

SMA

# The Art & Science of Healing

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A Guide to the Menninger Collection

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

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Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/  
Loo Family Intern*

◆  
Teaching Gallery display,  
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◆  
Ohio region, Middle Woodland Hopewell, *Polished effigy pipe*, 200 B.C.E.– C.E. 400, clay, Gift from the Menninger Foundation, A0123-0593, Archaeology Division, Biodiversity Institute, University of Kansas

*Nothing is so immediately ruinous to such [collections] as that they be dispersed or scattered over several areas of physical location or administrative authority. Once such an occurrence takes place there is vast professional experience to indicate the likelihood of almost instantaneous disintegration.*

— Museum of the Menninger Foundation, 1967<sup>1</sup>

## THE MENNINGER COLLECTION

Collections fill roles both emblematic and practical in the lives of collectors. They are embedded with stories about why objects are collected, shedding light on biographical moments that gain significance with the passage of time. Collections represent collectors' objectives in historical context, offering insight into social networks among collectors, scholars, communities, institutions, and museums. The disintegration of a collection often involves the dispersal of its material objects; the stories, meanwhile, embedded in the collections themselves, are usually lost.

Dr. Karl Menninger (1883–1990), known to his peers as Dr. Karl, was a pioneer in American psychoanalysis. In 1920, he and his father, Charles, founded the Menninger Clinic for the mentally ill in Topeka, Kansas. Dr. Karl's brother William joined the clinic in 1925. Together, the Menningers established a treatment approach that controlled the hospital environment so patients could cope with emotions and past associations that contributed to mental illness. In 1941, the family founded the Menninger Foundation, a non-profit organization that funded research, treatment, and training programs.

Dr. Karl was also a collector of indigenous art. However, almost nothing is known about this aspect of his life. Although the collections at the University of Kansas are known separately as the Menninger

*Dr. Karl's experience with the Hopewell pipe is fast becoming a Foundation legend. You were so considerate and generous in the face of an incident that horrified us all. Really, Byron, we will never forget it, plus the experience of you repairing it yourself and then, for heaven sakes, donating it to us. It is and always will be one of our most treasured possessions.*

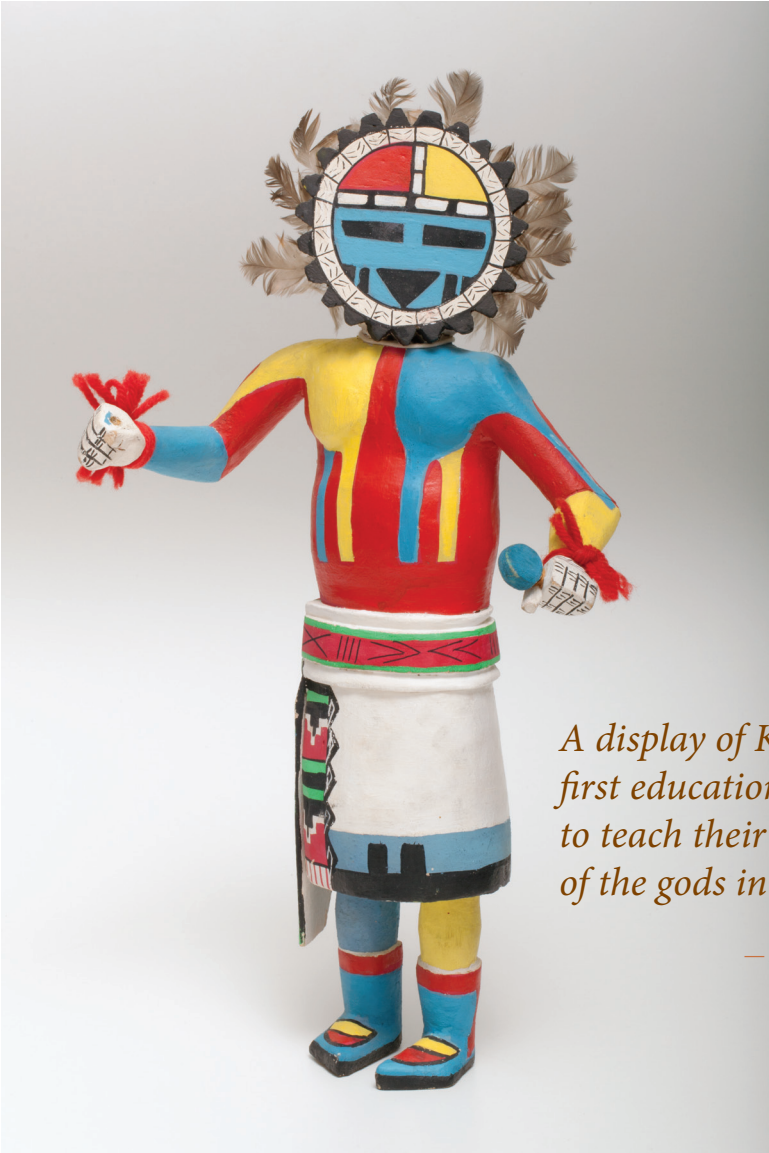
— Lewis Wheelock, MMF Director,  
to Byron Knoblock, June 16, 1965<sup>2</sup>

Foundation Collection and the Dr. Karl Menninger Estate Collection, this guide presents a single Menninger Collection emerging directly from Dr. Karl's interests.

Emblematically, the collection represents Dr. Karl's upbringing within an environment that fostered an interest in Native Americans. This interest in native culture extended into his career, where he explored the relationship between anthropology and psychoanalysis. He began collecting within this context, gravitating toward a network of collectors who shaped his interests. On a practical level, the collection represents Dr. Karl's application of indigenous art to psychoanalytic practices, including therapy, education, and medicine. He founded the Museum of the Menninger Foundation (MMF), where the objects he procured were collected, interpreted, and displayed with an emphasis on practical applications.

<sup>1</sup> Kansas Historical Society Archives. 1967 Three Year Planning Report Museum and Archives Division. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 233370. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Wheelock, L. 1965 Letter to Byron Knoblock, June 16. Kansas Historical Society Archives. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.



◆  
Hopi peoples, active United States,  
*Tawa (sun katsina)*, 1850–1969,  
wood, paint, feathers, yarn, string,  
carving, Gift from the Menninger  
Foundation, 2007.6007

*A display of Kachina dolls, “America’s  
first education toy”, used by the Hopi  
to teach their children the appearance  
of the gods in their religious system.*

— Museum of the Menninger Foundation<sup>3</sup>

## MISSIONARY SPIRIT

*The Indian collection is part of the Menninger family, its history and the Foundation*

—Lewis Wheelock, 1972<sup>4</sup>

The Menninger family embodied a “missionary” spirit and undertook mental health reform, establishing a mental health clinic, a school for cognitively disabled children, and a psychological training institute. Dr. Karl’s parents, Charles and Florence Menninger, were described as engaging their children in discussions covering a wide range of topics including Native American and Pre-Columbian history and art. This set the stage for Dr. Karl’s life-long interest in Native American cultures.

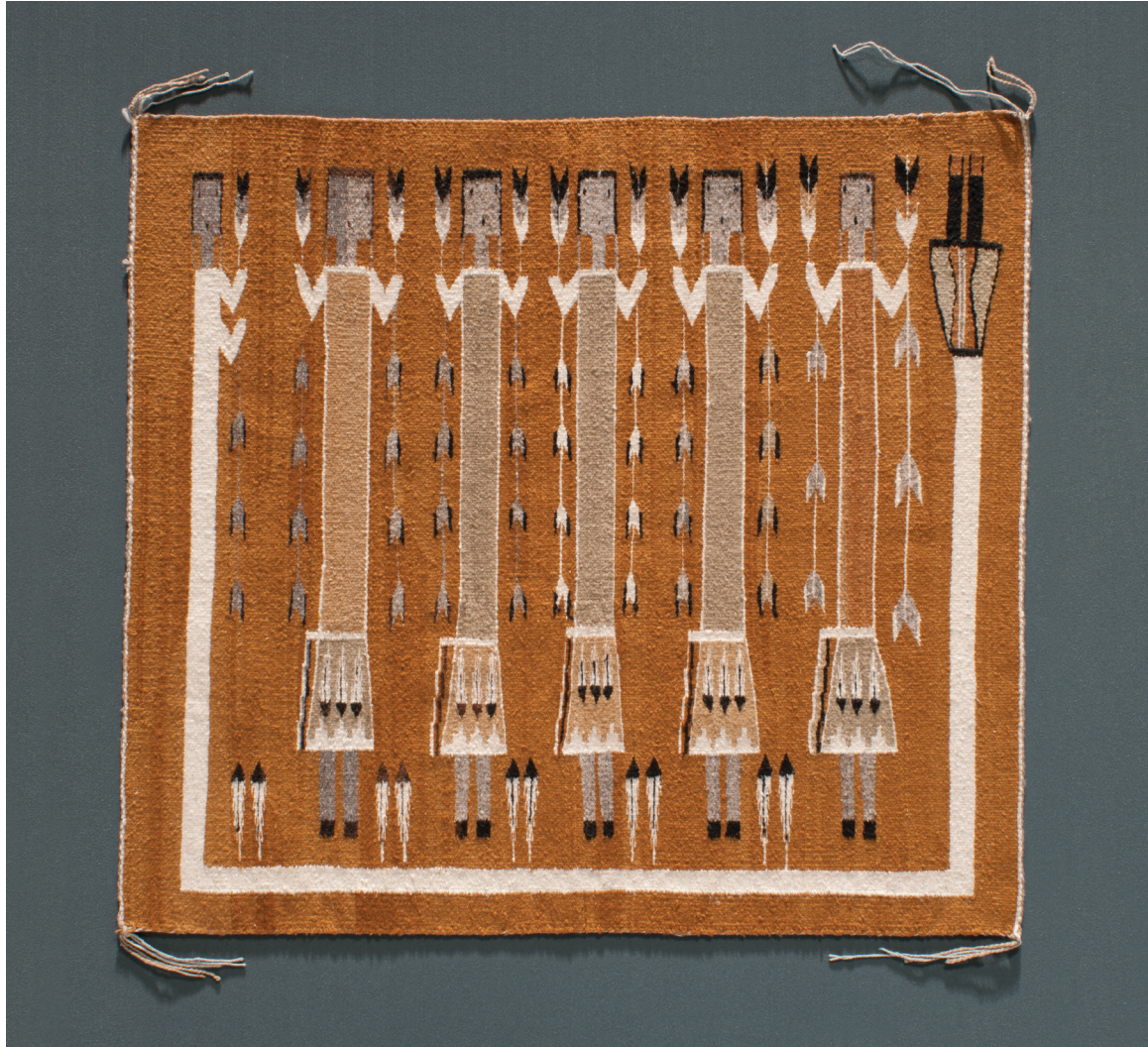
In 1957, Dr. Karl took his family on a vacation to the Southwest, which included stops at Native American reservations. This “vacation” was actually an official visit, as Dr. Karl had previously met with tribal leaders, administrators, and medicine men. In 1961, the family visited the Navajo Reservation to

learn about the Rough Rock Demonstration School, which taught children reading, writing, weaving, and Navajo language. Dr. Karl observed the negative effect of depriving Native American children of their culture and believed locally directed education was the solution.

Through his work with the school, Dr. Karl joined a collecting network that included Robert and Ruth Roessel, who operated the Rough Rock School. The Roessels gave Dr. Karl one of his first Navajo rugs, sparking his interest in collecting. Whenever Menninger vacationed, he stopped at reservation trading posts to purchase rugs and jewelry. For 15 years, Dr. Karl and members of his collecting network visited the Southwest, collecting and donating artifacts to the MMF.

<sup>3</sup> Kansas Historical Society Archives. n.d. Gallery Description. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> Kansas Historical Society Archives. 1972 Museum and Archive staff meeting # 25, August 31. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.



◆  
Diné (Navajo) peoples, active United States, *Yei rug*,  
1850–1969, wool yarn, weaving, dyeing, Gift from  
the Menninger Foundation, 2007.6545

## PSYCHOANALYSIS & ANTHROPOLOGY

Menninger's collection represents an interest in anthropology and its applications to psychoanalytic principles. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, had a similar interest and collected artifacts from ancient Egypt, Rome, and Greece. He believed that collections filled emblematic and

*It was the nicest present of all that your Indian rugs arrived just at Christmas. ... I have not quite decided yet whether to hang them up or have them on the floor; they look equally good both ways.*

— Anna Freud to Dr. Karl, December 30, 1962<sup>5</sup>

practical roles in a collector's life. Emblematically, Freud likened his work to that of an archaeologist, unearthing layer upon layer to uncover information. Freud's anthropological study *Totem and Taboo* compared the incest taboo across tribal cultures, relating it to his Oedipus complex theory; the Oedipus complex was, he believed, humanity's common basis for neurosis. Practically, Freud displayed the objects in his collection quite densely in his office, creating both intrigue and ease for his patients.

Dr. Karl's sole trip to visit Freud in Vienna ended in disappointment. He waited for an hour in the garden before receiving a short audience with Freud. It is unclear whether he ever viewed Freud's collection. However, during the visit, he did meet

Anna Freud, Sigmund's youngest daughter, herself a prominent child psychoanalyst. The two formed a lifelong relationship. Their correspondence includes a discussion of Menninger's collection. On Anna

Freud's trip to Ireland, she wrote to Menninger, "I suppose it must be something like your trips to the Reservations, — only the Red Indians missing. But there is the same freedom of the daily worries and problems and of the human contacts and difficulties."

<sup>5</sup> Freud, A. 1962 Letter to Karl Menninger, December 30. Kansas Historical Society Archives. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 263678. Anna Freud. Box 1. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.



◆ Lakota peoples, active United States, *Beaded vest*, 1850–1993, buckskin, silk ribbon, cotton, beading, Gift from the Menninger Foundation, 2007.1448



*[Objects] demonstrate the tendency of primitive man and the North American Indian to create things of beauty from objects in common everyday use.*

— Museum of the Menninger Foundation<sup>6</sup>

## PSYCHOANALYSIS & ANTHROPOLOGY

In 1946, the Menninger Clinic hired George Devereux, an anthropologist who merged the insights of psychoanalysis and anthropology. Devereux published *Reality and Dream*, describing the treatment and recovery of a Native American suffering neurosis. Menninger described this work as an “example of the systematic utilization of cultural material in clinical study...” Dr. Karl’s collection fit within his scientific approach to evidence-based research; objects provided evidence for study.

Devereux was interested in cultural influences on the etiology, symptomatology, and therapy for mentally ill patients from non-dominant cultures. His descriptions convey an awareness of the constant strain placed on the mental health of Native Americans due to living within two cultural environments: Native American and Anglo-American. In *The Human Mind*, Dr. Karl compared this struggle to that of a trout hooked by a fishing line: “In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch

him.” Dr. Karl admired Native Americans, stating, “We have much to learn from the Indian who lived peacefully with his environment. The Indian made useful objects but he took the time and care to make them beautiful.”

Dr. Paul Pruyser, who served as education director for the Menninger Foundation, proposed a set of psychiatric principles to guide the MMF. He suggested that indigenous art could be presented for its psychiatric value: “Why not try to promote some such instructional lesson to the visitor,” he wrote, “that in addition to enjoying these art objects they also learn what people can do in organizing their life so as to be happier and more innocent and less hostile and to be productive to society and to themselves.”

<sup>6</sup> Kansas Historical Society Archives. n.d. Gallery Description. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka:



◆ West Mexico region, Jalisco culture, *Ceramic squatting figure*, 100, B.C.E.–C.E. 250, clay, Gift of the Menninger Foundation, A0136-0593, Archaeology Division, Biodiversity Institute, University of Kansas

*You indicated you wanted to buy personally one of the figures Bill Bishop brought out: Jalisco figure, ca. 900 A.D. One of the disease types. Man thought to be dying of Potts disease (tuberculosis of the upper spine) with symptoms of ascites*

— Lewis Wheelock to Dr. Karl, October 28, 1964<sup>7</sup>

## NETWORK OF COLLECTORS

Described as a “biological organism,” Dr. Karl’s collecting network fostered a common interest while accommodating the unique interests of its individual members. Bob Hulsen and Paul Cory were members of Dr. Karl’s southwest collecting network. They were also part of the “Quincy Collector” network with Byron Knoblock, who is credited with donating Woodland archaeological objects, including banner stones and bird stones, to the MMF.

These objects are still poorly understood. At the MMF they were interpreted as atlatl accessories, medicine man staff attachments, protection charms, female fertility symbols, magic tokens, and idols. The impressive quality of these artifacts led rival Woodland specialists to accuse their donors of fraudulence, setting off a crisis within the network. Cory wrote Dr. Karl, “You may rest assured... you have nothing in your collection that...isn’t as authentic as any Indian can make it.”

Menninger’s interest in Pre-Columbian art was inspired by an influx of Central and South American doctors at the Menninger Clinic. In 1956, he traveled to Mexico and saw Pre-Columbian art first-hand. Prosperous doctors decorated their homes with this style of art and many of them gave Dr. Karl artifacts for his collection. In the 1960s, he visited Costa Rica, where he toured ruins and was given additional artifacts for his collection. He was especially interested in Pre-Columbian figures depicting mental and physical ailments. In keeping with the collecting group’s nature, everyone followed Dr. Karl’s lead and collected Pre-Columbian artifacts. In 1963, Menninger purchased his first large collection of Pre-Columbian artifacts from Bill Bishop, an antiques dealer in Topeka.

<sup>7</sup> Wheelock, L. 1964 Letter to Karl Menninger, October 28. Kansas Historical Society Archives. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.



◆ Eastern Woodland, "*Butterfly*" stone, 2000–1000 B.C.E, stone, Gift of the Menninger Foundation, A0649-0593, Archaeology Division, Biodiversity Institute, University of Kansas



◆ Eastern Woodland, *carved dog effigy*, 5000–2000 B.C.E., stone, Gift of the Menninger Foundation, A0119-0593, Archaeology Division, Biodiversity Institute, University of Kansas

## MUSEUM OF THE MENNINGER FOUNDATION

Practically speaking, Dr. Karl's collection represented an application of anthropology to psychoanalytic practices. Menninger's collecting was guided by three themes: Museum Therapy, Professional Education, and "Man and Medicine."

*Museum Therapy* was part of what the Menninger Clinic dubbed "milieu therapy," or the deliberate manipulation of the hospital environment to help patients cope with their emotions and associations. The clinic developed occupational therapy, religious programs, and recreational activities specifically for the needs of individual patients. Dr. Karl believed interests and connections provided increased opportunities to diffuse inner stressors. Within the museum, Director Wheelock stated, "[properly] structured work activities... could be as beneficially therapeutic, just as ceramics, painting and horticulture have been utilized within past practices of milieu therapy." The baskets, beadwork, pottery, and jewelry were recognized as having significant value for modified milieu therapy.

*I have been with the Navajo people and also with the Hopi people numerous times. I feel that we have much to learn from what they did and what they are doing, and I started a small museum in connection with our Foundation. We use this material for teaching patients and for teaching our doctors. I think I myself have been taught more than anyone.*

— Karl Menninger to Abner Weisman, New York City  
doctor and collector, December 13, 1963<sup>8</sup>

*Professional Education* was grounded in the teaching philosophy of the Menninger School of Clinical Psychiatry, a training program for clinical psychiatrists. The program grew from a belief that treatment, research and prevention should take place within "the richest and broadest cultural and intellectual environment..." Students were expected to have a wide ranging knowledge, including Pre-Columbian medical practices, William Shakespeare, Benjamin Rush, and T.S. Eliot. This pedagogical philosophy emphasized the "wholeness of man" and an understanding of historic and contemporary global cultures. Treatment was built on diverse knowledge, aiding doctors in establishing trust and mutuality with their patients.

<sup>8</sup> Menninger, K. 1963 Letter to Abner Weisman, December 13. Kansas Historical Society Archives. Corporate Records of the Menninger Foundation. 222753. Museum. Administration Records. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.



◆  
Omaha peoples, *rattle*, 1850–1993, wood, gourd, paint,  
leather, horse hair, gum resin, Gift from the Menninger  
Foundation, 2007.6019

## “MAN AND MEDICINE”

The museum’s collection strategy focused on “the acquisition and preservation of art and artifacts which illustrate the prehistoric, historic, and contemporary developments of healing practices and ceremonials, with particular emphasis upon the North and South American pre-Columbian peoples.”

In the 1950s, Dr. Karl visited White Mountain Apache where he met with medicine men. A museum brochure described medicine men as practicing what its authors called “primitive psychotherapy.”

Much ritual ceremony surrounded the treatment, which made the patient value the cure and the curer. ... Taken in its totality, the practice of ‘medicine’ was a religious act, in which the Indian herbalists, doctors, and priests understood themselves to be channels or tubes through which... the Great Spirit would work. ... The administration of medicine in general had a psychological basis, with recovery based in a large sense upon the patient’s faith in the Indian healing process.

*...the centuries of experience the Navajos have had in the area of psychotherapy have a great value. I suspect Medicine Men are better able to meet many mental and physical health problems of Navajos than are our western trained doctors and psychiatrists.*

— Dr. Karl Menninger to Joseph Califano, United States Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, March 2, 1979<sup>9</sup>

Menninger believed in the healing power of community and thought that Western psychiatry would move away from an individual focus toward a community model. “The participation of the community in the healing arts and the strong connection between these rites and the whole religion and tradition of the tribe produce certain psychotherapeutic advantages for the medicine man which the modern physician lacks,” according to Edwin Ackerknecht of the Menninger Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> Menninger, K. 1979 Letter to Joseph Califano, March 2. Kansas Historical Society Archives. Papers of Karl Augustus Menninger. 299219. Projects. Karl A. Menninger Miscellaneous Correspondence Regarding Projects. Topeka: Kansas Historical Society.

## THE MENNINGER COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS



### cover image

◆  
Acoma peoples, jar, 1850–1910,  
ceramic, painting, Gift from the  
Estate of Karl Menninger and  
his family, 2007.1338

When Karl Menninger passed away in 1990, objects in the Museum of the Menninger Foundation were quickly deaccessioned. Because the objects were collected to serve Menninger's interest in their application to therapy, education, and medicine, they no longer served a purpose at the foundation following his death. Through a family connection, these objects, along with much of Dr. Karl's personal collection, were donated to the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas. The Museum of Anthropology closed in 2002 and its collection was divided, with the Spencer Museum of Art and Biodiversity Institute taking stewardship of these objects.

The Spencer Museum of Art has undertaken a multi-year collections grant funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities to photograph and research its ethnographic collections. At its heart,

this project is an investigation of why artifacts are collected; within this context, the immaterial biographical moments and social networks that created the Menninger Collection have been painstakingly reconstructed and saved for posterity by Spencer Museum curatorial intern and University of Kansas graduate student Braden Conrad-Hiebner.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS FROM THE AUTHOR

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