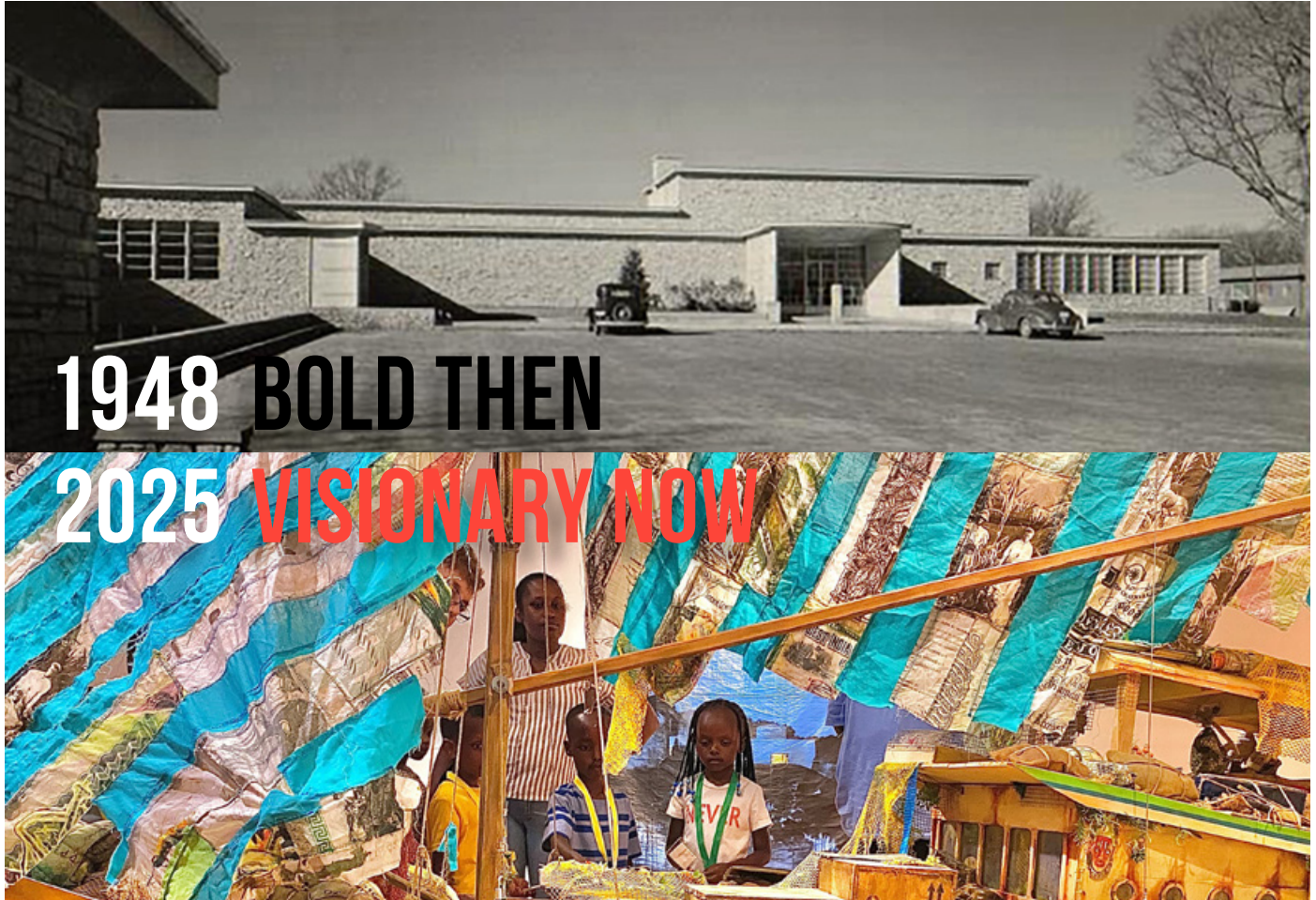


DES MOINES ART CENTER

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2025 TO 2029

Executive Summary



INTRODUCTION

Over the next five years, the Des Moines Art Center will expand upon the bold, visionary spirit that led to the institution's establishment in 1948, when a group of dedicated Iowa citizens built the state's first stand-alone, independent art museum and affiliated art school, which they chose to situate within a public park four miles from the Iowa State Capitol. That same spirit of courage, innovation, and entrepreneurship led to the commissioning of three distinctive buildings in 1948, 1969, and 1985 and, in 2009, the establishment of the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park, which now anchors a revitalized downtown neighborhood known as Western Gateway Park.

From the very beginning, the Art Center imagined itself as a resolutely modern institution for the modern age. Its horizon line was the present, not just the past, and with that in mind, it commissioned unique, avant-garde architecture for its campus, collaborating with experimental architects Eliel Saarinen, I. M. Pei, and Richard Meier. After collecting art from many times and places for roughly 20 years, it pivoted under the visionary leadership of James Demetrian in 1969, positioning itself as an advocate for the most ground-breaking art of the day. Today, we continue to focus on acquiring and exhibiting art from the last few

decades, while building and stewarding a group of objects representing hundreds of years of human creativity.

In embracing contemporary art as it did in 1969, the Art Center also signaled its willingness to engage with contemporary social, cultural, political, and environmental issues, allowing it to serve as a public forum for democratic debate — a tradition we continue to foster today. Historically, the Art Center has distinguished itself in other ways, too, embedding an art school in the museum, one of the few in the country, and instituting its pioneering Community Access Program 25 years ago. Perhaps most importantly, the Art Center charges no entrance fees. Free admission is the ethical heart of our institution, and we will work tirelessly to protect this fundamental aspect of our identity.

If this is our history, it is our future as well. We commit to proceeding over the next five years with rigor, creativity, courage, and distinction, addressing challenges inside and outside the institution and holding ourselves to the highest ethical standards. We will institute best practices at every level of the organization and expand access to our galleries, exhibitions, collections, tours, public programs, and our school for generations to come. We will also embed the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in all we do, holding ourselves accountable.

We are proud to be the only art museum in the capital city of Iowa and one of the few art museums in the state. The Art Center is unique and exceptional. We do things few other cultural organizations in the state do, answering needs that would not otherwise be met and providing opportunities that would otherwise be unfulfilled.

The Art Center is entering a pivotal moment of change. In 2023, we celebrated our 75th anniversary. Now, as we enter the last quarter of our first 100 years of existence, we look forward with anticipation to our centennial in 2048.

What we achieve over the next five years, with the guidance of this strategic plan, will set the stage for the institution's long-term sustainability and success. We acknowledge that the Art Center is a work in progress. We have much to learn, and there are considerable changes ahead of us. At the same time, we recognize the immense promise in this institution, and we are excited to build on the excellent foundations laid by previous staff, directors, and trustees. We move proudly into the next decades, as mindful of our past as we are thrilled at our future.

Dr. Kelly Baum
JOHN AND MARY PAPPAJOHN DIRECTOR



OUR FUTURE FOCUS

OUR PURPOSE | OUR WHY

The Des Moines Art Center catalyzes meaningful encounters with art and people to build creative, empathetic communities.

OUR MISSION | WHAT WE DO

The Des Moines Art Center stewards an exceptional collection of art and architecture, stimulates profound conversations about art, ideas, and society, and inspires the creativity of new generations of artists.

OUR VISION | OUR ASPIRATION

The Des Moines Art Center aspires to serve as a public forum where artists, visitors, and staff exchange ideas about art, explore the transformative potential of human creativity, and address contemporary issues with the goal of bridging both distances and differences.

OUR VALUES | HOW WE WORK

The Des Moines Art Center operates according to the highest ethical standards. We are accountable to uphold the values of:

- › Equity
- › Respect
- › Integrity
- › Continuous reflection
- › Collaboration

These guide our relationships with one another and with our community.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1: Be a Welcoming Home for All

PRIORITY 2: Bring the World to Iowa, and Iowa to the World

PRIORITY 3: Grow Our Revenue Streams Sustainably

PRIORITY 4: Champion Caretaking and Stewardship

PRIORITY 1

Be a Welcoming Home for All

Whether one is a learner, artist, maker, dreamer, or thinker, whether one seeks awe, comfort, or social engagement, we want the Des Moines Art Center to be a place for everyone.

In the next five years, we seek to close the gap between our attendance and the population of the Greater Des Moines region, increasing overall visitorship, attracting more guests to the main campus at 4700 Grand Avenue, drawing more visitors from the cities and suburbs around Des Moines, and hosting a more diverse cross-section of the state's population. To this end, we will prioritize the creation of a welcoming and accessible environment with multiple points of programmatic entry.

The Art Center's relationship with our visitors, students, artists, donors, government, and corporate partners is one of profound respect and reciprocity. We define our community broadly: it includes residents of the metro area and visitors from across the country and around the world. Every person is a potential guest, and we aim to receive each of them with graciousness and hospitality, a word whose long history derives from the Greek philosophy of *xenia*, meaning "guest-friendship," a type of generosity extended especially to strangers or, as we consider them, "new friends."

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Enhancing hospitality and accessibility through improved wayfinding, customer service training, and the activation of outdoor spaces.
- › Expanding data collection methods and refining communication strategies to better reach, engage, and understand a broad pool of new and existing visitors.
- › Building stronger, more durable relationships with visitors, members, and donors in the galleries and online.
- › Identifying ways to extend and deepen the average length of a visit by providing guests with more opportunities for rest, relaxation, sustenance, and creative engagement.
- › Positioning the Pappajohn Sculpture Park as the counterpart to the main campus in Greenwood Park and leveraging it as a gateway to the galleries and studios indoors.
- › Developing bold, robust exhibitions that foreground our exceptional collections of both historic and contemporary art.



PRIORITY 2

Bring the World to Iowa, and Iowa to the World

The Des Moines Art Center belongs to a dynamic cultural, social, and economic ecosystem that extends throughout the city, and into the wider world. As a civic institution, we embrace our responsibility to represent local, national, and global forms of creativity, highlighting the accomplishments of our immediate community while introducing less familiar perspectives from outside the state. In so doing, we uphold the value of cosmopolitanism, defined by scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah as "the simple idea that in the human community, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, of association...between people from different ways of life." To more effectively bridge both differences and distances, we will strategically partner with a diverse coalition of artists, thinkers, and organizations to realize vibrant, inclusive exhibitions and programs over the next five years. Working across institutional boundaries will serve to raise our profile as well, cementing broad recognition for, and participation in, our work.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Participating actively in civic society.
- › Creating space for robust dialogue and exchange on matters of particular relevance and urgency to our diverse communities.
- › Expanding and diversifying our partners, from artists and museums to schools and institutions of higher learning, both inside and outside the state.
- › Pursuing equitable and respectful collaborations.
- › Balancing ambition and fiscal responsibility by prioritizing opportunities with the greatest impact, strategic relevance, and mission alignment.



PRIORITY 3

Grow Our Revenue Streams Sustainably

As a responsible steward of its finances, the Des Moines Art Center has long matched its ambitions to its resources. However, in order to meet the ever-expanding needs of our community, to ensure greater access to our programs, to continue educating future generations of visitors, to adequately care for our collections and facilities, and, importantly, to preserve our free admission model, we will be required to expand contributed and earned revenue alike.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Deepening our relationship to existing patrons while building a diverse, geographically broad pool of new donors, both individuals and foundations.
- › Connecting the philanthropic interests of donors to our capital, operational, educational, and programmatic priorities.
- › Utilizing story-telling and clear messaging to convey the impact of philanthropic giving on both the Art Center and its communities.
- › Refining the structure and benefits of our membership program.
- › Expanding our planned giving program.
- › Growing our endowment to protect the institution in the long term.
- › Refining our offerings and expanding our schedules in our art school, balancing sustainability with affordability and accessibility.
- › Enhancing our rental, retail, and food and beverage business models to increase net revenue by pursuing operational efficiencies and instituting a culture of entrepreneurial thinking.



PRIORITY 4

Champion Caretaking and Stewardship

The Des Moines Art Center is a custodian not just of art but of architecture and people as well. Over the next five years, we will embrace an ethic of caretaking and stewardship, making strategic investments in our collections, institutional archive, and architecture as well as our visitors and team members.

Team

When our staff thrives, so too does the Des Moines Art Center. We aim to foster an environment in which every team member participates in the life of the institution, contributes their best effort, and performs to consistently high standards, accessing pathways to professional growth in the process. The institution's success also depends on an inclusive, productive organizational culture that prioritizes mutual respect, support, trust, recognition, engagement, belonging, and transparency. Ultimately, we will create at the Des Moines Art Center a microcosm of the world in which we want to live and the professional setting in which we want to work.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Instituting a culture of continuous learning, mentorship, professional development, and accountability among the staff.
- › Investing in training for managers so they are positioned to offer robust guidance and coaching.
- › Positioning the senior leadership team to effectively model and operationalize its overarching values.
- › Conducting regular surveys to benchmark and accelerate the institution's progress improving organizational culture and advancing the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- › Evaluating and enhancing personnel-related policies, practices, and procedures to ensure they are clear, transparent, fair, and equitable.
- › Developing and implementing inclusive recruiting, onboarding, and training practices that attract, engage, and retain a diverse workforce.



Guests

Over the next five years, we will turn our attention to universal accessibility. In so doing, we will purposefully strive to make all aspects of our institution, from facilities and policies to galleries, programs, classes, website, educational materials and more, as accessible and welcoming to as broad a range of people as possible.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Enhancing the visitor experience from the first point of contact, whether online, in the parking lot, or at the entrance, to ensure all guests feel properly informed and welcomed.
- › Implementing ongoing visitor experience training for all team members and volunteers, considering a broad spectrum of guests with different needs, interests, and requirements.
- › Conducting a comprehensive third-party accessibility audit, addressing accessibility gaps as appropriate.
- › Designing and implementing opportunities for learning, engagement, and creativity that are accessible to guests of varying abilities and needs in the galleries, studios, and sculpture park.

Collections and Archives

The Des Moines Art Center will continue to refine our practices for the care, preservation, and long-term management of both our art collections and our institutional archives.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Investing in collections-based scholarship, researching the art we hold in trust and sharing it widely with the public, in both printed and digital platforms.
- › Organizing and digitizing our irreplaceable paper, film, and photographic records, which narrate the institution's history.

Buildings, Grounds, and Operations

The Des Moines Art Center is housed in buildings of great historical and architectural importance. Two of the three buildings, those by Eliel Saarinen and I. M. Pei, sit on the National Register of Historic Places. Two of the three architects, I. M. Pei and Richard Meier, won the esteemed Pritzker Prize. Together these buildings form a unique, unforgettable campus found nowhere else in the world, a thrilling complement to the bold art on display. Importantly, they also serve as homes to our team, our guests, and our collections. To properly care for the latter, we must also care for the former, pivoting from a maintenance to a preservation mindset. As we make critical capital improvements, we will keep sustainability, efficiency, durability, and climate resilience top of mind, working to reduce our carbon footprint and protect our campus from increasingly unpredictable and destructive weather cycles.

WE COMMIT TO:

- › Creating and systematically implementing our first 10-year, laddered historic preservation plan.
- › Pursuing and instituting opportunities to “green” our campus, operations, and exhibitions.