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# Foundations of American art scholarship

Michael Leja

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- 1 In the early 1980s, directors of the Henry R. Luce Foundation wished to expand their grant program to support scholarship in art history. Namesake and founder Luce (1898-1967), the enormously successful publisher of the mass-market magazines *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life*, professed belief in the importance of art for elevating and inspiring a democratic society, so expansion in this direction suited his legacy. The directors, wanting to concentrate their support in a single subfield, surveyed specialists from museums, academia, and the government, who reportedly advised that “American art [meaning the art of the United States prior to World War II] was inadequately studied, documented, and funded” (LURIE, GILLIGAN, 2012, p. 14). This was certainly true: at that time, US art pre-1945 was not taken seriously. Few universities with graduate programs in art history had faculty specializing in this field, which had the status of “impoverished, unwanted stepchild of art history” (CORN, 1988, p. 188). The same could have been said for a host of other art-historically neglected regions at the time, but the Luce directors followed the specialists’ advice and began directing substantial funding to museum collections, special exhibitions, and academic dissertations concentrating on American art. Henry Luce had urged in his famous 1941 essay *The American Century*<sup>1</sup> that the United States embrace its power to lead the world in the post-war era, so the Foundation’s decision to support scholarly study of the country’s art was probably overdetermined.
- 2 Within twenty-five years a “Luce effect” was being discerned in the field. Writing in *Art Bulletin* in 2003, John Davis noted that funding from the Luce Foundation had already been transformative, and with more coming from two other private foundations committed specifically to American art scholarship, the Wyeth Foundation and the Terra Foundation, he had good reason to feel that “these are good times to be an Americanist” (DAVIS, 2003, p. 546).
- 3 In some ways the times have gotten even better for Americanists since 2003, whether they reside inside or outside the United States. The Terra Foundation’s grant programs

now surpass the Luce's, so that in total between \$15 and \$20 million solely from private foundations supports the exhibition and study of American art annually. While this amount may seem small in comparison with European levels of public funding for art and scholarship, it is remarkable in the United States, where relatively little taxpayer money is devoted to curatorial and academic scholarship on art. All fields of art history in the United States depend to a large extent on private funding, with the Mellon, Kress, Ford, and Getty Foundations being particularly prominent in this area. Additionally, many artist-endowed foundations, such as the Pollock-Krasner, Andy Warhol, Chinati (Donald Judd), Dedalus (Robert Motherwell), and Calder Foundations, support contemporary art projects as well as scholarship advancing the understanding of the founder's oeuvre (VINCENT, 2011).

- 4 That three foundations have isolated a single subfield for exclusive support is unusual, a mark of the national pride of the founding donors or subsequent directors who had various reasons for wanting to promote historical American art at home and abroad. Whether the expenditures are justified will have to be determined from the quality of the exhibitions and publications produced – a subject beyond the scope of this essay. A cohort of relatively high-profile scholars has emerged in the field, but what relation this development bears to foundation funding awaits examination. I wish instead to reflect on the fact that the growth and maturation of the field of American art history – we might even say its formation – have been subsidized to a great extent by private funding. What is the character of the organizations that have provided this money? What are their motivations and initiatives? Have their priorities become the priorities of the field they nurture?
- 5 In United States tax law, a private foundation is a non-profit, philanthropic organization whose assets come from a single source, usually a family or a corporation. It is governed by a board of directors or trustees, who may be family members but who must not derive personal financial benefit from the foundation's activities. In order to qualify for exemption from income taxes the foundation is required to give away at least 5% of the value of its endowment annually (*Foundation basics*, 2015). The wealthy individuals who provide the large sums of money to endow private foundations (and sometimes sustain them with periodic donations) are usually motivated by a vision of cultural or social improvement through an agenda that may be more or less specific. The foundation's objectives are typically encapsulated in a mission statement, and the members of the foundation's board are responsible for ensuring that the activities of the organization effectively advance its stated goals.
- 6 Private foundations are no different from public funding agencies in pursuing agendas, although the missions of the former tend to be more focused. Public funding in the United States usually avoids controversy or partisanship by promoting a field as a whole rather than any particular directions or tendencies, as demonstrated by the two principal sources of public money for the arts and arts scholarship, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). When all citizens are paying into the fund, all can claim some right to oversight. The administrators of public funds ultimately answer to the taxpaying citizens and their elected representatives, some of whom are quite willing to voice their opinions, especially displeasure. Some politicians have threatened to retract a grant when a publicly funded project violates their personal standards of propriety or national values. Although there have been notorious exceptions, most publicly-funded

scholarship on US art operates beneath the scrutiny of self-appointed cultural watchdogs. (Notable exceptions have been *The West As America*, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C., 1991, and more recently, *Hide/Seek*, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., 2010<sup>2</sup>.) Organizers of controversial projects usually seek private funding to minimize political fallout.

- 7 Public funding for the visual arts has been a fraught issue in American politics from the beginning, when many founding fathers associated art with church, monarchy, and aristocracy and considered public support inappropriate for an egalitarian, democratic society. US political leaders have preferred to direct taxpayer money back to its source by funding community arts programs through the NEA, leaving professional artistic production and scholarship largely to market forces. Foundations have stepped into the breach and they have long played a prominent role in the national arts and culture.
- 8 While government support for American art scholarship is relatively limited, it is by no means insignificant. Several of the national museums in the publicly funded Smithsonian Institution – which includes the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), National Portrait Gallery, Cooper Hewitt Museum, American Indian Museum, Freer Gallery of Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and Archives of American Art (AAA) – provide essential resources and institutional infrastructure for the field. Moreover, some of these museums offer fellowships for scholars working on American art at all levels, especially PhD students writing dissertations.
- 9 Collaboration between these public institutions and private foundations has been extensive. The SAAM, which manages the largest fellowship program for scholars and students of American art, has awarded some 174 fellowships over the past ten years, the majority of which (57%) have been funded by private money, including gifts from the Terra and Wyeth Foundations. Another national museum, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, houses a research institute, the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), which began with an endowment from Paul Mellon and is funded entirely through private money. CASVA's programs concerning American art – a lecture series and dissertation research fellowship – have been funded by the Wyeth Foundation (CROPPER, 2015).
- 10 Since private foundations are governed by boards whose members share general agreement about priorities and objectives, they can be more agile and less cautious in pursuit of their missions. Sheltered from public oversight, however, they run the risk of insularity. Boards are self-renewing entities inclined to replace members with like-minded individuals, and they ordinarily are far less diverse than the national population at large. Boards and Directors may pursue a narrow agenda or a broad one. They may seek to shape scholarship or be responsive to emerging opportunities in the field. They may operate transparently or secretively. They may enlist a broad pool of peer reviewers for their programs, or they may rely on a few trusted voices. As a general rule, many smaller foundations pursuing different agendas will be more beneficial to a field than one enormous fund wielding wide influence.
- 11 The three foundations concentrating exclusively on American art are strikingly different in terms of their founders, priorities, sizes, programs, administrative organizations, and effects. They can claim much credit for enabling the rapid growth of the field of American art history over the last several decades. The two largest of them – Luce and Terra – were endowed by figures active in national politics and voicing

highly partisan political views. Have those political commitments colored the work of the foundations?

## Founders and missions

- 12 The Henry R. Luce Foundation, incorporated in New York, dates from 1936, the middle of the Great Depression and the year Luce's *Life* magazine first appeared. He had already become wealthy on profits from *Time* (1923) and *Fortune* (1930), among other ventures. He established the Luce Foundation in honor of his parents, who were missionaries in China, and its original purpose was to foster education and exchange between China and the United States.
- 13 Although Luce did not initiate his Foundation's support of art scholarship, his writings placed heavy emphasis on art as an essential component of great civilizations. The United States had neglected the importance of art until the middle of the twentieth century, he believed, due to the pressures of the practical work of establishing a national republic dedicated to individual liberty and economic growth. Having now met these fundamental needs, the nation, he felt, should turn its attention to making art a central motivating and unifying force: "I invoke for the American of the future a will to beauty" (LUCE, 1956, p. 132). Luce's aesthetics construed art principally as a source of beauty that fostered individual growth and excellence, contributed to the education and happiness of the population, and was closely related to religious feeling. Classical forms loomed large, and beautification of the nation's built environment was a high priority. These views of art as a component of economic development and individual growth place Luce squarely at the conservative, traditionalist end of the spectrum at mid-century, when the American Artists' Congress, mural painting, Abstract Expressionism, and Neo-Dada promoted art that questioned such beliefs. Luce's politics were characterized by *The New York Times* at his death: "He was a staunch Republican, a defender of big business and free enterprise, a foe of big labor [...] an advocate of aggressive opposition to world Communism" (WHITMAN, 1967, p. 33). A recent, comprehensive biography presents a more nuanced but essentially concurring analysis of Luce's politics (BRINKLEY, 2011).
- 14 The mission of the Luce Foundation's American Art Program is articulated on its website: "The program's focus is an object-based, aesthetic approach to art historical inquiry"<sup>3</sup>. Ellen Holtzman, who has directed the Program since 1992, has pursued this mission with dedication and vigor. To qualify for Luce funding, projects must place art objects at their center. Exhibitions or scholarly studies prioritizing interdisciplinary interpretation, social history, issues of identity, or theoretical questions are at a disadvantage. Although Henry Luce did not formulate this mission, it suits his aesthetic vision. Its value is magnified at present when many interpretative approaches neglect close and tactful study of visual artifacts.
- 15 Daniel J. Terra's path to wealth intersected Luce's. As a young chemical engineer, he developed a printing ink that speeded drying time to one-fourth the usual 96 hours (KENNEDY, 2002). This invention so improved the process of high-speed printing of mass-market magazines and newspapers that it earned him a breakthrough project in 1936: supervising the printing of Luce's new photojournal *Life* just then coming to press. A few years later Terra founded the firm Lawter Chemicals to produce and market such

inks and other products on a larger scale. By the time he retired at the age of 83 in 1995, he had amassed a fortune estimated at \$790 million (BUKRO, 1995).

- 16 Terra's first wife, Adeline Evans Richards, was a painter and student of art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At her instigation the couple began collecting art around 1940, at first focusing on European painting, but turning to American works in the 1970s. The Terra Foundation for American Art was chartered in 1978 as a platform for establishing a non-profit museum for their growing collection. After Adeline died in 1982, Terra began planning for a museum among the upscale shops on Chicago's Magnificent Mile; it opened to the public in 1987. Another museum followed in Giverny in 1992, the Musée d'Art Américain. Both museums have now closed, but the Terra Foundation is unusual in maintaining and expanding a substantial collection of American art that it lends liberally to museum exhibitions internationally.
- 17 While amassing his collection and founding his museums, Terra was also working as a highly successful fundraiser for Republican politicians. Most significantly he served as finance chairman for Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign in 1980. After the election, Reagan appointed Terra "Ambassador-at-Large for Cultural Affairs." In that role he crusaded tirelessly for private funding of arts and culture while Reagan proposed cutting by half the budgets of the public agencies that provide modest support for arts and scholarship, the NEA and the NEH. In fact Reagan quietly planned to defund the NEA entirely, but political opposition prevented the cuts from being as deep as he proposed (BIDDLE, 1988). Terra recounted that at the time he had come around to supporting the NEA: "It's true there were some in the Administration then who would have liked to have seen the endowment reduced or done away with altogether. I came with a neutral mind, but then I took a very strong position in support of it, and gradually that became the consensus" (HONAN, 1988, p. 55). Terra also worked to promote American art internationally: "The President told me that my biggest job was to bring American art to the world" (GLASSMAN, 2002, p. 10). Terra gave this challenge a quixotic twist by focusing his efforts on persuading French audiences that paintings by Claude Monet's American disciples warranted permanent exhibition in Monet's own back yard (BOURGUIGNON, 2002).
- 18 The present Terra Foundation, which was refashioned through long legal conflicts following Terra's death, maintains some of its founder's core priorities but pursues them by funding scholarship, education, and exhibitions rather than by operating museums. Its mission is articulated as "fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences."<sup>4</sup> A high priority of the Foundation is situating American art in a global context, which derives from Terra's special attraction to American Impressionism and the productive give-and-take he saw among the international collection of artists who gathered around Monet at Giverny. Although the Foundation maintains centers in Chicago and Paris, its focus has been widened beyond the Franco-American transatlantic axis to encompass the world and all forms of artistic exchange involving US artists and their counterparts or audiences in other nations and cultures. Promotion of American art certainly remains part of the mission, but so is enhanced understanding through international conversations. The Foundation prides itself on funding projects that have "enriched the story of historical American art and made it relevant for a growing number of individuals worldwide by asking original questions and forging deeper connections." Implicit in the Foundation's activities is "the belief

that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them”<sup>5</sup>. The Foundation does not advocate for private funding of arts and culture against public funding; rather, it seeks to maximize public/private collaboration.

- 19 Painter Andrew Wyeth and his wife Betsy established the Wyeth Foundation for American Art in 1967. Wyeth was by then a well-known artist who had been exhibiting his distinctive realist paintings for thirty years. Usually featuring people and places characteristic of his hometowns in the Brandywine Valley in Pennsylvania and on the Maine coast, his paintings are distinguished by a spare and precise realism, often with a level of detail and strangeness that warrants the classification “magic realism” (CATEFORIS, 2014). Wyeth belonged to a prominent family of artists that included his father, the popular illustrator N. C. Wyeth, and his son, painter Jamie Wyeth, who continues the family’s artistic tradition and serves on the board of the Foundation.
- 20 Unlike many artist-endowed foundations, the Wyeth does not focus on the art of its founder but seeks to advance scholarship on historical American art more broadly. It does not specifically favor projects involving art in the American realist tradition, such as the work of Fitz Henry Lane, Winslow Homer, or Edward Hopper, although it has supported projects involving these artists. Nor does it pursue regional priorities, although it has given much support to institutions in the northeast corridor and especially to institutions around Philadelphia and Boston. Significantly smaller than the Luce and Terra Foundations, it has been based in Wilmington, Delaware, since 2002.
- 21 The mission statement of the Wyeth foundation spotlights promotion of American art: “The primary mission of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art is to encourage the study, appreciation and recognition of excellence in all aspects of American art.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it seeks “to fund programs which serve as catalysts to achieve greater recognition and understanding of excellence in American painting.” This would not seem to welcome critical perspectives on US art or attention to visual forms with weaker claims to fine quality, but the Foundation’s record of funding shows greater breadth than the mission statement suggests.

## Expenditures and Projects

- 22 The American Art Program of the Luce Foundation gives away annually about \$6 to \$7 million, although the amount varies depending on the performance of its endowment. Over the past thirty years about \$160 million has been awarded in grants and fellowships. The assets of the Foundation totaled over \$750 million in 2012, the income from which supports ten distinct programs, including American art.
- 23 The Luce’s American Art Program has three principal parts: grants to museums for expenses related to collections of American art, including collection catalogues, reinstallation and reinterpretation projects, websites, digitization initiatives, and occasionally conservation; grants to museums for special exhibition projects; and predoctoral fellowships for graduate students writing dissertations on American art, who are selected through a competition administered by a third party, the American Council of Learned Societies.
- 24 The collections grants have served a crucial purpose by helping large and small museums cover infrastructure and operations costs related to improving the presentation of their American art and making information about those holdings more

easily accessible. Exceptional examples are the large grants given to four major museums (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Historical Society, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and Brooklyn Museum) to fund construction of visible storage facilities. Costing as much as \$10 million each, these facilities make a very high percentage of the museums' collections accessible for browsing without appointments. Smaller museums with significant but underappreciated holdings in American art, such as the New Britain Museum of American Art, Wichita Art Museum, and Butler Institute of American Art, have received grants for catalogue and digitization projects to enhance their visibility.

- 25 Luce exhibition grants are given primarily to US museums, although Tate Modern received funding for a recent exhibition of paintings by Agnes Martin. The program's mission to support projects taking "aesthetic approaches" has figured most prominently in this category. Curators have sometimes complained that important exhibition projects have been rejected for Luce funding when their frameworks were unconventional or expansive.
- 26 The Luce allots \$350,000 annually for ten dissertation fellowships. Since 1986, more than 300 dissertations on American art have received funding. The list of winning projects is broad and diverse and shows little sign of limitation by the program's priorities.
- 27 Finally, other programs in the Luce Foundation occasionally venture into the American art field. For example, in 2012 the Luce's Asia Program teamed with the Terra to sponsor a two-week series of workshops in New York for fifteen leading Chinese scholars who teach Western art. Administered by the Asian Cultural Council, the workshops included museum tours and lectures by specialists. They were designed to give the participants materials and experiences that would enrich their teaching of American art when they returned to their home universities in China. Two of the Luce's missions – cultural and intellectual exchange with Asia and advancement of American art – intersected in this project.
- 28 The Terra Foundation awarded just over \$8 million in grants in 2013, not including expenses related to the collection. Since 2005 it has contributed more than \$50 million for almost 500 exhibitions and scholarly programs. In keeping with its mission, it awards grants worldwide and takes pride in the global reach of its funding. At the same time, it devotes special attention to its home city of Chicago. Its programs strive to reach audiences at all educational levels, from students in grade school to the most advanced scholars. It seeks to make relevant scholarly resources available worldwide, as demonstrated by grants to the Archives of American Art for digitizing its extensive collections of archival materials and making them available online, and by supporting the Louvre's database of American art in French national collections (to which the Luce Foundation also contributed)<sup>7</sup>. It works with institutions and individuals to support exhibitions and academic scholarship. The requirements for eligibility are sometimes complex, but the Foundation's website strives to clarify them.
- 29 Among the most distinctive of the Terra's many initiatives are its exhibition funding and scholarly exchanges. Both are designed to promote international conversations about US art. Exhibition projects are encouraged to "add an international dimension to the study or presentation of historical American art."<sup>8</sup> This may involve an international itinerary for an exhibition, or co-organization through international collaboration, or a significant scholarly contribution to understanding some



international aspect of American art. Increases in the numbers of multinational collaborative exhibitions and of projects initiated by European institutions are a clear sign that the funding strategy is having the intended effect.

- 30 The Terra's Paris office, just moving into expanded quarters at the time of this writing, serves as the home base for programs that bring specialists from the United States to Europe and Asia for visiting professorships at foreign universities and for conferences and symposia. Graduate students from the United States and around the world gather for summer dissertation workshops at the Foundation's properties in Giverny, donated by Daniel Terra. Scholars from abroad may apply for funds to conduct research and visit collections and archives in the United States. They may also use the research library that the Terra maintains in Paris. The Paris center hosts numerous events that bring scholars into dialogue, and it actively seeks new venues for collaborations and exchanges among scholars from around the world who share an interest in American art. It has recently undertaken to publish a series of volumes on selected topics in American art featuring a multinational cast of contributors. These various enterprises seek to generate substantial and critical scholarship. In collaboration with Yale University Press, the Terra offers an annual book prize for the most significant study by a non-US author, which funds publication of an English translation of the book and awards \$5,000 to the author.
- 31 An exceptionally valuable initiative of the Terra Foundation has been its decade-long collaboration with the Archives of American Art (AAA). As the primary national repository of documents related to the history of American art, the AAA holds collections indispensable to research across the field. A multi-million dollar grant in 2005 established the AAA's Terra Foundation Center for Digital Collections. Continued funding from the Terra has enabled this Center to develop an innovative digital infrastructure and interface and to make freely available through its website millions of its most significant documents. The benefits of this initiative to the growth of worldwide scholarship in the field are immeasurable.
- 32 The Wyeth Foundation's annual donations total significantly less than those of Luce and Terra. It does not make available annual reports, but its website states that over \$3 million has been given away since 2003, which amounts to about \$300,000 per year. The Foundation receives regular contributions from the Wyeth family, and it has the potential to grow significantly in years to come.
- 33 Like Luce and Terra, the Wyeth Foundation funds dissertation fellowships, one each administered by SAAM and CASVA. A number of conservation and preservation projects have received Wyeth support. One recent example is a rare moving panorama painting of *Pilgrim's Progress*, owned by the Saco Museum in Maine, which has been restored, made available digitally online, and documented in a print publication, all supported by the Wyeth Foundation. Preservation of the homes and studios of American artists is another priority. And like the Luce and Terra, the Wyeth provides funding for special exhibitions, although in smaller amounts and focusing on projects within the United States.
- 34 The Wyeth Foundation's commitment to publications on American art takes various forms. One of its programs, managed by the College Art Association (CAA), helps defray the costs of producing scholarly books through subsidy grants. A new online journal of American art, *Panorama*, which joins the existing journals *American Art* (published by SAAM), *Winterthur Portfolio* (Winterthur Museum), and *Archives of American Art Journal*

(AAA) in focusing exclusively on American art, was made possible through Wyeth (and Luce) funding. The Foundation sometimes gives sustained funding to long-term publication projects, such as the Fitz Henry Lane online catalogue raisonné underway at the Cape Ann Museum, and the N. C. Wyeth catalogue raisonné being undertaken by the Brandywine Museum.

## Administration

- 35 The administrative organizations of the three foundations are remarkably different. At the Luce Foundation, a great deal of power is concentrated in the hands of the Program Director, who, with a staff of one assistant, handles all grant programs. She answers to the Luce Foundation Board, which oversees the Foundation's ten diverse programs, including those on "Public Policy and Environment" and "Religion in International Affairs." Two or three of the fifteen board members – one of whom is the director of the SAAM, Elizabeth Broun – have a special interest and/or expertise in American art. A select group of trusted but unnamed peer reviewers, who serve for terms of unspecified duration – sometimes decades – evaluates exhibition proposals.
- 36 While the Luce outsources its dissertation fellowship competition to the ACLS, it maintains some control of the process. The Program Director assists in the selection of reviewers, favoring a predominance of museum professionals in hopes of insuring emphasis on object-based proposals. She also attends the selection meetings and supplies guidelines articulating Luce priorities to the panel. The reviewers, however, make decisions based on their own sense of the quality and significance of a project.
- 37 The current director's retirement was announced earlier this year, and her successor has just been named at the time of this writing: Theresa Carbone, formerly curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, who holds a PhD from the City University of New York. The selection of a curator with thirty years experience at the Brooklyn Museum, where she organized important exhibitions, a prize-winning scholarly catalogue of the collection, and an adventurous reinstallation of the American art galleries, suggests that commitment to object study remains a priority of the Foundation. If the Foundation's administrative structure continues unchanged, the new director will have considerable power to maintain or reshape the American Art Program's priorities and procedures.
- 38 In sharp contrast to the Luce, the Terra's administrative infrastructure is extensive: the website lists twenty-four employees. Since 2001 Elizabeth Glassman, currently President and CEO, and Vice-President Amy Zinck have led the Foundation through its transformation from museum management to granting agency. The large staff is necessitated to some extent by the decisions to retain the art collection and real estate properties in Giverny and to establish a Paris center, but more than this, the Terra is designed to pursue its mission through project development and proactive guidance as well as through grants. Several program directors and curators holding PhDs offer advice and feedback to applicants about their proposals, assist curators in developing exhibition ideas and securing loans, make connections among scholars and curators internationally who share particular interests, work with universities internationally to develop visiting professorships, and collaborate with publishers to facilitate translations and new publications. The Chicago and Paris offices are hubs for launching and advancing global initiatives and international collaborations. Applications for

funding are evaluated by external review panels whose members serve for limited terms.

- 39 The Terra's board of fifteen trustees is about evenly divided among collectors of American art, museum professionals, and specialists in business and finance. Half the members of the board are required to be residents of Chicago, where the Foundation is based. The board's responsibility is oversight of all activities of the Foundation.
- 40 The Board of the Wyeth Foundation is unique in taking responsibility for evaluating and selecting proposals directly. Management is entrusted to an estate planning and tax lawyer associated with the Wyeth family. The Foundation's organizational philosophy traditionally has been to directly administer or operate few programs and instead to utilize the resources, personnel and experience of established institutions and other non-profit organizations whenever possible. Its collaborations with SAAM, CASVA, and the CAA are cases in point. The nine members of the board of trustees include family representatives and five accomplished senior scholars of American art. Direction comes from the Board Chair, J. Robinson West, founder of an oil and gas company and longtime Wyeth family friend. Proposals submitted to the grant program that is administered directly by the Foundation are reviewed by all members of the board. This condensation of responsibility – for oversight and selection – minimizes the size and complexity of the Foundation's administration.

## Foundation effects

- 41 The United States has a history of putting art in service of cultural diplomacy. In the aftermath of World War II, during the Cold War, the State Department, the United States Information Agency, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York circulated exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist and other art internationally as exemplary of the country's brand of democracy, freedom, individualism, and entrepreneurial ambition. This was an important part of the process by which US art came to world attention and New York became a center for the international art market in the postwar world. Now, American art of the post-1945 era needs no assistance from foundations to be a topic of global interest and inquiry. There are good reasons why this art has compelled international attention, but without promotion by powerful institutions, its valuable qualities might not have been widely recognized.
- 42 In the three foundations under discussion here, pre-1945 US art has found its own institutional champions. (The cutoff dates for funding by the three foundations range from 1960 to the present, but all favor "historical" American art, which usually means art prior to the mid-twentieth century.) Whether this art will justify the efforts being made on its behalf and take a place in world art history remains to be seen. When this art was made, the United States was in formation, culturally in thrall to Europe and other parts of the world, striving to determine what the art of a democratic republic should be like, coming to terms with a diverse population, developing a growing market for visual artifacts, and slowly becoming a world power. The cultural and historical interest of this earlier American art is often very great, but the formal originality, technical achievement, or aesthetic gratification often less so. To judge by the growing number of exhibitions and publications devoted to historical US art appearing worldwide, interest is building. This surge of interest on the part of scholars, museums, and publishers may be due primarily to the availability of foundation

funding, to general interest in the cultural history of an often controversial global superpower, to the quality and significance of the art in question, to the originality of the interpretative scholarship, or to some combination of these.

- 43 The collective work of the foundations promoting American art has nurtured a dynamic field. It has enabled that field to acquire in a relatively short period a strong and broad infrastructure, rich in digital archives and databases of artworks, museum collection catalogues, scholarly journals, catalogues raisonnés, exhibition catalogues, monographs, etc. A large scholarly bibliography of research and interpretation, both museum-based and academic, has grown with remarkable speed. The diversity of voices contributing insights to the field from within and beyond the United States has been growing.
- 44 Within the country, the dissertation support provided by all three foundations has opened a wide portal to the PhD in American art. Whether enough professional positions will be available to accommodate the elevated number of specialists will be a matter of concern for years to come. During the aftermath of the 2008 recession, when hiring freezes drastically reduced the number of available jobs, foundations helped provide some relief by funding post-doctoral positions. This was a temporary palliative; a shortage of long-term opportunities persists to the present. Of course this situation is by no means unique to the field of American art, but it is exacerbated by the large pool of new PhDs fostered by the exceptional availability of dissertation funding in this area. Funding for foreign scholars working on American art is helping to increase their number as well. Will they find homes in existing American Studies programs, art history departments, or museums, or in new faculty positions at universities across Europe partially enabled by foundation funding?
- 45 In terms of emphases within the field, the priorities of the individual foundations have largely counterbalanced one another. The Luce has anchored a core commitment to tight focus on object study and analysis, the Terra has pushed for an internationalist and globalist orientation, and the Wyeth has gently favored a northeast-centric program of promotion and preservation. All of these agendas have been broad enough to accommodate secondary interests. None has prevented the scholarly directions flourishing across the humanities from rooting firmly in the American art field. Cross-disciplinary, identity-centered, eco-critical, social-historical, mass-cultural, data-analytic, critical-theoretical, and material-culture-oriented approaches are thriving, and projects favoring them have often received foundation support. The broader fields of art history, cultural studies, and American Studies exert a steady influence.
- 46 My own – admittedly unsystematic – survey of tendencies in American art scholarship over the past decade yields one reservation. The Terra’s energetic pursuit of its mission has been so effective that it has led to an abundance of studies of American art in an international context. If once it was necessary to counteract a naïve provincialism in the field – when the pressing question in the scholarship was “what is American in American art?” – those days are now past. Insisting that US art be viewed in an international field may come to seem equally narrow, insofar as it assumes that all US art warrants a global stage. Prying apart the Terra’s commitment to fostering and soliciting insights from scholars abroad, which is wholly salutary, from its commitment to the research theme of internationalism in the art would not be difficult. Other priorities might then move from secondary to primary prominence: expanding the canon, encouraging domestic as well as international diversification of the field by

nurturing scholars from underrepresented minorities and classes, or promoting contrarian methodological and critical innovation.

- 47 The grant programs of the Luce, Terra, and Wyeth Foundations have invigorated the field of American art history, and they have become integral to its normal operation worldwide. Like all powerful funding agencies, public and private, they have a responsibility to monitor closely their influence over the field and periodically commission external evaluations of their procedures and effects. If promoting the field's vitality and growth figures prominently in their missions, they will best accomplish this by finding creative ways to bring established priorities into alignment with promising opportunities and changing conditions. For their part, scholars at all career stages have essential roles to play as proposal reviewers, board members, program participants, external evaluators, and applicants for grants. Their input should extend beyond the implementation of existing programs to regular assessment of field developments and needs. The field of US art is extraordinarily lucky that such conversations are already normalized to some extent. They are the best way of insuring the productive flow of research resources in years to come.

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## NOTES

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5. See [www.terraamericanart.org/what-we-offer/grant-fellowship-opportunities/grant-opportunities-for-institutions](http://www.terraamericanart.org/what-we-offer/grant-fellowship-opportunities/grant-opportunities-for-institutions) (viewed November 25, 2015).
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8. See [www.terraamericanart.org/what-we-offer/grant-fellowship-opportunities/exhibition-grants](http://www.terraamericanart.org/what-we-offer/grant-fellowship-opportunities/exhibition-grants), viewed November 25, 2015).

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## INDEX

**Geographical index:** États-Unis

**Mots-clés:** fondation, financement privé, politique de la recherche, art américain

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