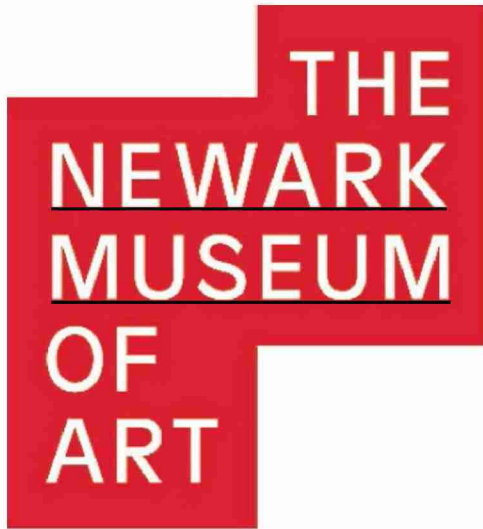


NEWARK



New frame of reference

Facing an identity crisis, the 110-year-old Newark Museum today unveils a modified name and new logo to reflect its extensive collection of art. "Museums are here not just to survive, but to thrive," says its director, herself part of the changes. **A15**

NEWARK

Museum rolls out new name to highlight its art collections



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The state's largest museum has a global art collection that ranks 12th among North America's art museums.

But even with that cachet, the Newark Museum learned in a survey that half the public didn't realize that and weren't quite sure what this grand institution on Wash-

ington Street was all about.

After 110 years, things are going to be different. The museum is rebranding itself today with a name change that calls on its roots. Please welcome the Newark Museum of Art, a moniker that Linda Harrison, its director and chief executive officer, believes will help build on its solid foundation in the arts, education and science.

"We need to take advantage of being relevant and having people get right off the bat who we are," said Harrison, who spearheaded the shift.

Who they are started in 1909 with its founding director, John Cotton Dana, who established the Newark Museum as an art museum in the Newark Public Library.

Since then, the museum has amassed collections of fine art from Asia, Africa and the Americas, and it has significant holdings in science, technology and natural history.

A cultural experience takes visitors to



the Victoria Hall of Science, the Alice and Leonard Dreyfuss Planetarium, the Maker-SPACE, the Billy Johnson Auditorium, the Alice Ransom Dreyfuss Memorial Garden, an authentic 1784 schoolhouse, the Newark Fire Museum, and the Ballantine House Victorian mansion.

Stature alone, however, is not enough.

“We wanted to understand how we are relating to the people who are here in Newark and the region,” Harrison said. “Museums are here not just to survive, but to thrive.”

Clifford Blanchard, co-chair of the board of trustees, said the new name is “perfectly appropriate,” helping to clarify for the community what the museum is about while highlighting its collections.

“It more clearly connects the museum with our mission, which, at its core, is about encouraging new types of experiences and learning engagement through art and science.”

Hiring Harrison is just as bold for the museum’s board of trustees when she left her post in January as director and chief executive officer of the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco. She’s the

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first African American in the Newark Museum’s history to be its leader in an industry that Harrison said has less than five African Americans running major museums.

“I come from a world where we must reimagine the notion of what a museum is or we lose that museum as being an anchor in the city and being a place that people can relate to and consider it a museum,” Harrison said. “That’s the challenge of museums across the country.”

In the survey, Harrison said folks knew the Newark building was a museum. They just didn’t know what type, let alone the extensive art collection. Some questioned whether it was even for them, a mindset Harrison doesn’t accept. She lives in the city, right downtown, often walking through Military Park to work, a place she wants to be an art hub for residents.

“We want to be a relevant museum for people who live here, and for the people who are coming here,” Harrison said.

It’s about telling stories in the museum’s collections, as well as providing programs that attract a wider audience with contemporary and diverse artists.

Earlier this year, the museum showcased Wendy Red Star, a contemporary multimedia artist from the Apsáalooke (Crow) Tribe, whose work examines Native American ideologies and colonialist structures.

Currently, there are two diverse exhibitions for your taste. One is “Beyond Zen,” the work of Japanese Buddhist artists from 1615 to the present. The genre then switches to a pop culture display, “What Exit, The New Jersey Spirit” an exhibit by photographer Timothy White featuring portraits of homegrown artists like Queen Latifah and John Travolta.

The name change, Harrison said, allows the museum to talk to new audiences while retaining its adult clientele with new staff challenged to think outside the box.

Say hello to Catherine Evans, former chief curator at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Museum of Art, who will be the deputy director for curatorial affairs, and Silvia Filippini Fantoni, former director of programs and audience engagement at the North Carolina Museum of Art. In Newark, she will be the deputy director of education and audience engagement.

The rollout of the name and logo today plans to be festive.

Admission is free with gallery tours, music, hands-on activities and selfie stations that will be used to create a mosaic of the celebration.

What’s in a name? Apparently, a lot by adding two words.

“We are a museum who doesn’t sit here on Washington Street,” Harrison said. “We are committed to being a cultural hub that is meaningful to the folks here in Newark and the region.”