



NEW LIFE FOR 400+ OBJECT COLLECTION OF THE WASHINGTON ART CONSORTIUM FOLLOWING 40 YEARS OF COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMMING ACROSS WASHINGTON

Seattle, WA—February 23, 2017—The Board of the Washington Art Consortium (WAC) announced today that its seven member consortium will disband, and that WAC’s art collection and endowment assets will be distributed to six of its member art museums. Originally founded in 1976 by Seattle philanthropist and collector Virginia Wright, WAC was formed to bring works of art by distinguished modern American artists to the State of Washington, and to spur collaboration among art museums in the state. Across 40 years of partnership, WAC has amassed a collection of 411 works by 175 artists, including works on paper, photographs, and prints created from 1945 through the late 20th century, and presented more than 130 exhibitions and programs.

The decision to conclude the consortium arrangement follows a period of strategic planning over the last 18 months. This process included: an examination of the ways in which WAC has successfully spurred collaboration among its members; a review of the increased role of modern and contemporary art in Washington; and a careful analysis of the benefits and costs of maintaining the consortium as an independent 501(c)3 entity. Finding that the capabilities of each member museum—as well as other arts organizations in Washington—have grown substantially, the WAC Board, to which Ms. Wright is a lifetime adviser, determined the need for a separate entity to ensure broad access was now less crucial, and that the resources to maintain it could be better deployed in service of audience engagement with collections. While the consortium will no longer continue as an independent entity, the former members will continue to work together on exhibitions and programs, fulfilling Ms. Wright’s vision for collaboration among arts organizations throughout the state.

Of primary concern in the strategic planning process was the ongoing care of and access to the works of art held by WAC. Following the Board’s decision to disband the consortium, WAC assembled a panel of three independent arts experts to make recommendations on how to disperse the collections and endowment assets. The panel reviewed both the WAC collections and the collections of the member institutions, to determine which groups of works would best fit with a member’s current collections or programming expertise. The panel also considered geography as an element of the process, to ensure that these works of art would be distributed across Washington State, thus increasing their accessibility to a range of audiences.

“For the last forty years I have enjoyed watching the Washington Art Consortium’s progress and development,” said Virginia Wright, WAC’s founder. “In 2015, as we approached our 40th anniversary, I encouraged our board to think about the future. I am pleased with their decision

and delighted that the collections will live on through our member museums, continuing to serve as an important resource for the entire state. And, finally, I want to extend my deepest thanks to the National Endowment for the Arts, to the Kreielsheimer Foundation, to the Aiken family, to Safeco Insurance, and to those other donors and advisors whose support has made WAC the success that it is.”

WAC’s seven members are: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; Museum of Art, Washington State University, Pullman; Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, Spokane; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle; Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma; Western Gallery, Western Washington University, Bellingham; and the Whatcom Museum, Bellingham. The collection is currently housed at the Western Gallery, Western Washington University, Bellingham.

The expert panel that advised WAC on the distribution of its collections consisted of Brian Ferriso, Director of the Portland Art Museum and current President of the Association of Art Museum Directors; Jack Lane, former Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Dallas Museum of Art, and Carnegie Museum of Art, and foundation president of the New Art Trust, San Francisco; and Barbara Johns, an independent art historian, former chief curator of the Tacoma Art Museum, and former curator at the Seattle Art Museum.

The panel’s recommendations were to divide WAC’s collections as follows:

- American Works on Paper 1945-75, comprising 98 works, will go to the Western Gallery at Western Washington University
- American Photographs 1970-1980, comprising 185 works, will go to the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington
- Mary Margaret Aiken and Richard Aiken Collection of 20th Century Prints, comprising 24 works, will go to the Museum of Art at Washington State University
- Safeco Collection of Northwest Works on Paper, comprising 104 works, will be divided among the Tacoma Art Museum, Whatcom Museum of History and Art, and Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

The panel also recommended—and WAC’s Board has agreed—that the former members of the Consortium will have priority access to borrow these works for exhibition or research, free of loan fees. To continue recognizing the donors who created the collection, and to ensure an ongoing legacy for WAC, individual works of art will continue to be acknowledged in records and labeling as from the “Washington Art Consortium Collection,” and thus exist as part of a legacy collection linked to other members and reflected on these institutions’ websites. WAC’s \$2.3 million endowment will be divided among the six institutions receiving parts of the collection, and will continue to be used for the care and maintenance of these works. Those artists still living whose works are in WAC collections have been informed of this change and of the new home for their works.

“Since this Consortium was launched, the visual arts in Washington have grown to an entirely new level, with expanded facilities, collections, exhibitions, and programs across the state,” said Sylvia Wolf, the president of the Board of WAC and the John S. Behnke Director of the Henry Art Gallery. “WAC was at the forefront of these changes, demonstrating how much could be accomplished through collaboration and collection sharing. In deciding to take this next step, we recognize that the landscape has changed for the better. This approach honors the intentions of the donors who helped create WAC collections and enables us to stay focused on these

incredible works of art, and to provide greater access to them for audiences throughout the State of Washington.”

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