

FRIDAY, JUNE 10 | 11:00 AM | MUSKEGON MUSEUM OF ART: CANNON GALLERY

\$12 MILLION GIFT BOOSTS MICHIGAN'S STATUS IN PROMOTING ART BY WOMEN

The Muskegon Museum of Art will soon be home to one of the only museums in the world to have a dedicated space devoted solely to the work of women artists, thanks to gifts totaling \$12 million from two of the country's leading art collectors, Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt.

Their donation includes more than 150 works of art - painted by women in the figurative realist style - and a \$1.5 million cash gift toward the highly-anticipated and much-needed museum expansion that will more than double the size of the museum.

QUICK FACTS

DONATION:

- The donation will position Muskegon among fewer than five museums in the world that have dedicated spaces for displaying the work of women.
- 150 works of art by 115 different artists, including Artemisia Gentileschi, Mary Cassatt, Agnes Martin, Elaine de Kooning, Harmonia Rosales, Julie Bell, Andrea Kowch, Katie O'Hagan, and dozens of others representing contemporary and historical women figurative realist painters.
- Bennett and Schmidt have collected figurative realist paintings by women artists since 2009 creating The Bennett Collection, and in 2018 established The Bennett Prize – a \$50,000 biennial award designed to propel the careers of women painters who have not yet realized full professional recognition. It is the largest art award offered solely to women painters.

EXPANSION:

- Formal Groundbreaking Ceremony will take place Saturday, June 11 at 4:30 PM.
- The \$11.2 million project is expected to be completed in 2024.
- The 26,000 sf expansion will double the size of the museum, creating new galleries for changing exhibits and spaces for education, collections, and visitor amenities including 4,000 sf ground-level gallery, outdoor sculpture plaza, a museum shop, classroom spaces, additional gallery/event space connecting the new entry to the existing museum, and 3,730 sf roof terrace for events.
- The Muskegon Museum of Art opened in 1912 and houses over 5,000 pieces in its collection. This expansion will allow the museum to display more of its art at one time. At the rate the museum rotates artwork, it would take more than 40 years to display the entire collection.

KEY PEOPLE

- Frank Bednarek: Muskegon Museum of Art Board of Trustees Chair
- Kirk Hallman: Muskegon Museum of Art Executive Director
- Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt
- Lead Design Firm: Ann Beha Architects, Boston, MA
- Collaborating Design Firm: Mathison | Mathison Architects, Grand Rapids, MI
- Owner's Representative: Construction Simplified, Grand Rapids, MI

MEDIA CONTACTS:

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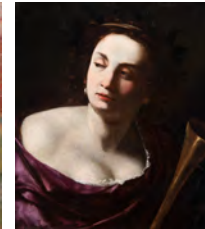
THE BENNETT COLLECTION

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IMAGES



Agnes Martin (1912-2004).
Portrait of Daphne Vaughn
encaustic on canvas, 20" x 16"
ca. 1948



Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653).
Self-Portrait as Clio, the Goddess of History
oil on canvas 22" x 20"
ca. 1640



Andrea Kowch (born 1986)
Dream Chaser
acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"
2013



Architectural rendering of the Muskegon Museum of Art Expansion

DIGITAL PRESS KIT

Scan the QR code below to access the Digital Press Kit or visit www.muskegonartmuseum.org/media-room/press-releases

- Fact Sheet
- Press Releases
- Images of Artwork
- Architectural Renderings
- Key People



Fact Sheet

GIFT OF THE BENNETT COLLECTION to the MUSKEGON MUSEUM OF ART

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

For The Bennett Collection:

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THE STORY:

Art collectors and philanthropists, Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt, from San Antonio, Texas, have committed to donate their \$10 Million collection of more than 150 paintings by women artists, plus \$1.5 Million in cash, to the Muskegon Museum of Art as part of the Museum's planned new expansion, which is breaking ground on June 11, 2022.

BACKGROUND:

Steven Alan Bennett, a corporate lawyer from Texas, met Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt, an educator also from Texas, in 2009. At that time, the couple together began collecting art with a special emphasis on paintings of women by women artists. In the intervening years, the couple has acquired a \$10 Million collection of 170 paintings of women by women. These works span the period from the early 1600's to the present and include both historic works by deceased artists as well as those by important women painters working today. Included in The Bennett Collection are historic works by Mary Cassatt, Elaine de Kooning, Agnes Martin, Sarah Miriam Peale, Suzanne Valadon and many others. Among the living artists represented in the Collection are major works by Julie Bell, Margaret Bowland, Zoey Frank, Xenia Hausner, Andrea Kowch, Alyssa Monks, Katie O'Hagan, Harmonia Rosales and dozens of others.

WHY MUSKEGON:

Bennett and Schmidt started a biennial, \$50,000 prize for women figurative realist painters in 2018 and, as part of that effort, sought to partner with a museum that would be willing to display the works of the finalists. After discussions with multiple museums, Bennett and Schmidt chose the Muskegon Museum of Art as the host museum for what has become known as "The Bennett Prize for Women Figurative Realist Painters." According to Schmidt, "being from the Midwest, Michigan and Illinois, we appreciated the straightforward and easy-going style of the Muskegon Art Museum and were tired of being condescended to by big art museums who really wanted nothing to do with a figurative art prize. After working with our

friends at the MMA on The Bennett Prize, we knew we had found a good home for our Collection as well.” Bennett added: “The MMA has an extraordinary collection that should get a boost with the addition of these works by women painters. What is already a great collection will now get even better.”

FACTS ABOUT THE COLLECTION:

The Bennett Collection is comprised of 170 paintings dating from 1640 to the present. All works are executed by women painters of a woman subject. The Collection is considered one of the most important “women painting women” collections in the United States. The paintings range in size from a three-panel work that is 6 feet high and 18 feet wide to a small portrait that is 7 inches high and 5 inches wide. The Collection includes works by approximately 100 living and 30 deceased women painters.

VALUATION:

The Bennett-Schmidt gift to the MMA has a total value in excess of \$11.5 Million. The Collection has a value in excess of \$10 Million. The gift also includes \$1.5 Million in cash.

MOST VALUABLE PAINTING:

The most valuable painting in the Collection (and also the oldest) is *Artemisia Gentileschi’s “Self-Portrait as Clio, the Goddess of History,”* which dates to circa 1640 and has been exhibited throughout Europe including, most recently, at the Rijksmuseum in The Netherlands. Gentileschi is generally believed to be one of the first woman painters to take credit for her work and was one of the first women admitted to the Florentine design academy as a professional artist in 1616, at the age of 23.

OTHER IMPORTANT HISTORICAL WORKS:

In addition to the Gentileschi self-portrait, the Collection contains many important historical works. These include:

Mary Cassatt, Portrait of Madame Alfred Sisley, 1873. An 1873 portrait of the wife of the Impressionist painter, Alfred Sisley, by the renowned American painter, Mary Cassatt, this painting is believed to have been executed during one of Cassatt’s first excursion tours of Europe as an aspiring artist.

Agnes Martin, Portrait of Daphne Vaughn, 1948. One of the only still existing realist works by Agnes Martin, *Portrait of Daphne Vaughn* depicts Martin’s lover during her college days and was presumably executed while Martin was still a student at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in 1948. Martin is known to have destroyed virtually all of her realist works by burning them in a bonfire in 1956. This painting is believed to have been spared because the sitter, Vaughn, would not give it back to Martin.

Elaine de Kooning, Nude with Jelly Beans, 1961. Elaine de Kooning, the wife of Abstract Expressionist painter, Willem de Kooning, painted this portrait of the daughter of sculptor Ibram Lassaw in 1961. The painting is believed to be the only female nude made by de Kooning and was executed about the same time as her famous series of portraits of John F. Kennedy.

Sarah Miriam Peale, Mother and Child, ca 1848. Sarah Miriam Peale was one of the Peale dynasty of American portraitists that included Charles Willson Peale, James Peale and Rembrandt Peale. This painting is a classic 19th century portrait of a mother and child from what is believed to be a prosperous family from St. Louis, Missouri. Sarah Peale is famous as one of the few early American women painters to make a full-time living from her work as an artist.

Suzanne Valadon, "Nu assis sur le Bord d'un lit" ("Nude Seated on the Edge of a Bed"), 1929. Valadon, who began as a model for numerous famous painters (Berthe Morisot, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, among others) taught herself to paint by watching the artists who painted her. Valadon led a tumultuous life and had many affairs, including with the composer, Erik Satie. This painting shows Valadon's trademark style—heavy black outlines around the figure and multi-colored draperies in the background and on the bed.

IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY WORKS:

In addition to the historical paintings, the Collection contains many important contemporary works. These include:

Andrea Kowch, The Visitors, 2011. This painting by Michigan native Andrea Kowch is one of her most iconic works. The painting, which is executed in Kowch's "rustic realist" style, features one of her many scenes of farm women working in the kitchen. This painting is one of three major works by Kowch included in The Bennett Collection that will go the MMA.

Harmonia Rosales, The Annunciation, 2018. Afro-Cuban- American painter, Harmonia Rosales, is prominently known for her depictions of religious and classical themes with black protagonists rather than the more traditionally depicted white ones. Her religious scenes are much in demand by collectors around the country and this is one of several examples that will come to the MMA from Bennett and Schmidt.

Katie O'Hagan, Dirty Laundry, 2013. The most completely represented painter in The Bennett Collection works headed to Muskegon is the Scottish-American painter, Katie O'Hagan. This self-portrait depicts the artist at the moment she learned terrible news about her life and her marriage. The painting is one of fourteen works by O'Hagan in The Bennett Collection.

Xenia Hausner, vor dem Leben ("Before Life") 2017. Xenia Hausner, the most preeminent Austrian woman painter working today, paints in a bold, colorful style, as shown by this work. This painting is one of three Hausner works in The Bennett Collection and was displayed last year at the Albertina Museum in Vienna, Austria when that museum held a major retrospective of Hausner's work.

SuSu, Empty Vessel III, 2021. Born in the Peoples Republic of China, SuSu moved to Pittsburgh to pursue an MFA in fine art at Carnegie Mellon in 2013. Her work, often self-portraits, depict a swirling, complicated world of pop and Chinese symbolism that personifies her cultural challenges as a woman straddling both Western and Asian society. Her paintings are avidly sought by important collectors around the world.

Julie Bell, Pegasus Befriends the Muses, 2018. One of the best-known fantasy artists of the current generation, Julie Bell specializes in monumental figurative works of women in fantastic settings such as outer space, the classical world, and places that, had she not painted them, could not be imagined. This painting depicts “the muse” being befriended by Pegasus, the mythical winged horse of classical Greek mythology.

THE BENNETT COLLECTION IN PRINT:

The Bennett Collection has been featured in multiple art publications, both in the United States and abroad. Among these are:

John O’Hern, “Figurative Focus: The Contemporary Art Collection of Steven Bennett and Elaine Schmidt Spotlights Paintings of Women by Women,” *American Art Collector*, Issue 137 (March 2017), pp. 034 – 041.

Leslie Gilbert Elman, “The Bennett Collection: Celebrating Women Painting Women,” *Fine Art Connoisseur*, Vol. 15, Issue 4 (August 2018), pp. 110 – 115.

Jennifer Rizzo, “The Bennetts: Collector’s Profile,” *Beautiful Bizarre Magazine*, Issue 25 (June 2019), pp. 88 – 95.

ABOUT THE MUSKEGON MUSEUM OF ART:

The Muskegon Museum of Art is renowned for its fine permanent collection of American and European paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings. Regularly on view in the permanent collection galleries, you will find works by notable artists such as John Steuart Curry, Edward Hopper, Winslow Homer, William Merritt Chase, Pierre Bonnard, and more.

The MMA studio glass collection is among the finest in the Midwest, featuring artists such as Dale Chihuly, Harvey Littleton, Dominick Labino, Dick Huss, and Richard Royal.

The museum also features many rotating exhibitions throughout the year, ranging from exhilarating nationally traveling exhibitions to contemporary regional and Michigan artist shows. Educational programs, such as lectures, films, workshops, classes, and gallery tours have been key to the mission of the Muskegon Museum of Art since its founding in 1912.

MUSEUM EXPANSION:

The Muskegon Museum of Art houses over 5,000 pieces in its permanent collection. As the museum continues to grow the collection, there is a need for more gallery and storage space. At the rate the museum rotates artwork, it would take more than 40 years to display the entire collection.

The \$11.2 million expansion project will more than double the size of the museum, adding three new rotating galleries, two classrooms, a rooftop terrace, a museum store, connecting and support space, and a public plaza.

With this expansion, the Muskegon Museum of Art strives to build a facility that will serve the needs of the community for the next century. With increased spaces for larger exhibitions and events, outside art spaces, and more classrooms to offer educational activities, the museum plans to be a greater resource for our local community as well as become a destination spot for visitors.

The expansion project is led by design firm, Ann Beha Architects of Boston, Massachusetts, collaborating design firm Mathison | Mathison Architects, and owner's representative, Construction Simplified, both of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In addition to Bennett's and Schmidt's cash gift, another \$9.6 million has been contributed by other lead donors including:

- \$1 million from the Van Kampen Boyer Molinari Foundation
- \$1 million from the City of Muskegon
- \$500,000 each from Carol R. Folkert & Family, The Hilt Foundation, Patrick O'Leary Foundation, Brad & Kathleen Playford, Shape Corporation, and Mrs. Shaw Walker
- and 250 additional gifts totaling \$11.1 million to date.

The groundbreaking ceremony will take place at 4:30 p.m. Saturday, June 11—with the \$11.2 million project expected to be completed in 2024.

KEY PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONS:

Frank Bednarek: Muskegon Museum of Art Board of Trustees Chair

Kirk Hallman: Muskegon Museum of Art Executive Director

Steven Alan Bennett and Dr. Elaine Melotti Schmidt

Lead Design Firm: Ann Beha Architects, Boston, MA

Collaborating Design Firm: Mathison | Mathison Architects, Grand Rapids, MI

Owner's Representative: Construction Simplified, Grand Rapids, MI

WEBSITES:

The Bennett Collection: www.thebennettartcollection.com

The Bennett Prize: www.thebennettprize.org

Muskegon Museum of Art: <https://muskegonartmuseum.org/>

Digital Press Kit: <https://muskegonartmuseum.org/media-room/press-releases/12-million-gift-to-muskegon-museum-of-art-boosts-michigans-status-in-promoting-art-by-women/>