

Dear PMA Leadership and Board of Trustees,

As a member of the PMA, a former artist-resident for a PMA school vacation youth program, and a Portland artist, I am writing to express my unequivocal support for the MainePMA Union.

As you know, the arts offer us endless opportunities to engage communities & shape people's critical thinking skills. Art creates space to inform public dialogue. However, in order to fulfill these powerful objectives, arts organizations must uphold a rigorous ethical standard in all of their business, and the PMA is no different: you have a unique chance to be on the cutting edge of defining what real, actionable social justice looks like by supporting PMA workers to unionize.

That's why I'm writing in full support of the unionization of PMA workers, and to not only encourage, but to demand that the PMA allow staff to vote in a union election without delay.

The arts can be a beacon for truth in an increasingly clouded public narrative--and I believe it is our responsibility as artists and curators to do all we can to uplift and support people to have a fair say in improving their own working and living conditions.

Art without appropriate, accurate, or fair representation is hollow at best, and damaging at worst. Please do the work to be on the right side of this issue.

Respectfully,  
Nicole Manganelli



Dear PMA Leadership and Board of Trustees,

As a member of the Portland community and a former PMA employee, I am writing to share my support for the MainePMA Union.

I know from experience that unions work. I have been a union employee at 3 large institutions in New York City - a museum, a university art library, and an art history department. Museums and big institutions are full of hierarchies, and unions are an effective way to break down divisions and help all staff feel they belong. Unions provide formalized, clear, and fair ways for employees to negotiate salary and benefits with leadership, empowering all workers regardless of their job position. Unions also provide a fair and democratic system to resolve problems and conflicts, creating a more stable workplace. The union made all workers feel they had a voice - regardless of their job title, level of education, relationship with management, or tenure. And when employees feel stable and represented, the whole institution benefits from a better work culture.

The PMA is a special institution. The museum staff are some of the most motivated and inspiring people I have ever worked with. Allowing employees to unionize is a declaration that leadership understands that these talented people are what makes the museum successful, and they deserve a seat at the table.

I know from my time at the PMA that leadership is passionate about goals of equity and inclusion. As union drives take place in museums across the country, from MFA Boston to LACMA and the Guggenheim, the PMA has an opportunity to be a leader in the field by allowing staff to exercise their right to unionize. It's a way to truly create a culture of inclusivity, and a show of support for transparency and the democratic process. What a refreshing action that would be for the PMA to take in these times.

Respectfully,

Kate Burch



Dear PMA Leadership and Board of Trustees,

As a professional member of the Arts community of Maine, I am writing to express my support for the MainePMA Union. I urge you to allow staff of the Portland Museum of Art to exercise their right to vote in a union election, without interference or delay. Please recognize the importance of giving all workers a seat at the table, and that you will come together with the union to negotiate a contract that ensures a stronger, democratic, and sustainable museum.

As a member of a unionized Faculty at the University of Maine, let me note that unionization benefits the entire institution, for it underscores the investment of labour in the long term sustainability of the institution. Too frequently, people perceive a unionized labour force as counter to the interests of administrators, when any close study reveals how unionization brings forefront that labour and management are mutually essential partners, whose common interests in serving their institution well as responsible members alone can ensure the sustainability of their institution.

Respectfully,

Dr Michael Grillo, History of Art, UMaine



Dear PMA Leadership and Board of Trustees,

I've been a member of the PMA for the 3 years that I have lived in Portland, and I love the PMA. I also am a museum professional working at a different Maine institution. I know firsthand the issues facing our field and I completely empathize with and support your staff's efforts to form a union. This museum is such a treasure to this city because it has dedicated and knowledgeable staff. That staff deserves to have a larger role in their future. I am strongly in favor of the MainePMA Union.

I urge you to allow staff of the Portland Museum of Art to exercise their right to vote in a union election, without interference or delay. Give your workers a seat at the table so that they can ensure a stronger, democratic, and more sustainable museum.

Respectfully,

Paul Fuller



Dear PMA Leadership and Board of Trustees,

As a former member of the Portland community, I am writing to express my support for the MainePMA Union.

2020 has brought an awakening and each of us is being called to rise to the occasion.

It is no longer acceptable for museums to model systems of oppression, hierarchy, cultural appropriation, all of which are rooted in white supremacy. To think that one is beyond or outside of white supremacy is to ignore our nation's ideological foundations in slavery and the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Consider the disparity between the Director's salary and the Visitors Service representative's salary, for example. There are plenty of resources to support everyone's needs. Why not make them more equitable?

This is particularly important seeing that leaders in the field like Yesomi Umolu are already laying the foundation for this transformative change. She highlights the important role that the museum has in a 15-part exploration, published on Artnet this June:

1. Museums are built on the ideological foundation of being repositories of knowledge and spaces of care in service of civic society in the western world.
2. The history of museums is tied to the colonial impulse to collect and amass objects (and therefore cultural knowledge) from the world over, charging specialist caretakers and scientists with their interpretation.
3. The conditions of collecting upon which museums were founded are inextricably linked to colonial violence enacted on the other—non-western bodies, spaces, and societies.
4. Museums have obscured this violence in their missions of knowledge formation and caring for objects. Museums have long positioned their values and activities as apolitical acts of civic benevolence without probing their own proximity to power.



5. Care in museums has expanded from a focus on safeguarding things and building western art history in the 19th century to the reification of audience engagement in the 21st century.
6. Museums have always been exclusionary, and for the privileged. They were built for the betterment of the western subject and society at the expense of the other.
7. This is further complicated by the fiction of the emancipatory power of the cultural/art object—museums deem themselves to be spaces of respite away from real politics and societal injustices.
8. Museums have therefore set themselves in a double bind, presuming to be at the service of civic society on the one hand, while setting themselves apart from it on the other hand.
9. If museums amass knowledge and care for things, then we must ask ourselves, in the midst of the social upheavals and global health pandemic of recent days, months, and years, for whom do they do this?
10. The answer is obvious. The statements from museum leaders in recent days starkly reveal this in so far as they have identified the need to better serve communities of color through all aspects of their work all the while educating their (yet to be diverse) boards, staff and audiences on the importance of anti-racism.
11. To acknowledge the limits of your knowing and caretaking is an important step.
12. But before moving forward, it is important to understand that to seek to make amends, repair, reconcile, and build for the future on broken foundations is a difficult and potentially dangerous path.
13. The task of the moment is not to seek to welcome the other and the excluded into these fragile spaces, i.e. filling quotas and exacting hastened inclusion policies without making any other changes to institutional culture or structure. For the violence will only worsen.
14. The task is to commit to practices of knowing and care that critically interrogate the fraught history of museums and their contemporary form, uprooting weak foundations



and rebuilding upon new, healthy ones. 15. Let us know and care for the other, ourselves, and society at large in equal measure, without prejudice. Let us know and care about bodies and their politics.

Do not use your ignorance of the museum's colonial history and the vast resources like Umolu's as an excuse for continuing to do nothing to promote change. It is no longer acceptable.

Make a commitment to be a leader in \*this\* moment, to learn from what this year has shown us all about the interdependence we have on one another. If you were wondering what you could do to help right the injustice that COVID and the Black Lives Matter movement has laid bare, this is the moment to be that person you see yourself to be.

Groups like Standing Up for Racial Justice provide resources for navigating these difficult conversations and to name the characteristics of White Supremacy so you can begin to unpack them in the work that you are doing and in yourselves.

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.htm>  
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Your employees are demanding the dignity and respect that comes with being paid a liveable wage, engaging in meaningful work, and exercising their right to unionize for one another. If you care about creating a future where art is an integral part of building community, you will meet their demands.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Spavento

Former Visual Arts Programmer of SPACE & Co-Director of Border Patrol

