



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-249221-OMS-21
Project Category: Collections Stewardship

Wichita Art Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$161,200
Amount of cost share:	\$161,263

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-249221-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.

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Project Justification

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?

The project will conserve 80 works from two important areas of the Wichita Art Museum collection—the recently acquired Americana collection and a group of key paintings. These two areas were first identified as conservation priorities in the museum’s 2017–2022 Conservation Plan. Developed by the museum’s curatorial and registrarial staff in conjunction with the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC) and approved by the Board of Trustees, the Conservation Plan outlines critical, high-priority, and medium-term priorities for collection care. In Spring 2020, WAM completed the first item in the document and achieved the Conservation Plan’s single critical goal by installing a new HVAC system (an expense in excess of \$2 million.) The next steps in the plan—those marked high-priority—call for conservation assessments and subsequent treatments of the folk art collection and key paintings. Following the path outlined in the Conservation Plan, WAM partnered with MACC in 2019 and 2020 to produce detailed conservation assessments of the folk art and key paintings collections. Funded by an IMLS Collection Stewardship grant, the assessments surveyed three object categories: 1) works on paper, 2) mixed-media objects, and 3) paintings. The fourth survey, textiles, will be conducted in March 2021.

This proposal requests funds to complete needed treatments. WAM is ready to begin treating the 80 artworks that have been prioritized as requiring—both structurally and aesthetically—a conservator’s intervention. Conserving collection gems for today’s audience and preserving them in pristine condition for generations of museum-goers to come is a foundational museum priority reaffirmed in both the 2017–2022 Conservation Plan and the 2018–2023 Strategic Plan.

The first set of objects to be conserved comes from the Americana collection, acquired in Summer 2016. Featuring more than 450 objects made across three centuries, this collection of exceptional quality was formed over a lifetime by a single couple and vastly expands WAM’s folk art holdings. The collection includes wide-ranging examples of American folk art, from hunting decoys and fishing lures to flag toppers and embroidered samplers. One highlight is a group of 29 nineteenth-century paintings, which includes ivory miniatures and large-scale portraits. Another highlight is a group of shop signs, which includes a 40-pound wooden whale that advertised a tavern to thirsty sailors. Not made by highly trained artists to fill the mansions of the country’s elite, instead these folk artworks were created by itinerant painters and local craftsmen. From facilitating basic tasks to communicating taste and values, these objects display the artist’s skill while representing the owners’ needs or desires. Each gives us a glimpse of daily life in early America.

Most works in this extraordinary group have received minimal, if any, previous conservation intervention and are not in exhibitable condition. Large parts of the collection can be improved by removing a layer of dirt and grime and stabilizing the paint—paints used on folk art objects are often homemade, weakly bound, and applied to unprepared substrates. This causes cracking, flaking, and loss over time. For instance, a nineteenth-century wooden rocking horse—its mane is made of actual horsehair—has flaking paint so severe it risks paint loss with any movement. MACC conservators also identified numerous other artworks needing special care and attention. For example, a monumental eagle flagpole topper has a crushed wing that needs to be stabilized and more securely attached to the body. The Americana objects have a particularly unique and varied set of conservation issues—evidence of the long and useful lives they lived in family homes and on

main streets. The Wichita Art Museum is eager to conserve the prized gems of this collection so they can be displayed both now and in coming decades and centuries.

The second set of works to be conserved comes from a group of priority paintings. These paintings are particularly significant to WAM because of their major art historical importance and/or meaning to the Wichita community. They represent the legacy of Louise Caldwell Murdock, the Wichita Art Museum’s founder. In 1915, through her will, Murdock made it her final mission to ensure her hometown would have an art museum. She allocated her considerable family fortune to the purchase of a “significant collection” of American art that would serve as the core of the new museum. (Murdock’s dream was finally realized in 1935 with the opening of WAM.) Although she lived in a modest prairie town, Murdock’s vision for a specifically *American* art museum was remarkably prescient—in 1915, American art was still the oft-overlooked cousin of European art, undervalued and underappreciated. In fact, Murdock was one of the early champions of the American art museum. She devised her plan nearly 15 years before the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City famously rejected Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s gift of 500 American artworks. Many of the paintings to be conserved come from this original group purchased by the Murdock Trust. Other paintings were acquired in subsequent years and continue to fulfill Murdock’s initial dream of creating a great American art museum on the prairie. Works to be conserved include those by American masters such as:

- Winslow Homer, *In the Moving*, 1874
- Benny Andrews, *Viola Andrews*, 1986
- George Bellows, *Mountain House*, 1920
- Robert Feke, *Mrs. Barlow Trecothick*, about 1748
- Robert Henri, *Eva Green*, 1907
- Walt Kuhn, *Neapolitan (Bread with Knife)*, 1948
- Ernest Lawson, *Spyten Duvvil Creek*, about 1914

One example of a painting in need of conservation is the recently bequeathed George Bellows painting *Mountain House*, made in 1920. *Mountain House* was accessioned in 2017, and it expands WAM’s remarkable collection of early American modernism and adds a second Bellows painting to the collection. Unfortunately, the painting was donated to WAM with areas of lifting paint and other condition issues. MACC staff performed a detailed conservation assessment on the painting and recommend consolidating the lifting paint and filling losses to make the work safe for travel and exhibition.

Other treasures will benefit from the expert conservation treatments of the staff at MACC. Benny Andrews’ 1986 portrait of his mother Viola is a Wichita favorite. The life-sized work is painted in oil and acrylic on linen and also features fabric and paper elements. The detailed conservation assessment prepared by MACC notes that the acrylic paint has trapped a small layer of grime on the painting’s surface, while many of the fabric elements are curling or releasing. The complex conservation treatment will rely on multiple members of the MACC team—including those with paper and textiles expertise—and not only the paintings conservators.

Throughout its history, WAM has been committed to the highest quality of collection care. The Americana and high-priority paintings conservation reflects a careful and deliberative process outlined in our 2017–2022 Conservation Plan to continue to maintain and preserve WAM’s collection for present and future museum-goers. WAM staff will ensure that Louise Caldwell

Murdock's museum of American art continues to delight and inspire our regional audience into the next century.

Who or what will benefit from your project? How are they involved in the planning?

The project will further WAM's mission to bring "people, ideas, and American art together to enrich lives and build community." The museum is committed to engaging the community—including 700,000 people in the Wichita metropolitan area—with opportunities to experience world-class art. Wichita is the largest city in the state, and for many people in central and western Kansas, WAM is the only art museum located relatively near their hometowns. Although WAM continually presents dynamic loan shows, the permanent collection—including the Americana objects and high-priority paintings—serves as the foundation of the museum's exhibitions and programming. In 2019, WAM attracted 81,000 visitors, representing a 62% increase in overall attendance in the past seven years.

Museum-goers outside Wichita and the region will have the opportunity to view the Americana collection and key paintings in upcoming touring exhibitions. The curatorial department is developing a national touring exhibition of the Americana collection—with accompanying publication—scheduled to open at WAM in Fall 2024 and then continue to three subsequent venues. WAM is also in the process of developing a regional tour in conjunction with the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art collection sharing program, Art Bridges. Art Bridges and WAM will share exhibition development and touring costs of *Americans in Paris: The French Connection from the Wichita Art Museum*. *Americans in Paris* explores the relationship between American artists and modern art as it developed in France. Three of the artworks to be treated—paintings by Walt Kuhn, John Henry Twachtman, and Abraham Walkowitz—will be included in that exhibition. Like the Americana exhibition, *Americans in Paris* will travel to three venues. Neither the Americana exhibition nor *Americans in Paris* will be possible without conservation treatments.

How will your project advance your institution's strategic plan?

In June 2018, the Wichita Art Museum Board of Trustees approved a Strategic Plan for the next five years. The Strategic Plan emphasizes three core objectives: (1) extend the museum's reach and impact in our community; (2) raise the profile of the museum and increase national awareness of the quality of the collection and curatorial work; and (3) invest in the museum's core functions and build long-term financial stability.

The second goal, raising WAM's reputation regionally and nationally, relies on the conservation of the Americana and key paintings collections. The Strategic Plan calls for the museum to become "more active and visible in the museum community." To achieve this goal, the Strategic Plan specifically calls for WAM to "organize exhibitions for travel," including "developing a national touring exhibition of the Americana collection" and "development of regional tours." As noted above, WAM is currently planning one national and one regional touring exhibition. In order to tour these exhibitions, it is imperative the works be safe for travel and display. For instance, a monumental eagle flag topper—one of the jewels of the Americana collection—risks breakage if it travels prior to conservation. Likewise, key paintings must also be conserved before they can be displayed at WAM or elsewhere. Abraham Walkowitz's *Memory Portrait of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas*—which depicts the interior of Stein's famous Parisian apartment—came to WAM with complicated condition issues that must be treated before it can be exhibited in *Americans in Paris*.

The third goal calls on WAM to invest in the museum's core functions, including critical facility improvements and collection care. Detailed collection care guidelines are outlined in the

Conservation Plan, approved by WAM's Board of Trustees in 2017. In Spring 2020, WAM completed the Collection Plan's single critical goal by installing a new HVAC system. The new system reflects an investment of \$2 million in quality collection care. That major and costly project has resulted in improved environmental conditions at the museum, including stable temperature and humidity levels. The next goal outlined in the Conservation Plan—completing conservation assessments of key paintings and the Americana collection—is nearly complete. The final survey, the Americana textiles, will be completed in March. Following completion of the assessments, the Conservation Plan calls for treatments of key paintings and Americana works deemed conservation priorities by the surveys. With the help of IMLS, WAM will undertake these conservation treatments, thereby advancing two core objectives of the museum's Strategic Plan.

How will your project address the goals for the Museums for America program (as described above in Section A1) and align with the project category you have chosen?

The goal of the Museums for America program is to support projects that strengthen the ability of a museum to serve its public, with the Collections Stewardship program specifically supporting the exemplary management, care, and conservation of, as well as broad access to and use of, museum collections. Successful conservation treatments of the Americana works and high-priority paintings will preserve and protect vulnerable material while simultaneously promoting access, through exhibition and publication, for both a regional and national audience. The results of the project will also be shared with the broader public through our website, social media, newsletter, and public programs.

Project Work Plan

What specific activities, including evaluation, will you carry out?

The Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC) will treat 80 artworks identified in 2019–20 as needing conservation as part of the IMLS MFA 2019 project. The surveys assessed the condition of high-priority paintings and Americana artworks in the collection. MACC gave a 1–4 rating for each object surveyed: 1=artwork at risk and in need of immediate treatment; 2=artwork requires treatment for condition and aesthetic issues; 3=artwork is not in jeopardy, but suggested for treatment for aesthetic improvements; and 4=artwork not recommended for treatment. WAM also gave each object a curatorial priority code. Artworks that are institutionally defining or of major artistic importance were rated 1. Artworks rated 1 or 2 by both WAM and MACC have been prioritized for conservation. The project will be conducted during a 25-month period. MACC conservators will treat (1) works on paper, (2) paintings, and (3) objects (including architectural elements, baskets, ceramics, decorative arts, furniture, and toys.) The first level of evaluation of project success comes when the conserved artworks are returned to WAM. Longer-term evaluation is tied to the impact we have on our visitors when the works are exhibited. Longer-term success is also tied to the overall completion of the Conservation Plan and Strategic Plan.

What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

As a mid-sized regional museum, WAM does not have conservators on staff and relies on MACC as leading conservation professionals in our region. Because objects will be shipped to Minneapolis for treatment, WAM will minimize potential risk during travel through careful packing, crating, and transportation with a certified art shipper and courier. MACC and WAM have also identified works that are too unstable to ship and will thus be conserved on-site at WAM. During treatment, teams from both organizations have also agreed on conservative treatments for those objects that might be harmed more than helped by extensive treatments—for instance, those paintings where removing a

layer of yellowed varnish might also remove glazing. Neither WAM nor MACC are interested in erasing the lived histories of the Americana objects. While they will be stabilized and surface grime removed, there will be no attempt to return them to like-new condition. WAM and MACC staff will discuss additional issues as they arise. Concern for the artwork will guide each treatment decision.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project? Will partners be engaged, and if so, for what purpose?

The project spans 25 months and is headed by WAM Registrar Leslie Servantez and Curator Dr. Tera Hedrick. Director Dr. Patricia McDonnell and CFO Jan Harper will provide oversight, grants management, and financial reporting. Other vital WAM staff include Manager of Imaging and Installation Kirk Eck and Preparator Rebecca Williams. WAM will work closely to coordinate the project with Megan Emery, chief conservator and senior objects conservator, Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC). Because the wide variety of works to be treated requires a diverse set of conservators, Emery will lead a team of four conservators at MACC. Emery joined MACC in 2013, coming from the Cincinnati Art Museum where she was responsible for the care and preservation of all three-dimensional objects. She holds a Master of Arts with a Certificate of Advanced Study in Conservation from the State University College of New York at Buffalo.

Like Emery, the rest of MACC's staff is highly trained. Courtney Murray, objects conservator, joined MACC in 2017, coming from the Denver Art Museum where she worked with an encyclopedic collection of three-dimensional objects. She also completed a Samuel H. Kress Foundation post-graduate fellowship and graduate internship at the Denver Art Museum, and graduate internships at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, British Columbia and the Toledo Museum of Art. Murray holds a Master of Science in Conservation from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation. The paper conservation will be led by the senior paper conservator at MACC, Dianna Clise. Clise joined MACC in 2007 after completing her Masters in Art Conservation with a specialization in works on paper from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Prior to pursuing her graduate degree, Clise worked at Etherington Conservation Center in Greensboro, North Carolina. Paintings conservation will be led by Kristy Jeffcoat. She holds a Masters of Art Conservation with a specialty in paintings and painted surfaces from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Art Conservation from Studio Art Centers International in Florence, Italy, and Bachelor of Fine Arts with a specialization in Art History from Louisiana State University. Associate Paintings Conservator Alexa Beller will assist with painting conservation. Beller holds a Master of Science in Conservation from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation. She joined MACC after completing a National Endowment for the Humanities Paintings Conservation Fellowship at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia.

When and in what sequence will your activities occur?

Fall 2021

- WAM packs and ships Group I (works on paper, select paintings, select objects) to MACC
- MACC begins work on Group I

Spring to Fall 2022

- MACC ships completed Group I back to WAM, WAM starts to mat and frame works on paper, reframe select paintings
- Paintings conservator will treat artwork on-site at WAM for one week
- Objects conservator will treat artwork on-site at WAM for one week

- WAM ships Group II to MACC

Spring and Summer 2023

- MACC continues treatment on Group II (remaining paintings and objects)

Fall 2023

- MACC ships completed Group II back to WAM
- WAM mats, frames, photographs, and stores conserved artworks; updates records

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?

This project will be a major undertaking requiring significant expenditures of both money and time. Although WAM invests heavily in conservation—to date in 2020, WAM spent \$83,257 on conservation—we are eager to garner outside financial support for a project of this scope. At MACC, five conservators will treat 24 paintings, 4 works on paper, and 52 objects for \$153,680. At WAM, although the project will not require additional staffing, it will add to the normal duties of the curatorial team. Packing and shipping will be a major financial investment and take significant staff time. Staff members will courier the works to and from Minneapolis. Once the objects arrive in Minneapolis, WAM staff will be in continuous communication with MACC staff regarding progress and treatment decisions. WAM’s curator and registrar will conduct any research necessary to help make treatment decisions as they arise. Once the objects are back on at the museum, WAM’s photographer will photograph each object. The preparator and installation manager will reframe paintings, mat works on paper, and return all works to storage. If necessary, the registrar and preparator will adjust storage conditions in accordance with any MACC recommendations. Finally, the registrar and curator will update records, entering reports into the museum’s database and filing hardcopies in curatorial records. The entire project will take 25 months.

How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

Project Manager Leslie Servantez will collaborate with MACC throughout the project to track treatment progress and maintain the schedule. This process will facilitate timely adjustments to keep activities on track. Museum staff will give updates to WAM’s Collection Committee, the committee tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Conservation Plan. The Collection Committee will share these results with the Board of Trustees.

How and with whom will you share your project’s results?

Internally, the treatment results will be shared with WAM’s Collection Committee and Board of Trustees. As a public-private partnership, the museum will also report the treatment results to the City of Wichita, Wichita City Council, and Mayor. Results will also be shared with the public. The WAM members’ newsmagazine—with a distribution of more than 3,000 copies—will feature an article outlining the conservation. WAM will also notify the local newspaper, *The Wichita Eagle*, and area news stations about completion of the project. We will also post before-and-after pictures and detail individual treatments on our website and social media pages. Conservator Megan Emery will also give a public lecture at WAM. Most importantly, however, WAM visitors as well as museum-goers throughout the county will see the results on display as the conserved artworks are exhibited in Wichita and on regional and national tours.

Project Results

What are your project's intended results that will address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified.

The project will result in conserved artworks from two important parts of WAM's collection. In 2017, WAM passed its first formal Conservation Plan, authored by WAM curatorial staff in conjunction with conservators at MACC. It gave us a roadmap to realize the best possible care of Wichita's prized art collection for the public we serve. The Conservation Plan identified one critical goal—installing a new HVAC system—which was completed in Spring 2020. We now have a first-rate environment in which to store and display the collection. The next goal—marked high-priority by the Conservation Plan—called for conservation assessments and subsequent treatments of two key parts of the collection (1) the Americana group and (2) notable paintings. In 2019, WAM received an IMLS Collections Stewardship Grant to conduct these surveys. As the next step in the Conservation Plan, this project will conserve those artworks identified by the surveys as needing treatment, thus completing the “high-priority” goals outlined in the Conservation Plan. Our project results will enable WAM to fulfill the museum's “profound responsibility to maintain and preserve artworks accepted into the collection for posterity.”

How will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum's collections and/or records that define the focus of your project improve?

The project will result in the improved condition of 80 artworks from the Americana and high-priority paintings collections. The project will also result in improved public access. After conservation, the artworks will be ready for travel and display, particularly in the planned Americana and Art Bridges exhibitions described above. Not only will the project result in conserved artworks that are safe for travel and display, the project will also improve WAM's knowledge of, and records for, works in the Americana and high-priority paintings collections. During conservation, MACC will document each treatment and its results. This information will guide future WAM staff as they care for these works in coming decades.

What data will you collect and report to measure your project's success?

WAM will receive treatment reports for each of the conserved objects. These reports will provide a detailed record of the treatments and include before and after photographs, written summaries of treatment steps, materials used, and suggestions for storage, handling, and display. WAM will share examples of these treatment reports with the Collection Committee and Board of Trustees. In conjunction with the artworks themselves, these records will testify to the improved condition of the conserved works and allow WAM to exhibit them with confidence.

What tangible products will result from your project? How will you sustain the benefits of your project?

The conservation treatments will result in 80 pristine and stable artworks that are ready for display in Wichita and beyond. Successful completion of this project will also mean the successful completion of the critical and high-priority goals outlined in WAM's 2017–2022 Conservation Plan (attached in Supporting Documents). It will allow the museum to begin work on longer-term conservation objectives. The full execution of the Conservation Plan will ensure the maintenance and preservation of the museum's collection for coming generations, enabling future WAM staff to exhibit and present our cultural and artistic treasures in coming decades. IMLS support will allow WAM to continue its mission to bring “people, ideas, and American art together to enrich lives and build community,” both now and into the future.

Schedule of Completion

