

THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

# Strategic Plan 2025-29





A guest with Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* (1940–41);  
A student tour in the new Welcome Gallery; Artist Trap Bob  
leads a hands-on mural-making workshop at Phillips@THEARC



# | We are unique.

The Phillips Collection is an extraordinary and distinct art museum. Unlike most museum founders who began with substantial collections, Duncan Phillips opened the doors of the Phillips with a modest array of artworks and envisioned the museum's growth as a collaborative and public journey. He referred to his project as an **“experiment station,”** underscoring its role as a dynamic and evolving space for art appreciation and dialogue.

Phillips's approach to curatorial work was groundbreaking. Rather than present art within traditional historical or cultural frameworks, he displayed objects from **different cultures, eras, and places side by side** to foster dialogue across time and geography. This method was not primarily about instructing guests in the history of art but rather encouraging them to engage with artworks directly and from their own experience. **Phillips wanted his guests to discover how artists “see differently,”** a radical perspective for his time that emphasized subjective approaches to viewing art and the subjectivity of artists, “gifted individuals well worth knowing and honoring.” As Phillips's perspectives and tastes changed over time, so, too, did the collection and museum.

## Statement of Values by Duncan Phillips

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I stand for open-mindedness and tolerance of different points of view; for the cultivation of enjoyment of the intentions of artists and the varied qualities of their work, qualities which reveal them as especially gifted individuals well worth knowing and honoring. Art is part of the social purpose of the world and a gallery can be a meeting place of many minds, harmonized by a genuine respect for the spirit of art, which is none other than the spirit of pleasure in the exchange of different attitudes and sensibilities.

—Duncan Phillips  
*A Collection in the Making*, 1930

# We are evolving.



In March 2023, Jonathan Binstock assumed the role of Vradenburg Director and CEO of The Phillips Collection, embarking on a project to align the museum's historic legacy with a bold vision for the future. Binstock led a transformative strategic planning process, guiding the Board of Trustees and staff through a comprehensive rejuvenation of the institution's mission and goals, as well as a newly stated set of values, anchored in the vision of our founder.

## Strategic Plan

The resulting strategic plan, rooted in the museum's legacy, was mindfully crafted through a collaborative and inclusive process involving input from a diverse set of stakeholders, including museum staff, the Board of Trustees, and members of the community. With the guidance of **Michael Kaiser and the DeVos Institute of Arts Management**, this thorough process was informed by an investigation of **key writings by Duncan Phillips**—he wrote over 400 essays and seven books—as well as essays by critics, curators, and historians. These texts encouraged reflection on Phillips's unique and visionary approach to building and sharing his collection and inspired the new strategic plan. **The plan honors the museum's superlative permanent collection; historical practices of collection building, display, and community engagement; and the need to innovate and chart a course for longterm sustainability and relevance.** A rededicated focus on engaging today's leading artists will enable The Phillips Collection to continue building meaningful connections with audiences, expand dynamic public programming, and strengthen its financial foundation.

This new plan honors the past while setting a bold course for the future. The plan aims to refresh the Phillips story to expand the museum's appeal so that it can serve a broader community while simultaneously enriching the guest experience. The Phillips Collection seeks not only to highlight artistic excellence but also, as Duncan Phillips aspired, to create **"a beneficent force in the community."**

Langston Hughes II performs in the Music Room during Phillips after 5; OPPOSITE: Artist Wesley Clark creating his Centennial Commission *genesis* in his studio; Artist Sydney Vernon leads a workshop with Malcolm X Elementary School students at Phillips@THEARC; Guests with Francis Bacon, *Study of a Figure in a Landscape* (1952)



## Commission and Acquire Art by Living Artists

- **Create a dynamic commission series that invites leading artists to create new, innovative bodies of work**—“units” in Duncan Phillips’s words—for the permanent collection
- **Attract and welcome new art enthusiasts** with dynamic, evolving content that resonates with today’s audiences
- **Diversify and expand the museum’s collection**, strengthening the Phillips legacy by deepening holdings and adding new global voices
- **Establish a robust endowment** dedicated to the strategic growth and sustainability of the museum’s collection, allowing for continued acquisitions and preservation of the permanent collection

## Develop Authentic Relationships with Audiences of All Kinds

- **Continue building meaningful connections with communities throughout DC and beyond**, ensuring belonging through museum programming
- **Expand public programming** by deepening public engagement, including lectures, workshops, and interactive art experiences that reflect the museum’s inclusive vision
- **Strengthen and expand the museum’s presence at THEARC** through arts programming, creative collaboration, and community partnerships
- **Expand institutional and programmatic marketing strategies to reach wider audiences**, utilizing digital platforms and community engagement efforts

## Strengthen Financial Foundations

- **Increase donor and member engagement**
- **Build a larger base** of major donors
- **Diversify Board of Trustees membership**, enhance governance practices, and foster a culture of strategic leadership

## Build Infrastructure and Operational Capacity

- **Invest in staff development and training to build a strong, knowledgeable team** to support the museum’s growth and evolving needs
- **Conduct a comprehensive technology audit** to modernize the museum’s digital infrastructure and enhance operational efficiency
- **Develop a long-term facilities plan** to guide the expansion, maintenance, and enhancement of the museum’s physical spaces



# Our Guiding Principles

## Seeing Differently, Inspired by You

**Seeing Differently, Inspired by You** embodies The Phillips Collection's renewed mission and values. It speaks to our commitment to offering **fresh perspectives and creating unique experiences** that respond to the expressed needs and desires of our guests. Inspired by Duncan Phillips's philosophy of "seeing differently," the museum invites everyone to view art and the museum through a lens that encourages personal discovery and shared dialogue.

**Marjorie Phillips wrote in 1970, "Some might think of Duncan as primarily interested in art, but a concern for people was always at the center of his thought."** Our guests, the community, and artists—people—are at the heart of the new plan, our journey for the next five years, and the effort to enhance The Phillips Collection as a dynamic space where art, ideas, and inspiration come together.

## Mission

The Phillips Collection is a welcoming home for all where the vision and spirit of artists thrive in intimate settings. We bring people together, from the local to the international, for learning and discovery, and to experience joy and respite.

## Values

The Phillips stands for:

- open-mindedness and experimentation
- intellectual humility and social purpose
- accessibility and inspiration
- stewardship, integrity, and excellence
- serving all members of our community justly
- authenticity, connection, and strengthening civil society





## Diversity Statement

The Phillips Collection is committed to fostering an inclusive environment that encourages and values diversity in its staff, Board of Trustees, supporters, volunteers, audience, collections, exhibitions, and programming. Diversity enhances the institution's engagement with an increasingly broad spectrum of participants and strengthens relationships within our community and beyond. Diversity promotes creativity and innovation, thereby increasing the institution's resilience and ability to embrace our ever-changing world. Diversity enables us to advance our mission.

## Land Acknowledgment

The Phillips Collection is a community of artistic expressions of diverse people, situated on the ancestral and unceded homelands of Piscataway and Nacotchtank (Anacostan) peoples. The area we know as Washington, DC, was rich in natural resources and supported local native people living there. We pay respect to their Elders, past and present. It is within The Phillips Collection's responsibility as a cultural institution to disseminate knowledge about Indigenous peoples and this acknowledgment reminds us of the significance of place and the museum's commitment to building respectful relationships with those who call these lands home today.

OPPOSITE: Guests with Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880-81); Artist Mickalene Thomas in conversation with Frist Art Museum Senior Curator Katie Delmez in the Mansbach Auditorium; Gayle Danley leads a slam poetry workshop during an Evening for Educators; Anthony Roth Costanzo and the Shanghai Quartet perform in the Music Room during a Phillips Music Sunday Concert



# An Enduring Legacy

The Phillips Collection, first opened in 1921 by Duncan Phillips, stands as a testament to the transformative power of art and the visionary approach of its founder. What began as an intimate, personal initiative in Duncan and Marjorie Phillips's Washington, DC, Dupont Circle home has evolved into a pioneering institution recognized as the **first museum of modern art in the United States**. The idea for the museum grew out of profound personal loss—namely, the recent deaths of Duncan's father and brother. In their grief, Phillips and his mother, Eliza, discovered solace in art and were inspired to share this experience with the public, positioning the collection as a source of healing and community.

Over the past century, The Phillips Collection has expanded beyond the original family home, yet the domestic scale of the historic residence remains an inspiration for the guest experience. The museum's legacy of intimacy and commitment to the personal experience of art may be found today in how we invite guests into a **warm and welcoming home for art exploration**.

The strategies originally pioneered by Duncan Phillips—such as juxtaposing artworks from diverse contexts while fostering participatory, reflective guest experiences—have since become widespread among museums across the United States and around the world.

With this new strategic plan, The Phillips Collection rededicates itself to engaging today's leading artists and strengthening its role as a dynamic and evolving space for art appreciation and dialogue.



Guests making crafts in the Art Workshop during Phillips after 5; Phillips Educator Monica Cohen Lenoff gives a school tour. All photos: AK Blythe. COVER: Guests with Sam Gilliam's *Broad Cape* (1972), *Maya* (1970), and *Red Register* (1970). Photo: Carl Nard