

Folger SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

Advancing knowledge & the arts

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KATHLEEN LYNCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FOLGER INSTITUTE, TO RETIRE

Washington, DC – Kathleen Lynch, longtime member of the senior team at the **Folger Shakespeare Library**, is retiring in Summer 2022 after a distinguished career leading the Folger's center for advanced research in the early modern humanities.

As the Folger Institute's Executive Director, Lynch has added new programs and platforms for scholarly discourse; funded thousands of research projects undertaken by scholars and artists around the globe exploring Shakespeare and the early modern world; inaugurated new collaborative forms of humanities research; and created numerous programs for sharing scholarly discoveries with a curious public. She led the Folger Institute's commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary in 2020.

"Kathleen's institutional and intellectual leadership at the Folger has been extraordinary," says **Folger Director Michael Witmore**. "In a career spanning 30 years, she has guided all aspects of the Folger's research efforts, from direct funding of researchers to innovative new configurations of research teams that have included scholars, artists, even a celebrity chef. She has set a high bar for advancing research and inquiry at the Folger, leaving a strong intellectual and institutional foundation for her successor to build on."

"Kathleen's skillful stewardship of the Folger Institute through the years has ensured that the Folger remains a meaningful partner in the larger scholarly community, and a resource that inspires and supports researchers," noted **J. May Liang, chair of the Board of Governors**. "In addition, she also found ways to bring those scholarly discoveries to a wider public through lectures, exhibitions, and performances that have been entertaining and enlightening."

Leading Scholarly Exploration about the Early Modern World

Lynch, who began at the Folger Institute as a program administrator, was named Executive Director in 1996. Under Lynch's leadership, the Folger Institute, which gathers interdisciplinary communities of scholars for collections-based research—setting agendas, modeling best practices, and testing new methods for scholarship—has grown its consortium of university members by 40% and increased its geographic footprint with the addition of international universities.

Facilitating the work of scholars exploring the Folger collections, the Folger Institute's scholarly Programs have identified areas of study both novel and longstanding, including the study of annotation and book history, digital approaches to literature and collections, Atlantic studies and colonial contact, and more recently, the study of race in early modern culture and its manifold expressions in surviving documents and contemporary attitudes. To encourage new lines of discovery, Lynch has convened humanities experts and scientists in interdisciplinary gatherings to study the mysterious Voynitch manuscript, understand the affordances of digitization and encoding of texts, and experiment with 'biocodicology,' the study of biological information stored in manuscripts.

Lynch has created new modes for disseminating research at the Folger. She has spearheaded a publishing partnership with the University of Pennsylvania Press for scholars working with the Folger. Nine books have been published since the partnership began in 2015. Across the 2020–21 anniversary year, Lynch launched “Critical Race Conversations,” a free series of virtual programs on YouTube bringing scholars and the public together to talk about early modern critical race studies, from “Cultivating an Anti-Racist Pedagogy” to “Race, Philosophy, and Political Thought.”

The Folger Institute has generated a wide range of teaching resources for learning about the Early Modern world, many developed through summer institutes for college teachers. Lynch has served as administrative project director for eight of these National Endowment for the Humanities’ summer programs. During the Folger’s 2016 tour of the First Folio to all 50 states, she directed a set of NEH ‘microgrants’ with university hosts on teaching Shakespeare. She has also created a guided undergraduate fellowship program with Amherst College’s Center for Humanistic Inquiry.

Over the course of her career, Lynch has secured five million dollars in funding for the Folger’s research activities.

Creating New Research Models for the 21st Century

Beginning in 2017, the Institute has sponsored a new research model at the Folger, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Initiative in Collaborative Research. Led by Lynch and funded by the Mellon Foundation, the first multi-million-dollar project, *Before ‘Farm to Table’: Early Modern Foodways and Cultures*, was designed to re-invigorate deeply rooted forms of humanistic inquiry and to create new partnerships among scholars, librarians, conservators, digital humanists, and other practitioners outside the humanities and outside the academy.

Before ‘Farm to Table’ had a core team of three co-directors and four postdoctoral fellows. The team convened residential fellows, Folger staff, artists, scholars, public history colleagues, and cooks to understand the powerful and sometimes hidden ways in which food is tied up with culture and actively shapes human knowledge, ethics, and imagination. The project has looked at the unevenness of food supply, the development and spread of tastes with their darker supply sides of enslaved labor, and the socially cohesive rituals of eating together. The team mined unexplored collections at the Folger; worked to highlight new voices and genres from the past; and brought food scholars, practitioners, and enthusiasts into conversation with one another.

The four-year research project has supported a vast array of scholarly and public programming, from the adaptation of historic recipes from the Folger collection for modern kitchens to an exhibition, *First Chefs*. In collaboration with Folger Theater, the project commissioned an original theatrical piece by Third Rail Projects, *Confection*, performed in the Folger Reading Room. The *Before ‘Farm to Table’* team also worked with college classes, including at Amherst College and with George Washington University’s class on food and sustainability taught by Chef José Andrés.

Supporting Discovery by Funding Fellowships

Throughout its history, the Folger has funded thousands of fellowships in support of research, some for long-term, multi-month research projects and others for a few months. When the Folger Institute became a department at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 2013, Lynch’s work expanded to include residential fellowships as well as scholarly programs. For the first time, Lynch introduced artistic research fellowships to the program. These fellowships have supported the work of playwrights, filmmakers, novelists, and painters on a wide range of research projects. While the Folger building is under renovation, Lynch has reimagined the fellowship program to fund research away from the Folger, emphasizing the array of online resources and addressing the different forms of support necessary for scholars to pursue and advance their work.

Beyond resources, Lynch has also focused on forms of community building for scholars by providing sociable spaces for discussion and feedback. She has started introductory lunches and teas for scholars to get to know each other. Other programs like Material Witness offer scholars the chance to discuss their research and share collection items with each other in informal conversations. Fellows have also begun to share their findings with Folger members and subscribers.

Connecting Scholars and a Curious Public Through Imaginative Programs

Collaborating with Folger colleagues, Lynch and the Folger Institute have offered a wide variety of programs bringing public audiences together with scholarly ones to discover more about the cultures and legacies of the early modern world. Weekend-long scholarly conferences have often kicked off with a public lecture. The annual Shakespeare's Birthday Lecture is another example, with audio recordings of many of the lectures available online, including a video recording of Gina Bloom's 2019 lecture on the Shakespeare video game *Play the Knave*.

The Folger Institute, in partnership with the Folger Consort, Folger Theatre, and the UK's Performing Restoration Shakespeare project, brought to the stage William Davenant's *Macbeth*, a 1664 adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy which had not been performed professionally in centuries. Scholars, actors, singers, and musicians investigated the play in collaboration with scholars. It had been inspired by earlier Institute and Consort projects exploring John Milton's masque, *Comus*, and Mary Hall Surface's adaptation of *The Second Shepherds' Play*. More recently, the Institute commissioned a new piece from Third Rail Projects about the high costs of sugar called *Confection*.

Folger Institute has often collaborated with the Folger's exhibitions program. Lynch curated the 2012 Folger exhibition, *Open City: London, 1500–1800*. The exhibition's outreach included podcasts of the companion lecture series and eight short videos, including one collapsing 200 years of history into five minutes, as London grows from a medieval city to the capital of the emerging British Empire.

Looking to the Folger Institute's Next 50 Years

In recent months, Lynch has been working with Folger Director **Michael Witmore** to plan the reopening of the Folger's historic building and to imagine what the Folger Institute's next fifty years may bring. She has also co-led the Folger's DEIA work for the past two years, working collaboratively with staff across the institution.

"I don't entirely know what the next decades will bring, but I am immensely grateful for having had a chance to lay a strong foundation for others to build on and to lead us into a new era of possibilities at the Folger, guided by our vision of what it means to do this work in this world," says **Kathleen Lynch, executive director of the Folger Institute**. "That includes making—and living—our commitments to the values of free and open inquiry into the legacies of the past. It includes making a commitment to expanding the opportunities for more people and more kinds of people to experience that kind of questing questioning. It includes a commitment to building better bridges to strengthen community and belonging across differences."

There will be a national search for Lynch's successor.

More about Kathleen Lynch

Holding a PhD in English literature from the University of Pittsburgh, Lynch's own research interests can be broadly defined as the formation of knowledge communities, including

transatlantic networks, with a focus on the methodologies of association among religious nonconformists. She studies the effects of regulations of religion and the book trade on devotional literature and identities. Her book, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford UP, 2012) was awarded the triennial Richard L. Greaves prize by the International John Bunyan Society. Among her many scholarly articles are “Staging New Worlds: Place and *Le Theatre de Neptune*” in the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* and “Whatever happened to Dinah the Black? And other questions about gender, race, and the visibility of Protestant saints” in *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in early modern Europe*, ed. Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith (Manchester University Press, 2016). Her recent articles include “Burning the Pope in London,” for a special issue on “London as Theatrical Space” in *The London Journal*, edited by Andrew Gordon and Tracey Hall (2021). Lynch has been the recipient of several fellowships, presented papers at dozens of conferences and seminars, and organized conference sessions for the Shakespeare Association of America, the Modern Language Association, and the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing, among other scholarly associations.

About the Folger Shakespeare Library

Folger Shakespeare Library is the world’s largest Shakespeare collection, the ultimate resource for exploring Shakespeare and his world. The Folger welcomes millions of visitors online and in person. We provide unparalleled access to a huge array of resources, from original sources to modern interpretations. With the Folger, you can experience the power of performance, the wonder of exhibitions, and the excitement of path breaking research. We offer the opportunity to see and even work with early modern sources, driving discovery and transforming education for students of all ages.

During our multiyear building renovation, join us online and on the road. Learn more at www.folger.edu, and on social media at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Connect with our e-newsletters and blogs at www.folger.edu/connect.

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