Joslyn Art Museum to Own and Manage Kent Bellows Studio and Mentoring Program

Omaha, NE – Joslyn Art Museum announced today its intent to become owner of The Kent Bellows Studio & Center for Visual Arts and manager of its Young Artist Mentoring Program effective January 1. Recognized for its dynamic vision, unique and versatile curriculum model, and exceptional work with youth, the program will experience growth, diversification, and financial sustainability under the auspices of the Museum.

The proposal to dissolve the Studio/Center as a separate entity and make it part of Joslyn Art Museum was approved by the governing boards of both organizations at meetings this week. Moving forward under Joslyn's ownership, the 1,800-square-foot building at 33rd and Leavenworth will be known as Kent Bellows Studio. It will serve as home base for the Kent Bellows Mentoring Program, managed by Joslyn's department of education and outreach. The two current full-time staff members will remain as staff of Joslyn Art Museum.

The legacy of Nebraska-born artist Kent Bellows (1949–2005), the Studio/Center, founded in 2007, operates from the 1915 building that had served as his studio. The building now comprises a student studio, gallery, portions of Bellows' original studio, and office space. The heart of the Center is its Young Artist Mentoring Program, matching 15 professional artist mentors with 50 high school students per semester and offering an environment with a balance of freedom and support, encouraged community involvement, and diverse art practice. Students selected for the program find personal inspiration, gain technical skills, and build their art portfolios during 65 contact hours each semester. As Joslyn's Kent Bellows Mentoring Program, the identity and integrity of this highly-respected program will not change.

Deb Bellows Wesselmann, sister of Kent Bellows and current president and member of the Center’s board, noted the significance of this step to both her family and the Center’s programming. "We have so loved growing this wonderful program that speaks to Kent’s passion for art and the mentoring of young people through art and creative outlets. It has been six outstanding years, supported so generously by some wonderful donors and our mentors. Kent adored Joslyn Art Museum. Our family and the Center/Studio board could not be more pleased that the Museum recognizes the important work in arts mentoring happening here and is committed to enriching it and ensuring its long-term sustainability. Kent’s unique legacy, and this program’s work with youth, will now endure through the Museum.”

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Historically, the Studio/Center's annual budget has been around $300,000, funded primarily by donations and partly by student fees. Under Joslyn's purview, the program will save significant operational costs, with an expected savings of at least 25 percent. The Museum's current annual operating budget is $5.35 million. Through the Museum, the Kent Bellows Mentoring Program has the potential to expand, making use of the Museum's spaces and resources to mentor additional students through greater programming options.

Jack Becker, Joslyn's executive director & CEO, spoke about the new possibilities this change creates for the Museum. "In assuming responsibility for the Kent Bellows Mentoring Program, Joslyn will keep it financially viable while bringing the Museum's significant experience and dedication to excellence in art education and outreach to its operation. At the same time, the new program will allow the Museum to significantly expand its active engagement of teens, local artist mentors, and youth agencies throughout the metro area. We will make every effort to retain the personality and energy of the Kent Bellows Mentoring Program while making it an integral piece of the Joslyn whole."

About Kent Bellows

Kent Bellows has been recognized as one of America's greatest masters of Realism since first exhibiting in New York in 1985. The Nebraska-born artist began his career as a free-lance science fiction illustrator in the late 1970s for publications such as *Omni* and *Rolling Stone*. He moved into commissioned portraiture and then figurative realism by the early 1980s, reaching national acclaim when he was discovered by the New York art market through Tatistcheff Gallery and then later Forum Gallery in New York.

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Our Mission — Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves, and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse audience.

Our Vision — To be cherished and respected as a premier art museum.

The Museum was a gift to the people of Omaha from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her husband, George, who made his fortune as president of the Western Newspaper Union. The Museum's original 1931 building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the nation, with 38 types of marble from seven countries. The Walter and Suzanne Scott Pavilion, a 58,000-square-foot addition built in 1994, was designed by renowned British architect Norman Foster, Baron Foster of Thames Bank, as his first U.S. commission. The Museum features galleries, a 1,000-seat concert hall, fountain court, education technology gallery, lecture hall, classrooms, sculpture garden, café, and shop.