

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Phoenix Art Museum announces departure of fashion-design curator, plans for international search

The Museum's Jacquie Dorrance Curator of Fashion Design Dennita Sewell concludes nearly two decades of service on August 13

PHOENIX (August 2, 2019) – Phoenix Art Museum will begin an international search for the Jacquie Dorrance Curator of Fashion Design in mid-August following the planned departure of Dennita Sewell, who concludes nearly two decades in the curatorial role on August 13. Sewell joined the Museum on January 10, 2000, and over nearly twenty years led a critical expansion of the Museum's acclaimed fashion design collection, adding more than 3,000 objects to the fashion design collection which now numbers in excess of 8,000 objects dating from the 18th century to the present. In addition, Sewell curated dozens of exhibitions that received significant national press over the years, featured in publications such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and *Elle*. Since 2016, Sewell has divided her time between her curatorial role at Phoenix Art Museum and a new role overseeing the development of a Bachelor of Arts program in fashion with the School of Art at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University. Sewell will now focus her attention exclusively on her growing role at ASU.

"On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Phoenix Art Museum, the staff, and most of all our community, we are incredibly grateful to Dennita Sewell for her outstanding work to elevate the fashion design program at the Museum on a national scale, specifically through her efforts to grow the collection and developing compelling exhibitions," said Jon Hulburd, Chair of the Museum's Board of Trustees. "Dennita leaves a lasting legacy of excellence, one that has been made possible in large part through the ongoing support of the Arizona Costume Institute, which has provided vital support for the Museum's fashion design program for nearly 55 years. We are excited for the next generation of fashion design professionals at ASU who will benefit from her creative vision and expertise."

During her time with the Museum, Sewell developed a number of groundbreaking exhibitions that expanded beyond traditional presentations of historical fashions. In 2011, the Museum presented *Fashion Independent*, featuring the extraordinary custom-couture wardrobe of American-socialite and tastemaker Ann Bonfoey Taylor, gifted to the Museum in 2008. In 2015, the Museum premiered *The White Shirt According to Me. Gianfranco Ferré*, featuring a study of 27 examples of the iconic fashion staple and the hallmark of the legendary designer's aesthetic. In 2016, Sewell curated *Emphatics: Avant-Garde Fashion 1963-2013*, featuring an archive of contemporary fashion and ephemera gifted to the Museum in 2015 by James and Karin Legato, owners of the legendary eponymous boutique in Pittsburgh. Sewell curated exhibitions that explored the intersection of fashion, art, and even technology. In 2018, the Museum presented its first virtual-reality exhibition *Moonage Virtual Reality*, which took visitors on a simulated journey through rock-and-roll fashion and culture and Pop Art.

Throughout her time with the Museum, Sewell developed other compelling exhibitions that showcased the Museum's fashion collection, featured the very best in contemporary fashion, and more. These exhibitions included a study of the cape in both historical and modern design; a retrospective of 1920s fashion; and exhibitions that featured fashion designs influenced by the sea, as well as those that were inspired by automotive culture, graffiti culture, and medievalism. In addition, she curated exhibitions exploring the work of some of history's most prolific and influential designers, including Ralph Rucci, Iris van Herpen, Yeohlee Teng, Jacqueline Groag, Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, Judith Leiber, Emilio Pucci, James Galanos, and Cristóbal Balenciaga.

“I have the greatest respect and admiration for Dennita,” said Jacquie Dorrance, Valley philanthropist, who endowed Sewell’s position with the Museum in 2016. “Dennita has been the face of the Arizona Costume Institute for nearly 20 years, and has brought national and international attention to our city and our Museum with her creativity, passion, and talent in fashion design. I know I speak for many of her friends and colleagues when I say we will miss her so much and wish her the best in the next phase of her career.”

Since 1966, fashion design exhibitions and acquisitions at Phoenix Art Museum have been made possible through the support of a community of donors known as the Arizona Costume Institute (ACI), a support group of the Museum first established to support the development of a fashion design collection composed of objects of both historical and aesthetic significance. In addition to their profound generosity, ACI has also spearheaded a robust array of enriching programs and resources that amplify the fashion collection and exhibitions, including lectures, films, and a body of research materials housed in the Astaire Library of Costumes, part of the Museum’s Lemon Art Research Library.

“Dennita’s impact on the vibrancy and success of Arizona Costume Institute over the past 19 years has played a vital role in ACI’s larger history, helping us to expand our impact on our community and the Museum,” said Kathie May, president of Arizona Costume Institute. “It was both incredibly fortunate and rare to have her vision and guidance for nearly two full decades, and I am grateful for the work she has done to prepare us for future success, as we look to the next chapter in ACI’s long history.”

The Museum will launch its international search for the next Jacquie Dorrance Curator of Fashion Design in mid-August. The new curator will continue to maintain and grow the Museum’s fashion design collection, while bringing a fresh perspective to the development and interpretation of the Museum’s robust fashion design program. The recruitment posting will be available at www.phxart.org/aboutus/careers.

The Museum’s next fashion exhibition, [*Antonio: The Fine Art of Fashion Illustration*](#), opens at Phoenix Art Museum on September 21, 2019. Find [exhibition media images](#) linked here. Email media inquiries to Margaree.bigler@phxart.org.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Since 1959, Phoenix Art Museum has provided millions of guests with access to world-class art and experiences in an effort to ignite imaginations, create meaningful connections, and serve as a brave space for all people who wish to experience the transformative power of art. Located in Phoenix’s Central Corridor, the Museum is a vibrant destination for the visual arts and the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Each year, more than 350,000 guests engage with critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions and the Museum’s collection of more than 19,000 works of American and Western American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed for visitors of all ages, along with vibrant photography exhibitions made possible through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

About the Fashion Design Collection of Phoenix Art Museum

Founded in 1966, the fashion design collection of Phoenix Art Museum is recognized for its quality and comprehensiveness. It is composed of more than 8,000 objects of American and European men’s, women’s, and children’s dress and accessories, dating from the 18th century to the present day.

About Arizona Costume Institute

The Arizona Costume Institute (ACI) was founded in 1966 to support the fashion design program at Phoenix Art Museum in the acquisition and preservation of garments and accessories of historical and aesthetic significance. ACI promotes appreciation of fashion design through programs and support of the Museum’s exhibitions. Learn more at www.arizonacostumeinstitute.org.

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