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Memphis Brooks Museum of Art Appoints Emily Ballew Neff As New Executive Director

Memphis, TN (February 24, 2015) The Board of Trustees of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art has voted unanimously to name Emily Ballew Neff, Ph.D., as the museum's Executive Director. Dr. Neff currently serves as the President of the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) and served nearly two decades as the first Curator of American Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where she established a significant presence for the museum in the field of American art, growing the museum's collections by more than 30 percent, organizing more than 20 exhibitions at the museum and coordinating 14 traveling exhibitions from other institutions.

Neff organized several major exhibitions while in Houston including the award-winning *American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World*, which received praise for its innovative approach to exhibiting colonial American art in a global context, and *The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950*, a show of more than 100 paintings and photographs that examined the relationship between the American West and modernism. Recognized for her scholarly work which has pushed the field of American art in new and innovative directions, Neff authored *Frederic Remington: The Hogg Brothers Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, the first major catalog to document this historically important collection and the Hogg family patron who created it.

Neff most recently served as the Director and Chief Curator of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, where she worked in close partnership with its museum boards, the Norman community, and

the university foundation, and sought to bring great masterworks to central Oklahoma through acquisitions and exhibitions during her tenure.

Neff holds a B.A. from Yale University, an M.A. from Rice University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Neff is a recent Fellow of the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL) in New York City. Other honors and fellowships include the Royal Collections Study Program (Attingham Trust); the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art; the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and Research Center; the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Emily brings national prominence and a wealth of skills from her education and experience in the art world," said Nathan Bicks, President of the Brooks Board of Trustees. "As we embark on the Brooks' second century as the centerpiece of the Memphis arts community, we have found a leader in Emily Neff who can assure this institution continues to transform itself and our community through the power of art."

"It is an honor to serve as the 15th director of the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art," said Neff. "On the eve of its 100th anniversary in 2016, the Memphis Brooks aims to deepen its commitment to the city of Memphis by providing dynamic and revelatory experiences for its visitors through great works of art from all over the world. I look forward to working with the energetic Board and staff, distinguished collectors, supporters and partners in this incredibly creative community. My husband Richard and our two sons Richard, 14 and Will, 13, are excited to embrace the city's rich cultural heritage and make Memphis our home."

Joining the Brooks in mid-April, Neff will quickly step in and lead a variety of projects and initiatives already underway in advance of the Brooks' 2016 centennial celebration, including:

- The renovation of the Dunavant Rotunda, the museum's lobby, which will be complete in April. The stairway to the museum's upper level, home to its world art collection, has recently re-opened; the rotunda repainted, and wayfinding simplified. A new visitors services desk is in the process of being designed and installed.

- The Brushmark Restaurant has received a similar renovation and an innovative new menu based on locally-sourced ingredients.
- A state-of-the-art family interactive gallery, funded by the Plough Foundation, is scheduled to open in 2016. The Brooks' family interactive gallery will focus on engaging children, building skills for exploring art and instilling confidence in their art museum experiences.

Neff's appointment comes after a six-month search by a blue-ribbon committee of Brooks' trustees and community representatives. Assisting the search committee was the New York firm, Phillips Oppenheim, which has an eminent history in executive recruiting for the nonprofit sector.

About the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art: Dedicated to the vision of transforming lives through the power of art, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is one of the most innovative and community-focused art museums in the nation. Exhibitions now on view at the Brooks include *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement*, which has received major coverage in local media, and the 50th annual Mid-South Scholastic Art Awards, which resulted in more than \$260,000 in scholarships and prizes awarded to talented Mid-South area students by the museum and various college partners. In summer 2014, the Brooks organized the major exhibition *Marisol: Sculptures and Works on Paper*, which traveled to El Museo del Barrio in New York. A catalog for the exhibition was published by Yale University Press.

Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, located at 1934 Poplar Avenue in historic Overton Park, is one of the leading art museums in the American South. For more information on the Brooks, and all other exhibitions and programs, call (901) 544-6200 or visit www.brooksmuseum.org.

Community Partners: ArtsMemphis, Hyde Family Foundations, Tennessee Arts Commission, The Jeniam Foundation, and AutoZone.

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