

MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA Announces the Curatorial Exchange Initiative

MASS MoCA brings six curatorial leaders of diverse practice to North Adams in an innovative pilot program.

North Adams, MA, July 2024 — MASS MoCA's Curatorial Exchange Initiative (CEI) is a 3-year pilot fellowship uniquely designed to incubate and amplify collaboration among diverse curatorial leaders whose practices, knowledge, and project development with contemporary artists are at the forefront of professional discourses in the field. CEI fellows work closely with MASS MoCA's curators, art fabrication and public programs teams, and with other key staff to realize exhibitions that will be mounted at, and supported through, MASS MoCA over the next five years. Fellows convene annually to share ideas and progress in their work, to consider exhibition and program spaces at MASS MoCA, and to identify project needs and potential community partners.

Among the defining features of the fellowship is its emphasis on curatorial exchange — intellectual, experiential, cultural, interpersonal, and institutional. MASS MoCA provides direct support for research, travel, residency, and commission/studio time for the artists each fellow is working with, and an annual stipend for the fellows that spans a two to three year period.

There are six fellows in the CEI, who hail from different geographies and cultural identities, and who are at various points in their careers including independent and institutionally-based curators working in the United States and Puerto Rico. The fellows are Ryan N. Dennis, Marissa Del Toro, Evan Garza, Michy Marxuach, Risa Puleo, and Terrence Washington.

“The central pursuit of our work at MASS MoCA is to sustain the diversity of contemporary artists making bold new work, while celebrating their contributions to culture,” said Director Kristy Edmunds. “That extends to the curators who champion artists, devise new ways of exploring exhibition-making, and add tremendously to public experience and scholarship. By shifting the cadence and duration of our exhibition schedule in MASS MoCA's soaring spaces, we have intentionally opened MASS MoCA to projects and possibilities that are grounded in field-wide connection and substantive exchange. After discussions with curatorial colleagues around the country, we realized that MASS MoCA had something unique to offer — space, time, and the embrace of exploring ideas in public, while also supporting a wide cohort of spectacular curators.”

The fellow selection process was led by Chief Curator Denise Markonish, who began by identifying exciting leaders in the curatorial field. This was followed by a deliberation process that centered a commitment to curators who represent diverse cultural realities who are known for their collaborative approaches in their work. After numerous discussions with Edmunds, the curatorial team, and the candidates themselves, MASS MoCA extended invitations to those whose projects and scholarship were indicative of the Initiative's aims, aspirations and imaginable impact.

"Having the opportunity to work with these six fellows has been an absolute dream," said Chief Curator Denise Markonish. "What makes being a curator at MASS MoCA extraordinary is the liberty to try, to continuously learn with artists and the ideas in formation, and to be in a making practice that is not constrained by the legacy pressures of a permanent art collection. The CEI brings a new set of voices into our small, yet mighty, curatorial team and amplifies the opportunity to learn from each other. It's about more than curatorial projects, it is about collegiality and building community. I can't wait to see the long term effects."

Evan Garza will present the first exhibition with artist Steve Locke titled *the fire next time*, opening on August 3, 2024 at MASS MoCA.

Curatorial Exchange Fellow Bios:

Ryan N. Dennis is Senior Curator and Director of Public Initiatives at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. From 2020-2023, Dennis was the artistic director of the Center for Art & Public Exchange (CAPE) at the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, MS. She previously served as the Curator and Programs Director at Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, where her work focused on African American contemporary art with a particular emphasis on socially engaged practices, site-specific projects, public interventions and the development of public-facing programs for adults and youth.

Marissa Del Toro is the Assistant Director of Programs and Exhibitions at NXTHVN in New Haven, CT. Since 2021, Del Toro has worked with Museums Moving Forward, a data-driven initiative to support greater equity and accountability in art museum workplaces through coalition-building, research, and advocacy. She is currently co-curating with Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Gilbert Vicaro the upcoming traveling exhibition, *Xican-a.o.x. Body set* for Summer 2023. She has guest curated and written for several institutions including the Latinx Project at NYU, Lehmann Maupin in New York City, and the Mission Cultural Latino Center in San Francisco, CA. She was a 2021-2022 curatorial fellow at NXTHVN, where she co-curated and worked alongside the studio fellows in developing their professional practices.

Evan Garza is a Texas native, a curator, a global contemporary art scholar, and a Graduate Curatorial Fellow at MASS MoCA working closely with Chief Curator Denise Markonish and Director Kristy Edmunds on the Curatorial Exchange Initiative program. Garza was the 2021–2022 Fulbright Scholar at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, and concurrently was Visiting Research Fellow in History of Art and Architecture at Trinity College Dublin. Garza was Artistic Director and co-curator of the 2021 Texas Biennial, a statewide project including more than fifty artists and five Texas partner museums. Garza is the former Director of Rice Public Art at Rice University in Houston, where they oversaw programming and care of James Turrell's *Twilight Epiphany* Skyspace and acquired artworks by Ursula von Rydingsvard and Sol LeWitt. Previously, Garza was Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2011, Garza was cofounder of Fire Island Artist Residency (FIAR), a New York nonprofit and the first residency program in the world exclusively for LGBTQ+ artists.

Michy Marxuach lives and works in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her curatorial practice establishes a forum for dialogue and camaraderie among artists, where projects are discussed and potentiated beyond traditional exhibition spaces. She is co-founder of Beta-Local, a non-for-profit organization that supports aesthetic practices and critical thinking, which she also co-directed from 2009–15. From 1999–2005, Marxuach founded and directed M&M Projects, an alternative non-profit space dedicated to strengthening the production of contemporary art in Puerto Rico and internationally.

Risa Puleo is an independent curator and one of a team of curators who recently organized the 2023 Counterpublic Triennial in St. Louis. Her exhibition *Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the American Justice System*, curated for the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (CAMH) and hosted by Tufts University Art Gallery, mapped the relationship of the prison to the museum. *Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly* conceptually redrew settler-imposed boundaries to reconnect the Americas as continuous indigenous land.

Terrence Washington is a writer and occasional curator living in Philadelphia. He completed his master's degree in art history at Williams College before working with the National Gallery of Art, the NXTHVN residency, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and now the Free Library of Philadelphia. He is interested in issues of class and power in U.S. art museums.

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Additional support for Steve Locke: the fire next time is provided by David and Marlene Persky.

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is currently celebrating its 25th Anniversary Season under Director Kristy Edmunds, not only as the largest, multidisciplinary, contemporary art museum in North America, but also as a creative campus with a regional, national, and global impact. MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art, and is an indispensable home for artists who stretch toward what has yet to be created. From its beginnings as the major textile mill Arnold Print Works in the mid-19th century, to its days as the Sprague Electric Company in the mid-20th century, to its current iteration as a globally renowned contemporary art museum and fabrication center, the 24-acre MASS MoCA campus has a rich history of serving as the economic engine of the city of North Adams and the surrounding region. With vast galleries and a stunning variety of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace art in all forms. For more information visit www.massmoca.org or follow on Instagram at @massmoca.