## Phoenix Art Museum

**News Release** 

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## Phoenix Art Museum's Paper! Exhibition Delivers More Than You Think

Paper! builds on community input, captures impact of paper on art, May 26-September 23, 2012

PHOENIX (May 26, 2012) – Phoenix Art Museum announces the opening of *Paper!*, an exhibition presenting works on paper and about paper, spanning its collection areas, blending media, movements, and historical periods, and influenced by the input of the Museum's local community to assist in the installation. Unlike any other exhibition in Phoenix Art Museum's more than five decades of history, *Paper!* celebrates the universal impact of this material on artistic expression through time and across cultures. The exhibition, which features fashion, photography, and work from America, Europe, Asia, and Latin America, is on view until September 23, 2012 in Steele Gallery. It features works from the Museum's collection that have rarely been exhibited due to their sensitivity to light exposure, as well as special loans and commissions from area artists and collectors that broaden the understanding of paper as both material and subject for artists.

Manufactured paper was first invented in China in 2 A.D. In modern times, paper is associated with wood pulp made from trees, but it is also made from a variety of plants such as cactus and certain grasses, as well as other materials, including rags, cotton, or even jeans. It is made from a pulp of water and fibers that is pressed together and dried into sheets. Its uses are endless. From newspapers to notecards, magazines to mailers, paper is, in American life, a touchstone of everyday existence. As 'going paperless' becomes a buzzword in a society looking toward sustainable practices and green living, paper usage has actually increased by 400% in the last 40 years, according to ecology.com.

With the prevalence of paper in daily life, Phoenix Art Museum began to consider paper and its role in the creation of art. To create an exhibition that focused on paper as both material and subject matter meant approaching the process of organizing an exhibition in an entirely new way.

Lead by Jim Ballinger, Phoenix Art Museum's Sybil Harrington Director, the Museum's curatorial and education departments sorted and sifted through thousands of works in the Museum's collection to identify close to 200 pieces that best captured the expressiveness and impact of paper in art. "It was exciting to bring every curator to the table, to work together in this way. It was also exciting to create a dialogue among different works of art in the collection with the assistance of our educators and installation team," says Ballinger. In addition to creating a dialogue between diverse works of art, the exhibition provided an opportunity to open up a conversation about art with the local community, to open new doors and educate visitors, expanding their experience with art, beginning with something as seemingly simple as paper.

"Paper is so universal. Works on paper appeared in every collecting area of the Museum," says Kathryn Blake, Director of Education at Phoenix Art Museum. "It was going to be challenging to present those works in a way that worked together visually and meaningfully."

To accomplish this, Blake and her staff engaged the local community. At a First Friday at the Museum, a community based event that invites people of all ages to attend the Museum at no cost the first Friday of each month, visitors played a word association game, responding to the simple question: what do you think of when you hear the word *paper*? Visitors responded, filling in hundreds of sticky notes with everything from money and trees to *The Office* and a drawing of toilet

tissue. "As we sorted through their responses, we noticed many of their ideas fell into several natural categories. We used those categories as a basis for how we then organized the exhibition," Blake says. "The goal was not to leave it at the ideas our visitors already had," she adds, "but to use that as a foundation from which we would then expand what they knew, what they believed paper could do. Ultimately, we wanted to show them that when it comes to paper, there is so much more than you think." The input of the community played an influence not only in the selection of art and the design of the exhibition space, it also influenced the exhibition's marketing efforts, which used a word cloud created directly from those original sticky notes. The labels and didactics in the exhibition space are modeled on the 'sticky note' concept that visitors may recognize from that First Friday visit, months before.

"This is the most direct impact our visitors have ever had on an exhibition in our Museum," Blake says.

The resulting exhibition is a complex but ultimately inviting, intriguing and enjoyable collection of works that include big names as well as relative unknowns. The works include the Americana of Norman Rockwell, brilliant lithographic posters of Henri Toulouse Lautrec, delicate hand-painted Asian scrolls, Pop Art paper dresses of the 1960s, and the satirical zinc etchings of Jorge Guadalupe Posada. The exhibition also includes a new piece, the clean, white steel sculpture emulating crumpled paper created by Phoenix metal sculptor Pete Deise, as well as its counterpoint: the stark and visually gripping papier-mâché sculptures of Tucson artist Michael Cajero, made from cast off materials like wrapping paper and cardboard.

Blending time periods and artistic movements, *Paper!* creates conversations between seemingly disparate cultures and historical eras, and invites the viewer to rethink everything they previously believed about what paper can do, ways it can communicate and transform, as well as its impact on art and expression in our modern age.

## **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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