹¹

Abby's involvement at the museum was multi-faceted. She was involved on an almost daily basis with the management, staffing, and exhibition selection at the museum, and served as a nurturer and confidante to MoMA's often-fragile executive staff, headed by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. She served on the museum's Board of Trustees, and her most important role in its early years was that of lead fundraiser, a position that proved particularly difficult because the stock market crash, which heralded in the Great Depression occurred just nine days after the museum opened. Despite her lead role in fundraising, her husband, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., heir to the Standard Oil fortune and worth an estimated \$995 million at the time, refused to throw his huge financial weight behind the project, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle which is the focus of much of this research.

Abby's involvement at MoMA continued until her death in 1948 but her co-founders' involvement was cut short. Sullivan resigned her trustee position on the museum's board on October 17, 1933, due to financial difficulties, but was made an honorary trustee for life in 1935. Bliss died in 1931, but after her death, one hundred fifty important works of Impressionist and

¹⁰ "Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller....has a Nose for New Talent," *Time Magazine*, Vol. XXVIII, No 4, Jan. 27, 1936), 29.

¹¹ Quentin Keynes "The Arts of our Time – New York's Museum of Modern Art," *Magazine of the Future* (Dec. 1948- Jan. 1949), 67.

Post-Impressionist art from her valuable personal collection formed the basis of MoMA's permanent collection. However, during the short time Abby, Bliss and Sullivan were together, they were an impressive team. Nelson Rockefeller recalled that the founders were "the perfect combination...they had the courage to advocate the cause of the modern movement in the face of widespread division, ignorance, and a dark suspicion that the whole business was some sort of Bolshevik plot."¹²

This research will demonstrate that through her modern art matronage, Abby created an immensely satisfying life, one in which she was able to self-fashion an identity as a modern art matron and a cultural leader in New York. By later utilizing her maternal authority, Abby trained both Nelson and David to embrace the new, often controversial world of modern art, demonstrating that Abby's own experience of mothering was a source of power. This project will depict a woman whose quest to further modernism in her own art collecting and at MoMA altered forever the cultural spaces and places in New York, despite the intransigent aesthetic divide in her own home.

¹² Sam Hunter, *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1984), 10.

Chapter One: The Rockefeller Marriage: “It’s Complicated...”

We had all drawn from the infinite well of Mother’s love, and it had sustained us more than we knew. Her passing left a void in all our lives, but no one felt the loss as deeply or desperately as Father. He and Mother had been inseparable throughout their forty-seven years of marriage, and like vines whose braided branches grow together, their lives had become one.

– David Rockefeller¹³

There are two nagging questions regarding the Rockefeller marriage which, in large part, drove this project. Why did John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Abby’s devoted husband of 47 years, refuse to lend his wholehearted support - emotionally or financially - to Abby’s venture to promote modern art and artists in New York City, and how did Abby succeed at MoMA despite his lack of enthusiasm and support? Alfred Barr bluntly wrote to Abby after the museum’s opening in 1929, “Remember me most cordially to Mr. Rockefeller (who I find hard to forgive his granite indifference to what interests you so much.)”¹⁴ Both David and Laurence Rockefeller confirmed Alfred’s impression of their father’s indifference which was demonstrated repeatedly, and they found his rejection of her work on behalf of MoMA troubling.

¹³ David Rockefeller, *Memoirs* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2002), 180.

¹⁴ Alfred H. Barr to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Sept. 8, 1930, AHB, Jr. Papers, (AAA: 3264; 1242-48), MoMA Archives, from Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, The Woman in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1993), 283.



FIG. 2
Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (undated)
Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Abby Aldrich and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. enthusiastically began their collecting efforts together as a young married couple in 1901, acquiring traditional Japanese and early American prints, European china, Chinese porcelains, and other highly conventional paintings and decorative wares. However, during the 1920s, a monumental break occurred in their collecting habits because Abby, much to her husband's displeasure, not only transformed herself into a collector who passionately sought out and purchased progressive, contemporary, and avant-garde art, but also played the leading role in implementing an organization that would institutionalize it.

Despite their complete devotion to each other for almost fifty years, Junior remained steadfast in his disdain for modern art. Ironically, it was his devotion that bordered on an obsession with Abby that actually prohibited him from investing himself wholly in her museum building efforts for if he were to lend his full support to his wife's efforts, that meant he would have to share her with others, something that was absolutely agonizing for him. As their youngest child, David Rockefeller recounts, his father approached life with a great deal of insecurity and in Abby, he found a vivacious, secure and confident mate who could understand, care for and protect his emotional fragility and insecurities. Junior wanted Abby to be with him always, and if not right by his side, then immediately available to him.¹⁵ He sought to keep her in their own private circle, a special space where there was only room for two. As David revealed:

From one point of view it was romantic, and I believe their relations with each other were extremely intense and loving. From another point of view, the bond they shared was exclusive of all else, including the children. And therein lay the source of much tension for Mother. . . . Father expected Mother to be there for him when he needed her, and his needs in this regard were practically insatiable."¹⁶

¹⁵ Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 17.

Junior's all-consuming need for Abby's attention and her constant attempts to console his anxiety is evident from the very beginning of their marriage. In 1903, two years after they were married, Junior took an extended tour of the Rockefeller mines in the western United States. Abby, pregnant with their first child, stayed with her mother and father and rest of her family at their home in Warwick, Rhode Island. While there, Abby sailed with her brothers, and engaged in a busy social schedule, secure in her place within her nuclear family and her place in the world. Her self-reliance and security were in stark contrast to her husband's, who was an embodiment of Victorian paternalism and hyperbole in his letters to her during her stay at Warwick: "My darling child . . . Perhaps the responsibility of the baby [as yet unborn] are too much for the dear child mother, and she needs her husband . . . I fear you are getting tired with so much visiting and so many friends."¹⁷ As the trip was nearing its end Junior writes "I want my wife with all her tender love, her sweetness and her exquisite beauty . . . And yet with all the added joy of returning to my wife . . . the one person in the world indispensable to me – and my love, the mother of my baby. Do you wonder then that the minutes become hours and the hours days as I impatiently wait to be reunited with my love and my life?"¹⁸ Although Junior expressed his love in an unabashed and thoroughly passionate way, Abby, secure with herself and with warmth, love and affection to spare, did not feel a desperate need for her husband. Unlike Junior, she was neither hampered by insecurities, nor was she completely dependent upon someone else for her happiness.

¹⁷ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Aug. 21, 1903, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center .

¹⁸ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Aug. 27, 1903, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Their first child, Abigail Aldrich Rockefeller, was born on November 9, 1903, (known throughout her life as “Babs”), and Junior perceived the child as serious competition and his jealousy began to emerge with respect to anyone or anything that took his wife away from him. (This all encompassing jealousy foreshadowed the profound resentment about his wife’s other “baby,” MoMA, which would “arrive” twenty-six years later). The plaintive sentiment in Junior’s letters changed greatly when Abby took Babs to visit her family in Warwick. Rather than expressions of longing and heartache as expressed in his earlier correspondence, his letters reflected feelings of absolute dejection. “We were made to live together and not apart,” he wrote.¹⁹ When he felt her love, the sun was bright and life seemed promising, without her, the world turned dark and cold.²⁰

Driven to soothe John’s anxiety with constant reassurance must have taken its toll on Abby, as a thoroughly engaged (and probably exhausted) new mother, but in every letter she tried to encourage him. “Please go out to dinner tonight. You don’t really think that I am so selfish that I don’t want you to have a good time in my absence?”²¹ While Junior remained in New York, a dark cloud seemed to envelop him: “I am sure the Lord made me with special needs which you alone can supply,” he wrote, “and I know that after living so many years without you He intended that when He gave you to me we should always live constantly together.”²² As Junior continued to remind her of his misery without her, Abby tried to comfort him, reassuring him of her love and devotion. But when Junior played the martyr’s role too often, she scolded him:

¹⁹ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, July 25, 1904, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁰ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 108.

²¹ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Aug. 7, 1904, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

²² John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Aug. 9, 1904, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Your letter this morning dear, amused me very much, one might think from reading it that you were obliged to stay in Tarrytown, lonely and alone while I was staying here from choice having a glorious time and quite neglecting you. Dear I am delighted to have you go where you are happiest and I don't blame you for wanting to be in Tarrytown one bit but you haven't been alone for a minute, and although I know that you miss us I can't but feel that it is my duty to stay with the baby except when you really need me to go with you. I don't mean to imply that I have had such an awful time myself because I haven't, the nights that I spent alone I enjoyed reading and at other times I have had a lovely time with the baby and family. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not complaining, simply stating facts."²³

But her consolations had little impact on Junior's acutely anxious and insecure state of mind.

Abby probably believed that if she loved her husband unconditionally and satisfied all his needs in her steadfast, warm way, his good spirits would return. Her nephew, Nelson Aldrich, suggested that part of Junior's attraction for Abby was how much he needed her. As a young woman, Abby often stood in for her mother at political events when Abby's father, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, asked. Abby adored her father and had responded to his requests unreservedly, relishing the opportunity to be needed. As Abby's biographer Bernice Kert suggests, transferring her devotion to her husband had a certain psychological inevitability about it.²⁴

Junior continued to ruminate about his own selfish needs and desires beginning from Abby's first pregnancy with Babs through her last pregnancy with David (and four other children in between, John D. Rockefeller III, Laurence, Nelson, and Winthrop). After Winthrop was born in 1912, Junior wrote to Abby from a fishing camp expedition "I hope you are not doing too much or seeing too many people ... You must get very well this time . . . Five little people need you now, besides a man who needs you more than ever, and who wants a great deal more of you

²³ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Aug. 27, 1904, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center .

²⁴ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 111.

than he has been having.”²⁵ Abby had just given birth to her sixth child yet her husband continued to write about his own unfulfilled needs and remained deeply jealous of the children throughout their marriage. According to David, Junior was eager for Abby to give up MoMA altogether in 1939 when Nelson became president of the Board of Trustees. “My father deeply resented her involvement,” David declared. When Abby seemed to back off a bit from the museum in 1939, David writes:

The reason she backed off in 1939 was because of his pressure. It was a world that was uncongenial to him and different from his. She was able to shield him from the art she bought that was offensive to him. With the museum itself, however, her organizing responsibilities were major, she had to see a lot of people, spend a lot of time on the telephone and at meetings, all of which took her attention away from him. We children, who had been his competition, were on our own now – presumably our needs were no longer a threat to him. But here was the museum, more complex than ever, demanding her energy, and it rankled.²⁶

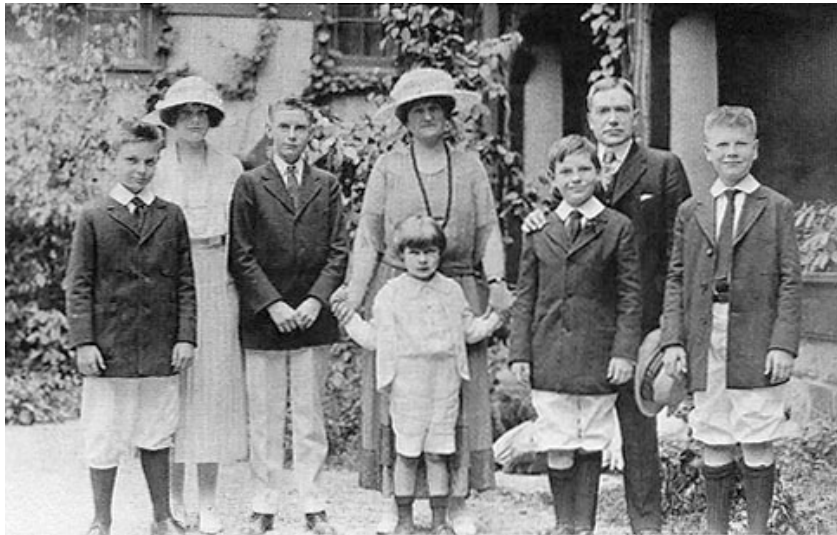


FIG. 3
Abby and John D. J.D. Rockefeller, Jr., with children in Seal Harbor, Maine
(1921)
Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

²⁵ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, May 15, 1912, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), from Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 142.

²⁶ Interview with David Rockefeller (Aug. 16, 1987 and Sept. 25, 1988), Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 419.

Junior's jealousy and insecurity continued throughout their life together. Even after twenty-one years of marriage he wrote her "Miss you . . . so sadly . . . need you so much . . . it seems as though you have been away from home for months," although she had only been gone one day.²⁷ They had already been married for over two decades but his desperation and reliance on Abby had not dissipated.

David recounted that all of the Rockefeller children grew up knowing that if they wanted any of their mother's time and attention, they would have to compete with their father for it. The Rockefeller children knew how much their mother loved them, but it was obvious that the conflict between their father's needs and their own caused her much anguish. David recalled that it was a never-ending struggle for her, the cause of great stress and it was something she was never able to resolve.²⁸

Reconciling Junior's Rejection of Modern Art and MoMA

Junior's implacable hostility to "Mother's Museum," as her sons would come to call it, defied all logic and reason for them because Abby had brought into his lonely, young manhood the love, affection, attention, and reassurance that became as essential to him as the air he breathed. If Junior perceived that her love and reassurance were diluted even in the slightest, as when she gave too much to the children or the museum, all he could think of was his own safety and survival.²⁹

²⁷ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, July 6, 1922 and July 8, 1922, Box 55, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Record Group 2, Rockefeller Family Files, Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁸ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 174.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

Junior's lack of support for MoMA was further complicated by the fact that he trusted Abby's judgment implicitly and admired her grasp of large issues important to him, so why did he refuse to lend his full support to a project that was so vitally important to her? In 1902, Junior was eager to establish a philanthropy to improve education for blacks in the south who lacked even one single high school. In honor of his father, Junior pledged \$1 million to be used during the next ten years for education, without any regard to gender or race of students.³⁰ The day after the first meeting on February 27, 1902, Junior wrote his father "Abby was the only woman present." Four months after they were married, the precedent was established that would be followed for the rest of his life as Junior continued to place great value on Abby's input on important issues.

He invited Abby to join him as part of the "block-aiders" under the command of the Block Community organization, an army of one hundred thousand volunteers in New York City to help families who were unemployed (a million people were without jobs in New York City during the Depression). She also went to the White House to accompany Junior when President Herbert Hoover called on national business leaders for advice.³¹ Abby was the "only woman present" in every critical decision he made. If he was reluctant to hand over miniscule daily household matters to her, he showed no reluctance whatsoever to exploit her shrewd understanding of large issues that affected society at large.³² If Junior trusted Abby's judgment, why would he not support her contention that it was vitally important to promote modern art in New York for both its citizens and visitors to enjoy?

Unlike Abby's other philanthropic endeavors such as the YWCA, MoMA was an overwhelming, all-consuming passion in which she was completely invested. For an anxious,

³⁰ John D. Rockefeller would fund the trust with \$129 million by 1921.

³¹ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 313.

³² *Ibid.*, 102.

insecure husband, this was too much to bear. Coupled with his profound insecurities and his loathing of having to share her with anything or anyone else, Abby's involvement in MoMA shook him to his core. Further, when Abby broke away from their partnership of collecting traditional art, it was something Junior could not support, and he resented her for it. Non-representational and avant-garde art – the art of her time - reached deep into her being, offering her excitement and challenges in a way that nothing else could, even being the matriarch of the wealthiest family in the United States.³³ Why, then, could her husband not support her needs for fulfillment outside of her family, when she was completely devoted to him and satisfied his every desire and need?

Turning attention to Junior's upbringing may help provide an explanation. Until the time he attended college at Brown University, life revolved around his family and the Baptist Church. His deeply religious mother, Laura Spellman Rockefeller, was a strict disciplinarian, the most influential person in his life who instilled in him a tremendous moral responsibility as the sole male heir and steward of the family's Standard Oil fortune. He was plagued with feelings of inadequacy because his father, John D. Rockefeller, Sr., had built a great fortune from nothing, but Junior never had an opportunity to do the same - to blaze his own trail in the business world.³⁴ Junior once described his brief stint as one of many vice-presidents at Standard Oil as "a race with my own conscience," and, in a sense, he was racing all his life to be worthy of his name and inheritance.³⁵

³³ Ibid., 215.

³⁴ Junior's profound insecurity was coupled with a severe bout of depression in his early thirties that prevented him from working for almost a year. When he retired from Standard Oil soon thereafter, he made it his life's mission to redeem the Rockefeller family name, sullied due to his father's much maligned monopolistic practices. Through prolific charitable and philanthropic endeavors in New York City and around the world, Junior attempted to bring honor back to the family name. Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 19.

³⁵ Ibid.

Although Abby and Junior enthusiastically began their collecting together, her taste eventually evolved from the traditional art her husband favored to art of her own time:

For many years my husband and I collected things of the past. I first started with Japanese prints and early American prints of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, and went on to Buddhistic art and European china and all sorts of very beautiful things that have been created in civilizations older than and different from ours. Constantly as I did this the thought came to me what do these things mean to the present and how will they affect the art and artists of today? Do they mean very much to our children and are they the sort of things they would be interested to keep and to live with? Gradually there developed in my mind the thought that probably the coming generation would neither be able to buy the sort of things that we had, nor would they be particularly interested to do so. So my thought turned to the art of the present, and those who were developing it. Finally it seemed clear to me that although many people and groups and dealers were doing a great deal for the encouragement of the painters and sculptors of this country, and although some museums did cooperate, the time had probably arrived when the United States should have museums of modern art such as Europe has had for many years, and that logically the place to begin was in New York.³⁶

Abby embraced her mission to look beyond art from the past, while her husband did not. While Abby was busy making plans for MoMA, her husband had become particularly interested in building monuments to bygone eras. Junior funded the restoration of Reims Cathedral at the end of World War I, and the palaces at Fontainebleau and Versailles. He also funded and developed The Cloisters for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, built the neo-Gothic Park Avenue Baptist Church, supervised completion of Riverside Church, and funded the revival of Colonial Williamsburg. Whether it involved new construction or the restoration of existing buildings, Rockefeller was determined to preserve or evoke the past.³⁷ Abby, however, was focused on cultivating the work of living artists, and embraced a future filled with possibilities waiting in the modern art world. Rather than donate large sums to support Abby's vision, a museum that would

³⁶ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to Conger Goodyear, March 23, 1936, Folder 105, Box 8, Correspondence, RG 2, Series I, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

³⁷ "The Old World for the New": Developing the Design for the Cloisters, Mary Rebecca Leuchak, *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 23 (1988), 258.

feature the work of progressive and modern artists, Junior donated millions of dollars to traditional art institutions and historic landmark projects.³⁸

Further, John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Puritan upbringing colored his view of modern artists and their work, and it was indeed a formidable barrier between his own traditional collecting, and Abby's desire for new, contemporary art. Modern art offended Junior's strong Christian sensibilities; he considered it an amoral enterprise, one with odd, sometimes erotic, exotic, and provocative images, all which riled his strong moral character.³⁹ He believed that the modern artist's desire for self-expression was irresponsible and self-indulgent, lacking in humility.

As suggested by art historian Frederick C. Moffatt, Junior might have been displeased by the aura of illicit sexuality that seemed to surround modern art because in his mind, the analogy quite possibly extended beyond descriptive references to genitalia and sexual play to the remarkably unrestrained artistic techniques employed and discipline seen in the painstaking work of, for example, the Chinese craftsmen who created the porcelains he treasured, the painting and sculpture of the Great Masters, or the work of other academically trained, conventional artists he collected. The modern artist's subversion of realism through their wild experimentation, slashes, and splotches on the surface of the canvas disturbed him greatly, despite Abby's efforts to encourage his interest in contemporary work. Junior was torn between Abby's way of viewing life, which had always brought him such exhilaration, and his mother's, whose strong religious influence would weigh heavily throughout his life: "My mother would say, 'we have always

³⁸ After years of negotiating between MoMA, Abby and Junior, he donated their home on West 54th street in 1937 for the museum's new building site, worth \$1 million. He also gave \$200,000 after a two-day negotiation with Abby towards the endowment fund to help secure the Bliss collection in 1933. When Abby finally had access to some funds later in their marriage, she was able to make larger donations to the museum, and after Abby's death, Junior donated \$4 million to MoMA in her memory. However, considering Junior was worth an estimated \$1 billion as well as having access to family foundation funds worth another \$500,000 million, these contributions seem paltry, especially when MoMA was financially struggling most of the time and Abby was its lead fundraiser.

³⁹ Frederick C. Moffatt, "Remembering Adam: George Grey Barnard, the John D. Rockefellers, and the Gender of Patronage," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), 70.

done this. Why should we do anything else?’ But my wife’s typical question was ‘. . . why not do it another way, or better still, why not do something else?’”⁴⁰

Abby curated her own modern art collection at home, a space relegated to the top floor of their townhome as Junior requested. Laurence Rockefeller tried to explain his father’s lack of enthusiasm for his mother’s passion project, “These were strange, irresponsible objects that she was bringing into his home. He did not approve of them.”⁴¹ With respect to her plans for a museum for modern art, Laurence stated, “She wanted a building for it, he would not oblige. Like the rest of us, she was on a tight string financially. So she did not have the money and she did not have the moral support.”⁴² Although John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was one of the wealthiest men in the world in 1929 (he was heir to the \$336 billion Standard Oil fortune and a devoted philanthropist, giving away \$537 million over his lifetime), he set up a fund for Abby’s art purchases of just \$25,000 per annum, although the budget was later doubled.

To maximize her purchasing power, Abby bought many small paintings and prints consistent with her art budget, and although some of them eventually became quite valuable, she missed out on some extraordinary opportunities to purchase larger, more important works of art. However, her inability to buy costly pieces from better-known artists yielded at least three positive results. First, with the help of friends and advisors like artist Arthur B. Davies and gallery owner Edith Halpert, Abby made informed purchasing decisions with her rather paltry art budget and her support of struggling artists whose work she could afford was crucial to the early growth of New York City’s modern art scene. Secondly, some of the small drawings and paintings she purchased for very little money and were passed over by other collectors have ultimately turned out to be enormously valuable. She collected small works by mostly American

⁴⁰ Mary Ellen Chase, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 130.

⁴¹ Interview with Laurence Rockefeller (June 11, 1987), Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 283.

⁴² *Ibid.*

and European artists including “Pop” Hart, Edward Hopper, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Max Weber, some of which skyrocketed in value after she bought them. Lastly, Abby amassed an enormous collection of prints and drawings, and donated 1600 prints from her private collection to MoMA, greatly enhancing the museum’s permanent print collection, one that eventually evolved into one of the museum’s premier study rooms, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room. Despite the humiliating financial restrictions placed upon her, her savvy purchasing proved prescient.

Philip Johnson, the postmodern architect and founder of the Department of Architecture and Design at MoMA, concluded that it must have been awful for Abby to be Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and not be able to make major art acquisitions for her own institution. “He was a bulldog,” said Johnson of Junior, “a very strong man, one who would say, ‘As my wife, you can do this and not that.’ The museum was her revolt all right. She had to do it.”⁴³ Some scholars have argued that perhaps Junior’s resistance to modern art girded Abby, so her interest became a rebellious and consuming interest.⁴⁴ Bernice Kert referred to Abby’s full-time occupation with MoMA as a mid-life crisis. She argued that Abby’s participation in an avant-garde, modern art movement that was so different from her orderly, restrained Rockefeller life must have brought her mischievous satisfaction.⁴⁵ A contrary opinion, however, is offered here that Abby’s involvement in modernism was far more than mere “mischievous satisfaction.” It was, rather, a liberation from her patriarchal marriage, one in which Junior did not support her efforts due to his profound insecurities, resentment of the time it took her away from him, and his aversion to contemporary art. Despite her husband’s lack of enthusiastic support, Abby needed to achieve

⁴³ Philip Johnson interview by Bernice Kert (June 11, 1987), Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 283.

⁴⁴ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women’s Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) 200.

⁴⁵ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 288.

and sustain a selfhood outside of and beyond traditional marriage, and her personal art collecting and her plans for MoMA were the passions that fueled this need.

If Abby Aldrich Rockefeller could not fully partner with her husband on a path towards modernism, she was determined to seek out others who would. In the chapters that follow, three of her most important partners will be profiled: Edith Halpert, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, and David Rockefeller, all individuals who were progressive aesthetic partners and who were all passionate about embracing the art of their time. They all facilitated, in different ways and at different times, Abby's vision to transform New York into a city that would become the cultural capital for modernism.

Chapter Two: Partners and Promoters of American Modernism: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Edith Halpert

Edith Gregor Halpert (1900-1970) was vital in Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's aesthetic transformation although rarely recognized as such. Their intriguing friendship, and their collaboration to further American modernism will be the focus of this chapter.

Abby's aesthetic evolution can be attributed, in part, to Halpert and the influence of other close advisors and aesthetes in whom she found progressive partners who cultivated her enthusiastic embrace of modern art, and also inspired her to build a museum to house it. Arthur Davies was a central figure in this group of aesthetes and Abby would seek his approval before making art purchases. He would go to galleries (including Halpert's) at Abby's request to consider paintings she wanted to purchase to proclaim them worthy, or not, of inclusion in her collection. The notion that Davies was one of Abby's most influential art advisors can be derived, in part, from a condolence letter sent by Abby to Davies's son after her friend's sudden death in Italy in 1928:

I have just read with very deep sorrow in the morning paper of the death of your father. I had for him the deepest admiration, and altho [sic.] I had known him only for a few years, I felt a very real affection for him. I feel that I owe to him a very great deal, because he inspired and encouraged me to acquire modern paintings, and without the confidence which his approval gave me I should have never dared venture into the field of modern art.⁴⁶

However, when Abby was asked by MoMA's first president, Conger Goodyear, to share her recollections about the origin of MoMA as background for a book, *The Museum of Modern Art: The First Ten Years*, Abby revealed how her aesthetic transformation and vision for MoMA was shaped and nurtured by several key individuals and Davies, although mentioned in passing,

⁴⁶ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to Arthur David Davies, December 18, 1928, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives 2, AAR Series B10.

was not cited as one of them. It is posited here that perhaps Abby was reluctant to acknowledge Davies's significance because after his death, his secret double life was revealed, one in which he had two wives (one legal and one common-law) for twenty-five years, and had children by both. The circumstances of his death were also mysterious. Newspapers pounced on the fact that notice of his death was announced *seven* weeks after he had passed (Davies had died in the apartment of his common-law wife, Edna Potter, whom he had settled in Italy but both wives, Virginia Davies and Edna, fashioned details for the newspaper notices claiming that his death was caused by a sudden heart attack brought on by mountain climbing while sketching.)⁴⁷ Although Abby hosted a commemorative exhibit of Davies's work almost immediately after his death, it is suggested here that perhaps when asked to recount her influences for MoMA eight years later, she excluded him for fear of re-opening his scandalous double-life.

There were other individuals listed in Abby's letter who propelled her foray into modern art. Her ambitions were fueled by the opinions and encouragement of friends and associates, including Howard Mansfield, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, William Reinhold Valentiner, Director of the Detroit Museum, and Martin A. Ryerson, Vice President of the Art Institute of Chicago. Abby also listed Lee Simonson, a prominent theater designer, Forbes Watson, an art critic and arts administrator, and Edward Harkness, one of America's wealthiest philanthropists. Among these men, Abby notes the significance of two:

I should say that the men who helped me the most were Mr. Ryerson, in whose judgment I had the greatest confidence, and Mr. Valentiner, who was struggling at the time to have modern art shown in Detroit, and whom I happened to meet in Europe the summer before I called that first meeting in New York.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Perlman, 361.

⁴⁸ AAR to Conger Goodyear, March 23, 1936, Folder 105, Box 8, Correspondence, RG 2, Series I, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives.

Although Abby specifically designated that Martin Ryerson and William Valentiner were the “men who helped me the most,” very little has been documented about either the genesis or nature of these relationships. There has been no indication in the historiography of how Abby and Ryerson knew each other or how their paths crossed, and very little has been documented about Abby and Valentiner’s relationship.

Martin A. Ryerson (1856-1932) hailed from Chicago, was heir to a successful lumber business, and is probably most recognized today for his involvement at the University of Chicago (co-founded and funded in 1890 by John D. Rockefeller) where he served on the Board of Trustees from 1892-1922. Ryerson was also a passionate art collector and served a trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Field Museum of Natural History, and his knowledge of art was said to be that of a connoisseur.⁴⁹ Upon his death in 1932, Ryerson bequeathed to the Art Institute a spectacular collection of French Impressionists (including five paintings by Renoir and sixteen paintings by Monet) and an extraordinary group of Old Master paintings.⁵⁰ Ryerson also served as a trustee on the Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, whose mission was, and remains, the promotion of the well being of humanity on a global scale.⁵¹

It is speculated here that Ryerson’s involvement at both the University of Chicago and the Rockefeller Foundation led he and his wife, Caroline Ryerson, to form extremely close friendships with both John D. Rockefeller and Laura Spellman Rockefeller, and later Junior and Abby. The sparse correspondence that exists reflects two generations of families who cared deeply for one another for forty years until Ryerson’s death in 1932. As Junior wrote to Ryerson in October of 1931:

⁴⁹ Building for a Long Future: The University of Chicago and its Donors, 1889-1930. <http://www.lib.edu/e/webexhibits/building/ryerson.html>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The Rockefeller Foundation, <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org>.

With what joy do we look back over the years and recall the happy relationship which the Rockefellers have had with the Ryersons for much more than a quarter of a century. During all these years, you and Mrs. Ryerson, have cheered, inspired and charmed your friends. I well remember the affectionate terms in which my dear Mother always spoke of you, and my wife has been happy that you have permitted the mantle of friendship to fall upon her shoulders.⁵²

Ryerson also proved himself to be an authority on the modern conception of what museums were as seen in correspondence to Junior in which he gives advice regarding the Rockefeller Foundation's affiliation with Museums of Art and Natural History in Chicago.⁵³ Although there is no archived correspondence between Abby and Ryerson, letters between Junior and Ryerson reflect remembrances of long trips the couples took together. Those trips could have been opportunities, arguably, in which Abby may have been influenced by Ryerson's great knowledge of various artists, movements, museum building and museum administration. Bernice Kert writes that Abby accompanied her husband for the official opening of the Peking Union Medical College, built and endowed by the Rockefeller Foundation under John's direction.⁵⁴ Although not noted by Kert, the ship's manifest lists Martin A. Ryerson, travelling in his official capacity as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation.⁵⁵ The trip lasted several months, providing plenty of time in which Ryerson and Abby could have conversed about many subjects, including art and museums. Abby's high opinion of Ryerson encouraged MoMA to ask him to join the museum's Board of Trustees eight years later, but he declined due to his advancing age and the distance of the museum from his home in Chicago.⁵⁶

⁵² Letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to Martin A. Ryerson, dated October 25, 1931, Folder 1401, Box 182, Series H: Friends and Services, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁵³ Letter from Martin A. Ryerson to John D. Rockefeller, dated May 13, 1919, Folder 257, Box 25, Series O: Rockefeller Boards, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Archive Center

⁵⁴ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 191.

⁵⁵ "Notable Passengers, Empress of Asia - August 18, 1921." <http://www.empressofasia.com/index.htm>

⁵⁶ Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern; an Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Athenaeum: 1973), 18.

William Valentiner (1880-1958) was one of the preeminent scholars, collectors and museum directors of the twentieth century. Originally from Germany, he was appointed, with J.P. Morgan's backing, as Curator of Decorative Arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art before World War I, and later headed the Detroit Institute of Arts from 1924-1945. He also held positions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the North Carolina Museum of Art from 1955 until his death in 1958.⁵⁷ Valentiner became a major force in the development of American museum collections, the organization of major loan exhibitions, art publications and, not least, the encouragement and patronage of the most significant and creative forms of contemporary artistic expression. He was the highly visible and exemplary link with the great German museological tradition begun by Humboldt, combining systematic knowledge with keen intuitive and optimistic instincts, qualities essential for a museum director of the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁸

Although an expert in medieval and Renaissance art and seventeenth-century Dutch art, it was Valentiner's greatest hope to see a flourishing of art in his own time. He used modern art as the basis for the study of all art, in contrast to other art historians of the period who judged all other work by the narrow tenet of their specialized field, and it was this unique practice which caused him to reject specialization in any one field and to turn his attention to the whole history of art from its beginning up to the present.⁵⁹

Valentiner had close friendships with many prominent American collectors, who relied on him for his judgment and advice including J.P. Morgan, Edsel Ford, V.E. Macy, William

⁵⁷ Sherman E. Lee, Review of *The Passionate Eye: The Life of William R. Valentiner*, by Margaret Sterne, (Art Libraries Society of North America Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 1: Dec. 1980), 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner. *Masterpieces of Art: In Memory of William R. Valentiner, 1880-1958, Representing His Achievements during Fifty Years of Service in American Museums, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, April 6-May 17, 1959* (Raleigh, NC: Museum: 1959), xvii.

Randolph Hearst, and both John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby.⁶⁰ For Abby, Valentiner's friendship must have eased tensions at home because unlike her other progressive friends, he was embraced by her husband who relied on Valentiner's advice during the design and building of The Cloisters in Fort Tyron Park, his own museum project for The Metropolitan Museum.⁶¹ Valentiner's traditional training was likely reassuring to Junior, who continued to reject Abby's embrace of anything unconventional.

In 1923, Valentiner joined Abby and her travelling party in Europe where he realized she was ready to advance further in her collecting (prior to this time, she was collecting work by American modernists like Charles Demuth and Arthur Davies) so he introduced her to the raw power of German expressionist paintings and prints which she began collecting. He would often call upon Abby when he was in Manhattan, participated in lectures hosted at her upstairs gallery, and she was always eager to meet with him about what was going on in the world of contemporary art and seek out his advice for problems that would arise at MoMA.⁶² Valentiner also functioned as an art dealer on Abby's behalf, and would buy modern prints that enriched her collection and she, in turn, would often lend her friend pieces from her personal collection when he needed to supplement exhibitions he was mounting in Detroit⁶³. Their relationship was a close personal and artistic association, one that they mutually benefitted from that lasted for almost twenty-five years. An excerpt from Valentiner's condolence letter sent after Abby's death reflects not only his affection for her but just how vitally important he thought she was to

⁶¹ Mary Rebeca Leuchak, "The Old World for the New": Developing the Design for the Cloisters: 262.

⁶² Abby Aldrich Rockefeller telegram to W.R. Valentiner, April 7, 1931 and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to W.R. Valentiner, December 6, 1929. Reels 272-276, Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner papers, Correspondence, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶³ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to W.R. Valentiner, June 5, 1930, Reels 272-276, Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner papers, Correspondence, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

the art world: “To have known Mrs. Rockefeller belongs to my most precious memories, as I do not know of anyone who has done so much for art and culture of our age than she.”⁶⁴

Despite Abby’s close affiliations with both Ryerson and Valentiner, and her contention in her letter to Goodyear that they were “the men who helped her the most” in devising her plans for MoMA, what is arguably more compelling is the startling exclusion of her close friend and pioneering Greenwich Village art dealer, Edith Gregor Halpert. This omission necessitates a revisiting of their relationship in which an argument will be made that Halpert was arguably *the* most important artistic mentor and advisor in Abby’s quest to build a museum for modern art. Halpert was instrumental in forming Abby’s taste, her personal art collecting, and her patronage of struggling American artists. She also generated a written proposal, at Abby’s request, detailing her own vision for a museum in New York to house the work of living artists. Further, she shaped Abby’s aesthetic preferences and art collecting (and, therefore, MoMA’s) through the promotion of American folk art, or as Halpert classified it, “American ancestors,” which she argued helped bridge modern American art with some of the most vital elements of art crafted in the early American tradition. Although Diane Tepfer, Halpert’s biographer, acknowledges that Abby rarely publicly recognized Halpert’s role as her advisor, she does not speculate why. Various theories will be offered in this chapter about why Abby rarely recognized Halpert’s profound influence on her contemporary and folk art collecting, plans for MoMA, and the subsequent introduction of folk art and its link to a modernist canon.

Halpert’s exclusion may be attributed to Abby’s conscious (or subconscious) bias with respect to Halpert’s profession and social status in New York. Or were the opinions of others regarding her young friend and dealer a deterring factor in Abby’s retelling? The individuals

⁶⁴ Letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. from William R. Valentiner, April 2, 1948, Box 33, Folder 301, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center.

listed in Abby's letter were all elites, and were likely individuals whom John D. Rockefeller, Jr. associated with in some way and approved of. However, the same cannot be said for Edith Halpert, the attractive, brash, immigrant art dealer, whom John D. Rockefeller Jr. objected to on moral grounds and whom MoMA's brilliant young executive director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., did not hold in particularly high regard either. Perhaps their opinions factored into Abby's thinking when constructing an historical account of MoMA.

It may be entirely plausible that John D. Rockefeller, Jr. helped Abby draft, or at least reviewed, her letter to Goodyear. Although there is only a scant amount of correspondence from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. concerning MoMA, it appears that he did involve himself in matters if they had the potential to negatively affect Abby's - and, thus, the Rockefeller family's - reputation. It is possible, then, that Abby excluded Halpert from the Goodyear letter because of her husband's prejudices against Halpert. Abby's references to refined and morally upstanding elites and aesthetes would have certainly pleased her husband, and their inclusion in MoMA's history and their association with Abby would be something he certainly would have approved of.

Thus, Abby's 1936 letter to Goodyear recounting her recollections on the origins of MoMA and her own aesthetic evolution is likely a document that was carefully, strategically, and, even, politically crafted, because Abby was likely acutely aware of her audience and the place her letter would have in the historical canon of MoMA. Is it possible, then, that the inclusion of elite men and her wealthy female co-founders, Lillian P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan, underscores both the political and gender parameters that existed at MoMA?

According to Halpert's oral history (from which much of this research is drawn), she believed her active involvement in Abby's life was vital to the establishment of the museum.

This chapter will consider why Edith Halpert was rarely given her public due by Abby, which seems particularly distressing since she is now considered an icon of modernism – a key player in the movement who shaped the way in which both American contemporary and folk art made its way onto the walls of both private and public collections.

The Downtown Girl and Her Gallery

Edith Gregor Halpert (born Edith Gregoryevna Fivoosiovitch) emigrated from the Ukraine to the United States in 1906 as a penniless Jewish immigrant, but she departed this world not only as a multi-millionaire, but left an even more valuable legacy as a pioneering art dealer, promoter and collector of progressive and modern American artists. Halpert worked tirelessly to promote the work of American living artists and is now lauded for her groundbreaking efforts due to the Downtown Gallery's success, her own important art collection, and her loans of contemporary art work by American artists to museums that otherwise refused to exhibit them.



FIG. 4
Photograph of Edith Halpert (ca. 1930)
By Man Ray, Downtown Gallery Records
Courtesy of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

In 1920, women had just been granted the right to vote in federal elections and Edith Halpert, like many American women, began to experience a new freedom in her life. After successful jobs in advertising at Stern Brothers Department Store, and later work as an efficiency expert at Manhattan investment firms, Halpert founded the Downtown Gallery in 1926, at the age of twenty-six, wasting no time in expressing her personal liberation and upending earlier societal mores.⁶⁵

Halpert chose New York's Greenwich Village for her gallery, rather than a site uptown where most of her competitors were located, because the Village had been a place since well before the 1913 Armory Show that was the global capital of modernity and facilitated debate about its meaning. She knew the Village was a place where a vital bohemian culture thrived, and by the mid-1920s, it had the added reputation of becoming a tourist destination, thanks in large part to the forbidden allure of its many speakeasies. It was a place, according to historian Casey Nelson Blake, where a multitude of subjects including sexuality, art, and politics, had always been freely discussed and given purpose and perspective within a new context of modernity.⁶⁶ Free expression and stimulating conversations could be found at various clubs, speakeasies and salons throughout the Village. Halpert loved escorting her uptown clients to speakeasies and nightclubs for shock value and to show off the tantalizing exploits of the Village.

⁶⁵ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), 61.

⁶⁶ Casey Nelson Blake, "Greenwich Village Modernism: The Essence of It All Was Communication," in *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, ed. by Marilyn Satin Kushner, Kimberly Orcutt and Casey Nelson Blake (New York: New York Historical Society, 2013), 86.



FIG. 5
Entrance to the Downtown Gallery and The American Folk Art Gallery (ca. 1938)
Reginald Marsh (1898-1954)
Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

Halpert's focus at the Downtown Gallery differed from the prevailing ethos of other New York dealers. While the overwhelming majority of galleries were owned by men peddling post-Impressionist and modern European art, Halpert, a young woman operating in a male-dominated art world, passionately advocated on behalf of, and sold exclusively, the work of living American artists, who were considered second-rate when compared to their European

contemporaries. American modernists were handled only by a few other galleries and rarely, if ever, shown in museum settings. Halpert's Downtown Gallery introduced or showcased American artists whose work could not be exhibited elsewhere in the city. She offered artists opportunities to create and sell under the best conditions possible and many of them would go on to become the old masters of American Art. The artists whom she knew, assisted or represented including Stuart Davies, Charles Sheeler, Georgia O'Keefe, Arthur Dove, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, John Marin, Max Weber, Ben Shahn, William Zorach and many others, constitute a litany which no exhibition of twentieth century American art can fail to recite.⁶⁷ Halpert's biographer, Diane Tepfer, has suggested that Halpert preached a form of cultural nationalism in devoting her life to the cause of the American artists. Such a passion – Halpert's unbridled devotion to promote American art – would appeal to Abby, who believed deeply in American creativity. The fact that Halpert was a woman making her way in a man's world would also appeal to her.⁶⁸

Halpert's Downtown Gallery had many wealthy patrons including Edsel Ford, Paul Mellon, and Olga Guggenheim, but wealth alone did not impress her. If a collector was not as passionate about learning and supporting American art as Halpert was, she wanted nothing to do with them, turning away hefty commissions. She despised wealthy collectors who were merely buying for investment purposes, instead preferring to encourage emerging collectors by offering pieces at low prices, hoping to broaden the base for American art collecting. Halpert even assisted beginning collectors by arranging installment payment plans, without charging interest, when necessary. Yet it was Halpert's rich and influential clientele who ultimately were the most important actors in the achievement of broadening the base for modernism through their

⁶⁷ Avis Berman, "Pioneers in American Museums: Edith Halpert," *Museum News* (1975), 24.

⁶⁸ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 254.

powerful positions as private collectors, and trustees and benefactors of art museums, institutions and public galleries.

Fortunately for Halpert, there were no collectors as passionate about contemporary American art than Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The story of their first meeting reflects Halpert's frank, irreverent, and independent spirit, qualities that Abby found refreshing. They met indirectly through the well-known architect, Duncan Candler, who had become a regular at the Downtown Gallery for both Halpert's friendship, outings together to their favorite speakeasy, and art purchases (as well as, unbeknownst to Halpert, the procurement of art and furniture on behalf of his client, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller).⁶⁹

Halpert was mounting an exhibit entitled "Landscape Experiments," and was in desperate need of a painting by Winslow Homer, already widely acknowledged to be a major American artist, to include in the display. Candler told Halpert that one of his clients owned a Homer watercolor and that she could borrow it for the landscape exhibition, but it would have to be displayed anonymously. Halpert smartly hung the Homer watercolor, *Shark Fishing*, between two more watercolors by modernists John Marin (1873-1953) and William Zorach (1887-1966), so that old and new were juxtaposed in stark contrast. Critics and patrons admired the thirty works displayed at the show, with special praise offered for the modern works, but the Homer was constantly singled out. Halpert received offers for Homer's *Shark Fishing*, with some of the highest ranging from \$10,000 to \$14,000 (most of the pieces in the Downtown Gallery could be bought for a few hundred dollars). Halpert enthusiastically encouraged Candler to try to get his anonymous client to sell *Shark Fishing* so she could earn her ten percent commission, which would be substantial. However, she was determined that the triad of the landscapes by Zorach,

⁶⁹ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 85.

Marin and Homer stay together, and declined offers of patrons desirous of either the Zorach or the Marin and repeatedly said "By golly, I'm going to make this idiot who won't take ten thousand dollars for the picture buy these two and keep it as a unit."⁷⁰ One day during the exhibit, a woman arrived at the Downtown Gallery admiring the Homer and the modern paintings by Zorach and Marin. As Halpert recounts:

One afternoon a woman came in, very prim, very respectable looking and so on. She looked expensive. She said, "What is the price of that Marin?" I said, "Seven hundred and fifty dollars." "What's the price of the Zorach?" I said, "Two hundred and fifty dollars." She said, "I'd like to take them." I said, "Oh, no, Madame, I'm sorry. I will not break up that trio. I'm waiting for that idiot who owns the Homer to come in."

She looked up and said, "I'm that idiot!"

Candler had told her that I wouldn't sell those two pictures to anybody, but the "idiot," and I had to repeat it to her! Well, when she said, "I am the idiot!," all I wanted to do was die but quickly. . . It was the most terrible experience I've ever had in my life to that time. She patted me on the shoulder and said, "That's all right."

From then on she became a very permanent and steady collector and she said, "This idiot also owns a great many prints that came from your gallery."⁷¹

The "idiot," of course, was Candler's client, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and, despite their awkward first encounter at the Downtown Gallery, a close friendship, mentorship, business relationship, and artistic partnership soon developed between Abby and Halpert, women of different ages and backgrounds, but with a common goal: to see the work of living artists be promoted, purchased, and displayed in homes, galleries, and museums, and for a permanent museum for modern art to be built in Manhattan, similar to those that existed in Europe (particularly, the Luxembourg in Paris). Their close bond may have been puzzling or troubling to

⁷⁰ Edith Halpert, interview by Harlan Phillips, New York, NY, 1962-1963. *Archives of American Art*. Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-Halpert-gregor-halpert-13220>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

some, like Abby's husband, but Abby had often aligned herself with talented, dynamic, independent young women. In a speech given before a group of young women in 1927 (just a year before she met Halpert), Abby remarked, "I like the looks of the young women I meet. Being naturally frank myself, I am not shocked by the lack of reserve that one notices in their conversations. I am delighted that [they] are having a chance to express themselves."⁷²

Both Abby and Halpert were deeply concerned that museums in New York City did not exhibit or collect the work of living American artists. Abby particularly lamented the long period between creation and appreciation of art (her son, David Rockefeller, recalls that his mother often cited the tragic case of Vincent Van Gogh, who died penniless and whose work was not celebrated until well after his death). Although other like-minded individuals like Katherine Dreier and her Société Anonyme lobbied for a museum to display modern art, in terms of institutions with real power to shape public taste, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was the only art institution in New York that had the platform, power and funds to do it. Curators and trustees at the Metropolitan, however, were not interested in contemporary art and had a particular distaste for anything provincial (i.e., American). Though Halpert begged the Metropolitan's curators to assist artists who were still alive, she got little response. Finally, in 1932, she managed to sell the museum two paintings by turning to Nelson Rockefeller, then twenty-four years old, who had been named to the Metropolitan's Board of Trustees. Nelson's opinion carried weight and he was already, thanks to Abby, thoroughly enamored of modern art. Thanks to Nelson's efforts, the Metropolitan purchased from Edith Halpert paintings by Bernard Karfiol and Glenn Coleman. Both works were figurative and relatively conservative, but it was a start and one about which Halpert was very enthusiastic. However, her enthusiasm proved to be

⁷² Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 90.

premature. The Metropolitan remained unmoved and uninterested in the new and untested, nor did the curators feel any special obligations to support the fledgling local gallery scene.⁷³

Halpert believed she was responsible for her most important client's mobilization of her friends and other leaders to found the Museum of Modern Art, and, in doing so, realized a variation of Halpert's own dreams for an institution (or part of an institution) in New York City devoted to contemporary American art.⁷⁴ Abby had acquired an intense devotion to the promotion of contemporary artists and asked her friend to submit a proposal for a new museum. According to Halpert, Abby had asked her to document in writing her plans for a museum of modern art. Halpert wrote:

I shall not go into the needs for such a collection in our metropolis – the logical art center of this country. Nor shall I dwell on the benefits to be derived by the public and the artists. Nor shall I point out how prestige would be added to us, in the eyes of the world . . . Many plans have been 'evolved' for a "Luxembourg" – good, bad and indifferent plans. None of these have been sufficiently practical to be put into effect. My idea, therefore, is to reduce such a plan to a scale small enough to be experimental, yet important enough to serve as a solid groundwork for future development.

1. that a committee of ten women art collectors, interested in American art be formed.
2. That each contributes a sum of \$10,000 annually for a purchase and maintenance fund to be applied toward the acquisition of Paintings, Sculpture, Drawings, and Prints – by LIVING AMERICAN ARTISTS.
3. That the expenditure of the annual total (\$100,000) be supervised by the committee, so that the selection might be personal and limited to those actually contributing the funds and ideas.
4. that this living collection be housed within the walls of our own Metropolitan Museum of Art . . . in a room assigned by the Museum for this purpose, and over which it would have no control, and would carry no responsibilities for any "mistakes."

⁷³ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 108.

⁷⁴ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery, downtown: 1926-1940: a study in American art patronage* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1929), 145.

5. that the directors of the Metropolitan Museum be given the privilege of selecting from this collection at fixed intervals works acceptable for the permanent collection (Louvre) – thus making room for additional acquisitions in the Contemporary American Room.

6. that this room be open to all those who visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the study of art of all times and countries, including our time and our country.

To me it seems fitting that women should foster this plan. Tradition points to greater courage in women toward reform and new ideas . . . Women have more time to devote to the arts as can be judged from the attendance at all art functions. . . . That the Metropolitan Museum officials may frown upon this idea at first is not at all unlikely. However, for the reasons I mentioned to you some months ago, when I first broached the subject, I have little doubt that they will cooperate with the committee of ten women, who are prepared to stimulate and to support the creative efforts of our native artists. What do you think of the idea?⁷⁵

It is not surprising that Halpert structured her museum plans around the involvement of forward thinking, art-loving, and art-consuming women. After the 1913 Armory Show, the majority of collectors of progressive, abstract, and avant-garde painting and sculpture were women, as were most of the Downtown Gallery's best clients, including Edith Wetmore, Mary Sullivan, Olga Guggenheim, and, of course, Abby. Halpert believed in the power of women to fight for change and to make a difference as she continually searched for ways to make a difference in the lives and reputations of contemporary American artists. To this end, she worked with MoMA from its very inception by facilitating loans of American art by both her gallery and her clients for the museum's exhibitions. Although MoMA's early founders did not adopt Halpert's plans, her championing of women to launch a museum for modern art, her tireless efforts on behalf of American living artists, and her crafting of an early scheme for a new museum at the request of Abby, led Edith Halpert to believe that *she* was absolutely vital in the museum's creation:

⁷⁵ Edith Gregor Halpert to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, June 5, 1929, Downtown Gallery records, Archives of *American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.

The Modern Museum opened in 1929, and the Whitney opened in 1930, or 1931... the Whitney was furious with me *because I was responsible -- quite responsible for the modern Museum*. . . I kept talking to Mrs. Rockefeller about it, and she got her friends, Mrs. Sullivan, Edith Wetmore, and so on, and I suggested that it be done entirely by women.⁷⁶ (Emphasis added.)

When attempting to reconcile Halpert's own proprietary interests and emotional investment in American modernism with Abby's reluctance to acknowledge her as an important influence (despite the artistic authority she wielded in Abby's collection of contemporary American, and, later, American folk art), it may be useful to consult Halpert's oral history in developing some plausible theories for her exclusion.

Edith Halpert reveals herself to be a frank, irreverent and often highly amusing raconteur. Her recollections reveal serious social spaces that were difficult to navigate in the 1920s and 1930s. Throughout Halpert's commentary, there are no less than fifty-nine references to the "rich" the dealer sold art to, and her comments are often disparaging. She contended that her wealthy clients almost all shared the same fear of being taken advantage of because of their financial status and the assumption that they could pay more for art due to their greater purchasing power. However, she also quite tellingly reveals that they (the rich) "deserve that kind of punishment" (the fear of being taking advantage of) and argued that even if they overpaid occasionally, it was all right because they were still getting artwork they desired.⁷⁷ It is no

⁷⁶ Edith Gregor Halpert interview by Harlan Phillips, New York, NY (1962-1963), *Archives of American Art*. Smithsonian Institution, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-edith-gregor-halpert-13220>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

doubt an interesting rationalization – that her wealthier clients should not mind overpaying for art because of their privileged status - and is a sentiment that reeks of biting the many wealthy hands that fed her. Halpert’s disapproval of the “rich” throughout her oral history is indeed indicative of a deep class divide, a rift of which she was acutely aware and vehemently resented.

There is a particularly revealing encounter, which reinforces the notion that despite their close bond, both Halpert and Abby were acutely aware of the challenges in social spaces and settings dominated by New York’s upper class, where social distinctions were magnified, rather than blurred. The incident occurred when Halpert wore an evening dress to a Rockefeller dinner party, one that was custom designed by the French artist and fashion designer, Sonia Delaunay.

As Halpert recalls:

Lizzie Bliss... looked at me, and she said, "Is that a Delaunay frock?" I said, "Yes." I thought to myself, "How in the world would she know a poor little dress maker?!" About a half hour later Mrs. Sullivan came over, and she said, "Is that a Delaunay dress?" Well, this occurred about four times. I thought that it was very strange, and I could feel, but very strongly, that it was the wrongest thing I could have worn. ...Mrs. Rockefeller asked me to lunch on Tuesday to talk about some purchases, or whatever, or the gallery, whatever it was....I arrived and Mrs. Rockefeller said, "Oh, Mrs. Halpert, you look so charming. Is that a Delaunay dress?" I said, "What does that mean. The night before last all the women came over and said, 'Isn't that a Delaunay frock?' Is there something wrong about my wearing a Delaunay frock?" She said, "Well, you know, Miss Bliss has talked for years about getting a Delaunay coat, and she just couldn't afford it." I looked at her and said, "Well, that's too damn bad!" I sat there, and I thought about it, and I said, "Well, I won't tell you what I paid, but she was a friend of mine. I did not know that she was this great designer. She told me that she was a dress maker and she made these clothes for me at a price that I could afford."

Then I got up, and I said, "I don't think I'll have lunch... I won't tell you how much I paid, but suppose I had paid twenty-five dollars for this dress. Would that still be wrong?" "Well," she said, "Delaunay clothes are something only a few people can afford." We had already sat down at this lunch table, so I said, "Would you excuse me if I left now.... I shouldn't be having lunch here. I'm a woman in trade. It just occurred to me that that is what everybody resented. At first I thought they resented me because I was so much younger and presumably better looking because -- you know, they just didn't like that kind of competition around, but at this point I realize that it is a matter of class distinction. I was poor

white trash. I was a trades woman. I had no right to compete with the rich. Good bye.” And I stormed out...

I'm very grateful for all those things because that distinction has never been eliminated with those people. Of all my experiences with the rich, this didn't embarrass me. It infuriated me. I mean, after all, it's none of their damn business! But I realized what it was, and it was that. When she called me and asked whether she could come down, she said, "I'm afraid you were right. I suppose that it is bad taste to go out of your financial class." I said, "How do you know I'm not hoarding money. Look at all the money I've made on you. I made ten percent on a hundred and eighty dollar sculpture. I made eighteen dollars on that Matisse, didn't I?" She said, "Stop that! Let's forget it!"⁷⁸

Halpert's story is interesting for several reasons. First, in the few historical works on Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (and as seen in her own archived correspondence), she is portrayed as a woman with a velvet touch, someone who very deftly and delicately made people of all social ranks feel comfortable in her presence, despite her great fortune and the intimidating, oil-rich, Rockefeller name. There is nothing noted in the historiography or her archived papers to show that Abby ever engaged in any kind of social privileging; in fact, her actions and words indicate quite the opposite to be true. Abby had a generous spirit, and was known for patronizing and providing funds for struggling artists. She was beloved by museum and household staff, and acted as an effective peacekeeper between MoMA's trustees and its often-fragile Executive Director, Alfred Barr. If Halpert is to be believed when she recalls Abby's statement, "I suppose that it is bad taste to go out of your financial class," it appears not only to be unapologetic, but confirmation, indeed, of a deep class divide between the two friends and one in which Abby Aldrich Rockefeller was clearly on top.

Is it plausible, then, to posit that one of the reasons Abby neglected to publicly recognize Halpert's influence was because of her dealer's lower social standing? Abby's letter to Goodyear

⁷⁸ Edith Gregor Halpert interview by Harlan Phillips, New York, NY (1962-1963), *Archives of American Art*. Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-edith-gregor-halpert-13220>.

listing her influences only recognizes prominent, wealthy individuals or aesthetes who had attained a certain social status in the art world, so perhaps Halpert's inclusion in the Museum's history would have ruffled a few feathers not only with Alfred Barr and others within the MoMA family, but also in her own.

The presumption of class discrimination, coupled with allegations about Halpert's supposed immoral behavior, may have contributed to Abby's unwillingness to publicly acknowledge her friend's influence. As Halpert recalls:

All the dealers wrote to Mrs. Rockefeller and said that I was immoral. I slept with every customer. God forbid! Most of them were women in the first place! Frank Wren, [J.B.] Neuman -- they all wrote letters to Mrs. Rockefeller saying that I was immoral, that I had no children and all that sort of stuff, that I had been married for so many years, and the like, and she spoke to me. I saw all the letters. ... Anna Kelly who was her secretary said... "Look what they do to you. They try to murder you." She showed me the letters, and I read every one of them.... I handed them back to her and I said, "I survived, didn't I?"

Mrs. Rockefeller said, "John is very disturbed about my collecting modern art." "Oh, yes. You've told me that many, many times." He made it very clear. He called me a "devastating influence in the house!" I said, "I knew that." She said, "Now, I want to ask you something. ... you've been married a good many years, and you have no children." I said, "May I tell you that it's none of your damn business, Mrs. Rockefeller?" She was very startled. She said, "No artists have children, and John thinks that all of you are leading a very immoral life."

Then he decided that it was very immoral, that these people, these artists were leading an immoral life that he was aiding and abetting free love and gin drinking. He withdrew the support for American art.⁷⁹

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s contention that Halpert and her cadre of modern artists were leading immoral lives in part because of their lack of children acknowledges his fervent religiosity, one in which children embodied a godliness and holiness that aided them in becoming important contributors in advancing a civilized and godly society. His derision also reveals how isolated he was from the often insurmountable battles that American artists faced during the bleak days of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

the Depression. Arshile Gorky, according to his wife, described the Depression years as “the bleakest, most spirit-crushing period of his life,” and bitterly recalled “the futility of such paralyzing poverty for the artist.”⁸⁰ Artists struggled to keep their own bodies, mental faculties and talent alive during the dark days of the Depression. Those artists who had children, of course, faced an even more perilous existence trying to provide additional funds to ensure their families survived.

Despite her husband’s protestations, Abby became Halpert’s best client and a regular visitor to the Downtown Gallery. She realized that the Village was a freewheeling, vital, and highly social cultural scene, and in what can be considered an exercise in mischievous rebellion, Abby begged Halpert to take her to one of the Village’s many speakeasies. Halpert made Abby solemnly promise not to share their plans with her teetotaling husband, to which Abby replied, “Good Lord, I wouldn’t dream of telling him. This will have to be the greatest secret from him.”⁸¹ (Indeed, it would have been a huge embarrassment to the Rockefellers if Abby was spotted at a speakeasy since the family was noted in the *New York Times* July 7, 1926 edition as leading the list of donations to the Dry League.) Despite Abby’s understandable uneasiness, Halpert set the date and arrived at a popular speakeasy in the Village, Julius’s, at 4:00 p.m., before the serious drinking started. As Halpert tells it, things did not go exactly as planned when the mischievous duo arrived at Julius’s:

....just as we were getting to the door, she suddenly grabbed my arm, ran out, and I followed her, and she said, "I don't know what happened to me! I don't know what happened to me! This is the most ridiculous thing!"

She got very upset, so I stood on the corner and got a cab. She said, "It would make the front page of the paper."

⁸⁰ Robert C. Vitz, "Struggle and Response: American Artists and the Great Depression." *New York History*, Jan. 57.1 (1976): 86.

⁸¹ Edith Gregor Halpert interview by Harlan Phillips, New York, NY (1962-1963), *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.

I said, "I wouldn't take you here, if they would recognize you... She said, "Somebody would recognize me -- the cook, the dishwasher, somebody, and the next day there would be this big story in the *Mirror*; that Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller were dragged out drunk from a speakeasy."

Nobody would have recognized her, but she got absolutely petrified so we went back to the gallery. She was leaving, and she said, "Please, Mrs. Halpert, ride home with me." So I got into the Rolls Royce, and she pulled the panel across between the chauffeur and us, and she said, "I am so sorry to have wasted your time. How stupid can I be! Can you imagine this being discovered!" She turned and looked at me, and burst into tears, and she said, "Mrs. Halpert, how I envy you! You can go anywhere. You can go anywhere, and you can say anything, and you do."

I was so dumbfounded. Then I began to laugh, and I said, "You know, Mrs. Rockefeller, you're reversing our roles. You are rich and I am poor, and I'm supposed to cry and envy you" "But," she said, "You don't." I said, "No, I don't." "But," she said, "I do," and she bawled away.

That, too, was a great lesson in my life. I realized that she was the victim of her name... The Aldrich name -- after all, her brother was a big shot. Her father was Governor, and so on, and she was a victim of two names, particularly the Rockefeller name which had restraints which the Aldrich name never had, and I was sorry for her.⁸²

Halpert's blustery boldness and seeming self-confidence is apparent throughout her oral history, particularly with respect to her interactions with the "rich," and it appears that Halpert's dramatic stories - in which she was often portrayed as the victim - were undoubtedly self-serving. Her recollections, however, might have been tailored to accommodate a great need to equalize the social barriers and class division between herself and the Rockefellers and other New York elites. Halpert's retelling of the speakeasy debacle in which she states to an inconsolable Abby that "I am poor, and I'm supposed to cry and envy you," indicate that Halpert was emotionally fulfilled in a way that Abby could never be, despite her great wealth, at least according to Halpert. In sharing her recollections about Abby throughout her oral history, Halpert continually attempted to level the power divide between the two women. In a close

⁸² Ibid.

reading of their exchanges, Halpert endeavored to show that she, despite her lower social status, was more emotionally fulfilled and accepting of her place in the world than Abby, who was hindered by her wealth and social status. Halpert shapes her oral narrative to portray herself as a sympathetic consoler and counselor to her wealthy friend and patron who she says often resented the burden of being a Rockefeller.

Although Abby and Halpert continued to negotiate an ever-present class divide, Abby still relied on her young friend's companionship and remained vitally interested in how bohemian artists lived and worked. She remained intrigued about activities and places she could not access on her own - like the speakeasy – things far different than what she could do in her own very privileged existence, so she relied on Halpert to provide insight into a side of life that remained a tantalizing mystery to her. Halpert escorted Abby to artists' studios and homes including the Zorachs' dingy apartment, and Abby reciprocated by inviting the Zorachs and other artists to visit her home, and funded festivities on their behalf. As Halpert recalls:

Mrs. Rockefeller was always very interested in everything that was going on, how the other half lived, and she was sincerely interested. She was terribly intrigued -- I mean, this was a new world that had opened up for her.

She met these people and found that they were -- you know, human, so she was talking about a Christmas party, a New Year's party they were having, and she said, "Do artists have parties like that?"

I said, "With what?"

Well, in any event, we made a deal that she would give me a hundred dollars, I think, and the party was held at Romany Marie's, and artists -- well, that was good for about fifty people, and these parties were fantastic!They were wonderful parties, and they went on for several years. She asked one day if she could come, and I said, "No, you can't."

They were perfectly respectable, gay parties, but she would have died of envy because she never went to a party where people were so gay.⁸³

How these two exceptional women of vastly different classes came to form a friendship and partnership that helped shape an American art canon is an extraordinary story, particularly with the social barriers that they were both profoundly aware of. They were intrigued with each other's worlds and Abby was absolutely fascinated and even appeared envious of the freedom that her young friend had. As Halpert explained when attempting to put their unlikely relationship into some type of context:

The reason I keep bringing up Mrs. Rockefeller all the time is that -- you know, she really played a very large part in my life....She was teaching me the facts of life, and I was teaching her the facts of life, and this was to go through every conceivable department and division, and it was really very funny because the schism...here were two completely separate worlds. I was as intrigued with her world as she was with mine. This wasn't a give. This was a give and take. It was an even batting average. I was intrigued with her kind of thinking.⁸⁴

Despite a mutually beneficial friendship, business relationship, and an ambitious agenda to promote modern American art, it can be argued that Abby knew that to publicly recognize Halpert's influence would have meant possibly tainting her own reputation, as well as MoMA's. If Abby's letter to Goodyear is read as a carefully and politically constructed account of MoMA's origins, public recognition of Edith Halpert had the potential to offend the sensibilities of existing and potential donors to MoMA, something Abby may have indeed seriously considered since she was tasked as the museum's leading fundraiser. The idea of any moral impropriety by Halpert, coupled with the devoutly religious and conservative John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s strong moral objections to both his wife's young dealer and her interest in

⁸³ Ibid..

⁸⁴ Ibid.

modern art, may have weighed heavily on Abby. She constantly held out hope that her husband would eventually warm up to modern art, as well as become a major donor to MoMA, and this perhaps explains her reluctance to acknowledge Halpert's influence.

Halpert recognized Abby's desire to patronize American artists in order not only to aid in their financial survival, but also to ensure that the creative process amid an already struggling American art scene remained alive. Abby, like the rest of the family, was kept on a tight leash financially, but nevertheless, when Halpert made her aware of American artists who particularly needed assistance, Abby gave as much as she could. With Halpert's encouragement, Abby commissioned artwork as well as made many outright cash donations. A notable donation negotiated by Halpert was Abby's assistance to Hale Woodruff, one of the first important black American artists, and a member of W.E.B. Du Bois's "talented tenth."⁸⁵ Woodruff lacked the necessary funds to return from a trip to Paris where he studied Post-Impressionism and Cubism between 1928 and 1931, so Abby purchased one of his paintings as well as sent additional money overseas for his return to the United States.⁸⁶ Woodruff later went on to great acclaim for his abstract mural painting, which is imbued with social advocacy themes and confers an inspiring optimism on different moments from African-American history.⁸⁷

In addition to continued large-scale purchases of art from the Downtown Gallery during the early years of the Depression, Abby consistently awarded many private commissions to artists associated with Halpert's gallery, including such notables as Ben Shahn, Stuart Davies,

⁸⁵ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery*, 108.

⁸⁶ Anna Kelly, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's personal secretary, to Edith Halpert, enclosing checks for Woodruff, in Downtown Gallery records, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁷ Woodruff's murals may be the greatest to emerge from the American Social Realist and mural movements of the 1930s and 1940s, raising eyebrows among admirers of Thomas Hart Benton, who led those movements and exerted an important influence on Woodruff. Arguably, Woodruff supersedes Benton in every way — in visual and narrative force, in his assured synthesis of history and also in his humanity. Art Review, "In Electric Moments, History Transfigured - Hale Woodruff's Talladega Murals, under 'Rising Up,' at N.Y.U." *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/arts/design/hale-woodruffs-talladega-murals-in-rising-up-at-nyu.html?_r=0 [accessed February 19, 2014].

Arshile Gorky, Stefan Hirsch, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Max Weber, Marguerite and William Zorach, and Charles Sheeler.⁸⁸ As Halpert recalls:

...I suggested to her that she have artists do things for her...I said, "Why don't you commission artists to paint, to sculpt for you. This was the way great art was created in the earlier ages." She decided that she liked a view from her window looking south, and Stefan painted this view in his style. There was no concession of any kind. She didn't ask for it. Margaret Zorach made embroidery of the Rockefeller family in Seal Harbor. Charles Sheeler made a drawing of Central Park. I mean, none of the artists made any concessions. Ben Shahn went out to paint a portrait of her favorite horse -- went out to Pocantico and painted a portrait of a horse. Reuben Nakian mended a piece of sculpture, and these artists had a ball because they did exactly what they wanted to do. There was no dictatorship in this of any kind. She accepted anything they did, and she was very happy with them -- she really felt that she was carrying on the great tradition of the past.⁸⁹

One of Abby's largest acts of patronage, again facilitated by Halpert, occurred in 1929, after Abby asked her if it was true that artists lived in deplorable conditions. Halpert suggested that they visit William and Marguerite Zorach, who lived above a bakery infested with rats, and whose young children would sustain rat bites as they played on the floor of the family's apartment. Halpert pointedly asked Abby if she would want to raise her own children that way, taunting her with the statement that Abby "even had an infirmary for the children in her home."

As Halpert recalls their exchange:

She was the kind of person you could talk to... and she was used to me about this time -- you know, I would put her in her class group, but this was going a little too far, so she said, "Just a minute! Please don't get cross with me. I don't understand these things."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery*, 139.

⁸⁹ Edith Gregor Halpert interview by Harlan Phillips (1962-1963).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Abby's continued frustration with Halpert is clear as she struggled to understand the plight of the working poor, while simultaneously trying to navigate the wide class barriers between herself and her dealer/friend, and the artists Halpert represented like the Zorachs. Despite Abby's valiant efforts to promote American artists and their work, there is no denying she was far removed from the harsh realities of their daily struggle to survive. According to Halpert, she seized the opportunity to channel Abby's frustration by encouraging her to commission artists to aid them financially, while at the same time feeding Abby's avid interest in the creative, artistic process. Halpert encouraged Abby to commission Marguerite Zorach, a gifted painter and textile artist, to create a large tapestry of the Rockefeller family, depicting them at their home in Seal Harbor, Maine. The price of the tapestry was \$20,000 and was the most expensive art purchase Abby ever made. She made payments during the three years of its making, allowing the Zorachs to continue their work as artists and support their two young children.⁹¹

Recovering a Useable Past: "American Ancestors"

American cultural critic and historian Van Wyck Brooks lamented what he and many of his progressive colleagues perceived as the poverty of American culture.⁹² He claimed that a cause of this deficiency was the lack of a "usable past" in the United States, a cultural memory that could provide American writers and artists with a comfortable sense of continuity, or being part of a national tradition. Brooks further argued that a self-styled cultural history should venerate the uniquely American creative impulse he had encountered among some forgotten,

⁹¹ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 129.

⁹² Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss. *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 1.

eccentric geniuses, who inhabited an American past.⁹³ Brooks argued for recovering an American aesthetic patrimony, as opposed to flaunting America's few acknowledged "masterpieces" in the European tradition, and his writing became something of an American cultural resource in 1920s and 30s. A national artistic heritage and Brooks' notion of a "usable past," were often cited in critical writings on the visual and literary arts by progressives. Holger (Eddie) Cahill, a curator specializing in folk art at the Newark Museum, as well as Halpert's frequent collaborator and purported lover, repeatedly used Brooks' terms when attempting to provide background for the development of American culture.⁹⁴ Historian Casey Nelson Blake posits when considering Blake's seminal essay that the past became "usable" when it allowed Americans to pry open spaces in the present for future innovation.⁹⁵

Cahill played a vital role in shaping Edith Halpert's recognition that folk art was part of a useable past, and a rightful forbearer to American modernism, but she was initially introduced to the idea through Hamilton Easter Field, an American artist, critic, collector, and patron notable for his support of modern art, and founder of the Summer School of Graphic Arts in Ogunquit, Maine, in 1911.⁹⁶ Field had been influenced by the work of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse while in Paris and their interest in primitive art and the art of Africa, Oceania, and other third world cultures, led him to identify American trade signs, weather vanes, and other artifacts as

⁹³ Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss, *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Casey Nelson Blake, "The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (August 1999), 421. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656660> [accessed March 15, 2014].

⁹⁶ Hamilton Easter Field papers, circa 1913-1966, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/hamilton-easter-field-papers-15927>.

art.⁹⁷ Field's School in Ogunquit attracted avant-garde painters and sculptors, and Halpert and her artist-husband, Samuel Halpert (1884-1930), spent two summers there. Visiting students and artists lived in cottages that Field had filled with folk art and country antiques, and Halpert reported that "the artists saw in these unconventional, direct, simplified, unselfconscious statements a kinship with their own aspirations."⁹⁸

Halpert became the enterprising leader in linking folk art to an American artistic usable past, and through her efforts she promoted a form of cultural nationalism. She primarily advocated for the modern, twentieth-century art produced around her, but she quickly began to perceive and promote American antiques as forming the foundation of a vital and living national artistic tradition.⁹⁹

Halpert sold American contemporary art during the Downtown Gallery's first year and then introduced nineteenth-century folk art after her time in Ogunquit. Rather than marketing finds from attics, barnyards and antique stores as merely folk art, Halpert ingeniously categorized them as "American ancestors" of modern art. For the Downtown Gallery's purposes, American ancestors, a much broader category than folk art, underscored the roots of American modernism. By stressing such formal traits as the austerity, severity and simplicity shared by most of the gallery's American ancestral objects and paintings, Halpert hoped that patrons would see them with different eyes than those who both created and owned the items in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Halpert's contact with artists at Ogunquit, her Russian-Jewish immigrant heritage, and her astute business sensibility helped her to implement and appreciate the potential importance of

⁹⁷ Henry Joyce, "Electra Havemeyer Webb and Edith Gregor Halpert: A collaboration in folk art collecting," *Antiques Magazine* January (2003), 186.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ruth Reeves and William D. Moore. "You'd Swear They Were Modern" *Chicago Journals* Spring 47.1 (2013. The University of Chicago Press on Behalf of the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum, Inc.), 5.

American folk art at the Downtown Gallery. Halpert's loyalties had been firmly transferred to nineteenth century Anglo-American folk culture from her native Russian-Jewish culture. Unlike Allen Eaton, whose 1932 publication, *Immigrant Gifts to American Life: Some Experiments in Appreciation of the Contribution of Our Foreign Born Citizens to American Culture* celebrated contributions of twentieth century American immigrants to an evolving American folk culture, neither Halpert nor her immigrant artists who collected nineteenth century American folk art showed any interest in folk art which recalled their own native lands.¹⁰⁰

Halpert chose not to formally exhibit American folk art at the Downtown Gallery until she had every crucial element lined up to help implement her theory of American ancestors. A strong collection of American folk objects juxtaposed with contemporary American art enhanced the aesthetic and economic value of both schools through Halpert's strategies of display and juxtaposition of art forms. She also excelled at drumming up publicity for the show through journalists, artists, museum curators, patrons of the Downtown Gallery and other collectors. And, most crucially, she had her most enthusiastic and supportive sponsor in Abby. With the wheels now in motion, she hoped that an American public might be lured to the Downtown Gallery, a modernist venue that most would normally not set foot in, but would be drawn to now because of the neutrality of folk art. Halpert stated indignantly, "We are opposed to the idea of selling individual items to persons who plan to use such pictures or sculpture as *little household decorations*. We feel strongly that this material is of great importance. . . and should be preserved now that it has been removed from parlors and attics."¹⁰¹

The Downtown Gallery's first show presenting folk art in the context of modern art, "American Ancestors: Masterpieces by Little Known and Anonymous American Painters (1790-

¹⁰⁰ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery*, 171.

¹⁰¹ Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern: MoMA, Women and the Transformation of European Modernism into American Style*. Diss. University of California, Irvine, 2001, 148.

1890),” was held the last two weeks of December, 1931. Halpert wrote in her press release that the museum realized “that many of these paintings are needed to fill in the gap in the history of American art. Collectors find that their appreciation of modern American work is enhanced by a closer study of these early American Painters.”¹⁰²

Halpert, with the help of Holger Cahill, opened the American Folk Art Gallery in October of 1931. The American Folk Art Gallery was the first of its kind in the United States, and was located on the second floor of Halpert’s Downtown Gallery.¹⁰³ (Cahill later served as acting director of MoMA from 1932-1933, when the museum’s founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., took a year long sabbatical due to exhaustion, and went on to become the national director of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration).¹⁰⁴ Fueled by Cahill’s expertise, Halpert boldly labeled the folk portraits, landscapes and still lifes (work that was largely by unknown artists) as “masterpieces.”

The most exceptional and well-reviewed painting in the Gallery’s “American Ancestors” exhibition was by nineteenth-century minister and sign painter, Edward Hicks, entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom*, one painting in a series done by Hicks that depicted parables of the animal kingdom inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah.¹⁰⁵ Hicks’s painting depicts a dozen wide-eyed farm and exotic animals grazing bucolically among three small children, with adult colonists and Indians pushed far back into the composition on a riverbank, with a sailing vessel

¹⁰² Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 140.

¹⁰³ Downtown Gallery records, 1824-1974, bulk 1926-1969, " *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/downtown-gallery-records-6293/more> [accessed March 17, 2014].

¹⁰⁴ Dictionary of Art Historians, *Cahill, Holger, né Sveinn Kristjan Bjarnarson*. <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/cahillh.htm> [accessed March 17, 2014].

¹⁰⁵ Halpert was particularly pleased that well-known artists raved about *The Peaceable Kingdom*, especially French painter and sculptor Fernand Léger who called it “the most thrilling picture he has seen in American art.” Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 140.

visible in the rays of the setting sun.¹⁰⁶ (Hicks was so enamored with the Kingdom piece, that he reworked the composition sixty-one times). The painting's subject matter, drawn from chapter 11 of Isaiah, was undoubtedly attractive to Hicks and his fellow Quakers not only for its appealing imagery but also for its message of peace: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."¹⁰⁷ *Peaceable Kingdom* and other American ancestors in the exhibit also resonated with a weary, twentieth-century American public suffering from the dire effects of the Depression. The positive moral values of *The Peaceable Kingdom* were well received, as was the painting's compositional charm. It proved so popular that multiple versions were reproduced and were soon widely exhibited and circulated in the popular media.¹⁰⁸ Hicks's enchanting painting was the lovely lure Halpert used to pull new clients into the Downtown Gallery and expose them to both folk *and* the contemporary American art she believed in so fervently. *The Peaceable Kingdom's* seemingly carefree depictions overrode realistic observation, akin to the modernist painting promoted at the gallery.

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller purchased Halpert's remarkable find from the "American Ancestors" exhibit, most probably due to the aesthetic pleasure she derived from it, rather than any prior theological significance associated with it. *The Peaceable Kingdom's* bucolic setting and charm would have appealed to her and would integrate nicely into her folk art collection comprised largely of paintings of little children, pretty flowers or pastoral landscapes. *The Peaceable Kingdom* is one of the prized possessions of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art

¹⁰⁶ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Museum, Colonial Williamsburg.
<http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/search@swg%20hicks/4/title-desc?t:state=flow=216a39cd-65c4-4eba-aa12-6f921a26c7d1> [accessed February 19, 2014].

¹⁰⁷ Edward Hicks: *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Worcester Art Museum
<http://www.worcesterart.org/Collection/American/1934.65.html> [accessed February 19, 2014].

¹⁰⁸ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery*, 164-65.

Museum in Colonial Williamsburg. Halpert's good taste and savvy business acumen certainly proved prescient. In 2008, another painting in Hicks' same series entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom With the Leopard of Serenity*, sold for \$9.7 million at Sotheby's Auction House in New York.¹⁰⁹

The Downtown Gallery's "American Ancestors" show in 1931 garnered generally enthusiastic publicity and sympathetic reviews, demonstrating the effectiveness of Halpert's educational campaign to see nineteenth century folk works as ancestors. The successful show was also the impetus for later "American Ancestors" exhibitions at the Downtown Gallery, and it was the considerable profits generated by folk art sales that allowed Halpert to continue to exhibit contemporary art from which she made very little money in the beginning.¹¹⁰

Both aesthetic and ideological tenets continued to underscore the ancestral association of folk and modern art. The perception that folk art reinforced ideological definitions of American cultural and national identity became common in the 1930s, largely thanks to Halpert's tireless efforts. According to art historian Wanda Corn, American modernists between the wars assigned their newly identified artistic ancestors the very same Americanist qualities they wanted to see in themselves; they were innocents, children, compared with worldly Europeans, and they spoke a direct, simple, and unaffected speech. These qualities, moreover, were not just temperamental but also deeply embedded in their art.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Katya Kazakina, "Jeweler Esmerian's Art Raises \$10.5 Million for Creditors." Bloomberg Luxury. Jan 27, 2014. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-01-28/jeweler-esmerian-s-art-raises-10-5-million-for-creditors.html> [accessed February 20, 2014].

¹¹⁰ Henry Joyce. "Electra Havemeyer Webb and Edith Gregor Halpert." *Antiques Magazine* January (2003), 186.

¹¹¹ Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 319.

In addition to these popular and democratic associations, folk art enthusiasts also embraced the primitive work for the aesthetic pleasures of its form and style. Contemporary artists saw that folk canvases privileged flat abstract forms over three-dimensional ones, and design over perspective and modeling. Modern sculptors praised the early carvers' handworking of wood and stone into toys, trade signs, or figureheads far outside the high art traditions of marble and bronze.¹¹² The abstract techniques improvised by these artisans grew out of handling the tools and materials of their trades as housepainters, carpenters, and blacksmiths, rather than from academic training. Sign painters, for instance, usually used a style of oversimplified legibility that included flat colors and bold, unbroken outlines.¹¹³ The innocence of indigenous folk, nonacademic art, was celebrated by American modernists, most probably owing to the fact that many folk artists were anonymous and worked outside the margins of American (and European) "high" art or culture.

One of Halpert's most successful artists, Charles Sheeler, a painter and photographer who is widely recognized as one of the founders of American modernism, explained the attraction of folk art as showing "us something of the character of the people of the time in which it was produced, and it often has characteristics common to the most satisfying expressions of any period: simplicity of vision and directness of statement with a considerable sensitiveness and originality in the use of the medium."¹¹⁴ Halpert represented Sheeler for over thirty years, beginning in 1931, and exerted a huge influence over his output of paintings, drawings, and photography, as well as secured commissions (including several important jobs from Abby), and

¹¹² Ibid., 321.

¹¹³ Cahill, "American Folk Art," *American Mercury* 1931, p. 42, in Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern: MoMA, Women and the Transformation of European Modernism into American Style*, PhD Diss. (University of California, Irvine, 2001), 157.

¹¹⁴ Constance Rourke, *Sheeler: Artist in the American Tradition*, 183, in Corn, 319.

was a close personal friend.¹¹⁵ Halpert also linked folk art, in particular, to Sheeler: “Perhaps more than any other artists, Sheeler is part of a purely American tradition stemming from the meticulous folk artists. . . . little influenced by foreign sources.”¹¹⁶ Sheeler became a central figure in Halpert’s campaign for an American modernist tradition untouched by European influences.

As Corn argues, by 1935, no history of American art could be written without the inclusion of the “simplicity of vision” that resided in folk art. Corn continues that “in one generation, a body of work that had little market value or historical significance was located, named, collected, researched, put into market play and show in museums across the country,” and the recovery was explosive.¹¹⁷ Unlike the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century decorative arts shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, folk art as a pursuit quickly passed from artists, who sought out examples for fun and pleasure, to museums, wealthy collectors, and commercial galleries.¹¹⁸

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller became Edith Halpert’s client and friend in 1928, beginning with their first awkward encounter at the Downtown Gallery. At the same time, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was utterly engrossed in the initial stages of the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.¹¹⁹ (Bernice Kert, suggests that Junior exploited Abby’s intuition, imagination and judgment, and that without her as his partner and sounding board, it is doubtful that the Williamsburg restoration would have proceeded, and even more doubtful it would have been successful.)¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Tepfer, 94.

¹¹⁶ ND/40, frame 397, Downtown Gallery Records, *American Archives of Art*, Smithsonian Institution, in Corn, 321.

¹¹⁷ Corn, 319-320.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹¹⁹ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery, downtown: 1926-1940: a study in American art patronage* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1929), 171.

¹²⁰ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 231.

Halpert recognized the Rockefellers' intense interest in recovering the American past. Always an aggressive and savvy dealer, she seized the opportunity to procure the primitive work of American eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which served to underscore the modern art in Abby's collection, relegated to the top floor of the Rockefeller mansion on 54th Street, far away from John D. Rockefeller's judgmental and disapproving eyes. On October 29, 1928, Abby made her first purchase of American folk art, acquiring chalk ware and minor unidentified pictures for decoration of guest room to familiarize herself with the theory encouraged by Halpert as background for her existing modern art.¹²¹ In doing so, one of the most important art patrons of the twentieth century set a groundbreaking precedent by imbuing folk art with a pedigree akin to fine, or "high" art, and rare collectibles, thanks to Halpert. She tapped into Abby's hearty appetite for folk art as well as her nationalistic ideals.

By 1929, Abby's collection of folk art procured by Halpert had grown exponentially. As an indication of the intensity of Abby's acquisition activity, Halpert submitted a statement in the amount of \$11,268 for Abby's "Primitive Account," in August 1931.¹²² Abby's art purchasing fund at that time was \$25,000 per year, so she directed almost half of it to Halpert's acquisition of folk art on her behalf. Halpert congratulated Abby on her fine collection: "After having seen several private collections...I am certain I can say with due modesty that what you now have is without a doubt the finest collection of American folk art in existence . . ."¹²³

With Halpert's enthusiastic encouragement, Abby's contemporary collection housed in her prized upstairs gallery was informed by, rather than conflicted with, primitive American art. They worked closely together to curate Abby's home gallery to enhance the aesthetic and

¹²¹ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery, downtown: 1926-1940: a study in American art patronage* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1929), 171-72.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

economic value of objects through the juxtaposition of folk art with modern art (much as Halpert did at her Downtown Gallery). Abby arranged both American and European modern paintings and sculptures among folksy pictures of stenciled flowers, paintings on velvet, children's portraits, whittled wooden knickknacks and toys, weather-vanes and other primitive objects. In doing so, Abby's gallery was a unifying space in which material cultures from different centuries (and continents) acknowledged each other.



FIG. 6
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's Seventh Floor Gallery (c. 1933)

Under Halpert's tutelage, Abby held private art exhibitions culled exclusively from her personal inventory of artwork and opened these exhibits to artists, art critics and friends. Recounting the installation of one show, Abby wrote of one afternoon spent with her dealer, "Mrs. Halpert and I got out all my pictures painted by Americans of America, commonly known as 'The American Scene' and we both feel quite proud of the result."¹²⁴ Halpert and Abby helped to rescue primitive American relics from obscurity in attics and barns, and facilitated a visual dialogue between two very different material cultures, furthering an ancestral linkage between modern painting and folk art at the Downtown Gallery, Abby's home gallery, and, eventually, at MoMA.

Despite both the national and aesthetic attributes ascribed to folk art's connection to contemporary American work of the 1920s and 1930s, some doubted its meaning and the attempt to link the two. Art historian Henri Focillon discouraged such views and cautioned, in 1931, that folk art was more international than national in its essential attributes, and that "*national* and *ethnic* frames of reference do not coincide with those of folk art, nor could they possibly do so."¹²⁵

Folk art also held several different meanings for Halpert. It was nationalistic, democratic, aesthetically pleasing and, perhaps most notably, its sale benefitted her financially. Somewhat sardonically, yet typical of Halpert, she betrayed her noble ambitions to establish an ancestral link between modernism and folk art by later acknowledging that folk art was just a "puller inner" to get potential and existing clients to embrace the contemporary work she was so devoted

¹²⁴ Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern*, 148.

¹²⁵ Henri Focillon, "Introduction" to *Art Populaire* (Paris, 1931), in *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*. Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 2.

to.¹²⁶ Always a savvy businesswoman, she sometimes referred to folk art as her “sugar daddy” which sustained her during the Depression years. In *The Function of the Dealer*, published in 1949, twenty-one years after she first opened the Downtown Gallery, Halpert wrote that American art gallerists hoped they picked winning artists, even though they did not garner huge prices and that the gallery “humbly takes in washing...some folk art – moneymakers to pay the overhead for the living American artist.”¹²⁷ Indeed, due largely to Abby’s intense collecting of folk art, Halpert is largely credited with single-handedly inventing a market for folk art in the 1930s.

Halpert’s admission that she aggressively used folk art and her theory of American ancestors underscores her passionate devotion – above anything else - to promote and have the public embrace the work of living American artists. If attic and barnyard finds supported Halpert’s modernist mission, both theoretically and financially, then she had achieved great success. The notion that American ancestors informed modern American art is still widely attributed to Halpert. Folk art may have indeed been Halpert’s “sugar daddy,” but positing a link between the two schools spurred museums and other galleries to also make the ancestral connection and tiptoe into exhibiting American contemporary art. MoMA’s exhibits and permanent collection of folk art were shaped by Halpert’s theories and practices, through Abby’s personal lending and donations of both folk and modern art.

¹²⁶ Interview with Edith Gregor Halpert by Harlan Phillips, 1962-1963." *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.

¹²⁷ Edith Halpert, “The Function of the Dealer,” *College Art Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (Autumn, 1949), 55.

MoMA and the Negotiation of Folk Art

Significant developments grew out of the crossover of two underappreciated and previously unrelated art forms. Owing in large part to Halpert's theory of American ancestors, and Abby's purchasing power, the gap closed between separate worlds of art (folk and contemporary), eras (eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and locales (city and country). Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's art collection stood at the center of this exchange facilitating a new artistic dialogue both in her seventh floor gallery and, soon, at MoMA. What began in Abby's gallery as an experiment developed into a new vision at the museum where folk art and modern art converged, owing both to Abby's position and patronage at MoMA, and her avid interest in primitive and contemporary American art. In the same way that Abby's upstairs gallery positioned modern art between folk art, MoMA placed itself between these same traditions. Through both Halpert's influence and Abby's patronage, MoMA released modern art from its European roots and re-positioned it into the context of an artistic canon that reflected a lasting American sensibility.

The museum benefitted from its founding member's vast collection of folk art (consisting of hundreds of objects), helping to thrust it front and center in propagating Halpert's theory that American ancestors were uniquely integral to an American modernist canon. When juxtaposed with Abby's folk art lent or donated to the museum, modern paintings were no longer in a privileged position but now shared wall space - and vied for status - with their ancestral forbearers. By creating exhibits using Abby's two-fold collection, MoMA offered its visitors and patrons a model of inclusion that embraced the past and future, farmyard and machine-age metropolis, and American and European sentiment.

MoMA first introduced the public to the high-art value of folk art in its exhibit “American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man (1750-1900),” in 1932. All one hundred seventy-five objects in the exhibition were lent anonymously by Abby.¹²⁸ Curated by Holger Cahill, during his tenure as MoMA’s acting director, the exhibition’s purpose was to establish folk art’s place as a legitimate art form, venerating common, simple objects by attaching them to America’s craftsman roots. Cahill selected folk art objects for their painterly and sculptural qualities and carefree depictions, which overrode realistic observation. He advised MoMA audiences to appreciate folk art’s flat patterning, emphasis on outline, and other qualities inherent in their designs that were typically associated with modernist abstraction.¹²⁹ Cahill pointed out that a craftsman’s handling of a cow weathervane showed its “sensitively modeled body, thin at the neck, soft and full at the sides, the calm of the pose enhanced by flattened curves.”¹³⁰

In the same way that Abby’s upstairs gallery and the Downtown Gallery positioned modern art between folk art, MoMA also placed itself between these same traditions. In doing so, the museum released modern art from its European roots and re-positioned it into the context of an artistic canon that reflected a lasting American sensibility.

MoMA’s “American Folk Art: Art of the Common Man in America (1790-1900)” was virtually ignored by the art critics.¹³¹ The critical response the exhibit did elicit wavered on the plausibility of the relationship between modern art and folk art posited by Cahill and MoMA. One favorable review by Henry McBride found these folk artifacts well-paired with modern art, especially as its antecedents: “it is impossible to regard them . . . without a nostalgic yearning for

¹²⁸ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery*, 173.

¹²⁹ Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern*, 157.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*.

¹³¹ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 142.

the beautiful simple life that is no more . . . ” even though unaware of “the demands of style, but they will always serve as a sort of touch stone as to what is genuine feeling. Artists who find themselves growing mannered or stale will always be able to review their appetite for expression by returning to the example of these early pioneers . . . ”¹³²

Conversely, critic Malcolm Vaughan, saw the tie as unconvincing and superficial. He offered a scathing review by pointing out that the work of folk artists was too cautious to be considered a precursor to modern art: “Their drawing is guarded, their coloring painstaking; the caution of the uninformed spirit.” Vaughan called them quant decorations at best, but certainly not art.¹³³ Folk art and its ancestral linkage to modernism were also excluded in historical accounts of the museum written by MoMA curators. In its comprehensive historical survey, *The Museum of Modern Art, New York*, published in 1985, which sought to explain the guiding principles and historical circumstances that shaped the development of the museum, folk art exhibitions, including “Art of the Common Man,” are not mentioned except for a thinly veiled reference: “In its first decade the Museum extended its reach in many ways . . . It pioneered with a number of unusual exhibitions . . . and was openly experimental . . . Its unorthodox exhibitions explored areas related to modern art, by way of establishing its foundations and affinities in non-Western and Primitive art.”¹³⁴ Any references to the concept of folk art or objects are completely excluded from MoMA’s own historical survey.

¹³²“New York Criticism,” *The Art Digest*, (Dec. 15, 1932), p. 42, in Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern*, 159.

¹³³ Malcolm Vaughan, “Modern Museum Exhibits Early Native Folk Art,” *American* (Dec. 10, 1932), in Marver, 159.

¹³⁴ Sam Hunter, *Introduction, The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 19.

American Art and MoMA's Regret

The opinion of MoMA's brilliant executive director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. carried great weight with respect to both American art and Halpert's aggressive campaign for it. Halpert solicited Barr and MoMA to purchase the work of American artists she represented, but was usually turned away. Throughout the 1930s, the museum purchased less than ten paintings from her Downtown Gallery because Barr was far more interested in spending his meager acquisition dollars on European art. Halpert periodically challenged Barr about his lack of support for her local talent, the Americans she had handpicked whose works hung just a few blocks away from the museum, but Barr considered most American art second-rate. Consequently, American art promoted by Halpert made its way onto MoMA's walls only through Abby's art purchases or her loans of art to the museum.¹³⁵

Barr discussed American painters disdainfully, in European terms: Stuart Davis was a "rather feeble [Raoul] Duffy . . . the odd European critic might be interested in Sheeler or Marin, he believed, but definitely not Robert Henri, Walt Kuhn, or George Bellows. Asked for advice on buying a modern picture for Wellesley's Farnsworth Gallery, Barr replied that a European picture would be "considerably better in quality . . . unless you wish to spend perhaps twice as much for the American picture."¹³⁶ Despite such contempt, Barr worried about his ignorance of American culture. (Eventually, when preparing to write the catalog for an exhibition of American works in Paris, Barr asked a Princeton professor to fill in his "scanty knowledge of American civilization.")¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Lindsay Pollock, *The Girl with the Gallery*, 250.

¹³⁶ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary: 1989), 79.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

In its historical review of the museum, MoMA acknowledged that its most critically weak area was in American painting of the teens, twenties, and thirties and the pervasive feeling among the curators (led by Barr), that American artists were essentially provincial when compared to the major European masters.¹³⁸ The fact that funds were extremely limited and that the Whitney Museum and the Metropolitan were both buying American painting, led to an understanding between Barr and the directors of these other museums that the Museum of Modern Art would concentrate its resources on the European vanguard.¹³⁹

MoMA further acknowledged that developments in American painting from the late fifties onward had made American art of the early part of the century (art that Halpert begged them to buy), look different. MoMA specifically cited that Demuth's poster-like, *I See the No. 5 in Gold*, acquired by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, looked quite different in the light of the pop art and printmaking work of an artist like Jasper Johns (1930 -). MoMA regrettably recognized in its historical survey that the "masterpieces of such painters as Demuth and Hartley that could stand, in their own terms, on an equal footing with the masterpieces of the European modernists the Museum possesses, have long been spoken for."¹⁴⁰

Indeed, the fervent belief of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and Edith Halpert about the uniqueness and value of American art proved prescient as indicated by the dearth of American art of the 1910s, 20s and 30s at MoMA, owing largely to Barr's disdain for it. Although Abby's large donation of modern art to MoMA encompassed works by many of Halpert's artists, including early watercolors by Demuth, the museum missed opportunities to acquire their later work, often considered their very best (Demuth's oil painting, *I See the No. 5 in Gold*, for

¹³⁸ *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 45.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

example). Arguably, Barr's contempt for early modern artists is not only evident in MoMA's dismal collection of early American art, but probably extended to their aggressive dealer, Edith Halpert. Barr is almost universally revered - both then and now - for shaping the modern art programme at MoMA, and is widely credited with turning it into a world-class museum. His opinion about Halpert would have indeed mattered very much to Abby, and may have been another contributing factor in her exclusion.

By 1935, Abby's art purchases appeared to stop. This seems to be explained by her shifting focus to consolidate her artwork – both modern and folk – to distribute to both family members and various institutions.¹⁴¹ Abby presented the Museum with one hundred and eighty-one works, mainly by American artists, including watercolors by Demuth and Sheeler. She also specified that a number of works in her gift could be exchanged or sold for purchase funds in order to strengthen MoMA's collection.¹⁴² To further strengthen MoMA, Abby also negotiated with her husband (on behalf of the trustees and museum staff) to deed their residence and land at 10 West 54th Street over to MoMA for a new, modern building. When the Rockefellers relocated to a new apartment on Park Avenue, there was no major space for art, and, consequently, Halpert's activity on behalf of Abby was limited.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Abby made plans to donate much of her art to MoMA, the Newark Museum, Dartmouth College, Rhode Island School of Design, Fisk University, and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection.

¹⁴² Sam Hunter, "Introduction," *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984), 14.

¹⁴³ Diane Tepfer, *Edith Gregor Halpert and the Downtown Gallery* 152-53.



FIG. 7

Nos. 4 and 10 West 54th Street, Townhouses of John D. Rockefeller
and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1937)
By Samuel Herman Gottscho (1875-1971)
Collection of the Museum of the City of New York



FIG. 8

Museum of Modern Art, birds-eye view from 41st floor of Rockefeller Center
(December 6, 1941) by Wurts Bros. (New York, NY)
Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

Abby's decision to give major gifts from her contemporary art to MoMA and to other museums and (on the advice of her husband and others) to send her folk art to Colonial Williamsburg also reflected a major cooling off period between Halpert and Abby. Halpert had wanted much of Abby's folk art to stay at MoMA or be sent to Providence, Rhode Island, where Abby grew up, but Abby was adamant that the collection go to her husband's pet project in Colonial Williamsburg. Halpert, fearful of losing her relationship with Abby entirely, withdrew her argument once she determined Abby could not be swayed. Halpert did have a major role with the Rockefellers through lending her expertise in the public installation of Abby's folk art collection in Colonial Williamsburg, but any new opportunities for purchases by Abby seemed to dry up.

The partnership of Edith Halpert and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller helped to conflate the design of folk objects with modernism and nationalism. Through the eventual inclusion of folk art at MoMA exhibitions and later at Colonial Williamsburg and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, folk art was institutionalized as an indigenous outcome of an American past and part of a material culture that helped inform art of the present and future.

Throughout her oral history, Edith Halpert crafted a narrative to mark her prominent place in the American art movement of the twentieth-century, as well as correct perceived misconceptions about her personal life and business pursuits. Her close friendship with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller can now be regarded in new light, one that is complicated by Halpert's notions of class divisions between herself, Abby, and the American artists the Downtown Gallery represented.

Despite Halpert's account of an ever present, hyper-awareness of a social divide, both women appeared to negotiate and navigate it along their passionate pursuit of American

modernism. Notwithstanding her exclusion, Halpert's repeated references and stories about Abby in her oral history attest to not only her fondness for her friend and benefactor, but also to the value she ascribed to Abby's endeavors to propel American art into the cultural landscape:

"Some have vision, some have courage, but it is rare to find someone who has both vision and courage . . . American art, American artists, and the American public . . . acknowledge a great debt to you."¹⁴⁴

Edith Halpert is acknowledged by art historians, scholars, critics, curators and artists as one of the leaders of modernism of the twentieth-century.¹⁴⁵ Without the benefit of Halpert's vision, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's aesthetic transformation and dreams for MoMA would have undoubtedly been limited to the influences of the elites and aesthetes within her own social class and art circle. Through Edith Halpert and her Downtown Gallery, Abby was exposed to, and became enthralled with, the diversity of both American life and progressive American art, things that were otherwise likely unattainable as the wife of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

¹⁴⁴ Edith Halpert to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, in Book of Tributes Family 2, AR Se. B30, 314, Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁴⁵ Edith Halpert became widely recognized as an authority on American modernism, an individual on whom even the United States government relied. She organized and directed the First Municipal Exhibition of American Art and worked with the WPA Federal Art Project to develop the Exhibition and Allocation Program, which facilitated nationwide circulation for works from regional art centers. She was also the curator of the art section of the American National Exhibition, sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency and the U.S. Department of Commerce, travelling to the Soviet Union with the exhibition. In recognition of her dedication to the arts, she received the Art in America Award in 1959, a USIA Citation for Distinguished Service in 1960, and the First Annual International Silver Prize from the University of Connecticut for "distinguished contribution to the arts" in 1968. The Downtown Gallery records, 1824-1974, bulk 1926-1969," *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.



FIG. 9
\$50 a Month Buys a Big Little Art Collection, 1949
Stanley Kubrick
Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

There may be no more appropriate way to conclude this chapter than with an excerpt from a letter to Edith from Abby's most favored son and art partner, Nelson, who wrote to Edith after his mother's death that her "generosity towards Mother was only equaled by her appreciation of all that you had done both for the American artists and for her personally. More than anyone . . . you made possible her active participation in the field of modern art and in the collecting of early American primitive art which gave her such great pleasure."¹⁴⁶ Finally, at last, Edith Halpert was recognized by a Rockefeller for the great influence she had on Abby.

¹⁴⁶ Nelson A. Rockefeller to Edith Halpert, October 8, 1951, AAR personal papers, Folder 747, Record Group Halpert, Series III, Subseries 78 (1932-54), Rockefeller Archive Center.

CHAPTER THREE: Motherhood: Abby's Training Ground for Modernism

Before considering Abby's position and influence as a mother, her own childhood and early adulthood will be briefly studied in order to ascertain the origins of her strong nurturing skills and political savvy, both employed successfully by her at MoMA and within her own family. Her relationships with her powerful father, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich from Rhode Island (commonly referred to in both political and public circles as the "General Manager of the Nation"), and her mother, Abby Pearce Chapman Aldrich, a loving mother and partner but an extremely reluctant political wife, both contributed to Abby's independent spirit and zest for life. Their influences were reflected in both Abby's public and private pursuits.

Abby's development as a strong nurturing presence was due to her assumption of certain responsibilities for her siblings and her father, in large part because of her mother's often-poor health and exhaustion from raising ten children, and her considerable lack of enthusiasm for Washington, D.C. life. Abby learned "emotional sensitivity and the tug of home and hearth," from her mother.¹⁴⁷ Her nurturing character and political skills proved to be a potent combination that facilitated and fueled her dreams for MoMA.

Abby's mother was uncomfortable with her role as a political wife to a senator who was widely considered to be one of the most powerful men in the United States for almost thirty years, as well as someone who hated her identity being tied to one of Washington's "first families" (she already came from one of the most esteemed and wealthiest first families of Rhode Island). Abby Pearce Chapman Aldrich was exhausted from her many pregnancies and missed her life in Providence, and as a young Abby watched her mother become increasingly detached from the political ambitions of her father, perhaps, unconsciously, she was motivated to

¹⁴⁷ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 4.

make her adored father's daily life brighter, and imagined that she could bring him a degree of companionship and approval not always available from his wife. Consequently, Abby attended many political receptions and parties with the Senator in her mother's place. She relished the opportunity to go to these events, curious about the world and eager to listen to what influential and important people had to say.

Abby acquired many of her father's political skills while serving as a stand-in for her mother at events in both Washington, D.C., and in Providence. Abby "could be resilient or tenacious as the circumstances required; she possessed her father's understanding of human behavior and the ability to reconcile opposing views . . . and like him she had a love that amounted to almost an obsession for the visual arts."¹⁴⁸ Abby's tenacity, vision, and maneuvering on behalf of MoMA, can largely be attributed to her father's great influence and a political skill set learned from him.

Abby's parents instilled in all of their children a pronounced sense of self and responsibility, ideals that manifested in Abby's later life as both a wife and mother. The Aldrich's home was not a Victorian household that was run in a patriarchal, authoritarian mode.¹⁴⁹ Abby's mother derived her own power from her inheritance and esteemed ancestral lineage, and however much she hated being the wife of the powerful Senator Aldrich, shuttling back and forth from their home state of Rhode Island to Washington, D.C., she never became submissive.¹⁵⁰

Abby's childhood was also shaped by her art-loving father. Before her father turned his attention to politics, Nelson Aldrich became a wealthy businessman, which not only allowed him to indulge his passion for world travel, but also furthered an almost obsessive quest for important

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

collectible objects. He was an avid collector of European paintings, Persian rugs, and antiques, and Abby eagerly fell under his careful tutelage at a young age. Inculcating a passion for beautiful things into a favored child at a young age is *exactly* what Abby did with one of her own children, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, his maternal grandfather's namesake, who also became a powerful politician.

The Aldrich's good childrearing instincts made for a wonderful environment for a young Abby, especially when coupled with their second hometown of Washington, D.C., a place which feminists of the day called "a special center of women."¹⁵¹ Women functioned differently in the Nation's capital than in other cities, and created an environment for Abby that was ripe with possibilities and freed her from constraints that were placed on many young women of her status and era. Women in Washington, D.C. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served as examples for a young Abby. Women were not merely decorative or society doyennes, but were engaged in stimulating and impressive professional careers and affiliations. Instead, women in Washington, D.C. commanded attention and respect and lead fuller lives than in almost any other city in the United States.¹⁵²

Abby embraced her freedom after gradating from Miss Abbott's school in June of 1893, and her society debut soon followed in November. She loved parties and embraced the freedom that her parents encouraged and women in Washington, D.C. enjoyed. She continued to accompany her father to political events and enjoyed a robust social and cultural life a both the Aldrich home in Warwick, Rhode Island, and in Washington, D.C.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Motherhood as a site of power

It has long been recognized among modern scholars of motherhood that distinctions between mothering and motherhood were what enabled feminists to recognize that motherhood, as an institution, was not necessarily oppressive, and the institution itself could even be empowering. Much of the literature regarding Second Wave feminism details how women used their positions as mothers to effect change through their children. Although written well after Abby's lifetime, she embraced many of the ideals associated with using her motherhood as a platform for cultural change in the early twentieth century, despite certain constraints imposed upon her by being a Rockefeller.

In the dominant patriarchal ideology of the 1920s, motherhood was still viewed simply as a private, and more specifically, an apolitical enterprise, one that did not necessarily have cultural significance. However, Abby was the antithesis of this type of mother by imparting to her children aspects of a visual culture in which beauty abounded. She was, arguably, a forerunner of mothers who later redefined so-called "motherwork," as a socially engaged enterprise that sought to effect cultural change through activism, and through that activism, a sense of self-fulfillment outside of motherhood could be achieved. As will be shown in this chapter, motherhood served as a platform and a site of power for Abby, through which she effected great cultural change.

**Abby and Nelson: -
The Partner She Longed For In Modern
Art and Museum Building**

Abby's legacy was ensured by her adored second child, Nelson Rockefeller. Due to her unbridled determination to cultivate in Nelson not only her boundless enthusiasm and joy for life (passing on to him the so-called "Aldrich" family charm and zest for life, characteristics which were contradictory to the puritanical and rigid lifestyle imposed on the family by Junior), she instilled in Nelson a passionate interest and an obsession with modern art that eventually rivaled, if not went beyond, her own. In Nelson, Abby found a cohort and confidante who had an interest and curiosity about the visual arts. (Much later, when Nelson formed a close relationship with Alfred Barr, Alfred remarked, "Nelson needs art more than any man I know.")¹⁵³ Abby recognized Nelson's early interest in the visual arts, seized the opportunity to enrich his life through them, and in doing so, ultimately enriched her own.

Through an analysis of the exceptional mother-son relationship of Abby and Nelson, an argument can be made that Abby realized her own particular version of motherhood. Through Nelson's training, Abby guaranteed that this new genre of art would be available to the public on a scale that was made widely available not just to the citizens of New York, but also to all who came and visited. When Nelson finally had access to the Rockefeller fortune which Abby never could access (she funded the majority of her own art purchases and most MoMA donations with her Aldrich inheritance), Nelson infused hundreds of millions of dollars into the collection and promotion of modern art, and ensured public accessibility to it, a direct result of the authority, influence, and maternal activism of his mother.

¹⁵³ Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson Rockefeller, Worlds to Conquer 1908-1958* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 151.

Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller shared an intense bond with Abby that was extraordinarily close as shown in their prolific exchange of correspondence. Their shared obsession with the visual arts unfolded over the course of almost thirty years, and was a collaboration so profound that it changed the face of modern art in New York forever. Their extremely close relationship and shared passion for art collecting, interior decoration, interior design, and MoMA reflects a deep bond between a mother and a favored son, one who became the vital, enthusiastic partner in the promotion of modern art in Manhattan that Abby never fully had in her husband.



FIG. 10
Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller (undated)
Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Abby and Nelson were engaged in a passionate, lifelong conversation about the visual arts, beginning from the time Nelson was just a young boy. Through the careful cultivation of his aesthetic interests, Abby shaped a partner who would ensure that her legacy and love of modern

art would thrive. Once Nelson had access to the Rockefeller millions (due to Junior's establishing trusts in 1934 for his children consisting of oil company stocks and real estate holdings), he immediately propelled himself into important modern art collecting, promotion, and funding large projects and endowments at MoMA.

It was through Nelson's example of an enthusiastic art partner that Abby so desperately needed that perhaps moved a heartbroken Junior, after Abby's death from heart failure in 1948, to make what was his largest monetary contribution to MoMA to honor his beloved wife and her devotion to the museum.¹⁵⁴ For years after Abby's death, Junior struggled with his ambivalence about MoMA and modern art. How could he justify his intense disapproval of that which had been so fundamental for her happiness when he knew that she had supported him in everything he set out to do?¹⁵⁵ On November 6, 1952, in a letter to Nelson, who had quickly ascended to the presidency of MoMA, his father admitted that although modern art had never greatly appealed to him he wished to make a gift, "In memory of Mama's devotion to the Museum and the realization of its objectives, it gives me pleasure to enclose herewith certificates in the name of the Museum for 40,000 shares of IBEC as a gift to the Museum's Endowment Fund."¹⁵⁶ The fair market value of this donation at the time was \$4 million.

It is important to put Junior's \$4 million donation in the context of Abby's previous and valiant fundraising efforts to launch MoMA. From the museum's inception in 1929 and throughout the 1930s, Abby was charged as MoMA's main fundraiser (with the added pressure of the museum opening just nine days after the stock market crash of 1929, leading, of course, to the Great Depression). Abby took on the daunting task of fundraising when she herself could

¹⁵⁴ Junior eventually became Abby's partner in MoMA, but it was an affiliation that he entered after Abby's death, only motivated to do so because of his extreme guilt in not supporting her earlier efforts.

¹⁵⁵ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 475.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

donate only a maximum of \$25,000 per year while having to ask friends, fellow trustees and potential wealthy Manhattan donors for far greater amounts to sustain MoMA and its exhibitions and programs.

The fact that Junior could have easily donated any and all funds the museum needed and refused to, despite his great love and admiration for Abby, is really quite confounding. One swiftly signed check from Junior to support his wife's passion project would have had a significant impact on MoMA's bottom line. Further, it would have given Abby the added credibility to ask for large donations, because of course, she herself, on behalf of the great Rockefeller family of New York, would be able to make those same substantial donations. Fundraising rule 101: 'Tis much easier to ask BIG, when one can give BIG!

If it were not for Nelson's complete support of her museum building efforts and passion to further modern art while she was alive, Abby would not have had a partner she needed – a confidante who loved modern art as much as she did and had as much of an interest to see it flourish in New York, in public and private collections and in institutions. By having another Rockefeller by her side, she had a true collaborator in her museum building endeavors. Nelson's unabashed support and love for her not only sustained her vision for MoMA but also ultimately helped her cope with her husband's real lack of support.

Nelson's Training In The Visual Arts

Bernice Kert, suggested that the notion that Abby “trained” Nelson in the visual arts was going too far.¹⁵⁷ However, an argument will be made here that quite the opposite was true. It was Abby who had the most profound influence on Nelson with respect to all things within her purview of visual culture, exposing him from an early age to the visual arts. Correspondence between mother and son reveal that Abby’s guidance, instruction and advice were absolutely critical to Nelson’s own obsession with the study, collection and patronage of modern art. Even as a young mother Abby espoused the importance of training a child’s eye to appreciate all that was beautiful. In an undated speech only entitled “Concerning Children,” she states that mothers should heed “the needs of all: the mental and the physical, the religious and moral, as well as the aesthetic – for to train the eye and ear of the young to appreciate the beautiful means much later in life by helping him to avoid what is vulgar and ugly . . . We must give them a chance to develop themselves. They need discipline, but they also need opportunity.”¹⁵⁸

Abby’s training of Nelson in the visual arts is vitally important because without it, he would not have risen to satisfy the unfulfilled role as her equal partner in modern art, and her museum building would have failed, as put forth later in this chapter. Further, Nelson’s contributions were vital to the promotion of modern art in New York State because of his position as Governor from 1959 to 1973. As governor, he had a public platform from which he could promote avant-garde and modern art thus, legitimizing it. Nelson exposed modern art to

¹⁵⁷ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 290.

¹⁵⁸ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, “Concerning Children, (undated speech), RG 2/OMR, Series AAR – II, Box 13, Folder 159, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the masses, setting an example for not just New York, but for all other big cities in the United States.

Correspondence between Abby and Nelson provides a glimpse into their close relationship beginning from Nelson's childhood up until Abby's death. In one of their earliest exchanges Abby writes:

Dearest Nelson: I was so pleased to get your letter. As you wrote me on the typewriter, I suppose you would like to receive a letter from me written on the typewriter.¹⁵⁹

Although this excerpt on its face doesn't appear to be especially noteworthy, it can be argued that it reveals interesting behavior on Abby's part because she was mirroring or modeling her young son's behavior by *typing* her letter to him since he had made the effort to type his letter to her. Abby's modeling or mirroring techniques reinforced the bond they already shared, or it was an attempt on her part to forge an even stronger bond that already existed. The letter's conclusion is particularly intriguing with respect to the proposal argued here that Abby was intent on forging, from very early on, a partnership with Nelson, in which they were able to share a passion for art and collecting:

The little carved seedpod that I gave you, I find from the bill is a reproduction from a lutos [sic.] seedpod. Do you think you are rapidly earning all the other carvings that I have offered you on certain conditions? I think you must be, because I only hear such good news from home.

With much love, Affectionately, your Mother

Abby was not only exposing Nelson to a rather exotic type of collectible, carved seed pods, but she was incentivizing him to collect objets d'art by behaving well and "earning all the other

¹⁵⁹ Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, April 9, 1921, Folder 356, Box 28, RG 4, Series H, Family and Friends Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

carvings . . . ”. This is the first written documentation showing the beginning of an absolutely monumental relationship between a mother and son who became committed partners who shared a mutual fascination with art.

Nelson’s first exposure by Abby to the primitive seed carvings may have instilled in him an enthusiasm for primitive art that remained with him for the rest of his life. Many years later, with the help of MoMA’s second executive director, René Harmoncourt, whose expertise was in American Indian Folk Art, Nelson expanded his already vast collection of primitive and pre-Columbian art. By 1944, Nelson had amassed 1,500 pieces of primitive art including Ivory Coast children’s masks, pre-Columbian Peruvian woodcarvings, and totems from New Guinea. Historian Cary Reich wrote that Nelson’s interest in primitive art was not anthropological in nature as he once confessed, ” Don’t ask me whether this bowl which I am holding is a household implement or a ritual vessel. I could not care less.”¹⁶⁰ Rather, Riech argues, Nelson regarded primitive art as works of high art, not differentiating between the two and the work could rank side by side with Picassos or Gauguins that the works so often inspired.¹⁶¹ In this regard, Nelson was so like Abby because she bought not necessarily what was considered “important” (her limited purchasing power also precluded that), but simply what she liked.

Nelson’s lifelong love of primitive art culminated in his own museum building endeavors. In 1954, he established New York’s Museum of Primitive Art, devoted to the indigenous art of the Americas, Africa, Oceania and early Asia and Europe, and his personal items formed most of the collection. In 1969, he donated the museum's collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

¹⁶⁰ Reich, 477-478.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Nelson attended college at Dartmouth, graduating in 1930, where, with Abby's blessing, he immersed himself into art history classes, and eventually founded an arts club that published a campus arts newsletter. In correspondence from Nelson to Abby sent to her during his junior year at Dartmouth, he proudly writes:

We were given a book of 125 masterpieces of all periods and countries. There were two copies of each painting – one the original and the other was the original only mutilated in some way....We were supposed to pick out the original in each case. I'm glad to say, Mum, that your training has had its effect. I hate to say so myself, but I not only had the highest percent right by far . . . but I ranked in the exceptional group of all those who have taken the test throughout the country. I wouldn't have mentioned this but I thought that you deserved all the credit and therefore should be told that your efforts had not been in vain. I think perhaps I'm beginning to acquire some of your good taste.¹⁶²

Later on, during a break from Dartmouth, Nelson wrote his mother about their gallery visits in the City:

Dear Ma,

You don't know how much I enjoyed our two trips to Mr. Davis and the visit to the Down Town Galleries. I feel as if I had been introduced to a new world of beauty, and for the first time I think I have really been able to appreciate and understand pictures, even though only a little bit. I hope to continue this when I am in New York and maybe do a tiny bit of collecting myself. I feel that was the outstanding event of my vacation.¹⁶³

Abby's reply describes the bond she hopes they will always share with respect to the arts while acknowledging that indeed cultivating Nelson's good taste early on would be paramount to further his art collecting:

It would be a great joy to me if you did find that you had a real love for and interest in beautiful things. We could have such good times going about together and if you start to cultivate your taste and eye so young, you ought to be very good at it by the time you can afford to collect much . . . It is very sweet to me to

¹⁶² Morris, *Nelson Rockefeller*, 74.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73.

hear what you say about your Mother and very comforting, too, because so often I feel that I fail to be what I should like to be for your sake, but my love for you, dear, is very deep and you can always count on it.¹⁶⁴

After graduating from Dartmouth, Nelson not only immersed himself in taking over the leadership of the newly built skyscraper and office complex at Rockefeller Center, his father's ambitious project, but simultaneously involved himself at his mother's own passion project, MoMA. Through an analysis of the vast amount of correspondence exchanged between Abby and Nelson during the MoMA years, a brash, young, undeterred Nelson emerges, as indicated through his enthusiasm, passion, and efforts as a Junior Advisory committee member, trustee, and eventual president of the museum, helping to ensure that MoMA would survive and thrive.

A pivotal event occurred in the course of MoMA's history in 1931, the year that one of Abby's co-founders of MoMA, Lillian Bliss, died, bequeathing her magnificent collection of one hundred and fifty Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, considered to be one of the finest in the world, to the museum, with the stipulation that an endowment fund of \$1 million be established to maintain the collection; otherwise, the collection would go to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Trustees, including Abby and Nelson, were scrambling to raise the necessary endowment funds. Remarkably, Nelson, then only 25 years old, made the final, anonymous pledge of \$100,000, after which the Bliss executors lowered the endowment to \$600,000, and declared that the Bliss collection could remain at MoMA, thus ensuring the museum would survive. (Much of the correspondence between MoMA staff and trustees during this time indicates that without the Bliss collection permanently installed, MoMA's future was precarious, at best). Alfred Barr considered the acquisition of the Bliss collection absolutely crucial for the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

museum and argued that, “New York can look London, Paris, Berlin, Munich, Moscow and Chicago in the face so far as public collections of modern art are concerned.”¹⁶⁵

Nelson’s motivations for giving the \$100,000 donation anonymously were first revealed to Eliza Bliss, Lillian Bliss’s niece:

The evening that the announcement that the anonymous donation was made, Nelson escorted fellow trustee Eliza Bliss, Lillie Bliss’s niece home. As their taxicab made its way through Central Park, Bliss prodded Nelson to confide in her the identity of the anonymous donor. As she remembers it, “Nelson turned into a stone statue; that’s the only way I can describe it. He sat in the corner of the taxi and didn’t look at me” Finally, when they emerged from the cab at 72nd street, Nelson said, “All right, I’ll tell you if you give me your word that as long as my mother is alive you’ll never tell a living soul.” Bliss made the vow, and Nelson slumped back into his seat. “I gave the hundred thousand dollars...you see, I just came into my money. You know, my mother is so crazy for this museum to really mean something to people, and for people to love modern art as much as she does. I just feel it would mean a great deal more to her if it came from somebody out there than if she knew it came from me.”¹⁶⁶

Eventually, Nelson wrote to Abby that he was the anonymous donor because he thought the news would lift her spirits while she was recuperating overseas from an illness. The letter reads, in part:

If it were not for you, the Museum of Modern Art would be a thing of the past today, and I am not exaggerating when I say that you did a job which any of the so-called “big executives” would have been proud to have maneuvered! It is your personality projected into the Museum which has made it what it is today. To show you that I mean what I have just written and how strongly I feel, and have felt, about the whole situation I am going to tell you now what I have not wanted to before for many reasons, that in fact the anonymous gift of \$100,000 was made by your son in grateful appreciation of all of the many many things you have done for him.

With loads of love to you both. Your devoted son, Nelson
P.S. I’ll watch out for the Museum as best I can in your absence.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Reich, 124.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Thursday, May 1934, Family and Friends NAR, Record Group 4, Series H. Rockefeller Archive Center.

Abby's response back to Nelson was only discovered in 2002, among Nelson Rockefeller's gubernatorial memorabilia, and has never been included in any biographies written about Abby or Nelson:

Dearest, dearest Nelson –

Never have I been as touched as I was by your dear letter, the news of the unknown donor. . . I find it difficult to adequately express my feelings. Of course it has always been an enormous satisfaction to me to have you share my enthusiasm for and my very real interest in art and beauty. I have felt that it brought us particularly near to each other. Ever since you were a very little boy we seemed to love the same things. And now to have you give so generously, I might say so magnificently and so spontaneously to the cause that I care most about, in appreciation of what I have done for you; to do it now instead of waiting until I die and to do it with the first money that was yours to command; fills my heart with a joy and gratitude as I have never known before. . . Dear boy, it was you who put the Museum on its feet and made it permanent, without your hundred thousand it would have failed. . . With deep gratitude and love from your most devoted Mother.¹⁶⁸

Because Nelson so prized his mother's response, he had her letter framed, and it became part of his gubernatorial memorabilia collection, and was never included in the Rockefeller Family archived correspondence. Since Abby's response had been buried in boxes containing Nelson Rockefeller's mementos, this important piece of history had been lost to biographers and historians until 2002.

In another remarkable letter to Abby not previously published, Nelson responds to his mother and reaffirms how much he valued Abby's letter acknowledging his donation: "It is hard to express in writing my feelings after reading your letter – it is the most beautiful one I have ever received and I shall always treasure it."¹⁶⁹ Through this previously unpublished exchange

¹⁶⁸ "Serendipity at The Rockefeller Archive Center," Collection News. Rockefeller Archive Center Newsletter, (Spring 2002), 7.

¹⁶⁹ Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Tuesday, May, 1934, Family and Friends collection, NAR, Record Group 4, Series H, Rockefeller Archive Center.

of extraordinary communication between Abby and Nelson, it is posited here that they had a bond that linked them not only as mother and son, but as partners absolutely devoted to ensuring MoMA's survival.



FIG. 11
Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller looking at a portrait of his mother (undated)
Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Bernice Kert's contention that Abby was not responsible for Nelson's training could not be further from the truth. Abby's training of Nelson and the importance of that training can simply not be overstated. Her guidance in the visual arts led to the hundreds of millions of

dollars that Nelson infused into MoMA, New York's art market, and beyond. His contributions to MoMA in terms of time and talent was not only to honor his mother, but to fulfill a deep need he had to immerse himself in the New York art world, and indulge his own passion for collecting. Nelson's impact on modern art in New York through Abby's strong influence had far reaching implications not only in Manhattan, but extended to the State's capital of Albany, when he was elected Governor of New York in 1959. In Albany, Nelson was largely responsible for the creation of the New York State Council on the Arts (which later became a model for the National Endowment for the Arts), an organization that awards over 2,700 grants each year to arts organizations in every arts discipline throughout New York, and whose mission statement reads, in part, that they are "dedicated to preserving and expanding the rich and diverse cultural resources that are and will become the heritage of New York's citizens."

Further, New York State commissioned the Empire State Plaza in Albany, which not only housed the various branches of state government, but also included the Empire State Plaza Art Collection, a collection Nelson largely curated. He wanted to pay homage to the modern art movement that had its roots in Manhattan, a movement he loved, and one that inspired a modernist vision for New York's capital. He undertook what was at the time the most ambitious public art project ever conceived; one that set a bold, new standard for public funding in the arts. The result was an unrivaled collection of modern and contemporary art, ninety-two pieces, all of which were on display for the public's appreciation at the State's capitol. The collection included works by Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Ellsworth Kelly, David Smith, Alexander Calder, Robert Motherwell and many other important abstract and modern artists, most of whom belonged to the so-called "New York School" of art. According to Glenn D. Lowry, MoMA's executive director, the collection continues to be the most important State collection of modern

art in the United States.

While still Governor, Nelson oversaw the construction of the State University of New York system and he built, in collaboration with his lifelong friend and fellow modern art patron Roy Neuberger, the Neuberger Museum on the campus of the State University of New York Purchase College. Not only were six hundred pieces of modern art displayed in the Neuberger Museum's permanent collection, the museum provided and continues to provide an in-depth community education program.

In 1977, Nelson founded the Nelson Rockefeller Collection, Inc. (NRC) an art reproduction company that produced and sold licensed reproductions of selected works from Rockefeller's collection. In the introduction to the NRC catalog, Nelson poignantly states that he was motivated by his desire to share with others "the joy of living with these beautiful objects."

Nelson Rockefeller's leadership and his infusion of hundreds of millions of dollars into the collection, promotion, and public accessibility to modern art all benefitted from his mother's early training and influence. Despite Kert's contention that Abby's training of Nelson in the visual arts was going too far, Abby's influence was absolutely profound because it changed immeasurably how modern art was promoted not only through Nelson's personal collecting and his efforts to help his mother sustain MoMA, but it affected New York on a statewide scale, serving as an exceptional example of how both private and institutional giving could affect the public promotion, education and appreciation of non-traditional, non-representational art.

Abby's influence was something that remained with Nelson even when he ascended to the vice presidency of the United States in 1974. In a speech made when Nelson received the 1977 Arts Award of the Council of the Arts, he shared a story from his childhood that is quite

revealing. He discussed a piece from his personal collection, a seventh-century Chinese Bodhisattva in white marble from his childhood home in New York City at 4 West 54th Street:

When I was a child (and mother was the great collector in our family) at the age of seven, or eight, or nine this was my favorite piece....I was crazy about it. So having been very fortunate in my forward thinking I asked mother if she would leave it in her will. This was at the age of seven or eight and she, having a good memory, did and so I was very fortunate to have it. So there it is and probably of the Tang period of China, the most beautiful marble piece in existence.”¹⁷⁰

Nelson was devastated by his mother’s sudden death. As his son Steven recalled, “I can remember Father coming in through the elevator doors at 810 Fifth Avenue. He was absolutely ashen white. I don’t think I have ever seen Father so deeply shaken.”¹⁷¹ Abby had been far more than simply a parental figure for Nelson: she had been a friend, a confidante, a source of solace and the one person in the world he felt completely at ease in unburdening himself. Their relationship with light and spontaneous, for Abby was caring, supportive, wise, fully cognizant of his weaknesses and yet still unabashedly adulatory.¹⁷² As Nelson’s son Steven further recollected, “If you went into his bedroom or study, there was a picture of one woman: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.”¹⁷³ Nelson had been his mother’s enthusiastic and generous partner and friend at MoMA during her lifetime, and his support only helped to deepen the powerful bond between them.

A particularly compelling excerpt from Nelson’s essay for a 1975 National Art Education Association publication, demonstrates the importance he placed upon training children in the arts, and, thus, is particularly meaningful to this project. As Vice President of the United States, Nelson once again not only used his position as a platform to advocate for the importance of art

¹⁷⁰ Nelson A. Rockefeller. “Remarks on art and art collecting,” 1977 Arts Awards Presentation of the Council of the Arts in Westchester. (Dec. 16 1977).

¹⁷¹ Reich, 423.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

education, but also went so far as to imbue it with a sense of the divine:

Much of education involves a necessary shaping and training of the child's mind. Art education goes a significant step beyond these educational aims.

Art education expands the mind. It sensitizes the child to new intellectual potentials. Perhaps the teaching of art, more than any other educational experience, is concerned with growth of human potential. When we have educated children in language skills, mathematics, science and the like, we have prepared them to live and make a living. But art education teaches the child how to enjoy life, how to use these senses fully. And in so doing, the child not only adds to his or her pleasure, but begins to understand the greatest wonder of mankind, the quality which separates human life from other forms of life, the capacity to be creative.

It is this spark of creativity that lends a touch of the divine to the human race. And it is in art education classes that a child can first be made to perceive that wondrous spark.¹⁷⁴

**David Rockefeller:
Abby's Most Powerful Financial Partner**

Through Abby's efforts to instill in her children a passion for collecting and the pursuit and embrace of beauty in art, she found a highly enthusiastic partner during her lifetime in Nelson. He became the partner in modern art that she so desperately needed, one who offered both his moral and financial support. By actively participating in MoMA as soon as he graduated from Dartmouth, first through his involvement in the Junior Advisory Committee and later as a Board trustee and president, his support at MoMA was absolutely crucial to its early success. Luckily, once again through Abby's inculcation and training, Abby's youngest son, David Rockefeller, became another tremendously valuable ally in ensuring that his mother's museum building legacy and goal to further modern art in New York would be secured. Because

¹⁷⁴ Nelson Rockefeller, et al. "The Value of Art Education." Art Education (National Art Education Association: Oct. 2 1975), 6-25.

her death in 1948 preceded David's involvement at MoMA, Abby was unable to witness the astounding impact he made on the museum, so their partnership is indeed a posthumous one. However, because of David's extraordinary achievements at MoMA, through his active leadership and involvement on the Board of Trustees, extraordinarily large personal donations, savvy fundraising skills, and impeccable personal collecting, MoMA owes him its financial survival, and its transformation into the most important modern art museum in the United States.

David's Own Training

Earlier in this work, Bernice Kert's contention is challenged when she wrote that Abby's training of Nelson in the visual arts was going too far.¹⁷⁵ Her contention is refuted by the review and analysis of both secondary and primary sources, which support the assertion that Abby did indeed train Nelson in the visual arts, beginning in his early childhood. Although access to any original correspondence between Abby and David is prohibited because his files will be released by the Rockefeller Archive Center only after his death, any accounting of his life and relationship with Abby exists through his memoirs and interviews. Throughout both, he conveys an intense devotion to his mother and lovingly dedicates the written account of his life first and foremost to her.

Abby was also extremely attached to David and the reasons for their closeness are not hard to tease out. David was the youngest child in the family and being alone with his mother in their home after his siblings had grown and left the house had much to do with their closeness, as did the fact that he openly adored her and was not afraid to show it.¹⁷⁶ They shared a mutual love

¹⁷⁵ Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 475.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 405.

of good food and sailing, and seemed to be allies in a home still run by Junior, because David was everything that Junior was not. He did not rely on Abby's constant reassurance for he was self-assured, intelligent and extremely competent. They remained close even after David attended Harvard and Abby would often visit. Later, in 1937, when David traveled overseas for graduate study at the London School of Economics, Abby wrote to her sister Lucy, "I don't allow myself to think how much I am going to miss David. At times it seems as if I couldn't bear it."¹⁷⁷



FIG. 12
John D. Rockefeller and his grandson, a young David Rockefeller

David documented his mother's profound aesthetic influence on him and reveals that one of his strongest memories is his mother's great love of art and how she subtly and patiently

¹⁷⁷ *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's Letters to Her Sister Lucy* (New York: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Sept.: 1937), 240, from Kert, *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*, 405.

conveyed it to him. He stated that he learned more from his mother than from all the art historians and curators who have informed him about technical aspects of art history and art appreciation over the years.¹⁷⁸ Beautiful objects “came alive in his mother’s hands, as if her appreciation imbued them with a special aura of beauty”. The longer she looked at a painting, the more she would find in it, as if by some magic she had opened new depths, new dimensions not accessible to ordinary people.¹⁷⁹

Once again, as with Nelson, Kert’s contention can be challenged with respect to Abby’s training of her children in the visual arts, as David clearly lays out his mother’s intentions:

Although she had an expert’s understanding, Mother also approached art emotionally, and she wanted her children to revel in the full beauty of a painting, print, or piece of porcelain. Above all, she *taught* me and my siblings to be open to all art – to allow its colors, texture, composition, and content to speak to us: to understand what the artist was trying to do and how the work might provide a challenging or reassuring glimpse of the world around us. It was often a deeply enthralling experience. I owe much to Mother, but her patient transmission of her love of art is a treasure beyond calculation. Her death in April 1948 left a deep hole in my life.¹⁸⁰

David revealed in an interview in connection with MoMA’s exhibition, *Cézanne to Picasso: Paintings from the Peggy and David Rockefeller Collection*, that even as a young boy, his mother encouraged him to select paintings to hang in his bedroom, so he chose a series of eight or ten Arthur watercolors, and that this was just one of many things she did with him to expand his interest in the arts.¹⁸¹ Much like his mother, David was curating, in effect, his own bedroom, just like Abby curated her own gallery on the seventh floor of the family’s townhouse on West 54th Street.

¹⁷⁸ “David Rockefeller on Art,” *Forbes*, 5 March 2003.

¹⁷⁹ Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Rockefeller *Memoirs*, 442.

¹⁸¹ Interview with David Rockefeller and Ann Temkin, MoMA’s chief curator, July 22, 2009. www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/51/350.

David shared that apart from Abby's devotion to her family, MoMA was her consuming passion, and the nurturing of the museum became her strongest priority. She hosted countless planning meetings for the museum at their home and he recalls her overwhelming enthusiasm for the museum (as well as his father's impatience for the meetings to be over). Because David was the youngest and the last child still residing at home during MoMA's formative years, he had a "front-row" seat during these planning sessions. It is suggested here that by observing his mother's passion and desire for MoMA, a passionate interest manifested in adulthood when he became enthusiastically immersed at MoMA. Unlike Nelson, who curtailed his involvement in 1958 once he decided to run for governor of New York, David's interest in the museum never diminished. As the years passed, he became further invested in its success and still serves as Chairman Emeritus, and his involvement on the Board spans over sixty-seven years.

The “Big Bucks” For MoMA Finally Roll In

It is argued here that if Abby succeeded in inspiring a passion for modern art and collecting in her children that they in turn would ensure that her love of modern art and contributions to MoMA would continue within the Rockefeller family, guaranteeing her legacy. Because Abby and the children had very tight budgets imposed on them by Junior, once the children had access to the Rockefeller millions, they had the potential to make enormous monetary donations and contributions of important works of art to MoMA, in part, to honor their mother. Indeed both Nelson and David have shown in spectacular fashion their generosity to MoMA with Rockefeller money that was so hard for their father to part with for “Mother’s Museum.”

From the time that David was asked to fill Abby’s seat on the MoMA Board in 1948, he proved to be an innovative fundraiser, from subtly pressuring other trustees to contribute more money to MoMA’s endowment fund, to instituting new donor programs, and even soliciting an aunt (his father’s sole surviving sister) to donate to MoMA two brownstones in which she had lived for most of her life so they could be incorporated into the museum. Further, he arranged for additional land on West 54th Street to be donated to MoMA shortly after his mother’s death so the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden could be built, a beautiful outdoor and now iconic space to permanently memorialize his mother’s important role at the museum.

There is an irony in David’s extreme benevolence and savvy fundraising skills because his mother was charged with the very difficult task of lead fundraiser in the early days of the museum, when she herself could not make very significant monetary donations. So, at long last,

a certain poetic justice for “Mother’s Museum” through David’s successful fundraising efforts and access to the Rockefeller fortune.

Suzanne Loebel argues in her book *America’s Medicis*, that of all the Rockefeller brothers, David was the savviest money-wise.¹⁸² Being his grandfather’s probable favorite grandson, he started with more money than the other brothers and as Chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank, increased it mightily.¹⁸³ Indeed, David is the last family member wealthy enough to support MoMA in a grand manner and has the credibility and connections in New York City to remain one of the museum’s most effective fundraisers by making huge personal financial contributions, donating tremendously valuable art from his own collection, and engaging in fundraising efforts that have netted hundreds of millions of dollars for MoMA. It is estimated that he has given either cash or pledges totaling \$200 million, excluding seventeen extremely valuable artworks, some promised and others already given, including masterpieces by Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso.

¹⁸² As of May 25, 2012, David Rockefeller’s estimated net worth is \$2.9 billion, per Forbes Magazine. <http://www.forbes.com/profile/david-rockefeller-sr/>.

¹⁸³ Suzanne Loebel, *America’s Medicis –The Rockefellers and Their Astonishing Cultural Legacy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010) 295.



FIG. 13

David Rockefeller (second from right) shaking hands with Jawad Hashim (left) who was the President of the Arab Monetary Fund Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

In 2005, David announced he would bequeath to MoMA \$100 million after his death, the largest gift ever made to the museum.¹⁸⁴ The gift was intended to shore up its public programs at the museum and, in the meantime, until his death, he would give the museum \$5 million a year as if the money were already invested in the endowment. David's \$100 million will enable MoMA to bolster its educational programs, including lectures and school initiatives and help finance future exhibitions, as well as hopefully spur the museum's other trustees to increase their donations.

¹⁸⁴ Carol Vogel, "MoMA to Receive its Largest Cash Gift," *The New York Times* (April 13, 2005).

Corporate Art Collecting on an Unprecedented Scale

In 1959, David used his platform as the chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank to institute a modern art collection on an unprecedented scale in corporate America. He took the lead in commercial art collecting by establishing Chase Manhattan Bank's Art Program, in which over nine thousand works of art were either purchased or commissioned for the Bank. Much like Nelson used his position as New York's governor to institute an enormous new building and modern art collection in the state's capital, David, similarly, used his own powerful position to cultivate modern art appreciation in New York. MoMA's influence was exerted on both projects because prominent curators and advisors from the museum made up a large part of each advisory committee.

Today, the JP Morgan Chase Art collection numbers over 30,000 artworks situated within four hundred and fifty corporate locations worldwide. The collection "continues to function as a 'working asset' to enhance the workplace for the enjoyment of employees, clients and guests, as well as to demonstrate key values of the firm: human creativity, innovation, and diversity."¹⁸⁵ Much like his mother's modern art activism in 1929, David, thirty years later, took on his own radical agenda: that art would no longer serve as mere decoration in office space, but would promote an environment that was visually and intellectually stimulating. Through modern art, David created a progressive and inclusive culture for bank employees, clients, and guests, an environment that engaged one's capacity for critical thinking as well as nourished the soul.

¹⁸⁵ "Creativity at Work: An Interview with Lisa K. Erf, Director, JP Morgan Chase Art Collection," <http://www.christies.com/features/creativity-at-work-lisa-erf-jpmorgan-chase-1669-1.aspx>.



FIG. 14
David Rockefeller's office, Chase Manhattan Bank (Nov. 12, 1969)
by Jan Jachniewicz
Collections of the Museum of the City of New York

There is a photograph that exists from the 1960s from the Chase archives in which David and the other art committee advisory members are looking at and rating various artworks for inclusion in Chase's collection. The subjects in the picture appear conservative, buttoned-up and stiff, but they were actually doing something quite experimental, freeing, and even radical. "They were starting something unique without knowledge that it would become successful . . . not knowing the magnitude of their leadership and social responsibility for future

generations.”¹⁸⁶ It is tempting to draw a parallel between Abby and David when considering Erf’s statement about the old photograph of David and his advisory committee. There is a certain satisfaction in envisioning Abby, thirty years earlier, admiring a painting by Picasso or Matisse, as she embarked on a similar radical mission to introduce unconventional art into uncharted territory.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's forward-thinking attitude, her careful navigation of a complicated marital relationship, her intriguing business and personal relationship with Edith Halpert, her lifelong partnership with Nelson, and a posthumous partnership with David, all contributed to her "emancipation" from both prevailing mores of the era and from her husband. Through this emancipation, Abby attained a fulfilling life outside of the traditional roles of wife and mother. By engaging in modern art activism and advocacy through her devotion and ambitious promotion of modern and contemporary art, artists, and creation of the Museum of Modern Art, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller engineered an immensely satisfying life for herself in addition to motherhood and marriage.

Abby's role as a mother was also a site of cultural power, one in which she could affect immense change by exerting her maternal authority over her children, and her legacy not only survives, but continues to thrive, through their tremendous efforts. MoMA continues to be one of the world's most important modern art institutions, thanks to a spectacular permanent collection as well as exhibitions that continue to push artistic conventions and boundaries.



FIG. 15
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (undated)
Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center

Because of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's efforts and later through the powerful platforms utilized by both Nelson and David, she not only helped to make modern art available and accessible in New York, she made it possible to consider the prominent place it had, and still has, in our visual culture. By building upon the efforts of progressive women like Clara Davidge, Katherine Dreier and, of course, her friend and partner in progressive art, Edith Halpert, Abby legitimized and institutionalized modern artistic movements - new genres of art undervalued and underappreciated by traditional collectors and museums. Disdained by established museums like The Metropolitan Museum, modern art was afforded neither the cachet nor the access to powerful institutions, galleries or exhibition spaces. In helping to create the Museum of Modern Art, Abby thwarted the traditional narrative of acknowledged masterpieces of the past with the art of *her* time. In doing so, she directly inserted herself into an exciting, often bohemian world,

one far different than the life she shared with her husband, and one in which she was able to self-fashion a very different identity, that of a modern art matron. Through her personal collecting of progressive and modernist art, the creation of a museum that would collect and exhibit it, and the steady hand with which she led her children to it, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller became one of the most important agents of modernism of the twentieth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Barr, Alfred H., Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Sept. 8, 1930. AHB, Jr. Papers, (AAA: 3264; 1242-48), MoMA Archives.
- Barr, Alfred J. to Katherine Drier, The Katherine Dreier/ Société Anonyme Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/katherine-s-dreier-papers-société-anonyme-archiv> [accessed Nov. 20, 2013].
- Erf, Lisa K., Director, JP Morgan Chase Art Collection. Interview. *Features Archive*. Aug. 15, 2011. *Christie's*. www.christies.com/features/creativity-at-work-lisa-erf-jpmorgan-chase-1669-1.aspx.
- Halpert, Edith to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, *Book of Tributes*, Family 2, AR Se. B30, 314, x.
- Halpert, Edith. Interview by Harlan Phillips, New York, NY, 1962-1963. Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution.
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-Halpert-gregor-halpert-13220> [accessed Feb 20, 2014].
- Halpert, Edith G. "The Function of the Dealer." *College Art Journal* 9.1, 1949.
- Hamilton Easter Field papers, circa 1913-1966, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/hamilton-easter-field-papers-15927>.
- Kelly, Anna to Edith Halpert, undated. Downtown Gallery records, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.
- Notable Passengers, Empress of Asia. August 18, 1921.
<http://www.empressofasia.com/index.htm>.
- Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, "Concerning Children, (undated speech), Folder 159, Box 13, RG 2, OMR, Series AAR – II, Rockefeller Archive Center.
- Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to Arthur David Davies, Dec 18, 1928. Rockefeller Family Files, Box 10, RG 2. AAR Series, AAR Papers. Rockefeller Archive Center.
- Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to Conger Goodyear, March 23, 1936, Folder 105, Box 8, Correspondence, RG 2, Series I, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Files. Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, John D., Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Aug. 21, 1903. Rockefeller Family Files, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Box 55, RG 2. Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, John D., Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Aug. 27, 1903. Rockefeller Family Files, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Box 55, RG 2, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, John D. Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, May 15, 1912. Rockefeller Family Files, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Box 55, RG 2, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, John D., Jr. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, July 6, 1922 and July 8, 1922, Rockefeller Family Files, JDR, Jr., Personal Series, Box 55, RG 2, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to Conger Goodyear, March 23, 1936, Correspondence, AAR, Rockefeller Family Files, Folder 105, Box 8, RG 2, Series I, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, undated. Family and Friends Collection, Rockefeller Family Files, Folder 359, Box 28, RG 4, Series H, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller. April 9, 1921. Family and Friends Collection, Rockefeller Family Files, Folder 356, Box 28, G 4, Series H, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to W.R. Valentiner. Dec. 6, 1929. Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner papers, Correspondence, Reels 272-276. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to W.R. Valentiner. June 5, 1930. Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner papers, Correspondence, Reels 272-276. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich to W.R. Valentiner. April 7, 1931. Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner papers, Correspondence, Reels 272-276. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rockefeller, Nelson Aldrich to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Tuesday, May 1934, Family and Friends Collection, NAR, Rockefeller Family Files, RG 4, Series H, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, Nelson Aldrich. to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Thursday, May 1934. Family and Friends Collection, NAR. Rockefeller Family Files, RG 4, Series H, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Rockefeller, John D. Jr. to Martin A. Ryerson, October 25, 1931, Folder 1401, Box 182, Series H: Friends and Services, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Ryerson, Martin A. to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., May 13, 1919. Folder 257, Box 25, Series O, Rockefeller Boards, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller. Rockefeller Archive Center.

Valentiner, William R. to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., April 2, 1948, AAR Papers, Rockefeller Family Files, Box 33, Folder 301, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Secondary Sources

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Museum, Colonial Williamsburg.
<http://emuseum.history.org/view/objects/asitem/search@swg'edward%20hicks'/4/title-desc?t:state:flow=216a39cd-65c4-4eba-aa12-6f921a26c7d1> [accessed March 13, 2014].

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's Letters to Her Sister Lucy. (New York: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., September: 1937), 240 in Kert, Bernice. *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: the Woman in the Family*. New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2003.

“Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller...has a Nose for New Talent.” *TIME Magazine*. 27 Jan. 1936: 28-29. Volume XXVII. Number 4. Rockefeller Family Files, AAR, Folder 89, Series I, Box 7. Rockefeller Archive Center.

Anderson, Dennis R., and Glenn D. Lowry. *The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Art Collection and Plaza Memorials*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2002.

Art Review. “In Electric Moments, History Transfigured - Hale Woodruff's Talladega Murals, in ‘Rising Up,’ at N.Y.U.” *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 2013.
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/arts/design/hale-woodruffs-talladega-murals-in-rising-up-at-nyu.html?_r=0 [accessed February 19, 2014].

Berman, Avis. "Pioneers in American Museums: Edith Halpert." *Museum News*, 54.2, 1975.

Blake, Casey Nelson. "Greenwich Village Modernism: The Essence of It All Was Communication," in *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*, edited by Marilyn Satin Kushner, Kimberly Orcutt and Casey Nelson Blake, 83-94. New York: New York Historical Society, 2013.

Blake, Casey Nelson. “The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 3., Aug. 1999.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/656660> [accessed March 15, 2014].

- Brown, Milton Wolf. *American Painting, from the Armory Show to the Depression*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955.
- Building for a Long Future: The University of Chicago and its Donors, 1889-1930. <http://www.lib.edu/e/webexhibits/building/ryerson.html> [accessed March 14, 2014].
- Cahill, *Art of the Common Man*, 6, in Amy L. Marver, *Homemade Modern: MoMA, Women and the Transformation of European Modernism into American Style*. Diss. University of California, Irvine, 2001.
- Chase, Mary Ellen. *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*. New York: Macmillan, 1950.
- Clayton, Virginia Tuttle, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss. *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002.
- Corn, Wanda M. *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999.
- "David Rockefeller on Art." *Forbes*. 03 May 2003. Web. www.forbes.com/2003/03/05/cx_0305conn_print.html [accessed April 12, 2012].
- Dodge, Mabel to Gertrude Stein, January 24, 1913, in *Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein*, Donald Gallup ed. (New York, 1953).
- Focillon, Henri. "Introduction," *Art Populaire* (Paris, 1931), in *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*. Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002.
- Gervasi, Frank. *The Real Rockefeller*. New York, Atheneum. 1964.
- Hicks, Edward: The Peaceable Kingdom, Worcester Art Museum <http://www.worcesterart.org/Collection/American/1934.65.html>. [accessed February 19, 2014].
- Hunter, Sam. "Introduction," *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection*. New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1984.
- Joyce, Henry. "Electra Havemeyer Webb and Edith Gregor Halpert." *Antiques Magazine*. January, 2003.
- Kazakina, Katya. "Jeweler Esmerian's Art Raises \$10.5 Million for Creditors."

- Bloomberg Luxury. Jan 27, 2014.
<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-01-28/jeweler-esmerian-s-art-raises-10-5-million-for-creditors.html>. [accessed February 19, 2014].
- Kert, Bernice. *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: The Woman in the Family*. New York: Random House, 1993.
- Keynes, Quentin. "The Arts of Our Time – New York's Museum of Modern Art." *Magazine of the Future* Dec. 1948- Jan. 1949 Dec. 1948- Jan. 1949: 67.
- Kramer, Michael S., and Sam Roberts. *"I Never Wanted to Be Vice-president of Anything!" An Investigative Biography of Nelson Rockefeller*. New York: Basic, 1976.
- Lee, Sherman E. Review: *The Passionate Eye: The Life of William R. Valentiner*, by Margaret Sterne. *Art Libraries Society of North America Newsletter*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Dec. 1980.
- Leuchak, Mary Rebecca. "The Old World for the New': Developing the Design for the Cloisters." *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 23, 1988.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1512857> [accessed March 29, 2014].
- Loebl, Suzanne. *America's Medicis: The Rockefellers and Their Astonishing Cultural Legacy*. New York: Harper, 2010.
- Lynes, Russell. "Good Old Modern; an Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art." New York, Atheneum, 1973.
- Marquis, Alice Goldfarb. *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Missionary for the Modern*. Chicago: Contemporary, 1989.
- Marver, Amy L. *Homemade Modern: MoMA, Women and the Transformation of European Modernism into American Style*. (PhD Diss., University of California, Irvine, 2001.
- McCarthy, Kathleen D. *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1991.
- Morris, Joe Alex. *Nelson Rockefeller, a Biography*. New York: Harper, 1960.
- Naumann, Francis M.. *New York Dada 1915-23*. New York: Abrams, 1994.
- Oaklander, Christine I. "Clara Davidge's Madison Art Gallery: Sowing the seed for the Armory Show," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 36, no. 3-4. 1996.
- Perlman, Bennard B. *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1998.

- Pollock, Lindsay. *The Girl with the Gallery*, New York: Public Affairs, 2006.
- Reeves, Ruth, and William D. Moore. "You'd Swear They Were Modern." *Chicago Journals* Spring 47.1, 2013.
- Reich, Cary. *The Life of Nelson A. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer, 1908-1958*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
- Rockefeller Archive Center Newsletter, Collection News. *Serendipity at The Rockefeller Archive Center* Spring, 2002.
- Rockefeller, David. Interview with Bernice Kert, Aug. 16, 1987 and Sept. 25, 1988 in Kert, Bernice. *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller: the Woman in the Family*. New York: Random House, 2003.
- Rockefeller, David. Interview with Ann Temkin, MoMA's chief curator, July 22, 2009. www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/51/350 [accessed April 15, 2012].
- Rockefeller, David. *Memoirs*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Rockefeller, Nelson, et al. "The Value of Art Education." *Art Education* Oct. 28 1975: 6-25. National Art Education Association.
- Rockefeller, Nelson A. Remarks on art and art collecting. 1977 Arts Awards Presentation of the Council of the Arts. Westchester, New York. 16 Dec. 1977.
- Rubin, William. "Painting and Sculpture," in *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection*. New York, NY: H.N. Abrams in Association with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984.
- Saarinen, Aline B. *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors*. New York: Random House, 1958.
- Saltz, Jerry. "Cubes! The Horror! Chaos at Armory Show." *New York Magazine* 9 Apr. 2012. <http://nymag.com/news/features/scandals/marcel-duchamp-2012-4/> [accessed September 13, 2103].
- Serendipity at The Rockefeller Archive Center," Collection News. Rockefeller Archive Center Newsletter,. Spring 2002.
- Tepfer, Diane. *Edith Halpert and the Downtown Gallery: Downtown, 1926-1940: A Study in American Art Patronage*. PhD Diss., Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 1989.
- "The Forbes 400: The Richest People in America." *Forbes*. 21 Sept. 2011. www.forbes.com/forbes-400/ [accessed September 5, 2011].
- Vaughan, Malcolm. "Modern Museum Exhibits Early Native Folk Art." *American*. Dec. 10,

1932, in Marver, Amy L. *Homemade Modern: MoMA, Women and the Transformation of European Modernism into American Style*. (PhD Diss., University of California, Irvine, 2001).

Valentiner, Wilhelm Reinhold. *Masterpieces of Art: In Memory of William R. Valentiner, 1880-1958, Representing His Achievements during Fifty Years of Service in American Museums*, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, April 6-May 17, 1959. Raleigh, NC: Museum, 1959, xvii.

Vitz, Robert C. "Struggle and Response: American Artists and the Great Depression." *New York History*, Jan. 57.1, 1-98. New York State Historical Association, 1976.

Vogel, Carol. "MoMA to Receive Its Largest Cash Gift." *The New York Times* 13 Apr. 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/13/arts/design/13gift.html?_r=0 [accessed May 17, 2012].