



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **COCA CELEBRATES EXPANSION WITH *ART LEADS THE WAY: A COCA GRAND OPENING FILM***

*A collaboration with filmmaker Marco Williams and Human Pictures, the October 11 virtual film premiere will feature COCA students, alumni, teaching artists and community members.*

**ST. LOUIS, September 17, 2020** – COCA will celebrate its Grand Opening Season on Sunday, October 11, with an immersive and joyful film experience: *Art Leads the Way: A Grand Opening Film*. Created by COCA's Artistic Team and filmmaker Marco Williams with Human Picture Productions, *Art Leads the Way: A Grand Opening Film* honors COCA's enduring commitment to serve as an inclusive creative hub for St. Louisans. It also serves as an expression of gratitude and a moment of celebration for the successful completion of the Create our Future Campaign.

The film highlights COCA's expanded Ferring East Wing—an accessible, state-of-the-art, 52,000 square foot addition—with immersive dance and theatrical performances from COCA alumni, students, and teaching artists. Performances also showcase COCA's Artistic Directors of Dance and Theatre, Kirven Douthit-Boyd and Jennifer Wintzer, as well as a one-night-only performance by COCA Artistic Director of Dance, Antonio Douthit-Boyd.

It marks both a unique moment of adaptation, and a shift into a new medium for the organization. When COCA's original plans for a large, in-person Grand Opening Celebration were no longer viable due to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Artistic Team pivoted, creating a brand-new virtual event. Through performances, poignant interviews, testimonies, and crystal-clear cinematography, viewers will experience the architectural splendor of the new building and celebrate a new creative movement fueled by community. Additionally, the film event will recognize key leaders for their contributions with the following awards, presented by Centene:

**The Ferring Award for Philanthropy:** Kim Kuehner

**The Newell S. "Jim" Knight Volunteer Service Award:** Linda & Jesse Hunter

**And special recognition of Create Our Future Campaign Chair:** Cheryl Holman

"While we wish we could express our gratitude in-person to our community and the generous supporters who contributed to the Create our Future effort, we are thrilled for this opportunity to provide our audience with an inspiring and lasting work of art that will launch us into the next phase of COCA," says Kelly Pollock, COCA's Executive Director.

The film will premiere free of charge on a new COCA microsite, [ArtLeadsTheWay.org](http://ArtLeadsTheWay.org) via RSVP. A home for all Grand Opening Season information and events, [ArtLeadstheWay.org](http://ArtLeadstheWay.org) will also serve as a digital hub to share and elevate voices and perspectives in the arts and in our community at large.

COCA's Grand Opening Season includes *Common Ground*: A participatory, site-specific art installation by artist AKIRASH on view beginning September 28, virtual and in-person building tours, an artist speaker series, and the upcoming COCA Presents performance season, to be announced in the *Art Leads the Way: A Grand Opening Film* pre-show.

The virtual film event is co-chaired by Shereen and Michael Fisher, Jesse and Linda Hunter, Kim Kuehner, Marsha and Al Mitchell

For more information on COCA's Grand Opening Season and for opportunities to get involved with the *Art Leads the Way* movement, please visit [ArtLeadsTheWay.org](http://ArtLeadsTheWay.org).

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#### **ABOUT COCA**

Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country, one of only 16 schools in the nation accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS), and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals—all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators. We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. Visit [www.cocastl.org](http://www.cocastl.org) to learn more.

#### **ABOUT HUMAN PICTURES**

Human Pictures is committed to work exclusively on projects that contributed to the struggle for justice, striving always to create unwavering and compelling work; and embracing complexity above notions of objectivity or neutrality. A political commitment toward social change does not require an artistic sacrifice; we stress creativity, beauty, and quality in everything we do. Through social documentaries, narrative films, and advocacy films, Human Pictures seeks to move beyond the role of a production company and establishes itself as a multimedia movement for social transformation.

#### **ABOUT MARCO WILLIAMS**

Marco Williams is an award-winning filmmaker whose films unmask and uncover the complexities of the human condition.

Awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the "Lehman Brady Visiting Joint Chair Professor" in Documentary Studies and American Studies at Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill, a George Foster Peabody Award, the Beacon Award, the Alfred I duPont Silver Baton, the Pan African Film Festival Outstanding Documentary Award, the Full Frame Documentary Festival Spectrum Award, and the National Association of Black Journalists First Place Salute to Excellence Award. Credits include: *Crafting an Echo* (2018), *Lonnie Holley: The Truth of the Dirt* (2017), *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (2017), *The Black Fives* (2014), *The Undocumented* (2013), *Inside the New Black Panthers* (2009), *Banished* (2007), *Freedom Summer* (2006), *I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education* (2004), *MLK Boulevard: The Concrete Dream* (2003), *Two Towns of Jasper* (2002), *Making Peace: Rebuilding our Communities* (1996), *Declarations: The Spiritual Deficit and The American Dream* (1993), *In Search of Our Fathers* (1992), *From Harlem to Harvard* (1982).