African arts between curios, antiquities, and avant-garde at the *Maison Brummer*, Paris (1908-1914)

Yaëlle Biro

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the appreciation of African artifacts in the West shifted dramatically: from colonial trophies and ethnographic specimens, they became modernist icons worthy of aesthetic contemplation. While this volume’s goal is to offer a critical rereading of the scholarly appreciation of non-Western objects as art around 1900, this paper investigates these objects’ redefinition through the development of their commercial platforms, adding yet another layer of complexity to the history of the reception of African arts in the West. The focus of this article is specifically the art dealer Joseph Brummer and his activities pertaining to the exhibition, the sale, and the promotion of African objects in his Parisian gallery, before 1914. By juxtaposing arts of diverse periods and of every continent he blurred the boundaries that isolated these different fields of collecting and played a critical role in the promotion of little-considered arts. He relied on preexisting networks established by the commerce of ethnographic objects, and simultaneously made use of the new path of modernism. Combining a rare sense for the beautiful, talents as a salesman, and the ability to capitalize on the popular commerce of curiosities that had solidified during the 19th century, Brummer found himself at the center of an extensive network of dealers, intellectuals, and collectors. Only known within specialized circles, Hungarian-born art dealer Joseph Brummer (1883-1947) developed an extensive trade network in the years before World War I, through talented salesmanship and brilliant art selections. Praised by late Metropolitan Museum medieval art curator William Forsyth for his ‘instinct for the unusual, the curious and the beautiful’, Brummer built his reputation by promoting original art forms that were not previously integral to the Western art canon. More specifically, the humble beginnings of this gallery founded in Paris in 1909, were intimately linked to the creation of a European market for African arts. Juxtaposing works from Africa with art of Medieval Europe, Ancient Greece and Rome, the Americas, Egypt, Ancient Near East, as well as creations by living artists, the Brummer Gallery blurred the boundaries that existed between these different fields


of collecting, and was instrumental in awakening the interest of many collectors and museum professionals for these arts. Joined in Paris by his two brothers Imre (1889-1928) and Ernest (1891-1964), his activities grew exponentially in just a few years. After 1914, the gallery expanded to New York – a move motivated both by the outbreak of the war and Joseph’s own professional ambition. During the following decades, the three brothers were responsible for a transatlantic commerce that marked indelibly the landscape of both the European and American art markets. They catered to a wide array of well-known private collections and built trusted relationships with several museums. During the Golden Age of collecting, from the 1920s through the 1940s, the holdings of many departments at the Metropolitan Museum in New York were enriched by works sold or donated by the Brummer brothers. They were particularly close to William Forsyth and James J. Rorimer, the medieval art specialists behind the opening of the Cloisters, and largely helped build the Metropolitan Museum collection. After Joseph’s death in 1947, Rorimer arranged for the purchase by the Museum of two-hundred and fifty works from his private collection. Today more than four-hundred works at the Metropolitan bear a

4 Thomas Hoving, ‘Foreword’, *The Grand Gallery at The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Sixth International Exhibition presented by the International Confederation of Dealers in Works of Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974, n.p.; for an overview of the Brummer contributions to the Metropolitan Museum collection, see Forsyth, *Brummer Brothers*, 106-107, and William H. Forsyth ‘Acquisitions from the Brummer Gallery’. *The Grand Gallery at The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Sixth International Exhibition presented by the International Confederation of Dealers in Works of Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974, 1-5. In November 1932, as a tribute to his involvement with the Metropolitan, Joseph Brummer was elected Honorary Fellow for Life by the Board of Trustees (Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, 1932). In 1974, a selection of works acquired through the Brummer Gallery was featured at the Metropolitan (see Forsyth, *Acquisitions from Brummer Gallery*). In Thomas Hoving’s words, this installation was a testament to ‘the fundamental inter-relationship between museum and dealer’ (Hoving, *Foreword*).

5 James J. Rorimer (1905-1966) was the first curator of the Cloisters before becoming its director and later the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.


'Brummer' provenance in fields as diverse as Medieval, Greek and Roman, Islamic, Ancient Near Eastern (Figure 1), Egyptian, Modern and African arts.\(^8\)

Despite the Brummer brothers’ extensive international dealership, the quantity and quality of works they sold and the fame of the collections they helped build, has only recently started to attract in-depth scholarship, as part of the rising interest in provenance research and the history of collecting. Also, while research has mostly been focusing on the brothers’ careers after their expansion to America,\(^9\) little attention has been given to the early years of Joseph Brummer’s dealership in Paris,\(^10\) certainly due to the lack of immediate access to documentation.\(^11\) The goal of this paper is to lift the veil of mystery that covers the early history of the Brummer Gallery using an array of unpublished archival documents and a variety of little-examined written accounts.\(^12\)

It is difficult to establish the chronology of Joseph Brummer’s early years. From his birth in 1883 in Zombor, a Hungarian town that became Serbian after World War I, to his settling in Paris in 1906, information is sparse. Archival documents kept at The Cloisters, combined with testimonies of friends and colleagues who knew him at that time, constitute the main available sources of documentation. He himself did not provide any written account of his life and, on the contrary, even seems to have consciously harboured an aura of mystery.\(^13\) From

\(^8\) I would like to thank my colleagues at the Metropolitan Museum for their help while preparing this article, in particular Michael Carter at the Cloisters, Joan Mertens in Greek and Roman Art, Kim Benzel and Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi in Ancient Near Eastern Art, Christine Brennan in Medieval Art and Jennie Choi in Digital Media.


\(^11\) Among the many archives consulted, the Brummer Gallery Records: 1890-1980, at The Cloisters Library and Archives, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY (hereafter, Brummer Archives, MMA) are the most significant. These hold much documentation regarding the Brummer brothers, both professional and personal: accounting ledgers, correspondence, photographs of artworks, personal and administrative paperwork. These records were donated to the Metropolitan Museum in 1988 by Ernest Brummer’s widow Ella Baché. They were recently digitalized and are now accessible online to researchers: http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16028coll9 (last accessed May 4th, 2015).

\(^12\) This paper is an abridged version of a chapter of the author’s dissertation dedicated to the commerce of African arts in the West from the 1900 to the 1920s. For an extensive overview of Brummer’s dealing of African arts and additional information on his early career, see Yaëlle Biro, Transformation de l’objet ethnographique africain en objet d’art. Circulation, commerce et diffusion des œuvres africaines en Europe Occidentale et aux États-Unis, des années 1900 aux années 1920, Thèse de doctorat, Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, 2010, 71-189. All the translations from French and German are by the author.

\(^13\) When, in 1934, a journalist from The New Yorker went to Paris to gather information on Joseph’s early years, his brother Ernest who had remained in Paris was asked to provide as little information as possible. Unfortunately, this article seems to have never been published.
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his school report cards, we learn that he was a mediocre high-school student but that he displayed early-on a talent for sculpture. In 1897, he entered an applied arts school, specializing in wood and metal work and two years later moved to Budapest where he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts to be trained as a sculptor. During the following years, he studied under some of the most prestigious professors in several European cities. In 1903 he studied in Munich under Wilhelm von Rühmann at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste; after a short stay in Paris in 1904, he spent the summer of 1905 in Nagybánya, the famous Hungarian artists’ colony, working under the guidance of painter István Réti. The year of Brummer’s permanent installation in Paris is uncertain and varies, depending on the accounts, between 1905 and 1907. It is my understanding that he arrived in the French capital during the summer of 1906. During the following three years, he studied alternately with the sculptor Auguste Rodin, at the prestigious Académie des Beaux Arts, the ‘Grande Chaumière’, the Académie Colarossi, and several other drawing and sculpture academies that flourished at the time in Montparnasse. Finally, in 1908, he was one of the first students to be admitted to the Académie established by Henri Matisse.

The extreme poverty of the young Hungarian emigrant in Paris clearly struck his contemporaries, and descriptions of his utter destitution ran through narratives of the time. According to Polish art historian Adolphe Basler, a close friend of Brummer during his Parisian years, the Hungarian offered to sweep the workshop in order to work at the Académie Matisse. Other witnesses describe how he arrived in Paris from Munich by foot, worked as a model in the drawing schools, cut marble at Rodin’s studio, repaired stoves, sold newspapers, and even that he and his brothers shared just one pair of shoes between them. He could also have been one of the Hungarian students caught during class eating the bread used as erasers by other students, as described by Gertrude Stein in her Autobiography of Alice Toklas. These testimonies sketch a picturesque and quite folkloric tableau of Brummer’s early years in Paris. While some of these vignettes certainly give a sense of Joseph’s life, one can assume that they were partly romanticized by his

15 See the discussion in Biro, Transformation en objet d’art, 75-76.
17 Purrmann and Göpel, Purrmann, 71.
18 Sandra E. Leonard, Henri Rousseau and Max Weber, New York: R. L. Feigen, 1970, 36; Letter from ‘Stern’ to Brummer in Hungarian, unsigned, undated, but probably 1920s. A great source of information, the identity of this letter’s author is only known to us through the content of the letter itself, as he apostrophizes himself ‘Stern’. Brummer Archives, MMA, Box 25.
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contemporaries, stunned by the brothers’ dazzling social ascension and their striking commercial success.

Without Joseph’s own account, it remains difficult to explain his move from intensive artistic practice to art dealership. Correspondence found in the Brummer Archives reveals that his immersion in the Parisian artistic circles and his discovery of the bold new directions taken by several artists were in part responsible for his change of heart. Indeed, an unidentified friend named Stern recalls that, under Rodin’s guidance, Brummer originally spent months looking for a way to represent the human anatomy in the most ‘perfect’ way. 21 However, he abruptly and decisively turned away from Rodin’s emotional sculptural style. Stern explains that after observing the new artistic solutions explored by modern artists, Brummer started prioritizing ‘thoughts over manual abilities.’ 22 Rather than searching for a new direction for his own art, Brummer progressively turned away entirely from his artistic practice in favour of art dealership. In addition to his changing aesthetic interests, one can easily imagine that his long-lasting poverty led him to embrace another potentially more lucrative profession. Finally, the testimony of another of Brummer’s friend, the American artist Walter Pach, offers a different perspective on the dealer’s beginnings. 23 According to Pach, Brummer’s interest in antiquities went back to childhood when he first discovered the figures, coins, and antique lamps that Hungarian farmers were unearthing in their fields. This interest in objects was transformed into a desire to create, and at the time the dealer met Pach ‘the two fierce interests were about evenly balanced in his mind.’ 24 Pach continues: ‘With its thirty-five thousand art-dealers, Paris offers simply endless opportunity to the collector, even one of the most infinitesimal means. Brummer bought what he could, sold in order to buy more, and finally, when the impulse to own works of art had gained ascendancy over the need to create them, he took the plunge and became a dealer.’ 25

How did Brummer find the necessary funds to start acquiring works of art? While William Forsyth suggests that Brummer made his first purchase by chance, Pach offers another explanation: ‘Of money he had almost none, and obtaining the fine things that could occasionally be bought for little was possible only for one who watched, decided, and acted with the boldness and speed of a hawk. Paris was full

21 Letter in Hungarian from ‘Stern’ to Brummer, Brummer Archives, MMA, Box 25 (translation Adam Biro).
22 Stern to Brummer: ‘At that time, Rodin was at the center of your interest. You were full of energy. You explained how seriously you were about your studies and you could spend months studying how to model a hand. A few months later, despite all this, you turned your back to it and when we went to the musée du Luxembourg, you coldly condemned Belonna [certainly the bust of Belonna modeled by Rodin in 1879]. You found him too attached to the medium. This was part of your observations of modern art which placed thoughts over manual ability’.
23 Pach, Queer Thing, 276. Pach and Brummer met in one of the Parisians academies early on, possibly in 1904, during Brummer’s first stay in Paris.
24 Pach, Queer Thing, 276
25 Pach, Queer Thing, 276, 277.
of hawks – but Brummer turned out to be the eagle among them.”  

All accounts concur that Brummer first bought Japanese prints in order to sell them to his fellow students.  

Stern remembers: ‘... you showed me Japanese wood engravings that you wanted to sell to rich students. I was supposed to arrange the business. Could this have been the beginning?’ African arts came second, probably as early as 1908, at around the time that he began purchasing paintings by Henri Rousseau.  

American artist Max Weber had introduced Brummer to the painter towards March 1908, and Brummer promptly started purchasing his work. Weber later remembered how Brummer kept ‘two small sketches of landscapes by Rousseau on a shelf, next to two or three magnificent Congo figures.’ About a year after they met, Rousseau painted Brummer’s portrait (Figure 2). Seated in an armchair covered...
by red velvet, in front of a backdrop of luxuriant plants (characteristic of the portraits painted by the artist at that time), holding a cigarette, it is difficult to recognize in this relaxed young man the dealer as we see him in photographs of the following decades.\footnote{Brummer told the story of his modeling sessions with Le Douanier for this portrait in a 1939 article of the Metropolitan Museum Bulletin (see Harry B. Wehle, ‘A Picture by Henri Rousseau’, \textit{The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin}, 1939, 34: 3, 65).}

It is as his friend, rather than as Brummer the dealer, who Rousseau immortalized in this portrait.\footnote{According to Basler (in Rousseau), Brummer had to sell his portrait in order to keep his business afloat. He sold it for 200 frs to German Wilhelm Uhde. Brummer kept track of this painting during the following decades, without ever purchasing it himself. In the Brummer Archives, MMA, box 25, one finds an article from the Figaro, dated January 19, 1928, regarding the sale of this portrait at auction for 98,100 frs to the Baron Fukushima. A handwritten note by Brummer states: ‘My portrait by Henri Rousseau’.}

The descriptions of Brummer’s first shop are as colourful as the descriptions of his poverty. His atelier served as his first gallery and has been described as an underground hovel as well as a shed;\footnote{Leonard, \textit{Rousseau and Weber}, 36; Ezio Bassani and Malcolm D. McLeod, \textit{Jacob Epstein Collector}. Milan: Associazione Poro, 1989, 28.} a witness also suggested that Brummer began selling objects from a wheel-barrow.\footnote{William Tyler as mentioned in Elizabeth P. Benson, ‘The Robert Woods Bliss Collection of Pre-Columbian Art: A Memoir’, \textit{Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past}. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993, 18.}

According to Basler, it was a sale of African objects that allowed Brummer to open his first boutique in 1909: a young artist and collector purchased his entire collection of African sculptures immediately, and at a particularly high price.\footnote{Basler, \textit{Rousseau}, 9.} Art historians have suggested that the buyer was American artist Frank Burty Haviland with whom Brummer continually collaborated during the following years.\footnote{Bassani and McLeod, \textit{Epstein}, 28.}

Located at 67, Boulevard Raspail, Brummer’s boutique opened in October 1909 under the joint name of \textit{Maison Delhomme et Brummer}.\footnote{Accounting ledger for the \textit{Maison Delhomme et Brummer}, Brummer Archives, Box no. 1. Nothing is known about Delhomme, Brummer’s first collaborator.} Careful analysis of the shop’s accounting ledger offered evidence of the types of items sold. Halfway between a thrift-shop and an art gallery, it offered candy boxes, fans, vases, frames, and soup tureens as well as engravings by Honoré Daumier, Japanese prints, books, Chinese bowls, small ivories, statues, paintings, and African masks and figures. By August 1910, Brummer was describing his trade in the official registration of the shop as ‘Antique Dealer’ and by November 1910 he was working alone under the new name ‘\textit{Maison Joseph Brummer}.’ His gallery moved in January 1911 to 3, Boulevard Raspail, at which location it would remain until the 1920s, even after Joseph and Imre had left for the United States.

From the existing documents, assessing the role played in the gallery by each of the Brummer brothers is a challenge. Imre and Ernest are mentioned for the first time in the gallery’s ledgers in 1911: first Imre in January and then Ernest in...
November. After those dates, their names are regularly mentioned, and so we can assume that they arrived in Paris approximately at that time.\(^{39}\) In addition, on January 1, 1912, the name of the gallery changed one more time to ‘Brummer Frères – Brummer Curiosités.’ Imre seems to have played an important role at the gallery, both administratively and in the acquisition of new objects. He was in charge of a large part of the correspondence and of the bookkeeping. During 1912 and 1913, he spent several months at a time in Egypt collecting works for the gallery. In 1914 he was the first of the Brummer brothers to travel to the United States. His early death in 1928 partly explains the lack of biographical information. Ernest, the youngest of the brothers, is described as having a quieter demeanour than that of his brothers.\(^{40}\) Trained in Hungary as a musician and as an art historian once he had moved to Paris, he travelled extensively throughout Europe looking for works of art. As the last surviving brother, he played an important role in securing the Brummer legacy by donating works to museums after Joseph’s passing.

If the accounting ledgers are to be taken as reference, the rapidity at which the *Maison Joseph Brummer* developed is astounding. Brummer recorded most of his spending, whether professional or personal, and the ledgers act as open windows onto every aspect of his life. During the first few months of 1911, one can follow the step by step modernization of his new gallery: electricity, gas, a new vitrine are all added promptly. New merchandizes enter and leave the shelves at a sustained rhythm, and prices are overall much higher than they were during the first year of activity. The works offered are of a variety of origins: Japanese prints and sculptures, Chinese objects and paintings, works from Persia, books, carpets, swords, medieval crosses, modern paintings, and African objects.

How can one explain the rapidity at which the activities of the Brummer gallery developed, and the transformation, between 1909 and 1913, of Brummer’s first shop – described as ‘a tiny place in a ramshackle one-storey (sic) building’\(^ {41}\) – into one of the most profitable and best-stocked galleries in Paris? First and foremost, one has to underline the importance of his ‘discerning eye’ in the success of his enterprise. As mentioned earlier, Brummer’s love for objects and his ability to identify those of exceptional quality in every domain of the arts was instrumental in his success. For Pach ‘[t]he romance of his rise is to be read in terms of his energy and his connoisseurship, but above all of his love for the things he deals in.’\(^ {42}\) In addition, his role as a ‘discoverer’ was emphasized by the late collector Alastair B. Martin, who assembled with his wife Edith the celebrated ‘Guennol Collection’, and met Brummer in New York in the 1940s:\(^ {43}\)

\(^{39}\) A letter from Ella Baché Brummer, Ernest Brummer’s widow to William Forsyth, dated March 22, 1974, however, affirms that Ernest arrived in Paris in 1909 (See Brennan, *Brummer Gallery*, unpublished article).


\(^{41}\) Pach, *Queer Things*, 277.

\(^{42}\) Pach, *Queer Things*, 277.

Many collectors consider Joseph Duveen the greatest American art dealer, but in my opinion that distinction belongs to Joseph Brummer. Duveen capitalized on fashion; Brummer introduced museum directors, and, through them, the public, to new cultures. He had a terrific eye." William Forsyth went further by declaring that the Brummer ‘imprimatur on an object … sets it apart in the art world.’

Early on, Brummer instigated a series of promotional activities as a way of expanding commerce: he participated in fairs, organized exhibitions, used photography and advertising as a means to augment his visibility and notoriety, and created an important European network of providers and clients. His first fair in early 1910 matched his humble beginnings. Named ‘La Foire aux Jambons’ and located in Passy, then the outskirts of Paris, it was more of a flea market than an art fair. Brummer sold about eighty objects and, on that occasion, made the most significant benefices of his first year of activity.

In January 1911, during his transferral into his new gallery space, Brummer curated an important exhibition of Chinese paintings at the gallery Bernheim-Jeune. On that occasion, he gathered a series of works from the Berlin collection of Mrs. de Wegener, and produced a catalogue for which he wrote an introductory essay. The exhibition was a success as proved by the article dedicated to the event by the renowned art critique and poet Guillaume Apollinaire, in the journal L’Intransigeant.

In April and May 1911, Brummer participated in the ‘Oriental Exhibition’ (Keleti Kiállítás) at the ‘Artists’ House’ (Művészház) in Budapest. While no works by artists from the Hungarian avant-garde were exhibited in this installation dedicated to ‘Oriental’ arts, the simple fact that it occurred at the ‘Artists’ House’, a space dedicated to a new generation of artists, reflected the importance accorded to non-Western art as a source of inspiration, well outside the Parisian art circles. This exhibition featured Chinese paintings, miniature paintings from Persia, Japanese prints, terracotta and bronzes from ancient China, Tibet, Cambodia and India, as well as sculptures from Oceania, Africa, and Peru, genres of works commonly found active in various exotic fields. [...] Brummer had a store filled with European objects of every age, from Cycladic to Renaissance, as well as early art from Mexico, Egypt, and the Near East. He showed me sculpture that was exciting, rare, attractive, somehow desirable, and it was he who would wind up the toy’.

44 Martin, Guennol, 15.
45 Forsyth, Brummer Brothers, 106.
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at the Brummer Gallery.\(^{48}\) The Brummer records attest that Joseph indeed sent twenty Chinese works on that occasion. In addition, he provided many of the works presented by writer and journalist Miklós Vitéz, one of the exhibition’s organizers, among which were seven African sculptures, several Chinese paintings, Japanese prints and Persian miniatures. In the catalogue’s introduction, József Rippl-Rónai, the most celebrated Hungarian painter of his time and co-organizer of the exhibition, stated: ‘The collection Vitéz is exceptional. I believe that his goal was to help us and to give us the opportunity to know these objects and to study art not only through the intermediary of the Germans or the French, but directly from the objects themselves. With his help, they are now ours forever.’\(^{49}\) Given Brummer’s Hungarian origin, it is not surprising that the first event in which he participated outside of France took place in Budapest. Nevertheless, his involvement with this exhibition is a testimony to his engagement at a European level, and to the breadth of his network.

Brummer’s contribution to the historical ‘Sonderbundausstellung’ in Cologne, a little over a year after the Budapest exhibition, illustrates further the extraordinary growth of his business and the extent of his circle. Named ‘Internationale Kunstausstellung des Sonderbundes westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler’, it took place from May 25 until September 30, 1912, and is considered one of the most important events about the avant-garde before the 1913 Armory Show in New York. While Brummer’s involvement with this exhibition does not appear clearly in the records of the event itself (there is, for example, no mention of him in the exhibition catalogue), his accounting ledgers, once again, demonstrate that he took part in the event in two different ways. We have mentioned previously that Frank Burty Haviland was one of Brummer’s most active clients. According to the Brummer archives, the dealer in fact owned shares in a number of modern paintings with Haviland and served as his commercial platform. Among these were several works by Pablo Picasso. It is likely that one of them was *The Actor*, a painting now in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection (52.175). Possibly sold to the Cologne-based Picasso dealer Otto Feldmann only a month before the exhibition, it was prominently featured there as well as in the exhibition catalogue. Three additional works by Picasso owned jointly by Brummer and Haviland were sent to the ‘Sonderbundausstellung’ and were sold on that occasion. There is no doubt that the event allowed the dealer to reach a large German clientele, including the collectors Curt Glaser and Karl-Ernst Osthaus, to whom he sold numerous works during the following months (Figure 3).

Early on, Joseph was fully aware of the power of the press and of photography as advertising tools.\(^{50}\) He placed ads in publications and specialized


\(^{49}\) *Keleti Kiállítás a Művészprézbán IV*. Budapest: A Művészpréz Keleti Kiállításából, 1911.

\(^{50}\) He posted ads in ‘*Les petites affiches*’ as early as 1909 and continued publishing advertisement in French and international publications throughout his career.
magazines (Figure 4), and, more importantly, he systematically had the works in his gallery photographed. The Brummer Archives hold several boxes of the photography itself, and the accounting ledgers state the prices paid to photographers, offering an interesting perspective on the importance of photography as a marketing tool at the time.\textsuperscript{51} These prints were made available to journalists or used in publications, such as Carl Einstein’s seminal book on African arts \textit{Negerplastik}, for which Brummer provided most illustrations (Figure 5), and avant-garde journals such as Prague \textit{Umělecký Měsíčník (Arts Monthly)}. Each of these appearances encouraged the perception of these African objects, which went through Brummer’s hands, as works of art.

\textsuperscript{51} Brummer Archives, MMA, Box 20.
The ledgers function as a ‘who’s who’ in the arts of 1910s Europe, and are a fascinating source of information for the patient researcher. While it is possible to investigate any art-form associated with Brummer, my focus has been to carefully extract the purchases and sales of African objects from 1909 through to 1914. It is the combination of Joseph’s interest in sculptural works stemming from his artistic training, his adventurous taste and ‘terrific eye’, the favourable atmosphere of the Parisian art scene for new forms, and a series of encounters, which, combined, led to his particular interest in African arts. Already mentioned above, an influential individual in Joseph’s life was Max Weber whom he met in 1906 (shortly after his arrival in Paris), while they were both students at the ‘Grande Chaumière.’ Weber served as his intermediary and introduced him to the avant-garde circles of the French capital, in particular at the Café du Dôme, one of the foremost gatherings of foreign artists and intellectuals. There, Brummer met German artist Hans Purrmann who in turn, helped him enter the Académie Matisse in 1908. One could suppose that it was in Matisse’s classes that Brummer was introduced to African art. Matisse’s purchase of a Vili figure from the Congo in 1906, from the vendor Emile Heymann at ‘Curios’ located on the Rue de Rennes has been widely discussed. It is also known that by 1908 the master owned a number of other examples of African sculpture, and Weber later remembered how Matisse often displayed his collection during his lessons to praise its sculptural merits. Interestingly, according to Brummer’s ledgers, Heymann became one of Brummer’s providers of African sculptures as early as 1909, and it is possible to imagine that, like Matisse, Brummer himself walked by this shop on his way to the Montparnasse academies.

Brummer’s other African art providers, from 1909 onwards, were mostly vendors of ‘ethnographical specimens’ and ‘curiosités’ from across Europe. In particular, the names of W. O. Webster, W. D. Oldman from London, the Umlauff...
Company from Hamburg, Germany, and Henri Pareyn from Antwerp, Belgium, appear regularly. From these dealers, Brummer acquired objects in bulk, which he divided into individual items and sold for a much higher price to his clientele of refined international collectors. Among these were the French industrial Alphonse Kann, the German modern art collector Karl-Ernst Osthaus from Hagen, the Austrian Bier magnate Carl Reininghaus – who purchased from Brummer in 1913 the Madagascar Couple (2001.408) now in the Metropolitan Collection (Figure 6), and the Russian modern art collector Sergueï Stchoukhine. In addition, Brummer was in daily contact with many Parisian dealers with whom he performed exchanges, shared ownership of objects, bought and sold art. Most relevant among these were the aforementioned Franck Burty Haviland, the French dealer Paul Guillaume (who was to become one of African arts’ foremost advocates during the following decade), and the symbolist poet turned antiquarian Charles Vignier. With the latter Brummer collaborated in 1913 on the first French exhibition to include African objects as ‘art’. Using a similar model to the 1911 Budapest exhibition, but on a larger scale, Vignier displayed works from his wide-ranging collection at the Galeries Levesque & Co (May 16 to June 15, 1913): objects from China, Korea, Japan, Cambodia and Persia composed the main part of the exhibition, comprising 447 works out of a total of 481. In addition, twenty-three African objects, nine works from the Americas, one work from New Zealand and a group of small Egyptian works completed the installation. The Brummer ledgers reveal that Brummer was in fact the provider of most, if not all, African objects.58

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56 As seen on a 1909 advertising for Au Vieux Rouet, Emile Heymann’s shop, Paris (in Paudrat, Afrique, 139)
57 Cf. Kaufmann, this issue.
58 See discussion in Biro, Transformation en objet d’art, 151-156.
One of them, the only one illustrated in the exhibition catalogue,\(^{59}\) a Baule Gba Gba mask from Côte d’Ivoire, is now part of the Metropolitan Museum’s holdings (1997.277).

Unfortunately, there are no explicit documents of the Brummer brothers’ activities between the end of July 1914, which marked both the beginning of the war and the end of the ledgers, and 1920.\(^{60}\) We do know, however, that it was Imre who first left Paris to explore the American art scene as early as January 1914. As for Joseph, a letter from the painter Raoul Dufy to Walter Pach, dated January 1915, proves that he had already joined his brother by that time.\(^{61}\) Ernest remained in Europe, enrolled in the French army from the beginning of the war and served as an officer and interpreter.\(^{62}\) After the war, he stayed in Paris where he was in charge of the Parisian branch of the Maison Brummer. This cooperation ended in 1921, a year during which he had a falling-out with Joseph and started working under his own name, at 36 rue de Miromesnil.\(^{63}\) Between 1921 and 1923, Imre settled back in France to take care of the gallery, but in 1924, Ernest started working with his brothers again, while Imre returned to the United States. Beyond the very factual character of these dates and events, the emergence, collaboration and coexistence of the New York and Paris branches are at the core of an essential aspect of the Brummer success: the transatlantic nature of the business, with France serving mostly as

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\(^{60}\) According to Forsyth, Imre tried to sell works to the Metropolitan Museum both in 1914 and 1916 (Forsyth, Brummer Brothers, 106). Archival documents suggest that they only opened a gallery in 1920. A letter from Joseph Brummer to American collector John Quinn announced: ‘Please note my new address: 19 West 52d street. It is only a temporary location and I expect to find a store or gallery in a short time’). John Quinn Memorial Collection 1900-1924. New York Public Library - Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York, June 6, 1920. In April 1921, his letter head states his new address in the heart of New York gallery district: 43 East 57th street.


\(^{62}\) See the foreword of the sale catalogue of the Ernest Brummer collection, Galerie Koller, Zurich, and Spink & Son, Ernest Brummer Collection 1979. Also, see the accounting ledgers, April 22, 1914: ‘Pour régler Ernest qui quitte son service: 23.000 frs’ (For Ernest who leaves his service, 23,000 frs).

\(^{63}\) Indeed, Ernest stopped working at the Parisian branch of the Brummer Gallery in 1921. It seems that Ernest and Joseph weren’t always on the best of terms. In a letter dated August 22, 1922, to an unidentified unhappy client, Ernest explained: ‘My brother Joseph is very rich. I was representing his gallery in Europe and I acted under his name. I have left my brother a year ago without money...’ And again in January 1923: ‘I have left my brother’s house... and it is probably out of meanness that he is trying to put me in trouble’. The brothers reunited however: many letters from the 1930s attest to a close, even if rather formal, working relationship (Brummer Archives, MMA, Box 25).
supply center. This bridge was without a doubt the final component that led to the spectacular commercial success of the Brummer Gallery in New York during the following decades (Figure 7).

In strong contrast to the gallery’s beginnings, there are no better words than those of William Forsyth to reflect on the success and the almost legendary reputation the dealers had acquired by the time of Joseph’s death in 1947: ‘The Brummer brothers were antiquarians in the best sense of that old-fashioned word. They were men who stubbornly sought the best and often found it.’

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