

## **Sarah Workneh to End 14-Year Tenure As Co-Director of Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture**

*Building on Skowhegan's founding history of inclusivity, Workneh centered equity and justice on campus and in Maine as a critical component of supporting creative practice*



Sarah Workneh, photographed by Elle Pérez

**New York, NY & Madison, ME, August 15, 2023** — The Board of Trustees and Governors of Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture announced today that long-time Co-Director Sarah Workneh will step down in December 2023 after 14 impactful years in her leadership role. Katie Sonnenborn, Co-Director, will continue in her role and the Boards will form a search committee to hire Workneh's successor.

Workneh has co-led Skowhegan during an important era of growth and evolution for the organization beginning with the first strategic plan and including its 75th Anniversary in 2021, a comprehensive campus redevelopment, the opening of its New York office, the most successful capital campaign in its history, revamping the school's admissions process, developing alumni programming, and leading the program through the pandemic. Workneh built on the school's history of inclusion and has greatly expanded the diversity of the participants, faculty, and staff, and worked to holistically shift the operations and physical facilities of the site to create greater equity and inclusion in support of greater experimentation.

In her 14-year tenure, she has worked with over 800 participant artists and 120 faculty artists. Speaking on behalf of the Board of Governors, Dave McKenzie (A '00, F '11, '17) reflects: "The relationships Sarah has formed with participants over the past fourteen years are generously conspiratorial— less administrative, more involved, deeper, meaningful, intimate, and rare. Founded *by* artists, *for* artists, is the motto, but to it Sarah has appended sustained advocacy, often invisible, for the artists and their practice."

In Maine, Workneh has been an engaged community member and worked closely with neighbors and regional partners to expand the school's economic impact locally, including through shifting the food program to be almost entirely sourced from local farms and producers. Building on this experience, in

January she will become the Co-Director of Sky High Farm, a non-profit organization founded by artist Dan Colen that is committed to food sovereignty by supporting burgeoning farmers through formal training and mentoring, grants to catalyze a more equitable food system, and food access partnerships designed to achieve long-term solutions to food insecurity.

Reflecting on her years at Skowhegan, Workneh said: “Skowhegan has given me so many gifts in what I have learned, what I have accomplished, and most importantly, what I have felt was possible in the world. I remain deeply committed to the mission of Skowhegan and the space it creates for artists to grow, to shift, to challenge and to start anew. It has always been filled with joy and with incredibly moving transformations. It has changed my life and I am unendingly grateful for all that I have learned in my role, and for every second I have shared with all of the participants and faculty, Governors, Trustees, alumni and supporters, our teams in NYC, in Maine, and with Katie. One can only dream about such collaborators.”

Chair of the Board of Trustees Eleanor Acquavella stated that “Sarah’s commitment to the program has been unwavering. There is not an inch of campus that she is not familiar with, nor a participant or faculty member she did not know deeply. She and Katie set Skowhegan up for a dynamic future, and the Trustees and Governors acknowledge with gratitude her extraordinary tenure at the school.”

2023 marks Skowhegan’s 77<sup>th</sup> year, and this year’s participating artists continued traditions forged by prior generations, while experiencing their own Skowhegan summer. Because Skowhegan is a once-in-lifetime opportunity, the magic each year comes from the unique composition of the assembled group, set within an artist community that is rich with history. This year’s class arrived from across the United States and many countries, bringing a full spectrum of studio practices from painting and sculpture to time-based, photo-based, and alternative work. They were joined by resident and visiting faculty artists, and program staff, many of whom return for many years. Workneh adds that “The brilliance and dedication of the program staff is essential to Skowhegan, and working alongside the summer team – primarily practicing artists – has been a singular joy for me in this role.”

In addition to her co-leadership at Skowhegan, Workneh has published a variety of texts, most recently an essay on radical education published by the Norwegian journal *Praksis* and a forthcoming essay on collectivity published by RAW Academie in Senegal. She has lectured at schools and universities around the US. She serves on the boards of Colby College Museum of Art, RAIR in Philadelphia, ProjectEATS, the Buxton School in Williamstown, MA, the Lake Wesserunsett Association where she is a member of the Lake Wesserunsett Association Conservation Committee in Madison, ME. She is on the advisory boards of Recess and the Black Lunch Table. In 2020, she partnered with Linda Goode Bryant & ProjectEats to convert an urban farm to a food pantry in Brownsville, NYC.

#### ABOUT SKOWHEGAN

Skowhegan is one of the country’s foremost educational experiences for artists. Located on a 350-acre campus in Maine, the nine-week summer program provides 65 emerging artists and 11 faculty artists with a collaborative and rigorous environment that is shaped by risk-taking, mentorship, and peer-to-peer exchange. Skowhegan does not consider financial ability or circumstances in its admissions process and, instead, focuses on an individual’s commitment to artmaking and inquiry. Founded in 1946 *by* artists, *for* artists, the program provides an atmosphere in which participants are encouraged to work in contrast to market or academic expectations. [www.skowheganart.org](http://www.skowheganart.org)

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