

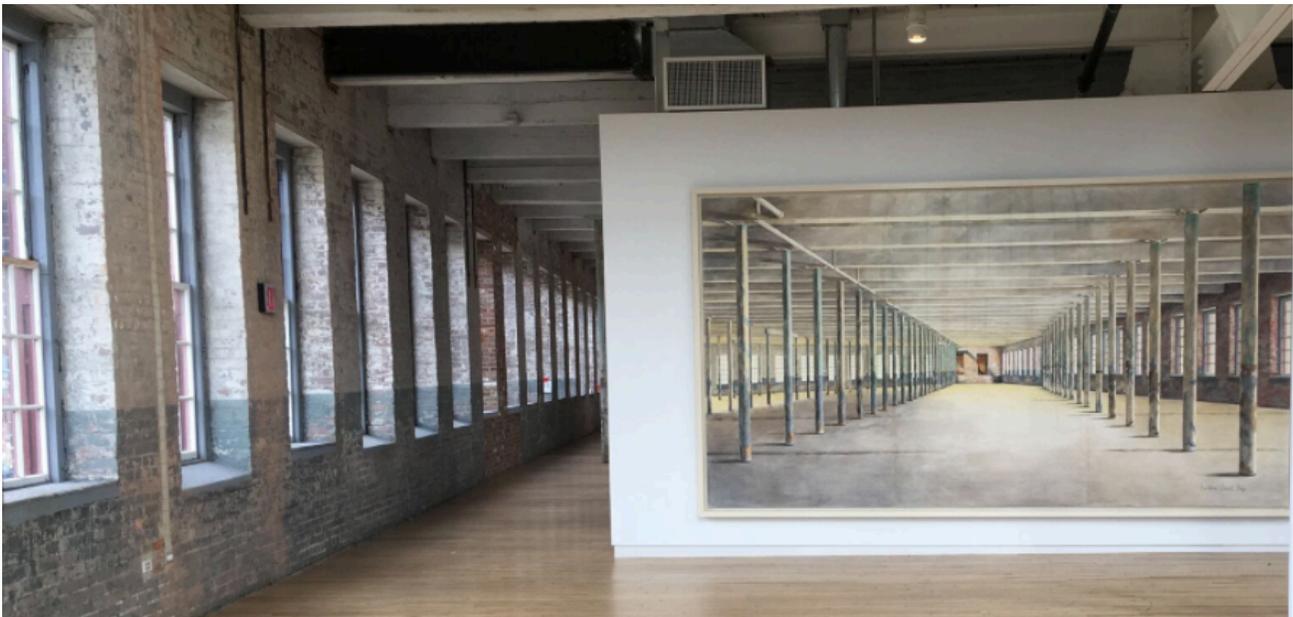
MASS MoCA to unveil world's largest watercolor painting, a 120-square-foot, site-specific commission from Barbara Prey

New York, NY and North Adams, MA — May 16, 2017 — With an unveiling timed to the completion of MASS MoCA's Building 6—a renovated and restored former factory that will house works from James Turrell, Robert Rauschenberg, Jenny Holzer, Louise Bourgeois, Laurie Anderson, Sol Lewitt, and more—the museum commissioned Barbara Prey to create the world's largest known watercolor painting, which will greet visitors in the new building's foremost prow when it opens to the public on May 28.

The site-specific work, titled *MASS MoCA Building 6*, depicts the early 20th century textile factory's raw state immediately prior to the commencement of its transformation into long-term exhibition spaces. Its precision of scale, combined with its particular placement in the renovated building, creates the spatial illusion that the viewer is looking through a window into the building's historical architecture.

At 8 by 15 feet, the piece is, according to MASS MoCA director Joe Thompson, a “technical tour de force” that required specially made papers, mounts, and frames—not to mention, the masterful execution of over 120 square feet of watercolor painting, a transparent medium in which any “errors” cannot be erased or hidden.

“Barbara’s painting will be monumental by any standard,” continued Thompson, “but for a watercolor on paper—perhaps the most unforgiving combination of any painterly media—the undertaking is truly breathtaking.”



MASS MoCA Building 6 tackles the vast horizontal spread of Building 6's second floor, which comprises more than a full acre of floor space with some 400 columns; hundreds of windows; and countless layers of paint from the building's decades of mixed industrial use. In preparation for the ambitious composition, Prey created a number of one-tenth scale mixed media studies onsite, each

of which focused on a different aspect of the space's industrial beauty. Distinct advance studies include the quality of light, the layers of paint on the columns, and the geometry of the industrial paned windows. The completed painting, which spans three adjacent 8-by-5-foot panels of custom-stretched archival watercolor paper mounted on aluminum honeycomb, will share a floor with a collection of Louise Bourgeois sculptures and works from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

"The piece reveres MASS MoCA itself as a work of art," said Prey. "It is obviously a unique concept for the structure of a museum to provide such direct inspiration for the art it holds, but if you were to visit the space prior to the renovation, there was an indescribably ethereal quality to how the natural light flooded the raw, industrial architecture of this cavernous, disused space. From a painterly perspective, I wanted to capture that first-person experience." Further anchoring the composition to its subject and home is a mixed media component for which Prey incorporated wood and paint chips she had collected prior to the space's pre-renovation cleanup, as well as dust and dirt from original building.

As the sole visual artist on the National Council on the Arts (the U.S. President-appointed 14-person advisory committee for the National Endowment for the Arts) for nearly a decade, Prey found the project to be aptly suited to the NEA's community-based focus; the building's former life as a textile mill once anchored the community economically, just as its incarnation as a museum now does in a cultural capacity. The work's thematic tie to the local community extends to a personal level as well; Prey attended the nearby Williams College, where she studied Baroque art and architecture under the mentorship of legendary art and architecture historian Lane Faison.

As an architecture scholar and member of the so-called "Williams art mafia" of the 1970s, Prey received access over the years to survey the interior of Building 6 in its various incarnations. The building's significance rests in the history of MASS MoCA's site, which spans more than two hundred years of economic, industrial, and architectural change, tracing—in the microcosm of this one factory-campus—the arc of industrialization and post-industrialization of New England, and indeed the world. Prey has watched the museum grow since its conception, and the watercolor commission afforded her the creative privilege of commemorating the new wing's storied architectural past as it looks toward a bright future.

ABOUT BARBARA PREY

Barbara Prey (American, b. 1957 in New York) is a contemporary painter whose work resides in the Brooklyn Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the New-York Historical Society, the White House permanent collection, the private collections of Orlando Bloom and Tom Hanks, and in over one hundred American embassies and consulates worldwide. In 2015, MASS MoCA commissioned Barbara Prey to create the world's largest known watercolor painting (8 by 15 feet) for its new Building 6, opening Spring 2017. Her creative repertoire extends across media to oil painting and illustration, the latter of which she contributed to the *New Yorker* for a decade.

With dozens of artworks commissioned by government agencies and institutions, such as four paintings for NASA, Prey is a global ambassador for American Art. Since 2004 she has been tapped annually for the U.S. Art in Embassies program. In 2003, Prey's work was featured on the White House Christmas card; she remains one of two female artists to be selected for the honor, and accordingly, she is one of just two living female artists in the White House permanent collection. Prey has received numerous institutional accolades, including a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation and the New York State Senate's "Women of Distinction" Award.

For nine years, Prey has served as the sole visual artist on the U.S. President-appointed National Council on the Arts, the advisory board to the National Endowment for the Arts.

Prey earned a Bachelor's degree from Williams College and a Master's degree from Harvard University, subsequently receiving a Fulbright scholarship in Baroque art and architecture. Prey is an adjunct faculty member at Williams College. She has studios in New York, Massachusetts, and Maine.