



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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Annual Report of the Art Commission 2012

The members of the Art Commission respectfully submit their *Annual Report* for the year ending June 30, 2012. As we enter our second century of service, the Commission remains mindful of its responsibility to care for and maintain one of the country's oldest public collections. We continue to develop and uphold museum standards in the non-museum setting of the State House, monitoring the works of art and artifacts, and collaborating with many offices in the preservation and oversight of this historic building.

The Art Commission was created in 1910 with a simple mission: to oversee the acquisition of new artworks for the Commonwealth's rapidly developing collection at the State House. These responsibilities were further expanded in 1924 to include "custody and care" of the collection -- the foundation of *General Laws* chapter 6, section 20. No formal policies or preventive care programs were initiated, however, until 1984 when an Art Collections Manager was hired on a contractual basis, and the Commission initiated a comprehensive collections care and conservation program. The collection continues to increase in size and in value. Hundreds of works of art, including paintings, two- and three-dimensional sculptures and wall murals, created by leading American painters and sculptors, as well as hundreds more priceless artifacts commemorate over four centuries of Massachusetts history. As we have repeatedly stated over the years, a collection of this scope, age and value, requires, and will always require, permanent professional care and oversight.

Legislation

I am pleased to report that progress has been made to update the Commission's 1910 mandate, last amended in 1924. House 3692 was filed by Representative Martha Walz, whose district includes the State House, on August 1 to increase the volunteer membership, establish the position of State House Curator, and clarify the Commission's expanded role in the preservation of the State House. After a well-attended hearing in November, with supportive testimony by legislators as well as many from the art community, H 3692 was reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development. Although the language in the bill was included in an outside section of the Senate FY'13 budget recommendation, this was rejected in conference, and the Art Commission's bill was combined with H 3571, an Act to create an Architect of the State House, to become H 4214. As of this writing, the revised bill has been reported out by House Rules, and rests in the House Committee on Ways and Means. We hope that the bill be shepherded through the legislative process by the end of this session in January.

2012 Annual Report of the Art Commission, page 2

Merger of the Bureau of State Office Buildings with the Division of Capital Asset Management

Since the Art Commission came under the BSB in 1991, we have worked with eight Superintendents, each of whom has been supportive of our roles and responsibilities. We, in turn, have effectively served them, along with the expertise and institutional memory of our Art Collections Manager, promoting best practices for historic preservation. As the BSB merges with DCAM, we look forward to working with the new management team under the Bureau of the State House.

Strategic Plan

A new three-year Strategic Plan was adopted in November. Mindful of the proposed merger of BSB and DCAM and the pending legislation, a broader plan was developed to address the following goals:

- Reaffirm the role of the Art Commission and its relationship with the executive and legislative branches
- Stabilize the Art Commission's financial situation
- Sustain excellence in collections care and historic site maintenance and preservation
- Provide greater access to and interpretation of the State House Art Collection

Activities

The Commission worked with the Governor's office, House, Senate, BSB and DCAM staff on a wide variety of art and building issues.

Exterior Sculpture Maintenance. Annual maintenance of the bronze monuments is necessary to protect them from the combined effects of acid rain, pollution, and salt air, which cause corrosion of the metal, deterioration and damage to the patina, and eventually irreversible damage to the original modeling. Due to this diligent program of care, conservators from Daedalus, Inc., Watertown, continue to report on the good condition of all the statues and exterior bronze plaques and were able to deliver this year's maintenance services under budget. Surface grime and mortar issues were addressed on several of the monument bases in order to keep them in good repair as well.

House Chamber renovations and mural reinstallation. The first phase of restoration of the House Chamber was undertaken by the Division of Capital Asset Management during the August 2011 recess when a single, 20-foot wide floor-to-ceiling elevation was cleaned, repaired and restored. Historical consultants conducted extensive analysis and testing of paint, plaster, wood, and extant gilding which resulted in the approval of a number of subtle color changes which will eventually be carried through the walls and decorative paint in the rest of the Chamber.



2012 Annual Report of the Art Commission – page 3

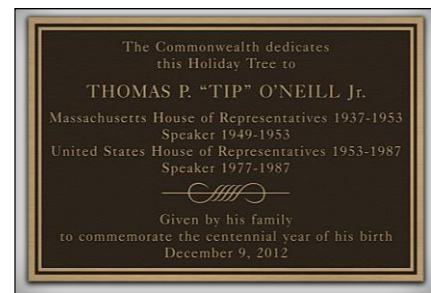
The project culminated with the reinstallation of the mural *John Winthrop arriving at Salem with the Charter of the Massachusetts Bay*, painted in 1942 by Albert Herter, and with conservation of the *fresco secco* decoration in the ceiling cove just above (see illustration, above). The Art Commission had the mural removed in 2006 when it noticed that the water leaks which had caused most of the damage to the walls and ceiling were also threatening the paint layer. The mural was removed by professional conservators, taken to a studio where it was cleaned, prepared for reinstallation, rolled, and returned to the State House in 2007. Upon completion of all roof repairs, and restoration of the surrounding wall area, a team of three conservators from the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, Williamstown, MA, unrolled and re-adhered the mural to the wall, removed the protective facing (see illustration, left), and surfaced cleaned the canvas. We welcome the mural's successful return after its long absence. Phase Two, the balance of the Chamber's restoration, will be undertaken at a future date.



Monitoring. All objects are regularly monitored for damage or change in condition, and the collection is inspected and surface dusted semi-annually. As it has for many years, the Commission was responsible for conducting annual condition inspection of the paintings on loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

New Acquisitions

A number of small additions were made to the collection, including the small tree marker for the new tree on the front lawn donated by the family of former Speaker Tip O'Neill, and another placed under the mural of the 94th Infantry Division Memorial. A watercolor of the State House by Eleanor Drinkwater of Medfield was donated to the Art Commission by her family.



Not all proposals for new artworks and incoming loans for the State House meet the Commission's criteria for acceptance. The board is careful in its deliberations and spends considerable time with the review process to ensure that such art works are appropriate to the State House, and are in good condition, and can be cared for within the limited resources of the Art Commission.

Outreach

Virtual Tour. The legislature invited the Art Commission to help develop a Virtual Tour of the State House. Meetings were held throughout the year with the Legislative IT department and web developers to discuss format and presentation. The Tour describes nine historic spaces and highlights paintings, sculpture, artifacts, and decorative arts commemorating the people and events that helped to shape the Commonwealth and nation. Chair Paula Morse and Art Collections Manager Susan Greendyke identified fifty objects from the collection and were solely responsible for all room descriptions and narrative content. This required a

2012 Annual Report of the Art Commission – page 4

significant amount of time on both their parts. The Tour was launched June 8 on the home page of the Massachusetts Legislature at www.malegislature.gov/virtualtour. We continue to fine-tune it for accessibility as well as content.

Unfortunately, the web development assistance promised the Art Commission last autumn did not materialize, and we continue to be without a web presence. We still aspire to perform the basic task of providing access to information and research on this historic collection. An attractive, robust website would facilitate this.

Commemorating the Anniversary of the Civil War.

In recognition of the 150th anniversary of the first battles, the Art Commission produced *Art of the Civil War at the Massachusetts State House*, a fully illustrated booklet highlighting over thirty-five works of art and artifacts in the Collection, including the mural *Marching Through Baltimore* (1931), that honor political, military, and citizen service, and the battle flags of the Civil War. This was printed by the Secretary of State and distributed to guests at ceremonies held in the House Chamber April 9. Although printed for a particular occasion, we hope to make this small publication available to a larger audience.



Research Inquiries. During the course of the year, hundreds of requests from around the world were addressed for information, research, and photographs of objects in the art, flag, and Grand Army of the Republic collections, as well as guidance on art related matters.

Tours. The Art Collections Manager is often called upon for tours of the building and collections. Among this year's guests were the Senate staff, the Senate Art Committee, the Massachusetts chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and several legislators.

Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Room. The Offices of the Art Commission continue to be located in Room 27 of the State House. Originally the Massachusetts department headquarters, the GAR Room serves as a memorial to the association of Union veterans of the Civil War. The room is legislated to the custody of the State Superintendent (G. L. ch. 8), with whom we collaborate by monitoring the collections and providing access to visitors.

Holdings include an extensive library of GAR records and publications that have never been catalogued. Throughout the summer, the Art Commission was fortunate to have the assistance of Ayda Pourasad, recent graduate of the Simmons College Graduate School of Library Science, to catalogue the GAR Room's library. Ayda laid the foundation and began compiling a comprehensive database of the research materials until she left in September to work in the archives of National Public Radio in Washington, D. C. We wish her well; we hope to engage another capable library science intern to continue her work.

Art Commission members and staff

I am pleased to report the appointment of two new members to the board: Dennis Fiori, president of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, and Martin Mahoney, Chief Registrar, Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, both of whom joined us last summer. We have already begun to benefit from the experience and expertise they bring to our discussions. I also wish to thank Mary Leen, Associate Director of the MIT Museum, and Beatrice Nessen, community activist, for the subtlety of their reasoning and their insights on the politics of public art.

Once again I acknowledge with pleasure the professionalism and creative efforts of our Art Collections Manager, Susan Greendyke Lachevre. She is ever resourceful in meeting the demands of the many stakeholders at the State House, while keeping true to the work of the Commission. She continues to serve under a yearly contract without benefits (this is her 28th year), even though the work she does is so essential to the preservation of the Art Collection and the historic building. She is always included in restoration projects and is widely perceived as among those most knowledgeable about both the art and the architecture at the State House. I am hopeful, however, that this year the legislature and the governor will pass H4214, thereby establishing the permanent position of State House Curator.

As always, I welcome your interest and support for the Commission, as well as your questions.

Sincerely,

Paula Morse

Chair