

Director's Report – Annual Meeting of the Corporation, November 14, 2019



I am going to start with no less than the world or, more modestly, a great chunk of the Northern Hemisphere. The map shows all the places where works from our collection have been over the past 12 months, or are still on loan.

You see a marker in Stockholm, top right; London, Florence, Paris are on the list too. In the United States, our loans over the past 12 months went across the nation, from New York City to Los Angeles. Impressive, right? I am showing you this, because a great measurement of the importance of a collection is the distribution of loans. If it is world-wide—we had loans in Japan and, I think, in Australia—the collection meets the standard of international importance. Worcester is probably one of the smallest cities with a museum to have made it into that league.

Let us look at several works that helped spread the word about Worcester, MA during the past 12 months.

For starters there is Sargent's portrait of *Katherine Chase Pratt* and Gainsborough's portrait of the *Artist's Daughters*.

The former went to the National Museum in Stockholm; the latter to the National Portrait Gallery in London. As both were on permanent display at WAM, we needed to find a substitute for the respective five months these paintings were visiting Europe. The good news is that we have the depth to do that, which is another tribute to the caliber of our collections.


Now, here is a panel that was discussed in 2018 at the last Corporator meeting. It had just been attributed by some scholars to Leonardo da Vinci and the lesser known Lorenzo di Credi, both in their youth affiliated with the studio of Andrea Verrocchio.

Traveling, in this case, helps spread the word about new attributions. Where did our panel go? First, to an exhibition in Florence, as part of a broader presentation of Andrea Verrocchio's work shop in the Bargello. It then went directly to Paris, and is now on view at the Louvre Museum. (Most of you probably heard about the Leonardo exhibition there.)

Major International Loans

<p>Nationalmuseum of Sweden</p>  <p><i>Katherine Chase Pratt</i>, 1890 John Singer Sargent (American, 1856–1925) oil on canvas 101.9 × 76.7 cm (40 1/8 × 30 3/16 in.) Gift of William I. Clark, 1983.36</p>	<p>National Portrait Gallery, London</p>  <p><i>Portrait of the Artist's Daughters</i>, about 1763–1764 Thomas Gainsborough (British, 1727–1788) oil on canvas 127.3 × 101.7 cm (50 1/8 × 40 1/16 in.) Museum Purchase, 1917.181</p>
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Palazzo Strozzi and Bargello, Florence/ Louvre Museum, Paris



Leonardo da Vinci 1452–1519 and Lorenzo di Credi, about 1456–1536, attr.
A Miracle of Saint Donatus of Arezzo, 1475–1479, 1940.29

Although the exhibition curator has some reservations about our new attribution, our work is nevertheless shown along with the master's securely attributed works. So, this can be seen as a cautious endorsement, of sorts.

Think about this: As the Louvre now attracts annually 9 million visitors, around 500,000 visitors will have seen the Leonardo exhibition during the three months of its run in Paris. I wouldn't be surprised if three times as many will come across the catalogue. All of them will be reading the name of the collection: the Worcester Art Museum!

We remain in Paris, as Worcester is contributing another high-level loan to the French capital's cultural offering of this fall, this time to the Greco retrospective in the Petit Palais, a prominent exhibition space between the Champs Elysees and the iconic Pont Alexandre III.



The loan in question is El Greco's *Repentant Mary Magdalene*. The snapshot in the Petit Palais was taken by one of our Salisbury members, who recently traveled to France. Our work is one of the stars of the show, it features prominently in the catalogue, too, and will be viewed by scholars of generations to come.

Think about another 200,000 visitors walking past this work and seeing on the label the name "Worcester Art Museum," not to mention all those who will study the catalogue.

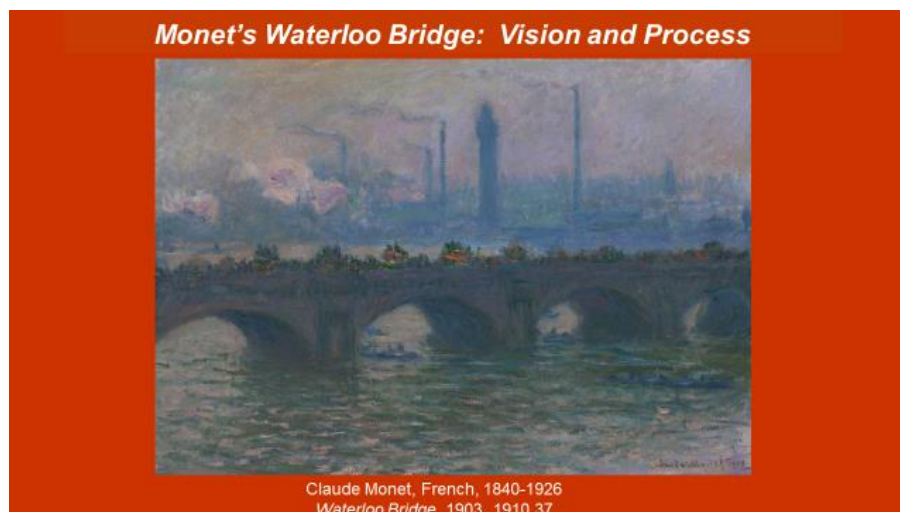
Would it be too ambitious to assume that in the past twelve months alone, around one million visitors have seen some work from our collection somewhere in the Western World? Probably not. If you are among those globe trotters and stumble upon one of our loans, please do us the favor and take a photograph (feel free to pose in front of the work!) and send it to us. We will gladly post it on our social media platforms.

Back to the mothership, where we continuously contribute, via high profile exhibitions and our many other programs, to the cultural vibrancy of our city and the region. The caliber of our own holdings is the basis on which we are building; we also have a reputation as a generous lender of internationally important art, which gives WAM a better position to ask for loans.

Besides the Hudson River School exhibition in the fall of last year and *Travels with Hiroshige*, we proudly presented nine versions of Monet's Waterloo bridges, accompanied by interactive media. Not only did this exhibition delight all of you, it consolidated our foot print in Metro West, and generated a lot of press, notably in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, and, of course, WGBH!



Here's a view of one of Worcester's two Monets. Our painting was the starting point for the exhibition, as we expanded the concept of the show, which was first presented by the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester.



NEW ACQUISITION HIGHLIGHTS

Collections are never complete. They are very much a work in progress.

As they evolve, they help to build an impactful exhibition program. In many cases, new acquisitions also help to expand contexts and upgrade our holdings further. At the same time, they reflect new realities, such as the change of taste and shifts in demographics and culture. Don't get me wrong: great art will always remain great art. Yet, every generation rewrites the canon.

Let us look at WAM's new mission statement: we *"connect, people, cultures and communities through the experience of art."* As it so happened, the accepted canon rarely included women artists, ditto for minorities. We are changing that, as many museums in this country are also doing.

Last fall, we acquired a small but major work by one of the preeminent women artists of the beginning of the 20th century in Europe: Gabriele Münter, who hasn't ascended as quickly into "the canon" as her lover, Wassily Kandinsky—both members of the Blue Rider movement in Munich. Münter, like so many women at the time, did not have the same access to professional training as her male counterparts.

Art historically speaking, Münter's production peaked around 1910—our work is from that time—showing bold experimentations with brushwork, pattern, palette, and the willingness to let the support show. The question if she influenced Kandinsky or Kandinsky influenced her in this period is purely academic and needs not to be answered; both bodies of work art at that time stand on their own.

Gabriele Münter
German, 1877-1962
Häuser in Riegsee, 1909
2018.40



Thanks to the Stoddard acquisition fund, we were also able to seize on another market opportunity: we were able to buy Paula Modersohn-Becker's *Three Bathing Boys by the Canal* from 1901. Like Münter's work, it is intimate in size—as most of her works—and very powerful.

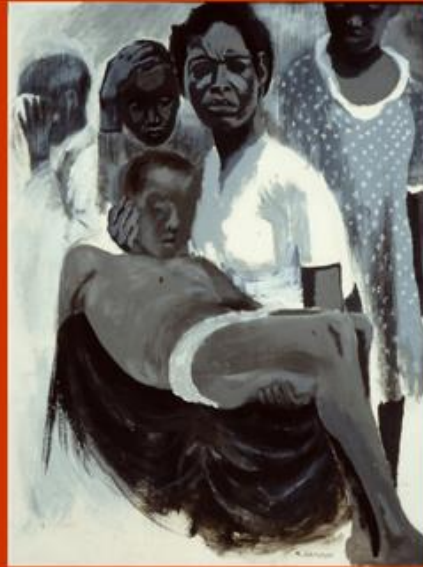
Paula Modersohn-Becker started in the German tradition of landscape painting. Exposure to the Parisian avant-garde in the 1890's—think of the Impressionists, Gauguin and Cézanne—led her to explore new color harmonies, innovate her brushwork, and focus on the human form. Remarkable is also the composition, with a high horizon line and diagonals across the canvas. This concept was very much appreciated by the modernists of the time and follows the example of Japanese woodcuts. Modersohn-Becker also breaks new ground in her depiction of the human body: local children from the impoverished farming families in the German Northwest. Instead of idealizing them or depicting them in a naturalistic mode, she stylizes them, as if to prepare German Expressionism.

This work will be on view in early spring of next year, together with our superb Gauguin from 1891, *The Brooding Woman*, and Braque's *Olive Trees* from 1907.

Paula Modersohn-Becker, German, 1876-1907
Three Bathing Boys by the Canal, 1901
2019.48



Reginald Adolphus Gammon, American, 1921-2005
Holy Family, 1964
2019.46



Here you see a work that my colleagues and I would call a masterpiece, Reginald Gammon's *Holy Family*. The painting was created in 1964, just a year after the now famous march on Washington took place, advocating for jobs and freedom, with Martin Luther King pronouncing in front of the Lincoln memorial his famous "I have a dream ..."

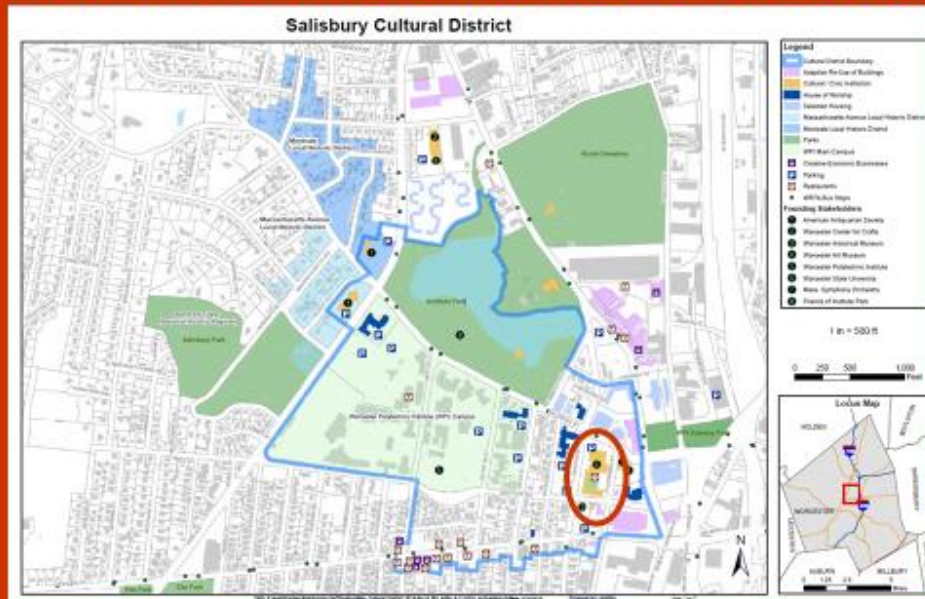
Many features make this work so compelling, among them the connection of Christian imagery—the Pieta—and the black and white depiction of a contemporary scene, as if it were a photograph seen in the newspaper of the time. Once this work will be on view in our contemporary galleries, you will be able to see the exquisite and rich brushwork and experience the tension between formal beauty and the depiction of political violence.

For most of us, Reginald Gammon (1921 - 2005) is a discovery. He was a member of Spiral, an African American artist group that was active during the civil rights movement. WAM is among the first museums in this country to acquire his art. We are thereby participating in Gammon's entry into the canon of contemporary art.

Is collecting art political? Yes, it is. If you only collect art that does not pertain to political realities you make a statement. If you only collect political art, you make another one.

Be this as it may, we will make sure that people visiting our museum feel at home. We will also make sure that the stories we tell embrace the complexity of humanity.

WAM and the Renaissance of Worcester



I started my presentation with a map of the world, I am concluding with an aerial view of the Salisbury Cultural District, of which the Worcester Art Museum is an integral part. Expand that map in your minds and you see how far our city has come, it is now experiencing a Renaissance. Grow this map even further and you see how much we are now part of the Greater Boston area.

Over the past 12 months, we have made major progress in supporting the cultural vibrancy of our city, we have also done our very best to spread the word about Worcester's riches worldwide. We thank you all for your support in this endeavor, as you gave us your time as volunteers, as you supported us via your donations, as you work as ambassadors of the museum in the communities and with friends.

Thank you!

Matthias Waschek, Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum