

**The Bronx Museum of the Arts Launches Major Architectural Upgrade of its Facility  
Adding New Spaces for Programs and Exhibitions  
Increasing Connections to Neighborhood, and Improving Service to Community and  
Public**

**Monica Ponce de Leon Selected as Architect for Project**

**Project is Public-Private Partnership with the City of New York**

**Bronx, New York—May 25, 2016**—The Bronx Museum of the Arts announced plans for a major architectural enhancement and upgrade of its facility to better serve its community and visitors, add new spaces for public programs and exhibitions, and to strengthen its crucial contribution to the civic fabric of the Bronx. The project is a public-private partnership with The City of New York, including the Mayor’s Office, the City Council, Office of the Bronx Borough President, and New York State Assembly to support the Museum’s growing role as a vital resource for the community and destination for the Bronx and visitors to the City, and to meet the demands of significantly increased attendance. The project, funded through the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and managed by the NYC Department of Design and Construction, will advance the Museum’s openness and expand connections with the neighborhood it has called home since 1971.

The Museum concurrently announced that Monica Ponce de Leon has been selected through the Department and Design Construction’s Design and Construction Excellence program (DC+E) to design the first phase of the project, working with the Museum on the redesign of the Museum’s South Wing Atrium as a new “Gallery Cube”. Ms. Ponce de Leon is the Dean of the School of Architecture at Princeton University and is serving as co-curator of the United States Pavilion for the 15th Venice Biennale of Architecture, opening this May. In 2007, Ponce de Leon was the first Hispanic architect to receive the prestigious Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture. Ponce de Leon is noted for working closely with a broad range of constituents in developing her designs, an important criterion for The Bronx Museum of the Arts project. The Museum, Ponce de Leon, and City partners will work together to create new spaces – all within the Museum’s current footprint – for the Museum’s programming and to enhance its connectivity and interchange with the neighborhood, increasing the vibrancy of the Grand Concourse.

“The Bronx Museum of the Arts was born in 1971 out of a belief that all residents of our city deserve to have a major cultural institution that’s a part of their community fabric,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “Since then, the Museum has fostered cultural expression that is deeply connected to the vibrant, diverse place it calls home, and has garnered attention from across the globe for its innovative and influential programming. My Administration is proud to invest in this project that will bring the talents of a remarkable architect to help build an even stronger institution that continues to engage residents, attract new visitors, and make this borough synonymous with creative vitality all over the world.”

The Bronx Museum organizes contemporary art exhibitions and education, public, and community programs that foster cross-cultural exchange, including the recent exhibition of works by the artist Martin Wong, programs with at-risk youth in the Bronx, and the first American museum collaboration with Cuba in 50 years. The Museum offers free admission and the public

response to its programming has been dramatic: attendance at the Museum has more than quadrupled in six years, including a 50% growth in free and subsidized tours for local K-12 students and adults, as well as more than 1,300 new memberships through the IDNYC program.

**Holly Block, Director of The Bronx Museum of the Arts**, said, “We are a cultural and civic gathering place for one of the most ethnically and socio-economically varied constituencies in the City, and this enhancement of our building responds to the ever-increasing public engagement with our programming and community initiatives. The project will enable us to better serve our growing audience, and better integrate our facility into its home on the Grand Concourse, enlivening our presence on the street and in the community. We are deeply grateful to Mayor Bill de Blasio, Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., New York City Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer, Council Members Vanessa Gibson, Anabel Palma, and the Bronx Delegation of the City Council, as well as New York State Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner for their generous support for this project and enabling us to increase the programs we offer for Bronxites and all New Yorkers.”

Total cost for this multi-year project as envisioned in the museum's master plan is estimated at \$25 million, with \$15 million for construction costs, and \$10 million to establish the Museum's endowment to support the continued growth of education and public programming. To date, the Mayor's Office, the City Council, and the Office of the Bronx Borough President have appropriated some \$6.9 million to the project's first phase, including the South Wing Atrium reconstruction and creation of a Gallery Cube, with an additional \$300,000 from New York State Assembly Member Latoya Joyner. The Museum is in the silent phase of a campaign to raise private funds for the full project.

The design of the South Wing Atrium/Gallery Cube will begin in 2016 and construction is anticipated to be complete in 2020. Plans for the subsequent phases of the project are under way and will be announced in the future. The Museum plans to stay open throughout the project.

“The Bronx Museum of the Arts is home to some of our city's most vibrant art, culture, and history, showcasing the creative expression and talent of New Yorkers across the five boroughs,” said **Speaker of the New York City Council Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “These enhancements and program expansions will ensure that the Museum can better serve residents and visitors alike and continue to be a premier cultural destination in the Bronx and citywide. The New York City Council is proud to support the Museum and I look forward to exploring its exciting new exhibitions in the months ahead.”

“The Bronx Museum of the Arts has been an anchor in the borough since its founding, serving the people of the Bronx with arts and education programming of a national caliber and supporting artists who embody and express the cultural diversity of the Bronx,” said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.** “The Bronx Museum has been a partner with the community for more than four decades, and through our support of this project, we are committing to the future vitality of The Bronx Museum of the Arts as it deepens its presence and commitment to the Bronx, the public, and the arts community.”

“The Bronx Museum of the Arts explores how artistic expression is shaped by the urban experience and cultural interactions, and it is important that its building conveys openness to its physical context, the neighborhood, and the public,” said **Architect Monica Ponce de Leon**. “The creative ferment at The Bronx Museum of the Arts is lively, but constrained within a facility that has evolved incrementally over time without an overarching plan. By uniting these elements

to create a new and cohesive whole, and opening the building's form, this design will weave together the street, visitors, neighbors, and passersby in a new dynamic."

"The Bronx Museum of the Arts is one of our city's cultural gems," said **Majority Leader of the New York City Council Jimmy Van Bramer**. "Every community in New York City should have access to world-class art and culture, and the Museum is a vital cultural institution, not only for its home borough but for the city as a whole. This project will make an already amazing museum even more vibrant, and will help attract residents and tourists alike."

"The Bronx Museum of the Arts has long been a leader in our community, providing a public gathering place and a vital forum to discuss issues and ideas of importance to the people of the Bronx," said **New York City Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson**. "I am proud to have championed City funding for this architectural project. It marks an important step in the Museum's evolution—one that will enable the Museum to advance its role as a neighbor in our community, and increase its contribution to the vibrant, dynamic culture of the South Bronx."

"For nearly half a century, the Bronx Museum of the Arts has positively impacted the lives of so many Bronxites, through exposing them to the arts. With their consistent dedication in presenting world-class exhibitions, providing interactive forums to educate and inspire, and their fervent support of emerging artists, the Museum continues to be a refuge for those seeking culture," said **New York City Council Member Annabel Palma**. "We are proud and excited to support the future plans of this venerable institution."

"I am proud to support the Bronx Museum of the Arts' plans for the future. It is a gem in our borough that has provided creative opportunities for our community for over 40 years," said **Assembly Member Latoya Joyner**. "The Museum plays an important role in enriching quality of life and contributes to the vibrancy of The Bronx."

In the Master Plan's first phase, funded by the City, the current opaque and under-used Atrium at the corner of Grand Concourse and East 165th Street will be redesigned as an energy-efficient, transparent Gallery Cube where education, public, and community programs can take place year round and connectivity between the Museum's North Wing—designed by Arquitectonica in 2006—and its South Wing—a decommissioned synagogue, originally completed in 1961—will be improved.

"The Bronx Museum of the Arts contributes greatly to the fabric of the Bronx, enriching the lives of youth, families, and residents of this great Borough and City," said **Laura Blanco, chair of the Museum's Board of Trustees**. "With this project, the Museum is increasing its commitment to our community, enhancing our spaces so we can provide even more thought-provoking exhibitions and education programs and welcome our growing and diverse audience. We are grateful to our Community Advisory Council for their energy and input and for helping us as we increase our contribution to the future of our borough."

Future phases of the project will further rework the internal configuration of the Museum, taking advantage of under-used existing spaces to: create new community, artist residency, exhibition, classroom, and administrative spaces; further improving public flow through the building; transform vacant lots to develop youth and community sculpture gardens, and create a new multi-purpose performance and event space. The Museum is in the Grand Concourse Historic District and the project will respect and enhance the character of the District; as a city-owned building and public resource, the Museum is also committed to meeting green building standards.

### **About the Bronx Museum of the Arts**

The Bronx Museum of the Arts presents innovative contemporary art exhibitions and education programs and is committed to promoting cross-cultural dialogues for diverse audiences. Since its founding in 1971, the Museum has played a vital role in the Bronx by helping to make art accessible to the entire community and connecting with local schools, artists, teens, and families through its robust education initiatives and public programs. In celebration of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Museum implemented a universal free admission policy, supporting its mission to make arts experiences available to all audiences. The Museum's collection comprises over 1,000 modern and contemporary artworks in all media, and highlights works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin-American ancestry, as well as artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their development.

### **About Monica Ponce de Leon, AIA**

Monica Ponce de Leon, AIA, leads MPdL Studio. With a background in Art, Architecture, Urban Design, and Interior Design, Ponce de Leon's practice encompasses a variety of fields and as a result has focused extensively on the development of public and institutional projects at various scales. As founding partner in the former Office dA, Monica Ponce de Leon's work is recognized for its innovation in design. She has been honored with the National Design Award in Architecture by the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian, and the Award in Architecture by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has also received honors from United States Artists, the Architectural League of New York, and the American Institute of Architects. Ponce de Leon's projects have received thirteen Progressive Architecture Awards, two ID awards, and the American Institute of Architects/Committee on the Environment (AIA/COTE) Top Ten Green Project Award. Her designs have been featured in publications around the world and she has also participated in exhibitions at venues such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and the Venice Biennale, where she is currently co-curator of the United States Pavilion. Monica Ponce de Leon received a Master of Architecture in Urban Design degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Miami. As of January 2016, Monica Ponce de Leon has been the Dean of Princeton University's School of Architecture.

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