

JAY MCKEAN FISHER TO STEP DOWN FROM BMA AFTER 45 YEARS IN CURATORIAL AND LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Pivotal to Securing Major Collections, Developing Critically Acclaimed Exhibitions, and Conceptualizing the BMA's Marder Center for Matisse Studies, Fisher Established a Lasting Legacy

BALTIMORE, MD (March 2, 2020)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) announced today that Jay McKean Fisher, one of the BMA's longest-serving curators and the inaugural director of the museum's Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies, has decided to retire on March 31, 2020 after 45 years at the institution. As of April 1, he will be named the Emeritus Senior Curator for Prints, Drawings, and Photographs. During his tenure at the BMA, Fisher shepherded numerous acquisitions for the museum's collection, including the George A. Lucas Collection of 19th-century French art, the Gallagher/Dalsheimer collection of American photography, and hundreds of works on paper by Henri Matisse from the Marguerite Matisse Duthuit Collection and the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation. Fisher has also organized many of the BMA's most important and celebrated exhibitions, including *Matisse: Painter as Sculptor* (2007); *Photographs, Drawings, and Collages by Frederick Sommer and Surrealist Art from the BMA's Collection* (1999); and *The Prints of Édouard Manet: A Centenary Celebration* (1983). Just as critical, Fisher has also built and maintained relationships for the institution with audiences, artists, scholars, collectors, and donors both in Baltimore and around the world.

"Jay has been an invaluable member of the BMA family, providing both continuity of leadership and a sense of institutional history that has ensured we remain true to our mission of service to the community," said Christopher Bedford, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "In an age of seemingly constant transition, it can be difficult even to contemplate the kind of multi-decade legacy that Jay has built here. But all of us who have had the pleasure to work with him know that he is a dedicated scholar of art history and unfailingly kind and collegial, always seeking opportunities to support projects and opportunities that will benefit the BMA and our audiences. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the museum are so very grateful for his service and commitment."

Fisher began his career at the BMA as an Assistant Curator in 1975 with an expertise in 19th-century French prints and drawings. Over the next 20 years, his primary focus was the museum's diverse collection of more than 65,000 works on paper, one of the finest collections in the country, and he became an authority on Matisse's graphic art. In 1997, following several other promotions, he was appointed the BMA's Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings, & Photographs; the following year he also became the Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, holding both positions until 2015. Throughout his time at the museum, he has expanded a range of scholarly interests, publishing essays on artists such as Félix Buhot, Théodore Chassériau, Édouard Manet, and Henri Matisse—as well as on topics such as etching techniques, book arts, and the collection of Claribel and Etta Cone, the sisters whose gift to the BMA forms the core of the museum's collection. Fisher also helped the BMA acquire more than 500 works by Matisse, more than doubling the Cone sister's original gift of 600 by the artist so that its holdings now encompass more than 1,000 works of art by the French master.

A hallmark of Fisher's time at the BMA has been his leadership, both within the museum and with the wider arts community. In addition to his responsibilities as Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, Fisher served as Interim Co-Director in 2015-16 while a search for a new director was conducted. Most recently, he was instrumental in shaping the vision and direction of the Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies with the concept for a center that would make the museum's extensive Matisse holdings more accessible for scholars and visitors. Last year, his leadership helped to secure the \$5 million gift from the Ruth Carol Fund to name the center and support its design, construction, and operations.

“Jay’s leadership at the BMA has always been guided by his love for art and for the community, as well as by his heartfelt belief in the museum as an essential place for learning and gathering. His adventurous spirit, intellect, and passion have shaped not only this institution but how so many of us here in Baltimore see the role and significance of the museum. We will deeply miss his partnership and guidance, but we are so thankful and honored that Jay dedicated so much of his career to this place and to us,” said Clair Zamoiski Segal, Chair of the BMA’s Board of Trustees.

Fisher has organized numerous exhibitions at the museum with many drawn from the Cone Collection and the Lucas Collection. Among these exhibitions are: *Théodore Chassériau: Illustrations for Othello*, organized in conjunction with the publication of the artist’s catalogue raisonné in 1979; *Félix Buhot, Peintre-Graveur: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings* in 1983; and *Matisse and Modern Masters from The Cone Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art*, a traveling exhibition of works on paper presented at the Isetan Museum in Japan in 1996-1997. In 2005, Fisher also directed a project to catalogue and create an online database of the BMA’s outstanding collection of 19th-century French drawings, in concert with the Walters Art Museum, resulting in the publication and exhibition, *The Essence of Line: French Drawings from Ingres to Degas*. His scholarship on Matisse also includes *Matisse: Painter as Sculptor*, a major traveling exhibition co-organized with the Dallas Museum of Art and Nasher Sculpture Center in 2007 and *Matisse as Printmaker*, a major traveling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Art and the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation in 2009. In recent years, Fisher organized a series of focused exhibitions of works on paper by Matisse drawn from new acquisitions, including *Matisse’s Dancers*, *Matisse’s Marguerite: Model Daughter*, and *New Arrivals: Matisse Prints & Drawings*; and contributed an essay to the catalogue for *Graphic Passion: Matisse and the Book Arts* at Morgan Library & Museum in New York in 2015.

“It has been an enormous privilege and honor to be a part of this great museum. There have been so many incredible milestones throughout my tenure at the BMA. The opportunity to shape the trajectory of an outstanding public collection and to bring those artworks to the fore through new scholarship, exhibitions, and programs has been among the great pleasures of my life,” said Fisher. “The BMA has always been a place of vision and purpose and that spirit is all the more present with the current staff and board. The newly formed Center for Matisse Studies is a career-long dream and I look forward to following its progress along with the many wonderful things to come for and from the institution.”

A graduate of Occidental College in Los Angeles, Fisher earned his M.A. from Williams College—Clark Art Institute Graduate Program in the History of Art, where he was designated a Samuel H. Kress Foundation Fellow in recognition of his academic achievements. Prior to joining the BMA, he served as an assistant in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Clark Art Institute and as a curatorial aide at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, CA. During his time in Baltimore, Fisher has also been active as an instructor for students interested in art history, and taught classes at The Johns Hopkins University, Goucher College, and for more than 20 years, taught “A History of Prints, A History of Drawing,” at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

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

General admission to the BMA is free. Special exhibitions may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m.–5 p.m. The museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year’s Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

Connect with us: #ARTBMA • [Stories](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Twitter](#) • [Instagram](#) • [YouTube](#)

###

For media in Baltimore:

Anne Mannix Brown / Sarah Pedroni
The Baltimore Museum of Art
443-573-1870
abrown@artbma.org / spedroni@artbma.org

For media outside Baltimore:

Alina E. Sumajin
PAVE Communications & Consulting
646-369-2050
alina@paveconsult.com