

KENT LYDECKER TO RETIRE AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG

Chief Curator Jerry N. Smith Named Interim Executive Director

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St. Petersburg, Fla., March 1, 2016—Kent Lydecker, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA), has informed the Museum’s Board of Trustees that he will retire, for health reasons, after six years leading the institution. Jerry N. Smith, Ph.D., Hazel and William Hough Chief Curator, will serve as interim executive director, and the MFA’s Board will form a Search Committee to conduct a national search for a new executive director to lead the institution.

Dr. Lydecker, who is recovering from cardiac surgery, has served as executive director since 2010. He has dramatically improved the Museum’s physical home, strengthened its commitment to presenting its diverse collection, expanded its dynamic exhibition program and forged connections with the region’s cultural community. Dr. Lydecker will provide counsel to Dr. Smith and the Museum during the transition.

“It has been an extraordinary privilege for me to lead the MFA during this important period of its history,” Dr. Lydecker said. “I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with such a talented staff and engaged Board, and I thank them for their support.”

“Kent has led the MFA with vision and distinction, overseeing a successful 50th anniversary celebration and our much-heralded *Monet to Matisse* exhibition,” MFA Board Chair Mark T. Mahaffey said. He noted that the *50 Artworks for 50 Years* campaign, held in conjunction with the anniversary celebration, exceeded its goals and made it possible to add more than 140 new works to the Museum’s collection. “The Board and I thank Kent for his outstanding service and leadership, and we look forward to Kent’s continuing involvement in the MFA community in the years to come,” said Mr. Mahaffey.

The fifth executive director in the MFA’s 50-year history, Dr. Lydecker oversaw the renovation of the Museum’s collection galleries, completed in 2013, and actively accelerated programming and engagement with the local arts community. Under Dr. Lydecker’s leadership, the Museum presented critically acclaimed international, national, and local exhibitions, including *Ancient Egypt—Art and Magic: Treasures from the Fondation Gandur pour l’Art* (2012), *Philip Pearlstein’s People, Places, Things* (2013), and *My Generation: Young Chinese Artists* (2014), a

collaboration with the Tampa Museum of Art that brought works by a number of artists to the U.S. for the first time. Dr. Lydecker's commitment to a diverse schedule of exhibitions is reflected in the Museum's most recently opened exhibitions, *Contemplating Character: Drawings and Oil Sketches from Jacques-Louis David to Lucian Freud* and *The Art of the Classical Guitar* (both on view through May 29).

Under Dr. Lydecker, the Museum developed a robust and experimental schedule of public programs and expanded services for children, families and schools. For instance, in 2014 the MFA established an initiative to bring all sixth-grade classes in Pinellas County public schools to the Museum as part of their social studies curriculum.

"The Board is gratified to have someone of Jerry's caliber to step into the role of interim executive director," Mr. Mahaffey noted. "Jerry and the MFA staff are poised to continue the positive momentum the Museum has achieved in recent years under Kent's leadership." Dr. Smith, who joined the MFA in October 2015 after holding leadership positions at the Phoenix Art Museum for more than a decade, commented, "We have the strong support of our members and community and an exciting calendar of future events and exhibitions."

The MFA continues to mount a wide array of exhibitions, including *Shana Moulton: Journeys Out of the Body* this summer, which will blend interactive video installations and live performance, and *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art*, an exhibition opening this fall with works from the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Mr. Mahaffey said the Board will work with a widely respected recruitment firm to conduct a comprehensive national search for a new permanent executive director. "We recognize that the Museum of Fine Arts is an important cultural asset for St. Petersburg and the entire region," he said. "We will work to ensure that we identify the best candidate to build on our considerable strengths and keep the MFA moving forward."

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

Founded in 1965, the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) is dedicated to this mission: “to engage, educate, and excite the community by collecting, exhibiting, and preserving works of art for the enjoyment of all.” The Museum’s collection numbers approximately 20,000 works, extending from antiquity to the present day and covering a span of 4,500 years. It is the only encyclopedic art collection on Florida’s west coast. Highlights include masterpieces by Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Morisot, Cézanne, Rodin, O’Keeffe, Willem de Kooning; galleries dedicated to ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art; an important collection of Steuben glass; and the most significant photography collection in the Southeast.

The MFA is located at 255 Beach Drive N.E. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. **Admission is only \$5 after 5 p.m. on Thursday.** Regular admission is \$17 for adults, \$15 for those 65 and older, and \$10 for students seven and older, including college students with current I.D. Children under seven and Museum members are admitted free. Groups of 10 or more adults pay only \$12 per person and children \$4 each with prior reservations. The MFA Café is open from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. For more information, please call 727.896.2667 or visit www.mfastpete.org.