

A Message from Director Pamela Franks

December 2022

Dear friends,

This year has been exciting for the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), full of both dynamic current programming and active planning for the future. I am delighted to share with you our online [Impact Report](#) detailing activity of the last academic and fiscal year (2021-2022) and, in this year-end letter, to add some more recent highlights from the museum.

Last summer we were thrilled to have launched the new Williams Summer Arts & Museums Immersion Program, designed to offer students the chance to dive deeply into the exceptional arts offerings here and gain hands-on experience working with mentors from across the robust Berkshire museum ecosystem. Seventeen students stayed on campus, residing together in a dedicated dorm, for full-time, paid internships at WCMA and other area museums as well as weekly workshops for the full cohort led by invited arts leaders. Outside work hours, the program offered enrichment outings to shows and performances locally as well as a three-day field trip to New York where the group met with many Williams alumni in the arts.

July heralded the opening of *Mary Ann Unger: To Shape a Moon from Bone*, which has received much critical acclaim and remained on view through the fall semester. The exhibition, years in the making and accompanied by a scholarly monograph, is a keen example of WCMA's ongoing support of new scholarship, women artists, and expanding the canon. Eve Biddle '04, Unger's daughter and an accomplished artist herself, guided several illuminating tours of the exhibition, highlighting the multidisciplinary practice of Unger and her significant contribution to artistic developments of the second half of the twentieth century. Looking outward from Unger's pioneering work to the current landscape of curators and artists working at the intersections of large-scale sculpture, material experimentation, and feminist practice, WCMA presented a symposium, *Women Shaping Space: Feminism and Materiality*, with an inspiring keynote talk by contemporary artist Heather Hart.

Programming this year began with a vibrant series of summer performances, including a medieval music ensemble and a Haitian dance troupe, as well as an evening of original storytelling inspired by works on view at the museum, written and performed by friends and alumni of the Williamstown Theater Festival. Our signature patio receptions celebrating these wonderful guest artists are always some of the loveliest of Williamstown summer occasions! Each fall, the annual Plonsker Family Lecture in Contemporary Art anchors WCMA's program, and this year we were delighted to collaborate with colleagues from the English and Political Science departments to bring multi-media artist Arthur Jafa, who discussed his creative practice in relation to Black identity and experience. We have also been very glad to welcome families to the museum over recent months with a new series, *All Together with Art*, offering fun and engaging art-looking and art-making for children and their caregivers.

In 2022, as Williams welcomed the largest first-year class in college history, WCMA was home base for an enthusiastic group in the Exploring the Arts orientation program for incoming students. With the Williams Art Loan for Living Spaces (WALLS) program back in full swing, students camped outside the museum the night before pickup day, hoping to secure their favorite artworks from the WALLS collection to live with in their dorm rooms all semester. In the curricular arena, this fall's iteration of *Object Lab*, WCMA's hybrid gallery-classroom, features eight course collaborations from Art History, Africana Studies, Computer Science, English, Sociology and more, showcasing the expansive range of disciplinary connections to the collection. Each year we are fortunate to grow our collection through strategic purchases and outstanding gifts, allowing us to better reflect the diverse community of Williams and make further connections to the curriculum as it evolves. This year was particularly strong for acquisitions of the work of living artists, some of whose works entered the collection for the first time included: Theaster Gates, Carolyn Lazard, Jésus Mari Lazkano, Marina Rheingantz, Yu Youhan, and Andrea Zittel.

In the midst of all our ongoing activities, we have also begun exciting work toward a new building for WCMA, with a design team led by SO-IL architects. SO-IL principals Jing Liu and Florian Idenburg bring an innovative vision for architecture with a strong focus on the arts, education, museums, and sustainable design. Together we aspire to create a center for learning and teaching with art that is integral to Williams' liberal arts excellence, purpose-built and right-sized for WCMA's mission. We aim to maximize collection access and display, achieve sustainability in line with Williams' ambitious commitments in this area, and set a high bar for museum architecture for the next century. With this project we have the opportunity to integrate our beautiful natural surroundings and embrace New England seasons. Our planning is greatly strengthened by the insights of a stellar building committee composed of students, faculty, museum professionals, and campus leaders who are working closely with the SO-IL team. We expect to have a design concept to share with you in the new year.

I am truly grateful for your enthusiasm for the museum. Your support is essential to all we do. I hope 2023 might hold the opportunity for you to visit and see our work first hand. We look forward to welcoming you!

Warm wishes,

Pam