

First-Ever Digital Board “Meeting”

Thank you ever so much, all of you, for checking in and expressing concern for the Nasher and our staff. Luckily, everyone is fine—and working madly from home. We connect by Zoom (like the rest of the world), which has been a successful format for us. I feel lucky to be in touch with the staff during this difficult time. As for our Board of Advisors, it's too complicated to conduct a board meeting by Zoom, therefore, this letter and the staff reports are coming to you through the online.

I miss all of *you*, and I want to express my great admiration and affection for each of you. I have treasured your guidance and support of me since the Nasher Museum opened, and especially since I became director seven years ago. I will miss our stimulating discussions and lively meetings, your fabulous ideas and the reassurance that each of you deeply cares for this institution. You are a very special board of advisors!

New Director Announcement

Duke Provost Sally Kornbluth has appointed a new director of the Nasher Museum! Trevor Schoonmaker will make a wonderful director. The official announcement, which we forwarded to you, gives the background and reasons behind this choice. Personally, I am thrilled -- he is simply the best person for the job. Trevor has played a huge part in the Nasher's success as a curator, and his brilliant vision will now be applied to directing the institution, taking the museum to new heights.

My last day will be May 8. These last weeks would have been bittersweet for me *without* a global health crisis keeping us apart! However, I promise to come back and celebrate with everyone when it's safe. Stay tuned for our rescheduled gala and new director celebration.

Busy & Productive

No, we are not open, but we are working and being productive. The Nasher website is offering visitors the opportunity to see archived videos and podcasts and read important national reviews of our exhibitions from years past. Link: <https://nasher.duke.edu/stories/light-in-the-attic/>

Our curators and educators are finding creative ways to support our communities, and our marketing team is packaging up these stories for our weekly e-newsletter and throughout our website and social media channels. Here are some of my favorite examples:

- Before the Nasher closed to visitors and staff in mid-March, Julia McHugh, Ph.D., Trent A. Carmichael Curator of Academic Initiatives, had the presence of mind to grab something from her desk: a 3D model of an ancient Peruvian ceramic work. The model was produced by the students enrolled in the [Wired! Digital Art History Lab](#), working alongside the Julia and her student curators of *Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas*. This 3D model was perfect for her lectures on Andean ceramics and safe art handling for the class she is teaching this semester. Now online, her class, The Museum Object (ARTHIST 221S), has 14 undergraduate and three graduate students. <https://nasher.duke.edu/stories/dispatch-from-our-virtual-classroom/>. I am very proud to say that during the 2019 fall semester, in the categories of Overall Rating of Course and Overall Rating of Instructor, Julia's course evaluations were among the top 5% of all undergraduate instructors in Trinity College.

- Ryan Helsel from our Education team created inspiring art projects for teachers and families with students trying to adjust to online learning. I love his idea for creating macro-photography stories using action figures, inspired by works in our collection by Hank Willis Thomas and David Levinthal. Link: <https://nasher.duke.edu/visitor-info/families/>. The community, especially parents of K-12 children, have expressed their great appreciation for this outreach.
- Our Academic Initiatives and Marketing teams worked with Ashleigh Smith, Duke Class of 2020, to convert her senior thesis project into an online presentation. Ashleigh majored in art history with a Concentration in Museum Theory & Practice. Her project had been planned as an installation for our Academic Focus Gallery. She talked about her project from her home in St. Louis for our podcast episode. “I feel so grateful to have started my art historical education at Duke with the Nasher,” she said. “The very first time I came to the Nasher as a high school student, I got the chance to see an exhibition that focused pretty heavily on contemporary African American art, and it was the first time that I had ever seen an exhibition dedicated to such subject matter. I was taken aback.” <https://nasher.duke.edu/dreams-of-defiance-black-feminist-fantasy-and-the-direct-gaze/>
- We turned over our Instagram channel one recent Saturday morning to Durham artist Scott Renk, who offered a virtual version of our monthly Sketching in the Galleries for visitors to try at home.

Exhibition Schedule

The curators and I have been working to revise our exhibition schedule. We are grateful that we successfully installed *Ebony G. Patterson . . . while the dew is still on the roses . . .*, although it was open for just 10 days before we had to close the museum. Because we are the final venue, the artist and lenders will allow us to keep it through December. Marshall N. Price was gracious and generous in leading us to the difficult decision to postpone *Roy Lichtenstein: History in the Making, 1948 – 1960* until fall 2022. The Nasher will now be the final venue for that original, traveling show. On a bright note: The beautiful exhibition catalogue is reputed to be printing on schedule in Italy as I write this. Also, our marketing team will release a lovely 30-minute documentary on the exhibition that they filmed in New York with Marshall—just days before the pandemic hit.

The staff and I are deep in conversation about what museum life might look like after the pandemic. As you know, people need art during hard times. If we can put into place new health and safety protocols, with Duke's permission of course, we would offer a much-needed haven. The building is spacious enough, and our staff is clever enough, that maybe we can be one of the first spaces to reopen. Digital art is not a substitute for the real thing!

Regaining our Financial Footing

In addition to adjusting our exhibition schedules to cut costs, we are finding many other ways to cut costs: postponing the Lichtenstein show will save on shipping and installation for the next fiscal year, holding off on printing Nasher Magazine and Calendar for fall, greatly reducing the number of public programs we offer, and spending less on print advertising are just a few examples. I have asked all heads of departments to look at their budgets and proactively suggest cuts for the rest of this fiscal year and the next. Our highly innovative, creative and hard-working staff are working together for solutions. We are losing revenue from admissions and rental income, but received a grant from The Duke Endowment that will lessen the impact of that loss revenue, I believe. Several foundations, including the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, the NEA and the Fox family Foundation have been in touch with us, granting permission to use their funds for core operational costs, if necessary.

Farewell to Tamara Brothers

Please join me in wishing our Director of Development, Tamara a fond farewell! Tamara has accepted an exciting new position as deputy director of the North Carolina Arts Council. The timing is not perfect, but this is a wonderful fit for Tamara. I've personally enjoyed working with her for the past 18 months. The whole staff will miss her beautiful smile and innovative ideas. I am sure we can count on Tamara to support our future grant applications with the NCAC.

Duke is Making a Difference

Finally, I cannot tell you how lucky the Nasher is to have been in Duke's hands during this upsetting time of crisis. The administration acted swiftly, and decisively, and have continued to guide the institution wisely on all fronts. Duke University has been incredibly supportive of the Nasher Museum, continuing to pay all full- and part-time employees. I want to share with you some ways that Duke is doing a great deal of good in the rest of the world:

- Duke is **saving lives** in its hospitals and clinics, and through the extraordinary preparation, skill, courage and commitment of its health care workers.
- Duke is **discovering the treatments and cures** in its laboratories, and helping to shape the policies that will restore our society, through the work of our faculty, staff and students.
- Duke is **reinventing education** and serving students in every state and around the world, supporting them through an unimaginably disruptive time and with a focus on preparing resilient leaders of tomorrow.
- Duke is **anchoring our communities** through a commitment to employees and their families.

A Fond Farewell and a Warm Welcome

I close by saying it was been a great honor to serve the Nasher, it changed my life in so many exciting ways. I could not have done it without this marvelous, generous, warm-hearted board. Thank you all.

I cannot be more pleased with the search committee's recommendation and Vince and Sally's decision to give the directorship to Trevor. He is perfect and has already shown excellent leadership skills in all kinds of situations. His keen intelligence, knowledge of and passion for the Nasher, discretion, level-headedness, calm demeanor and art world connections will serve the Nasher well, and take it to new heights.