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Sarah Higgins to lead USF Contemporary Art Museum

TAMPA, FL – June 11, 2026 – As director and chief curator of the USF Contemporary Art Museum, Sarah Higgins will lead the museum’s curatorial vision, steward the permanent collection and align programming with the university’s academic, student success and research missions. She will report to Chris Garvin, dean of the College of Design, Art & Performance.



Photo credit headshot: Jill Frank



Photo credit with dog: Higgins reviews proofs of ART PAPERS 46.02, Other Species, at her home in Atlanta, assisted by her dog, Stevie. Photo credit: Noah Reyes

“Sarah Higgins’ work as editor of Art Papers positions her as a unique and powerful voice in contemporary art, helping to shape a generation of emerging artists,” Garvin said. “We are thrilled to bring this visionary leader to the College of Design, Art & Performance as we chart a new future for our Contemporary Art Museum, which resides in the University of South Florida Arts District.”

“My passion for curatorial practice first arose in Florida more than 15 years ago,” Higgins said. “It will be a kind of homecoming, to return to the state where my commitment to exhibition-making began. In this role, I’ll have the opportunity to spark curiosity and excitement for contemporary art in a new generation and it’s an honor to be part of that continuum of discovery.”

Higgins brings extensive experience in curatorial practice, nonprofit leadership and arts administration to the position. She is an internationally-recognized arts leader and nonprofit executive with more than two decades of professional experience across publications, universities and nonprofit institutions. Her practice focuses on connecting visual art ecosystems in the southeastern United States to those around the world — championing artists, writers and grassroots organizations through mentorship, community-building and collaboration — all supported by successful fundraising. She holds a master of arts in curatorial studies from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and a bachelor of fine arts in printmaking from the Atlanta College of Art.

Throughout her career, programs she designed have received major grants from the Mellon Foundation, Terra Foundation, Wagner Foundation, Georgia Council for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and Teiger Foundation. Most recently, she served as executive and artistic director (2024–2026) and editor (2018–2026) of *Art Papers*, the longest-running nonprofit art journal in the United States. As executive director, Higgins conceived and led the Fire Ecology Project, a three-year strategic plan that guided the organization toward its 50th anniversary.

As a curator, she has mounted more than 45 exhibitions for institutions and art fairs, including the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. Previous roles include curator at the Zuckerman Museum of Art at Kennesaw State University (2015–2019), graduate program coordinator for the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (2013–2015) and community arts director at Atlantic Center for the Arts (2007–2011).



Higgins leads a post-performance conversation and Q&A with artist Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste, ART PAPERS LIVE, June 2, 2022, Perkerson Park Pavilion, Atlanta, GA. Photo credit: Raven Schley

She serves on the advisory board of Atlanta Art Fair and was a member of the 2023–2024 steering committee for SECAC (Southeastern Contemporary Art Conference). She has served as a juror and selection committee member for Artadia, South Arts Foundation’s Southern Prize and ARTFIELDS, among others.

“How exciting to join the dedicated team of such an esteemed academic museum. I look forward to building upon the museum’s already strong foundation. I envision a future for the museum in which its exhibitions and programs reflect the dynamism of the USF community.”

Building on this vision, Higgins will advance the museum as a focal point of the college and university by working toward shared goals, increasing visibility and accessibility and promoting interdisciplinary work among students, faculty and the Tampa Bay community. Her experience includes connecting curriculum with students, mentoring and a commitment to student internships and assistantships. She envisions the museum as a welcoming space for students to gather outside their residence halls or classrooms, known as a “third space.”

Higgins will begin her role at USF on October 12.

About the College of Design, Art & Performance

As the creative center of the University of South Florida, the College of Design, Art & Performance provides an enriched, creative, and professional environment for tomorrow's leaders in architecture, design, art, art history, dance, music, and theatre. The college embraces opportunities to embed new and existing arts programming in the rapidly growing regional communities, serving as an integral engine for socioeconomic progress through its research, advocacy, and engagement.

About the USF Contemporary Art Museum

The University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum organizes and presents significant exhibitions of contemporary art from Florida, the United States, and around the world. Serving as a teaching laboratory, the museum's curatorial initiatives and educational programs present students, faculty, and the community with current topics in contemporary art practice and explore the role of the arts in society. The museum maintains a permanent collection of more than 5,000 contemporary artworks.

The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.