2012.02.29 Synapsis Shuffle/Whitney Announcement
President of the Board of Trustees Mitchell Watt
Honorary Life Trustee Pamella DeVos
Director and CEO Dana Friis-Hansen

At a press conference on February 29, 2012, President of the Board of Trustees for the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Mitchell Watt introduced GRAM Honorary Life Trustee, Pamella DeVos to deliver a major announcement.

Mr. Watt thanked the Daniel and Pamella DeVos Foundation for their role as Presenting Sponsor of Robert Rauschenberg: Synapsis Shuffle, and stated in the introduction he wanted to thank “GRAM Honorary Life Trustee in particular, Pamella DeVos, for her remarkable support for and commitment to the Grand Rapids Art Museum. She serves on the boards of two art museums – the Grand Rapids Art Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York – and was instrumental in helping connect the two for this exhibition.”

Ms. DeVos recognized the collaboration of the West Michigan community, that GRAM has enjoyed a very involved and tremendously rewarding partnership with really wonderful art and community focused events in West Michigan, including ArtPrize and other community wide celebrations such as Festival of the Arts and Celebration on the Grand. GRAM has been host to spectacular exhibitions that also involved partnerships in the community, including one that will remain close to Ms. DeVos’ heart, one that she was also instrumental in bringing to Grand Rapids, Diana – A Celebration.

She noted the community-wide participants—such as the Grand Rapids Ballet Company, Grand Rapids Symphony, Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, and also innovative leaders in technology, education, medical research, design, and many others who are catalysts for positive growth and quality of life in West Michigan—in the Synapsis Shuffle event held the day of the press conference, and indicated that it is important to build upon that collaborative foundation and reach even farther.

“It is important for GRAM to be a champion for these ideas, and continue to thread these innovative groups together to weave a strong, forward thinking force within the community and beyond,” she stated. “Today, we are announcing a major step forward
in that vision of collaboration with a long-term partnership between the Grand Rapids Art Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art, connecting two Museums that I have great passion for and great joy in seeing engage in conversation.”

Ms. DeVos announced the three-year, three-exhibition partnership between GRAM and the Whitney, adding “I am thrilled to see this partnership put in place, a partnership that started with a conversation I had with the Director of the Whitney, Adam Weinberg, and later with our new Director here at GRAM. It then grew quickly into a reality for the Grand Rapids Art Museum.”

After the announcement by Pamella DeVos, Dana Friis-Hansen took the podium to thank Ms. DeVos and to provide a little more detail about the exhibitions included in the partnership, and how this partnership impacts the Grand Rapids Art Museum and the community of West Michigan.

Mr. Friis-Hansen thanked Ms. DeVos for her passion and commitment to the arts, recognizing her as a true champion and creative force for the arts in West Michigan, and for the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

**Following is Mr. Friis-Hansen’s presentation:**

“What a wonderful conversation that day last fall with Pamella DeVos, Adam Weinberg, Mitch Watt and me—just weeks after I started as the new director—as these creative and collaborative ideas bounced around the table, and GRAM’s future took form.

And here we are today, installing the magnificent *Synapsis Shuffle*, with the help of a few creative friends. Artists, ballerinas, brain scientists, curators, conductors, designers—all through the alphabet—including individuals selected from our Family Programs as well as a contest on Facebook!

Speaking of the future – I am thrilled that our conversation led to not only the Rauschenberg loan—a work of art seen only previously in NY and Paris before arriving in GR—but to a three-year, three exhibition agreement with the Whitney, bringing to West Michigan important masterpieces of American Art.

These pieces featured in these exhibitions are the landmark works by giants in American art history, key highlights of the pre-war and post-war movements. Our children have the opportunity to see, first-hand, what they are studying in Art History 101.

The people of this city built this 100-plus year institution for this very purpose, so that everyone in this community and those who visit our city have access to see and great works of art and learn about the importance of creativity in our daily lives.
It is GRAM’s responsibility to live up to the promise of this great building, completed just a few years ago. I see it as our obligation to the community; we have the world’s attention as the first LEED Gold certified art museum, we have the galleries designed for great exhibitions, we have the mandate to be a leader in the cultural community of Grand Rapids.

This is the very essence of GRAM’s vision: to build community strength and enhance the quality of life through art. We surround great exhibitions such as these with engaging interpretive programming, entertaining events, and many other wonderful ways to enjoy the Museum—inside and out but presenting great works of art is at the very core.

And the collaboration with the Whitney Museum we’re announcing today moves us much closer to that goal.


Let me tell you a little about the upcoming shows:

Last fall GRAM curator Cindy Buckner and I each traveled to the Whitney to see Real/Surreal this innovative exhibition focuses on the tension and overlap between two strong currents in twentieth-century art—Realism and Surrealism. These seemingly oppositional approaches—never before shown together in this way—have fascinating points of similarity and convergence and their juxtaposition encourages new ways of looking at the art of the twenties, thirties, and forties in America.

Real/Surreal includes over sixty paintings, drawings, photographs and prints from the Whitney, permanent collection, including Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, Ralston Crawford, Man Ray, and Grant Wood.

Called “one of the best exhibitions of the fall season” by Time Out New York, Real/Surreal also received kudos in a New York Times review as a “marvelous exhibition” of “forgotten treasures.” Real/Surreal opens just after ArtPrize, on October 19.

The Landau Collection will open at GRAM in 2014, as part of a nation-wide tour. I didn’t get to know Emily Landau well, but I did meet her on several occasions and visited her collection numerous times. She was one of the great collectors of post-war contemporary art, and I can say that the Whitney offers the best of that collection—and this means we’re bringing to Grand Rapids some of the most important works made in the last decades of the 20th Century.

This is a very exciting opportunity for Grand Rapids to experience and learn about today’s masters and the fresh questions they are asking about the world around us.

The 21st Century Museum opens doors to inventive, visionary thinking—
Connecting art and ideas across all disciplines, genres, generations and cultures. With Rauschenberg’s *Synapsis Shuffle*, GRAM has brought together representatives from the best of Grand Rapid’s creative communities together to collaborate with a true American Master in the “art game” he created.

Thank you everyone for joining us today. 
Now let’s go upstairs together and take a peek at the progress and preview of Synapsis Shuffle!

**Stop Action Film of Arrival and “Art Game” of Synapsis Shuffle:**
http://vimeo.com/artmuseumgr/review/37827028/4d97d54e9d

**GRAM Press Releases**
For more information on Synapsis Shuffle participants, the Robert Rauschenberg exhibitions, or other related activities and events, visit the GRAM Press Room page on the website: [http://www.artmuseumgr.org/home/page/Press+Room](http://www.artmuseumgr.org/home/page/Press+Room)

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