

## **SFMOMA APPOINTS CHRISTOPHER BEDFORD AS ITS NEW DIRECTOR, MARKING REIMAGINED VISION FOR THE MUSEUM AND ITS COMMUNITY**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (February 9, 2022) — The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) has appointed Christopher Bedford to lead the museum as its new Helen and Charles Schwab Director. Transitioning from Neal Benezra who has been Director since 2002, Bedford will start in June, joining SFMOMA from his current position as Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA), which he has held since August 2016. Presented to SFMOMA’s Board of Trustees as a unanimous choice by the museum’s search committee following a recruitment process exacting in scope and breadth, Bedford has been selected to create change, realize SFMOMA’s values, further the museum’s ability to serve both its local Bay Area community and the international art world and lead the museum towards a successful, purposeful and equitable future.

The search for a new director has been an almost year-long process, led by a search committee of nine trustees with a range of lived and professional experiences, which solicited input from over 300 individuals including staff, board, civic leaders, community members, peer directors and artists. This consultation directly informed the job description used to attract and screen a major pool of candidates from around the world.

Bedford meets and exceeds the job description criteria, demonstrating a prodigious track record in the following areas: rigorous curatorial scholarship that is all the more distinguished for its work in expanding conventional art histories; a singular commitment to and progressive thought leadership in realizing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across the breadth of an institution’s policy as well as its program; bold, energetic and inspiring leadership and capability to implement systemic change; and strong ability to articulate a clear and engaging vision for a sustainable future.

The search committee comments, “We have found in Chris a brave, empathic, inclusive and passionate leader; he is at a point in his career that combines impressive achievements with an open mindset and the ability to listen, learn and evolve with and for our community. He prioritizes collaboration, dialogue and engagement across leadership, staff and audiences — values and skills that are exactly what we were looking for. We are thrilled to welcome him to the Bay Area and to SFMOMA, and we are eager to work with him in support of an exciting future for the museum.”

### **Commitment to Artistic Excellence**

The search was uncompromising in its duty to bring to SFMOMA a talent that can deliver art and programs across the institution at the very highest level. Bedford has a record of exhibition making and collection building that is deeply rooted in an intellectual authority, artistic scholarship and commitment to an inclusive art historical canon. He has curated, led and collaborated on major international exhibitions, from Mark Bradford’s presentation for the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017 to SFMOMA’s and the BMA’s widely

praised Joan Mitchell retrospective, co-curated between Katy Siegel from the BMA and Sarah Roberts, Andrew W. Mellon Curator and Head of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA.

Bedford has realized globally significant spaces for scholarship, such as the Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies: a permanent resource and research center at the BMA that activates and amplifies study of its unparalleled holdings of Matisse by providing fellowships and other programs, fuelling a more diverse pipeline of museum professionals for the future. Embedding a museum in its community is also a key and integrated part of Bedford's work, and an essential component of the SFMOMA directorship. Mickalene Thomas's commission for the BMA, for example, has transformed the museum's two-story East Lobby into a living room for the city of Baltimore, filled with a curated presentation of works by artists with ties to the city, while a partnership initiated with Mark Bradford between the BMA and Greenmount West Community Center has provided opportunities to engage with art and develop social and economic growth skills for under-supported individuals.

"Chris is a visionary in the art world, an innovative leader who has unapologetically developed a clear mission to bring forth radical change to every institution he has led," shared Mickalene Thomas. "I am thrilled to see Chris embark on his new venture as Director of SFMOMA and could not think of a better leader for such an important institution and collection. In my own experience working with Chris, I have found his commitment to artists, his intellectual rigor, and his professionalism unparalleled in the art world. His call for institutional and programmatic change and advocacy for artists is a model that should be emulated by all museum leadership. I truly believe that when museums are able to support artists and offer a space to share the full complexity of their practice, they can become a space of genuine reciprocity between artist and audience, a critical cultural leader in society."

### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

The past two years have been an important catalyst for SFMOMA in evaluating its past, assessing missteps and planning for a future that centers and prioritizes diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). While there is much work still to be done in the museum's ongoing DEI journey, the past year has seen a critical step forward with the establishment of the museum's DEI Core Team, and the widespread staff and board effort to generate its forthcoming DEI Strategic Plan. For more than a decade, DEI has been at the center of Bedford's work: he has made evident a natural synergy between policy and program, ensuring that diversity, equity and inclusion is implemented across all endeavors, and driving systemic change across a museum's culture and output. This determination to lead with values is fundamental to SFMOMA's future.

Expanding the art historical canon is a life-long academic and professional pursuit for Bedford. The list of significant institutional acquisitions made under his leadership of work by artists of color, women artists and artists who identify as LGBTQ+ is vast. Bedford has written into the DNA of new programs provisions for study scholarships and fellowships aimed at applicants from diverse backgrounds and, as part of a strategy to increase and diversify the museum's audience, has ensured fundraising to extend public open hours at the BMA, recognizing the realities of working individuals and families. Bedford has also energetically brought attention to and developed strategies that have begun to tackle pay inequity and bolster dignity of work for museum staff. Funding was successfully secured to increase the base wage of all hourly workers at the BMA, and a forthcoming exhibition at the BMA titled *Guarding the Art* will see the museum's security staff selecting works for the presentation in collaboration with renowned art historian and curator Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, who has been invited to support staff with mentorship and professional development.

### **Leadership, Innovation and Systemic Change**

The Bay Area community is defined by its leadership in transformational innovation. The search committee sought a candidate with strong leadership skills, clear vision and an ability to generate change. These qualities will be essential to lead SFMOMA towards an ambitious future. Innovative and values-driven initiatives achieved by Bedford in close working dialogue with colleagues and partners have included a commitment to purchase and exhibit work only by women artists for the entirety of 2020 as a way to highlight long-term goals to increase equity for women artists, and the opening of BMA Lexington Market — a branch location of the museum that brings the museum directly into a busy and historic market in Baltimore, thereby enabling the BMA to increase access to its programs and meet the community where it already convenes.

### **Vision for a Sustainable Future**

Bedford's ability to articulate a clear and compelling vision points towards a director who will work with existing programs and teams to develop truly effective models of sustainability for SFMOMA. The clarity of message in the BMA's *Endowment for the Future* plan to enact structural change within the institution and to increase community access to exhibitions and programs has secured the BMA major philanthropic gifts. These are vital resources for the future ambitions of the museum.

On his appointment, Bedford says, "I want to thank the search committee for a thoughtful and engaging interview process, which captured a vision for SFMOMA that is grounded in commitments to equity and artistic scholarship. These values have been core to my work throughout my career, and I am very much looking forward to collaborating with SFMOMA leadership and staff to further define and develop the museum's mission, priorities and program. This work will by necessity require much listening and learning on my part, and I am excited to begin the process when I arrive in San Francisco in June."

Bedford's appointment represents a new chapter for SFMOMA: a moment to be bold, re-think old practices and fully realize the great potential the museum offers. SFMOMA welcomes Chris and looks forward to this new era for the museum and its community.

### **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**

151 Third Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art in the United States and a thriving cultural center for the Bay Area. Our remarkable collection of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design and media arts is housed in an LEED Gold-certified building designed by the global architects Snøhetta and Mario Botta. In addition to our seven gallery floors, SFMOMA offers 45,000 square feet of free, art-filled public space open to all.

Visit [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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### **Media Contact**

Clara Hatcher Baruth, [chatcher@sfmoma.org](mailto:chatcher@sfmoma.org), 415.357.4177