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Contemporary Arts Center Appoints Theresa Bembnister as Curator

Bembnister brings curatorial leadership and a history of thoughtful, community-focused partnerships and experiences



Photo by Jason Masters

Cincinnati, OH – September 28, 2023 – The Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati has announced the appointment of Theresa Bembnister as the institution’s new Curator. Bembnister will begin in her role October 31, 2023. In this role, Bembnister joins the CAC’s team to develop a multi-faceted exhibition program that builds on the institution’s long history of engaging and experimenting with the art, artists, and ideas of our time.

Bembnister joins the CAC from the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (AMFA) in Little Rock, where she has served as Curator since January 2022, beginning her role at the museum as Associate Curator in August of 2020. During her tenure, she worked toward the opening of the institution’s new building, including the inaugural permanent collection installation, its accessible and equitable labels, and a forthcoming publication about the design of the building and grounds. She also spent five years at the Akron Art Museum (AAM), where she began as Associate Curator before being promoted to Curator of Exhibitions. Her legacy there includes *Open World: Video Games & Contemporary Art*, an innovative, technology-driven exhibition that attracted new audiences and incorporated extensive community outreach and

partnerships. Additionally, Bembnister was integral to the team that developed the AAM's digital tour guide, Dot, which led visitors on a choose-your-own-adventure-style tour of the museum's collection galleries and encouraged conversation among users through social media. Prior to her time with the AAM, she was the Associate Curator at the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art. Bembnister was also an Art and Writing Curatorial Fellow with the Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition, where she received an Achievement in Writing Award.

"We conducted a rigorous search with many qualified candidates," said Alice and Harris Weston Director Christina Vassallo. "The search committee was deeply impressed by Theresa's ability to express her values through her exhibitions, her curious mind, and her reputation for hard work and integrity. These qualities will serve her well as she curates experiences that resonate with the CAC's many different audiences and embody our mission of bringing art and the creative process to all people."

"The Contemporary Arts Center presents a unique opportunity that I couldn't pass up," says Bembnister. "Curating contemporary art in the Midwest is familiar and important to me. Add to that the CAC's national reputation for its forward-thinking and boundary-pushing exhibition program, with values of social justice and equity in accessibility. It all aligns with my curatorial goals of cultivating memorable, collaborative, and relevant creative experiences for the community."

Beyond her innovative and relationship-driven curatorial record, Bembnister brings a wealth of additional experience, including journalism, public relations, graphic design, and fundraising. She has a Master of Arts in Art History and Museum Studies from Case Western Reserve University and received a BFA in Illustration/Design and Creative Writing from Kansas City Art Institute.

Bembnister joins the CAC as it celebrates its 20th year in its current location, the seven-story Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art—the first U.S. project designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Zaha Hadid and the first US museum designed by a woman. Hadid's original design, an "urban carpet" that dynamically draws visitors from the sidewalks of one of the city's busiest intersections into the building and up through the galleries, was visionary in establishing a critical connection to the center of urban life in Cincinnati. The building was instrumental in establishing downtown Cincinnati as a vibrant cultural hub with the CAC at its core and remains a local landmark today. Admission to the CAC is free for all, thanks to a generous grant from patron group The 50 and The Johnson Foundation.

About the Contemporary Arts Center

The Contemporary Arts Center is a catalyst for dialogue and discovery, driven by the art, artists, and ideas of our time. Through our exhibitions, performances, educational and community programs and partnerships, the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) provides opportunities for encounter: with artists both local and global, with cultural thought leaders, and with one's own creative potential. Embedded in the fabric of its community and committed to lifelong learning, the CAC aims to serve as an integral forum where people can reflect, create, collaborate, and connect around a more inclusive and sustainable culture of tomorrow.

Since its founding in 1939, the CAC has been a champion of emerging ideas in contemporary art, hosting one of the first Midwest exhibitions of Picasso's *Guernica* in 1939; mounting an early exhibition of Pop Art in 1963; representing the United States at the São Paulo Biennial in 1975; and presenting— and successfully defending—the 1990 Mapplethorpe retrospective that became a lightning rod in the era's culture wars and propelled the CAC into the national spotlight. Today, the CAC occupies the Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, the first museum designed by architect Zaha Hadid and the first U.S. museum designed by a woman.

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