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San Antonio Museum of Art names Houston native Emily Ballew Neff its new director

Deborah Martin, Staff writer

Dec. 6, 2021



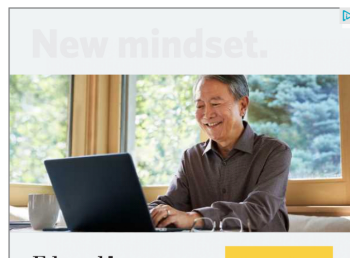
Emily Ballew Neff is the new director of the San Antonio Museum of Art.
San Antonio Museum of Art



Emily Ballew Neff, a native Texan who most recently led the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, has been named director of the San Antonio Museum of Art.

Neff will step into her new role Jan. 18. She succeeds Katie Luber, who left at the end of 2019 after about eight years in San Antonio to lead the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

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Neff said she decided to throw her hat into the ring party because of the strengths of SAMA's collections and party because it brings her back to her home state.

"The collections are deep and rich," she said. "The other thing is, the opportunity to return to Texas, which really values its art museums, was appealing to me. I have family and dear friends in Texas, and I think that if we've learned anything in the last couple of years, we treasure those relationships even more deeply.

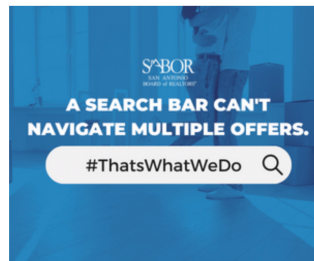
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"And I admire all the work that that has been done at SAMA in the past, and so I look forward to helping to write the next chapter."

Neff grew up in Houston, where she spent a lot of time at the Museum of Fine Arts as a child. She began her career there in 1989, starting out as a curatorial assistant and eventually becoming the first head of the department of American painting and sculpture, a post she held from 1997 to 2013. From there, she went to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, where she was director and chief curator before taking the job in Memphis.

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The board considered candidates from all over the world to lead SAMA, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

"Emily has this remarkably strong combination of experience, in scholarship and curatorial skills and management abilities," said board chairman Edward A. Hart. "Then we have this other benefit that she has Texas roots — she spent a lot of time in Houston at the Museum of Fine Arts.

"We got very visible in the last decade, thanks to the efforts of the board, but also Katie and our terrific staff. So we needed somebody to take us from where we are to yet another level, and also someone who's willing to think about what the museum needs to be in the next 40 years."

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The search for Luber's successor was put on hold until the start of this year because of the pandemic, which meant that the interim directors were in place longer than they probably would have been otherwise. The museum was led first by co-interim directors William Keyse Rudolph and Lisa Tapp until Rudolph left in March 2020. Emily Sano, the museum's Coates-Cowden-Brown senior adviser for Asian art, then became co-director with

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Tapp.

They handled a difficult period extremely well, Hart said

“I’ll never be able to say enough about their leadership,” he said.

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Written By
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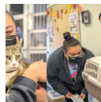
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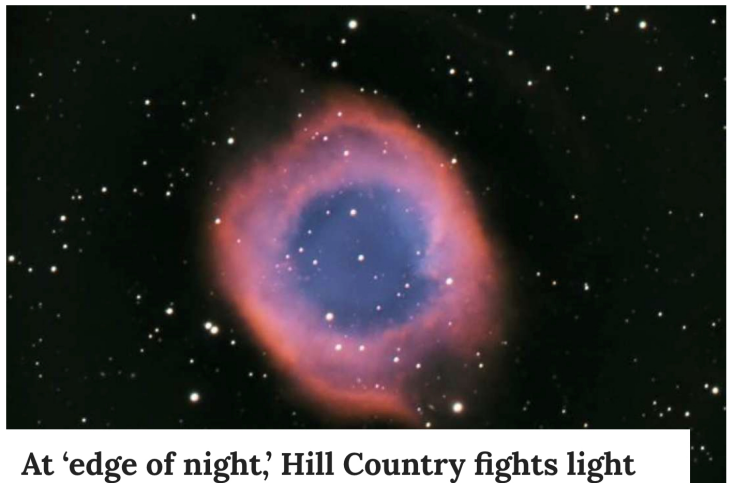
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