



# THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MOCA) ANNOUNCES  
JOHANNA BURTON AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PARTNERING WITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR KLAUS BIESENBACH**



**LOS ANGELES**—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) is announcing the appointment of Johanna Burton as Executive Director to lead the museum in partnership with Klaus Biesenbach, the Maurice Marciano Artistic Director. Burton comes to MOCA after an accomplished tenure as Executive Director of the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University where she has concentrated on developing initiatives that build and strengthen staff, artist, and audience engagement, and which strongly consider museums' role as a space of civic exchange. MOCA's Board of Trustees today elected Burton to start on November 1, 2021.

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MOCA announced the creation of the Executive Director role in February 2021 and launched an international search under the guidance of a search committee that includes David Johnson, Karyn Kohl, Barbara Kruger, Wonmi Kwon, Catherine Opie, Sean Parker, Heather Podesta, Carolyn Powers, Maria Seferian, and Chris Walker and the support of Spencer Stuart, a leading international executive search firm specializing in arts and cultural institutions. Burton was selected from a broad applicant pool based on her vision and experience in organizational leadership, as well as her demonstrated skills building teams, leading and developing people, engaging in strategic planning, driving results, and guiding change within the artistic field.

Johanna Burton said: "It's thrilling to join MOCA's team at this historic moment, and I am humbled to take a leadership role at such a pivotal institution for communities both local and international. MOCA's artist-centered mission dovetails with my own commitment to creating platforms that foster artistic innovation and emphasize deep connections to audiences. By pursuing these goals and supporting the efforts of MOCA's team, I'm looking forward to extending the museum's legacy while strengthening bonds both within the institution and with the public. I'm excited to work closely with Klaus on visioning the next era of MOCA, listening closely to our staff and communities, while bringing the museum's structures into ever-more vibrant alignment with the museum's values."

Klaus Biesenbach, Artistic Director of MOCA, shared: "I am excited to have such a strong partner in Johanna and eagerly look forward to collaborating with her. I have great respect for the integrity, perspective, and expertise Johanna will bring to our collective work serving MOCA's team, constituencies and artists, its increasingly large and diverse public, and all residents of Los Angeles. I am looking forward to focusing my work as Artistic Director to further expand MOCA being the experimental, innovative, influential and boundary-breaking museum of contemporary art that it has been since its inception and to grow the museum's reach to broader constituencies, audiences and partners, locally and internationally. MOCA is always contemporary and pioneering in its program, and now we are introducing a new, exemplary institutional model."

Maria Seferian, chair of MOCA's Board of Trustees said: "Johanna is an accomplished leader whose experience, management skills, and passion prepare her for this important new role. I'm grateful to our search committee and search firm for running a thorough and inclusive process. We believe that this new model of distributed leadership with an Executive Director working in partnership with an Artistic Director is responsive to this moment in our history. We are moving toward an interconnected team model focused on advancing institutional missions with mutual trust and responsibility."

As Executive Director of MOCA, Burton will join Artistic Director Klaus Biesenbach in leading one of the most important museums of contemporary art in the world, holding an extraordinary collection comprising more than 7,500 objects and a record of organizing international, ground-breaking, and scholarly exhibitions. MOCA is the only independent, artist-founded museum in Los Angeles dedicated solely to exhibiting and collecting contemporary art.

Sable Elyse Smith, artist, said: "I am beyond thrilled by this news and what it means in regard to the seismic shifts necessary within institutions and the cultural sector period. Johanna is immersed in the culture of artists and has a deep commitment to what it means to be a rigorous engaged thought partner. One who takes seriously the role of art in society, meaning beyond the institution's walls. Within the museum, she's willing to work deeply with issues and content that's too often dealt with superficially, and commits herself to artists, to ideas, and to co-creation over years, knowing that these endeavors take time and the cultivation of real relationships. I am excited by and look forward to seeing the impact she will bring as part of MOCA's leadership team. She is one of the most fiercely committed champions of artists I've encountered."

Isolde Brielmaier, Deputy Director of the New Museum, said: "I am so thrilled for my dear colleague Johanna Burton and for MOCA. She will make a tremendous impact. This I know for sure from my work with her while she was at the New Museum where I have just come on board as Deputy Director. She is forward thinking, and very much artist, audience and equity centered. She is a powerful collaborator who always sought to include and support some of the most important and often overlooked voices in contemporary art. Brava to her and to us!"

Burton has been active in the contemporary art field for more than 20 years, including more than a decade of leadership experience. Her career is distinguished by a long-term commitment to the kind of institution-building that is essential today, as well as engagement with education in its most expanded forms. Across a wide range of institutional contexts, Burton

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collaborates with teams to create new access points for artists and audiences. Her hallmark is implementing more horizontal institutional structures to support professional development and advancement of staff, as well as community engagement, always prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA). While at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Burton successfully developed new infrastructure to realize such institutional best practices, notably demonstrating her strength in fundraising around both programming and DEIA initiatives. Burton's dexterous prioritization of these critical objectives is evidenced in settings ranging from educational programs with applied studies (Director of the Graduate Program, Bard College, Center for Curatorial Studies) and experimental missions (Associate Director and Senior Faculty Member, Whitney Independent Study Program) to specific museum departments (Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, New Museum) and museums (currently serving as Executive Director of the Wexner Center for the Arts).

Alongside such work, Burton has, as an organizer engaging experimental and inclusive education formats, also collaborated with artists and community partners to create innovative exhibition and program platforms attuned to some of the most pressing issues of our time. Among her most prominent curatorial efforts are "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon" at the New Museum, New York in 2017; "Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology" at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles in 2014; and "Sherrie Levine: Mayhem" at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2011.

Throughout, Burton has continually foregrounded emergent thinking, research, and topics in the museum context, including a re-launching of the New Museum's historic Critical Anthologies in Art and Culture. As part of this initiative, Burton served as series editor for the volumes Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value (2020), Trap/Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility (2017), Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good (2016) and Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century (2015).

Burton's past posts also include Director of the Graduate Program at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies and Associate Director & Senior Faculty Member at the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program. She holds an M.A. in Art History from Princeton University (Ph.D., ABD), an M.Phil from New York University in Performance Studies, and an M.A. in Art History, Criticism, and Theory from the State University of New York, Stonybrook. She completed her undergraduate work in Art History at the University of Nevada, Reno. Burton was a Helena Rubinstein Critical Studies Fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program from 2000–2001, and a Center for Curatorial Leadership Fellow in 2019.

Image credit: Photo by Erin Leland.

### THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

**About MOCA:** Founded in 1979, MOCA is the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth; a world-class permanent collection of more than 7,500 objects, international in scope and among the finest in the world; hallmark education programs that are widely-emulated; award winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with modes of new media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

**More Information:** For 24-hour information on current exhibitions, education programs, and special events, call 213/626-6222 or access MOCA online at [moca.org](http://moca.org).

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