

Director's Report

Good evening everyone, and welcome to this 75th annual meeting of the membership of the Florence Griswold Museum. Since its earliest days, the Florence Griswold Museum has prized American art and history in its interpretation of the Lyme Art Colony, as well as the artistic development of the State of Connecticut. For many years, this mission and its work fell solely to volunteers, including those who were elected to serve as Trustees. To all of the past and current trustees and volunteers of this institution, we share our appreciation and gratitude for helping to grow the Florence Griswold Museum to its current prominence. I hope you all take a moment this evening to toast 75 years of achievement, a story in which all of you play a major role.

The diligence that has served as a bedrock of the collective oversight of this museum by board and staff has perhaps never been so tested as it has been over the past year. At our annual meeting in 2020, I spoke about the resilience of the Florence Griswold Museum, and how the strong support of our community has served an invaluable role in helping us weather the pandemic. Many of our peer institutions have suffered from extended closures, from which some have not yet reopened, devastating financial and personnel losses, and an uncertain future. While the museum field will never be the same and our vision for arts institutions forever impacted by what we have learned during the past sixteen months, strong guidance from our board and tireless commitment from our staff has ensured that we are in a position of strength and stability.

When we reflect on the past year, it is a challenging time that we will surely never forget. Yet for as many difficulties as we had to face, we realized success through innovation, communication, and collaboration. We created online content for audiences of all ages, and welcomed thousands of participants, including viewers from five countries to the 2020 Samuel Thorne Lecture featuring Randall Griffey of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Since our reopening of the Museum on July 1 of 2020, we rallied to create a space that offered our visitors comfort, ease, and security while continuing to serve our mission of the interpretation of art, history, and landscape. Never before have we so prioritized these elements of the visitor experience, and I believe these objectives will remain indefinitely. While we embraced online content and the ability to share our story with multitudes, we never lost sight of our home base, if you will, and continued to mount thought-provoking and illuminating exhibitions including *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*, all of which showcase the strength of our permanent and archival collections. And of course, our Robert F. Schumann Artists' Trail continues to attract people and to highlight the natural elements of our site, and is a beacon of tranquility to our community.

Whether externally facing, as in the visitor protocols enacted over the past year and the rich and abundant programming we continue to offer both online and in person, or internally focused, such as in our comprehensive systems transitions, the staff of this institution has committed itself to our work. Just as we hear stories of many of our museum colleagues struggling with job loss and institutional closures, we also learn of those beleaguered with inadequate support, ineffective communication, and overall unhealthy work climates. This team is vibrant, positive, knowledgeable, and always willing to face our challenges as a collective body in support of our mission and our community. As I have done in the past, I wish to take this opportunity to thank our staff for all that they have done and continue to do to make our museum a site of learning and a site of fun. I remain honored to work alongside you all.

On that note, I would like to mention a few of our colleagues who are celebrating work anniversaries this year. Jenny Parson, associate curator, has been with us for five years this May, and has brought us such exciting projects as the *Fragile Earth: The Naturalist Impulse in Contemporary Art* exhibition and our artist-in-residences. It has been ten years in March since Nathaniel Greene, manager of membership and individual giving, joined the Museum and in the years since he has built our membership program to new heights and built an annual benefit auction that is second to none. 2021 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the arrival of Amy Kurtz Lansing, our curator, who breathes new interpretive life into our collections and site at every turn. And in September of this year, we celebrate forty (yes, forty!) years of service by our intrepid business manager Therese Kus, whose hand is in virtually every single element of this Museum. We thank these colleagues, these friends, for their ongoing commitment to the Florence Griswold Museum.

We must also take this opportunity to express gratitude to Ted Gaffney, our facilities manager, who retires this year after sixteen years of service to the Museum. Not many of us can grasp the immense job it is to care for the property of the Museum, and Ted has done a truly masterful job of serving as steward of our land, buildings, and systems. Ted, we will miss your consistent and knowledgeable oversight of our spaces, as well as your contributions of freshly baked cookies prepared in the Huntley Brown office kitchen and clippings (sometimes of your own submissions!) of the *Financial Times* editorial pages.

It is through the efforts of these individuals, our entire staff, and the volunteers who serve on our committees, our Garden Gang and Docents, and our Board of Trustees, that we are able to herald a new chapter, both in our beloved Florence Griswold Museum and in the world at large. As of Tuesday, June 1, we are now able to open our doors to you in a way we have not done in more than a year. We are thrilled to be able to lift many of our guidelines regarding mask-wearing for those considered fully vaccinated both indoors and outdoors, social distancing, contact tracing, and in holding onsite gatherings. This is, in every way, your Museum, and we thank you for allowing

us the chance to rise to the crisis over the past year, and to be able to share fully this magnificent space again with you.

We look ahead with renewed vision, informed by what we have learned and experienced over the past year as well as the time allowed to reflect on the fortitude of this institution, as we enthusiastically welcome a future forged via ongoing planning conversations and in embrace of the voices of our community. A cultural institution that thrives during crisis is an emblem of the generosity, support, and participation of its family. With that in mind, we thank you for joining us tonight, we eagerly await gathering in person next year, and we look forward to continuing to forge the future of the Florence Griswold Museum.