

# Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum  
Busch-Reisinger Museum  
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

## Press Release

### **Mitra Abbaspour Appointed Curator and Head of Modern and Contemporary Art at Harvard Art Museums**



Photo: Emile Askey; courtesy of Princeton University Art Museum.

Cambridge, MA  
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Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums, today announced the appointment of Mitra Abbaspour as the new Houghton Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. She will also become the new head of the museums' Division of Modern and Contemporary Art, which oversees the collection of art from 1901 to the present day. A respected veteran in the arts field with over 20 years of experience, Abbaspour brings a dynamic vision and deep commitment to advancing global and inclusive narratives in the scholarship and presentations of art from the 20th and 21st centuries. She begins her new role at Harvard on September 11, 2023.

Abbaspour is currently the Haskell Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Princeton University Art Museum, where since 2016 she has headed the modern and contemporary collections, the most active and interdisciplinary collections area at the museum. In that time, she curated or co-curated 11 exhibitions, including *Cycle of Creativity: Alison Saar and the Toni Morrison Papers* (2023); *Colony / Dor Guez* (2022); *Helen Frankenthaler Prints: Seven Types of Ambiguity* (2019); *Frank Stella Unbound: Literature and Printmaking* (2018); and *Making History Visible: Of American Myths and National*

*Heroes* (2017). She also helped guide important art commissions for the Princeton campus, including installations by R&R Studios (Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt), Jim Campbell, Carlos Cruz-Diez, María Berrío, Maya Lin, and Titus Kaphar. Her acquisitions have exemplified the approach of a teaching museum with a global reach, connecting contemporary art to the conversations of the present and engaging directly with historical areas of the collection. She has built substantial representation of contemporary Indigenous art across media, extended representation of East Asian artists into the 21st century, and expanded the representation of Asian American, Latin American, and African American art in various geographies of the continent. She has added works by artists from the Eastern Mediterranean and Central Asia as relates to her scholarship and has partnered with faculty to acquire works related to their curricula and research.

Abbaspour previously served as associate curator in the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, NY, and as assistant curator for the California Museum of Photography at the University of California, Riverside, in addition to having served as guest curator for a number of exhibitions at other institutions. She received her M.Phil. at the Graduate Center at City University of New York, and her M.A. and B.A. from the University of California, Riverside, and Scripps College in Claremont, CA, respectively. She has taught courses in her specialization—modern and contemporary art of the Middle East—as well as in Islamic art, modern and contemporary art, and the history of photography at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York, NY; the Cooper Union, NY; Brooklyn College, NY; and at Hunter College, NY. She has authored numerous essays on contemporary artists, contributing to monographs of Reza Aramesh, Lalla Essaydi, Dor Guez, Hassan Hajjaj, Farhad Moshiri, and Shirin Neshat.

At the Harvard Art Museums, Abbaspour will work with colleagues in her division, as well as across the museums and the university, to implement a broad multiyear rethinking and reframing of the permanent collections and galleries. She will also research the collection and make new acquisitions to continue to diversify the holdings, organize major exhibitions, seek programmatic partnerships across the Harvard campus and beyond, and lead conversations on critical issues in modern and contemporary art. Through close collaboration with students and faculty—an area where she excelled during her tenure at Princeton—she will foster significant and sustained curricular use of the collection for both undergraduate and graduate teaching. Abbaspour will be a key partner to museum leadership as the institution advances its new strategic plan and expands access while welcoming new audiences following the recent launch of free-to-all admission.

“Mitra’s stellar curatorial and teaching experience, her scholarly research interests, and her passion for connecting with audiences are deeply aligned with our mission,” said Tedeschi. “My colleagues and I are thrilled to welcome her to Harvard and to work with her on amplifying our regional and global impact in the field of modern and contemporary art.”

“Modern and contemporary artists are engaged with the concerns of our lived experiences. For me, the greatest reward of an academic museum lies in the opportunity to converse with scholars across a vast expanse of disciplines—literature, political science, architecture, climate science, or cell biology, to name a few, as well as art—and to consider the world we live in and its future,” said Abbaspour. “I am delighted to be joining the remarkable team at the Harvard Art Museums to foster conversations that link the museums’ renowned collections and distinguished intellectual community.”

The Harvard Art Museums’ Division of Modern and Contemporary Art oversees a global art collection dating from 1901 to the present and includes more than 110,000 drawings, paintings, photographs, prints, sculptures, installations, objects of decorative art, and works of time-based media. Modern and contemporary works span the collections of the Fogg Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum, and Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Areas of the collection overseen by the Houghton Curator encompass great strengths and exciting opportunities for potential growth. Some highlights of notable depth include: European modernism, especially Cubism, Surrealist sculpture, and Social Realism; significant postwar

examples of figurative work and mid-century sculpture and abstract paintings; works on paper across decades; works by Fluxus artists from the 1960s and 1970s, and time-based media by Nam June Paik. The collection of contemporary art has seen targeted recent growth in works by Black, Native American, and Asian diasporic artists, as well as female artists from Latin America and the United States. The museums aim to continue their strategic expansion in these areas and especially of global representation and narratives in the collections.

### **About the Harvard Art Museums**

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Together, the collections include over 255,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies. [harvardartmuseums.org](https://www.harvardartmuseums.org)

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

### **Hours and Admission**

Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free to all visitors. For further information about visiting, including general policies, see [harvardartmuseums.org/visit](https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/visit).

### **For more information, please contact**

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