

2021 State of the Museum

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 past year has been defined by a state of constant change and response to emerging circumstances.

The Museum was closed to the public from March 16 to September 12, 2020 in accordance with local and state pandemic restrictions. Most staff returned to the building late summer, and the Museum reopened to the public with a host of new health and safety protocols and practices. The Museum installed plexiglass barriers and sanitizing stations, increased air filtration and flow, provided Personal Protective Equipment to staff and visitors, and implemented touchless payment and new cleaning protocols. Exhibition installations were thinned to allow more space for social distancing, and visitor services staff implemented timed, limited-capacity ticketing to ensure adherence to local and state gathering restrictions. As the Museum adjusted to the new environment, many staff members took on additional front-facing responsibilities to help guide and educate visitors and enforce safety standards.

The Learning & Engagement team worked to more thoroughly consider the long-range needs of classroom teachers and how best to serve them throughout the fall and beyond. They also examined possibilities for adult and family programming to continue virtual options while also imagining safe ways for small groups to interact onsite.

The Curatorial team confronted roadblocks in exhibition planning and scheduling, continuing to develop ideas and negotiate exhibition dates through uncertainty. Even with these many challenges, 2020–2021 was an extraordinary year in the life of the Museum, showcasing the resilience of Museum staff, leadership, and visitors. Please join us in celebrating the Museum milestones achieved over the past year as we look forward to continuing our journey of growth and recovery.

In 2020–2021, the Museum served 123,631 participants, including 26,820 children, through on- and off-site and virtual exhibitions and educational programs. In addition to direct participation, the Museum audience stretches worldwide with online access. The Museum's website had more than 362,000 pageviews and 916,000 Facebook impressions. The Museum also grew its reach on Instagram with more than 46,000 engagements and 937,000 impressions. As of June 30, 2021, the Museum's Collection—the only such resource in the region—numbered more than 6,700 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. It also contained 4,905 architectural drawings.

From September 12, 2020 through June 30, 2021, the Museum presented 21 onsite exhibitions and three pop-up exhibitions in the community. Select highlights include *Beauford Delaney's Metamorphosis into Freedom*, in partnership with the Knoxville Museum of Art, which examined Delaney's career evolution within the context of his 38-year friendship with writer James Baldwin; *Old World/New Soil: Foreign-Born American Artists from the Asheville Art Museum Collection*, which explored artworks by artists who adopted America as their home; and *Question Bridge: Black Males*, a

trans-media conversation that explored critically challenging issues within the African American male community.

It was also a time of innovation, with Museum staff imagining new ways to share our Collection with a wider audience. A special CARES Act grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities supported the implementation of technology to make our Collection publicly searchable via the website. This grant also supported the creation of a web-based multimedia tour with special commentary from several experts who contributed to the Museum's Collection reinterpretation and reinstallation project. The Curatorial team also pioneered a new no-fee exhibition exchange initiative with the Knoxville Museum of Art, leading to our presentation of *Beauford Delaney's Metamorphosis into Freedom* in exchange for an exhibition drawn from our Collection—*A Lasting Imprint: Rendering Rhythm and Motion in the Art of Black Mountain College*, which was on view in Knoxville from January 29–May 2, 2021.

This has been a year of continual evolution in terms of programming, with staff responding to changes in health and capacity guidelines to create programming that could engage people at home, at school, and onsite at the Museum. In March 2020, 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 served constituents through the Museum's closure and beyond. As capacity restrictions have lessened and then were lifted, the Learning & Engagement team has balanced demand for continued virtual programming as well as gradually introducing programs for groups to interact onsite.

The Museum's 385 education programs reached 7,829 participants and provided 17,575 hours of otherwise unavailable arts education and engagement. In 2020-2021, the Museum provided 2,868 pre-K through 12th grade children with visual arts education, including arts-integrated lessons in core curriculum subjects that took place at WNC schools, afterschool programs, arts camps, internships, and hands-on family activities. In addition to the Museum's educational programming for pre-school through 12th grade students, the Museum has an active schedule of adult programming that served 4,961 participants in the past year.

In the midst of a chaotic year, the Museum was selected as a finalist for the 2021 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the only museum in North Carolina and one of 15 nationwide to be selected. We were reminded of all that is possible when we work together with amazing partners and supporters like you. Though we know recovery from the pandemic will be long road, with your support, we can continue to share the transformative power of art with our community and beyond.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Myers
Executive Director