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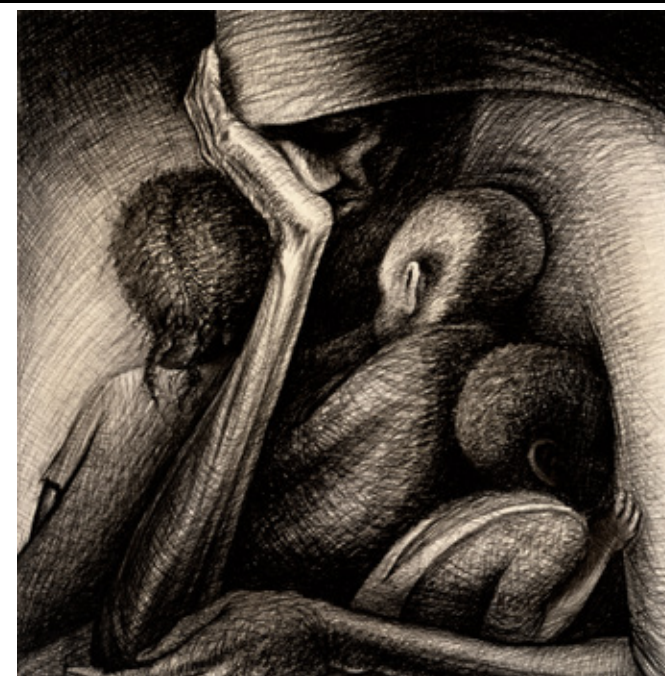
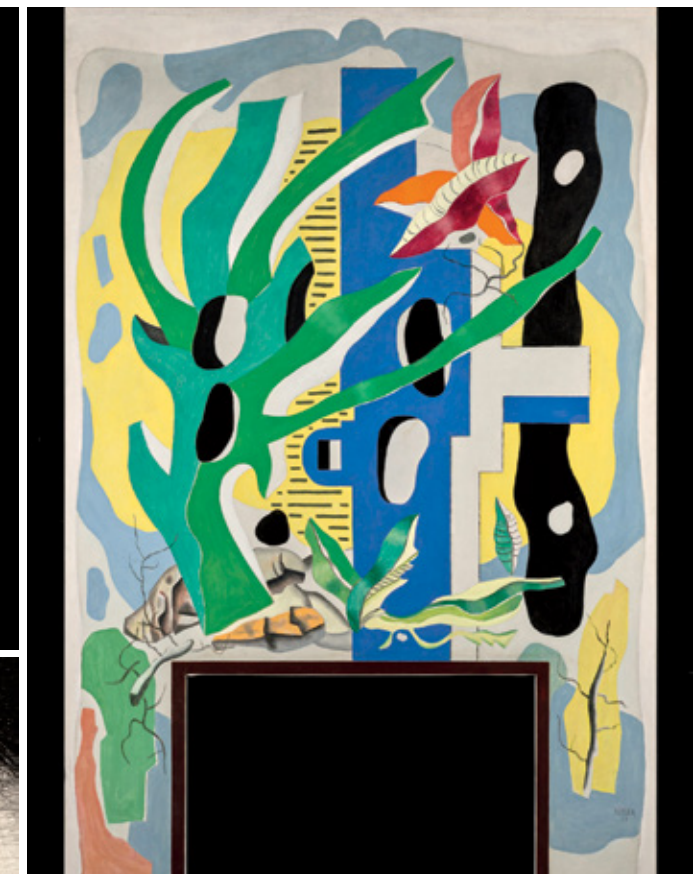
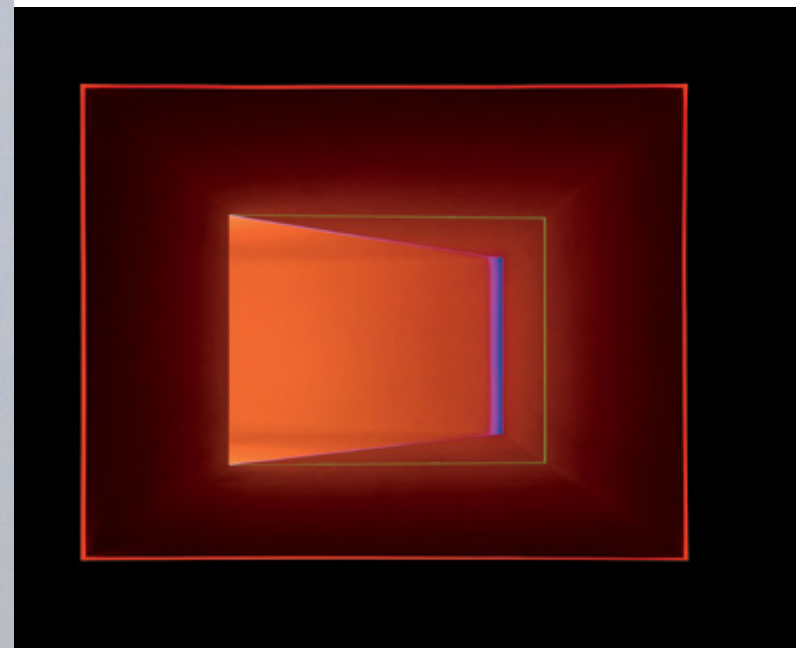
The Art of the Man

Gary Tinterow, who heads the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is perhaps the most creative force at work at the institution

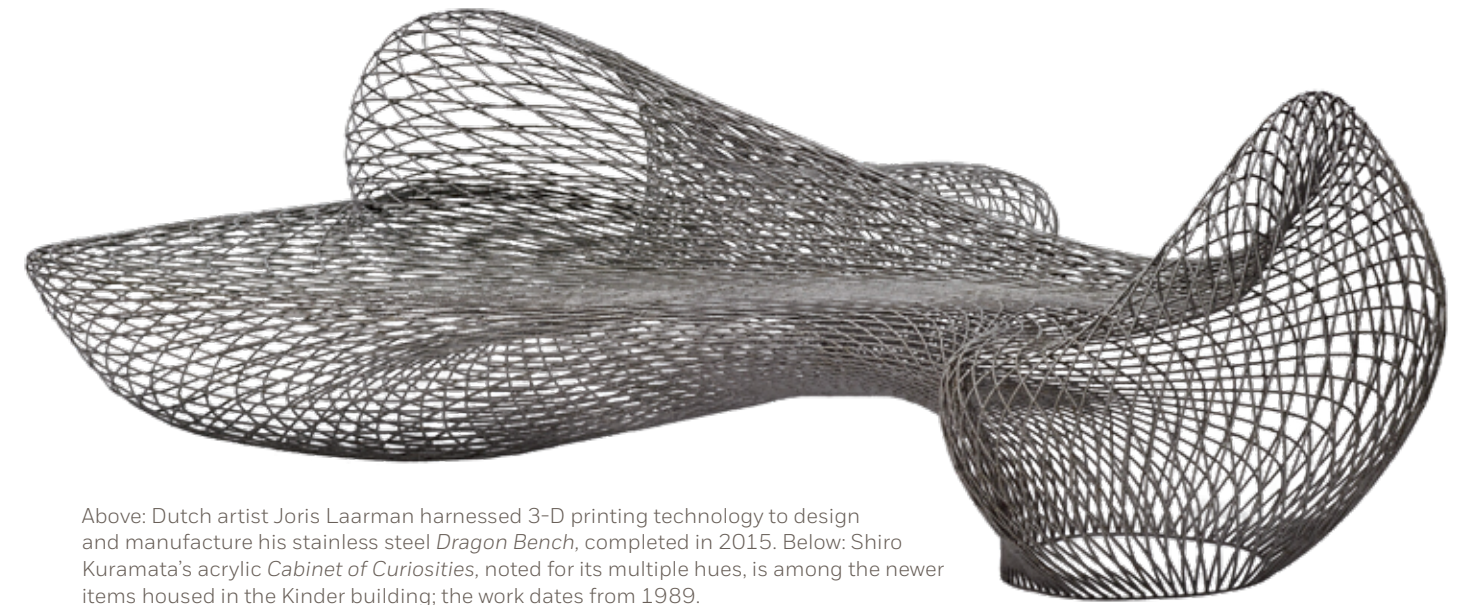
PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH BY *Richard Barnes* WRITTEN BY *David Masello*



As Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gary Tinterow (left), not only inherited one of the great institutions of its kind, but he has also continued to add to the collection—in buildings and artworks. Opening page: Among his achievements is seeing through to its opening the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building and the Glassell School of Art, linked by Olafur Eliasson's intriguing light tunnel.



Some works are iconic already, others are destined to be future ones at the MFAH. Clockwise from top left: Gyula Kosice's *Hydrospatial City* was begun in 1946 as an examination of future space habitats; a work by the late Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica; a fireplace mural by Fernand Léger; *The Cradle* by John Biggers, was completed in 1950, but as an African-American artist restricted by Jim Crow laws, Biggers was not allowed into the museum to accept an award given for the work by the 15th annual Houston Artists' Exhibition—until then-director James Chillman forced the board to open the museum to all people; one of James Turrell's ever-changing light sculptures.



Above: Dutch artist Joris Laarman harnessed 3-D printing technology to design and manufacture his stainless steel *Dragon Bench*, completed in 2015. Below: Shiro Kuramata's acrylic *Cabinet of Curiosities*, noted for its multiple hues, is among the newer items housed in the Kinder building; the work dates from 1989.



Clockwise from top left: Museum attractions include Ai Weiwei's *Reflection Dragon*; Martin Puryear's *Aso Oke*, backdropped by El Anatsui's *Untitled*, a work from 2020; Carlos Cruz-Diez's tri-color *Chromosaturation* that connects the Caroline Weiss Law Building with the Kinder; and a Calder mobile, which Tinterow decided to relocate to the new Kinder building.

To watch Gary Tinterow, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), walk the galleries is to see a man engaged as much with the art as he is with those looking at the art. He wants to see who is in the museum, who appears to have made a return visit, and how they are responding to what is on view. He covets the art and his public.

Even though he has likely seen every piece on display in the museum more than a few times (and many of them he has been responsible for bringing into the permanent collection), he stops at familiar works. Beneath the whirling fins of Alexander Calder's *International Mobile* he pauses, as if to feel the breeze its parts might stir as they revolve over the staircase in the new Nancy and Rich Kinder Building. He looks at his own arm when walking through the underground colored light tunnel connecting the campus's Glassell School of Art and the Kinder to see if he is bathed in the hue that is emitted. He examines everything as if for the first time—John Biggers's 1950 drawing, *The Cradle*; a Fernand Léger painting; a Noguchi work in the outdoor sculpture garden. "I don't know that I can ever see a work of art the same way twice," he says. "Great works of art constantly surprise and instruct."

Since assuming the position of director in 2012, Tinterow has continued to transform the museum into one of the world's leading art destinations, though it had been given a big head start before his arrival at the helm. Tinterow, a native Houstonian, is well equipped for the role. He came to the MFAH after having served for some thirty years at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art—as Engelhard Chairman of the Department of Nineteenth-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art and, prior to that role, as the department's curator of European paintings. Apart from his natural charisma and palpable passion for art of every era and culture, Tinterow understands the city in which he grew up in the 1960s and '70s and how it has come to be defined, in part, by its museums.

"First of all, it was wonderful to be able to return to Houston, primarily because of this extraordinary job that was offered to me, but also because of the personal connection I feel to the city," he says. "Houston is a very different place than when I grew up here—far bigger, with more stores, more people, more apartment buildings, and more diversity. And all of that is thrilling to me."

Because of his perspective as both a native son and one of the pivotal figures in the museum world, Tinterow understands the ethos of institutions as influential as the MFAH. "Inevitably, an art institution in any community is initiated by a small group of individuals who then find in the community a larger base of support. That is what happened in Houston." He cites some of the museum's earliest founders, patrons, and visionaries, notably the Hogg family, who secured land for a future museum back in 1914. "All the money

in the world and all the commitment you can find cannot overnight create a great museum," he stresses. "It requires the talents, the commitments, and the passions of hundreds of people in order to bring a museum to life."

It's fair to say that Tinterow himself is one of the true life forces of the museum, which now occupies ten acres and multiple buildings. Although many cite Tinterow as a guiding force in the creation of the newly opened Glassell School of Art, a monumental edifice designed by architect Steven Holl, and the recent opening of the Kinder, Tinterow

is a master not only of art history, but also diplomacy. "Much of what I've accomplished, rather what we've accomplished here, was put in place by my predecessor." The late Peter Marzio, the administrator to whom Tinterow refers, and Marzio's wife, Frances, then the Glassell Collection's curator, were critical influences in the building of much of the permanent collection. "Whether it's the Islamic art we've brought in, the Latin American art, or what ultimately became the Kinder, these were all initiatives by my predecessor and it has been my privilege to pursue them to their end."

Tinterow continues to compare life in Houston to that of his former city, New York. "This is not to brag in any way, but since I've been here, I find that perfect strangers come up to me on the street and thank me for a particular exhibition or new work in a gallery. And every few months, I might be stopping for sushi or a Vietnamese roll for lunch and someone will have picked up my check by the time I get to the cashier. People would stop me on Madison Avenue in New York, but no one there bought my lunch." ■

