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PICA names New Yorker to head TBA Festival

Mark Russell is the first of two people hired to replace Kristy Edmunds

By JOSEPH GALLIVAN Issue date: Tue, Jul 19, 2005
The Tribune

Mark Russell is the new Kristy Edmunds.

Sort of.

The independent art curator-producer, whose name is synonymous with Performance Space 122 in New York City's trendy East Village, was named Monday as a new guest artistic director for the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art.

He will replace PICA founder Edmunds as curator of the Time-Based Art Festival for 2006 and 2007. Another guest curator for PICA's visual arts program will be announced this fall.

"It's a real honor for me, it's a dream," said Russell. "One thing you can't do in New York is hold a decent festival, because of all the distractions. But in Portland you can, a festival where the whole city gets behind it."

During his 21 years as executive and artistic director of PS 122, which is housed in a former school, Russell nurtured the careers of the likes of Eric Bogosian, the Blue Man Group and Lisa Kron. The late Spalding Gray often tried out his monologues first at PS 122.

Russell, 51, not to be confused with the 73-year-old PBS satirist of the same name, will commute from New York.

Russell, who is married with a 2-year-old son, moved to New York City in 1977. He holds a bachelor's degree in theater direction from the University of Texas at Austin. Russell also has edited a book, "Out of Character: Rants, Raves and Monologues by Today's Top Performance Artists" (1997).

In January, Russell programmed the Under the Radar festival in Brooklyn, N.Y. It included such works as Cynthia Hopkins' "Accidental Nostalgia," which used a live band and video to tell the story of Cameron Seymour, neurologist, amnesiac and wanderer.

The nonprofit PICA was founded in 1996 by Edmunds, formerly the director of the Portland Art Museum's Art on the Edge program, and still specializes in cutting-edge performance and visual arts programming. Faced with a shortage of funds, Edmunds is responsible for shifting PICA's programming to the annual 10-day Time-Based Art festival in 2003.

In February 2004, Edmunds, 39, was appointed artistic director of the 2005 and 2006 Melbourne International Arts Festival in Australia.

Elizabeth Zimmer, dance editor of The Village Voice, knows Russell well. "He put a lot of people like Karen Finley on the map," she says. "He's a very nurturing producer."

His replacement as artistic director at PS 122, Vallejo Gantner, praises him highly: "He's been the arbiter of good work. He plays the man rather than the ball, as we say in Australia. Good show or bad show, if he believes in the artist, he backs them."

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