

Archived Director's Note



HOUSTON, TX (August, 2020)

2020 ain't over yet, and it's already unfurled the most momentous period in many of our lives. In a year of cataclysmic events, we've each surely experienced unique effects. Whether your year is defined by loss, transition, endless doom scrolling, or a newfound love of baking—I think we can all recognize the monumental shifts occurring across society and culture.

I believe 2020 may also be the most pivotal moment in the history of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. We turn 72 years old this October and throughout our history the museum has forged the leading edge of contemporary art—from landmark first museum shows to exhibitions that unveiled new scholarship and knowledge—CAMH is a pioneer of our field.

Yet, in 2020 is that enough?

In the last year, public demands for leadership accountability, staff safety, and equity within museums—particularly amongst boards, staff, artists, audiences—presented issues of urgent concern and a roadmap for future priorities. The societal quakes we are witnessing—including escalating inequality, effects of global climate change, public health and economic impacts of COVID-19, and calls for racial equity and justice in response to George Floyd's murder and systemic racism—compel museums to directly engage the realities of our world, even when the issues are wickedly complex and defy easy answers.

As a non-collecting contemporary arts museum, our mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to chart a path forward rooted in the ecstatic possibilities of contemporary art.

How do we do this?

It's easy to lean in to the platitude that art can change the world. It's difficult to recognize that in order to achieve that impact we need to change ourselves first. I joined CAMH on January 15, and we closed our doors on March 15 in response to COVID-19. That surreal rupture gave our team time to think, and to begin to remake the Museum from the inside. We are charting a course for CAMH rooted in an ethic of care, equity, and the joy of the creative process.

#TrustArtists
#atCAMH
@camhouston

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CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

This summer, CAMH initiated a series of needed changes that will define the experience of our audience and community alongside the experience of our staff and artists with whom we work. In July, CAMH balanced our budget and instituted 30% compensation increases across the board to our junior staff, and more senior team members whose wages had been dormant received long-overdue raises. All future CAMH positions will be posted with salary ranges adhering to our overall pay equity plan. We welcomed two new senior leaders—[Deputy Director Janice Bond](#) and [Director of Finance and Strategic Resources Seba Raquel Suber](#)—whose personal and professional commitments to equity and social justice are driving our transformation. This is the beginning. We are fully re-imagining the very fabric of the Museum, from how we care for and uplift staff, to our visitor engagement, to anti-racist policies and action, to the fundamental and imperative ideal that our internal culture must embody our values.

What's next?

Following our closure in March, CAMH not only ramped up our virtual presence and internal restructuring, we accelerated our [New Perspectives capital campaign](#). This initiative transforms CAMH's architectural and urban context in dramatic and subtle ways—our exterior garden offers a new site for public gathering and performance, our street-level visibility is enhanced through new lighting and signage, and one will experience our galleries through a more welcoming entry experience alongside a complete restoration of our Brown Foundation gallery and retail spaces, including new lighting, gallery walls, flooring, and building-wide electrical and air filtering improvements.

These improvements represent one aspect of CAMH's future direction. Even as we re-imagine our internal and physical architecture, CAMH is focused on the ethic and practice of a more porous museum—one that spills onto the street, launches long-term collaborations with artists, meets audiences where they are, and serves our communities' most compelling needs. We know that by trusting artists, and working to expand their agency in the public realm, meaning will shine through.

In this year of upheaval and regeneration, our core vision is:

CAMH Trusts Artists. Artists bring new ways to engage society's most intractable problem—they capture imagination, create common ground, and generate empathy across diverse perspectives. For artists to have true impact, we must first trust them.

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CAMH's goal is to catalyze artists' impact at civic scale. Beginning with hyper-local action, CAMH and the artists we support aim for global reach. We will work beyond our walls to chase big ideas—by giving artists the early stage resources, platform, and freedom they need to scale their impact in the world. By saying Yes and advocating for artists' essential role in public life, CAMH aspires to be a fearless institution that connects artists and audiences through alchemical experiences with contemporary art.

Thank you for your support and belief in CAMH. We look forward to seeing you in, around, and [beyond the museum](#).

Sincerely,



Hesse McGraw
Executive Director