

## FROM THE CHAIR... WE ARE THINKING OF YOU

*Tamara (Tammy) Meyer, DEC Chair*

Who could have predicted it? How radically our lives have changed due to a disease the world is trying to understand, harness, and contain. We long for the things we used to take for granted – working, shopping, greeting friends. Learning from home is the new norm. Our vocabulary has changed: essential, non-essential, social-distancing, shelter-in-place, quarantine.

Mia has always been there for us, inspiring our collective love of learning and fostering friendships that we all treasure. That has not changed. Mia's accomplished and resourceful staff are still there (though working from home). Its unparalleled value to the community of Minnesota and beyond remains. In a COVID-19 world we all await what is on the horizon, but docents and guides are resilient, adaptable, agile.

At our recent virtual DEC meeting, we made the unfortunate, but fairly easy, decision to cancel our Spring Luncheon. Challenges to make the museum more accessible will continue to shape future discussions within the DEC, and we will be asking for your ideas and thoughts for a future Forum. But for right now we await guidance from public health authorities, government and Mia leadership as they navigate this new reality.

On behalf of the DEC, know that we all hope you and your families, friends, neighbors, and communities are safe physically and spiritually. We wish the best for the marvelous staff of Mia in this time of uncertainty. Our hearts are with you all.



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*Audience 1 (Galleria Dell Accademia), Florenz, 2004*

Thomas Struth

C-print mounted on UV Plexiglas  
Gift of Funds from Wendy and Doug Dayton,  
Steve and Tamrah Schaller-O'Neil,  
and Kaywin Feldman and Jim Lutz

2010.51.2

Not on View

# MIA FACES THE VIRUS CRISIS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. KATHERINE LUBER

Imagine arriving at the pier to undertake a new command. And there it is, gleaming in the sun...an enormous, beautiful, powerful vessel – one thousand feet from stem to stern, displacement over 100,000 long tons, hundreds of complex, sophisticated systems, many hundreds of able, experienced, loyal officers and crew, all focused on a single mission. After a month of training and preparation, it's time to put to sea, and as the big ship pulls away under balmy skies on a gentle current, the clear-eyed captain eagerly envisions multiple, distant destinations, many, years off, and the achievement of that distant mission.

But just weeks away from the dock, the sky turns black and the sea takes on an ugly, menacing cast. Soon the winds are driving the sleet sideways, enormous waves exceed anything ever seen, and the vessel's (and the eager captain's) mission changes – to something far more immediate than distant ports. And as the storm rages on day after day, she wonders, "How long can this go on?"

On January 2, 2020, Dr. Katherine Luber assumed the post of Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. Her appointment came just four months after the trustees approved a master plan by David Chipperfield to rejuvenate the campus, a plan that Dr. Luber was to implement, while running the capital campaign to finance the renovations. Suddenly the museum closed its doors on March 13, and now faces unprecedented threats to its operating model and its mission. Amid these challenges, Dr. Luber graciously agreed to make time in a very busy schedule to sit down with us (remotely) for an interview. It has been edited here for clarity, length, context and sequence.

– Ed.

*It probably seems like ages ago given what has occurred since, but you've been at the helm here for just three and a half months. Then, several weeks ago...*

37 days, but who's counting?

*...the virus set upon us, seemingly changing everything. How would you describe those early, pre-virus weeks of transition?*

So, so busy. It was also wonderful. To come into a new community like Minneapolis, like the museum, to meet so many new people who were so welcoming to me. The Board was incredible in their welcoming me into the mothership of Mia. The staff was great. I've known about Mia and its collection for a long time; I've also known about its programs and what Mia stands for in the bigger world. This community cares so deeply and shares such a passion for this place. Guides, docents, everybody I've met has been so, so welcoming.

*How difficult was it to arrive after the Chipperfield long-range study was prepared and presented, but before its implementation was really underway?*

That is a challenging sequence of events, but it was very positive for me because it led to some enlightening exchanges with, for example, Board members who are so passionate about the future of Mia. The COVID-19 crisis has slowed the planning process down, but we will pick it up again when the time is right.

*I assume there are many other initiatives, plans and programs you have had to get up to speed on.*

That is so accurate. It has been a whirlwind, that is true. And I'm still learning. Mia is a big and complicated and richly textured and varied place, and it has been quite interesting for me to dive right into it and try to understand its many facets. So, that's what happened after I arrived. I was meeting so many people, I was searching for air bubbles because my dive was so deep, and so I would meet someone, and find oxygen. And then COVID came along and kind of brought us all to the surface and broke that dive, but it will come back. I feel really confident in that.

*You are quoted in a Tribune article as saying, "I look at property rights and human rights as being the two main issues that museums are engaged in today." What did you mean by that?*

I'm really interested in the way that art and people intersect, so art is on our walls, and people visit, and there has been a lot of discussion in recent years about how we tell the stories that are attached to the works of art in our buildings. Some of this emanates from concerns about works that were stolen from Jewish families during the Nazi regime. As time has gone by, some of those works have been repatriated. Museums are seeing requests for repatriation of African objects stolen during European colonialist times. So, that exemplifies one of the ways that human rights and property rights come together. But it's not just about who owns the work, it's also about whose stories are attached to that work, who gets to tell them and how we convey that. So that is really the core issue we face in the museum going forward.

*So, these are ethical issues intertwined with artistic issues.*

I believe that art is deeply, at core, an ethical and humanistic impulse, and it does not belong to one person, or to one group of people; it cannot be expropriated. Those of us who show art and those of us who witness it need to do so with sensitivity to the culture from whence it comes.

*Mia is unique among major museums in the sense that it relies for a substantial portion of its operating revenue on the Park Museum Fund, which was established under auspices of the Minnesota Legislature in 1911, and which continues to apply public funds to enhance the museum's work. How do you view that?*

What an amazing gift! What the Fund has done is allow Mia to be free. It is surely one of the things that has allowed Mia to be so successful. Mia is unique in its accessible, welcoming nature, and the fact that it is free is key to that core mission. That is certainly one of the things that attracted me to Mia, the chance to work at a museum that is so much geared toward service of the public.

*You've expressed enthusiasm for "home grown" special exhibitions, that is, those curated by Mia's own professionals. Can you talk a little about how you think about that?*

Mia has an incredible cadre of curators with extraordinary qualifications and knowledge and varied backgrounds. These are brilliant people who have achieved the highest levels of scholarship that is both broad and deep within their areas of expertise. They have mastered

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## EXCERPTS FROM STORIES



Delita Martin's colorful works combine print-making, drawing, and painting to celebrate African American women as icons of strength and community. Finding inspiration in oral traditions and vintage and family photographs, Martin's work explores the art of storytelling. By depicting her subjects as matriarchal symbols, she offers greater understanding and appreciation for the role of African American women in their families and communities. Her most recent body of work, the series "Between Spirits and Sisters," is inspired by the Sande society of West Africa's Mende people, an exclusive community of women that prepares Mende girls for their transition into womanhood. In her self-portrait, *The Soaring Hour*, Martin addresses her own dual existence between the physical and the spiritual. "The duality of women in this body of work project the spirit and its connection to the physical world, which reinforces the bond amongst women and how they co-exist in the physical and spiritual realms. The mask seen in the work is my interpretation of the Mende mask, specifically created for young girls being initiated into Sande. These masks are created as a reminder that human beings have a dual existence viewed as one body."

—Delita Martin, 2018

*The Soaring Hour (Self Portrait)*, 2018  
Delita Martin (American-born)

Relief printing, charcoal, acrylic, colored pencil, decorative paper, and hand-stitching on paper

complex artistic and historical data and concepts. And we've brought them here, literally from all over the world. So, I use the colloquial term "home-grown" in the very best sense – to enable their brilliance to bring out the best of our collection, combined with their passion within their own special fields of interest, and then to support that with our Learning Innovation, Audience Engagement, our staff, our digital technology and the other powerful resources of Mia. A great example of that is the wonderful, and wildly successful, special exhibition *Hearts of Our People*, curated, supported and created right here. The strength of the institution is that we have an amazing and innovative curator like Jill Ahlberg Yohe who envisioned HOOP and poured her energy into bringing it to life, and then we can support that and run with it because of the resources Mia can bring to bear. So, to me, the "home-grown" part is the best part.

*Can you share anything about special exhibitions in the pipeline?*

Well, perhaps there will be some exciting new things to announce soon, but I haven't gotten to that point yet. As we've discussed, I was here for just two months when suddenly we were all enveloped by issues surrounding COVID-19 demanding immediate, undivided attention.

*Is there anything about the way Mia operates that has been a surprise to you, anything that is totally unexpected?*

I've been in a lot of institutions, and worked in a lot of museums, and I wouldn't say that it is a total shock, but something that is remarkable, very interesting to me, is the way Mia's cross-functional teams work. I've never worked in a place that has had such a powerful cross-functional approach to problem-solving. We have a number of them, eight or ten, I don't even know them all yet. But we have one group of people, the Green Team, who are interested in how Mia can make a positive contribution to abate the climate crisis, and be more effective at recycling. And we have another team that is focused on accessibility, to enhance the ability of everyone to be able to make use of the museum. There is a really powerful team that focuses on issues of equity and inclusion. And they are just fantastic. So, what surprises me and what I'm interested in is how prevalent these are, and how passionate they are, and how much they have to contribute to the well-being and the mission of the institution

*So, when you describe those as cross-functional, I take it that what you mean is that their members are inter-departmental, occupying different roles within the institution.*

Yes. Just recently we've set up a new re-opening cross-functional team that has a member from every department and division on campus to really look at all the issues we're facing going forward, after COVID, including especially how we assure the safety of our visitors, volunteers and staff, which is our highest priority, to make sure we don't put anyone at risk, or rush into anything. And they are meeting every day. We need to be very thoughtful about a whole range of decisions we've never had to confront before, and I've been so impressed by the commitment of this group, across the entire organization, to do just that.



In February 2018, Navajo textile artist D.Y. Begay traveled to Grand Portage, Minnesota, from her home in the Southwest to create this work. Begay's textiles are abstract paintings on wool, drawn from her keen observations of specific landscapes, particularly within *Diné Bikéyah*, or Navajo land. In this instance, Begay spent days observing Lake Superior and its environs. Her attention to details, of the gentle mist, the light behind trees, and the vast winter sky, helps convey the serenity of the place itself.

*Náhookjí Hai (Winter in the North)/  
Biboon Giiwedínong (It Is Winter in the North), 2018  
D. Y. Begay (American, Navajo, born 1953)  
Wool and natural dyes*

*If we may, let's discuss Mia in the COVID world. What is the current situation for staff?*

Pretty much everyone is working from home.

*It will come as no surprise that those of us who volunteer at Mia have developed close and important relationships with those who work here. What can you tell us about what the future holds for staff, whether it be security guards, educators, curators, carpenters or art restorers?*

I don't know yet. That is a central focus right now. But I can tell you that the strength of Mia, in addition to its collection, is the strength of our staff, and how they value their role in bringing together art and people. There is a lot we don't know right now. I wish I could tell you, but like the rest of the world we can only wait for the siege of the virus to end and the economic and social lock-down to be lifted. I'm certainly looking forward to that, as we all are.

*Have there been furloughs?*

No.

*I'm sure planning is difficult for everybody.*

Absolutely. It's really hard. I won't lie – that's a huge challenge. We are trying to do everything we can. I am the kind of problem-solver who likes to look at all the scenarios and different options. So, I don't know if I can even imagine the worst case, but we are all trying to be informed, probably reading all of the same articles in the same papers. We are looking at what is the best case, the next-best case, and so on, and trying to map out what happens in each scenario. And then something new happens, and we have to start all over again, and that's what we do every day. We have a leadership team that includes leaders in every division working our way through this, and we meet every day to talk about modeling of this, and to make plans and review the reports coming out of the cross-functional teams. So, that's how we start our mornings, every single day. We're thinking about these challenges every minute. I will be excited to get back to art, whenever that may happen, but I have such deep admiration for these team members, and every one of the staff, really, that I've met. I look forward to meeting so many that I haven't met.

*In docent training here at Mia our instructors repeatedly stress the key to successful touring: "flexibility." How hard is that in this environment?*

Really hard. One of the Mia family values I like to emphasize here is the concept of agility. So, we are committed to the overriding mission, but we prize the agility to be able to quickly switch to different points and perspectives, being able to adapt. We also prize generosity and emotional awareness, considering the people around you. Hopefully, keeping our mission and our values in sight will enable us to be flexible enough to work our way through these tough times.

*Many milestones of change at the Minneapolis Institute of Art are marked architecturally: McKim, Mead, White/1915; Tange/1974; Graves/2006. Is our next big milestone the architectural concepts of the long-range Chipperfield study, or might it be, instead, radical re-*



In the late 1960s, Colombian artist Olga de Amaral embarked on a series of radical experiments in weaving, composing monumental sculptures consisting only of warp (vertical) threads using techniques akin to braiding. This body of work became known as her *Muros Tejidos* (Woven Walls) series. Here, earth tones and a lattice-like structure reference centuries-old Incan slit tapestries, indicating Amaral's long-term interest in historical Latin American textiles.

*Muro Tejido 82, 1972*  
Olga de Amaral (Colombian, b. 1932)  
Wool, horsehair

envisioning of what it means to be a museum in the new COVID-19 world?

Clearly, there will be radical re-envisioning of the means and methods we use to carry out our mission. But that is not at all inconsistent with the need to plan for and work toward the future as contemplated in the Chipperfield study.

*In The New York Times a couple of weeks ago, there was an article by Holland Cotter, “America’s Big Museums on the Hot Seat”...making the point that during this COVID-19 interval, museums ought to be re-thinking their roles and missions...*

*“In 2020, after the decades-long surge of identity politics, with its demands for inclusiveness and historical truth-telling, the traditional museum is on the hot seat. And a political present charged with racial bias, misogyny and economic inequality, has upped the heat. The result is a new institutional self-consciousness. Our big museums are feeling compelled to acknowledge that they are products of an earlier, ideologically fraught time. To retain credibility, they need to rethink what they were and are. They need to rethink the Temple of Beauty branding they’ve coasted on from the start. They need to acknowledge the often-conflicted relationship between aesthetics and ethics. They need to address what their collections leave out. They need to reconsider their own role as history-tellers and history-inventors. In short, they need to redefine what “encyclopedic” and “museum” and “art” can mean.”*

*So, first, do you agree with this analysis, and, where do you think Mia is along this path?*

I am very familiar with the article, and it resonates in important ways with me in the way I think about these issues. This relates somewhat to the property rights/human rights discussion we had a few minutes ago. But the one way that Holland gets it wrong is that he fails to consider institutions like Mia because we are so much further down the road in thinking about these issues than, for example, some of the coastal museums. And for good reason: we are not sustained by hordes of tourists from around the world like some of the New York and L.A. museums, for example. We are here to serve our community, and so Mia, long before I ever arrived, established its values and mission founded on the principles of diversity, inclusion, equity and accessibility. Take a look at the recent post in the [Stories](#) section of our web site featuring twenty-five great art works by women, chosen by Mia’s curators in honor of Women’s History Month. Matthew Welch, our chief curator, helped organize that, and Nicole Soukup, our assistant curator of contemporary art, wrote the accompanying article. Our curators have been forward-thinking for a very long time; it is not me – I happen to agree with them and to take my strength from them – but we are so far ahead of most museums in this country, and I am very proud of that, and I am really proud to be part of a place that values those things so strongly.

*Apart from the guidelines issued by CDC/State Department of Health, does Mia have timelines for action going forward?*

We are really basing our actions on the directives coming from Gover-



The Minneapolis Public Library, the original home of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, is in the background of this painting.

*Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue, c. 1902*  
Robert Koehler  
Oil on canvas  
Gift by Subscription In Honor of the Artist  
25.403  
On View in Gallery 302

nor Walz. What we know right now is that he has indicated an intention to lift many restrictions on May 4. We don't know what that means exactly, and I'm sure that depends on what happens between now and then. But at this point we are making plans to be able to open during that week. We are hoping it turns out that we can re-open in May, but we need to be able to assure the public, our staff and our volunteers that they are safe. We don't want to re-open and make it feel uncomfortable for anyone. That's why we meet every day. Among other things, we need to figure out, relative to the square footage of our galleries, how many people we can admit to the museum. We may need to implement some sort of timed entrance limitations like some grocery stores are doing now. We're looking at all those things and more, and if we need to implement them, we shall.

*Apart from efforts to make collections accessible online, which many institutions are doing, where is Mia in efforts to continue its mission with its doors closed, in this environment? What is under consideration? How about on-line AAG or docent-led tours? Bringing Mia into the classroom virtually?*

Again, we are in transition, and I again want to congratulate our staff as we roll these ideas out. But recall how suddenly all this came about. I think it was a Thursday, March 12, when we announced that we were cancelling programs through the end of the month, and the very next day we closed. That same weekend our digital teams were already at work developing content, organizing the message, and reaching out to maintain connections with our audience. I'm sure that will continue to be a part of the way we operate in the post-virus environment. But it remains to be seen whether our audiences will visit the museum in the same numbers as before. We know that theaters and concert halls are at risk because people might be nervous about being in enclosed spaces with lots of other people. Museums are not as dense as that, but we'll be looking at all these developments. Hopefully we will be able to resume some semblance of our pre-COVID life because I think museums are extremely important for the soul of the nation, and we need to see encyclopedic collections of art, art by women, art by people who have suffered and been outcasts in the past. We need art even more in perilous times for hope and inspiration, and we have to be able to experience them somehow. My commitment is to make sure that Mia's extraordinary collection remains accessible. How? I don't know, but we will do it. Absolutely.

*I'm sure you know that many volunteers love Mia and have centered their lives, passions, resources, intellectual curiosity and energy here. What would you like for them to hear from you in these stressful times about the sources of your strength and about your vision for the future?*

First of all, I'd like them to know how grateful I am for them. I've been in so many museums. I started my career so many years ago with the Houston Museum; I've been at the Metropolitan, the Philadelphia, at San Antonio. In every one of those places, there are volunteer docents and guides who have this love of life-long learning, and it turns out they are more committed than anyone, and I am so grateful for that passion. In some sense they are our first audience, and if we can satisfy them then we will have gone a long way towards making sure that we are still valuable and relevant. For anyone to give away anything in



*Model of original scheme for the  
Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, c. 1912  
McKim, Mead, and White  
Wood, plaster, and paint  
Transfer from The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts  
99.159A-D  
On View in Gallery 303*

this day and age is remarkable, but to give away your time, love, passion and enthusiasm is just fantastic. And I hope in return we are giving back to you all the passion for art and the joy of learning and engagement and the opportunity to share that with others. We fit together well, a perfect union, egg shell and the yolk, and the museum would not be what it is today without you. So my message is gratitude.

## HELLO, DEAR MIA FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

I think about you every day, and I hope you and your loved ones are doing well. As I sit at my dining room table, filled with the papers and folders I managed to bring home, I often wish I could pull a file out of one of my cabinets at work to find some piece of information I need, but it is out of reach. Or, I wish I could go up the marble staircase to a gallery that holds a work of art I'm thinking about, to check a detail I'm wanting to remember. Fortunately, with the wonders of technology, I can access much of what I need from my laptop. I see staff colleagues every day through the portals of Zoom and Google Hangouts. Family members are just a text or Facebook post away. Despite all these tech tools, I still prefer and really miss face-to-face contact - with people, and with art.

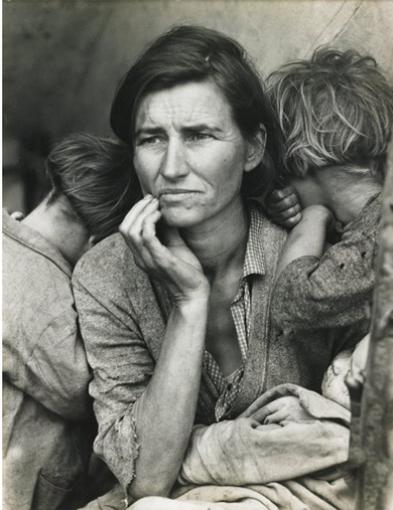
We don't know what the post-COVID-19 world will be like, but I believe that our desire for human contact will be stronger and ever more essential. That's what each of you brings to our visitors as you discuss the museum's cultural treasures with them. The works of art are the catalyst, a means to connect, share, celebrate, ask questions, and affirm together our common humanity. I look forward to seeing you again and talking about art, in person, on the "other side."

*Debbi*

# A PANDEMIC GALLERY

Those who love Mia rely on it for sustenance, comfort and inspiration.  
What does your Mia pandemic mini-gallery look like?

**For humble strength and resolve in the face of hardship...**



*Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936*  
Dorothea Lange;  
Depicted: Florence Owens Thompson  
Gelatin silver print  
The Alfred and Ingrid Lenz Harrison Fund  
92.136  
Not on View

**For courageous self-sacrifice  
for community...**

*Study for a Burgher of Calais  
(Pierre de Wiessant),  
modeled c. 1885 in plaster*  
Auguste Rodin  
Bronze, cast about 1902-17  
Anonymous Gift in Memory of Walter Lindeke  
59.20  
On View in Gallery 355



**For holding tight to loved ones, near and far...**

*Sleepers, 1979*  
Georges Jeanclos  
Fired clay  
Gift of Funds from Tamara and Michael Root  
and the Marguerite S. McNally Endowment  
for Art Acquisition  
2015.72  
Not on View



**For humility,  
acceptance,  
redemption,  
grace,  
peace...**

*"Burst bag" Freshwater Jar, late 16th - early 17th century-*  
Unknown Japanese  
Iga ware; stoneware with natural ash glaze; lacquer cover  
Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of The Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation  
2015.79.293A,B  
On View in Gallery 224