



AVERY BRUNDAGE AND ART



Our President, Mr. Avery BRUNDAGE celebrated his 82nd birthday on 28th September. It is well known that he has an equal passion for Olympic matters as for anything to do with Far-Eastern art.

All Olympic fans are familiar with the sporting image of the I.O.C. President, but few are those who have discovered the art connoisseur in him. His birthday seemed to be an ideal opportunity to introduce Mr. BRUNDAGE to you in this new light.

It was in 1935, on a visit to the first big exhibition of Asiatic art at the Royal Academy in London, that he fell in love with anything that throughout the centuries had been worked by the most gifted artists of the Far East

with such infinite care. *"An unceasing, immortal passion"*, as the President has been known to remark.

Shortly afterwards he began collecting oriental treasures, learning as he went, replacing some pieces with others, discarding some outright, always seeking the perfect specimens.

In his world travels as President of the United States Olympic Committee and then of the International Olympic Committee, he has had for many years an ideal opportunity to see and purchase additions. He stacked them in every room of his large Chicago apartment and in his house in Santa Barbara, California.

"Some 30 years after the famous London exhibition he was literally knee deep in treasures. They were all over the floor, window sills and book shelves of his office in the La Salle Hotel, which he owns" recalls Edith Weigle.

"I followed him as he raced up a spiral staircase to a huge storage room where hundreds more art objects crowded each other on the metal shelves. No wonder he was a three-time amateur, all-round athletic champion of America, I thought, as I toiled up those steps after him".

Always generous, he formerly loaned many pieces to the Art Institute, where they were exhibited for years. He has also been a long-time member of its board of trustees.

Ten years or so ago he offered his collection, estimated at a value of 20 million dollars, to the town of San Francisco which has since built a museum to house these thousands of objects: sculptures, ceramics, bronzes, paintings, jades, etc.

Recently he repeated this gesture and now nearly 50 million dollars-worth of oriental treasures have been collected at these very doors to the Far East.

A new 25-member committee from San Francisco and the Bay area, chosen by the Mayor for individual interest and knowledge in far eastern culture, will carry on raising maintenance funds and developing plans for the centre.

The Brundage collection is housed in its own specially designed wing of the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, a city-owned institution. The collection's curator, chosen by Brundage, is a Breton, René-Yvon Lefèvre d'ARGENCE.

A greatly expanded programme for display and study of the art objects - some of them without known duplicates anywhere - is getting under way. Lectures and symposiums will be held. Undergraduates and graduate students and other scholars of oriental art will be able to do research work in the museum. They will have ready access to hundreds of items which, for lack of space, have not been shown before.

The committee will work to augment the collections by filling gaps and will aid the work of d'Argence, whose authority is expanded under the new plan. It will carry on independent of the museum's own board of trustees.

Mr. BRUNDAGE says his new gift comprises "a couple of thousand items". (The first had over 6,000). Some of them are unique in the world today.

In an introduction to "Chinese Treasures from the Avery Brundage Collection", the catalogue of the recent travelling exhibition, Gordon B. WASHBURN, Director of Asia House gallery in New York, says: "Dependent though it is on large private resources, such collecting as this is even more dependent upon a strong human vision and on a truly indomitable will. Its assemblage represents a personal act of affirmation: It is a declaration of Avery BRUNDAGE's great faith in man and in the significance of man's history. Thus it may be understood as his own prodigious way of saying "yes" within the vast silence into which we are born and that each of us may break in his own way".

*

*

*