



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-251697-OMS-22
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

Ohio Wesleyan University (Richard M. Ross Art Museum)

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$50,000
Amount of cost share:	\$1,020

The Richard M. Ross Art Museum at Ohio Wesleyan University will undertake the professional conservation of 31 prints in its permanent teaching collection. Contracted conservators will pack the prints on campus, then transport them to a conservation lab. Informed by a previous Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) report, conservators will clean, stabilize, and rehouse the prints before returning them to the museum. Museum staff will record conservation treatments in the collections management database. The project will result in stabilized prints that can be used for exhibition and educational purposes in service to the campus community of students, faculty, and researchers, as well as regional audiences.

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.

Ross Art Museum: Conserving Masterworks in the Permanent Teaching Collection

The Ross Art Museum (RAM) at Ohio Wesleyan University (OWU) seeks funding for professional conservation of 31 of the most valuable examples of printmaking in its permanent teaching collection. Specifically, an IMLS Inspire! grant would pay the Intermuseum Conservation Association (ICA) to clean, stabilize, and rehouse the prints so they can be safely stored, displayed for exhibition, and engaged for teaching. The need for care of these artworks was identified in 2018--as the RAM began to focus on improving collections management--and documented in a survey of the objects by ICA in 2019 and a subsequent CAP report of the same year. Conservation of these objects is a current action item in the institution's preservation plan. This project supports the first goal in the museum's strategic plan to improve preservation and use of the collection.

Project Justification

Which program goal/project category and associated objective(s) of Inspire! Grants for Small Museums will your project address?

This project supports IMLS's Collections Stewardship and Access goal, and program objective 3.2 to advance the management and care of collections by supporting conservation projects.

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

The number one goal in the RAM's current strategic plan (SP) is to "Improve Use and Preservation of the Collection." The Permanent Teaching Collection is a core part of the Ross Art Museum's mission. Its purpose, as defined in the Collections Management Policy, is to form the basis of exhibitions offered to the public, to serve the university community as a teaching resource and to share knowledge with audiences in Delaware County and Central Ohio.

Of the three objectives under the goal to improve use and preservation of the collection, this project most clearly addresses "implementing best practices in care and management of the collection" (1.3). In order to track/evaluate our progress, one of the action items under this goal is to "evaluate and prioritize outstanding conservation needs for targeted collection objects." This group of artworks have been prioritized for conservation because they represent some of the most artistically significant and valuable examples of printmaking in our collection. The majority of artworks in this project are by artists who are relevant to major movements in Western Art History. Examples include: George Wesley Bellows (American Realism); Francisco Goya (Romanticism); Käthe Kollwitz (Expressionism); Jack Levine (Social Realism); Roy Lichtenstein (Pop); Rene Magritte (Surrealism); Henri Matisse (Impressionism); Pablo Picasso (Cubism); Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Neoclassicism). The prints in this group are primarily examples of intaglio printmaking and lithography. This group of works directly pertain to our campus Art History, Drawing, and Printmaking courses. However, the themes and content of the art also makes them valuable teaching tools for departments like Politics and Government (Levine), History (Bellows), and Modern Foreign Languages (Magritte, Matisse, Picasso). Finally, exhibits of these prints are compelling for community-facing programs such as OWU's Lifelong Learning Institute. This project would also include conservation of seven Japanese woodblock (relief) prints, which have been included for their relevance to Japanese classes at the university and the City of Delaware that has a sister city in Japan. (For a complete list of the works see Supportingdoc1.pdf.) Conserving all these works of art will stabilize their condition and support long-term preservation and use of this important resource.

In this project the RAM would be able to focus on objective 1.3 under our "Improve Use and Preservation of the Collections" SP goal, because the museum has already done extensive work to address objectives 1.1 and 1.2. In 2019 we addressed problems with the physical plant (1.1) by replacing the museum's roof, switching to LED lighting, and installing dehumidifiers in the archive to ensure that the environment in the collections area is stable and within recommended standards for care. The museum has also done extensive work to improve accessibility, awareness, and use of the collection (1.2) over the past five years. This has included fully digitizing the collection, improving metadata to enhance searchability, upgrading our collections management system to support user experience (in process), instituting annual exhibitions of the collection, and greatly increasing our work with faculty and community groups to engage the collection each semester. Therefore, we feel confident that the conservation of these works will support their use in exhibitions and teaching in the future.

The museum's strategic plan was originally scoped to run from 2019-2021. An extension of the strategic plan was necessary due to challenges that arose as a result of financial challenges at the university, subsequent programmatic changes at

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the museum, and COVID-19. The start time of this project would still coincide with the strategic plan though the project would not be complete until 2023. The board remains committed to the implementation of this project, even as it extends beyond the conclusion of this strategic plan. Further, the Executive committee of the museum's National Advisory Board and the Associate Provost (to whom the museum reports) have made the commitment that collections will remain a strategic priority as the RAM develops its next plan.

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

This grant project would allow the RAM to treat 31 prints that are in deteriorating condition or are at risk of degrading over time due to non-archival framing. In addition to our specific concerns about preservation of the artwork, these conditions also challenge our ability to safely engage these valuable works for teaching, study, and exhibition. Yellowing and burn caused by acidic mats on these works was originally noticed by our Collections Manager in 2018 when she did the first full inventory of the collection in many years. She recognized that the majority of these artworks, acquired between the 1970s-1990s, were still in the mats and frames in which they were donated and likely needed further examination. The museum did not have conservation knowledge on its small staff. Further, while the museum has two small endowments for acquisitions, there are no funds specifically dedicated for collections care or maintenance. For all of these reasons, the museum recognized it would need outside support to address this need. At the suggestion of the Assistant Director, we applied for the Intermuseum Conservation Association's (ICA) competitive annual grant for a subsidized conservation survey on this portion of our collection and were the recipients of this award for 2019.

The ICA examined all of the works and identified 14 as "a conservation priority due to physical and chemical instabilities, and damage resulting from poor matting environments." The remaining 17 prints were considered in good to excellent condition overall but problems were noted such as "discoloration, fading, staining, and undulations as well as matting that was abutting or overlapping the image." The ICA concluded that "the prints surveyed would all benefit from conservation treatment to visually improve and physically stabilize their current condition. The prints would also benefit from new archival quality matting and framing materials--or enclosure in Mylar D sleeves--to improve the long-term preservation through safe handling and storage while ensuring the ability to safely exhibit the works as well." They returned the work with treatment proposals and a treatment summary with cost estimates that the Ross planned to use to apply for a conservation grant in 2019.

The museum chose to delay applying for the grant in 2019 to address another challenge. At the time of the survey, 23 of the works examined were still framed. ICA examined the works in their frames. However, the treatment proposals designated that they be unframed for further examination. The museum director recognized that it would be prudent to unframe all the works and have them re-examined to create a more comprehensive proposal and ensure that full treatment for all the works could be completed at once. During the onset of COVID-19 the RAM applied for and received an NEH CARES grant in the Fall of 2020 to support a preventative conservation project carried out by our Collections Manager and Preparator (who both faced furloughs due to the pandemic). As part of this project, our preparator was able to unframe the 23 works that were framed during the original ICA survey. He found further damage such as discoloration and abrasion from adhesive tape, as well as mold and soiling on a number of the prints that had previously been hidden. (See Supportingdoc2.pdf) Our Collections Manager updated condition reports on these prints (and the entire collection) and took photographs of the front and back of each of the 23 objects that needed re-evaluation. These were shared with the ICA who developed holistic treatment plans for each object. As a result we were able to build an accurate budget for the comprehensive cost of treatment for the works that are the basis for this grant proposal.

The RAM is now fully prepared to address this project. In addition to the specific steps outlined above, we have made extensive efforts over the past six years to improve collections management, thus laying the staff and policy groundwork for a successful conservation project. Our dedicated part-time Collections Manager, hired in 2017, has vastly improved collections organization and access. In 2018 the museum took part in IMLS's Museum Assessment Program (MAP) in Collections Stewardship to help set general stewardship goals. In 2019, we completed a Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP), to specifically make preservation recommendations for the collection. We formalized our first Collections Management Policy in 2019 and a Preservation plan in 2020 and have steadily worked through the action steps. With a current IMLS grant to

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improve storage underway, the outstanding goal in our preservation plan is to “raise funds for conservation of the most fragile and valuable prints.” (See Supportingdoc3.pdf)

Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning? ‘Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?’

The primary target groups for this conservation project are the people the permanent teaching collection is designed to serve: the university community and audiences in Central Ohio. Specifically, it is the museum’s staff and the advisory board--especially members of the Collections, Executive, and Policies and Procedures committees--who are charged with ensuring that collections priorities are set, policies are approved, and strategic objectives are met. However, the target audiences and beneficiaries have also heavily influenced the planning for this project. Deepening engagement between OWU’s classes (especially in Fine Arts classes) and the museum’s resources was identified as a priority by the Provost and the museum director during our last round of strategic planning. This prioritization has had tangible results. For example, in 2020, the museum director was invited to sit on OWU’s search committee for a new Art Historian and engagement of the museum collection was part of the hiring criteria. As a result, OWU’s Art Historian has actively requested the use of objects in our collection throughout the semester for her well-enrolled survey classes. (Both the museum and the faculty member are enthusiastic about this collaboration, and we expect it to continue.) We also have interest from our part-time professor of Japanese to engage the woodblock prints in classes to encourage students to practice their language skills by describing scenes in the artwork. Currently, we are working with the Delaware Artist Guild, which is also specifically interested in creating a regular event for their members to see the masterworks in our collection. While these are examples of teaching, this group of prints have also been the subject of a number of popular public exhibitions of the permanent collection in 2012, 2013, 2015, and 2019. The City of Delaware Ohio and JASCO (Japan America Society of Central Ohio) are eager to work with the Ross on an exhibit of Japanese art to celebrate Delaware’s connection with a sister city in Sakata, Japan--which has provided a strong incentive to conserve the Japanese prints. The RAM is also actively involved with creating programs around our exhibits for OWU’s Lifelong Learning Institute, which offers classes to senior citizens in the Delaware community. All of these groups would be beneficiaries and we are eager to ensure that prints most relevant to their needs are clean, stable, and safe for long-term teaching and exhibition.

Donors and potential donors to the permanent collection will also be beneficiaries of this project. Sixteen of the works that would be conserved were gifts to the museum by a handful of individuals. It is generally a donor expectation that artwork given to museums will be preserved for the use and benefit of their audiences. The RAM tries to maintain positive relationships with living donors and projects like this show that a donor’s trust in the museum is well founded. Finally, projects like this can be encouraging for potential donors because they are demonstrations of the museum’s active efforts to both preserve and engage its collection.

Project Work Plan

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

The Ross Art Museum would subcontract with the Intermuseum Conservation Association in Cleveland, as we have only one full-time staff member and no conservation expertise on our staff. The ICA is the oldest non-profit regional art conservation center in the United States. They are staffed by professionally educated and trained conservators and are in the process of re-hiring a paper conservator. We have worked in close collaboration with them for the original survey of these objects and on our CAP assessment in the past. They have also helped us plan and develop this grant application. As they are an outside organization with their own internal processes, they will implement and manage the project. (See Supportingdoc4.pdf)

What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?

This grant would take place across 13 months from September 2022-September 2023. In the first month of the project the RAM would prepare the collection for transport to the conservation studios: documenting the shipment in the

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catalog, individually soft packing each work, and coordinating pick up with ICA-Art Conservation who will manage and implement the project. Once the objects have safely arrived at the conservation center (month 2), ICA staff will complete pre-conservation written and photographic documentation on all the prints (months 2-5). The bulk of the time in months 4-11 will be spent completing the conservation treatments outlined in the treatment plans. (Proposed conservation treatments include examination, testing, documentation, removal from current mounts and supports, removal of tape and adhesive residues, surface cleaning, stain reduction, washing, resizing, mending and reinforcing of tears, consolidation, filling, inpainting, humidification, and flattening as needed specifically for each work of art.) As treatments are completed, ICA staff will complete post conservation written and photographic documentation on all the objects (months 7-11). Once documentation is concluded the objects will either be rehoused in sealed mat packages or in Mylar D sleeves (months 7-12). The mat packages include sealing the objects within a package including archival matting, a moisture impermeable backboard, and acrylic UV filtering glazing. In the final month of the project the ICA will return the artwork. When the artwork is received, RAM will update catalog records on all the works and rehome the objects in its archives. (See also Scheduleofcompletion.pdf and Treatment.pdf)

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

We estimate that the total cost for the project will be \$51,020.00, of which the Ross will pay \$1,020.00 as cost share to keep our grant request within IMLS's \$50,000 budget maximum. This cost breaks down in three categories: transportation of the 31 works on paper to/from ICA-Art Conservation studios (\$1,662), conservation treatments for 31 prints (\$38,121), and mat packages for the 22 western master prints (\$11,237). These prices are based on estimates from ICA after careful examination of all the objects. For an overview of the cost breakdown and a detailed explanation of individual treatment and matting plans for each object see Treatment.pdf.

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

ICA has outlined conservation risks alongside recommendations in the treatment proposals from the original 2019 survey. The risks they detail are: limitations on treatment due to solubility of pigments/inks; pigments may become soluble during aqueous treatment; discoloration or staining may remain after treatment; aqueous treatment may alter original dimensions of works; bleaching may reduce but not eliminate staining; fills/inpainting may be visible after treatment; and objects that are severely deteriorated may suffer further damage during treatment and/or remain fragile after treatment. ICA outlines a number of ways to mitigate these risks including: taking care in cleaning around potentially sensitive areas, testing treatments prior to treating the entire object, and mending tears and losses with archival materials. The RAM will sign treatment agreements with ICA prior to transport indicating that we are aware of the risks and relinquish the conservators of liability, with the understanding that the highest levels of professionalism will be engaged on this project.

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

For efficiency and effectiveness, the conservation work will be handled by ICA, which has an outstanding reputation in the field of conservation, as well as the capacity to undertake all aspects of the project and complete them in one time period. As all preliminary assessments of the artwork have already been completed, this project is ready to go immediately pending funding. Per the work plan (see Treatment, pg. 3), project activities will be grouped to maximize efficiencies. ICA will be responsible for the managing and tracking of the project. The documents prepared for this grant, such as the schedule of completion, will set common expectations between the RAM and ICA for the overall timeline. ICA's point of contact for the project will provide monthly updates to the Ross Art Museum Director on its progression. This will allow for adjustments in timing between the museum and the granting agency in sufficient advance if changes are necessary. ICA's trained conservators will ensure that all work is at a quality level in accordance with the Guidelines for Practice of the American Institute of Conservation. All conservation will also be documented before, during, and after treatment. This documentation will be uploaded as part of each object's catalog record upon their return to the RAM. (See Perfmeasurement.pdf.)

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Project Results

What are your project's intended results and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified?

This conservation project would improve the appearance, stabilize the condition, and safely rehouse 31 of the most important examples of printmaking in the RAM collection. The museum advances knowledge and understanding of art through public exhibition and by making collection materials available for teaching, study, and research. IMLS grant support to conserve these objects will ensure that they are safe for handling and in good condition for presentation. As the only art museum in Delaware County, the permanent teaching collection is an important cultural resource that serves both the campus of Ohio Wesleyan and a broader public in Delaware, Ohio. Audiences from both constituencies have an active and ongoing interest in these treasures of the collection, hence, this grant will have direct benefits to the cultural landscape of our university and our community.

How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change as a result of your project?

The RAM plans to use this grant award to educate our public about conservation and raise awareness of the need for collections care with potential donors. Currently, there is little awareness among our audiences that collection maintenance is an ongoing and essential part of the museum's work (the Collections Manager is internally focused and the physical archives are not set up for public access). Historically, donors have simply given art to the museum without supplemental funding for its care. This reflects a lack of donor education around the cost of maintaining collections for the public. We anticipate that the name recognition of the majority of these artists will make this project of interest to a broad range of supporters. Using the documentation photographs from the ICA, social media, and our e-newsletter we plan to build excitement about the project and keep our audience aware of the conservation process. We anticipate that our campus and community audiences will respond with curiosity and interest in seeing the finished products. We also plan to use this project as an illustrative example with potential donors of the need for funds to support long term care of gifted artworks. We hope this entire process will help increase knowledge of collections care as a vital part of a museum's service to its community.

What products will result from your project?

The museum plans to have a public exhibit of the newly conserved prints in either Spring or Fall semester of 2024, so the campus and community can see the finished products of this grant. The RAM would use this exhibition as an opportunity to both discuss the conservation of the objects and promote the ways our audience can engage with the permanent teaching collection.

For Collections Stewardship and Access projects: Will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records improve as a result of the project?

Yes, we expect that the condition of these 31 artworks would be substantially improved as a direct result of the conservation treatments. The documentation from ICA will also improve our catalog records. We are also hopeful that the stabilization of degraded works will make these particular objects--which we have been cautious about showing due to their state--more accessible for teaching and exhibition purposes.

How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

The RAM has undertaken substantial work prior to this proposal to ensure that the climate in our archives is stable and the internal policies/systems are in place so we can appropriately track and care for the objects on their return to the museum. The 22 artworks that receive mat packages will also reduce handling of these popular objects to sustain preservation.

