

Move over Getty, make room for Lannan Foundation

Los Angeles gets yet another well-endowed patron of art

By Hunter Drohojowska

Move over Getty Trust, another foundation has moved to Los Angeles to spend millions of dollars on art. The Lannan Foundation plans to do for contemporary art what the Getty has been accomplishing in the field of pre-20th-century art: buy work, give grants, fund and organize exhibitions, and establish educational programs.

Although the Lannan Foundation will be spending money on a more modest scale, the impact on the L.A. art community is sure to be substantial. An editor for a New York art magazine gasped at the news: "Boy, you guys really are serious about building an art center out there!"

The foundation was formed in 1960 by the late J. Patrick Lannan, an entrepreneur and former director of ITT. In 1981, a museum of contemporary art was opened in Lake Worth, Fla., in Palm Beach County, to house his collection of paintings and sculpture. The foundation received a gift of \$100 million from the Lannan estate in 1986 and decided to establish its headquarters in Los Angeles, where J. Patrick Lannan Jr. and other members of the family live. The foundation will continue to organize and oversee exhibitions at the Lannan Museum in Florida.

Lannan Jr. explained the decision to locate in Los Angeles: "It is the alternative and emerging art center of the United States, there is no question about that. No other city compares to it. New York will probably be No. 1 for the rest of our lives, but L.A. will be the other big art center. To have gone to New York would have been like bringing coals to Newcastle. We can add something to L.A. just by being here."

To run this ambitious operation, the foundation appears to have followed the adage, if you want something done, ask the busiest person you know. They hired Bonnie Clearwater, who simultaneously has been curator of the Rothko Foundation and consulting curator to the Leonard Lauder Foundation since 1980. The Lannan Foundation

Modern Art in New York, and Herald art critic Christopher Knight.

Although based in L.A., Clearwater quickly stresses that the foundation is a national organization. It will locate in a 16,000-square-foot facility in Marina del Rey that is scheduled to open in 1987. Within that complex, a 5,000-square-foot viewing space will be open to the public by appointment. A larger study/storage area housing some 2,000 works of art will be open to scholars, artists and students, as will the library and archives, all by appointment only. The concept, according to Clearwater, is to keep down the cost of staff and overhead, and spend the money on art and exhibitions.

"We will be showing our collection at the space but we'll also function as an alternative space to show emerging artists," explained Clearwater. "We're flexible because we don't have to plan a year or two in advance. L.A. will get more exposure to what's happening around the world."

Future acquisitions by the foundation are likely to follow a pattern established by J. Patrick Lannan Sr., who often bought work in depth by emerging or underrecognized artists. His first purchase, in 1958, were two Morris Louis veil paintings.

"It was a significant event for both of them," said Clearwater of the artist and the collector. "It got Lannan excited about contemporary abstract art, and it was Louis' first big sale." There are now eight works by Louis in the Lannan collection. The foundation will continue to buy works by emerging artists and to augment its present holdings. The existing collection is strong in the areas of colorfield and minimalist art by artists such as Louis, Kenneth Noland, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin and Sol Lewitt, as well as neo-expressionist artists Sandro Chia, Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Mimmo Paladino.

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The Lannan Foundation will also be awarding grants to institutions

consideration will be given to proposals that feature emerging and living underrecognized artists, and those encouraging experimentation by midcareer artists. They will also fund projects for recognized contemporary artists in geographic areas where the work is not well represented.

Significantly, the foundation is interested in supporting art education through the exhibitions program and by fostering serious scholarship and criticism of contemporary art. "That's one of the reasons we are setting up archives and a library at the Marina del Rey complex," said Clearwater. "For the future, we are planning biennial meetings on topics in contemporary art and a fellowship program. Rather than spread ourselves thin, we've pinpointed things we will do to fill a void."

In addition to the visual arts, the Lannan Foundation will have a program for literature and poetry, as well as performance art and video.

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Lannan and his wife, Anne, collect the work of such contemporary California artists such as Peter Alexander, Billy Al Bengston, William Wyley, Wallace Berman, Ed Ruscha, Ed Moses and Alexis Smith. However, Lannan hastens to explain that the foundation is national, not regional, in focus. "We will see more of what is produced by emerging artists on the West Coast than if we were elsewhere. It's just a practical matter. Bonnie will see the shows in L.A. whereas if

Mike Mullen/Herald photographer

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To run this ambitious operation, the foundation appears to have followed the adage, if you want something done, ask the busiest person you know. They hired Bonnie Clearwater, who simultaneously has been curator of the Rothko Foundation and consulting curator to the Leonard Lauder Foundation since 1980. The Lannan Foundation plans to spend between \$4 million and \$5 million annually, guided in part by an informed advisory committee. The chairman of the three-member committee is respected art collector Gifford Phillips, now living in New York and New Mexico but formerly of Los Angeles. The other committee members are John Elderfield, curator of painting and sculpture and head of the drawings department at the Museum of

Modern Art in New York, and Herald art critic Christopher Knight.

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This growing collection will be exhibited at the Lake Worth museum but more importantly, it will be available for loan to traveling exhibitions, whether organized by the foundation or by other institutions. In addition, the foundation will provide long-term loans of individual works or cohesive groups of work that add depth to the holdings of the borrowing



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"Many museums have one of everything. We might be able to put together a selection of minimalist art, for example, that would round out what another museum has so, for a certain period, the public can see the work in-depth. Or we can build on certain artists. If a museum has the late veil paintings of Louis, we might lend our early paintings to give context to the work. This way the collection could be used by the largest possible public. The foundation wants to be

a museum without walls," Clearwater said.

Lannan Jr. explained such altruistic reasoning: "We believe there's plenty of brick and mortar in terms of museums. It seems a lot easier to raise money for buildings than anything else. Human nature being what it is, people like those brass plaques with their name on it. Yet, most museums are very short of acquisition funds, collections and they are certainly short of funds to do shows. We feel we can operate without that museum expense and

bureaucracy and get more bang for the buck."

The Lannan Foundation will also be awarding grants to institutions across the country beginning in 1988, its first fully operative year. It will not fund operating expenses, juried exhibitions that require entry fees, unfocused survey exhibitions, or the maintenance and conservation of sponsored projects or commissions. However, it will fund exhibitions, site-specific work, temporary installations and interdisciplinary activities. Special con-

underrecognized artists, and those encouraging experimentation by midcareer artists. They will also fund projects for recognized contemporary artists in geographic areas where the work is not well represented.

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Lannan continued, "Good art can happen anywhere. We're for good art and not afraid to take chances. We are collecting for aesthetic reasons while other people are collecting for other reasons. We have a blank board and a great opportunity and I think we'll do a good job."

Mike Muller/Herald photograph