

# WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

## **WORCESTER ART MUSEUM RECEIVES \$290,000 TO SUPPORT NEW ARMS AND ARMOR GALLERY, TEEN PROGRAMMING, AND OPERATIONS RELIEF**

Worcester, MA—September 30, 2020—The Worcester Art Museum (WAM) announced today that it has been awarded three grants totaling \$290,000 to support a new arms and armor gallery, teen programming, and operations relief. The awards include \$250,000 from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to fund the design and development phase for the long-term installation of the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection of arms and armor; \$30,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in support of Teen Arts at WAM programming; and \$10,000 in relief funds from Mass Humanities, provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020.

“This financial support for the Worcester Art Museum benefits all corners of our community by helping us transform lives with enriching programming,” said Matthias Waschek, WAM’s Jean and Myles McDonough Director. “We are grateful for this timely public support and confidence in our mission to connect people, communities, and cultures through the experience of art.”

Acquired in 2014 when the Higgins Armory Museum closed, the Higgins Armory Collection at WAM is the second largest of its kind in the Americas, next only to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Comprised of arms, armor, and metalwork from around the world and from antiquity to the 19th century, the collection is particularly known for its rare grouping of suits of plate armor from 15th- to 17th-century Europe. By the end of 2023, the Museum plans to open an Arms and Armor Gallery, displaying nearly the entire 2,000-object collection in a combination of gallery displays and open storage, an innovative design solution that allows museum visitors to see a large quantity of artwork in a non-traditional exhibition space. This new gallery will emphasize accessibility and accommodate different learning styles, empowering visitors of diverse ages, backgrounds, and abilities to curate their own experience in exploring the stories behind these objects.

“The ultimate result will be a stunning display of beautiful objects, but more importantly, it will offer a personalized visitor experience that capitalizes on the powerful popular appeal of arms and armor to engage existing audiences and draw new visitors to the Museum,” said Jeffrey L. Forgeng, The Higgins Curator of Arms and Armor and Medieval Art at WAM. “An accessible and inclusive interpretive strategy will tap into visitors’ curiosity about these objects to foster personal connections and inquiry, while delivering exciting multisensory experiences that have the potential to turn first-time visitors into life-long museum enthusiasts.”

The Museum recently launched [redesigned webpages for the Higgins Collection](#). These new pages provide comprehensive information about the collection, its history, related programs, and the present—and future—interpretation and

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integration of arms and armor throughout WAM. In addition, the Higgins Collection has its own [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages and [YouTube](#) library where followers get behind-the-scenes and in-depth information.

## **NEA award supports teen programming at WAM**

A long-time supporter of WAM's teen programming, the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded the Worcester Art Museum \$30,000 to support the Museum's teen offerings through the 2020–2021 academic year. *Teen Arts at WAM* comprises a suite of traditional and innovative (and now also virtual) art classes, intensives, apprenticeships, collaborative programs, and social experiences that take place outside of school time and are geared specifically for teens from the demographically diverse City of Worcester and surrounding communities. Partnerships with various groups, including the Worcester Public Schools and Worcester Juvenile Court, provide additional access points for rigorous art history and hands-on studio art instruction, as well as opportunities for exploration and belonging for approximately 250 teens each year. Professional artist faculty draw on the Museum's world-renowned encyclopedic art collection to ignite students' curiosity and spark conversations, shape ideas, nurture critical thinking, introduce careers in the arts, foster cross-cultural connections, and inspire new creative work.

## **WAM's Mass Humanities Award for \$10,000**

The Worcester Art Museum was one of 123 humanities organizations across Massachusetts awarded a combined \$572,500 this summer by Mass Humanities through funding received by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. These funds were made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and are to provide vital operational relief. The NEH received \$75 million from the \$2 trillion CARES Act legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Trump in March 2020.

"The humanities—our history, culture, and ideas—will be essential in any recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts," said Brian Boyles, executive director of Mass Humanities. "We're grateful to NEH for providing these funds to protect the humanities infrastructure of the state. We only regret that we could not meet the needs of every applicant. We will continue to seek ways to assist our grantees and other institutions in surviving this crisis."

## **About the Institute of Museum and Library Services**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums. IMLS advances, supports, and empowers America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. Its vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. To learn more, visit [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov).

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## **About the National Endowment for the Arts**

The National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency that funds, promotes, and strengthens the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation.

## **About Mass Humanities**

**Mass Humanities** funds the development of thought-provoking public humanities projects for Massachusetts audiences, bringing people together to explore the history, culture, values and beliefs that matter to communities in our state. Support for Mass Humanities comes from the National Endowment of the Humanities, Mass Cultural Council, and other generous donors and funders.

## **About the Worcester Art Museum**

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3,000 BCE to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

Since its founding in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum has assembled a collection of 38,000 objects: from the ancient Near East and Asia, to European and American paintings and sculptures, and continuing with works by contemporary artists from around the world. WAM has a history of making large scale acquisitions, such as its Medieval Chapter House, the Worcester Hunt Mosaic, its 15th-century Spanish ceiling, and the Flemish Last Judgment tapestry. In 2014, the Museum acquired the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection, comprising two thousand arms and armor objects. It continues to commission and present new works, such as 2017's installation of the immersive *Reusable Universes* sculptural series and *Organic Concept* environment by Shih Chieh Huang. For more information about the Worcester Art Museum, [visit worcesterart.org](http://visit.worcesterart.org).

## **Contact**

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