

## **Christina Vassallo Appointed Executive Director of Contemporary Arts Center**



*Christina Vassallo, photo by Jessi Melcer*

### ***Experienced art leader Christina Vassallo will arrive in time for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its iconic Zaha Hadid building and lay the foundation for years to come***

Cincinnati, OH – November 9, 2022 – The Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati has announced the appointment of Christina Vassallo as the institution’s new Alice & Harris Weston Director. An accomplished and effective arts administrator and curator, Vassallo brings more than ten years of executive-level experience at forward-thinking contemporary arts institutions, currently serving as Executive Director of The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. She comes to the CAC with a history of successful leadership in fundraising, education and outreach initiatives, and artistic collaborations of varying scope and size, as well as a deep understanding of the cultural ecosystems of Ohio and the Midwest, having previously served as Executive + Artistic Director of SPACES in Cleveland from 2014 to 2019. Vassallo begins in her new role at the CAC in March 2023.

“It was important to the Board that we select someone with an understanding of not just contemporary art, but the needs and interests of the region,” said CAC Board President Gale Beckett. “Christina is exceptionally qualified. She has experience collaborating with established and upcoming artists, passion and proven success in expanding outreach, and a strong track record of fundraising and fiscal stability. We are confident that she will help usher in an inspiring new era at the CAC.” Vassallo’s appointment is the result of a nationwide search led by Gale Beckett as Board President working with search firm Koya Partners and a Board subcommittee.

“Before moving to Philadelphia, I spent six years in Cleveland, so moving back to Ohio feels like a homecoming for me. There is such a rich network of artists and creatives in the Midwest that I can’t wait



to tap back into through the CAC, an organization at the cutting edge of the region’s cultural scene,” said Vassallo. “I’m looking forward to joining the CAC team and working to chart a new path forward that builds upon the institution’s deep history of supporting artists at the vanguard and nurturing curiosity and creativity in us all.”

Vassallo joins the CAC from The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) in Philadelphia, where she has served as Executive Director since January 2020. Taking the reins at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vassallo immediately executed a deft strategic vision that allowed her to keep her staff of 30 fully intact, cultivate six new board members, stabilize the museum’s finances, and continue an ambitious program calendar of residencies and exhibitions by Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Rose B. Simpson, Henry Taylor, and others. During her tenure at the FWM, she has also secured the Mellon Foundation’s Art Museum Futures Fund to develop a permanent collection care plan and support DEAI initiatives; created an earned revenue initiative to support artists through the sale of limited-edition works; laid the groundwork for a new strategic plan; and advocated for the region’s cultural sector when city and state funding were at risk.

Prior to her work at FWM, Vassallo served as Executive + Artistic Director of SPACES in Cleveland for nearly six years, where she provided creative direction and oversaw operations for one of the longest-running alternative art organizations in the country. At SPACES, she launched a \$3 million capital campaign and spearheaded a relocation project, expanded the organization’s outreach initiatives, developed grant opportunities for local artists, and curated several critically acclaimed group exhibitions examining contemporary ideas and issues. From 2011 to 2014, she was Executive Director of Flux Factory in New York City, where she set the course for a thriving institution comprising an international artist residency program, acclaimed exhibitions program, and unconventional education initiatives.

“Christina brings a wealth of experience from various institutions to the CAC,” said Chief Deputy Director and Interim Executive Director Marcus Margerum. “I look forward to working with her to continue to rebuild the CAC after a tumultuous two years, with a focus on the future.” Margerum has served as Interim Executive Director since the departure of Raphaela Platow in July of 2021. Upon Vassallo’s arrival, he will continue to play a vital role at the CAC as the Chief Deputy Director.

Vassallo is a founding member of the Philadelphia Collaborative Arts Consortium, a member of the national association of Contemporary Art Museum Directors (CAMD), a 2022 Marshall Memorial Fellow of the German Marshall Fund, and she completed the National Arts Strategies’ Chief Executive Program in 2020. Additionally, she has curated exhibitions for the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Everson Museum of Art, Jersey City Museum, NURTUREart, Lafayette College, and New Haven University. She holds a B.A. in art history and M.A. in nonprofit visual arts management from NYU.

Vassallo assumes leadership of the CAC at a pivotal time for the organization as it rebounds from the pandemic and enters a new era ushered in by a strong slate of recent programming and initiatives. The CAC’s 2021 exhibition *The Regional* was the first major, multi-museum survey of Midwestern artists, and



its 2019 career retrospective of Robert Colescott, *Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott*, has toured the country to critical acclaim. Most recently, the institution celebrated the opening of its new Creativity Center, a space for intergenerational, hands-on making and learning with an underlying focus on sustainability.

In 2023, the CAC will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> 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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For more information, please contact:

#### **Local/Regional Media:**

Kate Elliott | Contemporary Arts Center  
513-345-8403  
[kelliott@cincycac.org](mailto:kelliott@cincycac.org)

Tricia Suit | Game Day Communications  
513-541-8580  
[tsuit@gamedaypr.com](mailto:tsuit@gamedaypr.com)

#### **National Media:**

Emilia Litwak / Destanie Martin-Johnson /  
Delaney Smith  
Resnicow and Associates

212-671-5168 / 212-671-5172 / 212-671-5160  
[elitwak@resnicow.com](mailto:elitwak@resnicow.com) / [dmartin-johnson@resnicow.com](mailto:dmartin-johnson@resnicow.com) / [dsmith@resnicow.com](mailto:dsmith@resnicow.com)