



Brad Wheeler, "Museum of Contemporary Art plans housewarming party after 'pretty intense' relocation project," The Globe and Mail, January 31st, 2018

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Museum of Contemporary Art plans housewarming party after 'pretty intense' relocation project

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"It's been pretty intense," says Heidi Reitmaier, two weeks into her heavy new job as executive director and CEO of the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada. "I won't deny that."

Reitmaier is to be taken at her word. She took over leadership of MOCA with the art museum years deep into its challenging transition from a long-time site on Toronto's Queen Street West to its new home further to the northwest, in the city's Junction neighbourhood. This week it was announced that the museum will reopen in its new home on May 26, roughly a year later than was originally forecast, and almost two years after Chantal Pontbriand left the museum, by "mutual agreement," as its first-ever chief executive officer less than eight months after she assumed the position.

MOCA will open its doors for an inaugural exhibition, BELIEVE, that looks at what it means to inhabit a truly pluralistic society. "I think questions around beliefs and values and ideologies and behaviours are at the top of that," says Reitmaier, a Toronto native who joins MOCA from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. "The show opens up a lot of questions for us to tackle."

The exhibition will feature the work of 15 local, Canadian and international artists. Included among them are Jeneen Frei Njootli, a Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation artist who uses traditional materials and ancestral techniques.

Los Angeles-based collagist Barbara Kruger and Awol Erizku (the fast-rising photographer responsible for the viral portrait of a pregnant Beyoncé whose first European solo art exhibition was an anti-Trump show held last spring at Ben Brown Fine Arts in London) are among other participants.

The exhibition will occupy the second and third floors of the former Tower Automotive Building, shuttered in 2006 but now revitalized. The building's ground floor, described by Reitmaier as MOCA's "front porch," will be open and porous, free of charge and animated by the public. The space is to feature a rotating set of artists' projects, as well as amenities including an outdoor plaza, café and shop.

The fourth floor will house 20 artist studios. MOCA has partnered with Akin, an organization dedicated to providing affordable space for practising Toronto artists. Initial plans called for the museum to occupy only the first 2 1/2 floors of the renovated industrial building rebranded as Auto Building. With a fifth floor set aside for offices, meeting rooms and event space, MOCA is now leasing half of the total 10 floors.

"I think MOCA realized quite a while ago that more space would be required to fulfill some of its ambitions," Reitmaier says.

Part of MOCA's mandate involves its envisioned role as an accessible cultural centre in Toronto's west side. To that end, the museum will open with a free weekend of activities for the public. MOCA's rebirth has been a long time coming: Seeing will be believing.