

FROM FIELD TO MUSEUM

PLACING KRAMRISCH AND HER COLLECTION
IN POSTWAR UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

By 1956, the Philadelphia Museum of Art had acquired a major collection of Indian sculpture from Stella Kramrisch and appointed her as the Curator for Indian art. In postwar United States the institutional emplacement of Kramrisch and her collection represented (as Ananda Coomaraswamy was for a preceding generation) a deepening engagement with Indian art at museums at a time of widening interest in Asian cultures, including through university Area Studies Programs. This article examines the significance of Kramrisch and her collection, tracing the intertwining of her collecting and research activities during her early fieldwork, which contributed to the elevation of medieval sculpture within the field of Indian art history, and the way the acquisition and appointment relied on the alignment of multiple priorities and collective efforts.

KEYWORDS

Collectors and collecting; Stella Kramrisch; Indian sculpture; Art museums.

In her 1957 article on the newly acquired collection of Indian sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (henceforth PMA) published in the *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, Stella Kramrisch described the group of sculptures as having been “an anonymous loan since 1950” that represented “about fifteen hundred years of Indian sculpture”, and added that its acquisition placed the PMA “in the forefront of this field”. Kramrisch acknowledged the role played by W. Norman Brown, the noted Sanskritist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, observing at the outset that “the Museum is indebted for his successful efforts leading to the original showing of the collection and its ultimate acquisition”.¹ The tenor of the article, however, did not let on that the anonymous collection being referenced was in fact Kramrisch’s own, and that its purchase marked the culmination of several years of strategic alignments and deft negotiations. This paper considers the significance of Kramrisch’s collection formation alongside her early scholarly activities in India in the 1920s and 1930s, in relation to the subsequent arrival of both scholar and collection in the United States in the 1950s – from Kramrisch’s initial appointment at the University of Pennsylvania and the inaugural display of her collection at the PMA in 1950, to her eventual position as curator at, and the formal acquisition of forty-nine of her sculptures by, the PMA. The peregrinations of collection and scholar across continents relied on personal and professional networks as well as the navigation of institutional structures at a time of a deepening interest in Indian culture in postwar America, and particularly in the collecting and understanding of Indian sculpture.

I. First Steps. Piecing Together a Collection of Scholarly Significance

It is challenging to establish the details of how Kramrisch assembled the collection of Indian sculpture that would be so key to her life in the United States. Her writings scarcely acknowledged her ownership of the works, and by all accounts, Kramrisch preferred to keep the matter of the formation and sale of her collection to the PMA discreet, insisting on remaining anonymous in public arenas.² From her biography, however, one can determine that it was when

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Stella Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture Newly Acquired, in: *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 52/252, 1957, 30–38, here 31 (December 10, 2024).

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In a letter to W. Norman Brown from April 1950, when her collection of sculptures was first on loan to the PMA, in response to a request to sell photographs of her collection, she wrote: “I received a letter from Jean Gordon Lee, Curator of Chinese Art, Philadelphia Museum, asking my permission to photograph the sculptures and sell them to the public. They should remain copyright of the Philadelphia Museums is my request and the Museum’s as well as my own permission would have to be given should they be required for reproduction. I must insist that this loan collection remain anonymous.” Stella Kramrisch to W. Norman Brown, April 5, 1950, W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives. The PMA now acknowledges the pieces from the 1956 sale as having been “Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection”.

Kramrisch was residing in India, in the decades after her first arrival in 1922, that in addition to teaching at the University of Calcutta, she would spend many weeks every year traveling to historic sites. It was during these travels that she gradually amassed a significant personal collection [Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3]. The only known time she specifically described the process was years later in December 1956, when, likely necessitated by the sale of her collection to the PMA that year, she carefully recounted the formation of her collection in a private letter to the tax attorney Fred L. Rosenbloom:

For the major ones I worked, and for the rest I paid. Those for which I worked, I asked for in lieu of my honorarium when in charge of surveying a definite region, organising a local museum and cataloging the sculptures. For this purpose, I was granted leave from the University. The honorarium for the work varied according to the length of time spent on it. When I loved a particular sculpture to the extent that I want it to be with me forever, I suggested that in lieu of payment this sculpture should be my own.³

The field trips Kramrisch described presumably took place in the late 1920s and through the 1930s, but by the 1950s she was careful to not provide any transactional details, specifications of sites and locations of sources, or prices paid, couching her descriptions in broad terms, and explaining the absence of receipts to a matter of time elapsed since their purchase.⁴ The generality of Kramrisch's account, and her breezy suggestion that some sculptures were simply given to her "in lieu of payment", may today strike one as a calculated elision of details to gloss over any query about the terms of procurement, and one that conveniently sidestepped any questions about the transfer of pieces from archaeological sites that might technically have been deposited with the local archaeological museums and their authorities. At the same time, she recognized that her mode of acquiring her sculptures was enabled by her "unique opportunities as a scholar and explorer". One can, however, discern larger contexts and motivations for her collecting in her published works. In her article for the *PMA Bulletin*, she alluded to preexisting spoliation, and added that the gathering, collecting, and organizing of the "fragments" [Fig. 4] were a part of the process of recovery:

Time and decay, neglect and wars brought damage and destruction to many of these monuments. Though broken and scattered, their impact survives in some of their

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For the pieces that she detailed as being given to her in lieu of an honorarium, she estimated that the twelve sculptures that she acquired in this manner would be worth about \$50,820. Stella Kramrisch to Fred L. Rosenbloom, December 3, 1956, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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In the same letter to Rosenbloom, she simply stated that she never kept receipts for more than one year.



[Fig. 1]

Yakshi (Female Nature Spirit) with Hands Together in the Honoring Posture, 2nd century, sandstone, 16 1/2 × 6 1/4 × 3 1/4 inches (41.9 × 15.9 × 8.3 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-2](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 2]

The Goddess Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon (Mahishasuramardini), c. late 8th century, sandstone, 27 1/4 × 16 7/8 × 9 1/2 inches (69.2 × 42.9 × 24.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-7](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 3]

Maithuna, mid-13th century, black talc, 14 3/4 × 7 1/4 × 5 inches (37.5 × 18.4 × 12.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-18](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 4]

Male Warrior, early 11th century, sandstone, 12 3/4 × 7 1/2 × 9 1/2 inches (32.4 × 19.1 × 24.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-19](#) (December 10, 2024).

fragments. [...] The power vested in the monument was present in its parts. The entire surface was charged with meaning. [...] a particular image shines forth infused with illuminating intensity and imparts, even though it is severed from its original context, the essential impact.⁵

In her letter to Rosenbloom, Kramrisch acknowledged her work for local museums, and indeed her scholarship from this period was based on the careful salvage, organization, and study of material that had long been neglected by scholars. In articles in journals such as *Rupam* and later in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, she systematically analyzed this sculptural material, delineating in greater detail the rough categorization of archaeological material that had begun in the colonial era. While she was a scholar first and a collector second, her fellow authors in the journals in which she published included the likes of B. N. Treasurywalla, P. S. Nahar, and Ajit Ghose, who also built personal collections in tandem with their scholarly areas of interest. But in an early instance of a comparison that would prove enduring, Kramrisch was perhaps most akin to Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) who set out to write about Indian art and built a collection along the way. When Coomaraswamy had been collecting in India, he had been a man of means (his financial circumstances had altered by the time he arrived in the United States), and was able to build a collection initially for his own pleasure, and later for the purposes of institution building. Kramrisch had less disposable income to build a vast collection. In terms of the number of objects, hers was relatively small, but it nevertheless included important pieces collected by a discerning eye for quality and that dovetailed with her research interests. This was evidenced in her writings from the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, in her long and profusely illustrated 1929 article on “Pala and Sena Sculpture” in *Rupam*, although none of the included images are from her own collection, nevertheless some objects from her collection now at the PMA bear striking parallels to those referred to in the text [Fig. 5, Fig. 6].⁶

In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art (JISOA)* of which Kramrisch was the editor, Umaprasad Mookherji’s essay on “Sculptures from Candravati” included the illustration of a “Fragment of a Salabhanjika from the Harsiddhi

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Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture Newly Acquired, 13.

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Her article included images of fifty-five works, mainly from the Indian Museum, Calcutta, the Dacca Museum, and the Rajshahi Museums. Works that were in her collection that relate to the ones she refers to in her text include a votive tablet with Vishnu and the Dashavatara (PMA Acc. No. 1994-148-30), Lalita (PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-15), and an image of Buddha Subduing the Raging Elephant Nalagiri (PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-49). Stella Kramrisch, Pala and Sena Sculpture, in: *Rupam* 40, 1929, 107–126.



[Fig. 5]

Buddha Subduing the Raging Elephant Nalagiri, c. 9th century, schist, 23 1/8 × 12 1/2 × 5 1/2 inches (58.7 × 31.8 × 14 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-49](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 6]

Lalita, c. 1050–1075, phyllite, 22 1/4 × 10 5/8 × 3 1/2 inches (56.5 × 27 × 8.9 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-15](#) (December 10, 2024).

Temple”.⁷ Although the piece itself was not credited as being from her collection, the author acknowledged his indebtedness to Kramrisch in providing him with the photographs for his essay. That the photographs included views of the temple *mandapam*, as well as sculptures not only from the temples at Candravati, but also from the local museum at Jhalrapatan and finally one of Kramrisch’s own, suggest that in the preceding years, Kramrisch had traveled to Candravati for research and had presumably picked up a piece or two at that time [Fig. 7, Fig. 8].⁸ She would go on to publish the same Salabhanjika in her magnum opus *The Hindu Temple* (1946), although once again the source was not mentioned.⁹ In the second issue of the *JISOA*, in her essay on “Kalinga Temples”, Kramrisch included images from her own collection, then listed as “Private Collection, London”. These were the image of Kartikeya from Puri, a fragment of a *maithuna* couple from Bhubaneswar, and an image of Kicaka or Squatting Gana [Fig. 9, Fig. 10, Fig. 11].¹⁰

The examples above evidence that Kramrisch formed her collection as she went about her research, with pieces often directly related to her scholarly interests. Nevertheless, in a practice that would continue, her decision not to acknowledge the illustrations used in her own articles as being from the “Author’s collection”, as for instance Coomaraswamy had done in his seminal writings on Rajput paintings, raises the question of her deliberate preference to remain anonymous.¹¹ Perhaps she felt that anonymity accorded an objective distance between author and object of study, which would bolster the reception of her scholarly analysis. Such an interpretation about her motivations can only remain speculative, however, as Kramrisch left no record of her intentions in this regard. The preference for anonymity may also have been a matter of personality, for by all accounts Kramrisch was an intensely private person and discreet about her collection throughout her life.

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Plate XIII in the article, now PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-10. Umaprasad Mookherjee, Sculptures from Candravati, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 1/1, 1933, 59–62.

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These include PMA Acc. Nos. 1956-75-10 and 1956-75-11.

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Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, vol. 2, Calcutta 1946, 399.

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Plates XIX, XX, and XXIII correspond to PMA Acc. Nos. 1956-75-14, 1956-75-17, and 1956-75-40. Stella Kramrisch, Kalinga Temples, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 2/1, 1934, 43–60.

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With some exceptions. In Coomaraswamy’s early publications, of the forty-one items that he published in *Indian Drawings* (London 1910), thirteen belonged to the author, and of the thirty-seven items that he published in *Indian Drawings. Second Series, Chiefly Rājput* (London 1912), all but one belonged to the author. Finally, of the 105 items that Coomaraswamy published in *Rajput Paintings* (1916), eighty-one belonged to the author. While Kramrisch did not rely on her own collection to quite the same degree to illustrate her arguments, she also did not acknowledge the pieces from her collection in her scholarly essays. Pieces from her collection were, however, acknowledged in the catalogues for the exhibitions at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, London in 1931 and later for the Royal Academy exhibition in 1947.



[Fig. 7]

Celestial Woman Making a Mango Tree Bear Fruit, c. 10th century, sandstone, 17 × 19 1/2 × 10 1/2 inches (43.2 × 49.5 × 26.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-10](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 8]

Worshipping Goddess, c. 10th century, sandstone, 27 1/4 × 10 3/8 × 7 inches (69.2 × 26.4 × 17.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-11](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 9]

The God Karttikeya, 975–1025, schist, 22 1/2 × 12 × 4 5/8 inches (57.2 × 30.5 × 11.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-14](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 10]

Mithuna (Lovers in an Erotic Position), c. 1000–1010, sandstone, 11 1/2 × 8 × 3 1/4 inches (29.2 × 20.3 × 8.3 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-17](#) (December 10, 2024).



[Fig. 11]

Gana, c. mid- to late 13th century, khondalite, 14 1/4 × 9 × 7 3/4 inches (36.2 × 22.9 × 19.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-40](#) (December 10, 2024).

II. A Collection Worth Exhibiting

Nevertheless, among the field of scholars invested in Indian art, Kramrisch's collection was becoming known, as pieces not only were being requested for publications but were also being sought out for exhibition. Indeed, by the early 1930s there is evidence that works from her collection had found their way to London, as the earliest record of her sculpture being on display are from the Burlington Fine Arts Club's exhibition of Indian art in June 1931.¹² Organized by K. de B. Codrington, sixteen pieces from Kramrisch's collection were included, and were explicitly acknowledged as such in the accompanying catalogue. Indeed, "Dr. Stella Kramrisch" was listed as one of three women among the mostly male or institutional lenders to the exhibition.¹³ An analysis of the works included in the catalogue further reveals that while the exhibition covered both paintings and sculpture, and brought together pieces from government and private collections, among the latter only Kramrisch had lent a substantial collection of Indian sculpture.

At this stage, private collectors with interests in Indian art, such as Ajit Ghosh, P. C. Manuk, A. Chester Beatty and others, largely focused on Indian paintings, and rarely collected stone sculptures, in part because sculptural fragments from religious sites were still regarded as the domain of the archaeological museum, and less a site for connoisseurly endeavors, a view that would change in the decades to come. Collecting sculpture at the time also entailed challenges of access and did not typically enter the established antiquarian market networks for the circulation of pictures, jewelry, carpets and textiles, and small objects, in other words the realm of luxury items that were invariably objects loosened from royal treasuries, or from the ancestral collections of wealthy families. If a stray "idol" occasionally found its way into an antique shop in one of the larger Indian cities, little was known about its history or source location, and early ascriptions could often be erroneous. Stone sculpture, typically made for temples, had been associated more with the archaeological and museum contexts since the 19th century. It was in these milieux that stone sculptures from archaeological sites were studied and organized by scholars but were seldom collected in the manner of paintings or even bronze sculpture. Even Coomaraswamy – whose collection had notably entered the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston in 1917 – primarily collected paintings, and when he *did* acquire stone sculpture, he had done so on behalf of the museum, and that too on dedicated buying trips in 1921 and 1924.

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Brinda Kumar, "Exciting a Wider Interest in the Art of India". The 1931 Burlington Fine Arts Club Exhibition, in: *British Art Studies* 13, 2019, n.p.

¹³

List of Contributors, in: *Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Art of India* (exh. cat. London, Burlington Fine Arts Club), ed. by the Burlington Fine Arts Club, London 1931.

That is not to say that stone sculptures did not enter the market at all. However, they were typically intended for, or expected to be sold to, a museum whose collecting mandates extended to Indian sculpture. Padma Kaimal has discussed Jouveau Dubreuil's procurement of a set of seventeen sculptures from a site in Kanchi in southern India for the Paris-based dealer C. T. Loo in the 1920s. Kaimal observes that Dubreuil's procurement and export of the pieces was enabled by the complicity, or at least tacit awareness of, British officials, including F. H. Gravely, Superintendent of the Government Museum of Madras.¹⁴ Loo's primary interest was in placing the sculptures sourced through Dubreuil in prominent museum collections, not only to add to their prestige, but presumably also because individual collectors were less interested in purchasing such pieces for private use or placement at that time. In a significant coincidence, fifteen sculptures from this group were exhibited at the PMA in 1927.¹⁵ Even though the museum did not purchase works from the group, Loo's early sales and bequests of sculptures from this set (apart from a couple of sculptures to Baron Edward von der Heydt in the 1930s) were all made to museums in Paris and Boston. This would change after the war, for although he continued to sell to museums, individual collectors in the US, such as Avery Brundage and Christian Humann, finally began to take an interest in Indian sculpture.¹⁶ Brundage would later go on to buy a sculpture from Kramrisch.¹⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, Stella Kramrisch's collecting of sculpture was exceptional, and clearly born from a combination of her interests in the subject of medieval temple sculpture and her field work, which entailed travel to sites where she had unique access to collectable material. In contrast to many of her peers, and indeed as she had herself done for her doctoral work, once Kramrisch was in India, she no longer solely relied on photographs taken by others for research, but instead took every opportunity to travel to sites that she wished to study. As such it was a distinctive collection, and she would years later recount the process

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For a detailed account of the dispersal of the Kanchi yoginis from South India see Padma A. Kaimal, *Scattered Goddesses. Travels with the Yoginis*, Ann Arbor, MI 2012, ch. 4, How They Left. Dispersing the Kanchi Goddesses and Their Companions, 139–142.

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"Superlative examples of Indian art are the most difficult of all the oriental arts to find and study – apart from the notable collections in England, and naturally the monuments preserved *in situ* in India. No complete group of sculpture has ever before been shown in America with the exception of the museum's own temple colonnade which is of considerably later date. The opportunity to view these splendid examples of medieval Indian sculpture is, therefore, a rare one." Horace H. F. Jayne, *Mediæval Indian Sculpture*, in: *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 23/116, 1927, 15–17 (December 10, 2024).

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Kaimal, *Scattered Goddesses*, 142.

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The sculpture is a fragment of a Kushan-period Buddha image now in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Object ID: B65S10.

of how it was built, in a manner not untouched by the romantic, emphasizing the arduousness of its assembly:

Works of art of the quality of those now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art are very rare, one scarcely can find one in a thousand sculptures [...] I travelled by the general means of transport, but also a great deal by bullock carts, on elephants and camels to the remotest places for the purposes of knowing all the monuments and discovering some which had been unknown so far [...] If, on these expeditions, I badly wanted one or the other sculpture, I paid for it the price which the local priests or the village head men demanded. This required careful negotiations, repeated visits by myself or by my Indian, Brahmin assistants whom I had to engage for this purpose. On many occasions I failed to obtain the object and the money paid for travelling and in salaries and my time were lost. On the whole, I spent about as much in getting the sculptures for which I paid as I did by exchanging my honorarium for the others. I bought only four pieces in towns, one from a collection and the others from dealers. The artistic quality which alone interests me is scarcely ever to be found on the market in antique shops.¹⁸

Indeed, most collections containing pieces like hers were to be found in museums. This was evident in the famous exhibition of art from India and Pakistan held at the Royal Academy in London which took place in 1947–1948. While there were many private lenders to the painting section, most lenders of the 373 pieces in the sculpture sections of the exhibition were museums mainly in India but also abroad. Although there were some exceptional loans from private sources in this section too, the manner in which such pieces had been collected can be gauged from the fact that the “Gandhara and Minor Antiquities section”, which was the largest section by far, had loans from former British officers who had worked in the region, while the only section where Indian private collectors such as Gautam Sarabhai and Sir Cowasji Jehangir had contributed significantly was to the South Indian bronze sections. From Kramrisch’s collection of over fifty pieces, although only three pieces belonging to her were picked for the exhibition, in the section under which her objects were classified – that is, “Medieval 7th–17th century” – of the sixty-seven pieces on display, only three others were from different private sources [Fig. 12].¹⁹

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Stella Kramrisch to Fred L. Rosenbloom, December 3, 1956, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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K. de B. Codrington, who was the organizer of the exhibition, was critical of Kramrisch’s work and methodology, having given a lukewarm review of her first book *Indian Sculpture* (1933), which may explain in part his exclusion of some important pieces from her collection by the time of the 1947 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art in London, even though many more works from her collection had been included in the 1931 Burlington



[Fig. 12]

A Celestial Woman Attendant with a Vina (Stringed Instrument), 956–973, sandstone, 25 1/8 × 10 1/2 × 7 1/4 inches (63.8 × 26.7 × 18.4 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-12](#) (December 10, 2024).

The 1947 Royal Academy exhibition, celebrating the art of the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan, had garnered much interest among curators and museums in the United States as well, and there were rumors that it might even travel across the Atlantic.²⁰ Although this did not happen, an alignment of interests led the Metropolitan Museum of Art to organize an exhibition of photographs of Indian sculpture in 1949. Titled *Medieval Indian Sculpture*, the exhibition featured photographs by Raymond Burnier and opened in New York under the patronage of the Government of India in October 1949. The press release quoted the curator Alan Priest's observations of the exhibition:

while most of the larger American museums have examples of Indian sculpture [...] never in this country has there been anything like this photographic display to convey to the public the experience of visiting an Indian temple.²¹

The exhibition consisted of a series of large photographs, mostly of single figures and details from temples at Bhubaneswar, Khajuraho, and Mahoba. In a notable overlap, Burnier's photographs had been used by Kramrisch extensively – she had included them in the exhibition she organized at the Warburg Institute in London in 1940, and also used his photographs to illustrate *The Hindu Temple*. The two had also collaborated on Burnier's volume *Surasundari* (1944), published by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, which was focused on the celestial female figures from Khajuraho's temples. Thus, the initial exhibition of Burnier's photographs can be understood in the context of a burgeoning interest in Indian sculpture in America, spurred in part by the prominence accorded to sculpture in the 1947 Royal Academy exhibition, and was a timely foreshadowing of Kramrisch's collection that would soon be exhibited at the PMA. Indeed, the New York exhibition was on the radar of the curators at the PMA, and would later travel to Philadelphia in 1951, opening alongside the first installation of the Kramrisch collection at the museum.²²

Fine Arts Club (BFAC) exhibition in which Codrington had played a role on the organizing committee.

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“[T]he other day I was in New York and heard through C. T. Loo that the Indian show which is at Burlington House in London now is coming to this country [...]. From articles in various English publications I have seen, it looks to be a fine thing, and I was just wondering whether it were true that it was coming here, and if so where.” Jean Gordon Lee to W. Norman Brown, December 29, 1947, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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Exhibition of Photographs of Medieval Hindu Temple Sculpture Opens Today at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 6, 1949, [The Metropolitan Museum of Art Press Kits and Press Releases](#), The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives (December 10, 2024).

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The notice in the section “Exhibitions and Events” read “Opens March 11 – INDIAN SCULPTURE – 60 works from Oxford, London and Museum Collections. 100 photographic enlargements of Indian Sculpture by Raymond Burnier”, in: *The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin* 45/224, 1950, 74.

III. Peregrinations. Kramrisch and Her Collection in the US

In 1935, W. Norman Brown [Fig. 13], the Sanskrit scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, who also served as the curator for Indian art at the PMA, wrote in an article titled *Indian Art in America*:

With but one distinguished exception there is no city in America where it is possible to get a complete conspectus of Indian art. The one exception is Boston, where the Museum of Fine Arts, with the guidance of Dr. Coomaraswamy, has assembled a collection of Indian art that is one of the world's foremost.²³

As I have argued elsewhere, Coomaraswamy had played a formative role in fostering interest in Indian art among museum curators in the United States, at the same time as the role of art in the study of Indian culture was being increasingly appreciated by scholars such as W. Norman Brown, with whom Coomaraswamy maintained a collegial relationship.²⁴ At the PMA too, Coomaraswamy had advised on the first installation of the famous South Indian pillared temple hall at the museum as early as 1919. While the aforementioned *South Indian Sculpture of the Medieval Period* exhibition from 1927 that featured works from the collection of C. T. Loo, and a gift of twenty-nine sculptures from the dealer Nasli Heeramaneck in 1931, served to further affirm the museum's growing interest in Indian art, the PMA was not one of the museums to purchase Indian sculpture from Loo, while the Heeramaneck gift included works that were mostly modest in scale and often quite weathered. Therefore, the chance to exhibit and potentially acquire high-quality examples, such as those in the Kramrisch collection, was a rare opportunity that the PMA did not want to pass up.

Brown and Kramrisch had first gotten to know one another in the 1930s, and when she was in India, teaching at Calcutta. The two had maintained a correspondence, with Brown submitting articles to the *JISOA*, which Kramrisch edited, including for a special volume on Coomaraswamy.²⁵ Brown, in his capacity as curator at the PMA, along with Jean Gordon Lee, who was the Curator for Chinese Art, had closely followed the progress of the 1947 Royal Academy show and had also learned that only a handful of Kramrisch's sculptures were in that special exhibition, while the larger part of her col-

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W. Norman Brown, *Indian Art in America*, in: *Parnassus* 7/6, 1935, 16–19.

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For more on Coomaraswamy's early role in shaping collections of Indian art in the United States see Brinda Kumar, *Collecting with Éclat. Coomaraswamy and the Framing of Indian Art in American Museums*, in: Katherine Paul and Allysa Peyton (eds.), *Arts of South Asia. Cultures of Collecting*, Gainesville, FL 2019, 129–150.

²⁵

Kramrisch herself may have only met Coomaraswamy once in Calcutta, although they corresponded in the 1930s. By the time of Kramrisch's arrival in the United States for the first time, Coomaraswamy had passed away, a few years earlier in 1947.



[Fig. 13]
William Norman Brown (1892–1975), March 15, 1961, 6 × 4 inches (15 × 10 cm), UPF 1.9 AR,
Alumni Records Collection, Box 290, University Archives and Records Center, [University
of Pennsylvania](#) (December 10, 2024).

lection was on loan to other museums in England. In 1948 Brown's personal relationship with Kramrisch allowed him to approach her with an offer to have her collection shipped to the United States to be exhibited at the PMA. Until then Kramrisch's collection had been loaned to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and Oxford in England. The correspondence between Kramrisch and Brown from 1948–1949 reveals that at the time, Kramrisch was increasingly uncertain about her prospects in newly independent India, and was clearly conflicted about the matter, confessing that

Since we met I have been thinking many times about the possibility of my going to U.S.A. Material conditions and prospects for me here in India are not good. At times I am very depressed – but I cannot tear myself away from India.²⁶

Barbara Stoler Miller, in her biographical essay, and others who also knew Kramrisch personally, suggest that she was reticent to talk about her Calcutta days. In the early years, she had faced some difficulty as a woman in the male-dominated field of Indian academics and intellectuals that comprised her milieu in Calcutta. After independence, in the wake of prevailing nationalist sentiment, compounded by the fact that her husband Laszlo Neményi, had decided to work for the newly formed government in Pakistan, she felt further marginalized at the University of Calcutta.²⁷

Moreover, Kramrisch was also unsure of the status of her collection in England. She was loath to sell it piecemeal, and in the postwar economic climate in Europe, it was unlikely that any museum would purchase the collection in its entirety. She was therefore quite amenable to a loan to the PMA. The V&A, on the other hand, was reluctant to comply, particularly since they feared that Kramrisch may be tempted to sell the collection in America and wanted to be able to retain it in England. In his letters to Fiske Kimball about the collection, Leigh Ashton, then director of the V&A, revealed this unease and was discouraging of the collection's onward loan for exhibition, noting:

I assume you have received photographs of the collection as, despite the very high quality, a large proportion of the groups represent couples engaged in the sexual act. While the quality is of the very highest order the public has complained a good deal about its exhibition and I am merely underlining this in order that you may be perfectly clear as to what you are getting [...] I have also written to Dr. Kramrisch saying that I assume she is not going to sell the collec-

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Stella Kramrisch to W. Norman Brown, August 4, 1948, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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Maryanne Conheim, Art Expert's Jewel of a Life. Feast, Famine, Love, Death, in: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 4, 1978, 1–2H.

tion, otherwise I should oppose an Export License as the quality is of exceptional standard.²⁸

After repeated reassurances from both Kimball and Kramrisch, the Export License was procured, and by the summer of 1949, plans for a spring exhibition of the collection were penciled into the PMA calendar.²⁹ The sculptures arrived in Philadelphia for exhibition for a loan period of five years. Jean Gordon Lee and W. Norman Brown oversaw the installation of the exhibition, which was opened in the spring of 1950 by Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, the Indian Ambassador to the United States.³⁰

Nevertheless Ashton's fears had not been unfounded, for barely a month after the opening of the exhibition, to warm reviews by both the public and museum, Brown broached the subject of the collection's acquisition with Kramrisch.³¹ The timing of his missive was fortuitous, as Kramrisch's life was in sudden flux – the very day before Brown wrote to her, Kramrisch's husband had been discovered shot dead on a beach in Karachi in an apparent suicide. Although they had not been close or cohabited for many years, with Neményi's death Kramrisch felt her position in India to be even more vulnerable. In his negotiations with her, Brown needed to manage his personal friendship and his professional interests and ended up being the go-between for the museum and Kramrisch

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Leigh Ashton to Fiske Kimball, November 8, 1948, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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"Over a month ago I sent you a letter in which I copied the contents of a letter to me by Sir Leigh Ashton. Should it not have reached you I repeat its contents: "...I hope this does not mean that Philadelphia is going to buy your collection. If this is so, it seriously affects the question as to whether we can give you an Export License as we should wish in view of the long relationship between this country and India, that this museum should have the chance of purchasing this collection..." I reassured Sir Leigh Ashton that the collection was going to Philadelphia on loan as it had been in the V&A Museum." Stella Kramrisch to Fiske Kimball, January 9, 1949, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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"In early spring the Galleries adjoining the Indian Temple were installed with an anonymous loan collection of Indian sculpture and our own treasures in that field." R. Sturgis Ingersoll, A Review of the Year. Presented at the Annual Meeting on June 12, 1950, in: *The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin* 45/226, 1950, 107–119, here 107 (December 10, 2024).

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"At last the exhibition is up and has been received with a great deal of interest and admiration. I think that the general public's eyes have been opened to the beauty of Indian Sculpture more by your pieces than anything they have seen for a long time." Jean Gordon Lee to Stella Kramrisch, March 26, 1950, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. "Your pieces are being highly appreciated at the Museum, the President of the Museum Board and the Director have a feeling that it would be advantageous to the Museum to try to acquire them as a whole. As you can well imagine, that would suit me since I would like to see them kept here in Philadelphia. Of course, the immediate question is at what price you would sell them [...]. Since I am on the Museum staff, but at the same time your personal friend, I hesitate to give you any very strongly worded advice. It would, of course, be a simple transaction from your point of view to sell the collection as a whole, and be a convenience to do so." W. Norman Brown to Stella Kramrisch, April 28, 1950, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. The copy of the letter among Fiske Kimball's papers also contained a handwritten note referring to the initial price of \$50,000 offered, as a reminder, but the note says, "She says these figures were before her husband's suicide now collection is her only resource, wants minimum of 60. I phoned."

from 1949, when the subject of the loan of the collection first came up, until its final acquisition in 1956.

On learning of Kramrisch's willingness to sell, Fiske Kimball seized upon the opportunity to rally support for the purchase of the collection, and impressed upon the president of the museum, R. Sturgis Ingersoll, the need to do so. The two men recognized Kramrisch's desire to keep the collection whole, and in his annual report in 1951, Ingersoll advocated for its retention at the PMA since Philadelphia was home to a major center in the study of the arts and languages and literature of India, and hence the museum would be a fitting home for the collection.³² As an architectural historian, Kimball too had a deep regard for Kramrisch's work on *The Hindu Temple*, and understood the relationship between the individual sculptures and the whole temple form, which Kramrisch highlighted in her work. He no doubt saw the addition of a collection like Kramrisch's as an ideal complement to the setting of the PMA with its preexisting temple hall (even though it was from a different region to most of Kramrisch's pieces) and understood that the addition of this group of works would boost the overall status of the PMA's collection. In his letters to Ingersoll, Kimball highlighted the uniqueness and range of the Kramrisch collection, as well as its prestige. Having been formed by the preeminent scholar on Indian sculpture, the quality of the pieces, he argued, were second to none and compared particularly favorably with the collections to be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or the MFA in Boston.³³

Kimball also argued that the reputation of the collection was further enhanced by the fact some pieces had been part of the London show and had even been illustrated there.

We now have the illustrated volume on the Burlington House exhibition of 1947–1948, of the Art of India, edited by [Leigh] Ashton, and I have looked it over with Miss [Jean Gordon] Lee [...]. Of 300 numbers in sculpture listed (including many great ones from the Indian government), three were lent by Dr. Stella Kramrisch, and those illustrated (say 150) included one of hers [Fig. 14]. This is very creditable to

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"The loan collection of Indian sculpture continues with us. It is available to the Museum for purchase at what is considered by all who have given thought to the matter a modest price. The owner desires the collection to be kept intact and believes that its final home should be in Philadelphia, the city in America regarded as pre-eminent in the study of the arts and languages and literature of India. It is my hope that during the ensuing months, members of the Museum will examine that extraordinary collection and that eventually a donor or donors will be found to present it to the Museum". Ingersoll, Review of the Year, 60.

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"What Leigh Ashton wrote about the Kramrisch collection was: 'The quality is of the very highest order.' [...] I called Norman Brown to ask what book would be best on the mediaeval sculpture, and he said Dr. Kramrisch's own on that topic – although naturally it deals mostly with the major monuments in place in India [...]. He said Coomaraswamy's general book on Indian sculpture stresses more the earlier stuff. Boston is stronger in that. He volunteered that, for quality, the group here outdoes New York – I am sure for quantity also." Fiske Kimball to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, May 3, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.



[Fig. 14]

Serpent Pillar (Nagastambha), c. late 9th–10th century, gneiss, 41 1/4 × 18 × 9 3/4 inches (104.8 × 45.7 × 24.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, [Acc. No. 1956-75-45](#) (December 10, 2024).

the collection. These three pieces are here, and it surely adds to their value and interest that they were in the London show [...]. The Boston Museum, which is the richest over here in the field, lent two pieces of sculpture, one illustrated (among seven works of art lent by them) and the Metropolitan lent no sculpture (two paintings, one illustrated).³⁴

The correspondence underscores the PMA's ambitions as well as its sense of rivalry with other US museums in striving for the collection's acquisition, even though it would take some years still before this would come to pass.

At the same time as Kimball and Ingersoll's correspondence, Brown also undertook extensive efforts to source funds to establish Kramrisch as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania, which began offering its first full program on South Asian Studies in the academic year 1949–1950. He succeeded in securing funding initially through the Bollingen Foundation and later through the Rockefeller Foundation, that enabled Kramrisch to teach at the University of Pennsylvania, which was becoming the leading center for the study of India in the United States in no small measure due to Brown's own efforts. Yet Kramrisch's continued appointment was far from certain, and she was required to return to Calcutta, where the university had only granted her a leave of absence for her guest appointment at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1952, as she was about to embark for India for a period of research and to complete work on a new book, Kramrisch met Chadbourne Gilpatric, an officer for the humanities division at the Rockefeller Foundation, and was subsequently given a grant-in-aid for \$500. The memorandum that accompanied the grant stated:

Dr. Stella Kramrisch is one of the outstanding authorities on Indian art [...]. Her interests and knowledge range through Indian architecture, painting, music, dance and drama, both classical and contemporary, and her studies have taken her to practically all the important art centers in India and have given her acquaintance with leading artists, art critics, and cultural leaders. [...] In view of her many contacts and perceptiveness, it would be useful to have her survey and report on promising artists and art critics in India, and also investigate possibilities of a systematic study in the role of festivals in Indian life today. Information of this character would be submitted to the Humanities officers for their planning purposes in the area, and it is understood that she would not

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Fiske Kimball to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, September 13, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

make known to Indians any RF [Rockefeller Foundation] interest.³⁵

In Kramrisch's seventeen-page confidential and wide-ranging report that followed from May 1953, she covered several topics, including an assessment of the state of literature, poetry, the burgeoning film industry, dance, and music. Singling out the visual arts for critical review, her observations were scathing:

If the literary scene in Bengal is bright this can hardly be said about the visual arts. The younger generation of painters are spell-bound by Jamini Roy or they are hypnotized by any or several of the phases of Western painting which lie between post impressionism and abstract art. The latter has as yet but a few practitioners in India (and Bengal) and strangely enough these are young women painters [...]. It would require years of visual education to bring into existence in India a public who can see art [...]. The practicing artist has his public in the Western-educated intellectuals in towns amongst whom they [there] are hardly any patrons, although pictures are being bought occasionally. The Indian Government too is now giving scholarships though one would ask to what purpose for there is little scope in the 'artist' themselves and in facilities or opportunities in India for a serious quest in art, or for a place of its results in the life of the country [...]. The names of many of the well-known artists in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi could be strung together on a brittle chain of contemporary fame.³⁶

She dismissed the work of Indian artists as derivative of Western art and decried the lack of any criticism whatsoever, concluding her appraisal with a biting summation: "For all practical purposes visual art is dead and being murdered in modern India."³⁷ Continuing in her report, Kramrisch did, however, elaborate on what in her estimation could be remedies to the dire situation in the form of proper training with adequately paid teachers, and the awakening

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Grant-In-Aid Authorization, Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

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Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

³⁷

"Everyone [sic] of the Western art movements of individual artists can be recognized in their diminished selves in Indian fancy dress, in the innumerable exhibitions which are held throughout the years in the large towns of India [...]. There is no standard of criticism, no sense of quality amongst the "educated," i.e., Westernised Indian nor had it time to develop amongst those who turned away from Westernization. Gandhian "simplicity" protects the worst offenders, "Khadi" homespun and woven fabrics, are disfigured by virulent, clashing colors in effete patterns. The average home of the "educated" and or well-to-do man about town would give the measure of the incomparably poor standard of "taste." It is far below the level of the low standing of "living" of the masses." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

of the need for art through patronage, which she identified in the burgeoning interest by Marwari collectors such as Radha Krishna Jalan and Gopi Krishna Kanoria. Nevertheless, she noted that as connoisseurs and discerning patrons, they could not find the quality that matched their interest should it have extended to contemporary art.³⁸ Her subsequent remarks on the state of Indian sculpture were no less charitable:

In comparison to the masses of painted canvases and paper on view exhibitions which are part of the make believe cultural activities of the Indian towns, sculptures occupy a fraction of space and attention. This is more disheartening if one looks back [to] the five thousand years of Indian art which had found in sculpture their truest medium.

Kramrisch's indisputably negative report on the state of Indian painting and sculpture was likely symptomatic of many factors; by this stage not only was she evidently bitter from the hostilities she had experienced at the University of Calcutta, but also her priorities had diverged from exponents of modern Indian art, the center of which was shifting away from Calcutta to other cities. For although when she had first arrived in India in the 1920s, Kramrisch had been at the forefront of modern Indian art criticism in Calcutta, had been instrumental in the exhibition of Bauhaus works in India, and had championed the works of Gaganendranath Tagore, by the 1950s her interests lay squarely in the traditional arts of India and in temple sculpture. Thus, it is conceivable that as she felt her influence and importance slipping in India, she found a more sympathetic and supportive environment for her priorities in the United States.

IV. "Making Friends and Influencing People." The Case for Kramrisch and Indian Sculpture

Upon her return to Philadelphia, thanks to the efforts of Brown, Kramrisch was able to resume her position at the University of Pennsylvania. Brown also advocated for her appointment as Curator of Indian Art at the PMA – till this moment he had held the position, but in an unpaid capacity, and was willing to step down in favor of Kramrisch. Once again Fiske Kimball was energetic in his efforts to find money for this endeavor and approached Nelson and John D. Rockefeller 3rd. As part of their larger diplomatic and developmental initiatives of the 1950s, the Rockefeller brothers were active in the postwar period in promoting awareness of Asian culture among Americans. In a letter to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Kimball humorously noted, "Stella Kramrisch is quite a wonderful bird to put salt on the tail of. She will also make good relations

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"[T]hey begin to look – in vain – for contemporary art worthy of their attention." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

between U.S. and India.”³⁹ Consequently, the PMA made an application for a grant to the Rockefeller Foundation to fund Kramrisch’s curatorial position at the museum and for her to continue her teaching activities at the University of Pennsylvania for a period of five years. Advocating on her behalf, Kimball observed:

The main position of Dr. Kramrisch for the next five years would be Professor (not Visiting Professor) at the University of Pennsylvania, but she would also take over anything that may need to be done here in relation to Indian art [...]. Dr. Kramrisch, besides being a very attractive woman “of uncertain age”, is a demon scholar. There is not the smallest doubt that if she lives five years, as she should, she will go on with her teaching, her publications, and her curatorship, as well as making friends and influencing people in favour of India.⁴⁰

Once again Kimball argued for Kramrisch’s international reputation; he highlighted her connection to Coomaraswamy and presented her as his intellectual successor, while noting that the older scholar had been a promoter of her during his lifetime. The comparison would not end there, for Kimball also observed, “The limitation is that the private collections of Indian art in America are few”,⁴¹ alluding to the fact that Coomaraswamy had not only sold his own collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and negotiated a position as its keeper but had been instrumental in building the collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Freer Gallery in the 1920s and 1930s. In the American context, he presented a clear precedent for the purchase of Kramrisch’s collection and her appointment at the PMA. In some quarters, however, the parallels were interpreted less advantageously. While evaluating the appli-

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Fiske Kimball to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, March 10, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

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“We are making our application wholly on behalf of Dr. Norman Brown, who is head of the Department of South Asia Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He has built up a wonderful department of studies of the language and culture of India, Pakistan and other Southeast Asia regions. He has had Dr. Stella Kramrisch on his staff for several years – the supporting grant for her (I believe from the Old Dominion or Avalon Foundation) expires this June. Over there, she is Visiting Professor in the Art of South Asia, but she does way beyond art and has indeed made endless friends for India in Philadelphia and in the University. Norman Brown has acted without salary as Curator of Indian Art here for many years, and he is prepared to step down from that title in her favour. The University Museum, of the University of Pennsylvania, itself has fine collections of Indian art, but here we have more, especially with the inclusion of 250 [sic] pieces of Indian sculpture, all of it formerly on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and to Oxford University. (At the beginning of the war, we paid to have all this brought over here, and it has been here ever since, very magnificently installed and much admired along with our own Indian things) [...]. I cannot predict for you the future of the Indian collection in this Museum, except that like every other department we shall push it to the limit of our means and try to keep and improve our relative position in this country.” Fiske Kimball to Charles B. Fahs, April 7, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

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Fiske Kimball to Chadbourne Gilpatrick, The Rockefeller Foundation, May 10, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

cation, the Rockefeller Foundation sought the opinions of other experts in the field including Benjamin Rowland and Joseph Campbell, who shared their assessments of Kramrisch. Rowland, for his part, while affirming his regard for Kramrisch as “one of the most distinguished scholars of Indian art”, was nevertheless cautious about the precedent established by Coomaraswamy, who, he noted upon the sale of his collection to the MFA Boston, became increasingly indifferent to his curatorial responsibilities, preferring instead to devote his time to theoretical scholarly activities. As such, given her reputation as an academic scholar, Rowland expressed some reservations about Kramrisch’s commitment to museum work.⁴² As further part of their due diligence, the Rockefeller Foundation also checked Kramrisch’s name against the public record to ensure she had no known Communist affiliations, a matter of heightened concern for American organizations operating in the McCarthy era.⁴³ Once Kramrisch had cleared the necessary background checks, the Rockefeller Foundation confirmed the grant for “Intercultural Understanding” to the PMA supporting Kramrisch’s appointments in June 1954.⁴⁴

At the PMA, Kramrisch’s position as curator would be the sweetener in her negotiations to sell the collection to the museum, for unlike in Coomaraswamy’s time, when he had been fortunate to find a supporter in Denman Ross for his collection’s purchase in 1917 by the MFA Boston, by the 1950s, Kramrisch’s collection was garnering interest among the growing proponents of Indian art, and especially of Indian sculpture, among certain collectors and museums in the US. At the time of the PMA’s initial negotia-

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“From the Museum’s point of view I am rather dubious as to whether Miss Kramrisch would be very much interested in curating or adding to the collection. It is apparent, of course, from her own collection, now on exhibit in the Philadelphia Museum, that she is certainly a person of great taste and discrimination, but I must also point out to you as a parallel that once the late Dr. Coomaraswamy was appointed Research Fellow in the Boston Museum, his interest in the improvement of and arrangement of the collections completely vanished. My point is that if the Philadelphia museum wants a research scholar in residence, there is no one I could recommend more highly than Miss Kramrisch. If the museum also wants an active curator, I have my doubts.” Benjamin Rowland to Chadbourne Gilpatrick, May 21, 1954 Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

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A couple of years earlier in 1952, at the time of her confidential grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Foundation, the notes from a conversation Kramrisch had with Chadbourne Gilpatrick on June 8 reference the case of the economic historian Daniel Thorner who lost his academic position upon refusing to cooperate with McCarthy: “Miss K reports there has been something of a hubbub at the University of Pennsylvania concerning Daniel Thorner. About a month ago the University administration indicated that it did not wish to continue Thorner’s appointment. This was protested by [W.N.B] Brown, and no final decision has been reached. In the meantime, Thorner has modest outside help to work for a year in India.” Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center. Thorner would end up living in India till 1960.

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In the Humanities grant for Intercultural Understanding under which the funds were disbursed, it was noted that “In the present Humanities program, emphasis is placed on the significance of art in gaining a fuller understanding of major cultures. The recent grant to Cornell University for Miss Holt’s study of Indonesian art is paralleled to the new interpretations Dr. Kramrisch will give to the role of the arts in Indian culture.” Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

tions with Kramrisch, Norman Brown had tried to interest George P. Bickford, the Cleveland-based industrialist and art collector, in the Kramrisch collection.⁴⁵ Bickford himself was a patron of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and had been responsible for supporting curator Sherman Lee's efforts in building the museum collections of Asian art there. Lee and Bickford had broached the subject of her collection's purchase with Kramrisch, a matter that she seriously considered, until the PMA was able to match the offer and retain the collection. Nevertheless, Bickford's interest in Indian art would persist and he would build an impressive personal collection that would find its way into the Cleveland Museum of Art.⁴⁶ Drawing largely from his own experiences, Lee's observations in his introduction to the catalogue of the Bickford Collection were telling when he noted that,

The war [WWII] in the Pacific and South Asian theatres changed all this and exposed hundreds of thousands to the 'mystery' and excitement of Indian art and society. The earlier writings of Coomarsawamy were now read in the light of fresh and direct experience.⁴⁷

For others like John D. Rockefeller 3rd it was through an extensive trip through South and Southeast Asia that he found himself very drawn to Asia and its cultures, motivating him to found both the Asia Society and its Asia House Gallery, not to mention building a fine personal collection also dominated by Indian sculpture.⁴⁸

Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued that by the mid-century and following the 1947 exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, the reliance on and adoption of art historical frameworks that valorized Indian sculpture above all other art forms could be seen in the early decades following independence in India, but also in the US. This

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"When the pieces were brought to this country, they were meant only for exhibition at the Museum on a five-year loan. The question of purchase did not arise. Dr. Kramrisch's feeling is that she would like these pieces housed in a museum where they would be available for the public to see. This corresponds to the Museum's own desires. Since seeing you I have received word that the University has received the funds to continue Dr. Kramrisch on its staff at least a year. While she is here she makes regular use of those pieces in her teaching." W. Norman Brown to George P. Bickford, May 3, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

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Until the December 2013 announcement of the acquisition of the Benkaim collection of Indian paintings, the Cleveland Museum of Art was primarily known for its strengths in Indian sculpture, in no small measure due to George P. Bickford's collection.

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Sherman Lee, Preface, in: *Indian Art from the George P. Bickford Collection. Catalog* (exh. cat. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art), ed. by Stanislaw J. Czuma, Cleveland 1975, v.

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"Our collecting has always been closely related to our feeling for these Asian friends. It also expresses our hope of gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of these older civilizations." Sherman E. Lee, *Asian Art. Selections from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd*, New York 1970, 8. Speaking of the Rockefeller collection, Sherman Lee wrote: "[It] is rich in Indian sculpture and in Chinese and Japanese porcelain, categories we now recognize as two areas of prime innovation and creation in Eastern Asia." *Ibid.*, 9.

emphasis, which especially highlighted sculpture, and particularly ancient and medieval stone sculpture, to forward “a new art history” had been developed since the 1920s and 1930s and foregrounded sculpture as “the prime genre of India’s ‘great art’ heritage”.⁴⁹ Stella Kramrisch played no small role in this process, for in her writings from the 1920s onwards, and particularly in her seminal volume *Indian Sculpture* (1933), she argued for a system of internal aesthetic coherence in the appreciation of Indian sculpture. Her preface to the book opened with:

Anyone with an understanding of art in general and a knowledge, however slight, of Indian things, will, on being shown a work of Indian sculpture, unfailingly label it Indian. Differences in age and origin, however clearly marked to the discerning eye, when pointed out to the outsider, will be apprehended only with more or less difficulty. There is something so strange, and at the same time unique, in any Indian work of art that its ‘Indianness’ is felt first of all, and what it is, is seen only on second thought.⁵⁰

This emphasis on the essential and felt qualities of art took forward Ananda Coomaraswamy’s project in the study of Indian art, where the spiritual and the transcendental became the defining marks of India’s fine arts heritage. Indeed, in spite of different intellectual lineages, and arguably differences in the trajectories of their scholarship, there was a broad congruency in Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch’s interpretations of Indian art, as evident in the former’s largely positive review of the latter’s book.⁵¹ Kramrisch’s interpretation that “‘classically Indian’ refers more to the quality than to the chronology of art in India”, resonated with Coomaraswamy’s own ahistorical analysis, while his conclusion would forecast Kramrisch’s own later assessment of the state of the visual arts in India when he wrote: “only the folk arts are now ‘classically Indian,’ while the bourgeois and even the aristocratic milieus have broken with the

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Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories. Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York 2004, 188.

50

Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, ix.

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Ratan Parimoo has discussed this contrast in his essay: Stella Kramrisch. Indian Art History and German Art-Historical Studies (Including the Vienna School), in: id. (ed.), *Essays in New Art History. Studies in Indian Sculpture. Regional Genres and Interpretations*, New Delhi 2000. While Coomaraswamy differed with Kramrisch’s use of the terms “form” and “motifs”, he nevertheless endorsed the book by saying that “Dr. Kramrisch’s clearly written, well illustrated and well documented volume is nevertheless within its chosen limits probably the best existing introduction to the subject”. A. K. Coomaraswamy, Review of: Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54/2, 1934, 219.

past”.⁵² Thus by the mid-century the preponderant understanding of Indian art was premised on its distinction from all Western aesthetic frameworks, and Kramrisch’s scholarship signaled this shift away from the prevailing primacy of stylistic difference in the writing of art history. As Guha-Thakurta has observed,

Indian art could come into its own only through posing of a sharp East-West dichotomy in aesthetics: through a construed opposition between Western ‘realism’ and Indian ‘idealism,’ [...] Henceforth, the spiritual and the transcendental became the defining marks of India’s fine arts heritage, the code that could reduce and compress its complex history around a common essence.⁵³

Kramrisch’s writings from the 1930s and 1940s all contributed to the center staging of Indian sculpture as the primary expression of the spiritual essence at the heart of Indian art.⁵⁴

However, not all reviews of Kramrisch’s *Indian Sculpture* were as complimentary, and some scholars decried her emphasis on abstract ideas and philosophy, which sidestepped aesthetic judgment or the assessment of a formalist evolution of artistic forms.⁵⁵ This vein of critique would continue in reviews of some of Kramrisch’s later publications as well, when W. G. Archer and Benjamin Rowland would take issue with her abstruse prose, and her eschewal of art historical methods such as stylistic analysis.⁵⁶ For Kramrisch,

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Coomaraswamy, Review of: Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, 221. Such an assessment also anticipated Kramrisch’s groundbreaking contributions later in her life in the organization of the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (1968). On *Unknown India*, see Darielle Mason, ‘Timing the Timeless. Stella Kramrisch’s “Unknown India”,’ in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual – Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 5/4, 2024, 813–861.

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Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 186.

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Kramrisch continued this project in her writings in America, principally *The Art of India* (London 1954) and *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia 1960), the latter of which catalogued the holdings at the PMA, including her own recently accessioned collection.

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K. de B. Codrington, in his review for *The Burlington Magazine*, took issue with Kramrisch’s approach on several counts, from her reliance on archaeology to trace the development of form, her choice of examples, to her grounding her interpretations in Indian philosophy as the basis for an aesthetics that was distinct from that of the West. Codrington further suggested that methodologically, Kramrisch’s metaphysical framework could not contribute to art history: “It may be pointed out, both with regard to such a philosophy and western modernism, that there is a tendency on the part of such critics to substitute a rather indefinite appreciation of the artist’s state of mind, for a definite appreciation of the works of art in question. It is, after all, the business of art-criticism to discuss works of art.” Id., Review of: *Indian Sculpture* by St. Kramrisch, in: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 64/375, 1934, 291–92, here 292.

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Rowland, in his review of Kramrisch’s *The Art of India*, wrote: “In the present book the fault seems to lie in such a uniformity of metaphysical interpretation that the reader is unable to gain any real sense of development or change other than that conditioned by the requirements of iconography [...]. However admirable Dr. Kramrisch’s condensation of the subtleties of the Indian philosophy of art may be, one wonders just how far even this bril-

in contrast to Rowland for instance, the explanation of the style along a historical trajectory was of secondary importance to a far more important need to understand the ideas and philosophies that led to the emergence of forms. Yet if some art historians lamented Kramrisch's overemphasis on the metaphysical frameworks and symbolic aspects of Indian art, it was precisely these elements that she believed were important to foreground in the study of Indian art, and she often found sympathetic audiences for her views in other quarters. When the Warburg Institute approached the India Society in London to organize an exhibition on photographs of Indian art and culture in a bid to highlight India's importance and acknowledge India's contribution to the war effort, Kramrisch was invited to organize the exhibition in 1940.⁵⁷ The note written by Kramrisch in a memorandum outlined that the exhibition intended "to show how the Indian builder and craftsman have given shape to the religious ideas of the Indian people [...] the monuments convey, by their form and contents, the essential conceptions of the Indian mind".⁵⁸

Later in the 1940s, she built upon her earlier work in her two-volume magnum opus *The Hindu Temple* (1946), in which she approached the temple as a symbolic form, often basing her analysis on religious texts and architectural canons, her interpretation of Indian sculpture and architecture was a break from colonial archaeological readings of the structures. As demonstrated in *The Hindu Temple*, Kramrisch's interest in the religious symbolism underlying Indian art and thought was in sympathy with the Bollingen Foundation's mandate that had been founded in 1945 for the dissemination of Carl Jung's ideas in the scholarly field, and the foundation provided initial funding for her to lecture at the University of Pennsylvania when she first arrived in America in 1950.

The timing was propitious, for at the same time in public institutions such as universities and museums in the United States there was a more concerted turn to studying India and collecting Indian

liant performance can really lead Western readers to a formal and aesthetic appreciation, without at least some systematized analysis from a stylistic point of view and within a frame of reference that has some familiarity for them." Benjamin Rowland Jr., Review of: Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75/2, 1955, 138.

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"[W]e of the India Society, have been approached by the Warburg Institute with a proposal for arrangements to be made for an Exhibition of specially prepared photographs illustrating the great contributions to art and culture of the people of India. [...] It is felt that a time when India's unreserved cooperation in the War is a matter of vital importance no opportunity should be lost in this country of making known to a wider public than that which is already interested the variety and extent of Indian contributions in this way to human progress, and her worthiness to fill a great place in the future of our Empire [...] It is proposed that the organization of the Exhibition should be in the hands of Dr. Kramrisch, a lecturer in Indian Art both in the Post-Graduate Department and at the Courtauld Institute of the University of London." India Office Papers, British Library, MSS EUR/F147/78. For more on the 1940 Warburg Institute exhibition, see Sarah Victoria Turner, 'Alive and Significant'. 'Aspects of Indian Art'. Stella Kramrisch and Dora Gordine in South Kensington c. 1940, in: *Wasafiri* 27/2, 2012, 40–51.

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As quoted in Barbara Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, in: ead. (ed.) *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia 1983, 3–29, here 18.

art. Articulating the mandate for “South Asia Studies in the University of Pennsylvania”, W. Norman Brown emphasized “America’s national need for knowledge of South Asia” in which art history was also being envisaged as a key component for the postwar project of Area Studies.⁵⁹ As Fredrick Asher has pointed out, it was in mid-century America that “Indian art, as part of the disciplinary practice of art history, entered the academy”.⁶⁰ As for museums, by the mid-century, collections of Indian art in America were to be found principally in large museums in Boston, New York, Washington DC, and Philadelphia. Since their founding in the 19th century, many of these museums vied for prestigious collections, initially over their holdings of Western art, but the competitiveness often carried over into other fields as well. Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, however, stood at the forefront of Indian art in America, primarily aided by the collection and position of Ananda Coomaraswamy at the museum for three decades, from 1917 till his death in 1947. After Coomaraswamy there was no museum appointee who specialized in Indian art, and it was often the East Asian or Islamic art specialists whose curatorial duties extended to any Indian collections, as was the case with Jean Gordon Lee at the PMA. Nevertheless, in the decades preceding World War II concerted efforts had been made to expand the American public’s understanding of India through institutions such as the Watumull Foundation (which funded Indian students to study in the US), the Institute of Pacific Relations, and the American Oriental Society.⁶¹ By 1935, Brown had observed, with reference to an excavation then just commencing and being led by the American School of Indic and Iranian Studies and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts at a site in the Indus Valley, that “we might consider further evidences of America’s interest in the culture of India”.⁶² The potential was considered that as a consequence of this

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W. Norman Brown in his capacity as Chairman of South Asia Regional Studies provided an account of the program at the University of Pennsylvania, and listing the resources then available to students, noted that there were fifteen museums in America containing “fair to excellent collections of South Asian art or ethnographic material”, adding in the following sentence that “clearly these resources are not enough to meet America’s national need for knowledge of South Asia”. Further on in the same paper he added that “Art history too is of interest to us. We want to know the people’s aesthetic stimuli and responses. What are the theories of art, whether in architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, drama, music? In every South Asian country the arts are changing today. The surviving tradition of sculpture and handicraft is important. New developments demand our attention as well. Hence the University of Pennsylvania program has a separate appointment for South Asian art.” South Asia Studies in the University of Pennsylvania, 1949, in: W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

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In his essay Asher lays greater emphasis on the roles of Ludwig Bachhofer, Alfred Salmony, and Benjamin Rowland in creating a place for Indian art within their respective academic institutions. Fredrick Asher, *The Shape of Indian Art History*, in: Vishakha Desai (ed.), *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*, New Haven, CT 2007, 3–14, here 5–6.

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Among W. Norman Brown’s papers at the University of Pennsylvania archives is a 1944 paper titled “Program to Promote the Study of India in the United States” in: W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

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Brown, *Indian Art in America*, 16–19.

American interest in Indian archaeology, there existed a greater awareness of the plastic art traditions, and their continuation in subsequent centuries.

V. Endgame. A Legacy at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Thus, by the time of Kramrisch's arrival in the United States, the groundwork had been laid for the positive reception of both her collection and her scholarship. Kramrisch always saw herself principally as a scholar, and while reluctant to acknowledge herself as a collector, was nevertheless keenly aware of the value of her collection and was astute in leveraging her placement of it. That it was *her* collection was what in part made its initial exhibition and eventual acquisition by the PMA especially desirable. The initial loan period of five years for the Kramrisch collection's exhibition and her appointment as curator at the PMA coincided in 1954, and by the end of the year the matter of the collection's purchase came to a head. On account of interest expressed by a rival museum, Kramrisch asked for the insurance valuation for her collection to be doubled.⁶³ Henri Marceau, Kimball's successor and then acting director at the PMA, in a letter to R. Sturgis Ingersoll noted:

I am sorry to hear that the Kramrisch Collection is being considered by another museum. Of course, that seems inevitable in view of the importance of the material. All the same, I hope that we don't lose it!⁶⁴

By March of the following year, the case was pressed when the Cleveland Museum of Art expressed a formal desire to explore the matter of the purchase of the Kramrisch collection, but required assurances that they would not be competing with another museum and that they would have the right of first refusal.⁶⁵ Compelled to

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"Dr. Kramrisch has just left the office. I have acted as her attorney in certain matters. She informs me that she has been offered \$120,000, for the Collection of Indian Sculpture now in our custody. She says that to disclose the name of the Museum making the offer would require her to obtain the permission of that museum. I did not press the point. She said that in view of the amount of the offer she feels that the insurance on the collection should be increased from \$60,000 to \$120,000." R. Sturgis Ingersoll to Henri Marceau, December 20, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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Henri Marceau (Acting Director) to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, December 27, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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"She [Stella Kramrisch] has had considerable contacts with the Cleveland Museum. Apparently eighteen months or so ago a director – or the Head of the Department of Oriental Art – I do not know which, told her that the Cleveland Museum would buy her collection of sculpture. They suggested the figure of \$120,000. This was the origin of the increased insurance value. Dr. Kramrisch showed me this morning a letter she had just received from the Oriental Art man at Cleveland, whose name I stupidly forgot to note, and that letter in substance stated: "The Director desires to acquire the collection, there are complications because we are in the midst of a building program, – but a Mr. George Bickford (apparently a patron of the Museum) is much interested and on his trip to Philadelphia in April would like to discuss the matter with you". There then followed the final paragraph of the letter which read, – somewhat as follows: "Before such discussion we would ask you to inform

“meet the problem”, Marceau and Ingersoll had to act swiftly.⁶⁶ They acknowledged this necessity in a memorandum about the collection’s importance:

To Dr. Stella Kramrisch will go unending credit for gathering a collection with the knowledge of a savant and the eye of an artist – a rare and refreshing combination.

We are required to act fairly quickly. Dr. Kramrisch has a high regard for the Museum, and is fully appreciative of the sensitive way in which the pieces are presently installed, but as the collection is her major possession and the security of her future depends upon disposing of it advantageously, she cannot keep it indefinitely. And another museum is eyeing it with sharp interest realizing no doubt as keenly as we do that the collection will never be duplicated or a like opportunity present itself. The market value of good Indian sculpture has increased more than perceptibly in the past year or two, and it is destined to go very much higher as the supply diminishes. A conservative valuation of the Kramrisch collection piece by piece indicates that the sum she asks is quite in line with today’s prices for example of far less artistic importance.⁶⁷

Within the year, through the efforts of Ingersoll, the PMA and Stella Kramrisch had come to an understanding that the Museum would raise \$120,000 to buy the collection by June 1956. Then followed a period of fundraising ultimately resulting in monies for the purchase sourced from a variety of individual and collective funds, including not only Ingersoll himself but also Nelson Rockefeller.⁶⁸ The acquisition marked a culmination of not only several years of particular interest in Indian art at the PMA, but also signaled the

us that you are not negotiating with any other museum and that we would have the first refusal.” [...] Dr. Kramrisch told me that she wanted the collection to remain in our Museum but that she needed economic security and dreaded the thought of a present income of \$6000 from the foundations coming to an end and then finding that there was an uncertain or no market for Indian sculpture as of that time. She wants me to present to her some proposition where under she would attain economic security. She is fifty-eight years old [...]. I think the collection is an immensely important one for us to own.” R. Sturgis Ingersoll to Henri Marceau, March 10, 1955, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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“[I]n principle it makes me a little mad to feel that the Cleveland Museum people have been around here looking over the collection and making offers without first talking to us. This is not cricket. But, in any case, we must meet the problem [...]. I do believe that it is extremely important to keep the collection here.” Henri Marceau to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, March 11, 1955, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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The Kramrisch Collection, 2. Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

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The funding sources included Miss Anna Warren Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Mrs. Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, Dr. I. S. Ravdin, Mrs. Stella Elkins Tyler, Louis E. Stern, Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Levy, Mrs. Flagler Harris, and with funds from the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, funds from the proceeds of the sale of deaccessioned works of art, the George W. B. Taylor Fund, the John T. Morris Fund, the John H. McFadden, Jr., Fund, the Popular Subscription Fund, and the Lisa Norris Elkins Fund.

growing interest in Indian sculpture among American collectors and museums. Thus, in the decade following its Diamond Jubilee in 1950, the inclusion of the Kramrisch collection bolstered the PMA's ambitions, especially relative to rivals in New York (by 1960 the Metropolitan Museum of Art had opened its first permanent gallery of Indian sculpture) and Boston and strengthened its holdings into the first dedicated department of Indian art in an American museum, with arguably the leading Indian art scholar of the day at its helm.

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