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Photo credit: Alborz Kamalizad

Santa Barbara Museum of Art Appoints Amada Cruz as New Director

July 25, 2023 — The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Amada Cruz as the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and CEO effective October 30, 2023. Presented by the Museum’s selection committee, Cruz was subsequently voted unanimously by the Board of Trustees.

“We are grateful to the more than 100 stakeholders, including members of the community, employees, Trustees (past and present), and donors who participated in the selection process. Their inputs were used to inform our decision making and following an international search and reviewing many impressive candidates, we are delighted with the outcome,” said Lynn Cunningham Brown, selection committee chair.

Cruz comes to SBMA from the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) where she served as the Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO since 2019. She states, “I am thrilled to be joining SBMA with its important mission ‘to integrate art into the lives of people.’ That inspiring charge is a call to engage the different communities of the Santa Barbara region by increasing the Museum’s local relevance and global visibility. I look forward to working with the staff and Board to build upon the strong foundation of scholarly exhibitions and robust educational programs established under my predecessor, Larry Feinberg. As we move through the 21st century, museums are being challenged to prove their purpose by centering audiences and building community. The varied collections and programs of SBMA offer myriad ways to celebrate and embrace a rapidly diversifying population.”

Nicholas Mutton, SBMA Board Chair, states “Amada has a proven track record as a consummate professional, a visionary leader, and a change agent who has succeeded wherever she has been. We are embracing a wonderful opportunity at this moment in time. This change will allow us to craft together a compelling strategic vision for the future, engage with the Santa Barbara community, champion inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, empower and inspire our Museum staff, and enhance the institution’s resources.” He adds, “The Museum is thankful to Larry Feinberg, retiring at the end of this year, for his contributions during his successful 15-year tenure at SBMA.”

Over her 30-year career, Cruz has held posts as the Director of the Phoenix Art Museum; Executive Director at San Antonio-based Artpace, an artist residency program; Director of the Center for Curatorial Studies Museum at Bard College, where she co-organized the first US museum survey of Takashi Murakami's work; and Acting Chief Curator and Manilow Curator of Exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Cruz has also worked as a grant maker and was the founding Program Director for United States Artists in Los Angeles, where she formed longstanding relationships with artists around the country and was responsible for all programming activities of a Ford and Rockefeller Foundations initiative. She also has been Executive Director of Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue in New York City, which awarded grants to visual artists in San Francisco, Houston, and Chicago.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Cruz received a bachelor's degree in art history and political science at New York University. She received the 2018 Virginia Cardenas Arts Advocacy Award by Xico, an Arizona cultural institution serving Latinx and Indigenous artists. In 2015, *W Magazine* named her one of the 11 most powerful female museum directors in America.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is one of the finest museums on the West coast and is celebrated for the superb quality of its permanent collection. Its mission is to integrate art into the lives of people through internationally recognized exhibitions and special programs, as well as the thoughtful presentation of its permanent collection. SBMA opened to the public in 1941 and through the immense generosity of dedicated collectors assembled an important collection of over 25,000 works of art spanning over 5,000 years of human creativity.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.
Open Tuesday – Sunday 11 am to 5 pm, Free Thursday Evenings 5 to 8 pm
805.963.4364 www.sbma.net

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