

# THE MUSEUM UNION WAVE












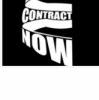






Data on this timeline came from public records, secondary-source media accounts, and email or phone exchanges with union members and leaders, as well as from union and museum social media accounts and press releases. The figures given for union sizes, director salaries, and annual operating budgets do not reflect any cuts, layoffs, or furloughs implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

In the months since the bulk of research for this project was completed, union efforts have gone public at the Milwaukee Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Portland Museum of Art, Maine; Meow Wolf, Santa Fe; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Film at Lincoln Center and Poets House, New York; and perhaps elsewhere.

No summary could be comprehensive, and this timeline is certainly not. Its relative accuracy owes a debt to the reporters who followed these stories on the ground and in real time. In particular, gratitude is due to Alex Greenberger at *ARTnews*; Ben Davis, Sarah Cascone, and Eileen Kinsella at *artnet news*; Zachary Small, Benjamin Sutton, Valentina Di Liscia, and Hakim Bishara at *Hyperallergic*; and O.K. Fox and Lucia Love, co-hosts of the *Art & Labor* podcast.

This timeline was assembled by Maxwell Paparella for *ART PAPERS*. It was edited by Sarah Higgins, copyedited by Ed Hall, and fact-checked by Kyra Baker. The labors of EC Flamming were likewise essential to its completion. An essay and a glossary of terms is available on [ARTPAPERS.ORG](http://ARTPAPERS.ORG).

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			General
Representation	Finances		
<b>Philadelphia Museum of Art</b> Philadelphia, PA 	AFSCME District Council 47 has represented museum workers from across 20 departments since 2020.	The museum is currently in the midst of a major capital campaign, with \$473 million raised of its \$525 million goal. In 2017, it undertook a \$228 million expansion project. In 2016, CEO Timothy Rub's salary was \$613,716.	← Feb. 22–Mar. 7, WV teachers and school service workers strike.
<b>Children's Museum of the Arts</b> New York, NY 	UAW Local 2110 has represented ~65 full- and part-time teaching artists, as well as visitor services and administrative workers, since 2020.		
<b>The Shed</b> New York, NY 	UAW Local 2110 has represented ~75 frontline staff referred to as VXA (visitor experience associates)—including gallery assistants, greeters, ticket takers, ushers, and other part-time, hourly-waged workers—since 2019.	The Shed occupies a new \$500 million building, which was sponsored by the city and built on public land. As of 2017, artistic director and CEO Alex Poots's salary was \$870,000.	
<b>MOCA</b> Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, CA 	AFSCME has represented >120 workers from almost every department—including visitor engagement, education, exhibitions, communications, retail, and AV, but not curatorial—since 2019.	As of 2020, the museum had an endowment of \$137 million. The museum has declined to release director Klaus Biesenbach's salary.	
<b>Marciano Art Foundation</b> Los Angeles, CA 	AFSCME District Council 36 proposed to represent 70 service workers in 2019, but the foundation closed before an election could be held.	As of 2015, founders Maurice and Paul Marciano were worth \$1.2 billion. They are two of the four founders of the clothing brand Guess, famous for union-busting since 1996, when it moved its factories from LA to Mexico and South America. In 2013, they bought the building for \$8 million.	
<b>Harriet Beecher Stowe Center</b> Hartford, CT 	UAW Local 2110 has represented nine visitor center educators, eight part-time and one full-time, since 2019.	In 2016, the center completed a \$3.3 million renovation.	
<b>The New Children's Museum</b> San Diego, CA 	IBEW Local 465 has represented 48 hourly-waged workers since 2019.	The museum has a \$4.8 million operating budget.	
<b>Milwaukee Public Museum</b> Milwaukee, WI 	AFSCME Local 526 represents ~100 full- and part-time workers, including ticket collectors, educators, maintenance staff, and scientists.	The museum is a public-private institution. In 2020, it received >\$3 million from Milwaukee County, in addition to millions in private donations. Currently plans exist to move out of the county-owned building to a new \$100 million facility, which management says must be done to maintain accreditation.	← Spring 2017, Management announces 15 layoffs amid a capital campaign to finance new construction; union members and supporters picket outside museum.
<b>Frye Art Museum</b> Seattle, WA 	The Art Workers Union, an independent and unaffiliated union, has represented six security guards since 2019.	CEO Joseph Rosa's salary is >\$229,000. Museum trustees receive the equivalent of \$115/hour for their "service."	
<b>BAM</b> Brooklyn Academy of Music Brooklyn, NY 	Unions represents 7 bargaining groups at BAM. This timeline features the largest and most recent, UAW Local 2110, which has represented ~145 administrative workers and cinema staff since 2019.	As of 2018, BAM's endowment was >\$97 million.	
<b>Tenement Museum</b> New York, NY 	UAW Local 2110 has represented ~75 visitor services, retail, advance sales, and education staff since 2019.	The museum's annual budget is ~\$11 million. They began an \$8 million expansion project in 2016.	← 2010 and 2014, Previous efforts to unionize fail.
<b>Guggenheim Museum</b> New York, NY 	IUOE Local 30 has represented ~140 installers, maintenance workers, and art handlers since 2019.	As of 2020, the museum's endowment is ~\$90 million. As of 2019, director Richard Armstrong's "total compensation package" was worth \$1.4 million.	← Fall 2017, An experienced carpenter slices his hand open on a table saw during installation; co-workers suggest he was "pushed to the brink by long hours and weekend work."
<b>Whitney Museum of Art</b> New York, NY 	Teamsters Local 966 represents art handlers at the museum, but this timeline features the efforts of non-unionized workers and artists to effect change to the Board of Trustees.	Director Adam Weinberg's salary was \$870,000 as of 2015. That year, the museum moved to its current building, which cost \$422 million to construct.	
<b>Vancouver Art Gallery</b> Vancouver, BC 	CUPE Local 15 represents ~200 workers including curators, AV staff, membership, preparators, librarians, coat check workers, designers, visitor services, etc.	The gallery's annual operating budget is ~\$25 million USD. Director Kathleen Bartels's salary was ~\$264,000 USD before her 2019 departure.	← July 2017, Previous contract expires; 8 months of bargaining follow.
<b>New Museum</b> New York, NY 	UAW 2110 has represented ~50 maintenance staff, including security, coat desk and gift shop workers since 2019.	In 2016, the museum raised \$43 million toward an \$80 million capital campaign, earmarking money for expansion and tripling the size of its endowment. As of 2018, director Lisa Phillips's salary was \$764,738. In 2019, the museum announced a \$20 million expansion project.	Mar. 12–13, Five workers begin attending "Changing the Balance We Deserve: Salaries, Promotion the museum hosted as part of a Cultural Sector series.
<b>SFMOMA</b> San Francisco Museum of Modern Art San Francisco, CA 	OPEIU Local 29 has represents 245 workers in many departments, including curators and installation workers, since 1972.	The museum has an annual budget of ~\$70 million. It reopened in 2016 after a \$305 million expansion. As of 2018, director Neal Benzra's salary was nearly \$1 million.	
<b>MoMA PS1</b> Queens, NY 	IUOE Local 30 has represented two bargaining units, (1) ~30 part-time installation and maintenance workers, since 2015, and (2) 23 full- and part-time visitor engagement workers, since 2018.	In 2013, then-director Klaus Biesenbach's salary was \$315,000.	
<b>MoMA</b> Museum of Modern Art New York, NY 	Unions represent five different bargaining groups at MoMA. This timeline features the efforts of UAW Local 2110, also known at MoMA as PASTA (Professional and Administrative Staff Association). They have represented ~250 technical, office, and professional workers—including curators, librarians, store staff, etc.—since 1971.	In 2019, the museum's endowment was ~\$1.2 billion. The museum undertook a \$450 million expansion, 2016–2019. Director Glenn Lowry's salary is \$2.2 million.	← Jun. 2015, Contract in place won after successful public pressure campaign.

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		May 21, Curator Kimberly Drew discloses her salaries at The Studio Museum in Harlem and at The Metropolitan Museum of Art during the American Association of Museums conference. May 31, Art + Museum Transparency salary-share spreadsheet begins circulating; to-date, it has accumulated more than 3,000 entries. Jun. 20, Association of Art Museum Directors passes resolution urging an end to unpaid internships, but makes an exception for those that offer academic credit.			
Apr. 5, The Shed opens.				Aug. 9, Board member and Hudson Yards developer Stephen Ross hosts fundraiser for Donald Trump. Aug. 10, Zachary Drucker and A.L. Steiner pull their work from the exhibition Open Call. Aug. 15, Fashion brands cancel scheduled shows at The Shed. Aug. 25, DJ Thanushka Yakupitiyage and dancer Elsz protest their Open Call performance, wearing Decolonize This Place T	
		May 21, Small group of workers meets with IBEW rep at coffee shop.	Summer, Weekly planning meetings; authorization cards signed and gathered.		Sep. 20, Petition to unionize, demo Many make just a
			Jun. 13, Museum announces a \$100 million building project in new location.	Aug., Contract negotiations begin; union demands "livable wages, affordable health insurance, and paid parental leave."	
		May 30, Workers announce intention to unionize, citing low wages (\$14-15/hour) and need for benefits, such as subsidized bus passes. May 31, Press conference outside museum with city councilmember. Jun. 6, CEO distributes anti-union literature to workers. Jun. 7, Mgmt. announces it will not recognize union. Union distributes "Setting the Record Straight" FAQ; workers wear union stickers during their shifts. Jun. 13, Solidarity Night at the Frye. <b>Jun. 18, Unanimous vote to unionize, 6-0.</b> Jun. 11, Bernie Sanders posts in solidarity with union.		Jul. 29, Contract negotiations begin with demands for higher wages and just-cause firing; CEO will fail to attend a single session.  Aug. 5, Art Workers Union Day declared by City of Seattle.	
Apr. 8, Initial NLRB letters filed. Apr. 16, "Turf war" between IATSE and UAW disputes which union will represent BAM workers. Apr. 19, Union posts social media introduction, referring to the workers as BAM's "lifeflood" and demanding "a real seat at the table." end Apr., Mgmt. emails workers "BAM Union Fact Sheet."	May 15, Annual benefit gala raises \$1.8 million.				Aug. 30, Union encourages applicants to the understaffed department, claiming management is "intentionally trying to exhaust us."
Apr. 9, Union announced; social media campaign begins. Apr., Mgmt. holds captive-audience meetings before agreeing to act in neutrality. <b>Apr. 15, Vote to unionize, 72-3 in favor.</b>					
um says they will begin er funding.			Jun. 6, Petition filed with NLRB. Workers announce intention to unionize, with complaints including low wages, no structure for raises, and unsafe working conditions. Jun. 11-14, Management conducts captive-audience meetings; consults with Epstein Becker Green, a "union avoidance" firm. Jun. 13, NLRB hearing; Guggenheim representatives decline to attend. <b>Jun. 27, Vote to unionize, 57-20 in favor.</b>		Sep. 9, Contract negotiations director will fail to appear at a sin bargaining meeting.
olonize This Place launches "Nine Weeks of Art staging demonstrations in the galleries during dmission to demand the removal of Kanders.	May 17, Whitney Biennial opens. Demonstrators march from the museum to Kanders' residence in Greenwich Village, deploying an oversized model of a tear gas canister that emits dry ice vapor.			Jul. 17, <i>Artforum</i> publishes "The Tear Gas Biennial," by Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett.  Jul. 19-20, Eight artists ask that their work be withdrawn from the Biennial. Jul. 25, Before the works are removed, Warren Kanders resigns from board, as does Allison Kanders from her position as co-chairperson of the painting and sculpture committee.	
	May, Director Kathleen Bartels steps down after 18 years.				
			Jun. 25, Demonstration outside summer exhibition openings. The opening remarks, which usually take place in the lobby, are moved to the top floor. Union releases open letter to management.  Jun. 26, Management announces museum expansion, budgeting \$63 million for its construction.	Aug. 29, Union releases an open letter to the director after management appeals NLRB ruling that associate curators and a senior editor & publications coordinator should be included in bargaining unit.	Sep. 19, Social media Sep. 27, with 96% Sep. sign in P
Museum settles with umbus for an sed amount.					Sep. 1, Visitor engagement bargaining unit begins first contract, with wage increases and a pension plan that includes part-timers.
'19	May '19	Jun. '19	Jul. '19	Aug. '19	Sep. '19
					Oct.



	Oct. 17-31, Chicago teachers strike.		Dec. 17, NLRB votes 3-1 to overturn Obama-era <i>Purple Communications</i> ruling, which had allowed workers to discuss unionizing and other matters on company software and servers.			Mar. 20, CARES Act allows arts industry relief, stipulates must "remain neutral in effort for the term of the 500-10,000 workers."
		Nov., First phase of Frank Gehry-designed renovation opens.		Jan. 10, Allegations surface that a manager, Joshua Helmer, made sexual advances toward multiple workers during his tenure, and that museum officials failed to appropriately respond. >400 workers sign a letter calling for accountability and structural change.	Feb., Allegations surface that a retail director, James A. Cincotta, physically and verbally abused workers. Feb., Management-hired grievance counselor is replaced after only one day on the job.	Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
				Jan. 16, Mayor of Philadelphia implores museum to "strengthen" sexual harassment policy.	Feb. 25, Petition filed with NLRB: workers announce intention to unionize, alleging that working conditions are "not up to par" and "poor processes for workplace grievances."	Mar. 14, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
			mid-Dec., Stephen Ross resigns from board of directors.			Mar. 13, The Shed closes due to COVID-19.
Ross during COVID-19.			Jan. 6, Petition filed with NLRB: workers announce intention to unionize, alleging that working conditions are "not up to par" and that there is "a lot of ambiguity regarding policies and expectations."			Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
		Nov. 20, After a \$10 million grant from board president, museum announces it will begin offering free admission in 2020.		Jan. -22, Management voluntarily recognizes union.		Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
		Nov. 22, Petition filed with NLRB: >50 workers present management with a statement of intent to unionize, citing poor pay and working conditions, and a "lack of transparency" between management and workers. Nov., Museum releases statement: "we do not believe that this union is in the best interest of our employees or the museum."				Mar. 24, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
		Dec. 6, Management voluntarily recognizes union.				
	Nov. 1, Petition filed with NLRB: workers announce intention to unionize, hoping to improve conditions and address issues such as scheduling, family leave, and the starting wage. Nov., Foundation releases statement "supportive of all recommendations to improve the workplace experience and will give this careful attention as we begin our discussions." Nov. 5, Entire visitor services staff laid off. Nov. 6, Foundation announces closure, citing "low attendance." Nov. 7, Final day of operations. Nov. 8, Terminated workers picket outside museum and file ULP claim. Nov. 16, Workers deliver letter to LAXart, where Olivia Marciano, daughter of Maurice, sits on the board.		Dec. 23, Worker files lawsuit alleging management violated the WARN Act, a California state law requiring notice before mass layoffs, seeking at least 60 days back pay and the value of lost benefits.			
	Oct. 18, Petition filed with NLRB: workers announce intention to unionize, demanding "sustainable positions with scheduled wage increases, transparency, and to have more voice in our conditions, to be able to keep these positions longer."					Mar. 14, Center closes due to COVID-19.
	Nov. 1, Unanimous vote to unionize, 9-0.					
	filed with NLRB. Workers announce intention to unionize, demanding a living wage and structured raises above San Diego's \$13/hour minimum wage.	Nov. 21-22, Bargaining committee undergoes "contract training" with IBEW representatives.		Jan. 7, Contract negotiations begin.		Mar. 16, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
	Oct. 9, Party at local store for bargaining unit members and supporters.	Dec., Drafting first proposal for contract.				
	Oct. 18-19, Vote to unionize, 34-14 in favor.					
	Oct. 22, Press conference in front of museum.			Dec. 31, Previous contract expires; management's offer includes tripling workers' health insurance deductible, eliminating cost-of-living adjustments, pay freezes for senior workers, cuts to the 401(k), and an unusual provision that would track the private medical data of workers and financially penalize them for failure to meet the benchmarks of a wellness program, increasing premiums by 15%. Lowest-paid workers would still be making less than \$11/hour.		Mar. 14, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
	Oct. 2, Mgmt. consents to close during cleaning, bowing to union's safety demands.	Nov. 11, "In June we had a staff of 13. . . . Now we're down to seven."		Jan. 18, More than 50 workers and supporters picket for fair contract during Museum Week activities.		
				Jan. 16, Union launches solidarity fund.		Mar. 12, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
				Jan. 27, Union reports progress in contract negotiations.		Mar. 18, With no word from staff & hourly workers
				Jan. 29-30, Union members join SEIU Healthcare 1199NW workers on the picket line at Swedish Medical Center.	Mar. 25, Mgmt. paid for reg	
	Oct. 10, Contract negotiations begin.					Mar. 13, BAM closes due to COVID-19.
		Nov. 22, Union issues response to a "divisive email" from mgmt.				Mar. 7, Union alleges mgmt. "is doing all it can to keep the museum open."
		Dec. 11, Mgmt. disables staff-wide email communications, except those approved by mgmt.				Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
begin; gallery	Nov. 5, Museum hosts panel on "Basquiat's 'Defacement': The Untold Story," excluding the exhibition's curator, Chae'dria LaBouvier, the first Black woman to curate a solo show at the museum. From the audience, LaBouvier accuses the museum of "institutional violence" and "weaponizing bodies of color."			Jan. 27, Members wear union T-shirts to work.		Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
	Nov. 14, Museum announces hiring of Ashley James, its first full-time Black curator.					Mar. 17, Union reports that Mar. 25-30, Freelance workers are not paid.
						Mar. 12, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
						Mar. 16, Gallery closes due to COVID-19.
solidarity campaign begins.						Mar. 12, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
Marathon weekend of bargaining begins. Union votes majority to authorize a strike if agreement is not reached.						Mar. 24, Union releases statement on distributed proportionate
30, Tentative agreement reached for 5-year contract including significant wage increases, reductions in healthcare costs, increases TO, and a grievance procedure.						
Oct. 2, Contract ratified by union, 53-3.						Mar. 13, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
						Mar., 131 on-call another 156 furloughed (~60% of staff); reduced hours.
	Oct. 30, Phil Collins withdraws video from exhibition in support of demands that MoMA board member and BlackRock CEO Larry Fink resign or divest from private prisons.					Mar. 12, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
	Oct. 10, New Sanctuary Coalition calls for MoMA board member and BlackRock CEO Larry Fink to divest from private prison holdings in open letter signed by >200 art workers.					Mar. 12, Museum closes due to COVID-19.
	Oct. 18, Demonstrators demand private prison divestment at VIP preview party.					Mar. 20, Union releases statement on distributed proportionate
	Oct. 20, \$450 million renovation opens to the public with free admission in a surprise public preview.					Mar. 20, Union releases statement on distributed proportionate
	Oct. 21, On opening day, demonstrators block entrance, demand resignation of board member Steven Tanenbaum, a profiteer of the Puerto Rican debt crisis. Seven are arrested.					Mar. 20, Union releases statement on distributed proportionate
'19	Nov. '19	Dec. '19	Jan. '20	Feb. '20	Mar. '20	Apr. '20

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