

Cleveland Atty On His Honorary Role With Ohio Art Museum

By **Emma Cueto**

Law360 (August 17, 2023, 11:49 AM EDT) -- Lawrence Oscar, a partner with Ohio-based firm Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP, was named an honorary director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland earlier in August.



Lawrence Oscar

In addition to his practice as a bankruptcy attorney, Oscar, who is also a former CEO and managing partner at Hahn Loeser, has long been on the board of directors for MoCA Cleveland. As president of the board during 2020, he helped guide the museum through COVID-19 and the racial justice protests after the murder of George Floyd.

Oscar recently spoke to Law360 Pulse about the highlights of his time in leadership roles with the museum and his advice for other attorneys looking to get involved with art institutions. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How did you first get involved with the museum?

I've always been interested in art. My folks raised me to have a fascination with art. We have an outstanding museum here, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and when I was little they took me there. So when I was looking to get involved in some community and cultural activities, which our firm encourages, it was natural that I look to the arts.

MoCA Cleveland was recruiting directors at the time, so I stepped forward to get involved. And it's been about 20 years or so.

You obviously must enjoy it to still be involved 20 years later.

It's a very mighty organization that's always punched above its weight, having a real can-do spirit. MoCA Cleveland is what they call a "kunsthalle," a non-collecting museum, so you're displaying the most current and most interesting art. So that creates a very healthy tension in the organization, to push for the newest, most interesting, most innovative ideas.

Because you're not drawing people to your museum with a Monet show or a Picasso show. You have to show something that's very interesting and of the moment — something created anywhere around the world, but reflecting the current zeitgeist and the current ideas that the artistic community is thinking about.

That makes it special, and I really got a lot of enjoyment out of the energy in that approach.

What was your reaction to being named an honorary director?

I really was shocked when the executive director, Megan Rich, told me she was thinking about bringing it up to our governance committee. The history of this recognition is for people who contributed a lot of money and a lot of leadership. Although I've always been — and my firm has always been — very solid supporters, we're not the people giving millions of dollars and getting naming rights and all that.

My contribution has mainly been through brain power and the effort required to keep a small but mighty organization going, including through the pandemic and the racial reckoning that swept through America after the murder of George Floyd. That happened to be the time I was in the president's chair. And that was a lot of work, but I never really thought of myself in that kind of way when others have given so much more money.

But it proves that leadership is important. I was moved and flattered by that.

Are there things that you're most proud of from your time in leadership at MoCA Cleveland or that you look back on most fondly?

There were two things that I think were especially exciting.

We celebrated the 50th anniversary of MoCA during my presidency in 2019, and there was a retrospective. The leaders of the museum came together, and we had a great party. But it included one of the founders of the museum, Agnes Gund, who is a lifetime trustee of the Museum of Modern Art New York and is originally from Cleveland. She saw, 55 years ago, the need for a contemporary art home in Cleveland, and she and two other women founded the museum.

So celebrating that 50th anniversary with an international retrospective of art was super exciting for me.

The other was being in the president's chair when we had long term, outstanding executive director Jill Schneider step down, and we needed to find a new executive director during the pandemic. We did a global search and finally chose Megan Rich, who was Jill's understudy who we had at home. That search was a lot of fun.

And I'll also add: While I was on the board but not president, we built a new building, a really dynamic and inspiring structure, which the New York Times highlighted as a must-see place.

So those three things were extremely rewarding and highlights that I'll talk about for the rest of my life.

Do you see a lot of connections between the community and

cultural work you do with the museum or do you see them as separate things?

I think they go together. For regional firms like Hahn Loeser, we all, I think, place an emphasis on contributing in our communities. That's the way that you can connect with other leaders in your community — not just cultural leaders, but business leaders who like to be involved. We connect and give back through that involvement.

And also in skills: A lawyer's skills are in listening, making sense out of a lot of different opinions and different points of view, and synthesizing them in a way that can help get a decision made. So your lawyering skills are also useful in these organizations. So I think it's a natural fit.

You don't want to get typecast as lawyers, and getting involved in community organizations — whether it's art or health care or education — that's where you can show that lawyers care about their communities and give back. You can put a more accurate face on what lawyers do for the world.

That to me is the essence of why our firm encourages community involvement. We want to give back. We want to be part of the community.

For other attorneys with an interest in art, or who would like to get involved with a museum in their city, what is your advice for how to go about it?

Do your homework. Learn about the organization. What are their motivating factors? What are their needs? Why is that organization relevant in your area? And then approach the leaders and say, "I'd love to get involved."

Most organizations welcome the involvement of knowledgeable professionals, and they're flattered by the interest. It may not be at the board level right away; most organizations have committees to get involved in.

Come to an event, a fundraiser, an opening. See who you know there, see if you like it, if you like what's discussed. Get a feel for the organization. And then connect with the people you may know or just make a cold call and say, "I'm interested." People respond to that.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.

Correction: A previous version of this story misstated Agnes Gunn's name. This error has been corrected.