



## Global Caretaking

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Arts patronage takes many forms. In the Renaissance, princes and popes commissioned such artists as Michelangelo and Raphael to build and decorate entire palaces. Today most collectors content themselves with supporting artists by collecting single works that enter their homes and collections. Patronage on a grander scale usually means writing a check or attending a fundraising event to help sponsor bigger projects like museum acquisitions or building projects. The Friends of Heritage Preservation (FoHP), a small group based in Los Angeles, has devised a new and effective approach to art patronage that not only helps fund projects in their own city but also takes them around the world.

Suzanne Deal Booth, a paintings conservator who organized international conservation education programs at the Getty, is the driving force behind FoHP. "The idea came out of frustration," Booth explains as we drive toward Prague to visit the group's latest project. While working for the American Institute of Conservation, she became exasperated by the amount of time she spent lobbying the government for "miserly amounts of money." When she pointed this out to her husband, David, he reminded her that the government didn't have the funds to give and suggested she divert her energies to attracting private individuals to conservation efforts. The Booths founded FoHP in 1998 along with four other philanthropic couples they invited.

FoHP is neither a nonprofit nor a foundation. "We are a private charitable group," Booth explains. "Our aim is to work with like-minded individuals throughout the world, getting involved personally and seeing specific projects through from beginning to end." Since its founding the group has expanded from its original 10 members to 21.

On this trip to Prague, I am joining the FoHP for the unveiling of one of its latest projects, which perfectly illustrates its philosophy. Booth and I are joined by 10 other members: Alison Crowel, Gay Browne, Karin Fielding, Laurie and Bill Benenson, Les and Sherri Biller, Peter Norton, Gwen Adams and Suzanne Kayne. The project the FoHP has funded is the restoration of a group of 13 portraits from the 17th century painted by Princess Ernestine Nassau-Siegen. She is thought to have been a pupil of Gerrit van Honthorst, whom she may have studied with while her family was in exile in the Hague. FoHP was approached by William Lobkowicz, whose family moved to the United States in 1948 after the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia. William, who was born in the States, moved to Czechoslovakia in 1990, to reclaim and take care of his family's vast heritage. This is the group's third trip to Prague to visit the Lobkowiczes. "Site visits are an integral part of our working process," explains Booth, "During our first visit we met with the

Lobkowicz who presented several different projects to us. This wasn't just some project on paper. Our group spent three days not only viewing the projects, but also getting an intensive lesson in Prague's cultural history, the Lobkowicz's properties and priorities and their relevance. This way, when it came down to making a decision, we were extremely well-informed. This was not a decision that could have been made from a desk in Los Angeles."

"This small group of paintings was the perfect way for us to participate," continues Booth. "The project was contained and had a definite finish. And while the works are obviously not masterpieces, they are very important both from an historical and a cultural point of view. With our help—a donation of \$28,000 over the course of two years—we have managed to bring these paintings out of storage and into the light. We were compelled to adopt this project as it was an important compilation of work done by one artist—a 16th century woman painter—and it offered the opportunity not only to restore the works which were in poor condition, but to expose them to a larger audience for the first time. The paintings had never been treated nor exhibited together, and it was an opportunity to do so."

The 13 paintings had been in storage in the Lobkowicz's Nelahozeves Castle, and had not been put on public display due to their fragile state. In fact, the most important work of the group, a self-portrait, was extremely fragile, torn in several places with a very brittle canvas. The paintings are all half-bust portraits of young, elegantly dressed women, from the circle of Princess Ernestine. "Our aim is not only to repair the paintings, but also to learn more about the Princess's life, her artistic ambitions, as well as her sitters and the circumstances under which the portraits were painted," explains Lobkowicz.

The first stage of this project, which the Friends of Heritage funded, involved the restoration of the paintings. As always, the group likes to keep things local if possible, so skilled restorer Martin Martan was employed. Over the course of 2005 all 13 paintings were photographed and documented, including infrared reflectography and x-rays. The canvases were removed from the stretchers and stabilized, and rips were fixed. Dirt and old varnish were removed and a new coat of varnish applied. And finally the paintings were fixed onto new stretchers. "It was very cost-effective," comments member Peter Norton, a former software publisher. "We could hardly believe how changed the paintings were from our last visit." The paintings—which originally had been dark, dirty and in danger of falling apart—now hang as a suite, for the first time, in a single room, sparkling with the clear and vibrant colors that the artist originally intended. "And for us, for this relatively small amount of money, we were not only able to learn a great deal about the culture but also get our feet wet with the Lobkowicz. This was such a successful experience that I'm sure we will be discussing future projects with them at our next meeting."

In fact, before we leave, the Lobkowicz do indeed introduce us to many other projects in need of preservation and conservation, including an 18th-century Asian-style screen and a collection of handmade rifles. These and more will be discussed and decided upon by the group at their next annual meeting. The group has just made a deal to partner with the World Monuments Fund

([www.wmf.org](http://www.wmf.org)) to help restore two villages, one in Yunnan, China, and the other, a Shaker village in Lebanon, New York. "We like being involved personally," Booth says. "We like working with people and we like going out to meet them and visit the projects. So who knows? We may be headed to China soon."

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