

I am an American We are One Nation

ART HELPS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

MEG JONES USA TODAY NETWORK

Scotland-born museum official takes an active role in his adopted country



MARK HOFFMAN/USA TODAY NETWORK MARK HOFFMAN/USA TODAY NETWORK

Graeme Reid, director of collections and exhibitions at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, grew up in Scotland and came to the U.S. in 1990 on a scholarship to Indiana State University.

WEST BEND, Wis. - Art museums sometimes have reputations as lofty, elitist, even unapproachable institutions.

Graeme Reid thinks art should be accessible to everyone. As director of collections and exhibitions at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, Reid trumpets the talent and dedication of artists in Wisconsin. He judges art competitions and gives tours of the museum on the Milwaukee River.

He believes beauty, in the form of paintings, sculpture, drawings and other artwork, can bring people together.

“Art offers you a different view or a different take. Maybe it makes you change your mind,” said Reid, 55. “Museums tend to unite rather than divide. Museums elevate rather than denigrate. Museums are more relevant now than ever.”

Reid is an American by choice. He grew up in Scotland and was a student at the University of Glasgow when he was offered a scholarship and graduate assistantship at Indiana State University. He worked weekends as a security guard at Swope Art Museum in Terre Haute, Indiana, and began giving lectures and tours before eventually getting hired as a part-time curator.

In 2001 he moved to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to work at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Two years later was hired by the Museum of Wisconsin Art.

Reid believes in getting involved in his community. Though he curates professional art exhibitions and has judged competitions on the state and national level, Reid volunteers as a judge for an annual VFW patriotic art contest, homeschooled art competitions, a duck decoy decorating contest and the Lakefront Festival of the Arts in Milwaukee.

After 18 years in America, Reid decided to become a citizen. America had become his country; he wanted to pledge his allegiance. He became a citizen on a Thursday, and the following Tuesday he voted in the 2008 presidential election.

“Without sounding awfully clichéd, America has been very good to me,” Reid said.

Q&A WITH GRAEME REID

What does it mean to you to be an American?

To be an American means I am a citizen. Originally being from the U.K., I was a subject. But I’m a citizen here, and I get to participate in every facet of life, political life, and I can vote for the dogcatcher to the president. Being a citizen was something that was very important to me.

What moment touched and motivated you to launch this effort?

What motivated me to be part of the Museum of Wisconsin Art was to get in on the opportunity to give Wisconsin its own museum that focuses on the art and artists of Wisconsin. To be a part of bringing that to not just the people of Wisconsin but also to be part of bringing that to a national audience as well was just a tremendous opportunity.

What gives you hope or what concerns you?

What concerns me I think is the political division and a coarsening of culture. But what gives me hope is the role an institution such as the Museum of Wisconsin Art can do. I think museums provide more unity than division. It also provides an elevation of culture rather than a coarsening of culture.

What do you hope to accomplish through your efforts?

I hope that the art and artists of Wisconsin will appreciate what we do for them. But I think the public will hopefully appreciate what we do for them in terms of recognition of the talent within this state. Not just talent from the past, but current talent and future talent as well.