

SYLVIA WOLF, JOHN S. BEHNKE DIRECTOR OF THE HENRY ART GALLERY, ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT



Sylvia Wolf. Photo: Jonathan Vanderweit

Seattle, WA (September 7, 2022)—Sylvia Wolf announced today that she will retire as John S. Behnke Director in spring 2023, after 15 years leading the Henry. The University of Washington, in consultation with the Henry’s Board of Trustees, will launch the search for a successor later this year. In the interim, Wolf will continue to serve in her current role, leading the long-term strategic and daily operations of the Henry.

“We are grateful for Sylvia’s outstanding leadership, for her vision, and for her many contributions to strengthening the Henry and the arts at the University of Washington,” says College of Arts & Sciences Dean Dianne Harris. “Since Sylvia joined the Henry in April 2008, the museum has become a platform for creative research and the development of new work, featuring a dynamic and diverse roster of artists and programs that amplify underrepresented voices grounded in community and social justice.”

The Henry’s mission is to engage all people in the transformative power of contemporary art and ideas. During her tenure, Wolf has overseen a period of extraordinary growth and transformation at the Henry, with the diversification of the artistic program, expanded engagement with the community, and ambitious collection growth that has added more than 6,500 works to the museum’s collection. To increase care and access to the collection, Wolf partnered with UW Libraries to develop a jointly held position—Associate Conservator of Paper and Photographs funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Wolf also curated large-scale exhibitions by Ann Hamilton and Gary Hill, a survey of digital photography, and several exhibitions from the permanent collection.

Wolf launched two successful fundraising campaigns and tripled the Henry's endowment, adding a fund for the creation of new works. During the pandemic, the Henry has continued to prioritize supporting artists and creating new formats for engagement. Under Wolf's leadership, the museum redirected resources to invest in digital programming, broaden community partnerships, and expand exhibition programming to include *Henry OffSite*, which brings art into public spaces across the city. Wolf also oversaw the shaping and execution of three strategic plans, with equity initiatives embedded throughout current tactics and goals.

"It has been an honor and a pleasure to lead an institution that has been a global beacon and magnet for art and artists since it opened in 1927," Wolf says. "Today, the Henry amplifies diverse voices and champions artists at every level of creation, from ideation to completion. Its great strength—as a laboratory for artists and as a place for communities to engage with the creative process—is made possible through the vital support of the University, the stewardship of a dedicated board, and the expertise of an extraordinarily gifted staff. I am grateful for the milestones we have achieved together, and look forward to seeing the Henry thrive in the years to come."

Henry Board Chair, Steve Hoedemaker, adds, "Seldom in my career have I had the privilege to work with someone who brings the talent, passion, and commitment to excellence that are Sylvia's rare and effortless gifts. At the Henry, we believe that connecting our community to artists and their works inspires new ways of thinking—and that these explorations are essential to helping us understand our world. Sylvia has been instrumental in advancing this cause during her tenure. Her unwavering commitment to investing in art and artists, engaging in open dialogue and vital conversations, and centering education and equity in the museum experience have left an indelible mark on the community and laid a strong foundation for her successor to build upon."

Wolf steps down following 35 years of museum service, including 20 years as a photography curator at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art before joining the Henry as Director. She is the author of 12 books on contemporary art and photography, including *The Digital Eye: Photographic Art in the Digital Age* (2010); *Polaroids: Mapplethorpe* (2007); *Ed Ruscha and Photography* (2004); *Visions from America: Photographs from the Whitney Museum of American Art 1940-2001* (2002); *Michal Rovner: The Space Between* (2002); *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women* (1998); and *Dieter Appelt* (1994).

As an educator, Wolf has taught studio art, art history, and museum studies courses at the graduate and undergraduate level for 20 years. She has served as Professor in the MA program for Curatorial Studies at Columbia University, as Adjunct Professor in art history at New York University's Tisch School of Art, and as Visiting Professor at the School of Visual Arts, New York. She is currently Affiliate Faculty at the University of Washington. Wolf received a BA in French literature from Northwestern University and an MFA in photography from Rhode Island School of Design. She has been awarded the French government's Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

ABOUT THE HENRY

The Henry advances contemporary art and ideas. The museum is internationally recognized for groundbreaking exhibitions, for being on the cutting edge of contemporary art and culture, and for championing artists at every level of creation. Containing more than 28,000 works of art, the Henry's permanent collection is a significant cultural resource available to scholars, researchers, and the general public. The Henry is located on the University of Washington campus in Seattle, Washington. Visit henryart.org to learn more.

###