

## American Art Association

**Active Dates:** 1883-1938

**Gallerists:** James Sutton, Austin Robertson, Thomas Kirby (auctioneer)

**Location:**

1883-1900 Kurtz Gallery Building, 6 & 7 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York<sup>1</sup>  
1885 Auctions held in Chickering hall auditorium, Fifth Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> Street  
1900-1922 New Plaza Hotel at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> Street  
1922-1937 30 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street  
1929-1937 American Art Association-Anderson Galleries opens additional building on  
30 E 57<sup>th</sup> St.  
1938-1964 Under Parke-Bernet Galleries Ownership<sup>2</sup>

**Specialty:** American and European art. First American auction house. Auction specialties in estate sales, Asian decorative arts, furniture, American & European paintings.<sup>3</sup>

### Gallery History

James Sutton, Austin Robertson, and Thomas Kirby formed the American Art Association in 1883. The association included an art gallery and auction house. Prior to founding, Sutton and Robertson had established the American Art Gallery in 1879 and Kirby worked professionally as an auctioneer for his own company<sup>4</sup>. The American Art Association initially leased space for its gallery shows in the Kurtz Gallery building on East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, facing Madison Square Gardens.<sup>5</sup> Kirby began auctioneering in the Chickering Hall auditorium on Fifth avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> street.<sup>6</sup>

The American Art Association hosted many prominent shows that relied on strong relationships with established New York dealers, such as Knoedler, Schaus, Cottier, and Tooth, among others.<sup>7</sup> In its first year of opening, the American Art Association exhibited a successful show of

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Carlsen Archives, "American Art Association" (webpage), Emil Carlsen Archives, accessed April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <http://emilcarlsen.org/portfolio/american-art-association-1883-1964/>

<sup>2</sup> All locations and dates retrieved from National Gallery of Art. "American Art Association."

<sup>3</sup> "Exhibition and Artwork 1897-1898: American Art Association records, circa 1853-1929, bulk 1885-1922; Box 14 Folder 45," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/american-art-association-records-6973/series-7/box-14-folder-45>

<sup>4</sup> "American Art Association Records," The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives, Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.frick.org/sites/default/files/FindingAids/AmericanArtAssociation.html>

<sup>5</sup> Emil Carlsen Archives, "American Art Association."

<sup>6</sup> "American Art Association," National Gallery of Art, Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, [https://www.nga.gov/collection/provenance-info.8515.html?artobj\\_ownerId=8515&artobj\\_vbnationality=American&sortOrder=DEFAULT&pageNumber=1&lastFacet=artobj\\_vbnationality#works](https://www.nga.gov/collection/provenance-info.8515.html?artobj_ownerId=8515&artobj_vbnationality=American&sortOrder=DEFAULT&pageNumber=1&lastFacet=artobj_vbnationality#works)

<sup>7</sup> "Illustrated catalogue of master works of the early English, Dutch, French and Flemish schools..." Getty Research Institute Internet Archive, Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/illustratedmaster00amer/page/n11/mode/2up>

famous American Thomas B Clark’s collection in support of the National Academy of Design.<sup>8</sup> Shows like these and the auction business boosted the association’s reputation, especially as a promoter of American art, in New York for decades. Kirby was known to be a skilled and insightful auctioneer. The association executed its first successful auction in 1885 when Kirby struck an important deal with bankrupt businessman George Seney.<sup>9</sup>

The American Art Association moved to a building on 30 E 57<sup>th</sup> Street in 1922.<sup>10</sup> Soon after, Kirby sold the association to Cortlandt Bishop. In 1929, the American Art Association joined with the Anderson Auction company and later became Parke-Bernet Galleries in 1938. Sotheby’s bought Parke-Bernet in 1964.<sup>11</sup>

## Illustrations



Figure 1: “American Art Association Building in New York City, 1922: American Art Association records, circa 1853-1929, bulk 1885-1922.” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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<sup>8</sup> “American Art Association,” National Gallery of Art.

<sup>9</sup> “American Art Association,” National Gallery of Art.

<sup>10</sup> “American Art Association Building in New York City, 1922: American Art Association records, circa 1853-1929, bulk 1885-1922,” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Accessed April 20th, 2020, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/american-art-association-records-6973>

<sup>11</sup> “American Art Association Records,” The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.



Figure 2: "Exhibition and Artwork 1897-1898: American Art Association records, circa 1853-1929, bulk 1885-1922; Box 14 Folder 45:" Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 3: "Herbert G Squire Sale 1912. American Art Association records, circa 1853-1929, bulk 1885-1922; Box 2 Folder 45." Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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**Author's Initials:** CT

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“Illustrated catalogue of master works of the early English, Dutch, French and Flemish schools : belonging to Eugene Fischhof, Paris and T.J. Blakslee, New York : to be sold at absolute public sale at Chickering Hall on the evenings of Friday and Saturday March 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at 8 o'clock.” Getty Research Institute Internet Archive. Accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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