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National Gallery of Art



Release Date: July 2, 2020

Michael Laphorn Named as New Chief of Design for National Gallery of Art, Washington



Michael Laphorn. Photo by Dan Dennehy, Minneapolis Institute of Art

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art announced today the appointment of Michael Laphorn as chief of design. Laphorn is currently the exhibition designer at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia), where he has been creating innovative installations and exhibition design since 2014. Prior to Mia, Laphorn was an exhibition designer and manager at The Metropolitan Museum of Art for nine years. When Laphorn begins his tenure on July 20, he will become the Gallery's third chief of design since the museum opened in 1941 and will succeed Mark Leithauser, who retired on July 1.

"Through his critically acclaimed work at The Met and Mia, Michael has enlivened the experience of art for millions of museum visitors. I am thrilled that he is bringing his talents to the Gallery. His experience with a wide range of art—from ancient to contemporary and from cultures around the world—will enrich and expand on the Gallery's long legacy of exquisite exhibition and installation design," said Kate Haw, executive officer for collections, exhibitions, and programs at the Gallery.

"I am honored to be joining a team of extraordinary museum professionals to build on the foundation of impeccable scholarship, outstanding exhibition design, and innovative gallery installations at the National Gallery of Art. I look forward to working with [National Gallery of Art director] Kaywin Feldman, Kate, and my new colleagues to advance the vision of the forthcoming strategic plan and find inventive, thoughtful, and engaging ways to make our collection and exhibitions even more relevant for our national audiences," said Laphorn.

As chief of design, Laphorn will lead a team of 40 staff in the design office, the silkscreen shop, the exhibition production shop, the armature shop, the lighting shop, and the architectural services department as well as oversee various contractors during large-scale projects. Laphorn will serve on the exhibition planning committee, work with curators to conceptualize exhibition design, and manage all temporary exhibition installations and displays of the permanent collection at the Gallery.

Laphorn has more than 25 years of experience in a wide range of design work, from special exhibitions and permanent collections to new construction and capital renovations. At Mia, he designed the popular *Martin Luther: Art and Reformation* (2016) and the groundbreaking *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists* (2019). He collaborated with such artists as Robert Wilson and Mark Mothersbaugh on their cutting-edge installations.

While at The Met, Laphorn worked within the permanent collection on the ethereal renovation of the Greek and Roman galleries; the new Hatshepsut gallery of the Egyptian galleries; and the popular Charles Engelhard Court in the American Wing. Among the temporary exhibitions he designed were *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (2013); *Photography and the American Civil War* (2013); and *Heroic Africans: Legendary Leaders, Iconic Sculptures* (2011), for which he received critical acclaim.

Laphorn's other design experience includes New York–based design consultancy ESI Design, the Chicago History Museum, and countless theatrical productions. Laphorn taught exhibition design at the Fashion Institute of Technology at the State University of New York.

Laphorn earned a BA in communications with an emphasis in theater from Northwestern University and an MFA in scenic design for stage and film from New York University.

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