

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
Wednesday, 19 September 2012, 10:30 am

Presiding: James W. McGlothlin, Co-Chair
Secretary: Ms. Suzanne Broyles

There were present:

James W. McGlothlin, Co-Chair
Karen C. Abramson
Mrs. Whitt W. Clement
Michael M. Connors
Ms. Susan S. Goode
Margaret N. Gottwald
Ms. Nancy H. Gottwald
Frederica P. Gray
Terrell Luck Harrigan
Dr. Elizabeth F. Harris
Keith R. Kisee
Marlene A. Malek
Charlotte M. Minor
Mrs. Deborah H. Quillen
Charles H. Seilheimer, Jr.
Dr. Lindley T. Smith
Mrs. Suzanne T. Mastracco, Ex-Officio

By Invitation:

Alex Nyerges, Director
Stephen D. Bonadies
Ms. Suzanne Broyles
Mary Anne Carlson
Dr. Lee Anne Chesterfield
W. Birch Douglass III
Richard B. Gilliam
Robin Nicholson
Cameron O'Brion
Satya Rangarajan
William A. Royall, Jr.

Absent:

Thomas F. Farrell II, Co-Chair
G. Moffett Cochran

I. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair, James W. McGlothlin, called the meeting to order at 10:34 am and welcomed the group. He gave a special welcome to the new Trustees, Mary Anne Carlson, Richard Gilliam, Meg

Gottwald, Terrell Harrigan, Satya Rangarajan and the Foundation Directors recently added to this Committee, Edie Cabaniss, Freddie Gray and Charlotte Minor.

II. MINUTES

Motion: proposed by Ms. Goode and seconded by Mr. Connor that the minutes of the last meeting of the Art and Audience Committee held on the 16th of May 2012 be approved as distributed on the 23rd of July 2012. Motion carried.

III. MEASURING SUCCESS – Robin Nicholson

Robin Nicholson displayed quotes by Maxwell Anderson, Director of the Dallas Museum of Art, Eli Broad of the *New York Times*, and Stephen Weil from his article *Success/Failure Matrix for Museums 2005* regarding measuring success. These show that there are differing opinions on how to measure the success of museums. This is an ongoing discussion that VMFA has had in the two and a half years since we opened the McGlothlin Wing.

Part of Maxwell Anderson’s quote indicates that the question “should be how many transactions were made with our visitors—and in our case, the transaction is artistic, intellectual, and emotional, not monetary.” Mr. Nicholson noted that Eli Broad’s statement that “cost-per-head” as an effective metric for measuring the success of a special exhibition is controversial. Stephen Weil’s quote mentions finding a middle ground: “There is probably no more important task in the museum field today than trying to establish some middle ground—something less than a numerical scale, but also something more than blind faith—between those funders (and others) who demand that museums provide them with hard evidence about their effectiveness and those members of the museum community who argue that the work of museums is of such self-evident value that no justification of that work is necessary.”

Alex Nyerges remarked that purists say the best museums are those without visitors and others feel that success should be measured only economically. Our perspective is that we are still trying to assemble ways to measure our success. Mr. Nyerges stated we have the public trust to consider and we must make good use of public money. He indicated that VMFA just ran a surplus two years in a row and this year will be a very good year for us also. He added that we are very interested in what you as Trustees and Directors think. Jim McGlothlin opened the floor for discussion.

Comments from those present included the following.

- It is important for the museum not to become commercial as we need to provide educational and informational benefits for visitors.
- Financial success is important and we should start measuring the audience using social media and see how we can get them to return. It was noted that if we cannot measure it we cannot manage it.
- A part of technology is availability and apps that educate. We need a VMFA app and add spin-offs to different exhibitions which will allow us to push and pull people back in.
- We must consider the finances but still offer scholarly exhibitions and use technology to refine the process.
- Attracting different audiences is important.
- Our museum has made great strides making our visitors feel comfortable and confident here.

- We need to communicate with the General Assembly the value of the scholarly; we can educate them and take it to the next step showing that we spend a lot of time statewide helping our partners.

Robin Nicholson mentioned the relevance of some of these points to the marketing campaign for *Chibuly*, which will involve apps and social media, to draw people into two-way discussions. The Director said our Technology Task Force is aware of our needs and he then announced that a brand new software system had just been installed on our website allowing us to track members' usage and giving better public interface. He added that five years ago our state appropriation was \$9 million and now it is up to \$9.5 million which is good in these economic times. He said the Board Retreat is October 10 and you will learn why Northern Virginia is so important to our mission; two million Virginians are living there. Mr. Nyerges concluded that we are still feeling our way, we beat the mark with *Maharaja* and we will with *Chibuly*. We want to make sure balance is imperative in our special exhibition program; it must relate to people and engage more diverse audiences.

IV. EXHIBITION PLANNING UPDATES - Robin Nicholson

Robin Nicholson presented upcoming exhibitions saying there is one new exhibition that has been added for June – September of 2014 and that is *Posing Beauty in African American Culture*, a survey of photographs of African Americans which should draw a large audience. Mr. Nicholson then reviewed the 2013-15 exhibition schedule with the Committee, which remains otherwise unchanged.

He then spoke about the curatorial staff and their plan to research and develop major exhibitions over the next three to four years. Mr. Nicholson said this is the first time VMFA has originated major exhibitions, rather than bringing in traveling exhibitions from other institutions. Alex Nyerges said his mandate to curators was for each to create a major international exhibition in their field and a book-length catalogue.

Mr. Nicholson briefly mentioned a number of areas that were currently being explored by the curators including Roman art, French Art Deco, Zulu art and culture, 20th century American art, and Hungarian photography. These are all in preliminary stages now and Mr. Nicholson will update the Committee on the exhibitions as they are developed.

V. OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am by Co-Chair, James W. McGlothlin.

Suzanne Broyles
Secretary of the Museum