

Harvard / News Release Art Museums

Harvard Art Museums Archives Announces Successful Completion of Getty and Institute of Museum and Library Services Grants

Research center sees increased usage as a result

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Photograph (c. 1935) of a fragment from a 12th-14th century Thai bodhisattva statue, along with the plasticene copy made by a pupil at the Perkins Institute who manually explored, and then copied, the hand. Courtesy Harvard Art Museums Archives, Records of the Assistants to the Directors, HC 21 (#502).

The Harvard Art Museums Archives is pleased to announce the successful completion of grants awarded in 2007 from the Getty Foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) Museums for America program. The grants have enabled the Archives to continue to analyze and catalog its major holdings in order to encourage and promote research, and use of the Archives has increased as a result.

During the grant period alone, the department fielded over 3,500 reference queries, most of them using the online finding aids, or detailed listings of records available, that the grants helped create. These finding aids will long outlive the grant period; they will serve as vital research tools to scholars, students, and the general public worldwide.

Since the grant period, the Archives has been answering three to ten times as many queries as peer institutions with equivalent staff. The online finding aids allow researchers to identify specific files or sets of records that can help them to direct their questions. This in-depth type of reference query is an indication that the grants have contributed to increased efficiency for researchers and staff.

The two grants enabled the Archives to catalog approximately 13,800 folders (760 archival boxes) of Art Museums records dating from the institution's founding in 1895 (as the Fogg Museum) to the present. Archivists created in-depth finding aids, which are now online at Harvard University Library's Online Archival Search Information System (OASIS), oasis.harvard.edu. The cataloged material includes items of great historical value to the museum and scholarly community, such as early exhibition records and the papers of Edward W. Forbes and Paul J. Sachs, director and associate director, respectively, during the first half of the 20th century. These collections not only illuminate the growth and development of the field of art history, but also highlight the adoption and evolution of the museums' teaching mission, showing how the museums became a premier training ground for art historians as well as museum administrators, curators, and conservators. Beyond the museums' specific history, the records reveal much about broader social issues, including women in the professions and the escape of Jewish curators and art historians to America from Nazi-occupied Europe. The cataloged collections include correspondence from artists, writers, and scholars including Thomas Stearns (T. S.) Eliot, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Barr, Alexander Calder, Ben Shahn, John Singer Sargent, and countless others.

Having provided an opportunity to develop standards and procedures for future processing projects, the cataloging will have a lasting impact on the Archives. For example, an integral part of cataloging was the creation of “in-house” processing notes for each collection, which become a method for tracking details about the contents of files, and relationships between items or sets of documents. The notes contain a level of detail that is not appropriate for a finding aid, but staff can consult them, often locating valuable information that is otherwise impossible to find. As researchers or staff consider an art object, they are now able to view the entire documentary history associated with it. The grants have thus brought the Archives more in line with the teaching mission of the Harvard Art Museums, and with many more parts of the collection accessible, use has increased substantially.

About the Harvard Art Museums Archives

The Archives collects, organizes, and preserves the institution’s historical documents and makes them available to students, scholars, and interested members of the international art community. Its mission is to document and promote knowledge and appreciation of the Harvard Art Museums’ history, programs, and goals, and the professional and personal accomplishments of its principals. Research visits may be scheduled Monday–Friday, 9am–4pm, by contacting the Archives at am_reference@harvard.edu, or by calling 617-495-2384. Please note that researchers must contact the Archives as far in advance of a visit as possible. A minimum of three weeks is requested.

About the Getty Foundation

The Getty Foundation fulfills the philanthropic mission of the J. Paul Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the understanding and preservation of the visual arts locally and throughout the world. Through strategic grants and programs, the Foundation strengthens art history as a global discipline, promotes the interdisciplinary practice of conservation, increases access to museum and archival collections, and develops current and future leaders in the visual arts. The Foundation carries out its work in collaboration with the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, and the Getty Conservation Institute to ensure that the Getty programs achieve maximum impact.

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. Museums for America is the largest grant program for museums at IMLS, providing more than \$16 million in grants to support the role of museums in American society: to sustain cultural heritage, to support lifelong learning, and to be centers of community engagement. Museums for America grants strengthen the museums’ ability to serve the public more effectively by supporting high-priority activities that advance the institution’s mission and strategic goals.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world’s leading art institutions, comprise three museums (Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. The collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media, ranging in date from antiquity to the present and originating in Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Integral to Harvard University and the wider

community, the art museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and other visitors. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in this country. www.harvardartmuseums.org.

In June 2008 the building at 32 Quincy Street, formerly the home of the Fogg and Busch-Reisinger museums, closed for a major renovation. During this renovation, the Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway remains open and has been reinstalled with some of the finest works representing the collections of all three museums. When complete, the renovated historic building on Quincy Street will unite the three museums in a single state-of-the-art facility designed by architect Renzo Piano. www.harvardartmuseums.org/renovation.

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For more information, please contact:

Jennifer Aubin
Public Relations Manager
Harvard Art Museums
617-496-5331
jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu