**Metal Museum exhibit explores forgotten history**

**of African American blacksmiths in Memphis**

UM Memphis professor and guest curator shares untold stories

of blacksmiths from past two centuries, highlights works by contemporary metal artists

A new art exhibit opening June 26 at the Metal Museum traces the role of African American blacksmiths from Central and West Africa to modern-day Memphis, bringing to the fore an often overlooked yet vital part of the city’s artistic history.

*From Artisans to Artists: African American Metal Workers in Memphis*, guest curated by historian and University of Memphis professor Dr. Ernestine Jenkins, provides a closer look at the morphing artisan identity and evolving blacksmith practices in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Using surviving artifacts and primary source documents Jenkins researched the lives of more than a dozen metal workers, among them Charles Bowles, David Carnes, Blair Hunt and Frank Stokes. In doing so, she developed a more complete picture of these metal workers whose stories were at risk of being lost to history. Those workers also include the enslaved blacksmiths of two Memphis-area plantation sites, the Hildebrand Plantation and the Hunt-Phelan House.

The exhibit also features contemporary artists Lorenzo Scruggs, Hawkins Bolden, Desmond Lewis and Richard Hunt. Hunt is a world-renowned artist known for his 1977 public art sculpture *I Have Been to the Mountaintop*.

“The blacksmith has always been one who forged together function and creativity,” said Jenkins. “Today a diversity of contemporary artist metalsmiths, while immersed in the tradition, fuse current techniques with modern designs to create new possibilities for an age-old craft.

Among Jenkins’ publications are such titles as *African Americans in Memphis* (2009) and *Race, Representation, and Photography in 19th Century Memphis: from Slavery to Jim Cro*w (2016). She has curated exhibits of African and African American art for the Art Museum of the University of Memphis, the Jones Hall Gallery (University of Memphis), Dixon Gallery and Gardens (Memphis, TN), and Memphis Brooks Museum of Art (Memphis, TN).

*From Artisans to Artists: African American Metal Workers in Memphis* will be on display in the Gasparrini Galleries at the Metal Museum from June 26 through Sept. 11. An opening reception will take place from 3-5 p.m. Sunday, June 26 at the Metal Museum, with an exclusive member preview hour beginning at 2 p.m.