

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART APPOINTS DR. JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE AS SPECIAL COUNSEL ON STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



BALTIMORE, MD (April 23, 2020)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) announced today that renowned scholar and arts administrator Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole will serve as the museum’s Special Counsel on Strategic Initiatives. In her role, Dr. Cole will provide guidance to the BMA’s board, director, and senior leadership team as they continue to implement the museum’s long-term strategic vision, which positions social equity and civic engagement as essential aspects of its scholarly and public program and within its internal structures. Dr. Cole will offer her expertise on a pro bono basis for a period of three years.

“Over the last several years, we have made important investments in enhancing the ways in which we represent and serve different individuals and communities. This has included a commitment to sharing the essential contributions of underrepresented artists and to expanding our connections to the people of our city through a range of off- and on-site initiatives. We are deeply honored to have Dr. Cole join us in enacting and furthering our vision to make the BMA a truly civic-minded institution,” said Christopher Bedford, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “As we look to the future, and in particular in this moment of uncertainty, we know that her knowledge and dedication to inclusivity in scholarship and public life will be invaluable as we shape the role of the museum and its relationship to the cultural and social landscape of Baltimore.”

Dr. Cole added, “I very much look forward to working with the board, director, and senior leadership team of The Baltimore Museum of Art, a museum that is committed to diversity and inclusivity among its staff, in its exhibitions, and its public programs.”

As a scholar, educator, and administrator, Dr. Cole has worked to address issues of race, gender, and other systems of inequality. She recently retired from the position of Principal Consultant at Cook Ross—a firm that supports organizations in establishing and expanding inclusivity initiatives. She was also the president of the Association of Art Museum Directors from 2015 to 2016 and recently co-chaired the American Alliance of Museum’s Working Group on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion. Prior to her role at Cook Ross, she served for eight years as the Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. During her tenure as the director, she appointed the first Chief Diversity Officer at a Smithsonian museum. In collaboration with her colleagues, Dr. Cole expanded the museum’s outreach to African immigrant communities in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, opened the first Smithsonian exhibition on the African continent, and launched an initiative to increase the museum’s acquisition and exhibition of works by African women artists.

Throughout her career, Dr. Cole has held leadership roles at a range of universities, including those dedicated to the education of black women. In 1987, she was the first black woman to serve as the president of Spelman College, and she later served as president at Bennett College—the only individual to hold that role at the two historically black colleges for women in the United States. Dr. Cole was also the first African American to serve as the chair of the board of the United Way of America, and the first woman to serve on the board of Coca-Cola Enterprises. She has held seats on the corporate boards of Home Depot, Merck, and NationsBank South. Dr. Cole is currently the Chair of the Board and the President of the National Council of Negro Women, as well as a fellow of the American Anthropological Association, and a member of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Johnnetta Cole received her Ph.D. in anthropology with a specialization in African Studies from Northwestern University. She has authored, co-authored, and edited numerous publications for scholarly and general audiences. Dr. Cole has received 70 honorary degrees and numerous awards, including the Legend in Leadership Award for Higher Education from the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute in 2018, Distinguished Service to Museums Award from the American Alliance of Museums in 2017, and the Alston-Jones International Civil and Human Rights Award from the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in 2013.

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.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The BMA is temporarily closed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Connect with us online at artbma.org and through social media with #ARTBMA • [Stories](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Twitter](#) • [Instagram](#) • [YouTube](#)

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Image: Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole. Photo by Boston Photography.