

# A bridge of knowledge...

The most outstanding collection of Asian art ever assembled by one man will go on public display for the first time next Summer in San Francisco.

Gathered by Avery Brundage, president of the International Olympic Committee, the collection, tracing more than four thousand years of Oriental art, is of such importance that the city of San Francisco has designed and constructed a major museum building especially to display it — the Wing for Oriental Art at M. H. de Young Memorial Museum.

Superlatives are bandied about whenever there is talk of the Avery Brundage Collection which contains some of the world's finest Chinese bronze vessels and mirrors, ceramics and jade, and of Gandhara, Khmer, Chinese, Japanese and Indian sculpture. While Avery Brundage's activities as a sportsman and Olympic leader are familiar to every-

one the world over, his standing as a collector of fine art is not widely known beyond scholarly and cultural circles. Yet, his expertise is such that he is regarded with reverential esteem by the most fastidious art dealers and collectors.

Asked where and why he started developing this extraordinary interest for Oriental art (a "disease" as he puts it), Avery Brundage answers "London 1935". at the first great exhibition of Chinese art ever shown in the West.

René-Yvon d'Argencé, consultant for Oriental art at de Young Museum, points out that Avery Brundage appeared on the collecting scene when the true nature and significance of early Far Eastern art were just beginning to be appreciated in the West and reevaluated in the East.

The first three decades of the 20th century proved exciting for Orientalists. Discovery of dead

cities in the Indus Valley, in northern China, Japan and Vietnam established existence of rich and varied Neolithic cultures throughout Asia. Other discoveries revealed great Bronze Age sophistication and artistic achievements.

The succession of archeological shocks caused art historians, museum curators and private collectors to reappraise their position and to readjust their taste — requiring reeducation in many cases.

All of this helped Avery Brundage become better served by history and archeology than his predecessors. But it is his predilection and methods of collecting that have given the collection its strength and originality.

"The various ingredients that go into the making of Avery Brundage's aesthetic ideals and policies are very complex, as complex as the man himself", art consultant d'Argencé said. "As a sportsman, he has fought all his life for 'amateurism', for the beauty of the individual and gratuitous effort. As you can see, whether they are applied to art or sport, these now almost derogative terms — 'amateur and amateurism' — retrieve with him their original significance."

In a speech delivered at the opening ceremony of the 54th session of the International Olympic Committee, in Tokyo in 1958, art collector president

Brundage used *netsuke* to compare the similarity of art and sport. *Netsuke* are thumbnail-sized wooden or ivory figures (miniature sculpture) that serve as toggles for seal and perfume boxes that hang from kimono sashes in Japan.

"Originally, these netsuke were carved with loving care for personal use", he said. "The carver conceived the design and built something of himself into the object. It may have taken him six months, but... it bore the stamp of his own personality. He was an amateur carver.

"Later, after the demand for netsuke grew, there arose a class of professional carvers. These men were usually more accomplished and expert. Their work was perhaps more polished and displayed a superior technical skill. But it was ordinarily cold, stiff, and without imagination. Missing was the spirit of the amateur carver, which causes these netsuke to be esteemed so much higher by the collector than the commercial product carved for money."

A patron of art and a patron of sport, Avery Brundage perpetuates the historical relationship between the two fields in the truly Olympic spirit. He often points out for instance that charioteering and archery were listed together with music, calligraphy, mathematics and propriety as the six arts of refined ancient China. And that in ancient Greece the Olympic Games were an artistic as well as an athletic festival. Like Pierre de Coubertin before him, Avery Brundage has advocated with great success the development of artistic programmes in connection with the celebration of modern Olympic Games. He himself contributed to an exhibition of Oriental art treasures held in Tokyo during the 1964 Games by lending the organizers some unique pieces of his collection.

"The Opening", as it is fondly referred to by San Francisco art patrons, is scheduled for June 11, 1966. The new Wing has



already received overwhelming approval from San Franciscans, when voters surged over the two-thirds majority to say 'yes' to the nearly 3 million dollars bond issue needed for its construction.

The collection will be arranged in chronological order according to geographic location with sections devoted to China, Japan, Korea, India, Siam, Khmer, Tibet, Nepal and Persia.

While visiting the collection, visitors will look out over the famous Japanese Tea Garden arranged in the Golden Gate Park where the de Young Museum is located.

San Francisco is planning numerous events in connection with the opening, including a symposium that will allow noted Orientalists from all over the world to delve deeply into the cultural and historical significance of the many rare treasures in the collection.

Another example of the close connection between art and the Olympic Movement is that both contribute to mutual respect and goodwill through developing international understanding and appreciation of different cultures, traditions and civilizations.

"San Francisco has long been considered the gateway to the Orient", president Brundage declared recently. "I hope the collection will help build a bridge of knowledge between East and West."