I. The Beginnings of the Kress Legacy

The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art first opened its doors to the public on March 26, 1916. Since then, it had been a rapidly growing institution that has housed centuries worth of artworks from across the globe. However, this growth and expanse of artwork could not have been created if it were not for the Regional Collection given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, which granted the museum with a total of 31 works over the years. The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was extremely lucky to receive such a generous gift from the Kress Foundation and Mr. Samuel H. Kress, but it was not through sheer dumb luck that the museum was able to obtain a spot on the list of 18 regional museums chosen for gifts. There was actually an enormous amount of spirited battle that occurred within the museum and its workers to obtain and keep the collection. Moreover, the legacy that the Kress Regional Collection left behind at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is one that will continue to resound in Memphis for years to come.

Samuel H. Kress was the second of seven children born in Cherryville, Pennsylvania, to a set of decently prosperous parents. In the spring of 1896 Mr. Samuel H. Kress opened his first general store – “S.H. Kress & Co. Five and Ten-Cent Store” in downtown Memphis, Tennessee. It was here in Memphis that his company took roots, and with a community that bought out the
stock almost as soon as it went onto the shelves, the first Kress store soon spread its tendrils across the nation, quickly blooming in over a dozen southern cities. It was shortly thereafter that Samuel H. Kress opened stores in locations such as New York City, New York and Los Angeles, California, and by 1907 Mr. Kress was running 51 stores. The small empire eventually grew to contain 264 stores, and once the business had grown to a level of stability, it seems that Mr. Samuel H. Kress began to show interest in European art, focusing on the Old Masters of the Italian schools. The stories of Mr. Samuel H. Kress posit that his friend Delva Kilvert pushed him towards this inclination, however, it would not be out of line to suppose that his health problems had a hand in this fascination with old Italian Art. Mr. Samuel H. Kress became ill in the late 1940’s, and was sent to European spas and specialists. This may have given him access to a number of the European museums, therefore only strengthening his curiosity and interest in collecting. Mr. Kress’ interest in collecting eventually turned into quite a fortunate event for the whole of America.

Mr. Samuel H. Kress began gifting museums with small gifts of paintings first in 1929. It was soon after that Mr. Kress developed the plan for the regional gifts, and by 1960, 43 institutions across the nation had been named to receive regional gifts from the Kress Foundation. This number was eventually narrowed down to 18 institutions, and by 1961 all of the regional institutes had been given their indentures. Even though Samuel H. Kress’ health declined steadily, and he eventually passed away in 1955, when his two brothers Claude and Rush Kress ran the company it seems that no one in the Kress offices forgot about Memphis. Samuel’s younger brother Rush Kress took over as C.E.O. of the company and even then Memphis’ hold was still apparent. In a letter to museum director Louisa B. Clark, written on
March 21, 1957 by Mr. Rush Kress, he reminded Mrs. Clark of Memphis’ importance as the birthplace of the Kress stores, and stated that he hoped to visit soon.²

**II. A Blossoming Friendship Between Brooks and Kress**

While the opening of the first Kress five-and-dime store was surely a foot in the door for Memphis and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in their hopes to be granted a regional collection, there were other instances that helped along the possibility that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art would get a part of the regional collection. In 1923, long before the idea of the donations to regional museums had sparked in Mr. Samuel H. Kress’ mind, the Kress Collection gifted a tondo to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. A sixteenth-century Italian painting, the tondo is titled “Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist,” and is accredited to a follower of Lorenzo di Credi. The tondo is a remarkable example of the di Credi style of painting, and is truly a quality piece – arguably the most important piece of work that the Brooks Museum had acquired at this point in their collecting. This first gift was early on in Mr. Samuel H. Kress’ stages of collecting, and due to such it is important to note that even in the beginning of his collection, Memphis was pulsating in Mr. Kress’ mind.

Memphis continued to be graced with the generosity of Mr. Samuel H. Kress in December of 1937, when the Foundation presented the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art with a painting by Matthaus Merian, the Younger titled “Portrait of a Man with Glove.” While the painting no longer resides in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, the gift itself was an important stepping-stone towards the later regional gift, as it showed the Kress Foundation that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was open and receptive to gifts of that nature. This can be
seen with Mr. Samuel H. Kress’ statement “Gifts of this kind, we assume are accepted by you in perpetuity,” written in a letter to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. The Foundation knew that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art would continue to be a welcoming and grateful beneficiary of the Kress Foundation.

III. Stipulations and Small Battles

However, even after Memphis and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art had begun to be considered for the regional collection, there was still a fight to be fought, for there were a multitude of stipulations that came along in accordance with the potential gift. As Mrs. Lucia Outlan, once a Board of Trustees member at the Brooks Museum of Art, said, “It had to be earned.” To begin, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art had to send the Kress Foundation blueprints of the rooms where the Kress Collection was supposed to be housed. The blueprints had to show the width and length of the rooms, ceiling height, specified doorways or openings. This was intended to show the actual size and layout provided for the paintings on each wall, ensuring that the museum was actually able to provide the appropriate amount of space for each painting. Furthermore, the museum had to provide the details of the lighting in each room, as well as the details of access to the building, in case loss of the paintings were to become a possibility. The Foundation stipulated that the paintings must be hung flat against the wall, and securely fastened against the wall with the hangings provided by the Kress Foundation. It is also important to note one of the larger points of the Foundation’s stipulations – that there must be a continuous average temperature of 67 degrees and a relative humidity of 47% to be maintained for 24 hours each day that they are in possession of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.
Moreover, the Foundation stressed that no changes may be made in the collection without written consent from the Foundation. Beyond that, the entire collection must be shown together and completely at all times. The Foundation also stressed that, if any of these specifications were not met or were compromised, the works were to be immediately returned to the Kress Foundation.

These stipulations were not something easily followed and adhered to by the Brooks Museum of Art, however. In fact, the museum had to build an entirely new wing to house the Kress Collection, so that they could follow all of the guidelines laid out by the Foundation. The new wing housed the two rooms that the Kress Collection eventually filled. In an interview with Lucia Outlan, she stated, “Without… a place to house another collection – a building – the Kress wasn’t going to drop in.”

While this was never specifically stipulated in writing in the correspondences between the Kress Foundation and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, it seems that this was an unspoken necessity for the museum to acquire one of the Kress regional collections. The $250,000 needed for construction was raised for the new addition, and architect Everett Woods designed the new 15,000-square-foot wing. However, the time that it took for the building to hit completion seems to have been one of the reasons that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was one of the last regional museums to be granted a collection, as construction was finished late in 1955.

There were not only concrete and written standards from the Foundation, however. There was one specification that was largely undocumented, but can be most strongly confirmed by verbal sources. It seems that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, in order to receive the later regional gift from the Kress Foundation, had to receive another collection – which turned out to be the McCall Collection. In order for the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art to assert its
importance as an influential museum in the south, the museum had to first obtain a larger collection, and this turned out to be thirty-eight paintings and objects purchased for $30,000 from Warner S. McCall in St. Louis in 1942. Lucia Outlan, heard and saw firsthand the pressure for the McCall collection in order to get the Kress Collection. Outlan was the daughter of Walter Chandler, who was not only the mayor of Memphis, but also on the Board of Directors for the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art during the acquisitions of both the McCall and Kress Collections. In an interview with Outlan, when asked about her father’s choice to use city money to buy the McCall Collection, Outlan stated, “He made a specific decision as Mayor of the city because he wanted it to be a possibility to open up to receive the Kress Collection gift.”

Without the acquisition of the McCall Collection, it is doubtful that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art would be put into the final considerations for part of the Kress Collection regional gift. Even with all of the criticism that the museum and the city of Memphis received for the purchase of the McCall Collection, the addition was a crucial step in the fight that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art put forth for the Kress Collection. It is noteworthy, however, that the time that it took to obtain the McCall Collection was yet another stalwart in the road to the Kress Collection, therefore becoming another one of the reasons that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was one of the last regional museums to be awarded a collection.

IV. Quantity Versus Quality

The struggles that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art went through did not end after the acquisition of the McCall Collection and the confirmation that all needs specified by the Kress Foundation in relation to the paintings would be met. In a letter from the Director of the
Kress Foundation, Guy Emerson to the Director of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Louisa B. Clark, written on October 9, 1952, Emerson responded to a request from Clark that the regional collection be larger than what was originally proposed – a movement to more than 27 pieces, instead of 19, so that it could occupy more space in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. It seems that Clark hoped for a slightly larger collection, in order to create a larger gallery of more rooms in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. Emerson replied that, since he was dealing with 20 other museums at the time, and the groups of works assigned to each museum averaged between 25 and 30 paintings, he could not acquiesce to her request.\(^{10}\) This is noteworthy because, when looking at the final indentures, the 18 groups of works given range in number from 14 to 74, with a mean of 41 and median of 39. Therefore, the numbers that Emerson gave to Clark were deceptively low. It may be that the Kress Collection simply upped the amount of works for many of the museums after 1952, or it could be that Emerson was simply trying to keep the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art at bay, considering that they were on the low end of the spectrum considering the regional gifts. In fact, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art ranks at low number four with 29 works when looking at the numbers of works given to each of the 18 regional museums, one being the museum with the lowest amounts of works gifted, and 18 being the museum with the highest.\(^{11}\)

Even though the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art had one of the lowest numbers of gifted works in the group of regional museums, there were a number of trials that the museum had to go through just to get a steady and decided number. A letter from Louise B. Clark to Guy Emerson on October 6, 1952 shows that the works chosen totaled (at minimum) 27 pieces.\(^{12}\) In a selection made in April of 1955, 36 total works were chosen, and later in March of 1956 only 21 works were on the list. In a letter written from Louise B. Clark to Guy Emerson on January 21,
1957, Clark stated that the selection “met with such approval of all the groups and individuals to whom I had shown the slides and photographs.” However, it seems that the approval from the board at the Brooks Museum of Art, as well as from Louisa B. Clark herself, was not enough for the Kress Foundation to solidify a collection, and another selection was made in December of 1956 - those works totaling 25. About half of the collection chosen in December was swapped out for another grouping of works – this time totaling 29, and the collection chosen at that point was installed on loan on April 18, 1958. This gift left Memphis with 31 pieces of art, including the gifts of 1923 and 1937.

The Kress Foundation had stated in the beginning, in a letter to Louisa B. Clark outlining the gift in 1952, “Your director has been (or will be) given the opportunity of making the selections of the objects of art for your consideration.” However, in an interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan, the daughter of Mayor Walter Chandler – a member of the Board of Trustees at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art at the time of the Kress acquisition – Outlan expressly stated that, “It was what they wanted to give us, and that was that.” What Outlan seems to have meant is that no one at the Brooks Museum actually had any true say in what was given. The Board of Directors and the Director of the Museum could fight for what they wanted with fervor and strength, but in the end the museum was gifted what the Kress Foundation ultimately felt inclined to give.

While that may be true, it does not, however, mean that the Kress Foundation was not influenced by the opinions of those such as Louise B. Clark and Walter Chandler. Clark especially seemed to have many strong opinions on the works chosen for the regional collection, and with appropriate reason, since she was the director of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art for the entire time that the museum and the Kress Foundation worked together. But instead of
picking only one painting to crusade for, Clark instead focused more on vying for a collection that spanned numerous schools of the Old Italian Masters. In the first letter regarding the choices of the works, written to Guy Emerson on October 6, 1952, Clark discussed what paintings she wanted to keep, and which she would like to trade out for others. To list them, she wished to keep two Sienese paintings, five Florentine paintings, and 12 Northern Italian paintings. While these three types of paintings were all that was offered by the Kress Foundation at that point in time, Clark went on to add at the end of the letter that she would have liked an example from Umbria, another Sienese painting with scholarly attribution, a Florentine portrait, a Venetian portrait, another example of the 18th century Venetian school, a Flemish painting, and two pieces of sculpture. While her emphasis remained honed on the Italian schools, it is clear that Clark still wanted a wide variety of works for the museum, calling for 27 total examples from at least six different schools. This fight for variety continues in the selection that Clark sent to the Kress Foundation in April of 1955. In that selection Clark asked for paintings from a number of different schools – six from the Sienese school, 11 from the Florentine, one Ferrarese, one Lombard, four Venetian, two from the Genoese Flemish school, one German, five Dutch, one Spanish, one Neopolitan, and three from miscellaneous schools – creating a total of 36 works requested from 11 different schools. While Clark was calling for more schools this time than of the first, it seems that afterwards, even though she kept trying for diversity, the variety fell away at a slow pace. By March of 1956, just eleven months later, Clark was asking for five paintings from the Sienese school, five from the Florentine, one Ferrarese, one Lombard, two Venetian, one Genoese Flemish, one German, four from the Dutch school, and one from the Spanish. This took the variety down from 11 schools to nine, and totaled 21 pieces. By the end of 1956, in December, the numbers had rise, and eight schools were represented in the choices –
six works from the Sienese school, three from the Florentine, nine Venetian, three Genoese Flemish, one Marchigian, one Bolognese, one Cremonese, one Dutch, and one painting from a miscellaneous school that was yet unnamed. This grouping then left eight schools with 26 total works. It was the selection of 1957 that left the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art with a final count on the variety of schools in the regional collection, and it came to represent seven schools, with 26 Italian works, including works from the Florentine, Sienese, Venetian, Brescian and Ferrarese schools, one work from the Genoese Flemish school, and a work from the Spanish schools. So, while it fluctuated greatly in the descending years, Clark was in the end able to get a decent variety of works in most respects.

While there seems to be a great variety of schools shown in the collection given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, it actually is a little bit deceptive, when one steps back from the individual schools, and looks at the regional collections by works from different countries. That is to say, if one was to look at the list of each regional collection, and noticed how many works each collection received from different countries, Memphis yet again seems to be bringing up the rear. Out of the 18 regional collections, 11 of them received works from four or more countries. One museum – Honolulu, Hawaii – received only works from Italy, while Kansas City, Missouri and New Orleans, Louisiana received only works from two different countries. Three other museums, including the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, received works from only three countries. Birmingham, Alabama, and the Birmingham Museum of Art, which was rumored to be Memphis’ long time rival, received works from five different countries. In an interview with Lucia Outlan, she stated at one point, “My father didn’t want Birmingham to get three crackers more than Memphis,” leaving the regional collection that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art
received to be a bit of a disappointment in regards to works from various states, and in relation to
Birmingham.

However, the regional collection that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art received from
the Kress Foundation did not fail in all of its endeavors. When looking at the collection,
although there may not be a large variety in the places of provenance throughout the works,
Memphis actually received a number of visually stunning and artistically important works. In
the interview with Outlan, she explained that her father, Walter Chandler, actually fought a great
deal for the Kress Foundation to gift the Canaletto painting titled “The Grand Canal from the
Campo San Vio.” When talking about the painting, Outlan described it, stating, “This was the
one that my father recognized as being one of the finest Canalettos. He said it was so much
better. This had been taken out of here, and taken to other museums. Canaletto painted the same
scene over and over and over and over and over and there’s a lot of collections, but this is a very pristine,
early example.”16 Due to the recognition of such a fine painting by her father, Outlan went on to
state, “It was the Canaletto that my father wanted of the Kress… He talked all the time, ‘You
know, we got the Canaletto.’”17 Without Walter Chandler’s strong feelings towards receiving
the Canaletto, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art may not have received such a brilliant
painting.

Yet another noteworthy piece received in this collection is Girolamo Romanino’s “The
Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine” of 1540, which depicts the Virgin Mary holding the Christ
Child, with St. Ursula holding a flag directly behind the Virgin Mary, the kneeling nun Sant’
Angela Merici in front, and Saint Lawrence on the far left. Fern Rusk Shapley, an Italian art
scholar and the curator of paintings at the National Gallery of Art from 1947-1960, wrote a
catalogue of all of the Italian pieces in the Kress Foundation, including those gifted to museums
and institutions. In the entry concerning Romanino’s “The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine,” Shapley commented that the piece was “A prominent position in the mature period of the artist,” suggesting that the painting is one of Romanino’s later and more masterfully painted pieces. In fact, Miss Mary M. Davis, assistant to the Art Director of the Kress Foundation, stated at one point that the Romanino “is perhaps – and has been called so, the finest representation of that artist outside of Venice.”

Guy Northrop, the art columnist for the Commercial Appeal, wrote, “This picture is a roomful in itself. It is noteworthy for tactile values and a distant landscape.”

The two pieces painted by Sebastiano Ricci are exquisite examples of his later work, and “The finding of Moses” may be an example of the collaboration that he shared in his later years with his nephew, Marco Ricci. Furthermore, Filippino Lippi’s “Saint Francis in Glory” was described as “one of the most outstanding works in the Memphis collection.” Overall, the group of paintings that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art received from the Kress Foundation is a strong selection, full of works that are both aesthetically and academically pleasing.

V. Changes in the Works

It is important to note, however, that even with such a strong grouping of works, there were some changes and exchanges that went on from the time that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art began receiving gifts from the Kress Foundation up until 1966, when Fern Rusk Shapley published her catalogue of Italian art in the Kress Collection. The first important change that is focused on a painting that was first introduced to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in April of 1955 as Goya’s “Duchess of Alba.” The portrait is of a Spanish noblewoman – thought to be the Duchess of Alba de Tormes, Spain. The painting depicts a slender and elongated woman,
with dark features and expensive clothing, holding a large bronze key. Up until around 1966, the work was attributed to Francisco de Goya, a well-known and highly respected Spanish painter from the late 18th to early 19th century. However, by 1966 scholarly work on the painting had determined that the portrait should actually be attributed to the lesser-known, yet still noteworthy, Joaquin X. Inza. The painting was then re-titled, “Maria Theresa Cayetana de Silva y Silva, XIII Duquesa de Alba.” It has remained under this title and attribution since then.

While the attributions of some of the paintings went through changes, it seems that there was also a trading game that went on for years between the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Kress Foundation. It began in April of 1957, when the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art returned the Matthaus Merian portrait titled “Portrait of a Man with Glove.” The painting is three-quarter length, and shows a gentleman in black, posed with one glove on, holding his coat. Louise B. Clark wrote a letter to the Assistant to the Vice Director of the Kress Foundation, Mary M. Davis, on April 24, 1957, regarding the return of the Matthaus Merian portrait, stating, “This sounds as though we did not appreciate the gift which is definitely erroneous but I feel sure that you and those working on the final gift of paintings for the Brooks Art Gallery will agree with me that the collection would not be enhanced by its inclusion.”

Though it may seem that this explanation was inadequate and short, it is more of an explanation than was given for a number of the other paintings that were exchanged.

1957 continued to be a busy year for exchanges between the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Kress Foundation, as three more exchanges were discussed. The first exchange that was considered was a switch of the painting titled ”Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist,” that was at the time accredited to Allievo di Credi. Painted around 1500, the tondo portrays the Virgin Mary and Christ Child, flanked by two angels and Saint John the
Baptist. This painting was not actually included in the regional gift, but was instead the first gift that the Samuel H. Kress Foundation presented to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. The museum had the choice of replacing the di Credi with either a painting by Macrino d'Alba titled "Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John," or a painting by Jacopo Francia titled "Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John." It is interesting to note that both paintings offered to replace the di Credi had the same subject matter as the original painting - the Virgin Mary and Christ Child with Saint John the Baptist. In a letter from Louisa B. Clark to Mary M. Davis, Clark writes, "We all prefer K-1207 (painting by Macrino d'Alba) and will be most pleased to add it to our collection." However, it seems that the transaction never went through, though the reasons for such are undocumented, and the di Credi remains at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, though now it has a more general accreditation, this time to a follower of Lorenzo di Credi.

The second transaction discussed in 1957 revolved around the painting that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art held done by Jacopo Bassano titled at that time “Portrait of a Man with Letters.” When the Kress Foundation suggested that they would like to trade something for the Bassano to return to their possession, Louisa B. Clark responded in a letter to Mary M. Davis on November 15, 1957, stating, “Tell Mr. Modestini it will have to be an unusually good painting to take the place of the Bassano portrait which we relinquish with regret.” The “Mr. Modestini” mentioned was Mario Modestini, the Kress Foundation’s head art historian, who was in charge of the restoration and cleaning of the pieces held by the Kress Foundation. He was in charge of many of the changes in the regional collections throughout the nation, and was the main voice for the exchange of the Bassano. The Kress Foundation responded with an offer of the painting titled “Portrait of a Gentleman in Black” attributed to Giovanni Battista Moroni. In a letter
responding to Clark, Miss Davis writes, “Enclosed is the photograph of the substitution for the Bassano. We all hope that you will be thrilled, for frankly we think it is a much more exciting painting.”

It is interesting that the Kress Foundation suggests that the Moroni is a more exciting painting, because the response from the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is largely unenthusiastic, with Clark writing of a Mr. William Kent, the president of the Board of Trustees at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, “He hates to part with the signed and dated Bassano, which also has the distinction of having been shown so recently in Venice. However, we like the Moroni.”

In two separate letters the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art expressed their disappointment in letting go of the Bassano, yet they were forced to comply with the Kress Foundation’s wishes, even though the sweet-talking about the Moroni portrait did little to impress.

The third exchange between the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Kress Foundation that occurred in 1957 was based on a painting by Francesco Salviati titled “Portrait of a Man,” dated 1540-1550. The Kress Foundation wished to reacquire that painting and in return give the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art Alessandro Allori’s painting titled “Portrait of a Young Man.” In a letter written from Mary M. Davis to Louisa B. Clark on November 26, 1957, Davis wrote “Mr. Modestini has decided that he would like to make another change in your Collection. He has asked me to send you the enclosed photograph of Alessandro Allori ‘Portrait of a Young Man’ which he would like to give you in place of Salviati ‘Portrait of a Young Man.’ He feels that this Allori is more lively and will go better with the Moroni.” Yet again, there is no further explanation as to why the switch was desired. The trade went through, and the two were exchanged later in 1958.
The acquisition of the Alessandro Allori portrait proved to be a valuable one for the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, however, because in a letter from Louise B. Clark to Mary Davis dated September 6, 1960, she expressed interest in the Jacopo Bassano portrait that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art had a few years prior been forced to return to the Kress Foundation. Now graced with a new title, “The Bearded Man” instead of “Portrait of a Man with Letters,” Clark wrote, “We discussed the Bassano portrait at length when I was in New York but I thought you would like the official decision voted by the trustees at their last meeting. They were all intrigued with the photograph of ‘A Bearded Man’ and would like very much to add this to our collection and they hope that the bust portrait of a young man by Alessandro Allori may be swapped for the Bassano.”

28 It seems that things had come full circle, and Clark’s desire to keep the Jacopo Bassano painting had won through. Mary M. Davis replied to the letter on September 27 of 1960, writing "We are glad to know that your Board has decided definitely in favor of exchanging your Allori portrait for the Bassano. As soon as possible, I shall have the Bassano sent to you. When it is received you can then return to us the Allori." The exchange was made, but it was not one that happened quietly. Guy Northrop, a columnist for the Commercial Appeal, wrote an entire column on the Jacopo Bassano portrait in February of 1961, stating that the painting is a noted and important part of the collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. He cites mainly Bassano’s use of color as the reason behind the painting’s brilliance, writing “In respect to his color, he regarded as more masterful than Titian and Tintoretto… In Bassano’s ‘Man of Letters’ [the title switched back and forth among circles] we find the famous color, the simplicity and the forthrightness for which he was acclaimed.”

29 Apparently, after it left Memphis it went back on tour with the Kress Foundation, showing in Venice, and the minute it landed back stateside, Clark was adamant about getting the painting
back into possession of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. Clark is quoted to have said; “I thought it a magnificent portrait when I first saw it.”30 So while it may have taken some time, and some swapping around of other pieces of artwork, the Bassano was finally reunited with the rest of the regional collection at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, and remains there today, thanks in large to the determination of Director Clark.

VI. Struggles to Set a Date

This was the last of the exchanges between the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Kress Foundation, and the final indenture was signed on December 9, 1961. While the indenture was not signed until 1961, the works were given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in 1958. The opening was pushed back multiple times for various reasons, and that itself is one of the many frustrations and obstacles that the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art had to go through when obtaining the Kress regional collection. In one letter from Guy Emerson and Mary M. Davis to Louisa B. Clark on September 25, 1957, multiple reasons for pushing the opening date back were expressed. Emerson wrote at one point, “Mr. Kress is not too well and attaches a great deal of importance to the Memphis Opening because of the fact that the Company was initiated in Memphis… But I think he feels that form the standpoint for health and local setting, Spring would be better than Winter for him. From my contacts with him and Mrs. Kress recently, I judge that an April date would be the most acceptable we could agree upon.”31 Rather than having the opening in the winter of 1957, the opening had to then be pushed back into 1958. Mr. Kress’ health was not the only problem that produced this push, however. Emerson went on to write, “There is also this factor: Dr Suida will not return from Europe until the first of October
and he has not yet prepared the material for your catalogue which, in turn, has to be planned and
printed and plates made. Mr. Modestini will also return about the same time, and he has on his
hands work for some five galleries with, as you know, not too large a staff.”32 The people
necessary to providing the opening with the materials it needed to be a success were not able to
get the work done, or even attend in Mr. Modestini’s case, until the spring of 1958, therefore
again pushing back the opening. In the very same letter there is yet a third reason for the delay
in the opening shortly after the previous quotes, and Emerson states, “Since we would like to
have the Opening in Atlanta during the same week as the Memphis Opening, I would say, based
on experience of many Openings, if we allow ourselves a little extra time now, we will be glad in
the end.” These reasons, put together, seem to paint a stressful opening based upon the
alignment of a multitude of things – things that were not moving as fast as many had hoped.

In fact, Louise B. Clark herself came under scrutiny for the delayed opening, most
noticeably in an article in the local Memphis newspaper, The Commercial Appeal. The article,
written by Guy Northrop Jr. early in 1957, was titled “Status of the Kress Collection ‘Definitely’
Due Later,” and began by questioning the opening of the Kress Collection at the Memphis
Brooks Museum of Art. Northrop writes, “The arrival of 1957 raises the natural question of the
status of the Kress Foundation paintings which were promised to the Brooks Memorial Art
Gallery a few years ago.” To answer such question, Northrop continues by quoting Director
Clark, stating, “For more than a year, Mrs. Louise Bennett Clark, Brooks director, has held 1957
as the target date for setting up the gift collection. She stands on that promise as the year begins.
‘The paintings will definitely be here in late 1957,’ Mrs. Clark said last week, ‘I hope to put
them up about October or November.’” Unfortunately for Clark, events did not happen in the
manner that they were planned, and as a museum director, she knew the possibility of this ahead
of time. Later in the article Clark is quoted to have said, “All I could tell anyone is that we are still working on the collection… There are many trips to make to New York (Kress Foundation headquarters) or Washington (much of the Kress collection is in the National Gallery there) before the selections are made. After the collection is ready to be offered to the city, then the gallery trustees and anyone they appoint can go to New York to see them and say yea or nay.” Clark was vaguely replying to the inquisition that there were many steps that must be taken for such a collection, and that they were moving slowly – delicately sidestepping a definitive answer, as the Kress Foundation continued to discuss the date for the opening with the Brooks Museum for a number of months.

In a letter from Louisa B. Clark to Mary M. Davis written on November 15, 1957, Mrs. Clark wrote, “It is good news to learn that we an make a definite date for the opening of the Kress Collection, and I presume you would like to have the opening the week before April 13 so that you would not have to return to New York. I suggest any day between April 6 and 13 with the exception of April 10 or 12. Let us know your preference and we will plan accordingly.” However, that date was unfavorable for the Kress Foundation, and in a response letter Davis wrote, “It so happens that the Sunday before April 13 (now scheduled for Atlanta) is Easter and not a convenient time for Mr. and Mrs. Kress to be away from their home and family. So what dates in the following week would please you… I believe that Mr. Kress wants to break the trip a bit and stop off somewhere along the way. However, I am sure they could arrive easily by the 17th (Thursday) which would make the 18th a good day for the Opening.” Luckily for Memphis and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, April 18, 1958 was a smart match, and Clark wrote in response, “April the 18th, will be satisfactory for the opening, but please to not make it any later, for all my Trustees are active in the Cotton Carnival Association, and some events will be well
under way by the middle of April.” It seems that Clark was finally putting her foot down on
the date, letting the Kress Foundation know that the opening could not possibly be pushed back
any further.

VII. The Anticipated Unveiling

The Kress regional collection given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was
officially opened at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, April 18, 1958 for all patrons of the Memphis Brooks
Museum of Art, and went on display to the public the next day, Saturday April 19. Rush H.
Kress, head of the Kress Foundation at the time, was in attendance, as well as a number of other
dignitaries. Rush Kress made the transaction final in front of about 200 members that Friday,
and gave good tidings along with the works. On the opening day, the crowds that flocked to the
Memphis Brooks Museum of Art were described as “record breaking,” and in one newspaper
article the turnout for the first night was estimated to be around 5,000. The author of the article
goes on to write, “A crowd had begun to form by 8:15, 15 minutes before the preview and
reception was scheduled to begin. For more than an hour a line of people stretching from the
front steps through two rooms moved at a snail’s pace into the two galleries where the collection
is hung. At one point the rooms were so filled with people that one guest was overheard to say:
‘But where are the paintings?’” The enormous interest shown by the community seems to have
been like nothing Memphis had ever seen in regards to art. Ted Rust, the Director of the
Memphis Academy of Arts was quoted to have called the opening “The most exciting evening
that Memphis has ever known,” and Mr. William Kent, the President of the Board of Trustees at
the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art spoke about the reaction from the community, stating that it
“indicates a tremendous interest not only from the Memphis public but from people throughout
the surrounding area as well."

It seems that the Kress Regional Gift created almost nothing but positivity among the community, drawing a mass of people not yet seen before by the artistic community.

Even with the massive amounts of positive feedback that came with the opening, there seemed to have been a bit of negativity thrown around as well, as is the usual with any group of artworks shown to the public. The most noteworthy cases of this was in an article written by Guy Northrop Jr. on December 21, 1958. The column was titled “Broader Vistas for Enjoying Art Opened in Kress Group at Brooks,” and mentioned criticisms of the Kress Regional Collection, citing practicing “artists, amateurs, and gallery-goers” as those who reflect on the grouping of paintings, stating, “these aren’t really good paintings.”

Northrop responds by stating that, while the pieces in the gallery are understandably not of the same caliber as those in museums such as the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but the paintings are still quality pieces that help to instruct this part of the country in the language of art. Northrop writes, “the Kress paintings in the Brooks Gallery help open the door to great art in a region which seldom gets as far as the door.” However, the article was easy to misinterpret, and Trustees on both the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the Kress Foundation boards were alarmed. In a letter written to Louise B. Clark shortly after the article was published, Mary M. Davis explains the misinterpretation, stating, “It’s all very discouraging. I understand what Northrop was driving at. And granted that all your paintings are not great masterpieces, quite a number of them are as good or better than representations of those artists in any big museum in this country.”

Clark responded with assurance that she had not been flustered by the ignorance, and assured Davis that “interest in the collection is growing daily.”
The works were not only praised for their high artistic quality, however, but also (and maybe surprisingly) for their tie to the Christian faith. In one column written by Northrop, Stanley Dillard, the Commissioner of Finances and Institutions for Memphis at the time, was quoted to have said “The citizens of Memphis and the Mid-South are very grateful for this collection of Christian art for us and for our children.” When actually looking at the subject matter for the pieces gifted, this is not as alarming, however, because all but six of the original pieces given in 1958 were Christian themed. Northrop goes on to state, “the Kresses have stressed this [Christian] aspect as much as the aesthetic beauty of the paintings.” Yet again, in yet another article by Northrop, he quotes Mr. Rush Kress, who, at the opening of the Kress Collection at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, stated, “this collection of Christian art is for your children.” This focus on artwork buried in Christian themes seems to be strong throughout the Kress regional gift for the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, and is one of the things that the community responded most vocally to when receiving the collection. In fact, when looking back at the first communication between the Kress Foundation and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art regarding the regional gift, Mr. Rush Kress expressly states, “In the distribution of my brother’s collection of art, our purpose is fundamentally for the purpose of giving our children and grandchildren the opportunity of not only the enjoyment and study of fine, irreplaceable objects of art, but is also principally for instilling and developing a high moral and spiritual quality as a thought throughout the nation.” The Memphis community responded exactly in the way that the Kress Foundation intended – with emphasis on the spiritual, Christian quality of the artwork.

VIII. The Legacy
Visitor numbers to the museum climbed 20% in four years, adding about 10,000 additional visitors per year. However, the most influential part of the Kress gift was not only that it allowed a greater number and diversity of people to visit the museum and experience the artwork, it was that it sparked a path of indentures to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art; it inspired other individuals and foundations to give, and to help the museum flourish. In an article printed in the Commercial Appeal, the collection was called “a seed bed of art that will blossom and grow.” Louise B. Clark retired in 1961, after the longest run of any Director at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, content with the state and potential of the museum now that the Kress Collection had been obtained. Her predecessor, R. L. Shalkop, summed up the importance of the Kress Regional Gift, in relation to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, in a letter written to Guy Emerson in 1962. Shalkop stated, “Most important, it seems to me, is the fact that the Kress Collection has established a solid foundation on which to build. Without it our gallery might have struggled along for years to reach the point where it could boast a significant collection. Its presence is a source of civic pride and inspiration to other prospective donors and all those who are working toward the cultural betterment of our community.”

The Regional Collection given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation is a collection that was not easily won. There were scores of issues that the museum had to battle through, but that is just what it was – a battle. In an interview with Lucia Outlan, she was asked, when it came right down to it, why did Memphis, Tennessee get such an impressive and noteworthy collection from the Kress Foundation. Her response embodies the character of all of those who were involved with the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art and the
acquisition of the Kress Collection. That is to say, Outlan simply replied, “Because we put up a fight.”
Works Given to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

Bartolo, Taddeo di
“St. James Major”
ca. 1410
Italian – Sienese

Bartolo, Taddeo di
“St. John the Baptist”
ca. 1410
Italian – Sienese

Bassano, Jacopo (da Ponte)
“Portrait of a Man of Letters (Giovanni Marcello?)”
ca. 1540
Italian – Venetian

Benivieni, Lippo di (attributed to)
“The Crucifixion with Scenes from the Passion and the Life of St. John”
ca. 1315-1320
Italian

Biondo, Giovanni del
“Madonna and Child, St. John the Baptist and St. Catherine”
ca. 1385
Italian – Florentine

Botticini, Francesco (attributed to)
“Madonna and Child”
Italian – Florentine

Canaletto, Giovanni Antonio Canal
“The Grand Canal from the Campo San Vio”
1730-1735
Italian

Cima da Conegliano, Giovanni Battista
“Enthroned Madonna and Child with Two Virgin Martyrs”
ca. 1495
Italian – Venetian

Costa, Lorenzo
“Saint Paul”
ca. 1510
Italian – Ferrarese
di Credi, Lorenzo (follower of)
“Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist”
ca. 1500
Italian – Florentine

Duccio (follower of)
“Madonna and Child with Saints and the Crucifixion”
ca. 1300-1325
Italian – Sienese

Fei, Paolo di Giovanni
“Christ on the Road to Calvary”
ca. 1385
Italian – Sienese

Gaulli (Baciccio), Giovanni Battista
“Portrait of Giuseppe Renato Imperiali”
ca. 1686
Flemish – Genoese

Inza, Joaquin X. (attributed to)
“Maria Theresa Cayetana de Silva y Silva, XIII Duquesa de Alba”
ca. 1780-1790
Spanish

Licinio, Bernardino (attributed to)
“Portrait of a Musician”
ca. 1515
Italian – Venetian

Lippi, Filippino (workshop of)
“St. Francis in Glory”
ca. 1505
Italian – Florentine

Maineri, Gian Francesco de (attributed to)
“Saint Sebastian”
ca. 1500
Italian – Ferrarese

Moroni, Giovanni Battista (attributed to)
“Portrait of a Gentleman in Black”
ca. 1570
Italian
Niccolo, Andrea di (attributed to)
“Pieta”
ca. 1500
Italian – Sienese

Previtali, Andrea
“The Annunciation”
ca. 1520-1525
Italian – Venetian

Ricci, Sebastiano
“Jephthah and His Daughter”
ca. 1710
Italian – Venetian

Ricci, Sebastiano
“The Finding of Moses”
ca. 1710
Italian – Venetian

Romanino, Girolamo
“The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine”
ca. 1540
Italian – Brescian

Rossini, Pellegrino di Mariano
“Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Bernardine of Siena”
ca. 1450
Italian

Sellaio, Jacopo del
“The Adoration of the Magi”
ca. 1480-1490
Italian – Florentine

Siena, Rinaldo da
“Madonna and Child with Four Saints”
ca. 1285
Italian – Sienese

Stefano, Tommaso di
“The Last Supper”
ca. 1530-1540
Italian

Tintoretto, Jacopo (followers of)
“The Flight into Egypt”
ca. 1575
Italian – Venetian

Pisan School (1)
“Adoring Angel”
ca. 1550-1600

Pisan School (2)
“Adoring Angel”
ca. 1550-1600
Museums Gifted Regional Collections by the Kress Foundation

1. Honolulu, Hawaii – (14)
   Italian: 14

2. Kansas City, Missouri (16)
   Italian: 15
   Dutch: 1

3. Houston, Texas (26)
   Italian: 20
   French: 2
   Spanish: 4

4. Memphis, Tennessee (29)
   Italian: 27
   Spanish: 1
   Flemish: 1

5. New Orleans, Louisiana (32)
   Italian: 31
   German: 1

6. Portland, Oregon (32)
   Italian: 26
   Dutch: 1
   French: 2
   German: 1
   Flemish: 1
   English: 1

7. Atlanta, Georgia (34)
   Italian: 30
   French: 1
   Spanish: 1
   German: 2

8. Seattle, Washington (35)
9. Birmingham, Alabama (38)

Italian: 33
French: 1
Spanish: 2
German: 1
Flemish: 1

10. San Francisco, California (40)

Italian: 23
Dutch: 2
French: 2
Spanish: 8
German: 1
Flemish: 3
Austrian: 1

11. Tulsa, Oklahoma (40)

Italian: 40

12. Denver, Colorado (41)

Italian: 26
Dutch: 3
French: 5
Spanish: 4
German: 3

13. Allentown, Pennsylvania (50)

Italian: 30
Dutch: 11
German: 8
Flemish: 1

14. Coral Gables, Florida (51)

Italian: 44
German: 1
Flemish: 5
Austrian: 1

15. El Paso, Texas (60)

Italian: 50
Dutch: 1
French: 2
Spanish: 6
Flemish: 1

16. Tuscon, Arizona (64)

Italian: 30
French: 4
Spanish: 29
German: 1

17. Columbia, South Carolina (65)

Italian: 57
Dutch: 2
French: 3
Spanish: 2
Flemish: 1

18. Raleigh, North Carolina (74)

Italian: 64
Dutch: 5
French: 1
German: 3
Flemish: 1
All dates in this paragraph come from the Kress Foundation website.
http://www.kressfoundation.org/

In the letter written from Mr. Rush Kress to Mrs. Louise B. Clark on March 21, 1957, Mr. Rush Kress states, “Am looking forward to the opening of the new wing as I desire to attend same as Memphis, Tennessee was out No. 1 store which I had the pleasure of attending over sixty years ago.” From the files on the Kress Collection in the Brooks Museum archives.

From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011.

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011. The entire quote reads, “Okay. Well without a permanent collection and a place to house another collection – a building – the Kress wasn’t going to drop in.”

From “Our History” on the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art website. brooksmuseum.org

From “Our History” on the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art website. brooksmuseum.org

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011.

See Amy Aughinbaugh’s Rhodes Summer Research Institute paper titled “

In the letter written from Mr. Guy Emerson to Mrs. Louise B. Clark on October 9, 1952, Mr. Emerson states, “You realize that we are dealing with 20 or more museums and have to have some reasonable limit both in numbers and subjects in any one museum… The groups assigned to the various galleries have averaged between 25 to 30 paintings each.”

See attached list of works given to each regional museum.

In the letter written from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Mr. Guy Emerson on October 6, 1952, Mrs. Clark listed paintings that she wished to add to the collection to strengthen it. While she stipulated what schools the paintings were to come from, her language specified “at least one” or multiple paintings if possible for a few of the schools. 27 is a base number, if she had only gotten one from each school where this ambiguity was listed. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In the letter written from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Mr. Guy Emerson on January 21, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Brooks Museum archives.

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011.

In the letter written from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Mr. Guy Emerson on October 6, 1952. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011.

From interview with Mrs. Lucia Outlan on July 6, 2011. The full quote reads as, “But it was the Canaletto that my father wanted of the Kress. And I don’t know whether he had a chance to talk about it, but this was the one he wanted. And I don’t know whether he spoke to them, or Mrs. Clark – he talked to her about it, he had a chance to talk to her about it – but he talked all the time, ‘You know, we got the Canaletto.’”


In a letter from Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louise B. Clark on February 22, 1959. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

From an article in the Commercial Appeal written by Guy Northrop. Undated.

From an article in the Commercial Appeal written by Guy Northrop. Undated.

In a letter from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on April 24, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.
In a letter from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on November 15, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on November 15, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louisa B. Clark on November 19, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Mrs. Louisa B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on December 3, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter written to Mrs. Louisa B. Clark from Miss Mary M. Davis on November 26, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.


In a letter from Mr. Guy Emerson and Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louisa B. Clark on September 25, 1957. The full quote reads, “Mr. Kress is not too well and attaches a great deal of importance to the Memphis Opening because of the fact that the Company was initiated in Memphis and, I may add, appreciates greatly the naming of the new wing for the Kress Family. But I think he feels that from the standpoint for health and local setting, Spring would be better than Winter for him. From my contacts with him and Mrs. Kress recently, I judge that an April date would be the most acceptable we could agree upon.” From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Mr. Guy Emerson and Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louisa B. Clark on September 25, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Mr. Guy Emerson and Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louisa B. Clark on November 15, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art archives.

In a letter from Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louise B. Clark on November 26, 1957. The full quote reads, “It so happens that the Sunday before April 13 (now scheduled for Atlanta) is Easter and not a convenient time for Mr. and Mrs. Kress to be away from their home and family. So what dates in the following week would please you, that is the week following April 13? I believe that Mr. Kress wants to break the trip a bit and stop off somewhere along the way. However, I am sure they could arrive easily by the 17th (Thursday) which would make the 18th a good day for the Opening.” From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

In a letter from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on December 3, 1957. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

From a newspaper article in the Commercial Appeal on Sunday, January 26, 1958. Written by Guy Northrop Jr. and titled “Top Kress Foundation Leaders to Attend Opening on April 18.”
From a newspaper article in the Commerical Appeal titled “Preview of Kress Collection Draws 5,000 to Art Gallery.” The article is unnamed and undated.

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From a newspaper article in the Commerical Appeal on December 21, 1958. Written by Guy Northrop Jr. and titled “Broader Vistas for Enjoying Art Opened in Kress Group at Brooks.”

In a letter from Miss Mary M. Davis to Mrs. Louise B. Clark on February 22, 1959. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

In a letter from Mrs. Louise B. Clark to Miss Mary M. Davis on February 25, 1959. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

From a newspaper article in the Commerical Appeal on Sunday, April 20, 1958. Written by Guy Northrop Jr. and titled “Gallery Accepts Kress Paintings.”

From a newspaper article in the Commerical Appeal on Saturday, April 19, 1958. Written by Guy Northrop Jr. and titled “Mr. Kress Will Open Gift Art Collection to Public Today.”

From a letter from Mr. Rush Kress to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art on July 24, 1952. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.

From a newspaper article in the Commerical Appeal. Writer unknown, date unknown.

In a letter from Mr. R. L. Shalkop to Mr. Guy Emerson on August 17, 1962. From the files on the Kress Collection in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art.