## Phoenix Art Museum

## **News Release**

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## Gustave Baumann Exhibition Captures Quality of Artisan Printmaking, Spirit of Coming Home

Gustave Baumann: Artisan Printmaker of the Southwest opens April 7 at Phoenix Art Museum

**PHOENIX (April 2, 2012)** – Beginning April 7, 2012, Phoenix Art Museum will present the work of Gustave Baumann, artisan printmaker (1881-1971) with the largest exhibition of his work in the state of Arizona. With more than 43 individual pieces, this important exhibition amplifies Baumann's love affair with the landscapes and indigenous cultures of the Southwest, in a medium that is staggering in its detail, complexity and palette. In addition to his woodblock prints, the exhibition will also include a rare oil painting, a handcrafted marionette, and a sample of the carved blocks used to create his work. An homage to the timeless art of this intricate craft, *Gustave Baumann: Artisan Printmaker of the Southwest* will be on view in the Orme Lewis Gallery, through July 8, 2012.

Born in Germany and reared in Chicago, it might seem strange to consider Baumann an artist of the Southwest. But Baumann fell in love with the landscape, culture and people of the Southwest on a cross-continental journey by train from Indiana to New Mexico, in 1918, and stayed in New Mexico for the next 50 years. It was the world he discovered there that spoke to him as a creator. He would later say, "Given a free choice in the matter, I would have selected the Southwest as the place to be born."

Among the collection on view at Phoenix Art Museum are the prints he made from his visit to the Grand Canyon in 1921, which feature a unique visual perspective that imparts a sense of the scope and scale of the massive canyon, as well as his ability to capture light and its effects on the canyon's hues, from the midnight blues of shadow to the brilliant goldenrod of the alpenglow on the canyon's peaks and plateaus. In addition, the exhibition features additional Southwestern landscapes, as well as an outside observer's portrayal of Native American ceremonies and life.

The exhibition also examines the artisan-quality of Baumann's color woodcut prints, a medium that stemmed from his art education in Munich during the early 1900s, and an extension of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ideals of handcrafted artistry. The term "artisan" stems from the Latin *artigiano*, from a root word that means "instructed in the arts." Today's audiences have become familiar with the term "artisan" as a buzzword that represents objects that are high quality and handcrafted, utilizing traditional methods in smaller quantities. Either meaning is apt for the body of Baumann's work as a printmaker. Baumann created each print first with a painting as a guide for what he wanted to achieve. Next, he drew the image on a wood block, and then began the intricate and physical carving process. It was this most visceral aspect of his art, the cutting away of the image into the wood that was appealing to Baumann. He enjoyed the connection with the materials in a more direct way, markedly different from most printmakers of his time who utilized etcher's needles on copperplate. Further, each individual print required a series of carved blocks; Baumann had to create a separate block for each color utilized in the final piece. The intricacy of carving included the complexity of tracking each element of the image in multiple blocks. In addition to forty different prints, the exhibition also features a sample block carved by Baumann himself.

The final stages were the application of pigments he had mixed himself with oils to create the vibrant hues, and insertion of one block at a time into a press, which applied the pieces of the image in their rich colors onto paper. Baumann then

had to wait for each color to dry before beginning the process over again to apply the next sections of a new color. In the entire process, the paper, specially ordered from a factory in Germany which would later be destroyed during World War II, was the only aspect not hand-constructed by the artist. For Baumann, this complex, multi-stage process was an intimate one. He never allowed anyone to watch him work nor did he employ a bevy of assistants the way other printmakers did, keeping the creation of his art ultimately private.

While the creative process was a solitary one, the experience of his art is not. Baumann's work is at once accessible and intriguing, both in terms of style and subject matter, as the artist sought a medium that provided access to art for many people. Throughout his life, Baumann remained committed to his art in a modest and unpretentious manner despite national acclaim. His philosophy was one of manifesting art in the daily world as a way of enhancing the enjoyment of everyday life. He described it thus, "My idea is to produce good pictures at low cost...many people think Americans judge art by the price they pay for it, and that they will not buy pictures if the pictures are cheap. I would not work for folk like that anyway." For Jerry Smith, Curator of Western and American Art at Phoenix Art Museum, who organized the exhibition, Gustave Baumann has a universal appeal, a kind of unassuming accessibility that resonates with many. "I don't know anyone who doesn't love Gustave Baumann once they've seen his work. He speaks to an appreciation for nature and living amongst nature in a way no one else does," Smiths says.

Baumann's life also resonates. In a city of transplants, a community of peoples who have gathered from all parts of the country and the world to call Phoenix home, Baumann's art speaks to the unsurpassed quality of the American Southwest to become a new homeland to persons of diverse backgrounds.

The exhibition is from the collection of Gil Waldman, and has been lent in memory of his wife, Nancy.

## **About Phoenix Art Museum**

Phoenix Art Museum is the Southwest's premier destination for world-class visual arts. Popular international exhibitions are shown along side the Museum's outstanding collection of more than 18,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. A vibrant destination for over 50 years, Phoenix Art Museum presents festivals, live performances, independent art films and educational programs that enlighten, entertain and stimulate. Visitors also enjoy PhxArtKids an interactive space for children, vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, the lushly landscaped Sculpture Garden, dining at Palette and shopping at The Museum Store.

Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 senior citizens (65+) and full-time students with ID; \$6 children ages 6 to 17; Children under 6 and Phoenix Art Museum members receive free admission. The Museum offers free general admission for everyone on Wednesday evenings, 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. and for First Fridays, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Some exhibitions have special admission fees.

Hours: Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Thursday – Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday Noon to 5 p.m.; First Fridays, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Some exhibitions have special hours. The Museum is closed Mondays, Tuesdays and major holidays. The Museum Store and Palette restaurant are open during Museum hours.

To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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