

Bank Awards Museums Grants To Study, Conserve Works

New York City: Four US museums will be able to study or conserve key works in their collection after being awarded a grant through Bank of America's Art Conservation Project. In all, 20 museums across the globe were named grant recipients this year.

The museums in the United States are the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York City, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Menil Collection in Houston; and the Seattle Art Museum; the artworks involved range from painters Pablo Picasso, Gilbert Stuart and Jackson Pollock to sculptor John Chamberlain.

Guggenheim



Pablo Picasso, "Woman Ironing, (La repasseuse)," Paris, spring 1904; oil on canvas, 45¾ by 28¾ inches.

Pablo Picasso's "Woman Ironing," 1904, is one of the standout works hanging in the Guggenheim, but little is known about the faint underpainting of a man with a mustache that was previously painted on the canvas.

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With this grant, museum conservators will study the 1904 painting from Picasso's Blue Period. A transitional work between the artist's Blue and the Rose periods, it is considered among the most important works in the Guggenheim's collection and is frequently on view in the Thannhauser galleries.

At the time that this work was painted, Picasso was living in extreme poverty, in a building called "Le Bateau-Lavoir" in Montmartre, Paris, where a number of other artists also lived and worked. The painting on canvas is thinly executed and a faint ghost of another figure appears as part of the final composition.

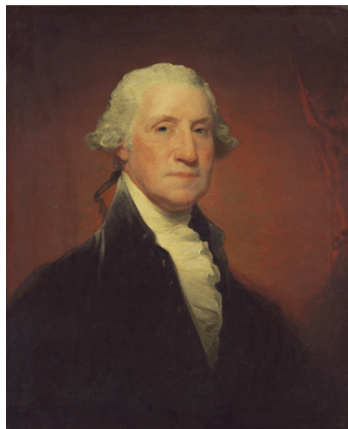
A cursory study conducted more than two decades ago revealed the presence of a painting below the Blue Period composition, which seems to be quite fully executed and the portrait of an unknown character.

Although infrared and xradiographic pictures were taken during the initial study, many questions remain. The Guggenheim has only recently purchased an updated infrared camera and is presently researching more precise xradiography techniques.

This project will allow a thorough scholarly study of this discovery beneath the painting to uncover (nondestructively) the story of the painting below the surface, identify the portrait and the person depicted in the underpainting, and in what ways it relates to the final composition.

The proposed project will be a collaborative study with curators and scientists, designed to study materials and execution, as well as the visual and aesthetic characteristics of the work. The painting will be featured in the upcoming "Picasso Black and White" exhibition opening at the Guggenheim October 5 and on view through January.

National Gallery



Gilbert Stuart, "George Washington (Vaughan-Sinclair portrait)," 1795; oil on canvas, 29 1/8 by 24 1/8 inches.

The National Gallery of Art has 45 works by Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755–1828) among its collection. Eight historical portraits will be addressed under this grant; all are oil on canvas

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portraits dating from 1790s to 1820. The portraits are of Stephen Van Rensselaer III, Lawrence Reid Yates, Captain Joseph Anthony, George Washington (Vaughan-Sinclair portrait), Abigail Smith Adams (Mrs John Adams), John Adams, Commodore Thomas Macdonough and Joseph Coolidge.

Most renowned for his famous images of George Washington, Stuart also painted virtually all of the important political figures and notable families of his time. No artist has provided a more complete or more vivid visual record of the men and women of the early republic.

Aside from a core group of about 15 portraits, the remaining works in the gallery's collection have not undergone recent conservation treatment.

These works are compromised by a variety of issues that preclude their being seen to best advantage, whether at the gallery or on loan to other institutions. Among the areas of concern are discolored varnishes, old retouchings that have become visible and structural problems, such as insecure paint and fragile canvases.

Menil Collection



John Chamberlain, "Rooster Starfoot," 1976. ©2012 Artists Rights Society, New York. The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich. —Hickey-Robertson, Houston, photo

As the Menil Collection enters its 25th year and two of the museum's John Chamberlain works go on view in a celebrated retrospective at New York's Guggenheim Museum, the museum has been awarded a grant to restore 12 sculptures by the American artist.

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"We are grateful for this vital support from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project," said Menil director Josef Helfenstein. "We're honored to be among its stellar recipients here and abroad. This international program helps ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy and experience the full impact of these modern masterpieces."

The Menil holds one of the world's largest and most significant collections of Chamberlain's work, with 14 drawings included among the dozen sculptures. With this funding, Menil conservators will be able to undertake a vital, in-depth study of the artist's working methods and materials.

The conservator's science in this case is designed to address the complex issues in these signature sculptures, made of automotive metal (including car bumpers, fenders and hoods), metal file cabinets and various bits of found steel. To the casual observer, such materials may seem like urban litter, but to Chamberlain, who died last December at the age of 84, they were "exotic." And he turned them into beautiful works of art.

The art conservator's approach is systematic, beginning with provenance research and photo documentation. "This helps us understand what the sculpture originally looked like and whether or how it has changed over time," said Menil chief conservator Brad Epley, who is in charge of the project, working with the museum's objects conservator, Shelley Smith. "This knowledge determines how we proceed with treatment.

The Menil will treat the 12 pieces in consultation with the artist's studio, developing conservation techniques suited to Chamberlain's aesthetic and philosophy. The first two Menil works to be treated — "Nanoweap," 1969, and "Rooster Starfoot," 1976 — are on view through May 13 in a major retrospective of the artist's work, "John Chamberlain: Choices," organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. The exhibition will then travel to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in the summer of 2013.

Seattle Art Museum



Jackson Pollock, "Sea Change, 1947, oil and pebbles on canvas, 57 7/8 by 44 1/8 inches. ©2007 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society, New York.

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The Seattle Art Museum will use the grant for the conservation of Jackson Pollock's "Sea Change," which is from a breakthrough group of early transitional works that he created in 1947, which led away from figuration toward a fully abstract application of his drip technique.

Its title, like others in this thematic grouping, comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and lends extra narrative content to the composition, suggesting an impending meteorological event. The painting was owned by art dealer and patron Peggy Guggenheim until its donation to the Seattle Art Museum in 1958.

The aesthetic character of this important painting was altered by the application of a restorer's varnish coating in the 1970s. Conservation will begin with high-resolution digital photography of the painting and analytical research to determine the nature and solubility of the existing coating. Work will continue with testing of the adhesion of the pebbles, research into the protective effect of coatings on aluminum paint and the removal of the existing coating. Finally, the painting will be protectively framed.

Art Conservation Project Background

Bank of America's Art Conservation Project was piloted in Europe, the Middle East and Africa in 2010, and provided grants to restore a diverse range of works of art in ten countries. The program has been expanded in 2012 to include conservation projects in Asia, Australia, Latin America and the United States.

The projects in this year's grants program range from Sixth Century BC Chinese artifacts to Renaissance and modern masters and will cover all forms of conservation on works spanning more than 2,500 years.

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