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## GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW DIRECTOR AND CEO

*Dana Friis-Hansen Will Assume the Position of Museum Director and CEO on July 13, 2011*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., June 2, 2011** – The Board of Trustees of the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) announced today the appointment of Dana Friis-Hansen as Director and CEO. The Art Museum selected Friis-Hansen, who most recently served as Executive Director of the Austin Museum of Art, as part of a national search effort. Friis-Hansen will begin work at the Grand Rapids Art Museum on July 13, 2011.

The new director brings a wealth of strong leadership and art history experience to the Grand Rapids Art Museum. Friis-Hansen served in curatorial positions from 1985 through 1999, continuing on as Chief Curator at the Austin Museum of Art while assuming the position of Executive Director in 2002. During his nine years as director, Friis-Hansen provided leadership for a staff of forty including fiscal oversight and expansion of budget; fundraising and major donor stewardship; audience development; Board relations and community collaborations; strategic planning and capacity building. Key accomplishments include the development of the FamilyLab and “AMOA for Families,” Laguna Gloria Restoration and Art School expansion, and planning for a downtown building campaign.

“Dana Friis-Hansen has an impressive history in demonstrating visionary leadership, an active presence in community engagement, and a strong commitment to collaboration of the arts. He has a proven track record that will help advance the Grand Rapids Art Museum into its second century,” said Scott Wierda, President of the Board of Trustees. “We look forward to Dana serving as the Grand Rapids Art Museum’s next great leader.”

Friis-Hansen joins the Art Museum during a significant time in its history. Founded in 1910, GRAM is the oldest visual arts organization in West Michigan and celebrated its centennial in 2010 with yearlong special programming and exhibitions. In 2007 the Museum moved into its first purpose-built building at 101 Monroe Center, creating a cultural centerpiece in downtown Grand Rapids that *Time Magazine* named one the “world’s best new buildings of 2007.” It gained the honor of being the first LEED Gold certified Art Museum shortly after opening its doors, and continues to be a leader in environmentally friendly function and design. The new facility tripled available gallery space from that in the previous building, and the focus in the new century is on growing the permanent collection and expanding educational programming as the Museum continues to be a valuable resource to the community.

“I am so excited to be joining the Grand Rapids Art Museum at this time,” said Friis-Hansen. “I’ve been impressed with GRAM’s notable new building and prime downtown location, commendable exhibition history, rich collections, strong education outreach, forward-looking Trustees, and experienced, dedicated staff. As we look to GRAM’s future, collaboration and innovation will be essential so that the Art Museum can build community strength by connecting the arts and creative ideas with a broader audience. Working with partners in the city, region, and beyond we

can make GRAM the ideal 21<sup>st</sup> century museum, serving as a community convener, an incubator for new ideas, experiences and arts content, and a catalyst for creative thinking.”

During Friis-Hansen’s tenure as Director, the Austin Museum of Art developed strong bonds within arts, civic, and educational communities and engaged programmatic partners as diverse as AIA, AIGA, Austin Craft Mafia, Austin Green Art, Austin Public Library, Austin Parks Department, Dell’s Children’s Hospital, Downtown Austin Alliance, *Edible Austin* Magazine, Fashion Week, Filipino-American Association, Fusebox Festival, Keep Austin Beautiful, Pro-Arts Collective, Teenage Eco Warriors, Texas Biennial, SXSW, and many others.

Additionally, Friis-Hansen is an accomplished writer and editor with dozens of catalogues, books, articles, and published papers to his credit. He has organized over seventy exhibitions presented in the U.S., Asia, and Europe. Friis-Hansen completed a noted artist-in-residency series at MIT, was co-curator for *TransCulture* at the 1995 Venice Biennale, and organized the first retrospective of Japanese pop artist Takashi Murakami. He is a member of the Association of Art Museum Directors. His past curatorial positions include the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas; Nanjo and Associates in Tokyo, Japan; and List Visual Arts Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He has served on the Art:21 Television Series Advisory Council and the Independent Curators International Exhibition Advisory Council. He has served on the boards or panels with the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Congress Avenue Wow committee, Create Austin (Leadership Council), the Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the General Services Administration Public Art panel, and many others. Friis-Hansen holds a B.A. in Art History from Carleton College in Minnesota and was awarded the Helena Rubenstein Fellowship at the Whitney Museum of American Art Museum Studies Program. He also attended the Museum Leadership Institute at the Getty Center in Los Angeles.

About relocating to West Michigan, Friis-Hansen comments: “I’m looking forward to moving to Grand Rapids because of its vibrant creative culture, its forward-looking civic leadership, its exciting art scene, its lively downtown, its beautiful natural environment, and its leadership in sustainability.”

A community reception at the Art Museum is planned for Friday, July 15 at 2:00 and 7:00 pm, giving everyone a chance to meet the new director and welcome him to Grand Rapids. In celebration, the Museum will also offer free admission that day.

### **About the Grand Rapids Art Museum**

The mission of the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) is: to inspire discovery, enjoyment, and learning about art; to serve as a welcoming and inclusive cultural resource; to collect, conserve, and interpret authentic works of art of the finest quality. Established in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, the new Art Museum is internationally known for its distinguished design and LEED Gold certified status. Established in 1910 as the Grand Rapids Art Association, GRAM has grown to include more than 5,000 works of art, including American and European 19th and 20th century painting and sculpture and more than 3,500 works on paper. Embracing the city’s legacy as a leading center of design and manufacturing, GRAM has a growing collection in the area of design and modern craft.

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