

Nancy Yao Maasbach  
President  
Museum of Chinese in America  
215 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10013

January 2, 2020

Dear Nancy:

Several weeks ago, we requested a statement from the Museum staff that would help clarify MoCA's involvement in the controversial citywide jail expansion plan that was recently approved by the City Council. We are writing to express our disappointment in the letter that was recently sent to members of Godzilla, which we believe was written on behalf of the Museum and its Board of Directors.

We were hoping that your letter would clear up any rumors circulating in the community about the concessions that were granted to MoCA, but it clearly neglects to mention the 35+ million dollars that MoCA will receive from the city as part of this jail plan—a giveback that was announced publicly and earmarks millions of dollars in city funds towards the purchase of the building MoCA currently occupies at 215 Centre Street.

Despite your inclusion of a timeline and your insistence that there is no connection between the money you will be receiving from the city and the new jail plan, here are some 'facts' that have been shared publicly: Written transcripts and audio of MoCA's meeting with other Chinatown organizations who were invited to discuss the jail plan with Mayor De Blasio have MoCA on record requesting 32 million dollars towards the purchase of a building. This documentation is proof that from the very beginning, MoCA understood the strategic advantage of directly linking city support for its capital campaign to the roll-out of the proposed jail plan. By leveraging its position as an anchor institution in the community and its ties to Council Member Margaret Chin, MoCA has been able to bypass the DCLA approval process and fast track the release of this money.

In an even more egregious move made at this meeting with the Mayor, MOCA ignored and failed to voice support for the legitimate concerns that were raised by community agencies for the safety of senior citizens, the displacement of small businesses, the environmental impact of 10 years of construction, and the diversion of much needed funds for social services and public health into a billion dollar jail project. MoCA used this meeting to push the Museum's agenda, placing MoCA's future above the future of Chinatown.

As artists, we care about the Museum and we are deeply troubled by the direction that we see MoCA heading in under its current leadership. We believe that MOCA is not acting in good faith, that it no longer listens to the community nor values the voices of the people who care

about the institution and its original mission. For this reason, we have decided to withdraw from the upcoming Godzilla exhibition being planned for 2020.

We would like you to know that we share a 40 year relationship to MoCA—we have curated exhibitions and donated artifacts to the permanent collection. We have participated in shaping the mission of the museum, from its early days as a division of Basement Workshop to its growth from a small non-profit into an institution; serving on the Board of Directors and as volunteers and consultants. In spite of our long history with the Museum, we have been accused of betraying the Museum and jeopardizing the Museum's funding; of 'hoping the Museum fails' simply by raising questions about MoCA's involvement in the city's jail expansion plan, a plan that directly and negatively impacts Chinatown and other low-income neighborhoods across the city. These accusations are painful and unwarranted. By asking questions, we join with the many friends and supporters of the Museum who are challenging the Museum to live up to its claim that it represents Chinatown. We expect our cultural institutions to work with--not against-- our communities.

We believe that in return for MoCA's support, a hugely unpopular jail plan that was unanimously rejected by both Community Boards 1 and 2 was artwashed and pushed quickly through an approval process with barely any community input. We believe it is unethical and morally wrong for a Museum to profit in any way off the building of jails—there is no such thing as a humane cage.

While we are speaking out as individuals, we would urge our fellow Godzilla artists, MoCA staff and members of the museum to learn more about the issues surrounding the building of these jails and an abolitionist movement that addresses the crisis of mass incarceration. This is a moment when the actions of our cultural institutions and their Boards are under public scrutiny. Ask yourselves what the moral implications are for MoCA to be connected to the construction of new jails. If it is not appropriate for war profiteers like Warren Kanders and opioid manufacturers like the Sacklers to sit on the Boards of our city's museums, how can it ever be appropriate or ethical for an institution like the Museum of Chinese in America to receive millions of dollars for its support of a violent, dehumanizing and constantly expanding criminal justice system?

Sincerely,  
Tomie Arai

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