

President's Letter

Camilla Van Vooren

I want, first of all, to thank the membership for giving me the opportunity to serve as president for the year 2007. This is indeed an honor, and I hope that I can serve you well. I would like to congratulate and welcome new WAAC Board members: our new Vice President, Susanne Friend, and our new Member-at-Large, Marie Svoboda. Scott Carrlee will be serving a second term as Member-at-Large. I also want to recognize outgoing WAAC Board members: Laura Downey Staneff, our outgoing President, Member-at-Large,

Nick Dorman, and Secretary, Tania Collas, for their contributions to WAAC. On behalf of the Board and myself I extend my gratitude to these individuals and to all the members who were willing to be included on the slate. Thank you, as well, to my competent Nominating Committee: Marc Harnly and Pauline Mohr who helped me put the slate together.

I'm sure that members who attended the annual meeting in Tucson would agree that it was thought provoking and lots of fun too. Special thanks go to the Center for Creative Photography who hosted the meeting and whose staff was so helpful. The opportunity to see the exhibit, *In the American West: Photographs by Richard Avedon* was a real bonus; it's an incredible body of work. The opening reception at the Arizona State Museum drew many attendees, which set a nice tone for the beginning of the conference. The quality of the talks was outstanding overall, and I wish to extend thanks to the conservators from Western Archaeological Conservation Center who, with all the other speakers, contributed to a terrific program and opened their studios for a tour. Again, I wish to acknowledge WAAC's outgoing President, Laura Downey Staneff, for efforts in organizing the meeting and for her tireless dedication to the organization during her tenure.

As you will recall, while we were kicking up our heels in Cody, a devastating hurricane was striking New Orleans. Immediately following the meeting, *Newsletter* editor Carolyn Tallent tore up the near-complete 27/3, and with the help of a number of contributors, including Chris Stavroudis and out-going president Bev Perkins, put together a special edition containing the Salvage at a Glance chart and many other useful articles relating to flood recovery. A significant number of complimentary and discounted issues were sent to the stricken areas and to workshops or conferences dedicated to disaster response. As well, Walter Henry made it available on the AIC website for a limited time. Hats off, too, to Chris, Bev, and all of our colleagues who went to New Orleans or made other contributions in the response to the disaster.

I'm pleased to report on one new action that was presented and approved by the members at the WAAC business meeting in Tucson: henceforth funds generated from the WAAC annual meeting silent auction will be set aside in a special fund for disaster response...an even better reason to keep in the bidding for that fake fur Elvis shirt!

Mark your calendars for the 2007 annual meeting September 14-17 in Denver, Colorado. For those of you interested in a vacation, this time of year is typically wonderful for visiting Rocky Mountain National Park: great for wildlife viewing, spectacular vistas, and the sparkling gold of the aspen trees. Recently, in Denver, there has been much excitement over the opening of the new Hamilton Wing of the Denver Art Museum. Reaction to architect Daniel Libeskind's daring design has been the talk of the town. I am delighted to report that we will be having one day of our 2007 meeting at the DAM. It is truly a significant and powerful contribution to Denver's skyline and has continued to conjure much comment, including a *Denver Post* article reporting on visitors experiencing vertigo while walking through corridors of slanted walls! The rest of the meeting will be held at the Colorado Historical Society, across the street from the Denver Art Museum.

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President's letter, continued

These two institutions share a three-block area with the Denver Public Library, which was renovated to a cheerful post modern building by architect Michael Graves in 1995. This section of town just south of downtown Denver is known as the Golden Triangle and is the location of the state capitol and the city and county buildings, as well. The museums, library, and the historic Byer Evans House are known as the Civic Center Cultural Complex.

The Denver Art Museum traces its beginnings to 1893 when a group of local artists formed the Denver Artist's Club to foster the arts by providing a means of exposure through exhibits and studio space. Exhibit space was established at the public library, the City County Building, and other public spaces. The group expanded to a nearby mansion, the Chappell House (no longer standing) which was to become the home of the Denver Art Museum as the club evolved into a collecting entity. It seems that the DAM realized early on that it would not become a great depository for Old Master works, therefore, in the twenties and thirties, an emphasis on the collection of American Indian artifacts was established. The collection was stored largely in the Chappell House until the late 1940s when the city designated the "museum block" where the museum now stands.

Various expansions and renovations of existing buildings over the next thirty years accompanied the growth of DAM's collections. Substantial additions to the European, Asian, pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, and American holdings along with the continued growth of the American Indian collection were made. DAM would have to wait until 1971 before it achieved its longtime goal: a new museum building. Designed by the late Italian architect Gio Ponti, the new museum (now known as the North Wing) was shockingly modern for many Denverites. Allegedly in response to the 45-minute attention span statistically established for museumgoers, Ponti designed upward, in seven stories, each level providing an opportunity for the visitor to pass his/her projected attention span. It was considered an innovation in museum design. Its fans, declared the building, "the most distinctive piece of contemporary architecture between Chicago and San Francisco." The building's exterior caused quite a stir: Corning glass tile-covered, asymmetrical twin towers reminiscent of a Renaissance fortress punctured with irregular windows (one critic suggested, an opportunity to pour molten lead on opening day visitors!) and a wall symbolically suggesting a moat. Despite local criticism such as the comparison to "a giant IBM punch card" Ponti was enthusiastic about analogy to a Renaissance castle: a fortress to house the city's cultural treasures.

Enter Daniel Libeskind. From the initial designs and models, it was hard for many of us to envision the physical presence of the eruption of geometric blocks that was to become the Hamilton Wing. Over the past several years, watching Libeskind's first American project take form has been fascinating. Gigantic, jutting forms made many of us wonder how this menagerie of angles could hold an art collection. We were to learn in early October during numerous gala opening events. Predictably, the press review nationwide was mixed, and we all have our own opinions of what works well and what doesn't. Across the board, the exhibition of DAM's contemporary collection, acquired primarily by Curator Diane Vanderlip who will be retiring this year, has had an enthusiastic response. One undeniable fact is that the enthusiasm and spirit in those galleries during grand opening festivities was absolutely charged. The titanium façade makes an interesting complement to the grey glass tiles of Ponti's design; the buildings are physically connected by a glass-enclosed bridge. The addition of the Hamilton Wing to the Denver Art Museum has brought new energy to the cultural district, and I am delighted that WAAC 2007 annual meeting attendees will have the opportunity to experience this and other Denver cultural offerings.

Along with continuing plans for the annual meeting, I hope, in subsequent letters, to continue to feature Denver's evolving art scene as a means of inviting all of you to visit Colorado in September.

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Deadline

Contributions for the May *Newsletter* should be received by the Editor before **April, 2007**.