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## President's Letter

*Susanne Friend*

As incoming president, I extend my thanks to all who voted for me and to all those who did not, thinking, justifiably, that I was out of my right mind when I agreed to run for office. Membership in this wonderfully quirky and dynamic organization is a delight, and I am honored to participate at this level.

I doubt that I would be writing this letter were it not for an epiphany I experienced some six years ago. At that time I was feeling jaded, exhausted, and fed up with conservation. I thought twenty years was too long to be doing any one profession and that the daily stresses of private practice were just too much. In short, I felt dangerous.

Then my partner and husband, Duane Chartier, was asked to go to New York to look at some paintings to provide scientific support to aid in the process of authentication. I decided he could not possibly do without my help and that our small children needed some time with a much beloved baby-sitter.

That was a fateful weekend. The art part of it went from bizarre to ludicrous as we looked at a shady Gauguin by the light of a swinging naked bulb in a dusty corridor of a 19th-century Upper East Side warehouse, a man from the Isle of Man with a Goya told us that tea leaves had brought us together, and a famous dead artist's former girlfriend tried to bully us into having the art world accept the last painting he did for her... by the end of the weekend we did not know whether to laugh or despair. So we saw the play *Art*, and then we went to dinner.

The restaurant we chose had a magnificent cheese cart, which I espied lurking regally in the back. As we ate, I kept looking at that cheese cart. I watched the maître fromager glide from table to table, the cart absolutely a mountain of the most gorgeous cheeses from all over the world. After a sumptuous meal I whispered to Duane that I wanted that cheese cart. The maître fromager approached, leaned over, and asked me how I felt, what cheeses I liked, and observed what wines we had been drinking. He then turned around and put together a plate of five cheeses -- a custom selection based on my tastes, the wines in my glasses, my personality -- for me. It was incredible. Duane, who is lactose intolerant, looked at me from across the table with bemused wistfulness. I looked around the restaurant, the world suddenly very simply divided into those who love cheese and those who just eat it.

When we returned to Los Angeles, I couldn't stop thinking about what had happened at the restaurant. The maître fromager had literally psychoanalyzed my cheese psyche. He profoundly knew what each person would like. I realized that I wanted to do that! What fun, I thought, to not only spread cheese, but spread the gospel of cheese, to propagate passion. I felt like a religious zealot. I jumped up and down on our bed, shouting to Duane and some bewildered visiting cousins, "I am going to teach people about the power of cheese, I will do people's cheese profiles, and take them on cheese tours, and, and, and . . ." and then, I realized I knew nothing about cheese.

I resolved to learn more about this incredible substance. At first I bought books, reading about cheese making and different milk types and cheeses of the world. We made a list of all restaurants in Los Angeles that had cheese plates and went to each one, carefully making notes. All in the interest of research, of course. This was expensive and nothing close to what I had experienced in New York. I eventually tracked down the source of the cheeses, which was the Cheese Store of Beverly Hills. I began buying from them and started a cheese database. At that time, however, the Cheese Store was the only resource in town, and the only way to really learn was to be there. One day I worked up my courage and telephoned the owner and asked him for a job. I told him of my passion for cheese and desire to do a "cheese internship" and, to my surprise, he said yes.

Every Saturday, for the past six years, I sell cheese. That one day per week surrounded by hundreds of glorious artisanal delicacies (professionalism dictates they all be tasted, of course) gives me sanity and balance. I have enjoyed my work in conservation much more since then and have redoubled my efforts in the field. Which is why I am here today. You elected me on a cheese platform, whether you knew it or not!

Sometimes in the day to day drudgery of providing for piano lessons and filling the gas tank, it is easy to forget what a wonderful profession we have. I almost did that. As we open this new year, I have to say I am profoundly grateful for all that I have and, indeed, for the perspective I have gained. Conservation may be repetitive at times, but I am certain that we never experience the boredom of most jobs. I am most especially grateful for the convivial embrace of the WAAC membership that permits personal and professional interchange and growth.

## President's letter, continued

Which brings me to matters of business. I extend thanks on all the membership's behalf to Camilla van Vooren, last year's WAAC president, for arranging such a seamless, informative, and relaxing meeting in Denver. We had a wonderful time and enjoyed the new Denver Art Museum. Those singing sinks will forever remain impressed upon my memory, lest I forget to wash my hands...

Thanks should also go to all those who generously offered their services to this organization and ran in last year's election. Congratulations and welcome to Scott Carrlee, our new Vice President and to our new Members-at-Large, Dana Senge and Marie Laibinis-Craft. Since Scott was a Member-at-Large last year, Camilla van Vooren takes his place for the balance of his term. Natasha Cochran has agreed to take over as Treasurer and Terri Moreno continues as Secretary. Leslie Rainer will be missed for her insightful contributions as outgoing Member-at-Large. A special thanks to Beverly Perkins who helped me put together a balanced and interesting slate.

**Please set aside the weekend of October 24-26, 2008, for this year's annual meeting at the Getty Villa in Malibu.**

Following a major renovation, the Villa is now an educational center and museum dedicated to the study of the arts and cultures of ancient Greece, Rome, and Etruria. New construction highlights include the 450-seat outdoor theater, the auditorium, and scientific labs for conservation analysis and treatment.

Bordered by coastal mountains and the Pacific Ocean, the Villa evokes the classical world in both its landscape and architecture. Modeled after the Villa dei Papiri, a first-century Roman country house, the original villa building has been reimagined as an artifact discovered in an archaeological excavation. The renovated J. Paul Getty Museum features more than 1,200 antiquities on view in 23 galleries devoted to the permanent collection. The Villa's four gardens are planted with species known from the ancient Mediterranean. The site is also home to the UCLA/Getty Master's Program on the Conservation of Ethnographic and Archaeological Materials, which opened in 2005. The partnership combines the resources of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA and the Getty Conservation Institute, and is closely connected to research activities at the Villa.

With so many interesting things going on in the museum scene in Los Angeles, I thought it time for us to return to this great city. By the time you come, the new Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art will be open. BCAM is part of renowned architect Renzo Piano's master plan to transform and expand LACMA and significantly alters the focus of this encyclopaedic museum towards contemporary art. Hopefully these things and other wondrous treasures, such as the Museum of Jurassic Technology, as well as Los Angeles' diverse cultural and culinary scene, will entice you to attend! Stay tuned...