



News Release/For Immediate Release

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NINA C. PELAEZ APPOINTED ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF LEARNING AND INTERPRETATION AT SCMA



Northampton, MA January 31, 2022— The Smith College Museum of Art (SCMA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Nina C. Pelaez—curator, educator and leader in the museum field— as Associate Director of Learning and Interpretation at SCMA. Nina brings deep experience in public programming and interpretation, most recently through her work as Curator of Programs and Interpretation at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) where she has served since 2015. She joins SCMA staff on March 7, 2022.

As a member of SCMA's Senior Leadership Team, Nina will contribute to the development of educational, artistic and engagement goals for the museum, lead the team responsible for interdisciplinary teaching, learning and engagement, and oversee all aspects of academic engagement, public and student programming, K-12 activities and museum interpretation.

"I'm thrilled to welcome Nina Pelaez and her creative and empathetic thinking to SCMA," said museum director Jessica Nicoll. "Nina stood out from among an impressive applicant pool as a visionary thinker, natural collaborator and powerful advocate for audiences. We were particularly impressed by the ways her work aligns with SCMA's core values, in her commitment to creating responsive, relevant programs, to activating the museum as a space for dialogue and to leading change in the service of making museums more equitable and inclusive. We look forward to welcoming Nina as a partner in advancing SCMA's mission to connect people to art, ideas and each other."

Nina shared: "I am so thrilled to join the Smith College Museum community in this new and exciting role. SCMA had an early impact on my academic and professional career and has continued to be one of my touchstones for innovative pedagogy, community-centered arts experiences and student mentorship. In the Summer of 2011, I attended Smith's Summer Institute in Art Museum Studies, which ignited my passion for teaching museums. As a museum educator and curator, I have since sought to foster bold yet nurturing communal environments for creative thinking, interdisciplinary exchange and critical discourse. I'm thrilled to be taking this next step at an institution that I know shares my commitments to collaboration, care, experimentation, criticality and multidisciplinary learning."



Nina joins SCMA's Department of Academic Programs & Public Education following a series of positions at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA). Most recently, she served as Curator of Public Programs & Interpretation, overseeing programming, interpretation and student engagement. In this role, Nina led the development of the museum's interpretive philosophy, oversaw program development and evaluation for live and virtual audiences, and launched and directed the Agents for Creative Action, a paid cohort of undergraduate students exploring museum practice as a creative process. From 2018–2019, she served as Interim Associate Director of Academic & Public Engagement at WCMA where she oversaw the museum's engagement department, contributed to a museum-wide renovation and supported the launch of WCMA Summer Space, a pop-up museum satellite gallery in Williamstown, MA.

Before working at WCMA, she was the Kress Interpretation Fellow at the High Museum of Art. She has also worked as a gallery assistant at CENTRAL BOOKING Art Space, a non-traditional gallery that highlights the breadth of book art alongside an exhibition program exploring the convergence of art and science. As an undergraduate, she worked at the List Gallery at Swarthmore College and, in the summer of 2009, was a Curatorial Intern in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.



Throughout her career, Nina has developed and curated community-centered conversations, exhibitions, workshops and activations spanning a wide range of topics. Consistently, her projects focus on experiences, knowledge and collaborations that think expansively about the role of an art museum within the context of a liberal arts campus. For example, *Ologies* (Williams College Museum of Art, 2018–2019), explored different disciplines through experiential activations created in collaboration with both contemporary artists and community experts. It featured work by artists including Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Paul Ramirez Jonas, Paul de Jong and Macon Reed. Another example of this type of work was *Summer School: The Library and the Archive* (WCMA, 2017), which explored how we engage with libraries and archives through a series of live programs both inside and outside the museum. *Summer School* included, for instance, a local perfumer who created collection-inspired scents prompted in part by the Versailles scent library, as well as a reading of original works by local writers imagining objects lost from the museum's archives.

Nina has also sought to center museum visitors' voices through programs, conversations and participatory platforms. Some of the conversation series that she has programmed include *Basquiat and Black Lives Matter* (Williams College Museum of Art, 2016–2017), a series of community conversations about Jean-Michel Basquiat's painting *Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart)* on topics including police brutality, black identity and the Black Lives Matter movement. Subsequently, *Getting a Read On: The Body* (WCMA, 2017–2018) prompted salon-style conversations about the body in art, culture and society, around works of art by James Van Der Zee, Catherine Opie and Robert Mapplethorpe. She also developed and launched *People's Library* (WCMA, 2017–2019), a community-sourced library of over 700+ books that grew in response to the question "What book is helping you understand the world right now?"

Her close collaborations with museum curators and college faculty have inspired several projects blending gallery installation and live programming. These include *Katie Paterson: Candle (from Earth into a Black Hole)* (Williams College Museum of Art, 2019), a series of community activations of artworks exploring human relationships to time, landscape and the universe, and *Poets Natalie Diaz and Ada Limón in Collaboration* (WCMA, 2019), an installation of collection works curated by visiting poets alongside a public reading and community workshops.

Recently, Nina's experimentations with virtual platforms have included programs such as *New Ecologies* (Williams College Museum of Art, 2020–2021), a series of online interdisciplinary conversations exploring connections between art, community, humanity and the environment, and *Cures for Strange Times*, (WCMA, 2021), a series of digital workshops highlighting Northern Berkshires creatives centering wellness, creativity and embodiment as forms of learning and being.

During her previous tenure at the High Museum of Art from 2014–2015, Nina co-curated the exhibition *Leonard Freed: Black in White America* and curated an installation of collection artworks by folk artist Nellie Mae Rowe.



Nina’s professional leadership and service work include her role as a founding board member of the Association for Art Museum Interpretation, as an inaugural member of Loom, a DEAI advisory group within the Williams College Museum of Art, and as a co-founder of Museum Workers Speak, a collective of activist museum workers interrogating the relationship between museum’s stated commitments to social value and their internal labor practices. She also serves as an advisory committee member for *Care Syllabus*, a justice-oriented public education and community resource featuring publications and live events by activists, artists and academics. From 2017–2019, she participated in Animating Museums, a creative leadership program hosted through the MCA Denver.

Currently, Nina is earning an M.F.A in poetry from Bennington College with an anticipated graduation date of 2023. She holds a M.A. from Williams College in the Graduate Program in the History of Art, and a B.A. from Swarthmore College in Art History and English Literature.

ABOUT SCMA

As a teaching museum affiliated with Smith College, SCMA is dedicated to connecting people to art, ideas and each other by engaging people with firsthand experiences of art, artists and museum practice; collecting, researching, presenting and preserving an expansive collection of art in the service of learning, teaching and critical dialogue; and by fostering an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives and inspires imagination.

In SCMA’s galleries, classrooms, and Cunningham Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, visitors experience a world-class collection that includes modern and contemporary art, American and western European masterworks, antiquities, emerging collections of Asian and African art, and a comprehensive collection of works on paper. SCMA and the Museum Shop are open to the public year-round Tuesday–Sunday, 11am to 4pm.

An accredited member of the American Alliance of Museums and a founding member of Museums10, a regional cultural collaboration, SCMA is also a member of the College Art Association and the New England Museum Association.

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