

# a man with a plan

Through his foundation, art collector Eli Broad may just change the way we view art.

Unless you're willing to duke it out for the handful of pieces that appear at public auction, the first job of any collector of contemporary art is to ingratiate himself with a gallerist or three. Galleries sell new art for well below the sum it could fetch at auction. As a result, demand always exceeds supply when it comes to the hottest artists of the moment, and a collector can't simply nab the piece he wants by offering to pay more for it.

Why would gallery owners willingly leave money on the table like that? It's

But the best result of all, for a gallery, has been to sell to a museum directly—or, failing that, to sell to a collector who promises to either donate the work or put it on permanent loan to a museum.

Until now.

Los Angeles art collector Eli Broad made huge waves in the art world in January when he announced that he wouldn't be donating his magnificent collection to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art after all. The museum world was shocked:

Broad had just spent somewhere in the region of \$50 million to build the new Broad Contemporary Art Museum within the Lacma complex. Would he really spend all that cash on a shiny

because they're playing the long game. They're interested in their artists appreciating in value in the future, and the best way for that to happen is for the artist to be exhibited in high-profile collections and exhibitions. If a painting gets sold to a collector who simply puts it above his fireplace and loves it, then that painting isn't going to help drive the artist's prices ever upwards.

Ultimately, what every gallery wants is for their artists' paintings to appear in museums. But museums generally don't have much of an acquisitions budget for contemporary art. So galleries instead rely on an age-old truism: collectors collect art, and museums collect collectors. What the gallery wants, then, is to sell to the kind of collector who will build up a museum-worthy collection, which will end up being donated to a major museum.

new Renzo Piano building and then fail to fill it with his own artwork?

Actually, he wouldn't. The new Lacma building will have lots of Broad's art in it. But the art won't belong to Lacma, it will continue to belong to Broad's foundation.

Broad's reasoning is simple. His art collection is enormous, and under any reasonable assumption Lacma could show at most only 20 percent of it at any one time—which would mean that the other 80 percent would languish, unseen, in Lacma's storage vaults. What's more, much of that 80 percent would never be shown, no matter how often the Broad Contemporary Art Museum gets rehung. By donating his collection to Lacma, Broad would essentially be consigning a large number of artworks to the fate befalling the Ark of the Covenant in the first Indiana Jones film.

So Broad has essentially said that Lacma gets first dibs on exhibiting whatever works it likes from his collection, whenever it likes, for however long it likes. But the works Lacma doesn't want to exhibit at any given time—those works, Broad will feel free to lend out to a large number of other museums that might be interested.

The inevitable result will be that a much higher proportion of Broad's collection will be on view at museums than would have been the case if he simply donated everything to Lacma. And in turn, that means Broad has now managed to elevate himself, from the point of view of a gallerist, to a level of importance even higher than that

**HEAVY EXPOSURE.**  
Eli Broad's new foundation will exist with the stated purpose of truly maximizing public display of art that might otherwise languish in storage.

held by museums. If a gallery sells directly to a museum, or to a collector who donates the work to a museum, then that painting will be shown occasionally. If the gallery sells to Broad, by contrast, the painting is likely to be shown much more often: if not at Lacma, then quite possibly elsewhere instead.

Indeed, just as Warren Buffett donated most of his personal fortune to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, it's entirely possible that other contemporary art collectors will end up donating their collections not to any museum but rather to Broad's new lending foundation.

Museums tend not to spend any time or effort lending out the works

they're not showing: if they're asked they might say yes, but they're not proactive about it. So while they might claim to be driven by the desire to show art to the public, in reality they only really want to do that within their own four walls.

Broad's new foundation, by contrast, will exist with the stated purpose of truly maximizing the public exposure that its art receives. That's a proposition which could be very attractive to collectors wondering what to do with their legacy: they provide the art, and Broad will take care of all the paperwork and relationship management.

So if you're buttering up a gallerist, maybe the best thing to do is no longer to hint that you're thinking of donating your collection to a museum: better that you hint that you're thinking of donating your collection to Eli Broad. ■

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