

# MCA receives 'one of the most impactful donations' ever to its collection

This MCA gift is 'one of the most impactful donations' to its art collection in its history.

STEVE JOHNSON 



Jannis Kounellis, Untitled, 1993

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Chicago's [Museum of Contemporary Art](#) will receive some 100 contemporary works from trustee and leading international collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos, a donation that includes pieces by American multidisciplinary artists David Hammons, Robert Gober and Kiki Smith.

"This is one of the most impactful donations to the MCA collection in its entire history," said Madeleine Grynszrejn, the museum's Pritzker director, noting that it will add some 10 artists not represented in MCA holdings.

Neither Daskalopoulos nor the MCA offered an estimate of the value of the gift, and art prices are mostly speculative until works are sold. Some pieces by Hammons and Gober have sold at auction in recent years in the \$2 million to \$3 million range.

The gift is exceptional, too, in that it is being made jointly to the MCA and to New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and its foundation, the first time that a major donation has been split between museums in this way, Grynszrejn believes.

"This is the opposite of a kind of provincial way of benefiting a society or community," she said. "This really is a kind of more global, cosmopolitan way of thinking through how to benefit the public, because it was always Dimitris' intent to give this body of works away."



Ernesto Neto, It happens when the body is anatomy of time, 2000

Other museums are sharing in the bounty of Daskalopoulos, 65, a Greek native who lives in Switzerland and made his fortune converting a family dairy business into the leading Greek food conglomerate, Vivartia.

In addition to the 100 works slated for the Chicago-New York tandem, some 140 pieces from the D. Daskalopoulos Collection will go to the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens as well as 110 to the Tate in London. It was important, he said via Zoom from Athens, that the work be given to the institutions without any clauses mandating how and how often they must be shown.

"I didn't want my name on a building or a wing," he said. "I didn't want to impose a way of exhibiting things. I believe in the museums and their ability and their willingness to show the art, because that is their job."



Robert Gober, Untitled, 1992

Although he's relatively young, he said, "I want to be proactive. People don't only die of very old age. So the idea of me not being here one moment and having left a big question to my inheritors about what is to be done with it is unfair to them, it's unfair to the artists, it's unfair to the artworks."

He added: "It is really a longstanding conviction of mine that these artworks deserve to be out there, accessible to as wide a public as possible, and do their job to interact with people and create emotions and create inspiration to art lovers," he said.

The relationship with the MCA owes both to his respect for Grynsztejn, Daskalopoulos said, and to his fond memories of living here while earning and MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management in 1980 and 1981.

"It was the first time I lived outside Greece for a longer time," he said. "I was just married at the time, I had my first child in Chicago. And so I have my favorite basketball team, my preferred pizza, my preferred place for ribs. . . .And then, there is Madeleine Grynsztejn, who became a friend, who had me on her board of trustees (beginning in 2016). I admire the work she's doing and the way she's managing the museum."

Each of the sets of works being donated represents a cross-section of the D. Daskalopoulos Collection, he said. And he noted that pieces tend toward being larger scaled and "visceral."

The complete list of donated works has not yet been announced, but the sampling of what is going to the MCA-Guggenheim pairing includes such materials as human hair, animal pelts, wine and clove, cumin and turmeric.

Daskalopoulos allows that it is "not a beautiful collection," but it is one very concerned with the human body "as the locus of existence and where everything that we do or feel comes from."

Both institutions worked with the collector to select pieces that worked to fill in holes and augment strengths in their existing collections, Grynsztejn said. In the MCA's case, the works have "an immensely important art historical focus on the 1980s and 1990s," she said. "That precise period is the bedrock period for the new emerging generation of art historians, curators and artists."

Although traditional museum directorship would see institutions being loath to share bragging rights to art from a major collector, Grynsztejn says she sees the art-sharing as an opportunity and perhaps as a new, more sensible model for the discipline going forward.

"And that puts two museums on a par with each other," she said, noting that any credit line will note the joint Guggenheim-MCA Chicago ownership. "That is very flattering, and I think important. So it's a different kind of bragging right."

Bigger picture, she said, "by centering collaboration between two major institutions, it will facilitate the creation of ideas and knowledge."

Yet to be worked out are such practical considerations as where the work will be stored and how the museums will handle, for instance, a desire to show Hammons' stone, steel rail track and human hair sculpture titled John Henry at the same time.

"I have a very long and trusting relationship with (the Guggenheim's) director, Richard Armstrong," Grynsztejn said. "My hope is that this unprecedented establishment of a shared museum partnership model will become a standard for many philanthropic considerations in the future.

"You get basically double the scholarship, double the number of curatorial eyes on on a great collection . . . double the audience in different geographic regions," Grynsztejn said.