

'We don't just want to export American art'

Elizabeth Glassman

The Terra Foundation has supported the study and exhibition of American art all over the world since 1978. Its CEO Elizabeth Glassman talks to *Apollo* about the organisation's mission and plans for the future

What was the original purpose of the Terra Foundation and how has the organisation changed since then?

The founder Daniel J. Terra was a first-generation American who felt very strongly about showing the world that there was an American visual culture before the contemporary era: that we had a long history. He wanted to make sure that this was known and talked about and seen.

I came to the Terra in 2001, to be the director of the two museums that Daniel J. Terra started. I came to run a museum in Chicago, on Michigan Avenue, that we ran successfully for 20 years, and then one in Giverny, in France – the Musée d'Art Américain – that operated for 15 years. After the death of the founder, we looked at our mission and decided that, instead of having audiences come to us, we would go to the audiences: that we would close our bricks and mortar facilities, and go out to audiences all over Europe and China and South America.

What does going out to audiences mean?

We have a grant programme. When it started in 2005, we had maybe 10 per cent of our grant requests from museums outside the United States, who were doing exhibitions on American art. Now, about 60 per cent of our exhibition funding goes to



Photo: Nathan Weber

museums around the world, who have been working on American projects. Another leg of the stool is our academic programming, which involves teaching fellowships and travel grants – and we also do projects with our own [art] collection.

How do you explain this increase?

Well, it's been interesting watching the interest in American art grow. One of the reasons is that our colleagues in museums in Europe, say, have been travelling more, since the 1980s and '90s, to the States, to work on their own projects, or are now in a position where they want to do their own shows of American art. And in Europe, like everywhere, the funding for public institutions has diminished. So there is a need for additional funding and it has caused more museums to reach out to us.

How do you see your role as an American private foundation collaborating with public museums abroad? How closely do you work together?

We don't just want to export American art – we want other people to engage in the conversation. Our very first exhibition, when we began to be a private foundation without museums – a museum without walls – was with the Louvre. It was curated by the French curator at the Louvre and by the American curator of our programme – and that's really a hallmark of our work.

We don't have to be involved in everything. Sometimes we can just give [museums] a grant and support what they're already interested in doing; sometimes we really engage. In London, Joseph Cornell [at the Royal Academy] is a brilliant exhibition because it shows Cornell's ties to themes in European art. Agnes Martin [at Tate Modern] is an artist who's not so well known and it's an opportunity to introduce a great artist. To the Tate, the relevance is not that she's American, but that she's an important artist.

And what about your activities within the United States?

US museums hold the majority of American



1. *Summertime*, 1894, Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), oil on canvas, 100.6 × 81.3cm. Terra Foundation for American Art



2. *Painting No. 50*, 1914–15, Marsden Hartley (1877–1943), oil on canvas, 119.4 × 119.4cm. Terra Foundation for American Art

art and they are also making exhibitions that we fund, which then travel all around the world. Over the years we have been very big funders of the Archives of American Art and of the digitisation of a large number of their holdings. We do quite a bit in Chicago: 50 of our paintings are on loan to the Art Institute of Chicago. And we were inspired by the Getty's Pacific Standard Time project, so we've announced an initiative that will focus on Chicago art and design in 2018.

Can you tell us about the Terra Foundation's own art collection?

We have about 750 works that range from the colonial period to the 1950s (Figs. 1 & 2). It was formed in the 1970s and '80s, so we were able to buy some real masterpieces. Last year we bought four works and two were by African-American artists: Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden. These were artists who were not previously represented in the collection and we've already used these works in exhibitions: the Bearden is on loan at the Museum of Modern Art and the Lawrence was in a show in Korea.

What are your plans for the future?

We are currently funding an exhibition called 'Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic Circle', where our partners are the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Pinacoteca in São Paulo, and the Crystal Bridges Museum. The curatorial team is headed by the curators from Canada, the US and Brazil; it is joined by curators from Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. This is a totally cross-cultural look at the way in which people thought about landscape and its role in the formation of national cultural identity.

This is the kind of activity that we really see ourselves moving towards in the future: [exhibitions] about the art of the United States in relation to other national cultural histories. **A**

To find out more about the Terra Foundation for American Art, go to www.terrafoundation.org.

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