

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

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

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 company⁴. The American Art Association initially leased space for its gallery shows in the Kurtz Gallery building on East 23rd Street, facing Madison Square Gardens.⁵ Kirby began auctioneering in the Chickering Hall auditorium on Fifth avenue and 18th street.⁶

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.

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

² All locations and dates from "American Art Association," National Gallery of Art, Accessed April 20th, 2020, https://www.nga.gov/collection/provenance-info.8515.html?artobj_ownerId=8515&artobj_vbnationality=American&sortOrder=DEFAULT&pageNumber=1&lastFacet=artobj_vbnationality#works

³ "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 20th, 2020, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/american-art-association-records-6973/series-7/box-14-folder-45>

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

⁵ Emil Carlsen Archives, "American Art Association."

⁶ "American Art Association," National Gallery of Art, Accessed April 20th, 2020, https://www.nga.gov/collection/provenance-info.8515.html?artobj_ownerId=8515&artobj_vbnationality=American&sortOrder=DEFAULT&pageNumber=1&lastFacet=artobj_vbnationality#works

⁷ In its first year of opening, the American Art Association exhibited a successful show of famous American Thomas B Clark's collection in support of the National Academy of Design.⁸ 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.⁹

The American Art Association moved to a building on 30 E 57th Street in 1922.¹⁰ 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 1964.¹¹

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.

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

⁸ “American Art Association,” National Gallery of Art.

⁹ “American Art Association,” National Gallery of Art.

¹⁰ “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>

¹¹ “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 20th, 2020.

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