

Museum Loan Network

The Museum Loan Network (MLN) facilitates the long-term loan of art and objects of cultural heritage as a way to enhance museum installations in the United States and to enable US museums to better serve their communities. In helping museums respond to the increasing public demand for installations relevant to people of diverse cultural heritages and age groups, MLN's grant programs have led to new collaborations among museums of varying types and sizes throughout the United States, and to improved artistic, cultural, and historical contexts for the works on display. Funded and initiated by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, the MLN is administered by MIT's Office of the Arts.

Program Development

The program continues to emphasize collaboration and the building of networked resources. In 2000, the MLN piloted a collaborative program with the American Composers Forum. Museums, Composers, and Communities (MCC) provided museums with an opportunity to work with composers and create new music for their communities. With MCC, the MLN created new models for interdisciplinary collaboration and enhanced the quality of the MLN projects involved in these partnerships.

Continuing in the same vein, the MLN launched a pilot program to facilitate and support partnerships between museums and public television stations in the spring of 2004. The initiative was developed in tandem with the National Center for Outreach, an entity funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The program makes it possible for public television representatives to travel with MLN travel grantees as they visit institutions to explore objects for possible loan. The values shared by museums and public television stations create unique opportunities for both organizations to develop innovative ways to blend museum and television assets to better serve their communities.

Searching for Treasure, a program launched by MLN in a Cambridge public school in the fall of 2002, aims to connect primary and secondary schools with the treasures of the nation's cultural heritage by using MLN's web directory as a tool to connect schools and museums in a process of educational discovery. The program is now in the planning stages at the Ditmas Intermediate School in Brooklyn, NY, with support from the J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation. Having invested resources to provide every student and staff member at the school with a computer and internet access, the J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation is now working closely with the MLN to put the technological innovations and content of the MLN Directory to work in the service of education.

Website

The online MLN Directory, a practical means of identifying objects of cultural heritage available for long-term loan to eligible museums throughout the United States, now contains 12,841 objects, of which 9,100 have visuals. The MLN continues to keep track of

the number of hits on the directory and on specific object entries, as well as the number of times each museum with a password has accessed the directory. Since January 2000, these 365 museums have logged on to the directory 1,983 times, and approximately 19,224 hits have occurred on over 6,804 individual records.

The MLN continues to develop virtual exhibitions on its homepage. Featuring 10 projects made possible by MLN implementation grants and designed in conjunction with MIT's Academic Media Production Services, these virtual tours not only provide visual models for museums to understand how to creatively utilize MLN, but also stimulate public interest in the arts and provide greater access to museums' hidden permanent collections.

Two online exhibitions have been established on the website from the directory, including *Colonial Choices*, a collaborative project between the MLN and the Haggerty School in Cambridge. The MLN has recently developed a new feature on the website that allows users to search and sort the 342 grants the MLN has given since 1996 by grant type, institution, location, date, and award amount.

Press and Promotion

The MLN continues to distribute a newly designed general brochure that was created in summer 2003. Illustrating images of cultural artifacts, educational programs, and MLN supported publications, the brochure presents the MLN's purpose and program descriptions and includes a map showing lines of connection between the communities in the 51 states and territories served by grant awards.

The MLN continued to work with communications consultant Resnicow/Schroeder who was hired in 1998 to lead an aggressive press initiative. *Museum Loan Network News 2002–2003* was printed at a run of 5,500 copies and distributed to museums, foundations, and other organizations across the country in November 2003.

The MLN director and program associates attended and/or lectured about the program and related issues at the following meetings: the American Association of Museums annual conference, New Orleans, LA; the Grantmakers in the Arts annual conference, Seattle, WA; the New England Museums Association annual meeting, Mystic, CT; the American Association of State and Local History conference, Providence, RI; the Organization of American Historians conference, Boston, MA; the Southeastern Museums Conference, Mobile, AL; and the Partnership for a Nation of Learners Summit, co-sponsored by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Washington, DC.

Grants

The MLN awards three types of grants to eligible nonprofit institutions in the United States: travel grants, survey grants, and implementation grants. Since its inception in 1995, the MLN has awarded 342 grants totaling nearly \$5.5 million to 229 institutions in 51 states and territories. MLN grants have been awarded to a museum with a budget of \$25,000 in a county with a population of 2,600, as well as to an institution with a budget

of \$52 million in a county with a population of 5.4 million. At the February 2004 and June 2004 Advisory Committee meetings held at MIT, 38 grants totaling \$665,942 were recommended for approval by MIT for funding to museums throughout the country, nine of which are located at universities. These awards facilitated the sharing of a diverse array of objects among museums of differing size and discipline.

Survey grants will allow for a variety of objects to be added to the MLN Directory, including 18th- and 19th-century American prints from the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; historical Chinese American objects from the Chinese American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; African, South American, and Middle American musical instruments and Brazilian objects from the Field Museum, Chicago, IL; ancient Egyptian objects and Southeast Asian ceramics from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; folk art from the Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, MI; Native American baskets from the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI; ancient Peruvian textiles from the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA; puppets from the Northwest Puppet Center, Seattle, WA; 18th-century English enamels from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; West Coast ceramics from the Ruth Chandler Williams Gallery, Scripps College, Claremont, CA; and domestic appliances from the Schenectady Museum, Schenectady, NY.

Travel grants allow museums to travel to other institutions to explore objects for long-term loan. A grant to the Cultural and Heritage Commission of York County, Rock Hill, SC, will allow the institution to explore objects for the core exhibition of its new Museum of Life and the Environment. The Wing Luke Asian Museum, Seattle, WA, will examine objects for a new Community Exploration Gallery, which will provide a comprehensive account of the Pan-Asian experience in the American Northwest. Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA, will explore loans of African American art for an exhibition commemorating the legacy of college art programs in the Southeast. Two travel grantees participated in the MLN/NCO pilot program described above by inviting local public television representatives to their institutions to initiate collaborations.

Implementation grants included an award to the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, CA, for an exhibition that will dynamically integrate museum and film archive collections to explore the concept of time in modern American art. The Natural History & Biodiversity Research Center, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, will borrow Asian and African amphibian specimens for a unique project that will examine how scientific specimens become cultural objects when collected and preserved. A grant to the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME, will support an exhibition about the culture of the Inughuit people of northwest Greenland.

Future Plans

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation renewed funding of \$2.75 million for the MLN for three years beginning in October 2002. Working with consultants Wolf, Keens & Co., the MLN has focused attention on diversifying its funding base to ensure future

sustainability. This effort has been guided by an Outcomes Report completed in fall 2003 that documents and describes the positive impact of MLN programs on the museum field.

On June 3, 2004, the MLN brought together key leaders in the fields of art, culture, and philanthropy for a forum entitled “Collaborating with Communities: Connecting through Collections.” Hosted by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts, the forum was intended to provide direction as the MLN plans for future program initiatives.

Personnel Changes

April Julich Perez was hired as program associate in December 2003.

Lori Gross
Director

More information about the Museum Loan Network can be found on the web at <http://loanet.mit.edu/>.