

LACMA and the Autry Museum announce new partnership to share their art



Chris Burden's "Urban Light" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The museum announced a new partnership with the Autry Museum of the American West. (Peter J. Holliday / Special to The Times)



By **Deborah Vankin**

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The Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Autry Museum of the American West are kicking off 2018 with a collaboration: The two institutions have entered a long-term partnership in which they will pool curatorial resources, create joint programming and share their art collections for exhibitions.

LACMA Director Michael Govan and Autry President and Chief Executive W. Richard West Jr. have been hashing out details of the partnership for more than two years, LACMA said. The partnership will allow both museums to broaden their audiences and will eliminate lengthy negotiations for art loans. Open access to each others' collections will promote easy viewing of art in storage for research and lending purposes.

“The idea is to treat our collections as one and for our curators to work together accordingly,” Govan said in the announcement. “This exchange of works and ideas will allow both museums to bolster exhibition content especially in the areas of the historical and contemporary American West and the exploration of indigenous cultures across the Americas.”

The Autry’s West said the partnership was a sign of the times.

“Gone is the era when museums could stand alone, separate and apart from each other,” he said. “Los Angeles is increasingly making a mark for itself both on the strength of its cultural institutions, as well as the degree to which these institutions foster sharing and collaboration. Our partnership, we believe, is an important evolutionary step in that progression.”

Govan and West will discuss the partnership at LACMA’s Bing Theater at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday as part of LACMA’s Director’s Series. Tickets are free but [required](#).

Museums often lend works to one another, co-organize exhibitions and collaborate on programming. In the last decade, LACMA has regularly programmed exhibitions and featured artists such as Mark Bradford and Ruben Ochoa at a satellite gallery at the Charles White Elementary School, the former campus of Otis College of Art and Design. “A Universal History of Infamy: Those of This America,” curated by artist and educator Vincent Ramos, opens there Jan. 27. Last year, LACMA programmed an exhibition about Chinese ceramics at Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College.

The Autry, which is in Griffith Park, partnered with the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA for its photography exhibition “La Raza,” currently on view. The Autry also has a long-term collection sharing agreement with the California Historical Society to feature about 60 paintings as part of its ongoing “Art of the West” exhibition.

The LACMA-Autry partnership will be different from standard museum partnerships, Govan said in an interview.

“It’s true that museums collaborate all the time through exhibitions, loans and research projects,” he said by email. “Yet it’s very different to think about including a work from your own collection versus a work and somebody else’s collection that would require a lengthy loan process. This agreement will virtually eliminate any distinction between the two collections, encouraging everyone to think about them as one. It will affect our acquisitions strategies as well, by taking each other’s collections into account when acquiring work.”

The partnership won’t involve the exchange of money, LACMA said. But pooling financial resources to jointly acquire new works may be part of it.

In 2006, LACMA jointly purchased Chris Burden’s “Hell Gate” (1998) with the Museum of Contemporary Art. Both museums have shown the work in exhibitions. LACMA also jointly acquired Robert Mapplethorpe’s archives with the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2011.

What kinds of exhibitions might come out of this new partnership? Exploring the arts of the indigenous peoples of the Americas will be key, said Nancy Thomas, LACMA's senior deputy director for art administration and collections.

"The Autry and the Southwest Museum [the Autry's Mt. Washington campus] have broad collections focusing on the art of the American Southwest, while LACMA has strength in Mesoamerica and works of art from Latin America," Thomas said. "In 2001, LACMA organized a major exhibition, 'The Road to Aztlan, Art from a Mythic Homeland,' that tracked some of these early connections. This is a theme that could be expanded through the relationship between the two institutions and lead to future programs, exhibitions and focus of scholarship.

"Perhaps the greatest synergy for LACMA with both the Southwest and the Autry collections is the access to their Native American and arts of indigenous cultures. The combination of these collections with LACMA's strength in other areas of the Ancient Americas will allow both institutions to tell the most compelling stories of any museum on the West Coast."

The LACMA and Autry collections naturally dovetail with each other, Govan said, lending themselves to dialogue. He pointed out the complementary nature of the collections "in telling stories about all art and telling stories about the West and the Southwest."

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