



MINNESOTA  
MUSEUM of  
AMERICAN ART

## **Position Announcement – Executive Director**

The M (the Minnesota Museum of American Art) is a St. Paul–based museum with a small, dedicated staff and a big mission: *to explore American identities and experiences through art and creativity*. A primarily visual arts museum, the M’s exhibitions and programs are co-curated with M staff in collaboration with diverse community partners, focusing on lived experiences and creativity of the many artists, cultures, and communities that have been historically, and continue to be, underrepresented by American museums. This model has developed organically over the past few years and has fostered strong multi-year partnerships that benefit both the museum and its partners, as well as the people they serve.

The M is bold and needs a visionary and responsive Executive Director to lead the museum at this pivotal time of transition and growth. Bolstered by generous individual donors, a \$10.5 million State of Minnesota grant, and catalytic foundation support, the M is beginning the final phase of construction of its permanent home in the architecturally significant, historic Pioneer Endicott building in downtown St. Paul. The M is a vital arts anchor for the city and region; the completion of the museum construction will ensure its creative energy is a permanent fixture in the heart of the city.

The M seeks an Executive Director who is deeply committed to advancing the richness of differences and the equitable inclusion of them. This exceptional leader will support the organization’s ongoing efforts to address issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, and race in how we hire, develop exhibitions and programs, enter into relationships, create opportunities, eliminate barriers to participation, shape organizational culture, and authentically live our mission and values.

The new Executive Director will oversee the grand reopening of the M’s renovated home; lead the process of building organizational capacity and financial resilience; and help the M to firmly establish its long-term sustainability as a key cultural institution in Minnesota’s capital city. The Executive Director leads the organization’s staff; manages an operating budget growing to approximately \$3 million in the next 12–18 months; and: directs the strategy and implementation of fundraising, earned revenue development, and programming for this dynamic cultural organization.

### **History and Local Context**

In 1894, St. Paul leaders established an art school whose charter endorsed “the study, knowledge, and love of art” for the citizens of St. Paul. In 1969, this organization was renamed

the Minnesota Museum of Art. Through fourteen locations and eight name changes, the M has responded to the needs and interests of St. Paul residents with tenacious, determined, and resilient approaches to serving the community.

Civic involvement and support have helped the M evolve and thrive during its 127-year history. Generations of Minnesotans have experienced art at the M and contributed to sustaining its activities and vitality. Many St. Paul families have meaningful and long-term ties to the museum, and the M has been knit into the fabric of the city throughout its varied locations and programs over many years.

The M is the only art museum in St. Paul, and it completes St. Paul's "Big Five" downtown cultural institutions, along with the Minnesota Children's Museum, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Minnesota History Center, and Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. The other prominent art museums in the Twin Cities (the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Weisman Art Museum) are all in Minneapolis, ten miles away, and serve different purposes and audiences.

The M is located within the traditional territory of the Dakhóta, which is home to diverse Indigenous and immigrant communities. The Twin Cities are recognized for their vibrant and substantial cultural offerings, with many nationally recognized visual, performing, and literary arts organizations, as well as numerous accessible parks and bike trails and a rich culinary scene.

## **The M Today**

Fueled by a talented and hardworking team, the M is increasingly recognized for its innovative, approach to curation and programming, which is based on collaboration with partners that bring alternative frameworks, new questions, and fresh ideas. This model reflects multivocal storytelling that is diverse in participation and content and compelling and relevant for all communities. With its emphasis on and connections with Minnesota artists, the M highlights populations and perspectives that are creating Minnesota's dynamic future.

## ***Mission, Vision, and Values***

### **Mission**

To explore American identities and experiences through art and creativity.

### **Vision**

The M, from its perch in the middle of the country and at the center of a diverse city, can inspire understanding and our common humanity through the power of art, artists, and community engagement.

## Values

**Bold:** We dare to respond to complex truths and envision a hopeful future.

**Engaging:** We build participation through fun and stimulating artistic experiences.

**Relevant:** We question, listen, and exchange ideas with our diverse communities.

**Inclusive:** We strive to make the M welcoming and accessible to all.

**Respectful:** We seek authentic relationships and act thoughtfully and transparently with resources in our care.

The M has completed a strategic plan for the period 2019–2022. For more background on the organization, please see our [website](#) and [Community Report](#).

## ***The Programming Model***

Recognizing that art facilitates understanding across differences, the M is dedicated to amplifying the power of art and artists who represent diverse perspectives, identities, and lived experiences.

In its evolving new programmatic and operating model, the M has embraced its role as a steward, rather than a gatekeeper, of American art. This vision for curatorial work emerged over the course of several collaborations between the M and other Twin Cities–based cultural organizations and creatives with a shared commitment to supporting multivocal and underrepresented stories about American experiences through art and creativity. Our partnerships are unique in that we collaborate from beginning to end of each project and aim to be radically flexible to our partners’ needs along the way, making all decisions—from content and tone to budgeting and allocation of resources—together.

Recent examples of this programming approach include these exhibitions:

- [\*A Choice of Weapons, Honor and Dignity: The Visions of Gordon Parks and Jamel Shabazz\*](#), in partnership with Robin Hickman Winfield and students from Gordon Parks High School in St. Paul, presented photographs by two artists that document expressions of dignity, honor, hope, and love in the Black community.
- [\*1.5: A Southeast Asian Diaspora Remix\*](#), in partnership with SEAD, the Southeast Asian Diaspora Project, explored the lived experiences of first- and second-generation Southeast Asians in Minnesota.
- [\*Outer Experiences: Black Lives in Rural and Suburban Minnesota\*](#), in partnership with the African American Interpretive Center of Minnesota (AAICM), explored the experience of being Black in Minnesota outside the Twin Cities. Drawing from AAICM’s archives and oral history project, this exhibition featured photographs by Chris McDuffie alongside excerpts from interviews with Black Minnesotans from rural or suburban areas of the state.

What these co-curatorial partnerships look like in practice depends on the needs and objectives of the M's partners, but all are based on collaboratively planning and executing exhibitions and related programming both at the museum and at other locations relevant to the partner and the communities it represents. Partnerships frequently continue for several years, take place at multiple locations, and may involve other groups or organizations linked to a primary partner.

### ***The M's Collection***

The museum's current collection comprises more than 5,000 works of art and contemporary craft by notable American artists, including Sonya Clark, Julie Buffalohead, Pao Houa Her, Wing Young Huie, George Morrison, Joan Mitchell, Warren MacKenzie, Louise Nevelson, Cameron Booth and Paul Manship. Staff and board recently selected collection highlights - see them here: [https://mmaa.org/art\\_and\\_artists/](https://mmaa.org/art_and_artists/)

Among the priorities informing the development of the M's collection moving forward is a dedication to supporting artists with ties to Minnesota, artists at emerging stages in their careers (the M is proud to be the first institution to collect an artist's work), and artists featured in the M's co-organized exhibitions.

The M will continue to build a collection that sheds light on underexplored aspects of the American experience and will deepen its commitment to sharing the collection as an accessible community resource (via digitization, physical installations, and multivocal and multilingual interpretation). The M's collaborative model will drive the development of the collection, as it seeks to advance a more prominent role for traditionally underrepresented artists and communities within the museum's collection.

### ***The M's Permanent Home***

The completion of construction of the M's permanent home in the Pioneer Endicott building is critical to creating sustainable economic vitality in downtown St. Paul, while positioning the visual arts on par with the other significant regional cultural institutions in the city. The M will be established as an important anchor that connects the lively arts scene of galleries, studios, performance venues, restaurants, and sports facilities in St. Paul's Lowertown with the group venerable cultural organizations surrounding Rice Park. The first phase of the renovated space opened in 2018, and the final phase of renovation is expected to reopen in 2023.

When completed, the M will occupy nearly the entire ground level of the Pioneer Endicott building and will include multiple gallery spaces, meeting rooms, a flexible workshop, classrooms, studio spaces, and staff offices and workspaces. A soaring sculpture court will be visible and accessible from the second-floor skyway, part of an architectural feature that connects most of downtown St. Paul's buildings. The skyway level of the Pioneer Endicott contains public pedestrian walkways with multiple retail businesses and access to a multilevel

parking ramp; luxury rental apartments occupy the upper levels of the building. The new museum will also include space designated for future flexible expansion.

### ***The Executive Director Position***

The M is seeking a seasoned, energetic Executive Director to lead the museum into a new era with its permanent new home, expanded programming opportunities and reach, and deeper engagement with diverse artists and communities.

#### **The Executive Director will:**

- Work with the board of directors and leadership team to ensure the mission, vision, and values are fulfilled through strategic planning and effective organizational implementation, programming, and community outreach;
- Inspire and collaborate with a talented and committed staff in moving forward with a shared vision for the future of the M, incorporating clear and inclusive communication and team-based decision-making styles that will unify the M staff in this effort;
- Nurture a positive workplace to attract, motivate, and retain effective and diverse talent;
- Ensure the financial health and sustainability of the organization through long-term planning, developing appropriate fundraising capacity within the organization, prudent budgeting and expense management, and the cultivation of diverse sources of funding;
- Secure operating, capital, and endowment funding from national, state, and local resources, foundations, corporations, and individuals, including the planning and execution of a multiyear \$10M endowment campaign;
- Provide the board of directors with timely and accurate information necessary to make informed decisions, including an annual budget, cash flow projections, and financial statements that accurately represent financial condition;
- Invest in strengthening organizational infrastructure, capacity, and processes that embody the M's commitment to equity;
- Oversee artistic programming and implementation, including assessment of the organization's stated goals and objectives;
- Oversee development and care of the M's collection of art in alignment with the museum's mission, vision, and values;
- Cultivate strong relationships with community partners, collaborators, artists, arts administrators, donors, colleagues, government leaders, and legislators at the state and local levels.

### ***About the Opportunity***

Since July 2020, the M has been led by a talented interim director, who has stabilized the institution's finances, led organizational planning, and helped the M emerge from the COVID-19

pandemic firmly rooted in its mission and values. With the gradual reopening of society, the M's board seeks to hire an experienced Executive Director who can immediately and effectively assume leadership at a critical juncture in the M's organizational development. The initial responsibilities of the position encompass making a timely push to complete the new facility's capital campaign; reopening the museum's existing galleries; and planning, funding, and launching a robust, innovative pipeline of new programming in collaboration with the staff, board, and community.

The new Executive Director will finalize and meet an ambitious calendar of fundraising deadlines; inspire donors, volunteers, and staff with the M's future-facing mission; attract new visitors and audiences; and lead the museum to a secure financial and organizational future that builds on the M's current strategic plan.

The ideal candidate will be energized by start-up, turnaround, and rebuilding stages of organizational life cycles and will thrive on advocating for the M's mission and civic value. The Executive Director will need to quickly establish community confidence in the M's new physical home and its innovative, important, and effective programming. The Executive Director must relate effectively and empathetically with people from all parts of the community, including artists, community and civic leaders, cultural partners, and donors.

**The successful candidate will possess:**

- Exceptional leadership presence, both internally with museum staff and board, and externally as a public representative of the museum
- Engaging communications skills, including strong active listening skills, excellent verbal and written skills, and strong public presentation skills;
- Ability to lead, motivate, support, and mentor diverse staff, and maintain a positive and inclusive workplace;
- A passion for the arts and their ability to inform and transform;
- Proven successful fundraising experience, strong donor relations skills, and comprehensive understanding of local and national arts funding;
- Financial management expertise, including budget preparation, analysis, and reporting;
- Proven ability to establish and nurture partnerships with diverse artists and communities, especially those who have been historically marginalized;
- Proven track record of addressing racial and gender inequality and issues of access.

**The successful candidate will be:**

- **An arts advocate.** A leader who has passion for art and art's ability to connect people and to express our common humanity.
- **A team-builder.** A leader not only comfortable with but excited about a team-based approach to the M's leadership.

- **An experienced fundraiser.** A leader who is a charismatic and persuasive public speaker and who excels at developing human connections and relationships that result in ongoing major support.
- **A connector.** A person who is comfortable in a co-creation and collaborative role with internal and external partners and who can engage such partners with clear communications, ability to set and manage expectations, personal engagement, and a commitment to finding mutually advantageous ways to work together.
- **An organizational capacity-builder.** A person who understands nonprofit governance, leadership, and management; inspires the M's staff and encourages professional development; and effectively engages, inspires, and utilizes board members' talents.
- **A "people person."** A leader who can communicate and relate effectively with the large range of people involved with the M, from visitors who may never have been inside a museum before to artists, staff, community partners, donors, foundation leaders, and the board.

### ***The M's Commitment to a Diverse Workforce***

The M's goal is to employ a diverse staff representative of Minnesota's communities and residents. The M acknowledges race, gender, and accessibility gaps in education and employment opportunities present in the Twin Cities.

### **TO APPLY:**

Please send a letter detailing your interest in this position and how you believe you meet the qualifications. A short resume or a link to your LinkedIn profile can be included. Send to [TheMSearch@8Bridges.com](mailto:TheMSearch@8Bridges.com). 8 Bridges Workshop is a St. Paul consulting firm supporting the work of the M's search committee and board of directors.

All applicants will receive an email reply within ten business days with information on the status of their application.

*Position open until filled. Start date flexible; ideally candidates will begin employment no later than November 1, 2021.*

### **Compensation and Benefits**

Compensation will range from \$145,000 to \$175,000 per year. Benefits include 80 percent coverage of the employee's health care plan, 403(b) contributions, and generous leave policies.

## Search Committee

### **Dr. Brenda J. Child, Professor, University of Minnesota**

Dr. Brenda J. Child is Northrop Professor of American Studies and former chair of the departments of American Studies and American Indian Studies, University of Minnesota. She is the author of award-winning books of American Indian history. She served as a member of the board of trustees of the National Museum of the American Indian–Smithsonian and was president (2017–18) of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. She was born on the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation in northern Minnesota, where she served on the committee to write a new constitution for the 12,000-member nation.

### **Jim Denomie, Artist**

Primarily a painter, Jim Denomie also works in printmaking, photography, ink drawings, and found object sculpture. His narrative paintings focus on political, social, cultural, and personal events (both current and historical) pertaining to Native American issues and his personal identity. He has been awarded numerous fellowships, including a Bush Fellowship, two McKnight Fellowships, a Joan Mitchell Fellowship, and a McKnight Distinguished Artist Award.

### **Aurea Gerard, Philanthropic Advisor, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation**

Aurea Gerard joined the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation in 2012 with substantial experience in the nonprofit sector, especially in project management and development. She studied at the University of St. Thomas and holds degrees in business administration and in metaphysical science.

### **Mai Nhia Vang Huizel, Hmong Museum Interim Executive Director**

Mai Nhia Vang Huizel is a passionate museum enthusiast with experience in museum and collections management. She holds an M.S. degree in anthropology and a museum studies certificate from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She is founder of Hmong Museum in St. Paul, Minnesota, and currently manages volunteers at the Minnesota History Center.

### **Nathan Johnson, Architect, 4RM+ULA**

Nathan Johnson, AIA, NOMA, is a partner in the architecture firm 4RM+ULA. The firm's mission is to reimagine cities and neighborhoods; reunite architecture and art; design spaces that respond to community, climate, and context; and create high-quality architecture in underrepresented communities typically underserved by design professionals. Nathan is also an instructor at Minneapolis College (MCTC).

### **Aaron Johnson-Ortiz, Director of Arts and Cultural Engagement, CLUES**

Aaron Johnson-Ortiz holds a master in fine arts degree (MFA) from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Originally from St. Paul, he grew up in Mexico and Guatemala. He has ten years of experience as a community organizer, a community-engaged artist, and an arts administrator. At CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio), he serves as director of arts and cultural engagement; he involves and uplifts Latino artists, curates the Latino Art Gallery at CLUES in St. Paul, and leads arts and cultural engagement programming. He is a bi-national, bi-cultural, and Chicano/Latino artist and an award-winning muralist.

### **Dr. Laura Joseph, Curator of Exhibitions at the M**

Dr. Laura Joseph is a curator interested in collaborative, experimental, and interdisciplinary



methods. Through her work, she seeks to draw attention to what is at the margins and in the shadows, with a particular investment in emotion, materiality, and embodiment. Her curatorial projects include *Harriet Bart: Abracadabra and Other Forms of Protection* (Weisman Art Museum), *Testify: Americana from Slavery to the Present* (Hennepin County Library), and *A Feast of Astonishments: Charlotte Moorman and the Avant-Garde* (Mary and Leigh Block Museum). Before coming to the M, she worked alongside artists with disabilities to challenge perceptions of disability at Interact Center for the Visual and Performing Arts. She has a PhD from the University of Minnesota, where she specialized in contemporary art.

#### **Ann Ruhr Pifer, Board Chair of the M**

Ann Ruhr Pifer is chair of the board of directors of the M and chair of the search committee for the Executive Director. She was a member of the M board from 2010 to 2019 and returned to the board in July 2020. She is executive director of the national nonprofit AdoptAClassroom.org, based in Minneapolis. She was the founder and owner of The Grand Hand Gallery in St. Paul, and previously had a career in corporate banking in New York City and the Twin Cities. She serves as a board member and treasurer of Craft in America, and previously was a trustee of St. Paul Academy and Summit School and a director of the Craft Retailers and Artists for Tomorrow.

#### **Ginger Shulick Porcella, Executive Director and Chief Curator of Franconia Sculpture Park**

Ginger Shulick Porcella is the executive director and chief curator of Franconia Sculpture Park. She holds a masters degree in sociocultural anthropology from Columbia University and a BA in art history from DePaul University. She was previously the executive director and chief curator of MOCA Tucson; executive director of the San Diego Art Institute; and the executive director of Art Connects New York. Among the critically acclaimed exhibitions she has curated are *Cyclic with Cassils and Ron Athey*; *Blessed Be: Mysticism, Spirituality, and the Occult in Contemporary Art*; *Dazzled: OMD, Memphis Design, and Beyond*; and *Amir Fallah: Scatter My Ashes on Foreign Lands*.

#### **Lisa Tabor, Founder and Principal of CultureBrokers LLC**

Lisa Tabor is a consultant who works with business, government, and nonprofit clients to deliver results-based cultural inclusion, diversity, and race equity. She previously served as secretary of NAACP St. Paul and as president of the Arts and Culture Partnership of St. Paul, and she has worked with Visit St. Paul (St. Paul Convention and Visitors Bureau) and the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Xavier Tavera, Artist**

Xavier Tavera is a photographer, community organizer, and teaching artist. Born in Mexico City and based in Minneapolis since 1996, he is best known for his nuanced portraits of members of the Latino community. These powerful pictures challenge our notions of race, gender, and class by subverting stereotypes and capturing the humor and pathos in identity; viewers who carefully examine these images can expect to question their own assumptions, biases, and prejudices. Tavera has shown his work extensively in the Twin Cities, nationally, and internationally, including in Chile, Uruguay, and China.

**Patty Dunlap Whitaker, Board Member of the M**

Patty Dunlap Whitaker is a retired marketing and communications executive with extensive experience in web content, print media, and advertising. She was the manager of corporate communications for Securian Financial, where she was responsible for internal communications, the annual meeting, and the annual report. She also worked as lead web writer for Target Corporation and was editor of the Marshall Field's website.

**Chris Widdess, Interim Executive Director of the M**

Chris Widdess is an arts and nonprofit consultant specializing in strategic realignment, special projects, new market development, and campaigns. She was the managing director at the Penumbra Theatre Company; director of public outreach, marketing, and development for the Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation; promotions manager for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; and director of marketing and communications at Minnesota Public Radio. As a consultant with the DeVos Institute of Arts Management, she has worked on capacity building with Weeksville (Brooklyn, New York); Casita Maria (Bronx, New York); and Red Cloud Indian School (Pine Ridge, South Dakota).

**Advisors to the Search Committee**

**Dr. Patricia Marroquin Norby** — associate curator of Native American art, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York); former senior executive and associate director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (New York); former director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at The Newberry (Chicago).

**Chanida Phaengdara Potter** — executive director of The SEAD Project (Minneapolis); two-time chair of the National Lao American Writers Summit; co-founder of the online publication *Little Laos on the Prairie*; board member of the Twin Cities Media Alliance. Potter collaborated with the M on the recent exhibition *1.5: A Southeast Asian Diaspora Remix*.

**Colleen Sheehy** — president and executive director, Public Art St. Paul; former director and CEO, Plains Art Museum (Fargo, North Dakota); former director of education, Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota.

**Dean Sobel** — associate professor of art history and museum studies, University of Denver; former director, Clyfford Still Museum (Denver, Colorado); former director and chief curator, Aspen Art Museum (Aspen, Colorado).