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The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Real-Life Monuments Men Part of Nelson-Atkins History

Legislation Would Award Congressional Gold Medals

Kansas City, MO. Jan 21, 2014— As excitement builds for the release of the Sony film *The Monuments Men*, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art applauds six real-life Monuments Men who either worked in or closely with the museum. Monuments men and women, commissioned by Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II, were tasked with the protection, recovery and preservation of millions of Europe's masterpieces during the Nazi occupation.

"The men and women involved in this selfless effort to keep art objects safe during a dangerous time in history showed immense courage," said Julián Zugazagoitia, CEO & Director of the Nelson-Atkins. "We are deeply in their debt for preserving these treasures for humanity."

A display of archival materials will be on view in Bloch Lobby that includes postcards, manuscripts, newspaper clippings and biographies of the Nelson-Atkins' Monuments Men.

"My research has shown that these six men brought to their military duties the same passion for art and culture that made them so valuable to the Nelson-Atkins," said MacKenzie Mallon, a researcher in the European Painting & Sculpture Department who has been working on this project for many months. "They took their responsibilities as protectors of these monuments very seriously."



The museum employed four of the Monuments Men and maintained strong ties with two others. Paul Gardner, the first director of the Nelson-Atkins, served as Director of the Fine Arts Section of the Allied Military Government in Italy. Another former director, Laurence Sickman, was assigned

to General Douglas MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters after the Japanese surrender and served as a technical advisor on collections and monuments, making trips to China and Korea to assess the level of damage to monuments in those countries. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for his war services.



The first curator of European Art at the museum, Patrick J. Kelleher, served as the head of the Greater Hesse Division of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section. Otto Wittmann, Jr., the first curator of Prints for the museum, was part of the OSS Art Looting and Investigation Unit (ALIU).

Langdon Warner served as the Asian art advisor to the Trustees of the Nelson-Atkins in 1930, and was a close colleague of Sickman. He helped found the American Defense – Harvard Group, a precursor of the Roberts Commission, Roosevelt's task force. James A. Reeds served with the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section in France in 1944. He taught linguistics at University of Missouri at Kansas City and served as a docent for

the Nelson-Atkins.

One of the finest examples of 18th century portraiture at the Nelson-Atkins, Nicolas de Largillière's *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, was found by the Monuments Men in a bomb-rigged salt mine in Alt Aussee, Austria, and returned to Clarice de Rothschild, whose family owned the painting. It was purchased by the Nelson-Atkins in 1954 after Rothschild sold it to an art dealer in New York.

During World War II, the Nelson-Atkins also served as a safe house for more than 150 paintings and tapestries from collections on the East and West coasts.

U.S. Senator Roy Blunt from Missouri recently introduced a bipartisan bill that would award Congressional Gold Medals to all 350 of the men and women referred to as Monuments Men.

"The Nelson-Atkins has a rich history which is only enhanced by the individuals who have worked there," said Senator Blunt. "These Monuments Men protected historical artifacts from destruction and saved these treasures for



future generations. I am proud to introduce legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the men and women who fought to preserve this priceless history.”

The Monuments Men, starring George Clooney and Matt Damon, will be released nationally on February 7. For more information on the film, visit epk.org. The film is based on the book *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* by Robert M. Edsel, who continued his investigation into the soldiers who rescued cultural treasures in *Saving Italy*. The latter book discusses the heroism of former Nelson-Atkins director Paul Gardner. Edsel has created the *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, which honors the legacy of the Monuments Men. For more information, visit monumentsmenfoundation.org.

Photos of Paul Gardner and Laurence Sickman courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Archive.

Image caption: Nicolas de Largillière , French ,1656-1746. Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, ca. 1714-1715. Oil on canvas. 57 1/2 x 45 1/2 inches (146 x 116 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. 54-35

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America’s finest art museums. The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access and insight into its renowned collection of more than 33,500 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings, photography, modern sculpture, and new American Indian and Egyptian galleries. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region. The institution-wide transformation of the Nelson-Atkins has included the 165,000-square-foot Bloch Building expansion and renovation of the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Streets, Kansas City, MO. Hours are Wednesday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Thursday/Friday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon–5 p.m. Admission to the museum is free to everyone. For museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

For media interested in receiving further information, please contact:

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