EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Position Description
For more than 100 years, the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art has operated successfully in Overton Park in Midtown Memphis. Now the Memphis Brooks Museum is poised to make an inspired strategic move to an entirely new and spectacularly sited building located downtown in a reanimated historic district, on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. And, of course, it was this iconic river, functioning as a great trading highway, which gave birth to Memphis itself.

At the beginning of its second century, the Memphis Brooks Museum will redefine itself in a dramatic new building designed by the Swiss firm of Herzog & de Meuron. The new Memphis Brooks Museum will be the only museum by the firm in the central and mid-south regions of North America. The new Memphis Brooks Museum building and its programs will play a key role in the rapidly evolving rebirth of the Memphis riverfront. The reborn museum will be a powerful cultural amenity for the citizens of Memphis, an important attraction for the visitors to the city and a renewed source of civic pride. The new building and the museum’s collections and programs will reinvigorate its relationship to the city and the broad and diverse community it serves.

The Memphis Brooks Museum intends to be a leader in and a source of inspiration for issues of diversity, equity and inclusion not only in Memphis and throughout Tennessee, but in the mid-south region that it serves. The setting of the new museum building, walking distance from both Memphis’ extraordinary National Civil Rights Museum, and Memphis’ famous home for blues music, Beale Street, will provide a unique platform to attract visitors, to celebrate diversity, equity and inclusivity and to reflect the civic and artistic values embodied in an important new art museum in the second quarter of the 21st century. The museum’s board leadership is progressive and optimistic about the future of Memphis and its museum. The museum’s volunteer leadership sees the new Executive Director as absolutely central to relaunching the museum into its second century in its new home and to bringing staff, board and community together under the umbrella of an expanded vision for the Memphis Brooks Museum. The museum’s board is eager to rally behind and support an energetic new leader’s vision.
The Memphis Brooks Museum was founded in 1916, and since that time, the Museum has been located in midtown in Overton Park. It is the only encyclopedic art museum in Tennessee with over 8,000 works of art in its collection. Ancient objects in the collection range geographically from China and Greece to the Ancient Americas. Greater depth is provided in European art, which ranges chronologically from a group of Kress Collection old master paintings to a collection of Impressionist paintings given by Memphis philanthropist Hugo Dixon. The American collection is the museum’s core strength, and the most dynamic aspect of the permanent collection is its modern and contemporary collection. The museum has a substantial collection of works on paper, including important holdings by two seminal Memphis based photographers: Ernest Withers (1922-2007) and William Eggleston (1939 - to date). The museum also owns a large collection of paintings by Memphis based painter Carroll Cloar (1913-1993). In recent years the museum’s purchases have focused on acquiring significant works of African American art through its newly established Blackmon-Perry Fellowship.

The advent of a new museum building brings with it the opportunity to make strategic acquisitions, and to revisit, rethink, and reimagine how to creatively display and interpret the collection in its new home. The new Executive Director, working closely with curators, educators and the exhibition team, will play a major role in visioning all aspects of the museum’s collection. In addition, the new Executive Director will serve as a catalyst to develop an exciting program of temporary exhibitions and educational programs and to initiate strategic institutional partnerships both near and far.

The new museum building is planned to be 112,000 square feet, and the museum plans to break ground on the new structure in mid-2023. Completion of the building is expected to be late 2025. The galleries will be arranged on a single floor around a central court and will provide approximately 25% more gallery space than currently exists. The plan includes a 175-seat box theater/lecture room overlooking the courtyard, as well as additional education spaces, a café and a museum shop. Other visitor amenities include both a covered and an outdoor roof top deck with an expansive vista of the Mississippi, providing elegant sunset views. The project is expected to cost $150 million and a capital campaign for the new building has been successful in raising $100 million to date.

The average operating budget of the Memphis Brooks Museum is currently $3.8 million. It is thought that the budget will expand in the new building. The museum staff currently consists of approximately 50 employees with the expectation that this number will increase due to the relocation. In 1989, the museum separated from city government and became a fully private institution operated by a separate non-profit organization. The city provides annual operating and maintenance funding to the Memphis Brooks Museum.

The Memphis Brooks Museum has an endowment to support a small portion of its annual operations. In 2021, the Blackmon-Perry Fellowship was established by a group of anonymous donors to establish a permanent rotating position for an emerging curator of color and to provide funding for exhibitions and acquisitions of artwork by contemporary and historic Black artists.
Memphis is the second largest city in Tennessee after Nashville, and it is located in the most populous county in the state, Shelby County. Memphis is the home to Tennessee’s largest African-American population. Over 60% of the city of Memphis’ population is African-American. While the city’s population is more than 600,000 people, greater Memphis has a population of more than 1.3 million. Memphis is widely known as the global headquarters of FedEx, the city’s largest employer, as well as the headquarters of AutoZone and International Paper, among other national and international public and private companies with a presence in the city. The city is also home to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

Studio Gang, a leading architecture and planning firm in Chicago, has developed the Memphis Riverfront Concept to increase the riverfront’s “use, vibrancy and economic potential.” The plan includes six miles of paths for walking and cycling, and the plan has triggered intense residential and commercial development downtown. This plan is now a reality with great forward momentum. All of these facets: a revitalized riverfront, renovated historic structures for commercial and residential purposes, new restaurants, adjacency to music and other cultural and entertainment amenities provide an energized and dynamic context for the new Memphis Brooks Museum to fit into, to help to define and to further energize.

In addition to the Memphis Brooks Museum and the National Civil Rights Museum, the city of Memphis is home to the Dixon Gallery and Gardens and the Memphis Botanic Garden. Memphis’ unique, generative role in the history of music is celebrated at Graceland, the home of Elvis Presley, and at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, as well as the Sun Studio and other venues and at annual music festivals including Beale Street Music Festival and Mempho Music Festival. Institutions of higher learning include the University of Memphis, Rhodes College, and LeMoyne-Owen College. Memphis’ unique culinary heritage is celebrated annually at the Memphis in May World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest.
The next Executive Director of the Memphis Brooks Museum should be a dynamic and energetic leader, who possesses both wisdom, experience and emotional intelligence fused with a deep understanding of art. The ability to energize staff, volunteers and community leaders to craft and operationalize a fresh vision of what art can bring to the Memphis Brooks Museum’s community is vital. The new Executive Director should also be an innovative and entrepreneurial leader who possesses a passion for art and will seek to understand the narrative of Memphis.

Position Description: Executive Director
LEADERSHIP

The position requires someone with visionary and strategic leadership who can anticipate, identify and address current and future opportunities and challenges the Memphis Brooks Museum faces in its current location as well as its anticipated relocation. The successful candidate will be able to translate their own personal artistic passion and skills into increased community engagement. Building trust among various constituents is important in developing an effective team of staff, volunteers and community members. Fundraising – that is, securing the financial resources to enable the museum to achieve its ambitions is – of course, very important, and some prior experience in it is highly desirable. Similarly, “soft skills” like courage and humor, flexibility and institutional agility (being able to pivot and capitalize on new opportunities) are also desirable attributes for a successful candidate to possess. With a strong building committee and a team of experienced consultants, the successful candidate will also play a pivotal role in completing the capital campaign, overseeing the construction of the new museum and leading the move and transition of the museum’s collection and operations into the new building.
FUNDRAISING & EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Learning about and understanding what Memphis has to offer as a city and how to harness those values into the museum’s program is important and is likely to lead to both fundraising success and significant community partnerships. The Executive Director should serve as a cultural ambassador for Memphis with a wide range of local, regional and national art world relationships. Developing and maintaining productive relationships with a variety of important stakeholders including donors, foundations, members, City of Memphis leadership, the business community, the Downtown Memphis Commission, and other government, business, philanthropic and civic leaders and groups will be important keys to success. The Executive Director will be expected to be the critical leader in proactively identifying and securing new sources of capital and operating funding and in leading the execution of comprehensive marketing and brand development strategies which will position the Memphis Brooks Museum appropriately and expand local, regional, national and international partnerships.
ARTISTIC & PROGRAMMATIC LEADERSHIP

Knowing about and being able to articulate the relevance of great art as an agent of educational and civic improvement is a core competency. The "power of art to change lives" is part of the museum's missions statement, and the museum is a primary engine for arts education in the Memphis community. In addition, a passion for art education and community engagement will enable the new Executive Director to lead effectively inside and outside of the museum and for the museum itself to further contribute to the vibrancy of Memphis. The Executive Director’s contacts with artists, other museum leaders throughout the United States and abroad, art dealers and collectors will be important ways to connect the Memphis Brooks Museum and Memphis to the larger world. The Executive Director should have the capacity of bringing the world to Memphis and Memphis to the world.
The Executive Director has ultimate oversight and responsibility for the operations, financial management and development, including growth of earned and contributed income, of the museum. The Memphis Brooks Museum is a lean operation but with sufficient resources and the anticipated relocation, the museum’s operations will certainly grow. The next Executive Director also needs to be a prudent and strategic steward of the museum’s existing financial resources and a partner with Board leadership, donors and other stakeholders to increase the available financial resources. The new Executive Director should be current with digital innovations which can expand the Memphis Brooks Museum’s footprint through its website and active and creative digital marketing.

Key metrics for success in this role include operating the museum with a balanced budget while thoughtfully and carefully building increased financial capacity in its endowments. Endowment growth for operations and acquisitions will be a vital long term fundraising goal. It is likely that there will be record attendance and greatly increased membership when the new building opens. Plans for sustaining the anticipated expanded membership growth and attendance in the new building will be important.
CANDIDATE PROFILE

There are many facets to successful museum directors: artistic drive and acuity is fundamental. Crafting a broad vision and then developing the plans and effective personal relationships and financial ability to carry out that vision are all key. Museums are collective enterprises and successful directors develop and nurture their staffs in a team-like environment. Maintaining traditional relationships while developing new artistic, financial and academic connections in Memphis and in other parts of the country is a crucial skill. And the Executive Director should deeply enjoy the privilege of bringing great art and programs in a unique setting to the Memphis community. The ideal candidate will have proven success in building, motivating and developing a high-performing team and will be an entrepreneurial and strategic leader with a track record for leading a growing organization to success. Specifically, the candidate should exhibit exceptional leadership skills with the capacity to set clear priorities, delegate to a leadership team, solve problems effectively and efficiently and successfully execute and achieve forward-thinking strategic, curatorial and operational plans and objectives. A demonstrated track record for developing and maximizing financial resources with contributed and earned income is preferred.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE
A passion for art and an interest in the collection and the museum as an institution are required. An advanced degree or equivalent knowledge in art history, fine arts, business administration or other related fields is preferable as well as at least five years of relevant administrative, management or leadership experience. Leadership experience in an organization of relevant size and scope is highly desirable, as is experience in fundraising, organizational change and team development.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION
The Memphis Brooks Museum and its leader should exemplify its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as a core value, which is reflected transparently throughout the institution, its staff, programs, and collections.

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To make recommendations, express your interest in applying, and/or submit a letter of application and supporting materials, please email DirectorSearch@brooksmuseum.org.

All nominations, inquiries, discussions and applications will be considered strictly confidential.

The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is an Equal Opportunity Employer and strongly encourages applications from a diverse pool of candidates. For more information about the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, please visit: https://www.brooksmuseum.org/