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Fleisher fixture leaves for print project
By Stephan Salisbury

Thora Jacobson, whose name in the Philadelphia art world is synonymous with the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial, will be leaving that school and exhibition facility to help launch a new international print festival.

Jacobson, 56, who has been on the Fleisher staff for 33 years and director since 1983, will become chief operating officer of Philagrafika, a project hatched by the Philadelphia Print Collaborative and slated to debut in 2010.

Philagrafika will explore the impact of printmaking in shaping contemporary visual culture.

"I've been sprung," Jacobson said yesterday.

Noting that Fleisher, located on Catharine Street in South Philadelphia, is completing a \$3.2 million capital campaign, she said she decided that "once that happened, in lieu of being carried out in a pine box, I should move."

The opportunity to guide the launch of Philagrafika came along, she said, at just the right time.

"Thora has been a driving force for growth, and she has set many milestones, from introducing the highly respected Challenge exhibitions to spearheading our current capital campaign with great success," said James A. Lebovitz, president of Fleisher's board.

Anne d'Harnoncourt, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which administers Fleisher, said Jacobson's "impact has been enormous."

In addition to the Challenge exhibition series, which focused on the area's finest visual artists, Jacobson labored to expand classroom and exhibition offerings, and oversaw renovation and expansion of virtually the entire Fleisher complex, which now encompasses several buildings in the 700 block of Catharine Street.

At Philagrafika, Jacobson will be helping to put together an array of exhibitions, programs, meetings and collaborations exploring the radically evolving world of printmaking.

"To have Thora Jacobson as chief operating officer will mean so much to the success of Philagrafika in 2010," said Judith K. Brodsky, emerita professor of visual arts at Rutgers University and board president of the Print Collaborative. "Her proven management capabilities have given her the experience to meet the demands of a citywide international festival intended to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors."

Teresa Jaynes, director of the collaborative, said Philagrafika's planned debut in 2010 would involve multiple area participants, including Fleisher, the Art Museum, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, the Fabric Workshop and Museum, the Print Center and the Brandywine Workshop.

Officials said a search for Jacobson's successor at Fleisher would begin immediately. She said she expected to leave at the end of February.

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