

Neal Benezra

Helen and Charles Schwab Director

A Bay Area native, Neal Benezra became the director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) in 2002. Under his leadership, SFMOMA has enjoyed a period of unprecedented growth in its collections; initiated pioneering partnerships with artists, collectors and cultural institutions on the local, national and international levels; and significantly increased and strengthened its staff. Benezra has spearheaded the project to transform SFMOMA through a physical expansion of the museum, designed by Snøhetta, and an extensive enhancement of SFMOMA's programs, collections and education services.

Benezra additionally oversaw an ambitious collections campaign—the Campaign for Art—that has garnered nearly 3,000 works by artists including Francis Bacon, Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, Agnes Martin, Jackson Pollock, David Smith and many others. He has taken an innovative approach to the museum's three-year closure for construction by launching an extensive off-site programming initiative—SFMOMA On the Go—featuring exhibitions, public art installations and educational programs developed with cultural partners throughout the Bay Area and beyond.

Benezra's collaborative approach has led to a groundbreaking partnership with Doris and Donald Fisher, whose renowned collection will be housed at the new SFMOMA. Benezra has also championed deeper relationships with artists, illustrated by efforts including an increased number of seats on the Board of Trustees for artists including Vincent Fecteau and Ed Ruscha and the inauguration of the Artist Initiative, supported by a \$1.75 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, to bring artists' voices to the center of conservation and collections work.

Benezra formerly served as Deputy Director and Frances and Thomas Dittmer Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, a dual position he assumed in 2000. Previously, he spent eight years at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where he was Assistant Director for Art and Public Programs (1996–99) and Chief Curator (1991–96). From 1985 to 1991, Benezra was a curator in the department of 20th century painting and sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago. He was a curator at the Des Moines Art Center from 1983 to 1985, and before that served as one of the first coordinators of the Anderson Collection in the Bay Area.

During his more than three decades in the museum field, Benezra has organized or co-organized numerous important exhibitions, such as *Mark di Suvero at Crissy Field* (2013, SFMOMA); *Jeff Wall* (2007, SFMOMA); *Pop! From San Francisco Collections* (2004, SFMOMA); *Edward Ruscha* (2000, Hirshhorn Museum); *Bruce Nauman* (1994, Hirshhorn Museum and Walker Art Center); *Martin Puryear* (1991, Art Institute of Chicago); and *Robert Arneson* (1986, Des Moines Art Center).

Throughout his career, Benezra has served on professional panels and advisory committees, including the Pew Fellowships in the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Art Advisory Panel of the Internal Revenue Service; the Smithsonian Institution Council; the International Advisory Committee for the 21st Century Museum in Kanazawa, Japan; and

CIMAM (Comité international pour les musées et les collections d'art modern). He currently serves on the Acquisition Committee for the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; the Advisory Board of Istanbul Modern; and is a member of the Board of Trustees for the New Art Trust.

Benezra holds both an MA and a PhD in the history of art from Stanford University; an MA in the history of art from the University of California, Davis; and a BA with honors in the history of art and political science from the University of California, Berkeley.