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ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION AWARDS GROUNDBREAKING $1.3 MILLION GRANT TO THREE RENOWNED CHICAGO-AREA INSTITUTIONS

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded three grants totaling $1,299,404 to three of the Chicago area’s premier institutions—the Art Institute of Chicago, Northwestern University and the University of Chicago—to enhance the study of art history through a focus on working with art objects.

This unprecedented, four-year, inter-institutional pilot effort, known as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Chicago Objects Study Initiative (COSI), will provide graduate students from both universities with new or significantly enhanced coursework and training in objects-based art history research. It will also increase their access to works of art drawn from the Art Institute’s renowned permanent holdings—both on view and in storage—as well as fully leverage the expertise of the museum’s curatorial and professional staff.
Thanks to this new initiative, emerging art historians will receive rigorous training in the
techniques, materials, and physical properties of works of art as part of their curriculum, as well
as develop related research skills. By emphasizing curatorial practice and providing in-depth
exposure to conservation and conservation science approaches to objects and materials, the
program addresses a professional need for broadening instruction in the discipline of art history.

The program will prepare graduate students to consider works of art as primary
sources for original research; it will also give students the tools, skills, and experiences
needed to prepare them for positions in museums, libraries, or other research
settings involving collections. Students will be given direct access to works of art through
visits to the Art Institute’s art storage areas, to be overseen by a newly created position—the
Mellon Academic Curator—and supported by a dedicated art-handling technician. The two
universities will also have expanded access to classroom space at the Art Institute where faculty
can hold on-site sessions for graduate-level classes in addition to an objects and materials seminar.

Coursework will be further supplemented by a biannual conference on materials and techniques
(including an integration of the strong collaboration already in place through the Mellon-
supported Northwestern University/ACCESS program) as well as an annual colloquium that
would connect to the Art Institute’s “Crossroads” exhibition series, a new and highly
experimental program envisioned to focus on cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary topics.
Lastly, a host of events will be held throughout the academic year for students, faculty, and
museum staff to encourage dialogue and collegiality among program participants and the
graduate student cohorts, as well as long-term relationships between faculty and curators.
An hour’s drive separates Northwestern from the University of Chicago, with the Art Institute situated squarely between the two. With the Mellon Foundation providing the means for these institutions to work on a single, collaborative program, the Art Institute will become the hub where all three institutions can connect.

In addition to the required coursework for all graduate students, three Mellon Research Fellows—two graduate students from the University of Chicago and one from Northwestern—will hold yearlong fellowships at the museum. They will be matched with appropriate departments and curatorial mentors who will supervise and support original research on objects in the museum’s collection. Northwestern will also select one graduate student per year to work in a curatorial department as a Mellon Curatorial Intern.

“This ambitious collaboration made possible by the Mellon Foundation heralds a new era of collaboration between the Art Institute and the art history programs at two great Chicago universities,” said Douglas Druick, President and Eloise W. Martin Director of the Art Institute. “All three partners have long desired to establish a closer relationship. This generous grant addresses a significant need in both research and training, and also promises to integrate our institutions as never before. In the process it will greatly enrich the practice of art history.”

“This initiative builds on existing collaborations between Northwestern and the Art Institute and promises unique ways for our art history faculty at Weinberg College and colleagues at the University of Chicago to combine their scholarly work,” Northwestern President Morton Schapiro said. “Our art history department is known for field-leading research, and by gaining new partners we can create novel programs for graduate students that will expand their career opportunities. We greatly appreciate Mellon’s support.”
“The arts are integral to the vibrant intellectual culture of the University of Chicago,” said University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer. “The Mellon Foundation’s support will create new opportunities for collaboration in art history among our three institutions, with vital educational and research benefits for graduate students. We are excited about this chance to work closely with the Art Institute and Northwestern, and we extend our gratitude to the Mellon Foundation.”

These grants form part of the Mellon Foundation’s initiative to support partnerships in research and graduate education between American art museums and doctoral programs in art history. The initiative seeks to strengthen the intellectual and professional preparation of art history graduate students through programs that fully integrate object-based study and curatorial and conservation practice into the PhD curriculum. Mellon Vice President Mariët Westermann said, “It is wonderful that these three institutions have collaborated to develop such a robust program, and that graduate students in these universities will contribute to new research based on the museum’s collections.”

Images:
Gathered in the Art Institute of Chicago's Conservation Examination Room, Art History grad students Hannah Klemm from the Univ. of Chicago, Ashley Dunn and Grace Deveney (seated) from Northwestern University, and Max Koss (UChicago), watch closely as the Art Institute's Assistant Paintings Conservator Kelly Keegan and Andrew W. Mellon Senior Conservation Scientist Francesca Casadio reveal fascinating learnings from Francescuccio Ghissi's The Crucifixion (c. 1370) tempera on panel.

Grace Deveney, Francesca Casadio and Hannah Klemm flank Edouard Manet's Portrait of a Woman with a Black Fichu (c. 1878) oil on canvas.

Ashley Dunn, Francesca Casadio and Max Koss discuss Edouard Manet's Portrait of a Woman with a Black Fichu (c. 1878) oil on canvas.

Grace Deveney, Kelly Keegan and Max Koss take a closer look at what the camera reveals in Francescuccio Ghissi's The Crucifixion (c. 1370) tempera on panel.
MUSEUM HOURS
Daily: 10:30–5:00
Thursdays until 8:00

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's days.
Children under 14 always free
Members always free

The Art Institute of Chicago gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the citizens of Chicago.