



Lucas Museum appoints a chief curator and five more women to key roles



Pilar Tompkins Rivas has been named chief curator of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. (Monica Orozco)

By [Deborah Vankin](#)

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George Lucas' \$1-billion [Museum of Narrative Art](#), under construction in Los Angeles' Exposition Park, announced on Thursday the hiring of a chief curator who will join five other key new staffers, some plucked from major institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

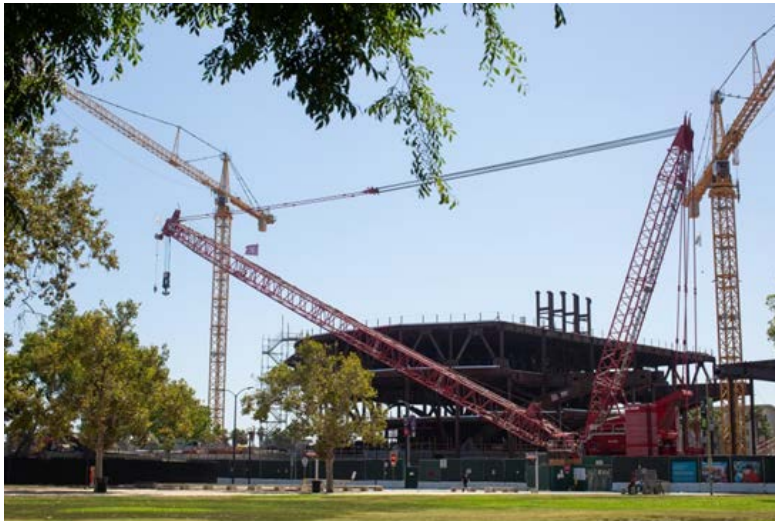
“This is an incredible moment for us,” said museum Director and Chief Executive [Sandra Jackson-Dumont](#), who came to the Lucas Museum in January from the Met. “So much emphasis has been on the building itself and this feels like a moment when the institution itself is starting to form, and that’s exciting. It feels like a big leap forward.”

[Pilar Tompkins Rivas](#) will be the Lucas Museum’s chief curator and deputy director of curatorial and collections. She comes from the [Vincent Price Art Museum](#) at East Los Angeles College, where she was director and chief curator for the last four years. Before that she served as coordinator of curatorial initiatives at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and she has held curatorial and project coordinator positions at Santa Monica’s 18th Street Arts Center, the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and the Claremont Museum of Art.

Jackson-Dumont called Tompkins Rivas “a fantastic curator with an incredible roster of exhibitions that’s brought new work and scholarship and incredible partnerships across the field.” She’s also someone who has “a commitment to Los Angeles and is very connected,” Jackson-Dumont added, “with an understanding of art history and a sweeping knowledge of Latinx art. She’s committed to a diversity pipeline. She’s also very interested in the notion of storytelling.”

That five of the six new hires are people of color, and that all are women, is in line with Jackson-Dumont’s vision as the museum’s self-described “chief diversity officer.”

“I’m an advocate for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, that’s a huge part of who I am,” she said. “But when I’m hiring, I’m looking for the best and most qualified candidates — and that was them.”



The future Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, under construction in Exposition Park on Tuesday, July 7, 2020. (Gabriella Angotti-Jones / Los Angeles Times)

Lucas Museum co-founder [Mellody Hobson](#) has emphasized the museum’s civic-minded and educational mission, calling it “a school for schools,” given the 500 schools within a five-mile

radius and the proximity to USC. So the appointment of a managing director of learning and engagement was key. Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, previously director of adult learning and associate curator of interpretation at the Art Institute of Chicago, will fill that role.

“Our commitment to education is across age demographics and interests,” Jackson-Dumont said. “I’m a fan of Nenette’s commitment to timely discussion and to making complex and important ideas engaging for anyone — to talk about issues of the day by looking deeply through the lens of works of art.”

The Lucas Museum has also brought on Amanda Hunt, formerly the Museum of Contemporary Art’s director of education and senior curator of programs, to assume the role of director of public programs and creative practice. The Met’s head of special events, Anais Disla, will fill the role of director of special events. Larissa Gentile, a project manager who most recently helped the Whitney Museum of American Art on a permanent installation in Hudson River Park in New York, will serve as managing director of special projects. And Erica Neal, previously a senior manager of IS Infrastructure at CalOptima, will step into the role of director of computing and infrastructure.

Former Lucas Museum deputy director Judy Kim departed in June. Jackson-Dumont said she couldn’t comment on personnel issues but said the museum was “more than grateful for her efforts.” Kim did not respond to a request for comment after her departure.

The Ma Yansong-designed Lucas Museum broke ground in March 2018. It will feature Lucas’ 100,000-object personal collection of fine and popular art, which includes paintings, sculpture and photography as well as movies, illustration and comic art, not to mention “Star Wars” ephemera.

The timeline — with “substantial construction” to be complete in 2021— is still being figured out, Jackson-Dumont said. Coronavirus briefly stalled construction of the building in late March, but the fifth of the building’s five floors is rising. Walls are being built for two ground-floor theaters, and the floor is being poured for the first-floor café.

“We’re making tremendous progress,” Jackson-Dumont said.

The six new hires reflects a significant moment for the museum, she added.

“It’s cementing. We’ve been pouring the foundation of the museum, literally, and this is pouring the foundation of how the museum will be and how it will work.”
