



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The year 2020 has been a year unlike any other in recent memory. The fateful combination of a global pandemic and a society riven—yet again—by social injustice has placed powerful strains on our nation and the world, profoundly impacting individuals and institutions alike. 2020 fully deserves the descriptive epithet “annus horribilis.”

The Kress Foundation has not been immune to these powerful forces and neither have our grantees.

We at the Foundation—prudently, as it turned out—shuttered our offices by mid-March in response to the incipient COVID-19 pandemic. Kress's small staff joined the legions of Americans increasingly working from home as part of a nationwide effort to minimize the use of public transportation and to help mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus through human contact. It is a tribute to our staff that we managed to navigate this pivot to remote work nearly seamlessly.

And yet this forced transition to remote work has come at a price. Nothing, after all, can replace seeing one's colleagues in person. And in our case, the same is true of our colleagues at the three other small non-profits that share a building with us: the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL) and the New York Preservation Archive Project (NYPAP). We not only miss seeing the staff of these neighboring organizations, but also miss encountering the many professional colleagues who—in bygone “normal” times—routinely passed through our doors on business related to the work of these organizations. We have always benefited significantly from the opportunities for dialog—both organized and spontaneous—that these visits offer us. And we very much look forward to reviving this informal network when the situation permits.

Of course, recent events have not merely impacted our own organization. They have impacted our many grantees and the individuals and institutions we seek to serve still more profoundly.

Art museums—like museums in general—have been disproportionately impacted by the events of 2020. Museums that depend upon earned income and visitorship have found themselves particularly at risk. Many have had to close temporarily at least once. Some will inevitably be shuttered permanently, while others, in an effort to avoid that fate, have felt compelled to lay off or furlough “non-essential” staff.

Nor has the academy been spared. Countless colleges and universities have been forced to move partially or entirely to online teaching and learning—a particularly challenging transition for the teaching of the history of art and architecture, art conservation, and related disciplines, where access to objects and teamwork are often essential.

At Kress we have sought to sustain our support for the fields about which we care so profoundly, and to express that support in creative new ways that we hope have been responsive to the changing needs of these fields.

In some instances, this responsiveness has simply meant extending deadlines for the expenditure of our grant funds and related reporting requirements. This has applied particularly to museum exhibition programming, which—being so fundamentally dependent upon museum loans and audience engagement—has been profoundly impacted by the travel and assembly restrictions imposed by the current world situation. In other instances, we have sought to intercede proactively to address the challenges our grantees are facing. For example, upon learning that many art museums felt compelled to furlough or lay off education staff (especially part-time staff), we made an emergency grant to our friends at Smarthistory.org, which has enlisted many of these colleagues to help produce new digital resources that allow art museums—and academic art historians—to sustain their engagement in new forms. We are pleased to add that this grant has subsequently inspired other foundations to contribute meaningfully to this important cause.

The global pandemic has also impacted Kress fellowship programs in profound ways. Fellowship programs here in North America have not been spared, though most of the emerging professionals pursuing Kress fellowship opportunities at art museums throughout the nation — whether as future conservators, curators or art museum educators — were ultimately able to assume their fellowship posts. The same is true of the cohort of art history PhD students pursuing dissertation research via Kress fellowships at both American and European art research centers. But the latter have typically experienced significant delays and obstacles due to restrictions on international travel and periodic closures of host institutions. We are proud to know that both individual fellows and institutional hosts have responded to this unprecedented situation creatively and in ways that offer testimony to the value of the Kress fellowship programs.

As calendar year 2020 draws to a close, we join all our friends and colleagues in fervently hoping that a new year will bring something resembling a return to normalcy — health and wellness for people everywhere, and a shared sense of purpose as we seek to right the wrongs of the past.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Max Marmor". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Max" and last name "Marmor" clearly distinguishable.

Max Marmor
President

Master of the Glasgow Adoration
(Spanish, active 1505–1520)
A Baptismal Ceremony, c. 16th century
Samuel H. Kress Collection
Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, Nashville, TN

