



## President's Message

# A THOUSAND DIFFERENT REASONS

When Henry and Arabella Huntington created the trust document that would transform their private estate into a public entity, they wrote that they were creating an institution that was ultimately “for the public welfare.” For Los Angeles today, that means welcoming an audience that is both multicultural and multifaceted, bringing a thousand different reasons for visiting. When we ask visitors on any given day why they come and what they take away, we rarely get the same answer twice: they come to exercise, to relax, to let their toddlers run around; to marvel at the medieval Ellesmere Chaucer or the contemporary art of Celia Paul; to explore the landscape traditions of China or the adaptations of desert plants. Or they simply come to see what’s here—and are amazed. The Huntington is a place that’s tailor made for the “experience omnivore,” someone hungry for the extraordinary variety and richness of The Huntington’s offerings.

An artist visiting recently said that she used to come here as a new immigrant to find solace—a place that would let her be herself. As a teenager, she was having trouble adjusting to her new home, new school, new everything. She said that while some people might see The Huntington’s gates and walls as imposing, she saw them as protective and comforting. It made me realize that the “Huntington experience” is different for every individual.

As an institution, we generate affection and loyalty in ways that are unlike other institutions with which I have been professionally associated. We have no undergraduates, no alumni, and no single formative experience that binds people together, as a college or university does in class after graduating class. Instead,

connections are made on an individual basis and they often last a lifetime—in fact, more than a lifetime, as these connections are often multi-generational. Fashion designers Kate and Laura Mulleavy, the young women behind the highly successful Rodarte brand, have often said that their work has been inspired by their visits to The Huntington as children with their mother and grandmother. Earlier this spring, they released their fall/winter line in a runway show at The Huntington, replete with botanical references and a bold palette of colors. In interviews, the Mulleavys said that holding their event here was a “dream come true.” What a powerful statement about their emotional attachment to this place and the way it has shaped lives.

With this degree of influence comes great responsibility, especially as we begin our second century. How might we better serve the people of this region—our visitors, members, students, and scholars? We have always operated on a lean budget and will continue to be strategic about how we deploy our resources, but our upcoming Centennial gives us an opportunity to try out new approaches—to experiment with showcasing exceptional but lesser-known parts of our collections, as well as our more iconic treasures. The Centennial also provides a chance for us to bring our three collections—library, art, and botanical—together in greater dialogue with one another, in the service of our fundamental research and educational missions. As we enter our second century, in welcoming the public to share in our treasures, we are committed to enriching the lives of those who visit, whichever Huntington experience they seek.

*Karen R. Lawrence, President*