

## **KRISTEN SHEPHERD NAMED NEW DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG**

***Innovative leader has blended fine arts and business expertise to build  
community engagement at museums in Los Angeles and New York***

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St. Petersburg, Fla., November 2, 2016 – Kristen Shepherd, an innovative leader in the art world who has expanded community engagement at museums in Los Angeles and New York, has been named the new Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA). She was unanimously approved by the museum’s Board of Trustees after a national search. She will join the museum December 15, succeeding former Director Dr. Kent Lydecker, who retired in March. She is the sixth director in the MFA’s history and its first female director.

Ms. Shepherd brings to her new role the perspective of an art historian combined with strong business acumen. She has served as Associate Vice President, Audience Strategy & Services, for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art since 2013. She led her staff and volunteers to create engagement opportunities for the diverse local audience, increasing revenue from visitor attendance and membership by 19 percent during her tenure.

In her previous position as Director of Membership and Annual Fund at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York from 2008 to 2013, Ms. Shepherd developed and launched the “Create Your Own Membership” program to attract and retain members. The award-winning program was the first of its kind and made it possible to customize benefits to fit a member’s individual interests.

For Ms. Shepherd, who lived in Clearwater, Florida during her high school years and still has family in the area, returning to St. Petersburg to lead the MFA has personal significance.

“This was the first art museum I ever visited, and it has remained a special touchstone for me,” she said. “I’ve always appreciated the diversity of the MFA collection, with its outstanding examples from so many periods of art history. It’s a beautiful, welcoming collection.” She believes that the breadth of the collection is a distinct advantage that presents a wealth of opportunities to engage a broad spectrum of visitors and supporters.

“Within the context of the thriving arts and cultural community in St. Petersburg, the MFA is uniquely positioned to tell stories across the entire history of art,” she said. “I am thrilled to continue the Museum’s tradition of presenting first-rate exhibitions and programs that will inspire and engage our visitors.”

Ms. Shepherd earned both her BA and MA in art history from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., with a focus on Pre-Raphaelite art. She is an expert on the work of Marie Spartali Stillman, and her thesis was a primary source in the recent retrospective

*Poetry in Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman*. Her work is cited in numerous publications on Pre-Raphaelite women artists.

Ms. Shepherd was selected as a Marshall Memorial Fellow by the German Marshall Fund in 2010 and was chosen for the Arts Leadership Institute in New York in 2012. She started her career at Sotheby's auction house in New York. From 1999-2008 her work for Sotheby's included leadership roles in strategic initiatives and special projects involving financial services, budgeting, real estate and construction projects, worldwide marketing ventures, and publications.

The MFA's new director is eager to engage with the region's arts community, including the performing arts, which have been a particular passion. Her mother Judith Mitchell has served as CEO of the Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach for the last 25 years and formerly was Vice President and General Manager of Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater. Ms. Shepherd is also an avid baseball fan and eagerly anticipates following the Tampa Bay Rays as her new hometown team, along with her beloved Los Angeles Dodgers.

"We are thrilled that our search across the country has brought a nationally recognized leader to St. Petersburg who also has roots in our region," said MFA Board Chair Mark T. Mahaffey. "We look forward to the leadership Kristen will bring to the museum and our entire community." Ms. Shepherd was selected after a nationwide search led by Koya Leadership Partners, a national executive search firm dedicated exclusively to serving clients in the nonprofit sector.

Mr. Mahaffey also expressed deep appreciation to Dr. Jerry N. Smith, Hazel and William Hough Chief Curator, who took on the additional responsibilities of interim director following Dr. Lydecker's retirement. He also thanked the trustees who served on the search committee, chaired by Cathy Collins.

"Jerry's talent and vision as Chief Curator is one of the great assets of our institution," he said. "With the combined expertise of Kristen and Jerry, the MFA is fortunate to have a dynamic leadership team that will continue to build on our 51-year history as an important cultural asset for St. Petersburg and the entire region."

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

The MFA, located at 255 Beach Drive N.E., has a world-class collection, with works by Monet, Morisot, Rodin, O'Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, and many other great artists. Also displayed are ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art. Selections from the photography collection, one of the largest and finest in the Southeast, are now on view in a gallery dedicated to the medium.

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-Sunday. For more information, please call 727.896.2667 or visit [mfastpete.org](http://mfastpete.org).