

Press Release



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Newark Museum's Sonnet Takahisa Honored with Katherine Coffey Award *Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums Presents Award Named After Newark Museum's Fourth Director*

NEWARK, NJ – In recognition of her distinguished service and lifetime achievements in the museum field, Sonnet Takahisa, the Newark Museum's Director of Strategic Education Initiatives, has been awarded the Katherine Coffey Award by the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums. The award is named after the Newark Museum's fourth director Katherine Coffey, who devoted 43 years of service to the museum before retiring in 1968.

“The Coffey Award is the highest honor in the Mid-Atlantic region and one of the most prestigious awards in the museum profession, said Gretchen Sorin, President of the Association. “We could not be more proud of the contributions of Sonnet Takahisa to our profession and to the people of our region.”

Takahisa joined the Museum in 2014, and under her leadership, the Museum opened the MakerSPACE, an intersection of art, science and technology. Additionally, she led the revitalization of Museum programs for diverse audiences such as Late Thursdays and Second Sundays; and re-introduced art classes and courses for adults, including Vitality Arts for individuals 55 and over. Takahisa also works with the curatorial department to reinterpret the Museum's collections for 21st century audiences. An advocate for public engagement, community building and education reform, she collaborates with arts, education and cultural organizations locally, statewide and nationally.

“We are proud of the work Sonnet has done here at the Newark Museum – an institution known for its exemplary arts education programs,” said the Museum's Interim Co-Director Deborah Kasindorf. “Sonnet has ensured that our education legacy continues to be a model for peers across the country.”

For many years, Takahisa was a consultant to museums, cultural institutions and schools. She served on national and local task forces for museums, arts, pre-K through higher education, government funding agencies and foundations.

Additionally, she was instrumental in initiating programs at Boston Children’s Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum and the National September 11 Memorial & Museum. From 1993 – 2003 she was the founding co-director of The NYC Museum School, a groundbreaking public school that used the “Museum Learning” model to engage middle and high school students by providing direct access to the resources of New York City cultural institutions. She also served as Senior Program Officer at New Visions for Public Schools, a New York academic management organization, where she worked with a portfolio of new schools co-created by arts and cultural organizations, youth leadership groups and the New York City Department of Education. For six years, Takahisa coordinated the statewide Museum School Partnership Professional Learning Network for the New York State Council on the Arts. She also consulted on exhibit planning and design for museums around early childhood education and public engagement.

She has taught intensive graduate seminars for The Johns Hopkins University Museum Studies students and presented seminars for students at other museum studies programs.

“Sonnet brings an impressive record of innovation to the Newark Museum,” said Stephanie Glickman, Chair of the Museum’s Education Committee. “She has a keen ability to excite and engage the Museum audience. Her engagement with the interpretation of the collection has helped take us to the next level regionally and nationally.”

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Founded in 1909, the Newark Museum is the largest art and education institution in New Jersey and one of the most influential museums in the United States. Its renowned global art collections, supported by significant holdings of science, technology and natural history, rank 12th among North America’s art museums. The Museum is dedicated to artistic excellence, education and community engagement with an overarching commitment to broadening and diversifying arts participation. As it has for over a century, the Museum responds to the evolving needs and interests of the diverse audiences it serves by providing exhibitions, programming and resources designed to improve and enrich people’s lives.

The Museum also encompasses the Victoria Hall of Science, the Alice and Leonard Dreyfuss Planetarium, the MakerSPACE, the Billy Johnson Auditorium, the Alice Ransom Dreyfuss Memorial Garden, an authentic Schoolhouse from 1784, and the Newark Fire Museum.

The Newark Museum, a not-for-profit museum of art and science, receives operating support from the City of Newark, the State of New Jersey, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State (a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts), the New Jersey Cultural Trust, the Prudential Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, the PSEG Foundation, the Phyllis Bolton Administrative Trust, the Wallace Foundation, and other corporations, foundations, and individuals. Funds for acquisitions and activities other than operations are provided by members and other contributors.

Caption: Deborah Schwartz, treasurer of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums; Sonnet Takahisa, the Newark Museum’s Director of Strategic Education Initiatives; and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, president of MAAM.