



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-255522-OMS-24
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

University of Rochester Memorial Art Gallery

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$62,955
Amount of cost share:	\$63,621

The Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester will work with a professional conservator to complete conservation treatments on 29 South Asian miniature paintings and drawings. These artworks range in date from the 16th through the 19th centuries and are inaccessible to visitors and very limited to researchers due to their present condition. The conservator will document the treatment in full photographic and written reports, and museum staff will re-mat the works and compile the treatment data for inclusion in the collection object records. As a result, the paintings and drawings will be available to the public, either on display in the Asian Art gallery or made accessible through photographs on the museum website.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan

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.

1. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Project Overview

The Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) of the University of Rochester seeks funding under the IMLS MFA Collections Stewardship and Access program for the conservation treatment of 29 high-priority South Asian miniature paintings and drawings. These works, ranging in date from the 16th through the 19th centuries, represent almost half of the museum's collection of 64 Indian, Persian, and Nepalese miniatures. Because of their present condition, these important objects are inaccessible to visitors and very limited to researchers. After treatment, and in combination with the 22 paintings that were treated in Phase I under a 2014 IMLS grant (MA-31-14-0527) and 13 that require no treatment, all of the museum's South Asian miniature paintings and drawings will be safe for exhibition and access.

Advancing the Museum's Strategic Plan and IMLS Goals

This project advances two core objectives of MAG's strategic plan, including its mission to connect people and ignite discovery through art and its strategy to care for, interpret, and share art from ancient times to the present. The project supports Objective 1 of MAG's current strategic plan, to "engage a broader, more diverse audience with art, social, and educational offerings," and related Strategic Initiative 1, to "build, balance, and interpret MAG offerings," including the care and preservation of the permanent collection.

Returning these rare paintings to exhibitable condition supports MAG's strategic goals for the display of its collections of European, Asian, and ancient art. As a group, the paintings offer a remarkable breadth of work that reflects the diverse religions, history, and cultural beliefs of East Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Essential to the museum's core educational mission, these works are important to local university students in art history, language, and history courses and support MAG's programming for schoolchildren, particularly in the curriculum area of global studies. Further, there is a large South Asian community in Rochester with a special interest in these paintings; MAG is partnering with the India Community Center and the Dogra Art Foundation to enhance programming and exhibition offerings in the area of Indian and South Asian art.

Completion of this conservation project will fulfill both objectives under IMLS's Goal 3: Advance Collections Stewardship and Access: Objective 3.1) to support collections care and management, and Objective 3.2) to promote access to the museum collections.

Statement of Need

These 29 paintings are the remaining works in the collection of Indian miniatures that require treatment in order to be exhibited and to prevent further deterioration. The submission of the entire group for treatment is a logical choice not only because of their geographic origins and related subject matter, but because their physical properties comprise the same basic original technique as well as similar condition problems and treatment challenges. In addition, successfully treating these 29 paintings as Phase II of our plan to conserve all the Indian miniatures in the collection will complete a major goal of our long-range preservation plan [see *Long-Range Preservation Plan*].

Each of the 29 paintings is matted to non-archival board and needs to be removed as soon as possible. Each has suffered a variety of damage and repairs over the centuries, including the use of tape and adhesive to stabilize tears and delaminating surfaces; and staining from acidity of medium or paper as well as water.

Background to the Project / Identifying the Need

In the museum's 1991 General Conservation Assessment Survey, Tom Branchick, Director of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center (WACC), identified as a high priority "updating or obtaining a prioritized object specific survey for the collections and applying for funding for the most urgent conservation treatments." During the process of writing MAG's Long-Range Preservation Plan in 2002, the MAG curatorial staff worked with consultant Barbara Moore to prioritize the collections most in need of such systematic condition surveys. When combined with curatorial assessment and exhibition needs, these surveys then provided a roadmap for prioritized treatment. MAG's Long-Range Preservation Plan was thus written as a guiding document that enables staff to identify and execute large projects in as timely and judicious a manner as possible, and as funds permit. [*See Long-Range Preservation Plan.*]

During the development of the long-range plan, certain collections took priority because of their fragile condition, complex treatment needs, light-sensitivity, requirements for scheduled rotation rather than permanent display, and importance to the museum's educational mission. A subset of objects identified during this process was the museum's collection of Asian paintings, including East Asian scrolls and screens and South Asian miniature paintings. These works, inherently delicate because of their media and sensitivity to light, entered the collection over the 100 years of MAG's history; many show the ravages of time. In terms of prioritization for conservation assessment and treatment, works on paper in the Asian collection are of special interest as we continue to establish defined rotation schedules for scrolls, screens, manuscripts, and miniatures.

The museum's Curator of European Art Nancy Norwood oversees the exhibition and care of the Asian collections. Over the past two decades, she has worked closely with specialist consultant curators and conservators to systematically evaluate the collection of Asian paintings in its entirety, with an eye to quality, condition, and authenticity. Previously, during the 1980s, professor Charles Dillard Collins, a specialist in Indian art from the Rochester Institute of Technology, had evaluated the collection of Indian miniatures for quality and subject matter. In 2008, paper conservator Patricia Hamm conducted a site visit to informally survey 79 works on paper, including about half of the museum's Indian miniatures.

In 2011, with an eye toward obtaining treatment funding, Norwood requested that Hamm conduct a detailed condition survey of the 24 Indian miniatures she had initially identified as at-risk and of highest treatment priority in her 2008 assessment. Two of these works were rapidly and actively deteriorating, and the museum decided to treat them immediately. The remaining 22 miniatures in that group were treated under an IMLS MFA Collections Stewardship Grant in 2014 as Phase I of the plan to treat all of the Indian miniature paintings in the collection as time and funds permitted. The group conserved under Phase I of the project formed the basis of a successful exhibition in 2016 [*see Supporting Document 3: Exhibition Review*], and have now been returned to the regular rotations of light-sensitive objects in the Asian Art gallery.

In 2022, the collection of Indian miniature paintings was evaluated in person by Dr. Sonya Rhie Mace, the George P. Bickford Curator of Indian & Southeast Asian Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art, who is a specialist in Indian miniature painting. [See *Supporting Document 2: Letter of Support.*]

The 29 Indian Miniature Paintings

Images of each painting, along with titles, dates, and accession numbers, have been incorporated into Patricia Hamm's condition reports and treatment proposals. [See *Conservation Treatment Proposal.*]

Of the 64 miniature paintings in the collection, 44 were given to MAG by the widow of Robert F. Reiff, an art historian and native of Rochester. The majority of miniatures proposed for treatment under this IMLS grant originate from Professor Reiff's collection, which was formed during 25 years of travel throughout the United States, Europe, and India. Professor Reiff specialized in western art; his collection was thus personal, put together for private contemplation and enjoyment rather than to form an encyclopedic survey.

The collection nevertheless represents many of the main tendencies of miniature painting in beautiful examples; its arrival at MAG in 1983 greatly expanded the museum's holdings of this genre. It represents the diverse geographical and court styles prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries, especially as the form's popularity grew after the Mughal conquest of Northern and Central India in the 1500s.

The diversity of subject matter among these 29 paintings represents both Hindu and Islamic themes. Each religion has its own methods of attaining peace and harmony in the afterlife, and the portrayals in these paintings illustrate these varied paths.

Part of the group proposed for treatment depict various stages of love. Some relate to the *Ragamala*, a basic source of love poetry that relates images to musical notes or modes. Three examples in this group are *Desa-Vairati, Love in Waiting* (1983.33), *Todi Ragini* (1928.441), and *Vibhasa Ragini, Love in Union* (1983.72). Other popular subjects represented include the traditions of portraiture and the Hindu pantheon, particularly the deity Krishna. Of particular interest are four very rare drawings, which give insight into the artists' process of spontaneous creation of compositions. Two examples include the *Desakhya Ragini, The Display of Physical Power* (1983.50) and *Episodes of the Life of Krishna* (1983.63).

This group of miniatures is remarkable for a diversity of subject matter as well as consistently high quality. As Dr. Mace writes in her letter of support [see *Supporting Document 2: Letter of Support*],

The works are significant for a range of reasons. Several paintings in this group are from recognizable, dispersed sets and series that are critical benchmarks for understanding the development of Indian painting and religious history from the 16th to the 19th century. Others depict such appealing subjects and narratives, that they promise to inspire visitors to become increasingly engaged with the arts and literary culture of the Indian subcontinent.

Indian miniatures are usually made in five stages: 1) the entire surface is covered with a priming of starch paste, 2) the main lines are drawn in black, 3) the background is colored, 4) the underpainting of the figures is covered with appropriate local pigments, and 5) there is a final definition of the outlines. Because most of the paintings were created in the same fashion, they suffer from many of the same condition problems and treatment challenges [see *Supporting Document 2: Visual Documentation*].

Although each miniature has individual issues, there are general challenges linking all of them, and the conservator will be able to address their treatment consistently.

Target Group & Beneficiaries

The target group that will be most immediately and positively affected by this conservation project are the museum's curatorial and collections staff, as well as scholars, researchers, other curators, and students interested in Indian art of this time period. The conservation of these 29 paintings will help ensure MAG is fulfilling its mission and purpose to care for its collections and serve as an educational and cultural resource.

Another important target audience for this project is the South Asian community of Rochester, which, through the India Community Center and the Dogra Art Foundation, hosted Dr. Sonya Rhie Mace of the Cleveland Art Museum in 2022 to speak on Indian miniature painting. Dr. Vikram Dogra, the head of the Dogra Art Foundation, has expressed great interest in working with MAG to promote this project among members of the area's South Asian community through programming.

The ultimate beneficiaries for this project are museum visitors of all ages, including adults, schoolchildren, and university faculty and students; MAG welcomes 125,000–235,000 visitors per year. Our goal is to make these rare and fascinating works as accessible as possible, both in terms of the actual objects and accompanying didactics. The 2016 exhibition of Indian miniature painting was very successful [see *Supporting Document 3: Exhibition Review*], and we know from visitor feedback that the regular rotation of paintings in the Asian Art gallery is appreciated. Because photographs, documentation, and any new research will be available on the museum's website, the wider public will have access at any time to images and data for every painting in the collection.

2. PROJECT WORK PLAN

Project Team

- Nancy Norwood, Curator of European Art and curator in charge of Asian art, Memorial Art Gallery
- Adam Ranz, Art Preparator and Curatorial Assistant, Memorial Art Gallery
- Patricia Hamm, Conservator, Hamm Arts LLC

Activities

The duration of the project is two years (September 2024–August 2026). Project activities will occur in the following sequence:

- **Preparation & Transport** (September 2024): The project curator and preparator will prepare the paintings for delivery to the conservator's lab in Clarence Center, New York. Museum policy requires that two people accompany the transportation of any work of art.
- **Research** (September 2024–August 2026): Throughout the course of the project, the curator will correspond with specialists to expand the research on each painting. In particular, she will send high-resolution photographs to Dr. Mace at the Cleveland Museum of Art, who has expressed interest in helping with this project.

- **Conservation** (October 2024–March 2026): The conservator, who has already examined the paintings and written condition reports, will begin treatment in the sequence she determines most appropriate. We estimate that treatment of all 29 miniatures will not take longer than 18 months.
 - *Monitoring Progress* (around March 2025 & September 2026): Approximately midway through each year of the project, or at the request of the conservator, the curator and preparator will visit the lab to discuss progress and possible treatment choices.
 - *Completion & Reporting* (March–May 2026): The conservator will complete the treatment and write final treatment reports by the end of the grant period.
- **Community Outreach** (Spring & Fall 2025 & Summer 2026): The project curator will work with marketing & engagement staff to promote the project on social media and the museum’s website. She will also work with the India Community Center and Dogra Art Foundation on potential programming opportunities.
- **Transport** (March/April 2026): The project curator and preparator will travel to the lab to pick up the paintings and return them to the museum.
- **Re-Matting** (April/May 2026): The preparator will measure each work and order the custom-cut over mats; once they arrive, he will re-mat each miniature.
- **Cataloging & Future Planning** (June–August 2026): The curator will oversee the incorporation of treatment reports and before- and after-photography into the museum’s collection management database. She will also develop an exhibition plan for display of the paintings on rotation in the Asian Art gallery.

Risks

While anticipated risks are minimal for this project, there are certain risks that are part of any conservation effort, related to scheduling, unforeseen conservation needs, and transporting collection objects. To mitigate these risks, MAG will be working with an experienced conservator who has worked with the museum for over 20 years. The project director/curator will maintain communication with the conservator throughout the course of the project in order to avoid delays and to answer treatment questions. The project director and the preparator will also accompany the objects as they are transported to and from the conservator’s studio, and will visit the studio twice during the treatment to monitor progress.

Project Planning, Implementation, and Resources

The project was planned and will be implemented and managed by Nancy Norwood, MAG’s curator of European art and curator in charge of Asian art. She will dedicate a portion of her time to managing and implementing this project over the two years [see details in *Budget Justification*]. Norwood planned and implemented the successful treatment of 22 Indian miniature paintings under an IMLS grant in 2014, and curated the 2016 exhibition of these works. She will also work with MAG’s Marketing & Engagement Department to promote the project on social media throughout the course of the grant period, and will continue working with the India Community Center and Dogra Art Foundation on potential partnership opportunities.

Norwood will be the point person for the consultant conservator Patricia Hamm, whose expertise is in the conservation treatment of works on paper. Hamm has worked with Memorial Art Gallery staff on several projects, including assessment and treatment of several Indian, Tibetan, and Islamic works. One of her specialties is the treatment of water-soluble media and its associated challenges, and she is thus well qualified for her role in this project. She also treated the 22 paintings that were the focus of the 2014 project.

Preparator and curatorial assistant Adam Ranz will assist in implementing the project. Ranz will pack the objects and prepare them for travel to the conservator's studio. Twice during the conservation treatment, he will travel with Norwood to the conservator's studio in Clarence Center, NY, to evaluate progress. He will determine the custom mat sizes needed, order the mats, prepare and hinge the custom-cut mats, and re-mat the conserved objects.

MAG has earmarked funds from endowed conservation funds to support this project, including a portion of the conservation treatment and round-trip travel to Clarence Center, NY. The salaries and benefits for project personnel (staff members Norwood and Ranz) are paid from the museum operating budget.

Tracking Progress

Progress on this project will be tracked to ensure the timely and appropriate completion of the conservation of the 29 paintings. The project director/curator will check in regularly with the conservator to monitor progress and maintain communication, and with the preparator will visit the conservator twice during the grant period to observe the progress of the treatment in person. These touch points will enable the project director to evaluate not only the quality of the work but also the timely completion of the project objective to successfully treat the 29 paintings.

Further, the project director/curator will meet regularly with marketing & engagement staff to assist with promotion of the project via social media and the museum's website, and in doing so will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach to our communities about this project and the importance of conservation.

3. PROJECT RESULTS

Intended Results & Products

This conservation project furthers the museum's core missions of public outreach, education, and stewardship.

Project Goal 1: Complete conservation treatment of 29 Indian miniature paintings, according to conservator's report [See Conservation Treatment Proposal.]

The successful completion of this conservation treatment project will halt the deterioration of these important Indian miniature paintings and return them to exhibitable condition, greatly furthering the museum's goal, as articulated in our Long-Range Preservation Plan, to assess and treat high-priority light-sensitive works on paper in our Asian collection.

Project Goal 2: Update collections database and website to include treatment information and high-resolution images

High-resolution photography and data, including treatment information, will be added to our collections database and website, thus benefitting an even wider audience. Visitors to the museum and to our website will have access to a much wider range of imagery related to Indian painting, culture, and religious history as a result of this project. Researchers and museum staff will be able to more readily access information about these important works and include them in future publications and exhibitions.

Project Goal 3: Engage communities with conservation of collection and through future exhibition of conserved artworks

When this phase of the conservation project is complete, all 64 works of South Asian painting will be available for viewing, and research conducted during the project period will enhance visitors' appreciation for and engagement with these important works. Ultimately, the paintings will again be placed on display for the enjoyment of museum visitors, after the end of the grant period. Members of the South Asian community of Rochester will be able to see art and participate in programming that reflects their culture and history.

Sustained Project Benefits

The benefits of the conservation of these paintings will sustain long past the grant period. Halting the deterioration of these works and returning them to exhibitable condition will ensure that they remain viewable for many, many years to come. Images of the paintings and treatment records will be available to researchers, scholars, and the public through our website or correspondence with curatorial staff. Even when not on display, the works can be seen in person by request by interested scholars, students, or members of the public. Once treatment is completed, the curator will develop an exhibition plan that will incorporate the paintings into the regular rotation of light-sensitive works in the museum's Asian Art gallery, in which only four paintings are on display at one time and for a limited period.

An anticipated long-range goal (beyond the grant period) is a second exhibition of miniatures in 2027 that builds on the success of this grant project and of the first exhibition in 2016. This exhibition would showcase the 29 artworks treated under this project; our hope is that an accompanying catalogue would include an essay by Patricia Hamm regarding the conservation of Indian miniatures.

Improved Collections Care, Management, and Access

The successful completion of this project will build on MAG's concerted efforts to steward, interpret, and provide access to its collections. It will return 29 important works of Asian painting to exhibitable status, works that are rare and enticing to visitors in terms of both beauty and subject matter. When exhibited, in an effort to ensure the long-term preservation of the conserved objects, MAG staff will plan to display the objects in appropriate environmental and lighting conditions.

New research and possibilities for display and programming will allow continued outreach to a diverse public, including schoolchildren, university faculty and staff, and the local South Asian community.

Indian Miniature Conservation Schedule of Completion																											
Grant Project Year	Year 1														Year 2												
Memorial Art Gallery Fiscal Year	FY25														FY26												
Calendar Year	2024				2025								2026														
Month	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug			
Curator's Overall Project Management	[Shaded]																										
Research: Corresponding with specialists, conducting research	[Shaded]																										
Preparation: Packing and preparing objects for transport	[Shaded]																										
Transport: Objects transported to conservation studio	[Shaded]																										
Conservation treatment		[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Monitoring Progress: MAG staff visit conservation studio							[Shaded]	[Shaded]					[Shaded]	[Shaded]													
Community Outreach: Speaking program, website, social media								[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]				[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]							[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Completion & Reporting: Conservators' final treatment reports																						[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Transport: Objects transported back to MAG																							[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Re-Matting: Measuring and ordering custom-cut mats																							[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Re-Matting: Mat prep and hinging																								[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]
Cataloging & Future Planning																								[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]	[Shaded]

DIGITAL PRODUCTS PLAN

The digital content that will be created from this project comprises high-resolution and web-accessible photographs taken before, during (when relevant), and after treatment. These images will be taken by the conservator.

Type of files

The conservators at HammArts, Clarence Center, New York, will take high-resolution photographs, using a microscope when warranted, of the 29 works to be treated. They will provide these files in TIFF or JPG format. When necessary or requested, MAG will also generate larger digital images suitable for online use or publication after the treated works return to the museum. At MAG, equipment includes a Nikon D70 camera, MacBeth color checker, and Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. For each work, the minimum format and size is a JPG, photographed at 180ppi, 1000 pixels on the longer side. Where possible, MAG retains uncorrected DNG files as well as TIFFs at 300 ppi. At MAG, these files will be attached to EmbARK as well as maintained on a University of Rochester server that is backed up daily.

Availability

All approved images and descriptive content will be made freely available through MAG's collections website (<http://mag.rochester.edu/collections/>). MAG retains copyright over this site as a compilation, but not over any of the works themselves. Visitors to the website may download the images directly. These images are available via any browser. No special tools are required. Should a visitor wish a larger size file or one of higher resolution than available on the website, they may contact the curatorial department and we will provide it free of charge for nonprofit, personal, or educational use.

Access

Digital content is freely available to the public through MAG's online collections website. In the event that a member of the public wants a higher-resolution image for research, educational, or personal use, they can easily contact MAG staff through the website and we will provide what they need at no cost. Images sized for publication are available at no cost for educational and non-profit use.

Sustainability

All digital image files at MAG, including those that will be produced under this project, are maintained on a University server, with daily backup and in perpetuity. Funding and staff for storage and backup is included in MAG's general digital asset management plan. Metadata about the photography itself is attached in batches to the master DNG files. Camera and photo credit data are attached in Lightroom and remain part of the master DNG file which is stored on University servers with other MAG images. Object metadata is entered manually into MAG's CMS, EmbARK, which is maintained on University servers and backed up daily.