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GREGORY WESSNER APPOINTED AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

Appointment Marks Latest Milestone in the NAD’s Revitalization, Following Creation of an Endowment Providing Financial Stability, and Reinvigoration of Commitment to Serving Artists and Architects

New York, NY (August 19, 2020) – The National Academy of Design (NAD) announced today the appointment of Gregory Wessner as its Executive Director. Wessner is currently Executive Director of Open House New York (OHNY), a nonprofit arts organization that enriches public education about architecture and design in New York City. In more than seven years at OHNY, Wessner transformed the organization into one of the city’s most important platforms for architecture and design programming.

Under his leadership, OHNY: strengthened its revenue streams and fundraising; doubled its budget; expanded institutional partnerships with more than 500 arts and cultural institutions, government agencies, and other organizations; and produced more than 300 public programs and events.
Wessner will assume his post at the NAD on September 8, 2020, succeeding Mary Fisher, who has served as the NAD’s Interim Executive Director since 2018. With Wessner’s appointment, the NAD has the components in place to shape and implement new forms of service to artists and architects, advance the national conversation about visual art and design, and reimagine cultural advocacy for the 21st century.

Wessner’s expertise bridges the worlds of visual arts and design; he has nearly thirty years of experience working as a curator, programmer, and fundraiser in cultural institutions including the Architectural League of New York, White Columns, and the Parrish Art Museum. His new position as Executive Director of the NAD marks a return to the organization, where early in his career he was Chief Administrator of the National Academy School of Fine Arts.

Founded in 1825, the National Academy of Design is America’s first institution specifically dedicated to advancing the work and ideas of U.S.-based artists and architects. Since its inception, artist and architect members annually nominate and elect a new class. Known as National Academicians, they number 2,372 in total, with 432 living members. Today, the NAD serves the country’s leading contemporary cultural practitioners and celebrates the legacies of its historic members through scholarship, programming, exhibitions, and education for the public, students, researchers, and scholars. This fall, the NAD will announce its 2020 members, and later this year and next will launch a range of new programs, partnerships, and other initiatives.

“Greg not only has extensive and wide-ranging experience leading and running cultural organizations, he brings something even more essential—an understanding of the power of architects and artists to rattle long-held assumptions and inspire change in our world,” said Wendy Evans Joseph, Board President, National Academician, and founder of Studio Joseph. “The Academy’s Board, staff, and supporters have worked with uncommon determination and commitment to secure the financial future of the Academy and lay the foundation for a new Executive Director to succeed. I see this as one of the most important moments in the NAD’s history since its founding, and I am thrilled that Greg will be leading the Academy for our 200th anniversary and into the future.”

“I am incredibly honored to have been selected to lead the National Academy of Design as it begins an exciting new chapter,” said Gregory Wessner, new Executive Director of the National Academy of Design. “I look forward to working with the Board of Governors, National Academicians, and larger NAD community to preserve and amplify the Academy’s extraordinary legacy, while also deepening its engagement with the work and ideas of contemporary art and architecture.”

Wessner’s appointment builds on the NAD’s success in addressing the financial and institutional challenges it faced in the past, when it was known as the National Academy Museum and School. In 2016, the Academy ended its association with its school of fine arts, allowing it to focus its core mission of service to artists and architects. The sale of its three buildings on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, finalized in 2019, enabled the institution to create a $65-million endowment, providing the financial stability to deepen its commitment to current programs and to launch new initiatives.

Currently in residence at the National Arts Club at 15 Gramercy Park, the Academy is touring an exhibition of 100 works from its collection to eight museums across the U.S., facilitating expanded resources for National Academicians, organizing exhibitions drawn from the Academy’s permanent collection, enhancing the storage and care of that collection, and supporting operations and future initiatives.
ABOUT GREGORY WESSNER
Gregory Wessner became Executive Director of Open House New York in 2013. Prior to joining OHNY, he worked at the Architectural League of New York for nearly two decades, where he served in a variety of positions including Exhibitions Director. He also served as Chief Administrator at the National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts and the alternative art space White Columns following his role as Special Events Coordinator at the Parrish Art Museum. In recognition of his contributions to art and culture in New York City, Wessner received the Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects New York (AIANY) this summer. The highest honor given by AIANY to a non-architect, the Award's previous recipients include Ai Weiwei, Janette Sadik-Khan, Phyllis Lambert, and Jane Jacobs.

Wessner is an Honorary Member of AIA New York and is a board member of the Association of Architecture Organizations. He was recognized by the Guides Association of New York in 2016 for Outstanding Achievement in Support of New York City. Wessner did doctoral research in art and architectural history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and completed undergraduate studies in Art History at Rutgers University.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN
Founded in 1825 by a group of forward-thinking artists and architects, the National Academy of Design was created to promote American art and architecture. In its nearly two-hundred-year history, the institution has changed names and locations, but its commitment to serving National Academicians has remained steadfast. With 432 living Academicians, and 2,372 Academicians in total, the NAD advances the work and legacies of artists and architects through scholarship, exhibitions, and other educational initiatives.

The NAD holds one of the country’s largest public American art collections, composed of over 8,000 works across media, donated throughout its history by Academicians. The collection can be accessed digitally on the NADatabase and can be experienced through its touring exhibition program. Last year, For America: Paintings from the National Academy of Design—an exhibition organized by the NAD—began a three-year tour to eight museums across the U.S. The exhibition is currently on view at the Dixon Gallery & Gardens in Memphis, Tennessee through September 27, 2020.

Please visit nationalacademy.org for more information, and follow us at @natlacademy.

For additional inquiries, please contact:

Resnicow and Associates
Megan Ardery / Katrina Reynolds
mardery@resnicow.com / kreynolds@resnicow.com
+1 212 671 5181 / 212 671 5184

National Academy of Design
Jessica Merritt, Head of Communications
jmerritt@nationalacademy.org
+1 813 293 1189