

Art in America

SEPTEMBER 2007

F R O N T P A G E

Tomorrow's Museum Directors

Early June saw the launch of the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL), an organization that seeks to train art-museum curators in the financial and managerial skills required of a museum director, with the purpose of encouraging their advancement through the ranks. Co-founded by Elizabeth Easton, former chair of the department of European painting at the Brooklyn Museum, and Agnes Gund, president emerita, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the center, which Gund has funded through its formative stages for three years, will select 10 fellows per year—presently limited to curators at institutions in the U.S.—to undergo a program of instruction and mentorship. All expenses are paid by CCL for a total of four weeks spread out over six months.

With a dearth of qualified candidates to fill a growing number of vacant directorships, many in the museum world fear that trustees and boards will turn increasingly to businessmen and others comfortable with the fiduciary end of running institutions—passing over what Easton calls “eminently educable” curators. Currently, some two dozen museums are searching for directors, among them such major institutions as the Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the National Portrait Gallery and the Phillips Collection, both in Washington, D.C.; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Details regarding most positions can be found on the Web site of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD).

“Curators should not be sidelined as mandarins, but encouraged to care about the larger institutional mission,” says Easton, who conceived the project while serving

(2003-06) as president of the Association of Art Museum Curators, which immediately upon its foundation in 2001 set the issue of advancement high on its list of priorities. “I believe it is easier to train curators in business and managerial skills than to train managers to become curators,” she adds, lamenting a trend away from research and care of collections toward bells-and-whistles social events and blockbuster shows that bring in revenues. Easton was one of a number of curators who left the Brooklyn Museum—she had been there 18 years—after a bruising reorganization last year by its director, Arnold L. Lehman [see “Front Page,” Sept. '06].

CCL's program is set to begin on January 7, 2008, with a two-week session of intensive morning classes (run by the Columbia Business School) and, in the afternoons and evenings, various lectures, panels and other events involving experts from all over the world. Participants will visit New York museums, speak to directors and CFOs, and attend social events with officials and trustees. In spring 2008, fellows will be mentored in residencies at museums other than their home institutions, and in June, they will spend a week in Los Angeles doing team assignments on a topic to be announced. Unlike the Getty Leadership Institute in L.A., an administrative skills program founded 25 years ago, CCL is not bound to a single institution (as the Getty has been since 1998), existing museum directors cannot be fellows, and all costs are paid.

The July 31 application deadline just passed as *AiA* went to press, with more than 50 applicants in the initial pool; Easton describes them as covering a range of specializations and levels, including some “very senior” candidates. The announcement of fellows will be made in early October. —*Faye Hirsch*