

## Two Remarkable Women/Sisters

By Deborah Del Gais

ddelgais@cox.net

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Lucy Truman Aldrich (1869-1955) and Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller (1874-1948) were both enthusiastic collectors of Asian art and great benefactors to the Asian art collections at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum. Lucy Aldrich's collection of Asian textiles, donated between 1934 and 1956, is not only the single most significant gift of textiles to the Museum but is also one of the broadest and best collections of these materials in the world. Two other important gifts from Lucy Aldrich, a Benin head (39.054) and a spectacular Elizabethan *Portrait of a Lady of the Hampden Family* (42.283), enhance the Museum's holdings significantly. Her younger sister, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, made a comparable gift to the Museum in 1934, when she donated her comprehensive collection of Japanese bird-and-flower prints (*kachōga*), one of the finest in the world. Mrs. Rockefeller and her husband, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960), also made various other gifts to the Department of Asian Art in the 1930s

and 1940s, including other Japanese prints and a Chinese jade lithophone inscribed and dated 1761. These very generous benefactions have played a major role in shaping the character of the Asian collections at the RISD Museum.

The eldest daughters of the powerful U.S. Senator for Rhode Island, Nelson W. Aldrich (1841-1915, in office 1881-1912), Lucy Truman Aldrich and Abby Greene Aldrich Rockefeller were educated and cosmopolitan, and their strength of character and independence of mind were deliberately fostered by their parents. Their father made a considerable fortune in business and developed broad aesthetic and intellectual interests that originated with his first trip to Europe in 1872-73. He married their mother, Abby Pearce Chapman Aldrich (1845-1917), in 1866. The two sisters, educated privately by governesses and later in private schools, drew upon the rich traditional culture of their New England heritage but also were familiar with the politically engaged world of the capital, having moved between Washington, D.C. and Providence during their early lives. Their father's interest in art certainly fostered the sisters' artistic and intellectual pursuits. Regrettably for their father, who was occupied with political matters in Washington, they took their first European grand tour with a family friend in 1894. This trip was to be the first of many to Europe and, in Lucy Truman Aldrich's case, to other parts of the world.

In November 1895, at the house of her friend Madeleine Goddard (d. 1931), Abby met John D. Rockefeller, Jr., then a student at Brown University and heir to one of the largest fortunes in the United States,. After a long courtship, the two were married on October 9, 1901, at Indian Oaks, Senator Aldrich's Warwick Neck estate, in an elaborate and festive society wedding. The couple remained devoted to each other throughout their

lives and had six children; their shared interests included philanthropy, art collecting, and historic restoration. After Abby married, Lucy maintained a close relationship with her sister and brother-in-law through visits and extensive correspondence and consistently expressed deep affection for her niece and five nephews.

Lucy, who was congenitally deaf, never married. In 1917, after the death of Abby Pearce, Lucy and Abby's mother, Minnie MacFadden (1876-1947), their mother's nurse during her last years, offered to become Lucy's live-in companion. With the final dispersal of their parents' property in 1927, Lucy's siblings gave her their shares of the family house at 110 Benevolent Street in Providence (now property of the Rhode Island Historical Society), where she resided until her death in 1955. Abby and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., also made occasional gifts to her, and John's business and philanthropic contacts provided a network of support around the world once she decided to travel extensively.

In 1919, after World War I had ended, Lucy embarked on the first of six trips to Asia and Egypt, spanning the period 1919-29. She was always accompanied by Minnie McFadden, who remained her trusted companion. It was on her first journey in 1919 that she discovered Japanese textiles and began collecting extraordinary examples of Asian costume and fabrics, many of which she bought during her travels in Asia. The Japanese Nō robe collection, in particular, is not only comprehensive and of outstanding quality, but also contains many documented costumes still preserved in their original wrappers with records of previous ownership. Lucy loved textiles because of their color and texture. In a telling commentary on her lifelong passion, Nelson Aldrich gave his daughter the wonderful Elizabethan *Portrait of a Lady of the Hampden Family* (42.283) that she

would later present to the Museum. The richness of costume and surface in this work clearly foreshadows Lucy's later collecting interests. Interestingly, it was Lucy who ordered Abby's wardrobe at the great designer houses in Paris, such as Worth, Reboux, and Patou; Lucy drew upon her encyclopedic knowledge of the Parisian sources for costumes and accessories when she undertook these shopping expeditions. The Asian costumes and textiles that Lucy Truman Aldrich so diligently and lovingly accumulated from 1919 on are now in the collection of the RISD Museum and form the core of one of the most significant collections of Asian textiles in the United States.

Abby, who visited Asia only once in the company of her husband and her daughter "Babs" (Abby Rockefeller Mauzé, 1903-76) in 1921, amassed much of her collection of Japanese prints in the United States beginning in about 1916 and 1917. She and her husband shared an appreciation of art; they were purchasing books on Chinese ceramics as early as 1908 and in 1915, in one of his first significant purchases, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., bought J.P. Morgan's (1837-1913) collection of Chinese ceramics for \$2 million. In the 1920s, Abby began buying Buddhist religious art and made these objects the focus of dedicated rooms in their New York apartment and in their summer home at Seal Harbor on Mount Desert Island in Maine. The Japanese prints collection, however, was exclusively Abby's undertaking, especially during the decade of the twenties. Although some of Abby's prints were purchased during her 1921 trip to Asia, much of what she bought came from American collections or from dealers like Yamanaka and Company, who were based in Japan and had offices in several locations on the East Coast. Sometimes the sisters would buy objects for each other, and in a letter of 1919 from Japan, Lucy laments the lack of availability of good Japanese prints for her

sister. By the time that Abby made her very generous 1934 gift of Japanese prints to the RISD Museum, she had already begun to shift her attention to her collections of American folk art and modern art. In 1929, her interest in contemporary art motivated her to found the Museum of Modern Art with Miss Lillie P. Bliss and Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan. In addition, she collaborated with John D. Rockefeller, Jr., on numerous philanthropic and historic restoration projects, including Williamsburg. Approximately half of the RISD Museum's collection of Japanese prints is a gift from Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Her collection of Japanese bird-and-flower prints (*kachōga*) is significant because of its comprehensiveness, its extraordinary quality, and its unusual subject matter. Long regarded as a minor genre in the Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock tradition, these materials have been understudied and underappreciated until recently.

The Aldrich family played an active role at RISD as early as the 1910s and 1920s, primarily through William T. Aldrich's (1881-1966) activities. Not only was Lucy and Abby's younger brother a member of the faculty and architect of the Museum's Radeke building (1926), but he was an Annual Governing Member of the RISD Corporation beginning in 1913 as well as a Trustee (1914-60, Trustee Emeritus 1960-66) and sat on the Museum Committee during the period 1914-40. Lucy became a member of the Museum Committee in 1933. In 1934, both sisters made their first donations to the Museum—Abby presented her collection of Japanese bird-and-flower prints (*kachōga*) and Lucy gifted some Asian textiles. A year later, Lucy gave the first in a series of significant donations to the Museum—an exquisite and important collection of Japanese Nō costumes and Buddhist priest's robes (*kesa*). These donations of Asian textiles

continued until her death, when the remainder of her collection entered the Museum in the form of a bequest in 1955 and 1956.

Between 1935 and 1937, the two sisters, with Mrs. Murray S. (Helen Metcalf) Danforth (1887-1984, President of the Board of Trustees and Eliza Radeke's niece), purchased an eighteenth-century English pine-paneled room to be installed as what is now known as "the porcelain gallery." The space was designed to create an appropriate setting for Lucy Aldrich's significant collection of European porcelain figures, gifted to the Museum in 1937. This was the first of a series of galleries designed to exhibit the Aldrich and Rockefeller collections housed in the Museum. After Abby Aldrich Rockefeller died in 1948, Lucy Truman Aldrich spearheaded the renovation of a section of the sixth-floor Asian galleries. Enlisting the assistance of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and her nephews, Nelson and David, she arranged for the renovation of a suite of three galleries that are now dedicated to the memory of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The first, the Asian textiles gallery (formerly known as the "silk room" because it was used to display the Asian textiles gifted and lent by Lucy Truman Aldrich over the years), was renovated by William G. Perry of the Boston firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn. Two adjacent galleries were designed by Philip Johnson (1906-2005) with the support of two of Abby's sons, Nelson A. Rockefeller (1908-79) and David Rockefeller (1915- ). One gallery was intended for the exhibition of Japanese prints and the adjacent stairwell gallery was distinguished by Johnson's striking cases, created to house Chinese porcelains gifted by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The galleries were dedicated on February 1, 1953 and continue to be used to display the extraordinary collections presented to the RISD Museum by both sisters.