

WELCOME

DR. MAURA SMYTH
CHAIR, INAUGURATION COMMITTEE
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF LIBERAL ARTS

[If necessary] You can all be seated.
And just a quick reminder to please silence your mobile devices.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the college, I welcome all of you to the Inauguration of the 12th Presidency and the Investiture of the 12th President of the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Dr. David P. Nelson.

When I first came to MassArt to teach four years ago, I felt I had found my place in the world. (It was the best feeling; it still is.) I could explore with my students and my colleagues the same big questions that had led me to get an English PhD in the first place: Why do we read literature? What is the value in creating art? How can we use the arts to make the world better?

Over the past four years, I have gotten to know MassArt in more nuanced ways. Joining, and then chairing, the Inauguration Committee gave me an entirely different and much broader view of the college. It did so especially because at the center of our planning over the past eight months was President Nelson's insistence from the start that the inauguration not be centered on him. "It should be about all of us," he said. "It should be about MassArt." As we worked together to plan the inauguration celebration, we sought to make that "all of us" front and center. (And I just want to pause for a moment to say how grateful I am to each of my collaborators on that committee.)

In a sense, my own ever-deepening and widening understanding of the "all of us" that comprises MassArt—and that includes our strengths as well as our flaws—is reflected in the inaugural events of the past two weeks. We have learned about the school's rich history and cultural legacy. We have made art inspired by the current exhibitions with each other and our families. We have visited our galleries and departments and studio spaces to discover more about what we all do, and to strengthen our connections with each other. And we have come together to discuss the work we all must still do to address the entrenched racial inequity in our culture and on our campus.

Two things have been glimmering into view for me since I arrived here four years ago. But they've come into crisper focus over the past few weeks, because I think they point to what David's leadership makes possible.

The first is the critical importance of each of us acknowledging, valuing, and seeking to better understand the perspective of every individual here at MassArt. Each member of this learning and living community brings their rich experiences and unique insights to the table. Especially recently, I have witnessed us strive to listen to and learn from each other with more attention and more empathy. As we do, we transform our campus. We foster a stronger and more deeply-rooted culture of care that pours support and love to vulnerable members of our community. We affirm as a central premise of our community that each person's perspective is as vital to its flourishing as every other's.

As we do, we make our culture here at MassArt more vibrant, innovative, intellectually rigorous, and endlessly creative, and so more capable of positively impacting the world around us. This points to the second thing that has glimmered into view for me. As we value the distinctness of our experiences, we increasingly realize the flip side of that coin: the collective power of the "all of us" of MassArt. David's model of shared leadership that he and others will soon talk more about offers us a way to see and value both at the same time. In fact, it argues that these two things are integral: our collective power to make the world better comes from valuing all of the distinct perspectives and experiences that comprise "all of us."

The model of visionary, collective, moral leadership that David brings to MassArt is especially necessary right now. Since its inception in 1873, MassArt has educated innovative artists, designers, and art educators who are leaders in their fields, but who are first and foremost informed, thoughtful citizens with a deep understanding of the socially transformative power of the arts of every kind. That tradition continues, but, with President David Nelson's investiture today, it is given a new chapter. We continue to answer those fundamental questions, What is the value of creating art? How can we use the arts to make a better world?, but within an increasingly urgent context. Right now, many people, including our country's highest leaders, actively seek to divide the world into deserving "us-es" and disposable "thems," and thus marginalize, devalue, and dehumanize certain members of our community.

David's leadership points us toward a different, better way. He exhorts us to use this word "us" to unite and empower and enact positive change. He calls upon us all to care about and learn from the distinctness of our perspectives, and to transform that learning into collective power. If ever there was a time for art to change the world for the better, it is now. If ever there was an institution up to that challenge, it is MassArt. With the inauguration of David Nelson as our new president, we can together craft a

better future infused with love, hope, and empathy, a better future for MassArt, for our commonwealth, for our nation.

“This is about all of us,” David said. Indeed it is.