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PAFA Appoints Michelle Donnelly, PhD, as the Evelyn and Will Kaplan Curator of Twentieth Century Art and the John Rhoden Collection

Distinguished art historian and curator returns to PAFA

Philadelphia, PA — December 11, 2025 — The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) is proud to announce the appointment of Michelle Donnelly, PhD, as the Evelyn and Will Kaplan Curator of Twentieth Century Art and the John Rhoden Collection. Donnelly brings more than a decade of leadership in twentieth-century American art, curatorial practice, and printmaking scholarship in her return to PAFA's curatorial team.

"We are thrilled to welcome Michelle back to PAFA," said Judith Thomas, Deputy Director and Interim Director of the Museum. "Her expertise, exceptional scholarship, and commitment to elevating underrepresented voices in American art align with PAFA's mission and vision. She will play a transformative role in shaping how twentieth-century art is presented and interpreted at PAFA."

Donnelly most recently served as the inaugural Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Predoctoral Fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. From 2013 to 2014, she served as a Curatorial Assistant at PAFA, where she curated *Art for Society's Sake: The WPA and Its Legacy* (2013–14) and contributed to landmark exhibitions including *World War I and American Art* (2016–17), *Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis* (2015–16), and *David Lynch: The Unified Field* (2014–15).

Her curatorial experience extends to leading institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Yale Center for British Art, the Morgan Library & Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Heckscher Museum of Art. At the Whitney, she curated *Experiments in Electrostatics: Photocopy Art from the Whitney's Collection, 1966–1986* (2017–18) and oversaw the Sondra Gilman Study Center for works on paper.

She has published widely in *Grey Room*, *Woman's Art Journal*, and *Pennsylvania History*, as well as in publications from the Getty Research Institute, the Museum of Modern Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Yale School of Art. She has presented nationally and internationally on artists represented in PAFA's collection, including Elizabeth Catlett, Edward Hopper, Louise Nevelson, Florine Stettheimer, Dox Thrash, and Grant Wood.

Donnelly earned her PhD in the History of Art from Yale University, her MA in the History of Art from the University of Pennsylvania, and her BA in Art History with Honors from Vassar College.

About PAFA

Founded in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is the United States' first school and museum of fine arts. A recipient of the National Medal of Arts, PAFA offers a world-class collection of American art, groundbreaking exhibitions, and exceptional educational programs. Through its museum and school, PAFA is committed to telling America's diverse story through art and expanding who is included in the canon of art history. Esteemed alumni include Mary Cassatt, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, William Glackens, Barkley L. Hendricks, Violet Oakley, Louis Kahn, David Lynch, and Henry Ossawa Tanner.

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