



**BALTIMORE  
MUSEUM OF  
ART**

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## **BMA Security Officers Take Center Stage as Guest Curators of a New Exhibition Opening in March 2022**

*This professional development initiative—the first of its kind for the museum—includes mentorship from Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims*

BALTIMORE, MD (July 12, 2021) In March 2022, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will present *Guarding the Art*, an exhibition curated entirely by 17 members of the museum’s security team. The exhibition will draw from works of art in the BMA’s collection, with each work selected by one of the participating officers. As guest curators, the officers will be collaborating with leadership and staff across the museum to select and reinterpret works from a variety of eras, genres, cultures, and mediums—offering a particularly human-centered lens through which to consider the objects. In addition, the team is working with renowned art historian and curator Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, who is providing additional mentorship and professional development.

“Our security officers spend more time in our galleries and living among our collection than any other staff within the institution,” said Christopher Bedford, BMA Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “It is their perspectives, their insights, and their relationships with the art and daily interactions with our visitors that will set the stage for *Guarding the Art* to be an exceptional experience.”

The exhibition was conceived earlier this year by BMA Trustee Amy Elias in conversation with Dr. Asma Naeem, BMA Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator, as part of a conversation with about ways to fulfill the museum’s commitment to be more diverse, more inclusive, and more representative of the community it serves. An inquiry was subsequently sent to all members of the BMA’s security team to gauge their interest in developing an exhibition that would provide them with the unique opportunity to have their voices heard through their perspectives about the museum’s collection. The 17 officers who elected to participate are Traci Archable-Frederick, Jess Bither, Ben Bjork, Ricardo Castro, Melissa Clasing, Bret Click, Alex Dicken, Kellen Johnson, Michael Jones, Rob Kempton, Chris Koo, Alex Lei, Dominic Mallari, Dereck Mangus, Sara Ruark, Joan Smith, and Elise Tensley. The group reflects a broad range of backgrounds and interests with officers who are also artists, chefs, musicians, scholars, and writers.

“There is so much more to see in the BMA’s collection than what’s on the gallery walls. It’s been exciting to get first-hand experience in organizing an exhibition and discovering all the behind-the-scenes considerations. It gives you a new respect for

how museums work and the stories they tell,” said Elise Tensley. “I cannot wait to see all the objects we’ve selected on display.”

Throughout the exhibition’s development process, the guest curators are collaborating with staff in curatorial, design, education, conservation, and marketing departments to support cross-departmental conversation, learning, and idea-sharing. With additional guidance from Dr. Sims, the group is conducting object research, determining the scope of the exhibition, weighing in on installation design, developing didactic materials, generating content for a catalogue, and planning visitor tours and other public programs. Along with the creative opportunity, each participant is being compensated for their time with funds directed from a lead grant from the Pearlstone Family Foundation.

While the exhibition is in early development, the curators have started to consider key artwork selections based on their personal resonances and direct engagement in the galleries. These include the often-overlooked *House of Frederick Crey* (1830-35) by Thomas Ruckle, which provides an early glimpse of Baltimore’s Mt. Vernon neighborhood, and *Still Life with Large Shell* (1939), Max Beckmann’s portrait of his wife, Mathilde, who was a violinist and singer. Alex Lei chose Winslow Homer’s *Waiting an Answer* (1872), saying “The Homer piece is one you may not notice until you stop moving, when you’re not distracted by showier works demanding your attention. It’s a painting of people caught in a moment of waiting, noticed by those who stop and wait, and strangely reflective of the experience of being a guard—a job mostly made up of waiting.”

Several guest curators are interested in works that speak to social justice, resilience during times of crisis, and the environment. A desire to see more works by underrepresented artists in the collection prompted the choice of a seated male figure (6th- to 10th-c.) from the Quimbaya civilization in Colombia. Artworks such as Emile-Antoine Bourdelle’s *Head of Medusa (Door Knocker)* (1925), Jeremy Alden’s *50 Dozen* (2005/2008), and Sam Gilliam’s *Blue Edge* (1971) were selected in response to specific interactions with visitors, or because of the time they spent regarding the works.

Dr. Sims added, “I am honored to be working with the security staff as the curators of this innovative and groundbreaking exhibition. It sends a potent message to the art world at large about the BMA’s commitment to present diverse voices that expand our experience of familiar works of art in the collection. The security staff’s relationship to the art they safeguard and their interactions with visitors are essential elements of this project.”

*Guarding the Art* is curated by Traci Archable-Frederick, Jess Bither, Ben Bjork, Ricardo Castro, Melissa Clasing, Bret Click, Alex Dicken, Kellen Johnson, Michael Jones, Rob Kempton, Chris Koo, Alex Lei, Dominic Mallari, Dereck Mangus, Sara Ruark, Joan Smith, and Elise Tensley, with support from Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims; Dr. Asma Naeem, BMA Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator; Sarah Cho, BMA Curatorial Assistant for Decorative Arts and American Painting and Sculpture; and Katie Cooke, BMA Curatorial Assistant to the Chief Curator.

This exhibition is generously sponsored by the Pearlstone Family Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Legum, Kwame Webb and Kathryn Bradley, David and Elizabeth Himelfarb Hurwitz, and Michael Sherman and Carrie Tivador.

### **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

### **Visitor Information**

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. 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.

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