

**Springfield Museum of Art**  
***Authentic Narratives: Ohio Regionalists, 1915-1950***  
**Major Grant Application Narrative**

**1. What do you plan to do?**

Support from Ohio Humanities will enable the Springfield Museum of Art to deliver outstanding scholarship that makes humanities themes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century works of art in the exhibition, “Authentic Narratives: Ohio Regionalists, 1915-1950,” relevant to the general public by:

- 1) Presenting three public programs with project scholar Michael Hall that will use art historical analysis to inform a general adult audience of the significance of the Ohio artists and works of art in the exhibition;
- 2) Partnering with Springfield’s Westcott House and Center for Architecture and Design to host a Pechu Kucha program at the Museum. Pechu Kucha is a presentation of fast-paced, individually curated slide-shows using 20 images in 6 minutes. Presentations typically have a common theme, ours would focus on architecture, and the planned and unplanned design of the Midwest landscape;
- 3) Creating compelling exhibit interpretation (labels, interpretive text, gallery guide, etc.) that compare and contrast shared themes from the early 20<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (i.e. land use, pollution, community) for both a general adult audience and K-12 and college students;
- 4) Working collaboratively with our local Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote this exhibition and related programs through the CVB’s regional Tourism Coalition, state-wide tourism network and their coordination of the LED billboard on Interstate 70 that reaches over 60,000 views per day.
- 5) Engaging project evaluators Drs. Tom Taylor and Molly Wood to assess the quality of the public programming and interpretive materials.

These activities will allow the general public to interpret the past and think about the future by making relevant connections with their experiences and interpretive text and labels in this exhibition. The public programs presented by humanities scholars will provide more in-depth analysis of art history, architecture, and the historical context of the art work on exhibit.

**2. How do the humanities inform this project?**

*Authentic Narratives: Ohio Regionalists, 1915-1950*, is an exhibition bringing together some of the state’s best known American scene painters such as George Bellows, Charles Burchfield, Clyde Singer, and William Sommer, and photographer Margaret Bourke White with their equally deserving but less well-known peers Edna Boise Hopkins, James Roy Hopkins, Emerson Burkhart,

Robert Chadeayne, and Yeteve Smith. Approximately 65 paintings and two photographs all by Ohio artists will come together for the first time at the Springfield Museum of Art. These artists, working primarily in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, captured the tension between urban and rural, agrarian and industrial, and machine and man through their art. This exhibition seeks to place these works of art in the context of their time and place. While these works of art belong to the American Scene, a term initiated in the early 1930's to label artists representing distinctly American places in their work, especially the Midwest and Great Plains.

The artists in *Authentic Narratives* were selected because they also express Ohio's distinctiveness as a location where industry and agriculture coexisted and remain so today. The exhibition's interpretive text and public programs will expand audiences' understanding of this art by exploring a range of humanities themes, many of them common, everyday ones such as the importance of community and gathering places, and the identity and pride found in workplaces.

The Museum fulfills its mission by engaging audiences with art in relevant and meaningful ways. As we face many of the same man-made tensions of our fellow Ohioans nearly a hundred years ago (contaminated water, land use, extraction of natural resources, air quality, and transportation), examining how these issues manifested or were expressed artistically can cause us to pause for a moment (or longer) to reflect on how we express dealing with those current tensions. The interpretive text accompanying this exhibition will explore many of these humanities themes using an inquiry-based method which asks the viewer to make connections between the art and their experiences. For example, as Henry Ford's Model T (1908-1927) was becoming increasingly available, William Sommer painted *Horse-drawn Cart in a Thunderstorm*, (1919) a powerful image of a man perched and hunched over on the seat of a wagon guiding a pair of horses through a driving thunderstorm with bolts of lightning, giving the trees and hillside an eerie illumination. A number of works included in the exhibition explore the tensions between machine and man, and urban and rural life.

Our interpretation will draw out humanities-focused, open-ended questions about increased mechanization and its complexity for our visitors to consider as they view the art. Michael Hall's essay in the exhibit catalogue on these Ohio artists will place them in context with their regional and national peers of American Scene painters. All of the artists included in Best of Ohio's Regionalists are story tellers and the theme of telling stories to create a sense of place and character of person will be explored throughout the exhibition and public programs in ways suitable for different learning styles.

### **3. Who are the humanities professionals and what are their roles in this project?**

Michael Hall is the project scholar for *Authentic Narratives*. He is writing the exhibition catalogue essay and will present three public programs. Hall spent his early career teaching studio art on

the college level. He holds a BFA from the University of North Carolina and an MFA from the University of Washington. His sculpture has been included in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Walker Art Center, The Detroit Institute of Arts and the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. For his work as an artist, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and two Michigan Arts Council awards for Creative Artists. Hall has authored numerous catalogues for museum and gallery exhibitions both in the United States and in Canada. A collection of his critical essays on art was published in 1988 and a book he co-authored on the American painter Charles Burchfield came out in 1997. His book on American Scene painting in the upper Midwest is entitled *Great Lakes Muse* and was published by the Flint (Michigan) Institute of Arts in 2002. Hall's biography on the Ohio painter, Emerson Burkhart, was released by Scala in 2009 and the book he co-authored with Pat Glascock on the subject of model totem poles was published by the University of Washington Press in 2011. Hall's most recent book, *Elijah Pierce: Legacy in Wood*, was published by the Columbus Museum of art in 2014. He is an independent scholar and Adjunct Curator of Folk Art for the Columbus Museum of Art.

**Tim Keny** is the guest curator for *Authentic Narratives: Ohio Regionalists, 1915-1950*. His relationships with collectors of American art and specifically Ohio artists will make it possible for us to bring together works of art in private and corporate collections that are rarely, if ever, seen by the general public. Many of these Ohio artists in private collections are also represented in major museums that Tim and his brother Jim Keny have collaborated with on exhibitions and art purchases in their more than 30 years as co-owners of Keny Galleries in Columbus, Ohio. Tim holds a BA in European history and art history from Colgate University, and a MA in business administration from The Ohio State University. He has curated numerous exhibitions and written essays for exhibition catalogues and museum publications.

**Ann Fortescue** will serve as project director for *Authentic Narratives*. Ann has worked in art, history, and historic house museums for over 30 years. Ann holds a BA in history from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine; an MS in museum education from Bank Street College of Education in New York City; and has completed the Museum Leadership Institute at the Getty Institute in Los Angeles. Prior to becoming Executive Director at the Springfield Museum of Art in 2011, she spent over 20 years building and operating the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh (PA) as the Director of Education and Visitor Services. Ann is active in the museum field and was recently appointed to the 8-member American Alliance of Museums' Accreditation Commission.

**Deborah Birt Housh** is the Curator of Education and Exhibitions at the Springfield Museum of Art. She will develop all the interpretive text and educational materials related to the exhibition. Deb holds a BA from Miami University in art history with an art studio minor, and an MA in art education with a focus on arts administration from The Ohio University. She has taught in classrooms and non-traditional learning settings in the United States and Thailand.

The project's evaluators, **Molly Wood** and **Tom Taylor**, are history professors at Wittenberg University. They bring two complimentary perspectives on American history with areas of focus in foreign relations and gender studies, and religion and architecture respectively. They will view the exhibition, interview the Guest Curator, Project Scholar, and Museum staff to understand how each approached the content and communication of the key messages. They will also attend as many public programs as possible and review all written evaluations from program participants. Dr. Molly Wood holds a Ph.D. in Modern American History from the University of South Carolina and Dr. Tom Taylor holds a PhD in Intellectual History from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

#### 4. How will you publicize the project?

*Authentic Narratives* will be publicized through social media, the Museum's quarterly newsletter, local media outlets (NPR affiliates WYSO and WDPR, the Springfield News-Sun, Dayton Daily News, Dayton City Paper), and selected publications in key metropolitan areas (Columbus Monthly, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dayton magazines, Ohio Magazine). The Museum currently receives an average of 229 website visits daily and an average of 469 likes/shares on our Facebook posts, although recent posts are receiving 4,500-5,200 likes/shares. Regular rotation on the double-sided LED billboard on Interstate 70 near Springfield exit 59 will reach an estimated 60,000 views per day.

The Springfield Museum of Art is a member of the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau Tourism Coalition, a group organized by the CVB to collaborate on promoting attractions for over-night stays and day-trips. The CVB manages placements on the LED Billboard on Interstate 70. The CVB uses its state-wide connections to assist Tourism Coalition members maximize their advertising and leverage their activities for non-paid promotions through partnerships. With help from the CVB, we are pursuing a partnership with Tourism Ohio to promote in-state tourism to see the exhibition and celebrate Ohio's artists in locations throughout the state, especially the locations of the lending museums: Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Columbus, Youngstown, and Portsmouth.

#### 5. Who is the intended audience?

*Authentic Narratives* is expected to draw 12,000 visitors, primarily a general adult audience. We have a large, attractively landscaped surface parking lot between Cliff Park Road and our front door, making it easy to park and walk up the Museum. The Museum is one level and fully accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The Museum communicates regularly with its nearly 500 member households through print and electronic communications. Survey data indicates members visit an average of four times per year, roughly coinciding with major changing exhibitions. Newspaper and magazine coverage in

Columbus and Dayton has been very successful in increasing attendance to special exhibitions and public programs. We expect about 75 adults will attend each of the public programs presented in conjunction with the exhibition based on past attendance at the Museum's gallery talks and artists' lectures. Our partnership with the Westcott House and Center for Architecture and Design to host a Pechu Kucha program at the Museum will draw between 120-160 adults based on past attendance at similar events.

## **6. What are the goals and outcomes of the project and how will they be evaluated?**

*Authentic Narratives* will help us to increase attendance by engaging audiences to explore humanities themes communicated in the interpretative materials and public programs. This exhibit and related public programs will help us to meet our goal of increasing revenue from increased admissions and memberships. Our partnership with the Westcott House will help both organizations increase visibility by sharing audiences through joint programming. We will measure the effectiveness of our advertising and non-paid promotions through the visitor comment book, program evaluation forms, visitor interviews, and zip-code attendance data. We will measure our performance based on revenue and attendance numbers. The project evaluators will interview a sample of adult audiences to gather qualitative data on how well the humanities themes were communicated through the exhibition, interpretive materials, and/or public program presented.

This exhibition will also deepen our relationship with museums and private collectors of Ohio art and artists by demonstrating our commitment to scholarship on this topic. We will measure our success through the number of new members and exhibition support from individuals. We will also gauge our success through any published exhibition reviews.

## **7. Who is the sponsoring organization?**

The mission of the Springfield Museum of Art is to collect, preserve, and exhibit works of art to educate and inspire. Through art exhibitions and art education, the Museum seeks to engage the entire community in the enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts.

Springfield is a small city (pop. 60,000) in southwestern Ohio nestled in an agricultural area between Columbus and Dayton. The city is about 18 miles from Wright Patterson Air Force Base which employs over 28,000 people and is the largest single site employer in the state. Springfield is the county seat and was once one of the largest centers for manufacturing of agricultural equipment in the world (White Industries, International Harvester). Springfield is still a hub for small specialty manufacturing and logistics in the region due to its location on Interstate 70 near the Interstate 75 junction. The population is mostly white (75%) and high school educated – only 14% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

The Springfield Museum of Art (originally the Springfield Art Association) was organized in 1946 by a group of concerned artists and citizens who felt a need for a visual arts facility in the community. Beginning in 1946, exhibitions were held in leased gallery spaces. The organization responded to the community's demand and began offering art classes to both adults and children in 1951. When the Association was able to erect its own building in 1967, it was designed for the express purposes of exhibitions and educational programs. A permanent collection of art work was started, and the name was changed to the Springfield Art Center. Additions to original building were completed in 1974 and 1995, more than doubling exhibition galleries to the current 6,700 square feet. In 1989, the name was changed again to the Springfield Museum of Art, to more accurately describe how it had been actually functioning for many years. In 1977, the Museum achieved initial accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, and has been re-accredited in 1986, 1999, and 2012.

After several years of downsizing and mounting operating expenses in a period of severe economic hardship, the Museum sold the physical facility to Wittenberg University in May 2010, and now leases the exhibition galleries, offices and collection storage from the University. The Museum hired a new Executive Director in 2011 to build strong relationships with new audiences, community groups, and members while working closely with the Board of Trustees to raise annual fund contributions, grant revenues, and corporate support. The Museum was accepted into the Smithsonian Affiliates program in January 2012.

Following continuing financial difficulties, the Museum made difficult yet necessary changes to reduce expenses in 2013. Three positions were eliminated and the organizational structure was revised until reliable financial performance and sufficient funds are in place to restore staff positions. The Museum received a restricted gift in 2013 to renew its art education programs. This enabled hiring a part-time museum educator and as a result attendance increased over 131% in one year. This success resulted in additional grant funds and donations to support art education. In 2014, the Museum received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that enabled the promotion of the part-time museum educator to full-time Curator of Education and Exhibitions. The Museum ended the current fiscal year with a positive cash balance for the first time in five years and has been operating "in the black" for the past 19 months.