

Telegram and Gazette
Saturday, October 20, 2012

Fitchburg museum names new director



Nicholas Capasso

By Nancy Sheehan **TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF**
nsheehan@telegram.com

A new director has been named at Fitchburg Art Museum. Nicholas Capasso, deputy director for curatorial affairs at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, will take his new position Dec. 3, succeeding Peter Timms, who has held the position for 39 years.

Capasso, of Acton, was chosen after a nationwide search, Lynne Benoit-Grzyb, search committee co-chair, said. "We had nearly 50 applicants from really major institutions, which I think speaks volumes for the museum and the community," she said. "It's just amazing that we landed upon someone who is local. It's exciting and a blessing. He really rose to the top in so many aspects."

Capasso is a 1981 graduate of Clark University, where he received a B.A. in art history and geography. He went on to earn a master's degree and a Ph.D. in art history from Rutgers University. Very active in the local arts community, he has often been tapped to be a juror for art exhibitions, including at Clark and ARTSWorcester. He has worked at the deCordova for 22 years.

"It's a big opportunity for me," Capasso said of his new job. "I've been in the same place for a long time, and I've achieved a lot of things here at DeCordova, but it's time to turn my interests and passions to something new."

The move to Fitchburg also marks an artistic change of focus for Capasso, since his work at the deCordova involved contemporary art exclusively. "Fitchburg Art Museum has an encyclopedic collection," he said. "It will be really interesting and refreshing to work with historical material and to bring to it what I know about contemporary work. What I hope to do with the collection at Fitchburg is to connect the past and the present. It's hard to do at deCordova because we don't have much past. It's all present."

Although he has enjoyed working in the lovely suburb of Lincoln, Capasso said he is eager to work in a city. "The Fitchburg Art Museum gives me the opportunity to work in an urban environment with very different kinds of communities and to work very closely with a city," he said. "The art museum is one of the city's major cultural institutions, and I think it could have a really positive role in the city's development. I'm looking forward to meeting the mayor and having that conversation."

That strong sense of community involvement is one of the reasons he was hired at Fitchburg, Benoit-Grzyb said. "In interviews he was incredibly engaging," she said. "We're really excited to work with him because we were looking for someone who will get out in the community and really be a pied piper for the museum, and he is that for sure."

At least initially, Capasso also will use his curatorial skills in his new position. Fitchburg Art Museum has been without a curator since Kristina Durocher left over a year ago. "Any museum with a permanent collection the size of Fitchburg's needs a curator, and it will be a priority to attract a really good one to the museum," he said. "But until the time comes that we're ready to do that I'll be taking on the major curatorial role."

Capasso will take over the reins of the Fitchburg Art Museum from Timms, who has been director since 1973 and retires in December. Timms came to Fitchburg when the museum was a single building with three galleries. Today the museum is a block-long, three-building, 12-gallery complex. "Peter has brought us to the stature we have today, particularly in the areas of our collection, building expansions and education," Benoit-Grzyb said.

Benoit-Grzyb co-chaired the search committee with Joseph Sylvia. Other committee members were Annelisa Addante, Gigi

Barnhill, Anna Clementi, Scott Foster, Susan Jackson, Dr. Roderick Lewin, Achla Madan, Nadine Martel, Susan Roetzer, Kent dur Russell and Deb Vilandry. They were assisted by search consultant Marilyn Hoffman of Museum Search & Reference.