



# Capturing the Imagination

## New audiences and the next generation

**Scott Stulen vividly recalls the day he met Rembrandt** at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. He was 9 years old and on a school field trip when he spotted a painting by the 17th century Dutch master. Mesmerized, “I got a little too close, crossed the invisible line and was aggressively scolded by a guard,” he says. Both encounters – with Rembrandt and the guard – made lasting impressions. Art would become his profession, and making art accessible would become his passion.

As the first-ever curator of audience experiences and performance at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), Stulen is developing programs that respond to research supported by a \$200,000 planning grant from Lilly Endowment. The study’s findings reinforced what IMA leaders had long suspected. To ensure that the institution will continue to thrive for future generations, Stulen says, “We need to reach out and embrace younger audiences. To do that, it can’t be business as usual.”

His plans, unveiled in November 2014, will fully unfold in 2015 and include creative programs on and off the IMA’s 152-acre campus. A truck – Stulen describes it as a “mobile IMA art lab” – will visit fairs, festivals and public schools. “By getting out into the community, we can listen to our neighbors and learn what they want, what they’re interested in and what hurdles prevent them from coming to the IMA,” he says. “My approach is to offer diversity. We’ll continue to have traditional exhibitions and artist talks, but we’re adding activities that mix learning and fun in unique ways.”

Stulen, who joined the IMA staff in March 2014, is exploring partnerships with area arts organizations and creative individuals whom he views as colleagues, not

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Guitarists perform and mark the end of summer at The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park: 100 Acres at the IMA (above). Avant Brunch brings chefs together and food fans inside an IMA gallery (opposite left). Art making is part of Summer Nights Film Series at the IMA (opposite right).

competitors. “We each have a niche or territory, and we reach different segments of the population,” he says. “I haven’t sensed that anyone is stepping on anyone’s toes here. To have a really vibrant local arts community, you need a lot of voices and different types of venues that offer multiple entry points for artists.”

### The partnerships include:

- ▶ Indy Film Fest’s collaboration with the IMA and the Athenaeum for “Cereal Cinema.” The monthly film series features family friendly movies offered on Saturday mornings with a breakfast cereal buffet. The IMA and Athenaeum take turns hosting.
- ▶ Local chefs, who create edible works of art for Avant Brunch, a series of multi-sensory experiences in the museum. Guests eat magnificent food in galleries filled with exceptional paintings, drawings and sculptures while a sound system surrounds them with fresh music from cutting-edge international musicians.
- ▶ Yoga instructors, who lead sun salutations throughout the campus. Yogis practice before “Angel of the Resurrection,” a Tiffany Studios window (c. 1905) within the Hunt Gallery, and outside in the shadow of “LOVE” (c. 1970), the iconic Robert Indiana sculpture on the Sutphin Mall.

These partnerships are opening up the IMA, a 131-year-old pillar of the arts in Indianapolis that is expanding what it means to be a museum, says Charles Venable, the Melvin and Bren Simon Director and CEO of the IMA.

“Like yoga practitioners in our galleries, we truly need to be flexible and balanced in the way we think about everything we do,” Venable says. “Through this planning process we have connected with some exceptional leaders of museums and botanical gardens from around the world who spoke to us about the transitions they have gone through. Over and again, they have talked about relevance, and that has become a lens through which we view our work.”

Even the choice to give Stulen the title of “curator” reflects this commitment to be relevant to people, especially people new to museums. After all, he is tending to

audience experiences, not simply the art they view on a gallery wall.

Venable says the IMA is balancing its commitment to a stellar collection of fine art with family art making in The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park: 100 Acres. It will continue to bring international exhibitions of the likes of Georgia O’Keeffe and Ai Weiwei, while inviting people to learn about sustainable agriculture during events at the museum gardens.

Working on behalf of the next generation of art museum goers, Stulen is mindful of his own childhood experience with that painting by Rembrandt.

**“My hope is that young visitors will find their curiosity embraced, nurtured and rewarded by the museum,”** he says. “I hope that the museum will be a place they want to bring their friends, and when they grow up it will still be part of their lives.”

