



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-259984-OMS-26
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access
Project Type: Small Project (\$5,000-\$25,000)

Edward Hopper House Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$22,345
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Edward Hopper House Museum will contract the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia, PA, to treat, conserve, and rehouse nine watercolors by Josephine (“Jo”) Nivison Hopper (1883–1968), the artist and wife of the iconic realist painter Edward Hopper (1882–1967). These significant works represent the second largest holding of Josephine Hopper’s work behind the Whitney Museum of American Art. Following treatment, the watercolors will be available for use in exhibitions, programming, and interpretation, and for researchers studying her life and work. The primary beneficiaries of this project will be the 8,000 annual visitors to the museum, as well as scholars, curators, and students studying the Hoppers’ careers.

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 most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

IMLS Imagine 2026 Narrative-Project Justification

The IMLS Inspire! Grant funding request by the Edward Hopper House Museum & Study Center (EHH) in Nyack, NY, will directory support The Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection Stewardship Project through the treatment and archival housing at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) in Philadelphia, PA, of 9 watercolors on paper by Josephine ('Jo') Nivison Hopper (1883-1968), the artist wife of the iconic realistic painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967). These 9 items are from The Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection of 52 watercolors and 3 oil paintings gifted by The Arthayer R. Sanborn Hopper Collection Trust to EHH in 2019; these exhibition quality works represent the second largest holding behind the Whitney Museum of American Art to whom Josephine N. Hopper also bequeathed 3,000+ works by her late husband in 1968. With this award, the works will be stabilized, increasing their accessibility to researchers and the public. The Stewardship Project will be fully funded by the \$22, 344.50 application request. No additional funding will be required. EHH's proposal aligns with IMLS Imagine Goals as it supports building the capacity of small museums to provide museum services to their communities and Objective 2 as it promotes collection care and management and promotes access to museum collections.

Accordingly, it serves to fulfill the Inspire! Program Goal to help small museums like EHH build capacity to provide museum services to their communities, here supporting the management and care of collections. Additionally, EHH's new Strategic Plan of 2024 builds on goals, set forth in a foundational plan of 2019, that reinforce these shared objectives. Specifically, the project aligns with Goal 1 on Mission Based Programs and Goal 2 on Archives and Collections. The first goal places emphasis on programmatic and operational decision making with adherence to the mission, and the second on expanding access and stewardship of the archive and art collections. Goal 2 also calls for the effective allocation of resources and an organizational structure to support conservation treatment and fulfill the recommendations of archival needs assessments (2019 Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York Archival Needs Assessment and 2021 American Alliance of Museums' Museum Assessment Program Report that called for implementing leading practices in cataloging and prioritization, increasing organizational awareness of concerns facing collections, and developing essential policies, procedures, and storage facilities to improve collections care. Further, this goal's objectives include expanding accessibility, online access to the collections and scholarly resources, and developing a comprehensive plan for content, interpretation and display.

This project builds on The Sanborn-Hopper Family Archive Stewardship Project (2020–2023), which utilized NEH and IMLS *Inspire!* Support. With NEH grant support, Phase 1 provided digitization and detailed conservation surveys of 135 objects; Phase 2, funded by a 2022 IMLS Inspire! grant support, included treatment plans were prioritized and conservation and archival housing executed. While these previous phases prioritized Edward Hopper and his ancestors, this proposal pivots to his wife and fellow artist, Jo Hopper. Her profound influence on Edward's career remains under-recognized, and her own body of work requires urgent professional stewardship.

Building on a 2024–2025 pilot project that conserved four Jo Hopper watercolors with two Greater Heritage Network grants totaling \$15,000, this IMLS support request will fund the treatment of nine

additional artworks. This expansion ensures that Jo's artistic legacy—and her distinct role in the Hopper narrative—receives the same rigorous preservation and visibility as the family archives that preceded her.

Also, the EHH 2024 Strategic Plan underscores the responsibility to honor Jo by having her work treated, displayed and interpreted so students of American art may gain access and insight into her artistic vision and process. The proposed works were prioritized in terms of treatment scope and costs, significance to her career, range of subjects, interest to national and international audiences of Hopper enthusiasts and researchers and realizing EHH goals for collection stewardship and sharing a renewed Hopper narrative. Jo lived for 84 years, a lifetime spanning two centuries marked political, social, cultural and technological advances and wartime crises; these works mark the span of her time with Edward too, as the earliest dates to 1923 and the latest to the 1960s. Many subjects on the recto and verso, aligning with Edward's subjects and sites, were painted in watercolor outdoors on trips to Cape Ann, Maine, Mexico, or from their home in New York City and Truro on Cape Cod. Others, like still life arrangements and gnarled trees, diverge from his. Jo's record books (private collection), like those she kept for Edward (Whitney Museum), provide data on some works and will be primary sources for next stages of research.

One of Edward Hopper's hallmarks is the deep sense of isolation he creates in his iconic art. His wife knew that isolation well; Jo posed as his sole model, served as his muse while simultaneously watching her own art career slip into the shadows. At meeting Hopper, Jo was an independent and buoyant modern woman of bohemian Greenwich Village. A native New Yorker, she was educated at what is now Hunter College, taught at a Lower East Side school burgeoning with immigrants, studied art under Robert Henri (before Hopper did), performed with the Washington Square Players, and established herself as an exhibiting artist (again, before Hopper did). Prior to marrying, Jo had received recognition as an artist in her own right. She exhibited at prestigious galleries with artists such as Demuth, Birchfield, Marin, Hartley, and Picasso and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Brooklyn Museum. After their romance bloomed in 1923, she advocated his watercolors join hers at a Brooklyn Museum exhibition that led to his rapid rise to fame. At their marriage in 1924, they were both 41. They lived, painted, and famously argued throughout their 43-year childless union, ending with their deaths 10 months apart. While Jo never resided with Edward in Nyack, scholars agree that she was an influential artistic life partner crucial to his development as a mature artist and integral to his acclaimed career.

Following treatment, these 9 items will be available for use in exhibitions, programming, and interpretation and for study by researchers as they further document her life and work. In 1980, Gail Levin, PhD, published a first-ever art historical article on Jo N. Hopper, as she signed her work, in *Women's Art Journal* (WAJ). This pioneering research was praised in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (1994), an anthology that ignited discourse on feminism and art history. Levin next published "Writing about Forgotten Women Artists: The Rediscovery of Jo Nivison Hopper" in another groundbreaking feminist investigation of the history of art, *Singular Women* (2003); she then gave Jo a major voice in the monograph, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (1995). Forthcoming publications on Jo also include Elizabeth T. Colleary's two-part article for *WAJ* (2026 online editions) that expand upon her 2004 *WAJ* article, *Josephine Nivison Hopper: Some Newly Discovered Works*, plus a monograph.

Though known among experts to be long overshadowed by her husband's success, Jo is beginning to find her moment in the larger public spotlight, getting the attention she lost after marrying Edward in 1924.

Since 2021, EHH has led the reappraisal of Jo Hopper's artistry, transitioning her from "muse" to a recognized master in her own right. The 2021 exhibition *Josephine Nivison Hopper: Edward's Muse* served as a landmark relaunch for the museum post pandemic, drawing 4,500 visitors and necessitating a 2024 reprint of the exhibition catalog due to sustained public demand. This momentum has fueled a 430% increase in visitation to date (8K annually), as audiences increasingly seek out the rotating displays of Jo's work within the historic house.

The Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection and works requested for conservation are central to EHH's curatorial strategy, which integrates Jo's oeuvre into contemporary and scholarly dialogues. This year we have two exhibitions that will place her work in the context of contemporary artists and their practices. The first, *Memory, Trees, and Shadows* (May–Oct 2026), is developed in collaboration with artist James Prosek and the Hood Museum of Art. This exhibition highlights Jo's sophisticated "portraits" of trees. These works demonstrate her technical prowess and visual exchange she shared with Edward and provide the intellectual foundation for Prosek's modern explorations. In the second, *Susan Chen: Old Cape Cod* (Oct-Jan 2027), Jo's watercolors of Truro will be exhibited alongside new landscapes by Chen. By pairing Jo's plein air pieces with Chen's contemporary observations of Cape Cod, EHH will contextualize the geographic and artistic synergy of the Hoppers' shared career. Conservation of these nine additional watercolors is essential to meeting future exhibition commitments and sustaining the public's burgeoning interest in Jo Hopper's legacy.

Moreover, *Edward's Muse* also stimulated Jo's story being championed anew with EHH lending two of the IMLS proposed works of the Hoppers' Washington Square studio to the Whitney's major exhibition *Edward Hopper's New York* (2022-23); with 768,000 visitors, it was the second most successful exhibition in the museum's history. EHH also lent three of Jo's Gloucester watercolors to the Cape Ann Museum's *Edward Hopper & Cape Ann: Illuminating an American Landscape* (2023). Upon seeing *Edward's Muse*, the CAM director and guest curator revised their plans by featuring a dedicated exhibit section and a catalog chapter on Jo. This exhibition also broke records with 37,000 visitors coming to the Gloucester, MA museum to see the exhibition over its twelve-week run. 2024 then marked the centennial of Nivison's marriage to Hopper, a year after they began to court in Gloucester and the premier of PBS American Masters' *Hopper: An American Love Story* that focused on Edward's career yet placed emphasis on the couple's complicated marriage and painting careers. The documentary includes interviews filmed at EHH with Colleary about Jo, on set in *Edward's Muse*, and the EHH director on Edward's boyhood and family. The January 2024 premier was seen in 98% of the country (48 states), on 602 public TV channels, and aired 1,341 times, data that has only increased with on demand streaming. Jo and Ed's story also inspired playwrights. In 2023, Debra Weiss published a one-act play, *Remembering Good Harbor Beach* set on Cape Ann and Cape Cod, that was performed as a staged reading across the northeast and at EHH. Last year, a musical, *Windows and Walls* by Dan Furman, also about the Hoppers' marriage was staged in Brooklyn with projected images of Jo's work from the EHH. Yet another Hopper play is in the works by the American Masters producers and is in workshop phase with the Off-Broadway MCC Theatre Group.

Project Work Plan

Over the 18-month grant period beginning in September 2026, EHH will contract with the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts to provide conservation treatment and housing services for the 9 items.

Founded in Philadelphia in 1977, CCAHA is nationally recognized as a premier conservation treatment facility for paper-based arts and artifacts. CCAHA's 36-member staff includes conservators, as well as conservation technicians, housing and framing technicians, digital imaging professionals, and preventive conservation (preservation) experts. CCAHA's wide array of services, sophisticated 10,500-square-foot treatment facilities, innovative approaches, and highly trained and experienced staff have earned it a prominent and respected place in the conservation field.

The 9 items have been examined by CCAHA Senior Paper Conservator Heather Hendry and an item-level Treatment Proposal developed (attached). Almost all of the watercolors were mounted in an unsafe manner, by attaching the artwork to the window with relatively recent pressure sensitive tape. This puts the artwork at risk of physical damage from its precarious attachment as well as future chemical deterioration and discoloration from the tape. The window mats vary in quality but are generally not appropriate for long term use. Several paintings have foxing and/or matburn that distracts from the image. There was also edge tears, distortions, and local accumulations of grime. As can be seen in the attached photographs, some of the objects have paintings or sketches on the verso that are currently inaccessible and may be exhibited or be of interest to scholars if they could be viewed. Conservation treatment would address the immediate physical risks to the artworks by safely removing the window mats and pressure sensitive tape, mending tears, and reducing dangerous cockling. Treatment would also improve the appearance of many of the artworks by reducing grime, foxing, and matburn. After conservation, the watercolors would be mounted with mulberry paper hinges in alkaline storage mats, double-sided when appropriate, so they could be safely stored and viewed. Conservation treatment will be performed by one or more CCAHA staff members under the supervision of Heather Hendry. Housing work will be conducted under the supervision of Joshua Rickards, Manager of Housing and Framing, in consultation with the conservators. All conservation treatment and rehousing work will follow best practice recommendations in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works.

EHH Executive Director Kathleen Bennewitz will serve as the Authorized Representative, Primary Contact/Grant Administrator, and Project Director, coordinating with the appropriate staff members at CCAHA. (Resumes for key project team members are in the attachments.) During the treatment process, CCAHA and EHH will maintain mutual contact to monitor progress on the treatments and address any questions or decisions that arise. The project will conclude with EHH submission of the required final assessment and report to IMLS.

There is an urgency to conserving these artworks due to the increasing demand to display Jo's work. All these items are currently in their original housing, which is not archival and lacks UV protection. To display her artwork in the future, the watercolors must be treated to prevent further degradation and rehoused using modern materials that can properly protect the works and ensure their safety as they find their way to more exhibit spaces. If these works are not treated and stabilized, further degradation will likely occur and future handling will continue to put them at risk of damage because of their tears and discoloration, precluding further exhibition. With the recommended conservation treatment and housing, the life of these 9 works on paper will be significantly extended.

All handling of fragile items involves some risk, but that risk is significantly mitigated in a facility with ten full-time conservators present and resources immediately available to address a myriad of problems.

The safety of objects is paramount at CCAHA. Its facility includes a 325 square-foot custom-designed vault with three hour-fire-rated walls, ceiling and door and is equipped with a Novec fire suppression system. All objects are kept in the vault when they are not in treatment. Items are taken out of the vault when treatment is to begin and are returned to the vault at the end of the workday. The facility is protected by a contracted security and smoke detection system with twenty-four-hour monitoring.

Project Results

The works in this proposal have been compromised by unstable media, poor environmental conditions, contact with acidic housing materials, and careless handling over time. Their chemical and structural stabilization will safeguard their longevity and, with proper housing, offer readiness for display. CCAHA will provide full documentation on the treatments, including photographic and written documentation. CCAHA's comprehensive condition and treatment reports, before/after conservation photographs, and documentation of media and renderings on the recto/verso will be added to the EHH collection management database. While treatment will not include installation of any works into frames, CCAHA will provide recommendations for a set of interchangeable, exhibition-ready standard-sized frames with UV-filtering acrylic to be utilized upon request for display, be easily and safely exhibited on a temporary basis, overall increasing accessibility and further improving the long-term stability of the works. CCAHA will also supply recommendations for preventative care, safe handling of the paper-based works, and environmental controls to reduce future damage from UV light exposure and humidity to EHH, which maintains close watch on environmental monitoring of temperature, humidity, and light levels in exhibition, study, and storage areas.

The ability to exhibit these largely unseen works will bring greater attention to the work of Josephine Nivison Hopper and increased public and accessibility online and for research by appointment at EHH. These artworks are central to the expression of a renewed narrative that places Edward's wife fully within the context of her husband's life, career, domestic sphere, and community. The EHH mission is to bring depth and understanding to the work of Hopper, and with this important project we can do more by giving his wife her rightful place as an artist of note and a promise that her legacy will endure. The Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection Stewardship Project will benefit the 8,000 visitors annually to EHH and provide previously unavailable access to her works for scholars, curators, and students studying both of their careers and an expanded, nuanced interpretation of their art.

The re-examination of Jo's artwork elicits a fuller telling of American art history, which often excludes women, especially artist wives. "We will never know how important of an artist she would have been had she not had to deal with the challenges of being a woman artist at this time," said Ellen Roberts, Taft Museum of Art director of curatorial affairs, in a 2023 Cape Ann Museum lecture. Roberts rightly asserts that the time has come to examine Jo's work alongside other modernist artists of her era. "She left a number of works we can look at today; when you begin to look at them, you see that she herself had a unique artistic sensibility that is really part of the history of [American modernism]."

The Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection, a treasure that is only now becoming fully accessible to the world. Combined with the accessioning of the Sanborn-Hopper Family Archive in 2019, this collection has ushered in a powerful new time of growth for EHH, offering a wealth of new material to

interpret her legacy and offering a tantalizing glimpse into the work of an American female painter and the artist wife of Edward Hopper.

During the conservation period, EHH will present on its social media platforms interviews with CCAHA conservators and Jo scholars on the treatment and significance of these works. Plans are also underway for a 2026 exhibition, which will include illustrated didactics on this project and seek to rebalance the narrative and demonstrate that women artists did indeed shape American art, particularly in Jo's era. Also in development is a "Meet Jo Hopper" section—to complement "Meet Edward Hopper"—on a forthcoming EHH guide for Bloomberg Connects, a free interactive app featuring guides to over 600 museums, galleries, and cultural spaces around the world.

**THE SANBORN JOSEPHINE NIVISON HOPPER COLLECTION STEWARDSHIP PROJECT
EDWARD HOPPER HOUSE MUSEUM AND STUDY CENTER (EHH)**

Conservation Treatment and Housing of 9 watercolors from the Sanborn Josephine Nivison Hopper Collection

Schedule of Completion	Sept. 2026	Oct. - Dec. 2026	Jan. - Oct. 2027	Nov. - Dec. 2027	Jan. 2028	Feb. 2028	Mar. 2028
Key staff and consultants from the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) convene for project kick-off meeting to discuss priorities, workflow, budgets, and schedules. EHH arranges transportation of the items to CCAHA.							
Conservators produce detailed condition reports and treatment plans for approval by EHH.							
Conservation treatment of 9 items.							
Produce social media posts on the project featuring short videos and/or photographs during treatment.							
Housing of 9 items completed.							
CCAHA submits final report and digital before and after images to EHH on all treated material.							
Packing and scheduling of transportation for return of items to EHH.							
EHH completes check-in of all treated materials and updates administrative records.							
Final report to IMLS prepared by EHH.							