



# THE TIMES

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By Dale Berning Sawa

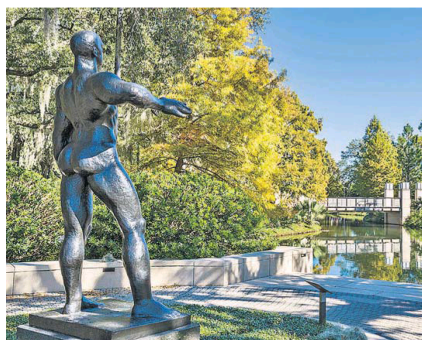
arts

## Need funding? Well, try hustling like Americans

US philanthropists give more to the arts than their British counterparts. Institutions need bold, new strategies, discovers **Dale Berning Sawa**

Last month the *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Rabkin Foundation — but she did not head to the bank. It came with a \$50,000 prize, but the paper's ethics guidelines instruct staff faced with such a conflict of interest to decline. Smith gave it all away. And the recipient of that gift — Agnes Gund's Art for Justice Fund — puts the spotlight on a giant in American cultural philanthropy and the potential of the US philanthropic system. Gund, who comes from a banking dynasty in Cleveland, Ohio, is a Manhattan institution, a vestige of old-world glamour, art-world clout and eye-opening generosity. Two years ago she sold Roy Lichtenstein's 1962 canvas *Masterpiece* for \$165 million. She used the proceeds to set up the Art for Justice Fund, whose remit is to help to reduce the high prison numbers in the US via the arts.

She has been donating, chairing, funding and otherwise serving in the non-profit arts and museum sectors, among others, for nearly half a century. She has accepted presidential



and half of those having no fallback, the American model may have something to teach us. This is what some in government have been advocating. I spoke to four philanthropists and a handful of funding specialists to find out why people give, and what institutions can do to nurture generosity.

From the ingenuity at work in finding things to put people's names on (escalators, lifts, bridges, benches — the Met Opera lists five types of seat, from Family Circle at \$5,000 to Orchestra at \$15,000, that you can buy a plaque for) recognition is a big motivator. As the Cleveland-based philanthropist Fred Bidwell says: "Patrons since the beginning of time have loved the idea of having their name carved on the pediment of a building." There is a competitive aspect to that, which, if it results in more investment and greater social benefit, he welcomes. In fact, it comes with the territory. Private wealth in the US is almost always from entrepreneurs like Bidwell, who made his money in advertising and marketing; they are risk takers, movers and shakers. To Bidwell's mind, institutions need to be willing to bring them on board and to take risks alongside them: "The institutions can earn their financial support, but also take advantage of their ability to innovate," he says.

Tax, or rather paying less tax, is another incentive — this applies to the UK as much as it does to the US, but the US system is more straightforward: you file an itemised tax return deducting the value of your donations (cash or non-cash, eg clothes, goods, shares etc). British advisory bodies, such as Philanthropy Impact, have been asking the Treasury to simplify matters for UK donors as a way to increase charitable giving. Figures from the Charities Aid Foundation show that the annual total given by

individuals in the UK in 2017/18, £10 million, has barely budged since 2007. And the arts, accounting for 2 per cent, came last, according to the foundation's UK Giving report.

Of the eight Americans I contacted none highlighted tax breaks as a driver for donors to donate more — to the arts or anything else. Melissa Berman, the chief executive of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, says that many Americans of modest means are donating and not taking any tax deduction, while many in the top part of the 1 per cent of highest earners are donating far more than they can take a deduction for. As the philanthropist Sydney Besthoff, from New Orleans, says: "It has helped, but it has not been the primary reason." Besthoff's decades-long involvement in his city's arts scene underscores his priorities.

In the mid-1970s Besthoff, the heir to the K&B drugstore empire, bought a building in downtown New Orleans that had a plaza with a fountain by the Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi. To give the Noguchi some company, he started buying other sculptures and has since been immersed in the local arts and culture scene. The New Orleans Museum of Art is about to unveil its second Besthoff-funded public sculpture garden and, at 91, Besthoff has been out there every day to check on things. Why a sculpture garden? Because it's free and easy to access, and stays open well beyond museum hours — at his insistence. "I knew it would help my city, and my area, and therefore I went ahead and did it."

For Berman, "a healthy community isn't just one that has jobs and not too much disease". The arts, in providing spaces to be together, to experience new cultures and expressions of one's own, are essential to a city's wellbeing. Leslie Anne Miller is an attorney in Philadelphia who chairs the board of trustees at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and whose investment-banker husband is chairman of the Philadelphia Orchestra. She says they are essential to a city's bottom line too. The arts not only generate tax dollars, they are crucial to attracting new investment, young leaders and fresh business to a town. "A great city cannot be great without a vibrant arts community," Miller says.

And there's the benefit to the bones of a city, its bricks and mortar. When Bidwell and his wife, Laura, opened an exhibition space, Transformer Station, on Cleveland's West Side in 2011, they did so mostly to house their private collection. The neighbourhood, however, has been transformed from one that is overlooked and crime-ridden into the fastest-growing in the city. This wasn't his plan, but it chimes with his outlook. Bidwell sees the city's

Heroic Man by Gaston Lachaise in the New Orleans Museum of Art sculpture garden. Below: Agnes Gund



### “Patrons love the idea of having their name on a building”

medals and sat on government councils, and *The New York Times* last year dubbed her, aged 81, the homecoming queen of the philanthropy world.

Do a little digging into the board of any US city's philharmonic orchestra, say, or any state's museum of modern art and you'll find that Gund is not alone. American benefactors abound. Where talk of UK institutions accepting money from billionaires often elicits scepticism, or even antagonism, in the US it is the way things work. The present publicity around the Sackler family shows why that can be a bad thing. Since the Sacklers are heirs to Purdue Pharma — the company that produces OxyContin and is alleged to be partly responsible for the opioid crisis, which it vigorously denies — some institutions on both sides of the Atlantic have deemed them too toxic to take gifts from. In March the Sackler Trust, in joint agreement with the National Portrait Gallery, withdrew a donation of £1 million.

Yet as cuts to public funding for the arts in Britain continue, with two thirds of arts organisations affected

WHY, BRAD MASTER HAVE ALL FOR YOUR



cultural heritage — its many museums, its neglected centre — as a special resource to be nurtured. And being able to do so is, for him, a responsibility and a privilege.

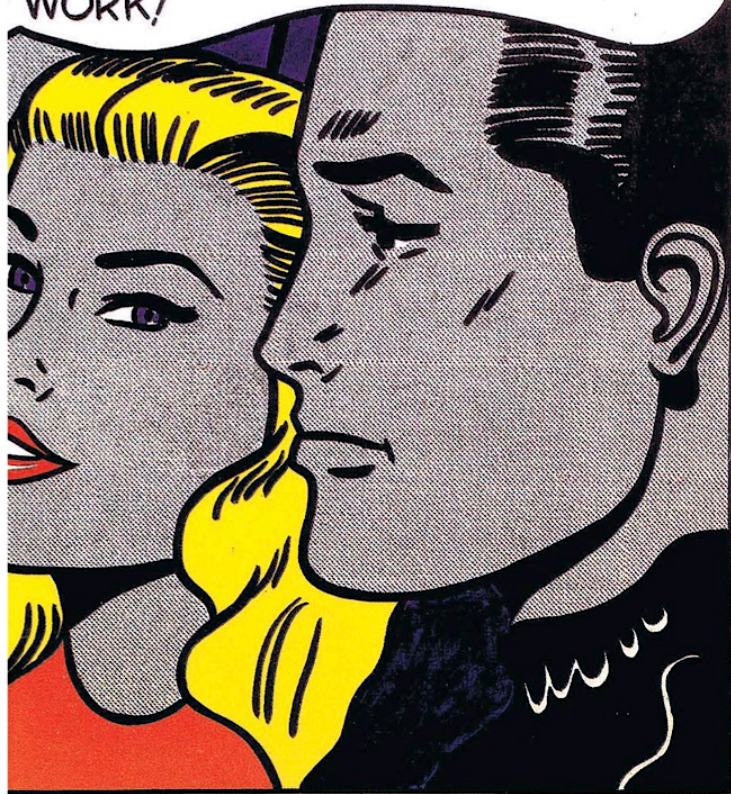
Therefore he works in collaboration and not in competition with Cleveland Museum of Art; it's not about his personal legacy but the city's riches. The museum programmes half the shows at Transformer Station; in the future it will own the centre outright.

Be it in New Orleans, Philadelphia or Cleveland, the correlation between investing in the arts and contributing to your town is clear, as is the sense of responsibility to do both.

These philanthropists repeatedly talk to me about self-organising, self-funding and going ahead and getting things done yourself. Which is traditionally, but also by necessity, the American way. Because in America government is smaller. Miller says this means institutions work hard for whatever limited public funds there might be: "I think that all of us endeavour to be public-private institutions," she says. This puts the onus on the museum or orchestra to



DARLING, THIS PAINTING IS A  
PIECE! MY, SOON YOU'LL  
OF NEW YORK CLAMORING  
WORK!



own its survival, not just bemoan its lack of funding.

In 2010 Lord Stevenson of Coddanham, a former HBOS chairman, was asked what institutions in the UK could do to encourage philanthropy. Hustle, he replied. "Not enough arts organisations use their noodle, still less their shoe leather to secure funds." Nearly ten years on, though, the situation has only got worse, as Nicholas Hytner, the former artistic director of the National Theatre and founder of the Bridge Theatre, has warned. On a local-authority level, funds are few — "the future is precarious".

So, as well as being bolder in asking for money and pushing for a clearer tax incentive for those who give it, Britain's government and institutions need to focus on how to engage a new generation of philanthropists, those on the receiving end of what is being heralded as the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in human history.

Several people I speak to use the word "relevance". Arts institutions need to meet people

**Roy Lichtenstein's Masterpiece, which Gund sold for \$165m to set up an arts fund. Below: Sydney Besthoff and his wife, Walda**



where they are (online; in hybrid cultural experiences that go beyond traditional categories; in the community) and need to tap into the things people care about most (social justice; education; economic disparity) to get them on board when the art alone doesn't. Which is to say they need to spell out their value, cultivate passion and think big.

Miller says of the Philadelphia Museum of Art that, unlike many cultural institutions, it is getting younger. "And the demographics of our audience are a pretty close mirror of the demographics of the city." Does the donor base mirror them too, I wonder. "Well, that is certainly our long term goal," she says. The museum is in the midst of the largest fundraising campaign in the history of the city to complete an ambitious Frank Gehry-led renovation. They are pushing for \$525 million (£407 million) and, for this last stage, are turning to the community for help. Any bunch that can pull that off has to feel good about themselves.



Teamlab's *What a Loving and Beautiful World*, 2011. Below: Sony's Aibo

## The legend of the golem, made real

A new show about artificial intelligence exposes humanity's inadvertent hubris, says **Tom Whipple**

### Exhibition

**AI: More than Human**  
Barbican, EC2

★★★★☆

In 1844 Ada Lovelace, arguably the world's first computer programmer and Byron's daughter, wrote to the engineer Charles Babbage. She proposed a mechanism to construct "a calculus of the nervous system", a mathematical model of how thoughts, feelings and intelligence arrive in the brain.

This letter, in all its optimism and hope, is displayed in the Barbican's new exhibition, *AI: More than Human*, which is spread across the building (the art gallery is hosting another, unrelated show). It opens its second section. And the first section? It is about something altogether darker: the mythical Hebrew creature, the golem, a terrible monster created by man from inanimate objects.

As visitors wander along a gallery, past the first robotic vacuum cleaner, the first robotic dog, and the 1960s chat program that interacts with you like a human, we see how Lovelace's vision is slowly being realised by technology. But something else appears too. The golem, imperceptibly at first, returns.

This monster, this mythical parable of man's hubris, is there in the AI being trained to automoderate abusive comments online — based on your input. It is there in the concerns about bias in machine learning algorithms — where you can watch in real time as words you choose, such as "jelly" or "woman" or "black" — become associated with values such as "good" or "bad". It is definitely there in the display

about autonomous weaponry. And it is there in all of our fears of a future in which robotic intelligence surpasses the human kind.

There is no shortage of artists looking to interact with AI. The problem is, how? If art is about examining the human condition, how do you make art about AI, a technology that by its very existence causes us to question what it is that makes us human? Why bother with the questions about sentience and consciousness raised by artists when there are those raised by Alexa? Why concern yourself with *Totem* — a piece in the exhibition that displays patterns in response to the behaviour of those passing by — when elsewhere AI will respond to your individual behaviour online to profile you in such exquisite detail it can tell you what books to buy or films to watch?

Perhaps this is why, in general, the stronger elements of the gallery are the classic museum exhibits — those that explain rather than provoke. But in the basement of the Barbican there is a reminder of the power art retains still, to translate and distil complexity.

Here there is a bare room in which, initially, the walls display tumbling Chinese script. By walking towards them, you can make the characters burst into life, creating trees, grass, sky and light; visitors dictate the environment that grows on the walls.

Sometimes this collective effort blossoms into something beautiful, with flowers and butterflies and sun and sweet rain.

Sometimes, without completely knowing why, it becomes darker, fierier and deadlier. That is when you realise, without even really understanding how, that through AI humans have inadvertently summoned a golem into the world.

020 7638 8891. To August 26

