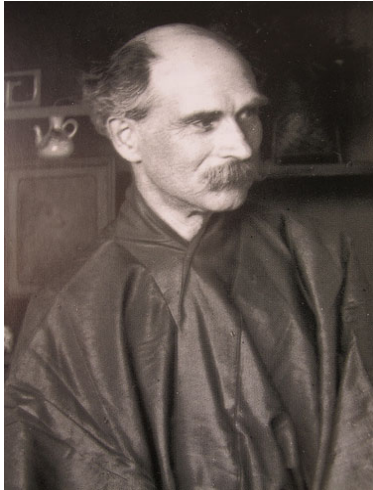


Siegfried Bing

1838–1905

Dealer in Art Nouveau and Japanese Art



Not only was Siegfried Bing respected as an indefatigable dealer of Japanese art in the late nineteenth century, but he also was recognized as a scholar, researcher, and pioneer of the Art Nouveau movement in France. Born in Hamburg, Germany, he became a naturalized French citizen with a career centered in Paris. He was first employed by, and later assumed ownership of, his family's porcelain and art glass firm, Bing Frères et Cie. At the same time, he developed a passion for East Asian art, especially for Japanese bronzes, ceramics, and woodblock prints. Western collectors were becoming interested in such objects, especially after seeing displays in the Japanese pavilion at the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle. Bing played a crucial role in educating Westerners about "Japonisme" and Japan as a

creative epicenter. He began dealing in antique and contemporary Japanese art as the European craze for Japanese prints grew. Bing spent a year in Japan, probably in 1881, on a trip facilitated by his brother-in-law, who was then the German consul in Tokyo.

Bing's collection of Asian porcelains, bronzes, lacquers, jades, crystals, ivories, and textiles led him to develop international branches of his business. He and Hayashi Tadamasa (1851–1906), an expatriate Japanese dealer, rose to the pinnacle of European art circles. As friendly rivals and sometimes collaborators, they were the principal dealers of Japanese art in Paris, and they extended their influence to the United States. The French government acknowledged the contribution of both Bing and Tadamasa by presenting each with the Legion of Honor. In 1890 Bing held the first comprehensive ukiyo-e exhibition in Europe, featuring more than 700 prints and more than 400 books, from all periods of Japanese art. He also published the influential illustrated journal *Le Japon Artistique*, which ran from 1888 to 1891.

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