

THE BMA ANNOUNCES FIRST NAMED PUBLIC ART COMMISSION FOR A U.S. MUSEUM AND NEW CURATORIAL FELLOWSHIP

*Historic Endowment Gift from Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker Establishes
Biennial Commission to Transform BMA's East Lobby and Improve Diversity in Museum Field*

Mickalene Thomas Selected as Inaugural Artist for Site-Specific Installation

BALTIMORE, MD (November 30, 2018)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) announced today a major new biennial commission made possible by an historic endowment gift from Baltimore philanthropists Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker. As the first named public art commission for a U.S. museum, the Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker Biennial Commission fosters the creation of new works by international contemporary artists, cultivates aspiring curators through a parallel fellowship, and activates the BMA's East Lobby with publicly accessible art. A priority for the selection of both the artist and the curatorial fellow is to strengthen the diversity of the museum. Internationally renowned contemporary artist Mickalene Thomas has been chosen for the inaugural commission, and applications for the first curatorial fellow will open in December.



“Mickalene Thomas’ installation will transform The Baltimore Museum of Art’s East Lobby by employing a generous language of welcome quite different from what is traditionally associated with cultural institutions and also deeply aligned with the museum’s bold new mission,” said Christopher Bedford, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “In addition to transforming its public face, the BMA is committed to creating an internal culture of excellence and equity and developing the next generation of museum leaders drawn from diverse backgrounds. Bob and Rheda’s visionary act of generosity has ensured that the world’s most important contemporary artists will make new, adventurous work for the City of Baltimore, while also providing for a permanent fellowship designed to change the pathway into museum leadership in the 21st century. No gift could carry greater significance for the future of this institution.”

“This transformative initiative embodies the BMA’s commitment to the dual pursuit of artistic excellence and social equity,” added Clair Zamoiski Segal, Chair of the BMA’s Board of Trustees. “We are especially grateful for the support of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker, which allows us to expand our impact in both areas with the creation of this commission.”

Building on the success of recent site-specific installations by artists Adam Pendleton and Tomás Saraceno, the two-story East Lobby was chosen as the location for the Meyerhoff-Becker Biennial Commission, as it is the BMA’s most welcoming and accessible space, connecting several key areas within the museum. In fall 2019, the Biennial Commission will completely transform the East Lobby with a new work by Thomas. Best known for her elaborately constructed and conceptually complex rhinestone-encrusted paintings of African American women, Thomas examines concepts such as power and beauty through a feminist lens, drawing on imagery rooted in art history and pop culture.

“I’m thrilled to be the first recipient to receive this tremendous commission from Mr. Meyerhoff and Ms. Becker for the BMA. This opportunity allows me to set the precedent by representing their values,” said artist Thomas. “My hope is to represent, engage, and bring visibility to Baltimore’s African American community. We will occupy the museum as our home by bringing the diversity that is needed to fill these spaces. I know being the first comes with tremendous responsibility, as does creating a space that’s genuinely welcoming of a diverse community. Collaboration from our institutions along with forward-thinking patrons and directors are necessary to make this a reality. I’d like to thank the BMA along with Christopher Bedford, and most of all the donors, for entrusting me with a part of their legacy.”

The Meyerhoff-Becker Curatorial Fellowship complements the Biennial Commission by providing an opportunity for a rising curator to work directly with the chosen artist and Bedford on the development and implementation of the installation. Fellows will receive direct mentorship from senior museum staff in addition to practical experience working with contemporary artists, along with a \$40,000 stipend. Post-graduate professionals with museum experience are invited to apply for the inaugural year-long residency in Baltimore starting May 2019. Details will be available in December at artbma.org/about/jobs, with applications due January 31, 2019.

Mickalene Thomas

Internationally recognized artist Mickalene Thomas (American, born 1971) makes paintings, collages, photography, video, and installations that examine how female representations in art and culture affect identity, gender, and sense of self. Her work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including The Dayton Art Institute, OH (2018); Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA (2017); Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA (2017); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016); Aspen Art Museum, CO (2016); Aperture Foundation, New York (2016); George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY (2014); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2012–13); Santa Monica Museum of Art (2012); and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2012); Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2011); and La Conservera Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Ceutí, Spain (2009). The New York-based artist received a B.F.A. from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and an M.F.A. from the Yale School of Art. Thomas is represented in the collections of The Baltimore Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. Thomas has also been awarded numerous prizes and grants, including the USA Francie Bishop Good & David Horvitz Fellow (2015); Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2013); Brooklyn Museum Asher B. Durand Award (2012); and the Timerhi Award for Leadership in the Arts (2010).

Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker

Baltimore philanthropists Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker are committed to reshaping the city’s institutions around access and inclusivity in education and art. In addition to the Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker Biennial Commission at the BMA, the couple has supported programs such as the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra’s OrchKids program, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at University of Maryland Baltimore County, the Peabody Institute Diversity Fund at the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, Teach For America-Baltimore, Baltimore School for the Arts, and Thread.

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Founded in 1914, The Baltimore Museum of Art is a major cultural destination recognized for engaging diverse audiences through dynamic exhibitions and innovative educational and community outreach programs. The BMA’s internationally renowned collection of 95,000 objects encompasses more than 1,000 works by Henri Matisse anchored by the famed Cone Collection of modern art, as well as one of the nation’s finest holdings of prints, drawings, and photographs. The galleries showcase an exceptional collection of art from Africa; important works by

established and emerging contemporary artists; outstanding European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts; significant artworks from China; ancient Antioch mosaics; and exquisite textiles from around the world. The 210,000-square-foot museum is also distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of 20th-century sculpture. The BMA is located in Charles Village, three miles north of the Inner Harbor, and is adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University. General admission to the BMA is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

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