

A History of the Lehman Family and the Robert Lehman Collection: 1844–1975



THE
MET



Philip Lehman (1861-1947)



Robert Lehman (1891-1969)



Robert Lehman (1891-1969)

Early Family History: 1844-1900

Cover:
Robert Lehman at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris in 1957, examining paintings from his collection prior to their installation in the exhibition entitled: *Exposition de la Collection Lehman de New York*

Fig. 1. Lehman Residence, 7 West 54th Street, New York

Fig. 2. Lehman Residence, Spanish and Dutch paintings

Fig. 3. Lehman Residence, drawings collection

Fig. 4. Lehman Residence, Flemish tapestry and Italian paintings

Henry, Mayer, and Emanuel Lehman, the sons of a cattle merchant and farmer from Rimpar, Germany, were among a large population of Jewish immigrants from Central Europe who settled in the Southern United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1844, Henry immigrated to Montgomery, Alabama, where he opened a general store specializing in cotton goods. Within the next five years, Mayer and Emanuel followed in Henry's footsteps, and became partners in his business, consequently named Lehman Brothers.

During the 1850s, Montgomery was a significant hub in the highly profitable cotton industry that formed the foundation of the nation's economy, commerce, and global trade. At their local store, the Lehman brothers often accepted cotton as a form of payment, and they soon expanded into the realm of trading the valuable commodity, serving as brokers between the southern plantations and the mills of the North. The cotton industry was predicated upon slavery, and several enslaved individuals worked in the Lehman household and business.

In 1858, Emanuel moved the family firm, now a cotton commodity brokerage, to New York City, and in the decades following the Civil War,



Fig. 1

its substantial growth included a wide range of commodities trading. By the early twentieth century, Lehman Brothers was increasingly engaged with investment banking.

In 1882, Emanuel's son Philip Lehman joined the thriving firm and served as its managing partner from 1901-1925, when he was succeeded by his son Robert.

Around 1900, Philip and his wife Carrie built a townhouse at 7 West 54th Street in New York City (figs. 1-4), where they resided with their two young children, Robert and Pauline. Over the following decades, the residence would house a large portion of the family's art collection.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Early History of the Collection: 1911–1920

When Philip began forming his collection in the early twentieth century, he was among an esteemed group of American collectors, including Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, and J.P. Morgan. His very first purchases, dating to 1911, reflect his early interest in Old Master paintings, especially portraits of the Dutch, Spanish, and Italian schools, including works by Goya (fig. 5) and a fifteenth-century Bolognese master (fig. 6). The following year, his acquisition of Bernaert van Orley's tapestry of the *Last Supper* (seen on view in the Lehman house in the photo on previous page) (figs. 4 and 7) may have been guided by Carrie, who had a deep interest in textiles.



Fig. 5

Fig. 5. Goya, *Condesa de Altamira and Her Daughter*, 1975.1.148, purchased 1911

Fig. 6. Attributed to the Maestro delle Storie del Pane, *Portraits of the Gozzadini Family*, 1975.1.95, 1975.1.96, purchased 1911

Fig. 7. Van Orley, *The Last Supper*, 1975.1.1915, purchased 1912

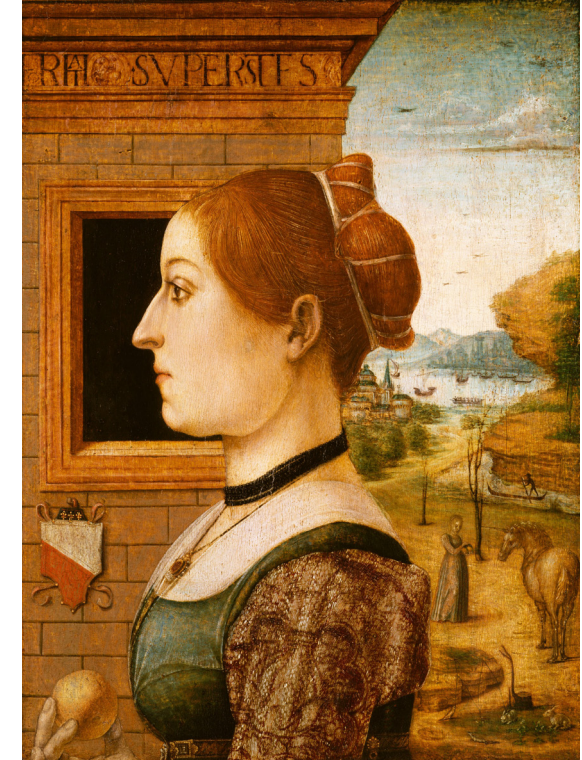


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Beginning around 1913, Philip and Robert were in communication with the connoisseurs Bernard Berenson and Francis Mason Perkins, and, with their counsel, began collecting fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian paintings with greater frequency. Philip purchased a large panel depicting the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Giovanni di Paolo (fig. 8), a Sienese master for whom the Lehmans - and other contemporary American collectors - had a particular fondness. In 1913, Philip also acquired two Iranian ceramic bowls, one of which depicts a very different type of coronation scene, but nonetheless, has certain compositional parallels to the Italian painting (fig. 9).

While Philip's interest in ceramics was subsequently focused on Italian maiolica, these early acquisitions point to a little-known area of the Lehman Collection, namely, the Islamic and Asian works that Robert, as a young collector, began to purchase during the same period.

Robert was involved in the development of the Collection from its inception, initially assisting his father with purchases and soon after, acquiring works independently. His knowledge of the art world began during his childhood, as he recalled: "Father and Mother went to Europe every year and

Fig. 8. Giovanni di Paolo, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1975.1.38, purchased 1913

Fig. 9. Iranian, late 12th-early 13th century, *Bowl*, 1975.1.1643, purchased 1913

Fig. 10. Chinese, *Bodhisattva (Maitreya) with crossed ankles*, 48.162.2, purchased by Robert Lehman in 1915, Gift of Robert Lehman to the Metropolitan Museum in 1948.



Robert Lehman, Japan 1914



Robert Lehman, Japan 1914

bought pictures, tapestries, and furniture. I was lucky enough to go along with them, when I was a boy, and get indoctrinated. They bought what they liked; they knew what they wanted."

Robert's formation as a collector and his interest in Asian art developed during his travels to China, Japan, India, and Korea following his graduation from Yale in 1913. While abroad, Robert made his first independent acquisitions, including several Japanese painted scrolls and a Chinese Bodhisattva (fig. 10). During his trip, he wrote impassioned letters to his father extolling the exceptional quality of Asian art, describing his encounters with works of art as "revelations," and urging him to share in his deep appreciation of Eastern artistic traditions.



Fig. 10

Robert's travels to Europe, directly following his trip to Asia, deepened his interest in Italian art. He met with collectors, advisors, and dealers, such as F. Mason Perkins, R. Langton Douglas, Bernard d'Hendecourt, and Joseph Duveen, and began advising and representing his father in acquisitions. In 1915, he purchased Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna and Child* (fig. 11) on Philip's behalf.

Over the next few years, Philip acquired several highly significant fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Sienese paintings (figs. 12–14), which now form the core of the Italian paintings in the Collection. Works such as Giovanni di Paolo's *Creation and Expulsion* and the Osservanza Master's *Saint Anthony in the Wilderness* suggest Philip's admiration of the Sienese masters' attention to narrative detail.

During this same period, between 1915 and 1920, Philip also acquired the most important Northern Renaissance paintings in the Collection, including Hans Memling's *Portrait of a Young Man* and Petrus Christus's *Goldsmith in his Shop* (figs. 15–16). Other early acquisitions reflect Philip's interests in the decorative arts, such as the aquamanile in the form of Phyllis and Aristotle, one of many such vessels in the Collection. (fig. 17)



Fig. 11

Fig. 11. Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, 1975.1.81, purchased 1915

Fig. 12. Simone Martini, *Saint Ansanus*, 1975.1.13, purchased 1916

Fig. 13. Giovanni di Paolo, *The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise*, 1975.1.31, purchased 1917

Fig. 14. Osservanza Master, *St. Anthony in the Wilderness*, 1975.1.27, purchased 1920



Fig. 12



Fig. 15

Fig. 15. Memling, *Portrait of a Man*, 1975.1.112, purchased 1915

Fig. 16. Petrus Christus, *Goldsmith in his Shop*, 1975.1.110, purchased 1920

Fig. 17. Netherlandish, *Phyllis and Aristotle*, 1975.1.14.16, purchased 1919



Fig. 13



Fig. 16

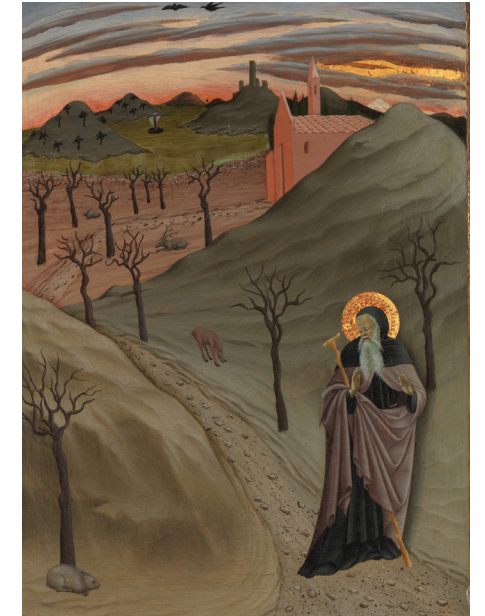


Fig. 14

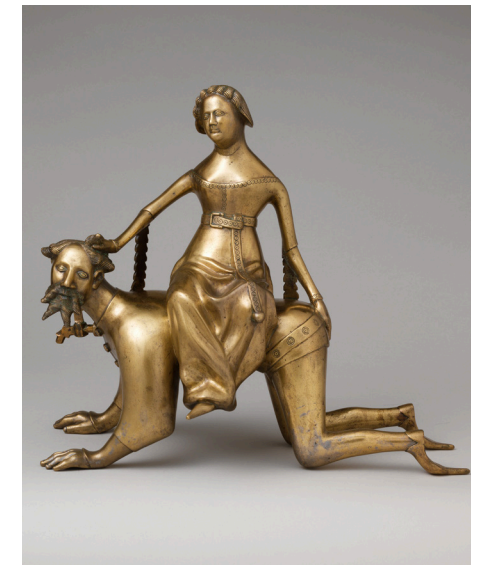


Fig. 17

The Collection: 1920–30

In the 1920s, while the pace of Philip’s collecting began to wane, Robert’s interests and activities expanded as he started acquiring illuminated manuscripts and Old Master drawings (figs 18–21), including a significant corpus of Italian drawings in 1923 and 1924, at the Luigi Grassi sale. Greatly enriching the holdings of Renaissance art, the drawings and manuscripts acquired at this time, and in subsequent periods, offered significant parallels to the paintings collection. Over the course of the next five decades, Robert would assemble a collection of approximately eight-hundred drawings, ranging from early-fifteenth-century Italian studies to sheets by twentieth-century French masters, roughly reflecting the scope of the paintings collection.

Robert’s keen interest in early Italian paintings continued to flourish during this period. In 1928, he purchased a small devotional panel by Botticelli (fig. 22), which may have been a birthday present for his father. In commemoration of Philip’s collection, the following year, Robert published a catalogue, entitled, *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York, Paintings* (fig. 23), which included his commentary on each work, incorporating scholarship by Bernard Berenson, Richard Offner and others. Printed in limited edition, copies were given to a close circle of connoisseurs and dealers, as well as museums.

Fig. 18. North Italian, *The Flagellation*, 1975.1.417, purchased 1923

Fig. 19. Simon Bening, *Self-Portrait*, 1975.1.2487, purchased 1926



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 22



Fig. 21

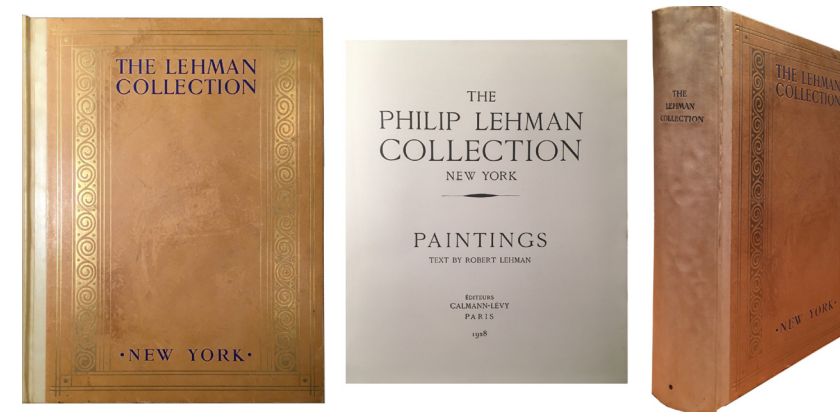


Fig. 23

Fig. 20. Attributed to Michelino da Besozzo, *A Gazelle*, 1975.1.402, purchased 1929

Fig. 21. Francesco di Giorgio, *San Bernardino*, 1975.1.2474, purchased 1929

Fig. 22. Botticelli, *The Annunciation*, 1975.1.74, purchased 1928

Fig. 23. *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York, Paintings*, published by Robert Lehman, 1929

The Collection: 1930–1940

During the 1930s, Robert Lehman was increasingly drawn to decorative arts of the Renaissance period, acquiring at various sales a significant number of bronze medals and plaquettes, French enamels, and Italian maiolica. Among the painted enamels purchased at this time are several works by Suzanne de Court (fig. 24), a significant female artist of the late sixteenth century, which complemented two works by her hand purchased by Philip Lehman in 1925. At the Henry Oppenheimer sale at Christie's in 1936, Robert purchased nearly 100 medals, including examples by Pisanello (fig. 25), the Northern Italian artist credited with the flourishing of this art form.

During the 1930s, Robert Lehman also acquired a substantial corpus of ceramics, ranging from Chinese porcelain to Italian maiolica. In 1930, he purchased fourteen lots at the Ton-Ying sale of Chinese art (fig. 26), and nine years later purchased sixty-nine pieces of Italian maiolica from the Pringsheim sale at Sotheby's (figs. 27-8). Robert was undoubtedly interested in the interrelationships and cross-cultural dialogues of these ceramic traditions, as well as their intersection with painting. Evidence of this can be found in the installation of two display cases in the Lehman residence, where Italian, Chinese, and Iranian ceramics appear side by side with small-scale Italian and Northern European panel paintings (fig. 29).



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

Fig. 24. Suzanne de Court, *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*, 1975.1.1235, purchased 1938

Fig. 25. Pisanello, *Portrait Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga*, 1975.1.1307, purchased 1936



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 26. Chinese, Qing Dynasty, *Ewer*, 1975.1.1693, purchased 1930

Fig. 27. Workshop of Giunta di Tugio, *Apothecary Jar*, 1975.1.1061, purchased 1939

Fig. 28. Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo, *Dish*, 1975.1.1130, purchased 1939

Fig. 29. Lehman residence, 7 West 54th Street, New York

Robert Lehman's interest in exploring the interrelationships among works in the Collection and across media is also reflected in his purchases that represent an artist's range of activities. For instance, in 1937, he acquired a miniature (fig. 30) by the fifteenth-century Sienese master Sano di Pietro, who was active as both a painter and illuminator. Six months later, he purchased a panel painting by Sano (fig. 31) — the first of several panels by the artist that Robert bought, although Philip had purchased a work by his hand as early as 1916.



Fig.30



Fig. 31

Fig. 30. Sano di Pietro, *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, 1975.1.2488, purchased 1937

Fig. 31. Sano di Pietro, *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels*, 1975.1.43, purchased 1938

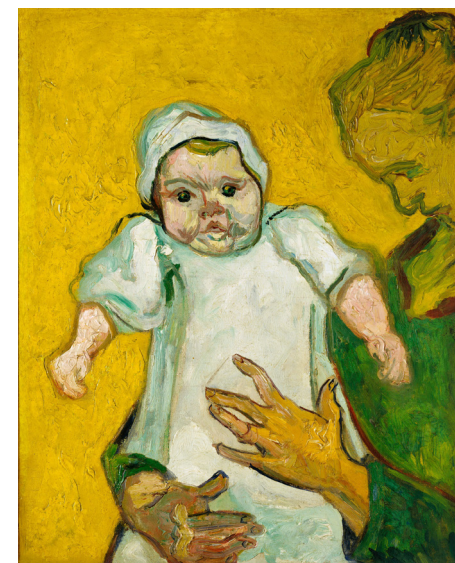


Fig.32



Fig.33

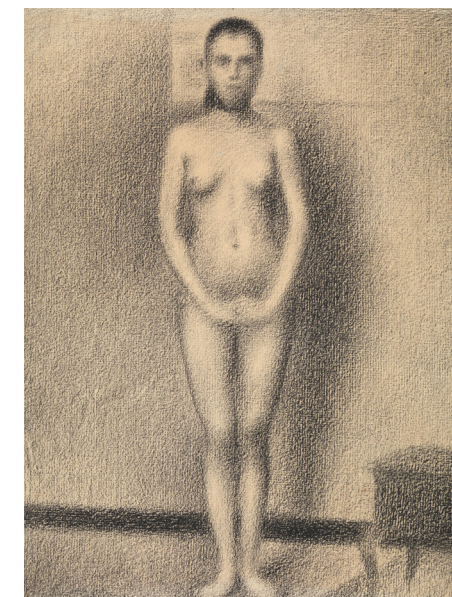


Fig.34

The Collection: 1940–1950

The 1940s, especially the latter part of the decade, marked a significant turning point for Robert Lehman as a collector. While he had purchased a limited number of nineteenth-century paintings and drawings in the previous decades, it was during this period, that his attention was increasingly drawn to Modern French masters. Among these acquisitions were works by van Gogh, Degas, Gauguin, Seurat and Matisse.

Alongside his growing interest in modern artists, Robert's continued dedication to Old Masters is reflected in several significant acquisitions in the mid-1940s, including some of the most celebrated drawings in the Collection, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Study of a Bear* (fig. 35). Among the thirty drawings purchased in 1948 from Philip Hofer are a *Self-Portrait* by Goya (fig. 36) and Pollaiuolo's *Study for the Equestrian Monument to Francesco Sforza* (fig. 37). During this period, he also acquired Rembrandt's *Portrait of Gerard de Lairesse* (fig. 38).

Fig. 32. Van Gogh, *Madame Roulin and Her Baby*, 1975.1.231, purchased 1948

Fig. 33. Renoir, *Two Girls at the Piano*, 1975.1.201, purchased 1948

Fig. 34. Seurat, *Study for the Poseuses*, 1975.1.704, purchased 1949

In 1947, following Philip's death, Robert purchased numerous art objects from his sister Pauline, which had either been given to her by her father during his lifetime or bequeathed to her. These included maiolica, furniture, and paintings, such as Memling's *Annunciation* (fig. 39), which Philip had purchased in 1920.

During the same period that Robert was consolidating works belonging to family members, he also donated a number of Italian and French paintings, drawings, maiolica and other works to American institutions, including the Yale University Art Gallery, the Kress Foundation, the Nelson Atkins Museum, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum. At this time, he also donated approximately thirty objects to The Met, ranging from early Italian paintings and Venetian drawings to a Japanese hanging scroll. Two examples are Bartolomeo Vivarini's monumental painting, *The Death of the Virgin* (fig. 40), which was purchased by Philip in 1925 (and owned partly by Duveen), and now resides in the Department of European Paintings, as well as the above-mentioned Chinese sculpture (fig. 10), now in the Department of Asian Art.

During the 1940s, Robert was not only a donor to The Met but was elected to the Board of Trustees (1941), and in 1948, was appointed as Vice President. His ties to the Museum would continue to grow over the next two decades.

Fig. 35. Leonardo da Vinci, *Study of a Bear Walking*, 1975.1.369, purchased 1945

Fig. 36. Goya, *Self-Portrait in a Cocked Hat*, 1975.1.976, purchased 1948



Fig.35



Fig.36



Fig.37



Fig.39



Fig.38



Fig.40

Fig. 37. Pollaiuolo, *Study for the Equestrian Monument to Francesco Sforza*, 1975.1.410, purchased 1948

Fig. 38. Rembrandt, *Portrait of Gerard de Lairesse*, 1975.1.140, purchased 1945

Fig. 39. Memling, *Annunciation*, 1975.1.113, purchased 1920

Fig. 40. Bartolomeo Vivarini, *The Death of the Virgin*, 50.229.1, purchased by Philip Lehman around 1925; Gift of Robert Lehman to the Metropolitan Museum in 1950.

The Collection: 1950–60

The 1950s marked a significant shift towards a more public presentation of the Lehman Collection through several exhibitions held in the United States and abroad. In 1954, Robert lent approximately five hundred works to The Met's exhibition dedicated to his Collection, which was installed in four galleries. Many objects remained on long-term loan at the Museum (fig. 41).

In 1957, the Louvre's Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris displayed approximately three hundred objects from the Collection, in an exhibition entitled: *Exposition de la Collection Lehman de New York*. Robert accompanied the works to Paris and was involved in the installation (figs. 42-3).

In 1959, an exhibition at the Cincinnati Art Museum aimed to recreate the installation in Paris. In 1958, Robert lent twenty-two of his esteemed Venetian glass objects to the exhibition, *Three Great Centuries of Venetian*

Glass, 1470-1770 held at Corning Museum of Glass. In 1960, he lent approximately thirty paintings, drawings, and bronzes to the Yale University Art Gallery for an exhibition dedicated to the collections of alumni.

Throughout this period, Robert continued collecting broadly across several centuries of European art. His purchase of four drawings by the German Renaissance master Albrecht Dürer — including his *Self Portrait* (fig. 44) — was a milestone. Other significant acquisitions include Rembrandt's *The Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci* (fig. 45). In 1957, Robert purchased Ingres's portrait of the *Princesse de Broglie* (fig. 46), and in the following years, he acquired several portrait studies by the artist. The purchase, in 1958, of Balthus's *Nude Before a Mirror* (fig. 47) offers a striking juxtaposition.

In 1958, Robert acquired a *Crucifixion* (fig. 48) by the early fifteenth-century Florentine master Lorenzo Monaco, which was displayed in his office at Lehman Brothers (fig. 49) along with another panel by the artist: a *Nativity* (fig. 50).



Fig.41



Fig.42



Fig.43



Robert Lehman, France, ca. 1955



Fig.45



Fig.46



Fig.44

Fig. 41. Paintings from Robert Lehman's collection on display at The Met long-term loans ca. 1960

Fig. 42. Robert Lehman at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, where his collection was the subject of an exhibition in 1957. He is shown examining a painting by the Siennese master Giovanni di Paolo (at right), which he purchased a decade earlier.

Fig. 43. Giovanni di Paolo, *St. Catherine Receiving the Stigmata*, 1475.1.34, purchased 1947

Fig. 44. Dürer, *Self-Portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow*, 1495.1.862, purchased 1952

Fig. 45. Rembrandt, *The Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci*, 1675.1.794, purchased 1953

Fig. 46. Ingres, *Princesse de Broglie*, 1815.1.186, purchased 1957

Fig. 47. Balthus, *Nude Before a Mirror*, 1945.1.155, purchased 1958



Fig.47

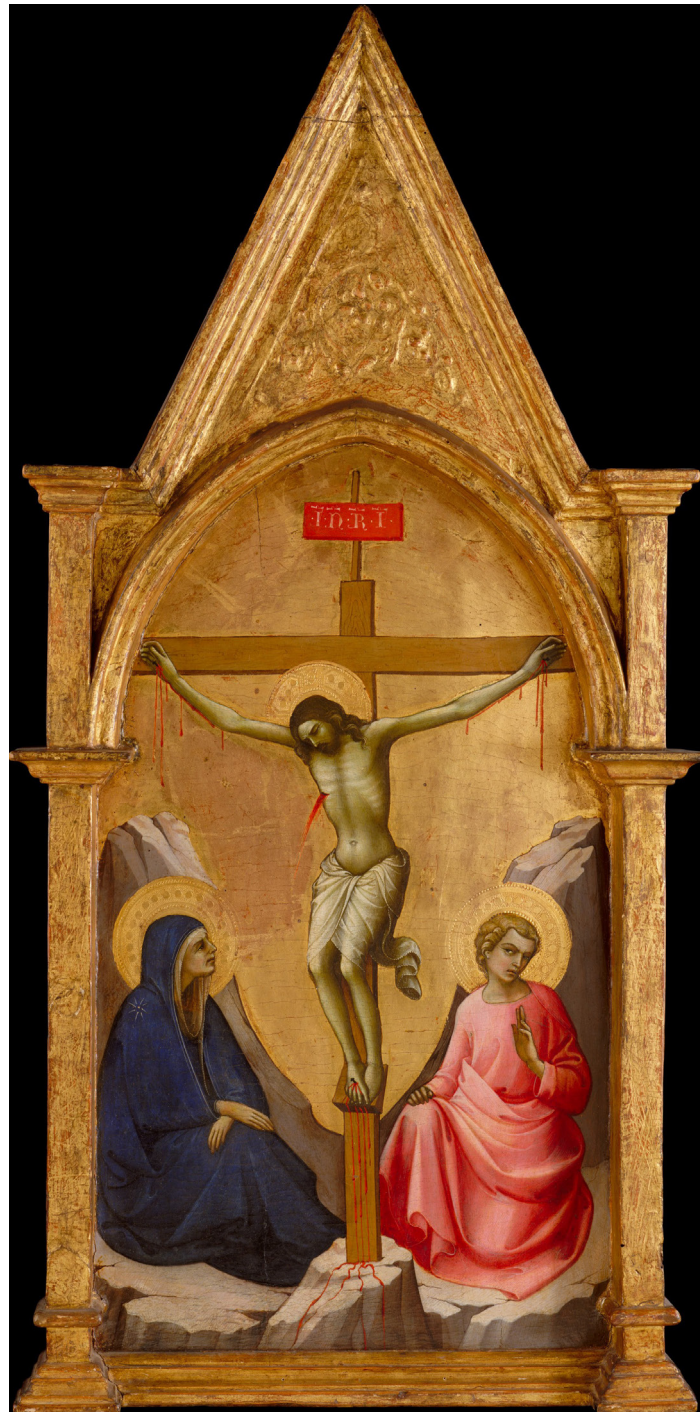


Fig. 48

Fig. 49. Robert Lehman in his office at Lehman Brothers, ca. 1960



Fig.49



Fig.50

The Collection: 1960–1969

In the final years of his life, Robert Lehman continued to add significant works to his collection, acquiring, among others, Monet's *Houses on the Achterzaan* (fig. 51), as well as a major corpus of 124 eighteenth-century Venetian drawings from Paul Wallraf in 1962, primarily by Tiepolo (fig. 52).

In 1961, Robert began refurbishing the 7 West 54th Street townhouse in an effort to make the Collection accessible to the public. However, plans evolved over the course of the decade as he entered into discussions with The Met. In 1967, having served as a Museum board member for twenty-six years, and as Vice President, Robert was named as Chairman of the Board. The following year, he reviewed design proposals for the installation of the Collection at The Met in preparation for a donation.



Fig. 51



Fig. 52

Fig. 48. Lorenzo Monaco, *Crucifixion*, 1975.1.67, purchased 1958

Fig. 50. Lorenzo Monaco, *Nativity*, 1975.1.66, purchased 1934

Fig. 51. Monet, *Houses on the Achterzaan*, 1975.1.196, purchased 1961

Fig.52. Tiepolo, *Soldiers around a Monument*, 1975.1.448, purchased 1962

At his death in August of 1969, Robert Lehman bequeathed the majority of his collection (approximately 2,700 objects) to The Robert Lehman Foundation, from which it transferred to The Met. His will stipulated that the Collection be displayed together in a new wing (fig. 54), and installed in galleries that evoked the ambiance of the Lehman residence (figs. 55–6). In May of 1975, the Robert Lehman Wing, constructed on the western side of The Met, was completed and opened to the public.

Material for this document was compiled, in part, from the Robert Lehman Papers Finding Aid, created in 2014 by Larry Weimer

https://www.libmma.org/digital_files/archives/Robert_Lehman_papers_b1848688.pdf



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

Fig. 53. Robert Lehman, ca. 1965

Fig. 54. Courtyard of the Robert Lehman Wing, The Met



Fig. 55

Fig. 55. Gallery of Fifteenth-Century Sieneese Painting, Robert Lehman Wing, The Met

Fig 56, back cover. Gallery of decorative arts surmounted by the glass dome (attributed to Tiffany and Co.) that originally formed the skylight of the Lehman townhouse, Robert Lehman Wing, The Met

