

# PRESS RELEASE

FEBRUARY 26, 2020

Press Contact

**Rachel Eggers**

Associate Director of Public Relations

rachele@seattleartmuseum.org

206.654.3151

## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM CURATOR CHIYO ISHIKAWA TO RETIRE AFTER 30 YEARS



SEATTLE  
ART  
MUSEUM

ASIAN  
ART  
MUSEUM

OLYMPIC  
SCULPTURE  
PARK

1300 First Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org

SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) announced that Dr. Chiyo Ishikawa, Susan Brotman Deputy Director for Art and Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, will retire in summer 2020, after 30 years at the museum. The museum's search for a replacement will begin immediately.

"It has been my honor and pleasure to work for an institution that so fully embraces its civic responsibility to serve our community," says Ishikawa. "After 30 years, it seems a good time to turn this wonderful opportunity over to someone new."

"Our doors will always be open to Chiyo," says Amada Cruz, SAM's Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. "My hope is that she will become bored in retirement and will want to organize special exhibitions for us from time to time. Her impact on SAM and on Seattle is beyond measure."

"It's rare for someone to have such an illustrious career at one institution," says Kimerly Rorschach, SAM's recently retired director and CEO (2012-2019). "Thoughtful, kind, and wise, Chiyo is a champion of the museum's values and a leader among the staff. She was a trusted advisor to me. During my tenure, she was particularly instrumental in SAM's work on equity and inclusion, participating in the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative and in the development of SAM's internal Equity Team. Her thoughtful perspective—and sense of style!—will be missed at SAM, but her legacy will endure."

"Chiyo is a scholar-curator whose work exemplifies excellence, knowledge and beauty," says Mimi Gardner Gates, SAM's Director Emerita (1994-2009). "The exhibitions she's organized combined fresh ideas and a choice selection of European art from celebrated collections. An engaging person with a rare sense of humor, Chiyo raised the bar at SAM, tirelessly leading SAM's spirited curatorial team, advising collectors, and mentoring younger scholar-curators. She's a cultural treasure who will be greatly missed."



Ishikawa joined the museum in 1990 as a half-time assistant curator of European painting—the museum’s first curatorial position for European art—just before SAM opened its downtown location in December 1991. She went full time in 1993. In 1997, Ishikawa helped bring *Leonardo Lives: The Codex Leicester and Leonardo da Vinci’s Legacy of Art and Science* to the downtown museum; the exhibition drew a quarter of a million visitors.

In 2004, Ishikawa co-curated *Spain in the Age of Exploration 1492-1819*, for which His Majesty King Juan Carlos of Spain awarded her the Order of Isabel la Católica, often called the Royal American Order of Isabella the Catholic. Throughout her tenure, she was SAM’s curator for notable exhibitions related to French art and culture, including *Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums* (1999); *Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris* (2010); *Gauguin & Polynesia; An Elusive Paradise* (2012); and *Yves Saint Laurent: The Perfection of Style* (2016). The Picasso exhibition welcomed over 400,000 visitors, setting a record for attendance that still stands. In 2018, Ishikawa was awarded the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) by the French Minister of Culture.

Ishikawa’s role expanded beyond curating when she was promoted to the Deputy Director of Art in 2005, a role in which she oversees the artistic program—including acquisitions, collection installations, and special exhibitions—working with the director and the curatorial team. Most recently, this role saw Ishikawa leading the curatorial vision for the renovated and expanded Asian Art Museum, which reopened in February 2020 with a groundbreaking thematic presentation of the museum’s Asian art collection.

Her tenure also coincided with the museum’s ambitious growth during 2007, which saw the opening of the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park on the downtown waterfront and the downtown’s museum’s expansion. In 2008, she oversaw a major art acquisition initiative in honor of the institution’s 75th anniversary, bringing in over 1,000 gifts (full, partial, or pledged) from more than seventy donors, bringing the collection to nearly 24,000 objects.

“Curators are agents of change in our museums, making our institutions inclusive and accessible by reexamining the lessons and narratives of the past,” said Judith Pineiro, Executive Director of the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) and AAMC Foundation. “If I were to seek a curator exemplifying this approach, it would be Chiyo. She has been of immense service to the AAMC Foundation and our mission to advance the curatorial profession to be more diverse, relevant, and thought-provoking. I deeply admire her grace, empathy, and generosity.”

Seattle-area artist Jeffrey Mitchell says, “You know that friend who you can nerd out with and pore over your shared experience with, who you can text a photo to when you see something they would get? That friend who you can’t wait to impress with your ideas and discoveries, and can’t wait to hear theirs? Who makes you see and understand? That’s my friend Chiyo.”

Dr. Ishikawa has been an adjunct professor in the Department of History of Art at the University of Washington in Seattle since 2016 and was a lecturer there 1990–93. Previously, she interned in the Department of European Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1989) and in the Department of Paintings Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1983–85). She holds a Ph.D. in Art History from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

**Photo credit:** Scott Areman

## **ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM**

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By

the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020 following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.