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JENNIFER TRAINER THOMPSON TO LEAVE HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE

Legacy of transformational leadership and expansion leaves Village poised for future growth

Pittsfield, MA—The Board of Trustees of Hancock Shaker Village announced today that director Jennifer Trainer Thompson will step down in July. Thompson has been widely credited for her transformational leadership of the museum and is recognized as an innovator in the museum community. Since her appointment in September 2016, Hancock Shaker Village has grown in size and stature and has been infused, as *The Boston Globe* noted last summer, “with great gusts of contemporary vitality”. Thompson is stepping down to work on creative projects, and will serve as a special counsel to the board of trustees following her departure.

“I have had the time of my life feeling the spirit of this place, responding to it, being nourished by it and all those who support the Village,” said Thompson. “It’s been thrilling to lead the organization to grow and thrive, even during challenging times. Today Hancock Shaker Village is in great shape -- financially, organizationally, and programmatically. Indeed, it is partly due to this success that it feels like the right time for me to leave. I have been blessed to have the opportunity to steward this organization – one of the oldest in the Berkshires -- and it has ignited a desire to follow a path that is creatively based. When a newspaper wrote last year that I was a ‘filmmaker, journalist, and museum professional’ it startled me – I’d never shuffled it in that order. But I have always been interested in bringing stories to life, through exhibitions, writing, and recently filmmaking, and, after 34 years in the museum business, the time has presented itself to continue in that creative thread.”

“This news is indeed bittersweet. We are truly grateful for the talent, energy and creativity that Jennifer has brought to the Village during her remarkable tenure, and we are sorry to see her leave. That said, we are happy for her and the opportunity this presents for her to engage in other creative pursuits,” said Diane Eshleman, chairman of the Hancock Shaker Village Board of Trustees. “Jennifer is a phenomenally talented woman who will leave a legacy of accomplishments that have added new vibrancy and a fun, contemporary spin to our programming, all while respecting the heritage of the Shakers and the custodial responsibility we have for this beloved historic site.”

Hancock Shaker Village Highlights under Thompson’s Direction

During her tenure, Thompson advanced Hancock Shaker Village regionally and nationally as one of the most comprehensively interpreted Shaker sites in the country, as a cultural icon, and as a place to gather, be inspired, and have fun. Under Thompson’s leadership, Hancock Shaker Village has featured exhibitions that view the Shakers through a contemporary lens; artists who have had exhibitions or site-specific installations at Hancock Shaker Village include Maya Lin, Thomas Barger, James Turrell, Jenny

Holzer, Don Gummer, Barbara Ernst Prey, Stephen Hannock, and Abelardo Morel, among others. This coming May the Village will present its first campus-wide exhibition that draws a link between this utopian religious sect and contemporary Asian art, with Pinaree Sanpitak, Yusuke Asai, and Kimsooja.

Designers attracted to the Shaker aesthetic who have curated or participated in shows at the Village range from Tory Burch to Gary Graham. A collaboration with Jacob's Pillow supported an artist residency with the Brooklyn dance troupe Fist & Heel, whose explorations of black ecstatic Shaker worship led to premieres in the Berkshires at Hancock Shaker Village and the Pillow, followed by the Boston premiere at ICA Boston and a New York premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. One of Thompson's first decisions as director was to turn the 1910 Barn hayloft into a concert venue, which led to performances by both well-known and rising stars, including Natalie Merchant, Autumn Defense, Dom Flemons, Anjimile, Yo-Yo Ma, and The Knights. Thompson also initiated a thought-provoking dinner series, Food for Thought, with guest authors ranging from Governor Deval Patrick to environmentalist Elizabeth Kolbert to Pulitzer Prize winner Stacy Schiff. With an ambition to raise the profile of the Village, Thompson curated several important exhibitions, including *Climbing the Holy Hill*, which wove together the work of performing artists Brad Wells, Rhiannon Giddens, Our Native Daughters, and Roomful of Teeth, as well as visual artist Allison Smith into a radiant, immerse sound art exhibition experienced while walking up Shaker Mountain, evoking the Shakers' annual pilgrimage up their Holy Hill, now part of Pittsfield State Forest.

New programs under Thompson's tenure include not only the concert and Food for Thought series, but Goat Yoga, Hancock Holiday Nights, Farm to Fork Fondo, and the Big Chill. These have spurred the growth of visitation even amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and positioned the Museum for continued operational success. Hancock Shaker Village's public outreach efforts have expanded to serve its diverse constituencies. Thousands of children visit the Village annually to interact with farm animals and learn about the Shakers. Through partnerships with Greenagers, Roots Rising, and Girls Inc., Hancock Shaker Village has engaged with area youth, offering opportunities for education and training.

To advance the Village physically, working closely with trustees, Thompson grew several new revenue streams that support the museum's programs and operating costs on an annual basis. Working with staff, under her leadership the long-forgotten trail and South Family Site of the Shakers (abandoned in 1849) were opened for the first time in museum history, part of a strategic plan to activate more of the 750-acre campus, which includes 20 buildings, forests with trails, and pastures. The Trustees' Office and Store was renovated into artist and intern housing in 2020, part of a paid internship program with housing that includes both traditional museum positions such as curatorial and education, but also farm internships – apropos, given that Hancock Shaker Village is the oldest working farm in the region.

“There are so many things I love about Hancock Shaker Village,” said Thompson, “its compelling physical presence, with the tall simple buildings speaking to each other, forming a community, the farm animals bellowing in the distance. The interiors and objects, where one can admire the architecture, in awe of the deep beauty, enjoying the touch, the color, the sensation of the divine.”

Under her leadership, critical preservation work, a perpetual need in the Village, has been done at the Village, including the restoration of two 19th century wooden silos, repair of the Dairy El and foundation of the historic 1826 Round Stone Barn, upgraded heating, electrical, and plumbing systems in the

Trustees' Office, and the introduction of sewer to the Village, which had relied on the Shakers' antiquated septic systems. The museum is also currently engaged in a priority need to provide proper collection storage of objects for future generations.

About Jennifer Trainer Thompson

In addition to her work at Hancock Shaker Village, Thompson was one of a small team who built and developed the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), where she worked for 28 years -- 11 years before the museum opened and 17 years after its 1999 opening. Her debut as a film director was with *Museum Town*, a documentary about the power of art to transform a community, which premiered at South x Southwest in 2019, was named one of the 10 Best Art Documentaries of 2020 by *Artnews*, was featured on PBS in September 2021, and is soon to be released for streaming. She has written about art, culture, food, and science, and is the author or co-author of 20 books, including *Nuclear Power: Both Sides*, *Beyond Einstein: The Cosmic Quest for the Unified Field Theory*, and *Fresh Fish*. Nominated for three James Beard awards for her food writing, she is currently working on a catalogue with artist James Turrell about *Lapsed Quaker Ware*, an exhibition currently on view at Hancock Shaker Village and MASS MoCA. A former trustee of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Thompson has served on numerous boards, including IS183 Art School of the Berkshires, the Williamstown Elementary Endowment Fund, and the WGBY Board of Tribunes. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Thompson attended Earlham College and earned a B.A. in English literature from Tufts University.

ABOUT HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE

Home to the Shakers for almost 200 years, Hancock Shaker Village is the preeminent Shaker living history museum in the United States. With 20 historic buildings on 750 acres, Hancock Shaker Village brings the Shaker story to life and preserves it for future generations. Through Shaker architecture, design, a 22,000-piece collection, and engaging programming, we promote appreciation of the aesthetics, beliefs, achievement, and controversies that have defined the Shaker experience in America. For more information about Hancock Shaker Village, please contact Carolyn McDaniel at cmcdaniel@hancockshakervillage.org or visit HancockShakerVillage.org.

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