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**NEW OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA EXHIBITION
PAIRS NEW WORKS BY CONTEMPORARY ARTIST
WITH CREATIVE PRACTICE OF LOCAL LGBT
ORGANIZATION**

Los Angeles-based Math Bass' Works Presented Alongside Imperial
Court of San Francisco Objects to Create New Meanings

Over the Top: Math Bass and the Imperial Court SF
on view April 1—July 23, 2017

(OAKLAND, CA) March 7, 2017—In April 2017, familiar symbols—reoriented through creative practices that are simultaneously playful, political, and subversive—will be featured in the Oakland Museum of California's (OMCA) new exhibition *Over the Top: Math Bass and the Imperial Court SF*. On view in the Museum's Gallery of California Art, the exhibition will feature new paintings and sculpture with video by perception-bending artist Math Bass and regalia from the Imperial Court emphasizing the radical possibility for artistic acts to foster self-determination and shared meaning for LGBTQ+ individuals and communities.

This exhibition pairs new work by a contemporary California artist with the creative practice of a local organization. Museum goers will experience Math Bass' compelling work presented alongside crowns, scepters, portraits, and banners selected from the archive of the Imperial Council of San Francisco, part of a larger organization known as the Imperial Court System. In paintings, sculpture, and video, the perception-bending Los Angeles-based artist emphasizes that symbols change meaning according to context and orientation, and that the body and its costumes are meaningful symbols whether they are actually present or only suggested.

Museum visitors will experience Bass' work alongside a selection of objects bearing the insignia of the Empresses and Emperors who have served the Imperial Court of San Francisco. These monarchs, elected annually, spearhead charitable fundraising efforts for the alternative society, whose core supporters are drag queens and other members of the LGBTQ community. Over the course of their 51-year history, the Imperial Court has created its own definitions, territories, and authorities in order to build legacy and tradition, form family and find new possibilities for survival.

"Math Bass suggests that we 'turn the language that is used against us upon its head.' A good example is the word *queer*, long used as a slur and laden for many with bad

memories, which has been largely flipped and embraced by younger generations as a fluid and open term. As with this term, artists in this exhibition have disrupted and upended a variety of symbols, from crowns to painted emblems, through inventive and creative actions. Set unstraight, the artists have made the symbols their own.”

—Christina Linden, OMCA associate curator of painting and sculpture

Math Bass (b. 1981, New York) lives and works in Los Angeles. She received her MFA from UCLA in 2011. Bass' first solo museum exhibition in the U.S. was presented last year at MoMA PS1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. Bass' first solo gallery exhibition took place in 2014 at Overduin & Co. in Los Angeles. Bass' work has been included in exhibitions at the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo, the Yuz Museum in Shanghai, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris, Cooper Union in New York, Tanya Leighton in Berlin, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, CA, White Flag Projects in Saint Louis, Andrew Kreps Gallery in New York, Galerie Nordenhake in Stockholm, and Silberkuppe in Berlin. Upcoming solo exhibitions in 2017 are being organized by the Yuz Museum in Shanghai and the Jewish Museum in New York.

Activist and drag performer José Julio Sarria (1922–2013) founded the Imperial Court in 1965 when she demanded the title “Absolute Empress de San Francisco” in lieu of just “queen of the ball.” This act of creative self-declaration echoes an 1859 self-proclamation by the eccentric San Francisco resident Joshua Abraham Norton (circa 1818–1880) to “Norton I, Emperor of the United States,” and later also “Protector of Mexico.” And so, Sarria was also known as “Widow Norton.” Each year since 1965, the Imperial Council of San Francisco (ICSF) has crowned an Empress, and an Emperor each year since 1972. Sister societies to the ICSF began to spring up around 1970 in the Bay Area, across the country, and internationally. Thus the ICSF is the founding court of the Imperial Court System, which now includes 53 chapters in three countries. The Imperial Star Empire Inc. and the Royal Grand Ducal Council of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties Inc. are chapters in the East Bay.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

[Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest](#)

April 29–August 20, 2017

Roy De Forest's vibrant works present playful visions that take us on a trip into alternative realities. In Spring 2017, the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) will present *Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest*, an exhibition designed to simulate an adventurous exploration of the artist's dream-like and sometimes humorous works. Large, colorful paintings and sculptures spanning De Forest's career will provide visitors the opportunity to navigate their own journeys by exploring vistas and portals into imaginative worlds. Listening stations throughout the exhibition will let visitors drift deeper into individual works, led by an array of exhibition-related character guides ranging from dog trainers to art historians and ship captains. A hands-on space will provide a social experience and allow visitors to manipulate and engage with textured, tactile materials and shapes inspired by De Forest's artwork. There is a \$4 charge for this special exhibition in addition to regular Museum admission.

[Dorothea Lange: Politics of Seeing](#)

May 13–August 13, 2017

Through the lens of her camera, Dorothea Lange documented 20th century life with riveting, intimate photographs that showed the major issues of the times. The emotional impact of her works continues to resonate with millions and illustrates the power of photography as a form of social activism. From documenting the plight of Dust Bowl migrants during the Great Depression to magnifying the grim conditions of incarcerated Japanese Americans during World War II, Lange's photographs demonstrate how empathy and compassion, focused through art, can trigger political action. *Dorothea Lange: Politics of Seeing* presents approximately 100 photographs to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the artist's gift of her personal archive to the Oakland Museum of California. Drawing upon vintage prints, unedited proof sheets, personal memorabilia, and historic objects, this exhibition takes a unique approach to a beloved American photographer by examining how her artistry and advocacy swayed minds and prompted significant change in this nation's history. There is a \$4 charge for this special exhibition in addition to regular Museum admission.

ON VIEW

[Out of the Box: The Rise of Sneaker Culture](#)

December 22, 2016–April 2, 2017

The first exhibition to explore the significance, complex design history, and evolution of sneakers, *Out of the Box: The Rise of Sneaker Culture* opened at the Oakland Museum of California in December 2016. Sneakers have long been a fashion staple and symbol of popular culture, worn by millions of people and transcending generations and socioeconomic status. Within the exhibition, visitors will view more than a 100 pairs of iconic sneakers from the 19th century to the present, including rare collectibles from the archives of brand-name manufacturers such as Adidas, Nike, and Reebok, and selections from renowned sneaker collectors—affectionately known as “sneakerheads”—including hip-hop legend Run DMC, sneaker guru Bobbito Garcia, and Dee Wells of Obsessive Sneaker Disorder. The exhibition will prompt visitors to reflect on sneakers as a representation of identity and sports fashion, while also incorporating community-inspired elements. Film footage, photographs, design drawings, and interactive media will showcase the history, technical advancements, fashion trends, and marketing campaigns that have played a role in the sneaker's evolution. *Out of the Box: The Rise of Sneaker Culture* is organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Bata Shoe Museum. The exhibition is curated by Bata Shoe Museum Senior Curator Elizabeth Semmelhack with OMCA Curator of Public Practice Evelyn Orantes as the host curator. There is a \$4 charge for this special exhibition in addition to regular Museum admission.

[Bees: Tiny Insect, Big Impact](#)

Through June 2017

This exhibition in OMCA's Gallery of California Natural Sciences takes a look at the wildly diverse and intricate world of one of the most important creatures to human agriculture and the natural environment. Through family-friendly experiences, hands-on activities, and media, *Bees: Tiny Insect, Big Impact* touches on topics of honeybees and Bay Area beekeeping, the diversity of California native bee species, citizen science projects, and the similarities between bees and humans. Visitors will discover real bee specimens under a microscope, crawl through a human-sized beehive, and try on a

beekeeper suit. In an immersive gallery environment, visitors can explore the causes of bee population decline, learn about the significance of bees to California's economy and ecosystems, and discover how simple but powerful actions by Californians can help bees to survive in a changing world.

ABOUT THE OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) brings together collections of art, history, and natural science under one roof to tell the extraordinary stories of California and its people. OMCA's groundbreaking exhibits tell the many stories that comprise California with many voices, often drawing on first-person accounts by people who have shaped California's cultural heritage. Visitors are invited to actively participate in the Museum as they learn about the natural, artistic, and social forces that affect the state and investigate their own role in both its history and its future. With more than 1.9 million objects, OMCA is a leading cultural institution of the Bay Area and a resource for the research and understanding of California's dynamic cultural and environmental heritage.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) is at 1000 Oak Street, at 10th Street, in Oakland. Museum admission is \$15.95 general; \$10.95 seniors and students with valid ID, \$6.95 youth ages 9 to 17, and free for Members and children 8 and under. There is a \$4 charge in addition to general admission pricing for special exhibitions. OMCA offers onsite underground parking and is conveniently located one block from the Lake Merritt BART station, on the corner of 10th Street and Oak Street. The accessibility ramp is located at the 1000 Oak Street main entrance to the Museum. museumca.org

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