A.W. Bahr Papers

Evelyn Khoo and Lara Amrod

2008
# Table of Contents

Collection Overview ........................................................................................................ 1  
Administrative Information .............................................................................................. 1  
Scope and Content Note ................................................................................................... 3  
Arrangement ..................................................................................................................... 3  
Biographical Note ........................................................................................................... 2  
Names and Subjects ........................................................................................................... 4  
Container Listing .............................................................................................................. 5  
    Series 1: Memoirs, 1944-1956 .................................................................................. 5  
    Series 2: Correspondence, 1919-1957 (bulk 1947-1957) ........................................  6  
    Series 3: Clippings, 1948, undated ......................................................................... 7  
    Series 4: Other Writings, undated .......................................................................... 8  
    Series 5: Images, undated ...................................................................................... 9  
    Series 6: Catalog Images, 1935, undated .............................................................. 10  
    Series 7: Art Object Photographs, undated ........................................................... 11
Collection Overview

Repository: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives
Title: A.W. Bahr Papers
Identifier: FSA.A2001.14
Date: 1919-1957 (bulk 1947-1957)
Extent: 1.25 Linear feet
Creator: Bahr, A. W.
Language: English.
Summary: Abel William Bahr was a coal merchant and general importer born in China who became an important collector of Chinese art. Several books and catalogues have been published about his collection. His papers include numerous drafts and notes about his memoirs as a collector, correspondence with other collectors and photographs of Chinese art objects, from jade to pottery to paintings.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
Gift of Penelope Bahr.

Provenance
Penelope Jane Bahr donated her grandfather's papers to the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives on November 12th, 2001.

Related Material
There are no known related materials at any other institution or historical society.

Processing Information
Processed by intern Evelyn Khoo, with the assistance of archivists Rachael Cristine Woody and David Hogge. Encoded by Rebecca Morgan, Summer 2012.

Preferred Citation

Restrictions on Access
Collection is open for research.
Use Note

Permission to reproduce and publish an item from the Archives is coordinated through the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery's Rights and Reproductions department. Please contact the Archives in order to initiate this process.

Biographical Note

1877
Born in Shanghai to German father and Chinese mother

Circa 1880s
Educated at St. Xavier's School in Shanghai

Circa 1894
Work as a clerk at a wholesale and retail coal merchant's office, left solely in charge during the first Sino-Japanese war, encouraged by backers to start his own business

1898
Goes into business with shipping friend, started the Central Trading Company

1900
Marries Miss Helen Marion Southey (daughter of Mr. T.S. Southey, in Hong Kong. Working at firm of Hopkins Dunn and Company. Begins construction on his first house, Fairview, outside the settlement on North Honan Road Extension, first son born[?]

1901
Recipient of Victoria Medal for his role as a gunner during the Boxer Rebellion (had joined the Shanghai Volunteers)

1908
Shanghai Exhibition of Chinese Art, which he helped to organize and which he loaned many pieces from his own collection. Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society. Publishes a catalogue of the exhibit in 1911, "Old Chinese Porcelains and Works of Art in China: Being Description and Illustrations of Articles selected from an Exhibition held in Shanghai, November 1908"

1909
Begins his association with Lord Kitchener; travels with him through China

1910
Leaves permanent residence in China, moves to London, England

1911
Catalogue of an Exhibition of Early Chinese Paintings from the Collection of A.W. Bahr, published by the Fine Art Society

1915
Applies to Foreign Office in London to go to America. (Involved in the art business; the war had stopped all such activities in London)

1927
Private printing of the catalogue, "Archaic Chinese Jades collected in China by A.W. Bahr, now in Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, described by Berthold Laufer"

1938
"Early Chinese Paintings from the A.W. Bahr Collection" by Osvald Siren, published by the Chiswick Press

1946
Leaves England, with his wife, daughter Edna, two sons and their wives and two granddaughters for Canada

1947
Metropolitan Museum of Art purchases Chinese paintings from Bahr, collection of archaic jades exhibited in the Royal Ontario Museum. The Met also publishes a portfolio of the painting, 'Ching Ming Shang Ho, Spring Festival on the River' which Bahr had donated to the museum
1948  The Met exhibits Bahr’s Chinese paintings. Several Chinese art objects on loan to the Art Association of Montreal and exhibited in the new Far East gallery

1949  Tang figurine, paint cakes and Han pottery vase on display at the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology

1950  Donates Chinese ceramics to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

1951  Begins writing his memoir[?]

1952  Last visit to London

1954  Gets typed draft of memoir. Living in Ridgefield, CT, working with C.R. Cammell

1959  Dies

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains manuscript drafts and notes for Bahr’s memoir, written by Bahr himself and C.R. Cammell, who was also the editor of The Connoisseur magazine. Other papers include correspondence with collectors of Chinese art or other figures in the art world, such as Lord Kitchener, the King and Queen of Sweden, Walter Muir Whitehill, Kenjiro Matsumoto and Senator Theodore Francis Green, among others. The bulk of the collection contains approximately 300 photographs of different Chinese art objects, from jade figurines to pottery to paintings. Most of these photographs are unidentified, but some of them include marginalia that indicate that they were of Bahr’s own art objects for publication in books or articles. Photographs which are identified point to art objects also belonging to Bahr. The photographs have been organized based on the object type in the photograph, such as painting, statue or figurine.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 7 series:

Series 1  Memoirs, [1944-1956]
Series 2  Correspondence, 1919-1957 [bulk 1947-1957]
Series 3  Clippings, 1948, no date [bulk no date]
Series 4  Other Writings, no date
Series 5  Images, no date
Series 6  Catalog Images, 1935, no date
Series 7  Art Object Photographs, no date
Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
- Art, Chinese
- Art, Japanese

Types of Materials:
- Letters
- Manuscripts
- Photographs

Names:
- Bahr, A. W.
- Cammell, Charles Richard

Geographic Names:
- China
- China -- Description and Travel
- Connecticut
- England
- Japan
- Japan -- Description and Travel
Container Listing

Series 1: Memoirs, 1944-1956
This series contains drafts of Bahr's memoir and other writings related to his memoir.

Box 1, Folder 1  Bahr's first person accounts, undated
Box 1, Folder 2  Manuscript: "Old China Hand, Merchant, Art Collector and Traveler", circa 1954
Box 1, Folder 3  Cammell's manuscript chapters, undated
Box 1, Folder 4  Handwritten notes on scrap paper, undated
Box 1, Folder 5  Biographical draft, 1949
Box 1, Folder 6  Correspondence regarding memoir, 1944, 1951

Return to Table of Contents
Series 2: Correspondence, 1919-1957 (bulk 1947-1957)

This series contains correspondence between Bahr and collectors of Chinese art and other figures in the art world, such as Lord Kitchener, Kenjiro Matsumoto and the King of Sweden. This series also has official correspondence between Bahr and museums, usually regarding donations of his pieces to their collections.

Box 1, Folder 7  Kitchener, Lord (Horatio Herbert Kitchener), undated
Box 1, Folder 8  King of Sweden, 1920-1954
Box 1, Folder 9  Whitehill, Walter Muir, 1956-1957
Box 1, Folder 10 Matsumoto, Kenjiro, 1955-1956
Box 1, Folder 11 Senator Theodore Francis Green, 1957
Box 1, Folder 12 Other Correspondence, 1919-1954
Box 1, Folder 13 Official Correspondence with Museums, etcetera, 1947-1951

Return to Table of Contents
Series 3: Clippings, 1948, undated

This series contains newspaper clippings, several of which have handwritten notes on the top saying 'book', indicating they are possibly to be used for his memoir.

Box 1, Folder 14        Clippings, 1948, undated

Return to Table of Contents
Series 4: Other Writings, undated

This series has other written materials such as possible poems written on scrap paper and a few written descriptions of Chinese art objects.

Box 1, Folder 15  Poetry, undated

Box 1, Folder 16  Collection descriptions, undated

Return to Table of Contents
Series 5: Images, undated

This series contains a few personal photographs of Bahr as well as several photographs of Chinese art objects.

Box 1, Folder 17  Photographs, undated

Box 1, Folder 18  Photonegatives of Lacquer Furniture, undated

Return to Table of Contents
Series 6: Catalog Images, 1935, undated

This series contains prints and photographs which seem to be grouped together in catalogs or printed in some publication.

Box 2, Folder 1  Prints, undated

Box 2, Folder 2  Photographs from the Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, 1935-1936

Box 2, Folder 3  Catalogue Pages, undated

Return to Table of Contents
Series 7: Art Object Photographs, undated

This series contains mostly unidentified photographs of art objects, possibly for use in Bahr's publications (as indicated by notes and annotation on some of the photographs.) Photographs have been re-organized based on type of object pictures, such as paintings, sculpture or figurine.

Box 2, Folder 4  Paintings - Portraits, undated
Box 2, Folder 5  Paintings - Landscapes, scenes with people and horses, undated
Box 2, Folder 6  Paintings - animals and plants, undated
Box 2, Folder 7  Paintings - deities, monks, etcetera, undated
Box 2, Folder 8  Statues/Sculpture, undated
Box 2, Folder 9  Sculpture Heads, undated
Box 2, Folder 10  Stone animal sculptures/figurines, undated
Box 2, Folder 11  Smaller stone animal sculptures/figurines, undated
Box 3, Folder 1  Single small stone or jade figurines and pieces, undated
Box 3, Folder 2  Small stone or jade figurine groups, undated
Box 3, Folder 3  Vessels, undated
Box 3, Folder 4  Disks and blades, undated
Box 3, Folder 5  Miscellaneous - friezes, seal(?) Stone statues, calligraphy, etcetera, undated

Return to Table of Contents