

DR. DOROTHY KOSINSKI, Director, The Phillips Collection

I am glad to be here, honored to be invited to participate, and especially happy to represent museums (by that I intend art museums) as powerfully important humanities institutions pursuing object-based learning, art historical scholarship and connoisseurship, and the advancement of new knowledge through conservation.

I am here to introduce a panel focused on the impact and vitality of the humanities outside the academy, in the broader realms of publishing, libraries, digital media, and the public intellectual forum. Museums fall perfectly within this context. It is worth noting how the art history we practice in museums has (curiously) been dubbed by the academy as the “other” art history.

The traditional museum mission statement ran along the line of “collect, preserve, and interpret” works of art. It is clear that the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century accomplishes that, but fulfills many other critical and demanding roles.

For instance, as we have abandoned the arts in our public school systems during the last 30 years or so, museums have actively engaged not only in teaching about art but also in assisting teachers “in the trenches” so they can learn to use art to be more effective in presenting their core subjects. It is not necessarily about making art, but fostering creative problem solving, innovation, and dynamic learning.

The museum has evolved as a powerful community forum, crafting partnerships with universities, theaters, dance companies, music organizations, and community cultural groups of every sort. The museum embraces a robust public intellectual persona.

Technology has had a hugely transformative impact. Decades ago there was a good deal of suspicion about how the virtual experience might undermine the special quality of the encounter with the original and thereby discourage on-site visitors. Instead, technology has allowed us to extend the impact of our knowledge and enhance experience through digitization, online tools, media rich experiences, etc., etc. Social media—from Facebook and Flickr to Twitter and Apps—allow us to reach out more effectively to new generations and diverse audiences. There is a demand for transparency and accessibility to which we feel bound to respond.

Corporate leaders, the Administration, the Department of Education, IMLS, and NEH frame the essential skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in much the same way—creativity, innovation, and visual literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration. I see a perfect alignment with the characteristics of the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Phillips Collection is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. It is fascinating that in the 1920s, when Duncan Phillips opened his home as America’s first museum of modern art, he explained his project as “an intimate museum combined with an experiment station.” How liberating and challenging it is to lead a museum whose founder embraced risk, the social impact of art, a dynamic dialogue with artists, and an openness to his visitor as an intelligent and inquisitive being.

It is our mission today to actualize Phillips's goal. We are an exceptional collection of modern and contemporary art in a dynamic environment for collaboration, innovation, engagement with the world, scholarship, and new forms of public participation.

To encounter the wonderful collection in the domestic, human-scaled, intimate, rooms of the Phillips is hugely appealing. Visitors frequently comment upon the authenticity of the experience. Our exhibitions and installations, guided by our curators and conservators, remain true to Phillips's standards of quality and thoughtfulness. We encourage taking time and looking deeply.

We craft our public intellectual persona through powerful partnerships with the University of Illinois, The George Washington University, and the University of Virginia. Our Center for the Study of Modern Art is led by a dynamic new director/curator generously funded through the Mellon Foundation; it is the nexus for conversations with artists and informal dialogues with students, faculty, post docs, our membership, the public in general, interns, and our professional staff.

We mentor teachers in schools throughout the DCPS and in more than a dozen communities across the country, forming a national community of learners that is sustained through meetings and virtual conversations. Our partnerships range from university collaborators, the Aspen Institute, theaters, dance organizations, and grassroots community groups of great variety.

By way of introducing our panel, focusing our attention on our essential topic of the humanities outside the traditional home of the academy, let me acknowledge a possible dilemma in the work of the museum. I mean the possible tension between slow looking, deep thought, and solitary contemplation with the fervent desire and need to be accessible, impactful, and vital. I think of the phrase used earlier today –“alone with others”; this is precisely the challenge and the excitement of the museum today.