

**Date:** October 15, 2020

**Subject:** NOMA's 90 Day Progress Report

### ***Executive Summary***

NOMA stands against all forms of racism. We are fully committed to fostering an equitable, anti-racist culture.

Beginning in June, the museum staff and board leadership began a comprehensive response to issues raised in the community through the Black Lives Matter movement and comments related to our structure and operations.

Here follows a comprehensive review and summary of the actions we have taken thus far in response to assertions along with key issues raised by our own board and staff members. Our Agenda for Change is available on the NOMA website and we will continue to provide regular updates on our progress as we move forward with various initiatives.

### ***Workplace Environment and Employee Experience***

In order to support an optimal workplace environment as well as an optimal employee and visitor experience and in response to the overall tenor of this time of COVID-19 and social unrest, in the last 90 days NOMA has:

- 1. Initiated Intensive Staff Training.** NOMA has contracted with a women and a people of color led non-profit organization to provide training and consultancy in diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism. They conducted staff training in effective cross-cultural dialogue in August, and will continue to work with NOMA for the next 18 months to assist in creating a NOMA culture of practicing equity, pluralism and inclusion.
- 2. Provided Third Party Employee Relations Resource for Employees.** A third-party human resources firm is providing ombudsman services for NOMA employees in employee relations matters. This independent, third-party entity is available to our employees through a 1-800 number. They will provide written reports of their investigations and findings for all complaints made to management and a Board committee.

3. **Contracted with a nationally known anti-racist training and organizing institution** to conduct anti-bias, race training for all employees. The first segment of training will be completed by the end of September with additional, two-day sessions for all staff scheduled for January 2021.
4. **Provided supervisor training for middle management**, including a focus on respect in the workplace, on September 21, 2020 with additional coaching available thereafter.
5. **Retained local minority communications strategist** to provide guidance and counsel with expanding our marketing and public relations efforts to attract diverse audiences and candidates for employment.
6. **Launched an internal staff portal in August for information sharing** as well as a virtual bulletin board for staff comments and discussion.
7. **Reviewed and revised hiring practices** to include broader outreach to potential candidates; affirmation of NOMA's Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion policy to applicants and the internal search committees; internal education about representation and inclusion in job groups; revision of candidate evaluation forms; and practices to ensure objective assessments.

### ***Board Development and Inclusion***

1. NOMA has committed to increasing the representation of BIPOC on our board to 25% each year over the next three years. The Governance Committee is currently in the process of recruiting the 2021 board class. The class will be announced in November and we believe that our efforts will ensure that our leadership is representative of the community we serve.
2. Board members are participating in two-day anti-bias, anti-racist workshops as are the leaders of our volunteer groups and our senior management.

### ***Permanent Collection and Acquisitions***

Since late 2010 and with the creation of a largely new curatorial team in the ensuing five years, NOMA has worked strategically to diversify its permanent collection holdings in each curatorial department.

This has led to the acquisition of major works by internationally renowned artists of color, including Odili Donald Odita (commission for NOMA's centennial, 2011), Yinka Shonibare (museum purchase for Sculpture Garden, 2014), McArthur Binion (museum purchase), Leonardo Drew (museum commission), Fred Wilson (museum purchase for Sculpture Garden), Radcliff Bailey (museum purchase), Gordon Parks (museum gift/purchase), Thornton Dial (museum gift/purchase), Mildred Thompson (museum purchase), Toyin Ojin Odutolah (museum purchase), Hank Willis Thomas (museum

purchase for Sculpture Garden, 2017-18), Torkwase Dyson (museum purchase), Roberto Lugo (museum commission, 2020), and Wangichi Mutu (museum purchase for Sculpture Garden, 2020).

Equally significant, NOMA has worked to expand our holdings of works by local and regional BIPOC artists, who had been under-represented in our collections, including: John Isiah Walton, Ron Bechet, L. Kasimu Harris, Willie Birch, Ana Hernandez, Lorna Williams, Abdul Aziz, Eric Waters and Akasha Rabut, among others. Many of these artists enjoy a rising national and international reputation as well.

As part of NOMA's Agenda for Change, the museum allocated the remaining 2020 acquisition funds to local and national BIPOC artists and will continue this commitment through 2021 and beyond. As an encyclopedic institution with responsibility for a broad historical collection, this commitment to contemporary, living artists is significant.

NOMA's permanent collection currently on view also highlights BIPOC artists in most galleries where the collection has benefited from the active, focused diversification of the acquisition program: decorative arts, 19<sup>th</sup> century, African, Asian, Indian, modern, contemporary, and photography. We will continue to incorporate these voices into our galleries with regular rotations and re-installations as we re-examine the canon of art history and its relationship to the presentation of collections.

### ***Greenwood Parlor***

Since the 1980s, NOMA has used a sequence of galleries along its mezzanine to explore taste and style in Louisiana from the 18th through late 19th centuries through the installation of furniture and decorative arts. A re-installation of these spaces was initiated in 2013, when we began to update both the installations and the interpretation. At much the same time, NOMA was offered the opportunity to acquire a suite of furniture and soft-furnishings from the Greenwood Plantation in St. Francisville, a rare, intact assemblage of mid-19th century material that, although manufactured in the Northeast, embodied Louisiana taste of the time.

In 2015, we presented this material in a special summer exhibition, and subsequently made plans to install it permanently on the mezzanine. The interpretation for the material changed substantially between 2015 and late December 2019, when we opened the new gallery. In the 2019 iteration, we focused the interpretive components on the enslaved labor that allowed for the accumulation of wealth by the owners of the Greenwood Plantation. Using archival documents (including census records and documents kept by Greenwood descendants) our curator of decorative arts was able to identify by name many of the individuals whose forced labor had long been unacknowledged. These records, and these names, are displayed prominently on the walls of the gallery.

As our re-opening in July 2020 approached, criticism of NOMA as having a “plantation mentality,” precipitated a temporary closure, and a full reconsideration of the appropriateness of the gallery for our community at this time. While the scholarship is sound, and the acclaim for this progressive, innovative approach to presenting and interpreting 19th century American decorative arts has been heralded throughout the field (nationally and internationally), it was clear that NOMA had not taken into consideration the potential for hurt and harm to our local and regional stakeholders.

We do not want the parlor to be either a flashpoint or a distraction from the work we are doing to issues regarding social justice and racial equity, and their impact on the arts. Consequently, we have closed the Parlor, and are examining the possibilities for re-interpretation, re-opening, or for another use of the space entirely. We have developed vehicles for public response within the museum and via the web-site, and are working with local universities and community organizations to hear their concerns and critique.

*NOMA’s special exhibitions, installations, and permanent collection rotations routinely highlight and feature works by BIPOC artists. Below is a partial list:*

<b>Year exhibition</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Location</b>
2011	Odili Odita: Forever	Elevator Lobby 1 <sup>st</sup> floor
	Ancestors of Congo Square: Highlights of NOMA’s African Collection	Ella West Freeman Gallery
2011-present:	Thematic installations drawn from Photograph Collection, e.g., What is a Photograph, Photography, Sequence and Time	Templeman and Paillet Galleries
	Zen Master Hakuin	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Elegant Image: Indian Bronzes	Ella West Freeman Gallery
2012	Thornton Dial: Hard Truths	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Leah Chase	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor galleries
2013	Gordon Parks: Making of an Argument	Templeman Galleries & toured nationally
	Rashaad Newsome: King at Arms	Great Hall

2014	Rising Up: Hale Woodruff Murals	Lupin Galleries
	Mel Chin: Rematch	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Behind Closed Doors: Latin American Art	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Woven Histories: Art of Houma Basketry	Contemporary Gallery
2015	10 Years Gone Visions of US: American Art from NOMA's permanent collection	Templeman Gallery  Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Reparations: Artists from New Orleans	Lupin galleries
	Yamaguchi Bidou	Japanese Gallery
	Kongo Across the Waters	Ella West Freeman Gallery
2016	Self-Taught Genius	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Unfiltered Genius	Helis/ Weisman
	Pride of Place (BIPOC, LGBTQ+ artists)	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Francoise Richardson Bequest of African Art	Focus Gallery
	Beyond the Frame: Photography and Native American Lives	Paillet Gallery
2017	New at NOMA	Helis/ Weisman Galleries
2018	Changing Course	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Lina Iris Viktor	Great Hall
	Carlos Rolon: Outside/ In	Helis/ Weisman Galleries
	New Forms/ New Voices: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics	Japanese Gallery
	Ear to the Ground	Helis/ Weisman Galleries

2019	Quilts of Gee’s Bend	EM Besthoff Gallery
	Regina Agu: Passage	Great Hall
	Bodies of Knowledge	Ella West
	Mildred Thompson: Against the Grain	Focus Gallery (Stafford)
	Ancestors in Stone	Focus Gallery
	Bodies of Knowledge	Ella West Freeman Gallery
2020	Alia Ali: FLUX	Great Hall
	Pursuit of Salvation: Jain Art from India	Indian Gallery
	Torkwase Dyson: Black Abstract Thought	Helis/ Weisman Galleries
	Buddha and Shiva, Lotus & Dragon	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	Mending the Sky	Ella West Freeman Gallery
	New Photography	Templeman Gallery

### ***NOMA Programs and Outreach***

Central to its mission, education, outreach, and community engagement have been and continue to be core priorities of the institution. The following is a selection of the activities NOMA has undertaken in this realm over the course of the past few years.

**Public Programs** – Over the last year and a half, NOMA continued and expanded its ongoing commitment to engaging, vibrant public programs for diverse audiences. With over 20,000 public program attendees, and over 525 programs throughout 2019, programming ranged from the very popular “Friday Nights at NOMA” series, to multiple film series, artist talks, gallery discussions and much more. In 2019, we saw the highest NOMA festival attendance to date with over 4,000 attendees, and 42 community partners participating.

As the museum has shifted its programming focus from in-person to online for a post-COVID world, the museum has provided a broad spectrum of free virtual programming

from reading lists, art making activities for multiple audiences, video content with artists and scholars, and much more.

**Community Engagement** – Building on the foundational work that the museum implemented in 2018 with the launch of the NOMA+ Mobile Museum, NOMA has continued to expand and further develop its community engagement programming through **the Creative Assembly Initiative**. *Creative Assembly* is a community engagement initiative that uses neighborhood-based participatory art experiences as a vehicle for personal exploration, community collaboration, and social change. Bringing together community members, artists, community-based organizations and museum staff, the *Creative Assembly* Initiative facilitates community generated art projects and programs in various New Orleans neighborhood spaces and at the museum.

**Art Access Kits**– Cognizant of the significant digital divide that exists in New Orleans, during the COVID shutdown, the museum has worked at length to provide arts access, resources, and analog art kits to a range of community partners. A few examples:

- Throughout the summer months, NOMA was part of the Creative Response Network (a consortium of arts organizations in the city, led by Antenna) which distributed free arts resources and materials at public free lunch sites for New Orleans youth. Over 5,000 kits were distributed through this channel.
- In August, NOMA partnered with the Youth Empowerment Project to provide 100+ free art kits to under-resourced youth in their network.
- At the beginning of September, NOMA partnered with Covenant House to distribute 100 free arts kits to homeless youth in their network.

**Youth, Family, and Teen Programs** – Youth arts education is at the heart of what we do, and this has continued post-COVID. NOMA's quarterly **Free Family Festival** program launched in August of 2019 with an attendance of over 1,500 multigenerational participants, and NOMA hosted its first ever **Family Field Day** in the expanded sculpture garden in November 2019. NOMA's **Teen Squad** successfully started its first full year at the start of October 2019, with thirteen youth participants representing eight different schools. In their first few months, participating teens met with a range of NOMA staff, and had in-depth artist sessions. The Teen Squad began in earnest to plan and develop a large-scale teen event held in March 2020, just prior to the COVID shutdown.

As an alternative to the pre-COVID NOMA Summer Camp, the museum quickly changed course and developed an extensive and comprehensive virtual summer offering in 2020. The Hot Art, Cool Kids: Summer Art Kit, featured live virtual sessions and at-home art-making activities inspired by works in the museum and sculpture garden. In August of 2020, the museum continued its tradition of an end of summer Family Festival virtually. Titled "Courage and Care", the programming explored what it means to have courage and to take care of ourselves and one another.

**School and Teacher Programs** – In 2019, more than **12,000 K-12 students** visited the museum on school tours. The museum offered a notable selection of programs for schools and educators designed to inspire a love of art, while increasing academic skills in communication, language arts, and critical thinking. In addition, 2019 marked the eighth consecutive year of the museum’s nationally renowned **Mini Masters** program, a collaborative arts integration program for **pre-kindergarten students**. Mini Masters encourages students to develop higher order thinking skills, make observations, and engage in conversations through museum visits and classroom activities. The program is designed to build capacity of early childhood educators through professional development and lesson modeling that develops discussion routines, techniques for teaching the elements of art, and skills for creating art in the classroom. Students visited NOMA at multiple points over the course of the year, and proudly exhibited their projects at the museum at the much-anticipated culminating Mini Masters Showcase held in the museum’s Great Hall. In 2019, 206 students from four schools participated in Mini Masters. Partner schools for 2018-19 included ReNEW Schaumburg Elementary, ReNEW Dolores T. Aaron Academy, Educare New Orleans, and Kingsley House.

In order to best assess the needs of teachers and students at this unprecedented time, the museum created a comprehensive survey that went out to 600 teachers from all grades, subjects, and school types in the New Orleans area on June 19, 2020. Taking the highest needs outlined directly by teachers from the survey, the museum has developed four K-12 options for Live Virtual Visits with a NOMA Educator. Each Virtual Visit will be tailored to the needs of the educator and will include a pre-visit consultation, pre and post-visit lessons.

## ***Conclusion***

NOMA has embraced its Agenda for Change, clearly articulated on NOMA’s website which is accessible to all. The intermediate goals of this comprehensive effort are:

- the recognition that NOMA has accepted its responsibility to address diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion;
- that NOMA will continue to foreground and prioritize these commitments among other challenging issues it is facing now and into the future;
- that it will continue to seek the assistance of proven professionals to create meaningful change;
- that it will continue to share news about NOMA’s progress through regular updates on the NOMA website;
- that its first 90-day report would contain substantive actions that could be documented.



These goals have been achieved. At the same time, we recognize that there is much remaining to be addressed. Our efforts every day are centered around improvement in ourselves and our relationships on behalf of this great museum. We believe in a community and people-centered organization dedicated to engaging and relevant content accessible to all.

Our commitment to work through the Agenda for Change is as strong as ever. We understand, however, that we are dealing with the very same issues facing every community in our nation. We are determined to continue to create a NOMA that is both an outstanding workplace and an experience that visitors will remember long after their time with us.