

ROBIN GRAEME NICHOLSON

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PROFILE

Art museum director with over thirty years' international experience in the museum and curatorial fields. Significant strengths in strategic planning, major exhibition development, fundraising, and museum visioning and leadership.

EXPERIENCE

INDEPENDENT ART MUSEUM CONSULTANT

2020 - Present

Based in Richmond, Virginia, working with another AAMD art museum director, and a consulting firm in New York, to develop an art museum-specific advisory service to help mid-sized museums emerge from the Covid-19 crisis and plan for the long and short-term future.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR and CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

2019-2020

TELFAIR MUSEUMS (Savannah, GA)

Executive Director and CEO of the oldest art museum in the South, with three distinctive buildings: two National Landmark structures, the original Telfair Academy, opened in 1883, and the Owens Thomas House and Slave Quarters built in 1819. The iconic contemporary Jepson Center, designed by award-winning architect Moshe Safdie, opened in 2006. The Telfair Museums collection of over 7,000 objects, is rich in American impressionism, post-1945 modernism, contemporary design and digital art, and historic decorative arts and furniture.

- Led a unique museum in America with a combination of contemporary and historic buildings, attracting a quarter of a million visitors annually.
- Within a year completed a \$6 million challenge grant to remove debt from the Jepson Center and position the museum for the future.
- Developed the next major strategic plan for the museum to lead it into the mid-21st century.
- Positioned the Telfair as a leader in interpreting the troubled history of slavery in the south.
- Developed major exhibitions that will ensure continued growth in visitation, membership, and support.
- Managed responses to the first wave of the Covid-19 crisis, March-May 2020.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2014 - 2019

THE FRICK PITTSBURGH (Pennsylvania, PA)

Executive Director of a six acre museum in the heart of Pittsburgh that includes one of the best-preserved Gilded Age mansions in America, a car and carriage museum, and an art museum with exceptional examples of Renaissance to 19th century European paintings and decorative arts, Chinese ceramics, and contemporary art.

- Reporting to a board of 30 Trustees, oversaw all aspects of operations of a 28-year old museum with an operating budget of \$7 million, an endowment of \$75 million, over 120 FT and PT staff, and annual visitation of 125,000.
- Completed a \$15 million capital campaign (2016) including three new buildings, collections storage, and endowment (\$6m raised in first year as director; project finished on schedule and on budget).
- Initiated and directed a two-year strategic planning and visioning exercise, resulting in the first comprehensive strategic plan for the museum (Frick 2017-2022 and Beyond).
- Initiated an ambitious program of fashion-based exhibitions and programming that delivered record-breaking attendance and raised over \$1m in foundation support (the largest non-capital gifts in the Frick's history).
- Secured and oversaw the most successful exhibition in the museum's history - *Van Gogh, Monet, Degas* (2018) - with record visitation and \$1m in corporate, foundation, and individual sponsorship.

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ART AND EDUCATION
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS (Richmond, VA)**

2010-2014

Senior staff member, head of art, education, and exhibitions division, at the premier art museum of the southeast USA (budget: \$33m.)

- Received direct reports from chief educator, chief curator, director of marketing, director of audience development, director of library and resources, head of exhibitions, and head of statewide partnerships, who in turn managed a total of 80 staff, 50 faculty, and over 300 volunteers in the art and education division, with a combined budget of \$8m.
- Oversaw exhibition fundraising, significant art acquisitions, new programming and new technologies, and audience development.
- Played a key role in two major strategic planning exercises (2010, 2014).
- Project-managed several of the most important exhibitions in the museum's history with multi-million dollar budgets including *Picasso* (2011), *Chihuly* (2012), *Hollywood Costume* (2013) and *Forbidden City* (2014).
- Initiated and managed international collaborations with museums in Canada, UK, France, Italy, and China.
- Provided leadership for the artistic and educational mission of the museum.

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR EXHIBITIONS
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, (Richmond, VA)**

2006-2010

- First head of exhibitions at VMFA directing 15,000 sq. ft. of new gallery space.
- Recruited to place VMFA on the international stage for traveling exhibitions .
- Managed all aspects of the re-vitalized exhibition program that transformed the museum.
- Promoted to oversee the museum's curatorial, exhibition, and educational programs in 2010.

**CURATOR OF COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS
THE DRAMBUIE COLLECTION, (Edinburgh, Scotland)**

1992-2006

Directed curatorial, acquisitions, and exhibition programs for major corporate art collection based in Edinburgh, London, and Miami.

- Single-handedly established the most important collection of Stuart and Jacobite art in the UK.
- Published catalogues, books, papers and other scholarly works on the collection.
- Organized traveling exhibition of the collection to eight art museums in the US and London.
- Oversaw long-term loan of the Jacobite collection to the National Galleries of Scotland in 2005.
- In 2005 oversaw the de- accessioning of the Scottish painting collection, establishing 11 world records.

GALLERY MANAGER, THE FINE ART SOCIETY, (Edinburgh, Scotland)

1990-1992

- Managed exhibition programs and day-to-day operations at the Edinburgh gallery of the UK's leading dealer of 18th-20th -century British fine and decorative arts.

**CURATORIAL INTERN, DEPARTMENT OF PRINTS AND DRAWINGS,
NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND, (Edinburgh , Scotland)**

1985/6

EDUCATION

- 2008 GETTY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, Los Angeles
Summer residential museum leadership program
- 1990 UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, England, MA History of Art
(Thesis: *The Evergreen: A fin de siècle periodical 1894-1897*)
- 1987 UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, England, BA History of Art
- 1983-84 QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, Ontario, Canada

EXHIBITIONS (selection)

Van Gogh, Monet, Degas: The Mellon Collection of French Art from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
March – July 2018, The Frick Pittsburgh (Frick project director)

Undressed: A History of Fashion in Underwear
October 2017 – January 2018, The Frick Pittsburgh (Frick project director)

Killer Heels: The Art of the High-Heeled Shoe
June-September 2016, The Frick Pittsburgh (Frick project director)

Forbidden City: Imperial Treasures from the Palace Museum, Beijing
October 2014-January 2015, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director)

Hollywood Costume
October 2013-February 2014, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director and curator)

Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann
April – July 2013, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director)

Chihuly at VMFA
October 2012 – February 2013, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director)

Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée Picasso National, Paris
February-May 2011, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director)

Tiffany: Color and Light
May-August 2010, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA project director)

Mystery
October-November 2007, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (co-curator)

Rule Britannia! Art, Royalty & Power in the Age of Jamestown
April-August 2007, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (co-curator, coordinator)

Loyalty & Exile: The Jacobites and America
April-June 2004, Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York (curator, organizer, coordinator)

Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Royal House of Stuart, 1688-1788: Works of Art from The Drambuie Collection, February 2003-December 2005, Society of the Four Arts, Palm Beach, FL; Telfair Museums, Savannah, GA; Headley-Whitney Museum, Lexington, KY; Albany Institute for History and Art, NY; Winterthur Museum, DE; University of Richmond Museums, VA; Dixon Gallery, Memphis, TN; The Fleming Collection, London, UK (curator, organizer, coordinator)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Present	Association of Art Museum Directors; South East Art Museum Directors Group; Board Member, Studio Pottery, London, England American Federation of Arts, Exhibitions Review Committee; International Committee, Jacobite Studies Trust; International Exhibition Organizers Group.
2010-14	Director of Art, Council of the Virginia Association of Museums; Affiliate Graduate Faculty, Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University.
2009	Bilateral Presidential Commission on US-Russia Relations, Working Sub-Group – Visual Arts.
2008	Museum Leadership Program at the Getty Leadership Institute, Los Angeles: one of only 31 participants awarded a place on this highly competitive annual residential program for museum directors and senior staff.
2004-2006	UK Program Committee, International Association for Professional Art Advisors.
2003-2006	Chairman, Scottish Society for Art History.
2003	International Association for Professional Art Advisors Excellence Award
2001-2006	Reviews Editor, Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History.
1990-1992	Chairman, Edinburgh Galleries Association.

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS (selection)

Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Making of a Myth: A Study in Portraiture, 1720-1892, (Bucknell University Press: Lewisburg/Associated University Presses: London, 2002)

Selected reviews: “a closely argued and perceptive study, which will be a valuable source of reference for all who are interested in 18th century portraiture.” *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*

“Excellent...blends a formidable knowledge of Jacobite and eighteenth-century history with art history...a substantial contribution to the material culture history of a European court” *Biography*

“Nicholson’s range, sharpness and attention to detail are impressive to the point of being delightful...” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*

‘Scottish Artists in North America, 1714-1945’, *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 2021

Director’s Choice: Telfair Museums (Scala Publications, London, 2020)

“Lochaber No More: Landscape, Emigration and the Scottish Artist 1849-95”, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, spring 2008

“From Ramsay’s Flora MacDonald to Raeburn’s MacNab: the use of tartan as a symbol of identity”, *Textile History*, 36.2, 2005

“From Fever to Fresh Air’: *The Evergreen, The Yellow Book* and the Threat of Decadence”, *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, Vol 9, 2004

“Highland Habits: the iconography of the Sobieski Stuarts”, *Scottish Studies Review*, vol 4, no 2, Autumn 2003

“The Tartan Portraits of Prince Charles Edward Stuart: Identity and Iconography”, *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 21, 1998

“Portraiture and Patronage of the Exiled Stuarts”, *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, Vol. 3, 1998

RECENT CONFERENCES / PANELS / LECTURES

Deaccessioning: Myths, Misconceptions, and Missed Opportunities, SEAMD/SEMC Panel (virtual), February, 2021
Scottish Artists in North America, 1714-1945, Scottish Society for Art History/Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, keynote speaker, February, 2020
How to Cancel Popular Programs and Still Make Friends and Money, Presenter, American Alliance of Museums Annual Conference, 2019
Titans in Tandem: J. Pierpont Morgan and Henry Clay Frick (with Colin Bailey), The Frick Pittsburgh, 2017
Photography and the Femme Fatale, The Frick Pittsburgh, 2016
Juror, *Carol R. Brown Creative Achievement Awards*, The Pittsburgh Foundation, 2015
Rain & Romance: Two Themes in British Art, The Frick Pittsburgh, 2015
Panel Moderator, *Meeting the West: Exhibitions from American Museums*, Nanjing Museum, China, 2014
The Future of Art Museums, Duquesne Club, Pittsburgh, 2014
Pop Art and Beyond: Tom Wesselmann, MacLean Project for the Arts, MacLean, Virginia, 2013;
Lessons in Leadership, Emerging Non-Profit Leadership Program, Richmond, 2013;
Exhibition Planning, Association of Art Museum Curators Annual Meeting, MoMA, New York City, 2009;
Audiences, Identity and Controversy, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, 2008;
Cultures in Context: African and Native-American Art in the Age of Jamestown, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2007;
Creating a Strategic Plan for Exhibitions, ArtWorks for Virginia Annual Conference, 2007;
Chair and Organizer, *What's on at the Museum Right Now? Exhibition Strategies in the 21st Century* Special Symposium, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2006;
Conference Chair and Organizer, *Art & Scotland: the Last 21 Years*, National Gallery of Scotland/Scottish Society for Art History, 2005.

RECENT MEDIA PROFILES & FEATURES

New executive director plans to move Telfair Museums in various ways, March, 2019
<https://www.dosavannah.com/entertainmentlife/20190323/savartscene-new-executive-director-plans-to-move-telfair-museums-in-various-ways/1>
[*A stronger Frick: Under Robin Nicholson, the museum prospered*](#)
[*Little wonder another museum wants him*](#)
Enriching a Regional Cultural Gem, Richard King Mellon Foundation Annual Report, 2018, pp.35-6, <https://www.rkmf.org/pages/robin-nicholson>
Frick Pittsburgh identifies its goals for the future, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, June 22, 2017
Frick Pittsburgh approves new strategic plan, Pittsburgh Business Times, June 22, 2017
The Sartorial Canvas: Fashion and Art, Op-ed by Robin Nicholson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 30, 2017
Changing times at the Frick? Pittsburgh Quarterly, Fall 2015, pp. 34-36
Frick Director works to make museum more 'open', Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, August 3 2015
New Direction at the Frick, Shady Avenue Magazine Fall 2014, pp. 52-55