



# Strategic Plan

## 2023–2033

Mildred Lane  
**Kemper Art Museum**

## Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

The Kemper Art Museum is part of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. Nationally accredited with an internationally renowned collection, it is uniquely positioned on the Danforth Campus, bringing together the cultural offerings of Forest Park, St. Louis's preeminent urban park; the vibrant social life of surrounding neighborhoods; the creative practices of the Sam Fox School; and the academic excellence of Washington University.

With some 8,700 artworks in its collection, the Museum has especially strong holdings of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century European and American art and a steadily growing collection of global art. Its active exhibition program presents the work of important contemporary artists as well as historical art in thought-provoking thematic explorations of issues relevant to today's world. As one of the University's primary interfaces with the public, the Museum welcomes and serves a wide range of audiences, with lectures, panels, gallery talks, and performances providing ways to delve deeper into the art.

# Strategic Plan

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Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, main entrance, 2019

Mildred Lane  
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Three floor-to-ceiling fabric prints by the German artist Katharina Grosse dramatically fill the Saligman Family Atrium as part of *Katharina Grosse Studio Paintings, 1988–2022: Returns, Revisions, Inventions* (2022), a pioneering exhibition of her works on canvas.





# Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Leadership 9

## Statements

Mission Statement 12

Vision Statement 14

Core Values 16

## Areas of Focus

Collecting Museum 20

Teaching Museum 24

Global Museum 28

Accessible Museum 32

Digital Museum 36

# Introduction

The timing of this strategic plan coincides with an exciting new chapter in the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum's history. Over the course of the last decade, the Museum witnessed tremendous growth, marked by a pivotal moment in 2019: the completion of a major expansion and renovation of its facilities that doubled exhibition space, increased visibility and access, and created new visitor amenities. This has allowed us to significantly expand display of the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions, increase program offerings and communications, and broaden our base of financial support.

The accomplishments across the Museum since the advent of the last strategic plan are many. The Art on Campus initiative—a percent-for-art program tied to WashU capital projects—introduced new public sculptures and installations throughout campus, while key acquisitions, driven by our Collection Development Plan\*, added experimental artworks to the historical collection and broadened the contemporary holdings. We produced significant international loan exhibitions that drew record attendance, including a presentation of the work of the international artist and activist Ai Weiwei, which explored the themes of human rights, historical ruptures, and the displacement of populations across the world due to political persecution and economic necessity. We published *Spotlights*, an anthology with contributions by more than thirty scholars on well- and lesser-known works in the collection as part of our ambitious publications program and expanded outreach into the St. Louis community through deepened and new collaborations with peer institutions, area schools, local educators, and departments and centers across campus. Importantly, we launched internships to advance a more diverse base of professionals in the museum field, now in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity & Equity. Establishing new membership levels and endowments enhanced the capability for long-term planning of major projects, and federally funded grants supported the conservation of paintings, sculptures, and works on paper in the collection. At the same time, we began to significantly expand our digital communications with a new website (launch in 2023) with advanced visual capabilities to allow greater access to the collection and related scholarship.

\*This plan is available separately.



Dan Graham's *Bisected Circle* (2019), part of the Art on Campus program, is situated in the Florence Steinberg Weil Sculpture Garden in Tisch Park alongside the Sam Fox School's Weil Hall. Also visible are works by Dan Peterman, Alexander Calder, and Auguste Rodin.

These accomplishments, parallel to the ambitious growth of the Sam Fox School's programs and facilities, provide a strong foundation for the Museum's plans for the future. As we find ourselves at a historical turning point, we are faced with critical political and environmental conditions affecting communities around the globe. Several pressing issues therefore guided our reflections in the formation of this plan. How can we underscore the visual arts and humanities as a vital part of a society that embraces freedom, a broad range of identities, and human rights? Based on the belief that art offers imaginative alternatives while critically mediating a multiplicity of realities, how can we promote conversations at home and afar that positively transform divisiveness into deep and inclusive discourses that lead to transformative changes and a more just world? How can we incorporate a heterogeneity of

voices to illuminate histories that have not been told? How best to tap the power of the rapidly evolving digital technologies that will govern how we learn, discover, create, and know ourselves and others? How can art, its histories, and its discourses increase awareness of the climate crisis and environmental injustices? In short, in what ways can the very institution of the university museum—our stewardship of the collection, pursuit of academic excellence, curation of exhibitions, and engagement with local communities—foster dialogues that spark innovation, cultivate social equity, and open up new understandings of our interconnected global world?

We conceive of the Kemper Art Museum as a communal sphere in and with St. Louis—a space in which seeing and being seen are part of polyvocal interactions that will shape the future. Within this guiding framework, the plan focuses on five

Black Anthology, an annual production written by Black WashU undergraduates, performs their poem “Black Destiny” through dance and spoken word amid the exhibition *Torkwase Dyson: Bird and Lava* (2023) as part of “Kemper Live,” a community event featuring local musicians, poets, and dancers.





areas central to the Museum's mission and responsibilities: the Collecting Museum, Teaching Museum, Global Museum, Accessible Museum, and Digital Museum. Understanding the Museum as a public interface and community forum, we will enhance sensory experiences and explore a variety of histories, imaginations, visual vocabularies, and types of knowledge. Building on the rich legacy of the collection, we will work to ensure that this internationally recognized cultural archive is as accessible as possible—as a teaching resource, a research tool, and the foundation for encounters with art that will captivate us, make us wonder, and help us reflect on the challenges and opportunities that will lead us into tomorrow.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Beginning in 2018 the Museum's director, senior staff, and members of their departments took time to step back from their daily work to consider their priorities within the context of museum practices today. We researched key issues, current trends, and unfolding developments in professional practices; reviewed a wide sample of institutional plans by other museums; met with, talked to, and polled colleagues at peer institutions across the country; and reviewed the progress and goals of our last strategic plan. Throughout a series of retreats, a draft took shape that provided the basis for conversations with leadership at Washington University, key stakeholders of the Museum and the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, and constituents both on and off campus. The completion of the Museum's plan closely followed the publication of the strategic plans of WashU and the Sam Fox School, ensuring alignment with campus-wide goals and priorities.

The Museum's primary advisory group, the Art Collection Committee (a subset of the Sam Fox School National Council) provided important input and feedback. The University-based Director's Advisory Committee contributed insights especially in relation to teaching and research activities on campus. This was augmented by feedback from a focus group of undergraduate and graduate students with close ties to the Museum. A select subgroup of Museum members offered valuable ideas from the perspective of local and regional communities, especially about issues of access and communications. Last but not least, feedback was solicited and received from a broad segment of the Museum's audiences, including members of the general public, program partners, and colleagues in the offices of University Marketing & Communications, University Advancement, and other related units across campus.

The plan formed under the leadership of Sabine Eckmann, William T. Kemper Director and Chief Curator, in alignment with leadership of the Sam Fox School: Carmon Colangelo, Ralph J. Nagel Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts and E. Desmond Lee Professor for Collaboration in the Arts; Heather Woofter, former Director of the College of Architecture and Graduate School of Architecture & Urban Design and Sam and Marilyn Fox Professor; and Amy Hauff, Director of the College & Graduate School of Art and Jane Reuter Hitzeman and Herbert F. Hitzeman, Jr. Professor of Art. It was reviewed and approved by Dean Colangelo and Julie Kemper Foyer, chair of the Museum's Art Collection Committee.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION AND STRATEGIC REVIEW**

This strategic plan is a living document that will evolve as opportunities and circumstances unfold. New initiatives will be developed and implemented by the director with senior staff. Annually, progress toward goals will be noted, existing priorities will be assessed, and strategies will be revised as needed. To ensure that planning remains in accord with larger institutional goals, the director will also review progress and new developments on a quarterly basis with the dean of the Sam Fox School and on a biannual basis with the School's National Council and the Museum's Art Collection Committee. The dean of the Sam Fox School will apprise the chancellor and provost of updates as appropriate, and financial affairs will be reviewed annually in the University-wide budget submission process, with ultimate approval by the Board of Trustees.

# Leadership

## UNIVERSITY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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**David W. Kemper**, Vice Chair  
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**Andrew D. Martin**, Chancellor  
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**Vicki Match Suna**, Chair, Sam Fox School  
 National Council  
**Carmon Colangelo**, Ralph J. Nagel Dean,  
 Sam Fox School  
**Sabine Eckmann**, William T. Kemper  
 Director and Chief Curator,  
 Kemper Art Museum



Sabine Eckmann, PhD, has served as the William T. Kemper Director and Chief Curator since 2006.

## ART COLLECTION COMMITTEE

**Julie Kemper Foyer**, Chair  
**Mary Randolph Ballinger**  
**Lee Broughton**  
**Spencer B. Burke**  
**Bunny Burson**  
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# Statements

Mission Statement 12

Vision Statement 14

Core Values 16

*Ai Weiwei: Bare Life* (2019), the inaugural exhibition in the Museum's newly renovated facilities, transformed the galleries with monumental installations and drew unprecedented attendance.

# Mission Statement

The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, part of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, is one of the nation's leading university art museums. As a teaching museum within a major research university, it serves as a center of cultural and intellectual life on campus and in St. Louis.

Its mission is to collect significant modern and contemporary art and preserve its collection for current and future generations; provide excellence in art historical research, exhibition, and object-based learning; and engage the campus population, its visitors and alumni, the St. Louis region, and the global art community.

The first site-specific installation in the Museum, Olafur Eliasson's *Your Imploded View* (2001) heightens awareness of the subjective character of perception as its subtly uneven surface distorts reflections. Also visible is Michel Majerus's *mm6* (2001).





← Modernism and the Twentieth Century

# Vision Statement

With the belief that the arts and humanities are essential to a democratic society, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum inspires discourses that utilize the power of art to advance understandings of the human condition and contribute to global equity and sustainability. Incorporating multiple voices through mutually beneficial collaborations, we aim to foster and disseminate innovative ideas and historically grounded interpretations; stimulate curiosity and creative engagement; and enhance visual literacy and critical thinking. Integral to the Kemper Art Museum's excellence and success is a commitment to diversity and inclusion as necessary to all institutional practices.

Tomás Saraceno's *Cosmic Filaments* (2019), a permanent installation commissioned for the Museum's May Department Stores Foundation Foyer, consists of three iridescent, polyhedron-shaped modules that hang from the ceiling via a network of ropes.







# Core Values

- Excellence in scholarship and programming
- Innovation in learning and engagement
- Relevance of art and culture locally and globally
- Diversity, inclusion, and access
- Equity and democratic citizenship
- Environmental sustainability and social justice







*Mother and Child* (1949) by Jacques Lipchitz is one of numerous artworks in the collection by exile artists and embodies both the artist's early fascination with Cubism and his turn toward spiritual and humanist themes later in his career.





# Areas of Focus

Collecting Museum 20

Teaching Museum 24

Global Museum 28

Accessible Museum 32

Digital Museum 36

The James M. Kemper Gallery, opened in fall 2019, greatly increased the space to display the Museum's paintings, sculpture, and video from the 1950s to the present, including Pop, Minimalist, and Postminimalist art.

# Collecting Museum

## Impactful collecting practices and sustainable collection care

Strengthen, expand, and preserve a distinctive art collection to enrich the lives of students, faculty, staff, and alumni of Washington University, the greater St. Louis community, and national and international audiences

Many of the Museum's modern artworks were acquired under the leadership of the renowned art historian H. W. Janson, a German exile who, as curator in the 1940s, initiated an expansive program to purchase the most significant art of the time.









## CONTEXT

Cultural archives are an indispensable resource for preserving, rethinking, and reanimating historical memory; conceiving new narratives; and encouraging critical thinking. Since its inception in 1881, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum has actively collected leading contemporary and historical artworks, demonstrating belief in the experience of art as personal, meaningful, and relevant.

## CORE ACTIVITIES

- **Preserve and develop the Museum's world-class collection**
- **Advance collection research** and artwork interpretation
- **Support artwork acquisitions and conservation** with endowments, gifts, and grants

## PRIORITIES & NEW INITIATIVES

- **Acquire significant, exemplary, and innovative artworks** in a range of mediums, inclusive of artwork from historically underrepresented artists and marginalized aesthetic practices, through purchases, donations, commissions, bequests, and strategic deaccessioning as outlined in the Collection Development Plan\*
- **Acquire artworks that address pressing critical issues**, including the climate crisis and racial and environmental injustice, to stimulate dialogue, raise awareness, and motivate a shared sense of human responsibility
- **Establish a rotating postdoctoral curatorial fellow** with expertise in canonically understudied areas to develop exhibitions, related programs, and artwork interpretations
- **Establish a conservation department** with a full-time conservator and research opportunities in preservation studies for faculty and students in the Sam Fox School and other schools across campus
- **Increase storage and work space capacity** for stewardship of the collection and collection conservation according to the Collection Management Plan\*

ABOVE: The sculpture *Golddigger* (2003), by Kara Walker with Klaus Bürgele, and the screen-print composition *Untitled (Colored People Grid)* (2009–10), by Carrie Mae Weems, are among the Museum's important acquisitions of twenty-first-century art.

BELOW: In 2022 the Museum received a Preservation Assistance Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support assessment of the Museum's works on paper dating from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

\*These plans are available separately.

# Teaching Museum

Relevant and stimulating  
learning and engagement  
experiences

Encourage and support visual literacy, intellectual inquiry, creative engagement, cross-disciplinary exchange, and aesthetic experiences through art historical scholarship and object-based learning in the arts

WashU students who participate in the Museum's Student Educator program build skills in visual analysis, critical thinking, and public speaking as they lead interactive tours in the galleries for visitors of all ages.





## CONTEXT

The Kemper Art Museum is unique among academic departments and research centers on the campus of Washington University. It provides distinctive opportunities for students, faculty, and staff for experiential learning with and about art objects. The Museum is also a gathering place for the broader St. Louis community and visitors to the region to engage with a world-class art collection, dynamic exhibitions, and stimulating public programs.

Museum tours for K–12 school groups focus on stimulating curiosity, encouraging active learning, and making connections among art, the classroom, and students' lives.





#### CORE ACTIVITIES

- **Present loan- and collection-based exhibitions and publish original research** that advance the fields of art history and theory as well as other disciplines in the humanities
- **Provide innovative learning opportunities and interpretive materials** that draw on the intellectual and cultural resources of on- and off-campus communities to ensure the relevance of Museum programs to all audiences
- **Support academic excellence across campus** through collaborations on collection research, exhibitions, critical theory, cultural studies, medical humanities, publications, and public programs on the history, theory, practice, and interpretation of the visual arts
- **Design arts-based curricula** for elementary through graduate schools, continuing education, and visitors with disabilities and underresourced communities

#### PRIORITIES & NEW INITIATIVES

- **Strengthen ties to the St. Louis region** by establishing a community programs coordinator position to develop new programs for teens, families, and older adults as well as public programs that create a social space for gathering.
- **Expand efforts to advance racial and economic equity** in the museum field, including providing more paid opportunities for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds
- **Provide new opportunities for Sam Fox School and WashU students** to increase exposure to museum practices, including supporting a Master of Arts in Arts Administration at the School
- **Establish a public-facing Teaching Artist program** with graduate students in the Sam Fox School to increase access to art for local audiences through on-site workshops and other programs

# Global Museum

## Globally oriented art and history

Encourage and support broadened understanding  
of artistic production and cultural histories and their  
interconnections across all continents

Ai Weiwei's large-scale *Illumination* (2019) is a Lego-brick version of the artist-activist's well-known selfie, taken in an elevator as he was being detained by police in China in 2009.









**JACOB LAWRENCE**

The 20th-century painting of an African American woman, by JACOB LAWRENCE. At the MEXAS (MEXAS) in "Harlem" (1941), 1941, 1941. The painting was in the collection of the "Harlem" (1941), 1941, 1941. The painting was in the collection of the "Harlem" (1941), 1941, 1941.



Jacob Lawrence with Ben Enwonwu at the AMSAC headquarters in Lagos, 1962.



## CONTEXT

Cultural institutions worldwide have begun to look more broadly at art produced across the globe. A multitude of artistic voices allows for an expansive appreciation of human experience, sociopolitical conditions, and cultural differences. The Kemper Art Museum is dedicated to fostering global explorations and partnerships that focus on inclusive narratives about art and its histories and shape a consciousness of a diverse yet interrelated world. We will present artists working in a wide range of geographical locations to explore culturally specific traditions, transcultural exchanges, and powerful aesthetic languages.

## CORE ACTIVITIES

- **Facilitate cross-continental collaborations** that advance global understandings of history and culture through the arts and humanities
- **Vitalize the international arts offerings in St. Louis**

## PRIORITIES & NEW INITIATIVES

- **Build new and strengthen existing international partnerships** to expand the research, presentation, understanding, and awareness of global artistic practices and histories
- **Conceive and curate exhibitions that explore the global** in relation to local, national, and continent-wide cultural contexts
- **Generate new scholarship on global modernisms, modernities, and contemporaneity** with a focus on colonialism and postcolonial histories through multidisciplinary symposia, panels, lectures, and publications
- **Expand the Art on Campus program** to include temporary commissions by a wide range of contemporary artists, including short-term interventions, performance-based projects, special commissions, and sound art installations
- **Increase the Museum's multilingual offerings** and draw on the Museum's international network of arts professionals and scholars in support of the Sam Fox School and WashU student populations

ABOVE: *African Modernism in America* (2023), organized by the American Federation of Arts and Fisk University Galleries, is the first traveling survey to explore the range of aesthetic strategies employed by African artists in the years after World War II and their complex relationship with American artists, scholars, patrons, and cultural organizations at the time.

BELOW: The opening celebration at the Museum featured a panel discussion with the exhibition curators that highlighted historical and contemporary challenges to expanding the canon of modern art history.

# Accessible Museum

## Access, inclusion, and community collaborations

Strengthen the Kemper Art Museum's connection to the cultural landscape of St. Louis and ensure the Museum's relevance for its regional, national, and international visitors

A dramatic performance in the style of the American dancer Loïe Fuller (1862–1928), who had captivated fin-de-siècle Paris with her multimedia spectacles of fabric, motion, and light, accompanied the faculty-curated exhibition *Spectacle and Leisure in Paris: Degas to Mucha* (2017).





## CONTEXT

The Kemper Art Museum is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive atmosphere for both first encounters and sustained engagement with art. Recognizing that there are a variety of barriers to accessing and navigating the Museum, we work to advance ways of ensuring meaningful experiences for all visitors. Dialogue and community-based collaborations strengthen connections among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the general public; reach new local and regional audiences; and support University-wide efforts to contribute positively to our home community of St. Louis.





#### CORE ACTIVITIES

- **Facilitate access to arts education** and a broad spectrum of sensory experiences with physical works of art
- **Foster freedom of inquiry and expression of ideas** for all visitors including from diverse economic, educational, racial, and cultural backgrounds
- **Create an equitable environment** that is welcoming to all

#### PRIORITIES & NEW INITIATIVES

- **Reach new audiences** through improved communications and deepened connections with local, national, and global arts media
- **Cultivate new, mutually beneficial partnerships with local institutions and practitioners** and WashU centers and departments to participate in knowledge-sharing through the visual arts
- **Expand on-site visitation** to reflect campus and regional demographics
- **Develop and implement inclusivity and accessibility standards** for institutional design, didactics, media, and communications in accordance with University-wide initiatives
- **Establish a community advisory group** to deepen local outreach
- **Diversify the full-time, permanent staff** to enrich institutional processes and programs
- **Improve staff training** and enhance methods for obtaining and integrating detailed visitor and participant feedback to ensure relevant and engaging Museum experiences

With priority placed on accessibility for visitors of various backgrounds and abilities, the Museum provides wheelchairs, sensory kits, large-print labels, magnifying glasses, specialized tours, and other amenities.

# Digital Museum

## Digital access, interpretation, and communications

Increase digital access to the material, intellectual, and programmatic resources of the Museum and enhance the aesthetic experience of online and on-site audiences through the strategic use of new technologies

Amar Kanwar's *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007), part of the exhibition *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations* (2014), employs an eight-channel video installation to examine the violence perpetrated against thousands of women during and after the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent.





**CONTEXT**

The advancement of digital technologies in the twenty-first century has fundamentally changed nearly every aspect of museum practices, from how information about artworks is stored, conveyed, and retrieved; to how audiences learn about and experience artworks; to artistic practices themselves. The Kemper Art Museum embraces a dual commitment to the importance of both online content and the physical experience with works of art. We are dedicated to enhancing innovation that drives the relation of digital and analog, virtual and physical into the future.





## CORE ACTIVITIES

- **Provide user-friendly digital access** to the Museum's collections, exhibitions, scholarly research, public programs, and related social and educational activities
- **Adapt advanced technologies to enhance on-site visitor engagement**

## PRIORITIES & NEW INITIATIVES

- **Activate the rich capabilities of the Museum's new website and database** (2023) by increasing the number of high-resolution images, enhancing searchability and findability for the Museum's resources, and creating new multimedia and digitized content relating to the collection, exhibitions, publications, and institutional history and practices
- **Establish a digital strategist position** to support the use of emerging new technologies such as AI and NFTs as they permeate the creation, interpretation, and experience of art and to ensure ready access to the Museum's world-class collection and other resources for research, teaching, and the preservation of historical knowledge
- **Establish and implement advanced resource management technologies** for preserving digital and analog records and assets in collaboration with WashU's centralized Information Technology and University Libraries initiatives
- **Improve efficiencies in security technologies** to ensure optimum safety for visitors and staff, artworks, and facilities
- **Improve efficiencies in tracking visitor services and membership data**, including visitor numbers and demographics, membership growth, shop sales, program attendees, and website and social media activities

Nicole Miller's *A Sound, a Signal, the Circus* (2022), a room-size multimedia installation commissioned by the Museum, featured an intricate choreography of moving image and laser-light animation accompanied by a soundscape of excerpted interviews with Black youth and other members of the St. Louis community.



The mirrored surfaces of Isa Genzken's *Little Crazy Column* (2002) and *Bill II* (2001) disrupt traditional boundaries between viewer and art, reflecting both body and gaze and furthering the artwork's social dimension.

# Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

## MISSION

The Sam Fox School is a leader in architecture, art, and design education. We are advancing our fields through innovative research and creative practice, excellence in teaching, engagement with a world-class university art museum, and a deep commitment to addressing the social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time.

# Washington University in St. Louis

## MISSION

The mission of Washington University in St. Louis is to act in service of truth through the formation of leaders, the discovery of knowledge, and the treatment of patients for the betterment of our region, our nation, and our world. At WashU, we generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge.

We foster freedom of inquiry and expression of ideas in our research, teaching, and learning. We aim to create an environment that encourages and supports wide-ranging exploration at the frontier of discovery by embracing diverse perspectives from individuals of all identities and backgrounds. We promote higher education and rigorous research as a fundamental component of an open, vibrant society. We strive to enhance the lives and livelihoods not only of our students, patients, and employees but also of the people of the greater St. Louis community and beyond. We do so by addressing scientific, social, economic, medical, and other challenges in the local, national, and international realms.

## PHOTO CREDITS

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