

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Some people know Katherine Sophie Dreier (1877-1952) as a prominent patron and collector of modern art in the first half of the 20th century (fig. 1). Others would identify her as the founder of the Société Anonyme, Inc., Museum of Modern Art, the first museum of its kind in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Still others remember her as an artist. Prior to the official dissolution of Société Anonyme in 1950, Dreier donated over 600 works of modern art to Yale University, including five of her own paintings, one sketchbook, and copy of her book of lithographs, entitled *40 Variations*. Despite this impressive collection and a lifetime spent propagating her beliefs on the ability of modern art to better society, she remains on the fringes of modern art scholarship.

During the early part of the 20th century, critics accused modern artists of charlatanry and chicanery as their work began to infiltrate the art scene in America.<sup>2</sup> These accusations notwithstanding, this art appealed to a small group of collectors, mostly centered in New York, who imported modern works from Europe. One such collector was Katherine Dreier. When others began to cultivate American artists and to encourage them to develop their own sense of “modernism,” her relationships with European artists flourished. These relationships and the kind of art she collected are well-documented. What is lacking from the Dreier scholarship is an exploration of her experience as a collector within the context of the history of collecting and with respect to fellow collectors and patrons. In this thesis I will first situate Dreier within a brief history of art collecting and then examine her practices with regard to those of her contemporaries Alfred Barr Jr., Hilla Rebay, and John Quinn. I chose these contemporaries out of a small group of collectors dedicated to modern art during the 1920s and 1930s because all three were acquainted, both personally and professionally, with Katherine Dreier. In addition, each collector made distinctive contributions to the advancement of modern art in the United

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<sup>1</sup> Dreier added the “Museum of Modern Art” subtitle to the name after filing incorporation papers with the city of New York. She used the full title on letterhead as evidenced in the Margaret Dreier Robins Papers at the University of Florida Library. Robert L. Herbert and others, eds., *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors* (New York: Random House, 1958), 241.

States using different approaches to collecting. These include academic instruction, spiritual enlightenment, and professional training, respectively.

## **State of the Question**

Scholars have not situated Dreier within a history of collecting, nor have they situated her within the context of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century art collecting. An in-depth analysis of her collecting practices is also lacking from this body of literature. Further, researchers have not compared the differing methods of early modern art collectors in American during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, literature devoted to women collecting this kind of art is sparse. For the most part, scholarship devoted to collecting has been focused on museum collections and not individual collectors, particularly in recent years. Susan M. Pearce has written extensively on the subject. In Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study (1993) she clarifies the social significance of the relationship between collectors, museums, and their contents in Europe. In a subsequent study, On Collecting: An Investigation in Collecting in the European Tradition (1995), Pearce explores the relationship between Europeans and the material world and explains collecting as a social practice. She also discusses how museums offer collectors recognition, immortality and social acceptance.<sup>3</sup> Russell W. Belk examines the collecting patterns of museums and individuals during the rise of consumerism during the twentieth century in the United States in Collecting in a Consumer Society (1995).<sup>4</sup> Literature on private collectors and collecting art in the United States has focused mainly on wealthy, male patronage and has tended to support the notion that collections reflect the preference of the collector and the particular period in history. For example, Great Private Collections (1963), edited by Douglas Cooper, includes only male collectors and discusses their acquisitions according to personal taste shaped by the times in which they lived.<sup>5</sup> Cooper places great private collections into two categories, historical and personal. Historical collections are amassed over centuries by a ruling or powerful family; personal collections are the result of an individual's efforts.<sup>6</sup> Cooper includes

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<sup>3</sup> Susan M. Pearce, Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); and Susan M. Pearce, On Collecting: An Investigation in Collecting in the European Tradition (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Russell W. Belk, Collecting in a Consumer Society (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Cooper, Great Private Collections (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963). Cooper does mention Mary Lasker but only as Albert Lasker's wife. Cooper 228-239.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper 11.

scholarship only on “personal” collections gathered during the 20th century and remaining intact in the collectors’ possession during the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, W.G. Constable takes a historical approach in Art Collecting in the United States of America (1975). He identifies the structure American collections took throughout history by considering political, economic, social, and cultural factors.<sup>8</sup> Like Cooper, he focuses mainly on male, private collectors, their collections, and how these men acquired the collections.

Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey address collecting’s male-dominated history in Great Women Collectors (1999).<sup>9</sup> The authors present an international history of women collectors from the early 18th century to the mid-20th century. The study cites two commonalities among these women: money (for the most part coming from the patriarch, a father, husband, or lover) and time.<sup>10</sup> Gere and Vaizey show the progression of women collectors, from Josephine Bonaparte, who amassed her amazing collection through her husband’s wartime plunder, to Coco Chanel, who built an empire to fund her own art collection. The authors address how collecting affected these women’s lives, in terms of their relationships with their husbands, advisors, dealers, and artists. Also, they argue that, in the 20th century, women collectors differed from their male counterparts in that women were more generally involved educationally and spiritually with their art collections. The authors discuss Katherine Dreier in relation to this claim.

There are two important studies of collecting in New York. In Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism (1985), author Susan Noyes Platt examines the European-American interaction between critics, dealers, collectors, and artists.<sup>11</sup> Collectors such as Alfred Steiglitz played a major role in this dialogue as they often prompted much of the media and publicity surrounding modern art exhibitions and artists.<sup>12</sup> The second study, William B. Scott’s New York Modern: The Arts and the City (1999), focuses on New York as the cultural center of the 1920s and 1930s. The author discusses New

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<sup>7</sup> This excludes collections that were donated to museums after the collector died. Also this book distinguishes ‘great’ collections from stamp collections, for example, which are only ‘great’ in number. Cooper 12.

<sup>8</sup> W.G. Constable, ed., Art Collecting in the United States of America (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, LTD. 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, Great Women Collectors (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Gere and Vaizey, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Noyes Platt, Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Platt 47.

York as a burgeoning, welcoming haven for Europeans fleeing from their native soil.<sup>13</sup> Scott examines how these European artists and collectors influenced American culture, namely art, music, dance, and theatre.

## State of the Literature

A moderate amount of literature has been devoted to Katherine Dreier and the Société Anonyme. When analyzing the course of her patronage activities, scholars have called Dreier a “proselytizer,” a “propagandist,” and a “crusader.” Her cause was modern art. Her audience was the American people, rich or poor. The literature reflects these notions and has focused mainly on her abilities as a collector and patron of modern art. The most important publication was the *catalogue raisonné* of The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University. Published in 1984, this book is the culmination of more than ten years’ research by noted art historians such as Robert L. Herbert, Dreier scholars such as Ruth L. Bohan, as well as graduate students. Dreier and Marcel Duchamp had authored a catalogue of the donated collection in 1950. Prompted by its outdated and eccentrically written text, the editors of the *catalogue raisonné* sought to provide a comprehensive inventory of the art in the collection, as well as biographies of the artists, exhibition lists, acquisition records, and some visual analyses of the works. Where applicable, the original text from the 1950 catalogue is included.

Dreier’s collecting habits are explored by Robert J. Levy in his 1981 Apollo article “Katherine Dreier: Patron of Modern Art.”<sup>14</sup> Levy looks at her ways of collecting in terms of her friendships with “scores” of artists.<sup>15</sup> Her relationship with Duchamp is well known, but this is most notably explored by Eleanor S. Apter in her chapter “Regimes of Coincidence: Katherine Sophie Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Dada,” in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse’s Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity (1998).<sup>16</sup> Apter provides a vivid account of the personal and professional relationship between these two individuals. In addition she describes the circumstances surrounding Dreier’s participation in the Dada movement (mostly financial) and how Duchamp helped her recognize other artistic talent.

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<sup>13</sup> William B. Scott, New York Modern: The Arts and the City (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. Levy, “Katherine Dreier: Patron of Modern Art” (Apollo 113 no231 May 1981: 314-317).

<sup>15</sup> Levy, 314.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998).

Other areas of scholarship concerning Katherine Dreier include her role as a curator of modern art while serving as president of the Société Anonyme. One fine example is Ruth L. Bohan's 1980 book entitled The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America. In this monographic study Bohan provides ample biographical material while chronicling the achievements of the 1926-27- landmark exhibition assembled by Dreier. Bohan cites two critical goals of the exhibition. First, Dreier wanted to explore the cultural and artistic significance of modern art. Next Bohan illustrates how she used this show as a platform to showcase the Société Anonyme and its ever-expanding collection.<sup>17</sup>

Scholarship in the 1990s tended to focus upon Dreier's development as an artist. Nancy J. Siegel's 1991-92 article "An Artist Patronized-The Abstract Paintings of Katherine S. Dreier" recounts Dreier's artistic training, her exhibitions, and her increasing interest in abstraction in her own paintings.<sup>18</sup> Most significantly, Siegel provides a comprehensive visual analysis of her paintings. Following Siegel's lead, Cynthia Fowler authored "The Intersecting of Theosophy and Feminism: Katherine Dreier and the Modern Woman Artist," published in 2000.<sup>19</sup> Fowler traces Dreier's belief in Theosophy, as evidenced in her lectures, her collecting, and her paintings.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from a few minor articles and book chapters, the literature on Katherine Dreier has focused on significant aspects of her career, such as her exhibitions and her bequest to Yale, while failing to place her within any context. This limited vision is the impetus for this thesis. Using scholarship published on Alfred Barr Jr. such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern (1989) by Alice Goldfarb Marquis, along with Dreier scholarship, I hope to put Dreier into context with her fellow collectors.<sup>21</sup> Other models I will use include Judith Zilcer's "The Noble Buyer," John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde (1978) and Joan M. Lukach's Hilla Rebay: In Search of the Spiritual in Art (1983).<sup>22</sup> All three publications include information regarding collecting habits, personal and professional relationships with other collectors, and

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth Bohan, "The Société Anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America," (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Siegel, "An Artist Patronized: The Abstract Paintings of Katherine Dreier," (Rutgers Art Review v. 12-13, 1991-92): 23-45.

<sup>19</sup> Cynthia Fowler, "The Intersection of Theosophy and Feminism: Katherine Dreier and the Modern Woman Artist," (Oculus Vol.3, No.1 2000): 2-15.

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, ed. Eastern Spirituality in America (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>21</sup> Alice Goldfarb Marquis, Alfred H. Barr Jr.: Missionary for the Modern (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Judith Zilcer, "The Noble Buyer," John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978) and Joan M. Lukach, Hilla Rebay: In Search of the Spiritual in Art (New York: George Braziller, 1983).

biographical details.

My research for this thesis includes Dreier's personal letters from the Margaret Dreier Robins Papers from the Department of Special Collections at the University of Florida.<sup>23</sup> Dreier scholars have ignored this collection. An analysis of these personal letters and documents reveals her political and religious views, about which other scholars have only speculated.

### **Précis of Chapters**

In my first chapter I will provide a brief history of collecting art in the United States from the 1870s to the beginning of the 20th century, when Katherine Dreier began collecting. Next I will introduce her as a collector. I will provide a brief biography citing specific moments in her life when her artistic beliefs and principles were developed. An explanation of how and what she collected will follow. In the second chapter I will introduce each of Dreier's contemporary collectors and outline their associations with modern art. Then I will discuss her personal and/or professional relationships with these contemporaries and compare the similarities and differences among their collections and collecting interests. Some questions that I hope to answer are: how did these relationships affect Dreier's collecting? How did she differ from other collectors in terms of her criteria for art? Who were the collectors' audience? Did this have an impact on the collection?

Finally, to conclude, I will comment on the collection that Dreier assembled for the Société Anonyme and the impact that this collection made on modern art and the history of art. She bequeathed the collection to Yale University rather than a public museum. This was an interesting choice in light of her relationships with museum directors and curators. I will include the reasons behind this choice and summarize what has happened to this collection since Dreier's death.

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret Dreier Robins was Katherine Dreier's older sister. She was active in the Women's Trade Union and fought for equal rights for women and men throughout her life.

## CHAPTER 2

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR KATHERINE DREIER: A HISTORY OF COLLECTING ART IN THE UNITED STATES

The history of art collecting in the United States is relatively brief, with major collecting beginning only after the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Europe, the U.S. did not have collections assembled by kings or rulers and then passed down through royal lineage. Nor did it have a solid foundation of distinctly American art or artists to provide for future collections.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I will outline briefly the history of collecting art in the United States, citing specific collectors and trends that have had an impact on collections today. Specifically, I will discuss the transformation of what had become standard art collecting practices to those utilized by Dreier when she began to collect. As I will demonstrate, during the 1920s and 1930s she revolutionized the way the American public viewed modern art and built an immense collection for the Société Anonyme by implementing her own approach to collecting. This unique approach would figure prominently not only in the quality of the collection that she assembled, but also in the way that she educated Americans about the function that this kind of art could have in society. Following a brief biographical overview, I will discuss Dreier as a collector and patron. Incorporated into this section will be a discussion about what kind of art Dreier collected and the artistic principles that guided her collecting tendencies.

Art collecting in the United States commenced with only a handful of individuals delving into the virtually unknown practice during the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> Most notably, Charles Wilson Peale (1741-1827) was among the first of these individuals to collect fine art in addition to items of natural history. He housed these objects in a museum that he built in 1786 (fig. 2). His collection included portraits of Revolutionary War heroes, such as George Washington, as well as images that he painted himself.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was another pioneer in art collecting. This politician and

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, a few noteworthy exceptions to this generalization, which I will include in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Constable, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Stewart, "The Works of Charles Wilson Peale" in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 204-223.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, 204-6.

author collected over fifty paintings that were housed at his estate, Monticello, in Virginia.<sup>5</sup> During the 1780s, as the minister to France, Jefferson traveled extensively to Europe and acquired many pieces of fine art.<sup>6</sup> He collected known artists, such as John Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart, and Frans Floris. His collection also contained copies of paintings by Raphael, Leonardo, and Titian.<sup>7</sup> Religious images, landscapes, and portraits of men he admired, including Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh, dominated the collection.<sup>8</sup> At his death in 1826, this group of paintings was sent to Boston. Two years later the Boston Athenaeum exhibited the works, and all but two were sold to private collectors.<sup>9</sup>

The Jefferson collection demonstrated the humble beginnings of art collecting, while setting a prestigious precedent for future art collectors. His role as a prominent political figure and intellectual during the formative years of this country helped him to pursue collecting fine art and objects.

Business savvy and family wealth enabled railroad industrialist William Henry Vanderbilt (1821–85) to build another important collection of art in the United States. Vanderbilt inherited his father’s family fortune, quickly doubling it, while buying hordes of contemporary works for his Fifth Avenue home.<sup>10</sup> Indeed his art collection was valued at \$1.5 million in 1879 and it was so vast that the magnate added a gallery to house the collection.<sup>11</sup> Vanderbilt began his collection by acquiring art by American artists like James Hart and Samuel Coleman whose works were readily available to him in New York. As he came into his inherited fortune, however, he bought only the best and most expensive art, which did not include American artists.<sup>12</sup> He bought only masterpieces by known artists, such as Gérôme, Bonheur, Meissonier, and Millet, and often held receptions in his gallery to showcase his collection.<sup>13</sup> He

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<sup>5</sup> Jefferson shipped sixty-three paintings to the United States after his 1786 sojourn to Paris. Susan Stein, The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993). Stein, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Henri Robinson, “An American Cabinet of Curiosities: Thomas Jefferson’s ‘Indian Hall’ at Monticello” in Leah Dilworth, ed., Acts of Possession: Collecting in America (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 16-41.

<sup>7</sup> Stein, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The Athenaeum organized a series of exhibitions from 1827-1835 that included the paintings of this collection and paintings by living artists from Europe and the US. Most of the images were on loan from private collectors with the intent to sell. Constable, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelius Vanderbilt, William H. Vanderbilt’s father, almost single-handedly built the railroad empire. Cornelius bequeathed \$90,000,000 to his son William H. after his death in January 1877. Wayne Andrews, The Vanderbilt Legend (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), 180.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, 223.

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, 224.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew, 226-27.

even opened his gallery to the public and published a catalogue, *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (1883), to aid guests while viewing the collection.<sup>14</sup>

Although he counted artists, art dealers, and advisors as friends, for the most part, Vanderbilt amassed his collection by traveling abroad and buying what he liked. His inheritance and successful business career allowed Vanderbilt to collect to such a grand extent. He was also an exceptional early collector. For other early collectors, though, there were several obstacles to overcome before art collecting was possible on a broad scale.

The relative obscurity of art collecting before the Civil War was influenced by many factors. Colonial Americans were wealthy enough to purchase land and living needs, but not wealthy enough, yet, to buy luxury goods such as art.<sup>15</sup> Homes built on these purchased lands were often secluded and far apart. This discouraged the possibility of a social center to incorporate craft and trade shops. The situation was somewhat better in colonial cities, like Philadelphia and New York, where trade and commerce encouraged the growth of culture and intellect. One example was the American Art-Union in New York, which was in existence from 1842-1852. The Art-Union established a way to support art in America by commissioning artists to paint scenes from American life, especially landscapes. The organization gave the art work out as prizes to its members.<sup>16</sup> A sense of community developed through the association's membership and taught Americans to appreciate American art and artists.<sup>17</sup> Rather than traveling to Europe to buy and educate themselves about art, as Jefferson had done, Americans encouraged by the Art-Union sought out art and artists at home. Nevertheless, art collecting remained easier to accomplish in Europe.

Europe had already an elaborate system of auctions houses and dealers, museums, and experts because of centuries of art collecting through inheritances, pillaging, and royal and Academic commissions. Early American collectors established a need for branches of European dealers in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Slowly, in the years after the Civil War, European dealers infiltrated the nascent American art scene. In effect, reputable and assiduous American art

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<sup>14</sup> Andrews, 221.

<sup>15</sup> Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 5.

<sup>16</sup> The Art-Union was based on two models: the Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Scotland and the Royal Academy in London. Its publications were among the first journals dedicated to art in this country. Miller, 163.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, 170.

<sup>18</sup> Constable, 5.

dealers emerged in metropolitan cities. In New York, these dealers included the Vose brothers, Michael Knoedler, and S. P. Avery.<sup>19</sup>

The economic boom that occurred after the Civil War had far-reaching effects. The considerable wealth that resulted after the Civil War in America permitted collecting on a much grander scale.<sup>20</sup> Although wealth is one commonality that most collectors share, even today, there were several other cultural and historical factors that contributed to the rise in popularity of art collecting. First was the industrial and commercial development of the city. As buildings and housing went up in metropolises around the United States, people flocked from the countryside to the newly established cities, some looking for work and others looking to set up residence.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time that the United States was garnering industrial might, an increased interest in culture and the arts was growing as well. The ideas of community and patronage that the Art-Union had established in the mid-19th century helped to promote other key characteristics of American collectors that began to emerge during the industrial boom. A campaign was in motion to achieve complete independence from England and Europe by developing a strong economy that would support a “native culture.” Cultural nationalists sought to accomplish this by encouraging individuals and communities to become patrons in the arts.<sup>22</sup> The desire to have the collection benefit the community, rather than passed down through generations of family, was instilled into these early collectors. As museums and galleries came into existence in city-centers, collecting on behalf of the public’s interest became a key motivating factor.<sup>23</sup>

As industry and wealth increased, so did the population. Between 1876 and 1901 the population in the United States grew from 38 million people to 91 million people.<sup>24</sup> It was also during this time that capitalism in the U.S. was developing further and, as a result, America was emerging as a world leader. The cultural and political climates were strong, business was booming, and people were flocking to the cities. For some Americans, who had the time,

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<sup>19</sup> Constable, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Constable, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Constable, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 9.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, this idea was developing in the US as early as the 1830s. In an 1833 speech, President of the American Academy of Fine Arts, John Trumbull, called upon individuals to help protect the fine arts by supporting contemporary art and artists and not relying on the government or the church to buy art for public edification. Constable, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Niels von Holst, Creators, Collectors, and Connoisseurs (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 271.

money, and expertise, the time was right to collect art at home and abroad.

Americans did collect. Telling of this was the number of museums that opened during the 1870s. Museums, in the United States, were created by private enterprise; that is, they were created by collectors and artists with little to no financial backing from government sources.<sup>25</sup> Major museums in Chicago, Boston, Washington, and Cincinnati opened in the 1870s.<sup>26</sup> It was also during this time that a prominent art collector from Boston began to assemble a collection that would be the foundation for another museum in Boston, several years later.

Isabella Stewart (1840-1924) was from a wealthy, New York family (fig. 3). She married wealthy Bostonian John “Jack” Gardner in 1860, and the couple settled in his hometown.<sup>27</sup> Isabella Stewart Gardner suffered a tremendous loss with the death of her only son in 1865. She was coaxed out of a deep depression two years later through travel to Europe, where she spent six months. Thereafter, she took annual trips to Venice, where she rented a palazzo and entertained friends.<sup>28</sup> It was only in 1878 that Gardner began to pursue art buying as a serious endeavor. It was in that year that she attended a series of lectures given by Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908) at Harvard University.<sup>29</sup> Under Norton’s guidance and tutelage, she began collecting. Her first forays into collecting were based on the French architecture of the house on Beacon Street that the Gardners purchased in 1880. In keeping with its French character, she bought paintings by well-known French artists, Delacroix and Corot, and the Barbizon School to decorate her new home.<sup>30</sup> Gardner continued to journey to Europe and collect art. She became friends with many artists and supporters of art, and her homes (a palazzo that she rented in Venice and her Boston home) became headquarters of sorts for this circle of friends committed to art.<sup>31</sup>

Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), an art connoisseur and Renaissance scholar, changed permanently the way that Gardner collected art. The two met in 1886 and became fast friends and colleagues.<sup>32</sup> Berenson began advising her from Europe on her art collecting, and it was not

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<sup>25</sup> Miller, 87-89.

<sup>26</sup> Constable, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Gere and Vaizey, 125.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Norton established the History of Art curriculum at Harvard University. Gere and Vaizey, 126.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Gere and Vaizey, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Berenson graduated from Harvard and promptly moved to Europe where he scouted for Gardner. Robert Hughes, American Visions (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 230.

long before she boasted an unrivaled collection of Renaissance and Baroque paintings.<sup>33</sup> Her collection included works by Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck, Botticelli, and Vermeer, among others.<sup>34</sup> Such a complete collection prompted Gardner and her husband to consider building a museum that would be open to the public. The couple chose an undeveloped area of Boston, known as Fenway, and built a Venetian-inspired, four-storied palazzo. The works were not arranged chronologically or grouped by schools. Instead well-known pieces were juxtaposed with artwork by friends and young artists. To Gardner, this arrangement suggested that the collection had been built over time, much like the Venetian tradition.<sup>35</sup>

When Fenway Court opened in 1902, the private collection was unrivaled in the United States. She accomplished this by taking the advice of an expert and by buying works early when they were still affordable and available to the everyday public. Typical with early collectors in *fin de siècle* America, as Gardner illustrated, was the desire to collect famous art of the past by known masters. Gardner is an example of a private individual collecting for the enrichment of the public through the establishment of her museum.<sup>36</sup> The Federal government had very little to do with cultivating the arts during the time in the United States. In fact, until 1909, artwork imported into the U.S. was subject to an *ad valorem* tariff. The Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909, under President William Howard Taft, reduced 650 tariff schedules; among them was the tax on imported art. Imported art over 20 years old was exempted from duty, but imported works of art less than twenty years old were taxed fifteen percent.<sup>37</sup> A prominent New York lawyer and collector, John Quinn, would soon help to modify this measure through the court system, but, in the meantime, it ushered in a new generation of collectors. Instead of collecting known artists, these collectors were in search of more modern art.

Little was known at this time about what kind of art contemporary European artists were producing.<sup>38</sup> This would soon change. A single blockbuster event, known as the Armory Show, provoked a new faction of art collectors in the U.S. Most of these collectors of contemporary art,

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<sup>33</sup> In 1891 Gardner's father died, leaving his daughter \$2.75 million. This coupled with Berenson's advice regarding art allowed her the money and *savoir-faire* to collect seriously.

<sup>34</sup> For a complete description of Gardner's collection, see Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston: The Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Gere and Vaizey, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Holst, 272.

<sup>37</sup> Saarinen, 209. This measure, it was thought, would protect living American artists from international competition.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, 58.

including Katherine Dreier, began their art-collecting careers during this monumental exhibition in 1913.

The American Association of Painters and Sculptors banded together in early 1912 and had one mission: to introduce Americans to contemporary art from the United States and Europe. They aimed to do this through exhibitions, namely The International Exhibition of Modern Art, to be held at the Sixty-Ninth Armory, hence the more common name of The Armory Show (fig. 4).<sup>39</sup> AAPS President Arthur B. Davies and executive secretary Walter Kuhn, both artists, traveled to Europe during the fall of 1912 to arrange the European contributions to the show.<sup>40</sup> By February 1913, the show had been assembled. It was comprised of nearly 1300 works, two-thirds of them by European artists. The show represented around 300 artists, from Ingres, Delacroix, and Goya to Picasso, Kandinsky, and Duchamp. Mary Cassatt, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and the Eight, and some of the early American avant-garde, including Joseph Stella, William Zorach, and John Marin, filled the American artists' section.<sup>41</sup> Over 250,000 visitors saw the show in its three venues, New York, Chicago and Boston, which kept modern art in the nation's limelight for nearly three months.<sup>42</sup> More importantly though was the establishment of a small group of American collectors that bought many of the 174 paintings that were sold at the exhibition. Among these early collectors of modern art were John Quinn and Katherine Dreier. Quinn had already begun to collect modern art, but Dreier, who had art work of her own in the Armory Show, was new to collecting.<sup>43</sup> Her studio training and philanthropic experiences would figure prominently in her in her collecting career.

Several key events in Dreier's life, in fact, led her to a career as an art collector. From the time of her birth, her German immigrant parents had upheld a strong sense of German identity through songs, language, food, and yearly trips back to Germany and other European countries, to visit family and friends (fig. 5).<sup>44</sup> The familiarity with European conventions she

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<sup>39</sup> Scott, 59.

<sup>40</sup> Davies and Kuhn had little exposure to European modernism so they attended the Cologne Sonderbund exhibition that included many of Europe's most important modernists for guidance. The pair also traveled to The Hague, Munich, Berlin, Paris, and, finally, to London. Scott, 59.

<sup>41</sup> The exhibition was only a sampling of European and American modernism. In fact, German Expressionism and Italian Futurism were not represented and many American modernists, such as Arthur Dove and Man Ray, were excluded. Scott, 61.

<sup>42</sup> Scott, 62.

<sup>43</sup> The still life was entitled Blue Bowl. Levy, 314. Dreier bought three paintings at the show: two landscapes by Walter Fitch and another by A. Roosevelt.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

gained from these early family trips would play a significant role in her later journeys to Europe to collect art.

Dreier's parents encouraged the artistic growth of two of their daughters, Katherine and her older sister Dorothea. The sisters began with private lessons in 1889, which led to classes at the Brooklyn Art School and the Pratt Institute.<sup>45</sup> Following a yearlong sojourn to Europe to study art in museums, Katherine began to take private lessons from painter Walter Shirlaw, who introduced his young pupil to modernist theory and art.<sup>46</sup> She studied with Shirlaw until his death in 1909 and then moved to London for two years, where she became acquainted with a variety of artists and writers. Here Dreier discovered the writings of John Ruskin and William Morris, founders of the English Arts and Crafts Movement. She based much of her artistic and collecting endeavors on theories by Ruskin and Morris. Through these writings, Dreier sought to break down the distinctions between fine and applied arts, artist and artisan.<sup>47</sup> It was during the next several years that she began to integrate these writings and ways of thinking into her efforts to help the less fortunate. She commenced with civic endeavors but gradually incorporated art into her plan to better society.

Shortly after returning from London, Dreier embarked on a series of humanitarian efforts that reflected the strong sense of compassion that her parents, especially her mother, had instilled in all of their children.<sup>48</sup> Much of the humanitarian philosophy that formed the basis of her parents' teachings grew out of Progressive era thinking. Dreier founded and was involved in many organizations that sought to help the disadvantaged. For example, in 1898, she was the treasurer of the German Home for Recreation of Women and Children in Brooklyn, a center she co-founded with her mother. The center was intended to be a refuge for women and children in need.<sup>49</sup> Though scholars agree that Dreier was not a feminist, she was nevertheless concerned with social reform, which ~~that~~ she propagated through education and the arts. The Cooperative Mural Workshops, which she co-founded in 1914, was her initial pursuit exploring art education as a means to strengthen societal values. She wanted to "establish the principle of art along the

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert, 210. From 1895-97 Katherine studied at Brooklyn Art School. The next year she enrolled at Pratt Institute where her sister Dorothea was a student. The following year both girls studied in Europe.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Carole Gold Calo, "Katherine Dreier: Art Patron With a Social Vision," in Carole Gold Calo, ed. *Writings About Art* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 97-104.

<sup>48</sup> The Dreier children, and parents to a certain degree, fought for the causes of the rights of women, immigrants, and children as well as political reform and education. Bohan, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Bohan, 3.

lines of democracy and make a vigorous attempt to bring democracy into the realm of art.<sup>50</sup>

The Cooperative Mural Workshops executed murals for private homes as well as public buildings, thus trying to integrate art into everyday life.<sup>51</sup> Also integral to this Arts and Crafts way of thinking and to Dreier's philosophy is the notion that art, no matter in what medium, has the ability to fortify society morally and socially.<sup>52</sup> These principles provided the foundation on which the Société Anonyme was based.

In 1920, with the help of Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, Dreier founded the Société Anonyme, Inc., Museum of Modern Art (fig. 6).<sup>53</sup> Her motivating factors were two-fold. The first was to promote contemporary modern artists, and to give them a forum to display and to discuss their work. The second goal was to educate the public about this new kind of art and how integrating it into society would be morally fortifying. The Société Anonyme was the first museum of modern art in the United States and a precursor to the Museum of Modern Art. With Dreier as its driving force, it was also the first organization to coordinate traveling art exhibitions, provide public lectures, and initiate public forums in the hopes of using modern art as a didactic force.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Dreier wrote extensively on the subject of modern art and used the Société Anonyme to disseminate her opinions. Never before had Americans experienced art education on this level. Indeed, she was largely responsible ~~not only~~ for initiating what would become museum education in the U.S.—She planned and organized most of the museum's events and exhibitions and financially supported it for almost the entirety of its existence.<sup>55</sup>

The Société Anonyme was a non-commercial venture, committed to public outreach. Its first location and exhibition space was in rented quarters in a Manhattan brownstone.<sup>56</sup> It was here that Dreier began to coordinate exhibitions and to lecture in front of works of art. She also invited the artists themselves to participate in discussions with visitors.<sup>57</sup>

It was Dreier's ultimate goal to find a permanent space for her organization and collection. Increased rents and general financial difficulties forced her to move the museum

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Levy, 314.

<sup>51</sup> Bohan, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Bohan, 8.

<sup>53</sup> The Société Anonyme was also founded with two businessmen, Henry Hudson and Andrew McLaren. Man Ray played a minor role during the first few months of the endeavor and then left the group. Herbert, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Saarinen, 246.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. The Dreier family was extremely wealthy; Theodore Dreier made his fortune in an iron importation/exportation business in the United States.

<sup>56</sup> Calo, 101. The address was 19 East 47<sup>th</sup> Street.

<sup>57</sup> Herbert, 1-2.

headquarters from one rented gallery to another several times during the decade. Her goal of a permanent space was never achieved, and the collection was moved to an unused barn on her estate at West Redding, Connecticut in 1933.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to her roles as President of the Société Anonyme, curator of exhibitions, author, and lecturer, Dreier also focused on gathering works for the permanent collection as well as for her personal collection. She traveled all over the world collecting artwork that was meant to support “art, not personalities.”<sup>59</sup> Names then were not important to Dreier, who wanted to underline the importance of the artwork itself, not the famous artist’s name attached to it.

Dreier began buying art for the permanent collection almost immediately after securing its first exhibition space. It was her policy to include as many examples of modern art as possible in order to best serve her public.<sup>60</sup> This meant extensive travel and research on Dreier’s part so that she could portray accurately the international range of contemporary art and present it to the public. The collection of art by living European and American artists was assembled largely from the 1920s to the early 1940s. By 1940, she had collected works by 129 artists (15 of them women artists) from 17 countries.<sup>61</sup> Dreier collected art to fulfill specific goals. First, she wanted modern art to occupy a central place in the public’s lives. Next, the art should be socially uplifting and spiritually stimulating, resulting in an enlightened frame of mind. Finally, the movement toward abstraction must be inherent in the work. Her early purchases made right after the Armory Show evidenced these criteria. At first she tended to buy and promote art by Germans, such as Franz Marc, Kurt Schwitters, and Heinrich Campendonk, whose work exhibited emotionally expressive qualities that appealed to Dreier.<sup>62</sup> She then sought and found unknown artists from across Europe, including Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, and Ferdinand Léger, and introduced their work to the American public and other collectors during the 1920s. She was also supporting avant-garde artists, such as Francis Picabia, Joseph Stella, and Constantin Brancusi.<sup>63</sup> At the time, these artists and others, like Kandinsky, Naum Gabo, and Joan Miró, were unknown in the United States, except to a small group in New York. Dreier, through the Société Anonyme, was among the first in this country to exhibit works by these now well-known

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<sup>58</sup> Levy, 317.

<sup>59</sup> Saarinen, 243.

<sup>60</sup> Siegel, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Katherine Dreier, Some New Forms of Beauty, 1909-1936 (Springfield, Massachusetts: The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Gallery, 1939), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Saarinen, 245.

<sup>63</sup> Bohan, 11.

artists.<sup>64</sup>

Dreier based some of her collecting principles on her belief in Theosophy. Just as Progressive ideals influenced greatly her notions of art and how art could be used to transform society, Theosophy played a part in what art she chose. Industrialization had bolstered some aspects of society, such as increased productivity, efficiency, and individual wealth, but it also had negative consequences. Poverty, crime, and unemployment were rampant in cities.<sup>65</sup> Dreier, like other reformers of the time, thought that education was the most constructive way to help people escape poverty and achieve a higher level of morality. As stated before, she chose art as her vehicle to communicate these beliefs to the public.

An additional consequence, some might say, of industrialization in the United States was materialism. As a Theosophist, Dreier developed ideas and beliefs about modern art that she thought would combat materialism. She showed a lifelong interest in this type of mysticism, which was popular among 19th- and early- 20th century artists. Theosophy can trace its roots back to antiquity, but much of its influence can be seen in more modern times. The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 to promote the ancient wisdom of the East.<sup>66</sup> One of the founders was Mme. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1833-1893). Blavatsky was from Russian aristocracy and claimed status as an occultist.<sup>67</sup> The other founding member was Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), a journalist and a lawyer of middle class American origins.<sup>68</sup> Through their Society, these two presented Americans with a new spiritual movement, a movement that some felt was badly needed.<sup>69</sup> Theosophy was an alternative to conventional Christianity and modern science. Although not a religion, Theosophy is a blend of Hinduism and Buddhism in teaching, and Christianity.<sup>70</sup> Its basic tenets include the thinking that a deeper spirituality existed than was presented in nature's material world. The increased materiality of individuals had seriously disrupted the possession of the one eternal truth that rendered its

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<sup>64</sup> Calo, 99.

<sup>65</sup> Bohan, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ellwood, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ellwood, 17-18. Katherine Dreier applied this spiritual awakening to art in a January 1923 letter to her sister Mary. She writes, "Dearest I feel it is just as important to find people spiritually as physically...Mary, I want more people here in America to feel about art as...it ought to be as life giving as bread and butter." Katherine Dreier to Mary Dreier, January 01, 1923, in Margaret Dreier Robins Papers, University of Florida Libraries, Box 26.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Samuel Braden, These Also Believe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 243.

possessors clairvoyant.<sup>71</sup> Meditation and using one's intuition could restore this truth that Blavatsky likened to a white light. Through time the white light had been fractured into several different colors and it was thought that through Theosophical teachings that these colors would again be united into the white color of the ultimate truth.<sup>72</sup>

Since Theosophy sought to delve into spaces that went beyond the material world, it appealed especially to modern abstract artists. Kandinsky, an artist whom Dreier admired not only for his art, but also for his spiritual philosophy, was a follower of Theosophy. It was early in his career that he was drawn toward the movement against materialism.<sup>73</sup> He attended lectures by Rudolf Steiner.<sup>74</sup> Steiner wrote the 1904 book called Theosophy that prompted Kandinsky to work out the combination of mysticism and aesthetic doctrines that led to abstraction in his 1911 book called Über das Geistige in der Kunst (or Concerning the Spiritual in Art). Scholars have previously shown that Dreier had read and absorbed both of these highly influential books.<sup>75</sup> It was Dreier's opinion that those artists who included "new cosmic forces" in their work would be the best public educators for the cause of modern art.<sup>76</sup> Theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater published Thought-Forms in 1901. Artists influenced by these Theosophical ideas often painted "Thought-forms," which were the manifestations of thoughts or ideas through colors and shapes. Artists were better able to communicate new and purer ideas of spirituality because they were able to connect with a higher plane of existence and creative forces than non-artists. These artists leaned toward abstraction because it best expressed this new language.

In order to acquire works of art for the permanent collection of the Société Anonyme, Dreier had to travel extensively around Europe. In doing so she befriended many artists by visiting them and viewing their work in their studios. This allowed her to buy directly from the artist, rather than negotiating through a dealer. She usually paid the asking price and did not try to bargain for lower prices, as some collectors did and still do.<sup>77</sup> Often the prices that she paid were already low because she usually sought out young artists at the beginning of their careers. In addition, because she was a painter, she received many gifts from fellow artists, which

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<sup>71</sup> Bohan, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Bruce F. Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 169.

<sup>74</sup> Campbell, 156.

<sup>75</sup> Bohan, 18-20. The author discusses Dreier's reaction to both of these books.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Fowler, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Levy, 79.

benefited the Société Anonyme collection. One such artist-friend was Marcel Duchamp, who introduced her to numerous other artists and advised her on art purchases. Dreier quickly became a major patron of Duchamp and his brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon.<sup>78</sup>

When curating an exhibition, Dreier would often borrow works from artists in Europe in order to expose Americans to what was happening abroad. This meant that the artist sometimes had to forgo selling the piece until after the show. In fairness to the artist, Dreier would purchase the painting or sculpture for the permanent collection.<sup>79</sup>

Although the majority of the collection that Dreier assembled for the Société Anonyme included art created by European artists, she also collected works by American artists, such as Patrick Henry Bruce, John Covert, and Stanton Macdonald Wright.<sup>80</sup> She collected works by selected women artists, as well, including Georgia O’Keeffe, Marthe Donas, Anne Goldthwaite, Marguerite Zorach, Dreier’s sister, Dorothea, and Dreier herself.<sup>81</sup> The limited number of works by women artists in the vast collection did little to acknowledge their contributions to contemporary art. Nor did it advance the cause of women’s equality, which was gaining greater momentum in the United States after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed in 1920. In fact, it was rare for Dreier to include or discuss works by women artists in exhibitions, except when it concerned her sister or herself.<sup>82</sup>

After buying works for the permanent collection, Dreier began to travel extensively to promote her cause. Her populist motivations took her, as she put it, “from the Colony Club on Park Avenue to the Workers Club on Union Square, from the Jewish Community Center in the wilds of Brooklyn to the finishing schools of Washington D.C.”<sup>83</sup> She traveled with the exhibitions where she would lecture and take questions concerning the artwork from a wide range of people that made up her audience.

Modern art became known to Americans through exhibitions that were usually international in scope. It was only because of Dreier’s wide-reaching efforts to include art from all over the world that she allowed the public, some of whom could not afford to go to Europe

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<sup>78</sup> Siegel, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Levy, 316.

<sup>80</sup> Saarinen, 245.

<sup>81</sup> Kathleen McCarthy, Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 195.

<sup>82</sup> Fowler, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Saarinen, 246.

for example, to see these works by international artists first hand and, on many occasions, for free. Her philosophy for teaching art centered on lecturing in front of the actual work of art, rather than using slides or pictures in books, as was customary until that time.<sup>84</sup> Dreier used her resources well; galleries became classrooms, artists became lecturers, and paintings became learning tools.<sup>85</sup> According to Dreier, “We are entering a new era and the men most sensitive to the coming, new influences, must in the very nature of things, express themselves differently from the past, whether it be in art, politics or science.”<sup>86</sup> Abstract painting was the medium that could best convey the language of this new era and she believed that it was the artist, not the historian, who could best relate these new ideas to the public.<sup>87</sup> Professionally trained artists could rely on their intuition and visual training to interpret and translate these images in such a way that others without studio training could not.<sup>88</sup> Modern artists were taking steps away from conventional art work, sometimes rejecting it altogether, and it was other artists who could easily recognize these movements toward abstraction. As the primary collector for the Société Anonyme, Dreier was directly responsible for each piece that she chose for the collection. Eventually she would have to convey to the public the importance of the particular work of art. For example, she was the first to give Kandinsky a one-artist show in America, during the spring of 1923 thus introducing the public to abstract art and, in effect, the spirituality present in this new kind of art.<sup>89</sup>

Dreier also introduced Americans to German and Russian modernists, Marxist art, and Eastern European work through Société Anonyme exhibitions. She provided biographical information for each artist and explanations of the art work at each exhibition. In addition, she lectured and made pamphlets and published books to further educate the audience.<sup>90</sup>

In 1926-27 Dreier organized the largest international exhibition of modern art since the Armory Show. It was held in borrowed space at the Brooklyn Museum and known officially as the International Exhibition of Modern Art (fig. 7). Twenty-three countries were represented by

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<sup>84</sup> Bohan, 30-31.

<sup>85</sup> Levy, 314-317.

<sup>86</sup> Katherine Dreier, “It’s Why and its Wherefore,” reproduced in Selected Publications: Société Anonyme v1 (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 5.

<sup>87</sup> Calo, 99.

<sup>88</sup> McCarthy, 187.

<sup>89</sup> During the period of 1920-26 the Société Anonyme held thirty-five exhibitions. Other notable one-artist shows include Klée, Leger, Stella and Villon. Herbert, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Bohan, 37.

one hundred and six artists, most from Europe.<sup>91</sup> Dreier chose to hang the paintings in a non-chronological, non-national fashion. Representative works from each country, style, movement, and artists were hung freely next to one and other. She turned one gallery into a home, of sorts; she included a parlor, a library, a dining room and a bedroom, where she hung works of art on walls and placed sculpture on furniture purchased at a local department store (fig. 8).<sup>92</sup> Her intent was to encourage visitors to bring modern art into their homes. Didactic materials displayed throughout the show attested to the power of modern art to make society a better place.<sup>93</sup>

After years of collecting and exhibiting modernist works, it was two events in 1929 that upset the success of the Société Anonyme. The Depression took a toll on Dreier's financial situation, which had, until that point, been the main monetary source for the Société Anonyme. The opening of the Museum of Modern Art, also in 1929, had other disappointing consequences. It was the establishment of a permanent, financially-secure organization for the exhibition of modern art that was the ultimate goal for Dreier's Société Anonyme, a goal that was never accomplished.<sup>94</sup> Although still active in the 1930s, the Société Anonyme was in decline. Dreier used this opportunity to lecture on modern art around the New York region.<sup>95</sup> Her decreased income forced her to become more of a caretaker of the Société Anonyme's collection, rather than collecting works for the collection.<sup>96</sup> Although her buying activities had slowed considerably, Dreier's exceptional approach to collecting and exhibiting modern art during the 1920s and 1930s had profound effects on the way Americans perceived this kind of art and how her fellow collectors adopted and sometimes modified these practices. In the next chapter I will introduce these fellow collectors and discuss their methods of collecting and contributions to modern art.

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<sup>91</sup> Bohan 52-53.

<sup>92</sup> Bohan, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Bohan, 67.

<sup>94</sup> The Société Anonyme did not have a permanent space to exhibit works. Instead Dreier rented various office and gallery spaces in New York as money allowed.

<sup>95</sup> In fact, Dreier was one of the principal lecturers around New York during this time, mostly because she did not wait for an invitation, but volunteered herself. Herbert, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Herbert, 20.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DREIER'S COLLECTING CONTEMPORARIES

In the years following the Armory Show there was a shift in the American art scene. Now that more and more Americans were aware of new European trends in art, there was a general increase in appreciation for modern art. This was especially true in New York, where a small group of collectors began to assemble great collections of this contemporary art. These collectors include: Alfred Barr, Jr., Hilla Rebay, and John Quinn. Despite differences and similarities in collections and collecting habits, these individuals represented a new generation of art collectors in the United States. First, these collectors saw themselves as philanthropists, whose goal was to better society, to enrich the public life through this new art. Second, these collectors began to utilize the artists themselves in new ways. Artists became advisors. Rather than relying on dealers to inform collectors about trends and choices in contemporary art, the artists were conveying these ideas to collectors who were ready to explore new styles. Finally, these collectors were creating a place, whether it was in the home, museum, or studio, for contemporary art where no place had ever been created. In this chapter I would like to discuss Dreier's approach to modern art collecting and compare it with her collecting contemporaries. Next I will introduce three of her fellow collectors. In each discussion I will talk about specific similarities and differences between the collector's method of collecting and Dreier's. Each collector contributed to the advancement and public acceptance of modern art in distinctive ways, which I will discuss as well. I will conclude by exploring Dreier's professional relationships with each patron and how these relationships affected how modern art could, or should, be used in society.

As indicated in the previous chapter, Dreier's methods of collecting art were radically different than the traditional means practiced in the United States since the Civil War. First, she collected art produced by living artists who were generally unknown at that time. Next, she let her spirituality and the spirituality present in certain artists' abstractions guide some of her purchases. She often purchased art directly from the artist, without going through a dealer or gallery, whether the artist was domestic or foreign, and her collection also included gifts from a number of artist-friends. Her contribution to her cause of modern art was accomplished through

public exposure and education.

Just as the Société Anonyme began its decline in the 1930s, the Museum of Modern Art was just beginning its tenure as a major modern art institution in the United States. The Museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (1902-1981), was largely responsible for this accomplishment (fig. 9). Much like Dreier's role in the Société Anonyme, Barr was the primary collector for the museum. Both secured artwork for their respective permanent collections, pursued potential donors, and devised exhibitions for the public. A major difference between the two collectors was Barr's constant responsibility to appease the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>97</sup>

Unlike Dreier, whose studies were focused primarily on studio training, Alfred Barr received his B.A. in 1922 and M.A. in 1923 in Art History, both from Princeton University. It was during Barr's tenure as a student when he developed his principles and methods for collecting art.

At Princeton, Barr studied with Charles Rufus Morey and Frank Jewett Mather, both men included among the "second generation" of professors appointed at Princeton's thirty-five year old art history program.<sup>98</sup> About the time Dreier founded the Société Anonyme, Barr took his first modern art course as a junior at Princeton. His professor, Frank Jewett Mather, was new to the program and quite conservative for that time; his "modern" art course covered the Renaissance to the Impressionists.<sup>99</sup> Mather, formerly an art critic for the *New York Evening Post*, included the Armory Show in his lectures and even published books on modern art, but did not hold the art of the avant-garde in high esteem. This art had a "strangeness and apparent ugliness."<sup>100</sup>

As a graduate student, Barr studied with Charles Rufus Morey. Morey's area of scholarship was ancient and medieval art. His method was to look at cultural factors and objects to determine how a certain style progressed or ceased.<sup>101</sup> This meant analyzing patterns and sources and tracing the similarities and differences throughout history to determine the evolution

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<sup>97</sup> Problems with the Board would eventually lead to Barr's dismissal as Director in 1943.

<sup>98</sup> Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 19. Charles Rufus Morey taught the first medieval art class in the United States at Princeton in 1907.

<sup>99</sup> Kantor, 27.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Kantor, 27.

<sup>101</sup> Scott, 169.

of a style.<sup>102</sup> Barr adopted this approach.

Upon graduation from Princeton, Barr entered Harvard as a doctoral student. Several events during his time at Harvard shaped his aesthetic principles and his convictions about modern art's place in society. The first was working with Paul Sachs, the associate director of the Fogg Museum. Under Sachs' tutelage, Barr learned the "Harvard method." This meant finding commonalities in form and style, developing an "eye" through connoisseurship, and exploring techniques.<sup>103</sup> It seems as if Barr had the best of both (art historical) worlds; at Princeton he learned a more investigative approach with regard to the development of style through cultural factors, while at Harvard he studied formal styles and techniques.

In 1926 Barr penned a controversial article that was published in the *Harvard Crimson*. He criticized the lack of modern art in Boston's well-established museums and suggested a museum of modern art to remedy the situation. The *Boston Herald* and the *Boston Examiner* picked up the article and ran positive and negative commentary. He enjoyed a few days of fame thanks to the controversy sparked by this article.<sup>104</sup>

Shortly after this event, Barr viewed the impressive Brooklyn Exhibition, assembled by Dreier, and began correspondence with her with the hopes of securing a similar show at Wellesley.<sup>105</sup> Although several attempts at collaboration failed, the pair became fast friends with modern art and education in common.

He taught one of the first modern art courses in America and organized an exhibition at the college's museum to supplement his classroom teachings.<sup>106</sup> In this class and exhibition, he broke down all associations between art and politics and focused instead on art's ability to embody the "modern spirit." Barr highlighted the artist's experience during the creative process and focused on form and style to illustrate the development of modern art.<sup>107</sup>

Barr subsequently resigned his position at Wellesley College in order to become the Museum of Modern Art's first director in 1929. The museum's founders, Abby Rockefeller, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Lizzie Bliss, secured a permanent space in Manhattan for the city's newest art museum, something Dreier never could obtain for the Société Anonyme, and

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Kantor, 38.

<sup>104</sup> Scott, 170.

<sup>105</sup> Kantor, 112.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. The show included works by 19th-century artists, like Delacroix, van Gogh, and Courbet, juxtaposed with works by Chagall, Picasso, and Matisse.

proposed to display only the best contemporary art. This meant they were less likely to take a chance on new or even unknown talent, as Dreier often did. The women also employed other art experts, including Conger Goodyear as the museum's first president and Paul Sachs as a consultant.<sup>108</sup>

Barr began to build the Museum of Modern Art's collection initially through donations.<sup>109</sup> Unlike Dreier, whose collection was made up of work by living artists, the MoMA collection commenced with numerous examples of well-known artists' work from previous periods in history. For example, after her death in 1930, Lillie Bliss bequeathed to the museum several Cézanne oils and her entire early 20th-century American collection. Following stipulations in Bliss's will, he began a massive fundraising effort to be able to purchase works for the permanent collection, rather than relying on donations alone. In doing so, it was necessary to define modern art. Compared with Dreier's broad definition of what designated modern art in her collection, Barr's idea of modern art was more focused and narrow. He wrote a prospectus concerning additions, purchased or donated, to the permanent collection in 1931. He proposed to include works created within the last thirty years and their "pioneer ancestors" created in the 19th century.<sup>110</sup> In order to keep the collection thoroughly modern, once "older" works had served their purposes in the Museum, they would be passed on to the Metropolitan.<sup>111</sup> This prospectus caused concern not only with the Museum's board, but also with donors. Goodyear, the president of the board, wanted the Museum to emphasize loan exhibitions, rather than the display of a permanent collection. Abby Rockefeller felt that donors would feel slighted if their donations were "disposed of" to the Metropolitan's collection.<sup>112</sup> Several trustee members did agree with Barr's guidelines and began to donate from their private collections. By 1934, the Museum had ninety-one works in its permanent collection.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, Barr had embarked upon a planned, systematic approach to building the museum's permanent collection. In a November 1933 report he diagrammed his approach, known as "Torpedo" in a series of three drawings. The first diagram outlined the museum's

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<sup>108</sup> Scott, 169. The museum founders had impressive collections of modern art and sculpture. Interestingly, when founded, the museum itself had no permanent collection.

<sup>109</sup> Katherine Dreier claimed to have opened the first "Museum of Modern Art" in the United States.

<sup>110</sup> John Elderfield, *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change* (The Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1995), 16.

<sup>111</sup> Elderfield, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Scott, 176.

permanent collection (fig. 10). The second diagram proposed the museum's ideal collection in relation to the Metropolitan's holdings. The third "Torpedo" proposed the Museum's ideal collection in relation to other New York collections, including the Whitney Museum. Barr did not include the Guggenheim or the Société Anonyme's collections in the diagrams (fig. 11). In a 1934 report to museum trustees, he asserted that both were, at that time, superior Museum of Modern Art's collection.<sup>114</sup>

During the late 1930s Barr continued to emphasize contemporaneity within in the collection by selling off "older" works, such as those by Degas, in order to buy Picassos and examples of "degenerate" art that the Nazis had begun to sell.<sup>115</sup> The Rockefellers gave enough money to purchase several examples of 20<sup>th</sup>-century works. These works included canvases by Kandinsky, Schwitters, De Chirico, and Miró.

Dreier lent Barr sixteen works from her collection for an exhibition entitled *Fantastic Art: Dada and Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1937. Works by Dali, Miro, and De Chirico were juxtaposed with precursors by Bosch and Goya. The exhibition created quite a stir when images drawn by children and painted by the "insane" were interspersed throughout.<sup>116</sup> This angered Dreier so much that she pulled the loaned works from the show. Despite this mishap, the two remained friends and Barr continued to court her as a potential donor.

When war broke out in the fall of 1939, Barr could no longer take trips to Europe to assess the art there or buy anything for the collection. Therefore, like Dreier, Barr had to look elsewhere to collect art. The trustees sent Barr on a six-week buying spree in Mexico and Cuba. Barr collected over two hundred modern paintings and pieces of sculpture in Latin America.<sup>117</sup>

Museum visitors liked what they saw on display; the purchases from the trip made quite an impression on some area residents, who gave money to continue buying Mexican works for the permanent collection.<sup>118</sup>

Barr, much like Dreier, single-handedly built the permanent collection of one of the first museums in the United States devoted to modern art. Unlike Dreier, who bought what she liked regardless of name or fame, Barr reported to a board of trustees that was rigorous in its attention to contemporaneity and value. This board also had access to an incredible amount of money and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Elderfield, 25.

<sup>116</sup> Scott, 177.

<sup>117</sup> Marquis, 192.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

allowed him to collect on a grand scale, whereas Dreier, for the most part, financed her collection out of her own pocket. In addition to large financial donations, the board also loaned and donated personal art collections. Barr had a permanent space that housed its collections and exhibitions, while Dreier moved her Société Anonyme to various locations. Both made modern art their mission and, in order to engage the public in this mission, they employed the might of their respective institutions. Through collecting, lectures, exhibitions, public programs, and classes they educated the public about European and American modernism.

Modern art, specifically abstract art, had a place in another New York museum, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, which opened its doors in 1939 at 25 E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, near Barr's Museum of Modern Art.<sup>119</sup> Dreier shared many similarities with one of the museum's founders, Hilla Rebay and, in fact, the two were good friends. Like Dreier, Rebay occupies an obscure place within the history of art collectors. In this section I would like to introduce Rebay as one of Dreier's close collecting contemporaries. First, I will highlight both women collector's predilections toward abstract art that were based on their Theosophical beliefs. Next I will discuss the similarities in their approach to collecting with regard to travel and acquiring artist-friends. Finally, I will talk about one glaring difference between these women that did not affect their relationship, but did affect Dreier's relationship with other collectors.

Hilla Rebay was born into Bavarian nobility in May 1890 in Strassburg, Alsace, which, at that time, was still considered part of the German Empire.<sup>120</sup> Her father, a Baron and an officer in the Prussian Army, moved the family to Freiburg. Rebay, at age 14, began taking private painting lessons, in addition to attending Theosophy classes taught by Rudolf Steiner, a self-proclaimed Austrian mystic and founder of the Anthroposophical Society (fig. 12).<sup>121</sup> As her interest in Theosophy grew, her artistic abilities developed. She began exhibiting her work publicly for the first time in the fall of 1912 in Cologne.<sup>122</sup> As artists, collectors, and Theosophists Dreier and Rebay were keenly aware of the how this movement could impact art collecting. The two began their respective collections of abstract art in mostly similar ways.

Rebay met Irene and Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York in 1928 when she painted

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<sup>119</sup> Scott, 362.

<sup>120</sup> Lukach, 1. Rebay's birth name was Baroness Hildegard Anna Augusta Elisabeth Rebay von Ehrenweisen.

<sup>121</sup> Campbell, 156.

<sup>122</sup> Lukach, 6.

Solomon's full-length portrait.<sup>123</sup> Rebay, who was interested in "non-objective" art, sought to interest others by using her studio as a gallery of sorts to display various artists' abstract art. So strong were her convictions about this kind of art that she convinced the Guggenheims to accompany her on a summer buying trip to Europe where she was also exhibiting her own abstract art.<sup>124</sup> The trip was successful; Guggenheim allowed Rebay to begin buying images for his collection and, in fact, left money at her disposal to do so. She bought several paintings by Kandinsky while in Dessau, Germany. She then traveled to Berlin to scour the art galleries there for new works. There she purchased canvases by Chagall and Moholy-Nagy.<sup>125</sup> Since Dreier had been collecting art she favored the method of visiting the artist's studio to view and to purchase art. Rebay adopted this approach as well. During the trip, she started to make appointments with the artists in their studios. This allowed her to buy directly from the artist instead of going through a gallery.<sup>126</sup> Both women had the desire to collect works by "living artists" and did so by seeking the artists out. This was usually the case after Dreier saw an artist's work in an exhibition. She and Rebay displayed their approval and encouragement not only through financial support, but also through her ability and means to promote modern art and artists.<sup>127</sup> By buying art from the artists they became friends with many artists.

Ten years after the inauguration of the Société Anonyme, in the spring of 1930, Rebay was envisioning plans of a grand museum of non-objective in New York. It was to be called the "Temple of Non-objectivity." In a letter to Rudolf Bauer, she described the features of the museum that included a resting room, a gallery, an art library, and a lecture room. Another commonality between the two collectors was education. Education was going to be a major function of Rebay's museum. "One has to educate young people. Advice and information ought to be found in one room...Instructive lectures for mothers and teachers, as well as for children."<sup>128</sup> Although her plans would not be realized for another nine years, the seeds for a museum of this sort had been planted and she continued to look for and to promote abstract art and artists.

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<sup>123</sup> Lukach, 53. The portrait was finished in February 1929 and by that time Rebay had painted portraits of several of the Guggenheim's friends and family members.

<sup>124</sup> Lukach, 57. Rebay had two exhibitions in Paris. The first was held at the Galerie Carmine and the second at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery.

<sup>125</sup> Lukach, 58.

<sup>126</sup> Lukach, 60.

<sup>127</sup> Herbert, 29.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Lukach, 62-63. In the letter Rebay mentions Guggenheim as the financial backer of the project.

The Guggenheims took a second trip to Germany with Rebay during the summer of 1930; the trio visited museums and artists' studios where contemporary art was displayed in seven different countries. Two highlights of the trip included traveling to Rebay's parents' house in Teningen and visiting Kandinsky's studio again.<sup>129</sup> It was decided that his work would be the focus of the Guggenheim collection. As previously mentioned Kandinsky's writings on art had a profound influence on Dreier and her philosophy about art and collecting.

The Depression caused Solomon Guggenheim to cease art buying for a short time and put off the building of a major museum until his financial situation was stable again.<sup>130</sup> As Dreier did when her funds dwindled after the stock market crashed, Rebay took this opportunity to lecture and write about abstract art, as a way to introduce and promote it to the American public. Her lectures discussed aspects of the spirituality present in art and how painters of "non-objective" art were inspired a higher power and did not need to represent earthly objects.<sup>131</sup> She began to exhibit examples her own work in addition to lecturing and writing. In effect, public awareness about the Guggenheim collection increased dramatically. This kind of publicity, coupled with Rebay's insistence, encouraged Guggenheim to purchase select works of art during the late-1930s when his financial situation was stable again. Motivated by the toll the Depression had taken on several of her artist friends, Rebay, with limited funds that Guggenheim allotted to her, acquired several works by Chagall, Gleizes, and Modigliani.<sup>132</sup>

The political climate in the 1930s had profound effects on artists and collectors alike. As Hitler began his systematic approach of ridding Germany of modern art, these artists fled the country and the market was flooded with examples of what Hitler deemed "degenerate art."<sup>133</sup> When the Nazis began to sell off the "degenerate" art in 1938, Rebay acquired several pieces. She was rescuing these paintings from destruction and, in effect, preserving an important part of modern art.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Lukach, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Lukach, 82.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Lukach, 88. In addition to buying works from destitute artist-friends, Rebay also bought several pieces of art from her friend, collector Félix Fénéon, who was also suffering because of the Depression.

<sup>133</sup> In the summer of 1937 the Degenerate Art Exhibition, or Entartete Kunst, opened in Munich. This exhibition included over 650 paintings, sculptures, prints, and books amassed from thirty-two public German museums. The purpose of this exhibition was to educate the German public about what kinds of art were unacceptable to the Reich through the method of defamation and derision. Stephanie Barron, Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant Garde in Nazi Germany (Los Angeles: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1991), 9.

<sup>134</sup> Lukach, 122. Rebay bought one painting by Delauney and six by Kandinsky through the Nazi sales.

This was a difficult time for Germans in America, particularly for Dreier and Rebay. Despite their German heritage, these two had drastically differing opinions regarding Hitler and the treatment of Jews in Europe. For example, in Berlin on January 4, 1933, Dreier went to see Hitler speak. In a letter to her sister Mary she wrote:

Tonight Hittler [sic] is speaking and we are all going. I wonder how it will be! I hope that he will speak as well as last time.... When one's following grows to 12 to 14 million-it is like the Grand Central Station-all kinds of people go in and out.... Of course I do feel very strongly that when a man becomes a leader of the youth of a nation that he should take great care that all his associates are morally clean men... Well-I am reporting all sides-for of course I am only interest in the movement as an expression of German life.<sup>135</sup>

She saw Hitler speak again in Berlin a few days later and wrote to her sister Mary about the experience:

But I must tell you about the Hitler meeting.... Hitler arrived at 12:30!! Half an hour after midnight!!!! He spoke for three quarters of an hour! And we got home at 1:30!!!! Not a soul had left except a few straglers. The tent seating 5000 were all there!!! Do you think that we have any men who could accomplish that? The street cars waited! The trains waited! For people had come from all the neighboring places - for this was the first important political meeting...the Nazis are marvelously organized. Their men formed a living wall literally around the tent permitting no one to enter to creat [sic] a disturbance. This wall was inside as well as outside!! Imagine their number and their disciplin [sic] to build a living wall inside and out around a tent seating 5000 people. And as it was a temporary tent which they put up - the seats were on the level - not in tiers as the tent where I heard him speak in Munich.... All in all it was a most interesting experience.<sup>136</sup>

From the letters we can discern that Dreier saw Hitler speak three times while in Munich and Berlin. Her punctuation indicates she was both excited and impressed by Hitler's presence, his following, and the attention he commanded from his audience. These letters that reported Nazi activity to her family in the United States created a flurry of correspondence from several family members who were embarrassed and ashamed about Dreier's support for Hitler.<sup>137</sup> Her pro-German sentiments were cause for concern among fellow collectors, a point to which I will return later.

Rebay shared Dreier's fierce pride in her German heritage; both took yearly trips to

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<sup>135</sup> Katherine Dreier to Mary Dreier, January 4, 1933, in Margaret Dreier Robins Papers, University of Florida Libraries, Box 25.

<sup>136</sup> Katherine Dreier to Mary Dreier, January 8, 1933, in Margaret Dreier Robins Papers, University of Florida Libraries, Box 25.

<sup>137</sup> For examples of these letters see, Margaret Dreier Robins Papers, University of Florida Libraries, Box 25.

Germany to buy art and visit family until the onset of war made it dangerous to do so.<sup>138</sup> Unlike Barr, who focused his art collecting energies on Mexico and Cuba during this tumultuous time, Rebay began the process of naturalization, in addition to finalizing plans for the museum. In 1938 she bought a house in Connecticut (not far from Dreier's West Redding home) and applied for citizenship. Her Alsatian birthplace allowed her to become an American citizen under the "French-born" category. It was difficult to gain citizenship as a German before and during the war.<sup>139</sup> Rebay was quite outspoken in terms of her politics. She criticized the Nazi regime not only in terms of its treatment of Jews, but also in terms of strict programs implemented concerning art in Germany.

The Museum of Non-Objective Painting opened successfully in rented quarters in 1939. Rebay, however, was able to secure permanent space for the museum a few years later. She and Guggenheim chose Frank Lloyd Wright to design the new structure. It would be over a decade before these designs were realized. Contributing to the delay in building were Guggenheim's death, Rebay's emotional instability, and numerous Guggenheim Foundation quarrels. Finally in 1953 Wright finished the building and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, as it was then known, opened in its permanent home on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue just north of the Metropolitan.<sup>140</sup> By his time Rebay had resigned as Director, but her years of service to the movement of non-objective art had left an indelible mark on the museum and its collection.

The numerous similarities between Rebay and Dreier would have almost warranted a friendship. As I have stated, the two were acquainted and were, in fact, good friends. They met in 1930 through mutual artist-friends, Mondrian and Kandinsky, who were represented well in both women's collections. When Dreier visited Rebay's studio, they began corresponding and collaborating immediately.<sup>141</sup> Hearing the news of Kandinsky's death, the two women began work on a memorial exhibition. This led to problems because they could not reach an agreement concerning the translation of Kandinsky's writings.<sup>142</sup> Despite the small incident, Dreier and Rebay remained friends until Dreier's death in 1952.

Through careful examinations of extant correspondence between the two, it seems as if

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<sup>138</sup> Dreier's last trip to Europe was in the spring of 1937. Herbert, 19.

<sup>139</sup> Lukach, 100.

<sup>140</sup> Scott, 362-3.

<sup>141</sup> Lukach, 227.

<sup>142</sup> Dreier was familiar with the Russian slant of his German writing, but Rebay chose an architect, Howard Dearstyne, to translate the book, which infuriated Dreier. Lukach, 230.

Dreier's Nazi indiscretions did not affect their relationship.<sup>143</sup> This subject did, however, affect Dreier's relationships with other collectors, like John Quinn (1870-1924), another of Dreier's collecting contemporaries. In the next part of this chapter I would like to discuss Quinn's private collection of modern art. Included will be a discussion of his associations with modern art, his collecting practices, and how he differed from other collectors of his time, mainly Dreier, in terms of how he developed his rich collection of painting and sculpture.

A New York attorney, Quinn was one of the most prominent private modern art collectors during the early part of the 20th century (fig. 13). Quinn, it seems, was often accused of elitism and was very particular about lending out works for exhibition. Unlike Dreier, he did not have the same "missionary spirit" with regard to modern art.<sup>144</sup> Like Dreier, and most other modern art collectors, his associations with this kind of art began with the Armory Show of 1913. In contrast to these fellow collectors, however, his contributions to the international landmark exhibition went far beyond just buying art.

Quinn was born in Tiffin, Ohio, to Irish immigrants in April 1870.<sup>145</sup> His mother encouraged his intellectual growth by supporting his avid reading habit throughout his youth. After attending the University of Michigan and Georgetown University Law School, Quinn went on to study international law at Harvard University.<sup>146</sup> At the age of twenty-five he was gainfully employed in New York. His venture into art collecting began with Irish nationalistic overtones; he bought several pieces of art from Jack and John Butler Yeats and brought back several works by Irish artists from a trip to Dublin.<sup>147</sup> The collector's tenuous beginnings with modern art began with the acquisition of a painting by Manet in 1910 from the New York branch of Durand-Ruel.<sup>148</sup> During the next few years, Quinn made some daring purchases with regard to the new art by buying works by Puvis de Chavannes and Alfred Maurer. His decision to collect modern art led him to London and Paris, which resulted in obtaining Cézanne's *Mme. Cézanne*, Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* and Gauguin's *Promenade au bord de la mer* and formed the

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<sup>143</sup> None of the letters included in Lukach's book mention the Nazi regime. The only correspondence mentioning Dreier's affiliation with Hitler from the University of Florida collection was reprinted in this paper.

<sup>144</sup> Judith Zilczer, "John Quinn and Modern Art Collectors in America, 1913-1924" (*The American Art Journal* Winter 1982), 57-71.

<sup>145</sup> Zilczer, "The Noble Buyer", 15.

<sup>146</sup> B.L. Reid, *The Man From New York: John Quinn and His Friends* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 5-6.

<sup>147</sup> Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer*, 20.

<sup>148</sup> This New York branch opened in 1889 because of the great demand for Impressionist painting in the United States.

strong beginnings of his modern art collection. Despite his impressive purchases overseas, it was his fruitful efforts at home that proved to be Quinn's most important contribution to the advancement of modern art.

Unlike Dreier, who used didactic ways to introduce modern art to the public, Quinn used his legal expertise to bring modern art into America. In a letter written to May Morris on March 4, 1913, Quinn wrote,

There has been a big international art exhibition here organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, young friends of mine whom I incorporated last Spring. It is at the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory and began on February 17<sup>th</sup> and ends of March 15<sup>th</sup>. It is away ahead of the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London because it has the classic example of the 19th century, the Impressionists, Gauguin [sic], Van Gogh, Cezanne [sic], Matisse, Picasso, Picabia and all of the later ones, the Cubists and Futurists, and the tin ladies coming down the stairs, and so on. I lent all of my John things to the exhibition and a few other pictures. It is a great success. They put it up to me to get a speaker for the opening night. But the Governor failed me and the Mayor couldn't come, and so I was forced reluctantly to say a few works.<sup>149</sup>

Quinn was being quite humble in his letter regarding his role in the Armory Show. Not only did he incorporate the society that produced the Armory Show, he also served as its legal council. In addition he was a major financial backer of the exhibition. He was among the top lenders and buyers of works of art from the Show.<sup>150</sup> Similar to Dreier's initial predilection toward German artists, he bought numerous works by French artists, among them Gauguin, Cézanne, Derain, Redon and Villon. He also purchased a few works by Americans, but mostly because of personal associations with the artists.<sup>151</sup>

Quinn was subject to the fifteen percent duty that was, at that time, imposed on all imported works less than twenty years old, according to the Tariff Act of 1909. Beginning in early 1913, Congress began to reconsider this tariff and Quinn and Walt Kuhn, who had become friends after the Armory Show, drafted a proposal to prohibit the importation tax. He testified before the Ways and Means committee citing personal reasons, as well as egalitarian reasons, for the lifting of this tariff. After several months of testifying and drafting proposals, the tariff was amended under Woodrow Wilson. Quinn wrote:

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<sup>149</sup> Letters published in Janis Londraville, On Poetry, Painting, and Politics: The Letters of May Morris and John Quinn (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 124. May Morris was the daughter of poet William Morris. Quinn and Morris had an eight-year relationship, which survives through their letters.

<sup>150</sup> Zilczer, The Noble Buyer, 26-27. He loaned seventy-nine works and bought over a dozen paintings and two sculptures.

<sup>151</sup> Reid, 149.

Yes, we won, or I won, the fight for free art...I started the fight; I made the only argument before the House; I submitted the only brief to the house; I submitted a brief to the Senate; I interviewed Senators; and finally, I submitted a final brief after the Senate had acted. I started the propaganda, sent the stuff to all the newspapers, collected the newspaper editorials and cartoons; my office sent out all the circulars... I bore all of the expenses of the campaign.... I made the fight nominally on behalf of the Association of American Painters and sculptors, but that is really because I wanted a peg to hang my brief on and wanted to represent some art body other than myself.<sup>152</sup>

The implications this statute had on the modern art market were tremendous. Original works under one hundred years old were exempt from duty. This meant that living European artists and dealers could now exhibit and sell art in the U.S. without having to pay bonds and taxes, which would allow Americans to buy foreign art without having to travel to Europe. Dealers could also send art back to Europe that was not sold; this was not allowed under the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909.<sup>153</sup>

Quinn's personal interest and legal abilities in the cause of "free" modern art helped Americans become aware of this kind of art in a different, but still crucial, way compared to the educational methods used by Barr, Rebay, and Dreier. By removing commercial obstacles for modern art collectors, he paved the way for several new galleries and dealers to open in New York, which catered to these new consumers.<sup>154</sup> In addition, he collaborated with several artists and dealers to organize three major exhibitions of French modern art from December 1914 through March 1915. The collector bought numerous works from each show. He also bought six canvases by Picasso that spanned the artist's career.<sup>155</sup> His purchases exemplified his art-buying philosophy. Earlier in 1914 Quinn wrote to his good friend W.B. Yeats about his collecting strategy, "I have made up my mind to buy only the work of living men, with the possible exception of Gauguin, and Van Gogh and maybe Cézanne, if I can get another good example of each at a reasonable price."<sup>156</sup>

These purchases illustrate a major difference in the collecting habits of our modern art collectors thus far. The war had made it dangerous to travel to Europe during the time that Quinn was building the bulk of this collection. In addition the influx of European artists to New

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<sup>152</sup> Reprinted in Londraville, 143.

<sup>153</sup> Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer*, 31. Artwork (original and fake) over one hundred years old was also exempt from duty.

<sup>154</sup> In 1914-15, five new galleries opened in New York that specialized in modern European and American art. Also a few established galleries began to include contemporary art in their collection. Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer*, 31.

<sup>155</sup> Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer*, 32.

<sup>156</sup> Reid, 213.

York during the war added greatly to the modern art market. Whereas Dreier, Barr, and Rebay mounted major European collecting trips, Quinn bought important examples of modern European and American art from almost every New York dealer.<sup>157</sup> The onset of World War I forced the collector to rely on galleries and art dealers to bring the art to him, rather than traveling to Europe to see it for himself. Despite not traveling overseas to obtain works during this time, he did not purchase very many paintings by American artists either. He believed them to be inferior to European art and what little interest he displayed was, mainly, in American landscapes.<sup>158</sup>

Quinn developed stomach problem that required surgery in 1918. A long recovery process slowed the pace of his art buying. He spent the rest of his short life refining his art collection by buying fewer works at higher prices, by buying more sculptures, and relying on numerous dealers and artists to help him pick only the best works of art.<sup>159</sup> Early in his collecting career he was quite daring in his purchases, often ignoring the advice from artist-friends, like Kuhn, to collect established artists' work and to stay away from contemporary vanguard pieces. Like Dreier, he took a chance on unknown artists and bought works that appealed to him as a collector; often these works were by French artists. Beginning in 1920 Quinn had a "man on the scene" in Paris, his good friend and artist, Henri-Pierre Roché. Roché would select paintings that he thought Quinn would like and send photographs of them (usually done for Quinn by Man Ray) to New York so Quinn could decide if he wanted to buy.<sup>160</sup> Through Roché, Quinn procured several works by Marie Laurencin and Toulouse-Lautrec through sales at three different Parisian galleries.<sup>161</sup> He also employed the De Zayas brothers as well as the Rosenberg brothers to seek art for him.<sup>162</sup> It became necessary for him to use these advisors because, despite his fervent passion for collecting modern art, he still held a full-time job in the city. Unlike Dreier, who made the Société Anonyme her livelihood, and Rebay and Barr, whose occupations were related directly to collecting modern art, Quinn ran a highly successful law firm that supported his art purchases.

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<sup>157</sup> Zilczer, *The Noble Buyer*, 33.

<sup>158</sup> Reid, 93.

<sup>159</sup> Reid, 398. Quinn bought two marble sculptures by Brancusi, a bronze by Marius de Zayas, three ceramics by Roualt, and a sculpture by Duchamp-Villon in 1919.

<sup>160</sup> Reid, 469.

<sup>161</sup> During 1920 Quinn was Marie Laurencin's only patron. Quinn appreciated the way that Laurencin "paint[ed] like a woman." Reid, 471.

<sup>162</sup> Reid, 472.

Quinn was able to travel to Paris in June of 1921, despite health problems and financial issues during the early part of that year.<sup>163</sup> While there, with Roché's introductions, he visited the studios of Picasso, Derain, Braque, and Dufy. At each place he purchased several paintings from the artists themselves and continued to strengthen his position within the French circle of artists and dealers.<sup>164</sup> The demands of his New York office kept in the States until 1923, when he returned to Paris. While in Paris he purchased a number of important works by Picasso, Rousseau, Cézanne, Matisse, and a Brancusi sculpture. The Rosenberg brothers secured the sales of some of these works.<sup>165</sup> Léonce Rosenberg had recently asked Quinn for advice regarding lending works to Katherine Dreier. Quinn responded in a letter, stating his dislike for Dreier and merely hinting at his disdain for Germans:

Miss Dreier is a woman who is financially responsible, although I detest her personally because she was pro-German during the war. She is a friend of Marcel Duchamp. I think you could safely send her the pictures for the exhibition.<sup>166</sup>

It seems that, in his opinion, Dreier's only redeeming qualities were her associations with Duchamp and modern art and her personal wealth. One obvious indication of Quinn's anti-German sentiments was the lack of any works by German artists in his collection. This is contrasted with Dreier and Rebay's preference of young, German artists and their work. His feelings toward Germans and Germany survive through letters. For example, in a June 7, 1915 letter Quinn writes, "I am in favor of boycotting them [Germans] in this country, of making them ashamed of the nationality and their blood and their names."<sup>167</sup>

Several differences are apparent in the collecting practices of Quinn and the other collectors discussed previously in this thesis. Quinn collected modern art for his personal collection. Dreier, Barr, and Rebay were collecting on behalf of the institutions that they represented or originated. The Société Anonyme, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim sought to educate the public about modern art through lectures, exhibitions, classes, publishing, and public programs. Quinn, on the other hand, rarely lent works for exhibitions, nor did he believe that educating the public, i.e. giving lectures, mounting traveling exhibitions, etc.,

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<sup>163</sup> Quinn was on the brink of a "nervous collapse" in the spring of 1921 and had recently lost \$30,000 in personal dealings. Reid, 496.

<sup>164</sup> Reid, 496-97.

<sup>165</sup> Reid, 594.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Zilczer, "John Quinn and Modern Art Collectors in America, 1913-1924," 68.

<sup>167</sup> Reid, 218. The letter was to artist Gwen John.

would advance the cause of modern art.<sup>168</sup> He wrote, “Peripatetic exhibitions cheapen art. Art, great art, the great art of Matisse and Picasso is never for the mob, the herd, the great PUBLIC.”<sup>169</sup> Quinn, in fact, was very private about his collection in general. On the rare occasion that he sold a painting or lent one for exhibition, he did not want his name associated with the sale or exhibition.<sup>170</sup>

When Quinn died in 1924, he left specific instructions for the dispersal of his vast modern art collection. With a few exceptions, his entire collection was sold through private sales during the three years following his death with the proceeds benefiting his immediate family. This enabled fellow art collectors, like Dreier and Goodyear, to add to their collections, but, in effect, dismantled one of the few, great assemblages of modern art in early 20th-century America. In contrast, Dreier chose to keep her collection intact by bequeathing it to Yale University upon her death in 1952. In the next chapter I will discuss how Dreier’s decision to leave her collection to a university affected future collections of modern art within the history of art. I will also talk about how and why she chose to leave her collection to Yale, instead of a public museum, and what has become of the collection since its arrival.

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<sup>168</sup> Zilcher, “John Quinn and Modern Art Collectors in America, 1913-1924,” 69.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. Quinn was writing to Sally Lewis, February 2, 1924.

<sup>170</sup> Reid, 560-61.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Although collecting modern art was still an unexplored activity for many Americans, a small number of patrons had already assembled fine collections and, for a variety of reasons, had to dissolve them during the early 1920s. In 1922, for example, Walter and Louise Arensberg were forced to sell the majority of their avant-garde collection through private sales in New York because of financial difficulties.<sup>1</sup> The same year another prominent art dealer and patron, Dikran Kelekian, put his collection of modern art up for sale in a public auction in New York.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, John Quinn, who had been friends with Kelekian and the Arensbergs, had his collection liquidated upon his death.<sup>3</sup> According to art historian, Judith Zilzer, the feeling among these dealers and collectors was that museums, at this time, were not ready for large donations of modern art and, instead, other collectors of modern art would benefit more from the acquisitions of these sales.<sup>4</sup> Dreier bought works of art from the Arensberg and Quinn sales, but when, in 1939, it became time for her to consider bequeathing the collection she assembled, rather than follow these examples, she chose an institution that would continue her educational mission. This donation was not only significant because of the quality of the collection, but also because it was a collection assembled by a woman, which entered a reputable public institution with her name attached. To conclude this thesis, I would like to discuss Dreier's decision to leave her vast collection of modern art to Yale University. I will explain briefly the events and circumstances that led to her decision to choose Yale, the reasons behind the decision, and what has resulted from the donation.

Initial plans called for the transformation of her West Redding, Connecticut home, The Haven, into a public art museum. Fueled by her pride in the collection and by her jealousy of MoMA and the Museum of Non-Objective Art, Dreier launched an ambitious campaign to make, what she called, "The Country Museum" a reality.<sup>5</sup> Her first task was finding a director. Upon

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Naumann, New York Dada 1915-1923 (New York: Abrams, 1994), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Zilzer, 69.

<sup>3</sup> Zilzer, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Zilzer, 70-71.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert, 22.

hearing of the recent resignation of the director of the Division of Art at the Los Angeles Museum, William Hekking, whom she knew from her 1926 Brooklyn show, Dreier sent Hekking her proposal and strategies for a fundraising campaign for the Country Museum.<sup>6</sup> The main function of the museum would be to create an educational environment built around a permanent collection of mostly 20th-century art. Her plans included a public library, exhibitions, studio classes, lectures, and courses designed to show the public how to integrate home, garden, and modern art. The direct beneficiaries of this endeavor would be the residents of western Connecticut, since the nearest art museums were in New Haven and in New York.<sup>7</sup> It was Dreier's hope that Yale University would embrace her educational program, and she began courting certain Yale administrators to become trustees of the Country Museum.<sup>8</sup> In spite of its status as a private institution, the educational environment of this university would continue to enhance Dreier's philosophy and desire to inform the public about modern art. Through a series of exchanges, letters, and introductions Dreier met Theodore Sizer, director of the Yale Art Gallery.

The collection at the Yale Art Gallery was deficient in modern art, and Sizer recognized the importance of her collection for its educational value and for its ability to fill the void.<sup>9</sup> Sizer countered Dreier's offer to run the Country Museum with another offer that Dreier ultimately could not refuse. Citing safety and financial reasons, Sizer persuaded Dreier to give the Société Anonyme collection to the Yale University Art Gallery. This officially took place on October 11, 1941 (fig. 14).<sup>10</sup> Dreier stipulated that the name would be "The Collection of the Société Anonyme," allowing the Société Anonyme to add to the collection and to arrange exhibitions from time to time. The Société Anonyme would dissolve after the deaths of Dreier and Duchamp.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to numerous exhibitions at Yale, Dreier and Sizer loaned selections to other

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<sup>6</sup> The Haven totaled 117 acres and included the main house, two cottages and several outbuildings, which would comprise the Country Museum. Herbert, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert, 24.

<sup>8</sup> It was at this point that Hekking backed away from the Country Museum and Dreier asked her neighbor Mrs. Stuart Hay to join in her efforts. Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Susan B. Matheson, *Art for Yale: A History of the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2001), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Sizer pointed out that Dreier's wooden frame house, The Haven, was a fire hazard and that it would take an additional \$1 million to renovate the existing structure to accommodate the safety needs required to house the collection. Donating the collection to an educational institution, like Yale, would accomplish Dreier's goals for her Country Museum, but in a much safer, more economical fashion. Herbert, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert, 25.

colleges and universities in the vicinity over the next decade.<sup>12</sup> In the spring of 1948, Dreier gave a lecture at the Yale University Art Gallery. In it she argued that art history was taught as a purely intellectual approach through books and photographs and that art must be studied through actual examples, because it is a visual experience. She stated further that no reproductions could take the place of the originals.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Yale students and others from the region were fortunate because they had a museum with a wide-ranging collection of modern art.

In 1963 architect Paul Rudolph completed a new building to house Yale's School of Art and Architecture. The architecture and graphic design departments were relocated to the new structure, leaving newly vacated space in the original building for permanent galleries and exhibition space.<sup>14</sup> The curators devoted much time, energy and money to acquiring contemporary art to supplement the already reputable collection of modern art that came from the Société Anonyme.<sup>15</sup>

Since Dreier's death in 1952 the Yale University Art Gallery has had numerous exhibitions that were comprised of works donated from the Société Anonyme. For example, at least two exhibitions per year have included works from the collection and over fourteen major shows dedicated to the Société Anonyme were organized. In 1984, a major exhibition devoted to the collection as a whole produced a catalogue raisonné.<sup>16</sup> This event produced a number of Dreier scholars, including Ruth L. Bohan and Nancy J. Troy, who were, at that time, an associate at Yale and a graduate student, respectively. Both have continued to contribute to the scholarship and understanding of the Société Anonyme. Other scholars have taken advantage of individual artists within the collection. Linda Henderson, for example, arrived at Yale in 1969 as a graduate student. She became interested in Duchamp's art work in the collection at Yale and produced a number of subsequent publications. Her most recent book, Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works, published in 1998 looks at Duchamp's *Large Glass*, which he donated to the Philadelphia Museum of Art upon Dreier's death.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Matheson, 124. These exhibitions were held at Wesleyan University, Connecticut College, Addison Gallery of American Art, and Saybrook College.

<sup>13</sup> "Intrinsic Significance in Modern Art," Three Lectures on Modern Art (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).

<sup>14</sup> Matheson, 201.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Matheson, 280-294.

<sup>17</sup> Sid Moody, "Linda Dalrymple Henderson, World-Class Duchampologist: Marcel Duchamp's X-ray Specs," The Austin Chronicler vol.18, issue 46 (July, 19, 1999): online edition.

A more recent exhibition entitled *The 1948 Directors of the Société Anonyme Exhibition*, held from January 29 – March 30, 2002, recreated the 1948 exhibition that celebrated Dreier's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Jennifer Gross, who curated the show, accomplished this by using the original checklist and five installation photos from 1948. Gross will also curate *The Société Anonyme: Modernism in America* in the spring of 2006. The show will travel to three US venues and will chronicle the development of the collection as it transformed from a teaching collection to the nucleus of one of the most significant collections of modern art in the country. From these examples of exhibitions and scholars, it seems Dreier's ultimate educational goal has been, and continues to be, fulfilled.

Future scholarship on Dreier could include an analysis of the lectures she gave during her tenure as the President of the Société Anonyme using the collection at Yale. A few questions that arise from a study like this include: who was Dreier's audience? How did they receive her lectures? Did the lectures advance her cause? Another area of scholarship lacking from the body of work devoted to Dreier is an exploration of her own art work, specifically the pieces that she chose to include in the Yale donation. Why did she choose these particular five paintings? What did they add to the collection in general? Finally, what is needed to supplement studies on Dreier is an in-depth study on the roles of women collectors in America. As I mentioned earlier, the scholarship devoted to collectors in America is sparse and contains mainly information regarding male patronage in the arts, mentioning woman only with their regard to their spouse status. Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey provide an international account of women collectors from the Renaissance to the mid- 1950s in Great Women Collectors (1999). A similar study of strictly American women would benefit not only strengthen the position of American women collectors in the history of art, it would also encourage future scholars to embark upon more extensive studies of their own.

Katherine Dreier was a pioneer in modern art collecting. She also initiated several ways to educate the public about the art that she collected, thus forming the beginnings of museum education as we know it today. By putting her into context within the history of collecting, I have demonstrated that she was among the first in the early 20th century to break away from traditional collecting practices. As a woman entering into a historically male-dominated domain, her position and practices were of particular significance to future women art collectors. She chose to collect and to exhibit the art of living, lesser known artists, rather than famous works.

She gave exposure to a numerous amount of artists previously mentioned that would have otherwise remained on the fringes of contemporary art. By putting Dreier into context with her fellow collectors, I hope to have shown the similarities and differences among the practices of collecting and contributions to modern art made by these four major collectors. Our perception of modern art today was formed largely on the collections of modern art that were assembled in the early 20th century and subsequent scholarship produced since then. It is my hope that this study will contribute to this body of literature and inspire future scholastic projects.