

New Leaders at Parrish and Watermill Center

BY JENNIFER LANDES

Two of the most significant arts organizations on the South Fork have new directors at the helm, both of whom say they have a love and respect for the creative process of artists. Terrie Sultan has taken the reins of the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, and Sherry Dobbin has become program director at the Watermill Center in Water Mill.

Calling the Parrish an "institution with strong local ties and a global outlook," Ms. Sultan is prepared to capitalize on both of those aspects in her stewardship. Museumgoers can expect shows that draw on the Parrish's traditional strengths of historic and contemporary East End art as well as more internationally focused presentations.

Ms. Sultan arrived at the Parrish on April 1 from the University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery, where she distinguished herself as the curator of a number of exhibits that went on to travel to other arts institutions. She has also held senior positions at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City.

Last week, she presented the 2009 exhibit schedule to the museum's board of trustees. "There's quite a mix of artists in the upcoming schedule," she said in an interview. As she had limited time to generate a schedule, the shows will draw predominantly on exhibits organized at the Blaffer Gallery, bringing a good amount of academic critical theory to bear on the Parrish's visual presentations.

The Blaffer shows in Southampton will include "Damaged Romanticism: A Mirror of Modern Emotion," which will open in February after the Parrish's winter show of student artwork. Internationally acclaimed artists such as Sophie Calle, Richard Billingham, and Petah Coyne will illustrate, according to the museum, the "collision or juncture between a romantic ideal (or idealism) and the often harsh and depressing reality of contemporary life . . . the existential dilemma of the human condition."

"Mixed Greens: Artists Choose Artists on the East End" will open in April and will feature works in all mediums, selected through portfolio reviews and on-site studio visits by a team of guest curators. It will be followed with photographs by Jean-Luc Mylayne in late June. Mr. Mylayne is a French artist who spends weeks in the field to become familiar with his subjects — commonplace birds such as sparrows, starlings, and bluebirds — and create intimate portraits taken without a telephone to lens.

In the fall of next year, Leonardo Drew's recent works will take over the galleries. Mr. Drew is an installation artist who also does works on paper. The show will include an installation and other works that are described as "meditations on creation and process, often centered on the artist's African-American identity."

At the Blaffer Gallery, Ms. Sultan organized shows such as "Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration," co-founded a universitywide interdisciplinary center for the arts with a \$20 million endowment, undertook a citywide outreach program, and implemented a five-year, \$20 million strategic plan for expanding and renovating the gallery.

She is coming to the Parrish as it confronts its own ambitious expansion plans; with a building designed by the Swiss architectural firm Herzog and de Meuron to be placed on a field in Water Mill.

"The building reflects the meaning of the institution," she said, obviously pleased to be part of the process. "We are lucky that the architects understand what we are looking for in a new building. It was a brilliant selection." She said that the architects understood that the Parrish has always associated itself "with artists who live and work in the area, more so than other museums of its kind."

Acknowledging that her concentration had been on contemporary artists and that her focus over the past few weeks had been the organization of the exhibit schedule, she said she had not given much thought to the original Renaissance collection of the museum's founder, Samuel Parrish.

"All nuances and aspects of the collection will be utilized" under her direction, she said. "We'll play to our strengths."

She will also bring a high degree of energy to the position. Of her previous post, she said, "We presented more than 40 exhibitions, 80 percent of which we organized on site." Of those, she said, seven or eight traveled nationally — "there were probably 25 to 30 institutions we touched with a project."

She intends to develop a similar program for the Parrish, in which "we can share our creativity and our scholarship with other institutions in the country." The Blaffer's show of Chuck Close prints was exhibited in 12 museums in the U.S. and abroad.

Ms. Sultan said she is excited about working with the museum's permanent collection of South Fork masters such as William Merritt Chase, Fairfield Porter, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Dan Flavin, Roy Lichtenstein, John Chamberlain, Chuck Close, Eric Fischl, April Gornik, and Elizabeth Peyton.

She is no stranger to the South Fork. Donald Sultan, an artist who lives in Sag Harbor, is her brother. "My husband and I have been coming out here pretty consistently over the past 20 years."

She finds the creative atmosphere here "extremely exhilarating. There's so much to learn. I am really looking forward to meeting people and getting their ideas." One of her goals is to tap into the disciplines of literature, theater, and music represented here for interdisciplinary projects.

"I'm very process-oriented and very interested in the way artists make decisions, how they go about creating things." She approaches management similarly. "I really enjoy the process of understanding what everyone does. It's a fantastic staff" at the Parrish, "really accomplished. It's great to get to know those people and get those ideas being heard."

Sherry Dobbin at Watermill

"Robert Wilson allows people to see, hear, and think differently — through his practice, his resulting installations and performances, through his collection, and even in the grounds and the building that make up the Watermill Center," Ms. Dobbin said.

Mr. Wilson, a director and designer, founded the Watermill Center in 1992. Its creative programs support visual and performing artists and culminate in presentations of new work that are open to the community.

Its new program director grew up in Connecticut and has spent the last 10 years in England, most recently working as program director at an arts and ecology center in London called Gunpowder Park.

Her background has a theatrical focus within a broader arts tradition. She studied theater direction and administration at Boston University and earned a master's degree in art history from the University of London.

She began her performing life at 13 in a theater group primarily run by children. "At 16 I was doing Commedia dell'Arte at the New Haven Jazz Festival," she



Terrie Sultan, the director of the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton

Max Hirschfeld

said. "But later I became interested in performance within our public spaces, opera, visual arts, and architecture." Her experience combining the theatrical and the work of artists in public spaces seems a natural fit for the varied program the Watermill Center offers.

Ms. Dobbin came to know Robert Wilson as an assistant director on his Los Angeles production of "Madama Butterfly," and was invited to the Watermill Center for its 2004 and 2005 summer seasons. She took on her new role on June 1.

"It's a really exciting time" for the center, she said late last month. Until the building was finished last year, there was only so much they could do. "Now we can take it to the next level."

Ms. Dobbin takes over a position most recently held by Elka Rifkin, who is now director of the Ross School's lower school. The connection between the two institutions is one that Ms. Dobbin would like to foster in order to develop the center's educational potential on the South Fork.

One of the chief functions of the Watermill Center is to support its artists in



14 Mai
East H
631-32



Sherry Dobbin, the new program director at Robert Wilson's Watermill Center
Georgia Oetker

residence program, one-to-four-week stays for artists to refine their work. At their culmination, the community is invited to open rehearsals of work typically still in progress.

"It's a glimpse into the creative process that happens here," Ms. Dobbin said. "It allows people to get a taste of how different artists approach their work, how something is created, rather than being given only the finished product."

"The work that takes place here is always interested in mixing the existing rich cultures across the globe with the exploration of new approaches, perspectives, or collaborations." On Saturday, for example, the last open rehearsal of the spring season was a collaboration between a group from Los Angeles and a Danish ensemble, with Swedish musicians performing.

"It is one of a few worldwide institutions that can dedicate itself to the development of new work and emerging artists, with the support of such an impressive international creative network."

The center's summer program will bring 60 to 80 artists from more than 30 countries. The workshops will include visual arts installations and operas by Mr. Wilson. One collaboration will include Mr. Wilson, Roger Waters of Pink Floyd, and the Shinnecock Indian Nation.

On Aug. 10, the annual summer benefit will include art installations and performances and an open house. On Aug. 30, Rufus Wainwright will headline the center's summer concert on its south lawn.

"Bob always said that this is his legacy," Ms. Dobbin said. The work that is done at the center is not about reproducing his work, but is a continuation of the ethos of what he has set up, "to support new artists who are able to collaborate" across national boundaries.

"My personal passion is new work and supporting a range of creative possibilities," she said. "It's a scary process. I like to be there to support [the artists] and open up the experience to others."

The East Hampton Star, June 19, 2008

ain Street Hampton 324-3444	62 Hampton Road Southampton 631-287-0583 www.rumrunnerhome.com
-----------------------------------	--