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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Des Moines Art Center launches new pilot program with By Degrees Foundation**

### **DES MOINES, IA (March 2022)**

With support from the Principal® Foundation, the Des Moines Art Center has partnered with the By Degrees Foundation to launch a new pilot program in participating Des Moines schools.

The “My Voice” pilot program is an exploration that invites youth to gather, question, and experience the ways that museums and art can serve as tools for creative and critical thinking, self-reflection, mindfulness, and shared human connection. Twelve students from participating schools—Findley Elementary School, Harding Middle School, and North High School—will be supported by the Des Moines Art Center and the By Degrees Foundation in creating an art piece inspired by work from the Art Center’s permanent collection using a medium of their choice.

Heather Isaacson, Director of Programs at the By Degrees Foundation, has already witnessed the potential impact of the program. “The My Voice project has given these young artists an opportunity to explore their own perspectives in the presence of rich art around them and then develop their own artwork to gift the world. There were audible gasps as we soaked in time at the Art Center and one of the students saw a piece by an artist they love. Their eyes shone with curiosity when a piece began to unfold for them. They held their heads higher, and with a sense of inner pride, when a peer appreciated how differently they interpreted the same painting. This project has already been a true joy to witness, a work of art itself, and we haven’t even started the best part yet! I can hardly wait to love what these students create,” Isaacson said.

In addition to facilitating student projects, the Art Center will create four separate video “toolboxes” for educators, parents, and students. Videos will cover topics such as what to expect when visiting a museum, how to prepare students or parents with small children for a visit, and how to invite curiosity into the museum experience. The first video, “A Place for Curiosity,” is currently available to [view online](#). Three additional videos will be produced later this year.

The culmination of the pilot program will be celebrated with a reception hosted by the Art Center for the students, their family and friends, schoolmates, and school administrators and teachers. Student artwork will then be on display at both the Art Center and the students’ respective schools for the remainder of the school year. A reproduction of the work from the Art Center’s permanent collection that inspired the student’s art will also be displayed at the students’ schools.

John and Mary Pappajohn Director Jeff Fleming states that the project, “aligns with the Art Center’s goals to provide additional access points and inspire new audiences to explore the museum with confidence.”

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The “My Voice” pilot program and partnership with By Degrees Foundation has been made possible by a generous grant from the Principal® Foundation. “Arts education is essential for building innovative, culturally aware, bold thinkers who will be our nation’s future leaders. Principal® Foundation is thrilled to support the ‘My Voice’ pilot which simultaneously promotes learning, personal growth, inclusion, and access through an engaging and fun program that I trust will continue to shape these students long after the school year ends,” said Jo Christine Miles, Director, Principal® Foundation.

For further information, please contact Director of External Affairs Amy Day at 515.612.0775 or [aday@desmoinesartcenter.org](mailto:aday@desmoinesartcenter.org).

#### About the Des Moines Art Center + John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park

Recognized by international art critics as a world-class museum in the heart of the Midwest, the Des Moines Art Center, an AAM-accredited institution, has amassed an important collection of art from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, with a major emphasis on contemporary art. Focused on quality and global in scope, it includes major works by Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edward Hopper, Georgia O’Keeffe, Francis Bacon, Andy Goldsworthy, Henri Matisse, Wangechi Mutu, Ai Wei Wei and Kara Walker, among hundreds of others. The collection is housed in three major buildings, each designed by a renowned architect—Eliel Saarinen, I. M. Pei and Richard Meier. With the exception of select special events, admission to the museum is free.

In September 2009, the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park opened in Des Moines’ Western Gateway Park. Philanthropists John and Mary Pappajohn provided funding for and donated 31 sculptures by internationally acclaimed contemporary artists to the Des Moines Art Center. The collection of sculptures by such artists as Martin Puryear, Louise Bourgeois, Deborah Butterfield, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Olafur Eliasson, Keith Haring, Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Yayoi Kusama, Jaume Plensa, Richard Serra and Joel Shapiro is the most significant donation of artwork to the Art Center in a single gift in the museum’s history. The Pappajohn Sculpture Park is a collaboration of the Pappajohns, the City of Des Moines, the Des Moines Art Center and numerous corporate and private donors.

#### About Principal® Foundation

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#### About By Degrees Foundation

By Degrees partners with whole schools to increase high school graduation and postsecondary readiness rates on Des Moines’ northside. The work begins in kindergarten and follows students through high school graduation, ensuring they’re immersed in an expansive culture of postsecondary education, career exploration and future-focused planning throughout their K-12 experience. By Degrees builds intentional partnerships with schools, community organizations, businesses and postsecondary institutions to uplift students, families and whole neighborhoods.