From the Director

Transforming Understanding of the Native American Experience

In the last issue of Expedition, I introduced our new mission statement: The Penn Museum transforms understanding of the human experience. Native American Voices, the first exhibition to open since we distilled what we do in the context of this mission, will transform understanding of the issues facing Native Americans by presenting objects which represent more than 50 tribal nations, brought into focus through the interpretive voices of living Native American artists, scholars, and activists. The exhibition’s stated goals are to break stereotypes and myths of the American Indian; to create a new understanding of the diversity of individuals, regions, experiences, and current issues in Indian Country today; to present living Native American individuals, experiences, voices, real issues, and contemporary concerns; and to emphasize activism, the future, and survival.

In the course of its five-year run, Native American Voices will feature more than 300 objects, including items such as the Museum’s 12,000-year-old Clovis points, dramatic Plains Indian war bonnets and war shirts from early Indian wars, beautifully crafted ceremonial regalia, and objects of everyday life such as clothing, baskets, pottery, and musical instruments. Visitors will be able to access in-depth information about the history, creation, and cultural contexts of the objects through touchscreen stations positioned directly in front of the perimeter cases displaying the objects.

At the core of their mission, museums have an obligation to be stewards of the collections entrusted to their care, and to use those collections to advance understanding of the human experience. When you visit Native American Voices I hope you will agree that this important new exhibition does both: it shows the Penn Museum as a safe haven for the Native American objects entrusted to it by Louis Shotridge and many others, and it provides a visual backdrop from which the stories of the more than 70 contemporary indigenous American leaders involved in its creation can be told. I join Exhibition Curator Lucy Fowler Williams in thanking all of the advisors and underwriters who made this exhibition possible.

Julian Siggers, Ph.D.
Williams Director