American University Museum Annual Report
July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

In this report we look back on the achievements of the American University Museum during the 2020 fiscal year. We began the year in our physical museum spaces and ended it in virtual space, illustrating the power of art to bring communities together, no matter the circumstances.

While it is impossible to list all the triumphs of the year, a few come to mind as particularly noteworthy. In the fall, we were joined by President Sylvia Burwell, officials from across campus, and donors to celebrate our first Corcoran Legacy Collection exhibition, Moves Like Walter: New Curators Open the Corcoran Legacy Collection, curated by students from Director & Curator Jack Rasmussen’s curatorial practice class. The museum also hosted our first Dance Capstone event in partnership with the Performing Arts Department. Nine students presented final projects that were inspired by the museum. And in the wake of COVID-19, we launched our Museum@Home initiative. As of June 30, we have hosted six virtual exhibitions, livestreamed a gallery talk, and shared three new e-catalogs alongside e-versions of past catalogs. We shared a series of Instagram stories on Behind the Scenes: Preparators and Their Art that was featured in the CityPaper, featured weekly collection highlights, launched an artist studio video series, designed at-home family art activities, and more.

EXHIBITIONS AT THE MUSEUM
From September to March, the museum hung 17 exhibitions in our galleries. A few notable exhibitions:

Norma Broude, American University Art History Professor Emerita curated Grace Hartigan and Helene Herzbrun: Reframing Abstract Expressionism. The show brought together more than two dozen large-scale and rarely seen works by Hartigan and Herzbrun from private and public collections, many in the Baltimore/Washington area. Through her careful selection of work, Broude redirected our attention to the local contexts and communities in which these works were produced and deepened our understanding of the relationship between mainstream modernist movements, such as Abstract Expressionism, and their rich regional transformations.

Two popular international exhibitions:

fair is foul & foul is fair, curated by Dr. Tina Kinsella, featured the work of Irish artists Alice Maher and Aideen Barry. Each artist shared their personal investigations of hybridity, carnality, and social politics that communicate to the viewer the Macbethian phenomena referenced in the show’s title. To achieve such a task, the artists utilized media in a blend of ingenuity and tradition that evoked all five senses.

Heroes & Losers: The Edification of Luis Lorenzana featured the work of self-taught Filipino artist Luis Lorenzana (b. 1979) whose background in politics has infused his work with a cynicism that belies his longing for a kinder, more equitable world. The exhibition thus touched on the themes of a desperate kind of selfless heroism—and the all-too familiar failure of a democratic political system.
The first in a sequence of eco-critical exhibitions:

*Landscape in an Eroded Field: Carol Barsha, Heather Theresa Clark, Artemis Herber* was curated by Laura Roulet to showcase three artists whose work reflects the evolution of the pictorial landscape tradition in the Anthropocene era. This exhibition spanned landscape painting that took no social or political stance to multi-media painting and sculpture that put climate change at the center of its meaning.

In our Project Space:

*Topographies of Life: Pam Rogers, Lynn Sures, Mel Watkin*, curated by Jennifer Riddell, explored each artist’s varied and distinctive use of the medium of drawing. Exposing the connection between humans and the natural world, the artists transmit their personal accounts and subjectivity while balancing the medium’s ties to illustration and science.

**MUSEUM@HOME INITIATIVE**

The museum closed due to COVID-19 in March of 2020 and is closed at the time of this report’s transcription. Our team responded to trying circumstances with determination and creativity—moving all exhibitions online under our Museum@Home initiative. In addition to the featured content mentioned above, using the hashtag #artwhereyouare, we’ve been in contact with our community on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as well as our mailing list and webpage.

**CORCORAN LEGACY COLLECTION**

The Museum presented two exhibitions featuring the Corcoran Legacy Collection: *Moves Like Walter: New Curators Open the Corcoran Legacy Collection* and *Robert Franklin Gates: Paint What You See*.

*Moves like Walter: New Curators Open the Corcoran Legacy Collection* was a product of Director and Curator Jack Rasmussen’s Spring 2019 course on curatorial practice. Upon receipt of the Corcoran Collection, graduate students in art history, arts management, and studio art curated a playful and provocative interpretation of the 9,000-piece gift.

Curated by Jack Rasmussen, *Robert Franklin Gates: Paint What You See* showcased an adventurous artist who greatly influenced the course of Washington art. Gates was a muralist, painter, printmaker, draftsman, and professor at the Phillips Gallery School and then American University for over forty years.

**THE ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART**

As part of the Alper Initiative’s mission to support and exhibit local artists, we presented three physical exhibitions and two online exhibitions.

During the early fall, the Alper space showcased the artists involved in the *WD Printmaking Workshop* that began in the home of Percy and Alice Martin. The included artwork reflected the workshop’s emphasis on experimentation and innovation. In the late fall, Christine Neill presented works that blended motifs of biological examination with visual processes and techniques. And
finally, Curator Claudia Rousseau kicked off 2020 with an exhibition that brought together **Ed Bisese, Elyse Harrison, and Wayne Paige**, whose works illustrate a connection to the surrealist imagery of the 1930s and ‘40s.

In response to the museum’s closure in March 2020, we presented our final Alper exhibition online as part of our **Museum@Home** initiative. **Behind the Scenes: Preparators and their Art** featured artists well known to the AU Museum—our preparators. Preparators are charged with the care, transport, and installation of art, and some of the best preparators are artists themselves. The exhibition included an extended page on our website, a digital exhibition catalog available for public browsing, and extensive social media coverage. Our first online Alper exhibition, the show inspired a Spotify playlist of songs selected by the artists and the launch of our “Artist Studio Series.”

On April 25th, benefactor of the Alper Initiative for Washington Art, Carolyn Small Alper, passed away. She was a Washington artist, AU Alumna, and philanthropist dedicated to developing our understanding of Washington art through research and study, exchange of ideas, and the presentation of focused exhibitions. Director and Curator Jack Rasmussen published a letter reflecting on her impact on the Washington art world with reflections from some of the students, artists, and partners supported by the Alper Initiative.

**OUTREACH**

Our programs served audiences of all ages providing art-filled engagements in a range of media. Some highlights include:

**Family Day**

Visitors of all ages attended our Family Day event to take part in activities inspired by our current exhibitions. Families created hands-on art projects that featured beadwork, portrait-making, and rubbings. “Critterdude” provided close encounters with snakes, tarantulas, and Bubo the owl.

**Art All Night**

Guests visited after dark as part of Tenleytown’s Art All Night. Our 308 attendees watched pop-up performances by students in the Department of Performing Arts, made their own Macramé art, and listened to live music while viewing our Early Fall exhibitions.

**Melissa Ichiuji’s Guise and Dolls**

Artist Melissa Ichiuji taught the virtual class “Pent Up Pin-Up,” a Guise and Dolls Figurative Sculpture Class from May 30-31, 2020. In this live two-day intensive class, participants learned basic techniques for building armatures, stitching, and joining soft materials to create a unique art doll that reflected their inner Femme Fatale.

**Senior Dance Capstone**

In partnering with AU’s Dance Program, guests had the chance to see the Museum through the lens of movement. On November 22 & 23, the galleries were filled with new works by graduating dance students including TED-style talks, new choreographies, and dynamic performances.

**PRESS**

Hyperallergic: **Grace Hartigan and Helene Herzbrun, Two Unorthodox Abstract Expressionists**
The Washington Post: Art from the Corcoran reestablishes its place in D.C. with exhibition at AU

AU Arts: When the Students Run the Show

Washington Diplomat: ‘Radical Link’ Looks at Asylum as Both an Archaic Cage and Modern-Day Escape

Washington Diplomat: Former Filipino Politician Uses Paint to Express Both His Disillusionment and Optimism

Creative Boom: What would climate change sound like if we could hear it? Artist Heather Theresa Clark might have the answer

Washington City Paper: City Lights: See Preparators’ Paintings or Make Bike Anywhere Week Every Week

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