

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Contacts:

Elena Grotto 312.397.3828 egrotto@mcachicago.org

Karla Loring 312.397.3834 kloring@mcachicago.org

Images: www.mcachicago.org/media



BLAIR THOMAS & CO., MOBY DICK

March 31 – April 3, 2016



The **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago** presents the premiere of **Blair Thomas's Moby Dick**. This contemporary interpretation of Herman Melville's classic American novel unites a stellar group of Chicago artists: puppet masters Blair Thomas and Michael Montenegro, singer-songwriter Michael Smith, percussionist Michael Zerang, visual designer John Boesche, and director Greg Allen. The project utilizes puppets, shadows, projections, and live original music to bring to life the complex symbolism of the novel. This presentation of **Moby Dick** is the culmination of more than five years of work by Thomas, and it takes place March 31 through April 3 at the MCA's Edlis Neeson Theater.

Blair Thomas's *Moby Dick* is a cautionary talk where the search for purification, fueled by hubris and righteousness, leads to self-destruction and tragedy. Thomas has assembled a quartet of male performers and cast them as members of a monastic order of ancient mariners descended from Ishmael, the narrator of Melville's *Moby Dick*. The mariners tell the story using metaphor and ambiguity rather than a conventional narrative of this epic book.

Blair Thomas started his first puppet company at age ten in Jacksonville, Alabama; studied at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music; and is a graduate of Oberlin College. He co-founded Redmoon Theater in 1989, serving as artistic director in the creation of productions, parades, and pageants. He has received two international UNIMA awards for excellence in puppetry and has twice been awarded the Illinois Arts Council Fellowship. He was the first Jim Henson Artist-in-Residence at the University of Maryland and is an adjunct faculty member at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Under his leadership, Blair Thomas & Co. has produced 15 works over its 13-year history. MCA Stage has presented his works *The Ox-Herder's Tale* and *Pierrot Lunaire: A Cabaret Opera*.

Michael Smith is a singer/songwriter who has performed at major folk festivals including Kerrville, Black Mountain Festival, Philadelphia, Owen Sound, and Winnipeg. His catalogue includes scores for theatrical productions, notably Steppenwolf's Tony-winning production of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Michael Zerang is a composer/percussionist who has collaborated on free-jazz, experimental, noise, and world-music projects, working with Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, Joe McPhee, and Hamid Drake. He has been collaborating with Blair Thomas since 1991.

Michael Montengro is a solo puppet artist and collaborator with a range of theater groups including Lookingglass Theatre, Next Theater, and Wrtier's Theater with The Puppetmaster of Lodz, which garnered a Jeff Award for Puppet Design. He also leads own company, Theatre Zarko: Puppet Symbolist Theatre.

Greg Allen is the founding director of The Neo-Futurists and creator of full-length Neo-Futurist productions. He has written, directed, and performed his original work for theater companies throughout Chicago and nationally.

John Boesche creates scenic design for theater, dance, and opera, and is particularly known for his projection designs. His designs have been seen throughout the US, including at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Lookingglass Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre.

TICKET INFORMATION

Moby Dick takes place March 31 through April 2 at 7:30 pm and April 3 at 3:30 pm. Tickets are \$30 and available at the MCA Box Office at 312.397.4010 or www.mcachicago.org. The performance runs approximately two hours with no intermission.

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Image: Blair Thomas & Co., *Moby Dick*, Photo: Kipling Swehla

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Blair Thomas & Co.: *Moby-Dick* is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by the MCA in partnership with Virginia Tech University, College of St. Benedict/St. John's University, and NPN. Additional support comes from the NPN Forth Fund and Performance Residency Program. Major contributors to NPN include the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency).

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies, including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. Museum capital improvements are supported by a Public Museum Capital Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District. The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue, one block east of Michigan Avenue. The museum and sculpture garden are open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday from 10 am to 8 pm. The museum is closed on Monday. Tuesdays are Community Free Days with free admission for Illinois residents. Suggested general admission is \$12 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors. Children 12 years of age and under, MCA members, and members of the military are admitted free. Information about MCA exhibitions, programs, and special events is available on the MCA website at mcachicago.org or by phone at 312.280.2660.