

Combining history and new art at Snug Harbor

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New director of visual art 'very excited' about his vision for the cultural center

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- When he first visited the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art 15 years ago, Patrick Grenier hardly imagined he'd be running the place some day.

Grenier, 39, is the new director of visual art at Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden, which encompasses Newhouse.

He's "very excited" by his own account. "It's a very dynamic sort of cultural institution, partly historical, partly contemporary. It kind of reflects my own career," he said.

Grenier has worked at cultural institutions that are saturated with history -- like Cooper Union and the Brooklyn Museum -- and at places that are, by comparison, barely unwrapped: The Rotunda Gallery in Brooklyn and New Museum.

The "exciting part" of the new job, he said, will be the chance to combine the two, historical presentations and new art.

Grenier, who lives with his wife in Hoboken, N.J., earned a bachelor's degree in art and art history from Pratt Institute and a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies from New York University. At New Museum, he helped produce "After Nature," a well-received survey that was part of the museum's inaugural season. At Rotunda Gallery, where he was associate director, Grenier programmed events, administered residencies and fellowships and supervised the installation of exhibits.

Grenier replaces Frank Verpoorten, who came to the Harbor from the Dahesh Museum. Grenier has not yet planned a season of exhibits. A show of LEMUR ("League of Electronic, Musical Urban Robots") will open in the fall.

The new curator recalled that he first visited the Harbor in 1994-95 when the big on-site exhibit was "Making a Frame." The multi-media show, a history of performance art with an ambitious performance series, was drawing visitors and press from all over the metropolitan area.

Nothing approaching its scale has been attempted at the center in the past four years. "That show just blew me away," Grenier said, "and I immediately admired the curator, Olivia Georgia, because the show was so interesting and comprehensive." Ms. Georgia, now executive director of the House Foundation for the Arts, was visual arts director from 1990 to 2004.

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