



## Statement from the Director

*Let them not say: we did not see it.  
We saw.*

*Let them not say: we did not hear it.  
We heard.*

*Let them not say: they did not taste it.  
We ate, we trembled.*

So begins “Let them not say,” which was written in 2014 by the Zen-practicing poet-extraordinaire Jane Hirshfield.

The poem was occasioned by concerns about climate change, but like all great poetry, it can mean much more than one thing. If the biological pandemic has begun to ease, it's largely because science is coming to the rescue: vaccines have been designed, produced, tested, studied, and distributed in less than a year. The events of the last few weeks illustrate a lesson learned too many times already: that the hatred, racism, xenophobia, and misogyny built into culture—our *American* culture—seem stubbornly resistant to change.

“One thing you begin to recognize growing older is how many things don't get better, don't get fixed,” Hirshfield said in an interview she gave about a year ago. A form or, perhaps, a result of such recognition is the doubt that comes with vigilant honesty, likened to a double hung window in another poem of hers, “My doubt,” which appears in the same collection and ends with elegiac poignancy:

*As the knob of hung lead holds steady  
the open mouth of a window,  
you hold me,  
my kneeling before you resistant, stubborn,  
offering these furious praises  
I can't help but doubt you will ever be able to hear.*

The museum stands against the rising violence and hatred directed at Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. But beyond condemning racism in all its forms, as we must, what can we do? Each of us will have our own answer. The “furious praises” I'll offer up celebrate the diversity, genius, and creativity—both collective and individual—that our museum preserves, explains, and presents. [I have lent my voice to this issue before](#), but that doesn't mean I won't continue to do so.

We're sharing [an array of museum resources](#) that feature Asian and Asian American voices addressing issues of identity, belonging, and community, including conversations, learning activities, and personal stories. Secretary Bunch has challenged each of us at the Institution to educate ourselves and the public and to appreciate the diverse voices and experiences that are part of the American story. Important work is also being done by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center to pull together helpful resources. And we're working closely with our Smithsonian colleagues to assemble and curate material that speaks to our commitment to foster respect, understanding, and empathy. Meanwhile, the perspectives of our Asian and Asian American colleagues at the museum, who embody that diversity, genius, and creativity, have a particularly important claim on our attention; let us listen to and learn from them.

Chase F. Robinson

Dame Jillian Sackler Director  
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