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| Whitney, Gertrude Vanderbilt (1875-1942) |
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| Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney,an American sculptor, art collector, philanthropist, and patron, is usually remembered as the founder of The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. A Manhattan native, she was the great-granddaughter of the wealthy transportation industrialist, Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877). In 1896, she married the affluent Harry Payne Whitney (1872-1930), an heir to an oil, tobacco, and banking fortune and descendent of Eli Whitney, who invented the cotton gin. She participated in many philanthropic activities in her lifetime, including sponsoring the American Ambulance Field Hospital in France during World War I. Though participating in society events, she preferred the company of the bohemian artists who frequented the Greenwich Village area of lower Manhattan. In 1907, she established her own studio on MacDougal Alley in the Village. In 1914, she bought a townhouse at 8 West 8th Street, to which she added adjoining townhouses that became known as the Whitney Studio Club. It was a gathering place where artists could socialize, study, sketch, and exhibit their work. It was during this period that she first employed Juliana Rieser Force (1876-1948) as her secretary. An able administrator, Force later became the founding director of the Whitney Museum at that location. |
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