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LACMA's Michael Govan honored by independent curators



LACMA Director Michael Govan is shown next to pieces from the pre-Columbian collection inside the museum's West Mexico room.

(Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

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Los Angeles County Museum of Art director Michael Govan will receive the 2015 Leo Award from Independent Curators International during its 40th anniversary benefit and auction in New York City in November, the group announced Tuesday.

The award recognizes "extraordinary commitment to artists and pioneering contributions to the field of contemporary art."

Govan expressed gratitude for the honor, which is named after Leo Castelli, the lauded art dealer and supporter of the curators' group.

"Leo was a cool guy. I knew him personally and he was as dapper and intelligent as everyone says. He represented the art world in the best way possible," said Govan, reached by phone in New York City. "It's really nice. I'm in good company."

Previous Leo Award recipients include Dimitris Daskalopoulos, Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein, Miuccia Prada and Dasha Zhukova.

"Amid considerable transformations in the artistic and curatorial fields, and in the arts funding landscape, Govan has come to represent a leading force committed to the

support of contemporary artists and audience engagement," the group's announcement stated.

Since Govan joined LACMA as director in 2006, the number of guests visiting its Wilshire Boulevard campus has nearly doubled from 650,000 in 2006 to 1.2 million today. The museum has acquired more than 10,000 works for its permanent collection. Govan is also spearheading plans for a dramatic makeover of the campus, which will include tearing down four of the existing museum buildings and building a \$650-million new museum designed by architect Peter Zumthor.

The curators' organization produces exhibitions, events and publications and creates research and training opportunities for curators and the public.

"ICI is a really necessary part of the art-world ecosystem," Govan said. "Not everything can be made best by the museums themselves and I think independent curators have a huge role to play. It's often outside the pressures of particular institutions that curators pursue work based on their own passions and that results in innovation and projects that wouldn't otherwise happen."