

# Gabi Ngcobo appointed new director of Kunstinstituut Melly

Press release — 22 August 2023



- The director's appointment follows an open call.
- Gabi Ngcobo succeeds Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, director since 2018.
- A director at this institution has a maximum of two three-year contracts.

The Supervisory Board of Kunstinstituut Melly in Rotterdam announces the appointment of Gabi Ngcobo as its new director. A renowned curator internationally, Ngcobo begins her tenure in January 2024. Ngcobo arrives at this position from South Africa, where she is Curatorial Director of the Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria.

Ngcobo will succeed Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, director since

2018 and who concludes her position at the end of 2023. At Kunstinstituut Melly, a director has a maximum tenure of six years.

Annet Lekkerkerker, chair of Kunstinstituut Melly's Supervisory Board, states "We are convinced that Gabi Ngcobo's experience and ideas will be of great significance to our institution in the coming years, as much as to the field of contemporary art in the Netherlands and abroad. We look forward to her arrival, and to warmly welcome her at Melly." Lekkerkerker is the chair of the Executive Board of the Amsterdam University of the Arts (AHK) and has been part of Kunstinstituut Melly's board since 2017.

"I'm excited and honored to be joining Kunstinstituut Melly as its director," says Ngcobo via email, adding, "This is an institution with a critical history; an institution that has had to face head-on challenging questions of our time. I look forward to working with the team towards the next steps."

In recent years, Ngcobo was key in positioning Javett-UP as a living academy. She organized several exhibitions there since 2021, as well as new commissions with artists Oscar Murillo, Nolan Oswald Dennis and Luana Vitra, among others. Previously, Ngcobo was the curator of the tenth edition of the Berlin Biennale in 2018, *We Don't Need Another Hero*, and was part of the curatorial team of the thirty-second edition of the São Paulo Biennale in 2016, *Incenteza Viva*.

Ngcobo observes that, "Over the years, Melly has strengthened its position locally by embracing a collaborative approach. I am dedicated to ensuring that it remains human friendly, accountable, and future-looking." A short bio of Gabi Ngcobo is below.

## **An open call issued by Kunstinstituut Melly; the selection process**

The director's search at Kunstinstituut Melly included an open call, including a position profile made by its Supervisory Board. The chair of the search committee was Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, who is Senior Curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Van der Heide has been a member of Kunstinstituut Melly's Supervisory Board for almost three years.

The position profile for a new director and the open call for applications were shaped after the Supervisory Board held conversations with more than thirty stakeholders, including artists, curators, educators, and supporters. All board members and a number of staff members participated in one or more parts in the selection process, including assessment of applications and interviews with candidates. During the final round of interviews and discussion, the presence and advice of De Ateliers Amsterdam director Maxine Kopsa was included. Kunstinstituut Melly's board members are Fariba Derakhshani, Timme Geerlof, Stijn Huijts, Annet Lekkerkerker, Annuska Pronkhorst, Gabriel Lester, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, and Yin Yin Wong. Short bios for each of them can be found [here](#).

Van der Heide explains that the search committee was impressed by Gabi Ngcobo's collaborative leadership style, management experience, and curatorial vision. The committee chair also says that, "Ngcobo's proven track record in contemporary art, education, curating and international collaboration, in addition to her successful leadership of noteworthy biennials and arts organizations make her very well-suited to lead the development of Kunstinstituut Melly towards an exciting future."

The search committee noted that Gabi's visionary practice as a curator—and also as an artist and educator—is rooted in lived experience. She examines global discourses and cultural developments, and tangibly relates these to her immediate surroundings. Van der Heide adds, "There is a common quest to transform institutions towards being more just and joyous. Ngcobo is well experienced in public engagement; she brings people along, and encourages people to be authentically themselves. She is an open collaborator. She has an understanding that radicality has roots, and that this means looking into history as much as into the future."

## **A director at this institution has a six-year tenure at its maximum.**

Since 2018, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy is the director of Kunstinstituut Melly. Her tenure ends in December 2023. Six years is the maximum period for a director's tenure at Melly. "This longstanding commitment to make leadership change is exemplary in the field," says Hernández Chong Cuy, "It involves a renewed artistic vision for our institution, it expands its networks,

and it brings to it new management styles reminding us to be relevant, and engaged to our times and ecosystem."

"We thank Sofia for all her work, her energy, and her important contribution to Kunstinstituut Melly," Annet Lekkerkerker says, and explains, "She has commissioned new work and organized exhibitions with many interesting artists as Melike Kara, Iris Kensmil, Teresa Margolles, and Cecilia Vicuña, among so many others. She also steered the institution through the corona pandemic, and led its name change initiative in an exemplary manner." Kunstinstituut Melly was formerly known as Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. You can read about its renaming [here](#).

*My Oma* is Hernández Chong Cuy's last exhibition at Kunstinstituut Melly, which she co-organized with curators Rosa de Graaf, Jessy Koeiman, Julija Mockutė, and Vivian Zihlerl. The exhibition opens on December 8-10, 2023 with a weekend of programs, including a farewell event for the director.

Since Kunstinstituut Melly's foundation in 1990, the appointed directors have been given meaningful time, resources and support to direct and program at the institution. Its former directors are: Chris Dercon from 1990 to 1995; Bartomeu Marí from 1996 to 2001; Catherine David from 2002 to 2004; Hans Maarten van den Brink, interim director from May 2004 to April 2006; Nicolaus Schafhausen from 2006 to 2011; and Defne Ayas from 2012 to 2017.

## About Gabi Ngcobo

Since 2021, Gabi Ngcobo has been the Curatorial Director of the Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria (Javett-UP) in South Africa. For years, she has also developed independent curatorial projects and collaborated with various institutions in different parts of the world. Among these are *The Show is Over* (2022) at the South London Gallery, in the UK, which she co-organized with artist Oscar Murillo, and *The 't' is Silent* (2021) at the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenes in Deurle, Belgium. In 2018, she curated the tenth edition of the Berlin Biennale in Germany: *We Don't Need Another Hero*. In 2016, she was one of the co-curators of the 32nd São Paulo Biennial in Brazil: *Incenteza Viva*.

Ngcobo has also been a lecturer at the Wits School of Arts in

Johannesburg. She is also a founding member of the Johannesburg-based collaborative platforms NGO – Nothing Gets Organised (f. 2016), and was a co-founder of the Center for Historical Reenactments (2010-2014). Her writing has been published widely. Recent essays were included in the exhibition catalogs *Shooting Down Babylon: The Tracey Rose Retrospective* (2022) at Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa; *Uneven Bodies* (2021) at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, Aotearoa New Zealand; and, *The Stronger We Become* (2019) in the South African Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Italy.

Kunstinstituut Melly's mission is to present exhibitions and organize activities that engage the public in experiencing and learning from the latest developments in contemporary art and theory. It creates exhibitions, publications, and educational programs of artistic merit and cultural significance. It also commissions new art, supports innovative research, and advocates for cultural partnerships. Kunstinstituut Melly conducts original curatorial work, fosters public dialogue, and welcomes audiences year-round in its +3,500m<sup>2</sup> nineteenth-century building, located at 50 Witte de Withstraat in the Cool District of Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

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# Kunstinstituut Melly

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