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Des Moines Art Center Announces Dr. Kelly Baum as New John and Mary Pappajohn Director

DES MOINES, IA (February 2023) – The Des Moines Art Center Board of Trustees has announced Dr. Kelly Baum as the museum's next John and Mary Pappajohn Director. In this role, Dr. Baum will lead the Art Center in furthering its mission to provide opportunities for transformational art experiences through its collections, exhibitions, and educational programming. Dr. Baum comes to Des Moines from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where she has served in multiple roles since 2015, most recently as the Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Curator of Contemporary Art.

"As the Art Center celebrates its 75th anniversary year and the remarkable tenure of retiring director Jeff Fleming, the trustees and staff are excited to partner with Dr. Kelly Baum as we look forward to the next 75 years," shared Board of Trustees president Dr. Darren Jirsa. "Kelly brings an impressive wealth of knowledge and experience well-suited to our mission and certain to advance our outstanding collections and programs and enhance our engagement with the community."

With a focus on art, education, and scholarship, Dr. Baum has worked as a curator of modern and contemporary art for 23 years, holding positions at four civic and university art museums: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met), Princeton University of Art Museum, the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. Dr. Baum holds a Ph.D. in Art History and an M.A. in Art History, both from the University of Delaware. She was a Class of 2018 Fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership.

Over the course of her career, Baum has curated or co-curated almost thirty exhibitions - twelve of them for The Met, including the museum's first commission for its historic façade, which featured Wangechi Mutu; the well-received retrospective "Alice Neel: People Come First;" and a major reassessment of postwar art, "Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950-1980." She has long embraced her role as an educator, helping pave the way for the next generation of curators and art historians through mentorship and teaching.

Dr. Baum's experience includes leading new initiatives and strategic planning, as evidenced by the instrumental role she played in conceptualizing a new wing for modern and contemporary art at The Met and in building and diversifying the collections at both The Met and the Princeton University Art Museum, greatly expanding their representation of women artists and artists of color.

"The Des Moines Art Center is an exceptional place. A museum that is also an art school and a sculpture park, it marries the study, preservation, and making of art with a strong commitment to the peoples and artists of Iowa. It is a public institution in the best sense of the word, a place of connection, exchange, and shared learning," said Dr. Baum. "I'm thrilled to lead the Des Moines Art Center into the future, working with its staff to grow its extraordinary collection, to care for its historic campus, to bring its resources to the

lives of ever more communities, to forge meaningful collaborations with local and national partners, and to magnify its impact in the city and beyond.”

A search committee comprised of Des Moines Art Center Board of Trustee members and one Honorary Trustee conducted a rigorous, nationwide search in order to recruit the very best talent to fill this role. The search committee employed the professional assistance of Koya Partners, an executive search firm that specializes in serving mission-driven clients. “We considered many talented individuals but ultimately chose Dr. Kelly Baum based on her deep knowledge and experience in the field of modern and contemporary art and her commitment to diversity, equity, transparency, and integrity which align directly with the values that guide the Art Center,” said Amy M. Anderson, Board of Trustees member and chair of the search committee. Additional members of the search committee include Board members Darren Jirsa, Rick Ballinger, Pamela Bass-Bookey, Mary Chapman, Mary Kelly, and Renee Montz.

Dr. Baum will assume the role of director in May 2023 following the retirement of Jeff Fleming who has served the Art Center for 25 years. Fleming leaves a lasting legacy of service to the community and a steadfast dedication to increasing diversity and representation within the collections. During his tenure, Fleming oversaw the acquisition of approximately 2,000 works of art, the 2009 addition of the 4.4 acre John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park, and a successful capital campaign that will exceed its financial goals in 2023.

For additional information, contact Director of External Affairs Amy Day at 515.271.0344 or 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 19th 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. Apart from 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.

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Newly appointed as the Des Moines Art Center's John and Mary Pappajohn Director, Dr. Kelly Baum currently serves as Curator of Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Photo: Aron Johnston

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