Minneapolis College of Art and Design Appoints Karen M. Wirth Vice President of Academic Affairs

Minneapolis, MN—The Minneapolis College of Art and Design has appointed Karen M. Wirth as vice president of academic affairs. Wirth had been serving in the role as interim vice president since July, when she returned to MCAD from a yearlong sabbatical. She assumed the new position on June 1, 2012.

“Karen has been an academic leader in art and design for seventeen years, and we’re thrilled that our nationwide search to fill this critical position found the best candidate for the job right here at MCAD,” says Jay Coogan, president of the college. “Karen’s skill in the classroom, her accomplishments as a working artist, and her national leadership in arts education, community collaboration, and curriculum design give her the depth and forward vision this institution needs to serve our students and to carry MCAD’s mission of progressive art education to the next level.”

Wirth has been a professor at MCAD since 2003, teaching across the curriculum as the college’s chair of fine arts. In 2010, Wirth took an academic leave to pursue leadership fellowships awarded by both the Bush Foundation and the American Council on Education to explore collaborative partnerships between academia and the community, as well as a one-year mentorship at Parsons The New School for Design in New York.

“Creating meaningful connections between artists and designers and the community has been one of Karen’s guiding passions,” Coogan says, noting that many of MCAD’s students are at work on projects that Wirth helped to pioneer with community partners such as Best Buy, General Mills, Carmichael Lynch, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the Bell Museum, Midway Contemporary Art, and the Soap Factory. “Teaching our students to apply and share their creative gifts and problem-solving skills in the community is part of the MCAD mission, and Karen’s vision has been an important part of that development.”

Wirth holds an MFA in sculpture from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities and a BFA in art education from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and she has served in a range of arts education roles at institutions that include the Walker Art Center, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Burren College of Art in Ballyvaughan, Ireland. Wirth began her academic administrative career in 1995, serving as the chair of fine arts and foundation at
the College of Visual Arts in St. Paul and later as the school’s dean of academic affairs.

An accomplished artist in her own right, Wirth co-designed four of the Hiawatha light-rail transit stations and the Gail See Staircase at Open Book in Minneapolis. Her work has been exhibited at the Walker Art Center and the Smithsonian Institution, and her artist’s books are held in public collections that include the Museum of Modern Art Library, the Getty Center, and Yale University. A contributor to such publications as the Journal of Artists’ Books and Bound & Lettered, and a two-time Jerome Foundation Book Arts Fellow, Wirth is also a founding board member of the College Book Art Association and served on the board of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts.

As MCAD’s chief academic officer, Wirth will be responsible for leading the curriculum design for programs that serve more than seven hundred students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in a wide variety of design, media, and fine arts disciplines. She will also lead recruiting and professional development efforts for MCAD’s faculty of professors, working artists, designers, animators, and other professionals with adjunct positions at the college. “I’m delighted to be serving in this role during such an exciting time in MCAD’s history,” Wirth says. “As an artist, I look forward to helping to carry on MCAD’s long tradition of visual arts education. And as an educator, I see our faculty leading the way in new fields from entrepreneurship to multimedia design to online education.”

**About MCAD**

Recognized nationally and internationally for its innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to visual arts education, the Minneapolis College of Art and Design is home to more than 700 students and offers professional certificates, bachelor of fine arts, bachelor of science, and graduate degrees.

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