



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Samuel H. Kress Foundation has been closely engaged with art museums almost from its inception in 1929. Our relationship with art museums has evolved over many years, assuming an embracing – and we believe, instructive – array of forms. The thread of continuity that links these forms is an abiding focus on people, on human beings as both the actors and the audiences who – together – animate the world of art museums.

Most familiar, perhaps, is the singular program of art philanthropy through which Samuel Kress (1863–1955) and, subsequently, the Kress Foundation donated hundreds – indeed thousands – of works of European art to scores of art museums all across the nation. Initiated ad hoc and on a modest scale in the 1920s, what began as a personal gesture on the part of Samuel H. Kress soon evolved into a deliberate program of art philanthropy. That program culminated three decades later with the systematic and thoughtfully orchestrated distribution of nearly 1,400 old master paintings, plus hundreds of works in other media, to eighteen regional museums, nearly two dozen campus art museums, and dozens of other institutions – including Kress's foundational gift of nearly 400 paintings to the National Gallery of Art upon its debut in 1941, which earned Samuel Kress a place on the select roster of the Gallery's "founding benefactors."

Less well-known is the fact that the "Great Kress Give-Away," as *Life Magazine* christened this program in a cover story in late 1953, was born of a traveling exhibition conceived, sponsored and, to a large extent, personally organized by Samuel H. Kress during the darkest days of the Great Depression. During the first week of October 1932, fifty-two masterpieces of Italian art were loaded on a railway car heading south along the eastern seaboard. First stop: Atlanta, Georgia, 1932. Last stop: Charlotte, North Carolina, 1935. What ultimately became a three-year-long touring exhibition to twenty-four cities around the country, with accompanying exhibition checklist, was initially conceived as a modest, four month tour of eight cities. Demand soon competed with – but did not by any means outstrip – supply.

If the Kress traveling exhibition of the mid-Thirties is largely forgotten today, the same cannot be said of what might well be one of the first “focus exhibitions”: Samuel Kress’s characteristic yet controversial decision to display his recently-purchased Nativity by the famous Renaissance artist Giorgione – not in an art museum, but rather in the window of his flagship “five and dime” store on lower Fifth Avenue, for the Christmas season in 1938. Kress had only recently purchased this masterpiece from the great art dealer Joseph Duveen, who, famously, was thoroughly scandalized to find it hanging in a shop window for all the world – and not merely the elite of the art world – to behold and enjoy.

The “Great Kress Give-Away” culminated, as noted, in 1961 with the formal donation of the Kress Collection to art museums across the nation. In the intervening half century, the Kress Foundation has sustained its commitment to art museums, especially in America but also abroad. That commitment has assumed a range of forms. We have supported – sometimes on a modest scale, at other times quite substantially – exhibitions, collection care and conservation; the publication of exhibition and collection catalogues; and more recently – and quite selectively – the digitization of key collections – including the digitization and online dissemination, on an “open access” basis, of virtually the entire Kress painting collection, a project carried out in close partnership with the Mellon Foundation’s ARTstor initiative. The Foundation continues to support this entire scope of art museum programming, with a special but by no means exclusive focus on the two score museums which collectively steward the Kress Collection, and to which the Foundation feels an ongoing stewardship responsibility. Through this range of commitments, we aspire to sustain the impact embodied in the initial distribution of the Kress Collection. This aspiration, of course, raises the question: Which of the myriad possible forms of support for art museums are truly – and maximally – impactful?

Over the past half-century, the Foundation has increasingly invested in the training and professional development of individuals pursuing careers in the art history field, in academe, in art museums and

in related institutional settings (archives, libraries, publishers, et al.). Today nearly fifty percent of our charitable giving (roughly \$2 million annually) supports fellowships – and related professional development opportunities – benefiting academic art historians, art conservators, curators, and art museum educators. Altogether, there have been approximately 4,500 Kress fellows in these several professional domains, and the majority are still active professionally. It would be hard to over-estimate the impact of these signature Kress programs.

Last year, in introducing the Foundation's 2013 Annual Report, we singled out for special attention our program of “Interpretive Fellowships at Art Museums,” launched in 2009. This program, intended to encourage students of art history and related fields – as well as their academic mentors – to seriously consider careers in art museum education and curatorial work. To date nearly fifty young people have benefited from this singular opportunity. Alongside these fellowships we continue to fund a suite of nine year-long post-graduate fellowships at art museums here and abroad, for emerging conservation professionals. This program, now capably administered by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation, helps shape the next generation of conservators. As part of a more recent effort to enable art museums to adhere to professional standards in the arena of provenance research, we have been funding and co-sponsoring with the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) a series of provenance research training programs for museum practitioners and art historians. Recognizing that there are too few opportunities for art museum professionals to pursue research, we are now supporting, in partnership with the American Academy in Rome, an annual short-term fellowship for members of the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) at the Academy – a program recently launched for members of the AAMD as well. Another partnership with AAMD seeks to increase the number of people of color represented in the art museum professions by providing minority internships through the United Negro College Fund. Kress has recently begun supporting

a similar internship program in partnership with ArtTable, providing internship opportunities for young women at art museums with Kress collections. We have come to believe that Kress makes the greatest impact on art museums by investing in the professionals whose commitment to them echoes our own.

What does this mean for the Foundation's current and future grant-making activities? We continue to encourage and to support a wide spectrum of art museum programs, including the conservation, exhibition, and publication of collections. In the interest of maximizing our impact, we are especially committed to art museum projects and programs which – absent support from Kress – might well not succeed and flourish. And we are increasingly committed to investing in art museums by investing in people.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Max Marmor".

**Max Marmor**  
President