



President's Message

AN AUSPICIOUS MOMENT

It is such an honor to be joining The Huntington as its new president, as we hone the plans for our Centennial celebrations, to be launched a year from now, and as we begin in-gallery conservation on our iconic painting, *The Blue Boy* (see page 3 for details about the opening of that exciting exhibition). I am in awe of this unique institution and its extraordinary library, art, and botanical collections and look forward to helping chart its future—growing the collections and increasing their national and international impact.

It seems particularly auspicious that I begin my presidency at another key moment in time: as the groundbreaking gets underway for the construction that will complete the Chinese Garden. Once done, Liu Fang Yuan will be among the largest classical-style Chinese gardens in the world and an extraordinary achievement for every one of the hundreds of people who have been involved in the project for the past decade and a half.

The significance of the Chinese Garden has been very much on my mind since returning from a trip to Guangzhou, China, a few weeks ago. I know from what I've been reading, as I've been gearing up to lead the institution, that the garden serves multiple purposes and a multitude of audiences. It was Jim Folsom's brainchild, as the Telleen/Jorgensen Director of the Botanical Gardens. He saw it as a way to talk about the natural history of plants in North America, and the fact that so much of the plant material we know here actually originated in China (think roses, stone fruit, camellias). He also knew it would be a great way to talk about early landscape traditions and their influence on contemporary gardening—across other parts of Asia (Chinese *penjing*, for instance, pre-dates Japanese bonsai), as well as Europe and elsewhere.

From a scholarly perspective, our Chinese Garden speaks to The Huntington's essence as a collections-based research and educational institution. It is modeled on classical scholars' gardens from the Ming Dynasty, when intellectuals withdrew from the world to think, write, and ponder, surrounded by beautiful pavilions, thoughtfully placed plantings, and the rocks and water features that create harmony in the landscape. Art,

literature, music, and theater were all common features—essentially a celebration of the humanities. One could say that the Chinese Garden is but a smaller version of the larger Huntington, with its extensive book and manuscript collection, art galleries, and expansive gardens. Both represent what people throughout time and across continents have commonly sought: the opportunity to build and celebrate knowledge, to engage in aesthetic appreciation, and to enrich one's life experience.

The Chinese Garden is, at the same time, a gathering place, and it's this feature that, for me, is perhaps the most exciting as I begin my presidency. The garden appeals to a wide constituency: to casual visitors who simply want a quiet walk through a beautiful space; to those of Chinese heritage who want to introduce their children and grandchildren to an authentic Chinese garden experience (without having to board a plane!); to those who come to hear traditional music played there every Wednesday afternoon; as well as to visitors looking for a special place to savor dumplings and a cup of jasmine tea.

It also affords us opportunities to do things we haven't attempted before. In late September, we premiere a new site-specific work written exclusively for the garden by internationally acclaimed playwright Stan Lai. His "Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden" draws on historical influences for inspiration, from a 16th-century Chinese romantic tragicomedy to tales of early 20th-century California. During the month-long run of the show, audiences will become an integral part of the performance, moving through the garden as the story unfolds around them. It is certain to be magical.

I am mindful of the many years of nurturing this garden has experienced since the first gift was received in 2001 and the first phase was completed in 2008. This Chinese Garden project has, in many respects, been a process of unfolding, or revealing, not unlike the scenes in a Chinese scroll painting. I am honored to be here at this moment in The Huntington's history, as the fullness of the garden reveals itself.

Karen R. Lawrence, President