

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
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PRESS RELEASE

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM APPOINTS DREW SAWYER AS SONDRA GILMAN CURATOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



New York, NY, May 30, 2023 — The Whitney Museum of American Art has appointed Drew Sawyer as the Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography to oversee the Museum's collection of photography from 1900 to the present and lead its photography acquisition committee. In his new role, Sawyer will organize exhibitions, write accompanying scholarly publications, cultivate relationships with artists, and develop ways in which artworks and archives can be interpreted through exhibitions, publications, events, and digital channels. Sawyer begins his new position in July 2023.

In addition to directing the Whitney's photography program, Sawyer will collaborate with members of the Museum's curatorial team broadly across mediums and disciplines. He will partner with Kim Conaty, the Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints, on the

program for the Sondra Gilman Study Center, which houses the majority of the Whitney's over 19,000 prints, drawings, and photographs. Sawyer will succeed Elisabeth Sussman, the founding Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, who will remain on staff as a curator focused on several much-anticipated exhibitions, including *Harry Smith* this fall.

An accomplished curator and art historian, Sawyer has focused on photography of the 1930s and 1970s, as well as queer art histories and contemporary practices in the United States, throughout his career. For the past five years, he has served as the Phillip and Edith Leonian Curator at the Brooklyn Museum, where his exhibition *Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines* will open this fall.

Sawyer previously held curatorial positions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Columbus Museum of Art, where he co-founded the Center for Art and Social Engagement (CASE) through a major grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Among other achievements, Sawyer received a 2020 Award for Excellence from the Association of Art Museum Curators for *Art after Stonewall: 1969–1989*, which *ARTnews* named one of the top 10 most important exhibitions of the 2010s.

"I am excited to be joining the team at the Whitney at a pivotal time in the institution's history, and I look forward to continuing their work in championing living artists and in redefining discourses in U.S. American photography and art through its renowned collection and programming," said Sawyer.

"Drew is one of the liveliest and most penetrating minds in the field of photography and contemporary art today. His expertise and interests range from the early twentieth-century documentary tradition to 1980s zines to the young artists of our moment, with whom he is intimately engaged," said Scott Rothkopf, the current Senior Deputy Director and Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator and incoming Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art. "We are grateful to Elisabeth Sussman for her extraordinary contributions to our collection and program, and I'm sure Drew will build beautifully on this legacy."

Throughout his career, Sawyer has curated or co-curated notable exhibitions including *Jimmy DeSana: Submission* (2022); *John Edmonds: A Sidelong Glance* (2020); *Garry Winogrand: Color* (2019); *Liz Johnson Artur: Dusha* (2019); *Art after Stonewall, 1969–1989* (2019); *Isaac Julien: Looking for Langston* (2018); *Allan Sekula: Aerospace Folktales and Other Stories* (2017); *Lucy Raven: Low Relief* (2016); and *'Social Forces Visualized': Photography and Scientific Charity, 1900–1920* (2011), among others.

Sawyer has also taught at Columbia University, Yale School of Art, and the Image Text Ithaca MFA Program, and regularly contributes to scholarly volumes, exhibition catalogues, journals, and magazines. He has recently organized and participated in talks with artists Khalik Allah, John Edmonds, Liz Johnson Artur, Mark McKnight, Carlos Motta, Elle Perez, Sasha Phyers-Burgess, Laurie Simmons, Ming Smith, and others. In 2017, he co-organized with Sarah

Miller a two-day symposium, "Reinventing Documentary Photography in the 1970s," which featured contributions from art historians, artists, and curators.

Sawyer received a B.A. in Art History and Economics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and a Ph.D. in Art History and Archaeology from Columbia University, focusing on North American art and photography.

Sawyer's position is named for Sondra Gilman Gonzalez-Falla, the Whitney's longest-serving Trustee and founding trustee of the Museum's photography collection. Under her visionary leadership, the Whitney formally started collecting photography in 1991 and formed a Photography Acquisition Committee, which she chaired for well over a decade. The Committee has been instrumental in enhancing the Whitney's photography collection, which numbers more than 6,000 works with deep holdings in areas such as New York School and conceptual photography. As part of the campaign that brought the Whitney downtown to Gansevoort Street, Gilman Gonzalez-Falla and her husband Celso gifted the Museum with 75 iconic photographs by Walker Evans, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, William Eggleston, and Imogen Cunningham, among others. In 2015, she founded the Sondra Gilman Study Center, a state-of-the-art storage and research facility, which for the first time since the Museum's founding in 1932, affords scholars, artists, art historians, and students access to the Whitney's renowned works on paper collection.

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ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied

with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgement

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning "island of many hills." The Museum's current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan ("tobacco field"). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region's original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum's Land Acknowledgement, [visit the Museum's website](#).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. COVID-19 vaccination and face coverings are not required but strongly recommended. We encourage all visitors to wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth throughout their visit.

Image credit:

Drew Sawyer. Photography by John Edmonds

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