State of the Museum – September 2020

On behalf of the board of trustees and staff of the Asheville Art Museum, we share this letter with you as an expression of our gratitude for your continued support and commitment. This time last year, we were preparing for the momentous opening of the new Asheville Art Museum after several years of construction and off-site programming. The openings in November 2019 were extraordinary, with community participation and excitement for our new facilities, collections, and exhibitions well beyond our expectations. We were exhilarated and planning for so much more to share with our members, donors, and visitors of all ages. We had a clear vision for the future, and we never could have imagined the changes we would face so soon after reopening.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, and in accordance with CDC and North Carolina guidelines, the Museum closed March 16, 2020. During our closure, Museum staff worked diligently to provide virtual access to special exhibitions and developed new interactive members-only and public educational programs and interactions with the Collection through our Museum From Home initiative. Museum staff also worked to ensure the safety, care, and proper maintenance of the amazing collection of American art that we hold in public trust for this community, as well as works of art on loan. Now, as we turn our focus to another reopening, Museum staff and leadership are imagining new transformations, from gallery installations that support social distancing to new program models to continue serving our visitors on-site as well as virtually.

Even with these many challenges, 2019-2020 was an extraordinary year in the life of the Museum. Please join us in celebrating the Museum milestones achieved over the past year as we look forward to another new beginning.

In 2019-2020, the Museum served 208,410 participants, including 55,398 children, through on- and off-site exhibitions and educational programs. In addition to on- and off-site participation, the Museum audience stretches worldwide with online access. The Museum’s website had 353,000 pageviews and nearly 1.7 million Facebook impressions. The Museum also built its reach on Instagram with over 48,000 interactions.

As of June 30, 2020, the Museum’s Collection, the only such resource in the region, numbered over 5,680 objects—including paintings, works on paper (including photographs, prints, drawings, pastels, collages, and watercolors), sculptures, and craft objects in glass, ceramic, metal, wood, and fiber—and 4,905 architectural drawings. From November 14, 2019, through March 16, 2020, the Museum presented 15 on-site exhibitions and four pop-up exhibitions in the community, while continuing a robust schedule of learning & engagement programming for all ages.

The core of the Museum’s educational programming for pre-K through 12th grade students are the special initiatives Literacy Through Art (LTA), More Than Math, and Tot Time and Early Childhood Outreach. Other ongoing education initiatives include school tours, art camps, after-school programming, and professional development for educators. The opening of the Museum also included the opening of the Wells Fargo Art PLAYce, a hands-on creative space for people of all ages.
The Museum also continued popular programs for adults, including Art Break talks led by staff, visiting artists and guest speakers, Discussion Bound monthly reading group, Film Screenings exploring multimedia storytelling, Art Travels guided art trips, and Performances that bring artworks in our Collection and special exhibitions to life through music, dance, and performance art. We are excited to have formally launched Connections, an arts-based program serving adults with mild to moderate memory loss and their care partners.

The Museum also debuted new programs like the Saturday Series, weekly activities for families and intergenerational groups, including yoga classes, art-filled scavenger hunts, interactive gallery tours, in-gallery programs and hands-on artmaking activities, held in the Museum’s new Education Center; and Adult Studio, a robust studio program offering a full core curriculum in drawing, painting, printmaking, and three-dimensional media.

In March, Museum staff pivoted quickly to create the Museum From Home initiative, providing new ways for participants to connect to our exhibitions and programming virtually. Art activities, virtual tours, and special programs, including Third Thursday, Slow Art Friday, and Member Programs are serving constituents through the Museum’s closure.

The Museum recently reopened to the public with reduced capacity and new protocols. In the early stages of reopening, the Museum will continue virtual programming and has developed a self-guided audio tour. Later this fall, we anticipate moving toward a hybrid model of on-site, off-site, and virtual programming, using new livestreaming capabilities. We continue to explore new program formats and technologies to ensure continued connection and impact within our community.

There has been an amazing confluence of seismic events in the last year, for the Museum and the entire world. The Museum’s long-awaited opening of its new facilities, the closing of the Museum for six months in light of the coronavirus pandemic, and the important campaign for equality and justice for all, have presented challenges as well as opened exciting new opportunities for learning and engagement. We will keep you informed as we move forward.

We deeply appreciate your commitment to the Museum and to keeping the arts in Western North Carolina vibrant. We wish good health to you, your family, and friends and look forward to welcoming you back to your Museum.

From all of us, thank you and stay well.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Myers
Executive Director