

# Cecilia McCormick

President, Maryland Institute College of Art

BY CARYN R. SAGAL

**According to Cecilia McCormick, “creativity is the one resource that cannot be automated, outsourced or depleted — and higher education must cultivate it for the public good.”**

McCormick, who considers herself a “deeply creative person with a talent for solving puzzles and problems,” built a career upon her father’s belief in the importance of a college education.

“I am one of eight children and my father wanted all of us to earn a college degree,” she explains. “We both understood that a college education is a pathway to the future, to a meaningful career and to a purposeful life.”

“I know firsthand how transformative a college education can be, but choosing to attend college is a difficult decision when no one in your family has gone before you to guide the way,” adds McCormick, a first-generation college graduate.

Her transition to college life was so profound that she made it her mission “to ease that experience for students by providing the mentorship and support they need along the way.”

While practicing law, McCormick taught as an adjunct at Villanova University, where she enjoyed sharing her knowledge and watching her students grow and learn.

“A mentor hired me to work at the business school to support its accreditation process. From there, I moved into increasing leadership roles,” she explains. “Another mentor encouraged me to consider a college presidency and provided me with the path to follow.”

McCormick spent the next 25 years



Cecilia McCormick

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LOBBY AND STAIRWAY OF INSTITUTE

A historic photo of the institute.



The main lobby today.

focusing on university administration, community and civic engagement, and community and economic development at four institutions. At Widener University, she rose to executive director in the Office of the President. At Johns Hopkins University, she was chief of staff to the senior vice president for Finance and Administration/COO.

At Thomas Jefferson University, she guided the Jefferson-Philadelphia University merger and led major academic strategy initiatives. As the first female president of Elizabethtown College, she led the institution through a transformative period, securing financial stability and enrollment growth.

McCormick returned to Baltimore in January 2024 as interim president of the Maryland Institute College of



Photography



Artist Derrick Adams, Maryland First Lady Dawn Moore, Executive Director at BmoreArt Cara Ober and MICA President Cecilia McCormick.

Art (MICA) — the nation’s oldest independent, continuous degree-granting college of art and design. She became president six months later, combining her expertise in higher education with her lifelong interest in the arts on a permanent basis.

“Art and music have shaped my life. I grew up singing in my church, which led to performing at weddings and other events,” says McCormick. “Art also graced my family home and all three of my sons have become artists in their own way.”

“I believe that art and music help soothe the complexities of life, and art is

Student Art on display at ArtWalk.



a powerful catalyst for change, inspiring ideas that ignite impact,” she adds.

Overall, MICA aspires “to cultivate the mind of the artist: to help students discover not only what they want to make, but why and where their work belongs in the world.”

Students begin with a rigorous foundation in drawing, painting, sculpture and craft, through which they develop technical mastery, discipline and a creative way of thinking. Liberal arts, sciences, social sciences, ethics, and creative and emerging technologies are layered in, giving students the freedom to integrate these disciplines in highly individualized ways.

“From the moment I stepped onto MICA’s campus, I felt creativity radiating from every studio, every hallway and every person who dares to imagine something new,” McCormick says. “Our students continue to fuel my passion for higher education, and I am so inspired to watch them mature as artists and designers.”

McCormick’s presidency comes at a major milestone as MICA celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2026.

“The college is amid a transformation and my experience as a college president has prepared me to lead MICA at this pivotal moment,” she says. “It’s important to recognize that our longevity reflects our ability to respond,



again and again, to the needs of each moment.”

With the Bicentennial approaching, MICA crafted a new academic vision, building on its studio-based fine arts education “to create an intentional and scaffolded experiential learning framework in which students integrate internships, community engagement, entrepreneurship and global exchange into their degrees.”

A new strategic plan will deepen MICA’s focus on experiential learning and strengthen its focus on creative entrepreneurship. The college is also launching a Bachelor of Design in

Interior Design, relaunching majors in Game Design and Film and Video, and introducing new programs in Creative Media Production and Design and Innovation.

The Ratcliffe Center for Creative Entrepreneurship will offer an alumni bridge program to provide recent graduates with the opportunity, mentorship resources and space to continue their projects post-graduation.

A revamped School for Creative and Professional Studies will serve working professionals and alumni seeking to upskill or advance in creative leadership, technology and design through master’s



Product Design



1926



Jack Edwards, Gloria Mermelstein, Dick Frampton, Gilbert Miller and Lee Gurney in 1961.



Commencement

programs, modular courses and master series courses.

And, a new Design and Innovation Hub will serve as a maker-in-residence “where students, faculty and partners from business, nonprofit and public sectors come together to transform creative ideas into cutting-edge solutions with real-world impact.”

“We’re setting the vision for the next century and introducing — and even reintroducing — MICA to our community, businesses, families and prospective students,” McCormick says. “We’re using this historic moment to spark conversations and deepen our connection to Baltimore and beyond. We’re accelerating what has always been

true: MICA is where creativity matters.”

Looking ahead, McCormick aims “to continue MICA’s strong trajectory of sustainability and growth in response to the evolving needs of our community.”

“MICA is an anchor institution in the City of Baltimore and a leader in the creative economy — locally, in the State of Maryland and beyond,” McCormick says. “The creative economy is key to our society and design thinking plays a

critical role in solving problems.”

“According to Forbes, 70% of employers say creative thinking is the most in-demand skill,” she adds. “I would say there is no better college than MICA to prepare students of any age to thrive in the creative economy.” □

*For more information about MICA and its Bicentennial, visit mica.edu.*

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