

## **MASS MoCA Announces Leadership Succession Plan**

*Director Joseph Thompson Announces Plans to Step Down  
Deputy Director Tracy Moore to Be Appointed Interim Director Following Transition  
Thompson will Stay on as Special Counsel for Next 12 Months*

(August 21, 2020) – Joseph Thompson, who has led MASS MoCA since its founding in 1988, announced today his plans to step down as Director. He will stay on for the next 12 months as Special Counsel to the Board of Trustees. In this new role, Thompson will focus on institutional advancement and special projects. The Board of Trustees plans to conduct a search for a new permanent Director considering both internal and external candidates.

Tracy Moore has been appointed to serve as Interim Director, following Joe’s transition to his new role on October 29. Tracy, who has over 18 years of experience in contemporary art museum programming, management, and leadership, joined MASS MoCA in 2019 and serves as Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, overseeing finance and operations.

“MASS MoCA has deeply talented staff, strong governance, a vibrant program, large audiences, and a starter endowment in place. After more than three decades as Director, it is high time for me to step away from day-to-day management of the museum, focusing for the next year on transition planning, institutional advancement, and capacity-building,” said Thompson. “While we’ve achieved much over the past few decades, there remains programmatic innovation, still to come. Our core work in commissioning and supporting the most important art of our time is – by definition – an endlessly renewable project. We’ve barely touched the 17 acres of outdoor grounds, and while we have an exciting and newly conceived Master Plan in place, two of our most important and strategically situated buildings remain to be programmed and renovated.”

“The capacities of this wonderful place, and the great people who work here, are unlimited, and the next Director will have endless opportunities to advance MASS MoCA’s mission. My last work will focus on deepening that capacity, helping to ensure MASS MoCA has resources and support networks in place to sustain its core programming and community redevelopment aspirations long into the future. I will be devoting the next 12 months to that end while also working with Tracy Moore and colleagues on several important initiatives underway, and while the Board conducts a search for a permanent successor,” added Thompson.

“We are grateful for everything Joe has done to build and invigorate MASS MoCA,” said Timur Galen, chair of the MASS MoCA Foundation Board of Trustees. “His dedication, innovation and leadership have made MASS MoCA a premier site for the creation and enjoyment of contemporary art, in all forms. On behalf of the entire Board and organization, we thank Joe for his decades as Director and his continued partnership in this new role. MASS MoCA’s deep connections to the community through educational programs present endless room to innovate, as does our mission to be a place-maker and economic catalyst for North Adams.”

### **MASS MoCA Highlights Under Thompson’s Leadership**

MASS MoCA was originally conceived as a depot for the display of Minimal Art of the 1960s and 1970s, and as an auxiliary exhibition space for the Williams College Museum of Art, where Thompson began his career as preparator and exhibitions designer. Under Thompson’s leadership, MASS MoCA’s program evolved into new, creative territory. Instead of a site for static display, he and his colleagues reimaged

the institution as an open platform for changing exhibitions and large-scale temporary commissions conceived specifically for its vast galleries and fabricated on site, with a vibrant year-round program of performing arts devoted to new music, dance, theater, film, and artist-in-residency workshops. After a protracted period of fundraising, planning, and environmental clean-up, MASS MoCA celebrated its opening in 1999.

During Thompson's tenure, the institution hosted more than 10,000 artists, working across all media. Annual visitation has grown from 60,000 in the early years of the museum, to 300,000 per year (pre-COVID), close to 25 times the population of its hometown. The developed footprint of the 24-building factory campus has grown from 200,000 square feet in five buildings, to 550,000 square feet in 17 buildings, making MASS MoCA the largest institution in the United States devoted to new art.

An inventive model of long-term partnerships pioneered by Thompson in collaboration with a host of fellow curators, lending institutions and artists has featured landmark retrospectives, major installations, and changing exhibitions including those by Sol LeWitt (co-organized with the Yale University Art Gallery and the Williams College Museum of Art with loans of 25 years from over 50 lenders), Laurie Anderson, Jenny Holzer, Anselm Kiefer (co-organized with the Hall Art Foundation with a loan of 15 years), and James Turrell (whose major 25-year retrospective installation includes examples from all seven decades of his career, and every major category of his work on loan for 25 years). Artists who have had important exhibitions or long-term installations at MASS MoCA include Ann Hamilton, Nari Ward, Xu Bing, Robert Wilson, Sanford Biggers, Cai Guo-Qiang, Mona Hatoum, Tim Hawkinson, Spencer Finch, Annie Lennox, Natasha Bowdoin, Martin Puryear, and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle. Under Thompson's leadership, MASS MoCA has become a premier concert venue in the Northeast, featuring performances by both well-known and rising stars, including Beck, Benjamin Clementine, Annie Lennox, The Pretenders, The National, Patti Smith, Maggie Rogers, Sinkane, Dr. John, Flying Lotus, Car Seat Headrest, Vampire Weekend, Adia Victoria, and George Clinton.

Thompson and his colleagues in performing arts have also nurtured a robust artist residency program at MASS MoCA, which has workshopped major new projects and experimental works-in-progress by Bill T. Jones, William Kentridge, David Byrne, Urban Bush Women, Paola Prestini, and an annual two-week residency with Roomful of Teeth. In conjunction with David Lang, Julia Wolfe and Michael Gordon, Thompson co-founded the annual Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival. Thompson also co-produced Wilco's Solid Sound Festival of Art + Music with Jeff Tweedy and Alex Crothers, and co-produced FreshGrass, an annual festival of American roots and alt-folk music with Chris Wadsworth. Thompson conceived a children's education facility and in-classroom program called Kidspace, with the Clark Art Institute and Williams College Museum of Art, which has now grown into an innovative education department serving adults, children and social service agencies across the Berkshires.

To advance the museum's community redevelopment mission, working closely with trustees, in addition to Jack Wadsworth, Thompson shaped and grew a commercial real estate development venture, creating a recurring ancillary revenue stream that supports 18% of the museum's programs and operating costs on an annual basis. Alongside galleries, stages and art fabrication facilities, the mixed-use commercial lease space also brings jobs, economic vitality, and substantial tax revenues to the City of North Adams. At the time the museum was conceived, North Adams' unemployment rate approached 20%, 7 times higher than the Massachusetts state average. By 2019, pre-COVID local unemployment had fallen to 6.4%, or about 1.4 times the Massachusetts state average. The inventory of hotel rooms in North Adams has grown to 245 keys, up from a total of 16 motel rooms in the early 1990s. In addition to business activity generated by its commercial tenants, by 2019 the museum itself sparked \$52 million in

new economic activity every year (and over \$700 million cumulatively, including investments in buildings and infrastructure), totaling many times the state's public investment of \$60 million over 20 years.

"I know of no other institution specifically founded with a two-fold mission to be a platform for new art, but also to use that creative energy to spark economic growth and community redevelopment," said Thompson. "That's a noble mission in today's world. At the end of the day, strong, sustainable institutions are about people, values, shared passions, and a disciplined work ethic. We in the arts and culture business know how deeply and directly the arts – and creativity in general – can fuel community development and commercial vitality. MASS MoCA and North Adams demonstrate that every day. I've been lucky to work with so many spirited colleagues and supporters over the years who understand this dynamic deep in their bones. But that work is just getting started. If anything, MASS MoCA's future opportunities exceed its achievements to date – but that's for the next person to realize, someone with a fresh point of view, expanded social and cultural networks, and new energy."

### **About MASS MoCA**

MASS MoCA, located in North Adams, in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts is one of the world's liveliest (and largest) centers for making, displaying, and enjoying today's most important art, music, dance, theater, and film. For more information, visit: [massmoca.org](http://massmoca.org).