

Swope Art Museum Grant Application

National Endowment of the Humanities Preservation Assistance for Smaller Institutions

“Purchase of Art Storage and Climate Control for Preservation of Permanent Collection”

Project Abstract

The Swope Art Museum cares for the artistic collection of three Terre Haute, Indiana native artists ranging across multiple eras and art movements (SAM, 2023). The artists, Gilbert Brown Wilson, James Farrington Gookins, and William T. Turman, are not well known to the art world, but have become the pride of the citizens in Indiana. They lived and died between 1840 and 1991, capturing subjects of their interests and their US travels. The artists act as an educational chance to connect the modern generation to the past as they learn about how a regular person may have lived then. This grant would continue SAM’s efforts in preserving their artwork and legacy as artists and educators. The Museum would be able to securely store the artwork in a climate-controlled storage room to ensure a long life and minimize any further damage.

What activity (or activities) would the grant support?

This grant would support the purchase of an art storage and climate control needed to successfully preserve the permanent collection. This purchase was recommended during a general assessment of the state of the institution's collection on November 13, 2022. The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) conducted the assessment.

What are the content and size of the humanities collections the project focuses on?

The total collection is made up of five hundred and seventy artworks. SAM is focused on preserving four hundred and ninety of them. There are four hundred and forty-four oil paintings by Gilbert Brown Wilson and the drawings he created for various short films during his life from 1907 to 1991; twenty-two oil paintings of portraits and natural landscapes by James Farrington Gookins from 1840 through 1904; and twenty-four oil landscape and miscellaneous paintings by William T. Turman during 1867 to 1960.

Gilbert Brown Wilson

Gilbert Brown Wilson was a native Indiana artist who could never quite break out into the art community. However, he was described as “a brilliant artist and one of America’s foremost painters” by film director John Huston and “one of the most potent mural painters in America” by Scribner’s Magazine (Admin, n.d.). His artworks include illustrations from the book *Moby Dick*, *Old Mr. World* and the *Hue Mans* animated film, self-portraits, and his *Insanity* series. Because many of his works did not gain fame until after his death, his works have been put up for auction but are in the process of being acquisitioned by SAM. Most of the museum’s Gilbert Wilson collection is comprised of *Moby Dick*, which is well known among multiple generations of students. Preserving Wilson’s pieces will act as an opportunity to promote social connections between the public across all ages. It will also encourage the younger generation to find creativity and joy in reading.

James Farrington Gookins

James Farrington Gookins was native to Indiana and primarily painted landscapes and occasional portraits. Although he was a well-known talented artist at the time of his life, he has now been forgotten in history. There is not much information on Gookins as a person, but there is evidence of his influence. Gookins and his fellow artist and friend John Love established the Indiana School of Art in 1877 but closed its doors in 1879 due to financial instability. This school was the first attempt at a professional art school in Indiana (Encyclopedia of Indianapolis 2023). They could not leave their doors open for long, but other art schools were able successfully lay down their roots, such as the Herron School of Art on the IU Indianapolis campus. Gookins' passion for art and teaching were important economic developments for the community. If his art school had not been placed in Indiana, the artistic community may not have blossomed as it did in the modern day.

William Thomas Turman

William Thomas Turman was born and raised in Indiana. He grew up to be an artist and educator who specialized in landscapes and still life paintings. Turman enjoyed traveling and depicted scenes during this time, such as *Sunset over Lake Michigan – Pentwater*. However, Indiana was his home, and he made it clear with his work. He painted multiple scenes from the state such as *Morning Over Nashville* and *Winter Morning Deming Park, 1930*. Turman was also an excellent teacher. By his retirement in 1934, he had taught over 15, 000 students, sometimes with over 200 in his class (Indiana State University 2024). William Turman planted seeds of inspiration in his students and promoted them to be creative. Lastly, he was the second art director of Swope Art Museum.

All these of these artists highlight Indiana in a way that is often overlooked. Indiana is viewed as a quiet, gentle place to relax from their perspective. The paintings and drawings may not hold significance to any major historical eras, but they are a part of Indiana’s history. This means they are still worthy of preservation.

How are these humanities collections used?

The Museum’s mission is to collect, preserve and share American art to engage a diverse audience (SAM 2023). One of ways SAM primarily uses its collection to make it accessible to the public is through exhibitions. Only 5% of the collection can be displayed in the Museum’s galleries. There are three annual exhibitions displayed. They are displayed for one to three months. The *Student Art Exhibition* displays the creative talents of children from elementary to high school and their skills. The *Wabash Valley Exhibition* displays work from artists around the Midwest. There is only one permanent collections exhibition called *Plein Air*. It was originally for Turman when he won a competition of the same name. Although he is gone, SAM still hosts a gallery for him every year. Due to the sensitivity of the paintings, *Plein Air* is only up for a month. Two paintings from the exhibition are currently on display. The rest have preservation issues that must be evaluated by a conservator.

The Museum’s changes to its exhibitions are used for humanities other than entertainment. It is also used to tell Indiana’s history, promote connections between people, inspire creativity within the public, and learn something new. The collection are assistants to the art programs the Museum hosts over the year. The topics of the programs include the free program Artists on Art. Artists on Art allow the public to learn about the historical significance of the permanent collection and the future of art from a contemporary artist or historian. It welcomes everyone of all ages and interests in the art community. The other three programs, Art Start, Art Plus, and Summer Art Studio, utilize young minds to promote creativity. This is done through painting, pottery, and various arts and crafts. They also strive to teach the children about art history, leadership, and project planning.

SAM will occasionally send out loans to other museums, galleries, and institutions upon request. The registrar and curator have recently approved a request to send *Mount of the Holy Cross, Colorado, Long's Peak from Estes Park Colorado*, and *Trout Pool on the St. Vrain River, Colorado* by James Farrington Gookins to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS). DMNS newest exhibition, *The Natural History of Colorado*, expands upon the natural

progression of the state using photography and fine art paintings. Gookins' travels during his time as an artist are important. He lived during the late 1800s, and his natural landscape paintings act as an educational and visual reminder of the rapid pace city life grew. DMNS wanted to display the history of Colorado with pride, and the Museum assisted with their vision.

The collection is occasionally used for research purposes. In 2019, a group of Indiana historians and biologists collected the paintings of James Gookins and William Turman to study the natural history of Indiana, and the damage caused due to a lack of sustainability. They claimed if the city council could visually see the deterioration of Indiana's parks and animal habitats, they will change their policies on recycling and fossil fuels. The paintings were used to formulate a digital map to accurately depict the parks during the 1800s. It transitioned between the 19th and the 21st century. This research and digitization project was presented to the city council as evidence to support their claim. The council changed their policies for the better, and other state institutions have approached the Museum to do projects similar to this. This research will become an exhibition at SAM once the historians and biologists provide a five-year update.

What is the nature and mission of your institution?

The Museum's mission statement is "The Sheldon Swope Art Museum collects, preserves and shares American art to engage a diverse audience" (SAM 2023). It opened its doors in March 1942 and gained nationwide attention. The past and present staff are passionate about ensuring the Museum is an institution of learning, creativity, and history. It is a non-profit organization and primarily receives financial support from donations from the public. The Museum also has three board members and thirty board of advisors, all of which are committed to fulfilling the Museum's mission statement.

There are seven full-time staff members at SAM. Fred Nation, the Executive Director; Amy MacLennan, the Curator; Wyatt Lawson, the Director of Education; Sara McCarthy, the Assistant Director of Development; Kayle Engle, the Registrar/Preparator/Collections Manager; Jim Dawson, the Facilities Manager; and Kristi Finley, the Office Manager all work together to assure the Museum runs smoothly. The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 12 pm – 5 pm. They are closed on Mondays and all Holidays. As of 2023, the Museum's budget for their total expenses is approximately \$814, 620 (Suozzo et al. 2024). SAM has no part-time workers and no volunteers to assist with their operations.

Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment?

Yes. The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) conducted a general assessment of the collection on November 13, 2022. During this assessment, CCAHA identified short- and long-term issues the Museum must prioritize if they are to successfully preserve the work in their permanent collection. This assessment:

- Identified potential risks to the collection due to significant environmental changes
- Out of date, inefficient storage

- Recommendations on how to improve the institution's storage practices
- General condition of the artists' work

CCAHA submitted the observations in a written report to be used as a planning document. This document will be used as a claim to process the Museum's preservation initiation. It is also being used as an attachment for the National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) grant. The NEH awarded the grant to the James Whitcomb Riley Museum Home (JWRMH) in 2012 to help the institution preserve the furniture damaged in a 2010 flood. They used CCAHA as consultants to stabilize the artifacts and the project was completed after eight months. JWRMH were able to conserve the artifacts and minimize the damage.

The Swope Art Museum has consulted the CCAHA in the past for the preservation of the permanent collection after a flood in June 2008 damaged 25% of the objects. CCAHA assisted with general cleaning, removing mold, and treating water damage that was sustained on the paper and canvas works.

What is the importance of this project to your institution?

This project will ensure the preservation and safety of the paintings acquisitioned and bequeathed to the museum from its opening in 1942. The preservation assessment by the CCAHA highlighted the inadequacy of the Museum's storage and temperature control. SAM has not had the financial opportunity to address the needs of the collection, and the grant will fulfill the institution's mission statement. SAM has attempted to address the improper storage facilities by purchasing shelves, flat files, and digitally documenting the artwork to minimize exposure to the air. However, SAM is acquiring paintings from James Gookins to cease auctioning his works. With the grant, the Museum will be able to optimize their storage space, preserve work in a climate-controlled room, and address overall collections concerns.

What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?

The executive director Fred Nation will oversee the acquirement of the storage and climate control installations. Collection's manager Kayle Engel will oversee the safety and transfer of the paintings from their shelves and flat files to the new storage. Fred Nation has thirteen ongoing years of consultation experience with artwork and has been serving the community since 2011. Kayle Engel has been the collection's manager at SAM since 2022 and has worked at various museums as a collection's intern. Please refer to their resumes in the Appendix.

What is the plan of work and timetable for the project?

Week 1 to Week 2

- Research modern art storage and climate-controlled brands (Nation, Engel)

- Plan for replacement of the shelves and transfer artwork to a secure space (Nation, Engel)
- Order art storage (Nation)

Week 3 to Week 15

- Install storage and begin reinstalling art (Nation, Engel)
- Research climate control system (Nation, Engel)
- Order climate control system (Nation)

Week 16 to Week 17

- Install climate control system (Third party)

Week 18 to Week 19

- Consult CCAHA for final assessment of collection (Nation, Engel)

Budget

	Details/Notes	Quote	Project Total
1. Consultation Fees	Needed to access problem areas during project completion	\$500	\$500
2. Storage	New storage for paintings	\$18, 000	\$18, 000
3. Climate Control	Previous HVAC from 1982, will be updated to 2022 or newer	\$5, 000	\$5, 000
4. Shipping and Handling	Non-local suppliers	\$0	\$0
5. Installation Fees	For climate control	\$3, 000	\$3, 000
6. Total Direct Cost	Without museum contributions		\$26, 500
7. Museum Contributions	Donations from public		\$16, 500
8. Total Project Costs			\$26, 000
9. Project Funding	Requesting From NEH	Outright	\$10, 000
		Matching Funds	\$0
		Total Requested	\$10, 000
	Cost Sharing	Applicant's Contributions	\$16, 500
		Third-Party Contributions	\$0
		Total Cost Sharing	\$16, 500
10. Total Project Funding			\$26, 000

Attachments

Staff

Fred Nation - résumé

Amy MacLennan - résumé

Wyatt Lawson - résumé

Sara McCarthy - résumé

Kayle Engel - résumé

Jim Dawson - résumé

Kristi Finley - résumé

Consultants

Jeanmarie Easter – Easter has been offering her conservation services for more than 20 years. She follows the code of ethics for the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), and she has a fine arts degree. She is local and specializes in paintings in general and paintings on canvas. She is a reliable source of information and conservation practices.

Conservation Center for Arts & Historic Artifacts – CCAHA have a history with SAM and has helped them with the preservation of the Museum's works before. They are familiar with the Museum's scope of collections, and their general preservation report is used as evidence for the NEH grant.

Reports

Carel USA – quote for climate control, valid for six months

CCAHA – general preservation report

Spacesaver – quote for art rack, valid for six months

Indiana historian and biologists – presentation with research provided

Denver Museum of Nature and Science – folder access to exhibition documentation

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