

## Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College Museum Subcommittee Draft Program Plan

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### **A Vision for the Museum**

Over the past few months, the museum committee has had the privilege of hearing first-hand how deeply engaged Colorado Springs is with art, and how committed the community is to celebrating the ways art enriches our understanding, inspires us, and expands our world(s). We found this message both affirming and inspirational. While our respondents often disagreed about the exact direction the museum should take, and how it might accomplish its tasks, they conveyed a fundamental conviction that the museum is of central importance in our city, and a faith in the museum's longstanding mission to elevate and celebrate the arts as an essential part of our shared human experience. We hope the recommendations in this report convey some of the excitement we heard – which we wholeheartedly share – about the tremendous potential and dynamic future ahead for the museum at the CSFAC at CC.

In the new CSFAC at CC, we envision a museum that embodies the rich history, current vitality, and exciting future of this community. Harnessing the power of the arts to bring people together, the museum will be a center not only for teaching and learning, but also a place of inclusion, exchange, collaboration, and inspiration for people across our community and our region. As the founders of the CSFAC envisioned, the museum will bring the finest of both historic and contemporary art to the public. Dynamic interdisciplinary exhibitions paired with innovative teaching opportunities will create a museum that celebrates excellence in the visual arts for all visitors. The aim of the CSFAC at CC will be to explore, challenge, and transcend traditional definitions of what a museum can be. The museum will embrace its function as a cultural destination - but it can also be more. Possibilities include: a center for interactive and experiential learning, a laboratory of new ideas, a place of solace, a creative nexus for artists, a hub for the exchange of opinions, a platform for inter-community communication, a destination for fun and enjoyment, and more. Ultimately, the new CSFAC at CC museum will celebrate the power of the arts to inspire people, spark learning, and forge equitable communities that will contribute to changing the world for the better.

### **Results from Listening Sessions**

Museum audiences were generous with their feedback, so we had the pleasure of receiving many different ideas and concerns about the museum, the collection, the exhibition program, and the museum's role in the community. One consistent theme was a directive to honor and support the regional Southwest focus of the Taylor collection, and to prominently show that historic collection. An equally robust theme we heard concerned the important role contemporary art plays in the museum's mission. The committee understood this to be a both/and situation: to support and grow both the historic and contemporary programs the museum offers and that community members clearly value. Maintaining high standards of quality was a central concern for all respondents, who stressed the

importance of ongoing professional museum accreditation and strong curatorial vision. Another consistent theme was a desire to see the museum be revitalized in its position as a major art institution in the region, and potentially the nation. Part of that endeavor would entail growing the collection, and we heard a lot of support for a more active program of acquisition of art in all of our collecting areas. As part of developing a national reputation, we heard interest in creatively developing the museum as a center for innovative teaching.

Consistent through the groups and also through the online responses was a desire for the museum to be more relevant and accessible to today's citizens in Colorado Springs as well as to the campus. People wanted to see the museum become a vibrant gathering place for community and students alike. Fears were expressed on two fronts: first, that the CSFAC at CC would become even less accessible due to the CC "bubble" and new academic museum status; and second, that the museum would not embrace the student and faculty perspective. To the committee, these divergent points illuminated a theme of broadening access and appealing to a wide variety of people. Specific ideas such as rethinking admission policies and opening hours came forward, but our respondents' viewpoints also encouraged us to think more broadly about who the museum audience is – or should be. In this vein, such responses challenged us to consider how opening up definitions, breaking down boundaries, and embracing innovation can engage more people across both campus and community by inspiring new ways of thinking about art and its role in our lives.

A final, related theme was an exhortation to fight against perceptions of the museum's isolation. We heard a call to leverage our position as major regional museum to support the arts broadly in the Colorado Springs community and beyond. We heard suggestions for inter-organizational and community collaboration, new program building, and drawing in new audiences on and off campus, as examples of what people wanted to see in a revitalized CSFAC at CC museum.

Over the course of the past four months, the committee worked hard to distill the great amount of feedback into core concerns, and to construct concrete initiatives that address those concerns. Our recommendations are gathered into two central themes drawn from the community feedback: one is focused on enhancing excellence in what the museum does (exhibitions, teaching, and collections); the other looks at the role of the museum in the community (including inclusive programs, dynamic opportunities for engagement, and productive collaborations).

The museum Subcommittee offers these themes and recommendations with sincere thanks to the many people who submitted their thoughts, insights, and ideas in the listening sessions.

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**Theme #1:**

**Honor and expand upon the Fine Arts Center's historic vision for innovative, culturally diverse, and interdisciplinary arts programs, and become a national model of excellence for a museum that serves community and campus, in this region and beyond.**

With roots reaching back to 1919 in the Broadmoor Art Academy, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and its museum originated from a remarkable, innovative vision put into place in 1935. Founders Julie Penrose, Elizabeth Sage Hare, and Alice Bemis Taylor believed – as do we – in the power of interactions between the visual arts, the practice of art making, and the performing arts. The Museum in particular benefitted from the gifts of Alice Bemis Taylor, whose love for arts of the Southwest produced the remarkable Taylor Collection. Of equal import was Elizabeth Sage Hare’s passion for contemporary art. Her connections among the European and American avant-garde in New York City resulted in FAC exhibitions of what are now some of the most renowned Modern artists in history. In the intervening decades, the Museum has grown significantly in its collection of regional art and art of the Americas, both historic and contemporary. Our first theme builds upon those past strengths, and leverages the power of the original, well-beloved and powerful interdisciplinary vision while harnessing the critical skills and expertise of our academic connections. This theme also challenges the museum to implement the “both/and” perspective that came through in our listening sessions.

*Recommendation A: We advocate supporting the museum’s central mission: to present excellent exhibitions that expand awareness of diverse cultures, ideas, and modes of artistic expression from across the globe, while also respectfully showcasing the cultures of the Southwest and the Americas that are part of the shared history of our community.*

We recommend continuing to invest in the museum’s established practice of presenting critically acclaimed exhibitions of both regional and internationally recognized art, both historic and contemporary. The museum might also share its perspectives and resources by generating exhibitions that travel to regional and national venues, thus maximizing national exposure to our excellent collection and providing an opportunity to showcase exciting new scholarship and critical approaches to studying the arts and culture of our region. For example, to create exhibitions that help visitors make meaningful connections between regional, national, and global experiences and values, the curators could use an interdisciplinary lens to provide multiple access points for diverse audiences. They might design and host innovative, dynamic exhibitions that connect audiences to historical and contemporary cultures in new or unexpected ways. Strategies could include inviting artists to curate or inviting participants with a diverse range of personal and disciplinary backgrounds to interpret, discuss, and respond to artworks on exhibition. An artist-in-residence program could bring art-making directly into the museum and also provide dynamic interactions with renowned practitioners in the contemporary art world.

*Recommendation B: We advocate for enriching the quality of the museum and its permanent collections by maintaining an active acquisitions program of historic and contemporary art of the Americas (consistent with our collections policy).*

A museum must be active in order to remain important and vital. The CSFAC at CC can grow its collections by devoting resources to careful acquisition. Focusing energies on productive relationships with donors is also important. Improving support for collections care and research are strategies that would support the museum’s world class collections. Photography and digitization would make the collection accessible to a broad audience, and raise our regional and national profile. Investing in

expanding and nurturing our ongoing relationships with tribal communities is an important part of ethical stewardship of the museum's Native collections.

*Recommendation C: The museum should become a national leader among academic museums for curricular and pedagogical innovation.*

With its offerings enriched by the incorporation of the College's IDEA program, the museum is well positioned to achieve this goal. The prospect of making the museum as central to a CC student's educational experience as the library is a real possibility, one that may be achieved through: increased interaction with teaching faculty; curricular innovations such as a museum studies program; and hands-on learning through museum internships for students. A scholar-in-residence program would bring national and international scholars to the museum and generate new bodies of knowledge about the collection, regional cultures, and museum pedagogies. These discoveries could be disseminated through printed and on-line publications as well as through increased access to museum archives. The museum could embed these results into public education initiatives as well, improving K-12 school tours, docent programs, and exhibition interpretation materials.

## **Theme #2:**

**Serve the campus and regional communities by becoming a cultural hub for a wide variety of audiences from the College, the city, and the region.**

Focusing on the importance of the museum to the community, this theme responds to the call to increase the vitality and relevance of museum programming. The Subcommittee heard loud and clear that audiences wanted the museum to make visits to the exhibitions more dynamic and meaningful. In terms of its exhibitions, the museum might present exceptional regional artists within a national or international context in order to situate the local experience within a broader context, and curate exhibitions that celebrate and critically reexamine institutional, regional, and local art history.

*Recommendation D: Keep the viewer experience at the center of the museum's activities, and create avenues for fruitful and inclusive discussion, collaboration, and exchange among visitors.*

To do this, the museum might facilitate multiple points of view within exhibitions and provide opportunities for visitors to generate or contribute knowledge to exhibitions, thus breaking the mold of the institution as the single transmitter of knowledge. Developing new technologies to provide access to information, hosting accessible events and learning opportunities, and fostering the creation of personalized social experiences within the museum could re-engage a diverse audience with the museum. Additional staff might be necessary for such ventures, but the results would be significant.

*Recommendation E: The museum should intentionally and authentically bridge across difference to engage a diverse and inclusive community with the museum.*

The three founders of the CSFAC envisioned an institution that was widely accessible, from Julie Penrose's donation of centrally located real estate to Alice Bemis Taylor's hope that the museum would be free in perpetuity. To that end, re-assessing admission policies and opening hours would be appropriate as a means to remove logistical barriers to attendance, while supporting enhanced K-12

school programs would enrich the art experiences of the city’s youth. Renewing our commitment to nurturing relationships with Native communities would not only deepen interpretation for museum audiences but also provide a national model for collaborative care and interpretation of Native objects.

*Recommendation F: The museum Subcommittee advocates for a more central role for the museum on campus and in the community through increased partnerships and collaborations.*

Collaboration is key to a vital institution and to a thriving cultural life for our city. Collaborations might occur within the Fine Arts Center itself (with Theater and Bemis) and will certainly draw upon closer relationships with college departments and programs. The museum might variously partner with the FAC Theatre, academic departments, and the Bemis School to program multi-disciplinary arts experiences that explore a central theme. Additionally, the museum can build relationships with other arts institutions in the region, and support community groups and programs to a greater extent. Such collaborative projects could include the creation a series of “salons” for local artists to explore individual and collaborative practices through discussion sessions and workshops, or programs wherein community groups may use the museum as a venue for cultural expression. Building on and expanding existing collaborations with other regional presenting organizations, the museum and its allies could embark on visionary projects that would be impossible for individual organizations to achieve, and that would have a significant impact on our community. Finally, the museum must facilitate and enable professional development and relationship building for its staff, who are the key to achieving these visionary goals.

## **The CSFAC at CC Museum Subcommittee: Background and Details**

The CSFAC at CC Museum Subcommittee consists of 10 dedicated and experienced people: museum professionals, leaders in the Colorado Springs arts community, current and former CSFAC Board of Trustees members, and CC staff and faculty. The Subcommittee members bring to the table skills and expertise in arts administration, curating, teaching, business management, and community outreach. Cochairs Blake Wilson and Rebecca Tucker wish to convey their thanks to this group, who dedicated many hours and significant energy to this project – a testament to their love for the arts, their respect for the two institutions, and their commitment to supporting and strengthening the arts in Colorado Springs.

Our initial charge, stated at the project’s beginning, was as follows:

“Through extensive outreach that is well documented, identify strategic themes, goals and initiatives to strengthen the Museum’s programming with an emphasis on implementing the CSFAC at CC mission.”

We began by listening intensively to as many people as possible. Through public listening sessions, targeted focus groups, email outreach, and online surveys, we were able to reach 968 people from a wide variety of backgrounds. We each attended as many listening sessions as possible, and we perused all the online feedback with great care. What we heard and read became the core of the themes and initiatives listed above.

## FINAL – February 21, 2017

The museum Subcommittee met bi-monthly from September 2016 through January 2017, and monthly thereafter. Our Subcommittee discussions were lively. Sometimes we disagreed, but our conversations harnessed the expertise of our members productively. We worked to balance both the “big picture” task (how to support, develop, and grow this historic and innovative museum for the benefit of both the Colorado Springs community and the College) and the specific desires expressed by the different community members. On white boards, post-it sheets, and computer screens, we produced 10 iterations of the themes in 10 weeks. We aimed to identify the core concepts we heard as concisely and authentically as possible. In the last phase, we attached specific tactics to the larger initiatives, aiming to combine general concepts with specific examples of how the museum might accomplish its goals.

Listening is critical to crafting a successful strategic plan, and we did a lot of it before the first mark was made on the whiteboard. To gain broader feedback, the CSFAC at CC held 13 sessions attended by 417 community members and sent out a survey broadly across the city and the region to which an equal number of individuals responded.

To gather more feedback specific to the museum at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, the museum Subcommittee hosted two focus groups and two group sessions. In total, 134 community members attended these sessions. We targeted CC faculty from across campus, the museum docent team, museum patrons and donors, CC students, CC staff, local young professionals, and Colorado Springs arts organizations/artists.

Museum Subcommittee members:

- Rebecca Tucker (Co-chair), Associate Professor of Art, Colorado College
- Blake Wilson (Co-chair), Owner, The Art Bank
- Joy Armstrong, Acting Museum Director/Curator, CSFAC
- Susan Edmondson, CEO, Downtown Partnership
- Santiago Guerra (Spring 2017), Assistant Professor of Southwest Studies, Colorado College
- Jane Hilberry, Professor of English, Colorado College
- Jessica Hunter-Larsen, Curator of the IDEA Space, Colorado College
- Mario Montaña, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Colorado College
- Eric Perramond (Fall 2016), Associate Professor and Director of Southwest Studies, Colorado College
- Annette Seagraves, Physician
- Bruce Warren, Attorney/Community Volunteer