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Ludwig Knaus, *Peace*, ca. 1878, and Gustav Richter, *Victory*, 1878

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New Discoveries

Ludwig Knaus, *Peace*, ca. 1878, and Gustav Richter, *Victory*, 1878 by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu

These two allegorical pendant pictures, each measuring a whopping 11.4 by 5.6 feet, once belonged to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a gift to the museum from the German-American banker Jacob H. Schiff.^[1] Deaccessioned in 1956 and sold at auction,^[2] both reappeared on the market recently: Ludwig Knaus's *Peace* (ca. 1878; fig. 1) was auctioned at Sotheby's, London, on June 6, 2017 (lot 33), and acquired by Galerie Michael in Beverly Hills, California, which sold it to a private collector in 2018; and Gustave Richter's *Victory* (1878; fig. 2) was auctioned at Sotheby's, London, on December 13, 2017.



Fig. 1, Ludwig Knaus, *Peace*, ca. 1878. Oil on canvas. Private collection, China. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of Galerie Michael, Beverly Hills, CA. [\[larger image\]](#)

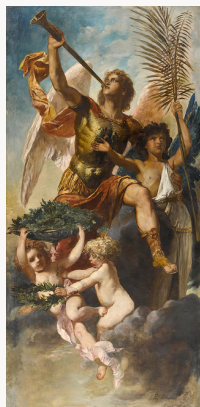


Fig. 2, Gustave Richter, *Victory*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Present whereabouts unknown. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © Sotheby's, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/19th-century-european-ptgs-117102/lot.67.html>. [\[larger image\]](#)

Peace features a winged female figure kneeling on a cloud, scattering flowers; two putti below her attempt to catch them before they flutter down to the earth. *Victory* shows a young male figure, also on a cloud but seated astride and blowing a trumpet. Dressed in armor, he is accompanied by a scantily draped winged Victory carrying a palm branch. A pair of putti at the bottom hold up a shield filled with olive branches and a laurel wreath, respectively. The two paintings were clearly conceived as pendants: they have the same dimensions and similar compositions. Both are signed but only the Richter is dated, to 1878.^[3] Little is known about their origin. All we know is that in 1888 the two paintings were owned by Galerie Honrath and van Baerle in Berlin.^[4] Located at Unter den Linden 3, this gallery was a *Hof-Kunsthandlung*, which meant that it was a designated purveyor of art to the imperial court. Due in part, perhaps, to this special status, the gallery had an excellent reputation and catered to an international clientele.

In 1888, Ludwig Knaus (1829–1910) was a famous artist, best known for his meticulously painted genre scenes of German country life. Fourteen years earlier, he had been appointed professor at the Royal Prussian Academy in Berlin, a post that he held until his death. His works were exhibited and sold throughout Europe and the United States. Two of his paintings were in the collection of Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (1828–87), who bequeathed them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art upon her death.^[5]

Peace was a departure from Knaus's habitual production in size, style, and subject matter. In general, his works tended to be small and tightly painted, featuring realistic scenes from German rural life. With its idealized figures and loose brushwork, *Peace* may be compared with the artist's *The Holy Family* or *Repose in Egypt* (fig. 3) of 1876, commissioned but refused by the Russian Czarina Maria Alexandrovna and ultimately acquired by Catharine Lorillard Wolfe.^[6] This work, as well as *Charity* (1887), a work also once held by the Metropolitan Museum (bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900) but deaccessioned in 2006,^[7] introduced an idealizing side trend in the artist's oeuvre.^[8] The putti at the bottom of *Peace* show a certain likeness to the angels on the left side of *The Holy Family*, suggesting that the work may have been painted around the same time (i.e., in the mid-to-late 1870s).



Fig. 3, Ludwig Knaus, *The Holy Family or Repose in Egypt*, 1876. Postcard after the artist's painting (present whereabouts unknown), printed by Detroit Publishing Company, 1905–14. New York Public Library, New York. Photograph courtesy NYPL Public Domain Archive, <https://nypl.getarchive.net/media/the-holy-family-ludwig-knaus-dc48f5>. [larger image]

Like Knaus, Gustav Richter (1823–84) was a respected German painter, though perhaps not as well known internationally. In the early 1850s, he painted mythological frescoes for the Neues Museum (New Museum) in Berlin.^[9] Later, especially during the 1870s, he became known as a portrait painter. He painted numerous likenesses of members of the royal and imperial families, including the well-known posthumous portrait of Queen Louise of Prussia (1879) now in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. *Victory*, painted in 1878, may be seen as a throwback to his earlier work of the 1850s and 1860s.

Jacob H. Schiff (1847–1920) was a New York banker and philanthropist.^[10] Born in Frankfurt, Germany, he came to New York in 1865 and established the brokerage firm of Budge, Schiff & Co. He became a US citizen in 1870 but returned to Germany in 1872 when Budge, Schiff & Co. was dissolved. Two years later, he came back to New York to join the bank of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., a move that marked the beginning of a phenomenal banking and business career that made Schiff both rich and famous. Soon after his return to the United States, on May 6, 1875, Schiff married Therese Loeb, who bore him a daughter, Frieda, in 1876 and a son, Mortimer, in 1877.^[11] The couple initially lived at 57 East Fifty-Second Street in a house bought by Schiff's father-in-law, Solomon Loeb. From there, they gradually moved uptown until, in 1901, they had their own mansion built on 965 Fifth Avenue by George A. Freeman and Charles C. Thain.^[12]

Schiff bought *Peace* and *Victory* from Honrath and van Baerle while on summer vacation in Germany in 1888. The express purpose of the acquisition was to donate the two paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Indeed, it appears that before sealing the deal, Schiff took an option on the works so that he might inquire whether the museum would be interested in them. Much of the transaction is recorded in the correspondence between Schiff and the director of the museum, Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1832–1904), currently held in the museum archives.^[13] First is a telegram, dated June 16, 1888, from Cesnola to Schiff, who was taking the waters in Marienbad, “Accepted with gratitude and best thanks of the Trustees.” Schiff

immediately responded with a long letter (dated June 18, 1888) in which he detailed the logistics of the transaction:

I rec.d yesterday your cablegram advising acceptance by the museum of the two paintings by L. Knaus and G. Richter (dec.d) and I have in consequence informed the owners (Messrs Honrath and van Baerle of Berlin) of the acceptance of the refusal, which I had on the paintings. At the same time I have instructed these gentlemen to forward promptly direct [*sic*] to the museum. The paintings are to be delivered free of every expense, in good order . . .

On July 2, 1888, Cesnola wrote an official thank-you letter to Schiff, who had meanwhile traveled from Marienbad to his native Frankfurt:

My dear Sir:

Before anything else, permit me to thank you most heartily both personally, and in the name of the Trustees, for having thought of our dear Museum and for your generous gift, which I have no doubt will be highly appreciated. If our rich New Yorkers, when they are abroad, would follow your excellent example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art would soon equal, if not surpass, similar institutions in the Capitals of Europe. The new building will be open to the public on the 28th of November next, preceded by the Grand Opening ceremony on the 27th of November at which I hope you will be present. When the pictures arrive here (I saw a cablegram from Berlin in one of our dailies saying that they had already been shipped) I will give them my personal attention . . .

In case you should visit Berlin before returning to New York and you have time to spare, I wish you would call on my good friend Profr. Knaus for whom I enclose you my card of introduction in case you do not know him personally. He will be glad to hear that another of his paintings, thanks to your generosity, is coming to adorn the walls of the Museum. We have two of his paintings in the Wolfe collection, and yours makes three . . .

Cesnola's letter reminds us that, at the time of Schiff's gift, the Metropolitan Museum was still a young institution. Incorporated in 1870, it opened its doors in 1872 in the Dodworth Building at 681 Fifth Avenue. Eight years later, the museum moved to its current site on Fifth Avenue and Eighty-Second Street in a new building designed by Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould. A first addition to that building, constructed in 1888, "the new western galleries," housed the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe collection bequeathed to the museum one year earlier.

Though the museum was still in its collection-building phase, decisions to acquire new works were nonetheless made prudently. The Metropolitan Museum archives include two letters from museum trustees with special expertise in contemporary art, who recommended the Schiff donation for acquisition, apparently after having been asked for their opinions by Cesnola. The first letter is from the well-known art dealer Samuel Putnam Avery,^[14] who, in an undated letter to the museum director, writes,

Dear General:

"Hooray" hurry over the cable "Accepted" and write also our thanks. I am sure that

I have seen the Knaus at any rate—and at any rate [*sic*] both are great artists, and as specimens of decoration works they will be very acceptable and useful. They can be put in some special place perhaps? At all events, they are valuable additions and also Mr. Schiff's example is a valuable one.

The acquisition of the painting was also cheered by trustee Henry G. Marquand,^[15] who wrote on June 17, 1888, from his home in Newport, Rhode Island, "I am truly delighted to find that we have a new strong friend Schiff. . . . The 2 works are excellent and we must study for a good place where we can use them."

Both letters suggest that the reason to accept the two works was not only their perceived quality but also the prospect of gaining the support of Schiff, who, by 1888, had become a rich and influential member of the New York banking elite. Since 1886, he was director of Kuhn, Loeb & Co. and he had set out on a path of philanthropy that would benefit numerous institutions in New York City.^[16] Both Avery and Marquand felt that Schiff was a man to be cultivated, and Cesnola appears to have agreed.

Peace and *Victory* were not Schiff's first donation to the museum. Five years earlier, in 1883, he had donated to the museum a copy of Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* (original 1514; unknown copy).^[17] In that same year, he had also given the museum a donation of \$5,000. However, despite Cesnola's gushy thank-you letter of 1888, Schiff would not make another donation to the museum until ten years later, when he offered the museum Henry Mosler's painting *Brittany Wedding* (1892).^[18] At that time, Cesnola held out the promise of a trustee position, writing,

Permit me to take this occasion to express to you my personal thanks for the kind interest you have always taken in our young Museum. . . . I should be very happy to see you fill the next vacancy on our Board of Trustees, as I am sure that the Museum could not secure a more valuable member in its board than yourself.

The trusteeship never materialized. Anti-semitism may be to blame,^[19] but it is more likely that Schiff's donations were too few and far between. Indeed, it was not until the early twentieth century that Schiff stepped up his giving to the museum, contributing \$1,000 toward the purchase of Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of Benedikt von Hertenstein (1517) and a total of \$3,832 toward the replication in marble of three reliefs by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, including one representing his own children.^[20] In 1910, he also donated a bronze sculpture, *World Peace* or *Universal Peace*, by the Russian sculptor Jules Butensky, valued at \$5,000, in addition to two Egyptian mummified animals, a hawk and a crocodile, and a set of Japanese imperial orders and medals.^[21] Moreover, upon his death, he bequeathed \$25,000 to the museum. All of this may have been too little, too late for a trustee position, but it did qualify Schiff, posthumously, for the official designation of benefactor of the museum, especially after his son Mortimer had added \$10,000 in his name to make a total of over \$50,000.^[22]

Knaus's *Peace* and Richter's *Victory* remind us of the convoluted histories of US museum collections, which, largely dependent on gifts and bequests, were and still are subject to the complex motivations of donors, as well as the tortuous decisions made by directors, trustees,

and curators. What inspired Schiff to buy these two paintings and donate them to the Metropolitan Museum? Did he especially admire the works, either for their style or their subject matter? Did he think that, in view of their size, they would make a spectacular gift? Was he trying to impress his acquaintances in Berlin or was he angling for a trustee position in New York? We will never fully appreciate Schiff's reasons, nor will we ever know exactly why the museum decided to accept (and later deaccession) the two paintings. Of course, one might argue that none of this matters since, like most deaccessioned works, *Peace* and *Victory* have barely left a trace. Other than two slim folders in the archive and a mention in an old catalogue, they have been expunged from the museum records. This short article illustrates, however, that deaccessioned works are an important part of a museum history. And although one understands why museums don't want to emphasize their deaccessioning activities, they are very much a part of their histories, reflecting changes in taste and market values, politics (at the macro and micro levels), ideology, and, ultimately, the ever-evolving and revolving ideas of the role of art museums in society.

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Notes

[1] Both paintings are described in Bryson Burroughs, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Catalogue of Paintings*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1916), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/>, in which they are listed as K 72-3 and R 41-1.

[2] *Oil Paintings European and American from the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Sold by Order of the Board of Trustees*, Catalogue Sale, Plaza Art Galleries, June 7, 1956.

[3] According to the Sotheby's auction catalogue (London, December 13, 2017), it was commissioned by Schiff from the artist; however, this cannot be confirmed. Indeed, in one of his letters to Cesnola (cited in the text) Schiff himself writes that both the Knaus and the Richter paintings were "owned" by Honrath and van Baerle.

[4] The gallery was founded in 1871 by Eduard Gustav Honrath (1837-94) and Adalbert Wilhelm Hubert van Baerle (1833-?). It was to close in 1903, when the surviving partner (van Baerle) auctioned off the remaining inventory of the gallery. See *Ölgemälde neuer Meister ersten Ranges die im Auftrage der Firma Honrath & van Baerle, Berlin, wegens Aufgabe des Geschäftes versteigert werden* (Berlin: Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, November 24, 1903).

[5] See "The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection," in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Hand Book, No. 1* (New York, 1887), 1:8, no. 26 (*Old Woman with Cats*) and 1:15, no. 116 (*The Holy Family or Repose in Egypt*), <https://cdm16028.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15324coll10/id/5363>.

[6] "The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection," 1:15, no. 116. The painting, as well as the other Knaus in Wolfe's collection, *Old Woman with Cats*, was deaccessioned sometime in the middle of the twentieth century.

[7] Sale, Christie's, New York, April 19, 2006, lot 94. Current whereabouts unknown.

[8] On this trend in Knaus's work, see Ludwig Pietsch, *Knaus* (Bielefeld/Leipzig, Germany: Velhagen and Klasing, 1896), 50-51.

[9] See "1850-1852, Gustav Heidenreich, Gustav Richter and Robert Müller," Germanic Mythology, accessed June 19, 2019, <http://www.germanicmythology.com/works/HeidenreichArt.html>.

[10] On Schiff, see, among others, Cyrus Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1929); Stephen Bermingham, "Our Crowd": *The Great Jewish Families of New York* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), esp. part 4; and Naomi W. Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American-Jewish Leadership* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press and University Press of

New England, 1999). See also Adam Gower, *Jacob Schiff and the Art of Risk: American Financing of Japan's War with Russia (1904–1905)* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

[11] A bronze relief portrait of the two children at ages seven and eight by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1884–85) is in the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in Cornish, NH. See John H. Dryfhout, *The Work of Augustus Saint-Gaudens* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008), 152–53. In 1906–7, Schiff financed the production of a marble copy of the relief for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc. no. 05.15.3; see also note 20). Frieda's portrait, at age eighteen, by Anders Zorn is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was painted during Zorn's first trip to the US in 1894. The painting was bequeathed to the museum by Frieda's daughter, Carola Warburg Rothschild, in 1987.

[12] For a photograph of the house, which is not extant today, see “The Jacob H. Schiff Residence,” *Beyond the Gilded Age*, published August 10, 2012, <http://www.beyondthegildedage.com/2012/08/the-jacob-h-schiff-residence.html>.

[13] The museum has two folders with Schiff's correspondence: Folders Sch 3, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. All letters cited in this article are in these folders.

[14] Avery was a founding and lifelong trustee of the Metropolitan Museum.

[15] Like Avery, Marquand was a founding and lifelong trustee.

[16] On Schiff as philanthropist, see especially Cohen, *Jacob H. Schiff*, ch. 20.

[17] The work appears to have been deaccessioned.

[18] The painting is no longer in the museum's collection.

[19] Cohen implies as much when she writes, “Schiff failed to scale the walls of the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Natural History . . .” *Jacob H. Schiff*, 75.

[20] For the relief of his children, see note 11; the other two reliefs are *The Children of Prescott Hall Butler*, original 1880–81, marble copy 1906–7; and *Homer Schiff Saint-Gaudens*, original 1882, marble copy 1906–7.

[21] The forty-eight medals, which were given jointly with Edward D. Adams, a museum trustee, are still in the collection of the museum. According to the museum website, they were acquired by Adams and Schiff from the Japanese government in Yokohama in 1905. They do not seem to have included the medals Schiff himself had received from the Japanese emperor for his efforts in extending a loan to Japan to help the country finance the Russo-Japanese War. See Cyrus Adler, *Jacob Henry Schiff: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1921), 11–16, and Gower, *Jacob Schiff and the Art of Risk*, passim.

[22] The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives (folders Sch 3) contain a list of all of Schiff's monetary and in-kind donations, including the \$10,000 from Mortimer.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Ludwig Knaus, *Peace*, ca. 1878. Oil on canvas. Private collection, China. Artwork in the public domain; photograph courtesy of Galerie Michael, Beverly Hills, CA. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Gustave Richter, *Victory*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Present whereabouts unknown. Artwork in the public domain; photograph © Sotheby's, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/19th-century-european-ptgs-117102/lot.67.html>. [return to text]



Fig. 3, Ludwig Knaus, *The Holy Family or Repose in Egypt*, 1876. Postcard after the artist's painting (present whereabouts unknown), printed by Detroit Publishing Company, 1905–14. New York Public Library, New York. Photograph courtesy NYPL Public Domain Archive, <https://nypl.getarchive.net/media/the-holy-family-ludwig-knaus-dc48f5>. [return to text]