



AN
ANCIENT
AND
INTRICATE
PRACTICE

Introduction

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

Commissioning art is an age-old activity. But as more and more works are being custom-made for greater and greater numbers of individuals, organizations and places, the practice is playing a more central role in the art world than at any time in the past. There is no single way to commission contemporary art: it is in the very nature of the undertaking that every circumstance and opportunity is different, and the approaches to commissioning can — and should — be as unique and specific as the works that they generate. At the same time, however, within all the various strands of contemporary art patronage one can identify a number of common principles and protocols regarding the fundamental questions of when, why and how to commission, and how to ensure the afterlife of the commissioned work.

Commissioning Contemporary Art seeks to do just that. It plots a direct and practical route into and through the multifarious and complex permutations of contemporary commissioning — a process that has now become truly global. It aims to point out the ethical and conceptual issues that underpin current patronage, as well as provide a practical ‘nuts and bolts’ guide to bringing about a successful commission. Some of the key issues around such matters as trust, accountability and relationships between all those involved in

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a commission are also highlighted in order to provide a clear picture of best practice.

Chapter 1 explores the thinking behind the act of commissioning and considers the various and often interconnected reasons why patrons employ artists directly, and why artists choose to accept their commissions. It also sets out some guiding principles for both parties to follow throughout the whole process — that is, before, during and after the work is made. The richness and complexity of the subject is examined in Chapter 2, which looks at the myriad projects generated by the six main categories of commissioning model: the public institution; the private foundation; the public realm; the event; the private home; and the commissioning agency. This chapter is in no way exhaustive; it indicates with a summary of selected examples the way in which commissioning art is now such a fluid and expanded field, and how it is further enlivened — and complicated — when these categories overlap and sometimes even merge altogether.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough step-by-step guide through each stage of the commissioning process, from selecting and approaching an artist, developing a proposal, and drawing up a contract through to the practicalities (and pitfalls) of producing and installing a work and making sure that it is properly documented and publicized. Responsibilities do not end once a commission is in place, however. Chapter 4 therefore deals with the afterlife of the artwork, from both the commissioner's and the artist's points of view, looking at the issues of ownership, maintenance, exhibition, intellectual property, and resale and recoupment agreements.

In this way, *Commissioning Contemporary Art* not only offers practical guidance, it also demystifies a process that, despite the widespread popularity of contemporary art and the ever-growing number of newly commissioned works in both the public and private realms, remains opaque and mysterious to many. It prepares and equips potential patrons of all budgets, inclinations and ambitions to be able to commission a work or works for themselves, and shows what they might encounter along the way. It also acts as a primer for any aspiring commissioning agents or curators, and for artists who may receive a commission. But it serves another audience too: it is also a book for all those readers who have no professional connection with the art world whatsoever, but who nonetheless wish to understand the physical processes, legal and ethical debates, and logistical challenges that lie behind some of the most significant and innovative artworks of recent years.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMISSIONING

The act of commissioning is almost as old as the making of art itself. In the fifth century BC, the Greek statesman Pericles enlisted the Athenian sculptor Phidias to oversee the design and embellishment of the Parthenon; while around thirty years after Christ, the Roman emperor Nero commissioned a colossal bronze sculpture of himself from the Greek sculptor Zenodorus, which was installed just outside the main entrance of the Domus Aurea, his three-hundred-room party villa in the centre of Rome that housed extensive frescoes by the painter Famulus, who was renowned for his swiftness and delicacy of touch. From the temples, palaces and public places of ancient Greece and Rome to the grand patronage of Renaissance popes and princes, the fashionable portraits of the nineteenth century, the state-sponsored schemes of the twentieth, and the more experimental projects of today — throughout the centuries various forms of commissioning have been crucial both for the creation and display of art and for its dissemination into a wider cultural and environmental context.

Whether artists have been commissioned for purposes of prestige, propaganda, celebration, commemoration, philanthropy or pleasure — and usually a mixture of all of these is involved — direct patronage has traditionally had a status that extends beyond mere acquisition.

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Public or private, large or small, institution or individual, the process of working with an artist to produce a bespoke piece often denotes a particular level of commitment and discernment that can elevate the act to the highest level of artistic and cultural engagement. Commissioning art has therefore always been an effective means for patrons to ensure a good image for posterity. The Renaissance pope Julius II may have been known in his lifetime as the ‘Warrior Pope’ on account of his aggressive attempts to extend the Vatican’s temporal power, but today he is primarily remembered for the way he set out to enhance and adorn the image of the papacy — not to mention his personal reputation — via his patronage of some of the most important artists of the day, notably employing Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Raphael to decorate the Stanze Raffaele in the Vatican’s papal apartments, and Bramante to begin the construction of St Peter’s. Ludovico Sforza embellished the reputation of the Duchy of Milan by employing Leonardo da Vinci as court painter for more than fifteen years, most famously commissioning his *Last Supper* (1495-8) for the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Similarly, the French king Louis XIV has gone down in history as the ‘Sun King’ largely on account of his extravagant patronage of the arts, and especially the succession of specially commissioned celebratory portraits by the likes of Gianlorenzo Bernini and Hyacinthe Rigaud, all of which embedded his image in the popular consciousness.

More recently, the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, is widely cited as a paradigm of modern commissioning and philanthropy, not only because of the scale and quality of its artworks, but also on account of the fact that, more than any other collectors of the time, Dominique and Jean de Menil brought the time-honoured practice of commissioning art alongside collecting into the late twentieth century. However, unlike the monarchs and statesmen of earlier centuries, the de Menils’ starting point was the art itself and its impact on the individual viewer. This desire to make art an intense and personal experience points to a vital realignment on the part of the patron, which lies at the heart of the best contemporary commissions up to the present day. According to Dominique de Menil, the couple’s aim was to ‘preserve some of the intimacy we had enjoyed with the works of art’. This philanthropic desire to open up a privileged private experience to a wider audience can be traced back to the emergence of the public art gallery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its attendant concern with making art appreciation accessible to the whole of society. In 1971, the de Menils opened the Rothko Chapel

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in Houston, containing fourteen specially commissioned works by Mark Rothko, as a non-denominational place of sanctuary. They also commissioned a site-specific installation by Dan Flavin in Richmond Hall, a former grocery store in the city, with the artist completing the design two days before his death in 1996. Donald Judd, Cy Twombly and Richard Serra are among the many other artists who have made major pieces especially for their collection.

When the de Menils' daughter Philippa established the Dia Art Foundation in 1974 — the name is taken from the Greek word for 'through' — more commissioning benchmarks were established by the family. Dia's commissioning, production and ongoing maintenance of works considered too extensive and ambitious by other institutions or funders have included Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* in the desert of New Mexico and his *Earth Room* in New York (both 1977), which are still managed and maintained by Dia, as well as the installation of works by John Chamberlain and Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, now administered by the Chinati Foundation. The establishment of the New York project/exhibition space Dia:Chelsea in 1987 resulted in Dan Graham, Robert Gober, Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Pierre Huyghe, Lawrence Weiner and Jorge Pardo — to name but a few — creating site-specific projects for the building, many of which have now entered into the Dia's permanent collection. Since 2003, this collection has been housed in Dia:Beacon on the Hudson River in New York state.

As the market economy boomed after the Second World War, commercial companies and corporations increasingly began to acquire and commission art in a similar manner to the great courts and noble families of earlier centuries. Among the first to do so was the JP Morgan Chase Art Collection, established by the company's president David Rockefeller as the Chase Manhattan Programme in 1959, which now numbers more than 30,000 items. Many of these works were commissions, some made by Rockefeller personally, including Peter Halley's 1990 painting *Commission for One Chase Manhattan Plaza Boardroom* and an untitled mural by Sam Francis from 1959, which was first spotted by Rockefeller in the artist's studio and then modified into a commission for the company headquarters. While economies dip and dive, companies continue to recognize the benefits in terms of profile, image-enhancement and workforce satisfaction that can accrue from having artists produce pieces specifically for their premises, even if, when times are leaner, they may choose to reduce their commissioning activities.

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In recent years, commissions have often been linked to a place as well as to a patron. In the process of commemorating an individual or an event, a commissioned artwork frequently defines its surroundings as much as it is shaped by them. *Silence* (2007), Paul de Monchaux's memorial on the island of Jersey, for example, marks the main entrance to the complex of tunnels built by slave workers for the Nazis during the Second World War, as well as commemorating their labour and loss of life; while a very different consideration for the immediate environment has made Jorge Pardo's wooden *Pier*, originally built for the Münster Sculpture Project in 1997 on the north-western bank of Lake Aasee, into a permanent and much loved local amenity and landmark.

In the greatly expanded global art world of the twenty-first century, commissioning is now just one among many means of obtaining art, yet the adventurous commissioning of a radical artwork is widely considered to be among the most prestigious form of patronage, in contrast to acquiring work that has already been produced. Whether it is Tate Modern commissioning Doris Salcedo's fissure running along the floor of the Turbine Hall in 2007; or the 8th Sharjah Biennial enabling Gustav Metzger's exhaust-belching twenty-car *Project Stockholm* (an idea devised in 1972, but realized only in 2008); or Anish Kapoor's giant reflective *Cloud Gate*, inaugurated in 2006 for Chicago's Millennium Park; or Doug Aitken's *Sound Pavilion* (2009), which listens to the rumblings of the Earth's core in the Instituto Inhotim in Brazil; or Andrea Zittel's guest caravan commissioned specifically for Cincinnati collector Andy Stillpass in 1998 — each of these projects carries the special cachet of being utterly specific to their particular time and place.

But today's various commissioning models are not always neatly and mutually exclusive. Both conceptually and practically, the commissioning of contemporary art has become an increasingly complex affair. Elements from different commissioning models are often combined to enable a particular project to come to fruition: for example, a private individual or group of patrons may co-sponsor a project for a civic site or partner with a commissioning organization, while public museums across the world increasingly rely on partnerships with private patrons and the commercial sector to enable them to achieve particular commissions. The support of Tate's annual Turbine Hall commissions by the multinational corporation Unilever, or the annual programme of new artworks by the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin, made possible by a collaboration between Deutsche Bank and

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the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, are just two examples of a wide variety of partnerships that have been forged across the commissioning spectrum in the past fifteen years.

Alongside the greatly expanded range of options and opportunities for commissioning, the art itself is also now infinitely more varied than the paintings and sculpture of previous centuries. In many of today's commissions, the permanent and monumental has been replaced by the temporary, the ephemeral and the immaterial. Increasingly, there has been a burgeoning of performative 'live' commissions that work with site, event and situation in radical ways beyond the traditional art object as we understand it. Pawel Althamer's giant inflatable self-portrait that was commissioned by the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi to hover above Milan's Arena Civica for a few weeks in May and June 2007, and Candice Breitz's first ever live performance work, *New York, New York*, commissioned by Performa in New York in 2009, are both examples of this new, extended model. So too are Gregor Schneider's queue of unsuspecting art-world habitués who formed a line around the Berlin State Opera in 2007 courtesy of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary foundation (also known as T-B A21); Tino Sehgal's visitor-activated singing Mexican women commissioned for the Culiacán Botanical Garden in Mexico in 2010; and Jeremy Deller's *It Is What It Is: Conversations about Iraq*, a series of public discussions that began in 2009 at the New Museum in New York and extended across America to a number of institutions and public spaces, with the artist being accompanied on the tour by an American war veteran and a wrecked car salvaged from a suicide-bomb attack in Baghdad.

Yet whatever the motivation, the medium or the era, at the heart of any commission lies the relationship between artist and patron. This has always been a highly delicate and potentially volatile dynamic requiring careful management with a strong element of risk, although with the promise of great benefits. Today it can be a complex and protracted process to commission an artist, especially a well-known one, to produce a unique piece; however history tells us that this is not necessarily a new phenomenon. According to Plutarch, the Athenian general and politician Alcibiades was so keen to get his house painted by the prestigious Greek painter Agatharcos that he kept him prisoner for three months, refusing to let him leave until he had completed the task. King Charles I of England used the lure of a knighthood to entice Peter Paul Rubens to London to paint the ceiling of the Whitehall Banqueting Hall in 1635 and then remain as

court painter — although as soon as the commission was completed, Rubens took his knighthood and decamped to Antwerp (to the monarch's chagrin), leaving his pupil Anthony Van Dyck on the payroll of the Stuart court.

At other points, however, the artist has been more beholden to the patron. The Renaissance may have ushered the notion of the artist as a distinct autonomous individual as opposed to the usually anonymous medieval artisan, but even in the highest-profile commissions what would now be regarded as the demeaning of great talent was standard practice. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, artists often resided with their patrons not as guests but as part of the household, receiving board and lodging and a stipend in return for accommodating their sponsor's aesthetic whims. Indeed, Andrea Mantegna was considered such a chattel by the Gonzaga court in Mantua where he resided from 1460 until his death in 1506 that, in addition to executing his better-known series of paintings and frescoes he was also put to work designing bowls and beakers and even on occasions had to suffer the ultimate indignity of being lent out by the Gonzaga family as a gesture of friendship to important allies such as the Duke of Milan.

Michelangelo might have professed himself delighted that he had always worked in great households for noble patrons — 'I was never the kind of painter or sculptor who sets up shop for that purpose' — and that he was paid by stipend rather than as artisanal 'piece-work', but while he might have been above an artisan in the cultural pecking order, his status was still that of gentleman-in-service, doing the bidding of his patron. Giorgio Vasari documents Michelangelo's unhappiness at being forced by Julius II to paint rather than sculpt in the Sistine Chapel, as well as recording the haggling between artist and patron over time and money: 'The Pope threatened that if Michelangelo did not finish the ceiling quickly he would have him thrown down from the scaffolding. Then Michelangelo, who had good reason to fear the Pope's anger, lost no time in doing all that was wanted.'

On other occasions, however, terms were more favourable. So keen was the Roman banking mogul Antonio Chigi to induce Raphael to complete the frescoes for his sumptuously decorated Villa Farnesina that he allegedly offered to install Raphael's mistress in residence there, to save the artist's time during the last phases of work. Sadly the generous offer backfired when Raphael died from a 'surfeit of love' after a visit to his mistress while she was still living up the road from the villa.

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The emergence of new social forms in the nineteenth century with the Industrial Revolution saw a gradual shift away from the European patronage system towards the evolution of a fully fledged art market where artworks were individually bought and sold. Accordingly, artists were increasingly esteemed for their originality of vision rather than for their particular skills. This growing autonomy and authority of the artist coloured not only the development of contemporary art, but also the attitude of the artist towards patronage. While commissions still took place, they increasingly tended to be portraits or more conventional decorative schemes, with the work of more progressive artists often proving to be less immediately conducive to the desires of the patron and the sometimes limited parameters of the commissioning process.

The famous court case in France between James McNeill Whistler and Sir William Eden, which was initiated in 1894 and finally resolved in Whistler's favour in 1900, reveals how the attitude of an artist towards his patron could swing from deference to defiance: an ambivalence that remains a potent factor in many commissions up to the present day, with the artist, rather than the patron, often remaining at the centre of any project. When Whistler declared his commissioned portrait of Lady Eden almost complete, he accepted and cashed a cheque for one hundred guineas from his patron. However, he then refused to deliver the work and returned the money, having substituted the face of Lady Eden with that of another. When the court demanded that Whistler both pay back the fee and return the work, the artist appealed, claiming that the portrait of Lady Eden no longer existed and in any case the work was unfinished, and it was up to the artist to decide when his painting was completed. After a second appeal, the court found in Whistler's favour and established the principle of the artwork as something precious and primarily connected to the artist.

However, some other early commissions that involved the more radical artists of the day working in the public sphere did not end so well. The Mexican muralist Diego Rivera may have been paid in full by John D. Rockefeller, who specified the subject and approved the design for the mural *Man at the Crossroads* of 1932–3 for his new Rockefeller Center, but that did not prevent Rockefeller from forcing Rivera to abandon the project and immediately destroying the mural when he refused to replace the face of Lenin with that of an unknown worker. Also in 1933, on the other side of the Atlantic, there was an outcry over sculptor Eric Gill's naked figure of Ariel commissioned by

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the BBC to decorate the newly built Broadcasting House in London, after comments about the size of his genitalia prompted a question in the House of Commons about the offence to public morals caused by the work. When BBC director-general Lord Reith ordered Gill to adjust Ariel's dimensions to more decent proportions, the artist initially refused, only acquiescing after a committee of noted Shakespeareans and a medical doctor concluded that Ariel's approximate age should be thirteen and that the sculpture did not reflect this fact. The necessary surgery was duly performed and the adjusted statue of Ariel put into the place that it still occupies on the building.

Another renowned commission that did not go according to plan was by the American beverage company Joseph Seagram and Sons, which, upon completing its new building on Park Avenue, designed by Mies Van der Rohe and Philip Johnson in 1958, decided that Mark Rothko was a suitably avant-garde candidate to produce a series of paintings for the building's new luxury restaurant, The Four Seasons. However, although the commission gave Rothko the intriguing challenge of designing a coordinated series of paintings and producing a composite artwork for a large, specific interior, and in spite of his altering his normal horizontal format to vertical to complement the restaurant's columns, walls, doors and windows, once he had visited the near-completed restaurant he deemed the atmosphere and ambience pretentious and inappropriate for the display of his works. Rothko refused to continue with the project and returned his cash advance to the company. Given that he had known in advance about the luxury decor of the restaurant and the social class of its intended clientele, the exact reasons for his sudden repudiation remain mysterious, although they point to the dependence of all commissions on the goodwill and temperament of the artist. (There is one school of thought that Rothko was under the impression that his murals would be displayed in the lobby of this prestigious new building, not the restaurant.) The commissioned paintings were kept in storage until 1968 and now hang in three locations: Tate Modern in London; Japan's Kawamura Memorial Museum; and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

It still tends to be within the realm of public commissions, where profiles are higher, audiences larger and the stakes correspondingly greater, that the parameters of patronage and the wider issues around the function and evaluation of contemporary art continue to be tested. Despite a lengthy court battle, Richard Serra ultimately could not prevent the removal of his sculpture *Tilted Arc*, commissioned by the

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Art in Architecture programme of the United States General Services Administration (GSA) for Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. Almost immediately after its installation in 1981, the nearly forty-metre-long, four-metre-high piece of Cor-Ten steel that effectively cut the plaza in half generated an escalating wave of public complaints, with office workers resenting the fact that they had to circumnavigate the piece in order to cross the square. Petitions with thousands of signatures were submitted calling for the sculpture's removal, and, despite passionate support from the arts establishment, a public hearing ruled that the piece be removed. Serra declared that this effectively meant its destruction, stating that 'a site-specific sculpture is one that is conceived and created in relation to the particular conditions of a specific site and only to those conditions' and appealed against the ruling. Yet ultimately the GSA's right to keep their square unobstructed prevailed, and on 15 March 1989 federal workers cut the work into three pieces and carted it off to a scrapyard.

The aftermath of the *Tilted Arc* saga saw the passing in 1990 of the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA), which amended United States copyright law to provide artists with moral rights of attribution and integrity, including the right 'to prevent any intentional or grossly negligent destruction of a work of recognized stature'. This provided an important symbolic and legal safeguard for the artist within the commissioning process. In 2008, the muralist Ken Twitchell invoked VARA and won a significant victory for the rights of the commissioned artist when he settled a lawsuit of \$1.1 million against the United States government and twelve other defendants when his twenty-one-metre mural of artist Ed Ruscha in Los Angeles was over-painted without authorization.

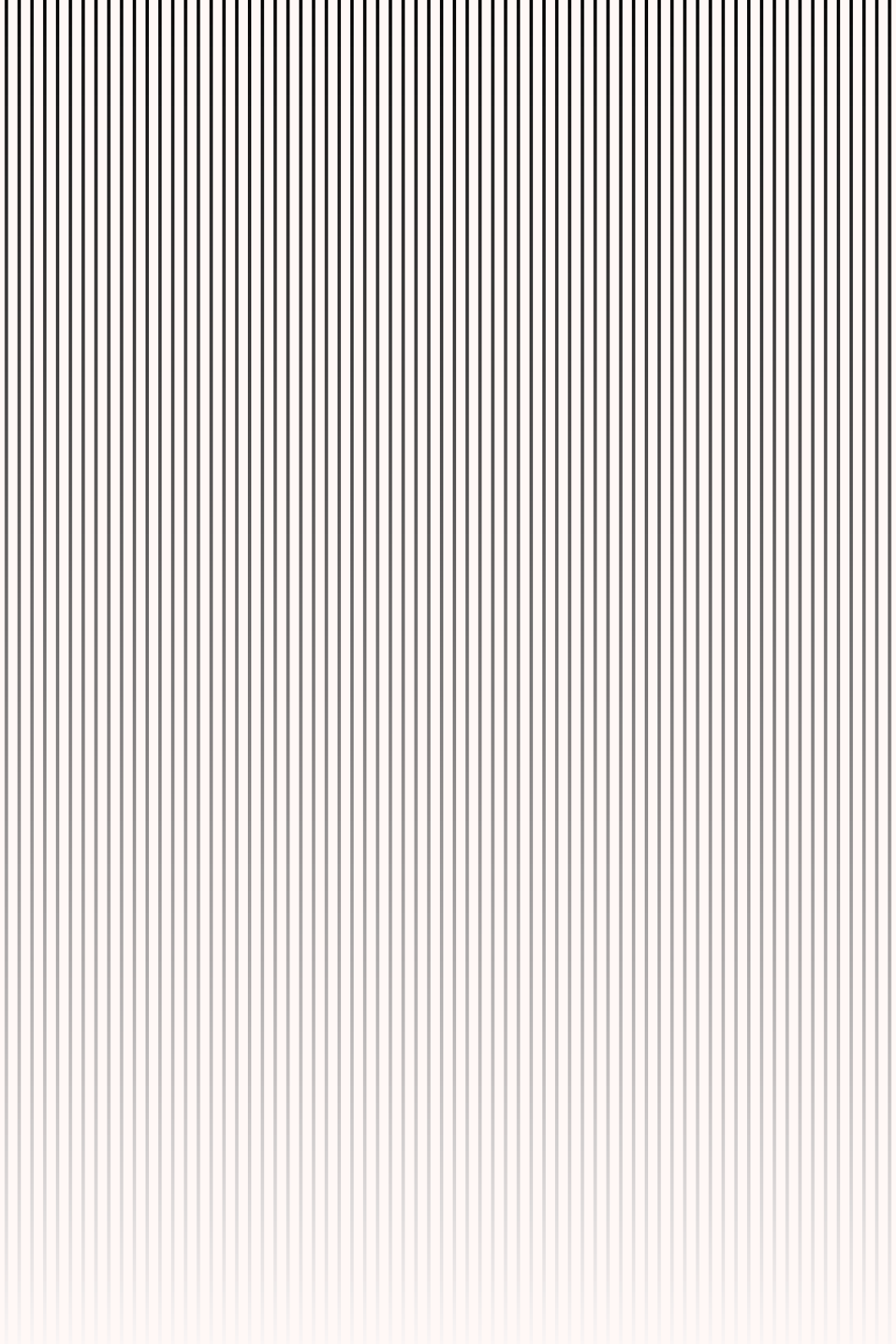
The recent legal proceedings between the Swiss artist Christoph Büchel and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Massachusetts (Mass MoCA) further shows that the act of commissioning and exchanges between artist and patron can still be fraught with pitfalls. It also confirms the importance of drawing up a detailed contract to prevent the opportunity for things to go awry. In 2006, Mass MoCA commissioned Büchel to produce *Training Ground for Democracy*, an ambitious piece involving the construction of a full-scale mock-up village based on those used by the US army to train its soldiers for the Iraq War, for a solo exhibition that was scheduled to open at the end of December 2006. After what Mass MoCA alleges was significant additional funding and deadline extensions, Büchel abandoned the work, counterclaiming that the museum had failed to support and finance

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the project as it evolved. Mass MoCA then cancelled Büchel's exhibition but announced its intention to display Büchel's unfinished work in a different exhibition, causing Büchel's lawyers to invoke VARA by claiming that such an act would infringe his moral rights and reputation as an artist. After a series of appeals and counterappeals from both sides, the issue of whether Büchel's integrity was infringed remained undecided while the piece was dismantled.

The case demonstrates that while today's extensive art world offers greater opportunities for commissioners of all levels, this state of affairs has not made the process of commissioning art any more straightforward. On the contrary, it has arguably made matters infinitely more complicated. Now that artists are being commissioned to produce multimedia works both temporary and permanent, and for museums, biennials and domestic spaces as well as within a public realm that can span from the traditional plaza to cyberspace, what has always been a complex activity has now become ever more intricate and freighted with ethical, legal and financial considerations.

Yet it is this very complexity that makes the subject of commissioning so fascinating, encompassing as it does so many issues that extend beyond the artistic. And it has to be emphasized that only a very small proportion of commissions end in failure, compared to the rich and diverse range of exceptional projects that owe their existence to the act of commissioning. As the possibilities of contemporary art become more dynamic and diverse, so this is reflected in the range of adventurous projects that are currently being made possible by commissioners of all kinds, who are further increasing their scope with new networks and partnerships, and offering artists the opportunity to be infinitely inventive. So, as well as providing a guide through the processes and models of commissioning, *Commissioning Contemporary Art* aims both to celebrate and to extend the potential of this wide and varied field, which is responsible for bringing the most exciting and innovative art to locations across the globe.





**WHY
UNDERTAKE
A
COMMISSION?**

Chapter 1

**The excitement is to produce
new works, to make them happen.
There is a utopian aspect to
commissioning: you are very close
to the artist's intentions.**

**Christine Van Assche,
chief curator and curator of new media,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris**

THE PATRON'S PERSPECTIVE

Whether undertaken by a public institution or a private individual, commissioning contemporary art is often an intricate and specialized business, especially as what constitutes a commission can now range from a monumental steel sculpture to a carnival parade. The various protocols, procedures and agendas in sourcing and approaching artists through public and commercial galleries, art consultants and art fairs all require careful negotiation, alongside the need to grapple with the myriad forms and concepts of contemporary art itself. As a result, specialist curators, commissioning consultants, independent producers and commissioning agencies increasingly play a key role played in the process. Especially in the public realm or in the case of large-scale projects, these individuals or organizations are crucial to facilitating every stage, from the initial selection of the artist to the ultimate completion of the commission and the effective management of its afterlife. (For purposes of clarity, throughout this book individual intermediaries who work on behalf of a commissioning client will be referred to as commissioning agents, while organizations that exist to carry out commissions either on their own behalf or for clients will be described as commissioning agencies.)

Within this complex ecosystem, the commission-based patronage of individual artists is undoubtedly one of the most sophisticated forms of artistic engagement. Even among those well versed in the

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contemporary art world, it is only the most dedicated, enthusiastic and committed who are prepared to take the plunge and venture into what can be a minefield.

Commissioning is a much more difficult process than building a collection, and because of that, you probably shouldn't be thinking about it unless you have been at it for a while, maybe a decade or so. You have to have a sense of who you are as a collector.

Dennis Scholl, collector, Miami

So what lies behind the leap of faith that distinguishes a commissioner from a normal purchaser of contemporary art? Why are an increasing number of organizations, institutions and individuals choosing to have work specially made for them, rather than buy it off the peg when their budgets and locations would allow them to do either? It is not simply a matter of acquisition, since many of today's commissioned artworks are brought into existence for reasons other than individual ownership. Both the desire for a unique bespoke artwork and the enduring prestige of the artistic commission may go a long way towards explaining why local authorities and developers commission art for architectural schemes and public spaces, why collectors commission works for their homes, and why curators work directly with artists on projects for museums and galleries. But behind these concerns lie a number of other key reasons why, even with all the attendant complications, an ever-greater number of individuals and organizations are keen to commission.

Over the years I have learned a lot: about chemical processes, treatments of metals, exotic flora and fauna, the problems of floor load capacities and much more. If you are not interested in this kind of experience, than I would recommend that you don't commission any artworks, except for small paintings.

Miuccia Prada, president, Fondazione Prada, Milan

Forging a relationship with an artist

One of the most appealing features of commissioning an artwork is that it generally involves entering into what can often be an intense dialogue with the artist. This patron-artist relationship can provide the commissioner with a privileged insight and involvement in the

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creative process, and in some cases even the chance to have an impact on it. Thereafter, the patron — whether public body, commercial organization, private foundation or individual — can be both actor in and witness to the artist's vision, and in many cases have the added bonus of owning the outcome — or at least the satisfaction of exhibiting it and of being associated with it. Museum curators, independent not-for-profit producers, representatives of commissioning bodies and especially private collectors all testify to the importance of this relationship and creative exchange.

When I was in college I read John Dewey's *Art as Experience* and the idea that art should be an experience became very important to me. So by commissioning works I feel that I'm collecting experiences. I love the objects that have resulted. They have become part of my life. But just as important are the memories and the experience of working closely with the artists and having them here in the house.

.....
Andy Stillpass, collector, Cincinnati
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One of the biggest advantages is the contact with the artist and their process. It's an amazing journey, very educational and rewarding. When the commission is complete, you have more than an artwork; the relationship between your history and the work's history ... it makes the collection more alive.

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Anita Zabłudowicz, collector, London
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The key is the trust between the artist and the curator; that trust is the curator's highest reward.

.....
Chrissie Iles, Anne and Joel Ehrenkrantz Curator,
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
.....

Creating culture

Whatever the scale or nature of the commission, it carries with it the excitement of being involved in bringing something new and unknown into the world, and thus potentially having a direct role in adding to art history. At the same time, it is also satisfying and reassuring for many commissioners to know that with the works they are commissioning they are continuing a long tradition of patronage established over centuries, however radical those contemporary artworks may be.