

REPORT FROM THE *AD HOC* COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE UI STANLEY MUSEUM OF ART

December 2020

Introduction

The University of Iowa Operations Manual requires that collegiate reviews be conducted regularly. For colleges that are subject to extensive external accreditation reviews, such as the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art, the review may be limited and focused. In accordance with this operating procedure, Executive Vice President and Provost, Montse Fuentes, formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Museum (the Review Committee). Interim Executive Vice President and Provost Kevin Kregel charged it to carry out a review and prepare this abbreviated report.

Review Committee Members

Six members comprised the Review Committee:

- Margaret Gamm, chair, head of Special Collections
- Clar Baldus, clinical professor of Education
- Dave Brennemen, Wilma E. Kelley director of Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
- Monica Correia, professor of 3D Design
- Marc Pizzimenti, director of Plastination Facility, associate professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology
- Bonnie Sunstein, professor of English

Materials Consulted and Groups Interviewed

Materials used to inform the Review Committee included the charge for the abbreviated review and the Stanley Museum of Art Self-Study Report revised in January 2020. A list of the groups interviewed appears in the Appendix.

Charge for Abbreviated Review

The Review Committee was charged to conduct a review of the Museum, limited to evaluating:

- I. Are the Museum's resources and priorities properly balanced between education, curatorial, communications, and collections care?
- II. Assess the Museum's plans for growth of programs in its new building.
- III. Assess the Museum's plans to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- IV. Assess staffing, staff organization, and governance.
- V. Make targeted recommendations that involve budget increases.

I. Are the museum's resources and priorities properly balanced between education, curatorial, communications, and collections care?

The Museum's priorities and objectives are comprehensive and well-defined in their strategic plan. However, there is a substantial disconnect between the museum's plans and its financial resources. This will make the goal of balancing these four areas challenging. The major deficiency repeated by the interviewees and heard by the committee is that current funding is not adequate, especially in the area of staffing, to do the necessary work in all four areas simultaneously.

- **Education.** The Museum is ambitious in terms of educational outreach and engagement, and it intends to serve not only the university community, but primary and secondary schools

throughout the state. However, given current staffing levels, it is not realistic to expect the museum to do both equally well. The Museum's digital presence should be enhanced to strengthen the Museum in a variety of ways (see below); and in the area of education, the Website should be improved as a tool for student success and outreach. Finally, the Museum has an ambitious goal of connecting all aspects of the university to its programs and activities, but its capacity in this regard are not clear. Inadequate staffing is the major concern.

- **Curatorial.** The museum's plans for programming and engagement are impressive, and under Director Lessing's leadership, the Museum has already proven itself to be a highly creative and collaborative partner. The Museum's website appears to be underdeveloped as a curatorial tool. For example, the Museum houses an impressive textile collection, but the website currently contains no information about this collection. The utility of the collection and its public profile would be enhanced by efforts to improve cataloguing and imaging of works in the collection in order to make them widely accessible through the Website. Adding more images of Museum holdings to the Iowa Digital Library would improve public and staff discoverability of the Museum's available resources; and improved communication and collaboration between the Museum and other campus units in this regard would create efficiencies and allow the museum and its sister departments to strengthen one another. The University has strong IT support, which should be assessed for untapped opportunities to strengthen the Museum's digital offerings and engagement tools.
- **Communications.** The Museum has done a good job in generating excitement about the new building, and creating awareness of the Museum's capital campaign has been a success, but it is not clear that the museum has the infrastructure and resources to capitalize on this current success. The museum needs help in building its digital infrastructure, increasing awareness, and enhancing connectivity through digital educational initiatives and collections sharing (see above).
- **Collections care,** and the staffing and physical infrastructure to properly store and conserve the collection is significantly lacking, and should be addressed as a high priority, especially considering the importance of the collection. Again, inadequate staffing devoted to this area is a major issue, but there are also concerns about the adequacy of current housing to meet the Museum's long-term needs. It would be advantageous to create a position for a Collections Care Specialist once the collection is in its permanent home(s), as well as storage and long-term plans for collection growth.

II. Assess the museum's plans for growth of programs in its new building.

The Museum has excellent and well conceived plans for the new building's grand opening. It launched an exciting and so-far fruitful capital campaign, and has forward-thinking and innovative plans for forging new partnerships, strengthening existing ones, and accruing audiences. Again, the major issue is that human and financial resources are currently inadequate to sustain the Museum's tremendous growth and ambitious plans for the future. The Museum staff conducted a thorough self-study and crafted an aspirational strategic plan. Given the current lack of resources, it will be critical, at minimum, for the Museum to prioritize its post-opening objectives and have support from the University's administration. For example, if the museum is

forced to choose, who will the Museum privilege: the state or the campus? Ideally, the museum should serve both, but given the present circumstances it will not be able to do both effectively.

Many units at the University have shown great interest in partnering with the Museum at both operational and project levels. A concrete plan for interdepartmental partnerships would likely bring exciting and grantable results, as in the case of the successful recent IMLS CARES Act Grant. Within the campus arts community, connections need to be strengthened and cohesiveness between units needs to be promoted. For example, the relationship between the Museum and the School of Art and Art History needs to be purposefully rebuilt and strengthened, as this connection was disrupted by the flood. Also, both the Collections Coalition and the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) Panel, which support partnerships between the Museum and other campus or nearby GLAM institutions, are semi-informal groups; with more formalized support from the Provost and VPR, participants in these groups could more easily collaborate or support one another. A shared cataloguing system between the Museum and other campus units would also be advantageous. Campus GLAM units currently cannot see the entirety of other collections, risking redundant expenditure, and instructors are unable to fully realize how students may best be served by “mixing” collections.

Finally, the Museum needs to modernize its IT infrastructure and digital presence. It needs to make a clear plan for its virtual/electronic resources. Since IT is a shared University service, it is advisable to find out what support can be expected to come from the University and at what cost, or where partnerships can be sought out, such as with the Libraries’ Preservation department or the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio. Scenarios like this must be sought out but expenditures associated with them examined. In particular, the IT costs for the new building should be assessed.

The Museum’s operating budget is the smallest of the Big Ten university art museums. This is understandable given that it is currently operating as a museum without a building. However, if the museum operates post opening with its current operating budget and at existing staffing levels, the needs of running the new building will limit the performance of key programs and activities by necessarily displacing the museum’s resources. Growth and sustainability of the museum’s operating budget should be a key concern and will become a problem if the Museum does not work with the University to identify sufficient ongoing financial support, especially “hard money,” to support enhanced staffing and building operations.

III. Assess the Museum’s plans to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

The Museum’s strategic plan to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion is principally focused on the program, collections, and activities of the museum. In that regard, the Museum has identified many thoughtful ways to increase engagement and access. In other areas, such as staffing and audience, it is not clear how the Museum plans to move the dial in DEI. It would be useful to find ways to measure progress in these areas. DEI principles should be defined and target metrics set to assess adherence to these principles. For example, metrics can track staff composition, student instruction composition, event and gallery attendance (i.e., what it currently is and what it should be). A metric could also measure the percentage diversity compared to state demographic profile. These numbers would allow internal tracking and measurement of

progress, metrics that are attractive for funding agencies because they can readily report on deliverables.

It is important to recognize that Iowa has unique aspects of DEI shaped by the state's large rural population, who may not have ready access to the Museum. Outreach to rural communities will look different from outreach at other museums and so will have its own challenges. These demographics must be considered not only in programming, but also in how the museum engages its community with its collections. It is critical to assess ways to engage these audiences and let them know why we have what we have. For this the Museum must generate narratives designed to engage new audiences and strengthen connections with existing audiences. The Museum will be greatly assisted in this regard through its impressive collection of African art as well as strong holdings of work by the famed 20th Century Mexican/African American artist, Elizabeth Catlett, as one of its first MFA graduates. The Museum also plans to foreground the difficult histories of some of the works in its African, Central, and South American Art collections in order to exemplify important DEI principles of self-awareness and transparency.

IV. Assess staffing, staff organization, and governance

Staffing. The senior leadership of the museum is very well trained and highly competent. However, as outlined above, staffing is a major challenge. Current staff is already feeling pulled in too many different directions, and there is a great deal of anxiety about the additional work of operating a new building and activating the collections. Like many comparable institutions, the Museum has also been challenged in diversifying its staff. Planning for the future, the museum should consider how the student pool can be a resource for diversity. By increasing student input the Museum could also enhance student success, a fundamental goal of the University of Iowa.

Governance. The professional senior leadership of the museum is viewed as a definite strength, especially the director, Lauren Lessing, who has demonstrated exceptional vision and a highly collaborative spirit. The strategic plan also addresses the need to increase patron support for the museum by enhancing the Museum's advisory board. Support and understanding from the University's administration, especially the Provost's office, will be key to the museum's success.

VI. Targeted recommendations that involve budget increases

The Museum should develop a plan for budget increases that prioritize the physical opening of the new museum and key new hires. These should include, but are not limited to the following:

New hire for manager of operations for the new museum. The opening of the new building will present a host of new operational activities from management and coordination of museum security to special events to visitor services. Current staffing and job descriptions do not account for these responsibilities. This position would ensure that the opening runs smoothly and that the operation of the Museum's new facilities are sustained going forward.

New staff for collections care is needed to properly care for works of art and to ensure that the collections are accessible for teaching. These include additional staff in registration, collections management, and art handling. For example, galleries will need to be changed periodically for

special exhibitions and works of art will need to be transported to new classroom spaces and then returned to storage. This will simply require more dedicated members of staff than the Museum currently possesses.

It is important that the Museum conduct an assessment of shared services and other resources to see how it could benefit more substantially from existing University resources than it currently does. We have already noted University IT. University communications presents another area of potential support. The Museum should work more closely with the Center for Advancement to assess its operational needs moving forward, and to ensure that the University's fundraisers are able to effectively address the Museum's short-term, mid-term, and long-term needs.

It should be noted that currently, funds spent annually to acquire new works of art appear as part of operating budget. *Collections assets should be accounted for separately from the operating budget.* This should be clarified in operational documentation in order to avoid external confusion about the Museum's assets.

Recommendations from the committee

The Museum has a strong, innovative, and inclusive program with a strong willingness to partner, collaborate, and engage. The director, Lauren Lessing, is an enormous strength. Lauren has shaped her team to be lean and effective, and makes the most of the funding the Museum has. The staff, overall, is small but highly competent. The museum has a great collection too, which provides a great foundation to build on. Now, it will also have a great building that will make it one of the gems in the crown of the University of Iowa's cultural assets.

Plans for the new Museum building's opening have been carefully crafted, but there is concern that too much focus is being placed on initial activation, with too little concern for sustaining momentum. A plan for the future is essential. For example, given the staffing shortage, the Museum must be careful not to let the building opening (a short-lived event) overshadow long-term event and collections care planning. Education outreach, in particular, merits attention.

With the opening of the new building, the work to be done exceeds what the current staff can do: New staff must be enlisted. Going forward for the new building, a challenge will be funding positions in support of collections care and infrastructure. This must be addressed soon and made sustainable, without reliance on soft money. A manager of operations position for the building is an essential new hire, as is a new hire exclusively devoted to taking care of the invaluable and ever growing collection. Working in partnership with the University administration and the Center for Advancement, the Museum needs to develop and implement a plan to substantially grow its operating revenues.

Appendix :

People/Groups Interviewed:

Director Lauren Lessing

Bria Marcelo (DEI)

John Doershuk (State Archaeologist)

Liz Crooks (Pentacrest Museums) and Bruce Sherting (Medical Museum)

John Culshaw (Libraries)

Jean Florman (CTL)

Council of Deans

Kim Datchuk, Joyce Tsai, Katherine Wilson (Stanley Museum of Art Staff)

Sarah Hansen (Student Life)

Rod Lenertz (Finance and Operations) and Susan Horan (UICA)

Theresa Mangum (Obermann Center)

Comments were also submitted by Steve McGuire (Art and Art History)