

\$50 Million for the Hammer Museum, and Fresh Energy for Arts Giving in L.A.

By Robin Pogrebin

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LOS ANGELES — The television producer Marcy Carsey — whose hits include “The Cosby Show,” “Roseanne” and “3rd Rock From the Sun” — typically directs charitable donations toward causes like affordable education and women’s equality. But now she is donating \$20 million of her fortune to an art institution.

Ms. Carsey’s gift to the Hammer Museum, announced Thursday, is the latest in an unexpected series of cultural investments by wealthy Angelenos. Last year, the filmmaker George Lucas said he would fund a \$1 billion Museum of Narrative Art, and the music mogul David Geffen pledged \$150 million to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Ms. Carsey’s donation accompanies a \$30 million lead gift to the Hammer’s renovation and expansion project from Lynda and Stewart Resnick, the billionaire couple behind POM Wonderful and Fiji Water.

Among the factors considered to be driving this philanthropy are institutions with strong leadership and fund-raising strategies; an expanding arts scene, with new galleries and museums; and the migration of artists into town. On Thursday, Frieze, the international contemporary art fair in London and New York, said it was adding a fair in Los Angeles in 2019, reflecting the city’s position as a global arts capital.

Los Angeles has long produced celebrated visual artists — Mark Bradford, John Baldessari and Barbara Kruger, to name a few — and it has recently increased the number of places to see art, adding the Broad Museum; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Hauser & Wirth mega gallery. Now, this energetic scene is helping to spur giving. Even the J. Paul Getty Trust — the world’s richest art institution, with a \$6.9 billion endowment — has begun to solicit individual donations from a swelling patron base.

The Hammer Museum at U.C.L.A., which highlights emerging and under-recognized contemporary artists, is putting its gifts toward a \$180 million project with the architect Michael Maltzan that is to increase gallery space by 60 percent. Its main building will be named the Lynda and Stewart Resnick Cultural Center.



A preliminary rendering of a new entrance to the Hammer Museum. Michael Maltzan Architecture

“We’ve never asked for this kind of money before from our donors — philanthropy used to be the one element of the ecosystem that was weak — but L.A. is a different city now,” said Ann Philbin, the Hammer’s director. “It still has a long way to go before it is as generous and automatic as it is in New York, but we have moved the ball substantially forward.”

Art-world leaders say Los Angeles is still working to establish a tradition of cultural philanthropy because the city was founded well after its East Coast counterparts and because movies — not museums — have historically been the dominant creative industry.

“We’re almost 100 years behind New York — we’re still young by museum and civic standards,” said Michael Govan, the director at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. “Philanthropy is growing as institutions are growing.”

Recent charitable contributions could suggest that a new donor class is emerging. That is important now that the city’s leading cultural philanthropist, Eli Broad, has announced his retirement from public life. Mr. Broad said he no longer feels so alone in support of the arts. “You’re seeing more and more people getting involved philanthropically,” he said.

Among the next cadre of patrons are the heiress Wallis Annenberg, president of the Annenberg Foundation; the married media executives Robert Iger and Willow Bay; and the financier Anthony N. Pritzker.

Ms. Carsey, unlike most art museum donors, is not a collector, although she has served as the Hammer's chairwoman since 2014. She said she felt inspired by the museum's "programming and its purpose," reflected in its mission statement about "the promise of art and ideas to illuminate our lives and build a more just world."

Hammer fans praise the museum's public screenings, readings, lectures and conversations. The collector Susan Bay Nimoy, who donated \$7.5 million to support the Hammer's new annex space in honor of her husband, the actor Leonard Nimoy, who died in 2015, said she is at the Hammer "three times a week."

Steven P. Song, who recently joined the Hammer's board, serves as chairman of the museum's new Global Council, which aims to expand international giving. "I asked philanthropists in South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines" to contribute, he said. "We so far have a 100 percent acceptance track record."

The three main art museums here are now all run by former New Yorkers — Ms. Philbin; Mr. Govan; and Philippe Vergne, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles — who have imported East Coast fund-raising strategies.

Mr. Govan has raised \$450 million toward his building's \$650 million new permanent collection building, and he has pushed to cultivate Hollywood by making art glamorous — namely with the museum's annual art and film gala, whose red carpet last fall included Leonardo DiCaprio, Kerry Washington and Jake Gyllenhaal. (Mr. DiCaprio recently underwrote the cost of 309 LED bulbs for Lacma's outdoor sculpture "Urban Light," by Chris Burden.)

"You have to acknowledge that film is art," Mr. Govan said. "You have to make the case, and I'm not sure museums were making the case."

Where young artists in Los Angeles used to feel they had to go to New York to pursue careers, many are staying put. The city has also become a magnet for artists in neighborhoods like Eagle Rock, Mount Washington, Highland Park, Silver Lake and Echo Park. California Institute of the Arts, the leading art school, reported that 50 percent of graduates in 2015 stayed in Los Angeles; that figure has increased to nearly 60 percent.

"Another few arrive each week," said the dealer Jeffrey Deitch, who served as director of MOCA and still keeps a home in Los Angeles. "The balance has shifted."

Paul Mpagi Sepuya, an artist who was born just east of Los Angeles, said he moved back from New York for more affordable studio space and the network that comes with attending art school at the University of California, Los Angeles. "I wouldn't be able to make my practice work or do the work that I'm doing in New York," Mr. Sepuya said.

He has also found a community. "Every day you go to an event or an opening or a friend's house for dinner, and you run into another artist who you lost touch with in New York," he said, "and you suddenly realize they're also in L.A."

Artists are coming from all over — Chris Johanson, a muralist and illustrator, came from Portland; Tala Madani, a painter, from Iran; Oscar Tuazon, known for architectonic sculptures, from Paris; Tacita Dean, a Turner Prize nominee, and Thomas Demand, the photographer, from Berlin.

And galleries are opening across the city. Relatively recent arrivals include Sprüth Magers, Maccarone and Franklin Parrasch. "I want to be where this energy is," Mr. Parrasch said. "I've been going to L.A. since the late 80s, and I've never seen it like this. I don't think it's going to go away."

Prominent artists want local representation. "You have to be here to protect your interests, because the artists are here, and they'll sell with somebody else," Mr. Govan said.

With people lining up around the block for the Broad, lounging at Hauser & Wirth's hip cafe and trolling exhibitions off the beaten path through last summer's regional art event, Pacific Standard Time, "Los Angeles is getting to be like the art center of the world," said the collector Maurice Marciano of the Guess empire. Mr. Marciano, who recently opened the Marciano Art Foundation in a former Masonic temple, also serves as co-chairman of MOCA, which has raised \$100 million of a \$150 million endowment campaign.

Although Ms. Resnick is a lifetime trustee at Lacma, she said she and her husband felt moved to support the expansion of the Hammer, "one of the places that we go to be inspired."

The campaign to fund the expansion — as well as to build endowment and exhibition funds — has raised \$132 million. Since Ms. Philbin became director in 1999, the museum's annual operating budget has grown to \$22 million, from \$5 million, and its staff to over 200, from 35.

"It's gathering big crowds," Ms. Carsey said. "This little museum can bring together different people from different sections of town and make it feel like a community."

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