

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thelma Golden

PERSON

Golden, Thelma

Alternative Names: Thelma Golden;

Life Dates: September 22, 1965-

Place of Birth: St. Albans, Queens, New York, USA

Residence: New York, New York

Work: New York, New York

Occupations: Museum Director; Curator

Biographical Note

Museum director and curator Thelma Golden was born on September 22, 1965 in Queens, New York. In 1983, she graduated from the New Lincoln School, where she trained as a curatorial apprentice at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in her senior year. In 1987, she earned her B.A. degree in art history and African American studies from Smith College. Golden worked first as a curatorial intern at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1987, then as a curatorial assistant at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1988. From 1989 to 1991, she worked as the visual arts director for the Jamaica Arts Center in Queens, New York, where she curated eight shows. Golden was then appointed branch director of the Whitney Museum of American Art's Philip Morris branch in 1991 and curator of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1996. While at the Whitney, she organized numerous groundbreaking exhibitions, including the 1993 Whitney Biennial and 1994's Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art. She also organized Bob Thompson: A Retrospective (1998), Heart, Mind, Body, Soul: New Work from the Collection (1998), and Hindsight: Recent Work from the Permanent Collection (1999). Golden also presented projects by artists Alison Saar, Glenn Ligon, Gary Simmons, Romare Bearden, Matthew McCaslin, Suzanne McClelland, Lorna Simpson, Jacob Lawrence, and Leone & MacDonald. She also worked as the special projects curator for contemporary art collectors Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton from 1998 to 2000. Golden returned to the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2000, where she was named deputy director for exhibitions and programs, and director and chief curator in 2005. Golden organized numerous exhibitions at the Studio Museum, including Isaac Julien: Vagabondia (2000); Martin Puryear: The Cane Project (2000); Glenn Ligon: Stranger (2001); Freestyle (2001); Black Romantic: The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary Art

(2002); harlemworld: Metropolis as Metaphor (2004); Chris Ofili: Afro Muses (2005); Frequency (2005–2006); Africa Comics (2006–2007); and Kori Newkirk: 1997–2007 (2007–2008). Golden also lectured at several institutions, including Columbia University, Yale University, and the Royal College of Art in London. In addition, she contributed essays about Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Bill T. Jones, Kara Walker, and Glenn Ligon to various publications.

Golden received honorary degrees from Moore College of Art and Design, Smith College, and the San Francisco Art Institute. In 2008, she was a member of the advisory team of the Whitney Biennial; and in 2007, a juror for the UK Turner Prize. Golden served on the graduate committee for Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies, and on the boards of Creative Time in New York and the Institute of International Visual Arts in London. In 2016, she was awarded the Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence.

Golden is married to London fashion designer Duro Olowu.

Thelma Golden was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 9, 2016.

Related Entries

Buckley Country Day School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

New Lincoln School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Smith College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A. Degree

Studio Museum in Harlem [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 200001 to 2005]

Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Programs

Jamaica Arts Center [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1989 to 1991]

Visual Arts Director

Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1998 to 1999]

Special Projects Curator

Studio Museum in Harlem [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2005 to ?]

Director and Chief Curator

Studio Museum in Harlem [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to ?]

Fellow

Whitney Museum of American Art - Phillip Morris Branch [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 198809 to 199811]

Curator

Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College [MEMBEROf]
[from 2002 to 2007]

Graduate Committee member

NYC & Company [MEMBEROf]
[from 2002 to 2007]

Board Member

Pew Charitable Trust [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Selection Panel Member

Federal Advisory Committee on International Exhibitions [MEMBEROf]
[from 2008 to ?]

Selection Panel Member

National Endowment for the Arts [MEMBEROf]
[from 1991 to 1993]

Selection Panel Member

Smith College Museum of Art Visiting Committee [MEMBEROf]
[from 2011 to ?]

Committee Member

Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, or FAPE [MEMBEROf]
[from 2006 to ?]

Professional Fine Arts Committee

Creative Time [MEMBEROf]
[from 2005 to ?]

Board Member

Artes Mundi Prize [MEMBEROf]
[from 2006 to 2006]

Judge

Turner Prize [MEMBEROf]
[from 2007 to 2007]

Juror

Whitney Biennial Advisory Committee [MEMBEROf]
[from 2008 to 2008]

Advisory Team member

Clark Prize Jury [MEMBEROf]

[from 2008 to 2008]

Juror

Association of Art Museum Directors [MEMBEROF]

[from 2009 to ?]

Board Member

Committee for the Preservation of the White House [MEMBEROF]

[from 2010 to ?]

Appointee

Spaceworks [MEMBEROF]

[from 2011 to 2016]

Board Member

Architizer A+Award Jury [MEMBEROF]

[from 2014 to 2014]

Juror

Yanghyun Prize [MEMBEROF]

[from 2014 to 2014]

Juror

Robert De Niro Sr. Prize Selection Committee [MEMBEROF]

[from 2014 to 2014]

Committee Member

James Dicke Prize for Contemporary Artists Jury [MEMBEROF]

[from 2014 to 2014]

Juror

Barack Obama Foundation [MEMBEROF]

[from 2015 to ?]

Board of Directors Member

Deste Prize Jury [MEMBEROF]

[from 2015 to 2015]

Juror

Los Angeles County Museum of Art [MEMBEROF]

[from 2016 to ?]

Board Member