



SUNLETTER

THE PEOPLE, EVENTS, & EXHIBITS OF THE GRACE HUDSON MUSEUM

SUMMER 2020 Volume 29, No. 2

Beyond the Museum's Walls

This year certainly hasn't followed the script we originally wrote for it. Rather, there has been much need for improvisation. The novel coronavirus has wreaked havoc throughout the world and, as of this writing, is touching Mendocino County in ways that should concern us all. In the effort to slow and control transmission of the virus, Governor Gavin Newsom mandated the closure of all of California's indoor museums—an upsetting though understandable action. Consequently, our winter/spring exhibition, *Metaphor, Myth, & Politics: Art from Native Printmakers*, was only publicly available for eight of its 16 planned weeks, while our highly-anticipated summer exhibition, *The World of Frida*, was on view for only one of its scheduled 12 weeks. Additionally, we had no choice but to cancel all of our ancillary public programs. With no clear indication of when museums might be allowed to reopen, I made the decision recently to postpone our scheduled fall exhibition, *Pulped Under Pressure: The Art of Handmade Paper*. Working with the exhibition organizer, we plan to present it in 2022.

Over the next several months, our staff will turn their focus to developing various forms of digital content that we hope will serve and engage our audiences. This includes providing educational experiences

to schools and students. Many of you followed, or are now catching up with, our social media program on Facebook and Instagram—*The Museum Comes to You*—offering artwork and insights from the Native print and Frida Kahlo exhibitions that both ended prematurely. From this we aim to expand how we bring digital museum experiences to you by creating and presenting programming that can be live-streamed and archived on virtual platforms. While it's enormously disappointing

not to be able to welcome visitors within our physical walls, I view this time as an opportunity to make lemonade from lemons. Virtual programming will further bring the Grace Hudson Museum into the 21st century. Our first big test for creating live-streaming content will be our annual Gala, historically held in mid-September. Months ago, health and safety concerns made it apparent to Museum staff and the Sun House Guild Board that an in-person event for 150 guests would be impossible this year. So, we've decided to try our hand at a virtual gala. Ideas are being developed as I write, so I can't yet share with you exactly what will be on the program. What I can say is that in a year that celebrates the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the United States, we thought it fitting to pay tribute to the many strong women who have shaped the Grace Hudson Museum. We also hope to feature a few artists and arts-related topics and, of course, we will be asking for your financial support. An invitation and letter of appeal will be going out at the beginning of September with details on when, where, and how to watch, as well as how you can donate.

One person who will play a major part in the GHM's efforts to break through our museum's walls is Alyssa Boge, our new Curator of Education and Exhibits, who began her duties on July 6. We will have a lot more to say about Alyssa and her museum background in the next *Sunletter*. Until then, be well, stay safe, and please wear a mask in public.

— David Burton, *Director*



Colonial Chic by Maya Vera, 2016, inkjet print



Sun House Guild

GRACE HUDSON

MUSEUM & Sun House

Hours: Wed-Thu 10:00 am - 4:30 pm

(Fri-Sun 12:00 pm - 4:30 pm) the month til 8:00 pm)

Sun 12 - 4:30 pm. (707) 467-2836

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An Evolving Artistic Landscape

Greetings! I originally wrote my message for the summer issue of the *Sunletter* over the Fourth of July weekend, hoping that by the time you read it, the Museum would once again be fully open to the public and you'd all be tripping over one another to see the long-anticipated exhibition, *The World of Frida*. As you now know, we were only open for five days, and are back to living in a world of understandably tighter social restrictions without a clear end in sight.

I couldn't help but notice over the many months of shelter-in-place orders—both from before our brief reopening and after—that artists from every discipline have been filling our social media outlets with music, dance, literature, and visual art. Among many offerings, people have had the opportunity to enjoy Shakespeare sonnets read by Sir Patrick Stewart; full performances from the Metropolitan Opera in New York; dancers from the Paris Opera Ballet performing *Romeo and Juliet* from their homes; virtual music festivals from performers around the world; and, not least, an in-depth review over several weeks on this museum's Facebook and Instagram pages of selected artwork from our spring exhibition, *Metaphor, Myth, & Politics: Art from Native Print-makers*, and more recently from our summer show, *The World of Frida*. It may not be the same as seeing the arts in-person, but it still has a way of exciting our minds and hearts.

What this tells me is that at a time of such unprecedented uncertainty in so many areas, the arts—which we appreciate and enjoy throughout our lives—are not only a stimulating outlet, but also a soothing balm. Even just a brief encounter with music, poetry, dance, or painting can have a lasting effect, keeping stress and anxiety at bay and reminding us that the world has much to offer. We look forward to having the Grace Hudson Museum be a vibrant part of this evolving artistic landscape.

— Toni Wheeler, *Sun House Guild President*

Heartfelt Thanks to the Following Donors

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Frida in the Time of COVID-19

Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) has increasingly been recognized in the years since her death for her vibrant folk-art-styled depictions of flora and fauna, Mexican culture, and striking self-portraits embedded with autobiographical elements. Personally, Kahlo suffered terribly throughout her lifetime from a series of physical ailments and accidents, and shared a tumultuous marriage with famed Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886–1957). Three years ago, the staff at the Grace Hudson Museum learned of a traveling exhibit, organized by the Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek, comprised of international contemporary art inspired by the fascinating life and work of Frida Kahlo. We immediately became interested in bringing it to the Grace Hudson Museum.

A contract was signed and *The World of Frida* exhibit was planned for May 23 to August 16, 2020. Envisioning a popular summer show, with exciting affiliated public programming, and fun Frida-related items in the Museum Gift Shop, the staff looked forward to the opportunities the exhibit presented. Unfortunately, a worldwide pandemic intervened and the very possibility of the *Frida* exhibition was put in doubt. The Grace Hudson Museum was forced to close on March 18 and museums throughout the country did the same as states implemented shelter-in-place orders. Traditionally straightforward aspects of developing an exhibit became fraught with uncertainty: when would the staff at the show's previous venue in Florida be allowed to re-enter their shuttered museum to de-install it? Would the seven wooden crates containing 117 works of art travel successfully through virus-laden states each with different closure regulations? How would the safety of the Grace Hudson staff be insured when unpacking the show?

The crates arrived in mid-May, which at the time seemed a triumph. They were wiped down with a bleach solution, and allowed to sit for several weeks to ensure no virus remained inside. I gathered a team of intrepid



Frida with Birds by Yan Inlow, 2016, embroidery

museum professionals cautiously willing to leave their shelter-in-place locales to install the exhibit. With the help of City of Ukiah Parks Department staff, portable walls were re-arranged on the gallery floor. Working apart as much as possible, and always wearing masks, the crew installed the show, all the while unsure when the Museum could open to the public.

An additional challenge was to design the exhibit so that the abundance of portraits of Frida Kahlo that it included did not make the viewer feel overly

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stared at. I interspersed these portraits with works that focused on other aspects of her experience, such as her painting materials, her wheel chair, her relationship with Diego Rivera, and her fondness for animals. Other pieces were grouped together because they referenced a particular painting by Kahlo herself and allowed for intriguing comparison, or because they shared a theme or media. The result was a colorful tribute to the powerful personality and influence of Frida Kahlo.

We're so sorry that only 150 or so visitors to the Grace Hudson Museum got a chance to see the show in person due to California's mandated museum closures. It may be small consolation for our constituents, but my new curatorial colleague, Alyssa Boge, and I created a four-minute video about how the *Frida* exhibition was organized and designed. You can find it on the Museum's Facebook page, originally posted on August 7.

— Karen Holmes, *Curator of Collections and Exhibits*



Sun House Guild

GRACE HUDSON MUSEUM

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Special Thanks for Collections Gifts

Deborah Kelley and the Estate of June Marie Drewry for the gift of two Pomo baskets from Covelo and a Navajo wedding basket woven by Bessie Holiday. John Hudson had a Navajo wedding basket in his personal collection, in addition to many Pomo baskets and artifacts from other tribes. With this in mind, we plan to place the three baskets from this gift in the Sun House where they will add to a sense of how the home was decorated when the Hudsons resided there.

Dennis Toth for facilitating the purchase of a rare Carleton Watkins stereograph image of a Pomoan woman basket maker and Pomoan boy holding a bow, at the Mendocino Rancheria near Big River in 1863. Watkins numbered it 221 in his stereographic series on Mendocino County. It is the first original Watkins photo



Basket Making, Mendocino #221 by Carleton Watkins, 1863, stereograph

added to our collections, joining a pirated copy of Watkins's #220 from the same series, and some copy negatives of photos he took around Noyo River and Mendocino.

Monte and Kay Hill for underwriting the purchase of stereograph #221 by Carleton Watkins, one of the premiere early chroniclers of California and the American West.