

Date: _____ Approved: _____

THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
Minutes of the Art and Audience Committee Meeting
Held, pursuant to due notice, Theater Level Conference Suite Room #1
Monday, 16 May 2011, 11:15 am

Presiding: Thomas F. Farrell II, Co-Chair
Secretary: Ms. Suzanne Broyles

There were present:

Thomas F. Farrell II, Co-Chair
Karen C. Abramson
Mrs. Whitt W. Clement
John R. Curtis, Jr.
Dr. Elizabeth Ann Fisher
Ms. Susan S. Goode
Dr. Elizabeth F. Harris
Keith R. Kisse
Mrs. Stanley F. Pauley
Dr. Lindley T. Smith
Ms. Mary F. White
Thurston R. Moore, Ex-Officio

By Invitation:

Alex Nyerges, Director
Stephen D. Bonadies
Ms. Suzanne Broyles
Dr. Lee Anne Chesterfield
W. Birch Douglass III
H. Eugene Lockhart
Ms. Joan W. Murphy
Robin Nicholson
Ms. Jayne Shaw
Ms. Alexis Vaughn

Absent:

James W. McGlothlin, Co-Chair
G. Moffett Cochran
Ms. Nancy H. Gottwald
Ms. Barbara-lyn B. Morris
Dr. Alvin J. Schexnider
Mrs. Suzanne T. Mastracco, Ex-Officio

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Co-chairman, Thomas F. Farrell II, called the meeting to order at 11:15 am and welcomed the group.

II. MINUTES

Motion: proposed by Mr. Farrell and seconded by Ms. Goode that the minutes of the last meeting of the Art and Audience Committee held on the 16th of February 2011 be approved as distributed on the 30th of March 2011. Motion carried.

III. EXHIBITIONS

Picasso Exhibition Update

Alex Nyerges remarked that the *Picasso* exhibition ended yesterday and it was a record setter. The numbers speak for themselves and Mr. Nyerges said we have received comments from tens of thousands about how they enjoyed the exhibition. Every time slot on the last Saturday and Sunday was sold out and people were overwhelmed by the fabulous show. He mentioned that we had great press coverage on this exhibition also. The impressed Committee responded with a round of applause.

Robin Nicholson commented that today we will begin to evaluate what we have learned from this outstanding exhibition. He said that our experience proves that the blockbuster model is still alive and well, although in FY 12 we will also see how we can accommodate smaller shows. Mr. Nicholson explained that one of our goals with this exhibition was to stretch our audience, but in the end the majority of visitors appeared to have been drawn from a 100 mile radius or less. Alexis Vaughn did state, however, that one on-site survey of 300 visitors showed that 25% of them came from outside of Virginia, so we still need to fully evaluate the demographics. We learned that investing heavily in marketing paid off and gave us the freedom to experiment with digital marketing and geography. We did get people from D.C., Northern Virginia, and Tidewater so we learned we can invest marketing funds there, although advertising is expensive in the D.C. area. Mr. Nicholson stated that the *Picasso* exhibition was an unqualified success.

FY 12 Exhibition Budgets

As we learn more about our audience and exhibitions in the first full year of operation after the expansion we realize that high expense / less popular exhibits are not a sustainable model and that we need a richer diet of lower-cost / high popularity exhibitions, while still maintaining high scholarly credibility. Robin Nicholson outlined some proposals for maximizing revenue and reducing cost within the exhibitions budget during the challenging FY 12. With the experience gained from *Picasso* and the movement of large numbers of people through the building it has become clear that *Mummy, Secrets of the Tomb* will need the entire lower level special exhibition space, not least because we intend to build a special 3-D theater within the galleries for that show.

To allow for this, as well as saving costs, we are moving Xu Bing's exhibition into the space where the *Ife* exhibition was, the future European Galleries and we will postpone the *Hasui* exhibition until FY 14. Mr. Nicholson informed the group that the budget constraints of FY 12 will also force us to raise \$800,000 to support the *Maharaja* exhibition. The committee members felt that *Maharaja* would be a very popular exhibition and were in favor of making every effort to raise the necessary funds. The Director indicated that we could possibly cobble together funds in a variety of pieces, corporate and individual sponsors, such as 16 gifts of \$50,000. The Committee discussed fundraising ideas.

Motion: proposed by Mr. Farrell and seconded by Dr. Smith that we follow management's recommendations regarding the FY 12 Exhibitions Budget. Motion carried.

Preliminary Review of 2013-15 Exhibition Schedule

Robin Nicholson remarked that we are now looking beyond FY 12 exhibitions and using the experience of the last year which was, thanks to the backlog of projects, probably too exhibition-heavy. In future we plan to have fewer projects that last longer. In addition we will be less reliant on exhibitions from outside sources, but develop exhibitions internally. He announced that all curators were recently told to be thinking about major exhibition projects which will allow us to push the schedule vs. relying on others from outside sources. This would lower the costs for us.

The major upcoming banner exhibitions we are working on are *Fabergé* in July 2011, *Mummy, Secrets of the Tomb* in November 2011, *Maharaja* in May 2012, and *Chibuly* in October 2012. Mr. Nicholson then gave a preliminary review of the 2013-15 exhibition schedule, which will be presented to the Art and Audience Committee in November 2011 saying we will be implementing the lessons learned from this year's exhibitions.

Robin Nicholson showed slides of the proposed banner exhibitions for 2013-15: *Samurai* in the summer of 2013, *Flower Painting in France* in the fall of 2013, *Treasures of the Forbidden City* in the summer of 2014, *American Colonial* in the spring of 2015, *Heaven & Hell the Art of Himalaya* in the summer of 2015 which Dr. John Henry Rice is working on, and *Caligula* in the fall of 2015 curated by Dr. Peter Schertz. Mr. Nicholson explained that the goal is to have most of the 2013-15 projects initiated by curators here at VMFA. Alex Nyerges noted that this would be a vast sea change for us saying that creating our own exhibitions will help us develop our brand throughout the world and give us a broader timeframe to raise funds.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT

The Committee was interested in the exhibition proposals and will look forward to the November meeting. No further business was brought before the Committee, and the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 12:13 pm.

Suzanne Broyles
Secretary of the Museum