EXPERIENCING time 2020
ANNUAL REPORT
EXPERIENCING TIME

2020 was certainly a pivotal year, in so many ways. When the covid-19 pandemic was officially declared, we had only just recovered from the shock of having had two bonsai stolen from, and then mysteriously returned to, the Museum. Then, as the new normal set in, we had to close the Museum to visitors for only the second extended period of time in our history. But time ticked on and the cycles of nature turned over, predictably, reassuringly. The reappearance of spring flowers was never a more welcome sight.

As the pain and grief of millions washed over us, from not only physical trauma but also social, we looked—along with so many bonsai appreciators around the world—to nature for consolation, which it delivered in abundance. We heard from so many supporters that looking at trees gave them a sense of calm, clarity, and focus. One community member put it this way,

“It's hard to imagine how a centuries-old tree in a pot experiences time, but we do know that many of the bonsai in our collection have been alive on earth throughout many, major social and public health crises of the past. They register each year in their limbs, holding stories, bearing witness, and healing themselves all the while.

Bonsai remind us that, like trees, we are resilient. In their small beauty, bonsai connect us all to a sense of largeness that soothes our spirit. Bonsai in our collection have lived on earth for hundreds of years—and we will see them through for another hundred with the help of our community. Thank you.

[Bonsai provide me with a more expansive perspective of this world we live in. They remind me that, in the natural world, sometimes beauty can be a result of a calamity.]

Kit Severson
Board Chair
Kathy McCabe
Executive Director

"Bonsai provide me with a more expansive perspective of this world we live in. They remind me that, in the natural world, sometimes beauty can be a result of a calamity."
We honor those who came before us from the world of bonsai, whose works we care for as living art, as well as the original caretakers of this land on which we stand today—the traditional home of the Coast Salish people, who are still here.

Pacific Bonsai Museum Honoring Statement, adopted in 2020
January 2020 was as normal as could be. We were busy preparing to open our 2020 exhibit, *World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience*, reviewing new applications to our volunteer Docent program, planning spring public programs, preparing to present the final session of our 2018–20 LAB project, caring for our collection, and keeping the bonsai warm on cold, wintery days.
On February 9, 2020, our staff awoke to the heartbreaking news that these two bonsai had been stolen from the Museum's collection. Then, less than 72 hours later, the elation that both trees had been mysteriously returned to the Museum in the night, likely due to widespread public interest spurred by a flurry of media attention and the public statement made by Pacific Bonsai Museum's Executive Director Kathy McCabe that there would be a ‘no-questions-asked’ return policy.

One delightful outcome of media attention on the theft was a rekindled connection between one of the stolen bonsai and descendants of its original creator, Japanese American Juzaburo Furuzawa. Had the theft not made international news, Pacific Bonsai Museum staff may have heard from them. “Juzaburo’s grandson saw an article and wrote to us, letting us know that the family previously had no idea that the tree existed,” said McCabe, adding, “They thanked us for taking care of the tree and stated an intention to visit it in person one day.” (And they did in 2021!)

The bonsai, a Japanese Black Pine (*Pinus thunbergii*) originally grown from seed in a tin can by Furuzawa while he was incarcerated during WWII, was planned to be the centerpiece of our special exhibition, *World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience*.

The other stolen bonsai, a Silverberry (*Elaeagnus pungens*) was mishandled by the thieves who broke one of its larger branches. Wire held the branch near the site of breakage, which meant that Curator Aarin Packard could work to put the pieces back together with cut-paste, which acts as a bandage for trees. Staff nursed the tree throughout 2020. Now, the site of the break is now hardly visible.
On March 16, following our Governor’s mandate and public health expert advice, we closed the Museum to visitors. Behind the scenes, our small bonsai care crew rounded up all the trees, consolidating them for ease of care, and attended to each tree’s needs, every day. With the display cleared out, we took the opportunity to repaint our exterior walls in preparation for the day we could welcome everyone to visit again.

As always, caring for our collection provided comfort and a sense of peace.

“Beauty—the recognition of it, the desire for it, the continuing praise of it—offers a rescue of the spirit when the spirit is under the greatest duress. And only a rescued spirit—one that remembers largeness—is able to continue to act on behalf of what it loves.”

—Jane Hirshfield
With the new normal setting in, we expanded our online offerings to include a virtual youth education field trip program (with art and STEM lesson plans and activities, all aligned with Washington State OSPI learning standards). We also expanded our collection of bonsai readings available on our website, adding content for a remote-access version of the audio tour, and new SLOW TV-type videos of our Museum.

In this photo, Curator Aarin Packard speaks with a worldwide audience via Facebook Live, sharing his expertise on the care of our tropical bonsai collection.
Our biggest event of the year, BonsaiFest!, scheduled for World Bonsai Day / Mothers Day weekend, was canceled due to covid. But we celebrated nonetheless, putting out a video message of hope to all of our bonsai-loving friends around the world.

Delayed by covid, the printing of our hardcover book, *A Gallery of Trees: Living Art of Pacific Bonsai Museum*, was finally complete and we started shipping them out to our Kickstarter backers and to the public.
In June 2020, as people took to the streets worldwide in defense of Black Lives, Pacific Bonsai Museum’s Board and staff put out a public statement (right) making it explicit that the Museum is an anti-racist organization. Overwhelmingly, the response to the statement was supportive, but there were a few comments on social media and through email along the lines of, “You had to go political,” questioning, “Why don’t you just stick to plants?,” and, “What does this have to do with bonsai?” The short answer: everything.

As this worldwide, racial equity awakening erupted, Pacific Bonsai Museum staff were deep in the production phase of World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience, which, at its core, shared a history of bonsai that is deeply touched by racism. Curator Aarin Packard had been collecting stories and information for the exhibition for more than fifteen years, plus was consulting with researchers in the Japanese American community, and was eager to pull it all together for the public in time for the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. It turned out that it couldn’t have been a timelier subject in relation to current events.

Pacific Bonsai Museum is an anti-racist organization. We believe racial equity is a human right. We support the work of Black Lives Matter and the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) movement.

As we sit here on the land of the Coast Salish people, we thank the original caretakers of this land who are still here. We acknowledge that this declaration against racism is long overdue (which we realize means way before these past few weeks). We regret not showing up to this conversation earlier and promise to do better in the future.

We have committed to actively evaluating museum systems, structures, and practices so that we don't reinforce discriminatory outcomes in the future. We seek to include more BIPOC voices and participation in our work. We are also organizing anti-biases training for staff.

We have educated ourselves about the trauma experienced particularly by Japanese Americans when they were subject to racist U.S. government policies that robbed them of their liberty and livelihoods—including the bonsai masters who laid the seeds of the art as it is practiced in this country. We are grateful that despite their understandable resentment and reluctance, appreciation for the art of bonsai spread all over the world because these people found the strength to share their art with others which ended up forming new friendships and promoting healing.
We were so excited to announce our reopening to visitors on Wednesday, July 7, with new-to-us policies: face coverings, one-way paths, social distancing, some closed spaces, and added personal safety measures. We were also busy finishing the installation of *World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience*, with the Furuzawa pine in its rightful place as the centerpiece of the exhibition.

That summer we were honored to participate in the *Tadaima!: Virtual Memorial Pilgrimage* to sites of the Japanese American incarceration. We offered three video presentations to pilgrims: Hawaiian bonsai and Pearl Harbor, Bonsai at Camp Amache, and Hiroshima & Japanese Bonsai During WWII.
75 years after WWII ended, we opened, *World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience*, which traced the cultural practice of bonsai from the pre-WWII period, through wartime, amid incarceration, and at peace. With bonsai, artifacts, documents, and photographs, the exhibition shared the little-known stories of the people who ingeniously and courageously cared for bonsai, shared their art, and spurred a flourishing global practice despite overwhelming hardships.
On August 19, 2020 our YouTube channel hosted a special, virtual edition of our annual Branch Out, featuring a special look into World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience, stories of strength, resilience, and longevity told through bonsai, behind-the-scenes Museum insights, a performance by CHIKIRI Taiko Drummers, live chat with the Museum’s Curators and staff, and a short appeal in support of Pacific Bonsai Museum. One powerful segment featured Marilyn Domoto Webb, who was born in a barbed-wire detention camp. She shared stories about her father, Toichi, their beloved trident maple, and how it came to be a part of our collection.
On August 15, 2020, Session 4 of Pacific Bonsai Museum’s multiyear LAB project was held at the Museum. It was the culmination of a four-part, multi-year-long experiment investigating 1) the influence of inspired architectural settings and 2) the effect of collaboration resequencing on the art of bonsai, with the overall goal of advancing innovation and artistic expression in bonsai.

Curator/LAB Facilitator Aarin Packard and LAB artists Austin Heitzman, Ron Lang, and Ryan Neil assembled the three, final compositions and revealed them to a small gathering of masked participants and a worldwide audience via Instagram Live.

Heitzman revealed his final piece—a concrete stand destined for Neil’s Limber Pine (Pinus flexilis) potted in Lang’s ceramic-posing-as-metal container, forming a composition that Packard called “a study in texture.”

The next composition to come together was the one that Lang started which followed the sequence pot>stand>tree. As Lang’s container was placed on Heitzman’s house-like, copper-clad stand potted with Neil’s root-over-rock Pacific Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *menziesii*), a beam of light appeared from the surrounding woods (right).

Finally, the yet-unnamed “succulent composition” was the most unexpected. “The stand is vertical, the small pot doesn't touch the ground, the species has probably never been used before as a bonsai, light-colored sand is a bonsai ‘no-no’, the bonsai depicts an arid environment that hasn't been reflected in bonsai... there's a lot of magic there,” said Neil.

The boundary-pushing, site-specific, considered totality gets to the heart of what bonsai does: bring culture and nature together in an artwork representing nature—or an abstract feeling of nature—in miniature.
In September 2020, acclaimed bonsai artist Roland Folse donated 20 bonsai from his personal collection to Pacific Bonsai Museum with the understanding that some would be added to our collection while others would be sold in support of the Museum. Three—a Ponderosa Pine, a Waxy fruit Hawthorn, and a Laceleaf Japanese Maple—were chosen for acquisition because they added even more botanic and aesthetic diversity to our carefully curated collection, while the others were set aside for special exhibition and an exclusive sale that would take place in 2021.

When Curator Aarin Packard traveled to Missouri to visit Roland, and then pack and personally transport his donations back to the Pacific Northwest, weeks of smoke from too-nearby wildfires were just lifting. The first day that the faintest blue sky and shadows appeared was the day this photograph was taken of a family visiting the Museum.

Other acquisitions to the Museum's collection in 2020 included the first bonsai ever created by our original collection's Acquisition Team leader, Sharon Muth, and an apple (Malus sp.) and Plum (Prunus sp.), both originally styled by "Father-of-American Bonsai" John Naka.
Volunteers returned to assist with bonsai care as they were able. We are always grateful for their skilled help.

2020 VOLUNTEERS
Dick Benbow
Sarah Ciambrone
Tony Fajarillo
Ann Hobson
Ken Martin
Patricia Negron
Lynn Paietta
Victorina Ridgeway
Millie Russell
Francesca Sarpola
John Schmied
Joel Schwarz
Ladd Smith
Tim Taylor
Iris Tiomatos
Vern Van Houten
Maria Walton
Ken Wassum
Bruce Williams
November 2020 saw the publication of “Reckoning with Racism in the History of American Bonsai” in the *Journal of the American Bonsai Society*, coauthored by our Communications Director, Katherine Wimble Fox, and Curator, Aarin Packard.

In our exhibition area, Erin Shigaki’s wheat-pasted murals depicting photos of figures in the Japanese American incarceration, overwintered. In a statement, Shigaki wrote:

“This lush setting of towering trees speaks to the landscape and lives that Pacific Northwest Nikkei lost when they were imprisoned in inhospitable desert camps. And yet, they resisted: planting gardens, raising children, serving in segregated units, refusing to serve in such units, reclaiming Japanese art forms, and enacting countless other tasks that amounted to keeping their souls and spirits alive.”
The death of a bonsai is painful, yet every practitioner knows a bonsai does not live forever. Despite this inevitability, people still cultivate them. The appeal of bonsai does not ultimately come from its beauty or even its vitality, but the relationship between a human and a tree. In Japan, displaying a dead bonsai not only honors the life of the bonsai but the memory of those who cared for it.

This tree was placed at the beginning of World War Bonsai: Remembrance & Resilience as a memorial to the millions of lives lost during World War II, and spoke to the many millions more lost to covid-19.

“...A dead tree may be as arresting, as filled with personality in death, as it is in life.”

-Edwin Way Teale

We feel forever changed by 2020, in ways both devastating, positive, and yet to be revealed. As always, we take time to observe and have faith that nature, in its self-healing wisdom, will show us the way to move forward.
THANK YOU DONORS!

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2020 BY THE NUMBERS

15,996 people visited the Museum in 2020 (a 60% decline compared to 2019) due covid-19 closure, March 17 through July 7.
All in-person community events were canceled or postponed.

580 hours were contributed by volunteers
51 days were staffed by Docents at the Museum
24 people took part in pre-covid tours
25 students participated in Field Trips
6 new volunteers nearly doubled our roster of Docents

REVENUE
- 27% Individual gifts $180,801
- 24% Foundation grants $156,634
- 9% Gifts in-kind, earned income & other $60,394
- 7% Donated assets $45,500
- 33% Endowment payout $218,100
Total Operating Revenue: $661,428

EXPENSE
- 45% Collections, grounds & facilities $329,330
- 15% Exhibits & public programs $110,083
- 15% Development & Marketing $111,754
- 24% Administration $176,651
Total Operating Expense: $727,818
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