

The Vancouver Art Gallery Confirms Eva Respini and Sirish Rao as Co-CEOs *Unanimous Board Decision Establishes Long-Term Leadership for Gallery's Next Chapter*



September 28, 2026, Vancouver, BC // Traditional Coast Salish lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery Association Board of Trustees today announced the permanent appointment of **Eva Respini** and **Sirish Rao** as Co-CEOs, confirming a dual leadership model designed to advance the Gallery's artistic ambition, operational resilience and global reach. The decision reflects the Board's confidence in Respini and Rao's leadership over the past year, during which they strengthened the Gallery's financial position, deepened its commitment to art, artists and community, and established a renewed vision for the institution's future. This announcement follows a rigorous evaluation process undertaken by the Governance and People Committee of the Board. In addition to assessing organizational performance, the Board sought extensive input from staff, donors, artists, community leaders and trusted advisors.

"Eva and Sirish have demonstrated exceptional leadership distinguished by shared purpose," says **Jon Stovell**, Chair of the Board of Trustees. "They each bring different but deeply complementary perspectives to the Gallery, and together, they are expanding our sense of what the Vancouver Art Gallery can be and the role it can play in the twenty-first century."

Moving forward, Respini will serve as Co-CEO & Chief Curator, leading the Gallery's artistic vision, including exhibition strategy, collection development, curatorial partnerships and the new building project. Rao will serve as Co-CEO & Executive Director, leading operations, earned revenue and finance as well as community outreach, institutional partnerships and interdisciplinary programming, including the Gallery's Art of Wellbeing

Lab and the Centre for Global Asias. Both will bring their extensive experience and expertise to bear on the programmatic direction of the future Vancouver Art Gallery.

The two were named Interim Co-CEOs in March 2025. Since then, they have strengthened the Gallery's leadership, audiences and civic role by:

- Reigniting audience momentum, with admissions and membership reaching their highest levels since before the pandemic.
- Reconstituting the executive leadership team to support institutional stability, accountability and long-term growth.
- Reimagining the curatorial program on the Gallery's distinguished collection of over 13,000 artworks, including the opening of its first dedicated collection floor in more than two decades, *Highlights from the Collection*.
- Expanding the Gallery's local community engagement and international reach through new partnerships, programs and public-facing initiatives.
- Charting a renewed vision for the new Vancouver Art Gallery, including leading the national architect selection process that commissioned Formline Architecture + Urbanism and KPMB Architects to design a sustainable new home grounded in the Gallery's rich history.

Since joining the Gallery three years ago, Eva Respini has shaped a renewed artistic direction and energy for the institution, placing its distinguished permanent collection at the heart of the Gallery while expanding its international profile. She has strengthened the collection through major acquisitions and gifts, including works by **Nan Goldin** and **Stephen Shore** and 122 artworks from the **Brigitte and Henning Freybe** collection, the most significant donation of international contemporary art in the Gallery's history. Respini has also created new opportunities to build the collection for the future, including leading significant co-acquisitions with institutions in Canada and the US, and establishing the Curator's Council to support the acquisition of works by emerging and established women artists. Her exhibition program has brought major artistic voices to Vancouver and positioned the Gallery within urgent global conversations, including through *Future Geographies: Art in the Century of Climate Change*, which opened to international acclaim and served as a testing ground for how museums can work more sustainably.

"I am honoured to co-lead the Gallery with Eva at this pivotal moment," says Rao. "She brings a truly thrilling international perspective that is shaped by her experience at some of the world's leading museums, along with a global network of artists and curators that creates new possibilities for Vancouver. She has an incredible clarity of vision and ambition, brings a commitment to curatorial rigour and accessible storytelling through exhibitions, and a deep belief in the role artists and museums can play in helping us understand the world around us."

Sirish Rao joined the Gallery in January 2023, and has strengthened the Gallery's institutional capacity, audience engagement and civic impact, building new partnerships and expanding access to art across communities. Under his leadership, Rao has positioned the Gallery at the forefront of new thinking about the role cultural institutions can play in society, including through the award-winning Art of Wellbeing Lab and the launch of a globally unique partnership with the BC Parks Foundation's PaRx prescription program, an initiative that enables healthcare professionals to prescribe free Gallery admission to their patients. He has advanced the Centre for Global Asias as a national platform for exhibitions, research and public programming, repositioning Vancouver and Canada's place within local and global conversations on art and ideas. His leadership has been recognized through his inclusion in *Vancouver Magazine's* Power 50, receipt of the King Charles III Coronation Medal and recognition as a "Creative Force" by *The Tyee*.

"Sirish is an extraordinary partner, and I am delighted to continue our co-leadership," says Respini. "He brings a deep commitment to community and an understanding of Vancouver's unique place in the Pacific, building

relationships across the Asia-Pacific that are opening new opportunities for the Gallery. Sirish is always asking: how do we bring people through our doors who might not otherwise come to an art museum? That question—how we make the Gallery more welcoming, relevant and connected to the communities we serve—is at the heart of so much of what we are building together.”

As the Co-CEOs take up their permanent roles, they are focused on developing dynamic new exhibitions and programmatic initiatives for local and international stages, cultivating support from Vancouver’s business and philanthropic communities, and realizing the new Vancouver Art Gallery.

Respini and Rao’s permanent appointment also marks an important next step in building the leadership team that will carry this vision forward. As part of this next chapter, longtime Gallery leaders **Diana Freundl** and **Stephanie Rebick** will join the Gallery’s executive leadership team. Diana oversees collections, research and public programming, while Stephanie leads exhibitions and publishing. They join **Jasmine Bradley**, who leads the Gallery’s communications, brand, government relations and audience engagement strategy; **Jackie Graham**, who leads philanthropy and fundraising; **Grant Mosby**, who oversees finance and operations; and **Kulwinder Sall**, who oversees people and organizational culture. Together, this expanded team brings expertise from across the institution to advance the Gallery’s artistic and public mission and build a strong foundation for its future.

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Image: Sirish Rao and Eva Respini, Co-CEOs of the Vancouver Art Gallery, in the permanent collection vault,
Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

ABOUT EVA RESPINI

Eva Respini, now Co-CEO & Chief Curator, joined the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2023 as Deputy Director & Director of Curatorial Programs.

Respini is an internationally renowned curator with a deeply global outlook, having lived in five countries by the age of 18. She has organized major exhibitions for museums and arts organizations in Canada, Europe, and the US, and serves as curatorial advisor to several projects, including the 2026 Toronto Biennial. From 2015 to 2023, she led the highly acclaimed artistic program at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston (ICA/Boston) as Deputy Director and Barbara Lee Chief Curator, organizing major exhibitions of artists such as Firelei Báez, John Akomfrah, Huma Bhabha and William Forsythe. In 2022, she served as the curator and co-commissioner for the U.S. Pavilion’s historic presentation of Simone Leigh at the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. Respini also organized the highly successful mid-career survey of Leigh’s work that toured across the United States from 2023 through 2025.

Prior to her tenure at the ICA/Boston, Respini served as Curator at the Museum of Modern Art for more than a decade in the department of photography, where she curated numerous acclaimed exhibitions of contemporary art and photography, including the major retrospectives of Cindy Sherman and Walid Raad.

Respini has lectured widely on contemporary art in universities throughout North America and taught at institutions including Columbia University, Yale University, the School of Visual Arts in New York, and Harvard University, where for five years she conducted a seminar on curatorial practice in the Graduate School of Design. She has published numerous books and catalogues, in addition to contributions to museum publications and periodicals.

ABOUT SIRISH RAO

Sirish Rao, now Co-CEO & Executive Director, joined the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2023 as Director of Public Engagement & Learning.

A native of Bangalore, India, and a trained Himalayan mountain guide, Rao has built a career in arts and culture across India, Europe, the UK, the US and Canada—work recognized with numerous honours, including the Lieutenant Governor's Arts and Music Award. For a decade he served as Director of the Chennai-based Tara Books, transforming it from a startup into one of India's most award-winning publishing houses and building partnerships with leading international institutions including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Frankfurt Book Fair, Kunsthal Rotterdam, the Museum of London, and the Jaipur Literature Festival.

After relocating to Vancouver in 2010, Rao co-founded the Indian Summer Festival and, as its Founding Artistic Director, built it into one of Canada's most acclaimed platforms for public discourse. Over more than a thousand presentations, he brought together some of the world's foremost thinkers and artists — from writers Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Ben Okri to acclaimed filmmaker Deepa Mehta and Nobel laureates Harold Varmus and Joseph Stiglitz, alongside Booker, Grammy, and Oscar winners and rising talents from around the world.

A public intellectual as well as an acclaimed author, Rao's own books have been translated into twenty languages and have won numerous international awards. He has been writer-in-residence at the University of Kent, Canterbury, and Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

His civic and cultural leadership extends well beyond the Gallery: he is a past Vice-Chair of the Vancouver Foundation and Board Director of the Vancouver International Film Festival and currently serves on the Advisory Council of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC and as a mentor with the Loran Scholars Foundation.

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931 on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's celebrated exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region—through the Centre for Global Asias (formerly the Institute of Asian Art) founded in 2014. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Gallery's new Art of Wellbeing lab furthers its commitment to community by promoting the role of art in fostering health and wellbeing. Developed in collaboration with healthcare professionals, researchers and Indigenous Elders, the lab creates opportunities for individuals to engage with art in ways that support mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Committed to inclusivity and accessibility, the Gallery welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to share perspectives, build community and shape our collective future through art.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the B.C. Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.