

## OPEN LETTER FROM *THE LONG DREAM* ARTISTS TO THE MCA

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*An injury to one is an injury to all.*

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA) continues to perpetuate harm to Chicago arts communities. *The Long Dream* exhibition and the artists in the show are being used to mask this violence. As such, and in solidarity with all of the MCA workers who have been laid off, fired, forced to leave, or silenced over the past year, we are withdrawing our work from *The Long Dream* exhibition at the MCA and calling for the following:

1. The MCA leadership to issue an immediate public acknowledgement of harms caused to MCA workers, specifically MCAccountable and BIPOC staff.
2. The transparent, public, and immediate implementation of MCAccountable's [demands](#) on the timetable they have laid out.
3. A public apology to the Chicago arts community. As we constitute both exhibiting artists as well as present and former staff members, we *are* the MCA's community.
4. The immediate restructuring of the board to include a majority of those most impacted by the decisions it makes and the budgets it approves—Chicago artists and MCA workers.
5. The immediate adoption of WAGE standards for artists the MCA works with.
6. The incorporation of language into artist contracts that makes it clear that artists retain the same rights as the institution and can withdraw from exhibitions without fear of retribution.

We recognize the labor and effort employees at the MCA put into installing our work, and the subsequent labor that will go into removing it. We sincerely thank MCA workers for the love and care our work has received and will accept any delays in returning our work with patience and gratitude. We hope our withdrawal will be an incentive to improve working conditions in the future, not worsen them in the present.

We are humbled and honored to be counted among the talented artists in *The Long Dream*, and have immense love for those who initially chose not to participate, those deciding to withdraw at this time, and those continuing to participate in the show. We want the work in the show to be experienced, and understand that there are many ways for artists to live by their ideals. Our

withdrawal is in solidarity with all artists invited to *The Long Dream*, and the multitude of efforts they have put forth so that our art can exist in an equitable world. We want to believe that change and compromise between artists and institutions is possible, and our response to the MCA's inaction intends to catalyze restructuring not foreclose dialogue.

The demands of [MCAccountable](#) remain unmet. Their concerns echoed issues related to racism, equity, transparency, and worker rights raised by the [Teen Creative Agency](#) (TCA) last year. These issues persist, as evidenced by the recent layoff of forty staff members by Director Madeleine Grynsztejn. Meanwhile, the COVID pandemic and economic fallout continues to disproportionately impact the Chicago Black and brown communities. The fact that after advocating for themselves, the vast majority of MCAccountable members have been forced out in retribution for their attempts to improve the institution is cause for serious alarm. Their absence from the MCA does not mean the issues they raised disappeared, but rather shows further evidence of the inherent problems in the museum's hierarchical structure. Those most vulnerable in an institution must have a seat at the table.

It is unconscionable to lay off so many people, after the receipt of federal PPP funds and Mellon Foundation [Art Museum Futures Fund](#) grant to sustain the operations of the museum through the pandemic. As written in the Clef Notes coverage, the Mellon fund was awarded to "help support expenses associated with the MCA's programming and exhibitions, including *The Long Dream*, featuring recent work by over 70 Chicago artists inspired by the current moment." We are sickened and heartbroken that money received in our names was used to harm our friends and colleagues, rather than help them.

Further, *The Long Dream* is installed in galleries named after MCA Board member and major donor Kenneth C. Griffin. In the last state election, it was widely reported that Griffin spent over fifty million dollars on an ad campaign that aided in the defeat of a proposed graduated Fair Tax bill. This highly public recent history sits disagreeably with the exhibition's claim that our art in *The Long Dream* "offers us ways to imagine a more equitable and interconnected world."

A number of our fellow Chicago artists including Aram Han Sifuentes, Folayemi Wilson, Maria Gaspar, and For the People Artists Collective, declined to participate in *The Long Dream* because of these issues. In concert with these refusals, and in a good faith effort, [nearly 100 of us associated with the exhibition wrote](#) to the Director Madeleine Grynsztejn and Board of Trustees expressing our support for the unmet MCAccountable demands, in solidarity with these artists,

and requesting a meeting to address these concerns. We were assured by Michael Darling and others at the MCA that our concerns were being taken seriously. We assumed that our relationship with the institution was one of mutual respect. Yet we did not receive a direct response to our letter until now, six months later. Instead, the museum attempted to preempt and silence our efforts through a [posturing email](#) to their members. Our work has been instrumentalized in disingenuous public relations campaigns in both [the media](#) and in MCA programming. This PR is merely virtue signaling, while the MCA has not committed to real, transparent, structural reform. This is a clear “mishandling” of our work and undermines its integrity.

The MCA has made the artists in *The Long Dream* unwillingly complicit in their harmful behavior, and this betrayal of trust has ramifications, not only for our relationships with the MCA, but for all such similar institutions. Forcing artists to choose between exhibition and the safety of their peers is unsustainable and unacceptable. We encourage other museums to take note of this moment, and recognize that artists have the right *not to be ashamed of* the institutions they work with. We understand that what is happening at the MCA is not unique. It is a reflection of the extractive, exploitative culture embedded in institutions across the country. Many of us have found fraught relationships with institutions to be the norm. We are starting with the MCA, but not ending with it. Change in one institution can inspire change in others, especially with community vigilance. This is a chance for the MCA to break with the status quo and listen to workers, artists, and Chicago community members. We urge them to sincerely take up the challenge of *The Long Dream*—revolutionize their structure, and decolonize—setting a *true* example for cultural institutions. The MCA itself and all of so-called Chicago sit on the traditional unceded homelands of the Council of Three Fires, including Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, who must regain custodianship of the land.

Many of us would not be involved in *The Long Dream* at all without the efforts of those same employees who were mistreated. It is their hopeful and uplifting thoughts about a radically different future for museums that encourage us to push for a more sustainable and equitable future. Their words and ideas provide a starting point.

To borrow from Malkia Devich Cyril, “accountability isn’t punishment.” We are writing this letter and withdrawing our work because we believe the MCA can and must do better. We believe in the ideals of its workers and the art it supports. This is an opportunity for the MCA to become a leading museum that furthers the values of an “equitable and caring institution in a

more equitable and caring Chicago” as [expressed by Director Madeleine Grynsztejn](#). However, the MCA must first acknowledge the harm perpetrated and enact the structural changes the community demands.

Chicago needs visionary arts institutions committed to taking meaningful action to uproot white supremacy and institutional oppression. Chicago needs cultural institutions that are unionized, accountable, transparent, and democratic —“that are living examples of equity.” Let our refusal to participate today be an opening for everyone to participate with dignity tomorrow.

In solidarity,

***The Long Dream* artists currently withdrawing:**

|                                           |                                     |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Aaron Hughes                              | Joseph Josué Mora*                  |
| Sarah Bastress                            | Felicia Holman *                    |
| Manal Kara                                | Chelsea Ross*                       |
| Max Guy                                   | Korey D Martin*                     |
| Joanna Furnans                            | Hereaclitus Here Vernon*            |
| Damon Locks                               | Sarita Hernandez*                   |
| Jeremiah Chiu*                            | Andi Crist*                         |
| Christopher Michael Hefner*               | Nick Wylie, Public Media Institute* |
| Mairead Case*                             | Monica Trinidad*                    |
| Sara Heymann*                             | Brian Herrera*                      |
| Kyle Hodges*                              | Valentina Zamfirescu *              |
| Sarah Joyce*                              | Christy LeMaster*                   |
| Eric Streichert*                          | Emily Eddy*                         |
| Drew Ryan*                                | Anthony Sims*                       |
| Brandon Sward *                           | Heather Gabel*                      |
| Jason Ogawa*                              | Louie Capozzoli*                    |
| Eric Von Haynes*                          | Vicko Alvarez*                      |
| Clay Hickson*                             | Micco Caporale*                     |
| Elise Barrington, Public Media Institute* | Stephanie Manriquez*                |
| Dylan Heath*                              | Charly Garcia, Sonorama Discos*     |
| Marc Fischer / Public Collectors *        | Betty Heredia *                     |
| Isyemille Lara*                           | Jesse Malmed*                       |

Brandon Alvendia\*  
Brian Mier\*  
Todd Diederich\*  
David Chávez\*  
Paul Durica\*  
Yollocalli Arts Reach\*  
Tara Betts\*

Nicole Marroquin\*  
Zakkiyyah Najeebah Dumas - O'neal \*  
Nell Taylor\*  
David Nasca \*  
George Porteus\*  
~~SANTIAGO-X~~\*

*\*Numerous artists on this list that have elected to withdraw are participants in the collective Quarantine Times and were not credited by the museum in the display of that work.*

***The Long Dream artists in support of artists above but not currently withdrawing:***

~~SANTIAGO-X~~ (Koasati/Chamoru)  
Debra Yepa-Pappan (Jemez Pueblo)  
Chris Pappan (Kanza, Osage, Cheyenne  
River Lakota)  
Edra Soto  
Lise Haller Baggesen  
Rebirth Poetry Ensemble  
Jessica Christy  
Selina Trepp  
Kirsten Leenaars  
jina valentine  
Claire Pentecost  
Louie Capozzoli  
Sadie Woods  
Ebony G. Patterson  
Guanyu Xu  
Diane Christiansen  
Josh Rios  
Allie Drew  
Victor Grigas  
Nereida Patricia  
Cecilia Resende Santos

Farah Salem  
Kiki Jia Qi Zhen  
Corinne Mucha  
Selva Aparicio  
Andres L. Hernandez  
Dutes Miller  
Amanda Williams  
Jeremiah Hulsebos-Spofford  
Olivia Junell  
Adam Vida  
Alex Inglizian  
Derrick Woods-Morrow  
Andrew J. Slater  
Angela Watkins  
Madeleine Aguilar  
Alberto Aguilar  
Leonard Suryajaya  
Moises Salazar  
shawné michaelain holloway  
Jefferson Pinder  
Tony Lewis  
Riva Lehrer

**Artist and cultural workers from Chicago and beyond in solidarity with artists withdrawing:**

For the People Artists Collective

Read/Write Library

Maria Gaspar

Robin Hustle

Jorge Lucero

Sharon Irish

Steven L. Anderson

Joshua Liston

Melanie Miller-Silver

Anthony Hamilton

Gretchen Hasse

Jordan Martins

Rob Ray (Shimmering Trashpile)

Seth Kim-Cohen

Amy gillian wilson

THE REINSTITUTE (BALTIMORE)

Jason A Soliday

Dr. Rachel Harper

Ken Ehrlich

Ernst Karel

Alonzo Pantoja

Matt Austin / Candor Arts

Christopher M. Reeves

Sonya Bogdanova

Gabriel Chalfin-Piney

Heather Lindahl

Thomas Huston

Sara Carminati

Christopher D. Thompson

Anne (Annie) Cullen

Lorenzo Conte

Riley

Nejla Yatkin

Christopher Smith

Stanlyn Brevé

Gareth Kaye

Matthew Galvan

Albert Stabler

Denise Yvette Serna

Sam Gould

Alden Burke

Andrew Chapman

Courtney Mackedanz

Annas

Sue Uhlig

Tizziana Baldenebro

Nina N. Yeboah

Christopher Whittey

Allison Manley

Jessica Harvey

Maricela Ramírez

Allison Moore

Lisa Armstrong

José Alejandro Rodriguez

Ryan Thompson

Lisa Barcy

Emily Navarra

Danny Floyd

Rami George

Dawn Weleski

Annas and the Chicago Arts Census -

Stephanie Koch

Bob Reinard  
Noami Guerrero  
Daniella Mazzio  
Ira S. Murfin  
Ari Karafiol  
Jeffrey Michael Austin  
Molly M Brandt  
Kristin + Nathan Abhalter Smith  
Lydia Jekot  
Ramon Gallardo  
Kelly Nicole Long Jimenez  
Jenn Smith  
Keri C.  
Gary Cannone  
SARA VENKMAN  
Chad Kouri  
Lisa Vinebaum  
Ignacio Nova  
Lydia Ross  
Jessica Pierotti  
Tim Reyes  
Drawstring Magazine  
Tamara Becerra Valdez  
Ann-Marie Gover  
James Emmett Jankowiak  
Jenn Freeman | Po'Chop  
Dan Regalado  
Gwen Scott  
Annie Rix  
Eileen Rae Walsh  
Julian Van Der Moere  
Murat Cem Mengüç  
Cassidy Early  
Jaclyn Jacunski

Emma Morris  
Kristi McGuire  
Marissa Finazzo  
Jill Flanagan  
Jacqueline Valdez  
Matt Mancini  
Lauren Goshinski  
Bryant Worley  
Natalie Kling  
Jeffreen Hayes  
Lizzie Goldman  
Rachel Dorsey  
Kayce Bayer  
Allison Parssi  
Magdalena Moskalewicz  
Madison N May  
Ben Bellwoar  
Fawn Pochel  
Emily Green  
Ian Bertorelli  
Amanda L Hoopingarner  
Karl Erickson  
Art Handlers Alliance  
Xaviera Simmons  
Vanessa Thill  
Francesca Altamura  
Stephanie Acosta  
Emma Hanselman  
Martin Patrick  
OTV - Open Television  
Fereshteh Toosi  
Christine Han  
Lizania Cruz  
Angela Ziqi Zhang

Tim Porges  
Huong Ngô  
Thomas Frank  
Kelly McBride  
Melissa Monk  
Michael Workman (bridge-chicago.org)  
Sal Campbell  
Peter Fleps  
Anthony D. Stepter  
Jeanine Pollard  
Aubrey Ingmar Manson  
Dara Kagan  
Ryan Griffis  
Art In These Times  
Alison Kuo  
callie kitral  
Christina Quarles  
Camille G. Bacon  
Tracy Kostenbader  
Be Oakley / GenderFail  
Sara Peak Convery  
Melisa Stephen  
Carol Zou  
Kelly J Neibert  
Araceli  
Patrick Wilkins  
Isabel Hannigan  
Asia Rabago  
Warren Wagner  
Joseph Lubitz  
Therese Quinn  
Erin Bliss

Minh Nguyen  
Jennifer Bastia  
Todd Ayoung  
Molly Costello  
molly coconnell  
Agathe Pinard  
David Bernie  
Ella Kinsman  
LaReyna Griffin  
Working Artists and the Greater Economy  
(W.A.G.E.)  
Ellen Rothenberg  
Grace Deveney  
Samus Starbody  
Mackenzie Salisbury  
Michelle van Naerssen  
Jibade-Khalil Huffman  
Elise Parisian  
Alex Paik  
Sigrid Manna  
Matthew Girson  
Anuradha Vikram  
Jessica Basta  
Cherrie Yu  
Aram Han Sifuentes  
Yesenia Bello  
Paola Cabal  
Melon

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