

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**\*Images Available Upon Request**

## **Cincinnati Art Museum's Sara Birkofer honored with national award for accessibility efforts**



**CINCINNATI**— The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD<sup>®</sup>) Awards has named Cincinnati Art Museum's Sara Birkofer, Manager of Accessibility and Gallery Programs, a recipient of the 2019 Award for Emerging Leaders. She will receive the award at the LEAD<sup>®</sup> conference in Denver on August 7.

The LEAD<sup>®</sup> Award for Emerging Leaders was created in 2008 to acknowledge arts administrators who are motivated by the LEAD<sup>®</sup> conference to become advocates for accessibility within their own organizations and communities. These individuals successfully apply what they learn at the conference to open doors to and shape opportunities that are inclusive of people with

disabilities and older adults in the cultural arts.

Birkofer has worked at the museum since 2015. Among the initiatives she has implemented and improved during her tenure include: Autism Family Exploration, a monthly program for families with children with autism; Custom Access Tours for groups from assisted-living facilities specializing in memory care and for groups with developmental disabilities; Memories in the Museum, a program for visitors with memory loss and their guests; and Connect, a monthly tour and art making experience for adults with developmental disabilities. She has also worked on developing a Sensory-Friendly Guide and Social Narrative for use in the galleries and ASL-interpreted videos available on the museum's website.

Birkofer attended the 2018 LEAD<sup>®</sup> Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, after which she created a cross-divisional accessibility committee that addresses accessibility and inclusion throughout the entirety of the museum. The group meets monthly, and its work so far has included application to an IMLS grant, review and rewrite of the staff access handbook, education of new hires during orientation, all staff training on accessibility, rewrite of the museum accessibility statement, and audit of the outdoor areas of the museum for accessibility concerns.

The accessibility committee's audit of the grounds of the museum and their level of accessibility has provided key resources for the museum as it moves forward with construction projects like the accessibility ramp built near the front entrance. Birkofer's attention to ADA requirements and visitor experience for everyone has marked her as a passionate advocate for visitors with accessibility challenges.

Birkofer has organized trainings through Cincinnati Children's Hospital, working with Dr. Jennifer Smith at the hospital's Kelly O'Leary Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders. This training focused on best practices for front-line staff to handle difficult situations, create a dialogue with visitors, and understand best practices.

# cincinnati art museum

The Kennedy Center's Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability Conference brings experienced and new professionals together to explore practical methods for implementing accessibility in cultural environments. For more information about the conference and its awards program, visit the Kennedy Center's website at <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/accessibility/lead/conference.html>.

Birkofer's efforts support the museum's accessibility statement: The Cincinnati Art Museum strives for inclusivity by increasing accessibility to its collections, programming and resources. The museum seeks to eliminate barriers by accommodating the individual needs of all visitors.

## **About the Cincinnati Art Museum**

The Cincinnati Art Museum is supported by the generosity of individuals and businesses that give annually to Artswave. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund the Cincinnati Art Museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cincinnati Art Museum gratefully acknowledges operating support from the City of Cincinnati, as well as our members.

Free general admission to the Cincinnati Art Museum is made possible by a gift from the Rosenthal Family Foundation. Special exhibition pricing may vary. Parking at the Cincinnati Art Museum is free. The museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and Thursday, 11 a.m.–8 p.m.  
[cincinnatiartmuseum.org](http://cincinnatiartmuseum.org)

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