

Washington County Museum of Fine Arts: *Treasures Abound*

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Hagerstown's City Park is considered the crown jewel of the city. At the center of the crown is a brilliant diamond — the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts. From the moment you approach the front archway of the museum there is a distinct sense of beckoning and welcome. Just strolling through the courtyard, past stone and bronze sculptures and a gurgling fountain lets you know that this is a special place; even the bench is a work of art.



Photo courtesy of Washington County Museum of Fine Arts

The welcoming atmosphere continues into the lobby area where visitors are met by knowledgeable docents and a friendly front desk security attendant. Staff is eager to provide each guest with an outstanding experience. On any given day you might run into the museum's director, Rebecca Massie Lane, who is happy to share her joy in this special place. Beyond the lobby, it's a dilemma of choices – go left or right? Truly, it doesn't matter, because there are treasures galore to discover in both directions, and the museum is designed in a way that leads naturally from one gallery to the next, until you end up back at the starting point.

If you've made the choice to turn left, the corridor leads to the Bowman Concert Hall and Gallery. The exhibitions in the gallery change, which is perfect for those who regularly attend the recitals, music workshops and lectures held in the hall, many of which are free. Moving from the lively Bowman Gallery leads to the Kerstein Gallery, which will soon house an exhibition of some of the museum's early 20th century collection.

In stark contrast, the next gallery features the museum's Old Masters works with paintings, sculpture and

antique furnishings. The gallery evokes the feeling of a great hall from the early Renaissance, which is the perfect showcase for these 15th-18th century works. It is here that you see the museum's first purchased acquisition and oldest painting, *Saints Mary Magdalene and Paul* by Giovanni Mazzone (c.1453 – c. 1510). The painting glows with ground gold halos, and Mazzone also carved the intricate gilded wood that perfectly frames this work of sacred art.



**The Museum's oldest painting –
Saints Mary Magdalene and Paul
by Giovanni Mazzone, 1480s.**

Here you'll also find the museum's iconic symbol, *Diana of the Chase*, a striking bronze sculpture by American sculptor Anna Hyatt Huntington from the early 1920s. This casting was donated to the museum by Huntington herself in 1941 in honor of the museum's 10-year anniversary. It was originally displayed outdoors, as was intended by the artist, but was enclosed in the current rotunda due to conservation issues in 1998.

Further along on your exploration, the Smith Gallery houses a significant portion of the museum's collection of mid-19th century art. Two very familiar figures are housed there – a bronze sculpture of Benjamin Franklin by Paul Wayland Bartlett (1865-1925) and a bust of Abraham Lincoln. If the

style of the Lincoln bust looks familiar, it is because it was carved by Gutzon Borglum (1867-1941), who created the monumental carvings at Mt. Rushmore and Stone Mountain Park. This bust is a smaller version of the same one that is kept in the crypts of the United States Capitol building.

Perhaps the heart of the museum is the Singer Memorial Gallery of American and European Art. The founders of the museum, Hagerstown native Anna Brugh Singer and her husband William H. Singer, Jr. established the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in 1928. Hagerstown was a bustling industrial town; a railroad hub and manufacturing center surrounded by rich farmland. Mrs. Singer saw that the region also needed a dedicated cultural center that was, “necessary for the spiritual growth of Town and Country.” Their gift became the anchor for the world-class collections that are enjoyed by people from around the country.

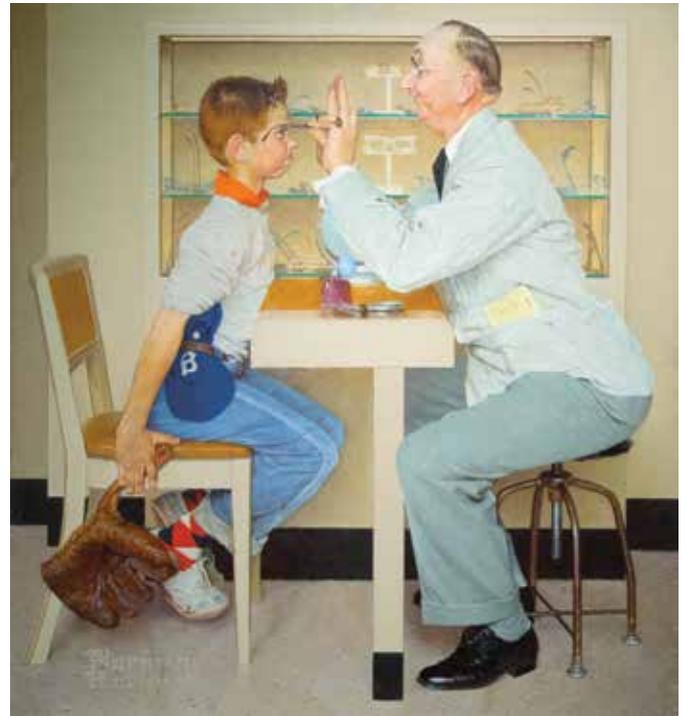
Through careful design of corridors and galleries, and the purposeful placement of artworks, visitors are often led directly toward special surprises. One of those is the oil on canvas painting *The Oculist* by Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). The image appeared on the cover of the May 19, 1956 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, and was purchased by the museum directly from the artist in 1957. It has been a favorite of patrons and visitors ever since.

There is a robust schedule of rotating exhibitions featuring objects from the permanent collection, works of living artists and notable traveling exhibitions such as the Masters of Photography show that will be on exhibit July 11 – October 25, 2015.

The work of notable photographers, including Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange, will be showcased in this exhibition, organized by Reading Public Museum. The photographs represent the history of photography from the 1880s through the 1980s, with a particular emphasis on the first decades of the 20th century.

Washington County Museum of Fine Arts is a place that you can visit often; a place to spend thoughtful time with old favorites or to make new discoveries.

Visit WCMFA’s website at www.wcmfa.org for a complete schedule of upcoming events.



Top photo:
The Oculist by
Norman Rockwell,
1956.

Left sculpture:
Diana of the Chase.



Photos at right are part of
the *Masters of American
Photography* show that
will be on exhibit July 11
– October 25, 2015.

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