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MCA DIRECTOR ROBERT FITZPATRICK ANNOUNCES PLANS TO STEP DOWN IN 2008



Robert Fitzpatrick, Pritzker Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago, has announced his plans to step down from the MCA in 2008, after ten years of exceptional leadership. Fitzpatrick, the longest serving director in the MCA's 40-year history, says, "After ten years -- a quarter of the life of the institution -- the time is right to make a change. The museum is thriving artistically and financially, with a distinguished collection; a clear international profile; gifted curators; and a generous and very supportive group of trustees. Change, particularly in a contemporary museum, is vital and healthy."

Fitzpatrick became the sixth director of the MCA in 1998, two years after the opening of the new building. In October, the MCA celebrates its 40th anniversary, presenting a trilogy of collection exhibitions that show how the MCA has grown into a leader in and incubator of artistic innovation. As the MCA enjoys a time of unprecedented energy and vision, Fitzpatrick, who is 66, remarks, "We have completed our strategic planning for the museum's fifth decade, and I want to give the trustees ample time to do a search so that there is no loss of momentum or focus."

"I believe in commitments of intensity, not of duration," Fitzpatrick adds, "and it is time for a new challenge."

Helen Zell, Chair of the MCA Board of Trustees, says, "It is with an extraordinary sense of gratitude that we plan for the departure of Robert Fitzpatrick after a decade of devoted leadership to the MCA. From the start, Bob fully embraced the idea that art is about breaking ground, and breaking the rules."

Zell continues, "Bob is a passionate and charismatic leader who met head-on the diverse challenges of a contemporary art museum -- he articulated a vision, developed a new mission and strategy, and then led a supportive team to make that vision a reality. He is a director who is able to achieve balance: of financial stability with creative risks; business acumen while pushing boundaries; presenting the cutting edge alongside the iconic.

It has been a privilege to serve on the Board and work with Bob. In the coming months, our search committee will focus on finding a worthy successor who will continue to make the MCA a place to expect the unexpected."

One of the most important goals that Fitzpatrick accomplished during his tenure was to make the MCA financially stronger by increasing fundraising, reducing withdrawals from the endowment, and having the MCA become the tenth member of the Museums in the Park (MIP), a coalition of Chicago museums that receive substantial annual support from the Chicago Park District. He also took the lead in organizing the Three M Project with the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, which set a new precedent for museums by jointly commissioning, exhibiting, and acquiring significant new works of art by emerging contemporary artists.

During the first few months of his tenure, Fitzpatrick made two key curatorial appointments that have had a profound impact on the museum during the last decade. He selected Elizabeth Smith as the James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs, and Francesco Bonami as Manilow Senior Curator at Large. Fitzpatrick encouraged his curatorial team to think internationally; originate more exhibitions; collaborate with other institutions; and to initiate shows that more broadly define the arts. He also emphasized architecture and design as part of the museum's mission. The team responded by producing highly acclaimed exhibitions such as *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective*, *William Kentridge*, *John Currin*, and *Roy Lichtenstein: Interiors*, along with group exhibitions, *Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture* and *Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye*.

Other major exhibitions of significance include solo surveys: *Kerry James Marshall: One True Thing, Meditations on Black Aesthetics*; *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture*; *H. C. Westermann*; *Dan Peterman: Plastic Economies*; *Wolfgang Tillmans*; and *Gillian Wearing: Mass Observation*; and thematic group exhibitions: *Unfinished History*; *Age of Influence: Reflections in the Mirror of American Culture*; *Figures in the Field: Figurative Sculpture and Abstract Painting from Chicago Collections*; and *Life Death Love Hate Pleasure Pain*. Many of the exhibitions that the MCA originated traveled to other major museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, and the Barbican Centre in London.

Fitzpatrick has overseen the three most highly attended exhibitions in the MCA's history: *At the End of the Century: 100 Years of Architecture* (1999), *Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective* (2004), and *Andy Warhol/Supernova: Stars, Deaths, and Disasters: 1962-1964* (2006). On several occasions Fitzpatrick took the unusual step of putting the collection in storage and turning over the entire museum to a single exhibition for: *At the End of the*

Century: 100 Years of Architecture and *Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye*. The presentation of the Three M Project's commissioned exhibits by younger internationally acclaimed artists Fiona Tan, Aernout Mik, and Patty Chang, was balanced by a popular ongoing monthly series of exhibitions, *UBS 12 x 12: New Artists/New Work*, that showcase the talents of emerging artists in Chicago, such as Paté Conaway, Rashid Johnson, Clare Rojas, and Angelina Gualdoni.

Fitzpatrick and Smith defined a collecting strategy for the museum that included collecting certain artists in depth; acquiring works that were part of exhibitions; and adding signature works for the museum, such as Jeff Koon's *Rabbit*, Maurizio Cattelan's *Felix*, Thomas Schütte's *Ganz Grosse Geister (Big Spirits XL)*, and Elmgreen and Dragset's *Short Cut*. He also established the museum's first collection endowment. In addition, instead of having selections from the collection on view indefinitely, Fitzpatrick encouraged the development of frequently changing lively thematic exhibitions that allow the public to see the full breadth of the collection.

Other iconic additions to the collection include Jeff Wall's *In front of a nightclub*; David Hammons' *Praying to Safety*; Lee Bontecou's *Untitled*; Kerry James Marshall's *7 am Sunday Morning*; Andreas Gursky's *Chicago Board of Trade II*; Ellen Gallagher's *Pomp-Bang*; Jim Hodges' *The end from where you are*; Sarah Sze's *Proportioned to the Groove*; Takashi Murakami's *Wink Sculpture (pink)* and *Jellyfish Eyes*; and Robert Rauschenberg's *Retroactive II*. In 2002, the museum was given an exceptional collection of 78 important photographs as a gift of Howard and Donna Stone that continued to develop the MCA's significant holdings of photography.

One of the primary priorities for Fitzpatrick has always been the public. He increased monthly free admission days to every Tuesday (currently underwritten by Target), which is also the museum's late night, and maintained a suggested admission price so everyone could have access to the museum. He reinvigorated the plaza by adding large trees, substantial landscaping, and sculptures; welcoming the City's Farmers Market; and adding vibrant program banners. He added glass doors to let more light into the building; replaced the galleries' ugly gray carpeting with sleek terrazzo flooring; installed better lighting, and had the security guards dress in more colorful and casual uniforms.

In his efforts to provide the best museum experience for the public, Fitzpatrick invited Wolfgang Puck to start a restaurant, a concept which has spread to museums throughout the country. In addition to a variety of successful public programs, such as Tuesdays on the Terrace with a jazz series in the sculpture garden, and First Fridays' art openings, visitors can also engage in a variety of performances from avant-garde multimedia productions to cutting edge international dance to traditional theater in the MCA's renowned performance programs run by Peter Taub, Director of Performance Programs.

Fitzpatrick wanted to reach out to all communities, and set a new level of commitment to diversity. Martin Nesbitt, MCA Trustee and Co-Chair of the MCA's Audience Development and Diversity (AD&D) committee says, "Robert Fitzpatrick has made diversity a priority at the MCA -- in the past six years since he formed the AD&D committee there has been a visible commitment to diversity in the exhibitions and programs, as well as the staff and trustees. His dedication to an inclusive environment has made the MCA a leader in presenting artists that reflect the multiple perspectives that constitute our local, national, and international histories."

Fitzpatrick enthusiastically embraced Chicago's greening program, receiving a "Green Museum" certificate from Mayor Daley for the MCA's environmentally-conscious practices. Fitzpatrick's commitment to these issues led to various initiatives including the recent exhibitions, *Massive Change: The Future of Global Design* and *Sustainable Architecture in Chicago*; the impending addition of wind turbines on the roof; and the creation of an active Green Team within the museum.

Fitzpatrick has had a richly diverse career that has been defined by his passion for the arts and a blend of superlative creative, business, and administrative skills. As an internationally recognized leader in arts and culture, he has served as Dean of the School of the Arts of Columbia University in New York; as President and CEO of EuroDisney in Paris; and as President of California Institute of the Arts. He also served as Vice President of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and Director of the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival and later founded and directed the Los Angeles Festival.

He has served as a trustee of the Cunningham Dance Foundation, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, and the American Center Foundation, and as a member of the Tony Awards Nominating Committee. He has also served as a trustee of the American Hospital in Paris, the American Film Institute, Bennington College, the American Cinémathèque, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra Society, the Craft and Folk Art Museum, and the Illinois Arts Alliance.

A native of Toronto, Robert Fitzpatrick received his bachelor and masters degree from Spring Hill College in Alabama following seven years of classical studies with the Jesuits. He pursued doctoral studies in romance languages at Johns Hopkins University as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. He has been married to Sylvie M. Blondet since 1966 and they have three adult children, all involved in the arts, and two grandchildren.

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Photo: Charles Rex Arbogast/AP Images

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (MCA) is a private nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Association of Museums. The MCA is generously supported by its Board of Trustees, individual and corporate members, private and corporate foundations, and government agencies including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. The Chicago Park District generously supports MCA programs. Air transportation is provided by American Airlines, the Official Airline of the Museum of Contemporary Art. The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue, one block east of Michigan Avenue. The museum and sculpture garden are open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday from 10 am to 8 pm. The museum is closed on Monday. Enjoy free admission every Tuesday generously sponsored by Target. Suggested general admission is \$10 for adults and \$6 for students and seniors. Children 12 years of age and under, MCA members, and members of the military are admitted free. Information about MCA exhibitions, programs, and special events is available on the MCA website at www.mcachicago.org or by telephone at 312.280.2660.