

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

MEDIA CONTACT:

Margaree Bigler, Communications Manager
602.257.2105 | margaree.bigler@phxart.org

Phoenix Art Museum shines new light on beloved painter and Museum founder Philip C. Curtis

Philip C. Curtis: The New Deal and American Regionalism re-examines the Arizona icon through his career as artist and advocate during the post-Great Depression era

PHOENIX (April 12, 2017) – Beginning on April 29, Phoenix Art Museum visitors will have a chance to see a Museum favorite through a new lens. The upcoming exhibition *Philip C. Curtis: The New Deal and American Regionalism* will explore the story of one of Arizona’s most historically-significant artists from a fresh point of view, placing the beloved painter’s works within the context of the Great Depression decade of the mid-1930s through World War II. The exhibition highlights the work of Philip C. Curtis not only as a painter, but also as a museum administrator and arts advocate. His career exemplified the success of federal programs that fostered unprecedented artistic creativity across the country, and his efforts would ultimately change the course of Phoenix’s artistic legacy and institutions for many years to come.

“It is a privilege to explore the work of Philip C. Curtis in this new light,” said Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum. “Curtis is a cherished, constant presence in the life of our Museum, and this exhibition will enrich our understanding of his career. This exhibition also represents a wonderful opportunity to re-examine the history behind the founding of Phoenix Art Museum, in which Curtis played a pivotal role. The themes in this exhibition will be meaningful to all those who care about the Phoenix arts community, as it speaks to the importance of strategically supporting the arts, and the impact our choices may make long into the future.”

The exhibition explores the time period between the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, during which Curtis made a lasting impact on the future of the Phoenix arts community. Curtis came to Phoenix in 1937 to run the Phoenix Federal Art Center (the success of which eventually led to the founding of Phoenix Art Museum). This time was a transformative era for artists in the United States, during which government-sponsored works programs included features that specifically aided artists. Artists were commissioned to create Post Office murals, poster graphics, and documentation for the Farm Security Administration. The federal government became a major patron of the arts for a relatively modest investment, and a period of artistic abundance ensued. Through help from these programs, the city of Phoenix experienced the powerful influence that artists and art advocates could have on the life and future of a community. The civic traditions established during this time, particularly the idea that art-making opportunities should become widely available to anyone in a community, would eventually become the catalyst for the founding of Phoenix Art Museum.

“It’s exciting to broaden our knowledge of the styles Curtis worked in during different time periods and locations,” said Betsy Fahlman, the Museum’s adjunct curator of American art who curated the exhibition. “Additionally, the work he supported as an administrator is equally fascinating. The quality, not to mention the range of themes, of the pieces on view by other artists serve as a testament to the impact of federally-funded arts programs that transformed our national art landscape after the Great Depression.”

This exhibition features works by Curtis before, during, and after his time in Phoenix, as well as works by other artists supported by federal programs including two of the Center’s teachers, Lew Davis and Kathleen Wilson. The broad scope of the exhibition touches on a web of themes, all interconnected through the art and personal history of Curtis within this era. The exhibition explores the styles with which Curtis experimented, including Post-Impressionism and abstraction. Works by other artists touch on themes from Arizona geography and heavy industry to women artists, and Native Americans. Images of Arizona’s Japanese internment camps, instituted at the beginning of World War II, will be included on a wall panel.

About the Exhibition

Philip C. Curtis: The New Deal and American Regionalism will be on view from April 29, 2017 through May 20, 2018 in the Orme Lewis Gallery. This exhibition is organized by Phoenix Art Museum. It is made possible through the generosity of donors to the Museum's annual fund. For more details about the exhibition, please visit phxart.org/curtisnewdeal.

Admission is free for Museum Members; past and present members of the Military; Maricopa Community College students, staff, and faculty (with ID); and youth aged 5 and under. Entrance to the exhibition is included in general admission for the general public. During voluntary-donation, free-access times, the exhibition is offered free to the general public. Free-access times include Wednesdays from 3 – 9 pm, the first Fridays of every month from 6 – 10 pm, and the second weekend of each month (Saturday from 10am – 5pm and Sunday from Noon – 5pm). For a full breakdown of general admission prices and hours, see <http://bit.ly/VisitPhxArt>.

To request interviews and high-resolution photography, contact Phoenix Art Museum's Marketing and Communications Office, at 602.257.2105 or email margaree.bigler@phxart.org.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum's permanent collection of more than 18,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

###