



THE BARNES FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**JAMES CLAIBORNE APPOINTED  
BARNES FOUNDATION  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT**

**Philadelphia, PA, January 25, 2024**—Thom Collins, Neubauer Family Executive Director and President of the Barnes Foundation, today announced the appointment of James Claiborne to the newly created position of Deputy Director for Community Engagement. A program and visual arts curator and educator with nearly 20 years of experience in the nonprofit cultural sector, Claiborne returns to the Barnes—where he previously served as Curator of Public Programs—after most recently serving as Senior Vice President of Exhibitions and Programs at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. He will begin his new post on February 5, 2024.

As Deputy Director for Community Engagement, Claiborne succeeds Val Gay, Deputy Director for Audience Engagement and Chief Experience Officer, in a reconfigured role. Gay is departing the Barnes following five years of visionary leadership to pursue her creative entrepreneurship full time. During her productive tenure at the Barnes, Gay led the formation of the Guest and Protection Services department—which is composed of staff responsible for welcoming and engaging guests while protecting the collection, staff, and building—to offer a more visitor-centered on-site experience. She was pivotal to the launch of the Pathways Program, the Barnes’s internal internship program designed for and directly investing in the skill development and career advancement of frontline staff. Additionally, she oversaw the vast expansion of Barnes family and community engagement programs, including the Early Learner Summer Pods program, which was designed to address gaps in early childhood development programs during the pandemic.

In his new role, Claiborne will work to strengthen the Barnes’s relationships with artistic and programmatic partners in the Philadelphia region and beyond. He will be responsible for developing, implementing, and assessing a wide variety of public programs, family programs, and community engagement activities that align with the Barnes’s progressive artistic, educational, and social missions. Collaborating across departments, he will cultivate new ways for artistic partners and program attendees to have meaningful and continuing relationships with the Barnes. He will also collaborate closely with Sheronda Whitaker, Deputy Director for Human Resources and Chief Diversity Officer, to support the design and implementation of DEIA initiatives.

“On behalf of Barnes staff and trustees, I want to express deep gratitude to Val Gay for all she has done to advance the mission of the Barnes over the last half-decade, and a warm welcome to James Claiborne,” says Collins. “James is a deeply strategic, creative thinker whose steadfast commitment to Philadelphia—and its robust community of visual artists, performers, musicians, and makers of all kinds—makes him uniquely suited for this newly reimagined leadership position. Building on his innovative work as Curator of Public Programs from 2021 to 2023, he will play a key role in strengthening the Barnes’s

connections with the many diverse communities we serve and expanding our DEIA initiatives.”

Throughout his career, Claiborne has shaped the vision and strategy for inclusive cultural programming and developed new programs that expand museums’ roles as centers of creative inquiry. From 2015 to 2021, he served as Public Director of Programming at the African American Museum in Philadelphia, and prior to that was Community Engagement Manager for the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, Editor for Visit Philadelphia’s Philly 360 campaign, and Program Manager at First Person Arts. Claiborne also served as an adjunct professor at Drexel University’s Westphal College of Media Arts and Design, where he taught audience development in the arts, with a focus on program creation, community engagement, and marketing.

“I am thrilled to return to the Barnes in this new role and deeply grateful to Val Gay for her invaluable leadership, mentorship, and friendship over the years,” says Claiborne. “The Barnes is filled with incredible opportunities for meaningful community engagement. I look forward to working with my colleagues and Philadelphia’s creative community to expand collaborations inspired by the Barnes’s dedication to education and commitment to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.”

In 2023, Claiborne and Nancy Ireson co-curated the Barnes exhibition *William Edmondson: A Monumental Vision and Returning to Before*—an installation and intervention by visual and movement artist Brendan Fernandes created in response to Edmondson’s work. As an independent curator, he has presented exhibitions by a wide range of artists and groups, including Deborah Willis, James Dupree, Amber Art and Design, Richard J. Watson, Ruth Naomi Floyd, and Barkley L. Hendricks. He has served as a board member, advisory board member, or consultant for several organizations in the Greater Philadelphia region, including *Artblog*, Art Sanctuary, FringeArts, Mural Arts Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Cultural Fund.

### **ABOUT THE BARNES FOUNDATION**

The Barnes Foundation is a nonprofit cultural and educational institution that shares its unparalleled art collection with the public, organizes special exhibitions, and presents programming that fosters new ways of thinking about human creativity. The Barnes collection is displayed in ensembles that integrate art and objects from across cultures and time periods, overturning traditional hierarchies and revealing universal elements of human expression. Home to one of the world’s finest collections of impressionist, post-impressionist, and modern paintings—including the largest groups of paintings by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne in existence—the Barnes brings together renowned canvases by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and Vincent van Gogh, alongside African, Asian, ancient, and medieval art as well as metalwork, furniture, and decorative art.

The Barnes Foundation was established by Dr. Albert C. Barnes in 1922 to “promote the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts and horticulture.” A visionary collector and pioneering educator, Dr. Barnes was also a fierce advocate for the civil rights of African Americans, women, and the economically marginalized. Committed to racial equality and social justice, he established a scholarship program to support young Black artists, writers, and musicians who wanted to further their education. Dr. Barnes was deeply interested in African American culture and became actively involved in the Harlem Renaissance, during which he collaborated with

philosopher Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson, the scholar and activist, to promote awareness of the artistic value of African art.

Since moving to Philadelphia in 2012, the Barnes Foundation has expanded its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and social justice, teaching visual literacy in groundbreaking ways; investing in original scholarship relating to its collection; and enhancing accessibility throughout every facet of its program. Hours and ticket prices are listed on our [website](#).

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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