

MoMA zeroing in on contemporary art with new associate director position

The former head of the Walker Art Centre takes up the newly created post next year

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The Museum of Modern Art in New York has named Kathy Halbreich to the newly created position of associate director for contemporary art. She begins in mid-February 2008.

Ms Halbreich was previously director of the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis for the past 16 years, but announced in March that she would step down to pursue another career.

Ms Halbreich, 58, says that she looks forward to working with artists on exhibitions. "I have missed that profoundly," she says. But her role at MoMA will not be limited to organising shows. The director of MoMA, Glenn Lowry, says that he created the associate director position to work closely with him on a range of issues, especially concerning contemporary art, which he defines loosely as post-1970s.

"She will have pan-institutional oversight of our contemporary initiatives," he says. These include the curatorial Contemporary Working Group, which discusses exhibitions, acquisitions, and the selection of artists to commission for special projects; and the Fund for the 21st Century, established three years ago, which includes 16 members, primarily trustees, who collectively contribute around \$1m a year for acquisitions of works made in the past five years.

The appointment exemplifies the museum's increasing focus on contemporary art. On the eve of the millennium, MoMA made the strategic decision to extend its range into the 21st century. But since the expanded midtown facility re-opened in 2004, MoMA's contemporary programmes have fallen short of praise with critics arguing that the museum has lost its edge. Mr Lowry denies that the hiring of Ms Halbreich was remedial, but he acknowledges that he hopes she will bring new ideas to MoMA and PS1 Contemporary Art Center, the museum's subsidiary in Queens.

The museum already has more curators focused on contemporary art than any other US institution—14 at MoMA and five at PS1. During the past two years, Mr Lowry has hired a number of young curators with expertise in contemporary art: Connie Butler, chief curator of drawings, had worked for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; Klaus Biesenbach, a founder of the Berlin Biennial, was named to head the new department of media arts; and Andres Lepik is the museum's first curator of contemporary architecture. Mr Lowry says the museum will hire another contemporary art specialist in Painting and Sculpture as well as a director of Curatorial Affairs at PS1 to replace Eugenie Tsai, who left last month.

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