

## Black Tulip, White Glove

### I.

Joseph Alsop's *The Rare Art Traditions* situates itself on an imaginary shelf somewhere between scholarly treatises and books meant for a more generalized, though erudite, audience. Alsop was after all a journalist, not an academic. Subtitled *The History of Art Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena*, the volume is massive, nearly seven hundred pages, 235 of them taken up with endnotes. When it was issued in 1982, its collaborating publishers, Princeton University Press and Harper & Row, claimed it to be "the first comprehensive, serious history of art collecting ever compiled." As if to reinforce its all-embracing nature, they prominently displayed a blurb on its dust jacket from H.W. Janson, whose similarly weighty tome, the survey-course text *History of Art*, is familiar to every college student who took art history from the mid-1960s onward for many decades.

Alsop's theory was that only under certain circumstances has art making given risen to an "integrated cultural-behavior system" that has produced so-called by-products.<sup>1</sup> The main by-products in his view are art collecting, the writing of art history, and the marketing of art. Alsop also identified five other secondary results. These are art museums, art fakers, appraisers ("a kind of stock market of taste"), the antiques market ("old-for-old's sake"), and the phenomenon of "super-prices."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in his view, this last consequence is literally the terminal one for any collecting field. "The payment of super-prices for works of art always announces the last and more luxuriant phase of development of the by-products of art," posited Alsop, who spent eighteen years on the undertaking of his book, and might have taken longer if he hadn't employed "a series of younger scholars" to help him research it.<sup>3</sup> The drop in prices for early

American “brown furniture” at the turn of the twenty-first century, after their phenomenal rise in the couple of preceding decades, resoundingly realized his theory, at least in that case.

Alsop (1910-1989) was educated at Groton and Harvard, then went to work in 1932 for the *New York Herald Tribune*—an unorthodox choice for an Ivy Leaguer with, no less, connections to Theodore Roosevelt and James Monroe through his mother and, later, John Jay through his wife. (A closeted gay man, Alsop married Susan Mary Jay Patten in 1961; they were divorced in 1978.) He was himself a collector, having begun in China during World War II, where “in a rigorous, passionate way,” he started buying works of art. He “kept up the practice” until 1974, when he retired from writing his newspaper column, whereupon, he somewhat smugly reported, he sold off “those pieces in my collection that had increased in value.” He noted, smugly once more, that he found it “surprisingly easy”—as if to say that his collecting had not been a mania; rather, it had been completely under his emotional control.<sup>4</sup>

Like virtually everyone who attempts to write about the phenomenon of collecting, Alsop found the task a bigger undertaking than he had initially imagined. While his project had begun as the story of art collecting in China, the West, and the Muslim world only, it grew “into a large and perhaps too laboriously notated volume.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, of the total eight volumes he authored or co-authored in his lifetime, he named *The Rare Art Traditions* to be his “proudest work.”<sup>6</sup>

Alsop did not discuss the collector personality in his opus, let alone the impulse to collect what came to be termed collectibles. If the subject of collecting is vast without delving into reasons why one collects, it is gargantuan if one includes motivation. But I like to imagine he did think about it and that he read the essay “The System of Collecting,” first published in 1961 by French sociologist, postmodern philosopher, and cultural critic Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007),

and reprinted many times ever since. “The active stage of collecting,” Baudrillard remarked, “seems to occur between the ages of seven and twelve, during the period of latency prior to puberty. With the onset of puberty, the collecting impulse tends to disappear, though occasionally it resurfaces after a short interval. Later on, it is men in their forties who seem most prone to the passion”<sup>7</sup>— Alsop’s age when he was on the upswing of the Asiana-collecting stage of his life.

Unlike Alsop, Baudrillard did not discriminate between collectors of the rare arts and those who covet lesser objects of desire, understanding that the choice is limited by a seeker’s education, class, and wallet thickness. “The fanaticism is always identical,” the Frenchman wrote, “whether in the case of the rich man specializing in Persian miniatures, or the pauper who hoards matchboxes.”<sup>8</sup> I subscribe to the same belief, and as a result I try to treat all collectors with respect, reminding myself when necessary that it’s always a privilege to be invited into someone’s intimate world of desire. And it’s always an education both about the subject of the collection and about the endlessly fascinating nature of humanity. A Barbie collector, for example, reverentially recounted to me that when the Ken doll came along two years after Barbie’s own debut in 1959, he was first sold wearing red bathing trunks with a white stripe and cork sandals. A little yellow towel was included as a prop. The Ken outfit called “Dream Boat,” dating from 1963, consisted of olive-green slacks, a patterned shirt, mustard-colored jacket, and red-banded hat. “Rally Day,” released in 1962, came with a set of tiny keys and a road map. I asked the collector what the map showed. “I’ve never unfolded mine,” she said. “With these things, considering their age, you sort of use the white gloves”—just like the bibliophiles who don’t like to read their most expensive and rarest books. There are reading copies for that.

Yet Baudrillard understood that “one does not collect paintings by Old Masters in the same spirit that one collects cigar-bands.”<sup>9</sup> In what I take to be his most succinct definition of what makes a collection more than a mere accumulation—and unquestionably more than a genuine hoarder’s chaotic piles and stashes—was “not only the fact of its being culturally complex, but the fact of its incompleteness, the fact that it *lacks* something.”<sup>10</sup> That is, the so-called black tulip, the term popularized by Alexander Dumas when he chose it for the title of his 1850 novel about Cornelius van Baerle, who at his peril became completely preoccupied with producing the perfect flower type in seventeenth-century Holland. But perhaps Baudrillard’s most famous statement about collectors and collecting is the one in which he claimed to have revealed “the whole miracle of collecting.” It is that “it is invariably *oneself* that one collects.”<sup>11</sup> If true, that explains certain behaviors, like the collecting of colonial American portraits by those sitters’ ancestors (or their wanna-be ancestors). As V.S. Pritchett’s narrator remarks in “The Camberwell Beauty,” his brilliant short story about the travails of an array of dealers who are also collectors: “If you are after Georgian silver you catch the illusion, while you are bidding, that you are related to the rich families who owned it.”<sup>12</sup> Fantasy identification with those who have wealth, power, status, or celebrity is the very definition of a fan—that is, a fanatic. *The fanaticism is always identical*. Collections often display these abstract values straightforwardly. Collections dependent upon historical associations do, too.

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The collection of the Concord Museum in Concord, Massachusetts, exemplifies what can happen when a constituency is as attuned to historical associations as Concordians have been since the museum’s beginnings (as the Concord Antiquarian Society) in 1886. To honor the

town's three-hundred-and-seventy-fifth birthday, in 2010, the museum exhibited over sixty objects that were passed down in local families before being donated. To be fair, the Concord Museum had an auspicious launch. Its founding collector, Cummings E. Davis (1816-1896), began collecting early American furniture, decorative arts, and artifacts long before almost anybody else had thought of doing the same. From that private collection, for which there was no model or precedent, this museum grew. "Every town has its long list of people who squirreled stuff away," Jane C. Nylander, a social historian and specialist in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New England life, once declared in a lecture. "They valued things that most people scorned and destroyed."<sup>13</sup> One of Nylander's examples was Davis. "Many towns have characters like this"—collectors who are seen as "childish old men."<sup>14</sup> But few of them amass collections of such lasting value as Davis's, and historical associational value was the primary reason why he and other Concord townspeople who came after him collected what they did.

One could say Concord had a leg up in the historical association department, having been the place where one of the first battles of the American Revolutionary War occurred. That engagement between Massachusetts militia and the British army on Concord's North Bridge on April 19, 1775, "changed the way the town thought about itself," in the words of the museum's curator, David F. Wood. It also presaged the survival of many of the objects the exhibit brought together. One of them, a powder horn, an undecorated example dating from 1745 to 1755, did not intrinsically have much going for it as a collector's item per se. But the object had been carried by Abner Hosmer when as a twenty-year-old militia member he was killed in Concord by British gunfire on what we now commemorate as Patriots' Day in Massachusetts. The horn was passed

down through four generations of Hosmers, not only because of its association with their family but with that momentous historical occasion.

Things also got saved then donated to the museum because they were associated with people known only locally for, say, their exemplary character. One local hero represented by objects in the exhibition was physician Josiah Bartlett's (1796-1878). His account books show he worked from 1822 to 1878 rarely taking time off, making house calls on horseback, as many as twelve a day, to patients that included his neighbors Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott. He was not well paid. Curator Wood calculated that his annual salary was never more than about \$2,000 and that his household expenses—for himself, his wife, and nine children—amounted to more than three quarters of that. Then, on the fiftieth anniversary of his coming to Concord in 1820 after his medical education at Harvard, two hundred of his patients raised \$2,000 to present to him in gratitude a mahogany desk/bookcase. Dating from 1810 to 1820 and possibly made in Charlestown, Massachusetts, it was bequeathed to the museum in 1994 by his grandson, Edward Jackson Bartlett, a cabinetmaker.

Despite its importance to American history, Concord was and still is geographically small. Many of the same family names came up again and again in the exhibition, and the stories can get complicated. The so-called Jones/Hoar/Clark/Emerson Family Chest was made in the Concord area circa 1705 of oak and pine. The inscription on it, "SJ/1705," refers to Sarah Jones and the year she married Lieutenant Daniel Hoar, a third-generation Concordian. Their granddaughter Sarah married Benjamin Clark in 1883, and the chest remained in the Clark family for over 150 years. For a time, it was in the Clark dining room, then it was put into the barn, where it was used to store grain. Because famous names get mixed up with not-so-famous

ones in the crucible that is Concord, it's not surprising to learn that the chest was later sold to the Emerson family, where it was returned to a dining-room setting for another fifty years until Mrs. Raymond Emerson, wife of Ralph Waldo's grandson (1886-1977), gave it to the museum in 1978, because, as she wrote, its history "shows that it truly belongs in Concord."<sup>15</sup>

The Bulkeley Family Looking Glass, made in England, 1735-1760—Mrs. Sidney W. Winslow's gift to the museum in 1945—is noticeably marred, but no less a town resident than Thoreau explained it in recording the glass's history: "This looking glass... has the name John scratched on the middle by a madcap named John Bulkeley from college [Harvard] who had got so far with a diamond before he was stopped."<sup>16</sup> Even without benefit of the Thoreau connection, the Bulkeley name is well known in Concord, since Peter Bulkeley was the co-founder of the town and the first minister of its First Parish Church.

Lucy Ann Merriam Brigham was a friend of Thoreau's sister, Sophia, who helped managed her brother's literary legacy following his death in 1862. Two years later, his posthumous volume *The Maine Woods* was published, and Sophia inscribed a copy to Lucy Ann, who gave it to the museum in 1942. In presenting it to the museum, she wrote in a letter that she wanted to put it "into your hands." The phrase became the exhibition's title.

And then there are the people who think of themselves, their kin, and, by the same logic, their possessions as special, and that's why their possessions are still extant. A beaded purse that once belonged to Concordian Lucinda Davis Clark was made in Continental Europe, and became hers at about the time of her marriage in 1816. From her it was handed down to her daughter, Miss Mary E. Tarbell, who in 1944 at the age of ninety, walked down to the museum from the

“Old Ladies Home” on Concord’s Walden Street to donate it along with a number of her mother’s other purses.

It may be legitimately argued that these savers are not collectors. At best, they are family archivists. At worst, they are old-time Yankees with thrifty habits. In September 2010, while the exhibition was still up in Concord, a triple ballroom inside a gigantic convention center in Worcester, Massachusetts, became the setting for the four-day, nearly 2,400-lot Green family auction. Orchestrated by auctioneer Richard W. Oliver of Kennebunk, Maine, the sale at the city’s cavernous convention center featured the belongings of ten generations of Greens dating from the seventeenth century through the twentieth. Besides the usual estate silver, china, glass, paintings, textiles, jewelry, furniture, dolls, toys, and games, there were journals, diaries, ledgers, household expense books, wills, broadsides, posters, photographs, newspaper clippings, postcards, invitations, diplomas, maps, hair samples, railroad and ferry passes, stamp collections, coins and paper money, and on and on and on. A 1696 deed to land in the vicinity of what is now Lynn, Massachusetts, was one of the earliest items. Some of the newer were items of clothing, including a 1950s prom dress in turquoise taffeta and a 1960s Davidow designer wool coat in navy, red, white, and orange plaid.

“Like many other families imbued with the Puritan tradition, the Apleys have not been in the habit of destroying letters or papers,” John P. Marquand remarked of a Boston Brahmin clan in his epistolary novel, *The Late George Apley*.<sup>17</sup> When auctioneer Oliver started going through Green family stuff, he found ten thousand pieces of correspondence alone. In a letter to his sister, Amelia, George Apley wrote: “In fact, Hillcrest and Beacon Street are so full of family silver, furniture, papers and draperies that there is not room for anything which is not family. None of



our ancestors seems to have thrown away anything.”<sup>18</sup> The Green family, though not from Boston, was very like that, and private collectors of all stripes and people bidding on behalf of public collections flocked to the event.

Some came because they were interested in Andrew Haswell Green (1820-1903). An influential New York City official, preservationist, and reformer, he played crucial roles in the creation of Central Park, the restoration of fiscal control to City Hall after the Boss Tweed years, and the consolidation of New York into today’s five boroughs.<sup>19</sup> He also turned the Green family’s farm in Worcester into a country gentleman’s estate. Green Hill is today Worcester’s largest municipal park, with over 480 acres, two ponds, a zoo, picnic grove, playground, little league field, golf course, and handball courts, but not the Green’s mansion, which was demolished in 1957. In the 1950s and 1960s, there were other losses, including portions of the property that were transferred to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. One of them was a takeover for Interstate 290, which linked Worcester east to west but also, unfortunately, isolated Green Hill’s parkland from its recreational area. Still, Green Hill is one of the city’s jewels, and regional historians came out to preview and to buy what Green Hill memorabilia they could. Another draw to the auction was Andrew’s older brother Samuel Fiske Green (1822-1883). As a seven-year-old, he noted in his journal one day that he had knitted himself a pair of mittens before breakfast because his hands had been cold. As an adult, he became a physician who made a mission of bringing modern medicine to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He also provided for the people spiritually by, for example, translating the Bible into Tamil. Mankind may owe debts to those two Greens, but a series of unsung family members, ending with Julia Thompson Green of

Kennebunk, who died on July 5, 2009, at age seventy-three, were the ones who, in auctioneer Oliver's words, "saved things, took care of things" to the ends of their lives.<sup>20</sup>

In the marketplace, of course, some family archive material, particularly correspondence, is more worthy of saving than other families'—and then of being collected by others. At Christie's in New York, on April 10, 2013, there was this on the block: a letter written sixty years earlier by Francis Crick (1916-2004) to his twelve-year-old son, Michael. In seven pages Crick succinctly outlined his co-discovery of the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule and its function as the carrier of our genetic makeup. "Jim Watson and I have probably made a most important discovery," the letter begins. "We have built a model for the structure of de-oxy-ribose-nucleic-acid (read it carefully) called D.N.A. You may remember that the genes of the chromosomes—which carry the hereditary factors—are made up of protein and D.N.A.... Now we believe that the D.N.A. is a code..." "You can understand that we are very excited," Crick's concluding lines say. "Read this carefully," he repeated, "so that you can understand it. When you come home we will show you the model. Lots of love, Daddy."

When Michael received the letter, he was isolated in his boarding school's infirmary recovering from the flu. That gave him plenty of time to study his father's words. As Michael wrote in an essay published in the Christie's catalog, he realized as an adult that those pages, written on March 19, 1953, were "the first public description of [the] ideas that have become the keystone of molecular biology and which have spawned a whole new industry and generations of follow-on discoveries." A video-game inventor, Michael was at the auction with his daughter Kindra, an artist. So was James D. Watson, who with Crick and Maurice Wilkins (1916-2004), shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1962. Francis Wahlgren, Christie's international head of

books and manuscripts, opened bidding at \$550,000. Phones were in pursuit, along with two bidders in the room, one of whom dropped out at \$2.6 million. The other ended his attempt at \$3.9 million. Thomas Lecky, head of Christie's printed books and manuscripts department, came in with a new phone bidder at \$4 million. Two million dollars later, that bidder was out. The final price, \$6,059,750, was the new world auction record for any letter written by anyone on any subject. Being at the auction as a reporter, I was obligated to ask, but the winner was emphatically identified by Lecky over his shoulder as "Anonymous" as he walked away.

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Those who collect objects because of their association with historical events tend not to worry too much about condition. Granted, when Abner Hosmer's powder horn was donated to the Concord Museum by Miss Elizabeth S. Hosmer in 1936, it still had intact its rare, original, wool woven strap intact, a detail that almost never survives, showing that it had been cherished. But that its form was pleasing and worthy of preservation on that basis alone was probably beside the point. And as the history of decorative arts repeatedly shows, our collective sense of aesthetics does tend to change over time, sometimes drastically. A piece of furniture in the Concord exhibition known as the Wheeler Family High Chest is illustrative. Attributed to a local mill shop, it was constructed of cherry and pine but made to look like mahogany about 1770. An archetypal case piece of the period, it had completely lost its value when such things went out of fashion in the nineteenth century and was put into the Wheelers' barn. That's initially why it was saved. After regaining some of its former aesthetic stature in the 1930s, Wilfrid Wheeler asked if the museum had a place for a "high boy... an old family heirloom."<sup>21</sup> It wasn't until 1996, however, that it came to the museum as a gift from Richard and Betty Ann Wheeler, who may

have noticed the rising prices for such archetypical antiques before the brown-furniture bane set in. Furniture scholars have since recognized it as a strong piece of evidence linking a distinctive cabinetmaking tradition to pre-Revolutionary Concord.

So the high chest lost its aesthetic value, then regained some of that worth, but perhaps not enough for the museum to take it. Then it accrued more, and was successfully donated. An early nineteenth-century tall-clock in the exhibit, by contrast, never lost the appeal of its physical presence, and that's why it ended up in the museum's collection. It belonged to Frederic Hudson (1819-1875), a New York newspaperman, who bought it when he retired to Concord in 1866. It was fifty years old by then, having been sold initially by Nathaniel Munroe, who made clocks in Concord from 1798 until he moved to Baltimore in 1817. Despite his abilities as a clockmaker, Munroe did not make this clock. Rather, his shop assembled it from parts made by others, while his brother William was probably responsible for the case. The clock came to the museum from Hudson's granddaughter, Marion Hudson Wilmot, and her husband in 2001—an object both beautiful and useful, and associated not only with their family but with Concord's trades.

In addition to the clock, the Wilmots gave the museum Hudson's collection of "curiosities." Many were collected by Hudson as travel mementos; others appealed to a journalist's "curious" mind. Hudson was in fact among the first employees of the *New York Herald*. As its managing editor he changed the way newspapers reported news, particularly wartime combat, as he instructed reporters to convey a sense of immediacy while witnessing the Mexican-American War and the Civil War. The collection of Hudson, who later became a founder of the Associated Press, included a necklace made from wild tamarind seed; a piece of submarine telegraph wire; Native American moccasins; and an egg-shaped carved box made by

an armless Parisian with his toes. Susan Sontag wrote in her 1992 novel, *The Volcano Lover*, that “accumulating souvenirs is not collecting,”<sup>22</sup> but filling cabinets with curiosities like these was the very definition of collecting in the eighteenth century and, as in Hudson’s case, beyond it.

In its lifetime the museum has also taken in a collection of household receipts: invoices and statements for food, coal, electricity, real-estate taxes, pet care, charitable causes, and so on and on, dating from 1936 through 1945. The family donated the collection in 2007, after tenth-generation Concordian Eric Parkman Smith died at age ninety-seven and the receipts, nearly fourteen hundred of them, were discovered in a drawer. Some may scoff, but Maurice Rickards, the ephemera collector and historian, in his influential *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera*, included “Receipt” as a category, noting that the receipt is “among the most commonly encountered of ephemera” and “often provides evidence beyond that of simple accountancy.”<sup>23</sup> Curator Wood, for his part, called the Smith receipts in their aggregate “a snapshot of the everyday life of a household in Concord during the Great Depression.” No one could argue with that. The point is, those receipts are now in a museum whose constituency may pride itself on and identify with those with a sense of history, even if it is merely a personal history that happened to morph into something else.

Historical associations. Aesthetics. Rarity. Or rarity’s opposite: commonplaceness. A certain few objects that one finds in private and public collections alike embody all four of these features. Concord’s Barrett Family Waffle Iron is unusual for its ornamental heart-shaped molds, which were much more often circular or rectangular when it was made in the period 1800-1840. A long-handled utensil, it was designed of cast iron and wrought iron for use over an open fire: hearth cooking and eating. One can’t get any more common than that, but the donor in 1897,

Colonel William G. Barrett II, was proud of his descent from heroes of the American Revolution. For him, even the waffle iron was imbued with his ancestors' aura.

Which brings us to collectors, collections, and our national identity. Like aesthetic values, that identity changes over time. As I write this, we're in the midst of yet another reevaluation whose sweep includes such idolized and idealized figures as George Washington. For decades, a certain segment of collectors have persisted in wanting to be associated with him, his myth, and his objects. Nonetheless, he was already being scrutinized and in some quarters vilified when, on June 22, 2012, in New York, Christie's offered Washington's bound and annotated copy of the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and first Acts of Congress. Bidding opened at \$1.3 million. The several contenders, in person and on phones, moved at steeplechase pace to \$7 million. After that, the competition was among Ann Bookout, representing the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, someone else in the room, and a holdout on the phone. The room bidder consulted a seat mate before making his last couple of bids. Bookout consulted no one and did not hesitate. In under four minutes the prize was hers for \$9,826,500.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps Bookout and her colleagues, whose private non-profit organization owns and operates the historical site of Washington's Virginia home, felt entitled to it all along. Specially printed and bound in 1789, the year of the first U.S. president's election, this unique artifact had been in the library of Mount Vernon until 1876, when it was sold at an auction in Philadelphia, having been consigned by the president's grand-nephew Lawrence Augustine Washington (1812-1882). According to research by William M. Ferraro, associate editor of the Papers of George Washington Project at the University of Virginia, it fetched \$13. Since then, it had belonged to a succession of people. They include William Randolph Hearst and pioneer

Americana collector and preservationist Henry Flynt. Flynt gave it to the Heritage Foundation of Deerfield, Massachusetts, in the 1960s, during a time when the organization was deaccessioning items unrelated to its mission. Consigned to a sale at Parke-Bernet in New York on November 17, 1964, book dealer George Sessler of Philadelphia bought it on behalf of the twenty-six-year-old H. Richard Dietrich (1938-2007), an heir to the Luden's cough drop and candy company fortune. The estate of Dietrich consigned the item to the Christie's sale.

Collecting as a way to establish identity of any kind can get complicated. In *Possession: The Curious History of Private Collectors from Antiquity to the Present*, Erin L. Thompson, an art history professor who bills herself as America's only full-time professor of art crime—at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of the City University of New York—makes the case that antiquities collectors have actually manipulated objects “to better express their identities” and that these manipulations have shaped “our contemporary visions of the past.”<sup>25</sup> For example, in fourteenth-century Rome, the *bovattieri* (cattlemen), who acquired their antiquities by digging in the ruins of villas buried beneath their grazing lands, used them not only to fabricate ancient family lineages. They also altered them, inscribing them with false names, the better to defend their fabrications. Luckily, these faux claims of lineage didn't fool everyone. Nor did they endure, being made less plausible by the growth of historical scholarship.

Antiquities collectors who succeeded the *bovattieri* began to claim the ancient Greeks and Romans as their spiritual rather than literal heirs. This was certainly true of British antiquities collectors. That roster includes the seventeenth century's Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel, along with scores of eighteenth-century practitioners of the Grand Tour, few of whom could resist the temptation to restore what they had brought home. They regularly cleaned,

polished, bleached, chiseled, and otherwise smoothed away original rough surfaces that they found displeasing. More radical restoration horrors that Thompson recounts involved such things as the “cobbling together of unrelated body parts to make a new creation rise from the dead.”<sup>26</sup> In one extreme case, a sleeping Hermaphroditus underwent castration in order to become a less complicated, sleeping Venus. Three infants, one of whom was suckling, were also eliminated in this example of what Thompson calls, on the one hand, “a moralistic manipulation rather than a restoration” and, on the other, sheer whim. This, she says, “was the identity of the statue [the collector] wished to have for his collection.”<sup>27</sup>

As for forgeries, Thompson’s view is that they reveal collectors’ desires and motivations even more clearly than restorations do. That’s because a restoration “must begin from some actual and perhaps unwieldy fragment of the past,” while a forgery “can exactly mirror what the collector wishes were true about the past and his connection to it.”<sup>28</sup>

All of that works with Baudrillard’s statement about the “whole miracle of collecting,” but what to make of the collector of “stray jigsaw pieces, found in the street,” a brief glimpse of whom is given to readers of Margaret Drabble’s *The Pattern in the Carpet: A Personal History with Jigsaws*?<sup>29</sup> He had twenty-five or thirty when Drabble wrote about him, each found separately, since he rejected any found in groups, admitting that the pastime was “just ‘a little bit of madness.’”<sup>30</sup> Best known as the author of *The Needle’s Eye*, *The Peppered Moth*, and other novels, Drabble writes, “One of the pleasures of the jigsaw-puzzle world” lies in the safety of “knowing that all the pieces will fit together in the end.”<sup>31</sup> But what about the puzzles with the missing pieces now in that man’s collection? Drabble doesn’t answer that question, but she does speak the truth when she says that writing a book is like solving a jigsaw-puzzle by virtue of the



fact that it is an attempt to “impose a pattern, to make a shape”—to make order from chaos. True also is her conclusion: “The admission of failure is the best that we can do. It is a form of progress.”<sup>32</sup> A collector who fails to find the black tulip can surely identify with that.

## II.

I once spoke with a collector of model trains who started his collection in 1947, when he was five. A retired railroad engineer, he coordinated a regular swap meet, yet was emphatic when asked about his own willingness to part with items: “I don’t sell nothing.” He estimated that his collection was worth \$100,000 and named as his most valuable pieces four brass steam locomotives worth about \$2,500 each. With collector-investor pride, he boasted that he had bought them new in the 1960s for \$100 a piece. (This was in the late 1990s.) Later, with a reporter’s skepticism, I re-asked the question about his lack of selling anything ever. He has hung onto every single thing he’s had since he was a kindergartener? “Yeah.” He laughed. That begged my followup, tongue-in-cheek question. Had anybody ever tried to tell him he was crazy? “My wife tells me all the time,” he replied.

Collectors as madmen or madwomen is a theme never far from the surface of many a book on the collecting theme—even ones written by collectors themselves. “He was a short, stocky man, aged (as he told me) seventy-seven, with the intense expression of the lifelong collector who wants to be certain that strangers do not think his hobby is proof of madness,” Wilmarth S. Lewis writes in *Collector’s Progress*, which is subtitled *The Collector’s Own Story of the Formation of the World’s Greatest Collection of Books and Manuscripts by and About Horace Walpole*.<sup>33</sup> John Fowles did no collector any favors when in 1963 he published his novel

*The Collector*, which was made into a “horror” movie two years later. Since it isn’t about real collecting—the black tulip of Fowles’s madman, Frederick Clegg, is a pretty young woman whom he captures, keeps, and kills—the book might more easily be dismissed than others. Clegg is only a metaphorically a collector. (“Having her was enough. Nothing needed doing.”<sup>34</sup>) But what about Norton Townsend Dodge?

For three decades, between 1956 and 1996, the subject of John McPhee’s extended profile, *The Ransom of Russian Art*, spent more than \$3 million buying approximately nine thousand works by more than six hundred underground artists in the former Soviet Union—a collection that is “by far the largest and (in the scholarly sense) most exhaustive in the world.”<sup>35</sup> For McPhee, Dodge, who died in 2011 at age eighty-four, was a hero on many levels. If he hadn’t collected these “subversive” works, many would have been destroyed. His purchases also provided financial support for the artists and their families. Those weren’t the reasons why Dodge collected them, however. Nor was investment on his mind, although the art was later worth many times more than what he had paid for it. (And for the record, Dodge was a world-class investor in the stock market, having started playing it in his head at age thirteen and then for real not too many years later.) He wasn’t mad, McPhee might argue, but merely obsessed.

Nonetheless, McPhee doesn’t fail to highlight Dodge’s many peculiarities. Invariably dressed in ill-fitting, used clothing, the professor of economics, who sported “a Guinness Book mustache” not as a fashion statement but because he didn’t take notice of its growth, was certifiably accident-prone (one car wreck every other year) and “absentminded to a level that no competing professor may yet have reached.”<sup>36</sup> McPhee reports that various friends of Dodge likened him to “an unmade bed.” One of them told McPhee that when going to meet Dodge for

the first time she was advised to “watch for a guy to come in with food all over his tie.”<sup>37</sup>

Another said: “You expect to find socks in his refrigerator.”<sup>38</sup> Dodge was also a world-class talker. When he sat down next to McPhee on an Amtrak train in 1993—that’s how they met—he spoke, by McPhee’s estimation, forty thousand words about Russian art in the mere two and a half hours it took to travel from Washington, D.C., to Trenton, New Jersey. Nor was Russian art Dodge’s only collecting area. Vintage records was another, and naturally he went big with it. As McPhee described those holdings after his visit to Dodge’s Maryland farmhouse: “Beyond the parlor is a small impacted space that may once have been a den but now is an outcrop of stacked periodicals and a collection of recorded music about as large as his collection of Soviet art.”<sup>39</sup>

Why Russian art? Why records? One for the eye, another for the ear? There’s obviously more to it, but McPhee doesn’t get into it, perhaps believing that there really is no explaining why some people choose certain love objects over others. And while I didn’t find out whether the model-train collector had been married more than once, Norton Dodge, for his part, was married twice. Divorced in 1970, he remarried in 1980 a woman who seems a saint. Just one evidentiary detail among many: she actually let him drive even though it was his habit to tear clippings out of newspapers he had been reading while behind the wheel. Since his right eye was blinded after a pedestrian accident in New York, she was prone to say to him from the passenger seat, “Norton, I hope you have the other eye open.”<sup>40</sup>

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Unlike McPhee, the narrator of Pritchett’s short story does get into the why of collecting. An unnamed young man among older ones, all of whom sell furniture (their “bread and butter”<sup>41</sup>) south of London shortly after the end of World War I, he tries to crack the collector codes of

these trade veterans, each of whom has a speciality beyond tables and chairs, a collection that they treat like any other collector's collection, and within it, one illusive black tulip. Each one "broods on [it] from one year to the next most of his life," the narrator observes. It is "the thing a man would commit murder to get his hands on if he had the nerve, but I have never heard of a dealer who had; theft perhaps."

One named Pliny collects Meissen and pictures himself "a secret curator of the Victorian and Albert museum—a place he often visited." By the narrator's lights, he resembled "a dressed up servant" with "raw eyes," "big wet ears," onions on his breath, and yellowed teeth.<sup>42</sup> But these attributes don't prevent his marriage to a young woman who seems to adore him. For her, he is her black tulip. Pliny, meanwhile, was "treating her like one of his collector's pieces."<sup>43</sup> The narrator, incensed, wants to rescue her, perhaps claim her as his own—he and Pliny come to blows over it—but, inexplicably, she doesn't want rescuing. Pliny is no Frederick Clegg. And when he gets knocked down, she takes up the defense. "We're not interested," she says.<sup>44</sup> They're words the narrator must accept. And if Pliny were somehow to attain his black tulip? Pritchett's narrator can tell you one thing: he would "never let it go or certainly not to a customer—dealers only really like dealing among themselves."<sup>45</sup>

Dealers do seem most at ease with each other, maybe because they are all collectors by default to one degree or another—and collectors do seem most comfortable among themselves if for no other reason than that there is less explaining to do. Even collectors who collect different things often don't find common ground. "I don't 'get' paper," a clock collector said when I told him I was going to an ephemera show over the weekend. I thought of his comment when Lisa Holley, wife of rare-book and ephemera dealer James Arsenault of Arrowsic, Maine, said to me,

unprompted, early on the second day of that show: “In the big sea of people who don’t get it, it’s nice to be in a place where people do.” In another instance, a collector who had come for the decoys was doubtful, to say the least, about the prospects for the paintings at the inaugural Sporting Sale of Copley Fine Art Auctions that took place in the ballroom of the Boston Park Plaza Hotel in Boston over two days, July 26-27, 2006. “Who’s going to buy *them*?” he asked his seat mate. He soon found out. The top lot of the sale, which offered high-end waterfowl and shorebird decoys, along with sporting art, was Frank W. Benson’s *Salmon Fishing*. Given by the artist to its original owner as a wedding present in 1927, the oil on canvas sold to a collector for \$747,500.

One of Pritchett’s other fictional dealers, named August, was an “ivory man,” whose “lust for ‘the ivories’ gave to his horse-racing mind a private oriental side.” That make-believe world of August, “who was not much better than a country junk dealer,” was peopled by “rajahs, sultans, harems.”<sup>46</sup> The dealers who went after silver developed similarly associational fantasies, except theirs related to the rich families who had originally owned these heirloom trays and coffee pots. “You acquire imaginary ancestors.” But how to explain the one who collected “Jades, Asiastics, never touched India” or the one who went exclusively after ephemera?<sup>47</sup> Among them, we learn offhandedly, was the nephew of a man in Brighton “who went mad looking for old Waterford.”<sup>48</sup>

I haven’t known or heard of someone in real life being driven truly crazy by a collecting obsession. (Cummings Davis died in Danvers, Massachusetts, in 1896, in the Danvers State Hospital [also known as the State Lunatic Hospital at Danvers, the Danvers Lunatic Asylum, and the Danvers State Insane Asylum], but not because he had been a collector.) On the contrary, I

have known collectors with a mania for something or other who have seemed to thrive because of it. It gives them a reason to live a directed, passionate life. *Lady Charlotte Schreiber, Extracts from her Journal 1853-1891* (1952) edited by her grandson, the Earl of Bessborough, is an account of a china maniac. Most collectors, as Baudrillard noted, start young. Lady Schreiber (1812-1895) didn't discover her passion for china until she was a fifty-seven-year-old widow a decade into her second marriage. (she was formerly Lady Guest.) The mania led her and that second husband, Charles Schreiber, all over Europe to buy it. For fourteen years she kept a record of those travels in her so-called *Notes Ceramic*. The complete *Notes* were published in two volumes in 1911 by one of her sons under the title *Lady Charlotte Schreiber's Journals: Confidences of a Collector of Ceramics*. I have dipped into the full monty in awe, but the grandson's book of excerpts should be quite enough for anyone. Like life itself, much of it is fairly routine, but, again like life, exciting moments come along now and again. Here's one of the routine bits: Bristol, September 17, 1869: " ... During our stay we called at Thornton's, at Edkins, and at the house of another dealer in the Matcham Marshall line, by name Hodder, who, being a chemist and vendor of quack medicines, has bethought him that in the present rage for the fine arts he shall make his fortune, by buying and selling china. His house contained a most miscellaneous assortment, almost all very bad ..."<sup>49</sup>

And here's one of the excitements: Versailles, June 1-3, 1871. After the Commune had been overthrown, people were beginning to head for Paris "to see the state in which it was left." She did the same. "It was a city of the dead, no life or animation ... We went to some of the dealers we had been used to buy of. Mme. Caillot and Mme. Oppenheim had both died of fright or anxiety. Poor old Fournier had lost his reason." The situation didn't stop a true collector,

however, and one dealer was grateful. “We found at Mme. Flaudin’s some dishes matching our maroon Chelsea set, which we bought of her, and she was overjoyed, saying we were the first customers she had seen for many months, dating from the beginning of the siege.”<sup>50</sup>

Lady Schreiber’s journal incidentally includes a memorable portrait of “an American lady,” a Mrs. Moore, who was buying for an unnamed museum to which her husband had bequeathed money for that purpose. Considering her antics, I can only imagine the bad impression of an American collector she must have given wherever she went. And yet she wasn’t a true collector much less a maniac. She was only a shopper as well as a kind of harmless stalker—of the Schreibers. They first encountered her in the early fall of 1880 in Hamburg, where she was spending vast amounts without much knowledge. When the Schreibers reached Amsterdam, they found she had followed them there. “She seemed to be very forlorn and unprotected and so clung to them, strangers though they were,” Lady Schreiber’s grandson wrote in his summary of this part of the journal. “She accompanied them for the rest of their travels in Holland, and continued to buy extensively ... A scene between her and a dealer ... caused a rather unpleasant diversion.” Meanwhile, “Lady Charlotte hardly thought the lady’s purchases were worth taking across the Atlantic.”<sup>51</sup> The Schreibers spent the month of November 1880 in Paris “with Mrs. Moore still in attendance.”<sup>52</sup> Then in Stockholm about ten months later they were surprised to hear that Mrs. Moore “was in the country and knew of their coming ... When they left Stockholm Mrs. Moore accompanied them to Copenhagen, and from there to Hamburg, where there was once again a scene with a dealer in connection with her purchases from him ... On arrival in Paris in November 1881 the Schreibers found Mrs. Moore awaiting them at the Hôtel

Meurice. A few days visiting the dealers' shops with her led to another scene with one of them."<sup>53</sup> Maybe the Schreibers were Mrs. Moore's black tulip.

Obsessed collectors do run the risk of finding out that they prefer things over people, or being accused of it anyway. Kaspar Utz is one. We don't meet Utz, the collector at the heart of Bruce Chatwin's 1988 novel, *Utz*, until his collection of Meissen is more or less complete. The problem he faces is keeping it in his possession in Prague after the Communist coup d'état in February 1948. Utz has chances to leave the country, but doesn't take them. He cannot bring himself to leave behind his collection, which the state allowed him to keep after every piece was photographed and numbered, and, although it was never put in writing, after he agreed it would go to the state for its museums upon his death—or upon his desertion of it.

Chatwin was best known as a traveler, travel writer, and celebrated author of *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*, but he was thoroughly familiar with the collecting world. He began working at Sotheby's in London in 1958 when he was eighteen. Among his first jobs was that of a porter in the antiquities department. He wore a grey uniform and stood behind the glass vitrines, "making sure that prospective buyers didn't sticky the objects with their fingers," he wrote in his last book, *What Am I Doing Here*.<sup>54</sup> By the time he was twenty-six, he had run two departments, antiquities and Impressionism, and been made a director of the firm that a friend of Chatwin's liked to call "Smootherboys."<sup>55</sup> Another Chatwin friend, Susannah Clapp, author of a memoir, *With Chatwin: Portrait of a Writer*, traced the genesis of *Utz* to an actual collector that a Sotheby's colleague told Chatwin about in great detail.<sup>56</sup> But it was more than twenty years after he'd left the auction house that he undertook the writing of *Utz*. In light of some comments the *Utz* narrator makes, I find it significant that Chatwin (1940-1989) knew by then that he was



dying—an early victim of the A.I.D.S. epidemic. To wit: “Things, I reflected, are tougher than people. Things are the changeless mirror in which we watch ourselves disintegrate.”<sup>57</sup> As for Utz, who not only loves objects more than people but more he loves than himself, he is held prisoner by his collection. “And, of course,” he tells Chatwin’s narrator, “it has ruined my life.”<sup>58</sup>

Henry James depicts a more extreme case in *The Spoils of Poynton*, in which the widowed Mrs. Adela Gereth tells her son, Owen, that the objects in her collection are “living things to me; they know me; they return the touch of my hand.”<sup>59</sup> Which would be fine, except that the rather hapless Owen has inherited them, and Mrs. Gereth is in a bit of a controlled frenzy over their fate. “The best things here, as you know, are the things your father and I collected, things all that we worked for and waited for and suffered for,” she tells Owen. “Yes... there are things in the house that we almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were *us!*”<sup>60</sup> The complication comes because Owen is about to choose a wife, who will herself legally own the collection too, and so Mrs. Gereth wants to choose her. To that end, she moves things and people around like a general with her troops—she, who “cared nothing for mere possession. She thought solely and incorruptibly of what was best for the things.”<sup>61</sup> Her “ruling passion” having “in a manner despoiled her of her humanity,”<sup>62</sup> she is foiled anyway. Fleda Vetch, her choice for Owen, loves objects, but she knows how to treat people. She is loyal, honors her pledges, and assumes others will do the same. Alas, that’s her undoing. She isn’t ruthless; she has scruples. And so she loses Owen to another, whom Mrs. Gereth loathes.

It’s worth noting that Fleda’s father is a collector—of things of little value or none. “He had in their common sitting-room the company of the objects ... shabby and battered, of a sort that appealed little to his daughter: old brandy flasks and match-boxes, old calendars and hand-

books, intermixed with an assortment of pen-wipers and ash-trays, a harvest he had gathered from penny bazaars.”<sup>63</sup> Still, they give him pleasure, and he wonders why Fleda doesn’t try collecting something: “She would find it gave an interest to life, and there was no end of little curiosities one could easily pick up.”<sup>64</sup>

It’s fortunate for Owen that he seems oblivious to his mother’s cold-hearted calculating. The innocent children of obsessed collector-parents often suffer. The daughter of the artist Dwight Blaney (1865-1944) gives us glimpses of her collector-father’s difficult ways in her privately printed book, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Hill Cram*. As a boy, Cram tells us, Blaney collected stamps and natural history specimens. As an adult, he became one of our country’s first serious collectors of American antiques, and a cranky one. Among the book’s illustrations is a sign that Blaney penned in longhand and placed prominently on one of his prized pieces: “—NOTICE—Do Not Touch or CLEAN this DESK OR ANYTHING ON OR IN IT OR—UNDER IT—.”<sup>65</sup> That desk was in the Blaney house on Boston’s Beacon Hill. There was also a house on an island in Maine, called Ironbound, and a farmhouse in Weston, Massachusetts—all packed full, each with its particular specialties. On Ironbound he continued to collect natural history. In Weston, he filled the place with “antique farm house furniture, pictures, pewter and other things he collected—cranberry pickers, apple shovels, cheese baskets, jugs, guns, and books about hunting and fishing.”<sup>66</sup> On Beacon Hill, Cram tells us, “Pictures were everywhere on every wall of the house. My brother David counted [them] once—more than 600! And that didn’t include the ones that were stacked or stored.”

One of the family’s worst moments came when Blaney refused to move anything out of the Beacon Hill house to make room for the guests who were going to come back there after

Cram's wedding at nearby King's Chapel. They did manage it, though, by planting him outdoors the whole day, where he greeted and visited with people, while they surreptitiously moved things out during the wedding ceremony and then back in when the festivities were over, before he'd had a chance to notice. One could argue that he would not have been easy to live with even if he had been only a temperamental artist, but there wouldn't have also been all the collections to deal with—and compete with for his attention.

Frank T. Siebert Jr., another collector-father, who was mostly absent from his children's lives, died at age eighty-five in 1998, after which his unequalled collection of books about North American Indians and the American frontier went on the block at Sotheby's in New York, where it sold in two landmark sales on May 21, 1999, and October 28, 1999, for a total of over \$12 million. More than a dozen years later, on September 24, 2011, in Boston, Skinner sold seventy-two lots of artifacts that he had collected along with the books. The results were a fraction of the amount that the books had brought, but it gave me the opportunity to interview one of his two daughters, Stephanie M. Finger of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

Siebert, born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1912, began as an adolescent to collect information about Native Americans, especially their languages, and then the books he needed to pursue his self-education. By the summer of 1931, he was already systematically gathering word lists and stories and acquiring moccasins from Munsee Delaware communities in southern Ontario. The following summer, he conducted self-directed fieldwork in Native American communities in Mashpee, Massachusetts, and on eastern Long Island. Later in that same summer of 1932, when he was twenty, he made an initial visit to the Penobscots on Indian Island in Old Town, Maine. From there, Siebert's lifelong study of Native Americans and his accompanying

bibliomania grew to be fanatical. Once, in 1939, by his own account, he sold some of his blood to obtain a \$6.50 copy of the rare 1806 second edition of David Zeisberger's *Delaware Indian and English Spelling Book*. Siebert was at that point an unpaid medical intern, having received his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1938. He worked as a pathologist until his early retirement in 1964, when he began to pursue his scholarly interests full-time.

For the last four decades of his life, Siebert lived close by the Penobscots in Maine. His publications about them were many, and included a dictionary of their disappearing language. At his death, he was the authority on it and on another key language of eastern North America, Catawaba. In a remembrance Ives Goddard, a senior linguist emeritus at the Smithsonian's department of anthropology, called the value of his total body of work immense and largely still to be appreciated. The Penobscots themselves have acknowledged his scholarship. And yet Siebert was, by all accounts, a troubled man. Words used to describe him in published accounts of his life include "unlikable," "reclusive," "abrasive," and "paranoid." More kindly words are "gifted" and "eccentric." While the sisters were growing up, their father, who was divorced from their mother when Stephanie was an infant, was "offtrack on his priorities," in Stephanie's phrase. She rarely if ever saw him, and there was no adequate child support. During his Maine years, he lived alone in a tiny house crammed with his collections. "Everything was there, just in boxes, filling every room, and no security system," said Stephanie. Colleagues, fellow collectors, and his estranged family members were rarely if ever invited in. Rather, he established long-term relationships with the remaining speakers of the languages he studied. Master basket-maker Madeline Tomah Shay (1915-1993) of Indian Island, for example, worked with Siebert until her

death. And a majority of the artifacts in his collection were gifts from those mentors, many of whom became his friends.

Together Stephanie and her older sister, Kathleen, were bequeathed the books that sold in 1998. Stephanie alone was given the Native American objects. (Kathleen got their father's model train collection.) "I always had an interest in Native Americans, even when I was young, and he saw that," Stephanie explained. As an adult schoolteacher of science, she once asked to borrow a pair of moccasins from the collection to show her class. "He lent them to me, but made sure I sent them back." One other personal detail about Stephanie may have impressed Siebert. Her husband is part-Cherokee, making Siebert's grandchildren (the last of whom was born in 1998) part-Cherokee, too.

Asked why she thought he got so interested in Native Americans in the first place, Stephanie said, "He believed in their ideas. He believed in what they believed in." In light of that comment, one piece in the Siebert collection, the so-called Bonaventure Hatchet, bears special mention. The late seventeenth-century cast-iron weapon was bequeathed to Siebert by Penobscot Lewis Lolar at his death in 1935. It sold for \$7,110, but the price isn't the significant thing. Siebert published an essay about the hatchet in 1989, one of the last pieces listed in his bibliography. Reading it, one begins to understand a little of why he may have been the way he was. For a lifetime he studied the cruel behaviors of white colonials and the Native American cultures they destroyed. "It has long been known that the rival European colonial powers, especially England and France, but also Holland and Spain, often supplied the Indian nations that were in their alliance with iron hatchets and knives," he wrote, citing previous researchers who concluded that "although scalping did exist in pre-Columbia America, the warring European

powers were the ones who “promoted and commercialized” the practice by offering scalp bounties to both whites and Native Americans “and by supplying the metal weapons for a more efficient production of scalps.” He continued: “Scalping reached the nadir of barbarity and commercialization during the American Revolutionary War... British Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton stationed at Vincennes and Detroit received the sobriquet ‘Hair Buyer.’ He distributed several thousand red-handled scalping knives to Indians in the British interest.”

Perhaps for good reason, he had other things on his mind besides parenting. Nonetheless, of seven boxes of his correspondence that are among his papers at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, there is exactly one item that pertains to Stephanie, from 1996, and none listed Kathleen.<sup>67</sup>

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In literature’s view, if not society’s, too, almost worse than being a collector who is a bad parent, or a collector who is a crazy person, a ruthless scoundrel, or an obsessive, is a collector who is a bore. An unremittingly unsympathetic collector-bore (and mansplainer to boot) is portrayed in a novel by James’s good friend Edith Wharton. *The House of Mirth* features one Percy Gryce, a New York man of wealth who collects Americana in the form of books. Supported by a fortune made by his late father’s invention of dubious value, “a patent device for excluding fresh air from hotels,” he is a bachelor living with his mother, “a monumental woman with the voice of a pulpit orator and a mind preoccupied with the iniquities of her servants.”<sup>68</sup> Percy, for his part, is simply dull. Yet he is in the gun sights of the novel’s main character, the young, attractive, financially desperate Lily Bart, a gold digger in pursuit of a rich husband. Gryce would be ideal, if she could only just tolerate his incessant book chatter.

“She had been bored all the afternoon by Percy Gryce. . . but she could not ignore him on the morrow,” Wharton’s omniscient narrator tells us; “she must follow up her success, must submit to more boredom, must be ready with fresh compliances and adaptabilities, and all on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honor of boring her for life.”<sup>69</sup>

What’s perhaps most maddening about Gryce is that he knows he is a bore. When he begins to answer one of Lily Bart’s questions, he is “prepared for the look of lassitude which usually crept over his listeners’ faces.”<sup>70</sup> He’s surprised when that doesn’t happen, “and he grew eloquent under her receptive gaze.”<sup>71</sup> Poor, dupable Gryce. He should have taken that unglazed gaze as an omen. For it’s a truth universally acknowledged that only fellow collectors aren’t bored by the endless details of one’s collection. Except that Gryce is not only a bore; he is something of an ersatz collector, for the core of his library did not originate with him. It was bequeathed by a bibliophile uncle—a fact Gryce has conveniently forgotten, taking “as much pride in his inheritance as though it had been his own work.”<sup>72</sup> To be fair, he adds to the collection, but goes about it dispassionately. His only reading is book-collecting journals, which he scours for mentions of the Gryce Americana collection. That is what truly excites him.

But Lily Bart herself is a fake. She not only listens to Gryce’s talk about “some rubbishy old books”; she actually studies up on the subject, so she can ask intelligent questions, the better to stroke her prey’s ego.<sup>73</sup> As monomaniacal as any other obsessive, she has clear motives: “[S]he was determined to be to him what his Americana had hitherto been: the one possession in which he took sufficient pride to spend money on it. . . and she resolved so to identify herself with her husband’s vanity that to gratify her wishes would be to him the most exquisite form of self-indulgence.”<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, it takes a well-suited life partner to tolerate the talk of a dedicated collector. That goes doubly for the talk of a disingenuous collector. Whom, for example, does Percy Gryce marry in the end? It is not Lily Bart, who dies alone and poor, but rather Evie Van Osburgh, “the youngest, dumpiest, dullest of the dumpy daughters whom Mrs. Van Osburgh, with unsurpassed astuteness, had ‘placed’ one by one in envious niches of existence!”<sup>75</sup>

It should go without saying that boring someone does not give the one being bored the license to be cruel. Collectors give us many opportunities to exercise our compassion. Daniel Clowes’s graphic novel *Ghost World* (1997) devotes only a bit of ink to a vintage-record collector, but the film version, released in 2001, makes a major character of him. Named Seymour, he is a schlubby assistant manager at the corporate headquarters of Coon Chicken, a fast-food chain where he has been employed for nineteen years. Girlfriend-less, he can’t remember the last time a woman has talked to him. What he does have is a collection of fifteen hundred 78 rpm records. Seymour, embodied perfectly by the rubber-faced Steve Buscemi, is a caricature of a loser—*Ghost World* is a wicked satire—but I have often wondered if every audience comprehends the larger purposes of its cartoonish exaggerations.

Two friends, played by Thora Birch and Scarlett Johansson, are newly graduated from high school and having a tough time transitioning from aimless snarks to purposeful adults. They are Enid Coleslaw<sup>76</sup>—her father changed the family surname legally from Cohen—and Rebecca Doppelmeyer. Enid and Rebecca have been watching Seymour and mocking him as they meander around their unnamed city. He isn’t their lone victim; they mock everyone. As a mean-spirited social experiment and way to show off to Rebecca, Enid befriends him, and soon gets an invitation to see his collection. “Look at all this stuff!” she exclaims in insincere amazement. You



are, like, the luckiest guy in the world. I would kill to have stuff like this.” Seymour, oblivious to her playing him, rejoins: “Please. Go ahead and kill me. You think it’s healthy to obsessively collect things? Can’t connect with other people, so you fill your life with stuff.”

Enid makes it part of her game to find Seymour a girlfriend. “I guess I just can’t stand the idea of a world where a guy like you can’t get a date,” she tells him to explain her motivation. Convincing him that all he needs is to meet the right person, she suggests they “go to a place where we can find someone who shares your interests.” To which Seymour replies: “Maybe I don’t want to meet someone who shares my interests. I hate my interests.” Despite that protest, Enid takes him to a blues club, where he meets a girlfriend prospect, but scares her off when he starts spouting esoteric information in the manner of Percy Gryce. He’s slump-shouldered as he and Enid exit. “I can’t relate to ninety-nine percent of humanity,” he whines. “I’m not even in the same universe as those creatures back there.”

Against the odds, Seymour does manage to begin a relationship. On one occasion, he and his date go antiquing. “She doesn’t *dislike* this stuff,” Seymour tells Enid afterwards, though that’s not the same as liking it. “Anyway, she’s trying.” But the woman doesn’t keep the whirligig she bought on their antiquing outing. “Said it would go better with my ‘old-time thingamajigs.’” Things deteriorate from there, hitting bottom after Enid inadvertently gets Seymour fired because she has exhibited an artwork, traced by to him, that usurps Cook’s Chicken’s old, racist logo and name (Coon Chicken). In our last glimpse of him he is seeing a psychiatrist and telling her that he has moved back in with his mother.

So what are *Ghost World*’s director Terry Zwigoff and Clowes, who with Zwigoff co-wrote the script, trying to say with their devilish humor? In my view, it is an intelligent and

highly original commentary on authentic friendship and, thanks to a couple of spot-on subplots, authenticity in general. While Enid was engaged in her Seymour project, she was taking a summer art-class whose teacher, a video and performance artist, is annoyingly, cloyingly, politically correct—a brilliant stereotype in her own right. Rebecca, meanwhile, was secretly seeing a boy that Enid liked, too. Betrayed, Enid knows her friendship with Rebecca is over. And as the girls part ways, feebly speaking of “getting together sometime,” we know they never will.

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Evan S. Connell Jr. limns several collector stereotypes and explores several types of authenticity in his equally satirical work, *The Connoisseur*. It is a taut novel, under two hundred pages long, during which Connell charts the progress of his protagonist, a widower named Muhlbach, from neophyte collector to full-blown obsessive. Having stumbled into collecting Pre-Columbian art while on a business trip to New Mexico for the insurance company he works for, he meets one of the collector types on the plane ride home to New York. He is the unkempt Holmgren, a collector of Native American baskets who discusses them in “stupefying” detail, saying such things as, “Listen, pal, you stand Brigitte Bardot next to a museum quality Tlingit and I wouldn’t see her.”<sup>77</sup> Muhlbach is repulsed by Holmgren’s “set of grubby fingernails” and the “faint odor of tuna” he emits, but recognizes that this man’s passion is genuine.<sup>78</sup> His next encounter is with the pedantic Dr. David Ascher—“a trim little fellow about fifty years old ... with silky blue-rinsed hair and the peevish expression of a lap dog”—whose Asian art collection is housed in its own gallery in an outbuilding on his property. Showing around guests, including Muhlbach, Ascher world-wearily recites “in a shrill nasal voice” each object’s age, provenance, and style. “What you see,” he intones as the group gathers around two wooden temple guards,

“may be the finest matched pair in the United States. The absolute soul of my collection.” But it’s clear from his demeanor that, while his collection has a soul, his own doesn’t equal it.<sup>79</sup>

Nonetheless, through Ascher, Muhlbach gets an introduction to Claude Varda.

Varda is a cigar-chomping screenwriter in frayed sneakers who lives in a penthouse overlooking the East River and, like Holmgren, truly loves the stuff he collects. “I got a hunger for this crap,” Varda says. “It’s like nothing else.”<sup>80</sup> He shows Muhlbach a gleaming orange bowl from Guatemala. Found in the ruins of Tikal, it is adorned with mysterious glyphs painted a thousand years ago. “Tap the son of a bitch with your fingernail. Break it and I’ll shoot you,” Varda tells Muhlbach, who is amazed and troubled by his growing fascination for such objects. As Connell writes, “Yes, [Muhlbach] thinks... if I were rich and could afford a passion this is how I’d ruin myself.”<sup>81</sup>

*The Connoisseur* includes Muhlbach’s encounters with dealers of various stripes, too, and his first-ever attendance at an auction, where he buys what he believes to be an Olmec mask that he later tries to get authenticated by an expert. “In a nutshell, I’m afraid I should say this was made not long ago. Not very long ago,” the expert tells him.<sup>82</sup> Later, the crestfallen Muhlbach remembers that the auctioneer represented the big green jade as Mexican, nothing more. “I was the connoisseur who labeled it Olmec,” Muhlbach admits to himself—he, an alleged collector with only two objects, one of which is fake. “What a spectacle I made of myself.”<sup>83</sup>

Like all true collectors, however, Muhlbach isn’t deterred. “I’m gripped by an obsession,” he thinks to himself. “I suppose I should be alarmed, but as a matter of fact I’m not. This is really rather pleasant. I want more. Do all deluded persons feel the same way? Do they all plead for more? And if they do, how does it end?”<sup>84</sup> In Muhlbach’s case, he comes to an understanding.

This love he has for Pre-Columbian art is as irrational as any love, and he's going to pursue it, no matter what, because he must.

I wasn't surprised to learn that Connell (1924-2013) was himself a collector of Pre-Columbian art, including, yes, an Olmec green-jade mask that was fake. "I was going to get rid of it when I found out, but I'd gotten sort of attached to it," Connell once told an interviewer.<sup>85</sup> Five years before he published *The Connoisseur*, he made a two-month trip to South America, in part to pursue his new collecting interest.<sup>86</sup> Nineteen-sixty-nine was also the year that he bought a tiny ceramic figure of a Maya lord in a Santa Fe curio shop. "He sat cross-legged, arms folded, head life, with an air of regal contempt for everything on earth," Connell recalled in a magazine piece published nearly two decades later. "Exactly four inches high to the peak of his elaborate, coiled headdress, he dominated the shop. I got him, or he got me, for the price of a first-class meal."<sup>87</sup> "Maya art appeals to me as the Venus flytrap appeals to the fly," he confessed.<sup>88</sup> "I head for the Maya department of every anthropological museum and almost at once grow sick with lust. I long to approach those opulent cases with a glass cutter and gunny sack."<sup>89</sup>

Surely Connell was sympathetic to his dedicatee, Robert Gottlieb, the book's editor. For Gottlieb was himself a collector of hard plastic handbags from the mid twentieth century—a collecting field much more in need of an explanation than Pre-Columbian art is. Gottlieb's book *A Certain Style: The Art of the Plastic Handbag, 1949-59* is illustrated with ninety-two examples from his collection of (at the time) approximately five hundred, photographed like objets d'art, in full color, one to a page. They are displayed in his home, Gottlieb says in the book's introduction, "on glass shelves around my bedroom, in bookshelves in halls, on the floor, under

my bed,” which he shares with a wife who “doesn’t totally grasp the charm of this collection,” but who apparently, wisely, gives him free reign with it.<sup>90</sup>

To my mind, however, Connell’s actual collection, while an interesting detail, is not essential to an appreciation of the novel. For I believe that *The Connoisseur* is about the pursuit of anything that feels necessary as air to the pursuer and yet appears foolhardy to the rest of the world.

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Some collectors retreat into themselves after being maligned and misunderstood. Others join clubs, found the club themselves if need be, or simply find like-minded friends to hang out with. Time and again, I have been struck by the friendship theme that runs through the history of collecting. Do some people collect in order to make friends, or do they make friends because they are collectors? It’s impossible to answer. I can say that some collectors give up collecting when there is no one to share the pleasures with. I once heard nautical antiques dealer John F. Rinaldi of Kennebunkport, Maine, tell a story about H. Harrison Huster (1911-2001), a member of the first generation of scrimshaw collectors. “He was mostly finished with scrimshaw collecting in the early nineteen-sixties,” Rinaldi said.<sup>91</sup> “It was years later that I went to his house, when he was quite elderly. I asked him why he had stopped. He said there was nobody to talk to. There wasn’t any society of collectors. He put it all away in boxes, and switched to decoys.”<sup>92</sup> In 1982, he published *Floating Sculpture: Decoys of the Delaware River*.

Wilmarth Lewis treats the friendship theme in *Collector’s Progress* from the outset, dedicating it to “Edward Clark Streeter, M.D. 1874-1947 Collector, Teacher, Friend.” Lewis and Streeter met in 1925 on the dock at Southampton, both of them sailing home. In 1928, the New

York Academy of Medicine bought Streeter's rare-book collection. Considered one of the finest private medical libraries ever assembled, it was sold to the institution by A.S.W. Rosenbach. Streeter also collected weights and measures, approximately three thousand individual objects, which he gifted to Yale, his alma mater, along with related books on the subject. As Lewis put it, compared to Streeter, he himself had "hardly reached the letter B in the alphabet of collecting as [Streeter] practiced it."<sup>93</sup> It didn't matter: the year after they met, they went on a collecting trip to England together. "We would go our several ways during the day," Lewis recounted. "Ned listened in the evening with kindness and courtesy to the details of my finds, even though they were only of books printed in the eighteenth century."<sup>94</sup> Some of Streeter's weights and scales were Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Islamic, Greek, and Roman. As for the books, "Ned belonged to the elite of the book world," owning "incunabula by the yard."<sup>95</sup> Still, they talked and talked in the smoking room at Brown's Hotel after dinner. "We sat in semi-darkness, deep in leather chairs that crackled when we moved." The waiter, delivering brandies to others, "would glance at us and no doubt wonder what there could be in it for this strange American pair who bought books and *weights* all day long and talked about them all night."<sup>96</sup>

Rob Fleming, a thirty-six-year-old Londoner who collects vintage records and owns a store that sells the same, is at the heart of Nick Hornby's comedic novel *High Fidelity* that goes surprisingly deep into the serious theme of friendship and loyalty. What motivates Rob and his fellow collectors, and creates their bonds, is their obsession with vinyl. How obsessed? They are "young men, always young men ... who seem to spend a disproportionate amount of their time looking for deleted Smiths singles and 'ORIGINAL NOT RERELEASED' ... Frank Zappa albums. They're as close to being mad as makes no difference."<sup>97</sup> Then one day Rob's scruples

are tested when on a house call, as he starts going through the records, he realizes “straightway that it’s the haul I’ve always dreamed of finding... There are fan-club-only Beatles singles, and the first half-dozen Who singles, and Elvis original from the early sixties...” It’s worth thousands, and the woman selling them knows it. Still, she says, “Give me fifty quid and you can take every one away with you today.” He wonders what’s going on. Were they stolen? It’s revealed they belong to her husband, who has gone to Spain with a twenty-three-year-old. “He had the f—king cheek to phone up and ask to borrow some money and I refused, so he asked me to sell his singles collection and send him a check for whatever I got, minus ten percent commission.”<sup>98</sup>

So does Rob take the records and run? “When I get back to the shop I’m going to burst into tears and cry like a baby for a month, but I can’t bring myself to do it to this guy,” he confesses. “How come I ended up siding with the bad guy, the man who’s left his wife and taken himself off to Spain with some nymphette? ... All I can see is that guy’s face when he gets his pathetic check through the mail, and I can’t help but feel desperately, painfully sorry for him.”<sup>99</sup> Misplaced compassion? Or was it the right decision to make? Unlike thieves, and unlike the young women in *Ghost World*, there is plenty of honor among collectors. They have their own morality code.

### III.

The Victorians' love of stuff is infamous. They lived their lives in houses full of stuffed furniture and stuffed birds, gewgaws and gadgets. But *horror vacua* was more than a style. It was a manifestation of faith that the meaning of the world itself would be revealed through objects.

This belief lay at the heart of the post-Civil War museum enterprise. Signage was not a big part of early museum designs, and docents were few. Museum builders of the time believed that the objects themselves would deliver the truth, even to those with untrained eyes. The style of eighteenth-century cabinets of curiosity, which had devolved into Barnum-type freak shows by the early nineteenth century (despite pioneer Charles Willson Peale's noble intentions), was assiduously to be avoided, however. Everything from arrowheads to zoological specimens needed to be arranged systematically. These arrangements, writes historian Steven Conn, in *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (1998), "followed a trajectory from simple to complex, from savage to civilized, from ancient to modern" as museums functioned "to underscore a positivist, progressive and hierarchical view of the world."<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, the arrangements and their categories became outdated as new knowledge was produced. Natural history museums, most crucially, hadn't counted on Darwin, whose influence began to be felt in the United States in 1860, after *Origins of Species* was favorably reviewed by Harvard botanist Asa Grey. Originally, anthropology was a department of natural history. It is Conn's belief that museums may have created the very field. But when intense examination of objects gave way to the study of intangibles—for example, social organizations—anthropologists left museum work for positions in academe. Conn argues more broadly that a struggle occurred between academia and museums over the production of original knowledge began at about the time of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and continued for the next fifty years. At the end of that struggle, around the time of the Sesquicentennial Exhibition of 1926, all museums except those devoted to art had lost out. Conn attributed the outcome to a shift away from an "object-based epistemology" in American intellectual life.<sup>101</sup> And although objects



continued to reign in history museums like Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, Conn believes those realms were nostalgia factories, not knowledge purveyors.

Art museums, meanwhile, had gained an intellectual foothold, because they themselves had undergone a transformation. Originally, their model was South Kensington, not the Louvre; their focus was as much industrial art as it was fine art. No longer. One reason why the transformation occurred was because museums had difficulty deciding whether their arrangements of objects should be based on geography or on some other organizing principle. Another, perhaps bigger reason why art museums traded their metal works for Old Masters was because they wanted to attract a wealthier clientele. The change reverberated in the collecting world and the market, and has resulted in the astounding prices we see today for paintings and sculpture, especially artworks created in the twentieth century.

So museum culture and its priorities made a market, but others—dealers, auctioneers, the media, scholars, celebrities, and collectors themselves, unwittingly or otherwise—helped. Those same forces, often in combination, have created other markets, both big and small, over time.

Scrimshaw collecting provides a good example. President John F. Kennedy's desktop collection, seen by millions whenever he addressed the nation on television from the Oval Office, helped make the scrimshaw market in the 1960s. That exposure "pushed the concept of scrimshaw into the national mind and eventually expanded collecting circles," said Andrew Jacobson, whose business, Andrew Jacobson Marine Antiques, is based in Ipswich, Massachusetts. He was speaking about the history of the market at the annual Scrimshaw Collectors' Weekend at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in June 2006. As mentioned, H. Harrison Huster switched from scrimshaw to decoys because there

was no one to talk to. But if new collectors were coming into the field, it's plausible that there were people to talk to, but he wasn't happy with what they were talking about; maybe he didn't want to talk prices.

In the pre-Kennedy-era, collectors had other reasons to collect scrimshaw. So did a number of post-Kennedy-era collectors, who were not following Camelot's lead. "They seemed to have had a family interest or connection to the whaling period," Jacobson said. "They were people who enjoyed the romance of the sea or they were people seeking knickknacks for their summer homes." In any case, prices in that period "seemed to be very reasonable and for the most part they were."

A change occurred again in the early 1970s, when scrimshaw started being offered by "a couple of rogue auctioneers," as Jacobson called them. Mail-order catalogs, now considered quaint, were a primary marketing tool of dealers of all kinds of the period, and some of them began offering scrimshaw, too. These and the auction catalogs, said Jacobson, became the reference tools for "the small, incestuous scrimshaw market," made up of people who had "a good idea of what things should cost," and "the price structure was stable for a long time."

Jacobson spoke nostalgically of that bygone era. "There were plenty of antiques. You could learn while doing and replace what you sold, neither of which is possible now. The parking lot at [Cape Cod auctioneer] Richard Bourne's was the scene of major wheeling and dealing," he recalled. "A lot of times the scene out there was more interesting than what was going on in the salesroom. I used to pull up in a 1971 Ford Econoline van right by the entranceway and sell out of the back of it. I wasn't alone. I did better there than anywhere else on the face of this earth for

many years. Bourne [1927-2016] changed everybody's life. It was tailgating, auctioning, buying, selling, seeing what was going on.”

Then, in the 1980s, a series of landmark auctions took place: the four sales at Sotheby Parke-Bernet in 1981-1983 of the collections of Barbara Johnson (ex-wife of a Johnson of the pharmaceutical family), and the sale of the Jeffrey and Francine Cohen collection at Bourne's in 1989. In the early 1990s, Bourne's operation in Hyannis collapsed—Richard A. Bourne Inc. filed for bankruptcy in 1993—creating what Jacobson characterized as “a major market void.” In short order, however, the vacuum was filled by Eldred's auction house on Cape Cod, Ronald Bourgeault's Northeast Auctions in New Hampshire, and Rafael Osona on Nantucket, with “the rest of us in the trade . . . playing alongside, in, and around them,” said Jacobson.

Simultaneously, scholarship had been having its effect on the market. In 1972, Norman Flayderman published *Scrimshaw and Scrimshanders: Whales and Whalemen*, and all at once collectors had “an instant Bible,” in Jacobson's phrase. “To this day a premium is paid for objects illustrated in it.” Stuart M. Frank, now senior curator emeritus of the museum in New Bedford, began publishing in the 1970s, too. (Frank's scholarship culminated in *Ingenious Contrivances, Curiously Carved: Scrimshaw in the New Bedford Whaling Museum*, published in 2012.) But as far as the late twentieth-century market was concerned, Flayderman's book was key. “Nothing validates a collector's choice more than a specific book reference and an illustration,” Jacobsen said. (The same goes for decoys pictured in reference books, especially William J. Mackey Jr.'s *American Bird Decoys* [1965]. Ones pictured on the dust jacket of Mackey's book are the most covetable. A so-called dust jacket shorebird, for example, sold for \$830,000 at a sale conducted by Guyette & Schmidt in Easton, Maryland, on November 8-9,

2006.) At the same conference where I heard Jacobson speak, Judith Navas Lund of South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, a former curator of the museum and author of, among other books, *Whaling Masters and Whaling Voyages Sailing from American Ports* (2001), concurred: “Price rises are one of the unfortunate spin-offs of scholarship.”

What collectors of scrimshaw traditionally had been paying the most for were items made by Edward Burdett (1805-1833), the earliest documented American engraver of sperm whale’s teeth, and by Frederick Myrick (1808-1862), the latter being the first known scrimshander of any nationality to sign and date his art. Collectors have particularly coveted the three dozen or so known teeth by Myrick, the majority of which he decorated with images of the whaleship *Susan* in the 1820s. “A Susan’s tooth was always the collectors’ standard,” Jacobson said. “It was what people strived to have.” A black tulip if you will. As for the rest, as whaleman John F. Martin was homeward bound to Delaware, concluding a four-year voyage in the ship *Lucy* in 1844, he wrote in a letter that there were enough scrimshawed walking canes onboard “to supply all the old men in Wilmington.”<sup>102</sup> And that was just the one form.

And yet until the late 1990s, compared to other kinds of antiques, what collectors were willing to pay for a tooth was, at least at public auctions, strictly limited. In 1971, for example, Bourne sold a Myrick tooth for \$11,000. In 1979, Sotheby Parke-Bernet sold one for \$21,000. In 1979, Bourne sold the same one for \$24,000. In 1981, Osona sold one for \$35,750. In 1997, that same tooth sold again at Osana, for \$50,600. As Jacobson pointed out, considering what real estate and other markets were doing during the same twenty-six-year period, those price jumps were hardly colossal.

It wasn't until January 19, 2003, that any tooth, appropriately one by Myrick, broke both the Osana record of 1997 and the \$100,000 barrier, when it sold at Sotheby's to dealer Alan Granby of Hyland Granby Antiques of Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, for \$102,000. The same tooth had previously been sold, in the Barbara Johnson sale of 1982, for \$44,000. It was, as well, the centerpiece of Everett U. Crosby's privately printed, exceedingly rare, sixty-three-page monograph, *Susan's Teeth and Much About Scrimshaw* (1955). "It was bought by the trade, and rumored to have been resold for close to cost," Jacobson said. "Assuming that happened, was it a case of the buyer being ahead of the market and dumping it prematurely, before the market caught up with it? Or was it a bargain" because marine antiques are habitually undervalued, even at record prices? Jacobson rhetorically asked. A third possibility is that Granby executed a marketing move, raising the scrimshaw stakes in a publicity-savvy way. He was one-man market trend of his own in those years. At any rate, the record for a tooth was held by Myrick until May 1, 2005, when one by Burdett sold at a Bonhams & Butterfield sale in Massachusetts for \$182,500. Myrick's work is celebrated for its documentary qualities; Burdett's is prized for its graphic excellence. When a tooth by the so-called Pagoda/Albatross Artist went up three months later at Northeast Auctions, it had both graphic and historical appeal going for it. "Fresh from a local estate, never out of the family, it was one of the finest pieces any of us has ever seen," Jacobson said. "If you're going to pay too much for something, this is the thing you should pay too much for." The price, on August 21, 2005, was a record breaking \$303,000.

Seventeen years later, in May 2022, the tooth went on public view, along with two hundred other examples, at *Scrimshaw: The Whaler's Art*, a comprehensive survey exhibition of the art and history of scrimshaw at the Cahoon Museum of American Art in Cotuit on Cape Cod.

The show was co-curated by Sarah Johnson, the museum's executive director, and none other than Alan Granby. Granby also produced the 376-page exhibition catalog, *Wandering Whalemen and Their Art: A Collection of Scrimshaw Masterpieces*. In the future we'll be able to measure the impact of the exhibition and the book on today's market.

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Since the announcement of its invention in 1839, photography has been an area of collecting where markets have been made and unmade repeatedly, the volatility perhaps because collecting photos, so seemingly simple to a non-collector, is actually quite complicated. Even at the beginning stages of photo-collecting, the activity can be fraught. "When collectors are drawn to certain images, they don't always know why," Daile Kaplan once said to me. Swann's photography department head for many years, Kaplan is herself a collector of what she has dubbed pop photographica<sup>103</sup> and of photographs of women "doing something" other than merely posing. "They may say, 'I like flowers.'" From that point, they may be unsure how to proceed. Nonetheless, says Kaplan, "Through the subject matter is how they walk into the wonderland."

The subject matter of Diane Arbus's 1963 *Teenage Couple on Hudson Street N.Y.C.*, for example, is at its most rudimentary level an ordinary love story. Alexander Gardner's *Dead Rebel Sharpshooter at Gettysburg* and *Sharpshooter's Last Sleep* are basic war stories. Elliott Erwitt's *New York City (Chihuahua in a Sweater)* is a comedy. Dorothea Lange's *Drought Refugees from Oklahoma* is a tragedy. So subject matter isn't a bad place to begin one's appreciation of photography, and it often does provide an entry point for a new collector trying to define an area of true interest. But as Kaplan once explained to me, every photo extant offers

more than half a dozen other storylines besides the image's content. There are the photographers' stories, the autobiographical reasons why they were attracted to certain subjects. There is the story of how the photograph was made—the creative act of producing the image, which may involve such things as fortitude, trial-and-error, danger, cajolery, or sheer luck. There is the technical story of making the print or whatever other medium of reproduction the photographer has chosen to deliver the image to viewers. There is the story of photography itself and how a particular photo fits into the overall chronicle of technical developments. There is the story of trends and aesthetic styles developed by photographers and imitated by followers. There is the story of the photo's exhibition and publication, and its acceptance or rejection by the powers who decide what images enter our visual culture's cannon. There is the story of the photo's ownership, its provenance—why it was bought, why it was sold, or handed down, and to whom—a story that may involve such things as banal as family feuds.

Vernacular photography is a relative new speciality in the photo-collecting world. Even people who aren't savers, much less collectors, usually hang onto the family photos. That's where a lot of it comes from. Considering the amount of material of this kind that's out there, literally billions of images, finding good examples is a formidable task. It takes patience to sift through bins of them at ephemera shows, and the time spent often goes unrewarded. But I defy anyone to do it and fail to be amazed at humankind and what it has produced, sometimes in its finest hours, sometimes in its weirdest. Do beware, however. Rifling around in one of those receptacles is like walking into the office of a psychological profiler. What needles in this particular haystack on this particular day will you pick up to examine? It's different if you come to it already a specialist with an unwavering mission. But if you're just a browser—or a reporter,

as I have been—be prepared for Bauillardian self-revelation. *For it is invariably oneself that one collects.*

Swann began offering vernacular photo sections at its sales in the early twenty-first century. At about that time, curators at fine-art museums were starting to examine and exhibit it. In 2007, for example, no less august an institution than the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., showed *The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson*, after which, in 2008, it traveled to the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth. On April 17, 2014, Swann held its first all-vernacular photo auction; after that, there began to be a vernacular section at each of its thrice-yearly sales. Need I say that the vernaculars that get accepted for consignment need to be extraordinary? “We are concerned about images and the quality of images,” Kaplan said, “but at the end of the day they need to be presented in a way that gives them a narrative, where the condition is very good if not excellent, where the material is thoughtfully created and cared for. Some vernacular materials were actually made by commercial or professional photographers, so there was an aesthetic at work, but of course they weren’t accepted as artists. Today those boundaries are much more fluid.”

Herewith, three examples that were consigned to Swann and did well.

An archive of 245 vernacular images of saloons, bars, hotels, restaurants, liquor stores, and cafes achieved \$11,875 on April 20, 2017. Attributed to a newspaper photographer, E.H. Kemper, and identified as locations in coal mining towns throughout Pennsylvania, the silver prints dated from circa 1915. It would seem an item ideal for an institutional purchase, and a great primary source for historical research, but according to Kaplan, it was bought by a private collector who has his own private museum.



A circa 1915 salesman's album of eighty-six hand-colored silver prints from the Eberhard Faber Pencil Company of New York was one of the surprise stars of Swann's photo sale on October 19, 2017. Showing pencils, pens, chalk, erasers, rubber bands, and other stationery items in bright, vivid colors and clean, strikingly attractive arrangements, the album sold to an institution that time, for \$10,625. "Everyone loved it," Kaplan declared. "People who grew up using pencils could immediately relate to it—the utility, the simplicity, the functionality of the pencil. It's a bygone era," she said of a time when the pencil was central to the story of how a child learned penmanship. So the lot had its nostalgic aspects, but it had a substantial aesthetic component, too. "There's something very beautiful about a still life of pencils," said Kaplan, "and something very contemporary."

A vernacular album of more than 130 albumen prints taken by an accomplished amateur photographer in 1889-1890 sold at Swann for \$5,000 on February 15, 2018. The maker of the photos shot scenes from travels coast to coast, the family back in Boston, as well as ones that appear to be self-portraits—selfies, as it were. Unfortunately, he is anonymous, his name unknown or, as seems to be fashionable to say on museum labels these days, "once known." But the fact that the album went to a new home constitutes a happy ending. "The poignant aspect of so much [vernacular photography] is that it becomes disconnected from the original family," Kaplan said. "But that this material enters the photographic marketplace is a commentary on how photographic images are, on the one hand, treasured when family members are alive and aware of them and, on the other, how, in instances when families come to an end, it continues to be appreciated by others."

#### IV.

John Szarkowski was the director of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art for nearly thirty years, from 1962 to 1991. He championed the careers of and, inadvertently or otherwise, helped to make the markets for a number of fine-art photographers, including Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and Lee Friedlander. His now classic book, *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, was published in 1973, at a time when, in his words, for "an art museum to make a serious commitment to the art of photography require[d] some imagination, and the willingness to accept some intellectual risks."<sup>104</sup> In addition to the above named, the book brought a host of others—Duane Michaels, Joel Meyerowitz, Jerry Uelsmann, Bruce Davidson, Roy DeCarava, among them—to the attention of the art-collecting world and, perhaps more important, the general public, where nascent collectors were ready to emerge. And yet, in his introduction, Szarkowski wrote that photography "has learned about its own nature not only from its great masters, but also from the simple and radical works of photographers of modest aspiration and small renown."<sup>105</sup> To illustrate the concept, he included two aerial reconnaissance photographs taken on the Western Front during World War I, images showing us "the strange impersonality of war, and its incoherence."<sup>106</sup> They were from the collection of Edward Steichen, who had been involved in just such military photography in wartime Europe, an experience that Szarkowski thought may have influenced the photographer's postwar work with its "rigorous, muscular sense of [abstract] form."<sup>107</sup>

Artists invariably have collections, even if only the artworks of their friends; and many non-artists go about collecting as if it were an art, which, I would argue, it is. It's telling that Szarkowski wrote in 1970: "With confidence and independence, a collector can be as good as his

talent allows.”<sup>108</sup> *Talent?* Isn’t that something an artist needs to have? Apparently Szarkowski believed that successful collecting, like successful art making, requires a special gift for it. The thinking of James Johnson Sweeney, a curator and department head at MoMA in the 1930s and 1940s, didn’t go that far, but at a 1967 lecture at the New School, he allowed that collecting came “as close as a non-artist can come to creativity with an artist’s materials.”<sup>109</sup>

Denman Waldo Ross (1853-1935), by contrast, was emphatic about collecting being an act of creative expression. “The work of [a collector’s] art lies in the collection he makes,” he declared in his book *On Drawing and Painting*.<sup>110</sup> One of Boston’s most notable collectors and an artist in his own right (a portrait painter), as well as a teacher, Ross donated the majority of the sixteen thousand objects he collected to Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum, and other institutions. Decades before Baudrillard’s essay was published, Ross wrote: “What we are is very clearly seen in what we like. Our discriminations, preferences and selections are our most unerring critics and judges. If we do nothing but observe, discriminate, prefer and select, we express ourselves unmistakably.”<sup>111</sup>

In another of his books, *A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm*, Ross asserted that next to “creative genius, the faculty which creates great works,” the rarest thing in the world is “the faculty of appreciation.”<sup>112</sup> And there was a simple reason for it: great collecting, like great art-making, requires an enormous expenditure of energy. “The profession of the connoisseur and collector is a highly respectable one in which nobody attains success and distinction without working very hard for it,” he wrote. “It takes years of application and effort to reach the finer discriminations upon which unerring judgment rests, if there is such a thing as unerring judgment.”<sup>113</sup> Being a first-rate collector also requires being as bold as any first-rate

artist. Marie Frank, author of a critical biography about Ross, said of him: “His confidence in his own judgment meant that he moved unhesitatingly into areas unfamiliar to or dismissed by other collectors.”<sup>114</sup> Japanese prints, Indian and Mohammedan artworks, Cambodian sculpture, and Coptic tapestries were among the unorthodox collecting interests he gradually developed—not exactly what the typical member of his class was bringing back from the Grand Tour.

Psychologists Paul Rozin and Julia M. Hormes, who study food choices, made a comment about aesthetics in some recent scholarship that seems applicable to the achievement of collecting prowess. “Aesthetic pleasures typically have a sensory root, but are more cognitively elaborated, and more likely to be acquired over a period of time,” they argued in “Psychology and Sensory Marketing, With a Focus on Food.”<sup>115</sup> In other words, it takes time to acquire a liking for smelly cheese and chili peppers. Those who have taken years to become a connoisseur of what to the rest of the world are unusual objects understand that logic and the process. Maybe it’s not for nothing that the word “taste” applies equally both to one’s food preferences, learned or otherwise, and to the choices one makes as a collector.

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I once interviewed an artist who collected snow globes. “As an adult you appreciate things about them that you don’t when you’re a child,” she told me. “Nostalgia is part of it.” But her feelings about these items, the earliest of which were made and sold in the late nineteenth century as world’s fair souvenirs, are complex. “When you’re a child, your world is like the globes: small, protected, where the snow falls gently, everything is always the same, and nothing comes in and changes it,” she explained. But there’s something unsettling about them, too.

“You’ll see the little human figures inside and think, ‘There’s no escape! They’re stuck in there forever.’ So the domes are both utopian *and* dystopian, both perfect and flawed.”

I often think of her comment when I encounter works by Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), many of whose enclosed assemblages are reminiscent of glittery, darkly magical snow-globe worlds. And I often think of Cornell when I meet a certain kind of collector. They are frequenters of flea markets, secondhand stores, junk shops, scrap yards, estate sales, old-tool exchanges, house-wrecking establishments, even their local transfer station, as well as their local antiques shows and ephemera fairs. And they are among the most loyal and passionate of object-seekers you’ll ever to meet. We all know a few of these souls, who are always searching, habitually searching for the objects of their desire, often related to pop culture, seemingly worthless, but imbued with a nostalgic sense of the past. Many of them are fans of one kind or another. Cornell, a collector of *Movieland* magazines, certainly was.

According to Deborah Solomon, author of *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell*, the artist-to-be discovered the pleasures of secondhand shopping one summer during his undistinguished four years as a student at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. (A member of the class of 1921, he did not graduate, and his formal education ended there.) It happened while he was visiting antiques shops on Cape Cod, where he acquired some early American Sandwich glass. Some of what he later came to collect is easily seen in his artworks. The creations took awhile to emerge from the collections, however. His first known work, a collage, dates from 1931, more than a decade after his Cape Cod visit, and he didn’t make his first shadow box until 1936.<sup>116</sup> The poet Charles Simic, in *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell*, itemized what was in a 1940 shadow box called *L’Égypte de Mlle Cléo de*

*Mérode cours él'ementaire d'histoire naturelle*: “Doll’s forearm, loose red sand, wood ball, German coin, several glass and mirror fragments, 12 cork-stopped bottles, cutout sphinx head, yellow filaments, 2 intertwined paper spirals, cutout of [late nineteenth-century ballerina] Cléo de Mérode’s head, cutout of camels and men, loose yellow sand, 6 pearl beads, glass tube with residue of dried green liquid, crumpled tulle, rhinestones, pearl beads, sequins, metal chain, metal and glass fragments, threaded needle, red wood disc, bone and frosted glass fragments, blue celluloid, clear glass crystals, rock specimen, 7 balls, plastic rose petals, three miniature tin spoons for a doll house.”<sup>117</sup> In other works, one can pick out old perfume bottles, pressed glass swans, wooden butter moulds, plastic Maine lobster souvenirs, wire cages for birds; celestial objects. Chinese marbles, soap bubble pipes, corks, watch springs, clock springs, hatpins, other doll parts, including heads. A wood duck decoy. A compass from a whaling clipper ship. A kaleidoscope. All of it, so ordinary and familiar! Simic compared him to Walt Whitman, who “saw poetry everywhere” and credited Surrealism with providing him with a way of “being more than just an eccentric collector of sundry oddities.”<sup>118</sup>

He also collected materials to create the housing for the assemblages, each one of a fairly intimate scale, none much bigger than a cereal box. For one piece, he employed a vintage apothecary, whose bottles he emptied, refilled, and relabeled. For others he used shoe boxes, stationery boxes, cigar boxes, and candy boxes. For still others, he made wooden boxes of his own, then baked them in the kitchen oven to give them a dark patina or left them out in the sun to age. He “antiqued” the insides of some of them, too, using six or seven coats of house paint, building up a pleasing crustiness. Sometimes he wallpapered the insides of them with ads he found in turn-of-the-twentieth century travel guides to European cities he would never visit. In

fact, he rarely strayed from the small family home on Utopia Parkway in Queens, where his collections were mainly stored down in the basement and where he lived with his mother, Helen Cornell (1882-1966), and his wheelchair-bound sibling, Robert (1910-1965), who had been born with cerebral palsy and was himself a collector of radios and model trains. (Joseph Cornell Sr. had died of leukemia in 1917.) Except that Cornell did go constantly on collecting excursions, mostly to Manhattan, but occasionally to antiques shows in the New York region.

Mary Ann Caws, editor of *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*, wrote that “Cornell was addicted to rummaging around in bookshops, all the second-hand ones along Fourth Avenue to begin with, and then many more, both larger and more specialized.”<sup>119</sup> In the bookshops he found not only shelves and shelves of old volumes but postcards, prints, and photography. There were as yet no stand-alone photography dealers; bookshops were the only place to find photos of all kinds, including ones from Cornell’s favorite category, movie stills. “Very few people in America were then collecting stills,” Solomon writes; “even the studios discarded them after a movie closed.”<sup>120</sup> And so, with relative ease, Cornell had assembled by the early 1930s some twenty-five hundred pictures—“one of the largest collections in individual hands.”<sup>121</sup> In May of 1933, when the picture collection department of the New York Public Library put on an exhibition tracing the history of cinema, the librarians borrowed some Western stills from Cornell. Even back then, according to Solomon, “People who collected movies in America—then a tiny coterie—all knew the name Joseph Cornell but didn’t necessarily realize that he was an artist.”<sup>122</sup>

When I toured a Cornell exhibition at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, some years ago, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan told me: “He was an artist, but I also

definitely think of him as a shopper and a collector. He was someone who shopped, browsed, collected, archived.” He liked “saving things, salvaging things, making new things from old things—impulses of the 1930s.”<sup>123</sup> Hartigan, now the museum’s executive director, had by then been working on Cornell for decades. The founding curator of the Cornell archives at the Smithsonian, she cataloged the non-art contents of his estate in 1978. I asked her that evening at the exhibition how many non-art items there had been. Her reply was unexpected: “I’m not allowed to say.”

Solomon characterizes Cornell as an “urban hunter-gatherer, expressing his secret self by collecting librettos, record albums, books, prints, souvenir photos, theater memorabilia, and ticket stubs.”<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, he rarely played the records. Instead, according to Solomon, he listened to the radio, tuning it to the classical station WQXR. “Visitors to his house were often mystified by the sealed albums heaped by the hundred in the glass-enclosed front porch of his house,” she writes. “Like many of Cornell’s other collectibles, his records apparently brought him pleasure only in the moments when he first discovered them. After that, it was enough just to have them, to know they were there.”<sup>125</sup>

Ironically, Joseph Cornell the collector wasn’t comfortable with the idea of Joseph Cornell the artist whose work collectors wanted to collect. He especially disliked the idea of bulk ownership. Ed Bergman, who with his wife, Lindy Bergman, amassed some thirty-seven Cornell boxes and collages, which they subsequently donated to the Art Institute of Chicago, was informed at a Manhattan gallery, where he had gone to buy yet another Cornell: “You’re Bergman from Chicago? I’m not supposed to sell you anything.”<sup>126</sup>



## V.

Why does anyone grow up to be an artist? Solomon asked herself in the course of writing her biography. She admits she never was able to answer the question. I might as easily ask, Why does anyone grow up to be a collector? It is a question just as difficult to answer as Solomon's. No matter what I write, I cannot fully explain it, anymore than the collectors themselves can.

In the mid 1990s, when I first thought of writing something about collectors and had not yet become a reporter covering the antiques trade, a collector-friend of paintings and books, now deceased, advised: "Don't ask them 'Why?' Ask them 'How?' and you just might get the answer to the first question." That friend once worked for Wilmarth Lewis, whose nickname was "Lefty" and who rhetorically asks the third-person narrator of his autobiography, *One Man's Education*: "What, I have often wondered, gives collecting its motive power? [Bibliographer and collector] Seymour de Ricci [1881-1942], a great authority on the subject, says 'vanity'; others say 'aggression,' 'escape,' 'infantilism.'" The passage continues: "Collectors like to think that nobler motives are involved in their own case, such as love of learning and salvaging civilization, but when the instinct to collect is as strong as it was in Lefty it is nourished by surges from the unconscious"—an unconscious that is by definition inaccessible.<sup>127</sup>

One of my first interviewees was a rare-book collector who, even before I began asking my questions, seemed to think he already knew what I wanted to hear. "I've had a certain amount of [head]shrinking," he said. "Collecting of any kind is, I think, a futile, anxiety-allaying activity." He lived alone, and thought his solitariness had something to do with the development of his collecting habit. "I've had to make the best of it, and you know, you fill up a certain amount of emptiness with things," he told me.

I had been eager to speak with him because I knew that he always had a fellow rare-book collector-friend hold his wallet when they went to book shows together. Here was someone who had the mania for sure. But to my surprise he told me on the occasion of our interview that he had decided to sell his collection. “I don’t make a great salary,” said this professor of languages at a small Catholic college in New England. “I was carrying a constant, nagging debt. This habit of buying was restricting my freedom. I mean, I consider [the selling] a fragment of sanity on my part. I worry about passing into dottiness, given the fact that I don’t have a wife or family member who is there to nag me and put limits on what I do. As it was, I felt [the book collecting] was unhealthy, even dangerous. The hobby was threatening to occupy more and more of my soul.” But what about the pleasures of collecting? Hadn’t he experienced that, too? “I do think I’ve wasted a great deal of time in haunting old-book shops,” he said. “And yet I also know that when I’m doing it I’m as calm and as pleased as at any moment in my life.”

Like that rare-book collector, the British writer Simon Garfield proves an exception to the rule about collectors being reluctant to assign motives to their collecting behaviors. *The Error World*, his memoir about the rise and fall of his stamp-collecting habit, is candid about what he thinks caused him to take it up and put it down again. In his case, he believes it was a response to trauma and then a coming to terms with it. When his twenty-three-year-old brother died of viral pneumonia, it sent him reeling; so did the premature passing of his parents. Born in 1960, he had lost his entire family by age nineteen. As he views the contours of his life story, he portrays collecting stamps as a way he made order out of chaos, something that bestowed his catastrophic world with stability: “Everything else in turmoil and flux, but the mail didn’t let you down.”<sup>128</sup>

Garfield tells not only his own tale; he reports on fellow stamp collectors as well as collectors of other things. An academician who collects and studies shopping lists; a man named Lucifer who collects blotting paper; the owner of fifteen hundred early light bulbs—they all make Garfield “feel a little bit better—a bit saner” about his own desire for stamps: stamp errors, specifically, ones missing the queen’s visage, say, or a certain color.<sup>129</sup> As it happened, they were seeing astounding prices realized at the time, the 1980s, though Garfield never dwelled on investment opportunities, he claimed: “The rising value of rare stamps ultimately” was “an entertaining side issue,” not the main event of his collecting.<sup>130</sup>

Perhaps it was inevitable that Garfield would give up his collecting habit later in adulthood and that he would return to it briefly before, during, and after a divorce. In the end, though, he decided to sell. Partly, it was because he needed the money. Partly, too, it was because he didn’t need the stamps anymore. And considering that they (“flat, stowable, secret”) were his refuge during difficult periods in his life, relinquishing them must have felt like a personal triumph.<sup>131</sup> Yet another deciding factor was that he couldn’t figure out how to display his collection easily. Nor was it satisfying to take it out of storage to show non-collectors. “Unable to adequately explain it,” he felt the exercise to be as damaging as trying to describe the idea for a new book when it was still only in his head.<sup>132</sup>

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The world’s stamp-collecting hobby began in 1840, the same year the world’s first stamps, Great Britain’s Penny Black and Twopence Blue, were issued. Since then, stamp collecting has been most often associated with schoolboys and fusty old men, but the first known stamp collector was a woman identified only as “E.D.” in an advertisement in *The Times* in 1841.

She wanted to cover her dressing room with stamps, and by the time the media learned of her, she had already collected sixteen thousand. She wasn't a lone phenomenon long. The following year *Punch* alerted its readers to the new "mania" that had especially affected the women of England. As more countries issued stamps, an international collecting community developed.

The hobby, along with collections, were handed down. Indeed, one of the simplest reasons why collectors collect anything is a more or less conscious one: because it's a family habit. I call it hereditary collecting, which sometimes manifests itself as obligatory collecting. It's done because that is what one does, as others have done before them. In a phrase, it's expected. When we speak of a "born collector," we are not referring to this sort.

Marquand's George Apley collected Chinese bronzes because he was a hereditary collector. As he writes to his non-collecting son: "As you know, for a number of years . . . I have tried to inform myself fully about these things, and I have spent much time with many wily Oriental dealers." He hasn't been collecting them because he "particularly like these bronzes." He "made this collection out of duty rather than out of predilection, from the conviction that everyone in a certain position owes it to the community to collect something." It's the noblesse oblige school of collecting, as he explains it: "In this way industries are stimulated and scholars are given definite occupations. In the end, the public will be the gainer. I had perceived that our Art Museum was short of Chinese bronzes and I started my collection at your Uncle William's suggestion. They will, of course, be left by my will to the Museum, just as your uncle William proposes to leave his own very extensive collection of Chinese ceramics."<sup>133</sup>

Sometimes, though, members of families who are supposed to collect do so with passion and genuine love for the objects. Or they come to collect them in that way. Readers of Edmund

de Waal's memoir, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, learn of his great uncle, Charles Ephrussi (1849-1905), an art critic and bon vivant (model for Marcel's Proust's Charles Swann), who was at first a "totally conventional"<sup>134</sup> collector while on his Grand Tour. He was twenty-three and buying crates of objects—"objects that need a connoisseur's eye"<sup>135</sup>: everything from tapestries and sculpture to a huge Renaissance bed. Later he moved on to paintings, particularly the Impressionists, including one of Monet's haystacks. But he still wasn't a true collector. That happened only after he discovered Japanese netsuke, the fanciful, miniature, carved sculptural objects, one of which is the charismatic, amber-eyed hare of de Waal's title.

At the opening of *The Hare*, de Waal uses an epigraph from *Swann's Way*: "Even when one is no longer attached to things, it's still something to have been attached to them; because it was always for reasons which other people didn't grasp." But do collector themselves grasp those reasons? Of collecting these trinkets, used decoratively to fasten the belt of a garment, de Waal writes: "[They] seemed to induce insatiability, to own you, make demands on you. Collectors themselves speak of the intoxication of hunting and buying, a process that could send you towards mania: 'Of all the passions, of all without exception, the passion for the bibelot is perhaps the most terrible and invincible. The man smitten by an antique is a lost man. The bibelot is not only a passion, it is a mania,' claimed the young writer Guy de Maupassant."<sup>136</sup>

Eventually, Ephrussi's netsuke collection numbered 264, all of which were passed down en masse in the family, the mechanism that provides the book's plot. We follow their fate through the stories of their various owners over a span of 140 years. Among them were the author's great-grandparents Viktor and Emmy von Ephrussi. They lived a life of luxury, Rothschild-rich, in the vast Palais Ephrussi on Vienna's Ringstrasse, until, that is, 1938, when the Nazis invaded

and appropriated the palace of this nominally Jewish couple, and the collection was nearly lost. Except that a servant smuggled them out, a few at a time, in her apron pockets and hid them in her mattress. It took her two weeks. ““And they didn’t notice,” she later recounted. “They were so busy. They were busy with all the grand things”— paintings, books, jewelry. “They didn’t notice the little figures.”<sup>137</sup>

Besides Vienna, the book’s other settings are Paris, Tokyo, and, finally, London, where the author, the collection’s current owner, lives and works as a potter with an international reputation. He has also been a curator of ceramics galleries at the V&A (just like one of Pritchett’s fictional collector-dealers harmlessly daydreamed himself to be). That he came to own them doesn’t surprise him. “I think of Charles with all his treasures, and know that it was his passion for them that kept them moving,” he writes. “Charles could not resist the world of things: touching them; studying them; buying them; rearranging them,” but when he gave the collection to de Waal’s great grandparents, that made space in his salon vitrine for something new.<sup>138</sup> He was in love with the hunt, with the process of collecting, more than the things themselves—or equally in love with both.

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It’s fairly plain why the nouveau riche become collectors. They have the money, and need (and want) to spend it. The unfairness of the situation irks the true collector who doesn’t have the funds. They torture themselves with the thought that the collected things won’t be appreciated. Won’t be loved. And often they won’t be. Lately, things like paintings have merely been stockpiled in warehouses, out of sight of anyone, not even finding their way onto walls, where they might be ignored.

Henry Osborne Havemeyer (1847-1907) was to sugar what John D. Rockefeller was to oil. It was Havemeyer, a progeny of German immigrants, who masterminded the creation of the so-called Sugar Trust in 1887, after organizing the merger of a dozen and a half refineries in several cities. By 1903, the American Sugar Refining Company—its official name—was the sixth largest industrial enterprise in the U.S., having achieved a near-perfect monopoly, at one point controlling ninety-eight percent of the country's sugar market.<sup>139</sup> Known as the Sugar King, notorious for his abrasive personality, the stout, balding, white-mustached Harry, as he was known, became a favorite subject of caricaturists as he manipulated railroads to get preferential rates, granted rebates to wholesale grocers in exchange for selling only his sugar, and engaged in other questionable or illegal business practices designed to subdue competitors and discourage new entrants into the field. He also became an art collector. Together with his second wife, Louisine Waldron Elder Havemeyer, a member of another sugar-producing family with German roots, he built a collection of European art, mostly Impressionist, with the help of Mary Cassatt. A fellow robber baron of the period, Charles L. Freer, said of Harry Havemeyer's love of art: "No one can be more deeply touched by beauty than he, provided he is in a mood to enjoy it."<sup>140</sup>

Collecting thus became hereditary, if not obligatory, in the Havemeyer family, especially manifesting itself in Harry and Louisine's daughter, Electra Havemeyer Webb (1888-1960), who collected American antiques and founded the Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont. Likewise, Webb's grandson (Harry and Louisine's great-grandson) John Wilmerding (b. 1938), who became a collector of American art, as well as a curator and author, and who, in 2004, became a major donor of art. That spring he announced a promised gift of fifty-one works by twenty-six American artists—a pantheon of our greatest, from Winslow Homer to Thomas

Eakins—to the National Gallery. In the fall of that year, I heard Wilmerding speak in Boston about how his collection began.

“It begins just a few blocks away, on Newbury Street,” he said, referring to Childs Gallery, where he bought his first painting, Fitz Henry Lane’s *Stage Rocks and Western Shore of Gloucester’s Outer Harbor*. This was in 1965 when he was a student at Harvard and Fitz Henry Lane was still known as Fitz Hugh Lane. He bought his second painting, *Mississippi Boatman* by George Caleb Bingham from Boston Vose Galleries, and reckoned he was now a “collector,” suffering from “the only disease that you can enjoy.” Both were part of the promised gift to the National Gallery. (The Bingham was actually gifted immediately.<sup>141</sup>)

Wilmerding had not only collector-models (and philanthropists) near at hand when he was growing up. He had the money to pursue his passion. Granted, less money, relatively speaking, was required to get into the game back then. (That first Lane cost him \$3,500. Thirty-nine years later, that is, just a little over a generation later, I saw one go at auction for \$5,000,000.<sup>142</sup>) But it’s also true that a plentitude of great American paintings were still available. Wilmerding recalled a bygone time when “works of amazing importance” would come fresh to the market “almost on a weekly basis.” He reminisced about being with a friend who bought in one afternoon in New Jersey for a few hundred dollars three works—by Martin Johnson Heade, Frederick Church, and John F. Peto, respectively. The friend sold the Heade to Wilmerding the same day; he sold the other two shortly. He knew on that day he wanted to become an art dealer, Wilmerding said of his friend, who is Stuart Feld of Hirschl & Adler, the New York art gallery, which Feld joined as a partner in 1967.<sup>143</sup>



The reason why works were still plentiful was because, of course, Wilmerding was collecting American art when native works were still a bold choice for a collector to make. Even bolder were the choices made by a man of means born a generation earlier. Joseph Pulitzer Jr. (1913-1993), scion of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newspaper family, became a prominent collector of modern art. Despite having grown up in a household where prevailing tastes tended toward Audubon, Currier & Ives, and ancestral portraits, he pursued the likes of Picasso, Cézanne, and Brancusi, then later Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Mark Rothko. With mountains of money and the good looks of *Mad Men*'s Don Draper, Pulitzer might have become a playboy. Instead, he became a scholar-connoisseur, then one of the most important donors of original works of art in the history of Harvard's Fogg, where his biographer, Marjorie B. Cohn, was curator of prints for many years.

In *Classic Modern: The Art Worlds of Joseph Pulitzer Jr.*, Cohn describes Pulitzer's boyhood collections of cigar bands and Tobler chocolate wrappers as "the gilt-edged debris of a luxurious youth."<sup>144</sup> Pulitzer's creation of his serious collection began when he was a Harvard undergraduate. While a college senior, he acquired Modigliani's *Elvira Resting at a Table*, then six by Picasso, who was his thesis subject. "Everyone thought I had gone crazy," recalled Pulitzer, whose father wouldn't advance the month's allowance that would have given him the \$30,000 to buy *Les Femmes d'Alger*.<sup>145</sup> The world was and would remain for some time a place where the response to the purchase of Van Gogh's *Stairway at Auvers* by a curator at St. Louis's City Art Museum was such that "you'd have thought he'd thrown a bomb into the museum," in the words of a painter who remembered the public's reaction.<sup>146</sup> Pulitzer, by contrast, on first sighting Picasso's *Woman in Yellow*, felt it as a "bolt of lightning."<sup>147</sup>

Outside of the family, Harvard fine-arts professor Paul Sachs was one of Pulitzer's crucial influences. Another was his second wife, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, a museum curator who led him to Judd and other minimalists, after Pulitzer's first wife, Lulu, equally supportive but less directly influential, died. But he shunned advisors or surrogates, and spoke about their dangers. "I buy only what I like and what I consider significant," he said. "Otherwise, my collection would have neither character nor individuality."<sup>148</sup>

## VI.

When he was only in his forties, Joe Pulitzer started letting go gracefully: he began making donations of his artworks. (Wilmerding was no less graceful about it, but he was in his mid sixties when he announced his promised gift to the National Gallery.) "A man cannot afford to die with a lot of pictures on his hands," Pulitzer said. "He should give them away in time or leave them to the public. He shouldn't force his taste on his children."<sup>149</sup> Besides, a career in the family business had taught him about finance, and he well understood the potential for tax savings allowed by gifts to institutions. This knowledge, Cohn writes, "greatly influenced Joe's donations and even his budget for new art purchases."<sup>150</sup> Admirably, he "never succumbed to the paralysis induced by memory of the art prices of his youth," Cohn notes. He "knew what he wanted and, eventually, paid what he had to through the decades of rampant art-market inflation, especially for the classic modern works ... that were so dear to him."<sup>151</sup>

Once an object goes into a public collection there it remains, barring deaccessioning, which is difficult legally, if not ethically. Private collectors can only gaze with wonder them, as Pritchett's narrator gazed at the "beautiful things enshrined and inaccessible" at the V&A,

“elevated to a state of worship as if they were idols, holy and never to be touched.”<sup>152</sup> Many collectors hope that what they have collected will go into a museum, as George Apley’s Chinese bronzes went to the “Art Museum” of Marquand’s fictional universe. The reality is that most of what collectors collect are not going to be wanted by an institution.

Auctioneers like to invoke the four D’s—death, divorce, debt, and downsizing—when explaining why things come to market. (To those four D’s, Pritchett’s narrator contributes another, all-around serviceable fifth one: “disaster”—along with “trouble with the police.”<sup>153</sup>) In any case, it is always good for a collector to remember that the objects in any collection are like the tide: they come in and then inevitably go out again.

Sometimes collections are greeted by waiting hordes, who collect them in new ways and for new reasons; but sometimes they are greeted with “Meh.” It all depends on what it is that has been collected by whom, how much the market values it at that moment, and how much of it the market and current collectors can bear. The collections’ fate also depends on what bidders are feeling on the day it goes on the block. That’s why a white-glove sale—the auction term reserved for sales at which every single lot finds a buyer and, according to tradition, the auctioneer is awarded a pair of white gloves to honor the occasion—is itself a kind of black tulip.

I covered only two white-glove sales in my seventeen years as a reporter for *Maine Antique Digest*, from the spring of 2003 through the winter of 2020. The first was the 457-lot, unreserved sale of Richard Wright’s doll collection conducted by Skinner on October, 10, 2009, at its suburban headquarters in Marlborough, Massachusetts. (See “King of Dolls” in this compilation.) Drawing a large, international audience of Wright devotees, who bid live, as well as on phones, online, and as absentees, it fetched a total of \$1,232,284. Being an unreserved sale

—without prices below which an item would not be sold—it might be considered a bit of a cheat of a white-glove sale. But I have been at plenty of auctions where, when some of it went up, they couldn't, as the saying goes, even give it away. My second white-glove sale was the fourth and final part of an auction series called “The Property of a Distinguished American Collector” conducted by Profiles in History, based in Calabasas, California. Every one of the 112 lots offered on July 11, 2013, was sold, mostly on phones, online, and via left bids (there were virtually no live bidders) for a total of \$1,892,400.<sup>154</sup> Profiles in History is best known for selling Hollywood memorabilia, but just a few months before the first sale in that series took place on December 18, 2012, the firm's president and CEO, Joseph M. Maddalena, contracted with Marsha E. Malinowski to become the auction house's consultant for books and manuscripts. It was Malinowski who landed the plum consignment and brought the Distinguished American's collection to market. A hands-down success, even without the “white-glove” finale, the tally for the quartet of sales that offered 875 lots in all was \$14,600,820.

One could say Malinowski brought good credentials to the task. She left Sotheby's in May of 2012 as a senior vice president after twenty-six years with that firm, having been involved with some of the most extraordinary sales of manuscripts in auction history. They included the copy of the Magna Carta that sold to philanthropist David Rubenstein for \$21 million. Of this sale's white-glove aspect, Malinowski said: “They're so rare and that's what makes them so gratifying. As the auction nears its end, and as the idea of selling every lot approaches the realm of possibility, you think, ‘Don't wish on it.’”

I think, however, I have learned more about collectors and collections—and people in general—at auctions that haven't gone as well. Among others I witnessed I remember

particularly well one I witnessed on October 31, 2003. Afterwards, people searched for the politic word to describe the results of the all-Shaker sale held on Halloween night at Skinner's Boston gallery. "Disappointing" would be an understatement. Almost a third—twenty-nine percent—of the 292 lots on offer were either passed or bought in. Total gross sales for the 208 lots that did sell were an unremarkable \$253,195. Bargains at auctions usually make dealers and collectors happy. But Jan Pavlovic of Winnetka, Illinois, who with her husband, Tom, bought one of the two top lots of the evening, said, "It was so sad. I had never been to an auction quite like that before."

Why did it happen? The next morning, Skinner's Stephen L. Fletcher said: "I don't know what happened last night. Those were really mixed results. One consignor's pieces did just fine. The other consignor really thought very highly of his material. He was more aggressive and pushed harder"—to get Skinner to agree to set high estimates. Skinner's usual policy, said Fletcher, is to pair conservative estimates with aggressive marketing. "When we deviate from that, that's when we get into trouble."

The sale featured furniture and household articles—boxes, baskets, bowls, pin cushions, yarn swifts, and spools; a shaving mirror, a mattress smoother, a niddy nobby, a fan. There was ephemera, too -- medicine bottles and their labels, seed advertisements and display boxes, photographs and hymnals. The items came from two major consignors, both well-known to the close-knit Shaker-collecting community. Slightly over a third of the lots, or 110 of them, were consigned by Richard Klank of Hyattsville, Maryland. Seventy-three came from Gus and June Nelson of Western Massachusetts. A majority of the rest were from a third collector, who chose to be anonymous.

The Klank items were the overestimated ones. The Pavlovics, Shaker devotees for over thirty years at that point, knew the market as well as anyone. What did they think when they first saw those estimates in the catalog? “We thought they were very high to start,” said Jan Pavlovic. “I can only imagine it was the estimates that scared everybody so. It looked like Mr. Nelson didn’t esteem his pieces as much as [Klank] did,” because his estimates were so much lower. “But I think it was just more his style.” The Nelsons were more modest than Klank? “Well, I think so. And the fact that the others didn’t sell would indicate that [Klank] was also more unrealistic.”

Even before the auction began, in the last moments of the preview, Fran Kramer, a collector of Shaker and author of *Simply Shaker*, voiced another concern. Skinner’s was the third all-Shaker sale in five months. If an auction were a bridge game, one might worry that the trump had already gone around too many times. Shaker is a collecting area that requires a great deal of knowledge; just like the Shakers’ celibacy rule, it keeps their numbers low. Were there enough collectors out there ready to buy again so soon? The sale results indicate that there weren’t.

The night before the sale, Kramer was part of a panel discussion hosted by Skinner, “Collecting Shaker: Perspectives and Preferences.” It was moderated by Gerard C. Wertkin, author of *The Four Seasons of Shaker Life* and then director of the American Museum of Folk Art in New York. The two other panelists were Tom Pavlovic and consignor Klank.

It was possible that some of the discussion, instead of increasing enthusiasm for bidding by attendees, had an opposite, chilling effect on their spending the following evening. What were they to make of it when Wertkin told them that Sister Mildred Barker, speaking in New York in the late 1960s, had “indicted” the collectors in her sell-out audience for “buying and selling

sacred art”? Sister Barker’s remark was “problematic” for some of them, said Wertkin, who knew a collector who gave up collecting Shaker as a result of that speech. He quoted her this way: ““I now look at a Shaker chair and it tells me it doesn’t approve. I don’t need that in my house.””

Other panelists spoke of having bought their pieces directly from the Shakers, in the days when there were more than just four still alive. (At that moment, four resided at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.) That direct contact added to the thrill of the purchase and ownership, they said. Klank showed a slide of the first Shaker piece he ever bought, a red-stained pine, recessed-panel cupboard that was listed in the auction catalog as Lot 17. “Nobody had ever owned it except Shakers before me,” he said.

But the trouble with his boast was that it emphasized the piece’s current distance from the Shakers. Because the celibate Shakers had no heirs, their pieces weren’t handed down in families. And now they are passed from one collector to another. What the market thinks of that collector, his (or her) eye, his taste, his documentation, helps determine the prices people are willing to pay. Were Klank and his collecting judgments sufficiently revered to justify his reserves? Again, the auction’s results are the answer: the red-stained pine cupboard found no buyer at the sale.

Klank is an associate professor of painting and art theory at the University of Maryland; he is also an artist. Skinner’s promotions of the sale presented Klank’s collection as one formed as a result of his interest in the Shakers’ purity of design, their philosophical ideals, and their philosophy of art. The Nelsons’ collection, by contrast, was presented as being “historically focussed.” Martha Hamilton, Skinner’s then expert in charge of the sale, said that when she went

to see Gus Nelson and his collection, at his home out near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where the Hancock Shaker Village is also located, she was “so impressed by his card files, with all the documentation recorded.” Nelson had an historian’s way of collecting, she said, because he had been guided by historian-collectors before him, including William Lassiter and Faith Andrews, both of whom became outstanding authorities in the field. Indeed, it was usually possible to guess correctly which lots in the catalog were Nelson’s, because their descriptions were so precise and so detailed with names, dates, and other facts that proved the degree of their “Shakerness.”

The word is one Kramer used in her remarks as a panelist. Later, after the auction, she told me.: “It’s the ‘Shakerness’ we want. We want ‘real.’ That’s in addition to what every collector who is paying a lot of money for anything wants—condition, form, and so on. But that specific history, the Shakerness that can be documented, is what is valued.” Its high degree of Shakerness is one reason why Kramer said she bought the Nelsons’ walnut lap desk for \$1,528, more than twice the high estimate. Thomas Fisher (1823-1902) of the community in Enfield, Connecticut, was its maker, and he signed it, “T. Fisher ’88.” Of the sale’s results in general, Kramer said: “Shaker collectors are very focussed and very fussy. If it’s not exactly what they’re looking for, they’ll hold back; they will not get involved. If they like what’s being offered, they will pay extremely well for it.” The collectors sound like the material itself, for it, too, is very focussed, very fussy, it was suggested. “And the Shakers themselves were very focussed and very fussy,” said Kramer.

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In his essay “Unpacking my Library,” Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), the German cultural critic, gave us his definition of a writer. He said they are people who write books “because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like.”<sup>155</sup> In addition to those I have already named and those given space in the pages that follow this introduction, dozens of books on collectors and collecting have been published during my lifetime alone: funny, serious, personal, impersonal, fictional, non-fictional, and now, increasingly, academic.<sup>156</sup> I have written this book, not because I dislike the others—in fact, I admire them all, to greater and lesser extents. But I still felt none of them was telling stories of collectors and collecting as I wanted them to be told. “Objects have always been carried, sold, bartered, stolen, retrieved and lost,” de Waal declares in *The Hare with Amber Eyes*. “It is how you tell their stories that matters.”<sup>157</sup> Along the same lines, a collector-acquaintance of mine likes to say that every object has four dimensions, the three that you can see and the fourth, which is the story behind it. (Not that it’s always to be believed. Buy the item, not the story, beginner collectors are told.)

*Story. History.* Each word has the same root. Some collectors aren’t great story tellers; they don’t say much. Others you can’t shut up. Either way, I submit that collectors are our most crucially necessary chroniclers of history—through objects; through material culture, as it’s called in academe; through things. “You get one person who doesn’t understand, and he can wipe out history,” Robert Opie once said—he, who started collecting commercial packaging in his native Great Britain in 1963, at the age of sixteen, and founded the Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising in London’s Notting Hill in 1984. There is what he shudderingly terms “‘the 30-second gap’ between ‘out it goes’ and ‘I wonder if anyone might be interested in that.’”<sup>158</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Joseph Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions: The History of Art Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena* (New York and Princeton: Harper & Row and Princeton University Press, 1982), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 17, xvi. He began collecting in 1964. See Joseph Alsop, with Adam Platt, *"I've Seen the Best of It": Memoirs* (New York: Norton & Company, 1992), 469.
- <sup>4</sup> Alsop, *Memoirs*, 468.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 469.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 9. (First published as "Le Système Marginal: La Collection," in *Le Système des Objets* [Paris: Gallimard, 1968].)
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 23.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>12</sup> V.S. Pritchett, "The Camberwell Beauty," *Selected Stories* (New York: Random House, 1978), 267.
- <sup>13</sup> Nylander gave her lecture at the 29th Annual Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, "New England Collectors and Collections," Deerfield, Massachusetts, June 18-20, 2004.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Exhibition label, "'into your hands...,'" Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts, on view April 6, 2010-September 19, 2010.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> John P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937), 8.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>19</sup>Before that land in the middle of Manhattan became Central Park, it was “worse than a wilderness.” Principally rock and swamp, its approximately seven hundred acres was home to five thousand squatters, a “huge” population of cows, horses, swine, goats, dogs, cats, geese, chickens, and their “filth.” It was also the city dump. John Foord, *The Life and Public Services of Andrew H. Green* (New York: Doubleday, 1913). A paperback edition was published in 2010; in addition, portions are available on the Internet, the source of these quotes.

<sup>20</sup> Several pieces from the Green troves were not family related, and they enticed a bidder who was very likely a collector of U.S. presidential material. (He wouldn’t say.) One piece was a letter from Thomas Jefferson to “Colonel James Monroe,” written at Monticello on September 23, 1790, for which that bidder paid \$18,800. Jefferson, soon to be our third president, was inviting Monroe, our future fifth president, and his wife to dine with him and others. He also wanted to discuss business. “I shall wish for some opportunity of a particular conference with you before you leave us,” he wrote, signing, “Your’s affectionately, Th. Jefferson.” The presidential letters, nearly a dozen, were from a collection given to Andrew Green by John L. Cadwalader, who was, among other things, a founder of the Association of the Bar of New York and Assistant Secretary of State during Ulysses S. Grant’s administration.

<sup>21</sup> Exhibition label from “into your hands...”

<sup>22</sup> Susan Sontag, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Maurice Rickards, *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian*, edited and completed by Michael Twyman with the assistance of Sally De Beaumont and Amoret Tanner (New York: Routledge, 2000), 267.

<sup>24</sup> Adding immeasurably to the value of this item was the marginalia. It was not typical for Washington to write in the margins of books. According to the Christie's catalog, Washington annotated only one other volume in his approximately 1,000-book library—a copy of James Madison's *View of the Conduct of the Executive*. But in the pages of the Constitution he added careful brackets and notes that highlight key passages concerning the president's responsibilities. It is also the most expensive Washington item ever sold publicly by far. An autograph letter written in 1787 by Washington to his nephew Bushrod Washington, on the subject of the ratification of the Constitution, was the previous highpoint. That went at Christie's for \$3,218,500 on December 4, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Erin L. Thompson, *Possession: The Curious History of Private Collectors from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Drabble, *The Pattern in the Carpet: A Personal History with Jigsaws* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 83.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>33</sup> Wilmarth S. Lewis, *Collector's Progress: The Collector's Own Story of the Formation of the World's Greatest Collection of Books and Manuscripts by and About Horace Walpole* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 211.

<sup>34</sup> John Fowles, *The Collector* (Boston: Little Brown, 1963), 101.

<sup>35</sup> John McPhee, *The Ransom of Russian Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 13, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 11, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>41</sup> Pritchett, 263.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 264, 267.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>49</sup> *Lady Charlotte Schreiber, Extracts from her Journal 1853-1891*, edited by her grandson, The Earl of Bessborough (London: John Murray, 1952), 115.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Chatwin, *What Am I Doing Here* (New York: Viking, 1989), 358.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>56</sup> Susannah Clapp, *With Chatwin: Portrait of a Writer's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 225-228.

<sup>57</sup> Bruce Chatwin, *Utz* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), 113.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>59</sup> Henry James, *The Spoils of Poynton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897), 35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Hill Blaney Cram, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Hill Cram* (Ironbound Island, Maine:

A.F. Morris, privately printed, 150 copies, 1992), 17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>67</sup> <https://search.amphilsoc.org/collections/view?docId=ead/Mss.Ms.Coll.97-ead.xml> Retrieved

March 19, 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 22.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>76</sup> Not so incidentally, Enid Coleslaw is an anagram of Daniel Clowes.

<sup>77</sup> Evan S. Connell Jr., *The Connoisseur* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 37-38.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 63, 67.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>85</sup> Gerald Shapiro, "Evan S. Connell: A Profile," *Ploughshares*, Vol. 13, No. 2-3 (Fall 1987): 23.

<sup>86</sup> Steven Paul, *Literary Alchemist: The Writing Life of Evan S. Connell* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2021), 193-197.

<sup>87</sup> Evan S. Connell Jr., "Legacy of a Maya Lord: A Novelist and his Pre-Columbian Protagonist" *Art & Antiques*, January 1987, 75.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Gottlieb and Frank Maresca, *A Certain Style: The Art of the Plastic Handbag, 1949-1959* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 11.

<sup>91</sup> H. Harrison Huster, "Scrimshaw: One Part Whalebone, Two Parts Nostalgia," *The Magazine Antiques*, August 1961, 122-125.

<sup>92</sup> H. Harrison Huster and Doug Knight, *Floating Sculpture: Decoys of the Delaware River* (Spanish Fork, UT: Hillcrest Publications, 1982).

<sup>93</sup> Lewis, *Collector's Progress*, 80.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>97</sup> Nick Hornby, *High Fidelity* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 37.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>101</sup> Conn, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Stuart M. Frank, *Ingenious Contrivances, Curiously Carved: Scrimshaw in the New Bedford Whaling Museum* (David R. Godine, in association with the New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2012), 176.

<sup>103</sup> Pop photographica is defined by Kaplan, in her booklet, *Pop Photographica: Image Objects* (Poppy Press, 2014), as “three-dimensional decorative and functional objects highlighted with photographic images.” Example: A 1969 Hillsboro coffee can with a wraparound photomechanical image by Ansel Adams.

<sup>104</sup> John Szarkowski *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>108</sup> John Szarkowski, “Photography and the Private Collector,” *Aperture*. Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer 1970): unpaginated.

<sup>109</sup> John James Sweeney, “Museums and Collections,” February 15, 1967.

February 25,

2022.

<sup>110</sup> Denman Waldo Ross, *On Drawing and Painting* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 94.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Denman Waldo Ross, *A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), 192.

<sup>113</sup> Ross, *On Drawing and Painting*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> Marie Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2012), 238.



<sup>115</sup> Paul Rozin and Julia M Hormes, “Psychology and Sensory Marketing, With a Focus on Food,” *Sensory Marketing: Research on the Sensuality of Products*, edited by Aradhna Krishna (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 309.

<sup>116</sup> Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 79.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 30.

<sup>119</sup> *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files*, Mary Ann Caws, editor (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 167.

<sup>120</sup> Solomon, 76.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>123</sup> Conceived and produced by Hartigan, *Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination* was the first major retrospective of the artist's work in more than twenty-six years. A presentation of 180 of his finest pieces, the show had already been on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., when I saw it at the Peabody Essex in 2007. It later traveled to its final venue, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

<sup>124</sup> Solomon, 48.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, xiii.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>127</sup> Wilmarth S. Lewis, *One Man's Education*, subtitled *The Autobiography of a Distinguished American Scholar, Author, Editor, and Collector* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 191-192.

<sup>128</sup> Simon Garfield, *The Error World: An Affair with Stamps* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008,) 14.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>133</sup> Marquand, 162-163.

<sup>134</sup> Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family's Century of Art and Loss* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 35. Note: The book was re-subtitled in subsequent editions *A Hidden Inheritance*.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. See Guy de Maupassant, "Bibelots," *Le Gaulois*, March 22, 1883, 3-17.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel Catlin, *Good Work Well Done: The Sugar Business Career of Horace Havemeyer, 1903-1956* (Self-published by the author, 1988), 7.

<sup>140</sup> For more information, see Harry W. Havemeyer, *Henry Osborne Havemeyer: The Most Independent Mind* (New York: H. W. Havemeyer, 2010); Louisine W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector* (Privately printed, 1961); Cynthia Saltzman, *Old Masters, New World: America's Raid on Europe's Great Pictures, 1880–World War I* (New York: Viking, 2008); and especially Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, et al, *Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).

<sup>141</sup> Press release, National Gallery of Art Office of Press and public Information, May 6, 2004.

<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/gallery-archives/PressReleases/>

2009-2000/2004/14A11\_45341\_20040506.pdf Retrieved March 23, 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Actually it was \$5,506,000, a new world record for a Fitz Hugh Lane that still stands. It was set at Skinner in Boston on November 19, 2004, when *Manchester Harbor* was sold to private dealer Michael Altman of New York. The auction house advertised an extremely conservative estimate, just \$650,000 to \$850,000, for the twenty-four by thirty-six-inch oil on canvas in its original frame. Everyone knew the final bid would beat that pipsqueak number. The question was: By how much? In the days before the sale, the figures bandied about by dealers and other market observers were in the \$2,700,000 to \$3,000,000 range. Maybe Skinner itself would have been happy enough if it had reached \$4,000,000, a price that would have subtly erased the record for a Lane that was set by Christie's on May 25, 2000, when *The Golden Rule* sold for \$3,966,000. But there was to be nothing subtle about this sale. At the time Altman said he had bought it for resale. Such a risk didn't seem all that risky back then, and apparently it wasn't. "I sold it within a year, I guess," Altman told me in a phone conversation in September of 2013, a few days before another Lane went up at Skinner and sold for \$1,384,000. "It was a great picture," he said of the \$5 million plus one, "and Lanes are very rare."

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.hirschlandadler.com/about-us> Retrieved April 2, 2022.

<sup>144</sup> Marjorie B. Cohn, *Classic Modern: The Art Worlds of Joseph Pulitzer Jr.* (Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums, distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>152</sup> Pritchett, 276.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>154</sup> Not surprisingly, a revelation of the identity of the Distinguished American was not part of the finale. The gentleman remains anonymous, although he can be defined by his vast interests, ones that ranged from Henry James to the outlaw brothers Frank and Jesse James, Frank Lloyd Wright to Orville Wright, Louis Pasteur to Louis Armstrong, and from George Washington to George Bernard Shaw to George Sand. He can also be defined by his membership in a generation of collectors who started collecting historical documents thirty years ago.

<sup>155</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 63.

<sup>156</sup> See, for example, two academic works: Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); and *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, edited by Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); and, for the general reader, Thatcher Freund's *Objects of Desire: The Lives of Antiques and Those Who Pursue Them* (New York: Pantheon, 1994) and Maureen Stanton's *Killer Stuff and Tons of Money: Seeking History and Hidden Gems in Flea-Market America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011). Deserving of its status as a classic, there is also a book from sixty-five plus years ago: Aileen Saarinen's *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958).

<sup>157</sup> de Waal, 348.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Opie, "Unless you do these crazy things..." in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 42.