

## Ruth Carter Stevenson (1923–2013): A Chronology

*"[My father said] that there are people out there who know how to do it. If you don't know how to do it, find them and let them do it."*

–Ruth Carter Stevenson

*"I've always thought that if you travel, you should either travel with somebody who is very scholarly or very witty. Both preferably."*

–Ruth Carter Stevenson

*"Great museums owe their success to creative and magnanimous people, all working together to collect, preserve, and interpret art."*

–Ruth Carter Stevenson

*"I think that is part of what makes Fort Worth such a unique city. There are so many people, small groups who care and they gather together and get their voices heard. You can get it done, that's the thing that's encouraging."*

–Ruth Carter Stevenson

### 1923

**Ruth Carter is born** on October 19 at the Baptist hospital on Pennsylvania Avenue, Fort Worth.

### 1928–38

**Attends the new North Hi-Mount Elementary School**, Stripling Middle School, and Arlington Heights High School, counting among her earliest friends future Fort Worth Circle artist Cynthia Brants and future first librarian of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Nancy Graves.

### 1938–41

**Attends the Madeira School in McLean, Virginia**, taking her first art history course, which includes trips to the Freer Gallery in Washington, DC. She is particularly interested in French.

Attends Franklin Delano Roosevelt's third inaugural celebration. Amon G. Carter is friends with the Roosevelts (whose son Elliot married Fort Worth native Ruth Googins and settled there) and former Vice President John Nance Garner, a fellow Texan.

Her parents divorce in early 1941.

## 1941-45

**Attends Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, with her childhood friend Cynthia Brants.** Particularly remembers music history with composer William Schuman. She and Brants often visit galleries in New York City, and she tries to buy her first artwork, by Lyonel Feininger, but cannot because her father, Amon G. Carter Sr., does not care for modernist works and will not grant her the money.

## 1946

**Marries J. Lee Johnson III** of Fort Worth while he is in law school at Notre Dame. Their first child, Sheila Johnson, is born on August 21 in South Bend the following year.

## 1948

**Successfully acquires from Knoedler Gallery, New York, her first artwork,** having taken the advice of family friend and president of American Airlines, Cyrus Rowlett "C. R." Smith. The selection of a French impressionist piece by Mary Cassatt is also influenced by her visit to the Art Institute of Chicago to see their Impressionist exhibition the previous year. Lacking a place to hang it, she approaches Sam Cantey III of the Fort Worth Art Association, who is delighted to hang it in the Association's galleries on the second floor of the public library.

## 1949

**Ruth Carter Johnson becomes a member of the board of the Fort Worth Art Association,** which also includes Sam Cantey III, patron of the Fort Worth Circle, along with other collectors of the Ashcan school, American landscapes, and George Inness. The association includes in its permanent collection Thomas Eakins' *Swimming Hole* (1885), purchased by the Association's founder, Sally Gillespie, from Eakins' widow. Late in the year, the Association and Amon G. Carter Sr. arrange for Knoedler Gallery to stage an exhibition at the public library, including works by Winslow Homer. This is the first major American art exhibition in Fort Worth. J. Lee Johnson III receives his law degree from Notre Dame in June, and J. Lee Johnson IV is born on September 27.

## 1950

**Ruth Carter Johnson begins collecting regionalist works acquired from Electra Carlin,** whose gallery represents artists such as John Guerin and the Fort Worth Circle's Kelly Fearing.

Begins her Junior League membership and is elected president in 1954. She works with the Fort Worth Circle's Bror Utter on an art education program for all fifth graders in Fort Worth to participate in an annual art lecture at the Fort Worth Art Association gallery.

Actively lobbies for reforestation and beautification projects along the Trinity River following the massive 1949 flood.

## 1951

Karen Johnson is born on March 19.

## 1952

**Works with Sam Cantey III, president of the Fort Worth Art Association,** and architect Herbert Bayer on the design of the Association's new building; the association eventually becomes the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, which resides in the Bayer building until the completion of a new building, by the architect Tadao Ando, in 2002.

## 1953

Kate Johnson is born on December 6.

## 1955

**The Herbert Bayer-designed Fort Worth Art Association building opens** with studio space for art instruction, such as Blanche McVeigh's classes on etching and printmaking and Flora and Dickson Reeder's school for theater.

## 1957-59

**Travels with Bishop Fulton Sheen and Father Edward O'Meara** to New York, Rome, Paris, Lourdes, and London. During these trips she makes excursions to the major sites and ruins in Rome, has an audience with Pope John XXIII, and on several occasions is given personal tours by the Vatican archivist.

## 1960

**Begins serving on the Fort Worth City Art Commission,** which she does until 1983, many of these years as chairman. In this capacity, she works with Dr. Richard F. Brown (who would become the first director of the Kimbell Art Museum) and Henry Hopkins, of the Fort Worth Art Association, on a City Hall sculpture commission that results in *Twelve Triangles Hanging*, by George Rickey.

Mark Johnson is born on March 17.

## 1962

**Serves on the board of Trinity Valley School.** The school was founded in 1959 by George Bragg and Stephen Seleny and initially provided education for the Texas Boys Choir until the facility developed into a fully independent academy.

## 1963

**Ruth Carter Johnson, Sam Cantey III, and Mitchell A. Wilder** (director of the Amon Carter) assemble masterworks for President John F. Kennedy's suite at Fort Worth's

Hotel Texas. The president and Mrs. Kennedy stay the night in Fort Worth before proceeding to Dallas the next morning.

## 1963

### **Founds the Arts Council of Fort Worth and Tarrant County.**

Appointed a regent of the University of Texas by Governor John Connally, becoming the second woman to serve in this capacity. She presses for the preservation of the historic campus architecture, serving as chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee from 1967–69; represents the regents at an urban planning conference, where she becomes friends with Lady Bird Johnson. She works with Frank Erwin, chairman of the board of regents, on full desegregation of the University of Texas system. Her term ends in 1969.

## 1964

**Repeats her marriage vows with J. Lee Johnson III** with the blessings of her spiritual advisors: Bishop Fulton Sheen, of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, and Monsignor Langenhorst; the ceremony takes place in the chapel of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns at the time of Ruth Carter Johnson's formal conversion to Catholicism.

## 1966/67

**Tours the National Gallery of Art and the Corcoran Gallery** with Lady Bird Johnson to see da Vinci's portrait *Genevra dé Benci* and a John Singer Sargent exhibition, which ultimately results in the acquisition of one of the Sargents for the White House.

## 1966–70

**At the request of Lady Bird Johnson, Ruth Carter Johnson fills the vacancy on the board of the National Endowment for the Arts** left by the death of René d'Harnoncourt. During her tenure, the old Pension Building is converted into the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery.

## 1968

**Named to the Board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.**

## 1969

**David and Peggy Rockefeller underwrite a multi-volume publication on U.S. wildflowers**, with an exhibition and unveiling of the volume on Texas at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The exhibition opening is attended by the driving forces behind the project: Ruth Carter Johnson, Lady Bird and Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Peggy and David Rockefeller.

## 1971

**Ruth Carter Johnson meets with Paul Rudolph and Vincent Scully**, architectural historian at Yale, which leads to the Amon Carter's publication *Pueblo Architecture*

*of the Southwest*. Scully's thesis proves controversial, garnering much debate within the fields of archeology and anthropology.

## 1974

**The Philip Johnson-designed Water Gardens**, a gift from the Amon G. Carter Foundation to the City of Fort Worth, is completed in downtown.

## 1975

**Ruth Carter Johnson is invited by Paul Mellon and Carter Brown**, director of the National Gallery, to chair a collecting group for the National Gallery of Art whose purpose is to contribute annually toward a specific artwork for the museum. This committee ultimately allowed the National Gallery to expand upon Andrew Mellon's original bequest and include works by living artists. The collecting group also includes Burton and Emily Tremaine; Charles Ryskamp, director of the Morgan Library (and future trustee of the Amon Carter); and Seymour Knox, benefactor of the Albright-Knox Museum. The first meeting results in the acquisition of a Joan Miro tapestry, a Robert Motherwell, and the Alexander Calder mobile in the East Building.

## 1975–76

**Meets with Nancy Lee Bass and Junior League representatives** in the Amon Carter Museum's director's office to address the condition of the Trinity River, which results in the formation of the Fort Worth Streams and Valleys Committee. Along with urban planner Lawrence Halprin, the committee develops a master plan for clean up, beautification, and recreation along the Trinity.

## 1978

**Joins the Visiting Committee at the Fogg Museum at Harvard.** "I have a museum, and I'm going to have plenty of time to devote myself to it now. So I thought I'd learn how other museums do things. The Fogg was the stepping stone to that and how you run [a museum], and the kind of people you have within the walls. It's what you put on the walls."

Ruth Carter Johnson's divorce from J. Lee Johnson III is legally finalized and is recognized by the Catholic Church in 1980.

## 1979

**Paul Mellon assumes the chairmanship of the National Gallery of Art** vacated by Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger; he asks Ruth Carter Johnson to visit him to see his personal collection and to converse with him about asking John R. "Jack" Stevenson to be a trustee of the Gallery. On a following visit to New York, Ruth Carter Johnson is invited by Mellon to serve as one of five trustees of the Gallery, filling the vacancy left by Jock Whitney. She accepts,

becoming the first woman to serve in this capacity.

## 1980

**Joins the board of the American Federation of Arts**, which has a long history with Fort Worth, including bringing Thomas Eakins' *Swimming Hole* to the city in 1921.

## 1981

**Attends an Augustus Saint-Gaudens exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art** and becomes enamored of his work, especially *Diana*. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art acquires three variations of *Diana*, including a gilded-bronze version (gifted in 1998 to Fort Worth's Bass Performance Hall) and a smaller bronze version entitled *Diana of the Tower*, which remains in the Amon Carter's collection.

## 1982

**Works with National Gallery of Art board president, John "Jack" Stevenson**, on extensive cultivation for the gallery's \$50 million Patron's Permanent Fund. Ruth Carter Johnson and Queen Beatrice of the Netherlands preside over the gallery's opening of *Mauritshuis: Dutch Painting of the Golden Age from the Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague*, featuring Vermeer's *Girl with the Pearl Earring*.

Amon Carter Jr. dies on July 24, and Ruth Carter Johnson assumes presidency of the Amon G. Carter Foundation.

## 1983

**Marries New York City resident John "Jack" Stevenson** at Fort Worth's Holy Family Church. Stevenson had served as legal advisor to the first Nixon administration and is involved in activities at the United Nations, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Council on Foreign Affairs, in addition to his work with the National Gallery of Art. Both continue as trustees of the Gallery: "[It was] suggested to Jack prior to our wedding that I step down as a trustee. Jack said that he would not do that because I had been elected to the board on my own merits and he could not see any pillow talk that would cause problems for the Gallery."

## 1984

**The Stevensons travel to The Hague.** Jack Stevenson, serving as a legal advisor to the U.S. State Department, argues the case at the World Court between the United States and Canada regarding fishing rights on the Georges Bank.

## 1985

**The Stevensons open *the Treasure Houses of Britain* exhibition at the National**

**Gallery of Art;** they receive President Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan for the preopening festivities; a reception for the Prince and Princess of Wales takes place the following month.

## 1986

**Ruth Carter Stevenson joins Lady Bird Johnson in fundraising** for the Wildflower Center at the University of Texas, Austin.

The Stevensons host a reception dinner at the National Gallery for the joint opening of the Washington Opera's *Goya* at the Kennedy Center and the National Gallery's *Goya: The Condesa de Chinchón and Other Paintings, Drawings, and Prints from Spanish and American Private Collections and the National Gallery of Art*.

## 1987

**Ruth Carter Stevenson is honored** at Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's luncheon for "ladies who did things" at the Supreme Court Building.

## 1988

**Archbishop Paul Marcinkus arranges a viewing for Ruth Carter Stevenson of the restoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.** "Having seen it years before, when it was all dirty, there is no way to describe how it looked. We were up on the scaffolding and, if I had dared, I could have touched it, but I wouldn't have for the world."

As representative of the National Gallery of Art, Ruth Carter Stevenson joins the State Department's Friends of Art and Embassies Program.

She presides over the official inception of the Fort Worth Cultural District encompassing a complex of museums, the Fort Worth Botanical Gardens, and the Fort Worth Zoo.

Jack Stevenson is named to the Human Rights Commission for the Organization of American States (OAS).

## 1989

**At the request of fellow Fort Worthian Robert Bass,** Ruth Carter Stevenson begins a second three-year term serving on the board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

## 1991

**The first expansion of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art,** since the 1974-77 addition, is initiated.

## 1992

**Dedication of the Ruth Carter Stevenson Chair of Architecture** at the University of Texas at Austin.

## 1993

**Jack Stevenson retires from the National Gallery of Art**, and Ruth Carter Stevenson becomes chairman of the board.

## 1994

**The Stevensons travel to Buenos Aires** for an Americas Society meeting.

## 1995

**Retires as chairman** of the National Gallery of Art's Collectors Committee.

## 1997

**Visits architect Philip Johnson** in New Canaan, Connecticut, to finalize plans for a revision of the Amon Carter's glass façade. The discussions develop into the beginnings of a full expansion of the museum.

A daytrip to Santa Fe with Nancy Lee and Perry Bass for the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum opening leads to the Bass' donation of funds to acquire Stuart Davis' *Bass Rocks 2* for the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Ruth Carter Stevenson retires as chairman of the board of the National Gallery of Art.

Jack Stevenson dies at home in Fort Worth on October 25.

## 1998

**Stevenson inaugurates the Visiting Committee at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.** Under the guidance of her niece, Nenetta Tatum, the museum launches a group for young professionals called The Gallery.

## 1999

**The Amon Carter Museum of American Art closes for renovation and expansion.** Philip Johnson continues his association with the museum by designing the new structure.

## 2001

**Grand reopening of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art;** the expansion quadruples the museum's gallery spaces and includes a conservation lab and cold and cool storage for the photography holdings.

## 2002-12

**Ruth Carter Stevenson continues to serve as president of the Amon Carter's board of trustees** and is active in many civic, philanthropic, and botanical endeavors. In April of 2011, she is honored at the museum's 50th Anniversary Gala on the plaza, which is attended by some 400 guests from around the country. The festivities culminate in a spectacular fireworks display. "It's a great institution because of her," says Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery and a longtime friend. "Over its history the Carter has put together one of the great collections of American art.... It's a great, great place she has created for Fort Worth and the nation."

## 2013

**Dies at her home in Fort Worth, January 6.**