

Langdon Warner's vision for the Japanese collection at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1930-1935.

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Abstract

Langdon Warner (1881–1955), one of the most influential historians of Asian art of the twentieth century and one of World War II's 'Monuments Men', significantly helped shape and sustain the American public's understanding of East Asia and especially of Japan, from the 1920s through the early post-war period. This essay explores his personal vision for the collection and display of Japanese arts as manifested in the collection at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, where he served as the museum's first Asian art adviser between 1930 and 1935. The Japanese arts that he acquired for the Nelson reveal what sorts of Japanese arts were and were not then available and what was fashionable among museum-goers in the US at that time. Moreover, although Warner's acquisitions for the Nelson were far from comprehensive, they demonstrate his keen understanding of the Japanese people and an astute sense of the artistic strengths of the culture.

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