Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA)
Chief Curator

*With a dramatic expansion underway as the museum builds its permanent home set to open in 2021, the Orange County Museum of Art seeks a curatorial visionary with experience presenting and shaping diverse modern and contemporary art exhibitions and collections that inspire community connection.*

The Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA) has embarked on a dramatic physical expansion and programmatic transformation, with a new museum set to open in 2021 that will position Southern California as the nexus of diverse communities, cultures and interests. The Chief Curator will build upon OCMA’s unique vision of modern and contemporary art by curating a diverse mix of exhibitions and permanent collection installations in its new building.

**BACKGROUND**

From 1962 until 2018, OCMA (and its predecessor the Newport Harbor Art Museum) was located in the city of Newport Beach and emerged as a leader in presenting and collecting modern and contemporary art from a Southern California perspective. In 2008, the museum received a gift of land at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, and in September 2019, the museum broke ground on its new home. At present, the museum operates a 32,000 sq. ft. temporary location in Santa Ana (OCMAEXPAND – SANTA ANA).

Since its founding, OCMA has been an innovative leader in presenting fresh voices of contemporary art, first from California and now from California and the cultures that comprise the Pacific Rim. Starting in 1984, OCMA has presented its view of contemporary art in a series of biennial and triennial exhibitions.

In 2013, the museum continued its 50-year tradition of innovation by focusing on the Pacific Rim region as an arts powerhouse. This pivotal initiative in part reflects the changing demographics of Orange County, now home to the country’s third largest Asian-American population. To date, work by artists from 27 of the 42 Pacific Rim countries have been exhibited at the museum. At its temporary location, the museum has expanded on its position as a lab for artistic expression and a dynamic space for creative thinking, experimentation, and dialogue, showcasing significant works by emerging artists from California and the Pacific region.

Its world-class collection consists of over 4,500 objects of modern and contemporary art that includes painting, sculpture, photography, drawing, printmaking, video, digital, and installation art by key artists associated with California: John Baldessari, Chris Burden, Vija Celmins, Bruce Conner, Richard Diebenkorn, Robert Irwin, Helen Lundeberg, John McCracken, John McLaughlin, Catherine Opie, Alan Rath, Charles Ray, Edward Ruscha, James Turrell, and Bill Viola.

OCMA collections and exhibitions have been presented by over 40 institutions worldwide (including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Guggenheim museums, and George Pompidou Centre), and its collections were experienced by over 1.2 million people in 2016 alone.
About Orange County

Located between Los Angeles and San Diego, Orange County is made up of 34 distinct cities and home to over 3 million people. OCMA is relocating from the edge of the County in Newport Beach to the center, at the boundary between Santa Ana and Costa Mesa (known locally as the City of the Arts). The geographic shift reflects an opportunity to expand the museum’s audience and better serve the entire County, now a “majority-minority” region. The new museum will be part of the Segerstrom Center for the Arts which is the only central hub of culture in Orange County and includes the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, the Samueli Theatre and South Coast Repertory, and is the artistic home to resident companies: Pacific Symphony, the Philharmonic Society of Orange County, and Pacific Chorale as well as the west coast home of American Ballet Theater.

New Beginnings

OCMA’s dramatic expansion will move the collection into a new home at Segerstrom Center for the Arts, creating an integrated visual and performing arts campus. The long-awaited museum, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Thom Mayne of Culver City-based Morphosis, features 53,000 square feet, a grand exterior staircase, a roof-top terrace for events, and 25,000 square feet of gallery space, which is nearly twice the exhibition space of its former facility in Newport Beach. By completing construction on this new museum space, the Orange County Museum of Art will expand its footprint, programming, partnerships, engagement with artists, collection, and outreach into the community, and ensure fiscal stability for the future. With the museum nearly doubling its exhibition area in its new home, OCMA will be able to do something it was never able to do at the same time—showcase its permanent collection in dedicated galleries and serve as a SoCal destination for high profile traveling shows of 20th and 21st century art.

The museum currently has a 26-member Board and 10 full-time staff members. In its new home, OCMA will have an annual budget of $5M. The museum anticipates the full-time staff to increase over the next 18-24 months as it prepares to open and operate the new home.

Responsibilities

The Chief Curator will play the lead role in shaping and implementing the museum’s curatorial approach by presenting the finest visual art of the 20th and 21st century from California, the Pacific Rim, and around the world to museum visitors. The museum seeks an innovator who will:

- develop exhibitions of visual art, design, and culture that prioritizes community resonance, while delivering artistic excellence, intellectual rigor, and innovative interpretation,
- shape experiences of art that excite and transform the perspectives of museum visitors as well as the local, national, and international art world,
- engage artists, gallerists, collectors, curators and others in enhancing OCMA’s collections and in developing an exhibition program that addresses OCMA’s audience development goals,
- conceive of the inaugural permanent collection show and exhibitions in the new museum.
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and subsequent installations,

- assess the strengths and gaps in the collection and cultivate strategic acquisitions,
- motivate and inspire an accomplished team of staff and guest curators

Reporting to the Deputy Director, the primary responsibilities of the Chief Curator include:

- Work with the Deputy Director, the Director/CEO, and members of the curatorial team to establish the direction, goals and priorities for OCMA’s collections, acquisitions, exhibitions, research, publications, and interpretation based on the institution’s audience development goals and core artistic values.

- Research and present a program of permanent collection installations for the new museum and OCMA-originated exhibitions, as well as those organized in collaboration with or by other institutions that resonate with the local community. Manage an active regional, national and international touring exhibition program.

- Develop a systematic plan to strengthen OCMA’s collections through strategic acquisitions, long-term loans, and conduct scholarly research.

- Enhance and expand the museum’s national and international network and partnerships with museums, collectors, artists, curators, academics and other stakeholders to negotiate traveling shows, solicit loans and expertise; acquire new work; and cultivate and secure patronage for initiatives.

- Advise on education and public programs that help visitors make personal connections to the art on view.

- Provide appropriate planning, support and consultation to shape the displays, utilization of galleries and other spaces as the new building is completed; protect and install art, etc.

- Prepare departmental budgets, staffing plans, professional development plans and periodic reports on exhibitions, collections, acquisitions, etc.

- Cultivate a respected, high functioning team of staff and interns and manage the department’s annual work plans and day-to-day activities.

QUALIFICATIONS and PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will have:

- genuine passion and enthusiasm for shaping transformative encounters with works of art for the general public,
- substantial experience working in institutions with collections and a demonstrated track record of curating and organizing compelling exhibitions, including nationally and internationally travelling shows; experience with both modern and contemporary art, as well as artists based in California and Pacific Rim countries is preferred,
- an advanced degree in art history or cultural studies (masters degree required), with an appropriate specialty in art that is relevant to the Orange County Museum of Art,
- experience working with scholars, curators, artists, educators and others as active and valued collaborators; demonstrated ability to forge mutually respectful and effective relationships with a diverse group of personalities to deliver exceptional museum
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experiences to the public,

- a mission-driven commitment to OCMA’s core values and transformation goals, open to experimentation; predisposed to juxtaposing ideas and objects in new and unexpected ways, including across disciplines, incorporating different realms of creativity beyond the visual arts and identifying links between the historical and contemporary,

- an entrepreneurial spirit that reflects the values of the organization and a resourceful and adaptive nature that is well-suited to being part of an organization that is embraces change,

- emotional intelligence and maturity, the ability to listen well and strategize; comfortable receiving input from many sources, and able to analyze and formulate disparate information into sound, well-organized goals, strategies and actions; a partner able to flexibly collaborate with people and organizations with diverse expertise, experience, cultures and personalities; a tactful negotiator,

- exceptional written and oral communication skills; ability to express themselves in clear language for the public, media, and funders,

- a talent for planning, prioritizing, organizing and following through; a hard worker with a high energy level who welcomes accountability,

- the leadership skills to impart trust, integrity and solidity and guide others in a similar vein; an ability to disagree without being disagreeable; someone who enjoys working in close collaboration with staff and community members and is able to connect with a broad spectrum of community members and partners; a person with a sense of humor and perspective.

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