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By Andrew Russeth  
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Museums & Institutions

## Swiss Institute Buys Space by New Museum, Plans Bowery Move

The storied nonprofit, which turns 40 this year, will own its home for the first time.

By Andrew Russeth



The Swiss Institute staff in front of the organization's forthcoming home on the Bowery, with its director, Stefanie Hessler, at left.  
Photo by Lee Mary Manning, courtesy SI.

# SI

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Free and open to the public

At the start of the year, the stretch of the Bowery just below East Houston was unsettlingly quiet on the cultural front. The **Sperone Westwater** gallery had shuttered its **Norman Foster**-designed headquarters, and the **New Museum**'s **OMA**-helmed expansion was still underway. **Salon 94** had decamped a few years earlier. But things can change quickly in Manhattan.

After delays, the New Museum finally reopened in March, to rightful acclaim, and soon it will have a marquee neighbor. The **Swiss Institute (S.I.)** is moving from the East Village building it has rented since 2018 to a space across the street from the New Museum, at 250 Bowery. The storied arts institution, 40 this year, has purchased the ground floor and basement, and it plans to open there next spring, following a renovation.

Right now, many in the arts are asking, "How do we make these incredible nonprofits that were founded 40 years ago, 50 years ago, how do we make them sustainable?" Swiss Institute's director, **Stefanie Hessler**, said in a video interview last week. "And sustainable not only in an environmental sense, which of course has been important to me, but also in a financial sense. How do we continue to be places where artists can experiment?"

For S.I., buying a permanent home provided an answer. The new venue will increase its total square footage, from 7,000 at its current home at St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue to 11,000. It is the first time that the organization will own its own space, and it is a rare example of an alternative-minded arts group that has been able to do so in a city with very pricey real estate. Hessler declined to disclose the terms of the deal. **Johnston Marklee**, the firm behind the **Menil Drawing Institute** in Houston and the new home of the **Whitney Independent Study Program** in the West Village, has been tapped for the renovation.



A 2012 installation by Nic Hess at a prior home of the Swiss Institute in SoHo, which is now the Jeffrey Deitch gallery. It moved to the East Village in 2018. Courtesy of Swiss Institute.

"The way that they're thinking about the new space," Hessler said, "is as a laboratory, which is both flexible and nimble, but also artist-centered, and by being flexible and nimble, allows artists to turn the space into what they need for their projects."

Some New Yorkers may be familiar with 250 Bowery. It had a short stint as the home of the **International Center of Photography**, from 2016 to 2019, before it moved a few blocks east, to a building that is part of the **Essex Crossing** development.

When we spoke, Hessler was just back in New York after some time in Switzerland. She had curated a very satisfying edition of **Parcours**, **Art Basel**'s public-art program, and opened a fundraising exhibition for S.I., titled "Regift," at **Luma Westbau** in Zurich that she curated with **Alison Coplan**, who is S.I.'s chief curator, and the artist **John Miller**.

The Swiss Institute's move will put it in an arts hub that includes not only the revitalized New Museum but also **Giorno Poetry Systems**, the venturesome nonprofit run by curator **Anthony Huberman**, Hessler pointed out. She also mentioned that artists like **Eva Hesse**, **Mark Rothko**, and **Harmony Hammond** once had studios in the area. "I think we'll be even more part of this circuit of people visiting SoHo, Tribeca, all the galleries in the neighborhood," she said.

S.I.'s final shows in the East Village are scheduled to close on Sunday, but the organization will not be going into hibernation. "No, never," Hessler said. While its new home is being readied, it plans to do an off-site exhibition in New York with the Polish artist **Rafał Skoczek**.