

David David-Weill (known as David Weill to 1929)**1871–1952****Collector, Philanthropist**

Born in San Francisco, California, to French parents, David Weill—as he was then known—relocated with his parents to Paris, France, shortly after his bar mitzvah. In Paris, he attended secondary school at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet. While in school, David Weill began collecting eighteenth-century French art, first purchasing a painting by the neoclassical painter Marie-Gabrielle Capet. Upon graduating, he completed his required service in the French military and then entered the family banking business of Lazard Frères, which was headquartered in Paris with offices in New York and London. In 1897, David Weill married Flora Raphaël and built an elaborate mansion in the bucolic town of Neuilly, France. The couple welcomed seven children over the course of their fifty-five-year marriage. In keeping with the aristocratic fashions of the 1920s, David Weill legally changed his family’s surname in 1929 to David-Weill.

David-Weill and his wife supported numerous philanthropic causes, including the construction of affordable housing, sanatoriums, and free medical clinics in Paris and beyond. He supported extensively l’Université de Paris, funding scholarships, campus construction projects, and opportunities for students to study abroad. His philanthropy extended to several museums and libraries, including the Bibliothèque National de France, where he paid for the institution to duplicate the card catalogue from the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, thereby providing French researchers with knowledge of the Washington repository.

David-Weill amassed an enormous personal art collection that eventually contained works of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European painting and decorative arts; Chinese bronzes, jades, and cloisonné; Islamic ceramics; and even pre-Columbian objects. The Académie des Beaux-Arts recognized David-Well as an astute collector, admitting him as a member in 1934. David-Weill made anonymous gifts of art to French museums and generous financial contributions, including personally supplementing the small salaries of some Louvre curators. In 1920, he joined the Consul of National Museums and served as president of the organization from 1931 to 1940. He participated in the Société des Amis du Louvre, becoming the organization’s vice president in 1926. Also in 1926, he announced a promised gift of one thousand objects to the National Museums of France; by the time of his death in 1952, this gift included more than two-thousand works of art. Throughout his life, he routinely financed large purchases on the request of museum curators, gifted objects he purchased independently, and

loaned objects from his collection to exhibitions. In the early 1930s, David-Weill hired Marcelle Minet (b. 1900) as the curator of his personal collection.

Asian art figured prominently in the David-Weill collection, including objects with Japanese, Chinese, and Iranian origins. He owned several rare nineteenth-century Japanese prints, which are known to have survived World War II; their present location, however, is unknown. David-Weill seems to have held bronze objects in high regard, as he amassed an enormous group of small-scale Iranian and Eurasian bronzes (ultimately auctioned at Hôtel Drouot in 1972) and ancient Chinese bronzes, many of which are housed at the Musée Guimet, Paris. Ahead of his time, David-Weill was among the first wave of European collectors of Chinese art, and his collection was wide-ranging, including objects from the Neolithic to early dynastic periods. Throughout his home in Neuilly, he displayed Song ceramics, Buddhist sculptures, classical painting, and ornate cloisonné alongside European works of art. He frequently purchased Chinese antiquities from the famed dealer C.T. Loo and, in 1934, participated in the Karlbeck Syndicate, an international consortium of museums and private collectors who purchased objects that Orvar Karlbeck, a well-known Swedish connoisseur of Chinese art, acquired while traveling in China.

David-Weill's ancient Chinese jades and bronzes, however, were the most celebrated in his collection of Asian objects, attracting the attention of scholars and museums. He promoted the field of Chinese art history by lending objects to major exhibitions and allowing scholars to publish on his collection. Pieces from his collection appear in several early publications on Chinese art history, including Osvald Sirén's *A History of Early Chinese Art* (1929). David-Weill lent highlights of his jade and bronze collection to the Musée de l'Orangerie for special Chinese art exhibitions, including *Bronzes chinois des dynasties Tcheou, Ts'in, et Han* (1934) and *Arts de la Chine Ancienne* (1937). He also lent twelve ancient Chinese bronzes to the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (1935–36) at the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

He encouraged the National Museums of France to collect and exhibit Chinese art by making frequent gifts. In 1912, along with his mother, he made his first gift of Chinese art when he presented the Louvre with an antique Chinese bronze (in 1945, it was transferred to the Musée Guimet, Paris). In 1923, he gifted an impressive group of 150 Chinese cloisonné objects to the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, forming the foundation of their Chinese collection.

In the summer of 1939, with the French approaching war with Nazi Germany, both the National Museums of France and private collectors began to carefully crate and store their collections in pastoral regions across France. In August, Marcelle Minet began the lengthy process of packing the majority of David-Weill's collection into 152 wooden crates, marked with the initials D. D-W. She sent 130 crates to the Chateau du Sources in the South of France where David-Weill's collection was stored alongside treasures from the Louvre. The other twenty-two boxes went to Chateau de Mareil-le-Guyon.

The following summer of 1940, after the German invasion of France, David and Flora David-Weill secured visas from the Vichy government to go to Portugal via Spain, planning to eventually flee to America. During their journey, Nazi soldiers arrived at their Neuilly home, looting whatever art objects remained onsite and seized the property, transforming it into the Nazi Headquarters outside of Paris. On September 8, David David-Weill learned via radio broadcast that he had been stripped of his French citizenship. By February the following year, the Nazis seized his family's bank, Lazard Frères, and shuttered its properties. Fearing for their safety, the David-Weills went into hiding at the Roquegauthier Castle in Cancon, France. By 1942, David and Flora David-Weill relocated to Agen, where they hid in the home of a friend and assumed the surname Warnier.

On April 11, 1941, German officers of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) arrived at Chateau du Sources, seizing the David-Weill collection. The ERR also discovered and seized David-Weill objects stored in Mareil-le-Guyon. All of David-Weill's collection passed through the ERR's central collecting depot at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris for shipment to Germany. While other collections were entirely inventoried, David-Weill's was not and several boxes remained unopened. The ERR sent David-Weill's collection to Germany for distribution amongst German museums. However, by the conclusion of the war in 1945, when David-Weill's collection resurfaced, it remained in its original, unopened crates. David-Weill's collection arrived in fall 1945 at the Munich Central Collecting Point (MCCP), a depot organized by the American Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Program (MFAA), where MFAA officers sorted, inventoried, and returned Nazi-looted art to the rightful owners. In December 1945, Marcelle Minet began working at the MCCP as a French liaison and immediately recognized the crates she had packed in the summer of 1939. She spent the following year coordinating the safe return of the David-Weill collection to Neuilly. David-Weill was reportedly so thrilled that she found his collection, he sent "fine French wine and champagne" to the MCCP. Allied forces recovered the majority of David-Weill's collection and returned it to him by 1947. Objects that remained missing were included in the massive publication, produced between 1947 and 1949, *Répertoire des biens spoliés en France durant la guerre, 1939–1945*.

After the War, David and Flora David-Weill returned to Neuilly, where they restored their home and continued their philanthropic efforts. David-Weill enthusiastically returned to collecting and gifting works of art to French institutions. He died at home on July 7, 1952. In 1953, the National Museums of France honored David-Weill's life and generosity with an exhibition hosted by the Musée de l'Orangerie, featuring highlights of his many gifts.

What objects he had not bequeathed to the French National Museums, David-Weill willed to his family. In the 1970s, after Flora David-Weill's death, there were a series of auctions that ultimately dispersed objects from David-Weill's collection around the world. Today, works from his collection can be seen in a number of institutions including the French National Museums, the National Gallery of Art, the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to name just a few.

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