

GALLERIES

A whole lot of changes at Hillyer

The art space has been renamed, IA&A's president and founder is retiring, and it has featured shows of international works

BY MARK JENKINS

There's a new sign over the door at Hillyer Art Space. But an even bigger change is afoot inside the Dupont Circle carriage house where the gallery — now called IA&A at Hillyer in a nod to its parent organization, International Arts & Artists — is located. David Furchgott, IA&A's president and founder, is retiring.

"I'm 70," says Furchgott, who created the nonprofit arts organization 22 years ago. "That's the record that's playing in the back of my mind. I'm not 32 anymore. I can't operate on four hours of sleep anymore."

IA&A is poised to begin the search for its new president, which could take 18 months or more. "I'm not leaving tomorrow," Furchgott allows. "But if somebody great popped up tomorrow, who's ready to go, and the board decided they wanted to do that, I would step aside, hopefully with a good amount of graciousness."

Conceived as a venue for organizing museum-scale traveling art exhibitions, IA&A also runs an international cultural-exchange program and operates a design studio that supports its own activities and those of other arts groups. It has arranged almost 100 shows at more than 400 museums worldwide.

Few of IA&A's shows ever get seen in the Washington area, in part because they're too large for the group's 1,040-square-foot exhibition space. "Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair" was recently on view at the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum. Another exhibition, spotlighting Filipino artist Luis Lorenzana, is scheduled to be shown at the American University Museum in 2020. But the ground-floor gallery, operat-



Deanna Luu, director of IA&A design studio; Allison Nance, director of IA&A at Hillyer; and David Furchgott, IA&A president and founder. "I'm 70. . . I'm not 32 anymore. I can't operate on four hours of sleep," Furchgott says of why he's retiring.

ing since 2006 in a courtyard behind the Phillips Collection and the Cosmos Club, is better known in local art circles than IA&A, whose offices are one flight up.

"We're doing a lot of things that we haven't tied tightly together, in the public's eye," Furchgott says of IA&A's work. "People who come here, by the hundreds, don't know what the organization is, and what our focus is."

There's more to redefining the gallery than simply changing its name. The venue is known for exhibiting local artists, which will continue, but in recent months it has featured shows of Italian and Iranian art. The international focus was always planned, Furchgott notes, but curtailed by recession-era economic pressures.

In 2009, he recalls, "we saw museums dropping off the face of

the Earth, virtually — some of them on occasion with exhibitions that we had booked. We owed money because other people owed us money. Now we're in very solid shape. It's a good time for passing on."

The new name also is compatible with potential expansion, Furchgott says. "If we decide to open another exhibition space around town, which is always pos-

sible, it could be IA&A at wherever."

Hosting international exhibitions, and the larger crowds they draw, required a few of IA&A's unseen changes: renovating the building's exterior and the imminent replacement of its air-conditioning and humidity-control systems. Both were partly funded by grants from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

"Recently, we've gotten a huge increase in the people who are showing up for the First Fridays. Ranging over the course of an evening from 500 to 800 people," Furchgott says. Nearly 1,400 people attended the event the gallery staged as part of September's city-wide Art All Night program.

Furchgott admits with a laugh that he's not sure what's driving the bigger turnouts. "One of the reasons it's time for me to retire is that I haven't figured out millennials yet. I'm not sure that other people have either."

"We get a large number of young people," he adds. "If I engage them individually, they are interested in art. . . and they seem to be somewhat knowledgeable. But when I look at the crowds — not just here, any openings I go to — people are engaged with each other."

Furchgott says he won't leave an agenda for his successor. But among the things he thinks IA&A might do is create support systems for local artists and acquire a warehouse so the organization could add to its own holdings. It now owns only the 374 tool-related artworks collected by John Hechinger, whose family started what was once Washington's leading building-supply retailer.

Potentially, IA&A might operate a sort of art bank that would support its touring shows and contain pieces available for loan to other institutions. Too many museums, Furchgott suggests, have too much of their art in storage rather than on display.

If IA&A's next president doesn't begin an art bank, though, Furchgott says that's fine with him.

"My legacy is the creation of the organization, not what it's going to be doing in the future. And I'm happy with that."

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