

## Queens Museum Hires Leading Curator Lauren Haynes as Director of Curatorial Affairs

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Lauren Haynes.

PHOTO: DERRICK BEASLEY

The Queens Museum has hired Lauren Haynes to serve as its director of curatorial affairs and programs, a newly created senior leadership position at the New York institution. Haynes will start in her role in mid-July.

In her new role, Haynes will manage the Queens Museum’s curatorial and programs departments, and work closely with the education department as part of a broader vision of integrating all of the museum’s activities into one team. The group of staff members will be known as the content team and will be overseen by Queens Museum executive director Sally Tallant.

“The siloing of curatorial and education is something that we’re really working to collapse at the museum,” Tallant said in an interview. “It’s not just an exhibitions-focused role. It’ll be working with the team to make sure that everything we do makes sense, so whatever experience people are having of art—whether that’s through a school visit, a tour, visiting a major exhibition, or having a year-long residency as an artist—there will be a curatorial oversight to that.”

Over the past 15 years, Haynes has established herself as a leading curator in the country. Known for her dedication to working closely with artists to build exhibition, she got her start at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where she worked for almost a decade. At the Studio Museum, she organized acclaimed solo shows for Alma Thomas, Stanley Whitney, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and the Spiral collective, as well as an exhibition looking at the influence of Ebony and Jet magazines on contemporary artists.

In 2016, Haynes joined the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, as its curator of contemporary art, where she helped substantially grow its contemporary art holdings and offerings. She was also instrumental in helping to launch Crystal Bridges’s contemporary art space in downtown Bentonville, which opened in February 2020, and was promoted to director of artist initiatives around that time. She also served as the institutional curator for Crystal Bridges’s presentation of “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,” which had been organized by Tate Modern in London.

Last summer, Haynes departed the Bentonville institutions **to become senior curator of contemporary art** at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. She organized “Reckoning and Resilience: North Carolina Art Now,” which opened in January, and is currently at work on the forthcoming exhibition “Beyond the Surface: Collage, Mixed Media and Textile,” which will open in June.

When Tallant joined the Queens Museum as director in 2019, she knew she wanted to create a senior-level curatorial position that would help her “further shape the program—someone who could integrate and make our program coherent across all the different strands of our activity,” she said. It took time for her to “clarify the vision” for the future of the museum and was delayed by the pandemic.

In Haynes, Tallant said the museum found a triple threat: a respected curator known for her close collaborations with artists, a leader who prizes working collaboratively, and a visionary in how to build and manage collections. The last of those is especially important right now, as the Queens Museum is currently at work on an expansion that will add 2,600 square feet of art storage and conservation facilities.

“She’s going to bring her own kind of energy and approach,” Tallant said. “Because she’s work in a range of different contexts, I think she’s going to bring great leadership qualities and diversity of experience to the table that will really help nurture our team and give them an opportunity to grow.”

In addition to returning to New York, where she grew up, after six years, Haynes said she sees this new role as an opportunity to think through the Queens Museum’s future growth.

“I love building things,” Haynes said. “I love working with colleagues and working with people to think about: Okay, where we are now is great, but where do we want to be? And not thinking that we stick with the status quo. This position is about thinking globally about the museum and about what content can be across exhibitions, public programs, and education.”

Haynes’s focus on artists, which she termed “an ongoing conversation” about their practices and work, will be key to what the museum will offer on the horizon.

Artist Sarah Cain worked with Haynes at the Momentary, right at the beginning of the pandemic. “Lauren is an artist-focused curator—she forefronts artists realizing their visions,” Cain said. “She has a deep breadth of knowledge of historically and contemporary art practices. Her ability to give artists room to flourish while also providing a place of inquisitive support is a rare gift for artists to receive.”

Artist Jennie C. Jones, who has known Haynes for over a decade and contributed to the Alma Thomas publication for the Studio Museum exhibition, agreed.

“Her warmth and brilliance is as contagious as her smile,” Jones said. “She puts artists first in thought and practice. Our dialogue over the years is grounded in our mutual investment in art history, particularly the exclusion of BIPOC artists (such as Thomas) in the shaping of contemporary abstraction.”

Most important to Haynes is how the museum sits within the world and how it connects with those who come to see all it has to offer.

“All of the museums that I’ve worked that for me have also been thinking about their particular audiences,” she said. “So for me, thinking about the audience of the Queens Museums: people who live in Queens, in the tristate area, in the world. How do we push those conversations and try to engage deeply with what maybe a core audience while growing other audiences.”