

## New UA Museum of Art Director Named

University Relations - Communications  
August 2014

**W. James Burns**, executive director of the Desert Caballeros Western Museum, has been named the new director of the [UA Museum of Art and Archive of Visual Arts](#) [1].

Burns comes to the UA having served since 2010 with the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Arizona, which specializes in Southwest and Arizona history and fine art.

"James Burns is versatile, having worked in all kind of museums, including those for anthropology and history as well as art ? and he is a great fundraiser," said **Jory Hancock**, dean of the UA College of Fine Arts.

Burns succeeds **Dennis Jones**, the interim director at the UAMA and director of the School of Art, who has retired. **Martina M. Shenal**, an associate professor of art, has been named the school's interim director, and a search is underway for a new director.

The UAMA, which reports to the Office for Research and Discovery, holds one of the most important art collections in the Southwest and is a prominent center for teaching, research and services related to the history and meaning of the visual arts, attracting visitors worldwide. The core collection consists of about 6,000 pieces and includes work from the United States and Europe. The UAMA collects, preserves, exhibits and interprets original works of art, serving as an advocate for the importance of art in society.

Burns' position at the UA becomes effective Sept. 1 and, for him, it is a homecoming more than two decades in the making.

Having grown up in Rochester, New York, Burns recalls that his great-great uncle collected issues of Arizona Highways and, later in life, would gift the magazines to him. In his youth, Burns would sift through the magazines and dream of the day he could visit Arizona. He would eventually apply to attend the UA "sight unseen," he said.

Burns first arrived at the UA to study horticulture. He changed his major four times before deciding to pursue a career in history. When a UA mentor showed him a list of viable jobs for a history major, "museum curator" was the one that stood out for him.

"I have wanted to work for the University of Arizona since I was an undergraduate student. I was a kid from a blue collar family, first generation college-educated and I didn't have a background that afforded me any cultural capital, but my mom taught my sister and I at a very young age that education was the way to a better life," Burns said.

While a UA undergraduate, Burns served as an Arizona State Museum volunteer, working on the Donald and Dorothy Cordry collection.

After graduating from the UA, Burns, whose research interests include the cultural, social and environmental history of the American West, earned a master's degree in public history from Arizona State University. He earned his doctorate in educational policy studies from Georgia State University. He also is a graduate of the then-called Museum Management Institute, supported by the Getty Foundation.

Throughout his career, Burns has worked for the Museum of Northern Arizona, the Louisiana State Museum, the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the Atlanta History Center. From 2000 to 2007, he served as the founding curator and director of curatorial services for the Booth Western Art Museum in Georgia. He then served as curator of history for the Tempe History Museum from 2007 to 2010.

Burns said what most excites him about his role at the UA is the Archive of Visual Arts, "the area presently with the greatest potential," and the modern collection, which includes works by Mark Rothko, Georgia O'Keeffe and Jackson Pollock.

He also will bring an interdisciplinary focus to the UAMA.

"I am very excited about the opportunities for cross pollination with other departments and colleges across campus and forging new alliances," Burns said. "I never wanted to leave the UA, and I have always looked for a way to get back. I'm passionate about the mission of the UA and the UAMA. I had a dream, and I followed it."

---

**Source URL:** [https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/new-ua-museum-art-director-named?utm\\_source=PANTHEON\\_STRIPPED&utm\\_medium=PANTHEON\\_STRIPPED&utm\\_campaign=PANTHEON\\_STRIPPED](https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/new-ua-museum-art-director-named?utm_source=PANTHEON_STRIPPED&utm_medium=PANTHEON_STRIPPED&utm_campaign=PANTHEON_STRIPPED)

#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.artmuseum.arizona.edu/>