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## Art Donors Increasingly Look to University Museums

College art museums are more likely to display donated works, keep collections together and incorporate them into the academic curriculum



A talk on the Jack and Susy Wadsworth collection of Japanese prints at the University of Oregon's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art PHOTO: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART / JACK LIU

*By Daniel Grant*

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Owners of large art collections often envision themselves eventually donating their works to a major museum, where the pieces can be viewed by the masses. But once such works become part of a museum's massive permanent collection, they often end up in storage and rarely if ever displayed. So prospective art donors increasingly are turning to more a receptive audience: college and university museums.

While less prestigious than the most prominent private and public museums, these academic institutions offer benefits that many art donors find appealing. For example, works donated to university museums are more likely to be put on display, examined regularly by students, faculty and scholars, and incorporated into the school's academic curriculum. As "big fish in a small pond," donors to academic institutions may find that they have more leverage when negotiating the terms of their gifts, says John Cahill, a New York City lawyer who specializes in art law.

In some cases, it's alumni who want to give back to their alma maters. But college-museum directors say they are pitching to—and getting requests from—donors who have no connection to the school. Many collectors “tell us that they are shopping pieces to different institutions, two or three on the average,” says Douglas S. Jones, director of the Florida Museum of Natural History at the University of Florida at Gainesville.

## Winning pitch

When evaluating potential recipients, donors may want to ask questions such as:

- How often will my collection be on view? Will my donated pieces be exhibited together?
- Will some of the objects in my collection be sold? If so, which pieces and how long will the collection remain together before any sales take place?
- Will the museum do scholarly research and/or create a catalog of my gift?
- Will the museum create an exhibition largely or specifically of the works in my donated collection?
- Will courses taught at the college or university focus on the objects in my collection?

Some academic institutions may be more willing than others to accede to donor requests. Experts say prospective donors can improve the chances that their requests will be honored by accompanying a gift of art with a gift of cash—say, for a study center devoted to the objects in the collection or to pay for conservation if the art being donated is fragile. (This tactic is sometimes used by collectors donating to private and public museums, too, experts say).



Lemon Juice, a 1984 screenprint that is part of the Jack and Susy Wadsworth collection of Japanese prints at the University of Oregon's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art PHOTO: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART

John S. “Jack” Wadsworth, honorary chairman, Morgan Stanley Asia, and his wife, Susy, considered donating their collection of 157 modern and contemporary Japanese prints to San Francisco's Asian Art Museum. “But then we only would have been able to see these works if we wanted to go into the museum's basement,” says Mr. Wadsworth.

So instead, in 2016 they donated the pieces to the University of Oregon's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, whose core collection is Asian art. Jill Hartz, director of the museum, which is in Eugene, says her winning pitch to the Wadsworths, neither of whom attended the University of Oregon, was that “academic museums will use and value their gifts more, and more often.”

The prints have been included in several academic courses and been the subject of an exhibition and catalog. And Mr. Wadsworth says the hands-on research by students and faculty has been the most impressive part, adding that “my wife and I learned more about these artworks than we knew previously, because of the research they did.”

## Classroom connection

Indeed, a university willing to use the collection for teaching purposes is a big selling point for some donors. Many college and university museum directors work with faculty in a range of departments to coordinate exhibitions with course offerings, says John Wetenhall, director of the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. He says his institution has developed teaching centers within the museum where specific works from the collection “can be pulled out in order to be studied by faculty and students. Even if an object isn’t put on display, it may still be used.”

Artist, art collector and master printer James M. Reed decided to donate his collection of 1,500 prints from the 16th century to the current millennium to the Fairfield University Art Museum in Connecticut instead of to a larger, better-known institution, because “I was convinced it just would have ended up in storage,” he says. Another incentive, according to Linda Wolk-Simon, director and chief curator of the museum, was that his collection would provide “teaching objects for classes taught by the departments of art history, European history, literature, sociology, economics and studio art.”

Mr. Reed says he wanted to keep the collection together, adding that other museums he approached for this donation only wanted specific pieces and wouldn’t promise not to sell some or all of the prints—which include 19th century French etchings and lithographs by Eugene Delacroix, Edouard Manet and others; German expressionist woodcuts and lithographs by Emil Nolde, Ernst Kirchner and Max Beckmann; and modern prints by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine.

“I wanted an exhibition of my collection and a small catalog to go along with it,” Mr. Reed says. “I wanted the collection to be in my name, and I wanted to give a talk about it.” Fairfield University Art Museum, which opened in 2010 and had a relatively small permanent collection, was happy to oblige.

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