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Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg adds two notable curators

Dr. Bennett is senior curator of early western art; Dr. Thomas is curator of collections and exhibitions

St. Petersburg, Fla. (Feb. 15, 2018) – The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg has added Dr. Michael Bennett as senior curator of early western art and Dr. Stanton Thomas as curator of collections and exhibitions.

“With an encyclopedic collection that spans 5,000 years, the MFA is rich in opportunity for creative galleries and curatorial distinction,” said Kristen A. Shepherd, Executive Director, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. “Michael and Stanton’s expertise will help the MFA continue to enrich visitors’ knowledge of the arts and heighten their experiences with our collections, programs, and exhibitions.”

Drs. Bennett and Thomas previously worked together at the Cleveland Museum of Art, which is internationally renowned for maintaining one of America’s most important museum collections. The Cleveland Museum of Art has been ranked among the country’s top museums in recent years by publications such as Business Insider and USA Today.

Dr. Bennett is one of the foremost experts in ancient art in the country. In his role as senior curator of Early Western art, Dr. Bennett will organize exhibitions and manage the scholarship, cataloguing, and collection strategy for the MFA’s ancient works. The MFA’s collection of ancient Early Western art includes a Cycladic Idol from 2,500 B.C.E., along with many works from Egyptian, Greek, Roman, ancient Near East, the Americas, and Byzantium. He will also lead the Mosaic Project to conserve five ancient Antioch mosaic tiles and return them to public view at the MFA.

“I was inspired by the MFA St. Petersburg’s strong commitment to curatorial specialization, original and innovative scholarship, and to building its comprehensive collection with purpose and dedication. I found the positive and optimistic spirit irresistible,” said Dr. Bennett.

Dr. Bennett brings deep scholarly expertise in ancient art to the Tampa Bay area. His research interests include the arts of the western Greeks, Greek and Roman bronzes, Greek art of the Geometric period, and the classical tradition. He’s worked as the curator of Greek and Roman art at the Cleveland Museum of Art for the past 20 years. Since 1998, he has developed temporary and traveling exhibitions curated from the CMA’s permanent collection. One of the many exhibitions that he co-curated during his tenure at the Cleveland Museum of Art was *Sicily: Art and Invention between Greece and Rome*. Previously, Dr. Bennett served as the curator of classical art at the Tampa Museum of Art. Dr. Bennett received his doctorate in fine arts from Harvard University, and served as Keeper of the Coins (Curator of Ancient Coins) in Harvard’s Department of Ancient Art. He received his bachelor’s degree in art history with a minor in Latin from San Jose State University.

In his role as curator of collections and exhibitions, Dr. Thomas will lead the MFA’s planning for future exhibitions and develop a plan for expanding the MFA’s collection. In addition, he will lead the efforts to catalogue and digitize the MFA’s permanent collection, and collaborate with the curatorial staff to create insightful and thought-provoking exhibitions and experiences for visitors. As a member of the Executive Director’s senior leadership team, Dr. Thomas will manage and direct the activities of the curatorial and registration departments.

"I was drawn to the incredible staff already at the Museum of Fine Arts--it was just great to be able to join that team. I also loved the remarkable breadth and quality of the collection, which offers wonderful opportunities for exploration and exhibition," said Dr. Thomas.

Dr. Thomas brings wide-ranging curatorial experience to the MFA. Most recently, he was curator of European and decorative art at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art since 2005. During this time, he greatly increased the Brooks' holdings of Southern regional decorative arts, helping the museum to acquire rare pieces of silver, quilts, and sugar furniture. Dr. Thomas has curated many innovative exhibitions and projects that brought the museum's collection to new audiences, including *Venice in the Age of Canaletto*; *Nonconnah and Pisgah Forest Pottery*; and *The Crossroads of Memory: Carroll Cloar and the American South*. Previously, he worked as assistant curator of painting at the Cleveland Museum of Art and as a visiting professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. He received his doctorate in Fifteenth Century Flemish Art from Case Western Reserve University, and he spent two years conducting archival research in Brussels and Leuven, Belgium as part of his studies. He holds a master's degree in art history from the University of Missouri, Columbia and a bachelor's degree from Truman University in Kirksville, Missouri. Dr. Thomas studied at the Center for Curatorial Leadership in New York City and London's Attingham Trust Summer School Program, which examines the architectural and social history of the historic British house and gardens.

With the additions of Drs. Bennett and Thomas, the MFA curatorial staff now stands at four full curators and two assistant curators, who together provide expertise across the entire history of art. Both begin their roles at the MFA in early March 2018.

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

The MFA 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. **Kristen A. Shepherd** is the Executive Director.

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. Special ticket prices apply for entrance to *Star Wars™* and *the Power of Costume*. For more information, please call 727.896.2667 or visit mfastpete.org.

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