



**Memphis
Brooks
Museum
of Art**

For more information:
Denise Parnell, Marketing & PR Specialist
denise.parnell@brooksmuseum.org
901 544 6251

Our History

The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art was established in 1912 and opened for viewing in 1916 after Mrs. Samuel H. Brooks donated \$100,000 for the construction of the museum in honor of her late husband. While first maintained by the Memphis Park Commission, leadership changed to the hands of the Arts and Sciences Commission in 1970, which reported to the mayor. Not until 1983 did the museum change its name from the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery to the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Inc., and shortly after, separated from the city government and became the fully private institution it is today.

Brooks' permanent collections grew as a result of generous donors such as the Kress Foundation and the Moss family. Included in these donations are many of the museum's prized Renaissance and Baroque paintings hanging on the walls today. Prominent citizens, bequests, and support groups played and continue to play a major role in the acquisitions of artwork. In 1957, the private Fine Arts Foundation was formed to allow the museum to raise money for collections and programs through the subscription of memberships. Because the Brooks receives less than 12 percent of its budget from government funding, these memberships as well as donations from private contributors have continued to fund the annual growth of the museum.

The generosity of friends and supporters of the Brooks allows the museum to offer the highest quality exhibitions and educational programs. Since 1912, the Brooks has made education an integral part of the institution by offering a variety of creative programs for children of all ages. The Brooks still maintains a close relationship with the Memphis College of Art, incorporating art students into the public art world.

In 1965, Brooks Museum League, which helped to begin educational programs, initiated the docent program as well as the museum's first gift shop. An art reference library opened that helped to further the museum's educational mission. In 1979, the Decorative Arts Trust was formed, which not only helps to gain more decorative arts for the museum, but also hosts seminars, lectures, and events to expand the appreciation and understanding of decorative arts in Memphis.

Through exhibitions highlighting both the Brooks' permanent collection and world-class traveling exhibitions, as well as dynamic programming, the museum has become a center of cultural activity in Memphis. Without the help of generous donors and supporters, the collection of 19 paintings housed in a building of 8,200 feet in 1933

could never have grown to become the 9,000 works of art housed in a building of 86,000 feet. The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art continues to fulfill the purpose of its founder, Bessie Vance Brooks, as a “repository, conservatory, and museum of art ...for the enjoyment, inspiration, and instruction of our people.”

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