

## **Fitchburg Art Museum Celebrates 100 Years, Launches Centennial Celebrations**



Modified (cropped) from *Fitchburg Art Museum Exterior* created by The Fall 2024 Advanced Photo Editing Class at Fitchburg State University

For 100 years, the Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) has been a vital part of the history, culture, and identity of both the City of Fitchburg and the North Central Massachusetts region. FAM was legally incorporated on December 31, 1925, and opened its galleries to the public in the historic Merriam Parkway Building in downtown Fitchburg on April 17, 1929. According to FAM Director, Nick Capasso, “This is a special and exciting time for the Fitchburg Art Museum as we honor our past, celebrate our present, and look forward to sustaining a bright future for our community.”

### **FAM’s History**

FAM was founded by American artist Eleanor Augusta Norcross. Eleanor was born in Fitchburg in 1854 into a prominent family – her father, Amasa Norcross, was the first elected Mayor of the City of Fitchburg. She studied art at what is now called the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston, and then at the Arts Students League in New York City. At the suggestion of her teacher, noted artist William Merritt Chase, she moved to Paris in 1883 and established her career as a painter of portraits and interiors in the

Impressionist style. She also amassed an extensive art collection, with a special emphasis on European works on paper and the decorative arts. She passed away in 1923, and left money, her collection, and her own paintings to establish an art museum in her beloved hometown. Eleanor’s generosity was motivated by a strong inclination to community service. Like many 19<sup>th</sup>-century arts philanthropists, she believed that exposure to the fine arts stimulated the creativity and well-being of working people. Indeed, she founded FAM for “the benefit of the families of the millworkers.” She also believed that great cities

require great civic institutions and was determined that Fitchburg have its own museum devoted to the fine and decorative arts – just like its neighbors: Boston, Worcester, and Springfield.



Portrait photograph of Fitchburg Art Museum founder, Eleanor Norcross. Photograph from the Fitchburg Art Museum archive

For its first 30 years, FAM was known as the Fitchburg Art Center, with a robust schedule of exhibitions of international, national, and local artists; a growing collection of art from varied historical periods and places around the world; and an art school that offered classes for adults and children. The Art Center also became an important social hub for its patrons and a growing community of arts and culture supporters.

In 1951, after successfully leading the Art Center through the domestic austerities of the Second World War, the institution's eighth Director, Zaydee Dejonge Harris, made the decision to change our name to the Fitchburg Art Museum, to reflect our growing impact, reputation, and ambitions.



Exterior photograph of Fitchburg Art Museum's original entrance on Merriam Parkway. Photograph from the Fitchburg Art Museum archive

FAM's ninth Director, Peter Timms, served in his post for 39 years (1973-2012), one of the longest tenures of any art museum director in this country. His longevity was matched by his many accomplishments. In the 1970s and 1980, he more than tripled the size of the Museum (to 40,000 square feet) by building new wings and acquiring and renovating adjacent structures. He conducted a successful capital campaign, and built a sustaining financial endowment. And, in 1995, he initiated a visionary collaboration with the Fitchburg Public Schools, known as The Partnership School, a regional arts-magnet school in which all academic subjects were taught in FAM galleries using an arts-integrated, collection-based curriculum. This program, which ran for just over a decade, taught over 200 middle-school students each year, was life-changing for many, and was credited with significantly reducing drop-out rates. The Partnership School received national attention, and worked with performing artists from Lincoln Center in New York. During this time, FAM adopted the tagline "a Museum with a School at its heart."

## FAM Today



In progress tour of the **FESTIVAL: A Celebration of African Art** at FAM exhibition

Since 2012, under the leadership of FAM's 10<sup>th</sup> Director, Nick Capasso, FAM continues to thrive. We have grown our collection to over 8,000 artworks, with specific emphases on American Art, African Art, and photography. Our mission now includes a special commitment to New England contemporary artists, and we maintain strong partnerships with the Fitchburg Public Schools, Fitchburg State University, and Mount Wachusett Community College. FAM has also recommitted to the health and well-being of our community. We are one of this country's first and few fully bilingual (English/Spanish) art museums, to welcome our city's 40% Latino population. We worked in partnership with local community development corporation, NewVue Communities, to develop the Fitchburg Arts Community, 68 units of artist-preference affordable housing in three former municipal buildings right across the street from FAM. And we have served on several

economic and community development leadership teams in Fitchburg to reposition the city as the regional center for arts and culture, helping to attract over \$200M in investment for local capital projects, programming, training, and leadership development. Moreover, during the worst years of the pandemic, FAM worked with the Fitchburg Public Schools to create Fitchburg Families First, a program to address basic human needs for families in the school system.

## FAM's Centennial

FAM is launching our four-year Centennial Celebrations with the following events and programs:

Effective immediately, and for the entire four years of our Centennial period (2026 through 2029), admission at FAM will be **FREE FOR ALL**. We strongly believe that as a community-oriented museum, we must work to remove any barriers between our mission and programs, and the people who love FAM. Should this program prove successful in increasing visitor attendance and engagement, we will make free admission a permanent policy.

Two new exhibitions will celebrate artworks from FAM's Permanent Collection, that we hold in trust for the people of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. **FESTIVAL: A Celebration of African Art at FAM**, brings together traditional artworks from across the continent with modern and contemporary artworks from the African global diaspora which reflect the tribal traditions. **Kaleidoscope: 100 Years of Collecting for Our Community**, is a spectacular floor-to-ceiling presentation of paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, textiles, and multi-media works that reveals the depth and breadth of the Permanent Collection. **FESTIVAL** is already open to the public, and **Kaleidoscope** premieres on Saturday, February 21, and includes a series of free programs to enhance visitors' experiences.

[fitchburgartmuseum.org/festival-a-celebration-of-african-art/](https://fitchburgartmuseum.org/festival-a-celebration-of-african-art/)

[fitchburgartmuseum.org/kaleidoscope/](https://fitchburgartmuseum.org/kaleidoscope/)

On March 7, 6-9pm, please join us to celebrate FAM's Centennial at a once-in-a-lifetime party, **Eleanor's Dream: A 100th Birthday Soirée**. Tickets are now available on-line:

<https://68111.blackbaudhosting.com/68111/Eleanors-Dream-A-100th-Birthday-Soiree>

FAM's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary will also include a \$5M Centennial Fundraising Campaign to help sustain our mission through the next century. Through 2029, we will be seeking support from our community for endowment growth, operating support, and the care and storage of our Permanent Collection.



Kaleidoscope: 100 Years of Collecting for Our Community exhibition photograph. Photograph by Sarah Harper

## About the Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM)

**The Mission of the Fitchburg Art Museum is to inspire creativity and learning, and to contribute to the well-being of our diverse communities in Fitchburg, North Central Massachusetts, and New England.**

To accomplish this mission, we organize exhibitions of the work of New England contemporary artists and artworks from our art historical collections, offer programs for learners of all ages, support public art projects, invite community participation and partnerships, and stimulate the creative economy – all in the spirit of inclusivity.

The Fitchburg Art Museum serves the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster and the surrounding communities in North Central Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. Founded in 1925, FAM plays a vital role in the cultural life of the region and has recently repositioned itself to focus on community access and service. FAM uses its artistic and educational resources to aid in the economic revitalization of Fitchburg, and the Museum maintains active educational partnerships with the local school systems, as well as Fitchburg State University. FAM is an engine for creativity, education, community building, and fun!

### **Hours**

Wednesday through Friday: 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Saturday through Sunday: 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM

FAM at Night: 12:00 PM – 7:00 PM\*

\*Hours for FAM at Night at subject to change; please see the most up-to-date hours on FAM's website.

### **Museum Website**

[www.fitchburgartmuseum.org](http://www.fitchburgartmuseum.org)

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