

**Michael P. Conforti**  
Trinity College Class of 1968  
***Doctor of Fine Arts***

On the occasion of your retirement last year from the directorship of the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, came the announcement of “a fitting tribute to Michael” in the form of a \$6.5 million gift from trustees, benefactors, staff, and friends of the Clark. The gift will provide capital and operating support for the museum’s newly named Michael Conforti Pavilion, as well as an endowment to fund academic and public programs held in the space, which will be an enduring architectural testament to your achievements during your 22-year tenure as director of the Clark and to a lifetime devoted to understanding art and to making the visual arts integral to public life.

At Trinity, you majored in fine arts, focusing on art history and graduating with honors in 1968. You then worked in London and New York with Sotheby Parke Bernet, becoming particularly interested in baroque art and the decorative arts and sculpture. You pursued these interests in graduate study at Harvard and a fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. After completing your doctoral dissertation on Italian sculpture of the late 17th and 18th centuries and receiving your Ph.D. in 1977, you worked as a curator at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. In 1980, you became chief curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

The Clark that greeted you when you arrived in 1994 was a regional museum dedicated to one family’s art collection, living off its endowment, with little fundraising and few public activities. Tasked by the trustees to expand on the Clark’s connection with Williams College by attracting professional art scholars, you expanded the Research and Academic Program, which has seen more than 300 scholars from around the world serve fellowships and now ranks now among the nation’s finest.

Under your leadership, the Clark’s special exhibition programs have won acclaim for rigorous scholarship and for promoting new thinking. You initiated international programs, including a recent worldwide tour of the Clark’s French paintings collection and cultural exchanges with Chinese museums.

With the growth of programming came the need to reconceptualize the Clark’s 140-acre site. You steered the museum through a \$145 million expansion that included adding buildings, designed by Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando; refurbishing existing structures; and enhancing the natural surroundings. About the July 2014 opening of the Clark’s expansion, *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith noted, “Michael Conforti ... and his trustees have fashioned their museum into a welcoming, comfortable place, where looking at art is the first order of business, environmental responsibility has become a lived commitment, and education is an increasingly multileveled project.” The renovations garnered the Clark the prestigious Apollo Award for Museum Opening of the Year.

At the same time, you have been a leader in the museum field, serving as president of the Association of Art Museum Directors from 2008 to 2010, as a trustee of four museums in the United States and Canada, and as an adviser to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia. You have advanced international cultural exchange in a variety of ways, including organizing conferences held in Rome and Salzburg, as well as in this country.

Today you remain close to academia, lecturing widely and teaching at Williams College in the Graduate Program in Art History. Your ties to Trinity have passed to the next generation, as daughter Julia graduates today.

In recognition of your extraordinary accomplishments in museum leadership and in the promotion of the visual arts, arts education, and community involvement with arts institutions, I have the honor of presenting you, Michael P. Conforti, for the degree of Doctor of Fine Arts, *honoris causa*.