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Contemporary Art
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chief Curator Wassan Al-Khudhairi selected as Focus Curator for the 2021 Armory Show and awarded \$25,000 VIA Art Fund 2021 Curatorial Fellowship



Photo: Orlando V Thompson II.

November 17, 2020 (St. Louis) – The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis announces that Chief Curator Wassan Al-Khudhairi is the recipient of two forms of major recognition from national arts organizations. She will be the Focus Curator for the 2021 Armory Show in New York City, and is the VIA Art Fund’s 2021 Curatorial Fellow. Both prizes were announced by the organizations over the past two days. CAM Executive Director Lisa Melandri says of Al-Khudhairi’s recognition: “It’s wonderful to see Wassan receive such notable and well-deserved acclaim. We knew when she came to CAM she would be a force for intelligent, thoughtful, and timely programming. From her very first exhibition here, *Hayv Kahraman: Acts of Reparation*, in 2017, to *Derek Fordjour: SHELTER*, in 2020, and next year’s museum-wide group exhibition, *Stories of Resistance*, Wassan expands our view of the art world and helps us realize the possibilities of what art can be and do.”

The next edition of **The Armory Show**, September 9–12, 2021, will be the first to be held at the Javits Center in central Manhattan. Al-Khudhairi will curate the Focus section of the fair, dedicated to solo- and dual-artist presentations of today’s most relevant and compelling artworks. A highlight of the fair, Focus provides additional opportunities for galleries to exhibit at The Armory Show by offering a subsidized rate. Previous curators of Focus have included Jarrett Gregory, Curator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (2017); Gabriel Ritter, Curator, Minneapolis Institute of Art (2018); Lauren Haynes, Curator of Contemporary Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (2019); and Jamillah James, Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2020).

Al-Khudhairi joins an impressive 2021 Armory Show curatorial team: Claudia Schmuckli, Curator-in-Charge of Contemporary Art and Programming, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, who will curate the Platform section of the fair, dedicated to large-scale and site-specific installations; and Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, who will chair the fourth Curatorial Leadership Summit, a one-day, invitation-only symposium of curators from around the world.

[The Armory Show 2021 Curators](#)

The **VIA Art Fund 2021 Curatorial Fellowship** includes a \$25,000 award. Selected through a nomination process that includes colleagues, constituents, and VIA partners, the VIA Curatorial Fellowship is an annual award in support of today’s visionary curatorial voices. The fellowship provides discretionary funds to midcareer curators to enable aspirational research and reflection, and to support travel or other scholarly endeavors designed to enhance a curator’s individual practice. Bridgitt Evans, President and Co-Founder of VIA Art Fund, commented: “Wassan’s curatorial expertise, which ranges from establishing the first modern art museum in Qatar, to curating biennials in Taiwan and South Korea, to connecting audiences with

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contemporary art in the American south and Midwest have given her a uniquely international perspective on the most pressing issues shaping our field.... She exemplifies the potential of curators to act as intermediaries between artist and public, forging new connections through thoughtful exhibitions and original research.”



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Al-Khudhairi says of the award: "In a year when so much is uncertain and things keep changing, I am grateful to have this support from VIA Art Fund. Curating should not happen in a vacuum and the ability to build points of connection with people in the community, through artist studio visits, experiencing art in real life, or attending an art biennial is crucial. The generosity of the fellowship creates greater possibilities for research and travel giving my work the opportunity to thrive in new ways.”

[VIA Art Fund 2021 Curatorial Fellowship](#)

Wassan Al-Khudhairi is the Chief Curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, where she has organized numerous exhibitions including those with Derek Fordjour, Stephanie Syjuco, Bethany Collins, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Guan Xiao, Hayv Kahraman, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and SUPERFLEX. Prior to her position at CAM, Al-Khudhairi was the Hugh Kaul Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Birmingham Museum of Art where she organized the first large-scale exhibition of the museum’s contemporary collection, *Third Space / shifting conversations about contemporary art*. The exhibition’s accompanying publication received the 2019 AAMC Curatorial Award for Excellence. Al-Khudhairi was invited to be a Curator for the 6th Asian Art Biennial in Taiwan in 2017 and Co-Artistic Director for 9th Gwangju Biennial in South Korea in 2012. Serving as the Founding Director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar, Al-Khudhairi oversaw the opening of the Museum in 2010 and co-curated the first presentation of the museum’s collection *Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art* and curated *Cai GuoQiang: Saraab*. She holds a BA in Art History from Georgia State University and an MA with Distinction from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

About The Armory Show

The Armory Show presents the world’s leading international galleries showcasing works from both modern masters and cutting-edge contemporary artists, and helps the art market thrive through making, buying, selling, and discovering art more accessible.

About VIA Art Fund

VIA Art Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public charity founded by an international coalition of individuals and private foundations who believe in the central role art plays in society. VIA’s activities support innovative, ambitious, and rigorous works of art and endeavors with far-reaching public impact realized in various forms including institutional production and acquisition, exhibitions, public installations, curatorial research, publications and symposia. Funding artists, curators and arts organizations around the world, VIA Art Fund awards grants in three categories—Artistic Production Grants, Incubator Grants and an annual Curatorial Fellowship grant—that exemplify VIA’s core values of Artistic Production, Thought Leadership, and Public Engagement.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis works to enrich lives and inspire curiosity, creativity, and learning through experiences with contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, the Museum reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape while engaging thousands of visitors through a wide array of public programs. CAM nurtures the creative minds of our city’s youth through free, in-depth art education, making a long-lasting impact on the community. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all.