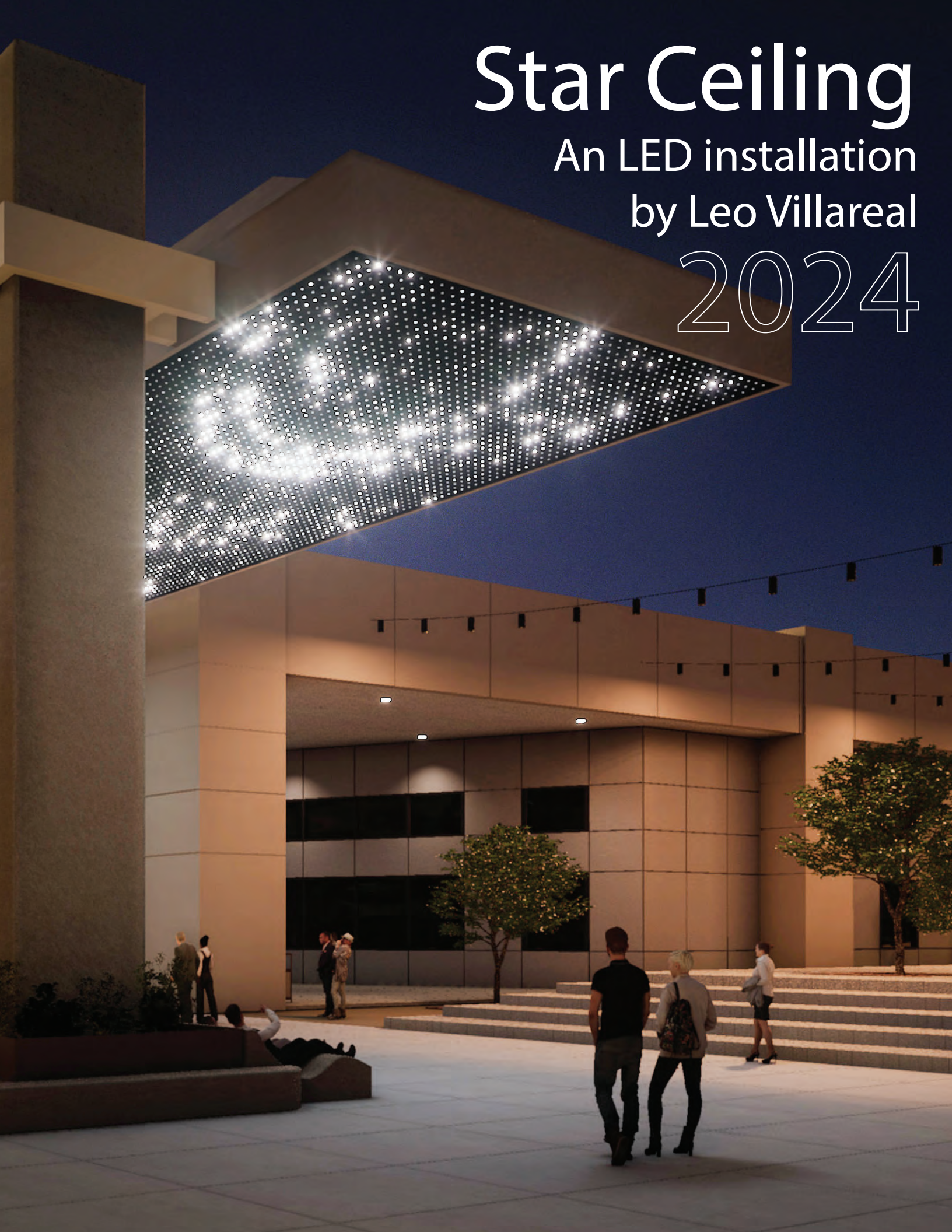


# Star Ceiling

An LED installation  
by Leo Villareal

2024





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An LED installation  
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Dear Friends,

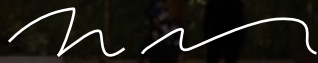
I'm thrilled to be working to realize Star Ceiling (El Paso), a site-specific light artwork at the El Paso Museum of Art's south entrance plaza. This installation, anchored by an LED canopy that I will activate with subtly moving patterns of light, will incorporate custom designed seating, and landscaping featuring species indigenous to the Chihuahuan Desert. I aim to transform the plaza into an outdoor extension of the museum's lively exhibition program, creating a space for introspection that is free and accessible to all. This work will not only encourage connection to community and environment, but will also serve as a space for reflection and wonderment.

El Paso's thriving and growing cultural hub is an important part of my sense of self as an artist, not only because it is my hometown, but because of the great privilege I feel to be part of this passionate community, to be in conversation with it, and be inspired by it. The warm welcome I receive from family, friends, and collaborators every time I come back to El Paso is unrivaled.

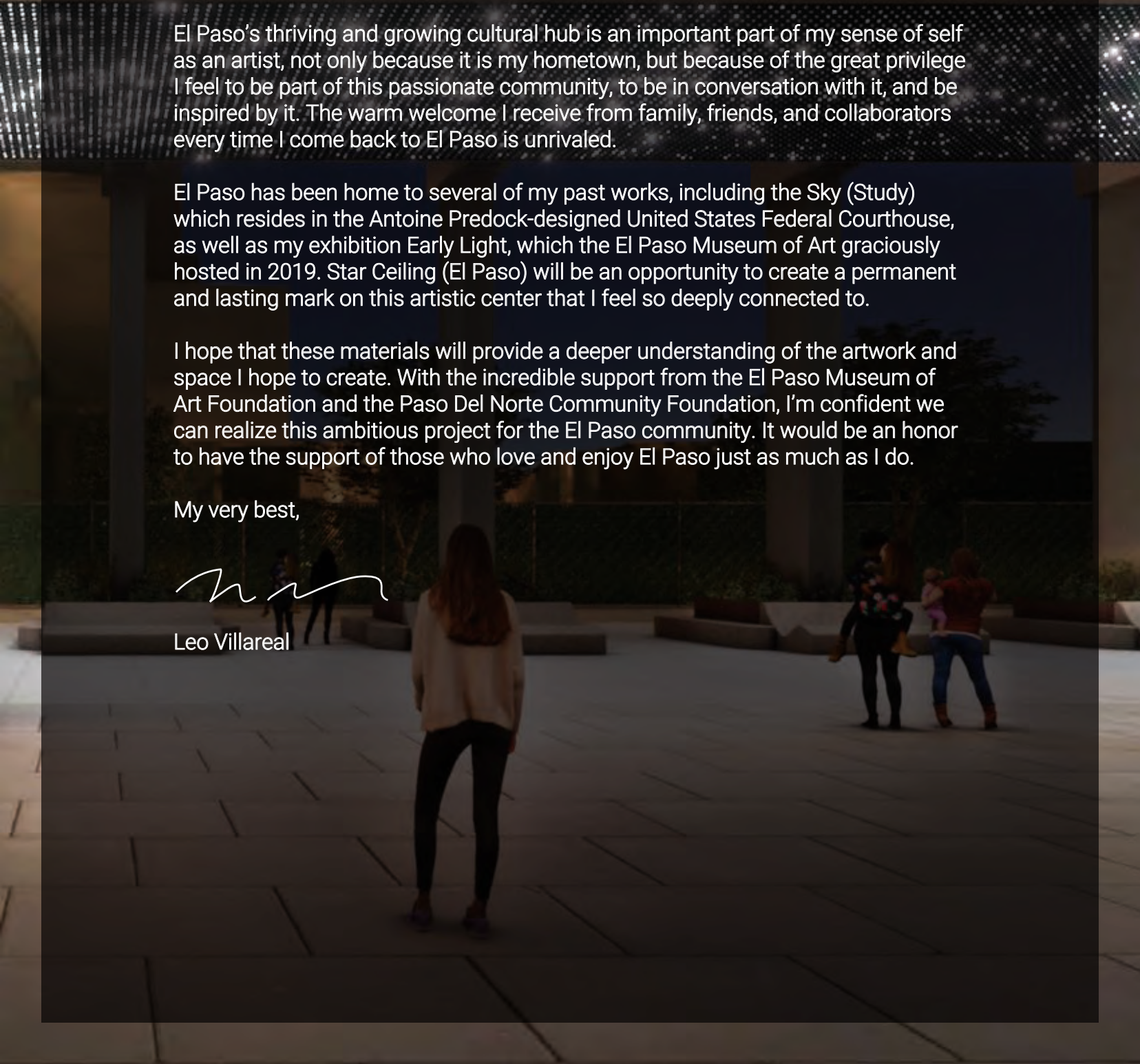
El Paso has been home to several of my past works, including the Sky (Study) which resides in the Antoine Predock-designed United States Federal Courthouse, as well as my exhibition Early Light, which the El Paso Museum of Art graciously hosted in 2019. Star Ceiling (El Paso) will be an opportunity to create a permanent and lasting mark on this artistic center that I feel so deeply connected to.

I hope that these materials will provide a deeper understanding of the artwork and space I hope to create. With the incredible support from the El Paso Museum of Art Foundation and the Paso Del Norte Community Foundation, I'm confident we can realize this ambitious project for the El Paso community. It would be an honor to have the support of those who love and enjoy El Paso just as much as I do.

My very best,



Leo Villareal



# CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

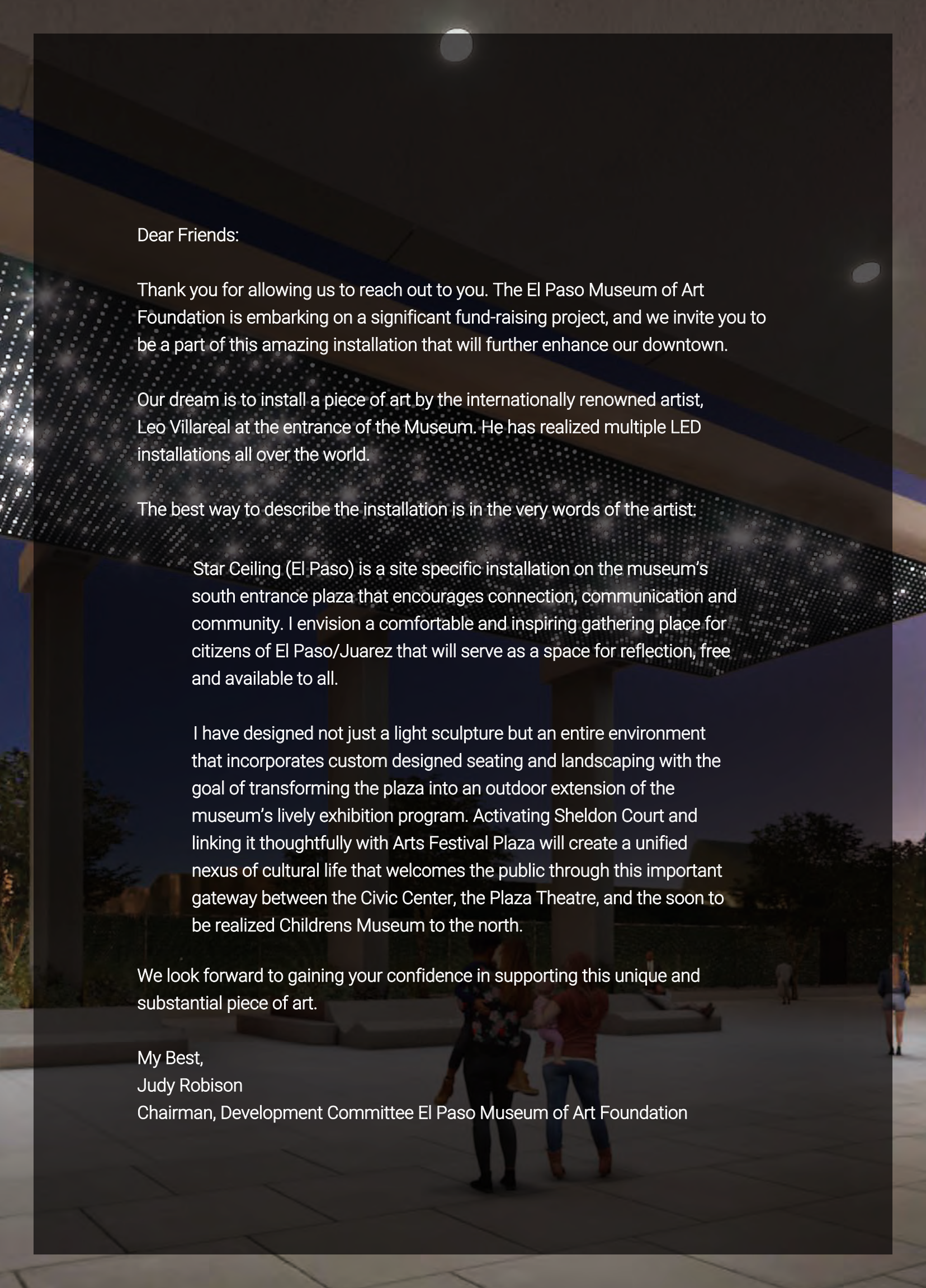
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Having grown up in El Paso and Juarez, Leo Villareal has many fond memories from his youth of observing the night sky over the desert, the vast expanse of city lights arrayed across the landscape, the monumental illuminated star on Mount Franklin and the ceiling of the Plaza Theatre with its twinkling constellations and projections of floating clouds. One could argue that these early formative impressions influenced Villareal and the light sculptures he has been creating for the last 20 years that fuse software and LED technology into arrays that evoke pyrotechnic splendor. Villareal's algorithmic artworks, which create non-repeating abstract patterns using code, offer a substantive dimension that is deeper than their immediate optical allure, reflecting on the inner workings of the natural world.

Leo Villareal is honored to present Star Ceiling (El Paso), an immersive artwork for the museum's south entrance plaza that consists of a suspended LED array, zero gravity benches carved out of local stone, and planters filled with species indigenous to the Chihuahuan Desert. A 120 foot long LED array is mounted on the underside of a canopy spanning the seven pillars that compose the existing conceptual pergola. The array is composed of 13,500 individually-addressable, monochrome LEDs that are activated by Villareal's bespoke authoring software. These fixtures are energy-efficient and also bright enough to be vibrant even during periods of full sun. To allow viewers to more fully experience the artwork, Villareal proposes the installation of seven zero gravity benches at 20 foot intervals under the LED display. He is interested in the zero gravity position and its use in early virtual reality experiments. The idea is that by equally distributing body weight, one can create a more powerful sense of immersion. In 2001, Villareal created his first zero gravity bench and has used them in many installations since. Villareal follows in the tradition of artist-created furniture, particularly John Chamberlain's Barges at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas.

In his site-specific installations, Villareal takes inspiration from the surrounding kinetic activity, manifesting it into ephemeral visual compositions. Hanging overhead, the undulating field of light glows and flickers in abstract patterns that shift in a seamless, non-repeating progression. Moving with a cadence similar to breath, Villareal's sequences suggest rippling water, shifting clouds, flocks of birds, or the vastness of the universe. As Taney Roniger writes, "Villareal's medium is not so much light but code: the invisible algorithms that give life to the otherwise cold and soulless hardware. One of the most profound revelations of digital technology has been that even simple sets of rules elicited by simple yes/no responses can give rise to patterns of astonishing complexity. That those patterns often bear an uncanny resemblance to the forms we see in nature is even more suggestive, as it points to the ontological primacy of information."

During the course of the commission, Villareal will spend time on-site to study how visitors move through and interact with the space. After a period of careful observation and reflection, Villareal will sequence the artwork, adjusting parameters like opacity, speed, and scale to create compositions that respond to and complement the activity in the surrounding area. The resulting public artwork will resonate deeply as Villareal reveals the universal and human responses that bring people together.



Dear Friends:

Thank you for allowing us to reach out to you. The El Paso Museum of Art Foundation is embarking on a significant fund-raising project, and we invite you to be a part of this amazing installation that will further enhance our downtown.

Our dream is to install a piece of art by the internationally renowned artist, Leo Villareal at the entrance of the Museum. He has realized multiple LED installations all over the world.

The best way to describe the installation is in the very words of the artist:

Star Ceiling (El Paso) is a site specific installation on the museum's south entrance plaza that encourages connection, communication and community. I envision a comfortable and inspiring gathering place for citizens of El Paso/Juarez that will serve as a space for reflection, free and available to all.

I have designed not just a light sculpture but an entire environment that incorporates custom designed seating and landscaping with the goal of transforming the plaza into an outdoor extension of the museum's lively exhibition program. Activating Sheldon Court and linking it thoughtfully with Arts Festival Plaza will create a unified nexus of cultural life that welcomes the public through this important gateway between the Civic Center, the Plaza Theatre, and the soon to be realized Childrens Museum to the north.

We look forward to gaining your confidence in supporting this unique and substantial piece of art.

My Best,

Judy Robison

Chairman, Development Committee El Paso Museum of Art Foundation

Dear Friends:

The Paso del Norte Community Foundation (PDN Community Foundation) is pleased to partner with the El Paso Museum of Art Foundation (EPMA Foundation) to support the fundraising and long-term maintenance of the EPMA Foundation's initiative to design and install Star Ceiling (El Paso), a signature art installation by world-renowned and El Paso born and raised artist Leo Villareal.

The PDN Community Foundation was established in 2013 to support the philanthropic goals of individuals, families, corporations, foundations, and nonprofit organizations to improve health, education, social services, economic development and quality of life in our bi-national, tri-state region. Since our inception, the PDN Community Foundation has invested more than \$68 million in grants and charitable expenses working with hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals in four priority areas – Philanthropic Giving, Community Projects, Nonprofit Investment, and Community Resilience.

We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with the EPMA Foundation to steward contributions to support Star Ceiling (El Paso) and look forward to working with you to make this signature community project a reality. We invite you to learn more about the PDN Community Foundation and the project at <https://pdnfoundation.org/give-to-a-fund/el-paso-museum-of-art-foundation-star-ceiling-fund>.

Sincerely,

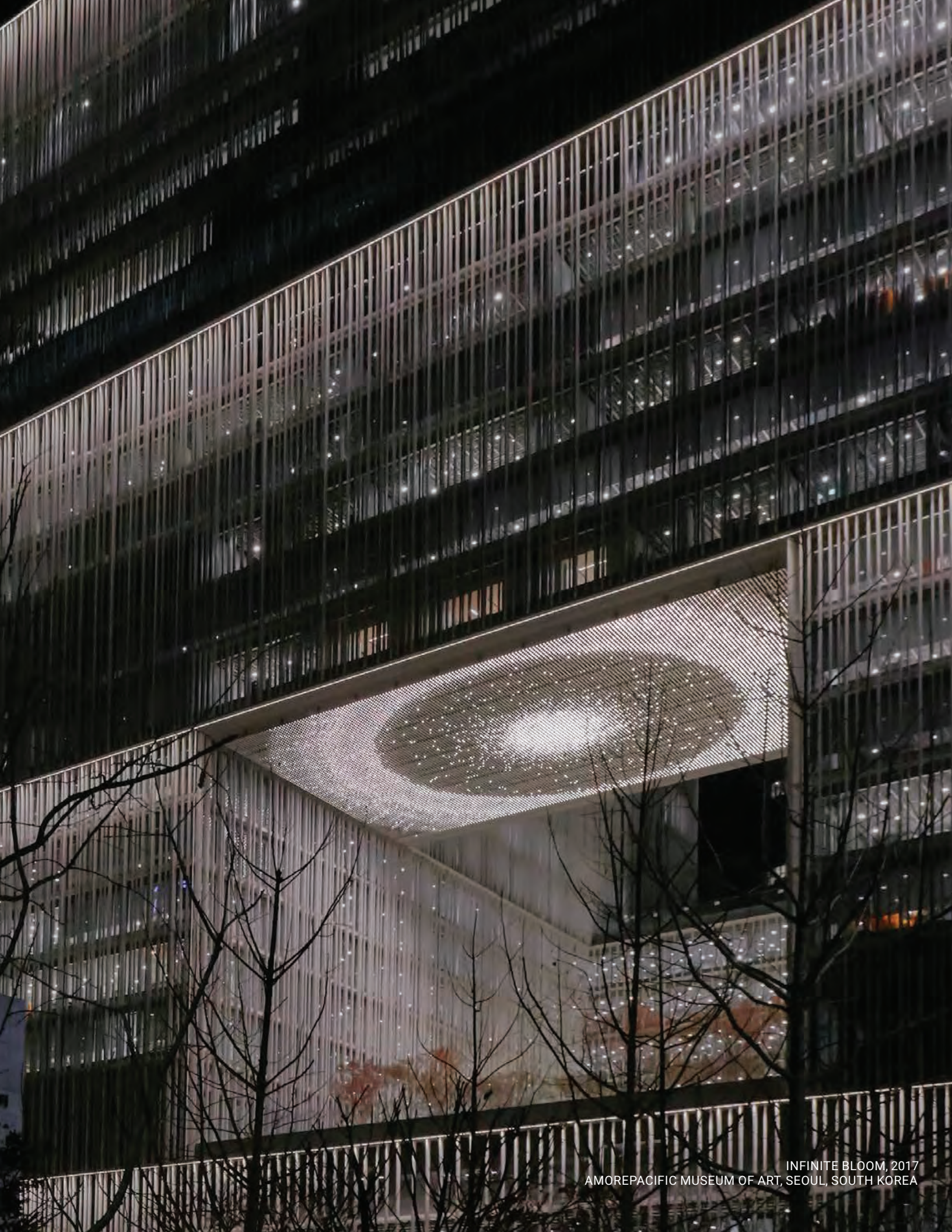
Leonard "Tripper" Goodman, III  
Board Chair











INFINITE BLOOM, 2017  
AMOREPACIFIC MUSEUM OF ART, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

# THE BAY LIGHTS

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Leo Villareal's artworks in the public realm are proven drivers of community engagement and positive economic impact while demonstrating a keen environmental awareness. Each piece is created with sensitivity to the physical, functional, and communal attributes of the site.

The Bay Lights is a 1.8 mile wide and 525 foot high LED sculpture. The artwork's 25,000 white LED lights are individually programmed by artist Leo Villareal to create a never-repeating, dazzling display across the West Span of the Bay Bridge. First launched for a two year run in March 2013 to commemorate the Bay Bridge's 75th Anniversary, it was then made permanent in 2016.

In its initial two-year run, The Bay Lights was seen by over 50 million people in the Bay Area with billions of media impressions worldwide. The economic impact assessment conservatively estimated that in those first years \$97 million was added to the local economy. The now permanent installation's impact continues to grow exponentially.

## THE BAY LIGHTS – SURVEY

In a survey mounted by the presenting organization Illuminate the Arts to evaluate the economic impact and "happiness index" resulting from the ongoing presence of The Bay Lights, the following was found:

- 87% of respondents thought it should be permanent, and the majority of all respondents who viewed the sculpture felt awed, peaceful, and happy
- 76% of respondents when asked, "Do you think we need public art like The Bay Lights to ignite imaginations and enliven public spaces?" said it is "Very Important"
- 75% of respondents, when asked on a scale of 1-5 how much they enjoy The Bay Lights, gave it a "5"

# ILLUMINATED RIVER

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Leo Villareal's artwork, *Illuminated River*, is the first artistic and cohesive vision for London's central bridges, celebrating them as architectural, social, and historical landmarks, and creating a symbolic link across the capital. At 2.3 miles in length (spanning 4.5 nautical miles of the Thames), this artwork is the longest public art commission in the world, seen over 130 million times each year. Free and publicly accessible for all to enjoy, *Illuminated River* transforms the experience of the city at night and defines the bridges as renewed civic spaces for Londoners.

It is expected that *Illuminated River* will cultivate an entirely new river experience that will support leisure and businesses near the Thames, especially relating to the nighttime economy. Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, endorsed the project saying that, "*Illuminated River* will give London free art and encourage more people to move around the city and in doing so bring support to nearby businesses and communities."

*Illuminated River* will refocus attention not only on the bridges but on the public spaces around them, encouraging more people to come and enjoy the river and riverside areas at night. This will be a catalyst for wider conversations about improvements to public space and lighting. The studio is working with bridge owners and local authorities to improve access to and around the bridges, exploring opportunities to make these areas more communal, inclusive, and safe, as well as to improve lighting and add more public seating.

The *Illuminated River* Foundation is committed to making improvements to this vital urban infrastructure. As the bridges currently have a varied spectrum of functional lighting, the organization will support the maintenance and energy costs of all of the bridges that are not currently or are only partially illuminated. The artwork will result in a net reduction in energy costs to all of the bridge owners. After the artwork's ten year duration, the lighting fixtures will be given to the bridge owners, creating a lasting tangible impact for all of London.

*Illuminated River* enriches the experience of traveling along and across the river at night, at street level, on foot, and by boat. It will encourage people to use the river (currently the city's most under-used artery) as a means of transport and will support a wider walkability agenda.



INFINITE BLOOM, 2017  
AMOREPACIFIC MUSEUM OF ART, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA