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TOURING *JOHN FRAME*  
June 2 – September 16, 2018

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This packet is intended to help you develop comfort with the informational content displayed in the galleries. The questions provided here will facilitate experiential learning and allow visitors to develop a personal connection to the exhibition.

John Frame's exhibit presents cognitively challenging content. The following questions are available for your own purposes; please use whichever questions feel age- and situation- appropriate.

With Visitors:

- **ASK: Have you ever had a dream that impacts your waking life? How did it affect you when you woke up? Do your dreams guide you?**
  - **INFORM:** Years ago, John Frame had a dream. Ever since this impactful night, Frame has been trying to convey the meaning of this dream through his artwork.
- **SAY: Walk through the exhibition and think about a dream or a nightmare (if developmentally appropriate) you've had that was vivid or memorable and how the dream affected you. As you do this, think about: If you were to tell the story of your dream through art, what method or medium would you choose to communicate it? Who would be the main character, the supporting cast, the setting, the plot, the resolution? |**
  - **INFORM:** John Frame's original dream was about the crippled boy with a twig sprouting from his nose (see if you can spot him), which offered inspiration to his original project. Frame has since expanded the cast, settings, and complexity of his plot. However, the timeline is non-linear, and the plot is uncertain. Frame encourages viewers to postpone thought in order to engage with emotion, experience, and the cyclical, confusing, challenging nature of our dreams.
- **ASK: What do you think the exhibit is trying to say? Why?**
  - **INFORM:** There are no right or wrong answers here. Each person is unique, so it is natural and encouraged to think through unique responses. Personally Reflect: What about who you are might impact the way you interpret this exhibit?
- **ASK: If you could only use three words to describe this exhibit to someone who had never seen it, which words would you pick? What, in particular, did you see that made you pick those words?**
- **ASK: How do you understand the timeline of the movie, or the exhibit? Does the title impact your understanding?**
  - **INFORM:** The nature of the exhibit and narrative is meant to elicit a dream-like experience in the viewer, which can be confusing. The delicate balance we have in our dreams, vivid yet detached, fragmented yet cyclical, both real and imagined, are all elements juggled in John Frame's exhibit. He captures then questions some of the intangible truths of the

human existence by using artwork to express that which cannot be put into words.

- ASK: **How do you feel when you see John Frame's sculptures? How does your experience change when you see them animated on screen?**
  - INFORM: Stop-motion animation is a technique in animation that places photos in a series. Each photo is shown for a short period of time, then followed by the next picture in the series creating the illusion of motion. When you watch TV, you are really watching a series of photographs displayed at 30 (or more) frames per second. Stop motion animation often uses fewer frames (photographs) per second than videos, which is why stop-motion animation appears choppy, or less smooth than TV. We soon will have our own stop-motion animation booth in this exhibition, so you can try it out!
- ASK: **What questions are you left with?**
  - INFORM: Frame expresses that his exhibit explores the age-old questions: who am I? Why am I here? What, if anything, happens when I'm gone? No one can answer these questions with certainty, and Three Fragments of a Lost Tale invites viewers to engage with these questions using the senses. Rather than employing logic or reason, Frame's artwork evokes emotional responses. Similar to a dream, the exhibit doesn't necessarily have the answers, but it certainly leaves you with a deep-rooted feeling, one that lingers long after waking up.

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## IF VISITORS WANT MORE INFORMATION

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### Concept of Exhibition

This exhibition comprises the sculpture, storytelling, and cinematography of artist John Frame. Although these “three fragments” come together to tell “The Tale of the Crippled Boy,” Frame intends for them to be appreciated as independent works of art. His stop-motion animated film, “The Tale of the Crippled Boy,” is a response to the universal existential questions: Where do I come from? What do I do while I'm here? What, if anything, happens when I'm gone?

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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Southern California-based artist John Frame has been making sculpture for nearly four decades, during which time he has honed a craft that honors historic artistic practices. Using traditional materials and methods, he skillfully constructs exquisite objects that evoke warmth and sentimentality. So refined was his practice, in fact, that he began to lose his enthusiasm for it about a decade ago, and this dwindling passion for his life's work led him to ask himself an unusual question for a well-established artist: “What sustains curiosity and joy?” As he felt his creativity wane, he considered what seemed

at the time to be a minor shift from the creation of fine art objects to functional woodworking.

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## MORE INFORMATION

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*“At its best, Art is a very high and rarified form of communication. We have it specifically so that we can deal with things for which other forms of language are either inadequate or inaccurate.”*

—John Frame

In 2005, John Frame had a dream.

It wasn't any ordinary dream that dissipates with the return of waking senses and re-connection to reality. It was the kind of dream that is vividly real, unshakable, and transformative — one that motivated the artist to get back to work without even the slightest hesitation. Upon waking, Frame spent hours in bed, recording his visions with words and imagery, committing every detail to memory and knowing without question that his artistic career would never be the same again.

Frame has transformed the story that emerged during that fateful night into *Three Fragments of a Lost Tale*, a lyrical, multimedia adventure that explores ideas of searching, loss, idealism, and disappointment. The tale features a cast of dozens of novel characters and provides a new narrative for the single character that Frame had created previously: a crippled boy depicted with a twig growing vertically from his nose. While Frame's narrative lacks a linear narrative, the artist's passion for literature is evident throughout the tale, which evokes magical lands such as *Wonderland*, *Narnia*, and *Middle Earth*, and also captures the epic qualities of the *Inferno* and the *Iliad*. A profoundly human comedy — both dark and enlightening — *Three Fragments* describes a hero's journey replete with obstacles to knowledge and self-discovery. The story invites us to consider the age-old questions of “who am I?” and “why am I here?”

Many of us are well familiar with the difficulties of trying to describe our dreams to another. How can we communicate the essence of our dreams? And, perhaps more importantly, how can something as personal as a dream have resonance and meaning for others? *Three Fragments* is itself a fragmented tale, told through found objects, sculpture, and stop-motion animation. Using a three-fold approach, Frame's system of art-making can be illustrated as a triangle: the first point “represents things intellectual, at the second point are all of the technical elements, and at the third are what he considers to be emotionally authentic experiences. Those three elements are woven together by intuition, which rests at the center of that triangle.” The artist takes a holistic approach to his work, believing that we are not made of solely heart or mind, but that impact and meaning are made through the engagement of a whole viewer and that the take-away will be different for each individual. *Three Fragments of a Lost Tale*, John

Frame's mastery of visual images, motion, and sound effectively transport us into an emotionally evocative landscape that is strangely familiar and can only be described as dream-like.

At first, the evolution of John Frame's artistic language from the traditional medium of hand-carved wood to the newer medium of animated film may feel like a leap. But on further consideration, the incorporation of stop-motion animation seems a natural progression of the artist's practice. Though his objects are put in motion, there is no digital alteration, nor any computer-generated expression. Frame's animation comprises nothing but the repetitive photographic capture of almost imperceptible adjustments in the angles or gestures of his carved figures which give the illusion of movement. Although it originated in the late-19th century, stop-motion animation continues to feel magical to contemporary audiences. Through the technique's patient magic, we witness tangible, non-living characters that seem to move on their own. In a high-tech world, Frame continues to embrace historic techniques, imbuing his animations with thoughtful attention.

Contemporary art often presents a challenge for viewers, using languages of abstraction and conceptualism that require time and patience to comprehend. While the narrative doesn't present a straight-forward story, *Three Fragments* proves more readily accessible through Frame's obvious craftsmanship and his cinematic story-telling, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the mystery of the story itself. Artistic techniques that may have felt nostalgic or old-fashioned, like hand-carving and sewing, take on a modern — almost subversive — character in our digital age.

*Three Fragments* is a journey open to interpretation that, like any great work of art, lingers with us long after the experience has concluded. At once foreign and familiar, the work functions as a metaphor for modern times; we are invited to join the quirky cast of characters in their quest to learn the meaning of life. There are, however, conditions to participation: we must surrender to the artist's stream of consciousness journey through time and space; we must accept that we have more questions than answers; and we must acknowledge that sometimes it is necessary to feel more than to think. We are, however, in good hands on this journey. Take comfort in knowing that John Frame's continued attention to the work over the course of more than a decade makes him an able companion in our shared struggle of a pursuit that may never be complete. In the end, *Three Fragments* invites us to recognize that the ongoing effort to understand and be understood reveals that we have been whole all along.

--Joy Armstrong, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

Blair Huff, Curatorial Assistant

Jessica Hunter-Larsen, Director of Academic Engagement

i Murphy, Kevin M. and Jessica Todd Smith, *Three Fragments of a Lost Tale: Sculpture and Story by John Frame*. (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2011), p. 15.