

## Society of Architectural Historians Announces Ben Thomas as Executive Director

Dec. 23, 2022 (CHICAGO) — The Society of Architectural Historians, an international membership organization devoted to the documentation and interpretation of the history of the built environment, today announced Ben Thomas as its next executive director, effective February 1, 2023. Thomas, who is currently director of programs for the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), brings to the role more than 17 years in nonprofits and higher education; strong financial and business acumen within the domain of a learned society; and a deep commitment to increasing diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion through strategic educational and outreach programs.

A search committee co-chaired by SAH President Patricia A. Morton and past SAH President Abigail Van Slyck led a rigorous, international search with assistance from Issacson, Miller, an executive search firm with a focus on diversifying leadership in the nonprofit sector. The search committee was impressed by Thomas's track record of expanding international partnerships, designing accessible programs that attract diverse audiences, and successful grant-writing and fundraising experience.

"Ben Thomas's deep knowledge of membership organizations and his commitment to diversity make him the ideal person to lead SAH at a transformative moment for the Society," said SAH President Patricia A. Morton. "We are delighted to welcome Ben to the SAH team."

Headquartered in Chicago, SAH serves an international membership of over 2,300 individuals that includes architectural historians, architects, museum professionals, preservationists, students, architectural history enthusiasts and others who work with the built environment. Through print and digital publications, in-person and virtual educational programs, advocacy efforts, fellowships, and mentoring, SAH promotes the study, interpretation and conservation of the built environment worldwide, for the benefit of all. In 2023 SAH will begin the development of a strategic plan that will guide the organization over the next five years. The SAH Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accountability, and Sustainability (IDEAS) Initiative will inform all aspects of the planning process. With a background in strategic planning, DEI work, fundraising, membership outreach, and program redesign, Thomas will help SAH engage new audiences, diversify its membership, and position the organization for long-term stability and sustainability.



"I am thrilled for the opportunity to lead this prestigious organization and am grateful for the trust that the SAH has placed in me to guide the society into the future," said Ben Thomas, incoming executive director of SAH. "I look forward to working with SAH's leadership, members, and talented and committed staff to fulfill and expand the organization's mission and goals."

Thomas comes to SAH from the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), where he leads a team that oversees a membership of nearly 6,000 individuals including professionals in archaeology and related disciplines, students, and archaeology enthusiasts; over 100 AIA Local Societies in the United States, Canada, and Europe; multiple grants, fellowships, and awards programs; and national and global outreach programs. From 2004 to 2008 he served as education and outreach coordinator for AIA.

Notable projects Thomas has completed at the AIA include a redesign of the National Lecture Program (NLP), a series that brings top scholars from North America and abroad to present on current archaeological topics. With his team, he transformed the NLP into a financially self-sustaining lecture series that includes virtual programs and features a diverse slate of speakers presenting on previously underrecognized topics. Working with committee members and staff, he was responsible for the complete restructuring of the AIA's Site Preservation program, which provides grants that support preservation and conservation efforts. The program now focuses on outreach and engagement that involves local communities in the planning, implementation, economic development, and long-term strategies for the protection of sites. In 2011 Thomas created International Archaeology Day, which is now celebrated in over 27 countries by more than 500 organizations that host events that reach over 250,000 people worldwide. During his tenure, the AIA has expanded its institutional affiliations and partnered with multiple organizations including the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) on outreach efforts, advocacy issues, and meeting participation.

Thomas earned his PhD in archaeology from Boston University in 2005 with a focus on ancient Maya architecture and settlement planning. Since 2005 he has been a faculty member in the Liberal Arts and Sciences Department at the Berklee College of Music and was recently promoted to the rank of associate professor. He has taught courses on Mesoamerican art and archaeology, art history, and artistic space. At national and international conferences, Thomas has organized and participated in sessions that explore how cultural sites are presented to the public, how site experts communicate with diverse audiences, and how archaeologists and site managers integrate tourism and site preservation at archaeological sites. Currently, he is a member of the AIA, SAA and EAA, and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Archaeology and Education* and the board of the Massachusetts Archaeology Educators Consortium.

### **About the Society of Architectural Historians**

Founded in 1940, the [Society of Architectural Historians](#) is an international nonprofit membership organization that promotes the study, interpretation and conservation of architecture, design, landscapes and urbanism worldwide. SAH serves a network of local, national and international institutions and individuals who, by profession or interest, focus on the built environment and its role in shaping contemporary life. SAH promotes meaningful public engagement with the history of the built environment through advocacy efforts, print and online publications, and local, national and international programs.

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