



**Museums for America  
Sample Application MA-30-13-0467-13  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship**

**Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum**

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$36,092
Amount of cost share:	\$37,619

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

## **Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum**

### **Permanent Collection Conservation Survey: Paintings**

#### **Abstract**

The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis is requesting funds to support a detailed condition survey of paintings in its permanent collection. The project will commence December 1, 2013, and be complete by December 30, 2014. The on-site survey will be conducted by a contracted team of professional conservators from the Midwest Art Conservation Center and will occur during the summer of 2014. The survey results will help guide the Museum's long-range plans for collections care and treatment, and the information provided will support research and educational efforts by the Museum's constituents, including university faculty, students, outside scholars, and the general public. Prioritizing conservation treatment and following through on the survey's recommendations will ultimately enable the Museum to increase access to the world-renowned painting collection via public display, publication, and loans, and preserve this valuable collection for generations to come.

Short-term effects will include identifying the top ten objects most in need of conservation, and for those objects additional condition reports, treatment proposals, and cost estimates will be provided. As a result, the Kemper Art Museum will be better able to protect the collection while it implements its long-range conservation plan, of which this project is an important step.

The tangible products of the project will be a compilation of reports on each painting surveyed, including photographs of areas of particular conservation concern. Detailed information provided by the survey will be recorded in the Museum's collections database and object files, components of which will be available on the publicly accessible Museum website.

## Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

### Permanent Collection Conservation Survey: Painting

#### Narrative

##### 1. Project Justification

The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis is requesting funds to conduct a comprehensive condition survey of the 337 paintings in the Museum's permanent collection. The relatively small but world-class collection is internationally recognized for the quality of its objects and has served as the foundation of the Museum's mission since its inception in 1881.

One of the oldest teaching museums in the country, established as the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum was initially located in downtown St. Louis under the direction of artist Halsey C. Ives. Through donations, endowments, and acquisitions by such key people as benefactors Charles Parsons and William K. Bixby, art historians and curators H.W. Janson, Frederick Hartt, and William N. Eisendrath, Jr., and prominent St. Louis collectors Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Morton D. May, Etta Steinberg, Sydney M. Shoenberg, Florence and Richard K. Weil, among others, the collection has grown to being one of the most important university museum collections of 19<sup>th</sup>-, 20<sup>th</sup>-, and 21<sup>st</sup> century European and American art.

In 2004, the Museum (formerly the Washington University Gallery of Art), was renamed the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum and in 2005 incorporated into Washington University's newly formed interdisciplinary arts center, the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. The Museum opened in its new building, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Fumihiko Maki, on October 25, 2006. The new facilities offered, for the first time, gallery space dedicated to year-round display of the permanent collection and a plaza for the display of outdoor sculpture, significantly increasing public access to the collection. With this move, fresh identity, and new governance structure has come the opportunity to not only broaden our exhibition, educational, and scholarly purview, but to think comprehensively about our collection goals and policies. Indeed, the first goal of the Museum's Strategic Plan, which was developed in preparation for the new building and in conjunction with the Sam Fox School's ten-year strategic Design for Excellence, is care of the collection, and establishing a conservation program is listed as "one of the most crucial new initiatives for the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum" (see Supporting Document: Strategic Plan Excerpt).

The move into a new building brought the opportunity to act on what has long been a goal: to take the Museum's conservation program to a new level. State-of-the-art environmental controls and excellent storage facilities laid a foundation of solid preventive conservation and prepared the Museum to embark on a more rigorous program of interventive conservation. Although the preservation and conservation of the collection has been a central concern all

along, resources are now available to begin a concerted effort that matches short-term opportunities with long-term goals (see Supporting Document: Long-range Conservation Plan).

In advance of plans for the new building, a 2001 Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) supported a survey of the general needs of the Museum and a review of the permanent collection (see Supporting Document: CAP Report Executive Summary). Saint Louis Art Museum conservator Paul Haner conducted the survey, which proved instrumental in helping the Museum prioritize physical needs in the new building. Among other recommendations, the CAP report called for more stable temperature and humidity controls, bigger, better storage facilities, and a room suitable for performing conservation examinations and basic treatments. The report, which especially addressed the painting collection, also noted that hundreds of works in the Museum's collection were in need of treatment, ranging from basic cleaning and cosmetic treatments to structural stabilization. Haner recommended documenting the condition of the collections through a series of condition surveys that would form the foundation for a comprehensive analysis and assessment of conservation priorities.

In 2004, the Museum received an IMLS Museums for America grant to complete its Collections Access Project, which supported the Museum's efforts to make the collection database available on the Museum's website. This user-friendly website now enables the general public, museum professionals, scholars, faculty, and students to browse, search for, and find visual and written information about the objects in the Museum's collection as well as helps promote educational programs and collections-related activities, exhibitions, and lectures.

In 2009, as a result of the research interests of Washington University classics professor Susan Rotroff and Saint Louis Art Museum conservator Laura Gorman, the Museum, with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, conducted an in-depth assessment of one of the most important small collections within the sculpture collection, a group of ancient Greek pots. The project has since moved forward and the first group of pots is currently being conserved under Gorman's supervision at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

In 2011, the Museum received an IMLS Conservation Project Support grant to complete a comprehensive survey of its sculpture collection. Each object in the sculpture collection was examined individually by two conservators from the Midwest Art Conservation Center. As a result of the survey, the Museum gained a baseline assessment for the condition of each work. The individual reports include a summary of condition, treatment needed, urgency of treatment, and estimated treatment time. In addition, the conservators wrote treatment proposals for 15 individual or groups of objects. The conservators determined that 367 objects (78%) were in stable condition and 93 objects (22%) were, in some way, unstable (many of which have already undergone stabilizing treatment). Additionally, the conservators assigned at least one of four treatment priority levels to each object.

The next step in the Museum's overall conservation plan is to continue with the series of condition surveys recommend in Paul Haner's 2001 CAP report. This series of condition

assessments—sculpture (completed in 2011), followed by paintings (current – the subject of this application), and works on paper (future – to complete the series)—is vital to the development of one of the Museum’s most important institutional goals: to establish a long-term, full-range conservation program that will protect and preserve the Museum’s outstanding permanent collection.

The Kemper Art Museum’s paintings, the core of the permanent collection, are the most frequently and widely exhibited and published objects in the collection. Although small conservation surveys have taken place over the past thirty years, the Museum has never conducted a general survey of the paintings collection, and the majority of paintings have not been examined by a conservator since entering the Museum’s collection. A comprehensive paintings survey will allow the curators to prioritize future conservation needs within the paintings collection as well as in the context of the rest of the Museum’s collection, and in turn guide planning for loans and display as the institution continues to grow.

After completing this essential part of the process, the next step in the long-range plan will be to hire a conservator to perform or oversee the many treatments the collection requires. This person will also support regular collection and exhibition activities, as well as help develop an educational component in conservation studies that will serve and benefit diverse units of the University and other cultural institutions in the region as well as local public audiences. The capstone of the Kemper’s expanded conservation program will be a state-of-the-art laboratory housed in a new Sam Fox School building, projected for completion in 2020. The establishment of the full-sized laboratory and the eventual expansion of conservation staff (to include a paper conservator and conservation technician) will afford unprecedented educational opportunities for students in cross-disciplinary art conservation coursework, to be developed in collaboration with key departments in the College of Arts & Sciences and the College and Graduate School of Art, as well as with the Saint Louis Art Museum and other local institutions.

The University support of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum’s commitment to responsible care of the collection has been and continues to be remarkably strong. Care of the collection was the main impetus for providing the Museum with its new building in 2006; further evidence of institutional support is the recent expenditure of \$75,000 in capital funds to install a modest conservation lab within existing facilities in 2011. The Museum also supports staff training and development in collections care, as evidenced by sending assistant registrar Kim Broker to attend the course “Care of Paintings” at the Campbell Center in Illinois in September 2010 and, more recently, head preparator Jan Hessel to two courses there, allowing her to further develop her study of frame restoration.

## **2. Project Work Plan**

The Permanent Collection Conservation Survey: Painting project will provide a detailed conservation survey of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum’s paintings collection of approximately 337 objects, ranging in date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to 2012.

The primary goal of the survey is to get a baseline assessment of each painting in the Museum's collection to be used for prioritizing treatments needed and planning a detailed long-term conservation strategy. An additional related goal is to identify the ten objects most in need of immediate treatment and to devise a plan for their conservation. Two specialists in paintings conservation from the Midwest Art Conservation Center, Joan Gorman and David Marquis, will travel to St. Louis for two visits of one week each to examine the paintings in June and July 2014. Gorman and Marquis have expertise in the types of paintings that comprise the vast majority of the Museum's collection: 19<sup>th</sup>– and 20<sup>th</sup>–century paintings. During their examinations, they will note condition details, treatment needed, urgency of treatment, and estimated treatment time. They will also add detailed information about the medium of the painting whenever possible. In order to assess the large number of paintings as efficiently as possible, they will use a checkbox form illustrated with an image of each object and make additional notes as needed (see Supporting Document: Survey Form). During their examinations, Museum staff will take detailed photographs to accompany the reports. Prior to their visit, Museum staff will work with Gorman and Marquis to tailor the Survey Form to the needs of the Museum's collection and to clarify parameters for ranking the urgency of treatment. Museum staff will then produce the illustrated worksheet for each object in advance of the conservators' arrival.

During the site visits, Museum preparators and art handlers will systematically move each painting to one of two examination rooms, where the object will be placed on an easel or cart, examined, photographed as needed, and returned to storage. Staff will accompany the conservators at all times during their examinations, in order both to ensure the safe and efficient handling of the artworks and to allow for the greatest educational benefit: the registrars' and collection curator's participation and observation is expected to significantly increase knowledge of collection conservation in general as well as the special needs of individual objects within the collection. At the end of the second visit, the collection curator will review the worksheets to prioritize those paintings needing treatments and, with the conservators, select the ten highest-priority objects which will then receive more detailed examinations and treatment proposals on site. The prioritization assigned to each object will then allow Museum staff to develop a long-range plan for stabilizing the collection and addressing any cosmetic issues that would inhibit each painting's being exhibited or sent out on loan. After the visit, Museum staff will incorporate the reports and photographs into the collection database and artwork files.

Each conservator will examine approximately 169 objects over the course of their two week-long site visits. Efficiency will be key to the success of the project. Groups of artworks to be examined in each session will be planned in advance based on storage proximity. In order to maintain flexibility while staying on schedule, the composition of the groups and their order will be predetermined and benchmarks will be set for each day. Museum staff will support the conservators by handling all of the artwork movement and by methodically preparing each batch of artworks for examination. With two adjacent spaces with adequate light and space for conservation examinations – the new onsite conservation lab and the Museum's Study Room – the Museum can ensure a smooth and efficient process of cycling through the complete

collection of paintings. Any artworks that are deemed too unstable or unwieldy to move safely, as well as all paintings currently on view, will be examined in situ using supplemental, conservation-grade lighting. As the conservators examine the paintings in one room, the preparators and art handlers will set up the next group of artworks in the adjacent room. By swapping rooms after each examination session is complete, clarity about which objects have been examined will be ensured and the focus and level of activity in each room will be consistent. Throughout this process, part-time student assistants who work for the Museum (Federal Work Study and through internships) will observe and assist as needed. These include but are not limited to those trained to handle art, those employed through the security department as Kemper Museum Attendants, and those hired to assist with registrarial and curatorial duties. (Note: funds for these are not included in the budget. See Required Documents: Budget Justification.) This working process mirrors—with slight revisions—the highly successful process followed for the 2011 Sculpture Survey.

The core work of the survey will take place during the conservators' two site visits. During that time, the Museum's collections staff and a significant number of security personnel will be largely devoted to the project. By scheduling both weeks during the summer and well in advance of their occurrence, however, normal Museum operation will be minimally affected. The Museum registrars and preparators routinely devote time each summer, when the level of public activity at a university museum decreases, to in-depth collections projects such as inventories. This project is planned as part of that routine. The Museum staff has also planned for the preparation and follow-up work to fit into their regular schedules during 2014–15.

Having moved the entire Museum collection into the new building in fall 2006, and more recently completing the survey of the sculpture collection, the Museum staff understands well the amount of preparation that will be necessary to orchestrate the survey smoothly and efficiently. Should the team progress through the material more quickly than expected, the conservators will be able to spend time on additional treatment proposals. If the schedule moves more slowly than expected, Museum staff is prepared to stagger schedules in order to allow longer hours for examination each day while minimizing any overtime costs.

In conjunction with Karen Butler, assistant curator, whose primary focus is on the collection, chief registrar Rachel Keith will lead the team through project planning and execution. Assistant registrar Kim Broker will coordinate all artwork movement and the incorporation of the reports into Museum records. Assistant registrar Kristin Good will photograph areas of concern and manage the integration of the photos into Museum records. Assistant curator Karen Butler will establish curatorial priorities considering treatment priority, aesthetic value, historical importance, and exhibition plans in order to select the ten objects to receive full condition reports, and to then prioritize the remaining objects for the Long-range Conservation Plan. Preparators Jan Hessel and Ron Weaver, with the assistance of their regular part-time staff and interns, will move and handle all artwork during the site visit. Security supervisor Michael Hesse, with the assistance of Erica Buss, facilities and security assistant, will coordinate additional security needed for the increased activity during the survey (Buss, a member of the Museum's installation team prior to joining the Museum staff full-time, will also assist with art

handling). Managing editor of publications Jane Neidhardt will oversee the administration and reporting of the grant as well as edit written documents intended for public or professional use. Administrative coordinator John Foughty will handle the financial reporting for the grant.

As evidenced in the Budget and described in the Budget Justification, the Museum's matching funds will come primarily from staff time. Additional dollars required will come from an endowment fund dedicated to collection care. (See Supporting Document: MACC Budget.)

#### **4. Project Results**

As a university art museum, all activities of the institution are based on education, study, and research. This project directly supports the Museum's core educational mission and strategic goals. In addition to ensuring the long-term preservation of the collection and improving the quality of the objects for exhibition and study purposes, the project will expand our understanding of the material nature of the objects and provide the opportunity to disseminate both new and existing scholarship, which will further increase public awareness of this important collection. Immediate and direct educational benefits will include not only increased understanding on the part of staff members of conservation concerns relating to the collection, but also exposure to the field by the students and interns who will assist with the project and by governing and advisory bodies such as the Museum's National Council and the Art Collection Committee, to whom the project, its results, and its impact on future plans will be reported. Indirect benefits will include all those for whom the collection is an aesthetic or research resource, today and for generations to come.

With the new building, the development of the current Strategic Plan (2009–2018), and significant additions to staff in all departments including registrarial, curatorial, publications, education, and security, the Museum is in a position to advance its priorities for the permanent collection and related public programs. This includes, among other initiatives, the development of a series of special exhibitions drawn primarily from the permanent collection, a series of scholarly essays and public lectures (Spotlight Series) that focus on selected work in the collection to provide deeper analysis and promote public discussion, and continued improvement to the catalogue information in the collection database, such as the compilation of detailed cataloging information about the permanent collection in the database. Moreover, in honor of the ten-year anniversary of the new building in fall 2016, the Museum is preparing for a major reinstallation of the permanent collection as well as significant expansion of its didactic materials (including the creation of detailed text labels for each object on display, self-guided tours on the permanent collection, a guide to the outdoor sculpture plaza, and a collection catalog).

The detailed condition reports and treatment proposals resulting from the Survey will not only guide the Museum in prioritizing the many treatments needed and strategically allocating resources, it will also be invaluable for leveraging available funds and obtaining future outside support from local, regional, and national sources. A wide variety of web-based venues will be utilized for the dissemination of information about the conservation activities and the grant from IMLS. These include the publication of a News highlight on the Museum’s website and on the website of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, the publication of a more detailed report on the project in the Museum’s seasonal newsletter *FYI*, and news entries posted on various social media outlets. Information about the project will also be publicized in a press release, which will be sent to all local newspapers and websites and posted on the Museum’s website, and information about the grant and project will be presented at the Sam Fox School National Council meeting, Museum membership task force, and Art Collection Committee meetings.

We expect the short- and long-term effects of this survey, by building on past conservation efforts and paving the way for future comprehensive care, to positively benefit all aspects of our institutional mission as well as all segments of our public and professional communities.

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum  
 Washington University in St. Louis  
 Permanent Collection Conservation Survey: Painting  
 Schedule of Completion

	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
	2013	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	2014	
Planning and Preparation														
Conservators' Site Visits														
Conservators' Reporting Period														
Assess report and incorporate into Conservation Plan														
Update object records with reports and photographs														
Final assessment and grant reporting														