

## First Female Director for the Barber Institute of Fine Arts

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History has been made this week at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, with the appointment of its first female Director.

Dr Ann Sumner, currently Head of Fine Art for Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales, and based at the National Museum Cardiff, will take up her post as the fifth Director of the Barber Institute on 1 October following the retirement of the current Director, Professor Richard Verdi OBE.

Dr Sumner was educated at the Courtauld Institute, University of London, and undertook her PhD at Newnham College, Cambridge. She began her career at the National Portrait Gallery, London and has held curatorial positions at the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Harewood House Trust and the Holburne Museum, University of Bath. She has held her current post at Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales for the past seven years. Her particular interests include seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish art, British portraiture and miniatures and French Impressionist painting.

Vice Chancellor Professor Michael Sterling today welcomed the appointment and paid tribute to Professor Verdi's achievements.

"We would like to record the University's enormous debt of gratitude to Richard Verdi, who retires in September, for what he has achieved at the Barber Institute over the past seventeen years. He has developed the collection, the acquisitions and exhibitions programme and the education and outreach activities extensively, bringing the gallery to its current high profile as a centre of excellence in the galleries and museums world, not to mention his work in developing the University's Department of History of Art.

'We are delighted to be able to announce Dr Sumner's appointment to this prestigious position. Dr Sumner is a distinguished gallery professional with a superlative track record in curating collections and exhibitions. We are confident that she is a worthy successor to the Directorship, and will further enhance the Barber's standing.'

Hugh Carslake, chairman of the Henry Barber Trust, which owns the fine art collection and is an essential funder of the Barber Institute's activities, said: "The Trustees were highly impressed with Dr Sumner's breadth of experience, and are very much looking forward to working with her. We are confident that she will bring a wealth of expertise, innovation, ideas and energy to the gallery.

Mr Carslake, added: "The Barber Institute is now recognised as one of the finest small galleries in Europe, which is in no small part testament to the enormous contribution Richard has made to the gallery, and to the cultural and academic life of the University, the city and the art world - regionally, nationally and internationally. We are immensely grateful to him for his work here and wish him a long, successful and happy retirement."

Dr Sumner said: 'I am delighted to have been appointed Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts and very much look forward to taking up my position in the autumn. I have always admired the range and quality of the collections and the excellent exhibition programme. This is a wonderful opportunity, and it is an honour to follow in the footsteps of Richard Verdi.'

Ends

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Notes for Editors

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts was founded in 1932. Its founder, Dame Martha Constance Hattie Barber, stipulated that it should be an Institute for the University 'for the study and encouragement of Art and Music', and that its collection should be 'of that standard of quality required by the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection'. It was opened in July 1939 by Queen Mary. Today it houses a collection of more than 1,000 paintings, drawings, sculptures and prints by most of the key figures in the history of art, including major works by Botticelli, Bellini, Rubens, Poussin, Gainsborough, Turner, Rossetti, Manet, Degas, Monet and Magritte.

The permanent collection of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts is owned and governed by the Henry Barber Trust, which funds acquisitions for, and management of, the collection, as well contributing substantially to the programme of exhibitions, concerts and events.

The Barber Institute building is owned by the University of Birmingham and also houses the University's Departments of History of Art and Music.

Directors of the Barber Institute to date:

Thomas Bodkin (1935–52)

Sir Ellis Waterhouse (1952-70)

Hamish Miles (1970-1990)

Richard Verdi (1990-2007)

Ann Sumner (October 2007- )

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