

COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHTS



Smithsonian
Institution

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LUCE-FUNDED AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLECTING INITIATIVE

In 2017, the **Archives of American Art** (“AAA”) received a grant of \$575,000 from the Henry Luce Foundation for a three-year African American Collecting Initiative. The grant has three components: 1.) collecting the papers of African American artists; 2.) processing and producing finding aids for collections documenting African American art; and 3.) overseeing three professional development internships. The pandemic slowed progress in 2020, however AAA sought and received a no-cost extension through 2021.

For this project, AAA’s Luce-funded collector, Erin Gilbert and subsequently Uchenna Itam, acquired the papers of Emma Amos, Renee Cox, Maren Hassinger, Nanette Carter, Joyce Scott, EJ Montgomery, Lowery Stokes Sims, Arthur Monroe, Charles W. White letters and photographs to Melvin Williamson, Sylvia Snowden, Howardena Pindell, Oliver Lee Jackson, Allan R Freelon, Ed Clark, Beverly Buchanan, Chakaia Booker, and Ruth Jett. Additions are expected for many of these collections. The project archivist, Rayna Andrews, processed and produced online finding aids for 24 collections including the papers of Elizabeth Catlett, Sam Gilliam, Hale Woodruff, Jacob Lawrence and Gwendolyn Knight, Ed Clark, Charles W. White, Ruth Jett, Senga Nengudi, Renee Cox, Beverly Buchanan, and others. As a result, these collections now have an online, fully searchable finding aid, which increases their accessibility and provides details for researchers worldwide. Three extraordinary interns helped move this project forward. The last, in the summer of 2021, worked remotely.

An important note on this initiative: AAA does not intend to hire permanent subject specialists in any particular area of study, however special initiatives such as the African American Collecting Initiative funded by the Luce Foundation, focused exclusively on acquiring primary sources for the study of African American art, enable us to make great strides in building and strengthening the collection. This short-term effort provides fertile ground for generations of scholars, students, art enthusiasts, and Smithsonian research staff to deepen their understanding of African American art and culture and also plants the seeds for future gifts to the Archives for years to come. Since its first African American acquisition in 1956—Horace Pippin’s unpublished memoirs—the Archives has acquired a critical mass of extraordinary material, and continues to build these resources. To understand this current initiative in the context of the Archives’ decades-long commitment to African American collecting, AAA published an online [guide](#) to its holdings for the study of African American art in 2020, with more updates to come.



Image: Photograph of Ed Clark, Herbert Gentry, Jacob Lawrence, Alexander "Skunder" Boghossian, and Vincent Smith, circa 1989 / unidentified photographer. Ed Clark papers, 1923-2017, 1950s-2000s. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

SUITLAND COLLECTIONS CENTER MASTER PLAN COMPLETED

Building on the success of the Smithsonian's [Collections Space Framework Plan](#) ("CSFP"), the Smithsonian Facilities' Office of Planning, Design, and Construction and the National Collections Program recently completed the **Suitland Collections Center Master Plan** ("SCCMP"). The Suitland Collections Center is a 110-acre campus in Prince George's County, Maryland, that currently serves as the Smithsonian's principal offsite collections storage and conservation facility. The SCCMP serves as a 40-year road map for developing a more sustainable and integrated campus at Suitland with shared operations, staffing, and spaces to strengthen the stewardship of Smithsonian collections. As the Secretary's foreword to the [Executive Summary](#) indicates, the Master Plan sounds "an urgent call to action."

The plan culminates a multi-year, highly collaborative, and interdisciplinary planning effort conducted by collections and facilities staff, serving as a model of advancing the One Smithsonian strategic priority. Many stakeholders from across the Institution contributed to the Master Plan through interviews, workshops, and reviews, including senior leadership, unit directors, and unit representatives. Through the planning process, the team conducted a thorough review of existing physical and operational conditions and requirements for the Suitland site; validated current and projected collections space needs over 40 years; and developed a two-campus program and site development strategies for the Suitland and Dulles campuses. The CSFP and the SCCMP both support concurrent development of the Suitland and Dulles campuses to address the Smithsonian's intermediate and long-term collections space needs.



Aerial rendering of proposed Suitland campus from southwest.

FOUR MILLION BOTANICAL SPECIMENS – THE FIRST TO BE FULLY DIGITIZED



After five years of operations, the Smithsonian's **Digitization Program Office** mass digitization project with the **National Museum of Natural History's** Department of Botany is nearing completion with four million botanical specimens digitized. Once completed in December 2021, the Smithsonian's Department of Botany will be the first major US herbarium to be fully digitized! Each specimen now has a high-resolution, research-level digital image showing detail visible down to 45 microns as well as individual digital database records transcribed from the specimen sheet's handwritten data labels.

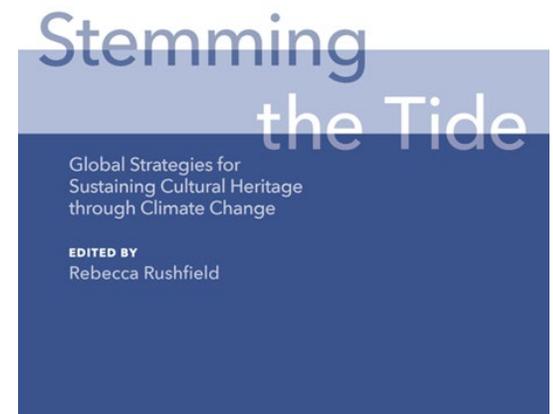


Using the specimen's digital images, morphological traits can be used in phylogenetic and evolutionary studies. By employing machine learning on this vast collection of digital specimens, researchers have already trained artificial intelligence to identify specific species. With digitized label data describing the time and location a specimen was collected, simple database queries will enable researchers to easily track distributions over time to monitor invasive and endangered species. These distribution data may also be used to chart the effects of climate change or human interactions on natural populations and ecosystems.

The once insurmountable task of making millions of specimens accessible via digitization is suddenly a reality! With well-defined and refined digitization workflows and processes in place, funding is the only limitation with regard to what we can achieve with a completely digitized Smithsonian collection. Watch a video of the project here: <https://youtu.be/SmHG73Ph8sY>

STEMMING THE TIDE: GLOBAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH CLIMATE CHANGE

Proceedings of the *Stepping the Tide* symposium were recently published online through the **Smithsonian Scholarly Press** (“SISP”), which includes an inspirational foreword by Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III. In early March 2020, just days before the pandemic shut down the nation, the **Smithsonian American Art Museum** and the **National Collections Program** hosted an informative, motivational, and action-oriented symposium titled *Stepping the Tide: Global Strategies for Sustaining Cultural Heritage through Climate Change*. The symposium included a series of presentations and breakout discussions, concluding with a public program, that explored the intersection of cultural heritage and climate change. In celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, the event was part of the Smithsonian’s 2020 Earth Optimism programming.



The two-day event addressed the impact of climate change on cultural heritage and communities worldwide, discussed the responsibilities of stewards of cultural heritage in fostering innovative solutions, addressed urgent questions of equity and inclusion, and identified strategies that leverage cultural heritage for climate action. With 250 registrants and 1,100 live web stream viewers representing 33 states and 25 countries, ranging from the United Kingdom, Spain, and Greece to Canada, Mexico, and Trinidad and Tobago, the symposium empowered cultural heritage authorities, managers, and advocates to pursue more ambitious engagement and collaborative approaches to the climate crisis.

The symposium’s discussions provide a framework from which the Smithsonian may consider future national and international programming and new Institutional initiatives toward greater sustainability of cultural heritage and the natural environment. [The volume is part of Smithsonian Open access and available to read and download, at no cost, from SISP's online portal.](#) Recorded presentations from the event are also available: <https://americanart.si.edu/research/symposia/2020/stepping-the-tide>.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN REPATRIATES TWO OBJECTS TO THE SIKSIKA NATION



Weather Dance Robe. Image courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian (13/2384)

The **National Museum of the American Indian** (“NMAI”) repatriated a Prairie Chicken Society Headdress and a Weather Dance Robe to the [Siksika Nation](#). The ceremony took place at the museum’s Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland, on July 7, 2021.

Siksika Nation, which is located in Alberta, Canada, maintains a network of societies that provide a foundation for their cultural and religious practices. The Prairie Chicken Society is unique to the Siksika, and the headdress once belonged to the society’s leader. It was accessioned into the Museum of the American Indian—the predecessor museum to the current National Museum of the American Indian—in 1908. The collector is unknown.

The Weather Dance Robe is associated with the functions of a Weather Dancer—a medicine man who maintains a divine connection with the sun. The primary function of a Weather Dancer is the control of the weather during ceremonial occasions, such as the Sundance. The Weather Dancer ceremonial obligations also include providing blessings for community members when requested. The Weather Dance

Robe in the museum’s collection was acquired by William Wildschut in 1924 from Yellow Old Woman, the robe’s maker and a noted Siksika Weather Dancer. Upon its return to Siksika Nation, it will be prepared for the Sundance Ceremony by Herman Yellow Old Woman, a current Weather Dancer and the great-grandson of the robe’s maker.

“Repatriation has always been one of the highest priorities for the National Museum of the American Indian,” said Machel Monenerkit, the museum’s acting director. “Our repatriation policy embodies our mission and vision, and we are proud to have worked with Siksika Nation to ensure the return of these objects.”

Siksika Nation Chief and Council Representative Kent Ayoungman and Ceremonial Elder Herman Old Yellow Woman attended the ceremony at the museum and were delegated to collect the *Natowa’piists* (sacred items) on behalf of Siksika Nation.