



Baltimore Museum of Art, Phoenix Art Museum Announce Guarding the Art Partnership with Exhibition Planned for 2024

Phoenix is the first venue of a national roll-out of the exhibition-driven initiative

(December 6, 2022)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) and Phoenix Art Museum (PhxArt) today announced a partnership to develop and implement a new edition of the acclaimed *Guarding the Art* exhibition in Phoenix, which is scheduled to premiere in February 2024.

Guarding the Art is a groundbreaking initiative that invites security officers and gallery attendants to gain deeper knowledge about every facet of exhibition development and create an exhibition of artworks that most resonate with their personal interests. Following the model developed by the BMA after its 2022 exhibition debut, PhxArt staff will work toward their own iteration of *Guarding the Art* over the next year. The forthcoming presentation at PhxArt marks the start of a national roll-out for the exhibition-driven initiative in museums across the United States. This first national iteration of the initiative is sponsored by PNC Bank and the Pearlstone Family Fund.

Guarding the Art was conceived by longtime BMA Trustee Amy Elias to highlight the unique perspectives and reflections of security staff, informed by their many hours in the galleries, their interactions with visitors and their unique interests and experiences. “It was always part of my vision to inspire other museums around the country to bring *Guarding the Art* to their institutions,” said Elias. “Phoenix is the perfect next step as its leadership embraces a similar philosophy to the BMA in its approach to recognizing and celebrating inclusion, diversity and equity.”

The process for creating the exhibition also allowed for professional development and mentorship opportunities for participating security staff as they connected with museum staff across departments as well as with an outside mentor with extensive experience in the field. The exhibition, which challenged traditional museum hierarchies and fostered considerable dialogue about who can and should talk about art, premiered to significant public interest in Baltimore in March 2022. “It was incredible to witness the energy in the galleries while this exhibition was open,” noted Dr. Asma Naeem, Interim Co-Director and Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator. “Privileging new voices among museum staff invigorated our visitors to engage more freely and more confidently with the art. It made the museum more accessible.”

Using resources created by the BMA, PhxArt plans to launch its own *Guarding the Art* initiative, with an announcement of the application process planned for early 2023. With that announcement, PhxArt will invite security officers and gallery attendants, along with other frontline staff from the institution’s visitor services, facilities, retail-services, and event-rentals teams, to apply for the opportunity to collaborate with curatorial, design, education and engagement, conservation and marketing and

communications staff as they select objects from the museum's collection and develop interpretation materials, including a publication. They will also receive additional compensation for their time working on the project. In support of the initiative coming to the Phoenix region, PNC Bank has signed on as presenting sponsor for the exhibition at PhxArt, providing incredible resources for the curatorial work, operations, and staff investment specific to the landmark project, the first of its kind for PhxArt and the Valley community.

"Museums around the country were enthralled by what transpired at the Baltimore Museum of Art with *Guarding the Art*," said Jeremy Mikolajczak, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum. "We look forward to bringing this opportunity to our own staff, who have distinct and dynamic perspectives on the art in our collections and galleries, drawn from their personal experiences as artists, students, art lovers, educators, and frontline team members who engage daily with our visitors. We are grateful to the BMA for their partnership and for allowing us to play a leadership role in expanding this initiative across the country. We also express our gratitude to PNC Bank, whose early sponsorship of the program at PhxArt will have a huge impact on our ability to share this exhibition with our community."

"PNC has a legacy of investing in the arts, and we understand the economic, social and civic impacts of a thriving arts and culture community," said Cathleen Walker, PNC regional president of Phoenix and Northern Arizona. "With *Guarding the Art*, Phoenix Art Museum continues to engage our community through dynamic and innovative exhibitions. PNC is proud to help bring this opportunity to Phoenix."

The expansion of *Guarding the Art* in museums across the country is being funded by the Pearlstone Family Fund. Its support enables the BMA to document the processes used during the project in a written guide that can be referenced by other institutions seeking to launch their own *Guarding the Art* exhibitions. The Pearlstone Family Fund is also funding a project manager at the BMA to provide support to peer institutions as they mount their exhibitions, including during the development of the initiative in Phoenix.

More About Guarding the Art

Guarding the Art transforms the museum experience for both visitors and museum workers. The project was conceived in 2020 by Baltimore Museum of Art Trustee Amy Elias as the result of a conversation with Dr. Asma Naeem, BMA Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator, about ways to engage with the BMA's security guards, who spend more time with the museum's collection than anyone else. Elias' vision for a guard-curated show resulted in an affecting and personal exhibition that was on view from March 27-July 10, 2022. The BMA staff who assumed curatorial roles leaned into their own histories and motivations as they researched art, wrote labels, and participated in all aspects of the exhibition making. They offered visitors a way to feel about the art rather than just a framework for how to think about the art. The project also afforded the guards an opportunity to guide museum conversations. *Guarding the Art* underscores the good that can happen when museums take a step away from their hierarchies and approach work anew.

About Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. artbma.org

About Phoenix Art Museum

Since 1959, Phoenix Art Museum has provided millions of guests with access to world-class art and experiences in an effort to ignite imaginations, create meaningful connections, and serve as a brave space for all people who wish to experience the transformative power of art. Located in Phoenix’s Central Corridor, the Museum is a vibrant destination for the visual arts and the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Each year, more than 300,000 guests engage with critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions and the Museum’s collection of more than 20,000 works of American and Western American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed for visitors of all ages, along with vibrant photography exhibitions made possible through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

About PNC Bank

PNC Bank, National Association, is a member of The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. (NYSE: PNC). PNC is one of the largest diversified financial services institutions in the United States, organized around its customers and communities for strong relationships and local delivery of retail and business banking including a full range of lending products; specialized services for corporations and government entities, including corporate banking, real estate finance and asset-based lending; wealth management and asset management. For information about PNC, visit pnc.com.

About Pearlstone Family Fund

The Pearlstone Family Fund was established in the 1980s by Jack Pearlstone and his son Richard to support the organizations and agencies that strengthen Jewish life in communities throughout the world. The Fund also support arts, culture, and community-based activities in the Baltimore metropolitan region.

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