



Position Specification

Williams College

Director, Williams College Museum of Art

Private and Confidential

Our Client

The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) offers engaging and provocative art experiences to incite new thinking about art, museums, and the world. Williams College is located in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts with easy access to the culturally rich cities of Albany, Boston, and New York City. The College is committed to building and supporting a diverse population of approximately 2,200 students, and to fostering an inclusive faculty, staff and curriculum. Williams has built its reputation on outstanding teaching and scholarship, and on the academic excellence of its students.

A vibrant center for the arts at Williams, WCMA embodies the liberal arts' ability to catalyze both creative and critical thinking. It is a vital hub for deep student learning and participation; for taking risks and testing creative forms of scholarship and teaching; and for affirming the relevance of the history of art and the arts more broadly. WCMA continues to push the field forward through its commitment to engaging with students in the experimentation and creative process.

Partnering closely with faculty in the art department and across the college, WCMA aims to both sustain and galvanize the college's legacy in the visual arts. WCMA is also a critical part of the region's vibrant arts community, which includes the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (The Clark), the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), and others.

The WCMA collection contains approximately 15,000 works, representing a broad range of time periods and cultures. Along with holdings in Ancient and European art, the permanent collection emphasizes American Art, Modern and Contemporary art, and the art of Asia and other world cultures. The museum itself was established in 1926 to provide Williams College students with the opportunity to observe works of art first-hand. As the collections grew throughout the 1970s, the museum focused its collecting efforts on American, Modern, Contemporary, and non-Western art, so as to complement the European holdings of the nearby Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

In time, the growing need for exhibition, storage, and office space led to a major expansion project in 1981, under the direction of the architect Charles Moore. Around the same time, the museum began hiring scholars to compile a catalogue raisonné of the works of the American artist-brothers Maurice and Charles Prendergast. The catalog raisonné was published in 1990, the same year that the museum founded the Prendergast Archive and Study Center to house letters, photographs, books, and other research materials relating to the Prendergasts and their era. Through the generosity of Charles Prendergast's widow, Eugénie Van Kemmel Prendergast, the museum has amassed the largest museum collection of watercolors, oils, and sketchbooks created by Maurice and Charles Prendergast.

Today, WCMA has an operating budget of approximately \$4.5 million, a staff of 31, and a Visiting Committee of 12 members. Between 35,000 and 50,000 people visit the Museum each year. In addition to cutting-edge exhibitions, WCMA engages its publics through a range of robust and innovative programs, including (but not limited to):

- Object Lab is a hybrid gallery-classroom and a teaching platform. Faculty across academic divisions collaborate with museum staff to select works of art that employ, convey, or investigate key course concepts. These works of art are installed in the gallery for the semester, offering students and faculty extended access to the art.

- WALLS (Williams Art Loan for Living Spaces) is a special collection whose purpose is to leave the museum and enter the living spaces and lives of students. It was formed in 2012 by a committee of students, staff, and faculty who created the initial collection of ninety works. The selected works sought to mirror WCMA's broader collection but also responded to student interests and the Williams curriculum. In Spring 2015, WALLS expanded to one hundred and twenty artworks. New acquisitions of work by artists such as Kiki Smith and Titus Kaphar diversified the collection in terms of artist's ethnicity, biological sex, and nationality. In addition, many of these new works grapple with racial and gender identity by confronting institutional and global concerns head on.
- The Rose Object Classroom provides a classroom setting for faculty from across disciplines to teach with works of art. Faculty across the college use the Rose to help students examine and investigate works of art that illuminate aspects of fields ranging from neuroscience to mathematics to art history. The Rose consciously reduces the barrier between viewers and objects, and it has expanded access to the collection to a wider audience of students and faculty.
- WCMA's Reading Room reinvigorates its legacy as a site of social learning and a center for public intellectual life. The space opened in 1890 as "a literary resort for students" when benefactor Eliza Field provided funds to add two small reading rooms to the college library, now WCMA's Rotunda. True to Field's vision of a student space with "a more homelike aspect," WCMA's Reading Room is a cozy, intimate space to linger and study, a gathering spot for meetings, and home to collaborative programs, projects, and conversations.

The Role

The Director will provide strategic and collaborative leadership and vision, effective management, and academic inspiration to the Williams College Museum of Art. In the daily operations of WCMA, the Director will ensure the Museum's mission is clearly understood, that its strategic objectives are fully articulated and effectively pursued, and that Williams faculty and students as well as the broader community see and use the Museum as a core learning resource. The Director has primary responsibility for all aspects of the Museum's operation and management, including fiscal and personnel management, as well as for raising funds to support the Museum.

The Director sets the artistic direction, exhibition strategy, educational approach and acquisition plans for the Museum. They serve as an advocate for the knowledge that can be gained from the direct study of and engagement with works of art and material culture as it relates to a broad range of disciplines. They are responsible for the management and development of the Museum's collection of art and artifacts, and for driving the acquisition of new objects. The Director works with the WCMA team to implement appropriate policies governing the conservation, documentation, security, and storage of, as well as physical and digital access to, the collection. Across all aspects of WCMA's work, the Director will cultivate a culture of inclusion and proactively foster opportunities for engagement with and expression of diverse identities, perspectives and creative practices.

The Director has faculty status (without tenure) and reports to the Provost of Williams College. In collaboration with academic and administrative departments on campus, the Director proactively engages students through teaching, exhibitions and related programming. They also represent the Museum to diverse constituencies, including faculty and students, alumni and friends of the College, public audiences throughout the region, and the museum profession at large. Key partners with whom the Director is

expected to work closely are other arts organizations in the region, including the Clark Art Institute, Mass MOCA, and the Bennington Museum.

Candidate Profile

The ideal candidate will be an inspiring, energetic, and collaborative leader who fully embraces the Museum's contribution to the educational mission of Williams College through its exhibitions, programming, research, and engagement with curricular and extra-curricular initiatives. The Museum is an engine of the intellectual life on campus and in the region. The Director, therefore, must exemplify a dedication to learning, a passion for the arts, and a combination of intellectual curiosity and depth. They must exhibit a thorough knowledge of art history and the ability to lead, collaborate with, and motivate a diverse community and team of staff, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students and other partners. The ideal candidate will have a persistently creative and open approach, and be a thoughtful and inclusive listener.

They will have a record of respected intellectual achievement with demonstrable success cultivating relationships with, and building bridges among, diverse constituencies. The candidate should be an articulate, dynamic, and effective communicator in person and in print. They are motivated by thinking about and experimenting with what a teaching museum can be in the 21st century, and will bring that spirit of creativity and innovation to the role.

The candidate must have significant museum experience, including experience with curatorial practice and exhibition planning, education programming, operations, fundraising, communications, and budget management. They will possess experience in setting direction as well as developing and implementing strategic initiatives within an organization, as well as a track record of successful fundraising. The candidate will be able to establish credibility with the faculty and relate intellectually with a wide range of disciplines in rich and layered exchange. They will also possess the sophistication and collaboration skills to work closely with the WCMA Visiting Committee.

The ideal candidate will embrace the Williams College and Western Massachusetts communities professionally and personally, enjoying the opportunity to live in such a robust and stimulating New England setting. At a foundational level, they will believe deeply in the values of a liberal arts education. They will drive the Museum forward, asserting its academic, regional, and national identity and individuality. The new Director will lead WCMA with integrity, courage, and enthusiasm.

In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

Strategic Vision

- The ideal candidate will have a track record as an innovative thinker and effective implementer. They will have the vision, creativity, and judgment to lead WCMA in ways that strengthen both the College and the Museum.
- This person will demonstrate knowledge of the key issues facing academic museums broadly, particularly in terms of strategies for engagement with student bodies and faculty in fulfilling the teaching mission of museums, in tandem with strong partnership with other arts organizations and community stakeholders.

- This leader will demonstrate an ability to develop a productive and mutually fulfilling relationship with the Williams College faculty, administration, and museum staff at all levels, as well as to engage proactively students of the College.

Management of Teams and Resources

- The ideal candidate will be able to translate WCMA's over-arching goals into clear objectives for the staff, optimizing the strengths of the Museum.
- They will foster a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, teamwork, and empowerment. They will have the ability to counsel and coach the Museum staff for success; they will respect, encourage, and celebrate the talents of that team while also holding each accountable to mutually agreed-upon goals. The ideal candidate will demonstrate extensive experience attracting, retaining, and motivating a diverse and talented staff.
- They will approach the financial oversight of the Museum with an even-handed and reasoned approach to budgetary decision-making in full transparency and collaboration with the Williams College administration, reporting to the Provost's Office on the operations and budgetary performance of the Museum.

Communicating, Influencing, and Building Relationships

- The ideal candidate will exhibit a collaborative yet decisive approach to problem solving that enables them to effectively build support for WCMA's initiatives within the College community and beyond.
- The Director will be an inspirational communicator, with a degree of personal passion and charisma that enables them to bring diverse constituents on-board with the mission and vision of WCMA.
- They will persuasively communicate WCMA's direction and strategy both internally and externally. The Director will actively solicit input from and develop key partnerships with the other arts leaders on campus and in the region in support of the Museum's mission.

Resource Development

- The ideal candidate will have experience building an institution's funding base—in collaboration with key partners—to increase and diversify financial support from alumni, individual donors, foundations, federal agencies, and other potential supporters.
- They will be an effective relationship-builder, able to inspire loyalty to and support of WCMA. Further, they will engage their professional network to further WCMA's mission.

Passion for and Distinction in the Art

- The Director will exhibit a thorough knowledge of and passion for art and art history, along with a record of well-respected achievement and distinction in their field. They will possess the intellectual rigor to interact with Williams College faculty and students from a scholarly perspective, as well as an ecumenical approach to working with diverse collections and genres of art.
- This Director should exude a passion for, and an interest in, WCMA's unique combination of artistic offerings and values and possess a deep appreciation for, and knowledge of, WCMA's collections, history, and potential.

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- They will engage passionately in the teaching mission of WCMA, and be committed to a vision of why the Museum is important to the College and regional communities. The ideal candidate will think broadly about questions around who owns the past, and about how museums can be a hub for discourse about diversity, tolerance, and understanding of difference.
 - The ideal candidate will be a culturally astute and broad-minded individual with a generosity of spirit and clear commitment to diversity.

Beyond meeting fully its legal obligations for non-discrimination, Williams College is committed to building a diverse and inclusive community where members from all backgrounds can live, learn and thrive.

Contact

Russell Reynolds Associates has been exclusively retained for this search and prospective candidates are invited to contact RRA directly at WCMADirector@russellreynolds.com. All inquiries and discussions will be strictly confidential.