

CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

CREATING A VERSATILE ONLINE COLLECTION WITH EMUSEUM



Crystal Bridges Museum's buildings and property surrounded by Ozark forests.
Photo by Dero Sanford, courtesy of the Museum.

Surrounded by sublime Ozark forests, the immense Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art hosts nearly 3,800 objects, both inside its awe-inspiring buildings—designed by famed architect Moshe Safdie—and outdoors, on a verdant 120-acre property. Spotlighting art that explores “the unfolding story of America,” the Museum’s permanent collection features work by such prominent names as Andy Warhol, Georgia O’Keeffe, Amy Sherald, Carmen Herrera, Julie Mehretu, Kerry James Marshall, Faith Ringgold, and José Clemente Orozco.

Crystal Bridges spoke with Gallery Systems to share how the decision to use online collections software has not only positively impacted the Museum’s public engagement, but also streamlined its internal workflow and external lending program.

“The online collection garners a significant percentage of our website traffic. Because we have published our collection, people know what we have and we therefore receive more inquiries from scholars, applications to reproduce images, and requests from other museum curators to borrow objects in our collection.”

- JENNIFER DE MARTINO, HEAD OF COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT,
CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



OVERVIEW

- 3,800-object collection, focused on five centuries of American art from the Colonial era into present day



RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Increased web traffic, a significant percentage of which is attributed to its online galleries
- Amplified international visibility
- Accelerated internal workflow for the delivery of copyrighted images and external loans with other museums, among others



PRODUCTS

- The Museum System (TMS)
- eMuseum

OBJECTIVES

Having opened its doors in November 2011, in Bentonville, Arkansas, Crystal Bridges Museum is still a relative newcomer to the cultural heritage institutions scene. Interested in quickly raising its public profile, the Museum's team sought out creative ways to share its expansive collection of American art, spanning five centuries from the Colonial era into our current day.

To increase its collection's visibility, Crystal Bridges Museum was motivated to establish an online collection, opening its virtual doors to the public, academics, and other cultural institutions. "We wanted to provide access to people who might not be able to visit in person," says Grace Pamperien, Collections Information Coordinator.

Bringing their collection into the public eye led to Crystal Bridges Museum's adoption of eMuseum.



Dale Chihuly, *Fiori Boat*, 2016, blown glass and metal boat, 73 in. × 22ft. 6 in. × 139 in.
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2019.10.
Photography by Stephen Ironside.

SOLUTION

Through its ongoing collaboration with Gallery Systems, Crystal Bridges Museum was able to create and easily upkeep a set of virtual galleries, filled with its collection's artwork, that speak to the in-person experience of touring the Museum and its wooded grounds.

The eMuseum team designed a collections site that matches the existing website through a look-and-feel customization, and includes navigation sections for Collections, On View, Artists, and Exhibitions, which pull data from TMS, their collections management system.

Miquel Geller, Associate Registrar of Collections, shares why the On View section is important: "Being a regional museum, we do get visitors who intend on seeing specific works, particularly some of our key collections highlights, such as Asher Brown Durand's *Kindred Spirits* or Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter*. A large proportion of our visitors start planning their visit by going to the eMuseum site to see which works are on view and ensure they know what they'll be able to see when they come."

The On View section uses eMuseum's Groups tool, which allows the groupings featured on the public-facing website to be updated automatically, based on each object's location in TMS. If a painting changes galleries, or returns from an external loan, it appears in its rightful place online—a useful feature for visitors and gallery staff alike, who are spared the inconvenience of manual updates.

Altogether, Grace estimates that 79% of the works under Crystal Bridges Museum's stewardship—approximately 3,700 object records—are currently displayed on eMuseum. The team is dedicatedly continuing to publish object records online as they complete the cataloguing process.

OUTCOMES

For Crystal Bridges Museum, the benefits of having an online collection have proved significant and multifaceted, ranging from bolstering their web presence to facilitating external loans.

As Jennifer De Martino, Head of Collections Management, relays, “The online collection garners a significant percentage of our website traffic. Because we have published our collection, people know what we have and we therefore receive more inquiries from scholars, applications to reproduce images, and requests from other museum curators to borrow objects in our collection.”

To chart the impact of their eMuseum site, the Crystal Bridges team tracks its key analytics, including page views and time on page. At the moment, the online collection receives approximately 30,000 page views per month, indicating a high level of sustained interest.

Beyond public engagement, the Museum’s internal workflow is also enhanced by its online collections, specifically in the areas of external loans and internal image requests. “When an institution’s staff contacts us to request a loan, they aren’t only referencing the object title and the artist’s name,” explains Miquel, “They also reference the artwork’s accession number and other details I know are coming from eMuseum.”

eMuseum also facilitates the institution’s day-to-day operations, notably in the realm of digital projects. Grace conveys that the eMuseum site’s images are “displayed based on copyright status, so our staff can easily select images for internal use that are already at the right size.” Once images are approved for use, that team member can go to eMuseum and download the files themselves, skipping over the extra step of requesting image delivery.

Grace additionally notes eMuseum’s versatility as a useful supplementary software to TMS. “It’s also convenient that staff can access so much information about our collection without needing to be on-site or logged in through a VPN,” she adds. “We do use eMuseum as an alternative.”



Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, 1999, bronze, stainless steel, and marble, 30ft. 5 in. × 29ft. 3 in. × 33ft. 7 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, 2014.20. © The Easton Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photography by Marc F. Henning.

 FUTURE

Looking forward, the team at Crystal Bridges is enthusiastic to continue expanding their eMuseum site's visual and structural capabilities. "We are working on several initiatives, including configuring one of our TMS fields to be specific for verbal description tours, so we can have a dedicated field for that in eMuseum," Grace tells us.

To further enhance the online visitor experience, the team is also looking into dynamic ways to incorporate video and audio into eMuseum. Visit the Crystal Bridges Museum's stunning online collections site to follow the evolution of these and future developments.



View of the interior of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Photo by Dero Sanford, courtesy of the Museum.