

Ashman returning to head Santa Fe arts center

By Jackie Jadrnak / Journal North Reporter

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Stuart Ashman will be the new director of the Center for Contemporary Arts, taking over Aug. 8.

SANTA FE – A figure of longtime prominence in the arts of Santa Fe and New Mexico is coming back home to head the Center for Contemporary Arts here.

Stuart Ashman, who left New Mexico almost five years ago to become president and CEO of the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, Calif., will begin his new job as CCA executive director on Aug. 8. From 2003-10, Ashman served as secretary of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

Ashman said in a phone interview that he and his wife, Peggy, always intended to return at some point to their Tesuque home, which they hadn't sold or even rented out. "My shoes are still in the closet," he said.

"I'm really excited to get back to Santa Fe, which has always been my home," he added.

In some ways, it's also like coming home to the CCA, where he had his first job in the 1970s installing the Armory Show and where he had an exhibit of his own sculpture around 1986, he said.

His goals will be to increase the visibility and visitation at CCA and to present quality exhibitions that "co-exist"

with SITE Santa Fe and the New Mexico Museum of Art's planned new wing dedicated to contemporary art. While SITE Santa Fe brings in works by recognized international and national artists on the contemporary scene, Ashman said he sees CCA as filling a niche in discovering new artists, particularly from New Mexico.

That move toward inclusion of local artists was expressed during his tenure at the California museum, Ashman said. When he got there, it had featured art from Latin American countries, but didn't include much from artists who lived in the United States with roots stretching back to those countries. "The local community felt alienated," he said, adding that he broadened the museum's mission to include artworks by members of the Latin American diaspora, which triggered "an outpouring of support from the Chicano community in L.A."

CCA is in good financial shape, with reserves and no debt, and has invested in needed renovations, Ashman added. Paul Hultin, CCA board chairman, said he is "very excited" to have Ashman come to lead the organization, which is developing a plan to create new space for performances and other uses at the south end of the Muñoz Waxman Gallery on the CCA campus. "Hopefully, we'll be breaking ground on that in the fall," he said. CCA also features an art-house cinema.

Ashman also has headed the New Mexico Museum of Art and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, both located in Santa Fe. He is replacing Meg Linton, who was hired as executive director earlier this year but had a change in family circumstances that caused her to move to Arizona. She has been retained as a consultant to manage the CCA in the interim and probably will continue to provide some curatorial help to Ashman, Hultin said.