

STAGE & ARTS

Bakken Museum, Highpoint Center for Printmaking poised for change with new leadership

Alissa Light and Jehra Patrick plan to build on the legacies of these institutions in their new roles.

By Alicia Eler (<https://www.startribune.com/alicia-eler/6370406/>) Star Tribune |

SEPTEMBER 15, 2022 — 10:34PM



Bde Maka Ska, formerly Lake Calhoun, separates the Bakken Museum and Highpoint Center for Printmaking, but both Twin Cities arts institutions will be transformed this fall under new leadership.

The Bakken, known for its work with science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education for kids, named Alissa Light president and CEO in July, and she began Sept. 7. At Highpoint Center for Printmaking, Jehra Patrick started her job as its new executive director Aug. 1 and is pondering what's next for the organization and how to authentically engage the community.

When Light, 41, learned about the opportunity at the Bakken, she connected with the institution's interests.

"I was perceiving this as a next chapter of asking some big questions about whose stories have been centered in the STEM fields, and whose haven't," she said. "What are we going to do to deepen our question-asking and curiosity to make change so that more people are a part of this future? Because that's the only way to do anything innovative."

As both leaders step into their new roles at these established Minneapolis arts organizations, they have something in common — they both want to listen.

"My approach is that of a listener and, I would say, a collaborative and relational leader," Patrick said. "It was important to me to not come in and say, 'OK, we're gonna do this now.' That's just not my leadership style."



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Jehra Patrick, left, and Alissa Light, two new leaders in the Twin Cities arts scene, stand along Bde Maka Ska.

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Patrick, 41, comes to Highpoint from Macalester College's Law Warschaw Gallery, where she was the director and curator, and as founder-director of the [Emerging Curators Institute \(https://www.emergingcurators.org/\)](https://www.emergingcurators.org/), which helps curators from diverse backgrounds build their careers.

Light arrives at the Bakken after 12 years as executive director of Family Tree Clinic, a community clinic that offers health care services to underserved and uninsured populations.

"I'm also drawing inspiration coming from a health care space — how healing environments are formed," Light said.

From the ground up

Patrick, who grew up in South St. Paul and has lived in various parts of Minneapolis the past 22 years, feels a special connection with Lake Street.

"We know that Lake Street has seen a lot in the last 20 years," she said. "It's very dear to me, and my lived experience from shopping at Extreme Noise as a teen to eating at amazing restaurants and the sort of emotional trauma of seeing it burned down."

Patrick is also very interested in creating an equity-centered organization — but not in the buzzword-centric DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) way.

"DEI is not an aspect of arts and cultural work — it is arts and culture," she said. "I'm really trying to strip that word from our future of programming, because it shouldn't be a thing we do — it should be everything that we do. So that's something I am trying to embed in the organization and throughout."

Light finds herself coming into the Bakken feeling excited about values.

"I'm coming in with a lot of questions and a lot of curiosity, and really leaning into this practice that the Bakken has about being bold in trying stuff and maybe trying more things so that we can be this quirky, sparkling, inspiring incubator for more people, especially young people," she said.

"As a white queer woman, I've experienced a feeling in science and STEM spaces that they're not for me, of being discounted, and also of being too much," Light said.

She said she feels strongly about "fostering spaces that actively invite disruption and work for belonging."

Similarly, Patrick wants to inspire more people to connect with printmaking.

"I'm thinking about the ways that we can grow our audience and really create awareness within the arts and cultural sector beyond just printmakers right now, because you don't have to be a printmaker to appreciate and connect with print as a medium," she said.

In July, Highpoint announced [Full Color Print Fellows \(https://www.highpointprintmaking.org/highpoint-news/2022/7/6/welcome-full-color-print-fellows\)](https://www.highpointprintmaking.org/highpoint-news/2022/7/6/welcome-full-color-print-fellows), a program in development since 2019 that aims to create more diverse and equitable spaces for artists of color.

The Bakken completed a [\\$4.5 million renovation in October 2020](https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-quirky-bakken-museum-reinvents-itself-with-4-5m-face-lift/572674982/?refresh=true) (<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-s-quirky-bakken-museum-reinvents-itself-with-4-5m-face-lift/572674982/?refresh=true>), the first part of a two-part \$7 million project. The museum is re-evaluating the second phase, rethinking needs as the pandemic continues.

[Highpoint's co-founding director Carla McGrath retired in November](https://www.startribune.com/co-founder-of-minneapolis-highpoint-center-for-printmaking-retires-after-20-years/600117715) (<https://www.startribune.com/co-founder-of-minneapolis-highpoint-center-for-printmaking-retires-after-20-years/600117715>) 2021 shortly after the Minneapolis Institute of Art acquired 20 years' worth of the center's archives and opened a major exhibition. It is poised for a new phase under Patrick's leadership.

"I believe that arts and cultural organizations are mirrors for society, and so I believe that if we're not reflecting everyone, we're not fully living up to our purpose," Patrick said. "So I'm hopeful that in conversation with our board, staff and community at large, we'll be tackling that in the coming years. I'm excited to lead this change as a collaborator, listener and advocate."

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