

Fresno Art Museum names new executive director

By Donald
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Front view of the Fresno Art Museum.

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After nearly a year of no one in the position, the Fresno Art Museum has a new executive director: Michele Ellis Pracy who brings 25 years of museum experience to the job. She most recently was director of the Ojai Valley Museum in Ojai, where during a five-year tenure she brought a “small-town” museum up to the level of an accreditation-worthy institution, she said.

Linda Cano stepped down at the end of last March after four years as executive director. Ellis Pracy will begin her new position March 2. She was one of 25 applicants for the position.

“What attracted me to the position is that it’s a museum of longevity,” Ellis Pracy said Friday by phone from a moving truck headed to Fresno. “It has a long-standing reputation for presenting California art. It’s flexible and takes risks in what it shows.”

One of her goals, she said, is to continue to do original exhibitions and expand the focus on artists who live and work in the Fresno area.

Ellis Pracy’s experience includes working in the art and history departments at the Oakland Museum of California, as

a corporate curator for the Transamerica Pyramid, and as a lecturer at the San Francisco Art Institute and California College of Arts and Crafts.

“We expect that, with her guidance, the museum can look forward to a period of growth and increased visibility in the Fresno community,” said board president Joe Sciarrone in a statement.

Ellis Pracy is taking over at an institution that has been challenged in recent years. The 2010 demise of the Fresno Metropolitan Museum soured many people from donating to museums, and the country’s economic woes made for a tough environment for all arts organizations.

In 2009, the museum’s budget was about \$1.2 million, compared to \$750,000 now, which Sciarrone in September said is the bare minimum for the museum’s size.

Fund-raising will be crucial for Ellis Pracy, who said she is optimistic about the museum’s finances. (That’s the reason she was on that moving truck.) One of her first tasks will be to hire a development director, she says.

“I run a museum like a business,” she added. “It’s crucial to me that we’re in the black.”

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