

At Home > Explore: A Cubist Collage Follow: Cooking Advice Visit: Famous Old Homes Learn: About the Vaccine



Do Museums Need a Shopping Network for Art Donations?

A new venture suggests it will help art institutions find works of art that collectors have decided they want to give away as gifts.



"Landscape for an Absconded God," a painting by Jonathan Lasker, is a work that an art collector is seeking to donate through a new venture. Jonathan Lasker and Greene Naftali

By **Graham Bowley**

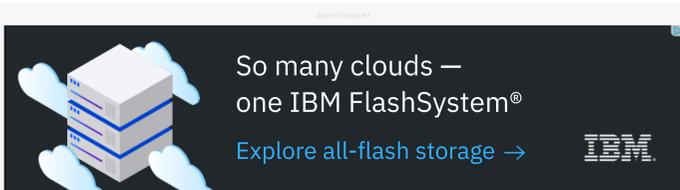
Jan. 21, 2021

For art collectors interested in donating a work, one worry has long been that their gift, a valuable, possibly beloved, painting would [end up in a museum basement](#), where many items from permanent collections reside, unseen.

For museums, who depend on the generosity of donors, the concern has been that it's difficult to compete for works against the most prestigious and popular of their kind.

"People know about major museums like the Whitney, the Met and the Guggenheim," said Carter E. Foster, a curator at Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas. "But they don't know us."

So curators like Foster and collectors, like Michael Straus, are cautiously optimistic about the potential of a new venture, the [Museum Exchange](#), a subscription online catalog of works up for donation that aims to put collectors looking to find homes for their possessions in touch with museums looking for items that support their mission.



"It's really most valuable for me to donate a work of art where it's perceived to fulfill a need," said Mr. Straus, who is using the exchange to offer a single series comprising 60 individual art pieces from the first decade of the current century.

Refer someone to The Times. They'll enjoy our special rate of \$1 a week.

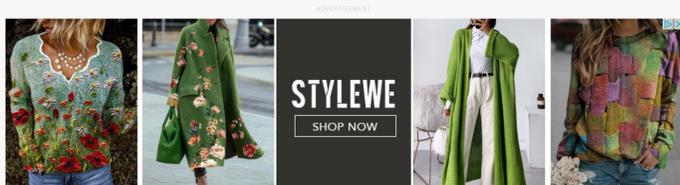
The exchange, still a fledgling business, has drawn interest from about a dozen institutions and published its first quarterly catalog last fall. It features 32 works by artists like Jonathan Lasker, Richard Hunt, Wangechi Mutu and Diana Thater that have been put up as potential gifts by 15 donors. Donors pay a variable processing fee that the exchange would not disclose.



Michael Darling is leaving his post of chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago to lead the Museum Exchange. Nathan Keyes/MCA Chicago

There is a \$1,000 a year subscription charge for museums and so far museums as small as the Blanton and as large as the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo have signed up. For the time being, the catalog focuses on modern and contemporary artworks, according to David Moos, a private art adviser who is one of the co-founders of the exchange.

The business plan involves ultimately charging collectors for other services like appraisals and shipping fees, but at the outset it relies on museum subscriptions. There would seem to be a need for a significant number of subscribers to fund operations, and the operators declined to say how many of the 12 museums signed up so far have paid the subscription fee.



The exchange will be led by [Michael Darling, who announced his departure](#) this week as chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

"Museums are going through a period of change that's really only just beginning," Darling said. "We want to help museums develop a broader picture of what contemporary art looks like by having access to different parts of the country."

Museum acquisition budgets have rarely been large enough to allow institutions to compete on the open market against wealthy collectors. This disparity has only grown in recent years with escalating prices for high profile contemporary art and has even been made worse by the pandemic. So relationships with donors are particularly important. Yet donors, though often motivated by the tax deductions that come with museum gifts, have been upset to see their gifts sometimes shunted aside — so upset, in fact, that some owners of the most prized collections have been able to get museums to sign agreements committing to exhibit the donated art.

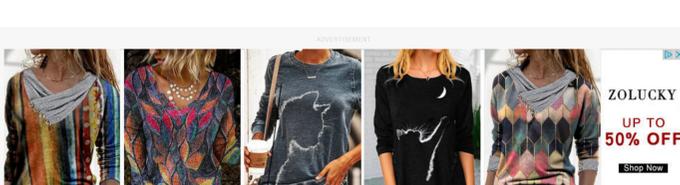
Foster said he had identified a contemporary drawing in the catalog that he hopes will be heading to his museum in Austin.

Under the exchange process, curators interested in a work have to write a pitch describing the nature of their institution and how the work fits. Collectors get to see who is interested in their works before deciding where it will go.

Cathleen Chaffee, chief curator at the Albright-Knox, said the site could help build relationships with potential patrons beyond their local region. "We hope this is an opportunity to meet like-minded collectors," she said. "Collectors not only can bring philanthropy. They are bringing their own community and expertise."

Editors' Picks

- ['S.N.L.' Takes on Marjorie Taylor Greene and GameStop](#)
- [How Do We Regain Trust in Institutions?](#)
- [The Board Voted to Keep Schools Closed. Parents Revolted.](#)
- [How Can Diamonds Help Create a Brighter Future?](#)



The site faces a number of hurdles, one of which is that many donors develop longstanding relationships with particular museums, which court them and provide them special access and other perks.

"Those sort of people will not want to end up just anywhere," said Karen Boyer, a private art adviser in Miami who has helped collectors place works with museums. "They want it to end up on the wall of an institution that they like and where their friends will see their name."

However, Tim Schrager, a collector based in Atlanta where he is a board member of the High Museum of Art, said he would try using the exchange. Recently, he said, he wanted to donate three works, but the High could only take two, and he had to look for another home for the third, by the Dutch artist Folkert de Jong. After much calling around, he placed it with a museum in Birmingham, Ala.

In the future, the exchange could make that process easier, he said. "Museums will be able to see it," he said, "and determine whether it fits."

Graham Bowley is an investigative reporter on the Culture Desk. He also reported for The Times from Afghanistan in 2012. He is the author of the book "No Way Down: Life and Death on K2." [@Graham_Bowley](#) [Facebook](#)

A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 23, 2021, Section C, Page 6 of the New York edition with the headline: Matching Those Who Give With Those That Display. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)



At Home

Here's what to read, cook, watch, play, listen to and do while staying safe at home.

[Hear Sophie's 12 Essential Songs](#)
27m ago

[Find Original Poetry Hiding in the Pages of Your Paper](#)
Jan. 30

[Catch a Movie About Time Loops](#)
2h ago

[Eddie Izzard](#)

More in Art & Design



[An Art Revolution, Made With Scissors and Glue](#)
Jan. 30



[With a Gift of Art, a Daughter Honors, if Not Absolves, Her Father](#)
Jan. 29



[The Great Beginning of Jules Olitski](#)
Jan. 28



[A Botticelli Portrait Sells for \\$92 Million at Sotheby's Auction](#)
Jan. 28

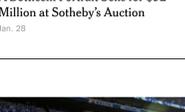


[Outsider Art Fair, Smaller This Year, but a Model for the Future](#)
Jan. 28

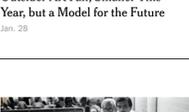
Editors' Picks



[A School District Vowed to Stay Open, Until Its Staffing Ran Out](#)
Jan. 26



[The Talk of the Super Bowl Is Quarterbacks, Except One](#)
Jan. 25



[Five Past Vaccine Drives and How They Worked](#)
Jan. 25

Most Popular

[21 Men Accuse Lincoln Project Co-Founder of Online Harassment](#)

[Napoleon's Brother Lived in N.J. Here's What Happened to the Estate.](#)

['S.N.L.' Takes on Marjorie Taylor Greene and GameStop](#)

[Part of Highway 1 in California Falls Into the Ocean](#)

[Legal Pressure on Trump Increases With Judge's Order in Fraud Inquiry](#)

[Trump Parts Ways With Defense Lawyers Handling Impeachment](#)

[New York Times Reporter Used Racial Slur With Student Group](#)

[17 Cooking Tips Our Food Staff Swears By](#)

[Grape-Nuts, Supermarket Mainstay, Is No Longer So Easy to Find](#)

[Eleanor Torrey West, Preserver of Her Inherited Island, Dies at 108](#)