

S50B01

REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM
2021 Budget Hearing Testimony



Elizabeth Catlett: Artist as Activist
October 2019 through March 2020

S50B01

Maryland African American Museum Corporation
Hearing Testimony — 2021

February 16, 2021

The Maryland African American Museum Corporation (MAAMC), known as the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, is one of the largest museums on the east coast dedicated to the preservation of the African American cultural experience. A longstanding Smithsonian Affiliate, we have a core collection of more than 11,000 objects, artifacts, documents, and photographs that span 400 years of Maryland history housed in an 82,000 square foot building which opened in 2005.

While none of us could have imagined a global pandemic bringing the world to a sudden halt, that is what happened in FY 20. As a result, the museum was closed from March 13, 2020 until September 10, 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the museum was on track to meet our match for state funding. When our doors closed, all of our spring programming for hundreds of students, professional development training for teachers and programs for adults and families, were shifted to virtual programming. Our exhibits are available virtually and more than 6,000 artifacts in our collection have been digitized. We lost a full quarter of FY 20 revenue from Admissions, retail sales, paid programming and special event rentals. The impact of the pandemic on capital markets resulted in unrealized investment losses for FY20.

During the first three quarters of FY20, the museum operation showed steady improvement. As we approach the end of our five-year plan, the board and staff will engage in a new five-year plan to direct the museum through its 25th anniversary. Terri Lee Freeman, our new Executive Director, will lead the museum through a strategic planning process to develop a plan with measurable goals and objectives for the next 3-5 years. We are confident that the Reginald F. Lewis Museum will gain recognition, as one of the major cultural attractions in the city of Baltimore and the state of Maryland.

Overall attendance for FY20 was 26,547 compared to 53,041 for FY19, a 50 % decrease. Working with our corporate and community partners, we produced compelling virtual ticketed Public Programs and attendance for these programs was relatively consistent with FY19.

	FY 20	FY 19
General Admission	10,178	19,704
K-12 Tours	5,350	7,042
Adult Tour Groups	792	2,977
Special Events	5,834	18,128
Educational Meetings	337	642
Public Programs (Ticketed)	4,056	4,548
Total:	26,547	53,041

There were a number of highlights during the year including, the continuation of our successful, Maryland Collects Series. Elizabeth Catlett: Artist as Activist, consisted of 20 prints and 14 sculptures, all but one was loaned to the museum from Maryland collectors. One of our donors is from Rhode Island. Ms. Catlett is considered one of the most important African American artists of the 20th century. Traditional rental fees for a similar exhibit would have cost in excess of \$50,000. The exhibit was named Exhibit of the Year, by the Baltimore Sun, and was sponsored by Kaiser Permanente and the Eddie and Sylvia Brown Foundation. Also, in FY20, our exhibit Empowered! Black Action Figures, Superheros & Collectibles, provided visitors an opportunity to explore a limited collection of figures played by black actors in starring roles as the Superhero and occasionally the super villain. The action figures covered the expansive world of pop culture from Star Wars and Star Trek to Marvel and DC Comics.

An amazing donation of 170 prints documenting the life of Arabbers in Maryland, from Roland Freeman, a renowned Smithsonian documentarian, was the impetus for our exhibit. We continued our program series, "Talks and Thoughts, which addressed subjects including, black voter suppression, disparities in healthcare for African Americans and strategies to increase wealth in black and brown communities. Public programs exploring the 855 women of the only all black military battalion to serve in Europe during World War II, a program to promote Baltimore Ceasefire, teaching families how to maintain their legacy through quilting and the arts, and exploration of slave quarters in Annapolis discovered by archaeologists in 2014.

We also partnered with Johns Hopkins Medical Systems and University for Hopkins Day, allowing free admission to all for a full day of talks, performances and activities for all ages. In a partnership with the Smithsonian, we premiered their movie, Breaking the Color Barrier and during the federal government shutdown, we offered free admission to the museum for all furloughed employees and their families.

School attendance, an institutional priority, decreased slightly in FY20 compared to FY19. However, our School Program remained strong. The Education and Community Programs department moved all our program offerings into the virtual space which allowed us to continue to offer Teacher Professional Development sessions, school exhibit tours and community programs, as well as Living History programming throughout FY20. Additionally, we held both our annual Kwanzaa Celebration and High School Juried Art Show virtually.

Museum fundraising revenue for FY20 was \$1,237,467 compared to \$2,037,147 in FY19. These amounts are exclusive of funding received from the State of Maryland and unrealized investment losses due directly to the pandemic.

- Museum Store gross sales were \$64,000 in FY20 compared to \$108,500 in FY19 — a 41% decrease. The museum store continues to be a source of earned revenue for the museum as we provide product lines that align with our mission.
- Special Events sales (building space rentals) of \$156,300 in FY20 represents a 35% decrease from FY19. The 82,000 sq. ft building continues to be a desirable rental space for individual and corporate events.

- Paid memberships increased 8% in FY20 as compared to FY19. During FY20, we redesigned our membership program to provide greater benefits to museum members and corporate partners, providing each with enhanced opportunities to participate in Museum programming and events, in advance of the general public. We introduced Membership cards that include pictures of historical and relevant Maryland African Americans. We have been experiencing tremendous response to both the new cards and the new Membership offerings. Our Membership revenue through December 31 of FY21 is \$50,000, an increase of 188% over the same period in FY20.
- Our social media presence was expanded and redefined towards the end of FY20 and into FY21 to reach a broader Maryland audience.

WEBSITE VISITS	FY20	206,013
ONLINE PORTAL VISITORS	FY20	4,952
SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE	FY20	17,702
VIRTUAL PROGRAMS	FY20	6,573

- Maryland Collects exhibition series continued to be extremely successful. In 2020 the exhibitions Maryland Collects: Elizabeth Catlett: Visionary Artist, November 10, 2019 - March 3, 2020, followed the FY19 exhibition, Maryland Collects: Romare Bearden. These exhibitions were made possible solely on the loan of artworks by area collectors. The exhibitions attracted diverse audiences and were favorably reviewed by the Baltimore Sun, the Baltimore Times, the Afro, Bmore Art, and various other media outlets.
- Our FY20 annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, offered a virtual reality (VR) experience for our visitors. By donning goggles, visitors experienced being a part of the 1968 Sanitation Workers Strike, and the subsequent Mason Temple speech delivered by Dr. King, the day before his assassination. It is innovative experiences like this that allow our visitors to not only learn about history, but to experience it. Our MLK Day celebration was featured on the front page of The Baltimore Sun newspaper on Tuesday, January 21, 2020.
- Digitizing the collection and making it visible and accessible online, continues to be a priority for the Museum. When we debuted our website Online Collections Portal in early 2020, we began with 1,092 objects available for viewing. At the close of FY20 we had 6,485 records online, an invaluable tool for our online visitors, scholars and researchers. We are one of only a few African American museums to have a searchable collections database online.

In FY20, the museum continued to increase its partnerships with corporations, cultural and community organizations. Our annual Children's Book Fair was held virtually on June 25, 2020 featured authors and illustrators of African American children's books, partnerships with the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and attracted 699 visitors. A rotating series of exhibitions curated by local photographer Joe Giordano, Reflections of Baltimore, showcase painters from MICA, and Baltimore street photographers who showcase their work on Instagram. In FY2, we entered the second year of our annual "Health and Wellness" partnership with Kaiser Permanente. We continued our partnerships with Whiting Turner, the Maryland State Arts Council, the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance and Visit Baltimore Morgan State University, Galerie Myrtis, the Enoch Pratt Free Public Library, and a host of local community artists and activists.

We are proud that the Reginald F. Lewis Museum has continued to be relevant and make significant progress in FY21, increasing the upward trajectory established in FY20. Our continuing efforts revolve around a focused plan for success post pandemic. Going forward the plan involves:

- Fiscal Management & Compliance - by maintaining sound fiscal policies, and regulatory compliance practices;
- Advancement- by expanding financial support from corporations, foundations and individuals invested in our mission;
- Education & Scholarship - by creating compelling history and interpretive experiences for visitors through scholarly exhibitions that appeal to all ages, races and cultures to emphasize the reality that African American history is American history.
- Community Engagement - by strengthening community partnerships with local constituents and national stakeholders;
- Branding & Positioning - by expanding marketing strategies that support the vision statement and promote cultural branding through the development of unique exhibitions and creative programs.

We are grateful for the Board of Directors' unwavering commitment to the Museum's success, and the elected representatives of this great state, who have remained stalwart. The State's continued recognition of us as Maryland's premier museum dedicated to the history and culture of African Americans resonates as an edifice of pride and community achievement.

We are thankful to the State of Maryland for its past support and look forward to continued support through future State allocations.

THE REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM

EMPOWERED! BLACK ACTION FIGURES, SUPERHEROES & COLLECTIBLES

August 2019 through February 2020

