Position Specification

Cornell University

Richard J. Schwartz Director of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art

Private and Confidential
Position Specification

Our Client

Mission: The Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University creates direct experiences with art and catalyzes interdisciplinary learning, opening new doors to lifelong inquiry and exploration. The Johnson Museum welcomes visitors to experience original works of art across a wide spectrum of global traditions, time periods, and media for education, inspiration, and delight, connecting to the vibrant intellectual and cultural life of Cornell University and a public audience through exhibitions, programs, teaching, and research, with free admission for all.

The Museum is named for benefactor Herbert F. Johnson, a distinguished graduate of Cornell’s Class of 1922, the late president and chairman of S C Johnson of Racine, Wisconsin, and a Cornell University trustee. In 1968, I. M. Pei & Partners (now Pei Cobb Freed & Partners) received the commission from the Trustees of Cornell University to design the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art. It was to be the third museum building created by the ten-year-old firm, and the largest, most complex one to that date. It is singular as a building type: a museum and teaching facility, one that functions for the University and contributes to the cultural life of the surrounding community. The Museum was awarded the American Institute of Architects Honor Award in 1975.

Since the Johnson Museum opened in 1973, its collection and programming have grown exponentially, and it has become a vital educational resource for Cornell students and faculty across a range of disciplines, and for visitors from around the country and the world. Today, the Museum’s permanent collection includes nearly 40,000 works, spanning six millennia and encompassing art from most world cultures. Among the strengths of the collection are the holdings of traditional Asian art; American art; European art, with special concentration in Old Master prints and drawings; photography; global modern and contemporary art; African sculpture and textiles, and pre-Columbian sculpture and ceramics. The collections are the foundation for Museum initiatives in teaching, research, and the development of projects to connect people, art, and ideas in creative ways.

Thought-provoking exhibitions and public programs explore ideas across disciplines and ensure that original works of art are seen, studied, and taught to their maximum curricular potential. Exhibitions and programs are designed to encourage independent thinking and help visitors experience the multiple ways that information can be conveyed by a work of art. The Museum’s year-long schedule of events includes visiting artist talks, lectures, exhibition tours, “Art-Full Family Day” performances and activities, and much more. The Museum offers a range of dynamic opportunities exclusively for Cornell students, including an active internship program and a variety of student-only social events.
In 2011, the Johnson Museum opened a 16,000 square-foot extension inspired by Pei’s original museum plan, designed by the original architect-in-charge, John L. Sullivan III (Cornell Class of 1962) of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners Architects LLP. The wing includes a dedicated 150-seat lecture room, a workshop studio, new galleries, art storage, and office space. A Japanese garden designed by landscape architect Marc Peter Keane (Cornell Class of 1979) and made possible through the generous patronage of Rebecca and Jim Morgan (both Cornell Class of 1960) was also installed on the west side of the wing. The $22 million project was funded by government and foundation grants, including grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Arts, challenge grants from Kresge Foundation of Michigan and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and private gifts. Renovated spaces in the original 1973 building, including expanded galleries for Asian art and a visible storage gallery, were also opened. In 2012, *Cosmos*, a dazzling site-specific illumination display by artist Leo Villareal was installed in the ceiling of the museum’s sculpture court. An homage to late Cornell astronomy professor Carl Sagan, it is an attraction, especially at night, for both Cornell students and the city of Ithaca, over which it is widely visible.

Since the museum’s expansion, the permanent collection galleries for European and American art have been refurbished and reinstalled with support from an NEA grant. With funding provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (2013-17), the museum reimagined its role within the university curriculum by developing nine new semester-long courses co-taught by curators and faculty, and adding a new academic coordinator to encourage faculty use of the museum’s collections and exhibitions in their teaching. These efforts have grown the museum’s outreach to sixty-five Cornell departments and programs, and more than 300 class visits to the museum per academic year. The museum is currently in the second year of a Mellon-funded project in partnership with the Cornell Library, for which a new curator of photography, shared by both units, was hired to develop new ways to use the rich photography collections across campus more broadly.

Given Cornell University’s Land Grant status and its mandate to play an important role in the community, the Johnson continually seeks to fulfill its cultural and educational responsibility to serve a broad and diverse audience. Thousands of schoolchildren visit the Museum annually. School programs are designed to meet New York State Learning Standards and include the acclaimed OMNI (Object and Their Makers: New Insights) learning units. Ongoing training for educators is a critical part of Museum outreach. The staff of the Museum is committed to engaging all visitors, and provides programming and museum experiences for people with disabilities, underserved populations, and those with special needs.

The Johnson Museum has a staff of 32 FTEs (not including security) and an overall budget of approximately $5.2 million. More than 80,000 visitors come to the Museum each year.

**The Role**

The Director will provide strategic and collaborative leadership and vision, curatorial oversight, effective management, and academic inspiration to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art. In the daily operations of the Museum, the Director will ensure the institution’s mission is clearly understood, that its strategic objectives are fully articulated and effectively pursued, and that Cornell faculty and students, as well as the broader Finger Lakes community, see and utilize the Museum as a vital learning resource. The Director has primary responsibility for all aspects of the Museum’s operation and management, including fiscal and personnel management, as well as for raising funds to support the Museum.
The Director sets the artistic direction, exhibition strategy, educational approach, and acquisition plans for the Museum. They serve as an advocate for the knowledge that can be gained from the direct study of and engagement with works of art and material culture. They are responsible for the management and development of the University’s collection, and for driving the acquisition of new objects. The Director works with staff to implement appropriate policies governing the conservation, documentation, security, and storage of, as well as physical and digital access to the collection. Across all aspects of the Museum’s work, the Director will cultivate a culture of inclusion and proactively foster opportunities for engagement with and expression of diverse identities, perspectives and creative practices.

As an indispensable leader for the arts on campus and beyond, the Director reports to the Deputy Provost of Cornell University, and works closely with the Johnson Museum Advisory Council. In collaboration with academic and administrative departments on campus, the Director proactively engages students through teaching and exhibition and related programming. They also represent the Museum to various external constituencies, including faculty and students, alumni and friends of the arts at Cornell, public audiences throughout region and across the country, and the museum profession at large.

**Candidate Profile**

The successful candidate will embrace the Cornell and Ithaca communities professionally and personally, enjoying the opportunity to live in such a robust and stimulating regional setting. They will drive the Museum forward, asserting its regional and national identity and individuality. The new Director will lead the Johnson Museum with vision, courage and enthusiasm. This individual will bring an entrepreneurial and creative approach to developing new, innovative ideas that will stretch the organization and push the boundaries within the field.

The successful candidate will be an inspiring, energetic, and collaborative leader who fully embraces the Johnson Museum’s contribution to the educational mission of Cornell University through its exhibitions, programming, research, and engagement with curricular and extra-curricular initiatives. They should exemplify a dedication to learning, a passion for the arts, and a combination of intellectual curiosity and depth. They should exhibit a thorough knowledge of art history and the ability to lead, collaborate with, and motivate a diverse community and team of curators. They will have a record of respected intellectual achievement, with demonstrable success cultivating relationships with, and building bridges among, diverse constituencies. The candidate should be an articulate, dynamic, and effective communicator in person, in print, and through exhibitions.

The candidate should have significant museum experience, including with curatorial practice and exhibition planning, education programming, operations, fundraising, public relations and/or marketing, and budget management. They should possess experience in setting direction as well as developing and implementing strategic initiatives within an organization, in addition to a track record of successful fundraising. The candidate will be able to establish credibility with the faculty and relate intellectually with a wide range of disciplines in rich and layered exchange. They will work closely with the Johnson Museum Advisory Council, as well as with the Office of the Provost and other key administrators across campus.
In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

**Setting Strategy**

- A track record as an innovative and entrepreneurial thinker and proactive implementer. They will have the vision, creativity, and judgment to lead the Museum forward.

- The ability to effectively balance the desire/need for change with an understanding of how much change the organization is capable of handling, to create realistic goals and implementation plans that are achievable and successful.

- Demonstrable knowledge of the key issues facing academic museums broadly, particularly in terms of strategies for engagement with student bodies and faculty in fulfilling the teaching mission of museums.

- The ability to develop a productive and mutually fulfilling relationship with Cornell University faculty, administration, and museum staff at all levels, as well as to engage students of the University.

**Executing for Results**

- Comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty; the ability to adapt nimbly and lead others through complex situations.

- A track record of conceiving exhibitions and programs of national and international significance.

- A considered risk-taker who seeks data and input from others to foresee possible risks or unintended circumstances from decisions.

- A leader who is viewed by others as having a high degree of integrity and forethought in their approach to making decisions; the ability to act in a transparent and consistent manner while always taking into account what is best for the Museum.

**Leading Teams**

- The ability to translate the Johnson Museum’s over-arching goals into clear objectives for the staff, optimizing the strengths of the Museum.

- A track record of attracting and recruiting top talent, motivating the team, delegating effectively, celebrating diversity within the team, and managing performance; widely viewed as a strong developer of others.

- The ability to persevere in the face of challenges, and exhibit a steadfast resolve and relentless commitment to high standards, which commands respect from followers.

- A leader who is self-reflective and aware of their own limitations; leads by example and drives the organization's performance with an attitude of continuous improvement by being open to feedback and self-improvement.
Fundraising and Relationships & Influence

- Demonstrated fundraising success, acumen and personality comfortable with initiating, developing, and stewarding relationships with board members, individual donors, corporate sponsors, foundations, and government funders.

- An inspirational communicator, with a degree of personal passion and charisma that enables them to bring diverse constituents on-board with the mission and vision of the Johnson Museum.

- Naturally connects and builds strong relationships with others, demonstrating strong emotional intelligence.

- Encourages others to share the spotlight and visibly celebrates and supports the success of the team.

- Actively solicits input from and develops key partnerships with the other leaders on campus in support of the Museum’s mission, with a particular focus on using the collections in a proactive manner as a trans-disciplinary pedagogical tool.

Contact

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search and prospective candidates are invited to contact Russell Reynolds Associates directly. All inquiries and discussions will be considered strictly confidential. For more information or to apply for the role, please reach out to JohnsonMuseum@russellreynolds.com. All applications should include a resume and cover letter.