

Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin: Collectors Extraordinaire

The collection of this remarkable couple began in 1940 when, about to be married, they saw a lithograph in a gallery in Atlantic City that matched the color scheme in their first home. After much consideration, they decided to acquire it, and paid \$70—roughly one-fourth of their weekly income at the time—and were hooked on collecting. These devoted Philadelphia natives (Pat Potamkin grew up in South Philadelphia, Vivian Orleans in the Logan section) started collecting American art, with a particular interest in a group known as *The Eight*, because of the social commentary of those artists.

The Potamkins' collection is widely recognized for its extraordinary quality, and they are celebrated for their pioneering commitment to American Art. In addition to the exceptional paintings by *The Eight* and the gilt bronze *Peacocks* by Gaston Lachaise—which they presented to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1964 in thoughtful recognition of a major gap in the Museum's holdings—the Potamkins' collection comprises nineteenth- and twentieth-century landscapes and still lifes; sculpture; works on paper dating from the 1890s to the 1960s; American Impressionist paintings; and Modernist works by artists of the Alfred Steiglitz circle.

They often acquired work by artists who were out of favor, or relatively unrecognized at the time.

Many have since become appreciated and much sought after. As Pat Potamkin said to a student reporter from his alma mater, Dickinson College, in 1989, "A valuable piece of art is any work which elicits a response from its viewer and adds a new dimension to his or her life."

Both the Potamkins have devoted much time to civic leadership and are recognized as outstanding patrons of the arts. Vivian Potamkin was a member of this Museum's Women's Committee and one of the founders of the Art Sales & Rental Gallery, established to present affordable art, often by new and emerging artists, to a wide audience. She was the gallery's volunteer administrator for eight years. Vivian is currently a member of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the board of the Archives of American Art, and is a vice-president of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Pat Potamkin, a Trustee of this Museum since 1963 and an Honorary Trustee since 1994, currently serves on the advisory board of Dickinson College, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Mann Music Center, and the board of Crime Prevention Association. Their generous gifts of works of art grace a cornucopia of institutions, including The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Dickinson College, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Dallas Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the National Gallery of Art, and the White House.



The Potamkins in front of Marsden Hartley's *Flower Abstraction* (1914), from their collection.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

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