

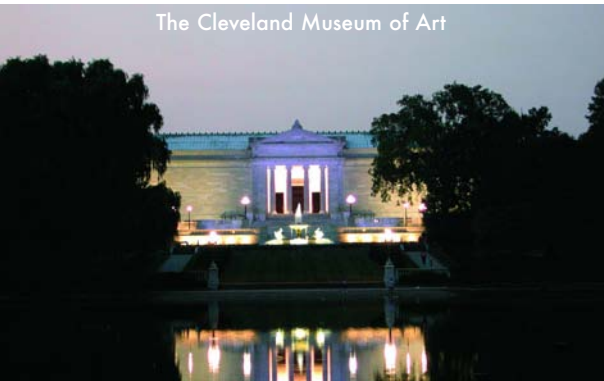
FRAME

THE ART OF DIPLOMACY

A Conversation with Elizabeth Rohatyn

This summer, the Clark hosts the highly acclaimed exhibition *"Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!": The Bruyas Collection from the Musée Fabre, Montpellier*, which was organized under the auspices of FRAME (French Regional and American Museum Exchange), a consortium of nine French and nine American art museums. Curtis Scott, the Clark's senior manager of publications, recently sat down with Elizabeth Rohatyn, co-founder of FRAME, to discuss the consortium's history, goals, and achievements. A longtime trustee of the New York Public Library and an active supporter of the arts in general, Elizabeth is also the wife of Felix Rohatyn, who was U.S. ambassador to France from 1997 to 2001.

The Cleveland Museum of Art



Musée de Grenoble



Dallas Museum of Art



CS: I wonder if you could tell me about the origins of FRAME. Whose idea was it and when did it start?

ER: At the beginning of my husband's tenure as ambassador to France, he found that because of financial constraints, many of the regional American consulates around France had been closed—I think there were perhaps only two left, Marseille and Strasbourg—and he wanted very much to make the American presence felt more throughout the country, rather than just centrally in Paris. He felt it was important to go about the country not only to discuss America's plans and policies, but also to listen to those of the French and to strengthen ties in all kinds of directions, such as cooperation in industry and in finance and in public affairs. So we traveled around the country and, while doing that, I had the good fortune to visit all of these extraordinary museums in cities all around France. When we came back to Paris, Felix asked me to help him think of a cultural project, and I told him I felt it would be a wonderful opportunity for us to form a consortium with American and French regional museums so that visitors to each country could experience the marvelous sorts of adventures I had had in discovering French culture through art. It would be a kind of "cultural diplomacy." He thought that was great and said, "Let's go for it."

CS: What were the next steps then?

ER: So the next steps were to decide who was going to lead this effort and which institutions should be included. I had a wonderful team at the American embassy, headed by Bill Barrett and members in the cultural attaché's office, and we thought that the best person to represent the French would be Françoise Cachin, who had been the director of the Musée d'Orsay and was then the director of the Musées de France, a national administrative body that oversees the hundreds of regional and municipal museums across France. I had met Françoise at a dinner party and asked her if I could come to see her and talk to her about this idea I had. She thought it was fantastic, was delighted, and said she had been thinking along some of the same lines, and so she joined forces to identify the French participants and to help with the formation of the consortium.

CS: And your team selected the American museums?

ER: Well, I didn't really know the American museum scene at all, so I was a bit concerned and asked Felix whom we felt we could reach out to. He remembered that his friend John Bryan, who was then the head of the Sara Lee Corporation, had donated the company's extraordinary collection of paintings and sculptures assembled by its founder to some forty museums around the world. Rick Brettell, who was a prominent expert



Elizabeth Rohatyn (*left*) and Françoise Cachin, co-founders of FRAME

on nineteenth-century art, had been the curator of the collection and had overseen its dispersal, and so we called him. Rick was delighted and thought it was a terrific idea, and so we all got together to designate the regional museums: Françoise chose the French museums because she knew them so very well, and Rick did the same for the American museums. He knew them very, very well.

CS: So then, once the museums were selected, how did you go about organizing and planning exhibitions?

ER: Well, the next step was to bring all of the museum directors together, to find a place to meet, and to see where we went



Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille



California Palace of the Legion of Honor
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon



At the FRAME annual meeting in October 2003, hosted by the Portland Museum of Art, members also took time to admire some of the area's natural wonders

from there. Since Lyon was the first American consular post that Felix had revived, we thought that would be the best place to have our first meeting. I also felt that we needed to have some weight behind this project, and so Françoise and I asked the First Lady, Madame Bernadette Chirac, to be our honorary president, and she gracefully accepted and even came to Lyon for the meeting. The mayor of Lyon, Raymond Barre, gave us an extraordinary, sumptuous, elegant dinner in a magnificent room in the Hotel de Ville that had been built to receive Louis XIV on his first royal visit to the city. The directors of the nine American museums came, and the nine French directors and some of their curators came, and I held my breath because I saw all of these very elegant, brilliant men and women coming together, all believing that they had the greatest museums in the world—and they do—and I thought, “Oh, my word! Is this ever going to work?” And after a very few minutes you could see that they were fascinated with each other, and asking each other, “How do you do your collections?” and “What do you do about conservation?” and so it got very exciting and I knew that we were on our way.

CS: It sounds to me like it was quite overwhelming for everyone. Such pomp and circumstance would have put quite the official stamp on things and said, “We are really serious about this.”

ER: Well it did, but the complication of it was that because it was such an overwhelming event, so many people and so many thoughts and so on, it has taken some time to kind of winnow out and really develop, as you wish, our “soul.” We decided at the beginning that our mission was to have the museums themselves decide what kinds of projects and exhibitions they were going to do, and in order to be able to do that, they first would have to make visits to each other’s museums. And so the nine French directors came to the American museums for visits and to see their collections, and vice versa. Out of that first meeting grew wonderful things and the beginnings of many friendships.

CS: With the centralized French structure—one administrative body overseeing all of the regional museums—it seems that as long as you had someone like Françoise Cachin on board, she could kind of drive things on their side, but with the independent American museums, building consensus must have been much more difficult.

ER: Absolutely. Because the French are under a single umbrella and, I think, all the directors of the Musées de France meet every single month and talk about policy and what they’re going to do and how they’re going to collect and so on, and we don’t have that. The American museum directors meet just a couple of times each year, and their meetings have nothing to



The Minneapolis Institute of Arts



Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes



Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon

do with FRAME. In fact, in order to see our American directors more frequently, we have started going to their annual meetings to have an early breakfast meeting devoted to FRAME.

CS: So FRAME has been a tougher sell on this side of the Atlantic?

ER: Well, not really. It's just been more difficult. The benefits of the program were apparent much sooner in France because the first exhibitions were held there, in 2001 and 2002, while the first FRAME exhibition didn't come to America until 2003, so there was a long time before the consortium really began bearing fruit for us on the American side.

CS: But enthusiasm has picked up now among the Americans?

ER: Oh, absolutely. In fact, we've been approached by a number of other American museums that wish to be added to FRAME if we ever expand.

CS: Is that likely?

ER: It's certainly possible; in fact it's under consideration right now, and, if agreed to by our current members, a small group of new members will join us at our next annual meeting in Grenoble. We've only recently been able to do by-laws, which have been approved by all the American museums and all the French museums. We could have never done that in the first two years because everything was too new and too misunderstood between the two sides, what the needs and demands of a consortium would really mean, and so we've kind of formed ourselves as we've moved along and grown.

CS: What have been the most difficult issues?

ER: Sometimes it's just a matter of the cultural differences between the French and American museum systems. For example, the Americans schedule their exhibitions much further out,

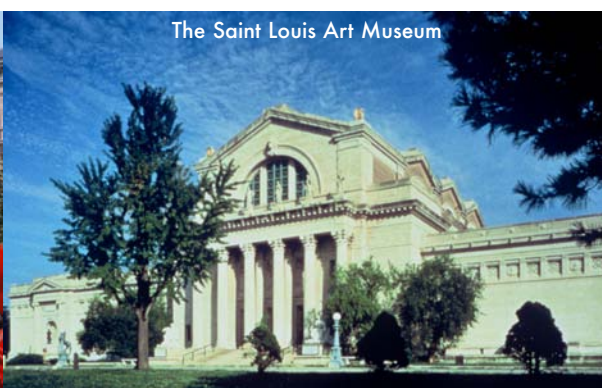


Curtis Scott, the Clark's senior manager of publications, and Geneviève Rudolf, editor at the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, check color proofs for the *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!* exhibition catalogue, co-published by the Clark and the RMN

which caused us problems in the beginning because the French, who could accommodate exhibitions on shorter notice, couldn't understand why the Americans kept saying, "No, I can't take that. No, that's too big." It caused a sort of consternation until the French realized that the Americans weren't being negative; it was just the constraints of what they were doing. Similarly, the role of the registrar is very different in France than it is in the U.S. The registrar in an American museum is very much in the loop on discussing loans and how they are to be carried out and what the standards for transporting and exhibiting the works of art will be. The French have their standards, too; they're just different from ours, and they don't have the personnel that we do in our museums to have special departments for this. At some point I realized that there was quite a bit of frustration at the difference of the standards, and so I went to St. Louis and Dallas to meet with the American registrars, to understand who they were and what their role was in the museum. Then I asked both the French and the Americans to write out what their standards and needs were, and to come together and refine something we could all agree upon to be the protocol for all of us for the future.



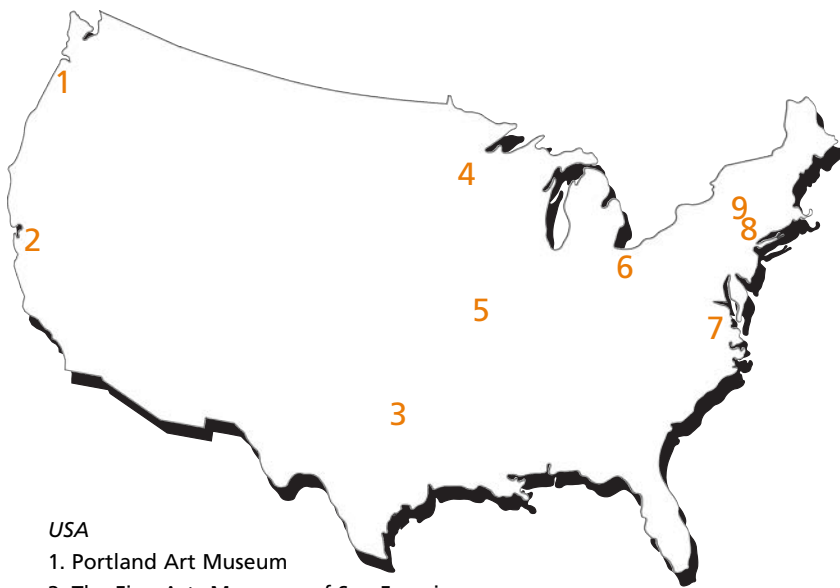
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen



The Saint Louis Art Museum

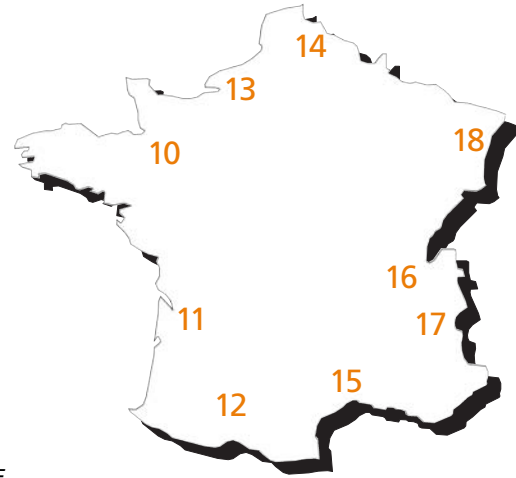


Musée des Augustins, Toulouse



USA

1. Portland Art Museum
2. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
3. Dallas Museum of Art
4. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts
5. The Saint Louis Art Museum
6. The Cleveland Museum of Art
7. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
8. Yale University Art Gallery
9. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute



FRANCE

10. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes
11. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux
12. Musée des Augustins, Toulouse
13. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen
14. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille
15. Musée Fabre, Montpellier
16. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon
17. Musée de Grenoble
18. Musées de Strasbourg

CS: What are some of the other challenges you've faced?

ER: Our very first exhibition, a wonderful survey of American art from 1908 to 1947 called *Made in USA*, was scheduled to open in Bordeaux just a month after the tragedy of September 11. We were all quite stunned by this horrible terrorist act, yet despite the tremendous shock the American lenders still wanted to make this exchange, to show that they would continue. It was important for both sides.

CS: Another step forward for cultural diplomacy.

ER: Yes.

CS: What are some of FRAME's less obvious achievements?

ER: Well, simply by taking an exhibition like *Made in USA* or *Sacred Symbols* [an exhibition of pre-Columbian and Native American art] to museums outside of Paris—and together they traveled to five different regional French museums—we have

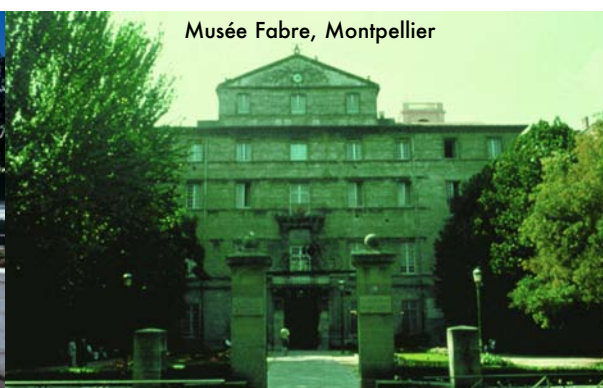
reached new audiences in places where those kinds of art are rarely seen. Another example of cultural diplomacy would be our exchange of ideas. Early on, two of the French directors [Rodolphe Rapetti and Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée] came to Williamstown as visiting scholars, where they discovered your extraordinary research library and found it to be such a marvelous place to study and to develop their ideas. That was very much part of what my initial hope and idea was—that the French would really get to know us and how we think and see us in a different perspective than the usual political and economic ones that are always in the newspapers.

CS: So what, then, does the future hold?

ER: Felix and I left France at the end of 2000, and we didn't know what was going to happen with FRAME. But everybody said, "Well, let's just keep going. It's extraordinary. It's unique, and we're all achieving wonderful things," and so I said to Felix, "Let's go for it." We've had incredible support from foundations and individuals and municipalities in France and here in



Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute
Williamstown, Massachusetts



Musée Fabre, Montpellier



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond



Left to right: Major Richard S. Reynolds III, Lynn Orr, curator-in-charge of European art at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, and William Barrett, special consultant to FRAME, at the opening of the *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!* exhibition in Richmond

America. We've also had very generous support from French and American companies—from FedEx Corporation and United Technologies here in the U.S. to Lagardère, Publicis, Saint-Gobain, Lafarge, and Suez in France. That's not bad, given the current political climate. So we're very excited with the chance to grow, to respond, to open up opportunities between the two countries to know more about each other's cultures. We hope in the future to develop much deeper and broader education programs to bring schoolchildren together through their own learning processes. As time goes on, FRAME grows and adapts to what the demands are between two different cultures. It's an amazing sort of thing and it's why I refer to it as cultural diplomacy. We're learning to deal with each other's structures and not just say, "This is the only way to do it. We're going to do it this way." And so, I think it is very healthy for peoples that think and do things differently to come together and work in ways where each one's integrity can remain while they deal with what the problems are.

FRAME EXHIBITIONS

FRAME

Raphael and His Age:
Drawings from the Palais
des Beaux-Arts, Lille

The Cleveland Museum of Art
August 25–November 3, 2002

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille
Autumn 2003

Made in USA: American Art,
1908–1947

Musée des Beaux-Arts,
Bordeaux
October 10–December 31, 2001

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes
January 18–March 31, 2002

Musée Fabre, Montpellier
April 12–June 23, 2002

The Triumph of French
Painting: Seventeenth-
Century Masterpieces from
the Museums of FRAME

Portland Art Museum
October 11, 2003–January 4,
2004

Birmingham Museum of Art,
Birmingham, Alabama
January 25–April 11, 2004

Form, Spirit, and
Metamorphosis: The Camera
Work of Four American
Master Photographers

Musées de Strasbourg
February 15–April 21, 2002

"Bonjour, Monsieur
Courbet!": The Bruyas
Collection from the Musée
Fabre, Montpellier

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
March 26–June 13, 2004

Sacred Symbols

Musée Fabre, Montpellier
July 17–September 29, 2002

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen
October 25, 2002–January 13,
2003

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon
February 20–April 28, 2003

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes
May 28–August 18, 2003

Sterling and Francine
Clark Art Institute
June 27–September 6

Dallas Museum of Art
October 17, 2004–January 2,
2005

California Palace of the
Legion of Honor
Fine Arts Museums of
San Francisco
January 22–April 3, 2005

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux



Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut



Musées de Strasbourg

