

מוזיאון ישראל, ירושלים
the israel museum, jerusalem
متحف إسرائيل، أورشليم القدس

James S. Snyder
Anne and Jerome Fisher Director



July, 2016

Mrs. Sonja Lahnstein-Kandel
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Via e-mail: lahnstein.sonja@step21.de

Dear Sonja:

Our 2016 International Council is behind us, and it was a great occasion. Over 200 participants joined us from seventeen countries, and more than 20% were first-timers, offering a strong message about the future vitality of the Museum's world enterprise. And our theme of *Crosscurrents* – between cultures in our own time and across the timeline of history – could not have been more to the point of the exhibitions on view or of our speakers' reflections on the preservation of cultural heritage and the risks to that heritage that we are experiencing worldwide today, so that content was front and center at all times.

This year's Council also celebrated the start of our second half-century, taking place just a few weeks after the close of our year of programming on the occasion of our 50th Anniversary and offering an opportunity to enjoy the seamless segue from that milestone to the start of our next chapter. This time of year also occasions the publication of our annual *Israel Museum Journal*, this year highlighting with gratitude the fullness of our Anniversary and offering an opportune time to report to our International Friends leadership on our ongoing progress.

Attendance

In what has become a pattern in these last few years, 2015 began with all of the promise of our Anniversary celebrations, and our attendance through the summer reflected this promise – only to be dampened by geo-political concerns first locally and then worldwide that emerged during the fall season. We nonetheless concluded the year with 734,000 visitors, once again finding our place in the Top 100 on The Art Newspaper's "World Art Museum Attendance Survey." This result is especially notable, given the drop in international tourism that is affecting museum attendance everywhere. And three of this year's exhibitions made the Top 10 listings in The Art Newspaper's survey: *Aristocratic Taste: Ancient Art from the Belfer Collection* was #6 and *Gold from the Sea: Newfound Treasure from Caesarea* was #10 on the list of Antiquities exhibitions; and *Rembrandt from Amsterdam and Jerusalem* placed #6 on the list of Old Masters exhibitions.

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Overall, with the reduction in international tourism, our performance only continues to underscore the remarkable dedication of our local audiences. And this performance has sustained itself during 2016, when, despite the growing geo-political challenges that are slowing travel worldwide, we are, thus far into the year, ahead of last year's performance.

Museum Programming

Our *Journal* summarizes a celebratory year that could not have been more full, rich, or momentous – from our 50th Birthday Party on May 11, 2015, with 12,461 guests and with Shimon Peres, who attended the opening of the Museum in 1965, as our special guest, to our International Council with 450 guests from 20 countries. However, most important for us was the year's exhibition program, once again crafted as an ensemble with a narrative anchored in our universal mandate and focusing on the one hundred years surrounding our founding in 1965.

Divided into two exhibition seasons, the first was anchored by *1965 Today*, exploring Israel's visual vocabulary in 1965, against the backdrop of what was happening in visual culture in the rest of the world. And this revelatory display was paired with *6 Artists 6 Projects*, enabling us to fast-forward fifty years to six different paths in contemporary creativity in Israel today. Our second season then looked back fifty years to the avant-garde culture that percolated in Europe after World War I and would be dispersed by the geo-political trauma of World War II, migrating in part to Mandate Palestine, where it would become the central source for the modernist vocabulary of the aesthetic culture of the new Israel and the founding spirit of our own Museum. The centerpiece of this season, *Twilight over Berlin*, brought fifty masterworks from the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, some traveling for the first time, and generating such a successful response that our German colleagues approved an extension of the exhibition through June, 2016, enabling the loan of these great treasures for an unprecedented showing of eight months in Jerusalem. And both seasons were bridged by our year-long *Brief History of Humankind*, illustrating our Museum's narrative of 1.5 million years of the unfolding story of human history with only 14 objects, all from our own holdings, and connecting these key objects to works of contemporary art, so as to show how the history of material cultural and the story of creativity in our own time are both part of the same continuum.

While small in scale, the last major exhibition of the year, *Hadrian: An Emperor Cast in Bronze*, could not have given a more meaningful closure to this celebratory time. This jewel of a display brought together the only three bronze portrait busts of Hadrian to have survived from the time of his rule 2,000 years ago. Crafted by artisans from three different geographies across the land mass of Hadrian's Empire – from Iraq to Great Britain, being the same land mass experiencing ethnic and cultural turmoil today – these three objects – from the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Israel Museum – also demonstrate the power of great museums joining forces to deliver a cultural message from the past with a meaning for our own time.

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As we began 2016, we opened *Pharaoh in Canaan: The Untold Story*, revealing the narrative of Egypt's rule in Canaan for nearly 400 years during the 2nd Millennium BCE, with 800 objects – all excavated in Israel – demonstrating the merging of ritual practices and aesthetic traditions between these two distinct cultures, offset by stunning loans of classic Egyptian archeology from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Creating a smooth segue to our 2016 theme of *Crosscurrents*, this exhibition – about aesthetic and ethnic mingling and migration in ancient times – delivers yet another message from ancient times with meaning today.

Operating Results and Capital Development

Expenditures for operations, exhibitions, and programs in 2015 totaled \$32.1 million, reduced from \$33.1 million in 2014 – even after including the added costs associated with our special 50th Anniversary programming. This result can be very much attributed to the special discipline characteristic of our staff, and notably after the turn of world events in the last quarter of the year that triggered a reduction of more than \$1.0 million in anticipated admissions revenues. This discipline, together with a special effort on the part of all of our organizations worldwide to generate as much support as possible and with a quiet initiative among close Museum friends to increase their unrestricted giving in this year – coupled with the continuing strength of our endowment support and our other key fund-raising initiatives internationally – enabled the Museum to complete this fiscally challenged year in balance for the 14th consecutive year, extending a financial performance that continues to be without parallel in Israel.

Total endowment and unrestricted funds in support of Museum operations and programs remain strong at nearly \$200.0 million, more than five times their value twenty years ago, when the Museum was turning 30, and thanks in great part to the many donors to our endowment campaign in memory of Teddy Kollek, which concluded five years ago, making ours the largest endowment of any cultural institution in Israel.

Director's Circle

Key to our financial wellbeing and to every accomplishment highlighted in the *Journal* is our Director's Circle. Since its founding in 1999 with the goal of stabilizing our core operations through ongoing annual gifts of \$100,000 or more, it continues to be fundamentally central both to our present success and to our ability to plan with confidence for the future. From six Founding Members, the Director's Circle now comprises – appropriately in our 50th year(!) – fifty individuals, families, and foundations, listed on p. 133 of the *Journal*, and with the addition in 2015 of Dina Recanati, New York.

This group's annual support covers nearly 15% of our core needs each year, essentially matching the income from our endowment and other unrestricted funds, so that these two assured sources together address nearly 30% of our annual operating needs, approaching our goal to secure one-third of our income from such sources and reflecting a three-fold increase in their shared contribution to our budget over these last ten years. And, within the larger picture of the Museum's financial profile overall, the ongoing commitment of our Director's Circle members simply could not mean more.

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50th Anniversary Collection Gifts

The fiscal health described above enabled us in our Anniversary year to focus not on capital fund-raising, but rather on collection building. And the *Journal* is resplendent with highlights of some of the year's more than 500 individual gifts and more than twenty complete collection gifts, together comprising several thousand additions to our holdings across all of our collecting areas. There can be no better seal of approval for the stature that our Museum has achieved after its first half-century than the quality of these gifts – and no better indicator that we are drawing closer and closer to the vision that Teddy dreamed for us as one of the great custodians of the world's cultural heritage from our powerful setting on our Jerusalem hilltop. And there could be not more meaningful time in modern history to be approaching this goal.

This is the last year in which I will be writing this annual letter as the Museum's Director, as I look forward to beginning my new role as International President and Director Emeritus in 2017, focusing on the breadth of our global enterprise and on our work with our international organizations, with collectors worldwide, and with our sister institutions everywhere. This Museum is too much a part of my life not to continue to be devoted to sustaining its amazingly upward trajectory. And I can only conclude here by saying how grateful I continue to be for the privilege of serving our Museum together with so many committed friends worldwide.

Along with all of our International Friends leadership, you remain an important part of this picture, for which you deserve our greatest thanks.

With gratitude and affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Teddy', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the text 'With gratitude and affection,'.