



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

2009 marked the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, which dates back to 1929. There is, in William Blake's apt phrase, a "fearful symmetry" between these two dates, both of which will long be remembered for precipitous declines in the American – and the world – economy. The Kress Foundation originally emerged from the depths of the Great Depression with a keen sense of mission. The "Great Recession" of 2008-2009 has similarly had a profound impact on all non-profit institutions which, like the Kress Foundation, ultimately depend on endowments. It has provided those of us to whom the Foundation has been entrusted an opportunity and an obligation to refocus our efforts and energies on our central mission. That mission – as I emphasized last year – remains fundamentally unchanged: to support the appreciation, conservation, interpretation, study and teaching of the history of European art, from antiquity to the dawn of the modern era. We do so today with somewhat diminished resources, but undiminished and indeed redoubled commitment. In this brief retrospective on our 2009 fiscal year, I want to take the opportunity to reflect on one of the chief expressions of that commitment: our ongoing engagement with the Kress Collection.

Half a century ago, the Kress Foundation was just winding down the decades-long, thoughtfully choreographed distribution of the Kress Collection of more than 3,000 old master paintings and other works of European art to scores of art museums and other institutions all across the nation. In the words of a contemporary editorialist, writing in 1962 in celebration of this singular program of art philanthropy, "the Kress Collection now extends from Puerto Rico to Honolulu, from Miami to Seattle." The writer continued, generously adding that "never in the history of art collecting has so much been owed by so many to so few." He concluded on a more cautious but ultimately optimistic note: "Whether the inhabitants of these distant towns yet appreciate what has been done for them is quite another matter. One would like to know what the drug-store assistants of El Paso (Texas), Birmingham (Alabama), Columbia (South Carolina), or Hawaii (Honolulu) make of their Bellotto,

their Paris Bordone, their Magnasco, or their Salviati portrait... So typical of America is the confidence with which extravagant schemes of this kind are launched, on a scale never before contemplated... but in the unshakeable belief that in time the scheme will bring in its rewards. We can be sure that these altar-pieces from Italian churches, these allegorical panels from French chateaux, which now stray across the American continent like bewildered refugees, will one day work their way, like every other foreign body in this astonishing country, into the very fabric of American life" (*The Burlington Magazine*, July 1962).

To this day, the Kress Foundation remains closely engaged with the Kress Collection, with the roughly 3,100 works of art that comprise it, and with the scores of museums and other institutions, large and small, which collectively steward the Kress Collection along with countless other works of art they acquired before and after the "Great Kress Give-Away." That ongoing engagement assumes several forms today, of which we will highlight just a few here.

Through the Kress Program in Paintings Conservation at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, the Foundation supports the conservation of Kress paintings from all around the country. This program, now entering its third decade, simultaneously provides for the ongoing care of the Kress Collection and offers a unique opportunity for students of old master painting conservation to hone their skills under the wise direction of Dianne Dwyer Modestini, Conservator, and Nica Gutman, Associate Conservator.

From 1964-1977, the Kress Foundation sponsored the publication of a scholarly *Complete Catalogue of the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, published on behalf of the Foundation by Phaidon Press, in nine illustrated volumes, each written by a leading art historian. Responding to the essential role emerging technologies now play in art history, in 2006 the Foundation made a grant to ARTstor (www.artstor.org) to digitize and disseminate high resolution images of the Kress Collection



A Dancing Faun,
model c. 1515, cast possibly mid-16th
century, Giovanni Francesco Rustici
(Italian, 1474-1554); Samuel H. Kress
Collection, The National Gallery of
Art, Washington, DC

for use in teaching, learning, and research. Working in collaboration with the nearly 50 museums that collectively steward the majority of the works that comprise the Kress Collection, the ARTstor project has focused above all on the more than 1,100 old master paintings that constitute the heart of the Collection. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which had recently launched the ARTstor initiative, generously partnered with us in sponsoring this effort. This ambitious project is now quite advanced, with more than 1,100 paintings from the Kress Collection – including nearly 400 paintings as well as 300 other works of art from the National Gallery of Art alone – now being represented in the ARTstor Digital Library and on the Kress Foundation website. We believe this effort will help ensure that the Kress Collection will remain a vital part of the canon of art history as that discipline becomes, to an ever-increasing extent, a digital enterprise.

Every work of art has, of course, its own distinctive history; and documenting these “histories” photographically has always been central to the art historical enterprise. This is particularly true of the Kress Collection, which has been especially richly documented. The Department of Image Collections at the National Gallery of Art serves as the official repository for historic photography of the Kress Collection. In 1977, the Foundation deposited at the Gallery all its roughly 6,100 photographic negatives of the Kress Collection, with the expectation that they would be made available for research and publication. These photographs, produced over nearly half a century (from roughly 1915 to c.1960), richly document the paintings, sculptures,

bronzes, drawings, furniture, prints, tapestries, and other categories of objects that make up the Kress Collection. The richness of the archive consists especially in the photographic documentation of Kress objects over the course of many decades, often beginning, well before their acquisition by Samuel H. Kress. Thus there may be from one to thirty unique images for a single Kress work (there are, for example, more than 5,000 photos of the approximately 1,100 Kress paintings). The Kress Negatives Collection documents and preserves the history of the individual objects as well as past conservation analyses and treatments, with images taken before, during, and after conservation, as well as x-ray prints and photographs taken under infra-red and ultra-violet light. These important negatives are currently being digitized with the support of a recent grant from the Foundation and they, too, will be added to the ARTstor Digital Library as well as being made available online by the Gallery itself. The Kress Negatives Collection will be complemented in coming months by digital versions of x-rays of Kress (and other European) paintings carried out in the early 20th century by Alan Borroughs, whose archive of x-rays of European paintings is being digitized by Harvard University with support from the Foundation, as part of an ambitious x-ray digitization initiative supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Not all historical documentation about works of art takes visual form, of course. Alongside photographic documentation we find bills of sale, correspondence with collectors and dealers, collection checklists and catalogues, and a rich array of conservation documents including condition and treatment reports, etc. In order to facilitate the description and discovery of the whole spectrum of existing documentation related to the Kress Collection, and to enhance access to these materials, the Foundation recently made a grant to the General Archives at the National Gallery of Art, in support of the design and development of a "Kress Collection Historical and Conservation Archive." This archive will be an online, searchable database of historical information concerning the entire Kress Collection. It will foster both the assembling and

description as well as the study of archival documentation related to the provenance, acquisition, and conservation of the Kress Collection. A special focus will be conservation documentation related to the analysis and treatment of Kress paintings around the country, whether performed at the owning museum or centrally through the Kress Program in Paintings Conservation at the NYU Institute of Fine Arts. Another possible focus of the project might be to assist museums in their ongoing effort to document the provenance – and especially the World War II-era provenance – of works from the distributed Kress Collection. One key goal of the project is to build an information resource that will permit conservators, curators and educators professionally engaged with Kress paintings and other old master paintings – as well as interested scholars – to locate and consult relevant documentation wherever it may have been produced or reside.

The thousands of works of art from the Kress Collection have, of course, taken on a new life in their various institutional homes all around the United States. These installations are themselves worthy of photographic documentation, and so through a Foundation-sponsored photographic campaign being administered by Kress itself, “virtual reality” panoramas are being created of several Kress Collections as currently installed in galleries across the nation. Thirteen museum installations have now been documented in this way. All are now on display on the Kress Foundation website. Many of these panoramas will also be used in innovative ways by the museums themselves, and we look forward to sponsoring further such photographic campaigns.

Needless to say, our engagement with the museums and other institutions that collectively steward the Kress Collection is not limited to that collection. We regularly award grants and fellowships to these institutions in support of their distinctive programs and missions. Representative recent grants include: grants to the Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina, the El Paso Museum of Art, and the North Carolina Museum of Art, all for new catalogues of their collections of European

painting and sculpture. In a particularly exciting recent development, through a recent grant to the Council of Independent Colleges, three museums with important Kress collections – the Birmingham Museum of Art, the High Museum in Atlanta, and the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College – will host successive summer teacher institutes for art history teachers at small liberal arts colleges wishing to enhance the quality of their instruction in European art history. And of course many Kress museums routinely host Kress fellowships in art conservation and museum education, while also benefiting from Foundation support for a range of programmatic activities from conservation to exhibitions and publications.

It is all too easy to overlook the fact that what makes an art museum successful is ultimately not the strength of its collections alone, but also and perhaps above all the caliber of its professional staff. We are now making a special effort to support important professional development opportunities for staff at those museums which collectively steward the Kress Collection. For example, this past year we funded travel and participation costs for educators from Kress Collection museums in the Teachers Institute in Museum Education (TIME), hosted each summer by the Art Institute of Chicago (a program we are now supporting directly). Similarly, we have recently been supporting participation in the annual meeting of the Association of Art Museum Curators on the part of curators who would otherwise be unable to attend, with our support focused upon emerging professionals at larger museums and curators at smaller collections. We hope and expect to continue to seek new ways of supporting the professional development of educators and curators.

Finally, it seems worth noting that the Kress Foundation has, throughout its long history, sought to play a leadership role in the communities it serves. At the same time, the Foundation has been regarded as a part of those same communities, offering, we have been told, a too-rare example of “philanthropy with a human face.” We seek today to sustain both these traditions, offering leadership where we believe we

have something unique to offer, while also working arm-in-arm with colleagues elsewhere to advance shared goals. This dual tradition is very much alive today as we seek to find ways of ensuring that campus art collections are – even in challenging economic times like the present – regarded and treated as the essential educational and scholarly resources they are, rather than as disposable assets. A few months ago we posted on the Foundation’s website an “Open Letter Concerning College and University Museums.” And we are both actively supporting and actively engaged with a collaborative effort on the same front being spearheaded by the American Association of Museums, the Association of Art Museum Curators, the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Association of College and University Art Museums, and the College Art Association. A “Statement of Solidarity,” expressing these organizations’ abiding commitment to campus museums and supported by the Foundation, has been widely disseminated in print and online (<http://www.acumg.org/webelieve/>). Our strong interest in this subject reflects the fact that among the museums that collectively steward the Kress Collection there are no fewer than two dozen campus art museums, a fact that powerfully underscores the Foundation’s strong and ongoing commitment to enlisting the power of art to sustain and advance the education of young people everywhere.



Max Marmor
President

Portrait of a Gentleman
Wearing a Gold Chain, c. 1525-30,
Giovanni Busi, called Cariani
(Italian, 1485-1548); Samuel H.
Kress Collection, North Carolina
Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC