Deputy Director and Chief of Curatorial Affairs
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
Kansas City, Missouri

THE SEARCH

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art seeks a visionary, collaborative, and strategically minded leader to serve as its next Deputy Director and Chief of Curatorial Affairs. A cornerstone of Kansas City's cultural landscape and one of the nation's premier art museums, the Nelson-Atkins is internationally recognized for its exceptional encyclopedic collection spanning Asian art, photography, European and American paintings, modern sculpture, and Native American, African and Egyptian art. Through free admission, innovative programs, and community-centered engagement, the museum fulfills its mission of making transformative art experiences accessible to all.

Reporting to the Director & Chief Executive Officer, the Deputy Director and Chief of Curatorial Affairs will join the museum at a pivotal moment as it prepares for a major renovation and expansion. As a strategic partner to the Director & CEO, this leader will help shape the museum's curatorial direction and guide the planning and reinstallation of its collections throughout the campus.

The successful candidate will be an accomplished curator and people leader who pairs exceptional aesthetic judgment and intellectual curiosity with the ability to translate ambitious ideas into action. They will be a collaborative, team-oriented leader who can mentor staff, cultivate external relationships, and navigate the complexity of large-scale institutional change.

The museum has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this recruitment. All inquiries, nominations, and applications with cover letters should be submitted in confidence to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART

History

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art arose from the aspirations of two individuals, William Rockhill Nelson and Mary McAfee Atkins. William Rockhill Nelson, founder of The Kansas City Star and a real estate developer, was convinced that for a city to be truly civilized, art and culture were necessities. When he died in 1915, at the direction of his will, the bulk of his estate was used to establish the William Rockhill Nelson Trust for the purchase of works of art. Mary McAfee Atkins, a retired schoolteacher and real estate investor, was inspired by the art she encountered on trips to Europe. When she died in 1911, she provided the city with approximately one-third of her estate to purchase land for a public art museum. The two estates were combined to build an art museum for the people of Kansas City.

The museum opened to the public on Dec. 11, 1933, with lines that stretched to the street. The east wing was named the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, and the remainder of the building was called the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art. In 1982, in preparation for the museum's 50th anniversary the following year, the institution became known as The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The Nelson-Atkins has offered free admission to all people for nearly 25 years. Trustees agreed to formally make admission free as part of the Strategic Plan adopted in 1998, and that is considered a core part of the museum's mission today. With intention and planning, the museum has deepened its commitment to inclusion. That means collecting works of art with an expanded diversity, stronger partnerships with local organizations, and listening to community members. Housing the Spencer Art Reference Library, a major art research library, and the Ford Learning Center, the museum also stands as a key educational resource for the region.

You can read more about the museum and its impressive collection, representing the depths and complexities of the human experience, here.

Mission and Values

Rooted in the belief that art has the ability to uplift, surprise, challenge, connect, and transform, the museum gives expression not only to distant cultures and times but also to immediate voices and issues and provides avenues for exploring the world, past and present, and for informing our shared future. The Museum is guided by three core strategies:

Welcoming All People: The Museum welcomes all people and offers many different paths for its community members to experience art. Doing so requires that onsite and virtual experiences are open, accessible, and easy to navigate. By offering fresh ways for guests to enjoy and interact with art, they will be inspired to return to the Museum and virtual sites again and again with a renewed sense of curiosity.

Learning from the Community: The Museum seeks to learn from the diverse communities that make up their audiences, staff, and trustees, from the immediate neighborhoods surrounding them to the global art world. Located in the geographical heart of Kansas City, the Museum reciprocally invests in the city's arts and cultural communities, fostering collaborations and artistic vibrancy. Through intentional listening

and learning from the greater Kansas City community, the museum can become more welcoming, more meaningful, and more relevant to all.

Ensuring the Museum's Future: The Museum is committed to building an informed and invested group of staff, volunteers, and trustees who are dedicated to the Museum's future through shared values and open, direct, and respectful communication. The Museum's future is deeply intertwined with that of Kansas City and will succeed only when the surrounding communities thrive through mutual investment, strengthening existing partnerships, and building new ones.

Current and Future Context

Now over nine decades have passed since the museum opened to the public. Because of the care and support of many people through the years, the Nelson-Atkins is home to nearly 50,000 works of art, with a campus that includes the original Nelson-Atkins Building, the Bloch Building expansion that opened in 2007, and the stunning Donald J. Hall Sculpture Park.

Recognizing the vital role the Museum plays in the community and in the arts world, the museum's board decided to embark on a bold campus transformation and capital campaign to more fully serve all Kansas Citians by expanding their facilities. The expansion, funded solely through private philanthropy, will provide more spaces to welcome audiences, new galleries to showcase art and the museum's globally recognized collections, new immersive experiences, and even greater opportunities to attend programs and make connections on the museum's beautiful campus. Welcoming entrances, intuitive pathways, and drop-in art-making spaces will prioritize ease, openness, and accessibility. With these changes, patrons will not just interact with the arts as viewers, but as participants as well. To ensure the transformation is impactful for museumgoers for generations to come, the redesigned museum spaces will be sustainable and built to adapt and grow as the needs and interests of the community change. Beyond energy-efficient spaces and smart design, this project signals a bright future for the museum — one that offers free general admission to creativity, joy, and cultural connections into perpetuity.

You can read more about the expansion, its scope, and the museum's roadmap for change here.

Leadership and Governance

Julián Zugazagoitia | Director & Chief Executive Officer

In 2010, Dr. Julián Zugazagoitia became the fifth Director & Chief Executive Officer of the Nelson-Atkins Museum. Zugazagoitia has been a prominent figure in the art world for decades and is known for his high-energy leadership, art connoisseurship, and community spirit. Born and raised in Mexico City, educated at the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre in France, Zugazagoitia has worked at institutions like UNESCO, The Getty Conservation Institute, the Guggenheim Museum, and Museo del Barrio in the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Zugazagoitia has served as Chair of the Warhol Foundation, as President and Board Member of the Association of Art Museum Directors, and was recently elevated to Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres Medal by the French Ministry of Culture, honored as a Distinguished Citizen of Mexico, and inducted into the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2025.

Following the 2020 pandemic, Zugazagoitia's stewardship allowed the Nelson-Atkins to become one of the few U.S. museums, reported by The Art Newspaper, to quickly welcome visitors back, achieving 77% of the pre-pandemic attendance just one year after reopening. The museum has since attracted an even more diverse audience, enjoyed solidly growing attendance that exceeds pre-pandemic levels, and maintained a strong focus on the core of its strategic plan.

Zugazagoitia also launched a major initiative to collaborate with local artists and showcase and celebrate creativity and diversity, all while pursuing many successful collaborations with other nonprofits, corporations, and fellow art museums. He has overseen critically acclaimed exhibitions with international partners including *Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky* with the Musée du quai Branly in Paris and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; *Alberto Giacometti: Toward the Ultimate Figure* with the Foundation Giacometti in Paris, which enjoyed a national tour; and more recently, *Hokusai: Inspiration and Influence* and *Mucha: Art Nouveau/Nouveau Monde*, organized in collaboration with international lenders and the Mucha Foundation in Prague.

The Board of Trustees

The museum is overseen by the Nelson Gallery Foundation Board of Trustees, who are responsible for the overall governance of the organization, the advancement of its mission, and its deep connection to the cultural fabric of Kansas City. The Board currently comprises 28 corporate and civic leaders within the city, and includes five executive officers, a Chair, two Vice Chairs, a Secretary, and a Treasurer.

Finances

Given that the Museum does not charge admission, it depends on building a strong endowment, fundraising, and philanthropy activities, among other earned revenue sources. For FY26, Museum operations were in excess of $42 million, 35% from fundraising and grants, 18% from earned revenues, and 47% from endowment support. The museum had net assets approaching $600M with endowment funds valued at roughly $400M and has successfully achieved a balanced budget for over 15 years running.

You can find the museum's most recent audited financial statement here.

Kansas City

A metropolitan city with a population of approximately two million people, Kansas City has an admirably high quality of life that melds nationally recognized arts, culture, sports, cuisine, business, and education institutions that place a high value on excellence and innovation. The city's central location in the heart of the country enables easy connection to all coastal, southern, and midwestern destinations and offers the distinction of being one of the top ten cities with the most green space per capita. The city is composed of character-defining neighborhoods, such as the River Market District in the north, the 18th and Vine District in the east, and Country Club Plaza in the south. Celebrated cultural traditions include Kansas City jazz; the Chiefs, Royals, Sporting KC, and KC Current professional franchises; and famous cuisine founded

on travel-worthy KC barbeque and local craft breweries. Kansas City combines a high quality of life and affordable cost of living with a thriving arts and cultural landscape, distinctive neighborhoods, parks, and other amenities. The region is home to major employers, including AMC, American Century, Burns & McDonnell, Garmin International, H&R Block, Hallmark Cards, Russell Stover, and T-Mobile. Its mix of professional opportunity, cultural richness, and accessibility makes Kansas City an attractive place to live and build a career.

ROLE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND CHIEF OF CURATORIAL AFFAIRS

The Deputy Director and Chief of Curatorial Affairs is a key member of the museum's senior leadership team and a strategic partner to the Director & CEO. The role contributes to institution-wide leadership and helps align artistic vision with the museum's broader strategic, operational, and public-engagement goals.

The role oversees curatorial, conservation, collections, registration, exhibitions, and provenance, and leads through collaboration, sound judgment, and institutional perspective. The Deputy Director will foster strong relationships across departments and with artists, scholars, donors, trustees, and community stakeholders.

A central charge will be guiding the museum's collections and galleries through a definitive expansion, including long-range planning, collection redeployment, and reinstallation. The role calls for a leader who can build consensus, navigate ambiguity, and maintain a compelling, unifying curatorial vision. It is not suited to an inflexible, top-down leader or one who prioritizes individual projects and legacy over collection activation, institutional collaboration, and the museum's public and educational mission.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Strategic Vision & Institutional Leadership: Provides leadership in developing and implementing a long-term curatorial vision that reflects the museum's commitment to excellence while embracing new voices, scholarship, and audiences. Works across departments to align priorities, navigate ambiguity during periods of change, and build institutional consensus around ambitious goals and initiatives.

Collections, Exhibitions & Conservation Leadership: Leads strategic planning for collections, exhibitions, conservation, acquisitions, and deaccessioning. Ensures that collection growth, stewardship, and presentation align with the museum’s mission and future aspirations, with a strong commitment to provenance research, repatriation, and ethical collections practices. Oversees the thoughtful interpretation and display of collections with exceptional aesthetic judgment and scholarly rigor.

Expansion & Collection Redeployment: Provides leadership for the collection's strategic reinstallation and presentation as part of the museum's expansion efforts. Works closely with architects, designers, facilities teams, and staff to ensure that collection planning and gallery development support long-term institutional goals and visitor engagement.

Operational & Administrative Leadership: Partners with senior leadership on budgeting, planning, and resource allocation, providing thoughtful financial stewardship and balancing curatorial priorities with available resources. Oversees the operational infrastructure supporting curatorial work, including collections management, registration, conservation, and digital asset systems. Brings experience managing large-scale institutional initiatives and complex organizational projects.

External Relations, Public Engagement & Development: Enthusiastically serves as a visible ambassador for the museum and its collections. Cultivates relationships with donors, collectors, artists, scholars, and community leaders. Supports fundraising efforts and effectively communicates the museum's vision to a range of audiences. Champions interpretation and educational strategies that invite participation, dialogue, and meaningful engagement.

Team Leadership & Talent Development: Builds and sustains a collaborative, inclusive, and high-performing culture. Provides direct supervision and leadership to department leaders, setting clear expectations, managing performance, and fostering accountability for individual and team outcomes. Recruits, mentors, and develops curatorial and collections staff while creating opportunities for professional growth, leadership development, and cross-functional collaboration. Encourages a team-first approach centered on institutional success and collective achievement.

Innovation & Future Readiness: Maintains awareness of evolving trends in museum practice, interpretation, audience engagement, and technology. Encourages thoughtful experimentation and strategic innovation while balancing new opportunities with scholarly excellence and long-term institutional impact.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Nelson-Atkins welcomes candidates from any curatorial discipline. This position is not defined by a specific collection area, but by a candidate's breadth of vision, leadership capabilities, and readiness to help shape the future of a world-class institution.

Desired Experience

- Significant senior-level curatorial and museum leadership experience within a complex cultural organization.
- A proven record of developing and executing successful exhibitions, collection reinstallations, and interpretive initiatives that demonstrate scholarly rigor, aesthetic excellence, and a commitment to public engagement.
- Experience leading, mentoring, and developing high-performing teams across multiple disciplines.
- Experience participating in a large-scale institutional project, including but not limited to capital projects and campaigns, gallery renovations, collection redeployments, building transitions, or museum expansion.

- Demonstrated ability to clearly communicate artistic objectives and balance them with operational and organizational realities.
- Experience building consensus among diverse stakeholders, including colleagues, trustees, artists, donors, and staff.
- Familiarity with emerging technologies, digital interpretation strategies, and audience engagement tools.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The compensation for this role is expected to be $220,000-250,000. Salary information is a general guideline only. The museum considers factors such as (but not limited to) scope and responsibilities of the position, candidate's work experience, education/training, key skills, internal peer equity, as well as market and business considerations when extending an offer.

The position is located in Kansas City, Missouri. The demands on the role necessitate a commitment to being a consistent physical presence at the Museum and may require occasional evening, weekend, and holiday work.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and resumes with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website linked here.

Sarah James, Quizayra Gonzalez, Siobhan Hanley
Isaacson, Miller

Commitment to Inclusion

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is committed to fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible environment for all. The Museum seeks to build a team that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves and encourages applications from individuals of all backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Equal Opportunity Employer

The Museum is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other protected status.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art would supersede any conflicting information in this document.