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Valerie Hillings Named Next Director of the North Carolina Museum of Art
The Duke University graduate and Guggenheim curator to start November 1

Raleigh, N.C.—The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) has named Valerie Hillings as its next Museum director. A Duke University graduate and curator with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation (Guggenheim) for over 14 years, Hillings is currently curator and associate director of curatorial affairs for the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi museum. She will join the NCMA on November 1, 2018, when Dr. Larry Wheeler retires after 24 years at the helm of the Museum.

"Valerie Hillings brings expertise and vision to her new role as director of the North Carolina Museum of Art," North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper said. "I'm confident that her leadership will help take the Museum to the next level for the people of North Carolina and visitors from around the globe."

Susi H. Hamilton, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, welcomed the Museum's new leader. "We are elated to have Valerie Hillings as our new director for the North Carolina Museum of Art. An exemplary scholar and passionate curator, she will bring new perspective to build on our collection and lead the Museum to inspire creativity through the power and wonder of art."

Hillings joined the Guggenheim's curatorial staff in 2004, holding senior positions for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation and working on projects for affiliate museums within its organization, including Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin; Guggenheim Hermitage Museum, Las Vegas; and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice—and with partner institutions in Australia, Europe, and the Middle East.

In 2009 Hillings joined the Guggenheim's dedicated Abu Dhabi Project staff, tasked with planning for the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, a museum of modern and contemporary art currently under development in the United Arab Emirates. Hillings led a team of curators to develop a strategy for originating the museum's collection and directed a robust acquisitions program, pre-opening exhibitions, public programs, and publications, realized in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism—Abu Dhabi. As part of the Guggenheim's senior management team for the Abu Dhabi Project, she was a key contributor to the master implementation and business plans, provided input on the building design by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry, and served as the curatorial spokesperson for this historic museum project.

Hillings's deep international experience is rooted in her ties to North Carolina. She earned her B.A. in art history from Duke University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. From 2014 to 2017, she was a member of the Board of Advisors for the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

"I am delighted to return to North Carolina to work with the board and staff of the NCMA, its donors and membership, to build on the strong foundations laid by Larry Wheeler," said Hillings. "North Carolina was the first state in the nation to use public funds to buy art, and its collection is a treasure to be shared with all North Carolinians, visitors to the state, and audiences reached through traveling exhibitions, publications, and digital outreach. I am excited by the opportunities ahead for the Museum to develop collection displays, exhibitions, programming, and digital initiatives



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that offer fresh perspectives and encourage reflection on the past and present through compelling encounters with art.”

The director is responsible for leading the artistic vision and stewardship of the Museum’s art collections, Ann and Jim Goodnight Museum Park, educational programming, interactive digital media, and events, and for projecting the Museum’s mission throughout North Carolina. Hillings’s appointment follows an extensive, rigorous eight-month search led by the Museum’s Search Committee, which was chaired by North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation Board of Directors member Ann Goodnight.

“We are excited about the appointment of Dr. Hillings as director of the North Carolina Museum of Art,” said Goodnight. “As an accomplished curator with international experience, Valerie has a proven record for building collections and organizing outstanding exhibitions. She will bring fresh ideas about expanding the cultural impact of the arts in North Carolina and beyond.”

During her tenure at the Guggenheim, Hillings curated more than 15 exhibitions on four continents, among them *RUSSIA!* (2005–6), *Hanne Darboven: Hommage à Picasso* (2006); *Guggenheim Collection: 1940s to Now* (2007); *Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s* (2009); *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* (2014); and *The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence* (2017). *ZERO*, inspired by Hillings’s doctoral thesis, was a 2014 AICA nominee for Best Thematic Show in New York, and the exhibition’s website won a Webby Award.

“On behalf of the Guggenheim Foundation and our colleagues in New York, Venice, Bilbao, and Abu Dhabi, I congratulate Valerie Hillings on this well-deserved appointment,” said Richard Armstrong, director, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation. “In addition to her exemplary scholarship on a number of exhibitions throughout the Guggenheim’s international constellation of museums, she has contributed significantly to the development of a transnational and forward-looking collection for the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and has been a gifted mentor to emerging curators. We wish her great and continued success.”

Hillings has collaborated with artists including El Anatsui, Angela Bulloch, Hanne Darboven, Marina Abramović, Susan Hefuna, Tomás Saraceno, and Günther Uecker on commissions, exhibitions, and public programs. She has been published and invited to lecture around the world, including in Australia, the Middle East, and North America. From 2007 to 2009, she was on the jury for the Kandinsky Prize for Russian contemporary art. Hillings was on the international ZERO Foundation Scientific Board, Düsseldorf, Germany, from 2011 to 2014. In 2016 she was a fellow at the Center for Curatorial Leadership in New York.

“We are delighted that Dr. Hillings will become the next leader of the North Carolina Museum of Art,” said Joyce Fitzpatrick, chairman of the Museum Board of Trustees. “Ann Goodnight led a vast and thorough search process, and we are pleased to welcome someone of Dr. Hillings’s stature and experience. Her extensive international exposure and reputation combined with her North Carolina roots perfectly position her to understand our Museum’s legacy as a leader in the arts, and build on its extraordinary growth under Dr. Wheeler’s tenure. The NCMA is a gem in North Carolina’s crown, and it is poised to shine even brighter now.”

At the Guggenheim, Hillings was also active in fundraising and development efforts, providing curatorial leadership for the Patrons Circle, a high-level Guggenheim membership group, and the Middle Eastern Circle affinity group, which supports acquisitions and programming at the Guggenheim Museum. Working in partnership with Development, she raised significant funding for exhibitions from corporations, foundations, and individual supporters.

David Brody, president of the Museum Foundation Board of Directors, also served on the search committee. “As part of our process we interviewed members, patrons, and staff to determine the qualities they wanted to have in the new director,” Brody said. “Staff asked for a good listener, a collegial, collaborative leader, and someone who would foster a dynamic, supportive working environment. Members and patrons wanted to build upon the successes of recent years by expanding the Museum’s collection with exciting art and programming. Dr. Hillings meets all of these requests.”

The announcement comes during an exciting year for the NCMA, which welcomed more than 102,000 visitors to *You Are Here: Light, Color, and Sound Experiences*, over the summer, its highest-attended contemporary exhibition ever. The exhibition was also the debut of an important new acquisition—the mirrored infinity room *LIGHT OF LIFE* by internationally acclaimed artist Yayoi Kusama. The highly anticipated exhibition *The Beyond: Georgia O’Keeffe and*

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Contemporary Art opens on October 13. More information on the Museum and its programming can be found at ncartmuseum.org.

Image credit:

Isaac James

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.