

University of Chicago

Smart Museum of Art - Dana Feitler Director

The University of Chicago (UChicago) seeks a visionary museum professional who, in collaboration with the University, will lead the Museum's emergence as a global model for an engaged and engaging university art museum.

BACKGROUND

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago is a site for rigorous inquiry and exchange that encourages the examination of complex issues through the lens of art objects and artistic practice. The Museum has long served as a model for academic art museums by combining the University's deep-seated commitment to intense creative and intellectual engagement and open dialogue with Chicago's entrepreneurial spirit, the South Side's robust creative communities, and global arts perspectives that bridge lines of culture, language and lived experience. As the Smart approaches its 50th anniversary, the University of Chicago is keen to support its dynamic role in expanding artistic canons, rethinking received histories, introducing new perspectives, and engaging diverse communities – locally, nationally, and internationally.

With guidance and support from the Smart's Board and staff, University scholars and administrators, artists, institutional partners and community leaders, the Director will develop a compelling and ambitious vision for a sophisticated, innovative, inclusive academic museum of the 21st century.

Founded as the David and Alfred Smart Gallery in 1974, the museum was renamed to the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art in 1990. Through strong [community](#) and [scholarly partnerships](#), the Museum incorporates diverse ideas, identities and experiences into its [exhibitions](#) and [collections](#), academic inquiry and public programs. The collection's 16,000+ objects are used by curators, scholars, students, community members, and others to support inquiry and exchange. Over 51,000 visitors annually experience the Smart, with exhibitions and programs highlighting permanent collections, works by contemporary artists, and objects on loan from institutional partners and private collectors.

The Museum ensures that collections, exhibitions, and programs reflect a broad spectrum of movements, techniques, orientations, and sensibilities. The broad-based [collection](#) is constantly evolving, including extraordinary works of:

Asian Art, including literati scroll paintings from China, Japan, and Korea, Buddhist sculpture, ceramics, and ukiyo-e prints.

Chicago Art Movements, including works by the Chicago Imagists, the Monster Roster, and self-taught artists like Henry Darger and Lee Godie.

Contemporary Art, including works by artists Dawoud Bey, Nick Cave, John Chamberlain, Theaster Gates, Antony Gormley, Richard Hunt, Robert Irwin, Laura Letinsky, Kerry James Marshall, Dan Peterman, Tony Tasset, Sylvia Sleigh, Andy Warhol, and Claire Zeisler.

European Art, including paintings by Cecco Bravo, Gustave Caillebotte, Luca Cambiaso, Donato Creti, Louis Dupré, Goya, Pordenone, Jean-Baptiste Regnault, Girolamo da Santa Croce, Jan Steen and Paolo Veronese.

Modern Art, including paintings by Paul Delvaux, Arthur Dove, Childe Hassam, Walt Kuhn, Norman Lewis, Roberto Matta, Joan Mitchell, Jean Metzinger, Diego Rivera, Mark Rothko, and others; and sculpture by Jean Arp, Edgar Degas, Henry Moore, Jacques Lipchitz, Auguste Rodin, and others.

Housed in an intimate modernist building designed by Chicago-born architect Edward Larrabee Barnes, the Museum is located on campus and interacts with a robust ecosystem of arts-focused units, initiatives, programs, and organizations.

University of Chicago's arts network includes:



The Smart Museum's own [Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry](#) which advances teaching and learning across the University's departments and disciplines through intense engagements with the Museum's collections; a renowned [Department of Art History](#) and one of the country's best studio programs in the [Department of Visual Arts](#).

Arts Research Centers and Institutes that include the [Film Studies Center](#), [Neubauer Collegium Gallery](#), the [Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts](#) (including its exhibitions program), and the [Richard and Mary L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry](#).

University-wide Arts Initiatives and Organizations that include [Arts + Public Life](#) and professional arts organizations and presenters that include the [Court Theatre](#), the [Renaissance Society](#), and [University of Chicago Presents](#).

Collections that complement the Smart's, including the world-renowned holdings of the [Oriental Institute Museum](#), the [Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center](#), the [Booth School of Business Contemporary Art Collection](#), and the display of prominent [private collections](#) through the Rubenstein Forum.

The University promotes an extraordinarily rich and concentrated environment for cross-collaboration, organizational cooperation, and innovative interdisciplinary arts programming. Beyond its role within the University, Chicago and the United States, the Smart Museum engages and influences art and its exhibition internationally through the University's global centers in Beijing, Delhi, Hong Kong, London, and Paris.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Smart Museum employs 23 full-time [staff](#) and over 50 part-time employees, with management support provided by UChicago Arts and the Office of the Provost. That support encompasses development, marketing & communications, facilities maintenance & operations, financial services, and human resources. The endowment is approximately \$26 million, of which about 30 percent is restricted in support of acquisitions. Annual giving (excluding gifts in kind and of art) averages \$1.25 million including support from foundations and individuals.

The Director reports to the Provost's Office. The Museum benefits from the advice and advocacy of a 27-member [Board of Governors](#) in addition to the Feitler Center Advisory Committee. The Board consists of local, national, and international arts patrons who support and advance the museum's mission through a series of committees and quarterly meetings. The Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums; its director is a longstanding member of the Association of Art Museum Directors.

The University of Chicago was founded in 1890 by John D. Rockefeller and is one of the world's leading universities widely celebrated for its research impact, faculty, students, graduate programs, record of philanthropic support, and endowment growth.

UChicago is home to over 3,100 faculty and academic personnel and more than 18,000 students. Faculty are organized in four divisions (Biological Sciences, Humanities, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences), eight professional schools (Booth School of Business, Divinity School, Graham School of Continuing Liberal and Professional Studies, Law School, Pritzker School of Medicine, Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, Harris School of Public Policy, and Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice) and the College. In addition to the academic units, the University boasts a medical center; a charter school with three campuses; an N-12 private school; a professional theater; two museums; six galleries; and the nation's largest academic press.

BASIC FUNCTION

The Director provides comprehensive artistic vision, administration, leadership, and oversight of the Museum staff. The Director works to secure the Museum's position as an innovative leader among academic art museums; champions the signal importance of the visual arts, arts education, curatorial practice, and scholarship; ensures that the Museum connects with and is accessible to the local community; and oversees Museum collections, exhibitions operations, finances, and fundraising. The Director is the Smart Museum's public advocate and ambassador, and is an active partner to the Board of Governors, the University community, and broader arts constituents locally, nationally, and internationally.

Given the Museum's importance as an educational and cultural asset, the University's leadership is poised to invest in and support the Director's bold strategic vision for the Smart Museum. The Director will redefine the role of an academic museum in the 21st century and reenforce the Smart Museum's role as a destination on campus and in the city, as a place of welcome, stimulation and contemplation for students, faculty, staff, and the citizens of Chicago's South Side and beyond for years to come.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Director will be empowered and expected to:

- Develop and communicate a comprehensive vision encompassing curation, exhibition, collections, and programming that is compelling, distinctive, imaginative, sustainable and that reflects the strengths and ambitions of the University of Chicago.
- Position the Museum within the University as an important and valuable partner for art experiences that are central to the intellectual life of the University.
- Position the Museum locally, nationally, and internationally as a thought leader in reconceiving and expanding narratives.
- Manage the museum's resources and strengthen accountability for delivering outcomes.
- Oversee and exercise discretion over the Museum's budget.
- Drive fundraising and in-kind donations of art to assure long-term strength in finances and collections.

The Smart Museum's operating costs are funded by a combination of endowment income, individual and institutional giving, as well as university support. In order to advance an aggressive agenda, the Museum must strengthen philanthropic support. The Director will be responsible for partnering with the Board of Governors and the University of Chicago Office of Alumni Relations & Development to increase major gift fundraising and attract new institutional and individual donors.

The areas in concentric circles around the UChicago campus--the South Side, the city of Chicago, and Chicagoland--buzz with artistic activity and energy, arts institutions and invested individuals. The construction of the [Obama Presidential Center](#) just east of campus, along with the growing impact of the [DuSable Museum of African American History](#), the Arts Block just west of campus, and many other cultural institutions on and around campus, exemplify the dynamism of the artistic landscape on the South Side. The Director will assume a key role in this constellation, exploring ways in which the Smart Museum can contribute meaningfully to this environment and engage creatively with it, seeking out new partnerships, collaborators, and audiences.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The successful candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal qualifications, characteristics, and experiences:

- **A thoroughgoing commitment to the complexity and revelatory potential of art.**
- **Passion for the mission and values of the University of Chicago:** commitment to rigorous inquiry, appetite for vigorous and inclusive debate, willingness to take risks, and intellectual independence and creativity.
- **Commitment to academic culture and a desire to contribute to the same:** broad vision and curiosity; boldness of ideas. A keen and informed interest in the work of faculty, students, and departments, and a desire to support and amplify their goals. Demonstrated orientation to collaboration, cooperation, and exchange.
- **Leadership qualities:** An audacious thinker with a record of successful executive leadership, including visionary thinking, strategic planning and implementation, board and community engagement, and program development and assessment.
- **Administrative and operational sophistication:** A record of effective management of physical, human, and financial resources. A deep understanding of and interest in financial and budget oversight and the interplay of institutional priorities, planning, resource requirements, and revenue generation. Substantial and successful fundraising experience; additional professional experience that reflects the development of robust support networks.
- **Commitment to diversity, inclusion, and accessibility:** A record of dedication to and success in the advancement of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Ability to model and establish a culture of mutual respect, transparency, and empowerment.
- **Professional qualities:** A management style that relies on open and responsive communication and reflects the highest professional and ethical standards. A collaborative approach to decision making, combined with a sense of energy, enthusiasm, and an entrepreneurial capacity to move things forward. A direct but diplomatic style. Consistency, maturity, and composure in presentation and interpersonal dealings.
- **Personal qualities:** Intellectual and emotional integrity, empathy, curiosity, and creativity. Confidence; comfort with ambiguity; patience and persistence. Openness to the opinions of others, coupled with independent thought. Honesty, tact, generosity, perspective, and good humor.

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