The Art Institute of Chicago is pleased to announce the appointment of Susanne Ghez, former executive director and chief curator of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, as Adjunct Curator in the Department of Contemporary Art, effective immediately. In this capacity, Ghez will bring her seasoned expertise in contemporary art to all aspects of the museum’s engagement with the field, including exhibitions, acquisitions, and collections. She will represent the museum in Chicago, around the country, and abroad, traveling widely to visit contemporary artists and institutions, and engaging on behalf of the Art Institute in global contemporary programming.

“Susanne Ghez is one of the most widely respected curators in contemporary art, not only in Chicago but around the world,” said Douglas Druick, President and Eloise W. Martin Director of the museum. “As the art world becomes increasingly global, with significant artists emerging in Asia, the Middle East, and South America, the museum is committed to remaining a vital force in this larger world. We have long admired Susanne’s experience, knowledge, and passion for the field, and I am thrilled that she will be joining us to help survey the vast amount of contemporary art in the world today and to assist us in crafting the museum’s programs and holdings.”

“After many years of collaboration between the Art Institute and the Renaissance Society, I am happy for this opportunity to advance our relationship,” said Susanne Ghez. “I have many valued...
colleagues and friends within the museum, and I greatly admire what they have done in the field of contemporary art. It will be an honor and a pleasure to join this extraordinary institution, and I hope to be able to contribute to the important work they are doing.”

Said James Rondeau, Frances and Thomas Dittmer Chair and Curator of the Department of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute, “Susanne has been a mentor to me since I came to work in Chicago fifteen years ago, and I am still learning from her example. As our plans for contemporary art here at the museum grow more ambitious than ever before, I cannot think of a wiser eye than Susanne’s to help shape our engagement with individual artists and objects, as well as the program as a whole.”

Susanne Ghez joined the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, the country’s oldest museum of contemporary art, in 1973, and became its executive director and chief curator the following year. Under her leadership, the Renaissance Society blossomed into one of the most respected venues for contemporary art in the world, and it is now internationally recognized as one of the most original and ambitious contemporary art museums in the United States. During her tenure there, Ghez curated more than 160 exhibitions, including early exhibitions devoted to artists who have since become leading figures in the contemporary art world.

In the 1970s, Ghez introduced Chicago audiences to the work of groundbreaking conceptual artists Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Smithson, and Lawrence Weiner in one-person shows, while painters Susan Rothenberg, Julian Schnabel, and Donald Sultan were featured in a noteworthy 1979 group exhibition, Visionary Images. In the 1980s, the Renaissance Society balanced exhibitions of art by pioneering Europeans (Daniel Buren, Louise Bourgeois, and Thomas Struth in one-person shows; German neo-expressionists Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz in a group show of graphic works) with shows highlighting prominent Americans (Nancy Spero, Mike Kelley, and Michael Asher in solo exhibitions; and a 1985 show of “New Sculpture” which included Haim Steinbach, Jeff Koons, and Robert Gober). The 1990s brought a number of landmark exhibitions, exposing Midwest audiences for the first time to the now legendary candy spills of Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1994) and the black paper silhouettes of Kara Walker (1997). The Society commissioned countless new works and sponsored residencies enabling artists such as Narelle Jubelin (1994), Luc Tuymans (1995), Shahzia Sikander (1998), Moshekwa Langa (1999) and Pierre Huyghe (2001) to present cultural perspectives from Australia, Belgium, Pakistan, South Africa, and France, respectively. Ghez’s programming has also included seminal exhibitions...
for artists who have made Chicago their home: Ed Paschke (whose first retrospective was held at the Society in 1982), Vera Klement, Hirsch Perlman, Gaylen Gerber, Arturo Herrera, Kerry James Marshall, Judy Ledgerwood, and Helen Mirra, among others, have had one-person shows at the Renaissance Society. After forty years at the helm, Ghez retired from the Renaissance Society earlier this year.

Ghez’s energy and passion have not been restricted to the Renaissance Society. She also served from 1999 to 2002 as co-curator of Documenta 11, one of the best-known and long-established contemporary art exhibitions in the world. She has served as juror for competitions and exhibitions such as the Baloise Kunstpreis, Basel, Switzerland; Wolfgang Hahn Prize, Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany; and David L. Lawrence Convention Center Public Art Program, Pittsburgh. Additionally, Ghez has been a panelist and nominator for the Illinois Arts Council; National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Visual Arts Fellowships; NEA Special Exhibitions; NEA Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions (FACIE); Seattle Art Museum Project; Jerome Foundation; Tiffany Foundation; Culture Foundation of the Stadtsparkasse Munich; and Brooklyn Academy of Music Visual Arts Initiative.

Beyond curating, Ghez maintains an extensive record of advisory and consulting roles with a global reach. She served as a member of the New Work Advisory Committee, MacArthur Foundation (1991); International Art Advisory Council of the Wexner Center for the Arts (1991–present); International Advisory Committee for the Carnegie International (1999–2000); Museum Studies program at Northwestern University (2001); International Advisory Committee for the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (2003–2005); Advisory Board for the MIT Visual Arts Center (2007–present); and Advisory Board at the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2008–present). Ghez is currently an affiliate member of the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago and is a Life Member of the University’s Visual Arts Visiting Committee.

Educated at Bryant College, the University of California, Berkeley, and Columbia University in New York, Ghez was recognized for her important contribution to the arts with honorary doctorates from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2003 and the San Francisco Art Institute in 2006, as well as numerous awards for curatorial excellence, including the 1996 Curators Grant from the Peter Norton Family Foundation and the coveted International Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. Earlier this year, Ghez received the prestigious Benton Medal for Distinguished Public Service from the University of Chicago, awarded to those who have contributed in a systematic and distinguished way to shaping minds and
disseminating knowledge. Nominated by members of the University of Chicago faculty and voted on by the Council of the University Senate, the Benton Medal has also been awarded to historian Timuel Black and U.S. Senator Paul Simon. Ghez is the 12th recipient of the award, which was created in 1967 to honor Senator William H. Benton.

At the Art Institute, her first curatorial project will be an exhibition of new work commissioned by the museum for the Bluhm Family Terrace by the Iranian Berlin-based artist Nairy Baghramian, slated to open in May 2014.

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