

PRESS RELEASE

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Press Contact

Rachel Eggers

Associate Director of Public Relations

rachele@seattleartmuseum.org

206.654.3151

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM (SAM) NAMES PRIYA FRANK DIRECTOR OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Leader at SAM since 2016 appointed to museum's first-ever executive role for equity work



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1300 First Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org

SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) announced today the appointment of Priya Frank as Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (DEDI), a new position on the museum's executive team. Frank has been at SAM since 2016 as the Associate Director of Community Programs in the Education department and the founding chair of the staff-led Equity Team. This new role grows out of Frank's ongoing work at SAM to integrate racial equity into the museum's strategic priorities. She will report directly to Amada Cruz, SAM's Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO.

In this new role, Frank will help shape the Seattle Art Museum's priorities, partnerships, communications strategies, and audience-engagement efforts to build an equitable, diverse, and inclusive museum. Internally, the DEDI will advance inclusion and diversity initiatives throughout the museum, including partnerships with human resources, curatorial, education, communications, and development divisions. Externally, the DEDI will build relationships with key stakeholders in the field, serving as a community liaison and connector.

"I am delighted that Priya has agreed to lead us in this important work," says Cruz. "SAM has a legacy of equity work dating back to the 1990s under Director Emeritus Mimi Gates that continued very intentionally under my predecessor Kimerly Rorschach. This new role for Priya is the logical next step to increase SAM's commitment to racial equity and social justice, as included in the museum's strategic plan. We have been planning for this new position since last winter, and with the increased calls for accountability of cultural institutions around their anti-racism work, the timing could not be better."

"I'm thrilled for this opportunity to continue investing in racial equity work here at SAM," says Frank. "I look forward to partnering with leadership across the



institution to create a culture shift and center racial equity within foundational and departmental practices. Undoing the institutional and structural racism upon which spaces like ours are built is a lifelong commitment, and it is a must in order for us to stay relevant, be authentically responsive to cultural communities, and be proactive in the critical role arts and culture play in building and sustaining a healthy community. Through reciprocal, community-centered collaborations and an innovative, joyful approach, I dedicate my work to my family, mentors, and friends who paved the way for me and I vow to continue doing the same, so that BIPOC communities can be themselves, and see themselves in leadership within all areas of civic engagement.”

Under Frank’s leadership, the Equity Team has grown to 40 members from all departments, with task forces tackling aspects of the culture and practices of the museum. Specific initiatives include the Emerging Arts Leader Internship, for candidates underrepresented in the museum field; paid Exhibition Advisory Committees, which invite community members to advise on interpretation and programming; and the Kimerly Rorschach Fund for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which ensures permanent funding for equity efforts at SAM.

Now, this ongoing work will liaise with a new Equity Task Force, a joint board, staff, and community effort co-chaired by Amada Cruz, Board President Carla Lewis, and Board Member and Education and Community Engagement Committee member Cherry A. McGee Banks, which will examine the ways in which race, class, gender, and culture are reflected in museum practices at SAM. The initial topics will include workplace staffing and culture, curatorial and collections, communications efforts, and development practices. This effort marks an important next step in SAM’s commitment to instituting structural, long-term change and promoting equity across the institution.

Born and raised in Seattle, Frank is chair of the Seattle Arts Commission and a graduate of Leadership Tomorrow’s class of 2015. She was named one of 2018’s Most Influential People by Seattle Magazine and made the Puget Sound Business Journal’s top 40 under 40 list in 2019. She holds a B.A. in Communications and American Ethnic Studies from University of Washington Seattle and an M.A. in Cultural Studies from University of Washington Bothell, where she was named Alumnae of the Year in 2020.

Photo credit: Zabiullah Fazly

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 rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. 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.