



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

An Astonishing Year

This past year, federal support for the arts and humanities faced disruption and, in some cases, halted completely, without any warning or apparent reason. This unsettling situation has particularly affected the fields, institutions, and individuals that the Kress Foundation serves. Over the course of this year, it has become evident that archives, museums, and libraries, the stewards of history and our continued understanding of it, are not immune to censorship. Moreover, increased interventions in the work of national repositories and institutions have rendered the data and research underpinning scientific, humanistic, and artistic projects less secure. Broadly speaking, the field continues to face strong and unpredictable headwinds.

Closer at hand, the Kress Foundation experienced a tragic and personal loss in May of 2025 with the sudden passing of President Julia M. Alexander, whom we had welcomed to the Foundation only seven months earlier. Julia was a vivid, joyful, and disarming leader, and during her brief tenure she engaged everyone on the Board, Foundation staff, and many of our grantees. While new to the world of philanthropy, Julia's intelligence and deep experience in the fields Kress serves allowed her to identify opportunities for the Foundation to increase its impact. She immediately engaged with me as her collaborator and thought partner, and together we generated considerable momentum. We met with numerous grantees, partners, and essential contributors in the field. We imagined a revised program structure to meet our unique historical moment while remaining true to our nearly century-old mission. In those seven months, we set a pace that has been sustained and will continue. I am deeply grateful for the insightful leadership of the Board and the efforts of the Foundation team who continue to support this work.

In this report you will see that the Foundation's steadfast commitment to scholarship and professional development, to preservation and access, and to rigorous and creative approaches to programming and exhibitions, remains unwavering. More than half of this year's awards supported fellowships: for emerging and established art historians at research centers within the US and in Europe; for pre- and post-graduate conservation training; and for emerging professionals exploring the intersectional work of curators and educators within art museums.

This past year, we also supported the fifth iteration of a partnership between the Alliance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Museums and Galleries and Yale University focused on training students and mentors from HBCUs in the fundamentals of technical art history and conservation. In collaboration with the Mellon Foundation, we supported another edition of the Art Museum Director Survey, conducted by Ithaka S+R. This important work provides a useful, longitudinal perspective on the complex and changing priorities and challenges of these institutional leaders. The Foundation also supported a pathbreaking exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston that celebrated the ingenuity of the Dutch Golden Age painter, Rachel Ruysch. Her masterful still life paintings, particularly of botanicals, were displayed alongside plant specimens Ruysch would have used as her models. This trans-institutional collaboration highlighted the complex 17th-century trade routes that brought exotic botanicals to the Netherlands and showcased Ruysch's remarkable talent and imagination.

The loss of our admired colleague and a beloved friend remains incomprehensible. Julia was a rare bright light who saw the opportunity for Kress in everything—from a missed meeting to a rainstorm, from persistent challenges to unexpected gifts—and had the ability to seize it. The Board and Foundation team remain indebted to her spirit, which continues to inspire our own resilience as we chart a course forward. In memoriam, and with love and gratitude to Julia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L W Schermerhorn'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'L' and 'W'.

L W Schermerhorn
Interim President, July 2025