



NEWS

# Hamza Walker named the new executive director of LAXART

The curator comes to the LA non-profit from Chicago's Renaissance Society

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by JORI FINKEL | 14 September 2016

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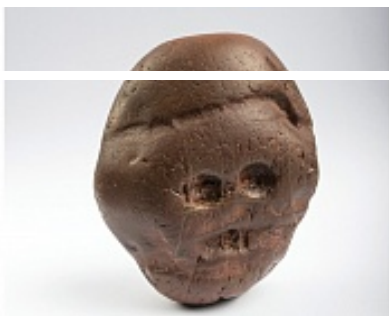
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The future of the non-profit Los Angeles-based art space LAXART has been uncertain since the beginning of this year, when the founding director Lauri Firstenberg stepped down from her job after a decade, leaving behind a high-profile but chronically underfunded space that survived project-to-project. Now, though challenges persist on the fundraising front amid growing competition, the future looks brighter. The LAXART board has confirmed its hire of Hamza Walker as its new executive director. He comes from the Renaissance Society of Chicago, where he was the associate curator and director of education. He is expected to start his new position on 1 October, with Catherine Taft staying on as the deputy director. “I think Hamza is one of the most important curators in the country and a radical thinker,” says Firstenberg, who now produces artists’ projects, including a documentary with Andrea Bowers that is in the works. “I wrote a succession plan a year ago, and he was the plan.” “It took them a year to move through their own decision-making,” she says of the LAXART board. “But it’s wonderful they developed their own rapport with him.” Walker says he was drawn by the “dynamism and diversity of Los Angeles” and the challenge of running an alternative art space in the city, even at a time when relative newcomers like The Mistake Room, run by LAXART’s former associate director Cesar Garcia, and 356 Mission play bigger roles. “How can a space make itself useful, urgent within the context of Los Angeles? That’s exciting to me,” Walker says. He mentions “old-school, alternative-space group shows that can respond to the moment—the agit-prop shows” as one area of interest. At the Renaissance Society, Walker organised or co-organised solo exhibitions of artists such as Wadada Leo Smith, as well as extravaganzas like Teen Paranormal Romance and Suicide Narcissus. He also co-organised the 2016 Hammer Biennial with Aram Moshayedi—formerly a curator at LAXART—which Christopher Knight in the Los Angeles Times praised for having “a relaxed, even casual quality that is especially refreshing in the frenzied here and now of our market-dominated art world”.

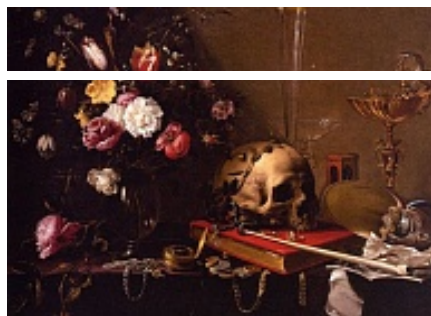
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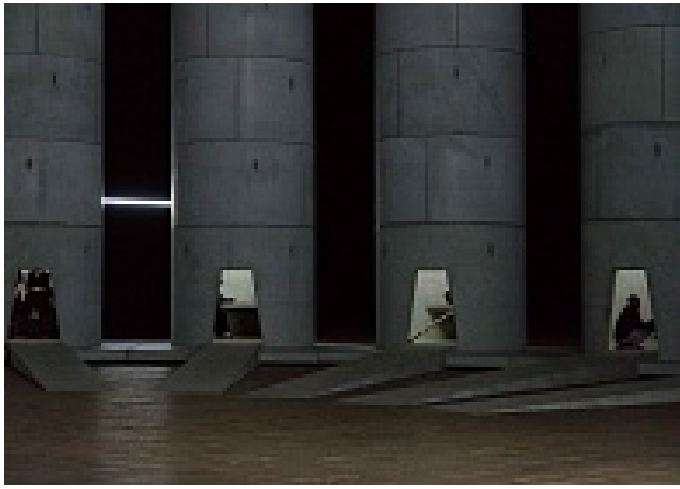
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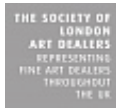
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