

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM RECEIVES EXHIBITION PLANNING GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES TO DEVELOP PERMANENT ARMS AND ARMOR GALLERIES

Worcester, MA—April 24, 2018—The Worcester Art Museum (WAM) today announced that it has been awarded a \$40,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support the planning phase for the long-term installation of the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection of arms and armor, acquired by WAM in 2014. This is the maximum amount awarded by the NEH in this competitive category in which only 12% of applicants received funding. The second largest collection of its kind in the Americas, next only to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Higgins collection at WAM includes arms, armor, and metalwork from around the world and from antiquity to the 19th century, and is particularly known for its rare grouping of suits of plate armor from 15th- to 17th-century Europe. Within the next five years, the Museum plans to open a long-term installation, 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.

The NEH grant will help fund preparatory activities, including review of the collection by specialists, brainstorming by regional academics and educators to suggest possible interpretive approaches, and consultation with interpretation and design specialists to turn these ideas into concrete plans for a compelling and engaging installation that will appeal to diverse audiences.

“This award is a vital first step in helping us develop a powerful installation that uses this remarkable collection to excite general audiences about the humanities,” said Jeffrey L. Forgeng, interim director of curatorial affairs and curator of arms and armor and medieval art at WAM. “Our goal is to tap into people’s fascination with arms and armor to encourage them to explore the stories behind these objects. People often assume that historical arms and armor are just tools to do a military job, but there’s much more going on: design and fashion, reality and fantasy, statements of personal identity, gender, social status, and cultural affiliation.”

WAM’s new arms and armor galleries will empower visitors to explore their own interests, taking advantage of the complexity of the objects to delve past the surface and unpack some of the meanings that lie beneath. The installation will emphasize accessibility, both physical and intellectual, allowing visitors of diverse ages, educational and cultural backgrounds, and physical capacities, to find their own path in exploring the stories around arms and armor. The installation will be multisensory and will emphasize the multiple lenses through which these objects can be understood.

“As we rethink our campus to make better use of existing space, we are extremely grateful to the NEH for their support of what is essentially our driving force—the continuing integration of the remarkable Higgins Armory collection into WAM,” said Matthias Waschek, C. Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum.

The Worcester Art Museum acquired the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection in 2014 after the Higgins Armory Museum closed. The permanent arms and armor galleries will be the final phase of fully integrating the collection into its new home at WAM. The first step was the *Knights!* exhibition, which opened on March 29, 2014—less than 3 months after the Higgins Armory closed—and remained on view until November 2016. Breaking from traditional forms of installation, *Knights!* encouraged visitors to appreciate armor for its aesthetic and social purposes, as much as its martial one. In 2015, the

Samurai! exhibition paired historical Japanese arms and armor with works by contemporary artists inspired by samurai and their enduring myth. The current integration phase entails the display of arms and armor in contextually related galleries throughout the Museum. For example, a Greek Corinthian helmet is displayed in the Greek gallery next to vase paintings depicting warriors, creating a new framework for exploring this material.

About the National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at: www.neh.gov.

About the Worcester Art Museum

Founded in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum's encyclopedic 38,000 piece collection covers 51 centuries of art. Highlights include the Medieval Chapter House, Renaissance Court, and Worcester Hunt Mosaic, as well as the recently integrated John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection of arms and armor. The Museum is internationally known for its collection of European and American art. It was the first in America to acquire paintings by Monet and Gauguin and one of the first to exhibit photography. As one of the first U.S. museums to focus on collaborating with local schools, it has been at the forefront of engaging audiences and giving them a meaningful and personal experience for over a century.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Friday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and every third Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$16 for adults, \$6 for children 4-17, \$14 for seniors 65+, and \$12 for college students with ID. Members and children under four are free. Parking is free. For more information, visit worcesterart.org.

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