

# WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

## INTEGRATING AND PROMOTING FINE ART AND ARCHIVES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY



Photograph courtesy of Williams College Museum of Art.

### THE PRENDERGAST DIGITIZATION PROJECT

Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), in Williamstown, Massachusetts, is widely considered to be one of the finest college art museums in the United States. It houses over 14,000 works that span the history of art, and is home to the world's largest repository of work by the American artist brothers Maurice and Charles Prendergast. As a teaching museum with over 3,000 college students served annually, the staff wanted to raise the profile of its Prendergast collection and make it more accessible to a wider audience. WCMA was already a Gallery System client, using The Museum System (TMS) collections management software to manage their permanent collection. They turned again to TMS, as well as eMuseum, Gallery Systems' web publishing toolkit, to digitize the Prendergast collection, integrate the archives into their permanent collection, and to take the works online for all to learn from and enjoy.

"Increasing accessibility to the collection, while at the same time reducing handling and light exposure of the objects, couldn't have been achieved without these new technologies and our partnership with Gallery Systems."

- RACHEL TASSONE, ASSOCIATE REGISTRAR, WCMA



#### PRENDERGAST COLLECTION OVERVIEW

- 400 works of fine art and decorative art
- 67 hand-carved frames
- 1,554 archival materials



#### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Increased accessibility to the collection for staff and public
- Efficient and uniform responses to image requests
- Better preservation of collection with reduced light exposure and handling
- Improved documentation



#### PRODUCTS

- The Museum System (TMS)
- eMuseum

## CHALLENGES

The Prendergast collection includes works of fine art, hand-carved frames, and archival materials such as family photos, letters, postcards, travel books and diaries, 88% of which are on paper. This posed a challenge in exhibiting the material without excessive handling and damage, so the Museum wanted to make these available in digital format. WCMA also wanted to catalogue, accession and digitize the collection's hand-carved frames, and update old black and white photography. Because the works are so well loved by visitors, it was important to make the collection easily accessible to an online audience.

## SOLUTIONS

WCMA selected TMS from Gallery Systems to manage their Prendergast collection. "TMS is an important part of our work in managing and maintaining our other collections, and it was a natural step to utilize this software again for the Prendergast collection," says Rachel Tassone, Associate Registrar at WCMA. "Additionally, the fact that TMS integrates with eMuseum was important to us because we wanted to take our collection online." When data is added or changed in TMS, it updates on WCMA's website through eMuseum web publishing software.

## OUTCOMES

WCMA's mission is "to advance learning through lively and innovative approaches to art for the students of Williams College and communities beyond the campus." With The Prendergast Digitization Project they have done just that. The project began in August 2011 with a three-year grant, and today the entire collection is accessible in digital format.

The project involved digital capture of works by a professional photographer, as well as cataloguing, integrating and digitizing the hand-carved frames, framed fine art, and archives. The recto and verso of the framed art was also documented, which included historical labels and inscriptions. "TMS, with its media, attributes, and thesaurus features, gave us the support we needed in documenting the collection," says Rachel. TMS pro-

vides Digital Asset Management (DAM) functionality, so virtually any media format can be read and managed. With TMS, the Museum can control access to images at different resolutions. "Although our main goal was to open the collection to a wider audience, our staff has also really benefited. Every object in the Prendergast collection can be cross-referenced in TMS. We can customize attributes and use the integrated thesaurus for easy searching. Now, if an image request comes in, our staff is able to respond quickly and uniformly," explains Rachel.



Photograph courtesy of Williams College Museum of Art.

eMuseum integrates with TMS to publish the collection to WCMA's website. According to Rachel: "We like the level of customization that eMuseum affords. We are able to match eMuseum with our website's existing look. Putting the collection online has allowed us to highlight the Prendergast collection, create customized subject hierarchy, encourage subject browsing and searching, and integrate the archives and frames. This opens our collection to the students we serve and a world-wide audience by giving them easy access."

Another benefit of the project has been improved preservation of the collection for future generations. "Increasing accessibility to the collection, while at the same time reducing handling and light exposure of the objects, couldn't have been achieved without these new technologies and our partnership with Gallery Systems," says Rachel.

In line with WCMA's goal of sharing the Prendergast collection with as wide an audience as possible, the digital images have been submitted to ARTstor's digital library. Going forward, WCMA will continue to digitize objects in their collection with TMS and eMuseum there to support them.