

THE NEW MEDICIS

PRIVATE ART SPACES HAVE FLOURISHED
IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, PROVIDING
SHOWCASES FOR COLLECTIONS BUT
ALSO SOME AMBITIOUS EXHIBITIONS

BY DEVORAH LAUTER

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The north facade of the Louis
Vuitton Foundation at night.

The new Milan venue of the Fondazione Prada Architectural project by OMA.

Shimmering architectural feats of glass and metal hovering over gardens, renovated old factories, Venetian palaces — these are the modern cathedrals that house so called “single-donor” private art foundations and museums. They continue to pop up across the globe, reshaping the artistic landscape in their wake.

Often designed by Pritzker prize-winning architects, many have well-known names in the corporate and fashion industry — the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Fondazione Prada — but others, adopting the names of their founders, are not necessarily associated with a particular brand or enterprise. From The Broad in Los Angeles and the YUZ Foundation in Shanghai to the Saatchi Gallery in London or the Garage in Moscow, such private contemporary art spaces have exploded in the last 20 years, leading observers to compare the phenomena to a level of arts patronage only seen from the American robber barons a century ago, or even the powerful, 15th-century Medici family.

“The number of foundations has grown exponentially,” said Peter Deckers, co-founder with Helena Stork of the World Art Foundation,

PHOTO: BAS PRINCEN 2015 | COURTESY FONDAZIONE PRADA





Installation view of "Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures," Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien detail from Room 4, exhibition design by Wes Anderson and Juman Malouf with Itai Margula (Margula Architects).

a platform that connects some 400 private art foundations around the globe. "Every year new ones open everywhere in the world, particularly in Africa, and the Middle East in recent years. We're seeing them in Tunisia, Australia, Korea." He added, "There were always people with big art collections, and they'd get their own wing in a museum. What has changed is that people have taken their fates into their own hands, and decided not to go through other museums."

The vast majority of private Contemporary art museums created by living, individual collectors were founded between 2000 and 2010, according to a 2016 Larry's List study, with the most appearing in South Korea, the US and Germany, followed by China and Italy. And more are on the way. In the spring of 2020 a new Pinault Collection museum, of the billionaire François Pinault, founder of the luxury conglomerate Kering, is slated to open in a 16th-century landmark and former stock exchange, the domed Bourse de Paris, adding a third museum to his two existing ones in Venice.

As their numbers continue to rise, so does these institutions' cultural impact, leading to questions that range from potential competition with public art institutions, to who chooses how art history gets narrated.

"Since their resources and funding do not rely on public money" and because "museum founders have more financial resources to acquire top artworks, there will be more interest in their exhibitions," drawing larger visitor numbers, concludes the same Larry's List report.

However, Astrid Welter, head of programs

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at the Fondazione Prada in Milan, points out that creating compelling exhibitions is not necessarily a question of greater financial means, or of acquiring new artwork on the market, which she said the Fondazione Prada rarely does. "It's not a question of money. It's more the inertia, the laziness in presenting things which are not really triggering. And this can be as easily true for the public as it is for the private," she said in a telephone interview. As an example, Welter pointed to the critically acclaimed show the Fondazione Prada exhibited in 2018 about art made during Italy's Fascist period, held during Italian elections, amid a rise in far-right populism.

"A public institution in Italy could have done that exhibition," said Welter, who explained that many of the pieces in the exhibition came from Italy, which reduces costs. "We didn't do it because we had enough money. We did it because we wanted

PHOTO: JEREMIAS MORANDELL | © KHM-MUSEUMSVERBAND

“A strictly binary view of public and private art institutions is misplaced, many argue, as the two regularly cooperate by loaning each other works, and use skilled professionals who jump from one to the other”

to pursue that idea, and take that risk.” Welter said a more fitting question may be: “How mainstream must public institutions be in their programming, in order to avoid political problems?”

Private art museums do tend to have the advantage of greater freedom, commented Deckers and Stork. “They have artistic liberty of thought, and can concentrate entirely on what they like,” said Deckers, who is also a curator and artist under the name Varozza. “We have this image of foundations as a bit reactionary, but a closer look shows that it’s more of a flexible operation.”

Stork agreed. “Foundations have a great freedom not being dependent on the numbers of people coming in,” she said. But “there is also a lot at stake: the image of the owner,” she said, which motivates them further to showcase critically compelling exhibitions. “They want to find out new things, have good ideas, make wonderful exhibitions. Most foundations are ambitious and passionate.” Stork pointed to Vicente Todoli’s work at the Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan, where she said he’s creating “fascinating exhibitions.”

Suzanne Pagé, artistic director at the Fondation Louis Vuitton, said that the pace has changed since she began working at the foundation in 2006 after running the public Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. “Things are much less formal [than in public institutions], meaning it goes faster, that’s for sure. And I no longer have to look for sponsors,” she said. The Fondation Louis Vuitton’s president, Bernard Arnault, “has a decisive role,” in the foundation’s own collection, said Pagé, who is quick to assert that the foundation “is a museum with private financing, but with the function of a public institution.”

Indeed, a strictly binary view of public and private art institutions is misplaced, many argue, as the two regularly cooperate by loaning each other works, and use skilled professionals who jump from one to the other. Private institutions also often function like their public counterparts in terms of educational and other philanthropic programs ranging from grants and publications to artist residencies. In what has been called a landmark example of such cooperation between the two, Fondation Cartier in Paris announced in September that it would be teaming with the publicly run Triennale in Milan for its April 2020 program, and would continue to do so for the following eight years, jointly putting up two to three exhibitions per year.

“That’s the kind of groundbreaking cooperation between public and private institutions that may be the future: this ideal, positive, fertile cooperation,” said Welter, who noted that the Fondazione Prada is currently working with Vienna’s two major public landmarks, the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Naturhistorisches Museum, for the

Jannis Kounellis, Visual Arts Center Pescheria, Pesaro 2016.



PHOTO MICHELE ALBERTO SERENI | COURTESY FONDAZIONE PRADA



PHOTO AGOSTINO OSIO | COURTESY PIRELLI HANGARBICOCCA

exhibition, "Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures," conceived by Wes Anderson and Juman Malouf, and showing until January 13, 2020.

The reasons for the boom in private Contemporary art museums are multiple, and vary by region, but are linked to evolutions in the art market. The previously noted Larry's List survey found that most private museums that opened after 2000 began their collections between the 1970s and 1990s, a period when art became more widely seen as a potential investment, just as collecting also became more democratized thanks to new technology, particularly in the 1990s.

In addition, along with their passion for the arts, and desire to leave behind a cultural legacy, the lack of public spaces for Contemporary art in their regions has been a key factor pushing collectors to open their own museums.

"Our foundation was stimulated by something of super cultural relevance," said Welter. In the early 1990s, the founders Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli "did something for which there was no space, there was nobody else, no galleries and warehouses, there were no Contemporary art museums in Milan who would do that, not even in Italy," she said of the non-profit.

Likewise, the Elgiz Museum was the first of its kind in Turkey, founded in 2001 in Istanbul by the collectors Sevda and Can Elgiz. The Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town became the first Contemporary art museum in Africa dedicated to African art, and opened in 2017 thanks to a public/private partnership between the city's V&A Waterfront and the collector Jochen Zeitz. Meanwhile, in China, for years few public institutions were willing to exhibit avant-garde Chinese art, so private collectors stepped in to fill the void, according to the Larry's List report.

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While the association between major fashion houses and Contemporary art serves to benefit the brand's aura, not all art spaces were created with that strategy in mind. "Now we are aware that people are asking this question, but the Fondazione Prada was set up totally independently," said Welter. "So I think that in our case it was something that stemmed out of two people making a cultural project which they found was meaningful."

Either way, public response has been generally positive, at least for the most successful ones. The Fondation Louis Vuitton and the Saatchi Gallery, for instance, clock in an average of around 1.4 million to 1.5 million visitors a year.

Yet while Contemporary art appears to be spreading its reach, attracting interest beyond what was once a more exclusive set only 40 years ago, Welter said she is not sure more people feel they understand it.

"The general public still thinks that they should know more in order to understand what Contemporary art is," she said. "As if this is only made for the people in the art world."

In the meantime, Welter tells visitors to the foundation's art exhibitions: "It is made for you. It's not made for the art world." 田

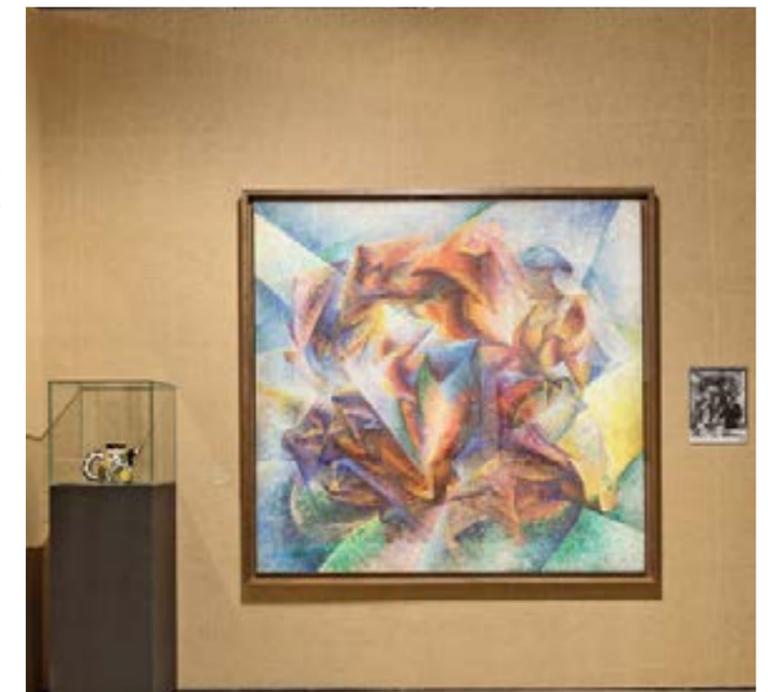
(L-R):
 Felice Casorati
 "Portrait of Renato
 Gualino," 1923-1924,
 Felice Casorati,
 "Portrait of Hena Rigotti," 1924,
 Felice Casorati,
 "Double portrait," 1924,
 Mario Sironi,
 "The Architect," 1922-23,
 Felice Casorati,
 "Silvana Cenni," 1922,
 Felice Casorati
 "Target shooting," 1919,
 exhibition view of "Post Zang
 Tumb Tuuum. Art Life
 Politics: Italy 1918-1943,"
 February 18, 2018-
 June 25, 2018,
 Fondazione Prada, Milan
 Courtesy Fondazione Prada.



Right:
 Installation view of "Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin
 and other Treasures," Kunsthistorisches Museum
 Wien Coffin of a Spitzmaus (Shrew),
 painted wood, 21.9 x 11.6 x 11.4 cm.,
 Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien,
 Egyptian and Near-Eastern Collection,
 exhibition design by Wes Anderson and Juman
 Malouf with Itai Margula (Margula Architects).



(L-R):
 Tullio d'Albisola
 "Brocca Baker,"
 1929,
 Umberto
 Boccioni,
 "Dinamismo di un
 foot-baller,"
 1913, exhibition
 view of "Post Zang
 Tumb Tuuum. Art
 Life Politics: Italia
 1918-1943,"
 February 18,
 2018- June 25,
 2018,
 Fondazione
 Prada, Milano.



(LEFT TO RIGHT): LEFT: PHOTO DELFINO SISTO LEGNANI AND MARCO CAPPELLETTI | COURTESY FONDAZIONE PRADA | TOP RIGHT: PHOTO: JEREMIAS MORANDELL | © KHM-MUSEUMSVERBAND | BOTTOM RIGHT: PHOTO DELFINO SISTO LEGNANI AND MARCO CAPPELLETTI | COURTESY FONDAZIONE PRADA