

# Institute of Contemporary University Art of Pennsylvania

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## **Q & A with Denise Ryner, Andrea B. Laporte Curator**

### **Q. What are some things you loved about working in the Vancouver and Berlin art community?**

**A.** Vancouver and Berlin seem like the extreme ends of a scale. In Berlin, the community is always in flux with artists, theorists and curators from pretty much every global region passing through, or arriving and quickly establishing new art spaces, collectives or satellite projects that correspond with Rome, Colombo, Jakarta, Cape Town, Buenos Aires, New York, anywhere. This of course made for a very stimulating working environment where, with little effort and no travel, I learned a variety of conditions and ideas around the presence of community and the presentation of artwork. Berlin is also an amazing place to make connections between the canonized artwork in the European historic museums, the antiquities taken from around the world (which in many cases requires redress) and up-to-the-minute contemporary artwork in the local art schools, galleries, artist studios and residencies. Located within this was Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), where this international character was reflected in our artistic teams, interns and audiences providing a lot of different perspectives and experiences that could inform the development of each event or project.

Learning to work in Vancouver meant working within a space that was defined by networked, but long-standing communities that engaged a different speed in terms of taking in new, or other perspectives. It's a community where working in the artworld means paying attention to local legacies and frequently engaging temperature-checks with audiences and colleagues. Vancouver has purposefully defined its voice as an art center in the Pacific Northwest, which made focusing on a curatorial vision in correspondence with local histories and well-defined art communities an easy task.

### **Q: Is there anything that you are looking forward to about Philadelphia's art scene?**

I've had the chance to visit ICA and the PMA during brief trips to Philadelphia in the past, but relocating here allows me to really spend the time and build the relationships that are necessary to learn about and follow the breadth of this, or any city's artistic ecology. This includes everything from the influence of Philadelphia's many art schools and students, to the DIY and community-directed spaces that drive and support artistic experimentation.

**Q. What is an integral piece of art or exhibition that inspired you as a curator?**

**A.** There are a series of exhibitions and works of art that have partly expanded my understanding and expectations of curatorial work. A recent example is the exhibition [\*Robert Houle: Red is Beautiful\*](#) which was a retrospective exhibition of Houle's work that I viewed at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Houle is Anishinaabe Saulteaux and the work in this exhibition makes clear that alongside his rigorous study and research of artistic areas such as Modern Abstraction, minimalism and color theory, he was dedicated to learning and expressing Indigenous visual form and narrative, and beyond that, activating awareness about land dispossession, genocide and cultural loss inflicted on Indigenous people as inseparable from art viewership in the exhibition. Many of the works were stunning, but it was clear that there was a deep and trusting partnership between Houle and the curator, Wanda Nanibush, for the exhibition to have offered such a thorough understanding of the artist's work and their complicated relationship with the legacies of the art histories and the art institutions they work within.

**Q. As someone who just moved to Philadelphia, what's something you're excited about or to visit within the city?**

**A.** I love to walk through cities to get a sense of what's different and what might feel unexpectedly familiar or seem similar to the places I've lived before. I'm excited to go for long, meandering walks as spring and summer weather approach and deciding on the places that will become my regular cafe or bakery.