

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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## Blanton Museum Announces New Board Chair

*Collector, Writer, and Philanthropist Suzanne McFayden steps into top position on the Blanton National Leadership Board*



Austin, TX — September 22, 2021 — The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is pleased to announce that it has named Suzanne McFayden the new Chair of the Blanton National Leadership Board. McFayden, who currently holds the title of Vice Chair, will assume her new role in September, succeeding Janet Allen, who has served as Board Chair since 2018.

“Janet Allen’s exceptional leadership has been instrumental to the growth of the Blanton and Austin as a cultural center,” said Blanton Director Simone Wicha. “We are incredibly fortunate to now welcome Suzanne McFayden as our new Board Chair at such a momentous time, as we transform the museum experience through the revitalization of our grounds. Suzanne also cares deeply about the Blanton’s commitment to education, public outreach, and being a welcoming and inclusive institution. She is a passionate champion for our exhibition program and collection, and for amplifying diverse voices. As we shape the future of the Blanton, her leadership and strategic thinking will keep us moving forward in service of the arts and our community.”

“I want to express my gratitude to the Board, and in particular to Janet Allen for her invaluable leadership and friendship,” said McFayden. “Art plays such an important role in our connection with the world and our fellow human beings. As the Blanton moves into a new chapter—both in person and virtually—I look forward to partnering with the museum’s staff, my fellow board members, and other friends and collaborators in continuing to build the museum’s impact throughout Austin and beyond.”

McFayden joined the Board in 2015, having first become involved with the museum through Blanton Art Club, a group of patrons who support the museum’s growing role in Austin and participate in behind-the-scenes programming with Blanton curators.

She was an early supporter of the museum’s Contemporary Project series, which began in 2017 to highlight international contemporary art and features new acquisitions. Recent Contemporary Project exhibitions have included celebrated solo shows by Diedrick Brackens, Susan Philipsz, Sedrick Huckaby, Kambui Olujimi, and Lily Cox-Richard. This December the ninth iteration of the series will feature new work by the artist and musician Terry Allen. In addition, McFayden has helped to underwrite important exhibitions like *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design* (2018), along with the museum’s educational efforts. A respected collector, she has also promised several works of contemporary art to enhance the Blanton’s future collection.

As McFayden explained in a [Financial Times interview](#) earlier this year, her support aims to contextualize art by and of marginalized voices, not only in terms of self-identity, but as the claiming of a collective history: “We have no common language, since we don’t know if we come from Benin, Nigeria or elsewhere, so I am a big believer in supporting artists’ shows. We need to show that there is a history of black artists’ work.”

During her tenure this past year as Vice Chair, McFayden was deeply involved in virtual Board meetings and the challenges the museum has faced throughout the pandemic. She was also an avid participant in working groups and planning related to the new grounds initiative, as well as helping design [a virtual panel](#) in fall 2020 as part of the museum’s popular *Curated Conversations* series. In this program Wicha, McFayden, and Board members Gilberto Cárdenas and Tom Dunning discussed the diverse experiences they bring to their roles and the future they envision for the museum.

“For me, it’s important to be involved in places where I feel that I can give the effort that’s necessary. I’m not interested in just a ‘name experience’ but actually learning from and contributing to the organizations that I work with in any sort of leadership capacity,” McFayden said in the panel discussion. “The Blanton aligns with my values, and I want to be very clear that aligning values doesn’t mean there’s no pushback or that there’s no conversation or discussion. Actually, that is how you understand if things are aligning for you.”

### **About the Blanton Museum of Art**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with around 19,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly’s *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

### **About the National Leadership Board**

The Blanton’s National Leadership Board formed in 2014, as a reimagining of its earlier advisory group, the Museum Council. The prestigious volunteer group is composed of University of Texas at Austin alumni and other friends who are collectors, philanthropists, and business leaders from across the country. The group serves as ambassadors and advisors for the Blanton and support the museum’s commitment to excellence and in continuing to build the museum’s profile on a national and international level. The Board is a university priority aimed at helping to position both the University of Texas and the city of Austin as centers for world-class art and education.

### **About Suzanne McFayden**

Born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica, Suzanne McFayden is an author, philanthropist and leading collector of modern and contemporary art. Suzanne holds a BA in French Literature from Cornell University and an MFA in Writing from Mills College. Her philanthropic investments continue to expand opportunities for women and children around the world, starting with ensuring that families worldwide have the food they need to thrive. Suzanne also serves on the board of the Studio Museum of Harlem in NYC as well as on Pratt Institute’s DEIA Committee. As a black female art collector, McFayden’s collection focuses on works that reflect who she is: woman, black, mother, immigrant, traveler, survivor, writer, *other*.

### **Image**

Suzanne McFayden, photo Kara Marie Trombetta