

# It Takes A Staff at National Sporting Library & Museum

By *Louisa Woodville*

**T**he National Sporting Library & Museum (NSLM) is broadening its reach with developments that are resonating throughout the rarified world of art.

First, Condé Nast Traveler magazine selected this Middleburg institution as one of the 50 best museums in the country, identifying its collections "as small but tight, ranging from rare photographs to works on canvas and sculpture, spanning centuries ...the permanent collection and past exhibitions have included fascinating explorations of British field sports, fly fishing, and more."

Then there's the upcoming exhibition of the English artist George Stubbs (1724-1806), which opens in the spring of 2027—sure to be a blockbuster, given this artist's prominence in major museums around the world, from the National Gallery in Washington D.C. to the National Gallery in London.

Lastly, the NSLM is physically expanding, taking over what had been the offices of the Chronicle of the Horse magazine. The new space will be used for both exhibitions and storage.

NSLM president and CEO Elizabeth von Hassell is quick to credit her staff and board of directors for the museum's meteoric rise.

And referring to Claudia Pfeiffer, the museum's George L. Ohrstrom, Jr. deputy director and head curator, she said, "Claudia has been the instrumental person in growing this museum, and I think because of her commitment, her knowledge, and her passion, we've now grown to a point where we're doing a \$3 million project next-door to completely gut and revamp the Chronicle building for expansion."

Asked about her contributions, Pfeiffer is quick to point out the obvious: it takes a village.

"These exhibitions are truly a team effort," she said. "Under Elizabeth's leadership, a collaborative environment is actively encouraged across all departments. We set the bar for the quality of artwork for the permanent collection."

She also noted that the significant growth of the collection in both number and quality has been possible through generous donations and bequests from Dr. and Mrs. Timothy J. Greenan, Jacqueline B. Mars, Gwynne McDevitt, and Felicia Warburg Rogan, to name a few.

Mounting an exhibition depends on a lot of people behind the scenes: private collectors and museum curators willing to lend works, insurance adjustors, NSLM board members, specialty fine-art movers, not to mention the carpenters and painters who ready the space and the staff who lead visitors once an exhibition has opened.

The NSLM often holds concurrent shows, each playing off each other with a unified theme. For example, currently on view is "Rose Marie Bogley: Elegance Aside" in the Forrest E. Mars, Sr. Exhibit Hall; "Madeleine Bunbury: Modern Classic" in the Library's Founders' Room; and "A Vision of Nature:



Gary Stout, Lily-Pearl Pai, Dana Stefanelli, Emily Tye, Elena Jaques, Lauren Kraut, Claudia Pfeiffer. Sitting: Reid O'Connor with Tweed the Spaniel, Elizabeth von Hassell, Julie Banner with Bunny the Corgi.

American Women Artists in the museum"—all pivoting around a theme of women's achievements that is supported by marketing, programming, receptions and lectures.

There is also an artist-in-residency program as well as fellowships for scholars dependent on NSLM's many resources, from its hidden treasures in the F. Ambrose Clark Rare Book Room to its 20,000 books, archives, and periodicals.

Library holdings are the bailiwick of Dana Stefanelli, the George L. Ohrstrom, Jr. Curator of Library Collections; Reid O'Connor, NSLM's Deputy Director & Chief Development Officer, is equally comfortable in the realm of rare books and stewarding members.

Julie Banner, the Clarice & Robert H. Smith education and marketing director, coordinates national speakers and community and member programs.

"Julie oversees all our amazing programs,

everything from our formal lectures to our Sunday Sketch series," said O'Connor. "She also does social media. Last year we had over 1.5 million views."

In addition to staff expansion, the NSLM is broadening its reach in other exciting ways as conservation takes center stage with scholarship and art.

"There was a sense before the museum opened that the NSLM was a scholastic institute on the hill that was only for special people or a special type of person to access," Pfeiffer said. "One of our goals has been that we engage everyone to connect with country life, because no one wants to see it go away and that's a huge part of what we do."

"The results speak to the importance of our team working in this way, and how important every person is as a contributor in the whole result," said Claudia. "We could not be on the trajectory that we're on if each of us didn't work full-mast and collaborate."