

WILLIAMS
COLLEGE
MUSEUM
OF ART

December 2024

Dear Friends,

It is an incredibly exciting time for us here as we look ahead and celebrate a major milestone for WCMA and its future. This October, we were thrilled to officially kick off the WCMA building project construction phase. It has been amazing to see the site of our first purpose-built home for the museum begin its transformation. We're so grateful that so many have stepped up to support this initiative in such extraordinary ways, and we continue to work hard to meet our fundraising goal for this spectacular new space.

The namesake of my directorship, the Class of 1956, witnessed the opening of the Clark Art Institute in 1955, a landmark development in the history of the Northern Berkshires. It's exciting to think that students graduating in the 2027-2028 academic year – decades after the Class of 1956 – will be a part of another leap forward for the arts in Williamstown, the Berkshires and beyond. With this new building, WCMA will grow and thrive as a leader and innovator among college art museums and build on the commitment to the arts that has defined Williams for more than a century.

We began this year with an extraordinary project that truly exemplifies Williams arts leadership and innovation, [*Emancipation: The Unfinished Project of Liberation*](#). Conceived as a commemoration of the 160th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the exhibition visualized what freedom looks like today through the perspectives of contemporary Black artists. WCMA co-organized the exhibition with the Amon Carter Museum, and the curatorial team tapped into the power of collaboration and mentorship across generations of Williams arts leaders: Maggie Adler '99 MA'11, former Curator of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper at the Amon Carter Museum; Destinee Filmore MA '23, former Mellon Curatorial Fellow at WCMA, now Assistant Curator in the Modern and Contemporary Art department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Maurita Poole, Director and Chief Curator at the Newcomb Art Museum of Tulane University and former Mellon Curatorial Fellow at WCMA. At Williams, the run of *Emancipation* included robust teaching, deep and dynamic programming, and artist engagement. The thought-provoking catalog that accompanied the exhibition ensures that the conversations spurred by the artists and the show continue.

With *Emancipation* we were fortunate to make exciting acquisitions of works by artists Letitia Huckaby and Sable Elyse Smith, part of a broader collecting strategy aimed at sustained impact. Indeed, WCMA's collection is essential to our mission, and we strive to bring in works that expand the possibilities for life-changing experiences with art, often through curricular connections but also through meaningful resonance with the many perspectives and experiences represented in the Williams and broader community. This year we have been profoundly grateful to receive several transformative gifts that build on our commitment to an inclusive collection and that extend its global reach. We acquired a breathtaking monumental canvas, *Sacrifice Decision* (1981), by Helen Frankenthaler – the first painting by the artist to enter the collection – thanks to the generosity of Elizabeth Ellrodt and Scott Schweighauser, Class of 1983. A gift of 31 of Hokusai's *Prints from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* from Thomas S. Michie '78, addressed a top priority collection goal to strengthen WCMA's holding of Japanese prints.

And we continue to enhance our representation of works by African American artists through the acquisition of 24 twentieth-century prints from the renowned collectors Jean and Robert S. Steele, including works by nine artists previously unrepresented in the collection.

Our programming this fall embodied WCMA's characteristic creative and intellectual energy, with a slate of exhibitions that embraced the breadth of our collections, showcased our commitment to original research and working with artists, and made visible the range of interdisciplinary possibilities for learning with works of art. We were thrilled to host eight courses this semester in *Object Lab*, including Art History, Classics, Environmental Studies, Dance, Psychology, and Sociology. We presented a truly magical installation, *Colour Theory*, by interdisciplinary artist and our colleague in the art department, Pallavi Sen, accompanied by a handmade artist book. This show also prompted an associated residency by the Urban Bush Women, continuing WCMA's long commitment to bringing dance into the museum. In our collections galleries, the exhibitions *Cracking the Cosmic Code: Numerology in Medieval Art* and *Remixing the Hall* featured the museum's collection "remixed" in new and innovative ways. And the revelatory exhibition, *Teddy Sandoval and the Butch Gardens School of Art*, curated by C. Ondine Chavoya and David Evans Frantz, marked an exciting collaboration among WCMA, the Vincent Price Museum of Art at East Los Angeles College, and Independent Curators International, accompanied by a robust publication.

Throughout the year, our lively galleries have afforded opportunities to reflect on WCMA's 100 years in Lawrence Hall, and share our appreciation for this history and our excitement for the future with our community. As we turn our attention to reimagining WCMA in our future home, Lawrence Hall will remain open for classes and to the public in a modified way during construction. Beginning in 2025, the upper-level galleries will be closed to the public and used for the monumental process of evaluating, packing, and moving the more than 15,000 objects in our collection to our new space. This committed staff time will allow our curators, preparators, and registrars a rare and critical opportunity to lay eyes on the collection in its entirety. Simultaneously, we will also undertake a collaborative planning process to shape our curatorial vision for the new museum in light of the possibilities presented by the new facility and findings from this comprehensive collections assessment. We look forward to inviting scholars, faculty and students to participate in this once in a lifetime process, and to sharing the stories and surprises that come out of this work.

In preparation for WCMA's tenure in Lawrence Hall coming to an end, Williams College is now initiating plans for a programming study to address the needs of the Art History branch of the Art department and the adaptive reuse of spaces that can support interdisciplinary arts education and student-centered collaboration across all arts departments. By strategically planning for Lawrence Hall in conjunction with WCMA's new building, Williams is building for a vibrant future of the arts on campus that will continue to be inspiring, relevant, and inclusive for students and the entire community.

I invite you to stay up to date with our newsletter, website, and social media, where we will be sharing stories and content throughout the course of the year about the variety of work happening in Lawrence Hall, the building site, and the broader community. As always, thank you for being a part of the WCMA community and for making the museum a part of your life. We look forward to staying connected in 2025!

With gratitude and warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Pamela Franks
Class of 1956 Director