

PRESS RELEASE

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Press Contact

Rachel Eggers
Manager of Public Relations
rachele@seattleartmuseum.org
206.654.3151

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM DIRECTOR AND CEO KIMERLY RORSCHACH TO RETIRE FALL 2019



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1300 First Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org

SEATTLE, WA - Kimerly Rorschach, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), announced today that she will retire in fall 2019 after seven years leading the institution. Rorschach will step down following the opening of the museum's newly renovated and expanded Seattle Asian Art Museum facility. The museum's Board of Trustees will initiate an international search to find Rorschach's replacement.

Winnie Stratton, President of SAM's Board of Trustees, noted, "Kim's retirement culminates an esteemed 25-year career leading museums. SAM and Seattle are stronger today thanks to her seven years of leadership. Over the years, it has been an honor to work with Kim and see how each of our three locations have matured to a new level and thrived with her guidance. She facilitated important art scholarship and brought to Seattle groundbreaking exhibitions. She worked to bring in more diverse and younger audiences, and increased attendance and community engagement."

Added Stewart Landefeld, Chairman of SAM's Board of Trustees, "SAM has flourished under Kim's leadership. Her myriad of duties aside, she has been the number one champion for the museum. Her contribution to fundraising has been transformative, including raising nearly \$125M towards the museum's current \$150M campaign to boost SAM's endowment, renovate the Seattle Asian Art Museum, and expand programming across all three sites. Collegial, disciplined, and community-focused, Kim has been a great mentor and colleague. Her passion, drive, and desire to foster new connections between art, culture, and the community, will be greatly missed."

Rorschach joined SAM in November 2012. She immediately set her sights on creating a schedule of exhibitions and programs for the museum's three locations that was compelling and timely and that would resonate with a rapidly growing and diversifying Seattle community.



Working with SAM's curators, Rorschach has been able to secure and produce an exhibition lineup that has bolstered the museum's mission to "connect art to life" and increased attendance and membership to new levels. Through the years, Rorschach has overseen a roster of special exhibitions such as *Disguise: Masks & Global African Art* (2015); *Intimate Impressionism from the National Gallery of Art* (2015); *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* (2016); *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* (2017); *Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect* (2017); and *Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas* (2018). In cooperation with The Phillips Collection and the Museum of Modern Art, Rorschach helped bring to Seattle in 2017 Jacob Lawrence's epic *The Migration Series*—the first time all sixty panels had been shown together on the West Coast for two decades. At the Seattle Asian Art Museum, known for its historic Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections, Rorschach and the museum's curators developed a lively and popular program of contemporary Asian exhibitions including *Live On: Mr's Japanese Neo-Pop* (2014), *Chiho Aoshima: Rebirth of the World* (2015), and *Tabaimo: Utsutsushi Utsushi* (2016). The Olympic Sculpture Park continued to develop and thrive with the introduction of new year-round programs including the popular SAM Lights in December, as well as art installations in the PACCAR Pavilion by Sam Vernon (2015), Victoria Haven (2016), and the current installation by Spencer Finch.

During Rorschach's tenure, SAM's global collection has been enhanced by significant acquisitions. Louis-Phillipe Crépin's *Shipwreck Off the Coast of Alaska* (1806); Raphaëlle Peale's *Still Life with Strawberries and Ostrich Egg Cup* (1814); Ai Wei Wei's *Colored Vases* (2010); Jaume Plensa's *Echo* (2011)—a gift of the late Barney Ebsworth; and Kehinde Wiley's *Anthony of Padua* (2013) are among the many new works that have added breadth and depth to the collection and addressed critical gaps.

Guided by a shared vision for strengthening SAM's collection for all, Rorschach has worked hand-in-hand with numerous generous donors to bring to the museum several substantial and transformative private collections, including the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, the most extensive collection of modern and contemporary art in the Northwest, featuring works by Johns, Frankenthaler, Rothko, Ruscha, Irwin, and more; as well as the Sam and Gladys Rubinstein Collection, focused on early European modernism, including works by Jawlensky, Delaunay, and Kupka.

Under Rorschach's leadership, SAM's growth has not been limited to its collection. She joined the museum as the nation and Seattle were beginning to rebound from a major economic downturn. She took steps to address the museum's long-term operating challenges, improving its operating performance year over year. She has been instrumental in the launch of a major \$150M fundraising campaign to secure the museum's financial future; greatly increase its operating endowment by \$60M; fund the \$54M renovation and expansion of the Seattle Asian Art Museum, located in SAM's historic first home; and fund numerous new programs, including a new Asian Paintings Conservation Center. She also worked with the museum's staff and Board of Trustees to create a multi-year Strategic Plan, confirming the museum's mission and vision, articulating its values, asserting its leadership position, and defining key strategic directions moving forward. This Strategic Plan continues as a template for SAM's growth and was recently updated to include new priorities, including a focus on equity and inclusion.

Equity and inclusion have been top priorities for Rorschach during her time at SAM. As part of a commitment to building racial equity, addressing institutional racism, and bringing forth real change, she led the museum's participation in the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative; established racial equity training for the museum staff, volunteers, docent corps, and Board of Trustees; and oversaw the formation of a museum Equity Team. Under her leadership, the museum also created special exhibition advisory committees to ensure that diverse community voices are part of the exhibition, programming, and marketing planning processes.

Engaging young people and building new audiences has also been a top priority for Rorschach. With her encouragement, SAM began hosting free

Community Celebrations, inviting thousands of people to see the special exhibitions on opening day. At the Olympic Sculpture Park, the museum launched the innovative Tiny Trees preschool program partnership and new winter programming for all audiences. And SAM has continued to grow its important partnership with the City of Seattle around the Creative Advantage arts education initiative. Overall, the museum has seen dramatic growth in its young adult audiences, echoing the rapid growth of the Seattle area.

Among Rorschach's proudest accomplishments is the renovation and expansion of the Seattle Asian Art Museum, currently underway. The project not only preserves and restores the historic Art Deco building that houses the museum, but it also adds much needed gallery and education space. The project creates an opportunity to rethink the way the Asian Art Museum collections are presented and how new tools, such as interactive technology, can help visitors engage with the collection. A 12,000-square-foot expansion will allow for an expanded programming schedule for students and adults, supported by dedicated education space and more rotating exhibitions featuring cultures outside of SAM's core Chinese, Japanese, and Korean collections. The anticipated reopening of the museum is late 2019.

"It has been a tremendous honor to lead the Seattle Art Museum during this exciting period of challenge and growth," said Rorschach. "I am so proud of all that we have accomplished, and of our incredible SAM staff, whose dedication has inspired me every step of the way. I am also enormously grateful to SAM's Board of Trustees and generous supporters, whose leadership has underpinned our many successes. With the downtown expansion and Olympic Sculpture Park, and now the rebirth of the Seattle Asian Art Museum, SAM's three sites are poised to serve the community for many years to come."

Before coming to the Seattle Art Museum, Rorschach was the founding director of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, which she established as the most dynamic museum presenting contemporary art in the region, with a significant national profile. She previously served as the director of the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, and held curatorial positions at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia. Rorschach holds a Ph.D. in art history from Yale University, and was a Fulbright Scholar. She is a former President of the Association of Art Museum Directors and serves on the board of the Center for Curatorial Leadership, New York, founded by Agnes Gund.

Photo credit: Scott Areman

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.