Dear friends,

I have likened 2020 to an unplanned institutional sabbatical. With only one interruption, in 1962, Skowhegan operated on a cyclical certainty that crescendoed between June and August when a new group of artists assembled together on campus for their singular summer. The pandemic upended our normal rhythm of programming; a forced pivot that created space to enact priorities that will have a lasting impact at Skowhegan. We turned this into an opportunity to work on critical campus buildings and a major publication on Skowhegan’s history and impact (forthcoming), all of which was spurred on by an anticipated impending endpoint to Covid (vaccines! a return to normalcy!) and inspired an urgency to our work throughout that first calendar year.

All of which made 2021 that much more complicated. Covid did not end; in fact, its complexity, challenges and contradictions only deepened. And Skowhegan hit a milestone—the 75th Anniversary—which we had been working towards for years and imagined celebrating in very specific kinds of ways (e.g., a very large party).

Our response was, in a word, very Skowhegan. Working in dialogue with Governors, Trustees, staff, and alumni, and guided by our mission and sense of purpose, we devised a year unlike any other. As you’ll see in the pages herein, we turned our campus over to alumni for two intergenerational limited-capacity residences that united artists from the classes of 1963 to 2017. The Alumni sessions were not meant to replicate or reproduce their previous summer experiences, but to instead offer the time and space for an intergenerational group to advance, expand, or reconnect to their practices by returning to Skowhegan for a few weeks.

We hosted the 75th celebration in parts, perhaps more reflective of the disparate but united nature of Skowhegan on campus, including: a vibrant Block Party outside our New York space with contributions from 48 alumni, an ephemera box, inspired by Fluxus boxes and time capsules; alumni class reunions over Zoom; council visits to exhibitions and studios; and intimate 75 Salons co-hosted by alumni, faculty and Board members. We launched a microsite to mark the Anniversary and shared an ever-growing collection of video reflections from alumni and faculty. And the 75th Anniversary Alumni Challenge was a $75,000 joint effort issued by several alumni and a Trustee, to galvanize support and participation. Indeed, it did just that—398 contributors, a 27% increase from previous years—demonstrating the collective commitment we share for Skowhegan. The festivities will culminate this April, when we salute longtime board chair Ann L. Gund for her peerless leadership since 1979.

This fluid and expansive response was possible because the past 5 years have been building capacity in the service of our program through the Master Plan, the strength of our alumni community, and the 75th Anniversary Campaign. In 2021, the iterative impact of this work matured, and we witnessed its compounding, positive effects—maintaining the campus at its core, while engaging more fully with our community through activities, events, and programs.

In the year ahead, we will continue with the Master Plan and develop a Flex Space to support artists working in performance, dance, sound and other non-object based practices. A pollinator garden is in the works, as is a second year of Bird Club. The Alumni Alliance is working on a series of exhibitions organized for the New York Space this summer, and we are planning for the 60th Skowhegan Awards Dinner in October. It will be a full year and the highpoint, surely, will be the return to campus and a new class of participants. Skowhegan’s magic comes from the assembled artists and the energy and community they will build together, and after two years deferred, we need it more than ever.

Reflection
Katie Sonnenborn, Co-Director

Skowhegan Ephemera Collection

The Skowhegan Ephemera Collection unites Skowhegan ephemera in disparate forms so that the themes and histories of the school are given dynamic play and represented by a multitude of artists from many generations. Conceived in partnership with Ally Caple (A ’19, Ana Maria Garcia, Duane Holmblad, Paige Laino, Sebenele Ndlangamandla, Katie Sonnenborn, Marc Swanson (A ’00, F ’14) and Sarah Workneh, it was made possible through the generous support of John Coleman (Trustee), and The VIA Agency.

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