

For Immediate Release

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**FROM MATISSE TO MICKEY: THE PAST & FUTURE OF LIBBY GARRISON
PUBLIC RELATIONS POWERHOUSE BIDS FARWELL TO SFMOMA AFTER NEARLY
20 YEARS OF KEEPING MUSEUM IN THE PUBLIC EYE**

**Experts Predict Garrison Will Bring to Walt Disney Family Museum Same Innovation and
Charisma that Built SFMOMA's Stellar Reputation**

In news today that rocked the worlds of art and journalism, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) announced the departure of Ms. Libby Garrison, the museum's highly revered and beloved communications guru of over 19 years. The Walt Disney Family Museum now stands to gain from her legendary public relations prowess, which has put SFMOMA on the map worldwide and made many a curator and artist a household name.

"Libby has shaped SFMOMA surely as much as it has shaped her," said director Neal Benezra at a museum press conference today, his eyes welling with emotion. "Her positive impact on both the character and course of the museum over the years cannot be overstated. She's irreplaceable, and we feel like a piece of the museum is leaving with her."

After nearly two decades of remarkable service to SFMOMA and the arts and entertainment media, Ms. Garrison has become known among her colleagues as "The Oracle"—consulted by all for her institutional knowledge.

"Whenever we're stumped in a situation, we turn to Libby for a creative solution," said Robert Lasher, SFMOMA deputy director of external affairs. "She will be storied as one of the brightest stars in SFMOMA's history."

Like baby Moses in a basket, Garrison arrived at SFMOMA in 1993, fresh out of college, as the marketing and communications department intern, practically growing up in tandem with the museum, and rising through the ranks to become an influential leader.

Some of her earliest career achievements include single-handedly responding to hundreds of visitor complaint letters in response to SFMOMA's controversial exhibition of Jeff Koons's pornographic "La Cicciolina" photographs, typing eloquent and feather-smoothing missives on a pint-sized computer that ran off a floppy disk. Other heroic feats include climbing through cobwebs and drywall to recover communications documents from the 1930s found stored inside asbestos-laced walls of the War Memorial Veterans building on Van Ness building during the relocation to Third Street.



Libby Garrison, just as fabulous in the spotlight as behind the scenes, riding high at the pinnacle of her profession

Seminal moments in her tenure include bridging SFMOMA and the glamorous world of rock ‘n’ roll by charming Mick Jagger with a private gallery tour. She also made her mark as a founding member of SFMOMA’s spirited softball team, which may have been worst in the league but definitely had the most artistic uniforms. “We called her “Libby Long-Ball, and she had a mean pitch,” fellow teammate and former director David Ross fondly recalls.

Editors, news reporters, and art critics know that her pitch is mean off the field as well. As a result of her unmatched public relations flair, SFMOMA has remained in the public eye with a frequency and favorable regard that earns the envy of all the other arts institutions in town as well as major national museums.

“I don’t know how she does it,” said a press representative at MoMA, New York. “It seems improbable that exhibitions way out in San Francisco could so consistently steal column inches from us in *The New York Times*. But with Garrison involved, it never fails to happen. Drives us crazy, but you have to hand it to her.”

Garrison has racked up stacks of important and positive coverage for countless exhibitions, leveraging her famous good humor and affinity for storytelling to leave even the most skeptical journalists with their tongues hanging out waiting to see the galleries.

Major projects she represented include hits such as *Bill Viola*, 1999; *Christian Marclay*, 2002 (a show the spinmeister cites as a particular favorite); *Diane Arbus*, 2004; *Robert Bechtle*, 2005; *Glamour*, 2005; and *How Wine Became Modern*, 2010.

Another highlight of her career was *Revelatory Landscapes* (2001), SFMOMA’s first offsite/in-the-field exhibition. “The press preview was held in a minivan, if you can believe it,” said Garrison via Skype from her new office located in a private booth in the secret restaurant in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland. “We piled journalists into the van and drove them around to installation sites all over the Bay Area from Berkeley to West Oakland to San Jose and Mission Bay.”

She also fondly remembers *Keith Haring* (1998), which inaugurated SFMOMA’s first all-night rave. “I was up for almost 24 hours, cleaning up spills from the gallery floor—definitely a highlight.”

The Boyd Collection exhibition from 1999 sparked her love for mid-century modern furniture; *Design Afoot* (2000) fed her sneaker fetish; and *Far Out: Bay Area Design 1967 to 1973* (1999) benefited from her first major national TV placement, with a 13-minute spot on *CBS Sunday Morning*.

Garrison’s healthy respect for the press and her keen understanding of their needs have gained the media’s trust and devotion, allowing her to provide boosts for scores of institutional initiatives and milestones. Over the years she has heralded fanfare for the opening of the current Mario Botta building, lathered up buzz for the Modern Ball, created cache for the Rooftop Garden, made SFMOMA’s 75th Anniversary a citywide celebration, significantly raised the profile of Blue Bottle and its art-inspired cakes, and expertly kicked off a highly successful communications campaign for the museum’s expansion project.

Garrison has also impacted the museum in so many ways beyond her primary communications role. For instance, many may be surprised to learn that she was a generous lender to several exhibitions over the years. Having impeccable design sense, of course she had a pristine set of Alexander Girard–designed glass goblets just lying around, and was all too happy to lend them to SFMOMA’s 2007 exhibition of the artist’s work. A vintage Mercedes-Benz hood ornament that had belonged to her father also found its way onto the checklist of former A+D curator Aaron Betsky’s *Icons: Magnets of*

Meaning in 1997. She served as unofficial party planner and chief morale builder for her devoted department, and co-curated the memorable 2007 staff art exhibition, *Under Our Noses*.

In addition to Libby's unforgettable communications accomplishments, she is known as a person who cares about other people and has won over the hearts of artists, celebrities, trustees, the media, and perhaps most importantly, her adoring museum family. SFMOMA will surely miss her and wishes her all the best.

"My tenure at SFMOMA has been rewarding, inspiring, educational, and some of the best years of my life. I grew into the adult I am today with the museum, having celebrated my 25th, 35th, and 40th birthdays here, having gotten married with many of my colleagues as witnesses, and having spent long hours in the office surrounded by some of my best friends. I will miss SFMOMA more than I can possibly imagine and I can only hope to have such a rewarding experience in my next venture. Who would have thought I had more to learn about Disney cartoons than I do about contemporary art? In true SFMOMA spirit, the title of my career to date should be *From Matisse to Mickey: The Past and Future of Libby Garrison*."

Contact: PressOffice@LibbyAppreciationSociety.com

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ABOUT SFMOMA

Museum hours: open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: visit sfmoma.org/tickets or for pricing information.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our website at sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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