

New York Times, 2 May 2005

A New Arts Foundation With a Focus on Creativity

By Felicia R. Lee

What happens to the brain when you write or read a poem, beyond the moment of creation or enjoyment? What do the arts mean for jobs and economies? How can creativity be taught and fostered?

Those are some of the questions that led Louise T. Blouin MacBain, founder of one of the world's largest art magazine publishers, to set up the Louise T. Blouin Foundation. The international non-profit arts organization has a wide-ranging agenda to support cultural development around the world, through research and new programs. It was to be officially inaugurated tonight with an awards ceremony in New York at the Nomadic Museum at Pier 54.

The honorees for their contributions to creativity include former President Bill Clinton; the Nobel peace laureate Elie Wiesel; and Clive Gillinson, managing director of the London Symphony Orchestra and the incoming executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall. It will be a glamorous beginning for a foundation with big ambitions. Mrs. MacBain, a 46-year-old French-Canadian, has pledged \$30 million to establish the Louise T. Blouin Center for Creativity in London and the first year's program budget.

"The foundation launch for me is where my knowledge and passions all come together," Mrs. MacBain said in a recent interview. She grew up in Montreal, she said, exposed to music and museums through her parents, who were also businesspeople. Her interests in the arts and business first converged, she said, when she became a co-founder of Trader Classified Media in 1987 and built a business with more than 400 publications and 60 Internet sites in 20 countries. Her company, the London-based LTB Holding Ltd., is a large art-magazine publisher and art-information provider.

Mrs. MacBain said that after she learned she had dyslexia at the age of 8, she became aware of how creative many bright people with learning disabilities are, making links among seemingly disparate subjects. So, through an interdisciplinary, international foundation, she said, she hoped to show how creativity benefits countries economically and culturally.

One of the foundation's early projects will be to study the economic importance of the arts. It plans to hold forums at which artists, politicians, business leaders and educators propose cultural policies. The foundation also wants to endow a chair at a leading university to research the relevance of art to everyday life and the connections between the study of art and the study of perception and cognition.

The foundation's advisory board includes Mr. Gillinson; Thomas Krens, director of the Guggenheim Museum; the soprano Renée Fleming; and the contemporary artists Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons and Francesco Clemente.

"It's an aggressive agenda," said Robert Lynch, the president and chief executive of Americans for the Arts, a national advocacy group for arts and arts education. He said that he was particularly intrigued by the foundation's international ambitions and its research agenda on creativity and connections between the arts and the economy.

"Creativity is at the core of the American economy right now," Mr. Lynch said, adding that his group's recent study on creative industries found that 578,486 businesses in the United States alone are connected to the arts in some way.

The Blouin Foundation's other award recipients tonight will be Gregory Colbert, the photographer who conceived of a "nomadic museum" that could be disassembled and moved; Robert Wilson, the theater and opera director; Anish Kapoor, an Indian-born British sculptor; Paulo Coelho, the Brazilian writer; and Dr. Richard Axel, a Columbia University medical researcher and Nobel Prize laureate.