New era set to start at San Jose’s Institute of Contemporary Art

Ali Gass succeeds Cathy Kimball as downtown gallery’s executive director

The Institute of Contemporary Art in downtown San Jose’s arty SoFA District will welcome Ali Gass as its new executive director on July 1, 2020. (Sal Pizarro/Bay Area News Group)

By SAL PIZARRO | spizarro@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
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It’s the start of a new era for San Jose’s Institute of Contemporary Art and a bit of a homecoming for Ali Gass, who will succeed Cathy Kimball as the ICA’s executive director next month.

Gass spent most of the past three years as the director of the University of Chicago’s Smart Museum of Art, but previously she had been chief curator and associate director for exhibitions and collections at Stanford University’s Cantor Arts Center and was an assistant curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
“Coming back home was a major priority,” said Gass, who said she was drawn to the ICA because of the opportunity give artists some of their exposure to the public. “A place like the ICA is dedicated to offering artists this chance. That’s the best and most exciting way to work in institutions.”
Kimball is stepping down after a hugely successful 20-year career at the ICA, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Kimball said she was thrilled with the selection of Gass because of her deep roots in the Bay Area.

“I am so proud that the organization was able to attract such a stellar arts professional and I couldn’t be happier and more confident of their choice for my successor,” she said.

Gass, 44, says contemporary art can be an important reflection of what is happening in the world around us as it is created by artists living and working in the moment. “It became a great lens onto the social, political, cultural and economic issues around us,” she said, adding that some of the best contemporary art draws on the past. “At the same time, it’s able to say something in a way we haven’t seen before or present it in a medium that we haven’t seen. Newness for the sake of newness isn’t that exciting.”

While the coronavirus pandemic has shuttered indoor museums for the time being, Gass said she’s looking forward to joining the cultural landscape of San Jose’s SoFA District, joining neighbors like MACLA and the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles. “The more exciting cultural events that are happening in San Jose, the better,” she said. “I always have loved collegiality and thinking of ways to partner with others. It feels like it’ll be wonderful to exist within this constellation of arts organizations.”

**SAN JOSE LANDMARK DEADLINE APPROACHES:** The effort by Urban Confluence Silicon Valley to create a landmark structure in San Jose continues, with the deadline to submit ideas quickly approaching on July 1.

Urban Confluence Executive Director Steve Borkenhagen said nearly 200 submissions have been received, with more than a third of them coming internationally. “We’d really like to see more local submissions because we know we have a very creative community here,” Borkenhagen said.
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560 South 1st Street

Remember Them? They're Separated Now And Look Insane

By Sal Pizarro

Sal Pizarro | San Jose metro columnist Sal Pizarro has written the Around Town column for The Mercury News since 2005. His column covers the people and events surrounding the cultural scene in Silicon Valley. In addition, he writes Cocktail Chronicles, a feature column on Silicon Valley bars and nightclubs.

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