

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Carlotta Stankiewicz, carlotta.stankiewicz@blantonmuseum.org

Dan Duray, dan@culturalcounsel.com

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART ANNOUNCES NEW GROUNDS INITIATIVE THAT WILL TRANSFORM MUSEUM EXPERIENCE



Design by Snøhetta includes new architectural features and landscaping, and mural by Carmen Herrera

AUSTIN, TX—January 12, 2020—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin announces plans for its comprehensive grounds redesign. The new grounds initiative will unify and revitalize the museum campus, which is approximately 200,000 square feet and contains two buildings and Ellsworth Kelly’s *Austin*, through architectural and landscape improvements. The project is led by acclaimed international design firm Snøhetta and will feature the first major public mural commission by noted Cuban-American artist Carmen Herrera.

“I believe that landscape has the power to transform a community, very much in the way that great art can transform our hearts and minds,” says Director Simone Wicha. “An undertaking of this scale would not be possible without our visionary partners, including the Snøhetta team, Carmen Herrera, The Moody Foundation, and our other generous donors. The new grounds initiative will transform the Blanton, opening the museum into the city, inviting people in not just to see great art, but also to linger, gather, and be inspired before and after each visit. We want to create a destination - a beloved destination - for families, students, tourists, and art lovers alike.”

The centerpiece of the project is the Moody Patio, a gathering space between the museum’s two main buildings that is framed by 15 elegant, petal-shaped structures, creating a shade canopy at the southern edge of the Blanton’s campus. Their curving outlines, inspired by the arched vaults of the loggia that outline the museum, help highlight views of Ellsworth Kelly’s *Austin* and the Texas State Capitol. The

structures will generate a dappled light effect during the day and will be illuminated at night, creating a one-of-a-kind visual marker for the Blanton.

This distinctive shade canopy, along with the Moody Patio and other new features, will transform how visitors encounter the Blanton grounds and begin their museum experience. Unique architectural elements will emphasize building entrances and aid navigation, while a network of landscaped pathways and gathering areas will invite exploration and relaxation.

“The Blanton holds a prominent place at the intersection of the new Texas Capitol Complex, and it also serves as the gateway to the university campus. Our inventive landscape and reimagined building entrances fulfill that promise,” said Craig Dykers, founding partner of Snøhetta and alumnus of the UT School of Architecture. “Snøhetta’s design expands the museum’s world-class art collection beyond the museum’s galleries and creates a highly visible public place of— and for—the arts and Austin.”



From Campus to Community

The new grounds initiative will reinforce the Blanton’s dual mission to serve university and city communities via improvements at the northern and southern gateways to the museum site: at the end of Speedway, the landscaped spine of the UT campus traveled by thousands of students a day, and at Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, which forms UT’s southern boundary with Austin. The wide and welcoming steps of the new Larry and Mary Ann Faulkner Gateway, set along MLK Jr. Boulevard, will act as a distinctive entry point for visitors to the museum and UT. The Blanton project, adjacent to the Texas Capitol Complex master plan currently under construction, will be a cultural anchor in this rapidly transforming district with other major building and public space projects in the works, including Waterloo Greenway.



An Enhanced Visitor Experience

The new design will engage visitors in an inviting and cohesive experience as they travel among the Blanton's two main buildings, Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, and other features on the museum grounds. A winding pathway landscaped with native plants will meander throughout, connecting all approaches to the museum and offering small garden areas and seating for relaxing and socializing. Entrances to the two museum buildings, the Mari and James A. Michener Gallery Building and the Edgar A. Smith Building, will be marked by protruding vaults that echo the loggia arches and the curves of the shade canopy. The vault addition to the Michener Gallery Building will be U-shaped and hold a unique interior viewing deck that allows museum goers to gaze down upon the Moody Patio. The lobbies of both buildings also have been redesigned to accommodate the Blanton's rapidly growing visitor and student communities.



A Vibrant Gathering Space

The Blanton's new grounds will be an inviting common area for the public, reflecting Austin's celebrated outdoor dining culture and lifestyle. The Moody Patio is the heart of this vibrant new gathering space, named in honor of the Moody Foundation's \$20 million gift to the museum that was announced in 2019. Stretching between the two main buildings and to Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, the space includes new landscaping, a lawn, and various seating areas. To amplify the Blanton's popular and innovative music programming, the design incorporates two raised platforms on the Moody Patio to stage live music and

other performances. The project also includes new space for al fresco dining with improvements to the current café area.

A Native Oasis

The project's landscaping draws on the unique character and resilience of native Texas flora -- more than 25,000 new plants will be added to the museum grounds, 95% of which are native to the state. Aspects of the design will highlight several existing heritage trees (trees with trunk diameters exceeding 24 inches) such as the Southern live oaks at the northeastern and southeastern corners of the grounds. Smaller flowering trees and plantings will frame the Faulkner Gateway and help shade the outdoor café seating, while a mix of native species such as dwarf palmetto, Texas gold columbine, and Cherokee sedge will populate garden areas throughout the grounds. The design's focus on sustainability has been developed with an eye toward SITES certification.



Public Art Commission

The redesigned grounds will include a new site-specific mural by renowned Cuban-American abstract painter Carmen Herrera that was commissioned by the Blanton. Sited on the interior wall under the Michener Gallery Building's loggia, it will span the length of the building, with the museum's entrance in the middle. "It is an honor that my first major public mural commission will be with the Blanton Museum of Art, an institution that I have admired and respected for decades," Herrera said. "As a museum that has long been at the forefront of collecting work by artists of Latin American descent, as well as the place where Ellsworth Kelly realized his last great work of art, entering the collection at this moment marks a high point in my long career." This major Blanton acquisition is made possible thanks to generous support from the Kahng Foundation. Several other art installations, to be announced in coming months, will provide additional ways to engage with art throughout the Blanton campus.

To date, the museum has raised \$33.1 million towards its \$35 million goal to fund the new grounds initiative, including \$17.5 million from The Moody Foundation, with an additional \$2.5 million to endow the museum's free admission day on Thursdays; \$5 million from the Still Water Foundation, including a \$2 million challenge match to inspire other donors; a major bequest from longtime Austinite and

museum member and docent Ann Bower; and gifts from the Kahng Foundation and Jack and Katie Blaha. Fundraising was mostly completed in early 2020. Construction is scheduled to begin in early 2021 and conclude by late 2022; the museum will remain open throughout.

On Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 7 p.m. CST, the Blanton will host a virtual groundbreaking event to celebrate this milestone in the project, showcasing the new design and featuring Blanton director Simone J. Wicha, the Snøhetta architects, and various community and university leaders, as well as other entertainment. Details at www.blantonmuseum.org.

###

About the Blanton:

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with around 19,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.