HOLCOMB ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM MEMORIAL ART GALLERY

ROCHESTER, NY, NOVEMBER 19, 2013 — Grant Holcomb, the Mary W. and Donald R. Clark Director of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, announced his retirement as director effective July 1, 2014. Holcomb noted that after an eventful year-long celebration of the Gallery’s 100th anniversary and the successful opening of Centennial Sculpture Park, the timing was right for him, as well as for the Gallery and the University. Board of Managers President Jim Durfee will lead a search committee charged with identifying a successor.

Holcomb stated, “What more appropriate time to conclude my long tenure as director than after an extraordinary and exhilarating year-long celebration of the Gallery’s Centennial anniversary.”

Holcomb, the sixth director in the Gallery’s long history, assumed the position in 1985 and over the course of three decades enhanced the Gallery’s permanent collections, broadened its exhibition programs and expanded the facilities. He led collaborations with cultural, educational and medical organizations that kept the Memorial Art Gallery an active leader for public engagement.

“Grant has shaped the Gallery’s internal and external spaces and enhanced its collections in ways that will benefit art lovers for generations to come,” University President Joel Seligman said.

Pete Brown, former President of the Board of Managers, recounts, “I had the pleasure of chairing the search committee that brought Grant to Rochester 28 years ago. We were struck then by his ability to share the art experience with everyone, regardless of background. To have had the singular continuity of Grant’s steady leadership and focus over the intervening years has enriched MAG and our community far beyond our most ambitious expectations.”

Under Holcomb’s direction, the Gallery initiated high-profile exhibitions featuring the work of Maxfield Parrish, Edgar Degas, Georgia O’Keeffe and Jacob Lawrence. MAG also acquired works of art ranging from an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus and a Renaissance suit of armor to works by such noted 19th- and 20th-century artists as Albert Bierstadt, Leonard Volk, Walter Goodman, George Bellows, Joseph Cornell, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith and Christian Boltanski. The Centennial year culminated with the addition of major contemporary works by Yayoi Kusama and Kehinde Wiley.

Holcomb supported significant initiatives between the Gallery’s Education Department and the University of Rochester Medical Center, the ARC of Monroe and the Alzheimer’s Association, among others. Programs like The Art of Observation and Meet Me at the MAG brought national recognition as medical professionals and caregivers, working with MAG staff, drew on the powers of art to enhance awareness and wellness.

Holcomb has long supported collaborative partnerships with other cultural organizations. Last year he received an award from Writers & Books for his “lifelong contributions to Rochester’s literary community.” Under his direction, the Gallery worked with, among others, Garth Fagan Dance, George Eastman House,
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Eastman School of Music, Writers & Books and Rochester Contemporary Art Center.

Holcomb also brought significant changes to the buildings and grounds of the Memorial Art Gallery. At the beginning of his tenure, the addition of the Vanden Brul Pavilion linked the original 1913 building to Cutler Union establishing a new indoor art space and main Gallery entrance on University Avenue. Most recently MAG completed the Centennial Sculpture Park and opened up the grounds committing the outdoor space to public art and community engagement. Four new site-specific sculptures make the park the largest initiative in Gallery history.

Holcomb is held in high regard by those who worked directly with him. His leadership fostered an environment of dedication and commitment at MAG summarized by a recent museum evaluator: “We have never seen a more dedicated group of board, staff and volunteers”.

Working with a national search firm, the formal process of accepting nominations for MAG’s next Director will begin, said Durfee. In addition to the Search Committee, finalists also will be interviewed by representatives of the Board of Managers, MAG senior staff, and University of Rochester leadership.

“Grant Holcomb has built a singular legacy of quality, character and community engagement,” Durfee said. “No one has been more effective at connecting diverse audiences with art.”

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