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**Patizipativer Sammlungsaufbau in der Vergangenheit**



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## Jewish members of Britain's National Art Collections Fund, 1903–1930

“It is high time that the Art loving patriots of this country should launch their new ship and I am prepared to work for it if my services are wanted”.<sup>1</sup> This was Isidore Spielmann’s (1854–1925), President of the Jewish Historical Society of England, reply to an invitation from the Chairman of the National Gallery, to join a new charity, The National Art Collections Fund (hereafter NACF). The charity was established in 1903 by Christiana Herringham (1852–1929), a tempera artist and women’s suffrage campaigner, on recognizing that a fundraising society was needed in Britain to help its national museums compete with their foreign rivals.

Although initially framed as “the Society of Friends of the National Gallery”, emulating the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, Berlin and the Société des amis du Louvre (both established in 1897), Herringham stressed that the NACF was primarily an acquisitions fund for national museums, which its name should reflect. The NACF was an overtly “national” cause – envisioned by its founders to protect Britain’s cultural heritage from “foreign” hands. Unlike its Continental antecedents, the charity did not raise money for one museum in a specific location or collect fine art exclusively.<sup>2</sup> The cause was promoted to a

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<sup>1</sup> Isidore Spielmann to the 27th Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, July 25, 1903, Crawford Muniments (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland) Acc. 9769/97/18.

<sup>2</sup> Ireland was not excluded. One of the first acquisitions made by the Fund was a watercolour by Arthur Hughes, *Marianna in the Moated Grange*, bought by Mrs Herbert Cohen, and presented to Dublin’s Municipal Art Gallery (now the Hugh Lane Gallery, no. 388), in October 1904. In her offer letter, she wrote that she hoped that the £ 20 picture “would please the Dublin folk”. See Mrs Herbert Cohen (née Jennie Salaman, 1865–1921) to Hugh Lane, October 23, 1904, *Sir Hugh Lane Papers* (National Library of Ireland, Dublin). Another painting was bought for the National Gallery of Ireland in the same year. It was thought to be by Antoine Watteau.

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broad spectrum of British society. Some historians have recognized the diversity of its membership in terms of gender; few have acknowledged the other ways this organization was diverse. The National Art Collections Fund gave Jewish members a means of demonstrating their allegiance to “the nation” but perhaps more importantly, encouraged sociability among those who shared aesthetic and philanthropic interests. Isidore Spielmann identified his own motivations: his love of art and his patriotism, were not incompatible with his Jewishness. He was not alone in this belief, even if he and other Jewish members of the NACF would have their allegiances questioned.

The first work of art ever donated to the NACF, as opposed to a financial donation like Herringham’s “seed funding”, was given by a German Jewish merchant, Max Rosenheim (1849–1911). London’s *Times* newspaper recorded that he left some of his personal wealth to charity, no mention was made of his support for the NACF.<sup>3</sup> A “Correspondent” wrote to the newspaper to rectify this oversight: “[He] was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the National Art-Collections Fund, took the keenest interest in the increase of the national collections, and was [...] a generous benefactor both to the British and the Victoria and Albert Museum”.<sup>4</sup> Rosenheim’s reputation as a collector of antique medals and a dedicated volunteer in the British Museum has not been acknowledged, despite his contemporaries’ efforts to grant him (albeit posthumous) recognition.

Jewish jeweller and art dealer Mosheh Oved’s autobiography, *Visions and Jewels* provides a description of the Rosenheim brothers (Max was business partners with his brother Maurice (1852–1922):

I once had two Jewish customers – two brothers who had wandered into this country from Germany in their youth, and who had built up a substantial export business in the very heart of the City of London. The first time they strayed into my little shop they were already, both very ripe in years and in wealth, and collecting had long ago become a highly cultivated passion with them [...]. The elder brother – the bachelor of seventy-five years of age – interested himself, with extraordinary diligence and intensity, in antiques, for the sake of knowledge, and to enrich the British Museum, “his home”.<sup>5</sup>

Max Rosenheim’s sense of being at “home” in the British Museum was significant when we consider his influence on the NACF. The Fund acquired examples

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<sup>3</sup> See Anon., “Gifts for Public Purposes”, *The Times*, October 31, 1911, 11: “Mr Max Rosenheim of Belsize Park-gardens, Hampstead, bequeathed his case of mathematical instruments made by Bartholomew Newsome for Queen Elizabeth to the British Museum; £200 to the Society of Antiquaries; £100 each to the Hampstead General Hospital and the London Hospital”.

<sup>4</sup> “A Correspondent”, *The Times*, September 22, 1911, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Mosheh Oved (né Edward Goodack (1885–1958)), *Visions and Jewels* (E. Benn, 1952), 172–3.

of both fine and decorative arts, as well as antiquities, rather than focusing solely on fine art. As Hercules Read (1857–1929), Keeper of Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum wrote to the NACF's Chairman, Lord Balcarres (1871–1940), Rosenheim was also instrumental in bringing new members to the NACF: “Rosenheim quite agrees to sink the Friends of the B. M. in the more comprehensive scheme [NACF] [...] He [...] will be a most useful man to urge his City friends to contribute”.<sup>6</sup> He indicated that his own museum's patron was already supporting a “Friends” scheme but was willing to combine his efforts with the NACF.<sup>7</sup> A letter from Baron Carmichael [Thomas Gibson-Carmichael, 1859–1926, (National Gallery trustee, 1906–1908; 1923–1926)] explained Rosenheim had “done something of the sort for the British Medieval Department [...]. [T]he way we did it was we put some money in Coutt's [the British bank] for Read to draw on [...]. [O]f course we gave fairly large subscriptions.”<sup>8</sup>

Read alluded to Max Rosenheim's influence in London's financial district, where support might be found for the charity. His wealth, Oved mentioned, was considerable, and Rosenheim gave £105 to the NACF every year, even though membership fees were a modest £1. 1s.<sup>9</sup> Other wealthy Jewish members who joined the movement early on included Edward Albert Sassoon (1856–1912) born in Bombay, who was married to Aline de Rothschild (1867–1909), of the French branch of the banking family.<sup>10</sup> Although Read believed that Rosenheim's involvement in the NACF would inspire other businessmen, and that this would positively impact the organisation's membership and finances, other members of the NACF's executive committee were less keen to promote his involvement. As Mary Lago noted, the NACF's organizers prevaricated about publishing a membership list. While Gibson-Carmichael recognized Rosenheim as

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Charles Hercules Read to Balcarres, July 31, 1903. Edinburgh: Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19.

<sup>7</sup> The “British Museum Friends” scheme was established formally as an integrated charity in 1968.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Gibson-Carmichael to Balcarres, July 28, 1903. Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.

<sup>9</sup> Accounting for inflation, Rosenheim's annual donation was equivalent to around €18,000, compared with the society's annual membership fee of circa €16.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Albert Sassoon to Balcarres, September 26, 1903. Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19. He wrote that he had spoken to “Alfred Rothschild who thinks that as a trustee of the National Gallery, it would be inadvisable for him to join, although I have no doubt, his influence would be forthcoming at the proper moment and may be more effectual were he outside this organisation”.

an enthusiastic supporter (of the NACF), he also advised the Chairman that in “Benson’s view”, Rosenheim’s name “might go against the thing”.<sup>11</sup>

A possible reason for certain NACF members’ anxieties about publicising Rosenheim’s name may have been his clear “foreignness”; he spoke German and Yiddish and reportedly spoke heavily accented English. As no antisemitism was directly expressed by either Benson or Gibson-Carmichael in their correspondence with the NACF Chairman, it was not clear why Rosenheim was specifically objected to among a published list of members. However, xenophobic sentiments were clearly articulated from the very outset of the establishment of the Fund, by its first members. The most vocal advocate for the Fund’s protection of artworks from “foreign hands” was Herringham. In a letter to Balcarres, she hoped that “this society [...] would make England rather less of a market for the foreigner – it seems a terrible pity that the results of the long work of our aristocracy in collecting pictures and fostering art should all be cast to the winds”.<sup>12</sup> The foreigner she referred to was more likely American plutocrats like John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), who spent large parts of the year in Europe buying art, rather than specifically those with Jewish heritage.<sup>13</sup> She was also concerned that she would not be the only woman in the “provisional” list of members, and encouraged Balcarres to reach out to “the most suitable person among my acquaintance [...]. Mrs Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes [1858–1950] [...], I think that Mrs Flower [later Lady Battersea, née Constance de Rothschild, 1843–1931] would be a very good committee woman – she has such connoisseurship and has very good business judgement”.<sup>14</sup> The women she proposed were well-known “connoisseurs” among the country’s art world, but it is striking that she cited Jewish Lady Battersea’s good business judgement as a potential asset for the NACF.<sup>15</sup> While on the surface this is a positive character assessment, it also

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Gibson-Carmichael to Balcarres, July 28, 1903. Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18. Robin Benson (1850–1929) was Treasurer of the Art Fund from 1906, and a Trustee of the National Gallery from 1912 until his death.

<sup>12</sup> Christiana Herringham to Balcarres, July 16, 1903. Edinburgh: Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.

<sup>13</sup> A contemporary journalist described “in plain English, the National Art Collections Fund is a society formed for the purpose of outbidding the American millionaire [...]. It is to be a conflict between unlimited dollars and limited pounds”. Anon., *Free Lance*, October 3, 1903, press cutting from Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19.

<sup>14</sup> The other women she mentions were “Miss Jane Harrison (1850–1928), who has [...] as expert Greek art knowledge as is to be had in the country [...] Miss [Sarah] Prideaux (1853–1933) is also [...] well known to members of the Burlington Club [...]. If you secured Lady [Harriet] Wantage (1837–1920) she would very likely suggest women members”.

<sup>15</sup> In the end, Lady Battersea did not support the NACF among her many charitable works, preferring to support specifically Jewish communal and both Jewish and non-Jewish women’s

played on antisemitic tropes, as “Mrs Flower” actually had no business of her own. Her connection to the wealthy Jewish Rothschild family was being alluded to and considered advantageous to the NACF’s cause.

In the papers of the early meetings of the fund, we find that descriptions of the types of members who were considered “desirable” was at best vague, and at worst, prejudicial. As the artist Charles Ricketts observed, the NACF had an inauspicious start, its first meeting in November 1903 was “polite but futile”, the scene described as “England in miniature [...] pompous nobodies nobbling everything”.<sup>16</sup> A turning point, however, came quickly with an offering made by Rosenheim in 1904, of an 18th-century watch by English horologist Daniel Quare (Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> Another NACF member who attended the earliest meeting and was later appointed the official “buyer” of paintings on its behalf, was Anglo-Jewish journalist Claude Phillips (1846–1924).<sup>18</sup> Born in London, he trained as a stockbroker, before a second career writing for *The Manchester Guardian*, Paris’s *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, and London-based *Magazine of Art* (edited by Isidore Spielmann’s brother Marion Spielmann, 1858–1948), the *Arts Journal*, and his uncle’s paper, *the Daily Telegraph*.<sup>19</sup> In his youth he studied in France and Germany, and as a young lawyer had spent time in Italy, where he fostered a love of Italian Renaissance painting. His scholarly background made him an ideal appointment for Keeper of the newly opened Wallace Collection. A collector himself, Phillips not only acquired works for the NACF. He made purchases using the £ 400 that was initially provided for the acquisition of pictures, including a *Madonna and Child* by Lazzaro Bastiani in November 1904, for the National Gallery.<sup>20</sup> At the same 1905 meeting where the Bastiani was accepted,

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charities and suffrage movements. See Thomas Stammers, “L’exception anglaise?: Constance Battersea et la philanthropie artistique des Rothschild d’outre-manche”, in *De la sphère privée à la sphère publique: les collections Rothschild dans les institutions publiques françaises*, ed., Pauline Prevost-Marcilhacy, Laura de Fuccia, and Juliette Trey (INHA, 2019); Ellery Weil, “Constance Rothschild, Lady Battersea”, *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rothschild-constance-lady-battersea>, updated June 23, 2021, accessed April 12, 2024,

**16** Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation’s Art: Contested Cultural Authority, 1890–1939* (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 107–8.

**17** This was the first work of art donated to the nation via the National Art Collections-Fund. See the entry for “Repeating Watch” on the Art Fund website, <https://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/6/repeating-watch>, accessed 9 March 2023.

**18** Phillips was knighted for services to the arts, on his retirement as the first Keeper of the Wallace Collection in London (1897–1911).

**19** Phillip’s maternal uncle was Joseph Moses Levy (1812–1888), owner of both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* (from July 1855 onwards).

**20** Richard Verdi, ed. *Saved! 100 Years of the National Art Collections Fund* (Scala, 1999), 53.

Phillips gave two of his own Rodin drawings to the British Museum.<sup>21</sup> In 1906, Phillips resigned from the NACF's Executive Committee, citing poor health, but continued to support the National Gallery in a personal capacity, as that year he gave a cartoon by Frederick Walker, *The Woman in White*, in his sister Eugenie's memory.<sup>22</sup> This gift was followed by several in 1910: Benedetto Diana's painting *Christ Blessing* and John Ruskin's drawing *Olive Branch*.<sup>23</sup> Phillips's most significant gift to the National Gallery was his bequest of 13 (largely Italian) paintings on his death in 1924, and a further £10,000 "Phillips Fund" for acquisitions.<sup>24</sup> The bequest also included "£200 to be divided between the Gallery warding staff".<sup>25</sup> Such was the Gallery's esteem for Phillips that he was considered for its directorship, but he declined for the same reasons as for leaving the NACF – poor health. Had he accepted, he would have been the Gallery's first (and to date only) Jewish director, though it has had several Jewish trustees.

In a posthumous profile of Phillips, his successor at the Wallace Collection and also a founder member of the NACF, Dugald Sutherland MacColl (1859–1948) wrote: "[H]e was anxiously wide minded, honourably and fiercely independent of personal influence or any taint of commerce".<sup>26</sup> Despite being the NACF's buyer, and the sound knowledge of the art market necessary for this role, here Phillips was praised for his disinterest in "commerce". This is significant when we consider that in endorsing Rosenheim's participation, Roger Fry (1866–1934) wrote that "he is, or will be, really one of the staunchest of our supporters as he has done a good deal in a quiet way by himself. [...] I am sure his advice about appointing buyers will be very valuable as he knows a great deal practically about the difficulties and dangers of buying a certain class of work".<sup>27</sup> Fry added, somewhat gnomically, that Rosenheim was keen to join as

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<sup>21</sup> National Art Collections Fund, *Minutes, 1903–1917*, meetings on November 29, 1904; January 26, 1905, 99–106. The Bastiani work is NG1953. The drawings by Auguste Rodin are *Nude Woman and Child* (British Museum 1905,0412.1) and *Nude Standing Figures* (British Museum, 1905,0412.2).

<sup>22</sup> As it was by a contemporary artist, it was accepted by the National Gallery's trustees but immediately put on display at the National Gallery of British Art, Millbank (now Tate). It is now Tate N02080.

<sup>23</sup> National Gallery, NG2725 and Tate, N02726 respectively.

<sup>24</sup> See online catalogue entry for Fabritius, *Self-Portrait*, National Gallery, NG4042.

<sup>25</sup> See National Gallery Archive, NG21/11; and NG24/1924/3.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Lago, quoting from D. S. MacColl's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for "Sir Claude Phillips", in Lago, *Christiana Herringham and the Edwardian Art Scene* (Lund Humphries, 1996), 71.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Fry to Lord Balcarres, August 3, 1903. Edinburgh: Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.



**Fig. 1:** Daniel Quare, *Repeating Watch*, c. 1705–1715, gold, presented to the National Art Collections Fund by Max Rosenheim, 1904, given to the British Museum, London. British Museum inventory number: 1905,0418.2. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

“he wants to safeguard against certain dangers which he foresees”.<sup>28</sup> It was not clear whether Rosenheim was aware of prejudicial comments made about him, but it would seem he and Claude Phillips were recognized rather differently by the NACF’s members. On balance, perhaps initially at least, Claude Phillips and fellow Jewish committee member Isidore Spielmann were more widely accepted by the “national” art collecting establishment as assimilated members of the Anglo-Jewry, than foreign-born collectors like Rosenheim.

By 1904, Isidore Spielmann had been appointed official “Director of Art” for the Board of Trade, responsible for organizing the British displays at international exhibitions. This government role provided Spielmann with a useful network, and experience negotiating with potential lenders of works of art. He came to the role of joint Honorary Secretary of the NACF with a valuable address book. Spielmann was the son of a Polish immigrant, Adam Spielmann, who had married into the Liverpool-based Samuel family, his uncle was Sir Samuel Montagu, first Baron Swaythling (1832–1911). Isidore’s wife Emily Sebag-Montefiore (1859–1929) was great-niece of Sir Moses Montefiore and was both more religious and wealthier than Isidore. Despite five children, theirs was not a love match, and Emily professed no interest in art, preferring “racing and

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**28** Roger Fry to Lord Balcarres, August 3, 1903. Edinburgh: Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.

bridge".<sup>29</sup> It was therefore surprising to come across a donation of £10. 10s made to the NACF's 1924 campaign to acquire Tintoretto's *Vincenzo Morosini* for the National Gallery from both "Sir Isidore and Lady Spielmann", his wife (he was knighted in 1905).<sup>30</sup> So committed was Spielmann to his role, which he shared with Robert Witt (1872–1952), as Joint Secretaries of the Fund, that he offered his office at 47 Victoria Street as the NACF's headquarters, and ceased all other paid work. As he put it, to dedicate himself to fundraising he was prepared to "have to take other irons out of the fire".<sup>31</sup>

Isidore Spielmann utilized his friends, business associates, and family in his NACF fundraising. For example, in 1904, Belfast-born John Jaffé, who lived in Nice, France, wrote expressing his interest in making a bequest to the new charity.<sup>32</sup> At the meeting on November 29, 1904, Spielmann suggested that Max Rosenheim should visit Jaffé to inspect his collection, to encourage the donor to leave it to "the nation".<sup>33</sup> Spielmann also promised to "convert some of his men" to the society, though it was not clear whether he meant Jewish men, or merely his friends. Of those he was able to introduce, he mentioned several artists: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), Sir Ernest Waterlow (1850–1919), Sir Wyke Bayliss (1835–1906), and the art historian Guy Francis Laking (1875–1919).<sup>34</sup> Of those he promised to invite, the majority were Jewish. He described his "surprise" that his uncle Samuel Montagu was not keen, as "he thinks the Government should do more" for the arts, while stating of Sir Ernest Cassel (1852–1921) that it "would not suit [...] to become a member", but "we

**29** Ruth Sebag-Montefiore, "From Poland to Paddington: the early history of the Spielmann family, 1828–1948", *Jewish Historical Studies* 32 (1990–1992): 246

**30** The work was acquired for the Gallery in 1924, the gift marking the 20th anniversary of the NACF, and the centenary of the National Gallery. It is now NG4004. There were at least 37 Jewish donors to this campaign. See the Art Fund acquisition file (London: Tate Gallery Archive), 9328.3.2.14.

**31** Isidore to Spielmann to Balcarres, July 28, 1903. Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.

**32** See Judit Kiraly, "John and Anna Jaffé: the art lovers from Belfast who gave the Emperor's Library to a nation", *Riviera Reporter* (2012), online edition, np. The couple were advised by von Bode and built a significant collection of around 500 Old Master paintings, several of which they chose to donate to their local Musée Messina in Nice in their own lifetimes. The collection was inherited by their nieces and nephews, and was subject to Nazi confiscation in 1942. See also Doreen Carvajal, "Jewish Heirs Sue Swiss Museum to Recover Constable Painting", *New York Times*, January 25, 2016, on the family's descendants' attempts to reclaim John Constable's *Dedham from Langham*, c. 1813, from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, <https://archive.nytimes.com/artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/jewish-heirs-sue-swiss-museum-to-recover-constable-painting/>, accessed March 7, 2023.

**33** National Art Collection-Fund, *Minute Book, 1903–1917*, London, Tate Gallery Archive, 9328.1.3.110, 110.

**34** Isidore Spielmann to Balcarres, September 6, 1903, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19.

might consult the 3 big men – Ld Rothschild, Ld Iveagh and Mr Cotes upon it – if we can get hold of them".<sup>35</sup> When sent some suggested names by Balcarres and Witt, Spielmann replied: "I think [Sydney] Goldman should be asked; he is a useful 'S. African millionaire' you know".<sup>36</sup>

Despite detecting hesitancy among some Jewish men like Lord Alfred de Rothschild who believed joining would be "improper", as he was a trustee of the National Gallery, nevertheless Isidore Spielmann proved an effective fundraiser.<sup>37</sup> His participation was the subject of internal debate, as Robert Witt wrote admiringly:

If they [Herringham] want to get rid of Spielmann they are wrong. I had never heard of him before I met him over this, but I have got to like him and he is invaluable as having unlimited leisure. Apparently, they are all working a dead set against him a being among other things "under the thumb of the Rothschilds" and "in the packet of dealers" and stuff of that kind and that "he is too fond of intrigue". It is too absurd even to notice and I know no one to whom these epithets would less justly apply – its worthy of Paul Devoléde! However, otherwise, they all seem rather ashamed of themselves (except C.P.) [Claude Phillips].<sup>38</sup>

The accusation from some members that Spielmann was "under the thumb" of a Jewish banking family revealed how antisemitism was deeply ingrained in élite British society. In the same breath, Witt identified it as "absurd". Despite no real acquaintance with the Rothschilds, who often declined to participate in the NACF (indeed Spielmann claimed to have had "a row" with Lord Rothschild, perhaps over the 1906 Whitechapel Art Gallery's *Jewish Art and Antiquities* exhibition), the accusation that Spielmann was "in the packet of dealers" was also a thinly veiled criticism of Jewish art dealers.<sup>39</sup> This "Jewish" association would dog Spielmann's career at the NACF, though the same criticism was not faced necessarily by other Jewish members.

Spielmann showed his strength as a campaigner during the NACF's acquisition of Diego Velasquez's *Venus and Cupid* ("the Rokeby Venus"), which was on offer at Agnews' London gallery in 1905, for £ 40,000 (Fig. 2). The purchase was

<sup>35</sup> Isidore Spielmann to Balcarres, September 6, 1903, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19. Lord [Walter] Rothschild (1868–1937), Lord Iveagh (1847–1927) and Mr [Merton Russell]-Cotes (1835–1921) were all prominent businessmen with famous art collections. The last part of Spielmann's phrase suggests that he was not well-known to any of them.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Sydney Goldman (1868–1958) was German Jewish, and was born in Cape Colony, South Africa, where he later became a director of S. Neumann mines. He married Agnes [Mary] Peel (1869–1959) in England in 1899, becoming Lord Peel's son-in-law.

<sup>37</sup> Alfred de Rothschild to Balcarres, August 6, 1903, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19.

<sup>38</sup> Witt to Balcarres, November 16, 1903, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/19.

<sup>39</sup> Spielmann to Balcarres, September 11, 1903, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/18.

controversial, as some of London's museum trustees like Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower (1845–1916) thought the nude painting indecent. Gower's contemporaries commented upon the "strangeness" of his criticism but not the irony that Gower cast himself as moral "protector", when he was a well-known homosexual, then a criminal offence.<sup>40</sup> Spielmann may himself have been keen to be identified as contributing to British cultural life, both as a Jew and as a "patriotic art lover", because he was the subject of some suspicion during his 1906 campaign to secure the *Rokey Venus* for the nation. Gower wrote privately to Balcarres in 1905, resigning his membership. In a later letter he cited a Jewish conspiracy to acquire the "immoral" painting for "a ludicrous sum [...] which some shady individuals in the picture trade will well enrich themselves – I think you might discuss the amount the Jew Spielmann [...] and Witt would make of the forty thousand".<sup>41</sup> The inference made here was that as a Jew, Spielmann must have an ulterior motive in the acquisition; personal "benefit" through a relationship with "rascally Jew dealers and picture brokers".<sup>42</sup>

Spielmann, if he was aware of Gower's antisemitic prejudice, was not dissuaded from campaigning for the picture's purchase. He sought contributions from friends including the King's financier, Ernest Cassel (1852–1921): "I have gone down on my knees to Sir Ernest Cassel to save us & the *Venus*".<sup>43</sup> Like Cassel, a significant number of Jews (both NACF members and non-members) made contributions to the *Venus* acquisition, and as a result several were made life members, including Herbert Stern, Lord Michelham (1851–1919), Joseph Duveen (1843–1908), Ludwig Mond (1839–1909), and his non-Jewish son-in-law, Sigismund Goetze (1866–1939).<sup>44</sup> Lord Rothschild refused to offer any funds, as "all the money he could spare would be given to [...] the unemployed in the East End and to the families of the Jews massacred in Russia long before he

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<sup>40</sup> Anon., "Velasquez and Values", *The Evening Standard*, November 21, 1905. See also Martin Spychal, "The 'beautiful boy' of the Commons: Lord Ronald Gower (1845–1916) and sexual identity in Parliament at the time of the Second Reform Act", *The Victorian Commons*, November 12, 2020, <https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2020/11/12/the-beautiful-boy-of-the-commons-lord-ronald-gower-1845-1916-and-sexual-identity-in-parliament-at-the-time-of-the-second-reform-act/>, accessed April 14, 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower to Balcarres, December 7, 1905, Edinburgh, Crawford Muniments Acc. 9769 /97/22.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower to Balcarres, December 7, 1905, Edinburgh, Crawford Muniments Acc. 9769 /97/22.

<sup>43</sup> Spielmann to Balcarres, December 3, 1905, Crawford Muniments, Acc. 9769/97/22.

<sup>44</sup> See National Art Collections Fund, *Minute Book, 1903–1917*, December 12, 1906, London, Tate Gallery Archive, 9328.1.3.110, 196.



**Fig. 2:** (B&W) Diego Velasquez, *The Toilet of Venus*, 'the Rokeby Venus', 1647–1651, oil on canvas, presented by the Art Fund, 1906. Museum inventory number: NG2057. © The National Gallery, London.

thought of pictures", with Spielmann privately worrying that his was "a view a great many will take".<sup>45</sup>

The 1905 Odessa pogrom occupied much Jewish charitable activity in London during this period.<sup>46</sup> At a meeting for the proposed *Jewish Art and Artists* exhibition, hosted by Isidore's brother Marion, the "idea [of the exhibition] generally met with strong opposition [...]. [S]o much had recently been required of the community for matters of absolute necessity, that 'communal funding' was inopportune; and [...] the Jewish people had been too much in the public eye of late [...] objections had been raised by Lord Rothschild, Sir Samuel Montagu

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<sup>45</sup> Gardiner, in Verdi, *Saved!*, quoting letter from Spielmann to Lord Balcarres, November 15, 1905, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Much earlier, in 1891, Spielmann had edited a supplement of *The Jewish Chronicle* on the theme of "Darkest Russia", in which he warned of the plight of Russian Jews in the face of top-down antisemitism, using the platform to address "a range of charges that Jews encountered in Russia", largely advocating for religious toleration, rather than specifically for a cessation of the persecution of Jews.

and Mr Claude Montefiore".<sup>47</sup> The observation that Jewish people were too visible, also related to the 1905 "Aliens Act", Britain's first modern piece of anti-immigration legislation. As playwright Alfred Sutro (1863–1933) summarized in his letter declining his support for the Whitechapel *Jewish Art and Artists* exhibition, he felt "as an English Jew [he] would rather he died an English, than a Jewish, artist", and did not want to be identified by others with the Jewish exhibition's aims.<sup>48</sup>

However, for many proud spokespeople among the Jewish community, contributions to national causes like the NACF provided a clear way of demonstrating one's sympathy with "British" values. Though patriotism inspired many to join the NACF, not least its members with Jewish heritage, arguably the cosmopolitanism of its members was the charity's key strength. Spielmann's work on international exhibitions involved collaboration with foreign governments, resulting in 1910 in honours for brothers Marion and Isidore from the Belgian Government. Other Jewish philanthropists gave to foreign causes, supporting the Red Cross in Britain and France during the First World War, while Henry Van den Bergh left £ 4,950 to 12 Jewish and non-Jewish charities in England and the Netherlands.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the inference that a fear of standing out led Jewish would-be philanthropists towards the NACF, in fact its campaigns were most successful when they sought support from those with a genuine interest in the promotion of the arts, rather than simply wealthy individuals wanting to offset their reputations as wealthy businesspeople. Several Jewish NACF members donated consistently throughout their lifetimes and donated their own art collections to the nation through the NACF. Among these was Isidore Spielmann, whose collection of Turkish rugs and Delftware went to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). He also donated "the Original Sketch by Verrio for the ceiling of the Hampton Court Banqueting House" to the V&A in 1916 (Fig. 3).<sup>50</sup>

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**47** Jewish Art and Artists Exhibition Committee, *Minute Book*, March 20, 1905, np, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive, WAG/EAR/4/13/1.

**48** Alfred Sutro to Canon Barnett, November 22, 1905, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive, WAG/EAR/4/13/1.

**49** Harry Schneiderman, "Necrology", *The American Jewish Yearbook* 39 (September 6, 1937, to September 25, 1938/5698): 588

**50** National Art Collections Fund, *Minutes 1903–1917*, November 9, 1916, London, Tate Gallery Archive, 9328.1.3.110.



**Fig. 3:** Antonio Verrio, *Minerva with Allegorical Figures of the Arts and Sciences (sketch for the ceiling of the Banqueting House, Hampton Court Palace)*, c. 1700–1702, oil on paper mounted on panel, given to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, by Sir Isidore Spielman, through the National Art Collections Fund, 1916. Museum Inventory number E.1085–1916. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

While facing accusations of disingenuous behaviour, Jews made hitherto unrecognized valuable supporters of the National Art Fund, particularly in its infancy. Their presence among its founder members brought the esteem of non-Jewish peers and proved to have a positive effect on Jewish and non-Jewish relations, as their actions disproved antisemitic fears about their “ulterior motives”. Moreover, the NACF gave its Jewish members a visible means of proving that their “communal values” were not incompatible with national interests, and indeed those members of the Jewish community both British and “foreign” played a valuable role in upholding and promoting the nation’s cultural wealth.

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