

# Ely Center

of Contemporary Art

November 16, 2022

*For Immediate Release: Ely Center of Contemporary Art announces new leadership, new cultural strategy, and an open call to artists.*

The Board and Staff of the Ely Center of Contemporary Art (ECOCA) in New Haven are pleased to announce the election of a new slate of Officers for the 2022-2023 year, and a new community organizing strategy for 2023-2024.

ECOCA was founded in 2016 as a successor organization to the John Slade Ely House. The mission is to cultivate and present thought-provoking, relevant, and original art that engages a diverse representation of perspectives that foster cultural equity and instigate dialogue around urgent local, global, and community issues. We believe this new slate of Board members will deepen these commitments from their predecessors.

Chair, Helen Kauder. Kauder is the former Executive Director of Artspace New Haven and producer of its annual open studios festival. A long time New Haven resident, she also serves on the advisory boards of the Guggenheim Museum and Norwalk Art Space. She is a recipient of Connecticut's Office of the Arts Elizabeth Mahaffey Award. Since the pandemic, she has also transitioned into a collage artist, showing locally.

Vice Chair, Debbie Hesse. Hesse is an award-winning, multidisciplinary artist with a studio practice in New Haven. She is a founding member of the Friends of The John Slade Ely House which formed to establish ECOCA where she also serves as gallery director. Hesse has been a major initiator, instigator, visionary, and advocate for creatives in the New Haven arts community for over 25 years. She was formerly Director of Artistic Services and Programs at the Arts Council of Greater New Haven where she developed innovative community initiatives and partnerships.

Secretary, Etana Solomon. Solomon is a Senior Analyst at the Center for Inclusive Growth which is the philanthropic arm of Mastercard. She serves the community at large by supporting a grant portfolio focused on small business, financial security, and data for social impact. Born and raised in New Haven, she is an alumnae of Hopkins School and recently relocated back to New Haven during the pandemic. She has been serving as a Consultant to ECOCA since the summer, focusing on community partnerships and business development.

Treasurer, Roger Castonguay. Castonguay is a Connecticut-based small business owner and entrepreneur, running Defining Studios, a photo and video content creation studio. The studio supports many creative enterprises, with a focus on the non-profit, education and arts community across the state.

New Board Member Stephen J. Grant. Grant is Associate Director of Digital Media at the Guggenheim Museum, NYC where he has worked with such artists as Nick Cave and Alex Katz, and earlier worked for the Arts Council of Greater New Haven, New Haven Land Trust, and Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. He has also been serving on ECOCA's Curatorial Advisory Committee. As an artist, he

creates music under the moniker Radio Stevie. Grant resides in Norwalk and is an alumni of Southern CT State University

Starting in 2023, ECOCA will operate in 2-year cycles in which each cycle is focused on a singular theme and issue of vital importance to our community. This will create new and timely opportunities for artists, community partnerships, collaborative learning, and growth. Our first theme will be “Home”, in all its possible interpretations. When we think about home, we think about shelter and sanctuary, hearth, garden and idyllic space, but also about gentrification, redlining, displacement, migration, and architecture for the age of climate emergency. And home is also the skin we’re in. A forthcoming announcement will elaborate on the ways we will explore housing as a fundamental human right, with dates for community convenings for artists to interact with designers, housing activists and local knowledge-keepers.

The Ely House is now ECOCA’s home and we aim to develop it as a welcoming home for the community. Each week, we invite you into our Home with our new weekly tours of the building. The tours include the floors that have never before been open to the public, and are offered every Wednesday at 12:15pm.

Board Chair Kauder says: In taking this role, I am standing on the shoulders of Jeanne Criscola, who is passing the baton after nearly 7 years of transformative leadership and service. She has guided ECOCA through the pandemic, and through the pivotal acquisition of 51 Trumbull Street to preserve it for the community and for the artists of today and tomorrow. We are very grateful to our other outgoing officers Jeanne Ciravolo and Suneet Talpade for their devoted service and we look to continuing our work with Ciravolo on the Board. On behalf of all the Board and staff, we are proud to be part of an orderly transition of leadership that demonstrates New Haven’s capacity for renewal and growth through the arts. The new board has big shoes to fill, and we welcome community input to help us carry on ECOCA’s founding vision.

While we embark on this new strategy, some things will remain the same, most notably our annual open call for artists, which last year attracted 450 artists. We’re making the application process easier and ensuring participation for many artists throughout 2023 programming. Our 2023 Guest Juror is the esteemed Curator nico wheadon. Applications for the Open Call are on our website, [elycenter.org](http://elycenter.org), and the deadline to apply is Sunday January 15, 2023.

nico is an independent arts consultant, curator, educator, and writer based in New Haven. She is also founder and principal of bldg fund, LLC; a visiting critic at the Yale School of Art; and a board member at The National Academy of Design, and the Arts Council of Greater New Haven. An advocate for BIPOC and womxn artists in *all* endeavors, she uses her myriad platforms to deepen the canon of contemporary art, whilst cultivating an engaged community of practice. nico recently curated exhibitions at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, Welancora Gallery, Sapar Contemporary, Future Fairs, and has supported strategic initiatives at the Legacy Museum, the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Arizona State University Art Museum, the Barrett Art Center, and the Association of Art Museum Curators. She is the author of *Museum Metamorphosis: Cultivating Change Through Cultural Citizenship*, (Rowman &

Littlefield Publishers and The American Alliance of Museums Press). More at <https://www.nicowheadon.com/>

We thank our neighbors, artists, and the New Haven community for your support during this transition. We are excited to expand our reach and engage the community as part of New Haven's Cultural Equity Plan. As we focus our work, it is paramount to us that ECOCA is an inclusive space that advocates for minority and underserved communities in the greater New Haven area. Our commitment to Black and Latinx communities will be showcased not only through representation in the gallery, but through our public programs and events. We look forward to embarking on this journey together as an institution that has been a part of the fabric of New Haven since 1961. Our door is always open, see you soon!

For more info and photos Contact: [pr@elycenter.org](mailto:pr@elycenter.org)



Helen Kauder - Debbie Hesse - Etana Solomon - Roger Castonguay - Stephen Grant