

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN
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Report of the President

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Good morning. It's good to see so many of you here today for our 75th birthday.

Last Friday, on its front page The New York Times published co-chief art critic Holland Cotter's appraisal of the newly expanded and rehung Museum of Modern Art. His lede is long but quite clear:

"When the Museum of Modern Art reopens on October 21 after a \$450-million, 47,000-square-foot expansion, it will finally, if still cautiously, reveal itself to be a living, breathing 21st-century institution, rather than the monument to an obsolete history — white, male, and nationalist — that it has become over the years since its founding in 1929."

No indecisiveness there at all. I suggest we pause for a moment on the knotty notion of "obsolete history," or, as Faulkner famously warned, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." We all, perforce, live in the *now* — it's always now where we are — and, when we attend to our better angels, we do our best to redress our ignorance of what came before, of how we got to *this* particular now.

That means we create a narrative, a story. It's our special power . . . humans are the creatures who can make stories. And how our stories are constructed — what connects to what, in what order, whose tales are left behind — ultimately comprises what we call history, complete with lots of contested territory. Recently, I heard African American artist and MacArthur Award winner Kara Walker (whose father used to be a department chair and attend these meetings) talking about how she came to make a fascinating public piece at Algiers Point, site of 18th century slave holding barracks on the river in New Orleans. Walker said looking at the simple marker "made me think about the underrepresentation of memorials about the institution of slavery and America." Having lived in Memphis for nearly two decades, I had passed the now removed monumental equestrian figure of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest countless times. Suddenly Kara Walker was pointing out that, though I had fumed at its presence, in all those years I had not once wondered about a monument to the others. I had not considered rigorously enough how that particular *now* had been constructed.

So, in the formation of the story—or the curriculum—what's included and what's not will usually prove enormously consequential. In fact, existential. In 1990, at a conference on the education of artists in the next century — the one we're in this morning — I was in a discussion group with Roberta Smith, not yet then The New York Times' other co-chief art critic. The topic we were chewing on was what to do about Janson. I'm sure there are still some among us this morning who can remember the absolute ubiquity of H.W. Janson's "History of Art." First published in 1962, somehow without a single female artist within, Janson was, for perhaps four decades, a widely assigned—and increasingly debated—"how we got to now" story of what great art was, courtesy of our institutions and our curricula.

I remember clearly that in our discussion Ms. Smith said, without any drama or self-importance, that "History of Art" was not simply the wrong book, it was probably the wrong place to start. She proposed

that all first-year art and design students begin their art history studies with the global history of pattern and decoration.

I thought right then, and still think, it's a wonderful idea, a truly informative and fruitful jumping-in point. In the intervening decades I've been a provost and a president, but I've never been able to put the global history of pattern and decoration in the foundation art history slot. Not because I didn't speak about it often and not, let me be clear, because I worked with rear-guard impervious curmudgeons. Today there are many texts and many points of entry for recounting a greatly expanded history of art and design. In truth, such changes are difficult and time consuming because—if we hold to our scholarly methodology, if 'we dance with who brung us'—they require many well-prepared, experienced and open-minded professionals to parse and chart together. Which brings me to us and the 75th anniversary of our first gathering.

Let's leave the expanded, rehung MoMA and walk about 30 blocks up Fifth Avenue to our inaugural meeting to look briefly at NASAD's first now. Absent half a billion dollars and 47,000 square-feet, the issues remain the same: how to represent what is important in our disciplines, how best to impart what's important to our students and, having created and organized the current story, how to design a method to keep it current.

In 1944 Richard Franz Bach was the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Curator of Education. A Columbia Architecture graduate and former faculty member there, Bach had a special focus on what was coming to be called industrial design. In fact, a number of our current institutional members have roots there as well. Nearly 200 years ago the oldest stand-alone colleges of art and design often had a special mission to teach workers how to think about and utilize then-new technologies . . . 19th century coding academies, if you will. Consequently, even with the war raging, when Bach reached out to the academic Design community there was established interest.

Representatives of 15 art and design schools and 7 universities (two from Alabama) gathered at the Met and began a four-year series of regular conferences that led them to formally organize the National Association of Schools of Design, voting on officers and standards they agreed on. They would meet annually at each other's institutions as they shared concerns and considered how to initiate assessment and accreditation.

While it's certain that those early meetings were entirely less diverse, less broadly constituted than we are today, the 1948 minutes share notes that we all recognize immediately:

"Mr. Alcott read a report on "Definitions." In connection with the questionnaires distributed to delegates, Mr. Alcott read a compilation of returns. Out of 27 returns, 19 indicated that they liked the definitions of industrial design; 8 did not; 14 offered suggestions and revisions. [Let me take a moment: Two-thirds "liked" the definitions, but more than half proposed changes!] These definitions were read by Mr. Alcott, and excerpts from letters to Mr. Alcott were also read by him. A letter from Richard Bach was read. Some of the definitions of industrial design were philosophical; others, useful, teaching definitions. . . Webster's definition of "design" was read."

We have all been in those meetings. In fact—reading the dictionary aside—we are in one now. It's what we are called to do by our predecessors and, more importantly, by ourselves; why we visit each other's campuses and why we feverishly prepare to be visited: to work together to make this now as current, to make our stories as accurate as we can possibly manage. It is honorable work and never simple. And, of

course, we have modern problems such that Mr. Bach and his colleagues could never imagine. And, of course, we must be nimble as we solve them: our clock is faster, and our urgency is profound. We can change many things, but I trust we will always stand together to guide and support one another in this work.

Happy birthday!