Position Specification

Seattle Art Museum

Illesley Ball Nordstrom Director and Chief Executive Officer

March 5, 2019
Our Client

The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) has been the center of world-class visual arts in the Pacific Northwest since 1933. At its core, SAM sees itself as a museum grounded in the city of Seattle, while its collections, installations, special exhibitions, and programs feature art from around the world and build bridges between cultures and centuries. SAM’s growing collection contains nearly 25,000 works of art from around the world. Dating from antiquity to the present, the permanent collection represents a wide range of global cultures and historical perspectives.

SAM is a welcoming community committed to exceptional art and dynamic programs. The Museum is comprised of three sites:

- **SAM Downtown**, in the heart of downtown Seattle, houses light-filled galleries in an elegant stainless-steel façade that responds to its urban surroundings and the landscape of the Pacific Northwest. SAM moved into its new home in 1991 and expanded into its current footprint in 2007, which doubled the Museum’s public and exhibition spaces. The collections include Asian, African, Ancient American, Ancient Mediterranean, Islamic, European, Oceanic, modern and contemporary art, and decorative arts and design.

  In conjunction with the opening of the expansion and SAM’s 75th anniversary in 2008, the Museum received an unprecedented series of gifts from prominent museum patrons and collectors. The gifts—nearly 1,000 works from more than 40 collections—significantly enhanced SAM’s holdings and reinforced the Museum’s dedication to artistic excellence. In a remarkable show of support, entire collections by some of the Northwest’s leading collectors have been committed over time, creating the largest gift in the Museum’s history.

- **The Asian Art Museum** resides in the Olmsted-designed Volunteer Park in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle in the original SAM museum location. Chinese and Japanese art remain the largest areas of the Asian art collection, while art works from Korea, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Himalayas, and the Middle East have grown significantly, as has the collection of contemporary Asian art. In 2017, the Asian Art Museum temporarily closed for renovation to undertake critical seismic upgrades, enhance ADA accessibility, and expand to add much-needed gallery and education space. Incorporating input from the City of Seattle, parks groups, and the community, LMN Architects created a design plan for structural improvements within the landmark 1933 Art Deco building, and a light-filled addition that offers a stronger visual connection with Volunteer Park. The Asian Art Museum will reopen in November of 2019.

- **The Olympic Sculpture Park** is an award-winning, nine-acre park on Seattle’s waterfront that is free and open to the public. The sculpture park evolved out of a mutual commitment between SAM and the Trust for Public Land to preserve downtown Seattle’s last undeveloped waterfront property and offers monumental contemporary sculptures. Since its grand opening in early 2007, SAM’s Olympic Sculpture Park has firmly cemented its reputation as a “must visit” place for locals and visitors alike. The sculptures, architecture, and maturing landscape have become iconic signatures for Seattle, and it is now impossible to imagine the Seattle waterfront without Alexander Calder’s sculpture *The Eagle* perched atop the park’s stretch of green.
Together, the three sites offer nearly 90,000 square feet of gallery and special exhibition space across Seattle, providing enriching, fun, and rewarding experiences for all, and celebrate the region’s position as a crossroads where east meets west, urban meets natural, local meets global.

Recent popular exhibitions include Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect, which presented 110 of Wyeth’s finest paintings and drawings in the first major retrospective since the artist’s death and drew over 175,000 visitors to SAM; Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas, bringing together three generations of contemporary American artists whose work challenges a Western painting tradition that underrepresents people of color; and Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India, an extraordinary exhibition of 250 objects from the kingdom of Marwar-Jodhpur, many of them on display outside their palace setting for the very first time.

Education and Public Programs
Through exhibitions, film screenings, pop-up performances, lecture forums, and partnerships with performing arts organizations, SAM acts as a forum where visitors can participate in cultural experiences that reflect the complexity and dynamism of the Seattle community. Across SAM’s three sites, programs amplify important voices in our communities and participate in critical conversations. Community outreach efforts deepen the SAM experience for visitors and strengthen its partnerships as the Museum works to make the arts a part of everyday life for people of all backgrounds and cultures.

Current Operations
Over the past several years, SAM has strengthened its financial base, creating a solid foundation for an ambitious plan of exhibitions, initiatives, and programs to come. Seattle is experiencing rapid growth and the rise of technology companies focused on Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality. SAM has benefited from this emergence of these entrepreneurial ventures; new staff and Board members with backgrounds in technology have brought an increased focus and energy to SAM’s digital strategies.

SAM is also now entering the public phase of a major $150 million fundraising campaign with three primary goals: the major restoration and enhancement of the Seattle Asian Art Museum, SAM’s iconic, original home in Seattle’s Volunteer Park ($54M); investments in bold new projects that advance SAM’s position as an international leader in the arts ($36M), including a new Asian Art Conservation Center and a new South Asian Curator; and a significant addition to the Museum’s operating endowment, and thus ensuring SAM is a thriving and dynamic institution, now and forever ($60M). To date, the Museum has secured over $126M (84%) towards its goal, including $63.5M committed by five lead supporters. 77% of SAM’s Board of Trustees have made commitments so far, totaling nearly $68M.

SAM has had strong financial momentum and has operated on or ahead of budget in each of the last six years. SAM’s current operating budget is $27.9 million, of which 57% goes directly into programs, with another 32% toward expenditures that indirectly support programming. There are 170 full-time and 145 part-time staff, plus more than 500 regular volunteers. The Board is active and engaged, and is a combination of long-serving and newer members with a backgrounds of expertise.

The Museum hosted approximately 980,000 visitors in FY2018 across its three sites, a figure which has steadily risen over the past few years, and has a membership base of 38,000 households, up from approximately 25,000 in 2003.

For more information, please visit http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/.
The Region
The Seattle metropolitan region is a vibrant metropolitan area experiencing rapid growth. The economy is strong and expanding; in 2017, the unemployment rate in the metropolitan area was lower than the national average at 3.7%. The region’s top industries, including information/communication technology, aerospace, maritime, clean technology, life sciences, and healthcare, are all expanding. The area is a leading center for information and communications technology, bolstered by industry pioneers such as Microsoft, Amazon, Expedia, Zillow, DocuSign, and 3,000 other companies.

The city of Seattle’s population is around 713,000, of which approximately one-third are within the 20-45 age group. The total population of King County is approximately 2.1 million, nearly double the region’s population in 1970. Of the city’s population over the age of 25, 64% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher – twice the national average. In 2017, Seattle was ranked sixth among the “Best Places to Live” by US News & World Report. The technology sector has created an influx of young professionals; according to a 2016 Mayflower survey, Seattle ranks fourth out of US cities in attracting millennials.

A major physical transformation for Seattle is in the works. The new waterfront development will redefine downtown Seattle as the city’s front porch and for the first time, connect the city and Pike Place Market to Elliott Bay.

Seattle is a creative city with a thriving arts community that includes an internationally recognized music and film scene, theatres, dance, museums, and artists. The arts community is supported by generous individuals, foundations, organizations, and corporations.

The Role
The Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and Chief Executive Officer is the driver of SAM’s creative and strategic vision. The Director oversees all functional operations for this complex, multi-site organization including curatorial, programs, marketing and communications, daily operations, finance, and fundraising. This individual will build a productive working relationship with SAM’s Board, building alignment on all aspects of SAM’s strategic direction-setting, including continuing the quality and scale of its ambitious exhibition program.

Under this Director’s leadership, SAM will continue to expand its role as an inclusive and engaging institution. The Director is expected to play a central role in the cultural and civic life of the city of Seattle and of the region. S/he serves as the organization’s primary advocate and ambassador on a local, national, and international level. This individual will be accessible and eager to interact with a wide range of constituencies with the goal of expanding audiences, raising the Museum’s profile, and building strong relationships with Seattle’s many diverse communities. The Director will inspire and support partner organizations to work in concert with the strategic goals of the Museum.

Critical to the Director’s success will be the ability to fundraise effectively as well as cultivate new and existing collectors. The successful candidate will have a track record of approaching resource-building with significant energy, creativity, and clarity of purpose. S/he will promote the talents and expertise of SAM’s diverse staff in support of the Museum’s goals and will encourage staff take an active role in representing the institution. Ensuring a wide range of individuals feel included and involved, the new Director will increase and diversify
financial support from individual donors, foundations, corporations, and where relevant, government funders for annual operations, capital projects, and growth of the Museum’s endowment.

This Director will provide oversight for all aspects of the organization’s operations. S/he will ensure that SAM’s strategic and programmatic objectives are fully articulated and effectively pursued, and that financial resources are allocated in alignment with SAM’s mission. S/he will approach the financial oversight of the Museum with vigilance, integrity, and balance, exerting an even-handed and reasoned approach to budgetary decision-making and in full transparency and collaboration with SAM’s Board of Trustees. Additionally, the Director will continue to ensure that the Museum’s use of technology continues to evolve in best service to the Museum’s goals and strategies in this digital age.

In addition, the Director’s primary goals and objectives include:

- **Seattle Asian Art Museum**: The renovation of this historic building, SAM’s original home, will be completed in November 2019 and will reopen with a primary programmatic emphasis on Asian art, taking advantage of one of the strengths of SAM’s permanent collection, and also seeking to explore opportunities to organize loan exhibitions. SAAM has an opportunity to become one of the premier institutions of Asian art in this country. A key element of the project is a conservation lab focused on particular physical characteristics of historical Asian art for the benefit of SAM’s Asian art collection and as a top-tier resource for collectors of Asian art nationally and internationally. SAM’s new Director must give a special focus to SAAM and to take advantage of this great opportunity.

- **Curatorial Staff**: SAM has multiple collection strengths, including Asian art, Post-1945 American and European art, Northwest Coast Native American art, African art, and Australian Aboriginal art, with great potential to grow in certain other areas, including American art. The Director must assess SAM’s opportunities across various aspects of art history and, based on this analysis, optimize curatorial staffing, collection display, and exhibition programming for the present moment.

- **Community Equity and Inclusion**: The Seattle Art Museum is recognized locally and nationally as a museum leader in equity and inclusion practices. In 2015, SAM partnered with the city of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative and formed an internal equity team composed of staff from all departments of the Museum. With 35 members from all departments at SAM, the Equity Team is committed to providing institutional accountability for strategic plan goals around racial equity, working with departments to provide an equity and social justice lens in all that they do, and making SAM an institution that is responsive to cultural communities and experiences. The Director will demonstrate through his/her actions a genuine commitment to equity and inclusion, and will be asked to implement strategies to diversify programming, staff, volunteers, and audiences at SAM.

- **Cultivating Collectors**: Part of the lifeblood of any museum comes from its relationships with local art collectors. Given the significant rise of new wealth in Seattle over the past decade, the SAM Board believes there is an opportunity to cultivate new art collectors and to help them in the process of creating new collections of art. The Director must develop an appropriate strategy to take advantage of this opportunity while also cultivating existing collectors. Part of this effort will include deepening our relationships with major corporations in the area.

- **Financial Management**: Earned revenue comprises approximately a quarter of SAM’s revenue with the majority coming from contributions and the endowment. The Director must continue to focus on fiscal
management, working closely with the Board and the development team, to sustain the long-term financial strength and sustainability of the institution.

- **Management of Three Sites:** SAM spans three sites – the downtown flagship building, the Olympic Sculpture Park, and the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park. The Director must create strategies to heighten awareness of SAM’s three coordinated locations and facilitate and optimize visitors’ experiences of this multi-site Museum.

- **Technology:** Seattle is a city increasingly associated with technological innovation. In 2018, SAM hired a new Chief Technology Officer to help move SAM to a position of national prominence as an innovator in the use of technology to improve visitor experiences and to improve operations generally. The Museum has also added new Board members with expertise in the technology and digital arenas to expand and improve these capacities. The Director must continue to find ways to make SAM a leader in the use of technology in museum operations.

- **Expansion/Improvement of Downtown Branch:** SAM downtown owns eight floors (convertible potentially to up to four double height floors for galleries) above its current galleries that are now subject to a lease which expires in 2031. The Director must develop a strategy for future use of this space, either as expansion space for SAM’s operations, or as a source of ongoing revenue, depending on the best interests of the institution.

## Candidate Profile

The Director will bring a passion for the Museum’s mission, including an authentic interest in and commitment to expanding audiences for the arts. The Director will have a breadth and depth of knowledge of art and art history as well as a fundamental belief in art and creativity’s value in society. S/he will understand the role of museums in the 21st century, including digital strategies for audience engagement. The successful candidate will think creatively across artistic disciplines, enabling him/her to advance the diverse range of programs and forms of creative expression that SAM offers.

This individual will bring a track record of innovative, inclusive, and strategic leadership experience in a multifaceted institution with varied internal and external constituencies. The next leader of the Museum will have demonstrated success in developing and implementing a compelling strategic and programmatic vision for an organization. This includes building the financial, operational, and ideological support needed, and skillfully balancing and aligning the needs of multiple interests.

The successful candidate will be an inspiring leader and will demonstrate a decisive, yet collaborative and inclusive approach to leadership. S/he will have proven experience creating and implementing strategies to ensure the organizational diversity, equity and inclusion objectives. This individual will be an experienced manager of teams and resources, including being a careful steward of organizational assets and providing effective financial oversight for budgets. S/he will be highly approachable, an excellent communicator, and an eager listener.

The ideal candidate will have worked with diverse constituents including Board members, donors, funders, businesses, community members, political leaders, volunteers, and the general public. The Director will be a civic-minded leader, who is comfortable and eager to engage with greater Seattle’s social and cultural environment and committed to investing the time and energy needed to further develop SAM’s reputation as a creative and committed partner to the communities the Museum serves.
In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

- **Credibility in the Field and Passion for the Mission:** The successful candidate will exhibit a thorough knowledge and passion for the SAM’s mission as well as art and art history. Ideally, this individual has demonstrated success in selecting and planning relevant exhibitions that have high artistic standards and connect with diverse communities, collectors, and increasing numbers of visitors. A graduate degree in Art, Art History, or a related field is preferred.

- **Strategic Leadership:** The successful candidate will have a track record as an innovative and creative thinker with the ability to develop and implement a creative and strategic vision.

- **Communicating, Influencing, and Building Relationships:** The successful candidate will exhibit a consensus-seeking, but decisive approach to problem solving that enables him/her to effectively build support for SAM’s initiatives. This individual will be a skilled internal and external communicator with an ability to engage effectively with a diverse range of partners and audiences. S/he must be politically astute and socially agile.

- **Management of Teams and Resources:** The successful candidate will have demonstrated success enabling a team to translate organizational strategy into clear goals and objectives as well as aligning key constituents around key institutional decisions. S/he will bring experience retaining, mentoring, and motivating top talent. This individual will have a reputation for fostering an inclusive organizational culture that values collaboration and mutual respect along with a healthy expectation of high performance and productivity. Lastly, s/he will have a proven ability to carefully steward organizational assets, balance budgets, and make smart decisions with limited financial resources.

- **Resource and Partnership Development:** The successful candidate will have experience broadening an institution’s funding base — including from individual, corporate, and foundation funders — as well as through fresh pathways for earned income. Further, s/he will demonstrate an ability to engage prospective funders locally, nationally, and internationally. Additionally, this individual will bring experience cultivating and engaging collectors and building collections. This individual will have proven success forging and maintaining mutually productive relationships with peer institutions and partners to further the SAM’s impact and reputation.

**Contact**

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search and prospective candidates are invited to contact Russell Reynolds Associates directly. All inquiries and discussions will be considered strictly confidential.

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Appendix I: Mission and Core Values

The Museum expresses its mission and core values as follows:

*SAM connects art to life.*

Through art, the Seattle Art Museum fosters creativity and builds community.

As a leading visual art institution in three unique locations, SAM shares its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to engage, educate, and inspire.

Its core values include:

**Creativity:** we bring art into people’s lives and help them understand its unique power to inspire creative thinking, which is crucial to understanding and solving our world’s complex problems.

**Excellence:** we build and create collections, exhibitions, and public programs of the highest quality and excellence.

**Equity:** we are responsive to cultural communities and experiences, and we think critically about the role art plays in empowering social justice and structural change to promote equity in our society. We are dedicated to racial equity in all that we do.

**Engagement:** we engage our audiences through dialogue that is mutually beneficial, inclusive, and enlightening in a spirit of mutual respect.

**Diversity:** we invite and respect many viewpoints and experiences, as we develop and sustain a diverse staff, board, and audience, and showcase art from the world’s diverse cultures.

**Accessibility:** we work to lower economic and physical barriers as well as barriers to understanding, so that art is accessible to everyone. We recognize the importance of excellent customer service in making art accessible to all.

**Stewardship:** we are transparent and careful stewards of resources, including collections, staff, volunteers, facilities, investments, and institutional records. We share SAM’s collection, our greatest resource and legacy to the future, with the public through scholarship and interpretation, creative installation, conservation, and programming.
Appendix II: Highlighted Past and Upcoming Exhibitions

- Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris
  October 8, 2010 – January 17, 2011

- Gauguin and Polynesia
  February 9 – April 29, 2012
  Co-organized by SAM, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek-Copenhagen, and Art Centre Basel

- Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art
  May 31 – September 2, 2012
  Organized by SAM. Exhibition tour (AFA): four U.S. venues in 2018-2019
  Catalogue published by SAM with Yale University Press

- Elles: Women Artists from the Centre Pompidou, Paris
  Co-organized by SAM and Centre Pompidou

- Future Beauty: Thirty Years of Japanese Fashion
  June 27 – September 8, 2013
  Co-organized by SAM and Kyoto Costume Institute, traveled to Peabody Essex Museum, Salem

- Peru: Kingdoms of the Sun and the Moon
  October 17, 2013 – January 5, 2014
  Organized by Montreal MFA-Canada

- Miró: The Experience of Seeing
  February 13 – May 26, 2014
  Co-organized by SAM and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, traveled to Denver Art Museum, Nasher Museum of Art, and McNay Art Museum
  Catalogue published by SAM with Yale University Press

- Modernism in the Pacific Northwest: The Mythic and The Mystical
  June 19 – September 7, 2014
  Organized by SAM
  Catalogue published with University of Washington Press

- Disguise: Masks and Global African Art
  June 18 – September 7, 2015
  Organized by SAM, traveled to UCLA Fowler and Brooklyn Art Museum
  Catalogue published by SAM with Yale University Press

- Intimate Impressionism from the National Gallery of Art
  October 1, 2015 – January 10, 2016
  Organized by National Gallery of Art

- Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic
  February 11 – May 8, 2016
Organized by Brooklyn Art Museum

- **Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style**
  October 11, 2016 – January 16, 2017
  Co-organized by SAM and Fondation Pierre Berge – Yves Saint Laurent, Paris; traveled to Virginia MFA
  Catalogue published by SAM and Skira Rizzoli Publications

- **Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series**
  January 21 – April 23, 2017
  Organized by MoMA and The Phillips Collection

- **Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors**
  June 30 – September 10, 2017
  Organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

- **Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect**
  October 19, 2017 – January 15, 2018
  Co-organized by SAM and Brandywine River Museum
  Catalogue published by SAM with Yale University Press

- **Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marhall, Mickalene Thomas**
  February 15 – May 13, 2018
  Organized by SAM
  Catalogue published by SAM with Yale University Press

- **Double Exposure: Edward S. Curtis, Marianne Nicolson, Tracy Rector, Will Wilson**
  June 14 – September 9, 2018
  Organized by SAM

- **Double Exposure: Edward S. Curtis, Marianne Nicolson, Tracy Rector, Will Wilson**
  June 14 – September 9, 2018
  Organized by SAM

- **Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India**
  October 18, 2018 – January 21, 2019
  Organized by MFA Houston

- **Jeffrey Gibson: Like a Hammer**
  February 28 – May 12, 2019
  Organized by Denver Art Museum

- **Flesh and Blood: Italian Masterpieces from the Capodimonte Museum**
  October 17, 2019 – January 26, 2020
  Co-organized by SAM, The Kimbell Art Museum and Mondo Mostre, Rome

- **Allure of Matter: Material Art from China**
  June 25 – September 13, 2020
  Co-organized by LACMA, The Smart Museum of Art, SAM and Peabody Essex Museum