

## Philadelphia Contemporary Expands Curatorial Team

*Robert Blackson Joins as Curator of Citywide Initiatives and Co-Director, Curatorial Program; Nicole Pollard Becomes Associate Curator*



*Robert Blackson (L) and Yolanda Wisher (R)  
Co-Directors, Curatorial Program*

**(Philadelphia, PA --Feb. 4, 2020)** Philadelphia Contemporary today announced that **Robert Blackson**, founding director of Temple Contemporary at Temple University, will join Philadelphia Contemporary as **Co-Director of the institution's Curatorial Program** and **Curator of Citywide Initiatives**. Blackson will join **Yolanda Wisher, Co-Director, Curatorial Program** and **Curator of Spoken Word**, in joint leadership of Philadelphia Contemporary's programs and exhibitions, and will formally join the institution on March 4, 2021.

At Philadelphia Contemporary, Blackson will continue his long practice of deep artistic engagement with communities across Philadelphia, an approach that both reflects and furthers Philadelphia Contemporary's commitment to city-wide programming and engagement, both during and after its development of a permanent space.



*Nicole Pollard*

In a further reflection of the institution's continuing growth and ambition, **Nicole Pollard** has been promoted to **Associate Curator**, and will work with Wisner, Blackson, and **Director of Programs Kerry Bickford** to continue to develop programming across the arts. Pollard's promotion reflects her record of accomplishment at Philadelphia Contemporary, most recently as co-curator of the public art exhibition and publication *Commonwealth*.

"I'm thrilled to welcome Rob to Philadelphia Contemporary, and couldn't be more excited for what our team has in store. Rob, Yolanda, and Nicole represent the best of Philadelphia's

curatorial and creative communities," said **Philadelphia Contemporary's Founding Director and CEO Harry Philbrick**. "Their backgrounds as artists and creative practitioners reflect our commitment to working with artists through creative collaborations, and engaging with the full breadth and depth of Philadelphia."

The curatorial team is representative of the diversity of Philadelphia, and the span of Philadelphia Contemporary's programming interests, which include the visual arts, performance, video, spoken word, and more. In his new role, Blackson will focus on engaging community needs and issues through singular art projects, complementing Wisner's work with emerging spoken word, film, and music practitioners and Pollard's engagement with the visual arts as applied through traditional and vernacular forms.

"I've long admired Rob's work in Philly, and there's a great deal of synergy between our curatorial poetics and practice," said **Wisner**. "He will round out a dynamic team of creative, community-centered leaders at PC."

"The mark Philadelphia Contemporary has made on this city in only a few short years is evidence of its ambition and creativity," said **Blackson**. "I couldn't be more excited to join Yolanda, Nicole, Kerry, and the rest of the team, and to help shape the future of this institution."

Blackson's projects at Temple Contemporary include *reForm*, in which artist Pepón Osorio addressed the loss of the Fairhill Elementary School in North Philadelphia; *Funeral for a Home*, a community history, art, and engagement project that celebrated the life of a Philadelphia row house as it was razed; *Symphony for a Broken Orchestra*, which facilitated the repair and return of 1000 instruments owned by the Philadelphia public schools after the broken instruments were used to perform a piece by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Lang.

Recent projects at Philadelphia Contemporary include an ongoing video series, [Talking Breakfast](#), and podcast, [Love Jaws](#); [Commonwealth](#), an expansive public art program and publication exploring collective wellbeing and individual freedom, co-presented with the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico; Susan Philipsz's [Muffled Drums](#), an immersive audio experience and one of the first artworks created specifically for the context of the COVID-19 crisis; and Elissa Blount Moorhead and Bradford Young's critically acclaimed meditative film installation [Back and Song](#).

### **About Robert Blackson**

For the past ten years Robert Blackson has served as the founding director of Temple Contemporary, a research and public program initiative whose signature projects include *Symphony for a Broken Orchestra*, *Funeral for a Home*, and *reForm* (with Pepón Osorio and the Fairhill community). Prior to initiating Temple Contemporary at Temple University's Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia, Blackson worked in the UK as curator of public programs at Nottingham Contemporary and the curator of BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle/Gateshead. His writings have appeared in numerous monographs and journals including *Art Journal*, *Labyrinth*, and *Cabinet*. He is a graduate of Rhode Island School of Design and Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies. He currently serves on the board of Site Collective, Isle of Skye, Scotland.

### **About Yolanda Wisher**

Yolanda Wisher has worked as the Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary since 2018. Her signature projects have included the Outbound Poetry Festival, *Stellar Masses*, and *Love Jaws: A Mixtape*. A Pew and Cave Canem fellow, Wisher served as the inaugural poet laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania and the third poet laureate of Philadelphia. She was part of the first cohort of artists with studios at the Cherry Street Pier on the Delaware River Waterfront. Wisher taught high school English for a decade, worked as Director of Art Education for Philadelphia Mural Arts from 2010 to 2015, and continues to lead workshops and courses focused on creative writing, literature, and poetry as public art. The author of *Monk Eats an Afro*, Wisher performs a unique blend of poetry and song with her band The Afroeaters.

### **About Nicole Pollard**

As Program Coordinator at Philadelphia Contemporary, Nicole Pollard has co-curated *Commonwealth* and *Edward Burtynsky: Megaresources*, and has helped produce the *Talking Breakfast* web series, Museums of the 21st Century talk series, and *Festival for the People*. In the past she has worked as Project Manager for Temple Contemporary, Curatorial Assistant for No Longer Empty, and an Exhibit Designer for Museum of Impact. In 2017, she was published in the American Alliance of Museum's National Association for Museum Exhibition's journal *Exhibition*. She holds an MFA in Museum Exhibition Planning + Design from the University of the Arts and a BFA in Art Education from Virginia Commonwealth University.

## **About Philadelphia Contemporary**

Founded in 2016, Philadelphia Contemporary presents visual art, performance art, and spoken word across the city of Philadelphia. A nomadic contemporary art organization with ambitions to establish a freestanding, globally oriented and locally aware non-collecting arts institution, Philadelphia Contemporary has pioneered a vibrant and sustainable model based on partnerships and collaborations. Having commenced pop-up programming in October 2016, Philadelphia Contemporary continues to develop an ambitious roster of projects that will be mounted in the coming years, while planning for a permanent home in a new building.

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