25 Women Curators Shaking Things Up

Brian Boucher, Tuesday, March 17, 2015

We all know that, as Beyoncé puts it, girls run the world. That’s arguably especially true in the art world, where many powerful and influential art advisors, auction house specialists and dealers are all women. And then there are the curators, whose exhibitions help us to reassess established figures or bring new ones to light. Curators help build museum collections, or work independently to organize biennials and triennials, and often publish in magazines and journals as part of their portfolio.

Who is the next Helen Molesworth, recently appointed at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (see Helen Molesworth Hired as Chief Curator of LA MOCA)? Who might be the future Ann Temkin, who has headed up the department of painting and sculpture at New York’s Museum of Modern Art since succeeding John Elderfield in 2008?

Keep in mind, too, that the road to the director’s office sometimes leads through the curatorial department. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Thomas Campbell, MoMA’s Glenn Lowry, and the Walker Art Center’s Olga Viso all served as curators before taking the helm of their institutions. Heads of major museums tend to be lavishly compensated men, but that’s an issue for another time—see We Asked 20 Women “Is the Art World Biased?” Here’s What They Said (see also The Top 20 Art World Women of 2014 and The Most Powerful Women in Art Part One).

We polled our colleagues far and wide to come up with this roundup of 25 up-and-coming curators to watch, arranged in alphabetical order. (No such list is ever
complete, so we also welcome your nominations on our Facebook page.) Maybe you’ll see them heading up a department at a museum near you?

1. Nancy Adajania, Independent Curator, Mumbai
Mumbai-based Nancy Adajania has brought her education in political science, social communications media and film to an engagement with contemporary Indian art. She was one of six curators (all women) of “Roundtable,” the ninth Gwangju Biennale in 2012, described as “an open-ended series of collaborations” and including Indian artists like Jangarh Singh Shyam and Sheba Chhachhi. She has lectured all over Europe, at venues like Documenta, in Kassel; the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM), in Karlsruhe; and the Gulbenkian Foundation, in Lisbon.

2. Katherine Brinson, Guggenheim Museum, New York
With a museum-wide Christopher Wool retrospective under her belt, as well as Hugo Boss Prize shows of Hans-Peter Feldmann and Danh Vo, Brinson has earned her seat at the New York Guggenheim, as well as organizing shows at the museum’s Berlin and Bilbao venues. Through her work with the museum’s Young Collectors council, she also
bolsters the museum’s collection of emerging artists, bringing in works by artists such as Kevin Beasley, Gerard & Kelly, Agnieszka Kurant, and Adam Pendleton.

3. Cathleen Chaffee, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
After stints at the Yale University Art Gallery, MoMA, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, Chaffee went to Buffalo in fall 2013, replacing Heather Pesanti (see below). Her new show “Overtime: The Art of Work” (through May 17) deals with artistic conceptions of labor and includes artists from Honoré Daumier and Tehching Hsieh to influential New Yorkers Josh Kline and Agnieszka Kurant. Among those who will be the subjects of upcoming solo shows are Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Joe Bradley, Michael Rakowitz, and Erin Shirreff.

4. Rachel Cook, DiverseWorks, Houston.
Sound art is coming into its own institutionally, especially since the 2013 exhibition “Soundings: A Contemporary Score” at New York’s MoMA, and Rachel Cook is part of that wave: her recent DiverseWorks show “SonicWorks” featured artists ranging from
locals The Art Guys to New York's Christine Sun Kim and Pauline Oliveros. Since setting up shop there in 2012, Cook has organized new commissions by artists including Wu Tsang and Liz Magic Laser. She also pitched in on "The Eleventh Hour," which highlighted presenting politically and socially engaged artists from Rick Lowe to Gorilla Girls Houston and the collective Anti-Trust.

Ruth Estevez, gallery director and curator, REDCAT, Los Angeles. Photo: Yvonne Venegas.

5. Ruth Estévez, REDCAT, Los Angeles
Director-curator of visual arts at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT), Bilbao-born Ruth Estevez was previously at Museum of Contemporary Art Carrillo Gil in Mexico City; while in Mexico she co-founded the nonprofit LIGA, Space for Architecture. At REDCAT, she's worked with artists including Pablo Bronstein, Javier Tellez, and Allora & Calzadilla. Among upcoming projects are "Hotel Theory," a group show looking at the performance of theory, and, in collaboration with The Getty Institute, a re-staging of a performance piece by the late Argentinian artist León Ferrari, who deployed sculpture and poetry as "revolutionary weapons" against war, political authority and religion.

6. Amanda de la Garza, MUAC, Mexico City
A curator at The University Museum of Contemporary Art since 2012, Amanda de la Garza Mata has organized a Bataille-inspired group show studying the foundation of the modern museum as linked to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution; a solo devoted to avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas; and, with Julio García Murillo, "Mina 8. Unidad Pasta de Conchos," an exhibition devoted to a controversial coal mine explosion in northern Mexico. In her free time, she's part of a collective, Illusory City, that has produced three documentary films on urban issues and helps to edit publications for Tabasco189 Editions, which illuminates links between contemporary art and literature.
7. Jarrett Gregory, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
At LACMA since 2011, Gregory organized the recent L.A. iteration of the traveling exhibition of French art star Pierre Huyghe (see Is Pierre Huyghe the World's Most Opaque Popular Artist? Ben Davis Sizes Up His LACMA Show) as well as shows of Stanley Kubrick and Stephen Prina. In her previous post, at New York's New Museum, she worked on acclaimed shows like the inaugural triennial, “Younger than Jesus,” and “Ostalgia,” which brought to light lesser-known Eastern European artists, and she's contributed to magazines like The Believer and Frieze.

8. Anna Gritz, South London Gallery
In charge of film and performance at the 124-year-old nonprofit South London Gallery, Anna Gritz is cooking up exhibitions devoted to artists Kapwangi Kiwanga, who draws on academic training for research-based projects, as well as veteran comic performer Michael Smith. After earning an MA in curatorial practice at California College for the Arts, she cut her teeth at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Hayward Gallery, both in London, and ran programs at New York's apexart. While writing for publications like Mousse and frieze d/e, she's got exhibitions in the works from Ljubljana to Cologne and Southend-on-Sea, where, with Paul Clinton, she's organizing a show about stupidity.
9. Rujeko Hockley, Brooklyn Museum
Despite being the museum’s assistant curator since just 2012, Hockley has pitched in on shows devoted to LaToya Ruby Frazier, the Bruce High Quality Foundation, and artists from the borough (“Crossing Brooklyn: Art from Bushwick, Bed-Stuy, and Beyond”), as well as the current and hotly debated Kehinde Wiley show (through May 24). She’s a veteran of the Studio Museum in Harlem and is, believe it or not, working on a UC San Diego PhD while also serving on panel discussions on Afrofuturism at the Studio Museum, young curators at the School of Visual Arts, and the prison-industrial complex at Neue House.

10. Jamillah James, UCLA Hammer Museum
Having held curatorial positions in New York at the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Queens Museum before going west to the Hammer, Jamillah James has helped to organize shows there of artists like Mark Bradford and Charles Gaines. She’s also pitching in on programming with Bradford’s nonprofit Art + Practice, which will bring art and social services to L.A.’s Leimert Park neighborhood. She told NY Arts magazine last year that she’s into pop and celebrity culture and appreciates that “it doesn’t take itself too seriously—and I think we can all gain something from that attitude.”
11. **Ruba Katrib, Sculpture Center, New York**
Since earning an MA in curatorial studies at the powerhouse training program at CCS Bard in New York’s Hudson Valley, Ruba Katrib has organized US museum debuts for Cory Arcangel and Claire Fontaine, both at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (see The ICA Miami Will Build a New Home). At SculptureCenter in Long Island City, New York, she’s helmed projects like the 2014 group show “Puddle, pothole, portal,” co-curated with artist Camille Henrot, and solos of Radamés “Juni” Figueroa, Jumana Manna and others. Her writing has been featured in Artforum, Kaleidoscope, and Mousse, and she’s organizing a group show with her old prof, CCS director Tom Eccles, on Governors Island this summer.

12. **Naima Keith, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York**
After starting out as an intern at the Studio Museum, Naima Keith returned there in 2011 as assistant curator, fresh off a stint as curatorial fellow at L.A.’s Hammer Museum, where she assisted with the 2011-12 show “Now Dig This! Art and Black Los
Angeles 1960–1980." She’s gotten attention for shows like "The Shadows Took Shape," looking at contemporary art through the lens of Afrofuturism, and a survey of Charles Gaines, whose works probe “the fraught relationship between a poetics of chance and a politics of radical engagement,” according to Art in America.

Tina Kukielski, independent curator.
Photo: Courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Art.

13. Tina Kukielski, independent curator, New York
No less a critic than the New Yorker’s Peter Schjeldahl called the 2013 iteration of the Carnegie International "strikingly thoughtful," and Tina Kukielski gets part of the credit, having organized the acclaimed show along with Daniel Baumann and Dan Byers. (See World’s Top 20 Biennials, Triennials, and Miscellennials). She also organized shows there with beloved artists working with new technology, like Cory Arcangel and Antoine Catala, who shows with plugged-in New York gallery 47 Canal. She’s now back in New York, with several projects in the works, including a group show this summer at James Cohan Gallery.

Alejandra Labastida, associate curator at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC).
Photo: frente.com
14. Alejandra Labastida, MUAC (University Museum of Contemporary Art), México

In 2012, MUAC associate curator Alejandra Labastida snagged the prize in Istanbul's Akbank Sanat International Curatorial Competition for a Gilles Deleuze-inspired show, “The Life of Others: Repetition and Survival,” featuring artists from François Bucher and Tania Bruguera to Artur Zmijewski. Since setting up shop at MUAC in 2008, she’s organized a number of in-house shows while also helping to organize the Mexican pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, in 2011. And she's not even finished with a master's degree in art history and curatorial studies at UNAM (Universidad Autónoma de Mexico).

Carol Yinghua Lu, independent curator.
Photo: Courtesy of Independent Curators International.

15. Carol Yinghua Lu, independent curator, Beijing

If you loved Christian Marclay's 24-hour video *The Clock*, you probably cheered when it won the Golden Lion at the 2011 Venice Biennale; the artist partly has Beijing-based independent curator Carol Yinghua Lu to thank, since she served on the jury. With Nancy Adajania (see above) and four others, she co-curated the 2012 Gwangju Biennale; she also co-organized the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale in 2012, including art stars like Wang Jianwei, Lee Mingwei, and Zhang Xiaogang. Artistic director and chief curator at OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Shenzhen, a division of the He Xiangning Art Museum, she co-organized with Liu Ding the show “From the Issue of Art to the Issue of Position: Echoes of Socialist Realism,” which is now on view.
Promoted twice since joining the New Museum in 2011, Margot Norton has organized exhibitions including one by Turner Prize-winner Laure Prouvost and the museum solo of Judith Bernstein. She’s been co-curator of an eye-popping litany of exhibitions, from the lauded recent Chris Ofili retrospective (see Chris Ofili's Glittering, Dung-Encrusted Paintings Return to New York) and the group show "Here and Elsewhere," devoted to art of the Arab world (see Palestinians and Arabs Hang Tough at the New Museum). The Columbia curatorial MA grad is looking ahead to a survey opening this summer of the late Sarah Charlesworth, who, Brian Wallis wrote in Artforum, "presciently grasped the visual seduction of photographs."

17. Heather Pesanti, Austin Contemporary
The Contemporary Austin is going big with its first large thematic group exhibition, "Strange Pilgrims," and they've placed it in the hands of Heather Pesanti. Focusing on the "immersive, participatory, collaborative and kinetic" and including artists from
Charles Atlas and Trisha Baga to Bruce Nauman and Yoko Ono, it opens in September. While at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in Buffalo, New York, Pesanti organized the well-received historical survey “Wish You Were Here: The Buffalo Avant-Garde in the 1970s.”

18. Susanne Pfeffer, Kunsthaus Fridericianum, Kassel
In what’s being called the Post-Internet era, in which images circulate endlessly and authorship is said to be irrelevant, Pfeffer’s 2013-14 show “Speculations on Anonymous Materials” brought together young artists like Alisa Baremboym, Oliver Laric, and Timur Si-Qin. While curator at Berlin’s KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Pfeffer conceived the 2008-09 Hotel Marienbad program, in which artists like Douglas Gordon had a residency in what resembled a hotel room. She’s organized solo shows of figures as varied as outsider artist Joe Coleman (whom no less than Charles Manson called “a caveman in a spaceship”), experimental filmmaker Lutz Mommartz (a film of his was included in the MoMA Polke retrospective), and sculptor Richard Serra. Pfeffer will work with artist Pamela Rosenkranz on the Swiss pavilion at the Venice Biennale, opening this summer (see The 2015 Venice Biennale List of Artists Is Out—See Our Exclusive).

19. Sara Raza, independent curator, London
The Guggenheim Museum is investing big in widening the global reach of its collection, with initiatives in Asia and Latin America as well as the Middle East and North Africa,
which is where Sara Raza comes in as the newest two-year curatorial resident. We’ll see her picks at a 2016 show. As for what those might be, we note that she worked with artists including Adel Abidin, Wafaa Bilal and Mohammed Kazem at the Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah when she was adjunct associate curator there; for the 2014 Venice Biennale, she co-curated a show of Saudi Arabian artists at the Venice Biennale, including Heba Abed, Basmah Felemban, and Saeed Salem.

20. Chen Tamir, Center for Contemporary Art Tel Aviv
The Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement, calling for cultural boycott of Israeli institutions, has generated copious debate, and CCA Tel Aviv curator Chen Tamir has contributed a report on the phenomenon, published recently by Hyperallergic (see The Cultural Boycott of Israel Isn't Solidarity, It's Condescension and Artists for Palestine UK Respond to JJ Charlesworth's Criticism of the Cultural Boycott of Israel). Besides her brick-and-mortar shows of artists like Amie Siegel and Tamar Harpaz, she’s also commissioned artworks for viewing on mobile devices on the CCA’s wireless network. If you missed her on a panel at the Armory Show recently, you can catch her in upcoming talks at the Vera List Center in New York or at L.A.’s Otis College.

Already a veteran of New York’s Zach Feuer Gallery and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Kitchen associate curator Lumi Tan has organized solo exhibitions of artists ranging from Luke Stettner to Chantal Akerman and produced performances including Danh Vo and Xiu Xiu’s multifarious show “Metal.” Tan is no slouch at the writing desk either, having penned articles for *Artforum, Frieze,* and *The New York Times.*

22. Kelly Taxter, Jewish Museum, New York
Before becoming assistant curator at the Jewish Museum in 2013, Kelly Taxter co-ran Taxter & Spengemann Gallery in New York, for eight years, fostering talents like Xavier Cha and Andrew Kuo (see [Andrew Kuo and Scott Reeder Opt for Panda Bear Zodiac Sign on Instagram Video](https://www.artnews.com/)). Taxter must have hit the ground running, as she’s already opened *Laurie Simmons: How We See,* the artist’s first New York museum solo, now on view. Besides that, no museumgoer will be able to miss her projects, as she’s overseeing site-specific works in the lobby, with artists like Willem de Rooij, Chantal Joffee and Valeska Soares on tap.

Stephanie Weber, curator of contemporary art at Lenbachhaus.
*Photo: Courtesy of Lenbachhaus.*
23. **Stephanie Weber, Lenbachhaus, Munich**

While at MoMA in New York, Stephanie Weber curated a solo show of Mark Boulos and film series of Charles Simonds and Christoph Schlingensief, all the while commissioning performances by Tom Thayer and C. Spencer Yeh and adding to the collection works by Vito Acconci, VALIE EXPORT and Martha Rosler. Since starting at Munich’s Lenbachhaus in September, she’s been hard at work on a retrospective of Polish-born feminist artist Lea Lublin that opens this summer. It includes a thirty-year span of work in various mediums by the Argentine-French artist, who once stole Marcel Duchamp’s mailbox.

![Michelle White, curator, Menil Collection.](Photo: Courtesy of the Menil Collection; Photograph by Eric Hester.)

24. **Michelle White, Menil Collection, Houston**

White took up her post at the Menil after honing her skills at Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; her endeavors have been as varied as projects with the Houston collective Otabenga Jones & Associates (who aim to “teach the truth to the black youth”) and the Richard Serra drawings retrospective that traveled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Among others, *Flash Art* and *Modern Painters* have published her writings.
Mika Yoshitake, assistant curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.
Photo: Courtesy of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

25. **Mika Yoshitake, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.**
As the Hirshhorn's assistant curator, Yoshitake oversaw the museum's installation of the traveling show "Ai Weiwei: According to What?" She earned an AICA-USA award for best show in a commercial gallery nationally for "Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha" (2012) at Blum & Poe in Los Angeles, which traveled to Gladstone Gallery in New York, and has contributed to other high-profile shows like the Guggenheim Museum's Lee Ufan retrospective and the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles' exhibition © MURAKAMI.

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