

Knoxville Museum of Art
Fiscal Year 2021
Annual Report

The KMA reopened June 24, 2020 after closing abruptly in mid-March. The reopening anticipated by a few days the July 1 start of the 2021 fiscal year and the long, slow process of moving toward something resembling the pre-pandemic normal. It felt good to do again what an art museum does, even as we kept a watchful eye on the public health numbers and anxiously awaited the production and distribution of a vaccine (which finally became widely available in spring 2021). For most of the year, visitation was limited to 100 visitors per day, with timed reservations to control traffic flow and numbers, and stringent protocols to protect floor personnel and visitors. Masks were required in all public areas and the common areas of the office. No one seemed to mind the restrictions. The KMA was one of the first public facilities in the area to reopen, and people were happy to get out of the house. Staff were encouraged to work remotely, and meetings and programs were on Zoom.

Even though for most of the year there was no on-site programming, we continued to generate quality content and experiences for children and adults that could be accessed remotely. The beautiful new classroom spaces carved out of former auditorium, which were completed just as the shutdown began, turned out to be perfect for video production. Indeed, one of the surprising positive outcomes of what was in so many ways a challenging period was the expansion of our capacity to connect with more people in new ways. The [KMA Collectors Circle](#), in a joint venture with the Asheville Art Museum, kicked off its new season in the fall with virtual visits to collectors' homes in Knoxville and Asheville. In December, the [KMA Guild](#) presented its annual Holiday Homes Tour, a beloved holiday tradition, as a completely virtual event, raising more money for the KMA than anticipated. The newsletter made the transition to a fully digital publication. We honored the invaluable contributions of the KMA's hundreds of volunteers with a virtual Volunteer Appreciation Reception in April. By then, we were old hands at organizing virtual events.

Not everything during the year was experienced through a laptop screen, however. By spring 2021, it was possible, with lots of limits and restrictions (not to mention a fair amount of social awkwardness) to host limited in-person events. We are overjoyed that [L'Amour du Vin](#), the KMA's largest single revenue source, went on as planned and was a huge success, animated by the joy of (masked) friends being with one another after so long apart. And, thanks specifically to the disruption of the pandemic, [Beauford Delaney & James Baldwin: Through the Unusual Door](#) enjoyed an extraordinarily long run, through October 25 (it had opened in February). The exhibition was originally slated to close in early May and dozens of important works returned to institutions around the country. Now those institutions were mostly closed. Nearly every lender to the exhibition generously extended their loans, so we were able to keep the exhibition on view far longer than we could have dreamed. Another COVID win! This groundbreaking exhibition stands as an exceptional achievement in the KMA's history, representing the highest and best expression of the KMA's focus on the art and artists of East Tennessee. *Through the Unusual Door* raised the KMA's national profile, made a significant contribution to Beauford Delaney scholarship, boosted our institutional capacity (we are now much better positioned to carry out such ambitious projects), and enhanced Beauford Delaney's visibility locally.

Following the October closing of *Through the Unusual Door*, the annual East Tennessee Regional Student Exhibition went ahead as planned in November and December, but without the usual public celebration for exhibiting students and their families.

Pandemic disruptions inspired some useful collaborations among cultural institutions in the region, as we all scrambled to salvage the exhibition schedules abandoned in March 2020. [*A Lasting Imprint: Rendering Rhythm and Motion in the Art of Black Mountain College*](#), drawn from the collection of the Asheville Art Museum, opened in January 2021. *A Lasting Imprint* documented an intense, experimental moment in American modernism that played out in Western North Carolina, demonstrating once again the unexpected cultural richness and sophistication to be found in Appalachia. In exchange, we shared with our colleagues across the mountains in North Carolina a show of Beauford Delaney material from our collection. (A similar exchange was planned for the following year with the Hunter Museum of Art in Chattanooga.) We were also able to present [*Homegrown*](#), an outdoor installation by Katie MacDonald and Kyle Schumann, the product of a fellowship at the University of Tennessee Knoxville's College of Architecture + Design, and [*Sculptural Objects from the KMA Collection*](#). The year finished up with two special exhibitions drawn from the KMA collection: [*A View of the City: Knoxville*](#) and [*Undercurrents: Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Art*](#). For the first time in our history, all three floors of the KMA were dedicated to showing our own holdings. This unprecedented situation in part reflected circumstances imposed by the pandemic, but also spoke to the impressive growth of the collection over the past decade or so.

Acquiring important new works continued in the 2021 fiscal year, global pandemic notwithstanding. It was particularly gratifying to be entrusted with several paintings by esteemed Knoxville Impressionist Catherine Wiley's by the artist's descendants, including [*Young Woman with Parasol Reading*](#), 1915, the gift of the Edwin Packard Wiley family. Thanks to the KMA Collectors Circle, we were able to purchase a monumental painting by Knoxville artist and University of Tennessee faculty member Jered Sprecher that had been on loan for years in *Currents*, the museum's permanent exhibition of contemporary art; a pair of prints by fellow UT faculty member Althea Murphy-Price; and an important work on paper by internationally acclaimed artist Willie Cole.

The KMA began in the fall of 2019 the process of developing new strategic goals to chart the way for the next several years, with the idea of completing the process by spring of 2020. Circumstances, of course, intervened, and it took until May 2021 to finalize and approve the new [strategic plan](#), which very much continues and reinforces the museum's current direction. The focus on regional content and programming is clear from the opening statement: "The Knoxville Museum of Art celebrates and explores the rich and diverse visual culture of East Tennessee and its connections to the wider world." The plan goes on to stress diversity in exhibitions, programs, staff, volunteers, visitors, and stakeholders; using technology to enhance the visitor experience and engage new stakeholders; the importance of operating ethically, responsibly, and transparently as a public trust; enhancing our community's quality of life and economic development; and meeting people where they are, creating the potential for life-long learning and introducing new ideas. Perhaps the most important action step in the plan, around which many other parts of the plan are constructed, is the complete rethinking, reinstallation, and upgrading of the museum's flagship permanent exhibition *Higher Ground*: A

Century of the Visual Arts in East Tennessee. It's been 12 years since *Higher Ground* first opened, mostly with borrowed works, and we now have a much bigger and richer collection to present. The new installation will also feature a more robust interpretive apparatus to engage visitors (including a phone audio tour) and in general tell our story in a more vivid way. We are confident that this project, with completion anticipated by fall 2023, will attract substantial support from national foundations and funding agencies (just as *Through the Unusual Door* did). Other planks in the new strategic plan address our commitment to diversity and inclusion; beefing up staff resources; and procuring the funding we need to carry out our mission effectively.

In that terrible spring of 2020, when we were putting the final touches on the 2021 fiscal year budget, things were uncertain, if not downright scary. No one knew what a global pandemic would mean, how long the shutdown would last, how much lasting economic damage there might be. We shaved down our original revenue projections for the coming year, and trimmed projected expenses accordingly. Much of that reduction came out of senior staff salaries, since people are by far the KMA's largest expense (as well as its greatest asset!). Things went much better than we could have dared dream, however. Our friends and supporters responded generously and with alacrity to a special appeal, contributing more than \$150,000 to what we titled the Resilience Fund, which covered any projected revenue losses and allowed us to make good at mid-year the salary reductions imposed earlier in the year. The 2021 fiscal year was a stress test, and the KMA and our community came through with flying colors. With this generous local support and an infusion of Federal funding through the Paycheck Protection Program, we ended the year in solid financial shape. We were even able to set aside additional reserves for building maintenance, art acquisitions, a well-deserved bonus for staff, and cash for a rainy day. It's good to have some dry powder stashed away.

David Butler, Executive Director

FY 2021 At A Glance

Total number of visitors 21,161
Membership retention rate 64%
Number of membership households 1,063
Private gifts \$792,089
Earned income \$76,988
Endowment corpus \$7,247,513
Total operating revenue \$2,094,689
Total operating expenses \$1,654,706

KNOXVILLE MUSEUM OF ART ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Gifts of \$1,000 and above received between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2021

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(\$100,000 and above)**

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