

THE WALKER SISTERS  
AND COLLECTING IN  
VICTORIAN BOSTON



BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART



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*On the cover and figure 1*

Robert Gordon Hardie. *Harriet Sarah Walker*. oil on canvas.  
1900. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904.4.

*The Walker Sisters and Collecting in Victorian Boston* celebrates the renovation and expansion of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's Walker Art Building by honoring the vision and patronage of the building's original benefactors. Mary Sophia Walker (1839–1904) and Harriet Sarah Walker (1844–1898) (figures 1 and 2) commissioned the Walker Art Building (figure 3) in memory of their uncle, Theophilus Wheeler Walker (1813–1890). He had held a deep, lifelong interest in the Old Master paintings, prints, and drawings collected during the eighteenth century by James Bowdoin III, the College's founding patron.<sup>1</sup> Walker first became involved with the art collection in 1850 when his close friend and cousin, the Reverend Leonard Woods, Jr., college president from 1839 to 1866, sought funds for the construction of a new chapel, designed by Richard Upjohn in the German Romanesque revival style. When Walker contributed \$1,000, the Board of Trustees recognized his generosity by naming a picture gallery, located on the second floor of the Chapel's

Banister Hall, in memory of his mother, Sophia Wheeler Walker. This room was the College's first formal art gallery. Walker, however, found the cramped second-floor space unsatisfactory for the exhibition of paintings. Bowdoin officials observed that Walker, during visits to the campus, formed an "unfavorable opinion" about the care and exhibition of the pictures.<sup>2</sup> Walker spoke of "providing a permanent home for the works of Art" but died in April 1890 before any plans were made.<sup>3</sup> Within a year of his death, however, Mary Sophia and Harriet Sarah Walker, his heirs, announced they would fulfill their uncle's intentions to build a new picture gallery.<sup>4</sup> The Walker sisters commissioned one of America's finest architects, Charles Follen McKim of the New York firm McKim, Mead, and White, for the design of a building "entirely devoted to objects of art."<sup>5</sup> Surviving correspondence reveals patrons with a remarkable vision and an architect who could realize it. Rejecting the High Victorian Gothic used for Boston's 1876 Museum of Fine Arts building at Copley Square,

figure 2

Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, *Mary Sophia Walker*, oil on canvas,  
1895. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904.3.

the Walkers sought a building whose "color [was] to be light."<sup>6</sup> For his first museum, McKim offered a "*balanced and symmetrical design* [McKim's emphasis]" based on Italian Renaissance models.<sup>7</sup> During his dedicatory address in June 1894, Martin Brimmer, president of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, hailed the new structure that "stands here to affirm, conspicuously, and deliberately, that Art is a great instrument in man's education, that it rounds and completes a training which would be imperfect without it."<sup>8</sup> Two spacious sky-lighted rectangular galleries, flanking the rotunda, held James Bowdoin III's historic collection and other works that had come to the College through the Boyd and Knox families. The Walkers' generous donations filled the oval Sophia Wheeler Walker Gallery, located on axis with the original entrance (figure 4). The building and collection inspired other donors to follow the Walker sisters' exam-





figure 3

The Walker Art Building, designed by McKim, Mead and White, 1894. Bowdoin College Museum of Art.



figure 4

The Sophia Wheeler Walker Gallery as it appeared in 1905 with the Walker collection. Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

ple with subsequent gifts of art and funding. From this auspicious beginning the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, one of the first college art museums in the United States, has grown to become one of the nation's finest.

The Walkers' choice of a classical "temple of art" may have stemmed from their residence in and reverence for Gore Place in Waltham, Massachusetts, one of America's most significant neoclassical houses. Built in 1806 by Rebecca and Christopher Gore and designed with the assistance of Jacques-Guillaume Legrand, a highly regarded French architect, the estate was an American model of a *ferme ornée*, where aesthetics of architecture and landscape design were united with agricultural reform (figure 5).<sup>9</sup> The Gores' innovative house stood within a property of 140 acres with fields under cultivation, extensive orchards and fine horticultural specimens. The Waltham estate was the Gore family's summer home; in the winter they lived on Boston's Beacon Hill next door to James Bowdoin III. Like James Bowdoin II, Gore was a Massachusetts

statesman who also served as governor in 1809. The Gores later retired to Waltham, residing there until 1822 when Christopher Gore's failing health required them to spend winters in Boston. In 1845 Nathaniel Walker, Theophilus's brother and business partner, married the Gores' grand-niece, Susan White Seaver Grant.<sup>10</sup> Theophilus purchased Gore Place in 1856. His nieces joined him there in 1869, moving from Croton, Massachusetts, after their mother died. At Gore Place, the Walkers furnished their two-story oval parlor with European and American paintings and sculpture, furniture, and Asian works of art. Harriet Walker avidly collected miniatures and European textiles.

*The Walker Sisters and Collecting in Victorian Boston* brings art and decorative arts in the classical and the colonial revival styles together with objects representing the Aesthetic Movement, a third artistic style popular in America after the Civil War. Most of the objects exhibited here were purchased by the Walkers expressly for the Bowdoin museum or were bequeathed by Mary

Walker in 1904. Intensely private individuals, the Walkers eschewed any desire for public notice. Although much about them has been gleaned from public records, few primary materials survive to shed light on their personal lives. Probate inventories do not detail their collection and no photographs are known that document their furnished interior.<sup>11</sup> Rather than imagining their Gore Place interior, this installation celebrates the Walkers' tastes and interests within the context of their Boston society. The Walkers' collection included works from the French Barbizon School and its American counterparts, ancient art and classicism, Japanese art, and works of contemporary artists, such as Winslow Homer and John La Farge. Noteworthy objects given since 1894 by other Bowdoin College Museum of Art donors as well as generous loans from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Portland Museum of Art; and the Wichita Art Museum round out the exhibition to vividly illuminate the range of Bostonian tastes during the late nineteenth century.



figure 5  
Gore Place, Waltham, Massachusetts,  
ca. 1895, photograph by Halliday Historic  
Photograph Company. Courtesy of Historic  
New England.

Theophilus's successful textile factories in Maine and Massachusetts provided his heirs with generous means for art collecting. The Walker sisters' interest coincided with a rise of art patronage in Boston, a city whose literary giants enriched American letters. Among leading authors in the Boston area were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the latter two of whom were Bowdoin College graduates of the Class of 1825. In Boston circles it was considered a civic duty to support the arts, a responsibility the Walker sisters embraced by making great world art available in Maine and establishing a high standard for art education at Bowdoin College.<sup>12</sup> The 1870s and 1880s saw dramatic additions to Boston's cultural landscape with new buildings for the Museum of Fine Arts and its Museum School and the Boston Art Club, fueling the city's leadership in American cultural life. The Boston Athenaeum, founded in 1807 as a library, began regular art exhibitions with the

establishment of an art gallery in 1827, promoting American artists as well as European works. The Walker sisters' membership there coincided with their purchase of a winter residence at nearby 53 Beacon Street in 1890.

While honoring the memory of Theophilus, the Walkers also collected specifically to address the needs of college art education. The eclectic nature of their interests is mirrored by other collections established to educate and refine public taste as well as train artists working in American industries, especially textiles, ceramics, and glass. Many of the objects the Boston Athenaeum collected, for example, were intended to address these issues.<sup>13</sup> Cultural leaders and museum advocates believed that educating and inspiring artisans and designers would elevate the aesthetics and production standards of the entire nation. At the time, textile mills in Massachusetts sent their woven fabrics to England to be decorated. Training local talent for the design of these goods in America would cut costs.

improve competitiveness, and increase productivity. These are among the reasons why the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandated art education in the public schools beginning in 1870.<sup>14</sup> The Walkers' vision differed markedly from that of collectors such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, who built a Venetian palace to house her world-class art. Gardner acquired Renaissance Old Master paintings with the scholarly advice of Charles Eliot Norton, Harvard University's great art scholar, and Bernard Berenson. It may have been the Walkers' private nature that shaped their more modest approach to collecting.

### CLASSICISM AND ITS REVIVAL

Having established a new republican government in 1789 that echoed democratic Greek and Roman principles, Americans embraced ancient forms and designs in their public and private lives. The taste for classical architecture ranged from formal government buildings to vernacular domestic residences, and from monumental

public art to utilitarian household furnishings. The Walker Art Building's classical elements — Greek plan, dome, rotunda, loggia, Palladian arch, and sculpture — were drawn from fifteenth-century Florentine architecture, notably the Pazzi Chapel by Brunelleschi and the Loggia dei Lanzi, site of the lion statues that served as models for the Bowdoin museum's noted examples.<sup>15</sup> Ancient sculpture at the Boston Athenaeum may have inspired decoration of the Walker Art Building façade. In the 1850s the Athenaeum had acquired full-length figures of Demosthenes and Sophocles, cast from the Vatican's collection.<sup>16</sup> The Greek orator Demosthenes (ca. 384–322 B.C.E.) came from the Roman copy, presumably of a bronze by Polyeyktos. The image of Sophocles (ca. 496–406 B.C.E.), a copy of a Greek marble, symbolized the concept of the "citizen ideal" during the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> By combining architecture and interior mural painting, as found in the great Italian palaces, McKim created a unified decorative program in

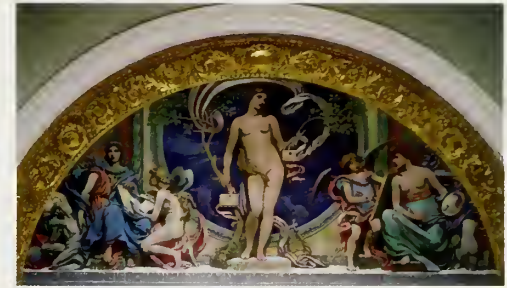


figure 6  
Elihu Vedder, *Rome*, oil on canvas, 1894. Gift of the Misses  
Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1893.37.



figure 7

Greek, after Lysippus, *Head of Zeus or Heracles*, marble, third or second century B.C.E. Gift of Edward Perry Warren, Esq., Honorary Degree, 1926, 1908.8.



figure 8a and 8b

Francesco da Sangallo, *Helena Marsupina* (reverse) and *Francesco da Sangallo* (obverse), bronze, 1551. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1895.35.

what became known as the American Renaissance style. For the large lunettes in the rotunda, four murals by leading American artists depicted creative centers of Western art: Rome, Athens, Florence, and Venice (figure 6). For the Walkers, art "[made] the past present and real."<sup>18</sup>

In selecting works for the Bowdoin museum, Harriet and Mary Sophia Walker sought the advice of Edward Perry Warren (1860–1928), an eminent antiquities collector, who had grown up in Waltham, not far from Gore Place. Sculpture, red-figure pottery, and glass were among the first ancient art objects the Walkers acquired for Bowdoin. Their fateful contact with Warren became an "acorn in the forest," a seed that inspired his subsequent gifts of nearly 600 objects which today form the core of Bowdoin's notable art collection of the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>19</sup> One of Warren's early gifts was a marble head of Zeus, copied after a work by Lysippus, one of ancient Greece's best-known sculptors (figure 7).

Subsequent gifts to the museum also under-

score the importance of Classical themes. Greek and Roman art, architecture, history, and mythology had inspired Western art beginning in Renaissance Florence. Roman commemorative medallions and coins were the sources for later medals and plaquettes, such as the 1551 double portrait medallion by the Florentine sculptor Francesco da Sangallo (figure 8a and b). Flemish tapestry makers vividly depicted Roman historical narratives. Circa 1600 in Brussels, Nicaise Aerts is credited with *The Conference between Scipio and Hannibal before the Battle of Zama*, one of a series from *The Story of Scipio Africanus* illustrating events of the Second Punic War (figure 9). The impressive twelve-by-fifteen-foot tapestry, part of the Gore Place collection, was given to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through the bequest of Mary Sophia and in honor of Harriet in 1904.<sup>20</sup>

When Charles McKim began designing the Walker Art Building, he was in the midst of a monumental architectural program for the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago





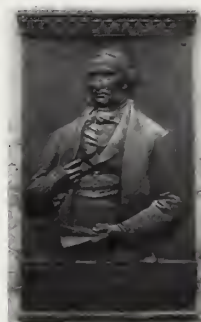
figure 9

Nicaise Aerts, *The Conference between Scipio and Hannibal before the Battle of Zama*, wool and silk tapestry, 1550-1625. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Miss Harriet Sarah Walker (through the bequest of Mary Sophia Walker), 04.279.

in 1893 to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the landing of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean.<sup>21</sup> The international fair recreated the splendor of Rome, Europe's fabled art city, on 630 acres of reclaimed marshy ground near Lake Michigan. A spectacle of tremendous proportions, the fair was noted for its extensive use of electricity, never seen before on this scale, and for the acres of highly decorated white plaster

buildings in the Beaux Arts style that gave it the name of the "White City." Promoting American progress, world knowledge, and the arts and industries of all nations, the fair also represented an unprecedented collaboration of architects, artists, and sculptors. Winslow Homer, one of an estimated 27 million visitors to the fair during its six-month run, documented his trip with *The Fountains at Night, World's Columbian Exposition* (figure 12). An unusual subject for Homer, the painting captures the illuminated sculpture in the Court of Honor which symbolized America's artistic achievements.<sup>22</sup>

Nineteenth-century American artists found inspiration in ancient forms, material, and subject matter. Two portraits in the museum's collection serve as important examples of sculpture based on classical models. The bronze tablet *Theophilus Wheeler Walker* by Daniel Chester French, who was one of McKim's collaborators at the Columbian Exposition and is probably best known for his statue of Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial, is the largest and most ambi-



Left:  
figure 10

Daniel Chester French, *Theophilus Wheeler Walker*, bronze, 1894. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1894.14.

Right:  
figure 11

Thomas Crawford, *Professor George Washington Greene*, plaster, ca. 1845. Gift of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1879.1.



figure 12

Winslow Homer, *The Fountains at Night*, World's  
Columbian Exposition, oil on canvas, 1893. Bequest of  
Mrs. Charles Savage Homer, Jr., 1938.2.



figure 13

John Rollin Tilton, *Temple of Aphaea, Aegina*, oil on canvas, ca. 1875. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904.15.

tious of his low-relief sculptures (figure 10).<sup>23</sup> The Bostonian Thomas Crawford was one of many American artists who lived in Italy, where access to ancient models was immediate. His bust *Professor George Washington Greene*, American author and abolitionist, which was given to the College by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1879, is based on Roman republican portraiture (figure 11).

Henry Longfellow patronized dozens of American artists, many of whom worked in Italy.

When he traveled to Italy with extended family in 1868, the studios of American artists were among their stops. Among these was Maine artist John Rollin Tilton, who kept a studio in Rome and traveled extensively. The Walkers acquired his *Temple of Aphaea, Aegina*, (figure 13) depicting one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world. This picture is typical of the Mediterranean landscape that inspired Americans.<sup>24</sup> Elihu Vedder spent much of his career in Rome, where he produced a great body of work, drawing from Italian life. Painted in 1879, *Eugenia, Portrait of a Roman Girl* (figure 14) was purchased in Boston by Thomas Gold Appleton, an avid collector and Henry Longfellow's brother-in-law. Appleton gave it to Ernest W. Longfellow, Henry's son, who was a professional artist. In 1923 Ernest Longfellow bequeathed dozens of paintings to the Museum of Fine Arts along with generous endowment funds.<sup>25</sup> From the French Barbizon School to American Impressionism, the pictures donated by Ernest Longfellow are related in style and sensibility to the Walkers' collection.

figure 14

Elihu Vedder, *Eugenia, Head of a Roman Girl*, oil on panel, 1879. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 23.488.



figure 15

Mount Washington Glass Company, New Bedford, Massachusetts. *Royal Flemish Covered Jar*, blown and enameled glass, 1889–1895. Courtesy of the Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, 2002.11.183.



Classical subjects also found their way into a wide range of household objects, often elevating utilitarian furnishings to art. For example, the émigré French cabinetmaker Alexander Roux settled in New York, achieving extraordinary success in the 1870s. His firm produced furniture in a range of styles to satisfy the eclectic tastes of Victorian Americans. His cabinets, used in parlors to exhibit fine sculpture, porcelains, or silver, epitomize the sophisticated Renaissance Revival style with its architectural form and neo-classical details.<sup>26</sup> On a smaller scale, but equally revealing, is a jar bearing Renaissance coins or medallions (figure 15). In 1889 New England's Mount Washington Glass Company developed an art glass it called Royal Flemish, incorporating classical ornament into sophisticated designs.

### THE COLONIAL REVIVAL

With the celebration of the centennial of the United States in 1876, Americans reflected on their nation's democratic independence and found inspiration in its historical past. A leading

figure in the colonial revival movement was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who embraced American history with his poetry. His iconic works included stories of the Puritan origins of Massachusetts in *The Courtship of Miles Standish* and the heroism of great Revolutionary Boston patriots with *Paul Revere's Ride*. A native of Portland, Maine, Longfellow graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825 and became the school's first professor of modern languages. On moving to Cambridge to teach at Harvard University, Henry Longfellow occupied the historic 1759 Vassall House on the Charles River that had served as George Washington's headquarters during the siege of Boston in 1775 and 1776. Nathan Appleton, a successful textile industrialist like Theophilus Walker, purchased the house as a wedding gift for his daughter Fanny and Henry in 1843. Although the Longfellows could have afforded to build a residence in the latest architectural style, they chose a beloved historic residence. By doing so, the Longfellows made fashionable that which was old-fashioned, and a

nation followed their example.<sup>27</sup>

Like the Longfellos, the Walkers revered the historical past. They honored the life of one of early America's leading statesmen by preserving not only Gore Place but also many of its original features, including early nineteenth-century wallpapers that other owners might readily have replaced. Of particular interest is a French wallpaper border, installed circa 1806 in the great hall. Its decorative motifs include a Roman drinking cup (*kylix*) and a pitcher (*oinochoe*).<sup>28</sup> Across a wide spectrum, Americans collected eighteenth-century "colonial" furniture, silver, ceramics, and other decorative arts with historical associations. A particularly fine example in the Walkers' collection is a Massachusetts desk, once owned by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Longfellow's college classmate (figure 16). The Walkers also acquired the portrait of *General Henry Knox*, painted by the young miniaturist Sarah Goodrich after a work by Gilbert Stuart (figure 17). The two artists held one another in high regard, with Stuart painting a demonstra-

tion miniature for Goodrich in 1820.<sup>29</sup> During the American Revolution, Knox had a distinguished career as an officer. He boldly delivered British guns captured at Fort Ticonderoga to Boston, thus forcing the British evacuation. As George Washington's close friend and military advisor, Knox later served as the president's first secretary of war. In 1796 Knox retired to Thomaston, Maine, where he began to develop an elegant agricultural estate similar to Gore's *ferme ornée*. He died in 1806 before his vision could be fully realized.<sup>30</sup> A pair of early eighteenth-century English side chairs with original needlework seats depicting English pastoral scenes provides another example of the colonial objects revered and collected by Americans. Unusual survivors, they are included in the exhibition to represent Harriet Walker's interest in early textiles.<sup>31</sup>

### THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT

Proponents of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s believed in art for art's sake and not for any particular moral or social considera-



figure 16

Probably Salem, Massachusetts. Desk, mahogany, 1780-1800. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1897.2.



figure 17

Sarah Goodrich, *General Henry Knox*, watercolor on ivory, ca. 1830. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904.69.



figure 18  
Julian Alden Weir. *The Connoisseur*.  
oil on canvas, 1889. Courtesy of the Wichita Art  
Museum, Wichita, Kansas. 1978.91.

tion. "Artfulness" was a contrast to the classical revival, which valued ancient Greece and Rome because of their political associations with American democracy. The Aesthetic Movement, synonymous with the artful interior, manifested itself in furniture, silver, textiles, stained glass, and glass and ceramic tablewares. Many Americans became more discriminating, a state elegantly captured by Julian Alden Weir's *The Connoisseur* of 1889, an impressionistic picture of a contemplative lady examining a print (figure 18). Weir's choice of the woman's loose gown, resembling a kimono, heralded his interest in Japanese art and culture.<sup>32</sup>

Many American manufactories, desiring to fill the demand for finely made furnishings, distanced themselves from shoddy mass-produced wares. For example, objects produced by Gorham Manufacturing Company and Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company were appreciated for their fine design and detailed manufacture. Often with considerable handwork, they were elevated to a level of art. These household objects were com-



figure 20  
Kinko. Japanese. *Tsuba (sword guard)*, sentoku  
(copper alloy) with ishime finish, nineteenth  
century. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker.  
1904.83.11.

bined with world art, including American and European painting and sculpture, Persian carpets, Japanese metalwork, and Chinese porcelains, to create domestic spaces valued for their artfulness. Wallpapers created a profusion of pattern, the stylish background for an artful interior. The wallpaper included in the exhibition, inspired by the English designer William Morris, was generously donated by Bradbury and Bradbury Art Wallpapers.<sup>33</sup>

The Aesthetic Movement coincided with the end of feudalism in Japan and the opening of

trade with the West. These events fueled American fascination with Japanese art and culture, especially in Boston. Among the first Americans to collect Japanese art was Charles Appleton Longfellow, the Longfellows' eldest son. Acquired during extensive travels from 1871 to 1873, his collection decorated the family's Cambridge home. Bostonians William Sturgis Bigelow, Edward S. Morse, and Ernest F. Fenollosa compiled a great collection of Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>34</sup> Winslow Homer's innovative watercolor techniques in his late watercolors are believed to have been inspired by Boston's Japanese paintings as seen in *The End of the Hunt*, one of his finest Adirondack watercolors (figure 19).<sup>35</sup> Japanese metalwork, especially swords and sword guards or *tsuba*, were eagerly acquired by Americans. Originally worn for balance and to help protect the wearer from the sword's blade, *tsuba* combined craftsmanship, symbolism, and utility. The Walker sisters acquired numerous examples, many of them signed by their makers (figure 20).



*Tsuba* also appealed to Winslow Homer, who installed one, decorated with a cricket, on his fireplace inglenook at his Prouts Neck, Maine, studio.<sup>36</sup> Enamelled Asian metalwares, known as *cloisonné*, were highly valued in the late nineteenth century. Harriet Walker so treasured her *cloisonné*

figure 19

Winslow Homer, *The End of the Hunt*, watercolor, 1892. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1894.11.

figure 21  
Gorham Manufacturing Company, *Mug with Arms of the Mystic Owls*, silver with gilt highlights, 1879. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904-157.



figure 22  
Constant Troyon, *Goat and Sheep*, oil on canvas, ca. 1850-1860. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1894-5.

vases featuring irises that she included one of them in her portrait (see cover).

Elements of Japanese design, particularly its profound connection with the natural world and an unusual asymmetry, made their way into American-made objects. The Gorham Manufacturing Company of Providence, Rhode Island, was one of America's pre-eminent producers of fine silver tablewares. A small silver mug, with ferns and butterflies executed in the

Japanese taste, belonged to Harriet Walker (figure 21). It bears the engraved Arms of the Mystic Owls, a private society in Atlanta, Georgia, to which Harriet Walker belonged. Harriet is believed to have designed the heraldic device for the club.<sup>37</sup> The Herter Brothers of New York, whose furniture represents the forefront of the Aesthetic movement, also looked to Japan for design sources. Bowdoin owns a fine side chair from a suite made in 1882 for the William H. Vanderbilt house in New York City. The carefully inlaid daisies on the crest rail relate to similar motifs found in Japanese textiles.<sup>38</sup>

In the field of painting, the Walkers were drawn to the Romantic sensibilities of the French Barbizon School and the landscapes of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Jean-François Millet. The work of these French artists was brought to Boston when painter and tastemaker William Morris Hunt returned from France in 1855.<sup>39</sup> Constant Troyon's pastoral *Goat and Sheep* had been in the Boston collection of John K. Hooper before the Walkers purchased it for



Bowdoin (figure 22). Painters in Boston inspired by these French models included the talented Joseph Foxcroft Cole and John Appleton Brown, less well-known today but beloved by Bostonians during their lifetimes.<sup>40</sup>

The global nature of the Walkers' art interests and collecting suited the needs of an educational institution. They selected a wide range of Chinese jades and porcelains, Indian furniture, and Persian metalwork to complete their collection. A seventeenth-century Persian suit of armor included a shield beautifully inlaid with silver (figure 23). Its ornamentation incorporates animals, hunting scenes, and other courtly pursuits.

#### CONTEMPORARY ART: ANOTHER WALKER LEGACY

As wide-ranging as their collection was, the Walkers remained grounded in Boston's contemporary art world. Working with Charles Follen McKim, they selected four artists to paint the twelve-by-twenty-four-foot lunettes spanning the Walker Art Building rotunda (see figure 6).

They decided on allegorical representations of great centers of artistic achievement in Western art. Visitors entering the original main door faced Elihu Vedder's *Rome*. Also called *The Art Idea*, *Rome* or *Nature*, seen holding the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, is the source of all inspiration. Clockwise, the other murals are *Venice* by Kenyon Cox, *Athens* by John La Farge — regarded as one of America's finest muralists — and *Florence* by Abbott Thayer. Cox's *Venice Enthroned* is flanked by Mercury, the patron of commerce, and Painting with her palette. The lion of St. Mark and other Venetian attributes are visible in the background. In his asymmetrical composition, La Farge rendered Pallas Athena (Minerva), on the left, drawing a portrait of Nature from life with her stylus and wax tablet. Observing from the right is the personification of Athens. In Abbott Thayer's design, influenced by Italian altarpieces, Florence protects the Arts. The Walker murals, set off by architectural framework and dark red walls, survive essentially unchanged. These extraordinary works represent



figure 23  
Persian, *Shield from a Suit of Armor*, steel with inlaid silver, seventeenth century. Gift of the Misses Harriet Sarah and Mary Sophia Walker, 1894.84.



figure 24

John La Farge, *Meditation of Kuwannon*, watercolor, ca. 1886. Bequest of Miss Mary Sophia Walker, 1904-18.

the Walkers' philosophy of collecting art of their own time. The sisters continued their association with John La Farge when they acquired three watercolors with Oriental subject matter (figure 24).<sup>41</sup>

Great Boston collections set standards for the nation, documenting patrons and their tastes — from James Bowdoin III and the Longfellos to members of the Boston Athenaeum. Unlike these individuals about whom much is known, the Walker sisters left little written evidence to express their views. It is the Walker Art Building and their Victorian collection that best illuminate their extraordinary vision for Bowdoin's remarkable art collection.

*The Walker Sisters and Collecting in Victorian Boston*, on view from October 14, 2007, to August 24, 2008, celebrates the Walker Art Building's renovation and expansion by architects Machado and Silvetti Associates, Boston.

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Cover Illustration: Robert Gordon Hardie, *Harriet Sarah Walker*, see figure 1.

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#### Endnotes

1. Lillian B. Miller, "The Legacy: The Walker Gift, 1894," in *The Legacy of James Bowdoin III* (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1994), pp. 187-215.
2. William Northend to George Little, July 16, 1889. Walker Art Building correspondence, Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library (BCL). For a time, the Maine Historical Society established temporary headquarters in the gallery. Eileen Sinnott Pols, "The Walker Art Building 1894: Charles F. McKim's First Museum Design" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1985), p. 39.
3. Harriet S. Walker to Charles F. McKim, July 6, 1891. Walker Art Building correspondence, Special Collections, BCL.
4. Walker to McKim, July 6, 1891. BCL. See also Walker biographical references in BCMA donor files.
5. Walker to McKim, July 6, 1891. BCL. The dedication to "art purposes" appears in an inscription in the rotunda floor.
6. Walker to McKim, July 6, 1891. BCL.
7. Charles F. McKim to Harriet S. Walker, August 10, 1891. Walker Art Building correspondence, Special Collections, BCL; Pols, "Walker Art Building 1894," pp. 81-82.
8. Martin Brimmer, *Address Delivered at Bowdoin College Upon the Opening of the Walker Art Building*, June 7, 1894 (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art), p. 2.
9. Today Gore Place is maintained as a public museum by the Gore Place Society. For more information, please visit its Web site at [www.goreplace.org](http://www.goreplace.org). See Laura Fecych Sprague, "Theophilus Wheeler Walker and Gore Place," in *The Legacy of James Bowdoin III*, pp. 216-224. For more on the estate's architectural signifi-

- cance, see Charles A. Hammond, "Where the Arts and the Virtues Unite": Country Life near Boston, 1637-1864" (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1982).
10. Theodore Woodman Gore, comp., *The Gore Family: John Gore of Roxbury, Massachusetts 1635-1657 and his Descendants to the Ninth Generation* (typescript at Gore Place Society), pp. 118, 186, 187.
  11. Although most of the Walker collection came as a bequest from Mary Sophia Walker in 1904, details of how it was installed at Gore Place are not known.
  12. Trevor Fairbrother, *The Bostonians: Painters of an Elegant Age, 1870-1930* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), p. 31.
  13. Stanley Ellis Cushing and David B. Dearinger, *Acquired Tastes: 200 Years of Collecting for the Boston Athenaeum* (Boston, Mass.: The Boston Athenaeum, 2007), pp. 34-35. In 1897 New York's Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration opened to provide a visual design resource for industrial artists; see Russell Lynes, *More Than Meets the Eye: The History and Collections of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum* (Washington, D. C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1981), pp. 11, 21-22.
  14. Diana Korzenik, *Drawn to Art: A Nineteenth-Century American Dream* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1985), pp. 153-154.
  15. Patricia McGraw Anderson, *The Architecture of Bowdoin College* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1988), pp. 43-48. See also Richard V. West, *The Walker Art Building Murals: Occasional Papers I* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1972).
  16. Cushing and Dearinger, *Acquired Tastes*, pp. 252-255.
  17. Cushing and Dearinger, *Acquired Tastes*, p. 255.
  18. Brimmer, *Address*, p. 3.
  19. In 1929 Sir John D. Beazley honored Warren's legacy when he observed in his eulogy: "... a coin, a gem, a vase, a statuette, would speak of Greece in the heart of Maine; and sooner or later there would be a student whose spirit would require them. There was no hurry: an acorn in the forest." For more on Warren's collection, see James A. Higginbotham and Katherine M. Westley, *Ars Antiqua: Treasures from the Ancient Mediterranean World at Bowdoin College* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 2005), pp. 19-23, and Kevin Herbert, *Ancient Art in Bowdoin College* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).
  20. Further details about why this was sent to Boston and not Bowdoin are unknown. Because of the tapestry's condition, it was not possible to display it in this exhibition.
  21. *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1979), pp. 12, 14, 17.
  22. *Winslow Homer at Prout's Neck* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1966), no. 27.
  23. Originally in the Sophia Walker Gallery on axis with the main entrance, the tablet is now installed in the rotunda. The museum's bronze roundel of *Robert Louis Stevenson* by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1904, 29) illustrates another classical form; see Margaret R. Burke, ed., *Handbook of the Collections* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1981), pp. 104-106.
  24. John Coffey, *Twilight of Arcadia: American Landscape Painters in Rome, 1830-1880* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1987), fig. 24, pp. 29 and 85-86.
  25. The author is most grateful to Victoria Reed at the Museum of Fine Arts for her assistance with the Ernest Longfellow collection.
  26. Burke, *Handbook*, p. 117.
  27. Christopher P. Monkhouse, "Longfellow in Everyman's Home," lecture presented at Maine Historical Society's Wadsworth-Longfellow Forum, September 22, 2001; see also Kathleen M. Catalano, "The Longfellows and their 'Trumpety Antiquities,'" *The American Art Journal* (Spring 1983): 21-31.
  28. This border was recently reproduced and reinstalled by Gore Place Society. Thanks are due to Lana Lewis, collections manager at Gore Place, for her assistance.
  29. Susan E. Strickler, *American Portrait Miniatures: The Worcester Art Museum Collection* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1989), pp. 108-109.
  30. Carolyn S. Parsons, "'Bordering on the Magnificent': Urban Domestic Planning in the Maine Woods," in Charles E. Clark, James S. Leamon, and Karen Bowden, eds., *Maine in the Early Republic: From Revolution to Statehood* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for Maine Historical Society and Maine Humanities Council, 1988), pp. 62-69.
  31. *Handbook*, pp. 56-58. Because of early twentieth-century practice to exhibit objects for long periods, often in high light levels, many of Harriet Walker's textile objects survive only in fragile condition.
  32. Novelene Ross, *Toward an American Identity: Selections from the Wichita Art Museum Collection of American Art* (Wichita, Ks.: Wichita Art Museum, 1997), pp. 254-255.
  33. For more information, see [www.bradbury.com](http://www.bradbury.com).
  34. William Hosley, *The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America* (Hartford, Ct.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1990), p. 42.
  35. Judith Walsh, "Innovation in Homer's Late Watercolors," in Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington, D. C., National Gallery of Art, 1996), pp. 287-290.
  36. The sword guard is in a private collection. Tom Denenberg, chief curator, Portland Museum of Art, kindly assisted with its research.
  37. See research by Martha Gandy Fales in the object file, BCMA.
  38. Katherine S. Howe, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, *Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Cilded Age* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1994), pp. 209-211.
  39. Fairbrother, *The Bostonians*, pp. 33-37. The Walker drawings by William Morris Hunt at Bowdoin are 1897.7 and 1897.8.
  40. Fairbrother, *The Bostonians*, pp. 202, 204. The Walkers acquired two Brown pastels (1894.13.2 and 1904.24) and *The Annisquam River, near Cloucester, Massachusetts* by J. Foxcroft Cole (1894.8).
  41. Accession numbers for the La Farge watercolors are 1904.18, 1904.19, and 1904.20.



Bowdoin

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