



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 16, 2017

MEDIA CONTACT
Kat Harding | (919) 664-6795 | kharding@ncartmuseum.org

**North Carolina Museum of Art Director Lawrence J. Wheeler
Announces Retirement**

After 24 years at the Museum, Wheeler will step down in November 2018

Raleigh, N.C.—The North Carolina Museum of Art’s director, Lawrence J. Wheeler, has announced his plans to retire in November 2018. In his 23 years at the helm of the NCMA thus far, Wheeler has led the Museum to new heights, shaping it into a top-tier art destination and, above all, a welcoming community space for a growing city and state. Wheeler will continue as director until a new director is appointed.

Wheeler was named director of the Museum in October 1994, having served as assistant director at the Cleveland Museum of Art and, before that, as deputy secretary at the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources in Raleigh. During his tenure the NCMA has become one of the leading art museums in America, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to the Museum galleries, special exhibitions, and Ann and Jim Goodnight Museum Park.

“North Carolinians of all walks of life have access to one of the most renowned art museums in the country thanks to Larry Wheeler’s visionary leadership,” Governor Roy Cooper said. “From overseeing construction of the original Museum building, to its ambitious expansion in 2010, to the creation of the new Museum Park, Larry has been the North Carolina Museum of Art’s guiding light. North Carolina is better for his service, and Kristin and I wish him all the best in his well-earned retirement.”

In 2006, under Wheeler’s leadership, the Museum unveiled its design for an ambitious expansion. His vision for a spacious, light-filled structure to house the Museum’s permanent collection became a reality in April 2010 with the opening of West Building. Today the American Institute of Architects award-winning space, surrounded by sculpture gardens and reflecting pools, presents works drawn from the NCMA’s outstanding permanent collection, spanning 5,000 years from ancient Egypt to the present day.

Wheeler also oversaw the innovative redesign and transformation of the Museum Park, which is among the largest museum parks in the world. The Park redefines the traditional museum experience as the site of outdoor art installations, community gathering spaces for social interactions, contemplative gardens, and the Joseph M. Bryan, Jr., Theater in the Museum Park, home to a celebrated outdoor performing arts series. “Ultimately, his complete trust in the vision and creative journey shaped the NCMA campus into the community gathering space it is today,” said Dan Gottlieb, director of planning, design, and the Museum Park, who worked closely with Wheeler throughout his entire tenure, and on the West Building and Park projects.

Wheeler worked passionately to develop the Museum’s collection, including securing a gift of 29 Auguste Rodin sculptures from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation in 2009, making the NCMA the largest repository of Rodin’s work in the American South. The large gift followed the tremendous success of the NCMA’s 1999 Rodin exhibition, which drew over 300,000 in attendance. “All Larry asked was to make the Rodin exhibition, which included 60-plus works from the Cantor Foundation, the best Rodin exhibition ever,” said David Steel, curator of European art. “Larry is never satisfied with ‘adequate’ or ‘good.’ What he demands is ‘superlative,’ ‘the best,’ and ‘more.’”

(continued)

Wheeler strengthened the NCMA's modern and contemporary collections, including overseeing a gift of works by masters of mid- to late-20th-century American art—Milton Avery, Richard Diebenkorn, Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Motherwell, David Park, Sean Scully, Frank Stella, and many others—from the private collection of Jim and Mary Patton.

Wheeler's awards include his 2017 induction into the Raleigh Hall of Fame, the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters from the Republic of France, the Medal of Arts from the city of Raleigh, the Leadership Award from the *Triangle Business Journal*, the Design Guild Award from the North Carolina State University College of Design, and the Thad Eure Memorial Award from the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau. In 2000 he was named Tar Heel of the Year by the *Raleigh News & Observer*, which called him "the godfather of the Triangle's cultural boom" and cited his skill at melding "arts, politics, and commerce into a powerful new cultural force." In November 2010 Wheeler received the inaugural Mary D. B. T. Semans Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts from Duke University's Nasher Museum of Art.

Wheeler grew up in Lakeland, Florida. He holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in history and French from Pfeiffer College and a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in European history from the University of Georgia. He has received honorary degrees from North Carolina State University and Pfeiffer University.

Details about events surrounding his retirement, including celebrations of Wheeler's legacy and an installation on the Museum's history during his directorship, are forthcoming.

###

About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.