

MASS MoCA

Immersive experience *The Plastic Bag Store* melds installation art, theater, film, and fun for its museum debut at MASS MoCA

Robin Frohardt creates a thought-provoking, awe-inspiring world out of discarded single-use plastic and cardboard, opening May 9, 2024

North Adams, February 20, 2024 – MASS MoCA, in association with Williamstown Theatre Festival, is thrilled to announce *The Plastic Bag Store* as part of its 25th Anniversary Season. Created by artist Robin Frohardt and produced by Pomegranate Arts, this guided and immersive, multimedia experience will be open from May 9 through November 3, 2024, in MASS MoCA's Building 1 and is recommended for ages 6+. Advance tickets, priced at \$25, are required and can be purchased at massmoca.org/plasticbagstore. Discounts are available for MASS MoCA Members, kids ages 6-16, and Williamstown Theatre Festival donors.

The Plastic Bag Store, subtitled “a tragicomic ode to the foreverness of plastic,” creatively addresses global climate concerns through art, humor, and a critical lens. Frohardt has meticulously hand-sculpted thousands of items, including produce, meat, dry goods, toiletries, cakes, and sushi rolls, using discarded plastic bags that have been thoroughly washed and ingeniously upcycled. Visitors will step into a vibrantly heightened, tongue-in-cheek supermarket setting meant to spark critical reflection on our culture of consumption and convenience. Frohardt repurposes 2-liter bottles as “Plastic Dew,” orange tarp becomes carrots, plastic caps are “capperonnis” on faux frozen pizzas, and “free-range” plastic bags transform into a dozen eggs. Touch is often encouraged, as a box of “Yucky Shards” reveals, with a gentle shake, to be full of clunky trash. Visitors should also be on the lookout for plasticized regional items on the shelves.

During timed activations, performers transform the store into an immersive cinema, using inventive puppetry, shadow play, and intricate handmade sets to present a darkly funny and often tender story about the enduring effects of single-use plastics. The comedic narrative explores the life behind things, emphasizing how what we value least may become our most lasting cultural legacy.

“MASS MoCA's presentation of *The Plastic Bag Store* marks the experience's first engagement in a museum and its longest run to date,” shared Director Kristy Edmunds. “Beyond the soaring spaces where ideas of scale can stretch out, MASS MoCA, at its core, is about an entrusted relationship with artists where going beyond the fenceline of the familiar is not only possible, it's elemental. It is also crystal clear that MASS MoCA's next 25 years must be grounded in durable

and environmentally resilient systems. The manifestation of *The Plastic Bag Store* on our campus—in addition to its long duration and joy-inducing wit—opens pathways for learning and conversation in our community on reducing our collective environmental impact.”

Frohardt started working on *The Plastic Bag Store* in 2015, inspired after watching someone double-bag groceries that were already bags inside of bags inside of boxes. The idea of a grocery store stocking items crafted from discarded plastic was originally designed as an immersive exhibit with a live puppet show, set to premiere in Times Square on March 18, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift to film, allowing Frohardt and her collaborators to capture the essence of the puppetry in a unique way.

In advance of the May opening, *Cardboard Cinema: Robin Frohardt's Handmade Worlds* is now on view in MASS MoCA's Kidspace. This companion project to *The Plastic Bag Store* is an installation of handmade cardboard sets and puppets accompanied by Robin Frohardt's animated short films. Kidspace is open during regular museum hours and admission is always free.

“Artists like Robin have an artistic practice of responding to what's happening in the world around them by designing familiar objects that have the power to draw audiences of all ages in, and inspire them to take action in their own lives and communities,” said Lisa Dent, MASS MoCA's Director of Public Programs.

Together, *The Plastic Bag Store* and its Kidspace counterpart offer MASS MoCA visitors of all ages a rare blend of laughter and learning.

About the Artist

Robin Frohardt, an acclaimed theater and film director based in Brooklyn, employs a narrative-driven approach in her work. Utilizing puppetry, sculpture, and film, she transforms everyday materials, often trash, to construct intricately detailed worlds that make magic of the mundane and highlight the trivialities of daily life. Frohardt's theatrical work has earned her a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Creative Capital Award, and multiple Jim Henson Foundation Grants. Notably, her play *The Pigeoning* debuted in 2013 and continues to be performed worldwide. Her follow-up project, *The Plastic Bag Store*, premiered in Times Square in 2020 and has since toured to Los Angeles, Chicago, Adelaide, and Austin. Additionally, Frohardt's films have been official selections at The Telluride Film Festival, Aspen Shortsfest, The One Earth Film Festival, and BAM.

Key collaborators: Freddi Price (composer); Tyler Gunther (illustration, props); Admiral Grey (puppetry ensemble, props); Andy Manjuck, Rowan Magee, Nick Lehane, and Emma Wiseman (puppetry ensemble); Chad Raines (sound design); and Robert Kolodny (director of photography, filmed segments). Detailed biographies can be found at www.theplasticbagstore.com.

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 collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace art in all forms. For more information visit massmoca.org or follow on Instagram at [@massmoca](https://www.instagram.com/massmoca).

About Pomegranate Arts

The Plastic Bag Store is produced by Pomegranate Arts. Since 1998, Pomegranate Arts has worked in close collaboration with a small group of contemporary artists and arts institutions to bring bold and ambitious artistic ideas to fruition. Creative and executive producers Linda Brumbach and Alisa E. Regas, along with their committed team at Pomegranate Arts, have produced the Olivier Award-winning revival of *Einstein on the Beach*; Taylor Mac's epic *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, *Holiday Sauce*, and *Bark of Millions*, co-created with Matt Ray; *Available Light* by John Adams, Lucinda Childs, and Frank Gehry; Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch's *Shockheaded Peter*; and the Drama Desk Award-winning production of *Charlie Victor Romeo*. In recent years, Pomegranate has expanded into non-performative mediums, including the feature documentary film *Taylor Mac's 24-Decade History of Popular Music* (HBO Original Doc), the film short *Taylor Mac: Whitman in the Woods* (ALL ARTS), and museum installations for Machine Dazzle. Pomegranate Arts is proud to support North American touring for Batsheva Dance Company and Sankai Juku. www.pomegranatearts.com

About Williamstown Theatre Festival

For seven decades, the Tony Award-recognized Williamstown Theatre Festival has brought emerging and professional theater artists together in the Berkshires to create a thrilling summer festival of diverse, world premiere plays and musicals, bold new revivals, and a rich array of accompanying cultural events. Artists are drawn to Williamstown Theatre Festival to make great theater in an environment conducive to artistic risk-taking. Matthew Broderick, Audra McDonald, Dominique Morisseau, Mary-Louise Parker, Susan Stroman, Uma Thurman, and Blair Underwood are just a few of the luminous theater artists who have worked at the Festival. Many others, including Sterling K. Brown, Ty Burrell, Charlie Day, Paul Giamatti, Kathryn Hahn, Allison Janney, Brie Larson, Chris Pine, and George C. Wolfe began their careers at the Festival. Productions and artists shaped at the Festival fill theaters in New York City and around the world. Recently, Williamstown Theatre Festival was represented on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regionally by *The Sound Inside*, *Grand Horizons*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *The Visit*, *Fool for Love*,

The Elephant Man, *Seared*, *Selling Kabul*, *Unknown Soldier*, the 2018 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Cost of Living*, and *Lempicka*, which will make its Broadway debut in March. www.wtfestival.org

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The Plastic Bag Store film segments were commissioned by the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA with additional support by the Adelaide Festival.

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