

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

SFMOMA adds curator for 21st century works

In a surprise move, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has announced the establishment of a new position, curator of contemporary art. Eungie Joo, a peripatetic curator with an international profile, will assume the role June 1.

Given its engagement with living artists and its strong reputation for collecting and exhibiting post-World War II art, one might have assumed that contemporary specialists abound among SFMOMA's 20 full-time curators. However, says Ruth Berson, SFMOMA's deputy director of curatorial affairs, contemporary art — which the museum considers to be “the art of the 21st century”

— “isn't their sole and primary focus, which is what we are doing with the appointment of Eungie.”

Joo (whose first name is pronounced “UN-jee”), told *The Chronicle* that she began discussion of a possible position with SFMOMA Director Neal Benezra last year, when she came for the opening of the new building. She was appointed after a vetting process that included interviews with Berson and Benezra, as well as meetings with trustees and senior staff. She will lead a new curatorial department, one of five collecting units in the museum, and will report to Berson.

“I think that on a day-to-day basis, we're looking for the mix to be ever richer and for Eungie to be convening conversations across the curatorial departments,” Berson said. “We have lots more gallery space, so there's a lot more room for a lot more curatorial voices.”

Said Joo, “When I saw the museum ... I was so impressed by this particular situation of being able to show a major modern collection alongside temporary exhibitions, which would be modern and contemporary, and what that might do for institutions on the West Coast. Because I did live in the Bay Area for about 10 years, and in Los Angeles for about five.”

Joo's past work positions her well to help the museum expand its contemporary offerings. As curator of education and public programs at the New Museum in New York from 2007 to 2012, she led efforts to



Heinz Peter Knes

Eungie Joo

create what that institution calls “a new model for curatorial practice.” The program was a partnership with organizations in South Korea, Mexico, Egypt and the Netherlands. She curated the 2012 New Museum exhibition “The Ungovernables,” which was notable for its international reach — of its roughly 50 artists, only four were born in the United States.

Joo, 48, was curator of the 2015 Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates, which

presented the work of 50 artists from 25 nations and featured many commissioned new works and performances. She most recently served as artistic director of the 5th Anyang (Korea) Public Art Project, a city-sponsored event for which she commissioned works by 23 Korean and international artists.

In 2009, Joo was commissioner of the Korean Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale. She was the founding director and curator of the gallery at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater in Los Angeles, serving from 2003 to 2007. She is a graduate of Vassar College and holds a doctorate from the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley.

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