



## Museums for America

Sample Application MA-249741-OMS-21  
Project Category: Lifelong Learning

### Portland Art Museum

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Amount awarded by IMLS: | \$250,000 |
| Amount of cost share:   | \$388,046 |

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:  
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-249741-oms-21>

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## Project Justification

The Portland Art Museum is applying for funds to support the exhibition *Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe* (on view July 2, 2022 - January 8, 2023), a major retrospective exhibition that features the work of groundbreaking mid-century modernist Oscar Howe (Yanktonai/Dakota; 1915-1983), co-organized with the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Funds will support the exhibition at the Portland Art Museum (the exhibition's only other venue), including support for significant community engagement, a major symposium, and community partner-centered programs with the reestablishment of a curatorial and community partnerships fellow position. The Museum is also expanding the reach of the exhibition by supporting the creation of a concurrent site-specific installation *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* by artist Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Band Choctaw, b. 1972), to be in dialogue with the Oscar Howe exhibition and artist legacy. Because the Museum scheduled both the exhibition and the responsive installation for an extended 6-month period—as opposed to the Museum's standard 14 weeks—this exhibition provides an exceptional opportunity to strengthen and enhance Museum relationships with existing and new community partners who serve and center the Native American community in the greater Portland area. This work builds on the goals of the Portland Art Museum's Center for Contemporary Native American Art (see [organizationalprofile.pdf](#)) and our institutional strategic plan and equity goals which prioritize engaging diverse communities and creating compelling audience experiences while ensuring that our exhibitions and partnerships are resourcing and centering local artists and organizations that have historically been underrepresented in anchor arts institutions. Finally, this funding would come at a time when the social and economic impacts of Covid-19 and our country's racial justice reckoning demand that museums and community organizations continue to come together to create shared spaces for greater public dialogue and understanding.

## Artistic Merit

In the field of Native art studies, Oscar Howe is an icon and an art hero, but it is shocking that his achievements have almost no visibility in the larger art world. He is known both for his bold, modernist approach as a painter and for his defense of the rights of Native artists to choose their own artistic paths. Jeffrey Gibson is an heir to his legacy who is also breaking down barriers with his dynamic and unconventional work, proving that it is possible to maintain and honor one's Native identity while having mainstream success. Both artists embody what has been defined as Indigenous visual sovereignty, or the right for Native artists to determine their own visual expression outside of any parameters determined by non-Native institutions or scholars. IMLS funding will give the Portland Art Museum the opportunity to resource community-centered programs that would introduce Howe and Gibson to audiences of all ages and inspire community members, both with their outstanding achievements with abstraction in a wide range of media and through their embrace of their artistic identities and cultural heritage. A symposium will be the capstone to a project that seeks to re-examine Howe's artistic achievements, inspire new scholarship, and cement his cultural legacy for future generations.

*Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe* is organized in partnership with the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in New York City (on view November 6, 2021 - May 8, 2022) and will include a multi-authored catalog edited by Portland Art Museum Curator of Native American Art Kathleen Ash-Milby and scholar Bill Anthes. The exhibition will include approximately 70 paintings by Oscar Howe lent from museums, historical institutions, and private collections from across the United States, including many that have never been exhibited publicly. Historic photographs, ephemera, and graphics will provide context as well as a 7- to 9-minute gallery film that adds biographical dimension to the presentation. Retrospectives all hew to an expected format

that serves to introduce audiences to a wide and deep body of work by an artist. Howe's presentation will maintain much of this established format, beginning with a chronological presentation for his early and formative work from the 1930s to the 1950s. However, it will then turn to a thematic organization to delve deeper into the meaning and approach to his subjects including narrative cultural subjects as well as his use of form and color, deeply embedded in Dakota belief and aesthetic systems. Unlike previous recent major retrospectives of Native American artists such as *Kay WalkingStick: An American Artist* (NMAI), *T.C. Cannon: At the Edge of American* (Peabody Essex Museum), and *Norval Morrisseau: Shaman Artist* (National Gallery of Canada), the Portland Art Museum's presentation of *Dakota Modern* will also include a contemporary response to the exhibition with the major, original installation *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* by renowned multimedia artist Jeffrey Gibson.

*THEY CAME FROM FIRE* will be a site-responsive installation in the Museum's central Schnitzer Sculpture Court that will interrogate the multiple meanings of fire as image, symbol, and process in contemporary American society and Native American culture. The dynamic work will combine laminated glass, text, and video projection of words and images to address conflict and anger as well as beauty and transformation. Gibson, a member of the Mississippi Band Choctaw and Cherokee descent, drew the title and inspiration from Oscar Howe's swirling abstract portrait, *He Came from Fire* (1962). Gibson is committed to collaboration with diverse communities, artists, and makers of all backgrounds, and uses his art to create kinship and resist homogenization. Coinciding with *Dakota Modern*, the installation will serve as an additional educational focus and bridge between the Museum's contemporary and Native American art collections.

*Dakota Modern* will continue to fill in the missing pieces of Native American art in the 20th century by focusing on an artist whose work and words were pivotal in the development of contemporary Native painting and art. Howe has been long overlooked by the art world and western art history, and the exhibition, publication and symposium will firmly establish his position and significance as a mid-century modernist. Howe's legacy is exemplified by the work of Jeffrey Gibson, whose installation at the Portland Art Museum, *THEY CAME FROM FIRE*, will serve as an affirmation of the continued vitality of Native American art in the 21st century.

### Needs Addressed by the Program

Portland has the 9<sup>th</sup> largest Native American population in the United States, with nearly 60,000 single-race or multiracial Native Americans living in the Portland Metro area. In 2014 the Museum developed the Center for Contemporary Native Art (CCNA) to complement the Museum's Native American art collection and serve as a conduit between the Native American community and the Museum. Since then, the Museum has presented eight exhibitions in the CCNA. Each exhibition has been accompanied by meaningful, artist- and community-centered programming, and has addressed the ongoing challenges surrounding issues of identity, historical trauma, and cultural continuity while educating a mainstream audience.

These exhibitions and related programs foregrounded Indigenous methodologies which privilege Native artist voices, language and knowledge, and respect "visual sovereignty" in the Native arts community. They were all curated or co-organized by Indigenous artists and curators. These processes and methodologies are all part of a larger movement within museums to re-evaluate decades-old practices and assumptions that are embodied by colonial institutions. This work reflects efforts sometimes described as "decolonizing the museum," by shifting voice and agency, not just in representation on the museum floor, but also as a constructive process behind-the-scenes, including decision-making and staffing.

This exhibition will reach beyond the walls of the CCNA gallery, maximizing opportunities in other locations within the museum campus. *Dakota Modern* will be located in one of the Museum's "mainstage" special exhibitions spaces and *THEY COME FROM FIRE* will be in one of the Museum's most prominent and heavily-trafficked locations, adjacent to the Museum entrance and the *Dakota Modern* galleries. This exhibition, with the addition of the contemporary Native artist component, offers an exceptional opportunity to expand the visibility and reach of the CCNA program and expand our community connections through a dedicated fellow position and related partner programming.

### Responsive Learning and Community Partnership Programs

The Museum will model *Dakota Modern* community partnerships and engagement strategies after the successful partnerships built during the recent *Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...* exhibition (organized by the Portland Art Museum and on view October 2019 - January 2020). These efforts and their subsequent evaluation (see [supportingdoc4.pdf](#)) were funded by an IMLS Community Catalyst grant, and the Museum will apply lessons learned from that partnership strategy to enhance community engagement and grow grassroots partnerships. While the Museum prioritizes authentic partnerships in all its work, we saw great success when we secured funding for an exhibition-specific Community Partnerships Coordinator to help prioritize work with and bridge community partnerships externally and internally in association with *Hank Willis Thomas*. Our summative evaluation of the partnerships created in association with the Hank Willis Thomas exhibition clearly showed that having a position that solely focused on developing community partnerships for a single exhibition over more than a year resulted in overwhelmingly positive feedback. Partners felt they were valued and part of a team, and described how exciting and inspiring it was to be in an inclusive relationship with PAM. (see letter from the Numberz in [supportingdoc3.pdf](#)).

For this exhibition, the Museum will again hire an exhibition-specific Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow to support the exhibition and public programs, with particular focus on developing and deepening authentic partnerships (see [staffresumes.pdf](#) for position description). This role will be managed by the Curator of Native American Art and will work closely with the Curatorial and Learning and Community Partnerships departments. The hiring of this Fellow will address the department's capacity needs to expand our community partner programming in conjunction with the opportunities presented by *Dakota Modern*. Given the sometimes-sensitive nature of relationships within a diverse Native community, the Museum believes hiring a Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow with experience working within these types of communities will help us develop trust and productive alliances.

In particular, the Museum will continue its existing collaborative relationship with NAYA (Native American Youth and Family Center), which is ongoing over many years in many different capacities. Since 2016, the partnership has included intensive work with one class of high school students each year from NAYA's Many Nations Academy. This program involves both visits to the Portland Art Museum and artist-led workshops and residencies at NAYA. The students visit the Museum multiple times over the year and study art that deepens their understanding of Indigenous and other world cultures. They meet with PAM staff from Curatorial, Learning, and other departments to learn about how museums work as cultural institutions and about career paths in arts and museums. Artist-led workshops deepen the students' experiences and relate to the content of their history and cultural arts courses. *Dakota Modern* and *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* provide important opportunities to expand the PAM-NAYA partnership. Program discussions with NAYA are ongoing and include several possible directions:

- *Indigenous youth docent program:* The Portland Art Museum would collaborate with Many Nations Academy teachers and students to develop a program for student-led tours of the exhibition. This program could also include students from Portland State University's Indigenous Nations program and Native American Student and Community Center who could mentor and co-create visitor experiences with NAYA students. (PAM has experience developing college/high school mentor programs with PSU's University Studies Department and Molalla High School.)
- *Artist-led workshops:* Partner with Portland-area teaching artists to provide workshops to NAYA youth to create art in response to the exhibition. The artwork could be displayed at NAYA and/or the Museum.
- *Expand our partnership* to other NAYA community services to include families and younger students in the after-school program.

We also expect *Dakota Modern* and *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* to draw an enthusiastic response from Oregon youth and educators. Oregon public schools are currently in the process of implementing a new K-12 Native American curriculum *Tribal History/Shared History*. There is great demand for additional resources and learning experiences centered on Indigenous art and artists, and the Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow will work with the Museum's Head of Youth and Educator Programs to develop these partnerships.

To address our collegiate level learners and the larger field of Native American art scholarship, the Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow will also work closely with Ash-Milby to organize a one-day symposium in Fall 2022 at the Portland Art Museum, focusing on the multifaceted work of Oscar Howe and his influence on generations of Native artists. This symposium may include partnerships with the National Museum of the American Indian and other institutions such as Portland State University, known for its robust Native American Studies program. The presentations will position Howe within the larger context of global modernism but also explore his influence on the field of Native American art from the establishment of the Institute of American Indian Art in the 1960s to his words being used as a rallying cry for Indigenous visual sovereignty in the 21st century. Speakers will be chosen who can thoughtfully problematize assumptions about his intentions and aspirations both as an individual artist and a cultural ambassador for his Dakota community.

Presenters under consideration include Bill Anthes (Pitzer College), Candace Hopkins (Independent Curator), Philip Deloria (Harvard), Jolene Rickard (Cornell), Manuela Well-Off-Man (Museum of Contemporary Native Art, Institute of American Indian Arts), Christina Burke (Philbrook Museum of Art), John P. Lukavic (Denver Art Museum), and Anya Montiel (National Museum of the American Indian). To assure we privilege Native voice and the artistic heirs of Howe, artists will participate in all sessions. Besides Jeffrey Gibson, other potential artist participants include Dyani White Hawk, Wendy Red Star, Kevin BraveHeart and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. With widespread interest in Howe's work, we expect at minimum an audience of 150 in person. Extending the invitation to students in nearby universities (Portland State University, Reed, etc.) and webcasting the symposium could further increase our reach and impact.

An additional and important focus of the Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow's work will be the development of a centralized "Community Partner-in-Residence" space situated within the exhibitions themselves. This space is envisioned as a lounge, reading, and gathering area where "Community Partners in Residence" will determine programming and also a rotation of community partner installations that are in conversation with the ideas and themes of *Dakota Modern* and *THEY CAME FROM FIRE*. This framework of resourcing a staff position coupled with a commitment to robust community relationships *and* a physical space programmed by partners was

piloted during the Hank Willis Thomas exhibition and proved extremely successful. In the project evaluation, community partners specifically called out that “their presence in the museum in front of audiences was a critical act of dismantling gatekeeping and reducing barriers.” The act of making community partnerships visible through the sharing of space should not be underestimated. In additional evaluation comments, *Hank Willis Thomas* partners reported that the “...value of visibility affirms belonging. Rather than being ‘put in a corner to provide ambience’ [the space] centered who the exhibit was for and who was welcome. It gave partners something they could tell their communities--that space was being made for them.” The Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow will work closely with all colleagues on the Learning and Community Partnerships team, including Stephanie Parrish (Director of LCP), Jaleesa Johnston (Programs Lead), Hana Layson (Head of Youth and Educator Programs), and Becky Emmert (Head of Accessibility) to plan, facilitate, and make accessible all learning and community partner programs.

## Project Work Plan

### Background/Work completed to date

The exhibition is curated by Kathleen Ash-Milby, the Portland Art Museum’s Curator of Native American Art. Prior to her arrival in Portland, Ash-Milby served as Associate Curator at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian where she began the research that serves as the foundation of this project in 2016. Ash-Milby’s role in curating this exhibition at both co-organizing institutions makes this a uniquely collaborative exhibition for both museums. In developing the exhibition and publication, she has collaborated with other scholars in the field, including her co-editor Bill Anthes, curators John Lukavic (Denver Art Museum), Christina Burke (Philbrook Museum), and consulted with numerous collectors, Oscar Howe’s family members, and Native and non-Native scholars with expertise in the art and culture of the Dakota, including Emil Her Many Horses (NMAI), Joe Horse Capture (Autry Museum), and Janet Berlo (Rochester University).

Hired in 2019, Ash-Milby (Navajo) has sought to create alliances and opportunities with other curatorial areas to expand the reach of the CCNA programming and exhibitions. As Curator of Native American Art at the Portland Art Museum, Ash-Milby is responsible for managing the Museum’s NAGPRA compliance (with several active claims), as well as working with a wide-ranging historical and contemporary art collection, pursuing acquisitions, and contributing to with a wide range of publications, serving on art juries, giving public lectures, and interfacing with collectors and museum supporters and trustees.

### Work Plan and Project Activities

This exhibition will be a main-stage special exhibition on view for six months, building on the work of NMAI and on the longstanding partnerships existing in the local community. The Portland Art Museum will commit significant resources to the proposed project, impacting every Museum department.

Project activities will occur in three phases: *pre-exhibition* (September 2021 - June 2022), *exhibition* (July 2022 - January 2023), and *post-exhibition* (February-April 2023). *Pre-exhibition* activities will include hiring a Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow, nurturing new and ongoing community partnerships, program development (adult programs, community partner-in-residence space, school partnerships, docent training, symposium), exhibition planning and installation, and formative evaluation planning. *Exhibition* activities will include the exhibition of *Dakota Modern* and *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* at the Portland Art Museum, the implementation of community-centered programs for adults and youth, and the symposium. *Post-exhibition*

activities will primarily focus on the exhibition de-installation and the evaluation of the community partnerships and public programs.

This project will benefit from a strong internal team that increasingly aims to work horizontally between Curatorial and Learning and Community Partnerships. This internal alignment of curatorial-learning-community partnerships is also responsive to the ways many community partners wish the Museum worked more often. Too frequently community partnership work has been siloed in museum learning/education departments, with partners rightfully questioning their role and ability to impact larger institutional norms. *Dakota Modern* and *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* allows for a potential deepening of this ongoing work and it also provides an opportunity to evaluate how tighter internal museum alignment impacts external partnership relationships and program outcomes.

The Museum does not foresee any significant risks with this project, as it builds upon past successful exhibition and community-building experiences and closely aligns with the institution's strategic plan and equity goals. Potential risks include unanticipated costs related to either exhibition installation, public programs, or staff time. Meaningful community partnership work is always rooted in building and sustaining authentic personal and organizational relationships, so we have aimed to mitigate those risks by deeply weaving curatorial and community partnership work so it is seen as shared work. Finally, in these uncertain times, the Museum sees attendance numbers as a risk that will be carefully considered. Because Howe and Gibson are not household names, the Museum will seek to educate potential visitors about the exhibition and its importance; we believe that grassroots outreach through our partners will help achieve this goal, as we have seen it succeed with other exhibitions.

## Project Results

Native American art contains powerful societal messages. Both to affirm the identity of Native Americans and to enlighten the general public, who often see Indians portrayed only as they lived in the past or in stereotyped ways. Art also inspires Native youth—who rarely see their culture portrayed accurately and respectfully. Inherent to the Museum's mission and collecting endeavors is the belief that objects root people to their history and ancestors. Research has shown that identity is closely linked to self-esteem and one's own likeness to succeed. This correlation is especially clear among urban Native American youth, whose self-esteem and performance in school declines dramatically without the support of their tribal community. In Portland, Native people count disproportionately among the urban poor, experiencing the highest rates of homelessness, poverty, and unemployment of all ethnic groups. Together, *Dakota Modern*, *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* and their accompanying school, community, and public programs will build connections with Native individuals, youth, and families through meaningful engagement with "knowledge-holders" and contemporary Native artists. Community partnerships will serve as a meaningful and supportive bridge between the Museum and surrounding communities, connecting Museum visitors, urban Native Americans, and Native American communities in Western Oregon.

The proposed project will result in the presentation of *Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe* and Jeffery Gibson's response, *THEY CAME FROM FIRE*. From these exhibitions and myriad public programs, visitors will be engaged and educated about the historical importance and legacy of Howe while foregrounding theories and practices associated with the "decolonize museums" movement. Expanding on these exhibitions, the Museum will hire a Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow to present a symposium, grow and deepen community partnerships, and offer a community Partners-in-Residence interpretive space. These programs will culminate in a collaborative evaluation process.

Together, these project components will shine a spotlight on two important Native American artists, as well as the broad and lasting impact Oscar Howe has had on modern and contemporary art. Through our community partnerships and public programs, we aim to amplify the contributions and perspectives of both Howe and Gibson, as well as the many Native American artists and communities living and working in the Pacific Northwest. The symposium will add important scholarly discourse to the exhibition, adding the perspectives of several additional Native artists working today who are heirs to Howe's legacy, and the partners-in-residence interpretive space will integrate public programs and authentic partner perspectives into the exhibition.

The Museum's multi-phased evaluation process will seek to understand the efficacy of community partner experiences throughout the program planning and implementation process, program outcomes, and the successes/challenges of efforts to improve internal Portland Art Museum alignment around community partnership work. The evaluation will center Indigenous perspectives and processes through its collaboration with Native-led evaluators. The Museum has experience with this approach through its multi-year summative evaluation of the Center for Contemporary Native Art completed in 2017, overseen by the Native Nations Institute at the University of Arizona.

In addition to the formal qualitative evaluation of partnerships, the Museum will evaluate the success of the exhibition based on exhibition and public program attendance, number of school and public tours, feedback from educators, press coverage, and peer reviews. Results and lessons learned will be shared with the public through professional networks and conferences, Portland Art Museum blog/member's magazine, and internally with Museum leadership and staff.

In closing, the Portland Art Museum remains deeply committed to racial equity and dismantling the damaging systems that continue to permeate large, white-dominant arts and culture organizations. The pandemic and the killing of George Floyd demand that museums do more to radically change the exclusionary systems that have long shaped our field, and the Portland Art Museum will continue to lead. "We are much more free to make change in a meaningful way, and in a quick way. And that's an opportunity, and it gives us a great hope. It will be a post-pandemic and a post racial justice reckoning world," said Brian Ferriso, Museum Director.

In this moment we face closure once again, but we remain hopeful for this inspiring future. Even as over one-third of museums face permanent closure in the face of a global pandemic, we dare to advance towards a brighter, bolder future. We are being called out and called upon to change and shift. We acknowledge these calls and have been focused on addressing them in many ways over the last several years. While these times have called for cutting back they also call for moving forward and doubling down on expanding and changing narratives. We thank the Institute of Museum and Library Science for their consideration of this request.

| Year 1   | Month | 2021 |     |     |     | 2022 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|--|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|  |       | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan  | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug |
| <b>Activity</b>  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Interview candidates for Fellow (will list position in August 2021)  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow (Oct 2021 - Feb 2023)   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Fellow: Curatorial and LCP orientation, introduction to museum   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Fellow: Identify and begin meeting with community partners to develop Oscar Howe and Jeffrey Gibson exhibition programming |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Multi-department coordination/planning meetings  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Evaluation begins  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Exhibition Installation (Howe and Gibson*)   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| <i>Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe and THEY CAME FROM FIRE</i> on view  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Public Programs with Community Partners  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Opening weekend public programs with special guest Jeffrey Gibson  |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Partners-in-Residence (community partner learning space in exhibition)   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Jeffrey Gibson artist-in-residence with TBD youth organization   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

\*Note: The fabrication of *THEY CAME FROM FIRE* (Gibson) is not part of this project proposal

| Year 2  | Month | 2022 |     |     |     | 2023 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|---|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|   |       | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan  | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug |
| <b>Activity</b>   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Curatorial and Community Partnerships Fellow (Oct 2021 - Feb 2023)                      |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| <i>Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe and THEY CAME FROM FIRE</i> on view             |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Public Programs with Community Partners   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Partners-in-Residence (community partner learning space in exhibition galleries)        |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| School tours and partnerships   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Educator Event (Museum provides resouces for educators to incorporate Symposium (1 day) |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Evaluation and review with staff and partners   |       |      |     |     |     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |