



# CALIFORNIA ART CLUB NEWSLETTER

*Documenting California's Traditional Arts Heritage Since 1909*

## The Bond between Patron and Artist: Archer Huntington and Joaquín Sorolla

*by Peter Adams*



Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923)

*Sevilla: The Dance, 1915*

Detail from *Visions of Spain*

Oil on canvas 138" × 119"

Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York

**T**HE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIPS between various great artists and their patron-benefactors and how these collaborations developed make for fascinating stories, tales that are rarely told. Art history is full of intriguing examples, some dating from as far back as ancient times. The great Athenian statesman, **Pericles (c. 495–429 BC)**, was an enthusiastic benefactor to the arts. In fact, the Age of Pericles (478–429 BC) is often referred to as the Golden Age of Athens.

Around 447 BC Pericles commissioned the famed sculptor **Phidias (c. 480–430 BC)** to work on the adornment of the **Parthenon**. Their vision was extravagant and costly. Phidias and his atelier created a number of graceful statues, and the remarkable polychrome frieze, and the colossal 38-foot gold and ivory “chryselephantine” monument of *Athena Parthenos*. There is conjecture, however, that Phidias and Pericles embezzled from the treasury in order to fund their collaborative project. Pericles was acquitted, but Phidias was found guilty and sent to prison where he may have died.

### *The Medici Legacy*

Patronage was also the life blood of great art during the Italian Renaissance when artists and wealthy persons joined forces, the best known of these patrons being the Medicis. Artists gratefully accepted their support and carried the favour of the members of this legendary banking family. **Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464)**, known as “Cosimo il Vecchio,” financed the careers of **Fra Angelico (1395–1455)**, **Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1469)**, and to some degree the career of **Donatello (1386–1466)**. In addition, he commissioned the architect

**Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446)**, at the time bankrupt, to complete the dome of **Santa Maria del Fiore** (the *Duomo* of Florence). Cosimo spoke candidly about the works of art he commissioned when he said, “All those things have given me the greatest satisfaction and contentment because they are not only for the honour of God but are likewise for my own remembrance. For the last fifty years I

have done nothing else but earn money and spend money; and it became clear that spending money gives me greater pleasure than earning it.” In some sense, such philanthropy, whatever the motive, along with the concurrent support of artists by the Catholic Church and the rediscovery of ancient Roman artefacts, helped spawn the Italian Renaissance.

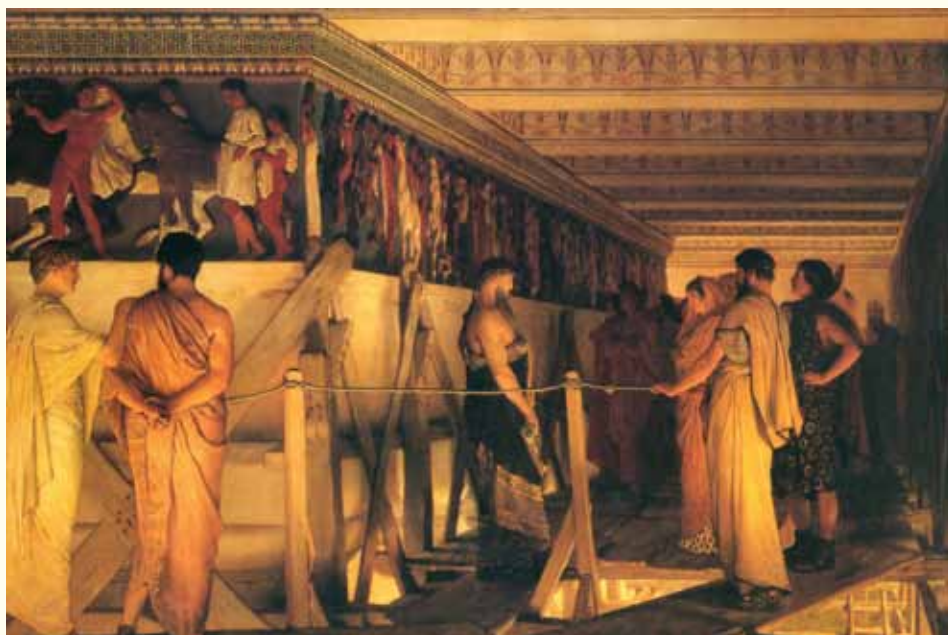
Cosimo’s grandson, **Lorenzo di**

**Medici (1449–1492)** known as “Lorenzo il Magnifico,” followed in his footsteps and greatly supported **Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)**, **Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510)**, and **Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)**. In fact, Michelangelo lived for a number of years with the Medici family. Il Magnifico’s second son, who became **Pope Leo X (1475–1521)**, commissioned **Raphael (1483–1520)** to redesign parts of the apse and nave of **St. Peter’s Basilica**. Raphael also painted a number of magnificent fresco murals for the *Vatican Rooms*.

### *French Kings, Queens and Emperors*

In France, rather than wealthy business interests, royalty bestowed the support artists critically needed. **Louis XIV of France (1638–1715)**, the “Sun King,” directed the finest artists of the day as they set about building the king’s grand **Palace of Versailles**. The construction of the royal château, its interiors, and elaborate gardens kept hundreds of painters, sculptors, architects, and gardeners busy. Chief among the painters was **Charles Le Brun (1619–1690)**, also the founding member of the **French Academy of Painting and Sculpture**. Versailles enabled LeBrun to exercise the full scope of his genius. He produced his greatest decorative works: the staircase of the Ambassadors, the Hall of Mirrors, and the Salons of Peace and War. **Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743)**, the top portrait artist of the day, painted numerous portraits of the Royal Family and other dignitaries. His definitive portrait of Louis XIV, showing the king at his coronation, hangs in the **Louvre**. Rigaud made a copy of the painting to grace the walls of Versailles. Among the sculptors working at Versailles was the Italian known as the “King of Sculptors and Sculptor of Kings, Cardinals, and Popes,” **Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680)**. Bernini’s bust of the Sun King shows the monarch’s youth and full head of curly hair looking every bit as triumphal and as regal as a lion’s mane.

The wife of **Louis XVI**, the ill-fated **Queen Marie Antoinette (1755–1793)**, also became a benefactor of the arts. Wanting portraits of herself, she selected artist **Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842)**, the great-great-grandniece of Charles Le Brun through marriage. Over a six year period Vigée



Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1926-1912)

*Phidias showing the Frieze of the Parthenon to Pericles, Aspasia, Alcibiades and friends*  
Oil on canvas 28" × 43 ½"



Raphael (B? – 1511)

Room of Segnatura, the Vatican Frescoes  
*Parnassus* (left); Fresco 22-foot base  
*School of Athens* (right); 16'5" × 25'3"



Louis Beroud (1858-1930)  
*The Grand Staircase*, 1877  
 (the Foyer of Palais Garnier)  
 Oil on canvas 25" × 21"  
 Collection of Musée Carnavalet –  
 Histoire de Paris

Le Brun painted more than thirty portraits of Antoinette. Through these commissions the Queen not only ensured that a *woman artist* would enter the highest rank of French painters, but ironically, she also ensured that her own fair visage, which was cut short by the cruel blade of the guillotine, would be remembered.

Such imperial patronage continued into the next century when **Napoleon III (1808-1873)**, during his reign in the Second Empire (1852-1870), began to employ designers to widen the streets of Paris into boulevards and create magnificent parks. He also commissioned **Charles Garnier (1808-1873)** to design the Paris Opera House, *Palais Garnier*. Many of the most respected French sculptors and painters of the day received commissions to work on interior and exterior elements of the building. **Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827-1875)**, **Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (1824-1887)**, **Charles Gumery (1827-1871)**, and **Jean-Joseph Perraud (1819-1876)** were some of the renowned sculptors who adorned the opera house. Accomplished painters were also engaged such as **Paul-Jacques-Aimé Baudry (1828-1886)** to create the ambitious murals for the ceiling of the grand foyer, depicting scenes symbolizing the music of different countries, using



Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827-1875)  
*La Dansa*, 1869  
 Stone 165" × 117" × 57"  
*Façade de l'Opéra Garnier à Paris*

mythological and Biblical stories to illustrate the power of music and dance. **Jules Eugene Lenepveu (1819-1898)** painted the ceiling in the main theatre.

### *American Patrons*

Until the mid-nineteenth century, heads of state and the like were the usual art patrons, but this was to change as capitalism began to alter the nature of art patronage. Paintings and sculpture began to be purchased by wealthy industrialists, especially in the United States. By the 1890s an impressive roster of names that included leaders of the Gilded Age, such as **J.P. Morgan (1837-1913)**, **Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919)**, **Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919)**, **Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919)**, and **Andrew Mellon (1855-1937)** were amassing art collections by European and American artists. **Charles Richard Crane (1858-1939)**, the heir to the nation's most successful plumbing parts manufacturing business, was approached in 1909 by artist **Alfonse Mucha (1860-1939)** to finance his great *Slav Epic*, chronicling the history of the Slavic Peoples, a series of twenty massive paintings that each measure approximately 18" × 25". Mucha worked on the murals for eighteen years, from 1910 to 1928. In 1921 Mucha toured five of the murals with exhibits through



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Brooklyn and Chicago to great acclaim. **William H. Goodyear**, the curator of the **Brooklyn Museum of Art** at the time, wrote to Mucha about his paintings, “I consider your mural paintings to be the greatest works of their class since the time of the sixteenth-century Italian artists. Dr. Goodyear commented that Mucha was “the foremost of contemporary painters, including all those of the nineteenth century.”

But perhaps the patron whose contribution to the arts became the most important and seminal was **Collis P. Huntington (1821–1900)**, the railroad magnate who founded a family unique in the annals of art patronage and philanthropy. Because of his financial interest in the **Central Pacific Railway Company**, and the rapid expansion of this form of transportation at the time, in 1871, seemingly overnight, Collis P. Huntington became a fabulously wealthy man. In that same year, already demonstrating his involvement with the arts, he travelled with master landscape painter **Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902)** to California’s Sierra, to Donner Lake, where he commissioned the forty-one-year-old artist to paint a 6" × 10" painting from a particular

spot Huntington had chosen. Shortly thereafter, the newly rich railroad tycoon also purchased a number of other works by leading contemporaneous artists, such as the French painters: **William A. Bouguereau (1825–1905)**, **Jehan Georges Vibert (1840–1902)**, **Jean-Louis Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891)**, **Alexandre Cabanel (1823–1889)**, and **Thomas Couture (1815–1879)**, as well as the American painters, **Eastman Johnson (1824–1906)** and **William Trost Richards (1833–1905)**. Huntington also purchased works by the German artist, **Adolf Schreyer (1828–1899)**. Collis P. Huntington collected and commissioned artwork all his life—moreover, his passion spread to other family members.

### *The Huntington Legacy*

**Henry E. Huntington (1850–1927)**, Collis P. Huntington’s nephew, continued the family tradition, following his uncle’s footsteps in several ways. He had worked with his uncle in his earlier hardware business and later served with him as a top executive with Central Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroad companies. Henry himself in 1901 founded the **Pacific Electric Railroad** (often referred to as the Red

Car Line). Then, when his uncle Collis died, Henry married his widow, **Arabella Huntington (1851–1924)**, fortuitous for the art world as together they set out and managed to collect some of the world’s finest works of art, manuscripts, and furnishings for their San Marino estate. In 1919, Henry and Arabella Huntington signed the indenture that transferred their San Marino property and collections to a non-profit educational trust, creating **The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens**. The Museum opened to the public in 1928, a year after Henry’s death, and today it hosts more than 500,000 visitors each year.

The philanthropy of Collis, Arabella, and Henry Huntington is well known in southern California. Less well known is the remarkable story of **Archer Milton Huntington (1870–1955)**. It is thought by many today that Archer was the “true” son of Collis P. Huntington and **Arabella Yarrington Worsham**, and that Archer was born out of wedlock while Collis was still married to his first wife, **Elizabeth**. A few years after Archer’s birth, Collis P. Huntington was openly paying attention to Arabella—taking her on long trips and elaborately furnishing her houses, which he bought for her. The house on West 54th Street in New York that he purchased for her was furnished by the master craftsmen **Herter Brothers**. In the drawing room hung the Bouguereau painting, *Mother and Child* (also known as *Temptation*, 1880), and in the master bedroom stood the beautiful marble statue *Cupid Blindfolding Venus* by Italian artist **Frederico Gaetano Villa (1837–1907)**, which presently resides under a cupola in the gardens at the Huntington Library. Elizabeth Huntington died in 1883 and in 1884 Collis and Arabella were wed. Shortly thereafter, Collis adopted Archer as his legitimate son.

Archer had a number of passions in life: he loved to read, write poetry, and collect coins, manuscripts, and art. He also adored museums and once said, “Wherever I put my foot down a museum springs up.” But most of all Archer Huntington was passionate about Spain—its culture and history, its language and literature, its art and architecture, and its people. He spent the better part of ten years researching and translating *El Poema del Cid* (anonymously written, circa 1200 AD).



Alfons Mucha (1860–1939)  
*Mt. Athos of the Slav Epic*  
Oil on canvas 18" × 25"



Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)  
*Beach of Valencia by Morning Light, 1908*  
 Oil on canvas 30 3/8" × 41 5/8"  
 Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Both of his passions, for museums and the Spanish culture would come together in one particular project that he would most cherish, the planning and construction of **The Hispanic Society of America**. This museum and library, erected on West 155th Street in New York City, is dedicated to the study of the arts and cultures of Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. When it opened in 1908 the museum boasted of possessing more than 100,000 books and manuscripts as well as paintings by some of the finest Spanish masters, including **Velazquez, Zurbaran, Goya, and Murillo**.

### *Discovering Sorolla*

The museum had been open for only a few months when Archer ventured to London and at the **Grafton Galleries** saw what must have amazed him—an exhibition of more than 100 paintings by the Spanish artist **Joaquín Sorolla y Bastista (1863–1923)**. Huntington was smitten. Undoubtedly Archer saw in Sorolla's paintings the life, the traditions, and the colours of Spain. Archer purchased a number of paintings and decided to invite Sorolla to create a solo exhibition at the Hispanic Society the very next year.

Sorolla worked feverishly for the exhibition and by the end of December

1908 he had shipped an astonishing 350 paintings to the Hispanic Society. But Sorolla was nervous about his American debut. Candidly he wrote in a letter to Archer whom he had not yet met, "... I am very worried, I am filled with emotion, carrying my heart full of

fears...What will happen in New York? How will they receive my work? Only God knows how anxious I am." Sorolla docked with his family in New York on January 24, 1909. Archer met them at 5:00 p.m. at the **Savoy Hotel** where the Sorollas were staying. That evening he escorted Sorolla to the Hispanic Society where the two men worked together for days, often into the early morning hours, installing the exhibition. It seems as they worked together, a strong friendship developed and grew.

### *Bringing Spain to New York*

No one could have ever expected the overwhelming success Sorolla's exhibition received. When it opened on February 4, it created traffic jams. It was loved by the people and adored by the press. The catalogues had to be reprinted five times. Although it was only open for a little more than a month, approximately 160,000 visitors saw the exhibit. The Sorolla event was the best attended art exhibit New York had ever seen. This period was also probably the high point of both men's careers. Although both men would have future successes, none would equal that month of February 1909 on West 155 Street. For Archer, it was a dream come true—to bring Spain to life in America and to bring acclaim and credibility to the Hispanic Society. Two-hundred paintings



Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)  
*Louis Comfort Tiffany*  
 Oil on canvas 59 1/4" × 88 7/8"  
 Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York



Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)

Valencia, 1916

Oil on canvas 139" × 120"

Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York

sold, and Sorolla received awards and numerous commissions, including portrait commissions to paint **President William Howard Taft (1857–1930)** and **Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933)**.

Sorolla soon received another commission, one that was to consume most of the rest of his life. The *Vision of Spain* was the brainchild of both Sorolla and Archer Huntington. The commission called for a mural to be painted for the Hispanic Society depicting thirteen areas of Spain and Portugal. The mural was planned to take about five years to complete and the overall measurement would be approximately 11 ½ feet tall by 233 feet wide.

### *Visions of Spain*

Sorolla threw himself feverishly into the work. He travelled to each of the different areas of Spain and Portugal and would paint out-of-doors, more or less completing each work on location. The superhuman effort he put into the work had a toll on his health. Nearing the end of his commission in 1918, Archer visited him in Madrid and was concerned about the artist's condition: "Sorolla is not too well. He is thinner and softer and I am alarmed about him... We went over each picture slowly and explored the house in detail. He is very proud of the house and calls it his Hispanic Society. He has a dream of its future as a Sorolla Museum and I think something of that kind may be brought about... There is too clear a change in his physical condition and a

sense of fatigue. But the work is done and may God bless him and his."

Sorolla suffered a stroke in 1920 and died in 1923. The Hispanic Society opened his great *Visions of Spain* to the public in 1926. Its acceptance was positive, but only lukewarm. The times had changed; Modernism had taken hold. But some eighty years later, from 2007 to 2010, The Hispanic Society of America organized a tour of the great murals throughout Spain. At every venue attendance records were broken. More than two-million visitors flocked to the exhibitions, making it the largest and most successful Spanish exhibition in history!

Archer lived until 1955. He successfully worked to save a number of cultural institutions from bankruptcy and served on boards of many others. He inspired his cousin Henry and his mother Arabella to found the Huntington Museum and Botanical Gardens. He himself established the **Museum of the American Indian**, the **Numismatic Society**, the **Mariner's Museum** in Newport News, Virginia, and helped to found the **American Academy of Arts and Letters**.

### *Anna Hyatt Huntington and the Symbol of El Cid*

In 1913 Archer married the renowned animal sculptor **Anna Hyatt (1876–1973)**. Together, they are credited in founding fourteen museums and four wildlife preserves. Their house on Fifth Avenue was donated to the **National Academy of Design** and they founded **Brookgreen Gardens**, the largest sculpture garden in America. In 1927 Anna presented her newly-completed monumental equestrian bronze statue of *El Cid Campeador* to the city of Seville, Spain. The tales of honour, courage and virtue that fuelled El Cid, played an important role throughout Archer's life. As a young man while translating the epic poem he probably saw his father Collis P. Huntington as a Cid-like character. No doubt he also saw El Cid in Sorolla—who, like the eleventh-century patriarch, imbued his craft with honour and nobility. Sorolla gave love and respect to his family and showered praise on his country.

There were six castings done of El Cid Campeador. It is fitting that one of these stands on the grounds of the Hispanic Society just outside the building that houses Sorolla's *Vision of Spain*. It is



Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)  
*Ayamonte*, 1919  
 Detail from *Visions of Spain*  
 Oil on canvas 137" × 191"  
 Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York



Anna Hyatt Huntington (1876-1973)  
*El Cid Campeador*  
 Bronze monumental  
 Balboa Park, San Diego

also fortuitous that another casting of that great monument stands in Balboa Park just outside the entrance of the **San Diego Museum of Art**, where the exhibition *Sorolla and America* is currently on view (May 31 – August 26, 2014). It is as if the nobility of El Cid, the patron of Spain, and the spirit of Archer Huntington—the patron of Spanish Arts—now presides over the exhibition of Joaquín Sorolla.

Perhaps the unique bond between the artist and the patron can best be described by a letter Joaquín Sorolla penned to Archer Huntington on June 10, 1909 translated by Mitchell A. Coddling PhD., Director of the Hispanic Society:

“Today I leave America, who knows if I will ever return, my last thoughts are only about you. My soul is filled with gratitude for all that you have done for me: I know that within my life as a painter, supposing everything done so splendidly by the Hispanic Society, but you know well that it is difficult, that as long as I may live it cannot be erased from my memory or that of my children, what happened in New York. I leave an artistic life in America, and of what remains, I should dedicate to the memory of my dear and affectionate friend Archer whom I effusively embrace like a brother.”

Throughout the centuries the relationship between patron and artist, which begins with mutual respect, often grows into an abiding friendship and ultimately, blossoms into works of art that can stir nations and leave a legacy of cultural significance for the ages. 📖

*Notes:*

*Peter Adams is an artist and has served as President of the California Art Club since 1993.*

*The author wishes to thank the Hispanic Society of America for providing many of the images for this article. Among the reference books used for this article were: Sorolla and America, edited by Blanca Pons-Sorolla and Mark A. Roglan, published by Meadows Museum SMU, 2013; and Art of Wealth; The Huntingtons in a Gilded Age by Shelley M. Bennett, published by Huntington Library Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, 2013.*

*The exhibition, Sorolla and America, is on view at the San Diego Museum of Art in Balboa Park through August 26, 2014. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue.*