



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-31-14-0527-14
Project Category: Collections Stewardship
Funding Level: \$5,001-\$25,000

University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$24,085
Amount of cost share:	\$0

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Abstract

The Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester seeks funding for the conservation treatment and rehousing of 22 high-priority Asian miniature paintings. This group represents about 30% of the 62 Indian, Persian, and Nepalese miniatures in the permanent collection. Their present condition precludes exhibition; recent examination by a conservator determined that, if left untreated, the condition of each will actively deteriorate. Once treatment is completed, the curator will develop an exhibition plan that incorporates them into the regular rotation schedule for light-sensitive objects in the Asian galleries.

The Collections Stewardship project “Conservation Treatment of 22 Asian Miniature Paintings” is designed to last one year, from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. Activities include the transport of the paintings to the lab, conservation treatment, consultation with the conservator throughout the treatment process, return of paintings from the lab, rehousing, compilation of treatment data for the permanent collection object records, and the development of an exhibition plan for regular rotation in the Asian galleries.

The intended results of the project are the successful treatment and rehousing of 22 Asian miniature paintings. Successful treatment of this important subset of miniature painting will greatly further the museum’s goal, as articulated in our Long Range Preservation Plan, to assess and treat high-priority light-sensitive works on paper in our Asian collection. Long-term benefits extend beyond quantifiable conservation treatment and rehousing activities. These 22 paintings, all of high quality and of diverse subject matter, will again be available to the public, whether displayed on rotation in the Asian galleries or experienced through photographs on our website.

Narrative

1. Project Justification

What does the project propose to do?

The Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester seeks funding for the conservation treatment and rehousing of 22 Asian miniature paintings. This group represents about 30% of the 62 Indian, Persian, and Nepalese miniatures in the permanent collection. Their present condition precludes exhibition; recent examination by a conservator determined that, if left untreated, the condition of each will actively deteriorate. Once treatment is completed, the curator will develop an exhibition plan that incorporates them into the regular rotation schedule for light-sensitive objects in the Asian galleries.

Background to the Project

In the museum's 1991 General Conservation Assessment Survey, Tom Branchick, Director of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center (WACC), identified as a high priority "updating or obtaining a prioritized object specific survey for the collections and applying for funding for the most urgent conservation treatments." During the process of writing the Gallery's Long-Range Preservation Plan in 2002, the Collections Department worked with consultant Barbara Moore to prioritize the collections most in need of such systematic condition surveys. When combined with curatorial assessment and exhibition needs, these surveys would then provide a roadmap for prioritized treatment. The Gallery's Long-Range Preservation Plan was thus written as a guiding document that enables the Gallery to identify and execute large projects in as timely and judicious a manner as possible, and as funds permit. These documents are attached to this application as Requireddocs#2 and 3, respectively.

During the development of our Long-Range Preservation Plan, certain collections took priority because of their fragile condition, complex treatment needs, light-sensitivity, requirements for scheduled rotation rather than permanent display, and importance to the museum's educational mission. The first group identified for consideration was MAG's important collection of European tapestries. Through funding from IMLS and NEA as well as private donations, this initiative has been systematically implemented over the past decade, resulting in a detailed condition survey and subsequent conservation of four Flemish Renaissance tapestries.

An equally important subset of objects identified during the process of developing the Long-Range Preservation Plan was the museum's collection of Asian paintings, including East Asian scrolls and screens and South Asian miniature paintings. These works, inherently delicate because of their media and sensitivity to light, entered the collection over the 100 years of MAG's history; many show the ravages of time. As a group, they offer a remarkable breadth of work that reflects the religions, history, and cultural beliefs of geographic regions as diverse as

East Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Their display is important to local university students in language and history courses as well as art history. Essential to the museum's core educational mission, these works comprise a central component of MAG's programming for schoolchildren, particularly in the curriculum area of global studies. In terms of prioritization for conservation assessment and treatment, works on paper in the Asian collection are of special interest as we continue to establish defined rotation schedules for scrolls, screens, manuscripts, and miniatures.

The museum's curator of European art oversees the exhibition and care of the Asian collections. Over the past decade, she has worked closely with specialist consultant curators and conservators to systematically evaluate the collection of Asian paintings in its entirety, with an eye to quality, condition, and authenticity. Professional Charles Collins, a specialist in Indian art from the Rochester Institute of Technology, evaluated the collection of Indian miniatures during the 1980s for quality and subject matter; Ellen Avril, Chief Curator and curator of Asian art at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell University, evaluated the East Asian works for quality and condition in 2003. In 2008, paper conservator Patricia Hamm conducted a site visit to informally survey 79 works on paper, including about half of the museum's 62 Indian miniatures. A separate survey of East Asian screens and scrolls was conducted by WACC conservator Leslie Paisley in 2011.

In 2011, with an eye toward obtaining treatment funding, the curator requested that Ms Hamm conduct a detailed condition survey of the 24 Indian miniatures she had identified as at-risk and of highest treatment priority in her 2008 assessment. Two of these works were rapidly and actively deteriorating, and the museum decided to treat them immediately. The remaining 22 miniatures in need of high-priority treatment are the focus of this project.

The 22 Asian Miniature Paintings

Images of each miniature, along with their titles, dates, and accession numbers, have been incorporated into Ms. Hamm's condition reports and treatment proposals, found in this proposal as "Requireddoc#1".

The 22 Asian miniature paintings that are the focus of this project represent approximately 30% of the museum's total collection. Of the 62 that comprise the collection, 44 were given to MAG by the widow of Robert F. Reiff, an art historian and native of Rochester. The majority of miniatures proposed for treatment under this IMLS grant originate from Professor Reiff's collection, which was formed during 25 years of travel throughout the United States, Europe, and India. Professor Reiff specialized in western art rather than Asian; his collection was thus quite personal, and put together for private contemplation and enjoyment rather than to form an encyclopedic survey.

The collection nevertheless represents many of the main tendencies of miniature painting in beautiful examples; its arrival in 1983 greatly expanded the museum's holdings of this genre. It represents the diverse geographical and court styles prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries, especially as the form's popularity grew after the Mughal conquest of Northern and Central Indian in the 1500s.

Subject matter and quality.

The diversity of subject matter among these 22 paintings represents a near totality of South Asian religious beliefs, representing Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Each religion has its own methods of attaining peace and harmony in the afterlife, and the portrayals in these paintings represent these varied paths.

Part of the collection consists of depictions of various stages of love. Some relate to the *Ragamala*, a basic source of love poetry that relates images to musical notes or modes. Three examples in this group are *Kakubha Ragini (Love in Loss)* (96.68), *Ramakali Ragini (A Lover seeking Forgiveness)* (83.70), and *A Raja Returning Home* (83.45). Other popular subjects represented include the traditions of portraiture and the Hindu pantheon, particularly the deity of Krishna. Finally, the rarest miniatures of the group come from a Jain manuscript that dates to about 1500 (83.56.1-2)

This group of miniatures is remarkable for a diversity of subject matter as well as consistently high quality. As Professor Collins writes in his letter of support (see Supportingdoc.#2),

The collection ... is remarkable for the range of themes covering several religions, many deities, poetic themes, and so on; the quality of the miniatures is as fine as you would find in any collection. The twenty-two miniatures to be conserved represent a well-balanced cross-section of the entire collection. Rochester is indeed privileged to have the paintings in its collection and they are quite worthy of conservation efforts in order to enhance their display for public interaction.

Conservation challenges and approach

These 22 paintings were chosen due to the conservator's assessment that placed them at the highest priority for treatment. The submission of the entire group for treatment is a logical choice not only because of their geographic origins and related subject matter, but because their physical properties comprise the same basic original technique as well as similar condition problems and treatment challenges. Indian miniatures are usually made in five stages: 1) the entire surface is covered with a priming of starch paste, 2) the main lines are drawn in black, 3) the background is colored, 4) the underpainting of the figures is covered with appropriate local pigments, and 5) there is a final definition of the outlines. Because most of the paintings were created in the same fashion, they suffer from many of the same condition problems and treatment

challenges. Each of the 22 paintings is matted to non-archival board and needs to be removed as soon as possible. Each has suffered a variety of damage and repairs over the centuries, including the use of tape and adhesive to stabilize tears and delaminating surfaces; and staining from acidity of medium or paper as well as water. Although each miniature has individual issues, there are general challenges linking all of them, and the conservator will be able to address their treatment consistently.

Project Benefits and Intended Results

The successful completion of this conservation treatment project will halt the deterioration of 22 important works of Asian art and return them to exhibitable condition. They can again be placed on display for the enjoyment of museum visitors; photography and information, including treatment information, will also be included in our collections database and website, thus benefitting an even wider audience. By virtue of their successful treatment, the project furthers the museum's core missions of public outreach, education and stewardship. Finally, treatment of this group furthers the implementation of the museum's Long-Range Preservation Plan.

Project Advancement of MAG's Strategic Plan

This project advances core elements of the Permanent Collection section of MAG's strategic plan. Specifically, the successful treatment and return to exhibition of 22 Asian miniature paintings furthers the mandates to "maintain professional standards for care and protection of the collection." The return to exhibition, or, in some cases, exhibition for the first time, of these rare and exotic paintings supports the Gallery's strategic goals for the display and re-interpretation of the collections of European, Asian and ancient art.

2. Project Work Plan

Specific activities

The scope of this project is quite straightforward in that it comprises the conservation treatment and rehousing of 22 small paintings. Activities include the transport of the paintings to the lab, treatment, consultation with the conservator throughout the treatment process, return of paintings from the lab, rehousing, compilation of treatment data for the permanent collection object records, and the development of an exhibition plan for regular rotation in the Asian galleries.

Project personnel

The project personnel include one consultant conservator and two museum staff members. Consultant: The conservator is Patricia Hamm, whose expertise is in the conservation treatment of works on paper. She has worked with Memorial Art Gallery staff on several projects, including assessment and treatment of several Indian, Tibetan, and Islamic works. One of her specialties is the treatment of water-soluble media and its associated challenges, and she is well qualified for her role in this project.

Memorial Art Gallery staff: Two museum staff members play key roles in this project.

Curator: The project director and curator is Nancy Norwood, the museum's curator of European art. Ms Norwood also has responsibility for the oversight, exhibition, and care of the Asian collection. She has a special interest in collections care, and over the past decade has directed several conservation-related projects, including the European Tapestry Initiative. Ms Norwood initiated this project by obtaining both curatorial and conservation assessments of the collections of Asian miniature paintings, and has worked with Ms Hamm on several past projects. Ms Norwood will be responsible for making sure that the project is on track, communicating with Ms Hamm throughout the course of treatment, delivering and picking up the paintings, and developing an exhibition plan once the paintings are conserved.

Preparator: The staff preparator is Carol Acquilano, who has been responsible for the storage and exhibition needs of the museum's collection of works on paper for over 20 years. Ms Acquilano has also worked frequently with Ms Hamm on a variety of projects, ranging from surveys to treatment and housing requirements. Ms Acquilano's role in this project includes readying the paintings for transportation, specifying the mat-cutting and preparation needs, and rehousing.

Sequence of activities

The duration of the project is one year. Project activities will occur in the following sequence:

1. The project curator and preparator will prepare the paintings, which are already matted, for delivery to the conservator's lab in Clarence Center, New York. This will occur during the first month.

2. Museum policy requires that two people accompany the transportation any work of art. The curator and preparator together will deliver the paintings to Clarence Center.

3. The conservator, who has already examined the paintings and written condition reports, will begin treatment in the sequence she determines most appropriate. We estimate that treatment of all 22 miniatures will not take no longer than 10 months.

4. Approximately midway through the project, or at the request of the conservator, the curator will visit the lab to discuss progress and possible treatment choices.

5. The conservator will complete the treatment and write final treatment reports by the end of the grant period.

6. The project curator and preparator will travel to the lab to pick up the paintings and return them to the museum.

7. The preparator will order the custom-cut mats; once they arrive, she will remat each miniature as directed by the conservator.

8. The curator will incorporate treatment reports and before- and after-photography into the museum's collection management database. She will also develop an exhibition plan for display on rotation. (Activities 6-8 will occur during the last month of the project schedule.)

Institutional resources

This project is submitted as a “no cost share” application because the total project costs are less than \$25,000. The project activities of the two museum staff members involved do not deviate from their normal responsibilities, and the museum supports the work hours that they will dedicate to the implementation of this project.

Tracking progress

Ms Norwood will communicate regularly with Ms Hamm to make sure that the project is proceeding according to schedule. Her visit to the lab during the course of treatment will help make sure that any questions or curatorial concerns regarding treatment can be resolved promptly. Ms Norwood and Ms Acquilano will coordinate transport and work together to ensure that rehousing is complete and an exhibition plan formulated by the end of the project period.

Sharing Project Results

The final treatment reports as well as photography taken before, after, and during treatment will be entered into the collections database, where it can be included in fields available to the public through our website. This information will also be available to researchers, when requested. The primary project result—the successful treatment of the miniature paintings—will be shared with the public through exhibition and inclusion on the museum’s website.

3. Project Results

The intended results of the project are the successful treatment and rehousing of 22 Asian miniature paintings. Successful treatment of this important subset of miniature painting will greatly further the museum’s goal, as articulated in our Long Range Preservation Plan, to assess and treat high-priority light-sensitive works on paper in our Asian collection.

Long-term benefits and sustaining the project

The results of this project extend beyond quantifiable conservation treatment and rehousing activities. First, 22 paintings will again be available for exhibition on rotation in the Asian galleries. When the Asian galleries were reinstalled in 2004, new cases were constructed specifically for the display of miniature paintings. These cases permit the display of paintings at extremely low light levels, and at a slight angle rather than vertically. On a typical rotation schedule, four miniatures are displayed for between 3 and 6 months. The addition of these 22 paintings to the pool of exhibitible miniatures will provide an additional five cycles to the rotation schedule. These five cycles will thus allow longer periods of rest between the exhibition cycles of all light-sensitive paintings with the goal of sustainable preservation.

Sustained access and long-term goals:

Images of the paintings, photography of the paintings, and treatment records will be available to researchers, scholars, and the general public through our website or correspondence with curatorial staff. Although not designed as part of the present project, Ms. Norwood and Professor Collins, who wrote in support of this conservation treatment project, are in early discussions about the organization of an exhibition of Indian miniatures with an accompanying scholarly catalogue. This exhibition, tentatively planned for Spring 2016, would showcase the 22 miniatures treated under this project. The catalogue would include entries on each miniature as well as a general essay by Ms Hamm on the conservation of Indian miniature painting.

Schedule of Completion: Conservation Treatment of 22 Asian Miniature Paintings

ACTIVITY	2014		2015	Mar Apr	May Jun	Jul Aug	Sep
	Oct Nov	Dec					
Miniatures packed and delivered to conservator	—						
Conservator treats miniatures and writes treatment reports	—————						
Curator visits lab to discuss treatment progress and options with conservator				—			
Miniatures returned to MAG						—	
* Preparator orders mats * Preparator rehouses miniatures * Treatment documentation entered into collections management records * Curator establishes rotation schedule for treated miniatures							—