

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

5216 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
CAMH.ORG | @camhouston

Trust Artists.

Press Release

Announcement

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston Announces Leadership Transition



Left: Photo of Ryan N. Dennis. Image: Charles A. Smith. Right: Photo of Melissa McDonnell Luján. Image: Fernanda Varela Rivera

HOUSTON, TX (December 20, 2024) – Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) announces the appointment of Senior Curator and Director of Public Initiatives Ryan N. Dennis and Deputy Director Melissa McDonnell Luján as Co-Directors, starting in January 2025. Dennis will assume the title of Co-Director and Chief Curator and Luján will be named Co-Director and Chief Operating Officer. Current Executive Director Hesse McGraw will serve in the role through the end of the year.

Hesse McGraw served as Executive Director of CAMH since January 2020. During his tenure, he led the Museum through the COVID-19 pandemic and launched important initiatives including CAMHLAB, the Museum’s ongoing artist-in-residence program offering critical and early-stage direct support for local artists. McGraw also helped establish *Rebirth in Action: Telling the Story of Freedom*, the Museum’s multipart partnership with Houston Freedmen’s Town Conservancy, and oversaw the acquisition of the properties adjacent to the Museum. In addition, McGraw advanced ambitious curatorial achievements, working alongside the curatorial staff on exhibitions including *Theaster Gates: The Gift and The Renege (2024)* and *CAMH COURT (2023)* featuring work from Trenton Doyle Hancock.

Press Contact

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“The past five years leading Contemporary Arts Museum Houston have been a great honor, and I am immensely proud of CAMH’s innovative curatorial and education initiatives that have meaningfully expanded the Museum’s impacts beyond our walls. I am especially thrilled to know that under Ryan and Melissa’s visionary leadership, CAMH will continue to reach even greater heights,” said Hesse McGraw.

“We would like to thank Hesse for his dynamic leadership, steering CAMH through the uncertainty of the pandemic, furthering the Museum’s engagement with the community, and overseeing several landmark exhibitions, public programs, and partnerships,” said Ruth Dreessen, CAMH Board Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees. “We are excited to bring Ryan and Melissa on as Co-Directors. As instrumental players in the region’s arts ecosystem, and existing members of the CAMH community, Ryan and Melissa are perfectly positioned to lead the Museum with curatorial acumen and pioneering programming, further advancing CAMH’s place at the forefront of contemporary art.”

Ryan N. Dennis joined CAMH in 2023 and in her role as Senior Curator and Director of Public Initiatives she stewarded the Museum’s collaboration with Houston Freedmen’s Town Conservancy, working closely alongside CAMH’s Partnerships team. As part of this initiative, she co-curated Theaster Gates’s blockbuster solo exhibition in 2024. In Spring 2025, Dennis will curate CAMH’s presentation of *Tomashi Jackson: Across the Universe*.

Prior to her role at the Museum, Dennis served as Chief Curator and Artistic Director at Mississippi Museum of Art, organizing solo exhibitions with Betye Saar and Leonardo Drew, and co-curating *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration*. In her position as Curator and Programs Director at Project Row Houses in Houston, she led the creation of the Strategic Art Plan, the 2:2:2 Exchange Residency Program with the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago and established Project/Site, a temporary, site-specific, commission-based public art program and worked with over 150 artists through exhibitions and community-based projects. Currently, Dennis is a board member at The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and has forthcoming curatorial projects with The Black School, MASS MoCA and the Mississippi Museum of Art.

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Melissa McDonnell Luján has over twenty years of experience planning and managing capital and site-specific artist projects, leading operations activities for cultural organizations and private developers. Since joining CAMH in 2023, Luján has overseen long-range and capital planning; facilities, exhibitions, finance, risk management, and resiliency initiatives.

Previously, Luján was at the Menil Collection for nine years where she most recently was the Director of Project Development and led capital projects and real estate development for the museum campus including the Menil Drawing Institute and Hotel Saint Augustine in addition to outdoor sculpture installations by Michael Heizer and Ellsworth Kelly. Luján was the Deputy Director for Ballroom Marfa where she led operations for the visual arts, music, film, and educational programming in addition to the conceptual planning of the Ballroom Marfa Drive-In. Prior to her work in museums, Luján spent ten years in architecture and design practice. Currently she serves on the board of *Gulf Coast: Journal of Literature and Fine Arts* at University of Houston. Luján has a Master of Architecture from Rice University School of Architecture in Houston and an Honors Bachelor of Arts in Spatial Arts and Design from Central Saint Martins in London.

CAMH Mission

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

General Information

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is located at 5216 Montrose Boulevard, in the heart of Houston's Museum District.

Hours

Wed	11AM–6PM
Thu	11AM–9PM
Fri	11AM–6PM
Sat	11AM–6PM
Sun	11AM–6PM

Admission is always free. For more information, visit CAMH.ORG or call 713.284.8250.

Under the leadership of Dennis and Luján, a talented team, and an engaged board, CAMH looks forward to continue welcoming visitors to *Vincent Valdez: Just a Dream...* on view through March 23, 2025 and presenting an exciting slate of exhibitions in the new year, including the Teen Council's 25th Anniversary Biennial; *Tomashi Jackson: Across the Universe*; and *Mary Ellen Carroll: How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*.

About Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH)

Established in 1948, CAMH is one of the oldest non-collecting contemporary art museums in the country, and is internationally known for presenting pivotal and landmark work by artists recognized as the most important of the 20th and 21st centuries. CAMH's mandate is to be present, to connect artists and audiences through the urgent issues of our time, and to adventurously promote the catalytic possibilities of contemporary art. CAMH's programming, both in and beyond the Museum, is presented free to the public, and advocates for artists' essential role in society.