



## **sheldon**

**Search for the Director**

**University of Nebraska – Lincoln**

**Lincoln, NE**

### **THE SEARCH**

The University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) is seeking a progressive and dynamic Director for the Sheldon Museum of Art. Building on a legacy dating back to 1888, the museum seeks visionary leadership to guide an entrepreneurial community and education focused institution. The museum is guided in its engagement by its mission: *Through our collections, exhibitions and programs, Sheldon Museum of Art inspires inquiry and discovery serving the University of Nebraska, the state, and beyond.* The Sheldon Museum of Art is home to a collection of world class American, modern, and contemporary art in an architecturally significant building and wonderful gem of a destination designed by renowned architect Philip Johnson.

To enhance its strengths, the Sheldon continues to build an art collection of international distinction and increase engagement with art through educational programs, exhibitions, and digital access. The Museum positions the visitor as central in all its actions and prioritizes building a welcoming learning experience for all the diverse audiences who engage with its art. The Sheldon Museum of Art has been on a path of sustainable growth and increased prominence. The next Director will bring an ambitious and inspiring vision for the role of the museum within the university and in serving the greater public of Nebraska and beyond.

UNL has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the next Sheldon Museum of Art Director. Please direct all applications, nominations, and inquiries to Isaacson, Miller, as indicated at the end of this document.

## The Museum

The University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) is a Big Ten, research university and the flagship institution of the four campuses comprising the University of Nebraska system. UNL currently has nearly 24,000 undergraduate and graduate students and is recognized as a top national public land-grant institution.

Sheldon is an integral part of the academic enterprise at UNL and a visual arts resource for the campus. Sheldon Museum of Art's collection, site, university, and community support position it as a premier university art museum and unlike many among its peers also is a leading cultural institution in the state of Nebraska. In 2001, the Sheldon Art Association (SAA) and the University adopted an agreement to formalize the operating relationship between the two organizations. UNL and the SAA are joint founders of Sheldon and have engaged for many years in a unique public-private partnership to support and enhance Sheldon. The SAA is an independent 501(c)(3), membership-based organization dedicated to supporting Sheldon and enjoys the distinction of being the oldest continuing art support organization in the United States. A major gift to the University came in 1950, when longtime SAA member Frances Sheldon died and left her private art collection and one million dollars to UNL for the "purpose of constructing and equipping a gallery." The University designated campus land for the building site, and Philip Johnson was selected to design the building. The building and sculpture garden are situated in a unified fine and performing arts complex on campus. Sheldon is a campus arts partner with the Lied Center for Performing Arts and the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts, which also includes the Nebraska Repertory Theatre, and the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center.

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, Sheldon houses both the Sheldon Art Association (SAA) collection, founded in 1888, and the University of Nebraska collection, initiated in 1929. Together these collections comprise over 13,000 works of art in all media. The 1,420 SAA-acquired-and-owned objects in the collection constitute 37% of the overall collection's value. This collection is renowned for its American art, including prominent holdings of 19th-century landscape and still life, American Impressionism, early Modernism, geometric abstraction, Regionalism, Abstract Expressionism, pop, minimalism and contemporary art. It includes works by Edward Hopper, Andy Warhol, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock, Mary Cassatt, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jacob Lawrence, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Marsden Hartley, Robert Motherwell, Robert Henri, Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Frank Stella, Gaston Lachaise, Constantin Brancusi, Elie Nadelman, Jacques Lipchitz, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, David Smith, William Tucker, Bryan Hunt, Mark di Suvero, Michael Heizer and Richard Serra. Recent purchases include significant works by Richard Avedon, Robert Colescott, Rackstraw Downes, Leonardo Drew, Melvin Edwards, Ron Gorchov, Carmen Herrera, Elizabeth Murray, Odili Donald Odita, Joyce Pensato, Amanda Ross-Ho, Peter Saul, Kiki Smith, Pat Steir, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Stanley Whitney, and Sue Williams. Of the 266 acquisitions purchased by the museum since 2006, more than 37% were by women and 42% were by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) artists. The collection is also noted for important works in photography and sculpture and the Sculpture Garden, created in the early 1970s, has been expanded across the university campus and today more than 30 monumental sculptures are exhibited year-round.



Sheldon Museum of Art houses 11 galleries totaling 10,017 square feet, administrative offices, storage space for some of the collections and the need to find more, a museum store and a 299-seat theater. One enters Sheldon through the sunlit 3,375 square foot Great Hall, which serves as an additional exhibition space and provides a spacious gathering place for public and private events. In addition to the 18 full-time and three part-time

staff and five security guards employed at Sheldon, there are 50 volunteers supporting departmental efforts. An endowment restricted to acquisitions generates income annually. Under the predecessor's tenure, the SAA endowment in support of the museum has increased plus or minus 457% since 2014. Separate from the SAA, there is also a Sheldon Advisory Board of approximately 20 members who are appointed by the Chancellor of UNL. Sheldon's Board advises on all acquisitions (donations and purchases) for the UNL permanent collection and loans to other institutions and exhibitions.

The curatorial staff works hard to organize compelling exhibitions drawn from the permanent collection, as well as loan works, like its Hopper "Room in New York" (1931) most recently to The Whitney's critically acclaimed "Edward Hopper's New York" (2023) exhibition. Since 2016, Sheldon has traveled 53 objects to 36 exhibitions at 60 different domestic and international venues, reaching over 3.5 million visitors outside Nebraska. Educational programs such as symposia, lectures, K-12 class visits, and tours are organized in conjunction with exhibitions and independently. The museum annually welcomes around 60,000 visitors, and is proud to craft compelling reasons for visitors to return when tourism is not a given in Lincoln. In a typical year, 7,300 students, 28% of the university's student population, engage with the museum through the class visits and both co- and extra-curricular programs.

Reaching out statewide to children and adults has long been a core value for the Museum. Sheldon Statewide is an outreach program created in 1987, with the mission to serve Nebraska communities throughout the state by sharing the museum's outstanding collection of American art. Sheldon Statewide typically starts with an annual exhibition at Sheldon, which then goes on tour. In 2022, there were 24,000 visitors to the Sheldon Statewide exhibition in Beatrice, Chadron, Fremont, North Platte, Omaha, Seward, York, and surrounding communities. Sheldon's permanent collection is digitized and [available online](#) to engage viewers in any geographic location and opens doors to increasing study of the collection. Virtual galleries enable visitors to explore exhibitions street-view-style. In 2022, there were 24,729 unique visitors to the collection online and 1,077,773 views of artworks in the collection. 92,400 people were reached through virtual tours, online gallery guide downloads, online artist and curator talks, and digital learning tools and engagement. <https://sheldonartmuseum.org/>

## **ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR**

The Director has responsibility for the artistic and administrative leadership of the Museum including development of a clear future strategy, audience engagement, care of the collections, acquisitions, and exhibitions. The Director also has responsibility for the overall management of Sheldon's physical, human and financial resources, its programs, direction and growth. The Director reports directly to the University Chancellor through the Associate to the Chancellor. In addition, the Director works closely with the Sheldon Art Association and Sheldon Advisory Board.

## **OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES**

The next Director will address the following key opportunities and challenges:

### **Define the strategic direction and lead the achievement of organizational goals**

The next Director will develop a broad vision of the type and range of potential programs and strategies that will best serve the Museum's mission and goals, including considering how exhibition programming relates to collection development. Since the pandemic, the Sheldon has developed strong exhibitions solely from its collection to great success. This has girded the museum's efforts to assert its tangible contribution and relevance on a campus known for Agriculture and Engineering and in a tech ecosystem informally referred to as 'Silicon Prairie' .

The Sheldon Museum of Art supports the four core aspirations of UNL as set in the [N2025 Strategic Plan](#): *Nebraska students co-create their experience; Our research and creativity transform lives and learning; Every person and every interaction matters; Engagement builds communities*. Guided by these aspirations, the Museum developed a [2020-2025 strategic plan](#). The next director will have the opportunity to adapt it in as a 'post pandemic' world and build upon it to set the vision and plan for the next phase of the Museum's future. Some short terms objectives worth noting include AAM reaccreditation in 2026; assessing staffing based on a new vision and multiple intentionally open positions for the incoming director to use.

### **Ensure long term financial sustainability through exceptional management and fundraising**

The Sheldon is in a strong financial position and the next leader will continue to grow the museum. Deepening existing relationships and establishing new connections throughout the community will be an essential element to build philanthropic support, including with the SAA and UNL Foundation, where possible. The Museum also has a track record of success receiving national support, including from the National Endowment for the Arts, Henry Luce Foundation, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Director will partner with Sheldon's Development Director, the SAA's President and Fund Development Committee, and the University of Nebraska Foundation to successfully fundraise for all Sheldon ambitions and activities.

### **Enhance the Museum's mission through expanding its regional, national, and international reach**

The Director will take a proactive approach as spokesperson for Sheldon and represent it to the University community as well as to a statewide and national audience and establish productive relationships with collectors, patrons, and community organizations. The Director will represent the museum in the greater Lincoln community as an engaged arts and culture leader and partner. In addition to serving as the face of the institution, the Director will prioritize strategy in marketing and engagement to expansively reach new audiences.

Within the campus, the Director will also have ongoing communication with the Deans and Directors of various colleges, centers, and divisions to strengthen and broaden a strong campus collaboration and identify new opportunities for collaboration. The Museum will continue to be an active resource for members of the university community and an integral part of student life and learning. Sheldon pays interns top salaries on campus to attract the best and brightest and securing additional resources to expand the popular program from six to a ready ten to twelve students would be lauded and welcome.

### **Lead, develop, and empower a high performing team**

The Sheldon Museum of Art is home to a team of collaborative and highly-motivated professionals. An enthusiastic mentor, the Director will prioritize creating opportunities for professional growth and leadership. Cultivating an empowering organizational culture to support the staff in their roles is a key element to Sheldon's success. The Director will be a values-driven leader who maintains clear communications, including through delegation of specific responsibilities and appropriate authority, maintaining transparency in decision-making, and regular supportive engagement with the full team.

### **QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

While no one person will embody all of them, the successful candidate will exemplify many of the following qualifications and attributes:

- A level of education appropriate to the position, at least an advanced degree in a relevant field and preferably seven or more years working experience within museums; broad knowledge of American modern and contemporary art and the current trends and attitudes of the American art scene considered a plus;
- Familiarity with the needs of the academic community and the general public and the communication skills to address both competently;
- Evidence of leadership in and strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity;
- Demonstrated success in fundraising and donor cultivation;
- A clear, inclusive communicator who would err on the side of repetition rather than omission.
- A desire to invest in the regional community and its citizens

- Excellent leadership and management skills, experience in staff development and institutional administration; the ability and appetite to develop and mentor staff;
- Strong financial management skills to oversee the financial needs of a growing institution;
- Demonstrated ability as a strategic thinker, planner and executor; an operating style that encourages collaboration;
- Ability to learn, navigate, and lead within a larger university environment;
- Strong interpersonal skills; superb oral and written communication skills to present ideas clearly and persuasively.

### **Applications, Inquiries, and Nominations**

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent in confidence to:

Sarah James and Ryan Leichenauer  
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/sheldon-museum-art/director>

*As an EO/AA employer, the University of Nebraska considers qualified applicants for employment without regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation. See <https://www.unl.edu/equity/notice-nondiscrimination>.*