



Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts News Release

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Director of MMFA to retire after 23 years, Interim Director Named

Montgomery, AL, July 26, 2017— The Board of Trustees of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and Mark M. Johnson, Director of the Museum, announce his retirement effective August 15, 2017. Johnson served for 23 years, by far the longest tenure of any director in the Museum’s history.

Johnson is a native of Chicago, Illinois, and received a BA in art history / studio art from the University of Wisconsin, and an MA in art history / museum studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He then joined the staff of the education department at the Art Institute of Chicago, and later worked as a curator of art history at the Cleveland Museum of Art, before accepting the position of Assistant Director at the Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Subsequently, he was named Director of the Muscarelle Museum at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. He joined the staff of the MMFA as Director in August of 1994.

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts is Alabama’s first art museum, founded in 1930. It is nationally recognized for its collections of American art, Old Master Prints, and regional works from the American South.

During Johnson’s tenure, the museum welcomed over 3 million visitors and acquired 1,700 works of art. Among the notable acquisitions were paintings by American masters including George Inness (1825–1894), Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), Max Weber (1881–1961), and Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975). He inaugurated the collection of American Studio Art Glass that now numbers more than 50 works. He also oversaw the growth of the Museum’s Old Master Print Collection and an expansion of the collection into traditional African art. The Museum undertook three major renovation or expansion projects during his tenure: the creation of the Weil Graphic Arts Study Center in honor of Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr. in 1998, and the expansion of the education wing / ARTWORKS gallery and creation of the Margaret Berry Lowder Gallery in 2006. In 2014, the Museum broke ground for a sculpture garden presently under construction on the eastern side of the Museum.

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees held June 27, 2017, the Board acknowledged Johnson's long tenure and accomplishments, and accorded him the honorary title, Director Emeritus.

At a subsequent meeting on Tuesday, July 25, 2017, the Board announced the appointment of Edwin C. Bridges, Ph.D., as the Interim Director of the Museum. Dr. Bridges is the former Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, serving in that position from 1982 until his retirement in 2012. He has agreed to serve as Interim Director while the Museum's Board of Trustees conducts a national search for a permanent director of the Museum.

Since his retirement, Dr. Bridges has continued to be involved in historical research and has completed a new general history of Alabama entitled *Alabama: The Making of an American State*, published in 2016 by the University of Alabama Press. He has also been actively involved as a volunteer working for Alabama's upcoming Bicentennial. Dr. Bridges comes to the Museum after a tremendous career as the well-respected director of one of Alabama's most important historical organizations, and will be acting to insure a continuation of the Museum's mission as well as a smooth transition for new leadership in the future.

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, a department of the City of Montgomery, is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Exhibition programs are supported by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

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