

## Kelekian Gallery

**Active Dates:** c. 1893–1951

**Gallerist:** Dikran Khan Kelekian

### Location:

1893 <sup>1</sup> , 1899 <sup>2</sup>	303 Fifth Avenue
1903, <sup>3</sup> 1905/1906 <sup>4</sup>	252 Fifth Avenue
1909/1910 <sup>5</sup>	275 Fifth Avenue
1914 <sup>6</sup> , 1916 <sup>7</sup> , 1918 <sup>8</sup>	709 Fifth Avenue
1931, <sup>9</sup> 1937 <sup>10</sup> - April 1939	598 Madison Avenue
opened May 1939 <sup>11</sup> , 1945 <sup>12</sup>	20 E. 57 <sup>th</sup> Street
1948 <sup>13</sup>	32 E. 69 <sup>th</sup> Street

Dikran Kelekian also had galleries located in Paris (10, rue Rossini, and later at 2, Place Vendôme) and Cairo (38 Kasr-el-nil or Opposite the American mission.<sup>14</sup>)

**Specialty:** Islamic art, Ancient Near Eastern art and artifacts. From the 1910s, Kelekian also presented modern French painting. [Areas of particular expertise: Coptic textiles, Persian ceramics]

### Gallery History

Dikran Kelekian was an important dealer of Islamic, Coptic, and ancient Near Eastern art, and modern French paintings from the 1910s forward. Kelekian was born into an Armenian family in

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Jenkins-Medina, "Collecting the 'Orient' at the Met: Early Tastemakers in America," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 73.

<sup>2</sup> Advertisement in *The Art Collector* 9, no. 8 (February 15, 1899), 126.

<sup>3</sup> *American Art Directory* 4 (1903), 188.

<sup>4</sup> *American Art Directory* 5 (1905/6), 575.

<sup>5</sup> *American Art Directory* 7 (1909/10), 308.

<sup>6</sup> *American Art Directory* 11 (1914), 516.

<sup>7</sup> *American Art Directory* 13 (1916), 459.

<sup>8</sup> *American Art Directory*, 15 (1918), 670.

<sup>9</sup> "Calendar of Current Art Exhibitions in New York," *Parnassus* 3, no. 2 (February 1931) 50.

<sup>10</sup> "Exhibitions in New York," *Parnassus* 9, no. 5 (October 1937), 40.

<sup>11</sup> Advertisement announcing the opening of new galleries at 20 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street in *Parnassus* 11, no. 5 (May 1939), 2.

<sup>12</sup> New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division-First Department, "In the Matter of Proving the Last Will and Testament of Henry Altmayer," New York Court of Appeals, Records and Briefs, New York, 1945, 181.

<sup>13</sup> *Arts Magazine* 23 (1948), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Per an advertisement for the gallery in *American Art News* 20, no. 29 (April 29, 1922): 10. This map of the American mission seems to suggest this is the same location as the Kasr-el-nil address which I found on google maps (it is spelled Kasr al Nile now). "American Mission in Egypt map," Presbyterian Historical Society, Pearl Digital Collections, <https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A1799>, accessed April 22, 2020.

Kayseri, Turkey, in 1868. After completing his education in Constantinople and Paris, Kelekian started his career working in his uncle's antiquities business—the Magasin Kéork Kélékian—located in the Grand Bazaar in Constantinople.<sup>15</sup>

In 1893, Dikran Kelekian opened his first gallery in New York [Fig. 1]. He stocked Le Musée de Bosphore (later, he simplified the gallery's name to Kelekian) with “Persian” art and antiquities that he had presented in the World's Columbian Exposition held earlier that year in Chicago.<sup>16</sup> In a promotional publication for the gallery, Wellesley Davis vividly described visiting the gallery as an opportunity for “those, who with cultured taste, would traverse paths of beauty, opened by the Ancient Arts in the sunrise lands of the world.”<sup>17</sup> Though the advertising for Le Musée de Bosphore drew upon Orientalist fantasy, Kelekian was a serious art dealer. In addition to the New York location, Kelekian operated galleries in Constantinople, London, Paris, and Cairo at varying points. The Cairo branch seems to have functioned primarily as a depot for storing and shipping objects purchased in Egypt, Iran, and Syria, while the other locations served as formal galleries.<sup>18</sup> He was widely respected in the art world for his expertise in Middle Eastern art and antiquities. Over the course of his career, he published books on topics including ancient Chinese pottery, Persian ceramics, and Coptic art.<sup>19</sup> The Shah of Iran recognized Kelekian for his efforts in promoting Persian culture, an honor that prompted Kelekian to add Khan to his name around 1904.<sup>20</sup>

As a collector and dealer, Kelekian played an important role in shaping American collections of Islamic and Ancient Near Eastern art. The Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibited textiles, ceramics, and *objets d'art* from Kelekian's collection long before it had a department dedicated to Islamic art.<sup>21</sup> The trustees of this institution also turned to Kelekian for advice, for example, by asking him to assess a proposed gift of Ottoman ceramics in 1902.<sup>22</sup> Kelekian enriched the Met's collections both through direct sales—including the museum's beloved faience hippopotamus “William” in 1917—and by encouraging others to purchase antiquities on the

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<sup>15</sup> Luiza deCamargo, “Content and Character: Dikran Kelekian and Eastern Decorative Art Objects in America,” (MA Thesis, The Smithsonian Associates and the Corcoran College of Art and Design, 2012), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Jenkins-Madina notes that “Persian” art in this context encompasses Arab and Turkish objects as well. Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, “Collecting the ‘Orient’ at the Met: Early Tastemakers in America,” *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 73-75.

<sup>17</sup> Wellesley Reid Davis, *Notes on Le Musée de Bosphore* (New York: Published for D.G. Kelekian, 1898), 4.

<sup>18</sup> deCamargo, 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> See list of primary sources below.

<sup>20</sup> Marianna Shreve Simpson, “‘A Gallant Era’: Henry Walters, Islamic Art, and the Kelekian Connection,” *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 95.

<sup>21</sup> 1895, 1898, 1911. Thelma K. Thomas, “From Curiosities to Objects of Art: Modern Reception of Late Antique Egyptian Textiles as Reflected in Dikran Kelekian's Textile Album of ca. 1910,” in *Anathēmata heortika: studies in honor of Thomas F. Mathews*, ed. Joseph D. Alchermes, Helen C. Evans, and Thelma K. Thomas (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2009), 310.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Lindsey, “Displaying Islamic Art at the Metropolitan: A Retrospective Look,” Blogs: Now at the Met, Feb. 2, 2012. Accessed April 17, 2020.

[https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/features/2012/displaying-islamic-art-at-the-metropolitan/#\\_ftn14](https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/features/2012/displaying-islamic-art-at-the-metropolitan/#_ftn14).

museum's behalf.<sup>23</sup> For example, Kelekian orchestrated the sale of the monumental friezes from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud to John D. Rockefeller, who in turn donated them to the Metropolitan Museum.<sup>24</sup> Of course, Kelekian sold art and antiquities to many other institutions as well including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Freer Gallery.<sup>25</sup>

Kelekian's cultivation of private collectors further enriched American institutions. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he helped Henry Walters, George Blumenthal, and Henry and Louisine Havemeyer build their collections of Islamic art—all of which are accessible to the public today.<sup>26</sup> Kelekian befriended his clients, even accompanying them on trips as he did on an expedition to Egypt with the Havemeyers in 1906 [Fig. 2].

Living in Paris much of the time, Kelekian also associated with practicing artists. He counted painters like Mary Cassatt, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Marsden Hartley, and John Singer Sargent among his friends.<sup>27</sup> In the 1910s, Kelekian had developed a passion for French modern art. He began collecting in this area—acquiring works by Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Derain, Matisse, Picasso, Vuillard, Courbet, Daumier, and van Gogh among others.<sup>28</sup>

Kelekian encouraged artists of his day to engage with ancient art. In particular, he perceived a resonance between the work of modern painters and the rhythms of Coptic textiles—an interest Milton Avery acknowledged when he depicted the dealer before a background of Coptic patterns in his portrait [Fig. 3].<sup>29</sup> In 1942, Kelekian aimed to demonstrate the artistic connection between the past and present with the exhibition, *Artists of the Remote Past and Their Grandchildren: An Exhibition of Modern Paintings in an Antique Background*.<sup>30</sup> Two years later, Durand-Ruel Gallery paid tribute to Kelekian's close relationship with contemporary artists with the exhibition, *Kelekian as the Artist Sees Him*.<sup>31</sup>

Kelekian remained a prominent figure in the art world for the rest of his life. His obituary in the *New York Times* mourned the loss of a “legendary—almost a fantastic—figure” in the art world when he died in 1951.<sup>32</sup> His son, Charles Kelekian (1900–1982), continued the family business accompanied by his daughter, Nanette Kelekian. After Charles passed away in 1982, Nanette and

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<sup>23</sup> “Provenance,” Hippopotamus (“William”), accessed April 22, 2020.

[https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544227?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&where=Egypt&high=on&ao=on&ft=\\* &offset=0&rpp=80&pos=44](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544227?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&where=Egypt&high=on&ao=on&ft=* &offset=0&rpp=80&pos=44)

<sup>24</sup> John Malcolm Russell, *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Metropolitan Museum's Assyrian Collection and the Hidden Masterpiece at Canford Manor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Simpson, 93.

<sup>26</sup> de Camargo.

<sup>27</sup> Exhibition Overview for “Coptic Art, Dikran Kelekian, and Milton Avery” at the Met Fifth Avenue, August 11, 2014–September 7, 2015, accessed April 22, 2020,

<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2014/coptic-art>.

<sup>28</sup> Simpson, 104.

<sup>29</sup> “Coptic Art, Dikran Kelekian, and Milton Avery.”

<sup>30</sup> *Artists of the Remote Past and Their Grandchildren: An Exhibition of Modern American and French Paintings in an Antique Background*, exhibition catalogue, January 5–31, 1942 (New York: Dikran G. Kelekian, Inc., 1942.)

<sup>31</sup> Frank Crowninshield, *Kelekian as the Artist Sees Him*, exhibition catalogue, 17 October–4 November (New York: Durand-Ruel Galleries, 1944).

<sup>32</sup> Meyer Berger, “Kelekian Plunges 21 Floors to Death,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1951, 23.

her mother Beatrice donated works of art and archival records related to the Kelekian Gallery to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>33</sup>

## Illustrations



Figure 1. *Le Musée de Bosphore*, New York City, 1899. Note: the man in the picture is not Kelekian. Image is from Jenkins-Medina, 74.



Figure 2. *The Havemeyer party and Dikran Kelekian in Giza, Egypt, 1906*. Image is from Jenkins-Medina, 84.

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<sup>33</sup> deCamargo, 52-53.



Figure 3. Milton Avery, *Dikran G. Kelekian*, 1943, oil on canvas, 36 ¼ x 28 1/8 in., Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian, 1998, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 1998.400.1, Rights and Reproductions: © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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**Contributors:** LND

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