

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Phoenix Art Museum CEO marks four-year anniversary with milestones of expansion, transformation, deeper community engagement

Focus on mission, financial stability, engagement, and diversity transforms Museum as it celebrates its 60th year

PHOENIX (March 4, 2019) – Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO, marks her fourth anniversary at the helm of Phoenix Art Museum with transformative growth and organizational changes designed to increase financial stability, community engagement, and diversity. Under Cruz’s leadership, Phoenix Art Museum has experienced increased attendance, active school engagement, and inclusive public programming. Additionally, the Museum has made tremendous strides in its operations and scholarship, attracting the institution’s first major grants from national foundations and the first National Endowment for the Arts grant in a decade, improving financial stability, diversifying staff and exhibitions, and developing a rigorous scholarship program, which has yielded various original exhibitions scheduled to travel to museums nationwide, among other achievements. With the Museum’s Board of Trustees, Cruz will soon embark on a second phase of strategic planning as Phoenix Art Museum is poised to celebrate its 60th anniversary in November.

“It has been an honor to serve the community of Greater Phoenix and the people of Arizona through my work at Phoenix Art Museum,” said Cruz, who was appointed the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO in 2015 following the retirement of James K. Ballinger, who previously served as director for more than three decades. “I have enjoyed the rare privilege of helping to guide the Museum along a path toward better fulfilling our mission as a vibrant cultural destination that provides every segment of our community with access to world-class arts and culture opportunities. We remain committed to enriching lives and building connections through art in an effort to unite people of different backgrounds and circumstances, and although we have much left to accomplish, I am excited about the progress we have already made, together.”

Since Cruz joined the Museum in 2015, she has led staff through a discovery process called Activate PAM, an initiative designed to activate the Museum space and transform it into a welcoming environment for visitors of every age and background from the Valley community. As part of this work, the Museum has reimagined free-access days and transformed them into compelling, interactive programming to continue its mission of reducing economic barriers to access while enabling visitors to engage with local artists and performers.

With the expansion of voluntary-donation times, the Museum experienced increased attendance from 2015 through 2018. The Museum’s popular monthly event First Friday, sponsored by PetSmart and Macy’s, experienced 105% growth in attendance from 2015 to 2018, welcoming more than 132,000 visitors. Additionally, the Museum experienced a 29% increase in attendance during Pay-What-You-Wish Wednesdays, sponsored by Macy’s, SRP, and Wells Fargo, welcoming more than 193,000 visitors. From 2016 through 2018, the Museum welcomed more than 97,000 visitors, of which 40% self-identified as first-time visitors, at Discount Tire Free Family Sundays, made possible through the generosity of Discount Tire Company and The Diane & Bruce Halle Foundation. From 2017 through 2018, the Museum provided free admission for nearly 5,000 veterans, active-duty military service members, and their families through the Military Access Program at Phoenix Art Museum (MAP@PAM), made possible through the generosity of both PetSmart and APS.

Since the beginning of Cruz’s tenure, the Museum has also launched offsite programs to help forge and strengthen relationships with artists and organizations throughout the community. The PhxArt Projects initiative brings art and performances by local artists to public spaces such as Cityscape’s Cityskate, and since the initiative’s inception, more than 150,000 visitors have engaged with works by emerging and mid-career Valley artists, including Saskia Jorda,

Sam Fresquez, Kenaim Al-Shatti, and Tessa Windt, among many others. Through PhxArt Projects, First Fridays, Discount Tire Free Family Sundays, PhxArt Amplified music festival, and other public programs and exhibition and acquisition activities, the Museum has featured the artwork or performances of nearly 1,200 local artists since fall 2015.

As the first woman and Latina to serve as CEO of the Southwest's largest art museum, Cruz also made it a priority from the onset of her tenure to increase diversity and create a culture of inclusion and accessibility. With her arrival in 2015, the Museum placed a *Welcome/Bienvenidos* banner in Greenbaum Lobby and has since included bilingual signage and didactics throughout every gallery to ensure Spanish-speaking residents enjoy an equal opportunity to engage with the art on view. Today, the Museum continues this bilingual engagement program and has hired the institution's first on-staff translator. Additionally, due to a significant grant from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and The Steele Foundation, the Museum is constructing a new, fully bilingual website to be launched in summer 2019. The website will be the first of its kind of any major cultural institution in the United States.

Cruz also began an initiative to increase diversity across Museum exhibitions and staff to better reflect and serve the diverse Phoenix community. In 2018, the Museum presented [*In the Company of Women*](#), its first exhibition focused on works by women artists from the Museum's own collection. The exhibition highlighted the disparity in representation of women artists in museums nationwide and was one of the Museum's most popular exhibitions of 2018, welcoming nearly 20,000 visitors in just five weeks. Also in 2018, the Museum presented [*Teotihuacan: City of Water, City of Fire*](#), which illuminated the storied history and artistry of the ancient Mesoamerican city and the first major metropolis in North America. The most highly attended exhibition at Phoenix Art Museum in nearly five years, *City of Water, City of Fire* welcomed 72,500 visitors.

Along with these exhibitions, the Museum has actively sought opportunities since 2015 to present exhibitions and installations of work by artists of color, women artists, and LGBTQI+ artists, including Julio César Morales, Valeska Soares, Sheila Pepe, Kehinde Wiley, Horacio Zabala, The Propeller Group, Fritz Scholder, Ai Weiwei, Kent Monkman, and Carlos Amorales, among many others. The Museum has also showcased art from various regions around the world, presenting numerous exhibitions focused on Sikh art and recently celebrating the opening of [*Wondrous Worlds: Art & Islam Through Time & Place*](#), to name a few. In addition to diversifying exhibitions, the Museum in 2017 created *The Whole Story* in partnership with Rachel Eseoghene Egboro. The storytelling series seeks to present and expand Black narratives in America, and now in its ninth installment, the series continues to sell out four times annually.

As part of Cruz's initiative, the Museum has also worked to diversify its staff. In 2017, Phoenix Art Museum was one of 20 museums nationwide to receive funding from the [*Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative \(DAMLI\)*](#), a partnership between the Walton Family Foundation and the Ford Foundation to support efforts to diversify leadership staff in art museums. The DAMLI funds have expanded the Museum's Teen Art Council initiative, enabled the Museum to offer paid internships for undergraduate and graduate students, and now support a two-year curatorial fellowship focused on Latina/o or Latinx art.

Additionally, the Museum has increased its operational and financial stability under Cruz's leadership. Along with new programs to increase earned revenue while balancing a need to maintain the affordability of its admissions and programming, the Museum broadened its contributed-revenue fundraising strategies. In its 60-year history, the Museum was awarded its first major grants from various national foundations, including the Ford Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Terra Foundation for American Art, and Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, and received its first grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in more than a decade. From fiscal years 2015 to 2018, the Museum experienced an 86% increase in contributed revenue, enabling the institution to pay off a \$4 million line of credit that had held a balance since 2011. Amidst a competitive fundraising landscape both nationally and regionally, Cruz continues to seek more strategic ways to reserve vital funds for Museum priorities and, in 2019, appointed [*Nicole Rivet*](#) as Chief Development Officer to oversee philanthropic strategies and operations within the Museum.

“Amada has navigated the challenges and growing pains that accompany any major change in leadership, particularly for an organization with significant longevity of leadership,” said Jon Hulburd, who has served as chair of the Museum’s Board of Trustees since 2017. “I have been inspired by and impressed with her thoughtful approach to the constituents with whom she works, her dedication to her staff, and her willingness to make courageous choices with the goal of opening the Museum to every person in our community. Her success is apparent through the many achievements the Museum has enjoyed thus far, and along with my fellow Trustees, I am excited by what comes next.”

In 2019, Cruz, the Board of Trustees, and Museum staff will shift their focus to a number of exciting events and programs in honor of the Museum’s 60th anniversary on November 18, 2019. For Cruz, there is no better time than this historic year to look ahead.

“It’s the perfect moment in our history to evaluate our path forward,” Cruz said. “As we celebrate these past 60 years at the heart of our city, we must also look to the future and work diligently to increase our financial stability, grow our base of supporters, and continue to deepen our engagement within the community to ensure the Museum’s success and relevance now and for decades to come.”

To request interviews and high-resolution photography, contact the Marketing and Communications Office of Phoenix Art Museum at 602.257.2105 or margaree.bigler@phxart.org.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for nearly 60 years and is the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s permanent collection of nearly 20,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain, and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

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