

# Report of the President and Director

It is my distinct pleasure to look back on fiscal year 2015, a time of great growth and promise at the Art Institute. Our international reputation was highlighted this year by our ranking as #1 museum in the world by TripAdvisor travelers, a result of the input of visitors near and far. In addition, I am celebrating my thirtieth year at the museum and my last full year as director: an auspicious time for reflection on what our trustees, staff, and supporters have achieved together.

This year, we presented the ambitious goals of our Long Range Plan—a roadmap to continued institutional preeminence in the 21st century. The plan is rooted in our unique history and informed by two years of research on many fronts; it is shaped perhaps most of all by our mission as a global museum. As we take clear steps toward championing diversity as it is reflected in the museum's audiences, collections, research, and programs, we will continue to advance the public good by engaging audiences in the issues of our time and all time.

In 2015 we became more aggressively global and culturally inclusive in our aspirations, focusing on building collections that will rival our long-recognized strength in Western art. In April, we welcomed internationally recognized Chinese art scholar Tao Wang as the new Pritzker Chair of the Department of Asian Art and Curator of Chinese Art. Tao brings a wealth of knowledge about the art and archaeology of China and will lead the department in its dynamic efforts to expand the reach and raise the profile of our Asian collection and programs. We also ramped up our outreach and travel to China, forging new partnerships with the Palace Museum, in Beijing, and the Shanghai Museum that will result in an exchange of research and exhibitions over the coming years.

In collaboration with the Government of India, we participated in our third year of the Vivekananda Memorial Program for Museum Excellence, a four-year professional exchange program. The impact of our partnership has not only created a strong network for program fellows, but also a searchable arts database that makes a growing number of objects and images accessible to an international audience.

It was also a banner year for gifts that are central to the Long Range Plan. With our heightened focus on expanding our Asian holdings, we were thrilled to accept Barbara Levy Kipper's gift of nearly 400 works from her exceptional collection of Buddhist ritual objects and Asian ethnic jewelry. The richness of her collection will add an important new dimension to the museum's holdings of Indian, Himalayan, Central Asian, Southeast Asian, and Chinese art. The museum also received the largest gift of art since our founding: 44 iconic, universally acclaimed masterpieces of contemporary art from collectors Stefan T. Edlis and Gael Neeson. Against the backdrop of our collection, Stefan and Gael's gift has allowed us to build one of the richest narratives of contemporary and Pop art that exists under one roof. The Edlis|Neeson Collection is transformative for the museum and is an incredible gift to the people of and visitors to Chicago.

Other acquisitions and gifts of art boosted our holdings across all of our eleven curatorial departments, including a significant and collection-enhancing body of contemporary works on paper given by Irving Stenn, Jr. With such gifts come ever-growing opportunities for our curatorial staff to create new narratives in the galleries—both in permanent installations and through ambitious special exhibitions. As acquisitions reshape and enliven our galleries, we continue to build on a robust initiative dedicated to telling stories that will enhance our visitors' experience both in the museum and through our website.

Our exhibitions program extended our reach and utilized new approaches. The lauded exhibition *Ireland: Crossroads of Art and Design, 1690–1840* was the first to explore the rich and complex art and culture of Ireland during the long 18th century, and did so while engaging our local Irish community and notable guests from Ireland. We opened our first-ever exhibition devoted to Latin American colonial art, *A Voyage to South America*. Monographic exhibitions dedicated to James Ensor, Josef Koudelka, and Charles Ray broke new ground in their treatment of these important

artists, while an experimental exhibition, *Shatter Rupture Break*, presented objects from our own collection in a fresh and immersive installation.

And so it comes as a great honor, but no surprise, that we gained new recognition this year through our fantastic ranking on TripAdvisor. Chicagoans and international tourists alike celebrated with us: visiting the museum in record numbers, taking selfies in front of our “World Champions of Art” sculpture as it moved around the city, and engaging in an online dialogue to share in the accolades.

Beyond social media efforts, our digital success flourished as we capitalized on the recent outfitting of the entire museum—galleries and public spaces included—with Wi-Fi capabilities. Utilizing this technology keeps our diverse audiences connected in new ways and allows them to create their own individual experiences with art. We also enjoyed the launch of five in-depth, online scholarly catalogues dedicated to artists Gustave Caillebotte, James Ensor, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and James McNeill Whistler and Theodore Roussel, adding to our growing register that provides global access to our collections.

With this foundation firmly in place, we are well positioned to fulfill our vision with energy and momentum in the coming years.

Douglas Druick  
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