

**The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Names April M. Watson
As New Associate Curator of Photography**

Jane L. Aspinwall Promoted to Assistant Curator of Photography

KANSAS CITY, MO, July 6, 2007 – The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, emerging as one of the world’s premier museums for photography, has named April M. Watson as the new Associate Curator of Photography. Watson, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, began her work last month as the Museum opened the new Bloch Building, an expansion with more than 3,000 square feet of gallery space dedicated to photography.

The Museum also has announced that Jane L. Aspinwall has been promoted to Assistant Curator of Photography, recognizing her years of work with the Hallmark Photographic Collection, which was acquired in its entirety by the Museum in late 2005. Drawing from that collection, Aspinwall and Keith F. Davis, Curator of Photography at the Nelson-Atkins, co-curated *Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography: From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate, 1839-1885*, a groundbreaking exploration of the first generation of American photography, as one of the inaugural exhibitions in the Bloch Building.

“The incredible photographs in the Hallmark collection instantly gave us one of the greatest collections of American photography ever assembled,” said Marc F. Wilson, Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell Director/CEO. “To honor this gift, we not only need to provide the kind of physical resources now available in our Bloch Building galleries to protect and present these works, but we need the intellectual muscle and creative attention that only comes from a dynamic and committed curatorial staff.”

Watson brings to the Museum a wide range of experience in researching, teaching and curating photography. She served as curatorial and research assistant to the photography department at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and has done freelance research and writing projects for the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, Tucson. She recently contributed to the monograph *The Art of Frederick Sommer: Photography, Drawing, Collage* (2005).

“April’s obvious passion for photography and breadth of knowledge in the field will help us make the most of the opportunities afforded by this collection and this space,” Keith F. Davis, Nelson-Atkins Curator of Photography said.

She received her BFA from Alfred University in 1991, her MA from the University of New Mexico in 1994 and is currently a Ph.D.candidate at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, a program she began in 2004. In addition to her work in the museum field, she has been very active as a teacher, presenting courses on photography and art history at the University of Kansas, Lawrence; the University of Missouri and the Kansas City Art Institute; the Baylor School, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Pima Community College, Tucson. She will work under Keith F. Davis in the expanding photography department.

“I am thrilled to be joining the Nelson-Atkins at this exciting moment,” said Watson. “The photography collection is an extraordinary resource for the community. I look forward to engaging with these incredible photographs and sharing that process of discovery with audiences of the Nelson-Atkins.”

Aspinwall has worked with the Hallmark Photographic Collection since 2004, helping move the works to the Museum and coordinating the exhibitions that are now in the Bloch Building. She authored the catalog section of the publication that accompanies *Developing Greatness*, providing detailed information on the photographs and their makers, and she assisted in installing *Harry Callahan*, the first small-scale temporary show in the Museum’s photography gallery, on view through Oct. 21.

Prior to her work with the Hallmark collection, Aspinwall had been an adjunct art history professor at Longview Community College and had worked with Margi Conrads, Samuel Sosland Curator of American Art at the Nelson-Atkins, in completion of the landmark two-volume catalog, *American Paintings to 1945*. Aspinwall holds a Master of Art in Art History from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a Master of Business Administration in Management from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Photography at the Nelson-Atkins

Acquired in full by the Nelson-Atkins in December 2005, the Hallmark Photographic Collection was considered one of the most broad-ranging and important private collections of American photography in the world. This celebrated collection represents the full spectrum of artistic achievement and technical innovation that have distinguished the medium. The collection spans the entire history of photography, from 1839 to the present, with works by such renowned pioneers and masters as Southworth & Hawes, Carleton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Alfred Stieglitz, Dorothea Lange, Harry Callahan, Lee Friedlander, Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman. Regarded at the time as one of the last great private holdings of photography, the Hallmark Photographic Collection pioneered serious collecting in this area when it was begun in 1964. It now contains superb individual works by virtually all the key American photographers in history, as well as by a number of significant figures from outside the United States.

Because of the collection’s scope, it not only represents a comprehensive record of the innovations and advancements of photography as a creative medium, but also provides a unique documentation of the growths, triumphs and tragedies of the American experience for the past 150 years.

The Nelson-Atkins’ acquisition of the entire Hallmark Photographic Collection, more than 6,500 works by 900 artists, was completed through a combination of gift and purchase. Hallmark gifted a significant portion of the collection as part of its continued generosity to the Museum, and the balance was purchased by the Museum with funds donated to the Nelson-Atkins by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation. This acquisition established the Nelson-Atkins as one of the premier museums in the world for photography.

Since its visionary founding more than 40 years ago, the Hallmark Photographic Collection has

been a tool for preserving, educating and promoting the legacy of fine art photography through internationally touring exhibitions, significant loans and seminal publications. The Nelson-Atkins' strong institutional focus on education and research makes it an ideal place to expand this tradition. The transfer of the collection came during an important time for the Nelson-Atkins, as it prepared for the culmination of its campus-wide transformation. The new Bloch Building provides state-of-the-art gallery space and expanded facilities to ensure that the Hallmark Collection has a prominent place for installation, appreciation and public engagement.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The campus transformation project at the Nelson-Atkins included the new 165,000-square-foot Bloch Building by Steven Holl Architects, the renovation of the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building, the reinstallation of its encyclopedic collection, and the expansion of the Museum's renowned Kansas City Sculpture Park. The project increased Museum space by 71 percent, providing new galleries, expanded educational facilities and Museum-support spaces. The Museum raised more than \$200 million for the renovation and expansion and \$170 million to grow the endowment fund. The expanded resources will ensure that the institution continues to attract and engage the next generation of audiences and is equipped to present and interpret the art of the past, present and future.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest encyclopedic art museums. The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access and insight into its renowned collection of more than 33,500 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European paintings and modern sculpture. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region and a national model for arts education. The Nelson-Atkins' expansion is also leading a field of new investments in local cultural infrastructure that is becoming known as Kansas City's "\$6 Billion Renaissance."

To view original press release, please visit the press room at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: http://www.nelson-atkins.org/welcome/PressRoom_Releases.cfm?type=Release