



The Daguerreian Society

PO Box 306, Cecil PA 15321-0306

November 4, 2020

Julián Zugazagoitia
CEO and Director
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
4525 Oak Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Richard C. Green
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Hon. Roy Blunt
US Senator
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Mr. Zugazagoitia, Mr. Green, and Senator Blunt:

I am writing you on behalf of the members and Board of The Daguerreian Society, a 501 (c) 3 organization devoted to the art, history, and cultural impact of the earliest photographs. This letter concerns the **alarming situation at the Nelson-Atkins Museum which has prompted three dozen staff layoffs**, including that of our colleague Jane L. Aspinwall, the museum's Curator of Photography.

For many years, there has been a close relationship between The Daguerreian Society (US-based but with an international membership) and The Nelson-Atkins Museum. Our organization has held its annual meeting and symposium in Kansas City three times—in 2001, 2007, and most recently in 2019. We've had many interactions with Keith F. Davis, Senior Curator at the museum, and former curator of the famed Hallmark Photographic Collection. Mr. Davis is responsible for developing the Nelson-Atkins photography department into **one of the world's leading institutional programs**, with a major and irreplaceable collection that has been enriched by extraordinary gifts from the Hall Family Foundation.

Sadly, after Jane L. Aspinwall's position was eliminated, Keith Davis felt it necessary to resign as Senior Curator of Photography at the Nelson-Atkins. This is a very serious loss to a previously great program—and that loss will be noted worldwide.

We understand that the pandemic is forcing changes on nearly every business and nearly

every family in America. We recognize that the U.S. Congress acted to alleviate hardships through the Payroll Protection Plan, which provided temporary help for The Nelson-Atkins and other organizations. Now that funding through PPP has ceased, however, those organizations are facing **severe and possibly irrevocable consequences**.

We are including Senator Blunt in this letter because of his steadfast support for American history and culture. We recognize his standing as a member of the Smithsonian Council for American Art and as a Trustee of both the State Historical Society of Missouri and the Kennedy Center.

The loss of expertise represented by the departures of Jane Aspinwall and Keith Davis will be an extraordinary blow to American art, history, and culture. This loss will be concentrated in Kansas City and Missouri, but it will be felt nationwide and globally.

When the municipal bankruptcy of the city of Detroit threatened the existence of the Detroit Institute of Arts in 2014, U. S. District Judge Gerald Rosen engineered an extraordinary “Grand Bargain” that saved the museum for future generations. While the situation at The Nelson-Atkins differs in some ways, **we are asking Senator Blunt to find a path that will rescue the Nelson-Atkins** and at least some of its staffers from the ravages of the current pandemic. We are concerned about all the museum’s employees, but speak with particular knowledge and concern about Jane Aspinwall’s talents and contributions.

Sincerely,

Mike Medhurst
President
The Daguerreian Society