

2019 Garden Docent Training Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

Marjorie Merriweather Post as Collector—Interpretive Messages

Post intended her art collections to be experienced within the intimate setting of her home. Post's legacy is Hillwood.

Post, under the tutelage of experts like Duveen, began in the 1920s to acquire outstanding French furnishings to decorate her homes, thus establishing interests in French and decorative art* that she continued throughout her life.

As a result of her Moscow experience in the 1930s, Post became a pioneer collector of Russian fine and decorative arts. It was during that time period that she had her "great moment of artistic and collecting innovation:" she recognized those Russian decorative and liturgical objects as having artistic merit.

Her collecting criteria was to look for objects with:

- Great beauty and design
- Exquisite craftsmanship
- Connections to historical figures and royalty

She had a means to collect because of the wealth inherited from her father C.W. Post, the founder of the Post cereal empire. That wealth continued to grow through business decisions like those made by herself with husband E.F. Hutton.

*Decorative arts are traditionally understood as furniture, metalwork, ceramics, glass and textiles. They are often juxtaposed with fine arts, which are typically understood to include paintings and sculpture.

Marjorie Merriweather Post & her Russian Collection—Interpretive Messages

From 1937-38 Marjorie Post was in the Soviet Union as ambassadress. While there, she fell in love with the Russian culture and its art.

She was in the Soviet Union at a time when the government was selling confiscated imperial-era objects for hard currency to fund its industrialization.

She purchased Russian art through government-sponsored commission shops. These shops were where Russian and Western art dealers and members of the diplomatic corps could purchase prized items.

She purchased only the nucleus of her collection while in Moscow, and acquired most of her collection over the next thirty years in Europe and the United States at auction and from art dealers and private collectors.

She was by far the most significant collector of Russian art in the United States during her lifetime.

Post's decision that her collections would become a museum resulted in the preservation of these objects for the public's enjoyment and education. As Mikhail Piotrovsky, director of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, has written: "...many of these objects might have been dispersed or destroyed had they not fallen into the kindly possession of Marjorie Merriweather Post. Thanks to her, there is now a small oasis of Russian culture in Washington...." (*A Taste for Splendor*, p. 8)