

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 19, 2026

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### **Bainbridge Island Museum of Art Announces Executive Director Transition**

*After 10 years, Bainbridge Island Museum of Art's Sheila Hughes will conclude her tenure in June*

(BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASH.) — After ten years of service to Bainbridge Island Museum of Art (BIMA) as Executive Director, Sheila Hughes has announced her departure effective June 20, 2026, marking ten years of deeply committed and transformative leadership.

Since joining BIMA in 2016, Hughes has led the museum to new levels of sustainability, visibility, and service through thoughtful artistic and programmatic growth. Her devotion to the mission fueled BIMA's commitments to diversity, community engagement, and the cultivation of meaningful partnerships, while helping place the museum on the national stage. Community partner and leader Akuyea Karen Vargas remarked that Hughes "... moved *art* to a whole new level. She broke down barriers and built a whole new community where we can come together, across diverse cultures, to celebrate the heart of unity through the arts."

She also elevated the Cynthia Sears Artists' Books Collection, supporting its recognition as an internationally significant resource and anchoring BIMA's leadership in the field of artists' books.

"Of particular strategic importance is her role securing the promised gift of the Cynthia Sears Artists' Books Collection and its related programs—an organization-changing development for BIMA, which is unique among museums across our country," BIMA's Chief Curator Greg Robinson emphasized. "As BIMA continues the years-long effort to build an Endowment Fund to help offset operational costs, we have Sheila Hughes to thank for crafting so many critical building blocks for BIMA's future success."

Throughout her tenure, Hughes brought a genuine sense of wonder and joy to the museum. Her decades of arts and spectacle experience, including executive positions at One Reel, Bumbershoot, Teatro ZinZanni, WOMAD, Summer Nights at the Pier, Gage Academy of Art, and Icicle Creek Center for the Arts, helped shape an artistically adventurous and public-centered philosophy at BIMA. Under her direction, BIMA built and produced one of the richest arrays of community and cultural events in the Puget Sound region. She spearheaded the BRAVA Awards, putting unrestricted gifts of \$15,000 each in the hands of four working artists each year, launched the one-of-a-kind DogEar Festival in celebration of artists' books, and was instrumental in creating the Within/Earshot Jazz Festival at BIMA. These initiatives cross-pollinated new audiences while keeping artists and their work at the center of every

decision. She also remained a steadfast champion of accessibility, working to ensure that museum admissions remain free, as it has since the museum opened more than twelve years ago.

Reflecting on her time at BIMA, Hughes shared her gratitude for the community and people who made the work possible:

“What a gift it’s been to be trusted with this exceptional organization—and to discover the constellation of artists, activists, supporters, staff, volunteers, and community groups who want to shape and immerse themselves in this vibrant, lively, warm, and wonderful incubator of art and ideas. The work has been so deeply collaborative and imaginative—and cultivated hope even in these dark and challenging times. I once called BIMA a gateway drug to joy—it really is *that* powerful and transformative—and I can’t think of anything this world might need more right now.”

Equally defining was Hughes’ care for people and culture. She built an exemplary, diverse staff, closely partnered with BIMA’s Board of Directors, hired team members who shared BIMA’s values, and fostered authentic relationships with artists and partners across the Puget Sound region. “She represents the best interests and objectives of the museum, and manages to inspire those who work with her to do their very best as well, and make their own deep commitment to BIMA’s well-being,” said museum founder Cynthia Sears.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, Hughes worked tirelessly to keep her entire staff of 40 employed, scrambled to fundraise even with the doors closed, and emerged with an organization that was stronger in the implementation of its mission, vision, and values. Known for empowering her team with autonomy and confidence, she worked to create a workplace where ideas are valued and innovation is encouraged. Working with the Board of Directors, Hughes helped establish best practices in operations, management, and fundraising, while also leading quieter but equally critical efforts, including expanding the BIMA campus with off-site office and storage facilities, launching an endowment campaign, and consistently delivering a balanced budget.

Suzanna Darcy, President of BIMA’s Board of Directors, expressed heartfelt appreciation for Hughes’ leadership and the foundation she leaves behind, saying, “Sheila Hughes is the whole package and a Board Chair’s dream. Sheila is smart, insightful, inspiring, creative, and financially astute—a unique combination of skills and heart. BIMA’s Board of Directors so appreciates what she has brought to the museum as Executive Director—and as a person—and we wish her as exciting a new chapter as the one she is finishing.”

Hughes will remain in her role through June 20, 2026, supporting a thoughtful transition to a new Executive. Additional information about the search and transition process will be shared in the coming weeks.

Bainbridge Island Museum of Art extends its deepest thanks to Sheila Hughes for her extraordinary contributions, lasting impact, and unwavering belief in the power of art and the power it has to build and connect community.

[You can find photos of Sheila Hughes for press use here.](#)

**About Bainbridge Island Museum of Art:**

Bainbridge Island Museum of Art (BIMA) BIMA creates a welcoming space and inspiring platform for lively public engagement and appreciation of the contemporary art and craft of the Puget Sound region and its international collection of Artists' Books. The art museum exhibits, interprets, preserves, collects, and promotes works of proven cultural value as well as new works by emerging artists and craftspeople.

The art museum is open daily from 10 AM to 5 PM. Free admission. BIMA is located in beautiful downtown Bainbridge Island, at the corner of Hwy 305 and Winslow Way, just steps away from the ferry terminal, and with easy access via public transportation or by car from the Kitsap Peninsula. <https://www.biartmuseum.org/>

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