Jason Jackson named Director of the Mathers Museum of World Cultures

Jason Jackson, associate professor of folklore at Indiana University Bloomington, has been named the new director of the Mathers Museum of World Cultures. He is the Mathers Museum’s third director. With the appointment, Jackson comes full circle, having worked at the museum during his first year of graduate school at IU, studying cultural anthropology and folklore.

Jackson brings a wealth of museum and scholarly experience to the position. Before returning to IU Bloomington, he was curator of ethnography at the Seattle Art Museum. With his appointment, Jackson will take on the responsibility of expanding the vision of the Mathers Museum by building on the leadership provided by former director Geoffrey W. Conrad. Conrad retired in October 2012 after 29 years overseeing the museum’s growing collections and programs and establishing the institution’s faculty research curator positions.

“Jason Jackson has excellent scholarly expertise in the fields of folklore and ethnology combined with extensive curatorial experience, and we are delighted that he is bringing all of these skills to the leadership of the Mathers Museum,” Soni said. “I’m confident that he will expand the vision of the Mathers Museum to attract more students, scholars, and external audiences around the globe.”

Sarita Soni, Vice Provost of Research at IU Bloomington, presents Director Emeritus Geoffrey Conrad with a photograph of Conrad’s “favorite object” in the MMWC’s collection – a Chimú-Inca style pottery bottle from Peru, dating to 1540. Conrad noted the artifact has a European-style crown and clothing, but also features earspools, an emblem of noble rank in ancient Peru. “It captures not just a central quality of early encounters between Europe and the Americas, but also an essential aspect of human nature,” he observed. “Faced with something totally new and alien, we strive at first to make it fit into the world we have traditionally known.” The artifact is on exhibit in Treasures of the Mathers Museum.

The museum moved to its current location in 1983, and was re-named the William Hammond Mathers Museum in recognition of the son of Frank and Maude Mathers, the principal building fund donors.

Geoffrey Conrad served as the director from 1983 to 2012 and oversaw the expansion of museum collections and programs during those decades. During the museum’s anniversary celebration Conrad’s work and contributions were hailed by Sarita Soni, Vice Provost for Research at IU Bloomington. Conrad retired in October from his position as director.

A new exhibit, Treasures of the Mathers Museum, opened in conjunction with the anniversary. “At its name suggests, the exhibition is an opportunity to survey the breadth and richness of the museum’s collections,” noted Jackson. “While a celebration of the museum’s anniversary, the exhibition traces the history of how the museum’s collections have grown, and how this growth reflects wider changes in the museum, as well as the passions and interests of those students, scholars, and collectors with whom we have partnered over five decades.”

The exhibition features a broad selection of the museum’s holdings, highlighting artifacts by decades and collectors. Distinctive strengths of the collections are represented in the exhibit, including artifacts of African, Native American, and Latin American cultures; historical materials from Indiana; and musical instruments from around the world.

Collectors featured in the exhibit include Henry and Cecilia Bluhm, Pacific and Indian materials; Laura Boivin, musical instruments; and Madge and Sherman Minton Jr., Pakistani materials; Roy Sieber, African materials; and Elinor and Vincent Ostrom, Native American materials.

Jason Jackson

“Key role for a modern museum is to translate scholarship on vital issues into public programs of wide appeal. On a campus rich in cultural, historical, and international studies expertise, the museum is well positioned to pursue this key public interest goal. Like the best museums, we can do this work in a way that is sometimes fun, sometimes serious, and always engaging.”

Jason Jackson

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Mathers Museum Celebrates 50th Anniversary; Conrad Retires

The Mathers Museum of World Cultures celebrated its 50th anniversary this April with a new exhibition featuring highlights from its collections, and special recognition for its former directors.

The institution was formally organized as the Indiana University Museum in 1963, under the leadership of Wesley Hurt. It grew from a small assemblage of artifacts in a few rooms in Maxwell Hall to the current holdings of 28,000 objects and 40,000 photographic materials that “match the international breadth of Indiana University’s student body, alumni, research, collaborations, and programs,” says Jason Jackson, the director of the museum in October.

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An exhibit of famed photographer Margaret Bourke-White’s rarely seen images documenting South Africa at the dawn of apartheid will be featured at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures this fall. Alex Lichtenstein, associate professor of history at IU, is curating the exhibit that captures the work of one of the most important documentary photographers of the 20th century.

Photos in Black and White: Margaret Bourke-White and the Dawn of Apartheid in South Africa opens at the museum on Friday, September 6, with a reception from 4 to 6 p.m. A number of other free programs will be presented in conjunction with the exhibit, including a symposium on “Documentary Photography and the South African Experience” on October 31, from 9 a.m to noon. The IU Cinema will be hosting three films in this exhibit.

“Cry, the Beloved Country,” on Tuesday, October 22, at 7 p.m.; “Come Back, Africa,” on Saturday, November 2, at 7 p.m. and “Searching for Sugar Man,” on Sunday, November 10, at 6:30 p.m.

Faculty research curators at MMWC

The Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR) and the Mathers Museum of World Cultures have partnered to establish Faculty Research Curatorships at the MMWC. Currently, two IU faculty members hold curatorships at the museum: Beth Buggenhagen and Stacie King, both associate professors of anthropology. King’s position is shared with the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.

Faculty Research Curators receive quarter-time release from their home schools/departments and research funding from OVPR and MMWC in order to carry out projects that connect their scholarly research with MMWC goals and initiatives.

Over the next two years Buggenhagen will be analyzing “how persons create their social and moral selves through valued objects, such as photographs, to argue that rather than being a site of atrophy and decay, African cities, such as Dakar, are vibrant centers of cultural production.” King will be developing a project to create a 3D collection of artifacts from Santa Ana Tavera, Oaxaca, Mexico, as well as a digital museum exhibit, in conjunction with the traditional in-person community museum that Tavela is going to create.

Ongoing Exhibits

Footsteps of a Stranger: Shoes from Cultures Around the World—Explores how shoes can reflect the values, ideals, and aesthetics of an era or culture.

From the Big Bang to the World Wide Web: The Origins of Everything—Examines history on a large scale, through the exploration of cosmic, biological, and human origins.

In the Kitchen Around the World—Objects used in preparing food and food service from different areas of the world are highlighted throughout the museum.

Rhythms of the World Audio Exhibit—A free audio guide tour of musical instruments from around the globe featured in exhibits throughout the museum.

Thoughts, Things, and Theories…What Is Culture?—Examines the nature of culture through the exploration of cultural traditions.

Time As We Keep It—Different facets of time are discussed in this exhibit, including the evolution of the clock, and contrasting cultural perspectives of time.

Treasures of the Mathers Museum—The museum showcases the breadth and richness of its collection in celebration of institution’s 50th anniversary.

Scholars discuss artifacts and studies during “Meet the Collection” events

As part of its 50th anniversary celebrations, the Mathers Museum of World Cultures is presenting a series of public conversations with curators, researchers, students, and scholars from a variety of disciplines who study and explore the museum’s rich collections.

The first of this series, “Meet the Collection: The Chairs of Chester Cornett,” focused on the museum’s collection of works showing the creativity and craftsmanship of Chester Cornett (1913-1981), a gifted chairmaker who hailed from the mountains of southeastern Kentucky.

The April event featured presentations by Jon Kay, Director of Traditional Arts Indiana; James Seaver, a graduate student in history and curator of the 2009 Mathers Museum exhibit A World of His Own: The Uncommon Artistry of Chester Cornett; and Ellen Sieber, Curator of Collections at the MMWC.

Later that month, Earlham College art historian Julia May present- ed a selection of MMWC paintings on eucalyptus bark panels from Arnhem Land in Australia’s Northern Territory, and discussed the history of the form, the methods used to create the paintings, and interpretations based upon the Aboriginal system of belief called the Dreaming.

The program will continue this fall as Eduardo Brondizio, IU pro- fessor of anthropology, will discuss the artifacts he and fellow re- searcher Andrea Siqueira collected during their research in Brazil. The free program will be presented on Friday, November 1, from 4 to 5 p.m.
We welcome gifts of any size, and donor funds can be directed to a wide range of purposes that will enhance our work in research, graduate and undergraduate education, collections development and stewardship, exhibitions, public programming, and community outreach.

Donations help us sustain enduring commitments, such as responsibly preserving the museum’s priceless collections, and to undertake crucial new work, such as the development of digital exhibitions and the pursuit of new research partnerships with local communities around the globe and in our own Bloomington neighborhood.

The museum is beginning to undertake new efforts to gather endowment funds that can be used to sustain long-term goals, such as increasing student assistantships and other training opportunities provided at the museum and pursuing new collections research projects in the museum and in field sites around the world.

Whether they are providing a small occasional gift in support of a public program or student exhibition, or pursuing a large estate plan to help expand the museum’s staff or collection, we are most appreciative of all of those friends of the museum who are investing in our future. We are committed to being serious stewards of all of the gifts with which we are entrusted.

For those who wish to make a donation online, this is easy to do using the “Give Now” button. Online contributions can be made to one of two IU Foundation funds that are available for this purpose. The Geoffrey and Karen Conrad Endowment is an endowed fund supporting a diversity of special museum projects. One time, or reoccurring gifts, to the Mathers Museum Annual Fund helps support the museum’s vital work on a year to year basis.

Those wishing to support the work of the museum in other ways are always encouraged to contact me or the IU Foundation staff. Those wishing to support the work of the museum in other ways are always encouraged to contact me or the IU Foundation staff.

Thank you very much for your support.

Jason Baird Jackson, Director

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As noted in its Mission Statement, “the Mathers Museum is Indiana University’s museum of world cultures. Through its collections, exhibits, and programs, the Museum is dedicated to preserving and promoting knowledge of the world’s cultures, past and present. In all of its activities, the Museum strives to further its audience’s understanding of both the diversity of the world’s specific cultures and the underlying unity of culture as a human phenomenon.

Financial donations to the museum strengthen this work and are deeply appreciated by all who are gathered together through its work—friends, faculty, staff, IU students, school children, researchers, community partners, and others.

Donations help us sustain enduring commitments, such as responsibly preserving the museum’s priceless collections, and to undertake crucial new work, such as the development of digital exhibitions and the pursuit of new research partnerships with local communities around the globe and in our own Bloomington neighborhood.

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Thank you very much for your support.

Jason Baird Jackson, Director

Giving to the Mathers Museum

Students in Jason Jackson’s recent curatorship class are gaining hands-on experience curating the Ostrov collection of Native American. They’re among the first to handle some items from a vast Native American art collection donated to Indiana University by the late Elinor and Vincent Ostrov.

Known to many simply as “Lin,” Ostrov was Distinguished Professor and the Arthur F. Bentley Professor of Political Science at IU. The only woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, she died June 12, 2012. Her husband, Vincent, the Arthur F. Bentley Professor Emeritus of Political Science, died just two weeks later.

Jackson says the Ostrovs’ gift as a perfect opportunity to create a teachable moment for his students—something he believes would have appealed to the couple who spent their lives on research that changed the way people think about the relationship between individuals and institutions.

“The Ostrovs’ collection extends and complements what has been here at the Mathers for many years, and I can’t help but think the Ostrovs would approve of IU students gaining experience by working with these items,” Jackson said. “Museums like ours would be hard pressed to collect the way they did, so we’re very fortunate to receive these items.”

And Jackson’s students have clearly responded to the opportunity to use the Ostrov collection for hands-on study. Their work will be incorporated into an exhibit and other activities, partially funded through one of the first grants given by the Ostrov Grants Program of the College of Arts and Sciences.

“It’s really fascinating to see the behind-the-scenes processes,” said Dorothy Berry, a dual masters student in ethnomusicology and library science. “Anyone can go look at an exhibit, but to be in here, in the basement, and to really see the organization that goes into cataloguing and organizing items, it’s pretty interesting.”

Museum of World Cultures a “Blue Star Museum”

The MMWC is participating in Blue Star Museums, a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense, and more than 2,000 museums across America to recognize and support active duty military personnel and their families through special programs and exhibits.

At the MMWC Native Americans’ contributions and commitments to military service are highlighted in “They are not afraid of hell itself.”, Native Americans in World War I. The exhibit, drawn upon the museum’s Wanamaker Collection of Native American Photographs. The collection features over 8,000 images, and thousands of pages of documentation that accompany images, that were gathered by Joseph Dixon between 1908 and 1923. The exhibit displays a small sampling of the photos and data that Dixon collected.
Visiting the Mathers Museum

The Mathers Museum of World Cultures is located at 416 N. Indiana Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana. Admission to its exhibit halls is free. MMWC exhibit halls and Mathers Museum Store are open Tuesdays through Fridays, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; and Saturdays and Sundays, from 1 to 4:30 p.m. The Mathers Museum will be closed Saturday, July 27 through Monday, August 26.

Free visitor parking is available by the Indiana Avenue lobby entrance. Metered parking is available at the McCalla School parking lot on the corner of Ninth Street and Indiana Avenue. The parking lot also has spaces designated for Indiana University C and E permits. During the weekends free parking is available on the surrounding streets.

An access ramp is located at the Fess Avenue entrance to the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology on the corner of Ninth Street and Fess Avenue. Reserved parking spaces are available on Ninth Street, between Fess Avenue and Indiana Avenue. If you have a disability and need assistance, special arrangements can be made to accommodate most needs. Please call 812-855-6873.

For more information, please call 812-855-6873, email mathers@indiana.edu, or visit our website at www.mathers.indiana.edu.