



Pennsylvania Academy
of the Fine Arts

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PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS ANNOUNCES NEW PRESIDENT & CEO

Kristen Shepherd Brings 25 Years of Experience Nationally to America's First Museum & School of Fine Arts; Calls PAFA a "Force" in American Art

PHILADELPHIA (January 22, 2026) – The Board of Trustees of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) today announced that, following a comprehensive, national search, it has unanimously selected its new president and CEO. Kristen Shepherd will join PAFA as of February 9, 2026, bringing a national perspective honed over more than 25 years in the sector.

“We set out to find a dynamic leader with the vision and expertise to build on our venerable history and fortify PAFA’s position as the preeminent voice in American art,” said Donald Caldwell, chair, Board of Trustees. “Kristen Shepherd has established herself as a leader and change maker in the museum sector, and we are delighted that she will be bringing her experience, energy, and fresh approach to PAFA, particularly at the outset of this momentous year.”

“PAFA’s collection is superlative, and it demonstrates that American art is an ever-evolving story. The fact that the institution has been collecting contemporary art since its inception in 1805 and was the nation’s very first fine arts school is a remarkable legacy and mandate. PAFA has always been at the forefront of nurturing, teaching, and collecting important work for every generation of American artists. It is a privilege to build on this foundation and identify bold new ways to lead the institution into its next chapter as a force in the world of American art,” said Shepherd.

As executive director and CEO, Shepherd was central to the revitalization of the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, FL, where she materially increased attendance, membership, contributions, and a growing national profile. Prior to that, she held key senior leadership positions with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New York’s Whitney Museum of

American Art, and Sotheby's in New York and London. Most recently, she served as a consultant to museums from coast to coast, including the Honolulu Museum of Art, the Museum of Tolerance (Los Angeles), the San Antonio Museum of Art, the 16th Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, AL), the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History & Reconciliation Foundation (Tuscaloosa, AL), and the Chrysler Museum of Art (Norfolk, VA). Her consulting work through [Shepherd Lane + Associates](#) spanned exhibition development, strategic planning, audience and membership strategy design, and elevating the visitor experience.

"Art and the artists who make it play a critical, societal role in bringing people together to engage with a multitude of experiences, perspectives, and history," Shepherd says. "That makes joining the PAFA community now, in a vibrant art city like Philadelphia, even more of a thrill. As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of America's founding document, it is an exciting and important time to share the ongoing story of American art. Our founders established PAFA because they believed that cultivating the fine arts was important for our young country, and we carry those ideals forward today."

Shepherd earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in art history from The George Washington University. She was a Marshall Memorial Fellow of the German Marshall Fund and has served as a member and trustee of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and a member and peer reviewer for the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). She is also a member of the International Women's Forum (IWF).

In addition to the nation's 250th birthday celebration, 2026 is a particularly significant year for PAFA. The institution is preparing for the reopening of the Frank Furness and George Hewitt-designed Historic Landmark Building this spring and the opening of signature exhibitions, from [Threaded Currents](#) (January 22-April 12, 2026) to the highly anticipated [Bodies and Souls: Kohler Collection](#) (March 14-July 12, 2026) and [A Nation of Artists](#) (April 12, 2026-September 5, 2027).

About PAFA

Founded in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is the United States' first school and museum of fine arts. A recipient of the National Medal of Arts, PAFA offers a world-class collection of American art, groundbreaking exhibitions, and exceptional educational programs. Through its museum and school, PAFA is committed to telling America's diverse story through art and expanding who is included in the canon of art history. Esteemed alumni include Mary Cassatt, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, William Glackens, Barkley L. Hendricks, Violet Oakley, Louis Kahn, David Lynch, and Henry Ossawa Tanner.

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