Emily Ballew Neff to Serve as Director of Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at OU

NORMAN, OKLA. – Emily Ballew Neff, a distinguished curator of American art and the art of the American West, and the founding Curator of American Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will be appointed Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, pending approval by the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents.

In January 2014, she will assume the position vacated by Ghislain d’Humières, who served as Director of the museum since 2007 and left earlier this year to assume the position of Director and CEO of the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Ky.

“The university is extremely fortunate that Emily Neff has agreed to become the new director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art,” said OU President David L. Boren. “Dr. Neff is one of the most highly regarded art historians in our country and was our first choice as a potential director for the museum.”

Neff has served as curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, since 1997. For many years, she worked closely with Peter Marzio, the museum’s late director, who was widely considered to be among the most outstanding museum directors in the United States and a trusted advisor to many cultural institutions.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Neff established a significant presence for the museum in the field of American art, growing the museum’s collections by more than 30 percent, building a dynamic patron support group, organizing more than 20 exhibitions at the museum and coordinating 14 traveling exhibitions from other institutions. She has authored several major exhibition catalogs, numerous publications, and essays, including Charles M. Russell: The Masterworks in Oil and Bronze, published by the OU Press in conjunction with the Denver Art Museum. Known for organizing exhibitions that push the field of American art in new and innovative directions, Neff is also a lecturer and
teacher, serving in 2010 as the H.E.R.E. Distinguished Lecturer at Rice University, Houston.

Neff will assume responsibilities at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art as OU prepares to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2015, of which the museum’s almost 80-year tradition of encouraging an understanding of art and culture is an important part.

“I am honored to join OU’s Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and to lead this important institution in its next chapter,” Neff said. “With almost 16,000 art objects in its collection, a new, state-of-the-art museum facility, and the stewardship of the renowned Bruce Goff-designed, mid-century modern Ledbetter House, the museum is an impressive institution with a talented staff. Moreover, it is an integral part of a dynamic and collaborative university led by President David Boren. I look forward to working with university leadership and the museum’s staff and Board of Visitors, to expand the art collections, shape the exhibitions program, broaden the museum’s audiences, and, most of all, advance its already distinguished reputation as one of the major university art museums in the United States.”

Neff has organized several major exhibitions for American art projects while in Houston with support of major grants and gifts from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, foundations, and private individuals. Neff recently mounted American Adversaries: West and Copley in a Transatlantic World, which is receiving praise for its innovative approach to exhibiting colonial American art in a global context. Other exhibitions include The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950, a show of more than 100 paintings and photographs, including paintings of the Santa Fe Indian School, that examined the role the American West played in the development of American modernism, and John Singleton Copley in England, based on her dissertation on the same subject, which revealed the entrepreneurial role the Boston colonial painter played on London’s 18th-century artistic stage.

An exhibition particularly celebrated in Houston, American Made: 250 Years of American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presented in 2012, highlighted for the first time in the museum’s history the superb quality and dramatic expansion of its collection. Neff also 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. Her involvement in the field of Remington studies includes her role as consultant to the Whitney Gallery of American Art at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

Neff holds a B.A. in art history from Yale University, an M.A. in art history from
Rice University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. She was chosen to participate as a Fellow at the Royal Collections Study Program (Attingham Trust); the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum and Research Center; the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She is a recent Fellow of the Center for Curatorial Leadership in New York City. Currently, she serves as President of the Association of Art Museum Curators, which has a membership of more than 1200 in North America.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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**IMAGE CREDIT**

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma announced Monday that Emily Ballew Neff, a distinguished curator of American art and the art of the American West, and the founding Curator of American Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will be appointed Director of the OU art museum, pending approval by the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents.

Photo courtesy of Will Michels