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By Arun Kakar
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The Swiss Institute team outside the new space at 250 Bowery. Photo by Lee Mary Manning. Courtesy of Swiss Institute New York.



Swiss Institute Contemporary Art

38 St Marks Place
New York, NY 10003

+1 (212) 925-2035
info@swissinstitute.net

swissinstitute.net
Free and open to the public

Swiss Institute (SI), one of New York's leading platforms for experimental contemporary art, has announced the acquisition of the ground floor and lower level of 250 Bowery in Manhattan. The move marks the first time in its 40-year history that the institution has owned its premises. The new location will open to the public in spring 2027 and will remain free of charge.

Founded in 1986 by artists and art patrons, SI has established itself as a distinctive force in the city's cultural landscape, known for championing emerging and under-recognized artists, fostering cross-cultural exchange between Switzerland and the international art world, and maintaining free public admission throughout its history.

SI has occupied a succession of rented spaces across the city, from a townhouse on West 67th Street to SoHo, Tribeca, and most recently, 38 St. Marks Place in the East Village. It has built a reputation for rigorous, forward-thinking programming and an early platform for artists including Pipilotti Rist, Thomas Hirschhorn, Christian Marclay, Nicolas Party, and Peter Fischli & David Weiss.

The move to 250 Bowery expands the institution's footprint from approximately 7,000 to 11,000 square feet and places it alongside the New Museum, Giorno Poetry Systems, and Participant Inc. in one of the city's oldest cultural areas.

The renovation has been entrusted to Los Angeles-based architecture firm Johnston Marklee, whose recent projects include the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program space, the Menil Drawing Institute in Houston, and a renovation of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The firm's design prioritizes flexibility, modularity, and environmental sustainability, incorporating reclaimed materials, energy-efficient lighting, and reusable exhibition infrastructure. Work begins this fall.



Exterior view of Swiss Institute at 18 Wooster Street, with exterior by Nic Hess.

The opening exhibition, “The Environment,” will be an international group show drawing on an artist-led community project initiated by experimental filmmaker Bud Wirschafter in downtown New York between 1966 and 1968. Artworks will be presented not only within SI but across building façades, community gardens, and other public spaces. While renovations are underway, SI will continue offsite programming, including “Kino East,” a fall 2026 exhibition by Zürich-based Polish artist Rafał Skoczek, who will transform a disused commercial space into an evolving site for gathering and exchange.

In a statement, Stefanie Hessler, director of SI, said the move represented “both a culmination and a beginning,” adding that owning a permanent space for the first time would allow the institution to “put down roots and continue to grow.”