

Alfred University alumnus creates endowment to support directorship of museum

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Wayne Higby

The Alfred University alumnus who made the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum at Alfred University a reality is now helping to ensure its future with an endowed directorship.

Marlin Miller, Jr., a 1954 alumnus of Alfred University, chairman emeritus of its Board of Trustees, and longest-serving member of the Board, has committed \$2 million to establish an endowed directorship in honor of Wayne Higby for the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum at Alfred University.

Wayne Higby, the director and chief curator of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum, as well as an internationally acclaimed artist and arts educator, and the current holder of the Robert Turner professorship in Alfred University's School of Art and Design, will be the first to hold the endowed directorship, said Alfred University President Mark Zupan. The endowed directorship appointment is for a three-year, renewable term.

“For Marlin, creating the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum has been an ongoing priority, and a labor of love on many different levels,” said Zupan. “By endowing the directorship, he is underscoring the importance of the Museum to the Alfred University community, and in a very practical way, helping to provide for its future.”

“All of us are inspired by and grateful for Marlin's love for, and unflagging involvement with, and sage counsel to our University,” added Zupan.

“The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum is a dream come true,” said Higby. “It is a dream that began deep in the history of ceramics at Alfred University and was shared, over time, by many of my close friends, colleagues, and mentors. It is this collective vision that inspires my commitment to participate in the process of making the dream a living reality.

“It never crossed my mind that one day I would be the director of the Museum serving to help get its magnificent facility built and open to the world. Marlin Miller's friendship and belief in me, over the years, has been a most important touchstone of my artistic life and work. He often has inspired in me the courage to go beyond what I thought possible. His gift of the Museum to Alfred University is extraordinary. His endowing of the Museum Directorship in my name is a great honor. This recognition is surely the capstone of my career.”

“The arts—all the arts—are a very important part of what Alfred University is today, and part of its future as well,” said Miller, and that is the reason he continues his support. Deciding to name the directorship for his long-time friend Wayne was an easy choice, he said. “Wayne embodies what is unique and wonderful about Alfred University. He’s an extremely talented artist and teacher who has now turned his considerable talents to establishing the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum and assuring it has a strong foundation upon which to grow. Wayne stands for those who have gone before him, like Robert Turner, who believed so strongly in the Museum as a way to attract and educate students. More than that, however, the Museum will make the arts more accessible to all students at Alfred University.”

It was more than 25 years ago that the idea of building a free-standing museum open to the public first arose, following a 1991 decision by the Board of Trustees to formally create a museum. There had been “study collections” prior to that, going back to 1903, shortly after the founding of the New York State School of Clayworking at Alfred University, but there was little or no public access to the collections.

Various sites and designs were considered for the new museum, but nothing came to fruition until 2014 when Miller stepped forward with a gift to cover the cost of constructing the building. At the time, he pledged his support would go beyond bricks and mortar, and now it has.

The endowed directorship in honor of Wayne Higby for the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum honors a long-standing friendship between Miller and Higby. It also reflects Marlin’s love of the arts that began when he was a student at Alfred University. Miller’s first wife, the late Marcianne Mapel Miller, was a 1954 graduate of Alfred University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. A ceramic artist, she inspired an interest in the arts by Miller, a ceramic engineering major. Miller’s second wife, Ginger, is an accomplished artist, and shares his involvement with and appreciation for the arts.

Higby’s work is in the permanent collections of numerous art museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo and the National Art Museum of China.

Higby is a member of honor of the United States National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, a Life Trustee of the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, the Vice President Emeritus of the International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva, Switzerland, and an honorary citizen of the “Porcelain City” of Jingdezhen, China. In 2014 the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C. presented a retrospective of Higby’s work accompanied by the book *Infinite Place: The Ceramic Art of Wayne Higby*. *EarthCloud*, an extensive porcelain installation, considered to be Higby’s magnum opus, was commissioned in 2001 by Miller for the Miller Performing Arts complex at Alfred University.

The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum officially opened last fall and houses nearly 8,000 ceramic objects ranging from small pottery shards from ancient civilizations to modern and contemporary ceramic art. As a research and teaching facility, the Museum’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit ceramic art. Additionally, the exhibition cycle of the museum addresses art in all media.