

THE NEW PATRONAGE

A new generation of art collectors is changing the way we see patronage by going beyond merely buying artists' works to establishing relationships, supporting cultural exchange and creating non-profit spaces through which artistic dialogue can flourish, as **Julie Baumgardner** discovers







New Directions

Previous spread *The BKLYN IMMERSIVE* pop-up exhibition, organized by Spring/Break Art Show and held during Frieze Week in New York, 2017, with 12 site-specific installations
1 Aurore Ogden, director of art at The Arts Club in London in front of a painting by George Condo at the club **2** American artist Lawrence Weiner's '1/2 BEGUN 1/2 FINISHED WHENSOEVER' (2016), part of Yasubaru Isbikawa's Okayama Art Summit, Japan **3** 'From Unit 3 to Unit 7' (2016) by Guan Xiaoxiao, at her exhibition *Flattened Metal* at the ICA, London, April 2016, organized with K11 Art Foundation

possibilities. Not everyone sees patronage as just about collecting or is content with enabling artists through just this single channel. As Performa biennial founder, RoseLee Goldberg, recently told *The New York Times*, "Funding based on a collection model is backward." What is seen, exhibited and often produced across institutions, art fairs and gallery shows is fair game for the patronage of contemporary art. "It's universally understood that culture contributes to a healthy society and whether that's through acquiring a work of art, supporting a non-profit like YoungArts or Creative Time, or becoming a museum member – it's all a way to contribute," says Helen Toomer, who recently stepped down from the PULSE Contemporary Art Fair director's chair to start an artist's residency in upstate New York.

"When people think of a 'patron of the arts' they often initially think of collectors and philanthropists who provide financial assistance to non-profit institutions," explains Marwan Zakhem, a British-Lebanese construction magnate who opened a commercial enterprise, Gallery 1957, as a means of supporting the art scene's growth in Accra, Ghana. The idea of patronage is usually based on the archetypal Renaissance model, where a work or a series of works was commissioned with payment for operational costs made up front. Were there perhaps some aesthetic considerations made by the artists in deference to their patrons? It's hard not to see Lorenzo de' Medici's crest in Botticelli's *Pallas and the Centaur* or the countless patrons-as-saints in Giotto, Piero della Francesca and Leonardo da Vinci. This kind of patronage was also a status play, with wealth and social mobility a benefit to both the artist and the patron, and it set the tone for centuries to come.

And so, patronage has been both a means of production and a method of consumption. Post-industrialization and the birth of capitalism led to a new sort of collector who bought objects and works with the intention of stewardship and archive, for market preservation and the writing of art history books of *The Important*s; the sort who very much round the top 100 Collector lists today: the Vogels, the Broads, the Arnaults. This 19th-century model of patronage, handed down from Sir John Soane, John Ruskin and Paul Durand-Ruel, is certainly a tried-and-tested way to create an ecosystem for an arts institution.

Today, however, people across the world who collect art are approaching the pursuit of supporting artists in different ways to their predecessors and follow paths that don't necessarily lead to the major museums and their advisory committees. "Being an arts patron means supporting creative expression beyond what is easily consumable – and supporting artists to think bigger than they could on their own," says collector and patron, Nadia Samdani.

The word 'patron' still evokes a certain gilded opulence. A golden Medici throne, a Sonnabend shrine, a Rockefeller wing. But the nature of arts funding or support isn't simply a pursuit of the rich and powerful. In an ever-evolving arts landscape, Instagram can now serve as a gallery, art fairs play the role of institutions, and non-profits often wander from space to space. Why should patronage, then, look any differently?

It doesn't, even though it may appear on the surface that nothing has changed. Look across the major cities and the types of environments where collectors are circling. Sure, patronage still means Agnes Gund donating \$1 million to the Museum of Modern Art, or Adrian Cheng gifting three years' salary to the Centre Pompidou to add an Asian contemporary art curator, or François Pinault founding yet another museum (designed by Tadao Ando) for his contemporary collection in Paris. And it's still near impossible to get into the Metropolitan's Apollo Circle or the Serpentine's Summer Garden Party unless at least a considerable sum has been donated in service to the workings of these institutions (as much as the status it brings). In an age of heavy market rotation, where certain artists have become guaranteed good investments and major public and private institutions are equally worried about immediate bottom-lines as well

as future security, collectors buy and bequeath works that have investment value. But is that only patronage?

With dealers with business above \$50 million seeing sales increase by 19 per cent, as reported in Dr Clare McAndrew's inaugural go at the annual art market report for Art Basel, is it hardly a surprise that the works in question are museum quality, destined for the stacks of a starchitect-designed institution or a private museum of market-friendly holdings on a Connecticut or Maryland estate open only for grand fetes and collegiate field trips (private schools, of course). No shade here. These practices have allowed artists to work and create.

Yet, "patronage is also only a small piece of the puzzle in terms of supporting artists," says Aurore Ogden, director of art at The Arts Club in London and an ambassador for Tate Young Patrons. "Today, patronage is about individuals and groups coming together to help platforms that can offer long lasting and continued models of support for the careers of a broader demographic of artists, without whom we would have no art scene."

Economic and political demands, plus the human imagination, have greatly helped the collector-to-museum funnel model to succeed as well as opening it up to scrutiny and new



Barjeel Art Foundation

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
 Founded by Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi

While the Western art jet set may only have recently begun to trek en masse to the Middle Eastern art mecca of the United Arab Emirates, in one of the more conservative emirates, Sharjah, is a spread of progressive art institutions that support Arab and Islamic artists on an international scale. In addition to the Sharjah Art Foundation's often startling biennial, the Barjeel Art Foundation, founded and directed by the outspoken public intellectual Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, has set a tone for a cultural institution that funds and creates opportunities for artists in the region, such as Farah Al Qasimi, Mohammed Kazem and Thuraya Al-Baqsmi, as well as on an international scale. Barjeel just recently opened its self-curated show with Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, in New York, 'No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects', focusing on works in the Barjeel collection from 1990 to 2016 and introducing ideas of incursion, trespassing, violation and confrontation from Kader Attia, Mona Hatoum and Yto Barrada.





Samdani with her husband Rajeeb founded the Samdani Art Foundation in her native Bangladesh as a means of internationalizing the reach of South Asian artists. “But through our journey as patrons,” she says, “we realized that supporting a handful of Bangladeshi artists to exhibit abroad would not make as big of an impact as supporting the entire Bangladeshi art scene to showcase their work in Dhaka.” The biennial Dhaka Art Summit, the first of which took place in 2014, was founded by the foundation and has become the single largest exhibition platform for South Asian art, as well as a locus for research on contemporary artists of the region. In fact, curator Adam Szymczyk plucked Naeem Mohaiemen (after meeting him at the inaugural edition) for Documenta 14 as the first Bangladeshi artist to be included in the career-making, five-yearly German exhibition.

While Samdani’s scope isn’t limited to a simple nationalistic or regional exercise – both her foundation and the art summit incorporate non-nationals who have long engaged in the region, such as Lynda Benglis who has a studio in India – the foundation has, however, played an important part in getting Raqs Media Collective to the 56th Venice Biennale and Rana Begum to the Parasol Unit in London, and has created the Samdani Artist-Led Initiatives Forum to

support the work of Bangladesh’s independent art collectives. “To be an arts patron you have to make sure that your work supports artists and not limiting it to the institutions that present artists’ work,” explains Samdani.

At the 2017 edition of Art Basel Hong Kong, a panel on patronage featured Hallam Chow, Founder, H2 Foundation for Arts and Education in Jogn Kong, and Qiao Zhibing, the founder of Tank Shanghai. It was moderated by the architect William Lim, who identified a thread connecting the panellists, saying, “Everyone here believes art has a power beyond what we see that to be, beyond just acquiring and collecting”. Supporting artists has traditionally meant simply purchasing works. Still, is that enough in these market-tipped times? Across the globe, it seems there’s a growing distinction between collector and patron. Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi (see case study above), the founder of the Sharjah-based Barjeel Art Foundation which has been instrumental in bringing global attention to Arab artists through its shows in the United Arab Emirates, is fully aware of this trend. “Each patron or art supporter has a different policy. Some support artists by purchasing or commissioning the work and others by promoting it,” he says, adding, “artists need all kinds of support, from funding to critical scholarship.”

Maryam Eisler

Arts patron and artist, based in London

These days Maryam Eisler is hitting her stride as a photographer (with gallery representation and several Thames & Hudson tomes to her name), but she hasn’t slowed down on her duties as a co-chair of Tate’s Middle East and North Africa Acquisitions Committee and as a member of the board of the Whitechapel Gallery. “I don’t see myself as a ‘collector’ – I only have four walls,” quips Eisler, “I don’t have a foundation or an institution; I live with the pieces I love the most and the rest are a headache.” However, to Eisler, patronage goes beyond acquisition. “My focus has been my associations with institutions,” she explains, hoping that over the past eight years with Tate a valuable contribution has been made by the committee of 40 patrons, people who love the region and who have “become friends and do things together”. She says that at both Tate and the Whitechapel there’s been a sharing of ideas. “I firmly believe that the artistic platform is one of exchange and open-mindedness where politics can’t do the job but creativity can,” she says. This is what patrons do, they embrace that exchange and make it all possible.

Bodily Forms

1 The South Korean choreographer and performance artist Jeong Geumhyung, who was in residence at the Delfina Foundation, London 2 'Stephanie' from the series 'Yellow is the Colour of Water' (2016) by Jeremiah Quarsbie, shown at Gallery 1957, Accra



Across the Continents

1 'Astro Golf' (2016) by Farah Al Qasimi, a photographic work from the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, included in the exhibition *No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects* held at The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York 2 Installation view of *Effigies of Life: A Tribute to Magdalena Abakanowicz*, organized by the ArtEast Foundation, Wrocław, Poland 3 *Nadia Samdani* of the Samdani Art Foundation



"It is never enough!" exclaims Carolyn Ramo, the executive director of Artadia, which gives grants, typically \$5,000 to \$20,000, to artists to practice at will, and establishes networks of curators, residencies and collectors. "Artists need funds but they also need a diverse and engaged audience, many platforms to show their work, time and space to create work, a critical discourse, an engaged community, curatorial and institutional opportunities, conversation and advice," Ramo explains. "The next generation of philanthropists, the millennials, are very enthused about being involved with projects and organizations and a deep engagement with the artists they are supporting." Cesar Garcia, who founded Los Angeles-based artspace The Mistake Room (TMR) in 2014, agrees: "My board chair, Joy Simmons, always says to me: 'the collector buys an artwork, the patron will support on a one-time basis, and a philanthropist made sure Michelangelo could eat.'" Garcia is quick to talk in terms only related to LA, where his renegade non-profit cultural space has confused collectors and ignited curatorial conversations on subjects often deemed confrontational in the arts. "Even though there's been a lot of press about LA being the centre of the universe, it's not," quips Garcia, who has recently been doing some soul-searching to figure out what the institution should be doing. "LA, I believe, has not quite been fertile terrain for the mid-size space," he says. This has prompted TMR to think beyond the borders of California or even the US; their projects are often cultural exchanges with Latin America, in particular Mexico, where TMR has an outpost in Guadalajara. Of course, Garcia mounts exhibitions like a typical institution or gallery, but with experimental projects by Cao Fei and Milena Bonilla as a product of a commission model. TMR has seen Garcia invest heavily in "doing things to keep ourselves sustainable" by operating as a "public experiment in institution making". As Garcia explains, TMR is able, through "alternative ways of fundraising", to engage patronage through a new model, not "just a benefit auction" as the typical format goes. "The flagship element of our



model is the membership programme. We don't have a development team, we have a small staff, and we keep our membership groups tight and define them quite well," explains Garcia of their three-tiered membership circles. The highest, at \$20,000, allows patrons to receive an original multiple, "in the way Duchamp thought about them", from artists they support.

Then there is newcomer Lafayette Anticipation, the institution of le Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette, which plans to open its doors in 2018 in the Marais district of Paris. It was founded to realize the vision of Galeries Lafayette heir Guillaume Houzé of a new type of cultural space. "We developed a new model that's dedicated to art, fashion, design, with an emphasis on production," explained managing director François Quintin, speaking at the same Art Basel Hong Kong panel discussion on patronage in 2017. As part of this vision, Quintin says, "an institution has to be able to produce art work with artists and change the way art is exhibited." The flexible space with moveable platforms will be a place of possibilities. "The way we are designing this new institution, with production at the centre, art could also be the source of the collective intelligence," added Quintin. "Art is not so much about education; a much more potent goal is the making of

ArtEast Foundation

Wrocław, Poland

Founded by Irmina Nazar and Artur Trawinski

Despite a long tradition of the arts, Poland has had a tricky time in the post-Soviet era developing a robust community of art patrons. However, as ArtEast Foundation founders Irmina Nazar and Artur Trawinski say, arts funding is looking up for the Slavic nation that is the fastest growing economy in the region and the sixth largest in the EU. "Polish society has changed drastically as a result of our economic transformation," they say. "Although the art market and cultural philanthropy are new phenomena in Poland, we see that increasingly people understand how important it is to value our own cultural background and our artists both in a national and international context." ArtEast certainly, too, has set an example of how non-profit organizations support artists of the former Soviet bloc. Based in Wrocław, the 2016 European Capital of Culture, ArtEast has been showing a retrospective of work by the sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz who died in 2017, an exhibition in line with their stated mission of giving "support to research projects on seminal artists from this region, who were overlooked in recent decades, especially post-war artists."

Yasuharu Ishikawa

Founder, Okayama Art Summit, Japan, 2016

“Acceptance of diversity is a wonderful aspect of art,” says Yasuharu Ishikawa, a business man and collector, known in Japan as a next-gen Yusaku Maezawa (now famous for his record-breaking Basquiat auction grab), who has channelled funds from his fashion manufacturing empire into actively creating opportunities for both Japanese and global artists to engage with his hometown of Okayama. In October 2016, Ishikawa devised an exhibition-style art summit, with Liam Gillick as artistic director who weaved together reflective video works by Yu Araki and Anton Vidokle with public displays from Ryan Gander and Lawrence Weiner. Ishikawa has plans to display his collection in a permanent public museum. “Even if showing works generated new, unpredictable reactions in an audience, I am satisfied with that in terms of activating people’s imagination,” he says, “I consider that is one role of my collection.”

something and the process of it. That’s where art becomes the territory of the exchange of ideas and people get to know each other through this wonderful object of thinking.”

Is this new flexible way of patronizing the arts something of an under-40s thing? In some ways, it is. It’s not simply chatter – millennials do things differently than their post-war parents. Experience and narratives, not objects and permanence, guide the generational divide. Even younger heirs to world-coveted art collections have branched off from their parents’ example. Max Levai, son of Marlborough Gallery owner Pierre Levai, has taken up Anne Neukamp, Davina Semo and Betty Tompkins and minted his spaces for Marlborough Contemporary. Tiffany Zabudowicz, whose family’s collection is a crown jewel of London, has been flexing her muscles in New York by throwing pop-up exhibitions (one even in an occupied Times Square office unit). Lu Xun, son of a Chinese industrial magnate, turned the grounds of his Steven Holl-designed Sifang Museum into a leisure complex to attract even more visitors to their Chinese contemporary-heavy holdings.

On the other hand, Adrian Cheng’s K11 Art Foundation (KAF) is a shapeshifter in itself, being neither a gallery nor a museum, and with no representation of artists. This year KAF partnered with MoMA PS1 on the exhibition in Hong Kong titled ‘.com/.cn’ with work by both Chinese and Western artists. KAF also helped fund a site-specific installation (replete with neon tigers) from the ever-imaginative Adrian Wong. It even runs an art village with studios and residencies. “With the K11 Art Foundation we want to create the environment or context where artists are able to create work freely. For me it is very important that everything we do is sustainable and has a lasting impact on the careers of the Chinese artists we work with,” says Cheng, who, at 36, is also the general manager of New World Development, founded by his billionaire grandfather. Cheng instituted a lucrative idea of how to grow arts engagement in China by putting art spaces inside his K11 Malls in Shanghai

and Hong Kong. But KAF is far from a cheap commercial ploy. “Our work encompasses the organization of exhibitions, funding academic research, and creating a residency programme in Wuhan where our K11 Art Village is re-launching this November,” explains Cheng, “Rather than doing one-off projects with the museum partners, artists and curators we work with, we focus on longer-term partnerships, which can grow and develop in collaboration,” adds Cheng.

It’s a cliché, but it remains true that growth takes time. “Everything is so fast these days because of social media and art fairs. People are bombarded with too many things,” says David Totah, whose year-old space TOTAH is on New York’s Lower East Side. “I never thought the world needed another gallery,” he says, “[but] it’s engaging with art again. It’s a community of everyone chipping in to feed certain values and make them succeed through the artists, collectors, curators, and writers... to prevail over certain models that have prevailed for so long.” Totah himself, however, comes from a European line of Old Master dealers and is well aware of how to play the market. However, “my name has to do with accountability,” he says, “I don’t look at things from a top-down standpoint.” Mounting shows of overlooked Light and Space artist Helen Pashgian, or avant-garde architect and artist Lauretta Vinciarelli (whose career was eclipsed by her affair with Donald Judd), or Aleksandar Duravcevic’s totems of trauma, Totah sees his space as an “integration of polarities”, for “art is not something that can be put in a rigid structure. The best plan is not have any plan”.

While perhaps this turn to the authentic is a change in the role of more traditional, established culture capitals in other parts of the world, some gallerists play more of the role of a patron than a dealer. Marwan Zakhem in Accra, for example, set up Gallery 1957 “to support the younger generation of artists in Ghana by providing them with an infrastructure to support career growth, to showcase their talent internationally, without having to leave Ghana”

– thus galvanising the flourishing art scene in the country, he says. “Perhaps I’m indicative of the changing face of patronage,” he muses. Ghana’s art scene, while relatively known outside West Africa (not just as El Anatsui’s birthplace), “is truly unique and offers an astounding amount of peer-to-peer support,” explains Zakhem, despite a landscape with no funding support from the government and collectors few and far between. In addition to putting artists such as Jeremiah Quarshie, Zohra Opoku and Gerald Chukwuma in front of organizations like Sotheby’s, Ikon, Tate, Documenta and the Harn Museum of Art, in Florida, and selling works to public and private museum collections, Zakhem points to residencies as a deeper exchange in this international conversation. “The artists we work with at Gallery 1957 are so engaged in the social and political issues that face the community in Ghana that it would be a great disservice to everyone – locally and internationally – to remove them from this base,” he says. “What they are doing here could incite great change and we don’t want to lose them.”

An artist residency, after all, is a place for exploration, but also for cultural exchange. Part of Garcia’s plans to expand the efforts of The Mistake Room is through a curator-residency programme. Indeed, Toomer left Pulse after turning the fair into a platform of discovery as well as acquisition to start the Stoneleaf residency, where she has created an “intimate environment in which artists and creatives could connect, eat and share,” as she describes it. “We are living through an incredibly challenging moment in time and I want to take a step back from the commercial aspect of the art industry and refocus my efforts solely on artists.” Toomer’s words are echoed by many younger patrons who reject convention, not for rebellion, but by seeing tenable models for the future. It’s not so much what patrons are doing, which is supporting artists (still often through buying their work), but how – through different processes, with sustainability and cultural exchange in mind. ♦♦

