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SCI-Arc Honors the Life of Friend and Honorary Trustee Merry Norris

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SCI-Arc former board member, honorary trustee, and longtime friend Merry Norris sadly passed away on March 16, 2020.

Norris is widely known as an enthusiastic supporter and advocate for cultural and civic life in Los Angeles, dedicating a nearly 35-year career to facilitating art and design in the city. Championing public art awareness and design excellence through her role in numerous major activities, Norris was instrumental in the founding and building of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) from 1979 to 1984, and was appointed in 1984 as one of the city's first Cultural Affairs Commissioners. In addition to being named the first Honorary Member of the American Institute of Architects Los Angeles (AIA/LA) in 1990, Norris is the first person in the chapter's history to be elected as a public member to the Board of Directors of AIA/LA in 1995, where she served for 14 years.

Always forming connections between the creative universes of art and architecture, Norris served on the SCI-Arc Board of Trustees since 1987. Over the years, she also developed and fostered close collaborative relationships with SCI-Arc cofounder Thom Mayne and former director Michael Rotondi. In recognition of Norris's deep and lasting involvement at SCI-Arc, the school acknowledged her in 2017 as the honoree of its annual Main Event Gala. "I am fortunate indeed to have been involved with this extraordinary school and its faculty for so many years," Norris said of the honor.

Herself an avid collector of modern and contemporary art, Norris led the transformation of many of the city's public areas with large-scale works and spaces by known and emerging artists, such as converting a freeway-adjacent parcel in Santa Monica into Tongva Park, enhancing the West Hollywood library with major art installations by David Wiseman and Shepard Fairey, and commissioning a mural in Pasadena by artist Kenny Scharf.

In the words of SCI-Arc Director Hernán Díaz Alonso: "Merry Norris was in a league of her own. Her generosity and passion for SCI-Arc and the arts was unparalleled. Over the years, her contributions have made her inseparable from what SCI-Arc is and will continue to be. We will miss her deeply."

SCI-Arc trustee, founding and distinguished faculty Thom Mayne writes of Norris, "A really sad loss of a member of our family. She approached everything with wonder and enthusiasm —she loved the world and the people in it. We were so lucky that she turned her attention to our project when she did. I will never forget her face, her smile, her joyful and contagious irreverence. Merry we will not forget you."

SCI-Arc trustee William Fain contributes, "Merry was devoted to SCI-Arc and understood the importance of personal commitment to and the artistic mission of the organization. On a personal note, she was a deeply principled woman, having strong opinions, with a big heart and love for her friends and especially her family. We will miss her and remember her with great fondness."

SCI-Arc Chairman of the Board of Trustees Kevin Ratner shares, "Merry was a beloved and engaged member of the SCI-Arc community; a fixture of LA's cultural fabric; a committed board member who connected the school to the greater arts community and whose strong opinion always mattered."

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