

## Art Agency, Partners

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## Right Place, Right Time

### The New Museum



Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo credit: Dean Kaufman

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**New York** - Many people believe you make your own fate. I don't. I was in the right place at the right time. Someone who had achieved greatness herself—Marcia Tucker—believed in me, entrusting me to fulfill her vision and to discover my own.

Marcia founded the [New Museum of Contemporary Art](#), which is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. At the age of 19 I became its first employee. I wasn't qualified to be a curator—I hadn't known a thing about contemporary art until I met Marcia a few months earlier as a student volunteering at the Whitney Museum of American Art—but she empowered people because she had such great faith in those she placed her trust in.

Marcia was a charismatic and inspiring person—the last of a great generation of activist curators—who were an integral part of the artist community and who exhibited radical new ideas in art in real time, in the periods in which they were envisioned and made.

The New Museum was created as a safe haven for the untested in new art, created in the spirit of the alternative spaces that were the center of the contemporary art community, but with the professional standards of museums. Everything began and ended with artists. They built the museum, were our inspiration, and in a period where there were virtually no collectors for the work of artists younger than Donald Judd, they were our audience, spiritual guides, and judges.

The world has changed dramatically since the museum was founded. There soon developed a large and voracious market for collecting The New, and in recent years, the focus of collecting contemporary art has shifted from the artist to the product, from patronage to capital formation. But the New Museum, under the equally visionary leadership of its second and current director, Lisa Phillips, continues to put artistic practice at the center of its values.

Marcia built into the mission of the New Museum the elasticity to be able to always adapt as the times and our frames of reference change. To endeavor to always be relevant, to serve The New in art, and to present, interpret, and reinterpret contemporary art and the work of artists who have yet to be fully understood—to do that well and to be willing to risk failure remains at the foundation of what this museum does.

Those values set the foundation for virtually all the work I have done since being a student curator, formed in me through Marcia and the principals that defined the New Museum. I remember the first time she took me on a studio visit, a sacred process for which she had a precise ethical code. She told me at first to observe, say nothing, and learn.

Here was her rule book: never spend less than 45 minutes; don't critique; try to understand what the artist is attempting to communicate; ask probing questions; offer insights—even if you think the work is terrible, you have been invited into a person's vulnerability, a place where an artist spends most of their time alone, filling the emptiness, endeavoring to be original, truthful, moving, profound, themselves; respect the endeavor, the commitment.

So, on behalf of all of us who have benefited from the museum that consistently celebrates the new, I thank you, and salute Marcia, Lisa, the board of trustees past and present, for the next 40-year journey.