

Director's Report

Good evening everyone, and thank you for making the effort to join us for the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Florence Griswold Museum. Since we last gathered together in June of 2019 to celebrate our Annual Meeting and the opening of *Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art* we have faced one of the most memorable periods in the history of the Museum, a time of both incredible achievement and progress, and also one of sacrifice and challenge.

At this time last year, we were completing the Robert F. Schumann Artists' Trail and reinterpretation of our grounds, concluding Phase One of our Master Plan and reimagining our site of 12 acres to host programming focused on our natural heritage and ecological history. Our summer, fall, and early spring months were overflowing with an abundance of innovative programs and new initiatives. We welcomed four contemporary artists for the *Fragile Earth* exhibition, including our first artist-in-residence, Jennifer Angus and her installation in the Florence Griswold House, *Silver Wings and Golden Scales*. The exhibition and the inauguration of the Robert F. Schumann Artists' Trail welcomed a new era for the Museum in which we attend to the full integration of exterior and interior spaces to activate our mission's dedication to art, history, and landscape. In the months since, we have been proud to host *Nothing More American: Immigration, Sanctuary, and Community – An Exhibition by Matthew Leifheit*, a chronicle of and reflection on the religious, artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical significance of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme. The supplemental community photography exhibition *SANCTUARY*, originally intended to be installed onsite in the Marshfield House, has been mounted on our website and perhaps holds greater meaning and reach than we ever could have imagined.

Behind the scenes, we have made significant progress on our strategic planning process, which formally began on January 1, 2020 with the support of the Winkler Group of Charleston, South Carolina. We have completed review of institutional archives, conducted stakeholder interviews, and hosted an online survey for our membership and general community, which garnered a fantastic response from all of you and for which we are extremely grateful. Your continued participation in our planning process ensures the future of a museum committed to its membership, to welcoming new visitors, and to serving its important educational mission for years to come. We look forward to recommencing our planning initiative with focus groups as soon as we are able.

When that will happen is unknown for, as we all know, we are in a truly and historically trying time. While we had hoped to gather together this evening to enjoy the opening of our summer exhibition, we must conduct our business virtually. Our halls are quiet, our lights are dim, and our offices unpopulated. As many of you know, the necessary closures of Connecticut's cultural institutions in response to the COVID-

19 public health crisis has precipitated a vulnerable situation for our arts economy: according to data disseminated by the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, between March 13 and April 30, 2020, the arts sector has lost an estimated \$10 million in revenue, close to 260,000 visitors and program attendees, and the employment of at least 700 of our valued colleagues. On the national scale, Americans for the Arts estimates \$5 billion in lost revenue and 62% of artists and creatives to be fully unemployed. And according to a recent Hartford *Courant* article, the arts field has suffered an 88% loss in weekly revenue to date, worse than even restaurants and hotels.

The reality of our circumstance is indeed sobering and must be acknowledged. Our institution, however, is a strong one, a place that continues to benefit from the support of its community and an enduringly resilient character. I am proud to share with you that because of the wise oversight of our Board of Trustees and the tireless dedication of our team, we have maintained our entire staff, and explored new and innovative ways to keep in touch with you all. Our popular Winter Studies program transitioned online to live webcasts, we have created virtual tours of the Kriebler Gallery and the entirety of the Florence Griswold House, and our team communicates with you all via social media. A Garden Raffle takes the place of our 2020 Garden Luncheon (tickets are available until June 29th!), and we continue to plan our 2020 -2021 exhibitions, *Fresh Fields: American Impressionist Landscapes from the Florence Griswold Museum*, *Expanding Horizons: Celebrating 20 Years of the Hartford Steam Boiler Collection*, and *Centennial of the Lyme Art Association Gallery*, which we plan to share with you, albeit on a revised calendar, when we can reopen. Our entire staff, every single one of them, has played an instrumental role in working together to face these operational challenges and support our new and revised activities. I want to give particular attention to two of our colleagues, Fred Cote and Joan Greene, who are celebrating service anniversaries in 2020. My sincere appreciation to Fred for his 10 years of service. Never have we been so attuned to our financial health, and your clear eye and consistent oversight of our financial resources are incomparable. My sincere appreciation to Joan for all you have contributed over the past 15 years her knowledge of visitor services and support of our operations. While I wish we all could raise a glass to your years of service together, I trust you will celebrate following our meeting tonight.

We are navigating our “new normal” assertively and strategically, with all hopes that we will be able to welcome you back soon, while adhering to our commitment to do so safely and following all precautions. Our staff is in the final stages of preparing a business resumption plan which, along with the direction we receive from the Governor’s office, will determine our structure and timeline for reopening. Your sharing your time with us is the greatest joy of being part of the Florence Griswold Museum community, and the relationship we have built with each one of you – to which you all have welcomed me with open arms – is paramount in our minds, motivating us forward. While virtual connections are no match for the conversations, events, and daily interactions we have grown to cherish, I wish to share my deep

appreciation to all of you for your unwavering support, your understanding, and your flexibility as we continue to plot our course ahead.

And so it is equipped with both a pragmatic understanding of our current context but also a command of our resources, well-informed governance and operations models, and the palpably steadfast support of you all that we look to our future. A future that has been built upon decades of sound board leadership, most recently under the adept eye of David Dangremond. With an esteemed and extensive career and a dedication to the arts, in particular the Florence Griswold Museum, we have benefited so much from David's devotion to this Museum for over three decades. It has been an honor to work with, learn from, and collaborate with David over the past two years. I look forward to David's continued service, together we welcome Deborah Moore to the position of President of the Board of Trustees. With a long history of organizational administration, board participation and leadership, and her family's multi-generational passion for the Museum, I trust that Deborah will help us to dream and plan for our next chapter. Please join me in celebrating the accomplishments, the endurance, and the bright future of the Florence Griswold Museum.