

October 20, 2020

In the weeks since The Baltimore Museum of Art announced its plans to establish the *Endowment for the Future*, I have grown increasingly troubled by the suggestion that the BMA's leadership has been derelict in its duty as stewards of the museum and its responsibility to the community. These accusations have no merit, and greatly diminish and misconstrue the long-standing, and in many instances, multi-generational, commitment of the members of the BMA's Board of Trustees to the City of Baltimore and to the Museum that serves this community.

My connection to the BMA extends through decades. I grew up within its walls, as my family was deeply involved with the Museum as benefactors, and as members and leaders of the Board long before I came to serve on it. I understand the value of this institution because it is intrinsically tied to my own dedication to my community and the place where I learned to love art. In large part because of my history with the BMA, I have spent my professional and personal life investing in and advancing the arts in our city. Those who know me can attest to my many years of service to the arts within the Mayor's Office and through philanthropic activity for educational, cultural, and artistic entities across Baltimore.

I first joined the BMA's Board as a representative of Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke in 1989 and became the Board Chair in 2015, following many years of engagement as a member, donor, and volunteer. I share my responsibilities with individuals who have equally deeply rooted relationships to the Museum, as well as newer voices, who are bringing fresh and important perspectives. In addition to raising money annually to support the Museum's \$18 million operating budget, over the past two and a half years alone the Board has contributed and/or raised an additional \$16 million in endowment funds to support the work of the staff, including exhibitions, public programs, and endowing staff positions; \$9,750,000 in private funding for critical building renovations and the creation of two study centers; and, perhaps most importantly, funds to ensure that even in this most difficult time that the BMA could maintain its full staff.

But to continue to evolve and create the museum we want—one that acknowledges the shortcomings of the past and one that serves our community most completely—we must take advantage of the different avenues available to us. This includes making well-researched and considered decisions around deaccessioning and the application of the sale proceeds. There is nothing short-sighted nor nefarious about deaccessioning. It is a regular practice, undertaken by every art museum in the United States. Assertions otherwise are simply a means of inflaming controversy and serve only to maintain the status quo of museums as repositories of riches serving the elite alone.

The greatness of the BMA's collection does not live within three individual paintings. It lives within the narratives that the BMA can share, the voices it reflects within its walls, and the individuals that it can yet bring into the conversation. To suggest that the absence of these three works breaks the public trust omits the reality of the many individuals whose trust we have not yet won. We have not yet won that trust because we, along with many other museums, have been operating within a system that has excluded too many for far too long. This exclusion registers in the art history we represent in our galleries, in the extent of access we provide to that history, and it registers in those staff members we employ to shepherd and interpret these histories.

Change is not easy. It requires letting go of some things to make space for others, it requires a measured and proportional sacrifice to achieve a just future, and it can take time before changes that seem radical in the moment become accepted as normal.

I voted in support of the BMA's deaccessioning decision, as did a supermajority of voting board members—a simple fact that many commentators have omitted in their narration of events to serve their own purposes. We voted for this action not as a dereliction of duty, but as an acknowledgment of new opportunity and a means of enacting real and tangible change in service of our Museum's mission and the strategic plan that we approved in 2018. The change brought about by the BMA's *Endowment for the Future* will impact the shape of our collection, our ability to invite, accommodate, and connect with a greater swath of our community, and to honor the people who work at the BMA by paying them a fair and living wage. These are not abstract goals; these are priorities with lasting impact and with which museums need to be engaged. This is an effort to live our mission, and the change is necessary and long, long overdue.

We are proud of our decision and we look forward to continuing to serve our community and making them proud.

Clair Zamoiski Segal, Chair  
Board of Trustees  
The Baltimore Museum of Art