



Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle

Monetta White, amid the show "Black Is Beautiful," has been a Museum of the African Diaspora board member and fundraiser.

Interim executive director keeping the job at MoAD

Restaurateur Monetta White praised as 'a fast study'

By Charles Desmarais

At a meeting Tuesday afternoon, Dec. 3, the trustees of the Museum of the African Diaspora eased into a transition begun in August, confirming the permanent appointment of Monetta White as executive director.

White, 54, is a successful restaurateur and marketer

known best for her work as managing partner of 1300 on Fillmore, which she opened with her husband, chef David Lawrence, in 2007. The restaurant now continues as 1300 on Fillmore at SFO International Airport.

She had been interim director of the museum for 3½ months, having stepped in from a board position. Her involve-

ment with the organization goes back 15 years, she said in an interview at her MoAD office.

"It was my birthday, and it was a significant one," she remembered. Rather than gifts, she told friends, "there's this museum that's being built, and I think it's going to be really important. I would like you to support that." It was her first

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Restaurateur tapped to lead S.F. museum

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fundraising effort for MoAD, and the donations rolled in, totaling more than \$15,000.

Since that time, her work on behalf of the museum, particularly in leadership roles for annual galas in 2017, 2018 and 2019, has helped raise more than \$3.5 million.

White admits that, as director of an art museum, an aptitude for fundraising will be only part of the required skill set. Does she find the art aspects of the job daunting?

"Terrifying," she said. "At least, I did 3½ months ago. I've learned so much in a short time." She expressed confidence in the museum's small staff and said she would rely upon "my mentor team" for advice on art. Among the advisers she mentioned were gallerists Karen Jenkins Johnson and Jessica Silverman in San Francisco, and Mariane Ibrahim of Chicago.

Two others to whom she would turn, she said, are Charles "Chuck" Collins, the YMCA of San Francisco CEO and a trustee of the San Francisco Museum of Modern

Art, and Pamela Joyner, a noted collector of African American art. Both Collins and Joyner, in separate interviews, praised the choice of White. Each emphasized her management skills, a healthy modesty and an ability to help the museum achieve what they called "sustainability."

"She understands this community," Collins said. "She understands business. She understands what it means to really bring together a group of supporters."

She can contextualize what is going on in art within the African American experience, he said. Moreover, "She is utterly without ego. She'll speak the truth."

Joyner called White "pretty self-effacing. She's a learner and a fast study."

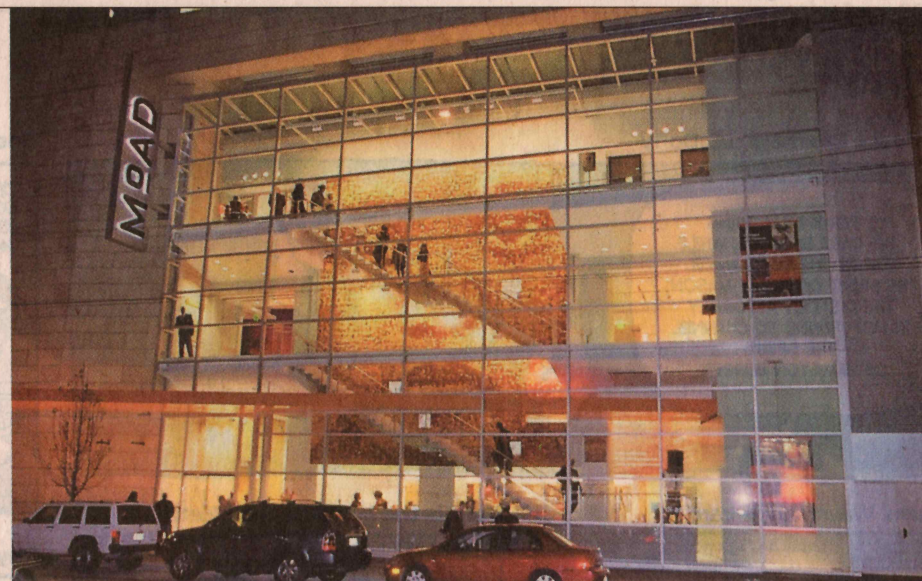
"If she were to call me right now with a plan," Joyner said, "I would expect that all the business details would be in place ... and I am confident that she would listen closely to any suggestions I might have on the art side."

White is a San Francisco native and a graduate of San Francisco State

University. She was vice president of the city's Small Business Commission and serves on the board of several nonprofit and business organizations.

She is the Museum of the African Diaspora's sixth permanent director since journalist Belva Davis first took on the role in 2000, even before the existence of a building. She succeeds Linda Harrison, who left one year ago to step up to a similar job at the far larger Newark Museum in New Jersey.

In a statement distributed by the museum, Wade Rose, chair of the MoAD Board, called White "a leader in the community ... (who) will guide the Museum into significantly more expansive community engagement. We could not be more pleased."



Museum of the African Diaspora

The Museum of the African Diaspora has had six permanent directors since 2000.

White expressed particular support for MoAD's Emerging Artists Program, which helps talented artists with a financial support and a museum exhibition. She is already working to build relationships with legacy institutions in the Bay Area like the San Francisco Art Institute and the school boards of San Francisco and Oakland, and is talking with staff "about black leadership development, helping other organizations to

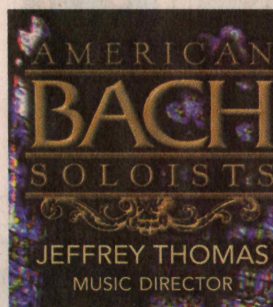
get black curators."

But with deepening interest from larger museums in exhibitions like the de Young's "Soul of a Nation," and efforts at museums across the Bay Area to add works to their collections by artists of color, might MoAD's partnerships be contributing to its own eventual demise?

"Those shows are going to be gone," says White, "and no one is going to be better able to tell our story than we.

"My two things — and probably this is what the board saw in me — are shepherding the museum to stability and community engagement. I believe it's a matter of connecting the dots; if we have the right programs, we are the ones who will be owning that space."

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