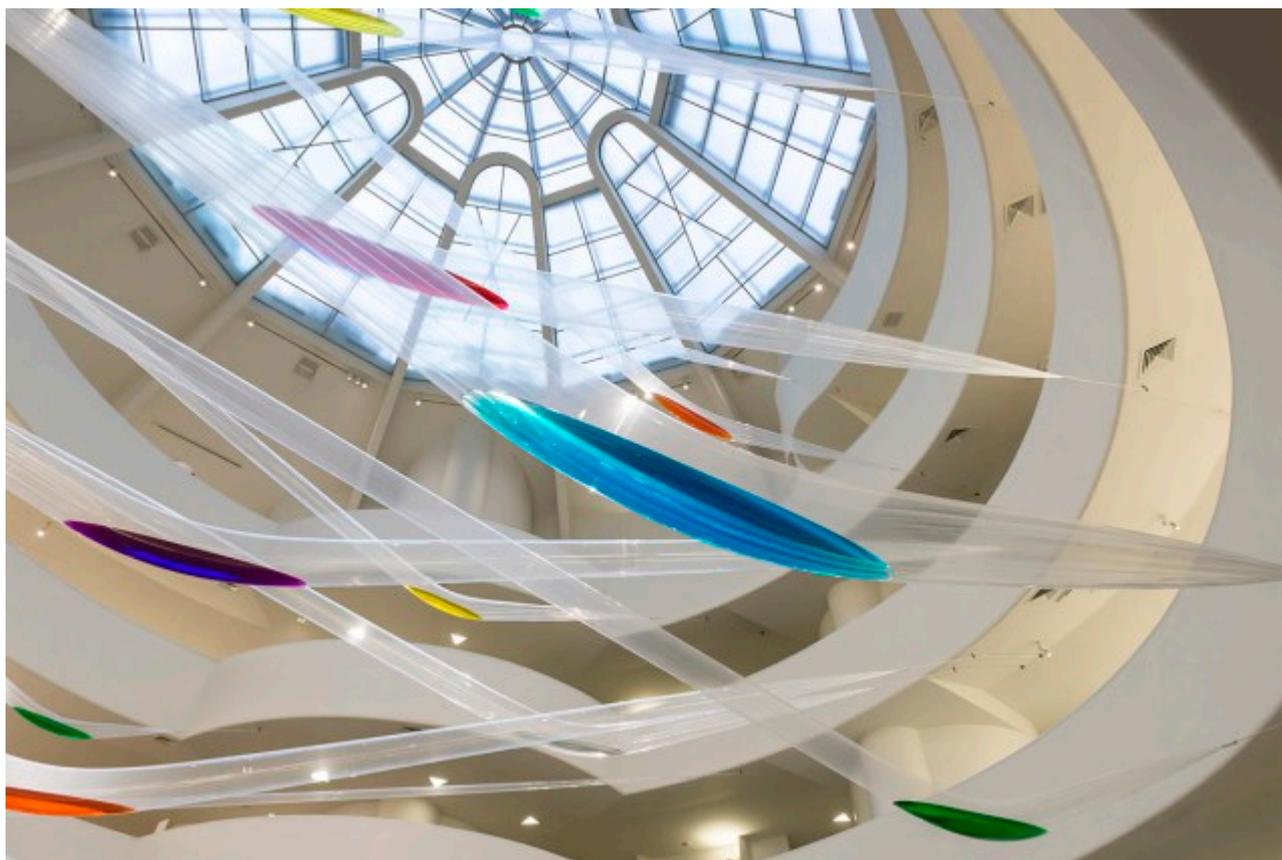


Art Agency, Partners

Art Agency, Partners is a bespoke art advisory firm founded in 2014, and built upon decades of combined experience, to provide counsel to many of the world's leading art collectors and institutions on collection assessment and development, estate planning, and innovative approaches to museum giving and growth.

An Appetite for Risk

Going Deeper Into the Forest



Installation view of "Gutai: Splendid Playground" curated by Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (15 February– 8 May 2013) © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Photo credit: David Heald

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In anticipation of the art season that is about to begin, rather than write about upcoming exhibitions or forecast what I believe will soon happen in the market, I'd rather tell you about a new project that is uppermost in my mind (and heart).

It seems increasingly the case that museum exhibitions which attempt to rethink art history—whether by staging shows of a thematic nature or retrospectives devoted to key figures who have flown under the market's radar—are becoming more and more rare.

These kinds of exhibitions are expensive to produce but difficult to fund, and tend not to attract the size of audience that would generate substantial income or provide the record-breaking statistics by which most major funders measure the value

of an exhibition (and which therefore define their priorities to support). The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles almost went out of business because of the discrepancy between the cost of a big-idea exhibition and the funds that can typically be raised to support that kind of show.

Couple this with the reality that curators are increasingly obliged to focus their energies on fundraising for their exhibitions, and it becomes abundantly obvious that the time, space and institutional resources available to think outside the norm, to stage exhibitions that draw attention elsewhere than what's already known, is in danger of becoming an endangered species. None of this is the fault of museums, as I see it, but a natural result of the economics of culture.

And so this fall, we are initiating an annual grant called the [Sotheby's Prize](#), which will fund a major museum exhibition that attempts to break new ground in our understanding of a period or a concept about art, an artist or how we experience art—exactly the kind of show that would likely not take place without these funds (up to \$250,000).

When we first thought to do this, we tested the idea on a dozen or so museum directors, curators and funding entities with an appetite for risk, and they all responded with such enthusiasm that it was clear we were on the right, and potentially contributory, track.

We received almost 100 applications from around the world. The majority are for exhibitions well worthy of funding, from small arts spaces to major museums that you wouldn't think had difficulty funding exhibitions—but they do (and not for lack of effort or expertise in raising money).

It is my hope that this prize will open the door for curators and institutions to challenge the status quo, as was the norm not so long ago, and to think in innovative ways. I hope that we are taking an important first step to helping create a safe haven for that kind of thinking. In truth, while the art market has become very efficient, it has also become somewhat lazy, and this is one of the central threats to cultural sustenance.

My secondary, though perhaps more important hope, for the prize is that it may inspire others to adopt a project that nurtures the kind of risk, experimentation and cutting-edge thinking that are necessary for culture to thrive. Many charitably minded people who choose the most familiar paths simply don't have enough entry points to help them to look beyond the most validated forms, figures and beliefs. It is time to go deeper into the forest.

There are a few other initiatives in gestation that I hope to be able to talk about before too long. Let this be the season for forging new paths.