



(Photo by Wayne Roth)

2016 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA

The true measure of the Academy's greatness can be found in the achievements and wellbeing of its alumni. A vast number of whom have gained unique distinction through success in their professions, contribution to their communities and service to the Academy.

For this reason, Lacordaire Academy has established the Distinguished Alumna/us of the Year Award in recognition of outstanding graduates to celebrate their achievements and honor their legacy of excellence.

MARY BIRMINGHAM '72

Mary Birmingham is Curator at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, where she directs an ambitious program of contemporary art exhibitions. Since 2010 she has organized more than thirty-five group and solo exhibitions for the Art Center, which is the largest public institution in NJ devoted exclusively to contemporary art. Birmingham was brought in as the Art Center's first Curator "to develop a vision and provide the Art Center with more visibility and credibility as a destination for contemporary art nationally and internationally."

Mary began her career at the Whitney Museum and worked in the curatorial department at the Montclair Art Museum from 1994-2003. She was Director of Exhibitions at the Hunterdon Art Museum from 2007-2010. She has also taught art history at Montclair State University and at Kean University in Union, and written about the arts for Hudson County's *Jersey Journal*.

Birmingham has an MA in Art History from Hunter College, with a concentration in American Modernism. She is the author of *Dynamic Impulse: The Drawings of Stuart Davis* and co-author of *Montclair Art Museum: Selected Works*. She has organized numerous exhibitions, and has written and lectured on a variety of topics in American and contemporary art.

Birmingham, who grew up in the Boston area and moved to Montclair as a teenager, is the mother of three. Her husband, Gary Villanova, works in real estate development and property management in Northern New Jersey.

Birmingham graduated Lacordaire in 1972 where she was very active in dramatics, the newspaper and yearbook for which she was Editor in her senior year. She remembers with great fondness days spent in the warm and nurturing atmosphere of the art room.

"Lacordaire is where I discovered the meaning and relevance that art can bring to every life, and where I first encountered the idea that it might be possible to achieve a sustainable life in the arts. I am so happy Lacordaire is still a place that values the arts and nurtures individual creativity. I am extremely grateful for the early influence of two gifted teachers: Sister Irene Marie, who introduced me to the discipline of Art History, which would eventually become the focus of my academic career; and Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, whose open heart embraced the creative spirit in all her students, and whose quiet strength still inspires me."

In more recent years, she has returned to Lacordaire to share her time, talents, and resources on behalf of the school's endeavors. Birmingham helped bring classmates together to update the art room for their 40th reunion gift. She has juried the Academy's Art Museum Night, provided lectures for the fine arts department and contributed scholarship prizes to Upper School students entering a fine arts major in college. Birmingham shares Lacordaire Academy's vision of the arts as relevant and necessary core elements of 21st century education and is personally committed to their ongoing support and potential growth.

We are proud to honor Mary Birmingham with the Distinguished Alumna Award for her legacy of professional excellence and commitment to Lacordaire.