

Montana Historical Preservation Grant 2024

Brief Description of proposed projects



The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art (The Square) is proposing three substantial maintenance projects for the purpose of rehabilitating the historic building that was built in 1896 as Central High School that now houses the museum's art exhibition galleries, permanent collection, educational facilities, and gift shop. Since 1975, the Square has provided central Montana with excellent contemporary art exhibitions and high-quality art educational opportunities that serve at-risk youth, students with cognitive and physical disabilities, Veterans, adults, and youth of all ages. The proposed projects will improve the health and safety standards of the building and promote long-term stability of its historic structure.

In 2023 The Square was awarded a national competitive CAP (Collections Assessment for Preservation) Assessment from the IMLS (Institute of Museums and Library Services). The assessment was funded by generous support from a cooperative agreement between the Foundation for the Advancement in Conservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The purpose of the assessment was to provide recommendations to further improve storage and environmental conditions, to increase outside awareness of collections conservation concerns, and to help with the development of a long-range preservation plan to move towards an eventual application for AAM accreditation. One immediate need outlined in the CAP assessment included creating a temperature and humidity-controlled environment for the permanent collection. Address temperature, humidity, and ultraviolet (UV) light issues in the permanent collection storage space. The Square needs to expand permanent collection storage into an additional space, to complete a collection inventory, and continue to rehouse collection and cover objects to protect from dust and other harmful conditions.

The Square's currently has a collection of over 1,100 objects. These works consist of contemporary art of the 20th and 21st centuries by artists from Montana and the Western part of the United States and "Outsider" sculpture of the same period. The collection has been built for over the past 47 years. In the beginning the collection started with the Junior League of Great Falls by sponsoring Art in the Park each fall starting around 1967. It included a juried exhibition with a purchase prize. Each year the Junior League purchased one or two pieces from the exhibit. They were creating a collection of art but had nowhere to house it. In 1977 the Junior league donated nearly 25 works of art to Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, which began the collection. The collection grew quickly by accessioning 243 works of art by Outsider Artist Lee Steen, from Roundup Montana. In 1992 The Square clarified the focus of its collecting and adopted a collections management policy. By the mid 1990's finances were stable enough to begin purchasing one to two works of art per year. Today most of the works of art that enter our collection are gifts from estates, foundations, and the artists themselves.

Educational programming is an essential part of museum exploration and understanding. Over 1200 people participate in art classes per year for all ages and abilities. This includes five free art programs: Veterans Art Program, Curative Art Collective for teens, Senior Art Class, and Third Grade Tours. For the public, classes for youth and adults such as ceramics, painting, drawing, textiles, precious metals and print making are offered. The lower level of the building houses the education department. There is activity in all education classrooms 5 days per week. The floor in classroom 18 needs immediate attention. The central beam that supports the floor is elevating upwards, causing cracks in the flooring and unlevel. There are trip hazards in the floor causing

the space to not be ADA compliant. Students with wheelchairs and other handicaps access this space regularly.

Last but not least, is a project to add new window shades to existing windows and replace old window shades throughout the historic building. According to the CAP Assessment The Square needs to make the windows UV protectant for the preservation of the wood throughout the building, permanent collection, and to help with climate control and dust build-up throughout the building.

The proposed projects are for meeting strategic plan goals for rehabilitation needs and preservation for the historic building and The Square's permanent collection. Rehabilitating the historic building that houses the museum's galleries, permanent collections, educational facilities, and gift shop and for preserving The Square's permanent collection of over 1,100 works of regional art will help further our mission, vision and values. The Square focuses its collection on contemporary modern art of their region which includes Visionary or Outsider Art, Abstract Art, Postmodern Art, Native American Art, and functional artwork such as jewelry. I Since 1975, the Square has provided central Montana with excellent contemporary art exhibitions and high-quality educational opportunities that serve at-risk youth, students with cognitive and physical disabled, and veterans, adults, and youth of all ages. The proposed projects will improve the safety standards of the building and address the need for ADA accessibility in the proposed art classroom, long-term stability of its historic structure, as well as preserve the permanent art collection which is in dire need of a climate-controlled space so that the artwork does not continue to deteriorate.

The Square currently has \$17,000 secured and available as matching funds and expects an additional \$60,000 to be available by May of 2025. TD&H will provide \$2,000, LPW Architecture will provide \$2,000 of in-kind donations in the form of design work for the projects. The balance of \$15,000 is currently in The Square's savings. Work on all three projects will begin immediately upon receiving grant approval, and completion is expected by August 2026.

Upon completion of these three projects, the Square will be able to continue to offer free admission for all, expand its educational offerings, exhibition capacity, permanent collection preservation and documentation projects, and upgrading our ADA accessibility for the public, thus, improving the cultural exposure, tourism, and local and county public visitation activity enhancing its reputation as a premier destination spot in Great Falls, Montana.