

# FUNDACIÓN CISNEROS COLECCIÓN PATRICIA PHELPS DE CISNEROS

**Gustavo A. Cisneros**  
**Patricia Phelps de Cisneros**  
Founders

**Adriana Cisneros de Griffin**  
President

**Rafael A. Romero**  
Director Emeritus

**Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro**  
Director

## **Patricia Phelps de Cisneros**

For more than four decades, Patricia Phelps de Cisneros has fervently supported education and the arts, with a particular focus on Latin America. In the 1970s, along with her husband, Gustavo A. Cisneros, she founded the New York City and Caracas-based Fundación Cisneros. Its mission is to improve education throughout Latin America and to foster global awareness of the region's heritage and many contributions to world culture. The Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, founded in the early 1990s, is the primary art-related program of the Fundación Cisneros.

### *Early influences, work, and education*

Patricia Cisneros's great-grandfather William Henry Phelps (1875—1965) undertook an ornithological expedition to Venezuela the summer after his junior year at Harvard University. During that trip, he fell in love with the country, and after graduation settled there permanently. Phelps was a great entrepreneur of his era who developed modern business practices and established many companies that ranged from television and radio networks to those that imported automobiles, refrigerators, Victrolas, typewriters, and Venezuela's first taste of the game of baseball. He also started Venezuela's first foundation. Following his deep interest in natural science, he became a noted ornithologist who catalogued South American bird specimens and published his discoveries alongside his mentor, curator Frank M. Chapman, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. A supporter as well as a scientific contributor to the AMNH in the following years, Phelps was awarded the position of Research Associate there in 1947.

Patricia has credited her great-grandfather's meticulous attention to the classification of his tropical birds as the inspiration for her awareness of the high level of care and cataloguing needed to preserve a collection and make it available for study. Growing up in the cosmopolitan city of Caracas in the 1950s, she also had daily exposure to outstanding examples of public modernist art and architecture, which influenced not only her aesthetic, but her determination that art should be shared with a broad audience. Her marriage to Gustavo Cisneros in 1970 gave her a partner with an infectious international outlook, inspiring her to make connections through art and education beyond the borders of her native Venezuela.

Educated in Caracas and in the United States, Patricia was encouraged by her parents from an early age to expand her horizons through meaningful work. Those experiences planted the seed for Patricia's commitment to education and its



inclusion as a core mission of the Fundación Cisneros. She worked for an organization called Accion International, an NGO whose aim was—and still is—to help people help themselves. From its inception, Accion’s volunteers encouraged economic and community development by working within the communities they served to identify needs and formulate solutions. After her involvement with Accion, Patricia became a founder of and instructor for AVEPANE (Asociación Venezolana de Padres y Amigos de Niños Excepcionales), which is also still operating today. It advocates for the education and acceptance of developmentally disabled children and has created methodologies and training for teachers of Special Education. In her twenties, Patricia became the founder and director of the language department of the Simon Bolívar University in Caracas. There, in addition to her duties as an instructor, she developed an innovative audio-visual approach to teaching foreign languages.

Patricia received a BA in Philosophy from Wheaton College in Massachusetts, and was particularly interested in the educational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead’s view that education could improve lives by connecting thought and action in a nexus of knowledge, allowing imagination to illuminate facts, and taking into account an individual’s distinct natural proclivities was one that Patricia internalized, further strengthening her conviction about the transformative powers and vital importance of education both for societies and individuals.

In 2003, Wheaton College awarded Patricia Cisneros an Honoris Causa degree in Fine Arts. She was an MA candidate at NYU’s Gallatin School, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 2015.

### ***The development and dissemination of the collection***

Patricia and Gustavo Cisneros began buying artworks soon after their marriage, and Patricia’s eye was drawn to the elegance, austerity, and rigor of geometric abstraction. Though examples were abundant throughout Latin America, they were underappreciated at the time. Gradually, Patricia acquired the nucleus of what she would come to realize, with some surprise, was a significant collection of artwork, with the responsibilities that such a holding entailed. It became known, in the 1990s, as the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros—or, for short, the CPPC. Making the artworks in Patricia and Gustavo’s care available to the public through exhibitions and loans has been a critical component of the CPPC’s efforts to enhance appreciation of the diversity, sophistication, and range of art from Latin



America. Over 60 exhibitions of the collection, and countless short and long-term loans to institutions throughout the world have taken place since 1999 .

Exhibitions of the CPPC have won wide critical and popular acclaim. In 2008, the exhibition *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* at the Blanton Museum of Art (it subsequently travelled to the Grey Art Gallery at NYU) was awarded Best Thematic Show Nationally by the AICA-USA. In 2013, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the CPPC were jointly awarded Best Institutional Show of the Year (Mejor Exposición Institucional del Año) for *La invención concreta* by Spain's Instituto del Arte Contemporáneo.

Although the CPPC is perhaps best-known for its collection of Modernist geometric abstraction from Latin America, the collection also comprises equally important holdings of work by traveler artists to and within Latin America and the Caribbean from the 17th to 19th centuries; furniture and art from Latin America's colonial period; contemporary art from Latin America; and an important group of art and artefacts from indigenous peoples of Venezuela's Amazonas region (known as the Orinoco Collection) that has been the subject of fourteen exhibitions in nine countries and has been seen by more than seven million people.

### ***Education initiatives***

In addition to loans and exhibitions, Patricia and Gustavo have promoted excellence in education through a number of large-scale initiatives supported by the Fundación Cisneros. In Venezuela, two programs with a highly significant educational and social impact were developed in the 80s: ACUDE, a literacy program delivered in kits that included LP records, players, and study guides, benefited over 300,000 Venezuelans throughout the country; and the Centro Mozarteum, which afforded scholarships to youth across the economic spectrum to study classical music in a Caracas-based school and also provided the most gifted of those students unique opportunities to further pursue their studies abroad. The Mozarteum sponsored visiting performances in Venezuela by internationally renowned orchestras and conductors, making them accessible to the general public and to schoolchildren. Since 1996, Patricia and Gustavo have annually supported a scholarship for an outstanding student from Venezuela's Mozarteum to attend the Aspen Music Festival School.

The Fundación Cisneros was also responsible for the development of media-oriented, pioneering educational programs for the Latin American region. In



keeping with its commitment to education, and utilizing the rich visual resources of the CPPC as well as the media expertise of the Cisneros businesses, the foundation created a number of initiatives. *Cl@se*, the first pan-regional educational television channel in Latin America, was made available from Mexico to Argentina via cable and satellite television, reaching over two million homes and 30,000 schools throughout the region with content that facilitated learning in areas such as science, math, history, and foreign languages. AME, a distance learning program for the professional development of teachers, reached over 20,000 teachers in 20 countries from the southern US to Antarctica. *Piensa en arte/Think Art* was an educational platform based on visual arts that provided a methodological model for the teaching of critical thinking skills in school-aged children, through teaching guides and workshops conducted in museums and schools throughout Latin America.

The Fundación Cisneros currently continues to provide professional development opportunities to teachers through its partnership in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic with *Tu clase, tu país*, an online platform and collaborative community that offers courses in the areas of curriculum, innovative pedagogy, and personal development.

#### ***Publications and professional/institutional support***

The CPPC has generated a number of publications about Latin American art, including exhibition catalogues and a series of bilingual, sustained dialogues between contemporary artists and critics and art historians, called *Conversaciones/Conversations*.

The Fundación Cisneros, with the CPPC, has sponsored scholarships and travel grants allowing artists and curators to further their development through travel in and study concerning Latin America. Several leading gifts and endowments have allowed cultural institutions and institutions of higher learning to establish new positions that generate knowledge about Latin America's contributions to the arts. And many works from the collection have been donated as gifts or promised gifts to important institutions, including MoMA, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas, Austin; Tate in London; and in Venezuela, the Museo de la Estampa y del Diseño Carlos Cruz-Diez; Fundación Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas; Centro de Arte Maracaibo "Lia Bermudez"; Museo de Barquisimeto; Fundación Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del Zulia; Universidad Católica Santa Rosa; and Universidad Monte Ávila.



*New Media initiatives and awards*

Gustavo Cisneros has always sought ways in which his core enterprise in media could support education and cultural programs developed by the Fundación Cisneros and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, so it is not surprising that many FC/CPPC initiatives have embraced the latest developments in media. Patricia and Gustavo's daughter, Adriana Cisneros de Griffin, followed her father's footsteps in 2013 as CEO of Cisneros Group and as President of the Fundación Cisneros, and is just as fervently committed to this vibrant cooperation between technology and culture.

With Adriana's encouragement, the CPPC created a new website ([www.coleccioncisneros.org](http://www.coleccioncisneros.org)) for the dissemination of art and ideas from Latin America with a journal-like format that allows for timely consideration of what's new and interesting in the field. It also makes the collection available to expanded audiences in fresh ways.

The collection of art and artifacts from the Amazonas region of Venezuela known as the Orinoco Collection was featured in an earlier website, Orinoco Online. In 2000, the site was recognized for its innovative use of technology by *Museums and the Web* in the category of Best Innovative Site. It also won a Bronze Award that same year for interactive media from I.D., the international design magazine, and was a Finalist in the Stockholm Challenge Award for Culture and Entertainment.

For the exhibition *Invención concreta: Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros*, which was shown in 2013 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, an innovative mobile website, [www.lainvencionconcreta.org](http://www.lainvencionconcreta.org), an app (available on iTunes), and a mobile tour were created.

The *Invención concreta* website won the 2013 Webvisionary Award in the category *All Your Format Are Belong to Us*. In 2014, the website and app won the 2014 Webby Awards in both the *Web, Art and Mobile Sites and Apps, Education and Reference (handheld devices)* categories. The app garnered a Silver Award from the Philadelphia Addy Awards for *Digital Advertising, Apps, Tablet*; and the Philadelphia Addy Awards gave a Gold Award to the website and mobile tour in the category of *Digital Advertising, Websites/Consumer, Services*. Four honorable mentions in 2013, one from Awwwards, a second from the American Alliance of Museums Muse Awards for *Online Presence*, and two others, from the 18th Annual Webby Awards for *Best User Experience and Art*.



*Boards and memberships*

**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**

- Board of Trustees (since 1992)
- Architecture and Design Committee (member 1992—2014; past Chair 2001—2006)
- Painting and Sculpture Committee (since 1992)
- Conservation Committee (since 1993; past Chair 1995—1996)
- Latin American and Caribbean Fund (founder, and chairman since 2006)
- International Council (Board of Directors, since 1981)
- Museum Archives, Library and Research (since 2010)
- Library Council (since 2011)
- Nominating Committee (1993—2000)
- PS 1 board member (2005)

Additionally, Patricia Phelps de Cisneros has supported a wide range of cultural institutions in the Americas and Europe. Those are (in reverse chronological order):

**Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brasil**

- Founding International Advisory Board member (since 2016)

**Círculo Internacional de la Escuela de Música Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain**

- International Patron (since 2015)

**The Feuerle Collection, Berlin, Germany**

- Founding member, International Ambassadors (since 2015)

**Fundacion Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain**

- Founding Patron (since 2014)
- Nominating and Governance Committee (since 2015)

**Museum Berggruen, Berlin, Germany**

- International Council (since 2011)

**Association Centre Pompidou América Latina, Paris, France**

- Founding Member (2011—2014)

**American Friends of the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland**

- Member (2011—2014)



**CIMAM**, the International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern Art

- Founding Member (Since 2009)

**Patronato Internacional del Museo del Prado**, Madrid, Spain

- Founding International Trustee (since 2007)

**UBS**, New York, USA

- Art Advisory Board (2004—2006)

**Aspen Institute**, Aspen, USA

- Art Advisory Committee (since 2004)
- Society of Fellows, Presidential level (2004—2010)

**Tate**, London, England

- Founding member of Latin American Acquisitions Committee (2003—2014)
- International Council (2003—2008)

**Casita Maria**, New York, USA

- Board member (1998—2008)
- Chairman's Council (2008—2012)

**Programa Andes Tropicales**, Mérida, Venezuela

- Founding member, Board of Directors (1997—2003)

**Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery**, University of Texas, Austin, USA

- Latin American Advisory Group (1997—2000)

**Harvard University**, Cambridge, MA.

- Advisory Committee, David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (1998—2011; founding board member 1994)
- Committee to Visit the Harvard University Art Museums (since 2001)

**Metropolitan Museum of Art**, New York, USA

- Chairman's Council (1992—1996)

**Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía**

- Founding Patron (1991)



**Sinfonietta Caracas**, Caracas, Venezuela

- Advisory Board (1987—1990)

**New York Botanical Garden**, New York, USA

- Board member (1985—1993)

**Americas Society**, New York; USA (*the Americas Society was known as the Center for Inter-American Relations until October 16, 1986*)

- Board of Directors (since 1981)
- Chairman's International Council (since 1985)
- Cultural Council Committee (since 1986)

**Just One Break (JOB)**, New York, NY

- Board Member (1980—1983)

**Museo de Bellas Artes**, Caracas, Venezuela

- Board member and member of the Friends of the Museo de Bellas Artes (1970—1980)

*Awards and honors*

In recognition for her work to strengthen and promote education and the arts in Latin America, Patricia Cisneros has received numerous awards. Those are:

2015: Honorary Doctorate Degree from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Medalla de Oro al Mérito en las Bellas Artes, Spain

2013: Gran Cruz de la Orden Civil de Alfonso X El Sabio, Spain

Distinguished Service in the Arts Award, ArtTable, New York

2010: Iris Foundation Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Decorative Arts, Bard Graduate Center, New York.



**FUNDACIÓN  
CISNEROS  
COLECCIÓN  
PATRICIA  
PHELPS DE  
CISNEROS**

2008: Gertrude Venderblit Whitney Award for Outstanding Patronage of the Arts, Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, New York;

Gold Medal Honoree, 28th Annual Spring Party, The Americas Society, NY (along with Carlos Fuentes and Peter Munk in honor of their creative and philanthropic contributions to the arts, education, and social initiatives within the Americas).

2005: Recipient, medals of Honor, Ministry of Culture, Colombia, for work in promoting education and culture in Latin America. (2 medals: Senado de la Republica, Orden del Congreso de Colombia en el grado de Comendados; and Camara de la Democracia Simón Bolívar en el grado cruz de comendador)

2003: Honorary Degree (*Honoris Causa*) in Fine Arts, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts;

Alumnae Recognition Award, Madeira School, McLean, Virginia.

2002: Cross of the Legion of Honor of the Republic of France.

2000: *Leone d'Oro di San Marco*, awarded to the Colección Orinoco program area of the Fundación Cisneros.

1999: Recipient, *Order of Simón Bolívar*, Venezuela.

Recipient, *The Order of Francisco de Miranda*, Caracas, Venezuela  
Granted by the Venezuelan government for citizens who have exemplified outstanding merits.

1986: Recipient, *The Order of Good Citizen*, Caracas, Venezuela  
Granted by the City Council of Caracas for community leadership

Recipient, *The Order of Andrés Bello*, Caracas, Venezuela  
Granted by the Venezuelan government in recognition of her Contributions to the cultural development of the country,  
Band of Honor, first class

