

**From Experiment to Experienced:
The Cultivation of a Gallery – and a Curator – at the University of Minnesota.**

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To K.C. & E.M. Thank you for the introduction...

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PREFACE

The completion of a collaborative archival project between the University Archives and the Weisman Art Museum (WAM) at the University of Minnesota revealed Ruth Lawrence... her efforts in the education of University students, as well as the evolution of the University Gallery (precursor to WAM) under her guidance.

In order to create an awareness of Ruth's work – which was primarily visual – a companion website was produced by the author that utilized principles learned from instruction in online presentation and web design. This website was created as a visual online compliment to this formal written thesis, and can be accessed at the following web address: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~wils0952/index.html>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a letter dated September 16, 1944, Corporal James Thompson of Texarkana, Texas, wrote to Ruth Lawrence, Director of the University Art Gallery at the University of Minnesota, and inquired about the presumed qualifications of her occupation,

Dear Mrs. Lawrence,

Like thousands of other soldiers, I am trying to plan for my post-war education. In this connection I thought perhaps you could tell me of some schools where it is possible to get a degree in Gallery Management. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Cpl. James Thompson
3032 OCAM Co.
625 OBAM Br. RROD
Texarkana, Texas¹

Lawrence responded to Corporal Thompson by outlining the traits required to manage a gallery, based on her personal experience,

There are two main pre-requisites for such work, the first is a fund of knowledge, based on scholarship and research ability; second is administrative ability, drive coupled with social suavity, grace and tact. The ability to see and make the right social contacts, a charming personality and good presence, and the ability to talk frequently and easily about most any subject, and finally the capacity to raise money and draw in gifts.²

¹ Corporal James Thompson to Mrs. Lawrence, September 16, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

² Ruth Lawrence to Corporal James Thompson, September 20, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

Lawrence's description of the skills required for gallery work was formed after a decade of experience in the role of Curator, and eventual Director, of the University Gallery. The characterization that she used to describe her occupation reveals a sense of confidence, a confidence that was not always felt by Lawrence, who did not hold a degree in gallery management or possess formal training in museum practices. In a personal reflection upon her initial entrance into the profession in September 1934, she stated—in the third person—that

she was amazed and somewhat confounded, although also flattered, that they would think that she could handle such an assignment... she felt she was not qualified, had had no training and would not know where to begin... she believed they had mistaken her capabilities.³

“They” refers to University of Minnesota President Lotus Coffman and Assistant to the President Malcolm Willey, who appointed Lawrence to the title of part-time curator of the Little Gallery for the 1934-1935 academic year, filling a vacancy essential to the success of the infant gallery. Conceived by Coffman and Willey, the aptly nicknamed gallery began as an experiment in the fine arts that first opened on the fourth floor of Northrop Auditorium on April 5, 1934. In its inaugural season, the Gallery was managed by Hudson Walker, who was trained in gallery management at the Fogg Museum at Harvard College. Walker, Curator of Art, left his position in June 1934 at the conclusion of the academic year to open his own art gallery in New York, leaving the University's new art gallery without a leader.

The attention that the Gallery received in its first few months of operation, as well as its reception amongst students, faculty, and the greater community, impressed upon Coffman and Willey that their experiment had potential for further growth, and that a new leader should be selected to continue it. In preparing for the 1934-1935 academic year, Willey relayed to Coffman the difficulty in choosing a person to lead the Gallery: “It is difficult to find a person with the historical background in fine arts, an interest in students and the right personality to do all of this.”⁴ Willey suggested that Ruth Lawrence, widow of the former Assistant to the

³ Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 4, University Art Gallery, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

⁴ Malcolm Willey to President Lotus Coffman, August 29, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

President, James Cooper Lawrence, be considered for the role. Lawrence held a degree in Architecture from the University (B.A., 1933) and was at the time studying sculpture in Italy. Correspondence between Willey and Coffman further revealed that university leadership hadn't mistaken Lawrence's abilities – as she so humbly believed – but that “they” had great confidence in her potential:

She has the graces that would be of assistance in establishing contacts for the gallery with citizens over town; she would appeal to students... Here is a project that I am sure would be completely to her interest, and in a field where she is likely to go ahead and develop something that would be of tremendous benefit to the University.⁵

Lawrence, the admitted unqualified curator, would fulfill Willey's description, and go on to utilize the resources of her time – and strength of her character – to lead the University Art Gallery for twenty-three years.

Today, the University Gallery is known as the Weisman Art Museum, an internationally renowned university museum—the legacy of which is credited in large part to its initial formative years as a gallery under Lawrence's direction. How did Lawrence, an amateur artist, avowedly untrained in formal gallery management, establish practices and develop exhibitions and programming at the University Gallery? Through the pursuit of exhibitions, relationships, and outreach initiatives that were relevant to University students and to the greater community, Lawrence transformed a gallery experiment into an art establishment at the University of Minnesota, and in turn, cultivated her personal growth and professional career to become an experienced Curator/Director.

On the occasion of Lawrence's retirement in 1957, Willey reflected upon his earlier prediction regarding Ruth's qualifications, “Some day, when the story of art in Minneapolis is fully told, the imprint that [Lawrence] and the Gallery made, notably in awakening an interest in contemporary art, will constitute a very significant chapter.”⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bev Mundrum, “The Artist in The Gallery,” *Ivory Tower* (Minneapolis, MN), June 17, 1957, 20, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1957/06/17>.

What follows is a humble attempt to contribute to that chapter by providing a case study of the role that Lawrence played in the early development of the University of Minnesota's art gallery, as well as how Lawrence developed personally and professionally as a gallery curator, director, and artist. Inspired by the archival records that illuminate Lawrence's administrative activities, exhibition planning strategies, educational philosophies, and personal triumphs and tragedies, I offer a reflection upon Lawrence's "fund of knowledge, drive, and social suavity," in consideration of her development of formal gallery practices and contribution to the foundation of the museum.

Through the close examination of primary sources that are seldom considered, new insights are revealed about the cultivation of fine arts instruction and appreciation in higher education, and bring to awareness the contributions of an unsung contributor to the legacy of the University of Minnesota.

The following chapters begin with a short profile of Lawrence's background prior to her position with the University of Minnesota, as previous experiences would later influence her actions and philosophy in the development of the gallery program. Chapter 3 will establish the genesis of the gallery fine arts experiment by University President Lotus Coffman, which will provide a framework for Lawrence's eventual career, and details the circumstances under which her position was created.

Chapters 4 and 5 reflect upon the early formation and development of Lawrence's educational philosophy and formal practices in the execution of exhibitions, programs, and development of a permanent collection.

Chapter 6 details the influence of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects assigned to the gallery from 1938-1942, which provided Lawrence with a workforce to develop outreach services that built influence throughout the state and nation.

Chapter 7 and 8 will explore the impact of WWII on the gallery. After the U.S. entrance into war, WPA employees assigned to University projects were re-assigned to the war effort, which resulted in the suspension of many gallery services. Lawrence and a skeleton staff were left with the task of mounting exhibitions that were not only informative, but also relevant to the lives of students in the context of war. After the conclusion of WWII, Lawrence pursued the addition of professional staff and the continued development of outreach initiatives.

The final chapters will reflect upon the end of Lawrence's career, her sabbatical study, personal interests, and retirement; and will conclude with an acknowledgement of her accomplishments and contribution to the University of Minnesota.

CHAPTER 2

MRS. JAMES COOPER LAWRENCE

Ruth Elizabeth Williamson was born in Clarksfield, Ohio, on June 9, 1890, to Allen John Williamson and Leila Edith Wheeler Williamson.⁷ Allen, a congregational minister, and wife Leila, raised Ruth and her elder brother Ralph in Pennsylvania and Ohio.⁸

The course of Ruth's eventual introduction to art can be charted by events in her early adult life. She attended Ohio State University from 1911-1914, but did not initially finish her degree, deciding instead to marry James Cooper Lawrence on April 22, 1915, in Buffalo, New York.⁹ She later resumed her education however, explaining that, "After our marriage, my husband and I happened to live in college towns. I went back to school... There were so many things I hadn't learned; neglected parts of my education."¹⁰ Though she took primary care of her home and her children, Elizabeth Ruth (born in 1917), James, Jr. (1921), and Mary Virginia (1922-1927), Ruth's life was also very much aligned with her husband's career and interests.¹¹

James Lawrence began his career in higher education as an English professor and chairman of the English Department at Westminster College in Pennsylvania, but later entered into the private business sector in 1911. Between 1911-1928, James worked at the Goodrich Tire Company in Akron, Ohio, and served as the President of the Racine Horseshoe Company as well as the Faultless Rubber Company, where he acquired knowledge in economics and management.¹² Despite his corporate position and inclination, James acknowledged the

⁷ Esther Stutheit and the Minnesota Editorial Association. *Who's Who in Minnesota*, 1941: 890.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bev Mundrum, "The Artist in the Gallery," *Ivory Tower* (Minneapolis, MN), June 17, 1957, 11, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1957/06/17>.

¹¹ "Ohio, Deaths, 1908-1953," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/X82J-MM1>), Mary Vergergina Lawrence, died December 14, 1927, death certificate 20056, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. According to the death certificate, Mary Virginia Lawrence was born on October 22, 1922 and passed away April 11, 1927 due to idiopathic dilation of the colon, caused by Hirschsprungs disease.

¹² University of Minnesota Alumni Association, "Lawrence, New Aid To President Coffman Arrives," *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, 27, no.8 (1928): 354, <http://purl.umn.edu/53976>.

economic hardships that faced Americans in the mild depression that followed World War I. With assistance from his wife Ruth, James established a knitting guild to bring employment to the many women displaced financially by the faltering economy.¹³ Ruth credited this project for bringing art into her consciousness: “My job included both designing and selling knitted garments.”¹⁴ She attested, “During this time art became my prime interest.”¹⁵ To expand her interest she also attended the New York School of Interior Decorations (known today as the New York School of Interior Design) from 1926-1927.¹⁶

Ruth’s continued pursuit of her interest in art would develop alongside changes to her husband’s career. In February 1928, James accepted the position of Assistant to the President of the University of Minnesota, and relocated his family – Ruth, daughter Elizabeth (Betty Ruth), and son James, Jr. – to Minnesota. James began his work in support of the educational vision of University President Lotus Coffman. His administrative duties included arranging addresses, conferences, and lectures that featured noted scholars representative of many disciplines, as well as speaking at convocations, and also directing the Summer Session program. In 1931, James assumed the title of “University Dean.”¹⁷

In an extension of his duties at the University, James pursued public service work that related to economic improvement. In 1930, his sympathies towards those affected by the Great Depression were channeled into an appointment to a position with Herbert Hoover’s administration as the Director General of Regional Advisors on the Emergency Committee on Employment – a federal entity created to address economic disparity and unemployment. The role required James to be on leave from the University from November 1930 - May 1931.¹⁸ Upon his return, he worked to establish the Employment Stabilization Research Institute. The

¹³ “Mrs. Lawrence Founded University Art Gallery,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Aug. 11, 1944, 3, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1944/08/11>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Esther Stutheit and the Minnesota Editorial Association. *Who’s Who in Minnesota*, 1941: 890.

¹⁷ University of Minnesota, “Lawrence Made University Dean,” February 9, 1931, *Minnesota Chats*, 13, no. 8 (1931): 4, <http://purl.umn.edu/108848>.

¹⁸ University of Minnesota, “The Biennial Report of the President, 1930-1932,” 1932, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 56, <http://purl.umn.edu/91580>.

institute initiated an instrumental two-year study of unemployment in Minnesota that aimed to ascertain how vocational training could lead to employment opportunities.¹⁹

In addition to his public service, James fulfilled duties expected of a high-ranking university official. He regularly attended and spoke at meetings as an official representative of the University, often with his wife Ruth by his side. At a December 12, 1931, meeting of a unit of the Minnesota Alumni Association hosted at the home of a member of the University's Board of Regents, James gave a speech titled, "The Place of [Inter-Collegiate] Athletics in the Scheme of University Life." The alumni association's magazine reported on the speech: "with characteristic power and wit [James] outlined the great contributions that competitive athletics makes toward University spirit and morale."²⁰ The report also noted that James was "accompanied by Mrs. Lawrence and their touch of enthusiasm added to the success of the occasion."²¹

Any enthusiasm expressed by Ruth in support of her husband and of the University of Minnesota was also evidenced in the pursuit of her interest in art, as the University served as an ideal setting for her education. Inspired by "curiosity," she enrolled in the School of Architecture with no intention of completing a degree.²² In a description of this period of her life, Ruth explained, "In addition to carrying 22 credits and running a home, I did [a] sculpting commission for which I had to move four tons of clay."²³

The enthusiasm present in all aspects of Ruth's life, as a mother, wife, and amateur artist, would transition from curiosity into serious study following the unexpected death of James to suicide, as result of a rumored University financial scandal, in August of 1932.²⁴ Ruth went on

¹⁹ Donald G. Paterson, "The Minnesota Unemployment Study," November 21, 1931, *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, 31, n. 9 (1931): 135, <http://purl.umn.edu/53998>.

²⁰ The Minnesota Alumni Association, "Moorhead Meeting," January 9, 1932, *The Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, 31, n. 13 (1932): 207, <http://purl.umn.edu/53998>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Mrs. Lawrence Founded University Art Gallery," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), Aug. 11, 1944, 3, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1944/08/11>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Minnesota Death Certificates Index" database, Minnesota Historical Society (<http://mnhs.org>), search for James C. Lawrence, died August 14, 1932; death certificate 020487, Hennepin County, Minneapolis, MN, Minnesota Department of Health, Section of Vital Statistics.

to complete a Bachelor of Arts with a major in architecture and a minor in fine arts in 1933.²⁵ After completing her degree, Ruth left her life at the University of Minnesota to travel to Europe and continue her study of art. She enrolled her son James Jr. in a boarding school in England (daughter Betty Ruth was by then attending college at Radcliffe), and moved to Italy where she studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* (“Academy of Fine Arts”) in Florence from 1933-1934.²⁶ After plans to study sculpture with the artist Ivan Mestrovic in Yugoslavia fell through, Ruth returned to Italy where she learned of an opportunity that would allow her to not only continue to develop her interest in art, but also to share it. She recalled: “I found a letter waiting for me in Florence. They wanted me to come back to the University to teach.”²⁷

The letter was from Malcolm MacLean, administrator of the University’s General College and a colleague of James Lawrence during his term as University Dean. MacLean wrote to Ruth to inquire if she would accept an appointment as a part-time counselor to female students and part-time assistant to Fine Arts instructor Everard Upjohn.

Ruth accepted the offer. However, she would return to Minnesota to find that President Coffman and his new assistant, Malcolm Willey (former professor of sociology), had different plans in mind for her return—plans that involved the “little” art gallery that was established on campus during that past year.

²⁵ Esther Stutheit and the Minnesota Editorial Association. *Who’s Who in Minnesota*, 1941: 890.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Bev Mundrum, “The Artist in the Gallery,” 20.

CHAPTER 3

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY GALLERY

In a public institution cultivation of the fine arts is likely to show a wavering pattern, with its moments of light interrupted by dark ages of protracted duration... every institution comparable in age and effort to Minnesota has a similar record of brave starts, long chilly pauses, and underground movements.²⁸

– James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951*.

In his anthology of the history of the first one hundred years of the University of Minnesota (U of M), James Gray stated: “The story of the growth of art instruction at Minnesota is that of a kind of stubborn, furtive flowering...”²⁹ Several published histories reference the stubborn start of the fine arts at the U of M, all of which generally credit the introduction of coursework in art to purposes related to the instruction of engineers. A series of courses related to mechanical drawing were among the first art courses offered at the University, but were later abandoned due to lack of interest or changes in department structures. In 1882, Professor William Pike of the College of Engineering, Metallurgy, and the Mechanic Arts created an artisan training school and an evening course in industrial drawing designed “for men engaged in mechanical pursuits.”³⁰ The training school continued until 1892 when it was disbanded.

More formal attempts to introduce art into the curriculum developed across disciplines beginning in the late 1880s. In 1887, instructor Henry T. Ardley formed a school of design in the mechanical arts department.³¹ William Kirchner, instructor of mechanical drawing and descriptive geometry, taught coursework in drawing, painting, and modeling.³² Henriette Clopath served as the head of the School of Freehand Drawing and Design, part of the College of

²⁸ James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 453, <http://purl.umn.edu/51020>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 454.

³⁰ E. Bird Johnson, ed., *Forty Years of the University of Minnesota* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota General Alumni Association, 1910), 46, <http://purl.umn.edu/59623>.

³¹ James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951*, 454.

³² *Ibid.*

Engineering and Mechanical Arts, during the 1890s. The department of education offered courses in domestic art and science, physical culture, music, woodwork, and machine and ironwork and incorporated the Minneapolis Handicraft Guild into its organization in the early 1900s. By 1916, professor of architecture Samuel Chatwood Burton held regular lectures on a variety of art topics in addition to teaching courses in drawing, “hand-print,” and stage design in the department of architecture.³³ On the “farm campus” in St. Paul, sisters Harriet and Ruth Goldstein instructed home economics within the department of agriculture, and even co-published a book on art appreciation titled, “Art in Everyday Life” through the University Press in 1925.³⁴

During his term as the Dean of the College of Education (1915-1920), Lotus Coffman considered art less as a supplement to training in formally established technical and mechanical disciplines and focused more on the study of art as a distinct field of its own. Coffman transformed the Minneapolis Handicraft Guild into an art education department and promoted the guild’s principal, Ruth Raymond, to lead it.³⁵ Raymond provided instruction to teachers in training to enable them to implement fine art processes into elementary and secondary education. With this development, instruction in the fine arts on campus focused not only on learning the methods of artistic production, but also on the attainment of the skills necessary to teach artistic methods—and art appreciation—to others.

Coffman, who was born and raised in rural Indiana, was a trained educator who served as a teacher and superintendent prior to his career in higher education. It is not until Dean Coffman became *President* Coffman that the fledgling instruction of art at the University of Minnesota would change to become a priority at the forefront of the development of adult education.

Coffman, who became President of the University in 1920, is noted for implementing many initiatives—largely experimental—that resulted in great expansion for the University, despite being set amidst the economic backdrop of World War I and the Great Depression. Coffman’s experiments in higher education were framed by, and responsive to, the economic and social realities of the time. One of Coffman’s primary concerns was to provide education and training to young Minnesotans, to include recent high school graduates, as well as U of M

³³ James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951*, 455.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

students who were struggling to afford the costs associated with their education. Coffman recognized that to adequately support and provide for the futures of young adults, a program of financial assistance was necessary, but that such a program could not be the only basis of support. A cultural component was also needed.

As early as 1927, Coffman was involved in discussions that concerned the development of culture amongst university students through the implementation of fine arts instruction in higher education. Fred Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation—a proponent of higher education initiatives in the 1920s—corresponded with Coffman about “giving more and more attention to the fields of adult education in the fine arts in their relation to American life.”³⁶ Keppel relayed to Coffman that funding could be made available through the Corporation to study how the fine arts could lead to the “advancement and diffusion of knowledge” throughout the country.³⁷ Coffman’s response to Keppel acknowledged that “it is a fact that there is very little art education of a superior grade in this country,” and relayed the frustration he experienced as the head of a state university in hiring talented instructors, “You will find before a month has passed by that there aren’t any, or at any rate that there are very few and that many of them need additional training. Some of the ‘Artists’ are not artists at all. They are persons with eccentricities who have some inclination for art.”³⁸ Coffman outlined actions that were “imperatively needed” for the fine arts to be successfully developed into a university curriculum,

There must be fellowships for the training of those who expect to become teachers of art... so that some of the scholars might visit the art centers, both European and American. There must be two or three schools of art in connection with universities just as there are schools of library science. Museum opportunities must be enlarged and improved. There should be loan and deposit collections of replicas of masterpieces not available in this country except in certain great American centers. Money should be set aside for investigation in art... In other words we must appeal to the imagination of the people with reference to the development of art, the value of art, the need of training people in

³⁶ Fred Keppel to Lotus Coffman, March 15, 1927, Office of the President’s records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Development at the University of Minnesota, 1919-1940.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lotus Coffman to Fred Keppel, April 19, 1927, Office of the President’s records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Development at the University of Minnesota, 1919-1940.

art. We must improve the opportunities for those who expect to teach art, both for study and for employment.³⁹

Coffman's correspondence with Keppel articulated the groundwork that was needed in order to establish the fine arts as a formal discipline of study in higher education.

Coffman and Keppel agreed to continue to work cooperatively to develop the fine arts, with the Corporation playing a supportive financial role. In 1930, the Carnegie Corporation donated \$250, "to be used in promoting interest in the fine arts, either in the form of a prize for the most meritorious piece of original art work by a student during the year, or in any other way that commends itself to the University."⁴⁰ The Corporation's support in the stimulation of the arts was one of the many areas to which it contributed financially to the U of M. Funds from the Corporation supported studies in the areas of collegiate athletics, architecture, and dental education, among others. In 1931, a \$75,000 gift was made to support the University's ongoing study of the "re-education of the employed," and an additional \$50,000 was given to support the Employment Stabilization Research Institute (the organization involved in the study of unemployment in Minnesota, which was founded in part by Dean James Cooper Lawrence).⁴¹

Financial support from corporations and foundations, as well as support from the government at the state and federal level, would become essential to Coffman's program of expansion, specifically in his efforts to offer greater access to education.

In acknowledgement of the increasing unemployment rate in the years following the Great Depression (the national rate was as high as 24% by 1933), Coffman implemented an experimental education/work program that addressed his perceived plight of young adults, whom he believed were faced with "idleness and discouragement."⁴² The program, which offered work relief to support college attendance, was realized through partnerships with the Minnesota Emergency Relief Administration, State Department of Education, and the Federal Emergency

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ University of Minnesota, "The Biennial Report of the President, 1930-1932," 1932, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 45, <http://purl.umn.edu/91580>.

⁴¹ University of Minnesota Board of Regents, "Minutes: Board of Regents' Meetings and Committee Meetings: January 20, 1931," 1931, 828, <http://purl.umn.edu/45429>.

⁴² University of Minnesota, "The Biennial Report of the President, 1932-1934," 1934, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 306, <http://purl.umn.edu/91581>.

Relief Administration (FERA). In November 1934, FERA made a special grant to the Minnesota Emergency Relief Administration, which along with a special state grant, provided employment to students enrolled at universities throughout the state of Minnesota at the rate of \$25 per month. Students who came from families receiving public or private financial assistance were deemed eligible for the program, as determined through registration with the state department of education.⁴³

President Coffman reported to the University's Board of Regents in 1934, "The jobs assigned to [the students] were not created for the sake of permitting students to go through the motions of working; they were tasks which the University wanted done but which could not have been done on its own budget."⁴⁴ Not only did students benefit from the program, but departments throughout the University—to include athletics, farm labor, buildings and grounds, translation, technical services, and janitorial—received support from the students added to their workforce via FERA. Despite relatively average ratings received on the work assessments that were submitted for each student, FERA deemed the Minnesota experiment a success and extended the grants to the rest of the country. The University of Minnesota, under the leadership of President Coffman, became the original site of, and the inspiration for, the modern day federal work-study program utilized by thousands of students across the nation.

To Coffman, aid in the form of employment was not the only measure of relief that deserved attention in the trying times of the 1930s. On January 16, 1934, Coffman wrote to Keppel and expressed his long-standing dream to promote and develop the cultural life of the community that surrounded the University,

I was born and reared in a country community in southern Indiana where there was no music, no art and little culture... I saw none of the great paintings of the world; no great works of art of any kind; music was confined to the singing of gospel hymns, and a knowledge of painting to an occasional reprint or crude sketch.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ President Coffman to Fred Keppel, January 16, 1934, University Archives, University of Minnesota, in *American Paintings and Sculpture in the University Art Museum Collection*, (Minneapolis: University Art Museum, University of Minnesota, 1986), I-II.

Coffman elaborated upon his dream, and predicted that the arts would serve to be influential in guiding young college students towards becoming successful adults, “There is a need for new values to sustain the morale of individuals in the days ahead. The arts are a source for such values, and I want this University to play a leading part in instilling them.”⁴⁶

By 1934, Coffman had instituted many initiatives that would help to realize his articulated dream, as well as set the stage to experiment with yet another—the opening of an art gallery on campus. Three additional milestones established during Coffman’s tenure would serve to provide the foundation upon which a gallery program could be implemented.

The first milestone was the opening of Northrop Memorial Auditorium, a 4,800-seat performance hall, in 1929. The auditorium provided a needed physical space where the fine arts could be practiced and performed. The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (today known as the Minnesota Orchestra) performed regular concerts there, a University Artists Course was held, and dance performances, lectures, convocations, and other events occupied the stage during the auditorium’s inaugural year. The Summer Session program also instituted an annual Fine Arts Symposium that utilized the auditorium spaces for seminars that featured instruction in the graphic, plastic, and dramatic arts.⁴⁷

The second milestone was the establishment of the Junior College in 1932. Under the direction of Malcolm MacLean, the college was founded to provide general or overview coursework in a two-year course of study to recent high school graduates who may or may not pursue a four-year degree. Within the college, which became the General College in 1933, the division of a program in the fine arts was established, which was lead by professor Everard M. Upjohn. It is at this point that regular, systematic instruction in fine art processes was offered not only for an applied or supplementary purpose (as in the case of early engineers) or even for the attainment of a full four-year degree, but for the simple purpose of acquiring artistic skills or developing an appreciation for art. The opening of the General College established yet another achievement in the democratization of educational practices at the University of Minnesota.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ University of Minnesota, “The Biennial Report to the President, 1930-1932,” 1932, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 38, <http://purl.umn.edu/91580>.

The third milestone in the coordination of the fine arts was the establishment of a Fine Arts Committee (FAC) in the early 1930s. The FAC was composed of representatives from the various arts divisions on campus: Everard M. Upjohn (Fine Arts in the General College), Frederick Mann and S. Chatwood Burton (Architecture), Ruth Raymond (Art Education), Harriet Goldstein (Home Economics), Faith Thompson (Ancient History), and Dean Malcolm Willey, who served as the administrative chairman. Through the collective action of the members of the FAC, a formal proposal was submitted to President Coffman to institute an art gallery on campus.

The idea for the gallery emerged during the construction of Northrop Auditorium when Dean James Lawrence found unused space above the portico on the fourth floor of the building. Rather than close off the space – which was the intention – it was reserved for a potential art gallery. Frederick Mann, chair of the department of architecture and member of the FAC, drew the plans to accommodate a gallery program in the space. With consultation from Russell Plimpton, director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), the FAC formulated a proposal that called for an allotment of funds to ensure the operation of a gallery, a salary for a director to oversee it, and a request for students from the University-established federal work-relief program to be assigned to the gallery in order to assist the director. Coffman approved the proposal of the Fine Arts Committee in 1934 and made \$325 available out of the operating budget to open the gallery “on an experimental basis for the remainder of the present Academic Year.”⁴⁸ An additional \$25 a month was allocated for shipping costs, with a second expenditure of \$25 per month reserved for the purchase of supplies and printing.⁴⁹

Upon the insistence of Upjohn, and with the approval of the FAC, Hudson D. Walker was appointed to the position of Curator of Art for the period of March 5 - June 15 to prepare exhibits for the gallery.⁵⁰ Walker, a graduate of the University of Minnesota, was formally trained in gallery management at the Fogg Museum at Harvard College, one of the few establishments in the country that provided such training at the time. Walker had additional connections to the arts in Minnesota, as he formerly operated a commercial gallery in Minneapolis, and was also the

⁴⁸ Malcolm Willey to John Johnston, March 3, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Everard Upjohn to Lotus Coffman, March 5, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

grandson of T.B. Walker, founder of the Walker Art Gallery. Walker was hired with an annualized salary of \$1800, which was the base rate for a nine-month appointment at the time.⁵¹

When informing John Johnston, Dean of the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts, to establish the position of a curator, Willey asserted, "The appointment of Mr. Walker is a temporary one," indicating that administrators were planning the gallery experiment without any assurances of success.⁵² Willey indicated to Coffman that, "we are not certain of the response that will follow the opening of a gallery, but that a trial period for the remainder of this year will give us considerable insight into the matter."⁵³

The trial period began when the Little Gallery opened on April 5, 1934 on the fourth floor of Northrop Auditorium. The first exhibit consisted of twenty-eight 18th and 19th century paintings by French and American artists loaned from collectors and galleries in the Twin Cities, Chicago, and New York. The gallery was open weekday afternoons from 3:30-5:00 pm, Saturdays from 12:30-5:00 pm, and also during the intermission of symphony orchestra concerts given in Northrop Auditorium on Friday and Saturday afternoons. Reported attendance figures indicated that more than 1,200 people visited the gallery in the inaugural week, with an estimated 100 visitors daily.⁵⁴ Professor Everard Upjohn observed that, "during the intermission of the Symphony concert, so many people crowded into the gallery that it was difficult to see the exhibits at all."⁵⁵

Reaction to the opening of the gallery was positive amongst University faculty. Upjohn, who was instrumental in assisting Walker with the installation of the first exhibit, asserted to President Coffman his enthusiasm with their experiment, "The success of the gallery may be said to be clearly proven already. In view of the number of flights of stairs to it, it is no exaggeration

⁵¹ Malcolm Willey to John Johnston, March 3, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, March 1, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁵⁴ "1,200 Visit Northrop Gallery First Week," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), 1934, found in University Gallery Press Book 1934-1937, 1, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

⁵⁵ E. M. Upjohn, "Minnesota's New Little Gallery of Art," *Minnesota Chats* (Minneapolis, MN), April 21, 1934, 485, found in University Gallery Press Book 1934-1937, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

to say that the attendance has been remarkable, far exceeding our wildest hopes."⁵⁶ Ruth Raymond of the department of art education, and member of the FAC, wrote to Coffman and noted the collaborative element that the gallery had fostered, "The Little Gallery is the first tangible evidence of Fine Arts integration at the University of Minnesota... As one vitally interested in the integration's success I am writing to express my gratitude."⁵⁷ To prepare for another exhibit to be mounted during the trial period, Upjohn prepared a survey that was sent out to faculty in order to develop a list of faculty-owned artworks, as well as to ask if members of the faculty would consider loaning their works to the gallery. Responses from faculty representing a variety of disciplines were received. Home economics instructor Harriet Goldstein and Frederick Wulling of the College of Pharmacy both expressed enthusiasm for the new gallery and indicated that their personal art possessions were at Upjohn and Walker's full disposal.⁵⁸ Two separate shows of faculty-owned artwork were exhibited in the gallery prior to the end of the 1933-1934 academic year.

Upon evaluation of the spring trial period, Professor Upjohn shared with Willey that the first exhibition of 18th and 19th century paintings cost more than was allotted (with Walker having to pay insurance fees for the exhibit out of his own pocket), and requested that a formal budget be established for the gallery.⁵⁹ Upjohn reported, "[The gallery] is one more contribution to the cultural life of our community, and there can never be too many. Let us hope that the University will continue to be able to give its students the values of the opportunities afforded by the Little Gallery."⁶⁰ To proceed with a gallery program for a second year would require the

⁵⁶ Everard M. Upjohn to Malcolm Willey, April 28, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁵⁷ Ruth Raymond to President Coffman, April 6, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁵⁸ Harriet Goldstein to Everard Upjohn, April 1, 1934, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 85/Faculty Possessions, 1934. Goldstein's response to Upjohn's survey, asserted about her paintings, "Please explain to Mr. Walker that none of these things need to be hung but he is free to use any that he cares to." Frederick Wulling to Everard Upjohn, April 17, 1934, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 85/Faculty Possessions, 1934.) Wulling stated, "There is no one on the University campus happier than I am because of the development of an art department here. I have always been interested in art and my father was an art patron. Since my advent to the University in 1892, I have been hoping that the University would some time possess a worthwhile art gallery."

⁵⁹ Everard M. Upjohn to Malcolm Willey, April 28, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

establishment of an annual budget, a regular salary for a curator, and other financial considerations. Had the trial period, as Willey proposed, given the administration “considerable insight into the matter” of establishing a permanent gallery?⁶¹ Had support for the arts reached a level wherein a gallery was a justified and worthwhile expense? This question was raised by one local newspaper when it reported upon the gallery opening in April 1934.

While many area newspapers reported positively about the novelty of the gallery, one media entity raised a note of caution in consideration of the broader social and economic context of the time period as it related to the gallery’s service to the community, and the community’s support of the gallery in return. An editorial in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* titled, “Museums and the Depression,” reacted to the address that MIA director Russell Plimpton gave at the Little Gallery’s opening. In his speech, titled “Who Created Museums Anyhow?” Plimpton asserted that the world had become more museum conscious as a result of the depression, as museums increasingly served as destinations for recreation and respite. In response, the *Tribune* editorial cautioned,

While Mr. Plimpton finds people flocking to the art galleries as a result of the depression, one need have no doubt that the same depression is exerting another influence on museums and galleries which is anything but good... The arts are easily sacrificed when there are a hundred demands for available dollars, all of which are of greater immediate urgency. And with galleries, which are for the most part philanthropic ventures, a great many of them dependent on private endowments for their principal support, the effect of a depression over a long period of time is likely to be disastrous... What the future holds for many of these institutions may be doubtful, since there is something apparently repugnant to a democracy about tax support for the fine arts.”⁶²

Though financial implications were undoubtedly considered by University administration, decisions related to the continuance of the gallery program were also made by advice received

⁶⁰ Everard Upjohn, “Fine Arts Head Describes First Exhibition,” April 28, 1934, found in University Gallery Press Book 1934-1937, 1, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

⁶¹ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, March 1, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁶² “Museums and the Depression,” *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), April 15, 1934, found in Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

from curator Hudson Walker as he made preparations to leave at the end of his appointment in June 1934.

Walker provided “suggestions, based on experience, on establishing of a permanent University Museum” to Willey, should the administration decide to continue the gallery program.⁶³ Walker emphasized that, “There should be some anchorage provided in the way of a permanent collection to insure a permanency of interest,” and added that the gallery should emphasize a “workshop character” as opposed to the “traditional notion of a museum as a place for safekeeping of rare objects.”⁶⁴ Walker’s final statement, “Each museum really should specialize in and be among the leaders in some particular field for the sake of the standing this gives the fraternity of museums,” would later greatly influence Willey’s support of the development of the gallery.⁶⁵ In other words, in order for the gallery to continue successfully, it must not take on too much, be too many things to too many people – it must align itself first and foremost with coursework and instruction and serve as an extension of the arts curriculum at the University.

Correspondence reveals that Willey and Coffman conversed about the gallery, with Coffman revealing his desire to keep it open for the next academic year. Willey indicated to Coffman, “in view of the interest and attendance last spring, I hope this may be done. In fact, it seems to me we scarcely began to exploit the possibilities of the gallery.”⁶⁶ Willey went on to provide a list for Coffman of the “dozens of ways for exploiting the gallery and stimulating interest in fine arts,” to include the promotion of a student loan collection, gallery talks, and extended use of the gallery by instructors for fine arts classes.⁶⁷ Yet despite the apparent potential that Willey believed the gallery could foster, due to the departure of Hudson Walker, one administrative detail in regards to the gallery remained: securing the services of a qualified person to operate it.

⁶³ Hudson Walker to Malcolm Willey, June 5, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, August 29, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

As University administrators made budget and hiring preparations for the 1934-1935 academic year, Willey suggested to Coffman that Ruth Lawrence, widow of James Cooper Lawrence, former Assistant to the President and University Dean, be considered to run the gallery. Willey relayed his justification to Coffman,

I should like to put a suggestion before you, which may be quite impossible but seems to me to have much in its favor. In talking with Mr. MacLean the other day he told me that Mrs. Lawrence is returning to Minneapolis and that you and he have made a place for her in the General College at a modest salary... Mrs. Lawrence, it occurs to me, has the very combination of traits that we need in the gallery.⁶⁸

Likely an action of sympathy by Coffman and General College director Malcolm MacLean that was intended to support the widow of their deceased colleague, the administrators had originally offered Ruth a position as a counselor to female students enrolled in the General College. Further correspondence indicates that MacLean met with Ruth while she was studying art in Europe and convinced her to return to Minnesota to assist the General College in supporting and developing the social life of female students, as well as provide assistance to creative arts instructor Ray Faulkner.

Willey asserted to Coffman that Lawrence would be better suited to work in the gallery rather than undertake a role in the field of counseling, a field in which she had no training. Willey wrote an appeal to Coffman to request a change to Ruth's appointment:

Her years and a half abroad have been spent in art study; she had previously taken formal art courses at the University; she, herself, does creative art work; she has the graces that would be of assistance in establishing contacts for the gallery with citizens over-town; she would appeal to students. Is there any possibility that we might shift her program so that she could work into the gallery?⁶⁹

Willey further advocated that,

“[the gallery] is a project that I am sure would be completely to [Ruth's] interest, and in a field where she is likely to go ahead and develop something that would

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

be of tremendous benefit to the University... Given a relatively free hand at the gallery I think she might do a great deal with it... I think Mrs. Lawrence would be as good as competent a person as we could hope to find.⁷⁰

Willey's further assurances that the gallery "can be run on very little money," that it required "only a bit of ingenuity," and that "good loan collections can be had for nothing, or next to nothing" seemed to convince Coffman that continuing the gallery program for a second year under Ruth's direction was in the best interest of all concerned.⁷¹ It was a prescient move.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

RUTH'S WORK BEGINS

“Mrs. J.C. Lawrence is to have supervision of the work at the Little Gallery this year and it is necessary for her to have a key.”⁷²

- Malcolm Willey, memo to the Department of Buildings and Grounds at the University of Minnesota, September 26, 1934.

When Ruth returned to the University in the fall of 1934, she learned that the administration had already made several arrangements for the gallery over the course of the summer and into the beginning of the 1934-1935 academic year. Though Ruth was to have supervision over the gallery, Malcolm Willey, chairman of the Fine Arts Committee and Assistant to President Coffman, would continue to tightly control its affairs. Over the summer, Willey established a formal budget for the Little Gallery to cover the period of October 1, 1934 - June 30, 1935, using \$270 of reserve funds from the university budget. He also made arrangements for a few exhibits that included artwork owned by the University. Despite being issued a key to the gallery by the Department of Buildings and Grounds, the new curator's role within the gallery was not ubiquitous. Her signature was not initially accepted in order to approve official budget expenditures, indicating that the gallery continued to be viewed as a highly experimental undertaking by certain members of the administration. When Willey questioned William T. Middlebrook, university comptroller, as to why he was expected to continue to sign requisitions for the gallery rather than the new curator, Middlebrook responded,

... may I suggest that you do sign these requisitions during this preliminary period. After the Little Gallery is well organized and you feel that you can safely shift the responsibility to someone else, my office will be very glad to recognize Mrs. Lawrence's or any other signature which you may desire.⁷³

⁷² Malcolm Willey to The Department of Buildings and Grounds, September 26, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁷³ William T. Middlebrook to Malcolm Willey, October 30, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

Due to this administrative requirement, any purchases—and therefore any planning—that Ruth would proceed to make for the gallery would require the support and official approval of Willey.

Though Willey executed the administrative requirements associated with entering into official contracts and approving expenditures at the outset, he and Ruth worked jointly, and discussed openly, the educational philosophies that they would base the development of the gallery upon. They agreed that the gallery program should not duplicate the work being done at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) or the Walker Art Galleries (now known as Center), and that the purpose of the gallery should first focus upon the instruction of university students to develop their exposure to emerging practices in the fine arts. Their guiding principles were apparent in an article found in the University's student newspaper, *The Minnesota Daily*. In the article, which announced the first exhibition for the 1934-1935 season, Ruth was quoted as stating, "Exhibitions as varied as possible will be presented in an attempt to overcome the too-widespread opinion that museums are stuffy, dead sites for the interment of 'works of art,'" and continued, that in cooperation with the Fine Arts Committee, they hoped to "find out in which fields student art interest lies to establish a contact between campus life and art."⁷⁴

Inspired by current events, Ruth demonstrated the relevance of art to campus life within the first month of the 1934-1935 academic year. Though the first two exhibits held at the gallery that year were arranged by Willey (to include a display of university owned lithographs by the artists Daumier and Gavarni from October 19 - November 1, 1934, and a show comprised of paintings of campus landscapes from November 2 - November 16, 1934), an event held on campus during this period inspired an impromptu exhibit. In the first week of November 1934, anti-war demonstrations were held on campus in conjunction with a lecture given by U.S. Senator Gerald Prentice Nye, chair of the Nye Committee – a committee that investigated the munitions industry's involvement in leading the United States into war.⁷⁵ A collection of propaganda posters created during the World War (now known as WWI) were loaned from the university library and displayed in the gallery for three days (November 7 - 10, 1934).

⁷⁴ "Art Gallery to Open Tomorrow Evening With Poster Display," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 18, 1934, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 5, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

⁷⁵ "War Posters Shown By Little Gallery," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), November 6, 1934, found in University Gallery Pressbook, 1934-1937, 6, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

In order to make room for the short poster exhibit, several paintings from an exhibit that featured the University's collection of campus landscapes were removed, but were again hung for display through November 19, 1934. The landscape paintings were of particular significance and pride to the University, as they were created with the same spirit that inspired the creation of the gallery – to make art part of campus life.

Soon after the gallery closed in the summer of 1934, President Coffman pursued an idea for the University to employ the services of artists in the soon-to-be terminated federal Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) to capture landscape scenes of the campus. His intention was to acquire original works of art that could be placed in dormitories and study halls to be regularly viewed by students.

Instituted in 1933, the PWAP, a federal economic relief program of the New Deal funded by the U.S. Civil Works Administration, employed artists on a variety of creative projects throughout the nation. In Minnesota, the project was administered by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts under the direction of Russell Plimpton. After the conclusion of the PWAP program in 1934, individual states assumed responsibility for projects still in existence. At the end of the program, Coffman and Willy approached Plimpton with the idea to provide work to PWAP artists, not only to support them, but also to stimulate the culture of the community, and provide student exposure to the arts at the University. Over the course of six weeks in the summer of 1934, seven artists were employed by the University to produce original oils and watercolors that depicted scenes of campus life.⁷⁶ By the end of the project, the University acquired 43 watercolors and 38 oil paintings of various sizes.⁷⁷

In one of her first official duties as curator, Ruth worked with the PWAP artists on tinting the works after the frames were completed, and was also charged with distributing the works amongst three college residence halls – Pioneer, Sanford, and the College Women's Dormitory – after they were exhibited.⁷⁸ The exhibit of campus landscapes, which ran for less than a month,

⁷⁶ The artists that participated in the project included: Cameron Booth, Dewey Albinson, Elof Wedin, Erle Loran, Syndey G. Fossum, Arnold Klagstad, and Stanford Fenelle.

⁷⁷ Malcolm Willey, "University Art Project Employing PWA Artists," November 14, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

recorded an attendance of 2,156 within the first twelve days that it opened, which was more than double the total attendance of the previous months' exhibition of lithographs.⁷⁹

Ruth was well suited to support and develop Coffman's vision to provide students access to the fine arts. She was thoroughly involved in support of the University, first as the wife of an administrator, and second, as a student herself. As an alumna of the U of M, she completed many of the art courses students were then taking. Her own children were of the demographic audience that the gallery was designed to attract – daughter Betty Ruth, a student at Radcliffe College, and son James Jr., a high school student. Her life experiences, as well as the relationships that she formed prior to becoming the University's curator, would greatly inform her work in the gallery, as demonstrated through her arrangement of exhibitions and planning of supporting programs and lectures.

But before Ruth could begin to make arrangements for the gallery schedule for the remainder of the 1934-1935 academic year, a logistical matter needed to be addressed. The first several exhibits displayed in the gallery that year consisted of works owned by the University. Hoping that it would be possible to borrow works from other institutions for display, Willey requested additional funding from Coffman in order to acquire appropriate insurance coverage to protect the University from liability resulting from theft or fire (in the previous year, unbeknownst to Willey at the time, curator Hudson Walker had purchased policies for loaned works and paid the premiums out of his own pocket).⁸⁰ Willey appealed to Comptroller Middlebrook for advice on how to secure the appropriate coverage to insure art. Upon Middlebrook's recommendation, a blanket policy in the amount of \$5,000 was obtained from the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company to insure all works of art loaned for the remainder of that academic year.⁸¹ A copy of the policy, in addition to a report of the titles and valuations of any artworks on loan, was required to be submitted to the University insurance officer.⁸² With

⁷⁹ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, November 15, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁸⁰ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, December 6, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁸¹ Requisition, January 23, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁸² William T. Middlebrook to Malcolm Willey, December 17, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

an insurance policy in place, the gallery was able to exhibit the first loaned exhibition of the season, a selection of etchings lent by the artist Levon West, a U of M graduate.

To build the rest of the exhibition schedule that would follow the West etchings, Ruth arranged for the loan of individual works, as well as entire shows of traveling exhibits that were arranged by various art associations and organizations. A survey of the exhibitions held during Ruth's first year reveals that a variety of types, styles, and methods of art were displayed. *Modern Trends in Textile Design* was loaned from the College Art Association; an exhibit that described the process of lithography (a print method that utilized a stone or metal plate) was sent from the Smithsonian Institute; and watercolors produced by the artist Eliot O'Hara were displayed. An exhibition of the work of Native American artists was supplemented with a lecture and a demonstration of ritual sand painting. A group of drawings by the artist Ivan Mestrovic, purchased by the Department of Architecture, were also displayed. To finish out the year, the gallery exhibited over 100 original illustrations lent by the College Art Association that showcased the animation work being done by the Disney studio in California, which was complimented by regular showings of Mickey Mouse "Silly Symphony" cartoons through the use of a projector.

Ruth later described the exhibits amassed for her first year as a "coat of many colors," and indicated that, "We had to take what was available and minimum in cost."⁸³ Despite this financial caveat, Ruth described the schedule of exhibits to Willey, and shared the philosophy that guided her arrangement,

You will notice that I have changed the exhibition rather oftener than we discussed. I feel that we needed freshness and a realization in the students minds that we were very much alive, and they must watch us or they would miss something of importance."⁸⁴

Ruth extended the description of her exhibition philosophy in a reflection upon her first year as curator, "My aim was not to have merely an exhibition gallery, but to have a working laboratory

⁸³ Ruth Lawrence, "University of Minnesota Gallery of Art," 1959, 6, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

⁸⁴ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, November 15, 1934, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

where students could use material in connection with their classes. At the same time, I tried to make the exhibitions interesting to the general public.”⁸⁵

To connect her “working laboratory” to the classroom, Ruth developed relationships with faculty in order to align the gallery to support the arts curriculum on campus. In her first year, she arranged an exhibit that featured concepts of interior decoration for the benefit of the home economics department as well as to supplement instruction in the General College. During the spring term, exhibits of work created by members of the art faculty, in addition to the display of student artwork, demonstrated the creative work that was being done on campus.

Ruth’s exhibition philosophy was greatly attuned to this creative work, and she put great focus on the interdisciplinary application of art appreciation. Upon reporting the gallery attendance during her first year, Ruth indicated to Willey that,

The interest is beginning, in a pleasing way... approximately 38,000 students visited the gallery in this one year. I believe, we can keep the exhibits fresh, vital and interesting this next year so many more students will spread the news that its a place to go that is worth while. If we can reach the students by playing to the different colleges, for instance, the Engineers will be interested in machine or [i]ndustrial [a]rt, those interested in dramatics would come to see a good stage design exhibition, those in fashions would be interested in costume design – and I'm hoping this [next] year we can make every field feel we in the gallery tie into their interest.⁸⁶

This ideal—that the gallery should serve as an extension of the classroom—would guide Ruth’s work, and would be reflected in the exhibition schedules for many years to follow. Through the Fine Arts Committee, as well as individual consultation with faculty members, Ruth obtained the intended curriculum for each upcoming academic year, and designed her exhibition schedule to correlate to it.

Due to her faithful consideration of the art instruction on campus, Ruth’s work came to be greatly respected by University faculty members and other colleagues, despite the initial reservations about her qualifications. General College professor Everard M. Upjohn, who worked with Hudson Walker extensively in the original set up of the gallery in 1934, expressed

⁸⁵ “Mrs. Lawrence Founded University Art Gallery,” *The Minnesota Daily*, August 11, 1944, 3.

⁸⁶ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, June 25, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

his early skepticism of Ruth's qualifications to Willey, but ultimately complimented the curator's accomplishments,

I should have not selected Mrs. Lawrence to take charge of the Gallery had the decision rested with me last spring. In fact I had many misgivings when I heard that she had been appointed. In those I was entirely mistaken. I think no one could have done more than she has with the gallery this year. I marvel at her record.⁸⁷

In addition to praise, professor Upjohn also advocated on Ruth's behalf, and asserted to President Coffman that Ruth's efforts were even more impressive when one considered the small budget—approximately \$270 for the entire year—that she was given to operate the gallery,

I am sure that anyone familiar with museum work would say that it is impossible to run a gallery with such frequent changes for the sum she has at her disposal. Last spring I happen to know that Mr. Walker spent more than the [pittance] he received from the University to help things along. He could afford to do so. I also know that Mrs. Lawrence has had all [sorts] of little expenses which she has met with her own purse and which she can ill afford.⁸⁸

Upjohn did not hold back in his assessment of Ruth's work in the gallery, and asserted to Coffman that, "I don't know whether you or Mr. Willey entirely appreciate the work involved in running such an undertaking."⁸⁹ He continued with a description,

Mrs. Lawrence has spent untold evenings and Sundays in the gallery on her own time through absolute inability to complete the work during the day... Publicity, supervision of hanging and taking down of exhibitions, the production of some small catalogue, making labels and verifying them and a hundred other occupations are time consuming tasks. I recommended last spring that the gallery needed at least one responsible person on full time or its equivalent. In that instance, experience has shown that I was right. To do that job properly, requires incessant care. If it [is] worth doing at all, the University should be willing to do it well.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Everard Upjohn to President Coffman, March 23, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

It is likely that Upjohn's letter impressed upon Coffman and Willey an appreciation for the work being done in the gallery, as Coffman would allocate additional funds during the remaining months of the academic year to further support gallery needs, as well as appropriate money from the University's reserve fund to purchase original works of art in order to support the development of a permanent art collection.

Willey recognized that the interest and attention that the gallery received over the course of the 1934-1935 season justified continuing the program into a third year. However, as professor Upjohn pointed out, certain issues would need to be addressed in order for the gallery to be set up efficiently. Willey provided Coffman with several recommendations of needed improvements based upon the experience that he and Ruth observed throughout that year.

Willey's first recommendation to President Coffman—the addition of needed equipment and display materials—reveals the rather primitive setup of the gallery during its infancy. Willey requested funding for the purchase of four large wall cases and four flat cases in order to display items that could not be hung, and indicated that without such furnishings, the gallery was limited to exhibiting only paintings or sculptures that could be placed upon the gallery walls.⁹¹ During the previous year, Ruth had to borrow various cases from the library and the Department of Anthropology in order to display small handicrafts and jewelry. The gallery was also in need of sturdy sculpture stands, as the makeshift stands that were improvised for previous exhibitions were deemed by Willey to be “dangerous and unsatisfactory.”⁹² Willey also asserted the need for adequate storage space to house the print collection, as well as the cases used for packing artworks. He informed Coffman that he made a request of the staff of the department of Buildings and Grounds to study a proposed remodel to the space granted for a gallery in Northrop Auditorium to allow for more storage.

Willey also alerted Coffman to the fact that the gallery was in need of basic supplies to support clerical functions. Filing cases were needed to organize the regular correspondence that was created to request exhibits, coordinate the shipment of artworks, and produce

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, June 1, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁹² Ibid.

announcements. Willey recommended the purchase of a new typewriter, as the current typewriter, a machine rebuilt at the cost of \$5, was “totally inadequate, besides being one of the noisiest machines imaginable.”⁹³ Willey estimated the total cost of the equipment and supplies that were needed for the gallery to be \$1,963.30.⁹⁴

Willey then asserted the need to establish a regular budget “ample to permit planning a year’s work.”⁹⁵ The budget of approximately \$30 a month had not been sufficient, as evidenced by Willey’s repeated appeals to Coffman throughout the course of the year for supplemental grants from the reserve budget to cover insurance and additional exhibit fees.⁹⁶ A suitable budget would also need to accommodate for the salary of a curator, for which Willey also had a recommendation. He reasoned to Coffman that, “It is clear from this year’s experience that the Little Gallery, operated even at the level we have operated it this year, requires the services of a full time curator.”⁹⁷ As described in Professor Upjohn’s report, the duties performed in the gallery had grown to a level wherein part-time attention was insufficient to support gallery functions.

In further commentary on the curatorial position in relation to the budget, Willey relayed an assessment of Ruth’s performance and advocated for her to continue in the position,

I think that Mrs. Lawrence has done an excellent job this year. She has shown a good deal of ingenuity in running the gallery on almost nothing at all, and has devised some interesting exhibits. She has also made decided progress in bringing together the staff members in the various departments teaching art. She seems to be successful in dealing with the students. She has had formal training that gives her some qualification for the work. I recommend retaining her, at full time, in the gallery position.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, June 1, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art: Little Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

As the position of a full-time curator was a new position at the University, Willey recommended the basis upon which the position should exist within its administrative structure,

The salary of the curator should be set at a figure that the position calls for. It is somewhat incongruous, in my judgment, to pay the curator of our art gallery less than the campus secretaries of the lowest grade, and on a par with the routine clerical staff. Without respect to personalities involved, the position should have at least the status of an instructorship on the instructional staff.⁹⁹

His inference of, “without respect to personalities involved,” addressed that his recommendation to establish the position of a curator in such a manner was made regardless of the fact that Ruth—who they had hired, in part, because she was the widow of their former colleague—would be the person to fill it.

In further establishing the budget for the 1935-1936 academic year, Willey made provision for fifteen exhibitions at an average cost of three hundred dollars each (for a total of \$4,800), an estimation that included the cost of shipment as well as fees for artists and lecturers that might speak in relation to an exhibit. Another three hundred dollars was set aside for equipment, supplies, printing, and other clerical needs, with Willey noting that in the next year it would be “desirable to have a few printed folders describing the important exhibitions, announcement cards, etc.”¹⁰⁰ A final expense was listed at \$100 for membership in print clubs from across the country, which would provide the gallery with regular literature on topics related to art, a discount on the fee associated with the lending of an exhibit of print reproductions, as well as an annual gift of one print.¹⁰¹ President Coffman approved all of Willey’s recommended expenditures.

With a formal budget, adequate supplies, and equipment in place, Ruth had a baseline of support in which to plan for her second year. With the official approval of the Board of Regents on June 29, 1935, Ruth – with one year of part-time experience under her belt – was promoted to the title of full-time curator, with a salary of \$1600, for the 1935-1936 academic year.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Curator: Qualifications of the Position, Desired Training

Though Ruth had a foundation of artistic training, she did not have formal training in gallery management, a field that emerged in 1922 with the establishment of the *Museum Work and Museum Problems* course at Harvard University, taught by Paul Sachs, curator of the Fogg Museum.

Sachs's museum course was one of the first of its kind to provide instruction in the historical, philosophical, administrative, and organizational details of curatorial work, and covered topics that ranged from donor relations to collections development. Hudson Walker was selected by the Fine Arts Committee to be the University's first curator in part because he received this training at Harvard. Many graduates of this course went on to run prominent public museums throughout the country.

As there were fewer galleries and trained artists in the Midwest than in the eastern United States during the early 20th century, it was not entirely uncommon for those in charge of gallery programs to be of novice stature, and to utilize methods of trial and error in order to perform the colloquial, "hanging of a picture show." Although Ruth developed a network of experienced colleagues in the Twin Cities, to include Russell Plimpton of the MIA, and Cameron Booth of the St. Paul School of Art, there remained limited access to formal training in standard gallery practices and museum management during this time period.

In order to prepare the exhibition schedules for the forthcoming 1935-1936 academic year, Ruth convinced the administration that a travel allotment should be expended as part of her salary for a multiple week trip to make the necessary arrangements for securing exhibitions. In the development of fine arts initiatives on campus, Coffman had asserted the need for instructors to be able to receive training – surely the curator of the University's art gallery should also have this experience. Ruth found that not much convincing was needed, as Coffman and Willey both recognized the importance of training for the curator. In a letter to Coffman, Willey conveyed this importance: "It is essential for the Curator of our gallery to have contacts with creative artists, galleries and dealers. Through such contacts, exhibitions are arranged, and knowledge

¹⁰² University of Minnesota Board of Regents, "University of Minnesota Board of Regents Meeting Minutes, June 29, 1935," 463, <http://purl.umn.edu/45468>.

gained of interesting developments in the art field.”¹⁰³ They arranged for Ruth to have a summer appointment that would involve travel to the East Coast to visit galleries and arts organizations, and to meet with artists, curators, and arts directors in order to make arrangements for loans to build the exhibition schedule for the forthcoming year. This summer appointment was determined in consideration of the overall salary awarded the curator, and was referred to by Willey as a “training project.”¹⁰⁴

Ruth shared her travel schedule with Coffman and outlined her plan: “You won’t think that we are in any danger of becoming stuffy and dusty with just pictures. My belief is that we must keep our exhibits as fresh and varied as is possible and should include all the field of art, not just painting.”¹⁰⁵ She expressed that it was important for the gallery to make contacts with artists, dealers, and others if they were to create a successful program, and referenced other institutions of higher education that had done the same,

I am hoping that we may make many contacts with those whom we might, at some future time bring to the University in this broadening cultural program. Dartmouth, as you will remember, brought [Orozco], the Mexican, to do frescoes; New York University, I believe, did the same.¹⁰⁶ It is so necessary in the arts that students have the opportunity of seeing how a thing is done, and perhaps participating in it.¹⁰⁷

A form titled, “Request for Authorization For Travel Outside State,” dated June 29, 1935 documented Ruth’s training trip, for which \$250 was allotted. From July 1 - September 15, 1935, Ruth travelled to “Boston and vicinity, Cape Cod, Southern Connecticut shore, New York

¹⁰³ Malcolm Willey to Lotus Coffman, June 1, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hood Museum of Art, “José Clemente Orozco: *The Epic of American Civilization*,” Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2012, <http://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/collections/overview/americas/mesoamerica/murals/>. The artist José Clemente Orozco was hired at Dartmouth College in 1932 as a visiting instructor to paint a fresco mural in the university’s library. The mural, titled, *The Epic Of American Civilization*, covered 3,200 feet of wall space, and was completed in 1934.

¹⁰⁷ Ruth Lawrence to Lotus Coffman, May 28, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

and vicinity, and principal cities en route to the East,” the purpose of which was recorded as, “To enable the curator of the University Art Gallery to interview museum directors, artists and art dealers and arrange for exhibitions and demonstrations for the academic year 1935-1936.”¹⁰⁸

The “training project” became an annual excursion, in which Ruth would later refer to as her “collecting trip.” The trips were often followed by personal vacations wherein she would visit her parents John and Leila, her son, who was in boarding school, as well as her daughter Betty Ruth, who was attending Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

While Coffman and Willey afforded Ruth the opportunity to receive informal training through travel and exposure to the arts scene in the East, it is through her daughter that Ruth would obtain access to the formal training provided in gallery management by the Fogg Museum at Harvard, the same instruction that her predecessor, Hudson Walker, received.

While in attendance at Radcliffe – the all-female coordinate college of Harvard University – in the 1930s, Betty Ruth Lawrence enrolled in Paul Sachs’s, *Museum Work and Museum Problems* course. Archived administrative records of the University Gallery contain a folder titled, “Museum Studies (Betty’s Notes) Course in Museum,” dated 1935-1936, which is filled with Fogg Museum course notes and templates for art loan agreements, descriptions for object labels, as well as a list of resources for requesting loans from galleries, amongst other reference materials applicable to museum studies. It is through the careful study and consultation of her daughter’s course materials, supplemented by other research, that Ruth accessed formal instruction in gallery management from the Fogg Museum. She became a self-taught graduate of *Museum Work and Museum Problems*.

Additional reference materials found in Ruth’s records include pamphlets and publications from established museums. In addition to a pamphlet from the Toledo Museum, titled, *The Museum Educates*, and clippings from *The Art Digest*, fliers produced by the Newark Museum titled, *The Museum*, were found amongst Ruth’s research materials. The Newark Museum publication outlined recommendations for running a museum or gallery, and featured articles such as, “A Convenient Gallery Stool,” which suggested that a bench or stool placed within a gallery would address the ‘museum fatigue’ often experienced by visitors. Another

¹⁰⁸ University of Minnesota, “University of Minnesota Comptroller Form 9: Request for Authorization For Travel Outside State, for Ruth Lawrence, Curator, University Art Gallery,” approved June 29, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

article titled, "Case Movers," addressed "Mr. Dana's Original Solution of a Difficult Museum Problem," or the problem of moving large, heavy display cases to different positions within a gallery.

Mr. Dana refers to the founder of the Newark Museum, John Cotton Dana, a trained librarian and museum director who established the museum in 1909. At the Newark Museum, Dana promoted the appreciation of the arts and sciences, and upheld the value of contemporary artwork, which helped to develop the appreciation and study of photography, and the decorative and machine arts in a time period when the study of European master artists was the vogue. Beginning in the late 1920s, a 12-month apprentice program was offered through the Newark Museum to provide instruction in gallery practice and museum management.¹⁰⁹ Through *The Museum* publication, developments in exhibit design, museum education, and visitor experience were shared. These resources were utilized by Ruth and clearly influenced her methods at the University Gallery.

Supervision and Instruction

The methods that Ruth implemented in the first few years of the gallery program were supported by her only staff – students assigned to the gallery as part of the work relief program first established at the University, which later became a federal program administered under the National Youth Administration (NYA). “Federal students,” as they were referred to, assisted Ruth with exhibitions and implemented gallery programming. They performed secretarial work, created posters to promote exhibitions, wrote publicity notices for the student newspaper and radio station broadcasts, constructed frames, packed and unpacked art for travel, and guarded the gallery during hours open to the public. Students were also trained in the construction of frames, and learned how to cut matting and glass. Six federal students assisted Ruth in the 1934-1935 academic year, 11 students in 1935-1936, 15 students in 1936-1937, and 20 students during the 1937-1938 academic year.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Buck, “Beyond the Four Legged Chicken: A History of Museum Registration,” *Museum*, July-August 2010, 51, <http://www.aam-us.org>.

¹¹⁰ “Gallery personnel,” 1935-1938, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

In a 1938 report, Ruth reflected upon her supporting staff, and indicated that the federal students “were wholly untrained and those assigned often came to us at first disinterested in the work, and great deal of patience was needed in training them for the tasks they were to do.”¹¹¹ Yet despite their initial lack of skills, Ruth’s arduous instruction of the students enabled her to express appreciation for them, “without the excellent cooperation and enthusiasm of these students and a determination to build the Gallery into a fine thing, this task would have been hopeless.”¹¹²

The unique training that the gallery provided served as practical career preparation for at least one federal student assigned to gallery work. Norman Geske, who started under Hudson Walker and continued his employ under Ruth throughout his undergraduate education, expressed the effect his experience had in inspiring his personal career ambitions. Geske wrote to Ruth in 1937, saying,

To have had this opportunity – matter of chance as it were – has completely sealed my determination to continue in the field of museum work, and to have had it while still an undergraduate has been the more fortunate, as I had not expected to be able to do any work of this kind for years to come. While my studies in the history of art and science of museum techniques have yet to be begun, I find myself acquiring ideas, even exact knowledge of policy methods of presentation which I doubt very much if I will find in any academic course elsewhere. I understand one such course in museum administration is offered to selected students by the Newark Museum. I would like very much to secure this study for myself, but it occurs to me that in a sense I have already accomplished much of what any such course must offer, and it occurs to me as well that the University Gallery might be such a place quite as easily as could the Newark Museum, and could offer several distinct advantages which as far as I can tell are not offered by that institution.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ruth Lawrence, “1938 Report,” 1938, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/Gallery Procedures and Instructions, circa 1938-1950.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Norman Geske to Ruth Lawrence, May 6, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

Ruth shared Geske's letter with Willey, with the hope that a program of museum instruction could be started at the U of M. In response, Willey expressed concern with the duplication of programs in higher education,

In the past the history of higher education has been cluttered by the fact that each institution tries to duplicate the work of every other institution regardless of the demands for service... If Newark is already offering the work and Harvard, and other places, why should MN attempt to develop it? Would not our students go to Newark or the other centers of training? Perhaps there should be a development in the Middle West along the lines suggested by Mr. Geske; but certainly one would have to proceed very cautiously.¹¹⁴

Inspired by Geske's letter, Ruth nevertheless began her cautious pursuit by developing a formal university course in the instruction of the methods of a small gallery.¹¹⁵ A course titled *Museum Science and Management* was offered through the College of Science, Literature and the Arts from 1937 - 1940, and could be taken by special permission from art professor Laurence Schmeckebier.¹¹⁶ The course was discontinued after three years, as a result of students not being prepared for the course topic, and due to the reduced availability of the art faculty to assist with instruction. Ruth commented upon the course, "It was evident art was not being considered on a professional level. This was more reason for coordination with staff geared to change this attitude and to properly prepare the student."¹¹⁷ Through her continued attention to exhibitions and programming throughout the remainder of the 1930s, Ruth would aim to achieve these articulated results.

In 1938, after four years of experience as the curator of the University Gallery, Ruth again pursued the possibility of establishing a program of instruction in small gallery operations

¹¹⁴ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, May 8, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 46/Art Gallery, 1937.

¹¹⁵ Norman Geske won an essay contest that was held in conjunction with the gallery's opening in 1934 on the topic of the importance of an art gallery to a university. Following his graduation, Geske went on to work at the Walker Art Gallery. He remained in the museum field, and became the Director of the Sheldon Museum of Art at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1963, and retired from that position in 1983.

¹¹⁶ University of Minnesota, "Bulletin 1941, Part 1," 1941, Course Catalogs, Bulletins, and Course Guides, 51, <http://purl.umn.edu/56127>.

¹¹⁷ Ruth Lawrence, "University of Minnesota Gallery of Art," 1959, 12, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

by inquiring about available funding to Fred Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation, who had supported many studies at the University and donated generously in the area of fine arts. Ruth proposed to Keppel a three-part study,

First: to study small gallery and museum practices, the physical plant, the methods of operation and installation of exhibition materials, possibilities of exhibits for schools and colleges having little money to spend on such materials, and what is being done to develop the cultural life of the communities in which they operate.

Second: to study the work given in art in colleges which have exceptional art programs to learn what was outstanding, and the contributing factors to the liveliness of that program, whether it be personnel, policies, or the manner in which courses are handled, and whether or not it would be useful to pass on such information to other institutions.

Third: To make a study of whether there is need for a different type of training for small gallery directors than is to be had at the museum training schools such as Fogg Museum.¹¹⁸

Ruth indicated to Keppel that if there is a rise in the number of small galleries, the type of training provided at such institutions as Fogg and Newark was too specialized and somewhat irrelevant to prepare individuals for positions in small Midwest art galleries, and asserted that “there might be a need for people especially trained, not in identifying and x-raying and studying the old masters... but it would be rather the bringing of art to the community and fitting it into the everyday experience of that community, as in our program in the University Gallery...”¹¹⁹ She stated that the mission of the Gallery, which had expanded over the past four years under her direction, was to make the surrounding community aware of present trends in art and culture. She described,

We may not agree with those trends, just as we do not agree with much that is going on socially and politically in the world today, but we must know about it if we are to be intelligent. If we are going to raise the level of taste and help people who really want to make their lives more pleasant and beautiful, we must help them in their selection and in the making of their everyday choices. Therefore, it

¹¹⁸ Ruth Lawrence to Fred Keppel, March 28, 1938, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1938.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

is necessary to bring good fine arts exhibitions in painting and sculpture and graphics. It is also valuable to help the community learn more about problems in interior decoration, dress design... questions in landscaping designs, good design in modern textiles, ceramics and glass, which are within the reach of the common man.¹²⁰

Ruth's proposed study, to be finalized in "printed form," would act as a tutorial that addressed the creation, formation, and function of a small art gallery. It could serve as a reference for other such organizations. Such a study was needed she inferred, on the basis of her alone receiving correspondence at least once a week from colleges and schools from across the country that inquired about the Gallery's beginnings, in addition to requests for suggestions for exhibitions or advice on operations.¹²¹ She continued with a description of the many achievements of the Gallery over the course of the past four years under her direction, to provide an impetus for her argument.

In Ruth's appeal to Keppel, self-acknowledgement of her work was made evident, and her passion as a curator, as well as her commitment to the work being done at the University Gallery was revealed,

The basis on which I make my request to study this problem is because of the fact that I have grown up with the Gallery and it with me, and I feel that because I have built this through a period of 4 years I understand the problems of gallery management and have been closely identified with the teaching of art on our campus. May I ask you to consider my request to make a study of this project?

In making this request I feel that the contact which other galleries might have with us, knowing what we have done, as well as our gaining from [what] they have done, it is of mutual helpfulness, and the possibility of printing my report at the end of the study should be a helpful collection of facts which would help in small gallery set-ups and developments.¹²²

The assertiveness of her conjectures signal that Ruth had developed a sense of pride and real satisfaction in her work. However, her concern that Keppel might perceive her as unfit to pursue

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

this study is evidenced by her ending the proposal with a list of references, all of whom were men,

As to my capacity for handling such work you may refer to Acting President Ford, or Dean Willey, Cameron Booth of the St. Paul School of Art, Mr. Killam of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Mr. Hyslop of Carleton College, who have all watched our work closely. Should you wish any other names, I would be happy to supply them.¹²³

Keppel's delayed reply to Ruth's proposal indicated that funding through the Carnegie Corporation was not available for such studies at that time.¹²⁴

Though Ruth was not awarded funding in 1938 to pursue her study of the unique problems and practices of small Midwest art galleries in an effort to aid other organizations, the study of her work as curator, and of the development of the University Gallery, can provide insight and appreciation for her achievements. In the proceeding chapters, I report further upon Ruth's tenure as the Curator/Director of the University Gallery – and address the “small gallery and museum practices, the physical plant, the methods of operation and installation of exhibition materials, possibilities of exhibits for schools and colleges having little money to spend on such materials,” and what Ruth did “to develop the cultural life of the communities in which” she operated.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ruth Lawrence to Fred Keppel, March 28, 1938, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1938.

¹²⁴ Fred Keppel to Ruth Lawrence, April 18, 1938, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1938.

¹²⁵ Ruth Lawrence to Fred Keppel, March 28, 1938, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1938.

CHAPTER 5

RUTH'S "MUSEUM SCIENCE"

Ruth departed for her first collecting trip at the end of June 1935. In addition to visiting galleries and museums to arrange for exhibits for the coming year, Ruth would also make selections of furniture, blinds, carpeting, and other items of general décor to compliment the University's purchase of a special original work of art – for the purposes of yet another experiment in the fine arts. Within the schedule of meetings and appointments Ruth arranged when in New York City, she also made a special visit to the gallery of the artist and dealer Alfred Stieglitz, upon Malcolm Willey's request. Willey wrote to Ruth and indicated that he would travel from Minnesota to join her for the meeting, "My present plans will bring me to New York late next week and I am making an appointment to meet Mr. Stieglitz at An American Place, 509 Madison Ave, at about 11 o'clock on the morning of July 8. I hope that you can arrange your schedule to be present also."¹²⁶

Willey began corresponding with Stieglitz after he first visited Stieglitz's An American Place gallery in February of 1935. Their correspondence was related to a special project that Willey had envisioned for the Gallery – a Fine Arts Room. When President Coffman approved of the Gallery budget and of the full-time position of Curator for the 1935-1936 academic year, he also approved for the sum of \$2,700 to be allocated towards yet another fine arts experiment. The experiment was a project proposed by Willey inspired by the "theory that true appreciation of fine art comes from being in presence of a fine object under ideal conditions."¹²⁷ Willey outlined the project in his proposal to Coffman,

I should like to try the experiment of fitting up on our campus, as part of our attempt to increase interest in and appreciation of fine arts, a room which in its furnishings should be simple, but in impeccable taste, comfortable, and in every way lovely as a room. Into this I would put one art object at a time – one of the fine things we have bought... I would open this room as a retreat. No studying

¹²⁶ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, June 27, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹²⁷ Malcolm Willey to President Coffman, June 1, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

allowed, no textbooks admitted, no formal instruction. If the setting and the art object [cannot] induce the spell I am seeking, nothing else can.¹²⁸

In order to “fit up” a Fine Arts Room on campus, Ruth spent part of her summer collecting trip in New York City meeting with Donald Desky of the design firm Modernage, to arrange for and select the décor and furnishings for the room, which would be set up as an extension of the Gallery in Northrop Auditorium.

Willey requested that Ruth join him to meet with Stieglitz, through whom Willey hoped to acquire—at a modest price—an original oil painting produced by Stieglitz’s wife, Georgia O’Keeffe. The painting would serve as the focal point of the Fine Arts Room, and would demonstrate Willey’s theory that “The beauty of a single picture can make its effect upon the inner emotional experience of the individual if the circumstances are such that the individual and the picture come into what may be termed ‘emotional rapport.’”¹²⁹ Willey asserted the hope that Stieglitz would support the University and their “experimental room” through his correspondence – or negotiation – as he implored the dealer to consider the humble tax-supported institution in agreeing to a price for one of O’Keeffe’s works.¹³⁰ By June of 1935, Stieglitz – who had originally refused the sale of O’Keeffe’s work to the University – received a letter from Willey that notified him that President Coffman had made an allowance of \$1,200 for an original O’Keeffe painting. Willey asserted to Stieglitz that by the President

setting aside a sum of money of this size for a single work of art we are doing what the University of Minnesota has never done before... out here at Minnesota we follow our ideals so tenaciously that sometimes things come to pass that truly seem impossible. If there is any credit due it is to the understanding of the President, who [realizes] that even in a flour city man does not live by bread alone.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Malcolm Willey to Alfred Stieglitz, February 18, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹³¹ Malcolm Willey to Alfred Stieglitz, June 8, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

This metaphor, which addressed Minneapolis's well known standing as the center of the flour milling industry in the country at that time, dispels the notion that the city, far from the culturally advanced metropolis in New York, was not deserving of works of fine art to present to its citizens for appreciation. President Coffman's marked philosophical – and financial – support for the fine arts had already developed fine arts appreciation within the University and throughout the city, and would ensure the Gallery's efficacy as the experiment progressed.

The sum that Willey offered for the painting was acceptable to Stieglitz, who was looking out for O'Keeffe's best interests as an artist, as she had experienced health problems, and medical bills were a consideration of the financial security of the artist. A telegram from Willey in late June 1935 notified Stieglitz that Willey would arrive in New York on July 8th to meet with him, and indicated that "Mrs. Ruth Lawrence from Minnesota will probably call on you this week and has authority to discuss selection."¹³² Ruth visited Stieglitz on multiple occasions during her stay in New York City in order to finalize the selection and purchase of the O'Keeffe painting. Ruth, who remained in New York to finish her collecting trip, wrote to Willey (who returned to Minnesota after their meeting) about her visits with the artists at An American Place, and reported – with candor – upon their burgeoning relationship,

After I had left you on [July 8] I had an irresistible desire to return to An American Place for a moment. When I walked in I found Stieglitz much weighted down by what news the doctors would give his wife. He begged me, almost, to sit down with him until she came. He rambled on as usual, then suddenly Georgia O'Keeffe came in.

Mr. Stieglitz explained my presence and said 'She is all right; she knows and understands without our explanation.' I was therefore accepted by O'Keeffe on a basis of friendliness and it was a most pleasant next few minutes. She then turned to me and said, 'Come on let's all go to lunch and celebrate the occasion.' I tried to back out, but the dynamic O'Keeffe said, 'not at all!'¹³³

¹³² Malcolm Willey to Alfred Stieglitz, June 18, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹³³ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, July 10, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935. Ruth also shared her impression of O'Keeffe with Willey, "O'Keeffe I had pictured from Stieglitz's description as a little woman, but she is decidedly not. She has tremendous personality, but is a very simple and rather naïve person. I can see how she needed a business manager to run her affairs where the sale of her pictures were concerned," in addition to her impression of Stieglitz and O'Keeffe as a couple, "Their relationship to each other was very beautiful to see. You would have thought the marriage a very recent one, the tender way they looked at each other and the little intimate glimpses of their [thoughtfulness] of each other. A real love match, surely, is this one!"

Ruth, O’Keeffe, and Stieglitz lunched on that afternoon of July 10th, and Ruth again returned to An American Place the following day upon the insistence of Stieglitz, who proceeded to show Ruth all of O’Keeffe’s major works. Impressed by the variety, to include trees, hills, and architectural subjects, Ruth commented to Stieglitz that the University should have examples of all of O’Keeffe’s phases. Ruth wrote to Willey and described that,

Stieglitz agreed with me and said it all depended upon us from now on, he would play ball and reduce any price to a minimum. He visions for the first time an opportunity to have her work where it will be used and where it can live. He told me that he thought something could grow out of our area, lined up as we were... You may say – a clever salesman, but I believe we, neither one of us, believe Stieglitz is only that. I think he is very sincere.¹³⁴

Stieglitz also wrote to Willey about the July meetings,

I can't begin to tell you what an experience your coming as you did... Mrs. Lawrence then returning and coming yesterday again – what it all meant to me. I know something very fine has happened and will bear wonderfully fine fruit... I do want to thank you for the beautiful spirit you have brought to this whole matter... Naturally I am most curious as to how your experiment will work out. I feel it will be a triumphant success.¹³⁵

Willey, who also was pleased with their visit, replied to Ruth with comments about the sincere salesman that had charmed them both,

I had always been a bit perplexed concerning Stieglitz’s ‘salesmanship.’ Was his merely a clever technique? Did he adapt himself to his prospective customers? I didn't care, really, because in my mind and heart I know that O'Keeffe is a great painter, and her works are moving and powerful. It was an O'Keeffe we wanted for the room. But I am now certain that Stieglitz is sincere, that he really does have an extraordinary understanding of emotion, and that he is accepting us on that basis. I have no longer any doubts on this.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Alfred Stieglitz to Malcolm Willey, July 10, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹³⁶ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, July 12, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

Willey ended his letter to Ruth by stating, “we are but at the beginning, but I am enthusiastic about that beginning... The year ahead promises to be both significant and exciting.”¹³⁷

In order to finalize the preparations for the year ahead, Ruth delayed shipment of the selected O’Keeffe painting, “Oak Leaves, Pink and Gray,” to Minnesota, so that she could ensure the right color scheme was incorporated into the décor of the Fine Arts Room. She shared her design philosophy with Willey,

I suspect this picture will be one of the hardest of any of the pictures we will have to fit gracefully into a scheme. The colors are so very subtle and we must be especially careful... I suspect you will feel some anxiety about my going ahead boldly with this scheme. I believe it will set your mind more at ease if you get Mr. Burton's opinion of whether I can do it or not he's seen me handle color – furniture problems and schemes of composition. There is bound to be criticism no matter what happens and I do hesitate doing it alone but since we could not talk today over when you were in the East I take it you are willing to have me proceed independently.¹³⁸

She further commented upon the appropriate design for the room, taking into consideration the predominantly Georgian architectural style reflected throughout campus as well as the Greek influences found within the design of Northrop Auditorium. Willey’s project would give Ruth the opportunity to exercise her training in interior decoration, and put to use her degree in Architecture from the University. She provided Willey with an assessment of how she would proceed in designing the room, expressing to him that the room

must be sincere and honest in its architecture suited to its purpose, elegant enough for what use we are putting it to – satisfying to most people who use it and serviceable enough to stand up under hard use. It takes a good deal of study and many angles must be handled before I do [anything] definite.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, July 12, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Ruth proceeded to make arrangements for the room, which would reflect a modern style. Two of the walls were painted light blue and two walls off-white, with a mirrored section to provide a transition in between. The windows were covered with deep blue venetian blinds, and were anchored by long blue drapes that ran to the floor. "Oak Leaves, Pink and Gray," which hung in a recessed alcove beneath indirect lighting, was the sole work of art displayed in the Fine Arts Room upon its opening in February of 1936. To accompany Ruth's decoration and the O'Keeffe painting, Fred Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation (who was kept abreast of the University's arts experiments through Willey) donated the Corporation's "School Arts Reference Set" for use in the room. The set of arts resource materials included 127 books, 21 boxes of black and white photographs, prints, a group of color reproductions, and portfolios of graphics processes and American art.¹⁴⁰

Willey submitted an announcement promoting the Fine Arts Room to *The Art Digest*, and had pictures of Ruth's design taken through the University's Photographic Laboratory to be published in the magazine. An additional announcement (that did not include a photograph) appeared in the 1935 edition of the educational journal, *School and Society*, in an article titled, "An Experimental Arts Room at Minnesota." These published articles prompted several inquiries from interested parties. In one of her replies to these inquiries, Ruth described the components of the rooms design and ended with an anecdote,

Everyone seems to feel that the room is fulfilling adequately the hope that it will become an art sanctuary. I believe an incident [that] happened when we opened the room will illustrate this. The evening before the opening reception, I was sitting in the room, giving it a last appraisal and criticism, when one of my employees came in to ask me a question. He progressed to the center of the room, stood still a moment, and then, with a hasty apology, carefully carried his cigarette to the door, and stamped it out saying that it was nothing short of sacrilege to smoke there.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, January 17, 1936, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 46/Art Gallery, 1935-1936.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Lawrence to C.H. Bennett, February 17, 1936, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.



Figure 1. *Fine Arts Room furnishings, 1935, photograph.* Books from the “School Arts Reference Set” gifted to the University by the Carnegie Corporation are shown amongst the furniture of the Fine Arts Room, which opened in February 1936 adjacent to the University Gallery in Northrop Auditorium.

Source: University Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.



Figure 2. *Fine Arts Room featured work*, 1935, photograph. Georgia O’Keeffe’s painting, “Oak Leaves, Pink and Gray,” oil on canvas, 1929, is hung in a recessed alcove within the room designed specifically for art appreciation.

Source: University Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

The modern style of design that Ruth employed in the Fine Arts Room would also inform her design of the Gallery's exhibition program. During the 1935 collecting trip in which Ruth made arrangements for the Fine Arts Room furnishings and the University acquired the O'Keeffe oil painting, it was decided amongst Ruth and Willey that their gallery should feature contemporary work in order to provide a niche that would engage their primary audience of University students.

Ruth frequently corresponded with Willey during her collecting trips. On several occasions, multiple letters were addressed from Ruth to Willey, and from Willey to Ruth in return, on the same day. Ruth's letters to Willey reported upon her activities whereupon she often made an account of her expenditures, and included receipts for reimbursement of lodging and dining. Her letters reveal her excitement at the possibilities for potential exhibits, as well as potential purchases available to the University. Willey's replies often included friendly reminders to strictly adhere to the travel budget allotted, and interjected reason to counter her excited assertions. Though it appears from the available record that Willey thought no expense should be spared towards his project of the Fine Arts Room, he offered Ruth suggestions when making exhibition arrangements and proposing purchases, and advised thrift-like avenues to explore, warning, "The University for many years to come will not be in a position to do much buying and if we gather our pictures all around, I do not think we will make as effective a showing as if we acquire a few contemporary Americans."¹⁴² He asserted that, "we can make a place for ourselves by picking the work of outstanding modern Americans... We will gain more by becoming known as friendly to the moderns of our own country than we will by trying to cover too broad a field."¹⁴³

In following this principle, Ruth proceeded to design the exhibition schedule accordingly. The meetings with Stieglitz and O'Keeffe, and the acquisition of the O'Keeffe painting, seemed to insert a drive of enthusiasm into the new curator, who finished her collecting trip with a fervent flair – which would bring to the Gallery in the 1935-1936 academic year a variety of exhibitions that introduced students to the contemporary, with a focus upon the emerging trends and practices in art.

¹⁴² Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, July 19, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

The first exhibit of the 1935-1936 academic year was titled, *Twentieth Century Painters*, and was displayed from October 21 - November 5 in the Gallery. On loan from Sidney Janis of New York City, the show was comprised of 17 original paintings of the artists Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Henry Rousseau, Fernand Léger, and Ashile Gorky. In a review of the show in the *Minnesota Daily* titled, "Late Paintings in U. Gallery Vary in Appeal," University student Elinor Anderson commented upon the guiding theme of imagination and symbolism that was evident in the exhibit, and described Rousseau's depiction of a forest scene as "breath-taking," and also iterated that Klee "draws like a child but he has complete organization and balance."¹⁴⁴ The exposure to these contemporary art forms (Picasso and Léger's cubism, Gorky's postimpressionist style) was appreciated by Anderson, who commented, "It is shocking and stimulating to any smug conception of representational or naturalistic art... It is worthwhile however, to understand something we know nothing about—something which many people in the world think vital and forward-looking."¹⁴⁵

To provide students with a greater exposure to the world, an exhibit of Chinese folk costumes and Japanese swords next filled the Gallery, and performances of "shadow plays" were held. Puppeteers described Chinese instruments and folklore, and provided demonstrations on how to manipulate the movement of the puppets using one's fingers.¹⁴⁶ From China, the Gallery travelled to Africa, with an exhibition of African and Bush Negro Art, the objects of which were lent by anthropologist Melville Herskovits from Northwestern University. Herskovits, who studied native peoples in their environments, visited the University and held a lecture about his collection, which included carved wooden combs, drums, and brass and wooden figures from native tribes of Africa and South America.¹⁴⁷ Ruth also gave a lecture regarding the religious

¹⁴⁴ Elinor L. Anderson, "Late Paintings in U. Gallery Vary in Appeal," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 23, 1935, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 21, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ "Shadow Plays to End Exhibit," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 15, 1935, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 22, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁴⁷ "Prof Will Talk On African Art," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), November 21, 1935, found in the University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 25, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

symbolism found within the works. As the *Minneapolis Journal* pointed out in a description of the African Art exhibit,

It is opposed to all that European art was and is, its forms follow no academic rules and the best work is farthest removed from the European tradition. Those who have been trained in the belief that there is no beauty in the world of sculpture except Greek beauty will have a bad time... those who make an ever changing attempt to interpret life, for those there will be a real emotional stirring when first we see African art.¹⁴⁸

The African exhibit was followed by a display of paintings by Soviet artists in an attempt to present an international array of arts appreciation to students.

In an article that promoted upcoming exhibits for the winter of 1935-1936, the *Minnesota Daily* reported that the Gallery had reached record-setting attendance as a result of the Fall quarter exhibits, “The modern and African art shows proved the most popular, drawing about 4,000 and 7,800 respectively. Present indications show that the photographic salon now on exhibit will equal or exceed these figures.”¹⁴⁹ An exhibit of photographs from the Silver Medal National Salon was held at the University Gallery in conjunction with the Minneapolis Institute of Art’s exhibit of the Gold Medal photographic group in December of 1935. Photography, which was also considered an emerging art form in the 20th century, was regularly exhibited in the Gallery for contemporary appreciation, along with watercolors, lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, and ceramics.

It is likely that Gallery attendance reflected the various lectures, demonstrations, and radio talks – given by Ruth and members of the art faculty – that served to publicize exhibitions. To promote a show of watercolors held at the start of the Winter quarter in 1936, Ruth gave a talk titled, “What Water Colors Have Meant to America and the Use of This Medium Today”

¹⁴⁸ “African Art on View at University,” *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), October 24, 1935, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 24, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁴⁹ “More Than 22,000 Visit Art Gallery,” December 2, 1935, *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), December 2, 1935, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 27, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

during a regular Gallery radio broadcast.¹⁵⁰ Art Education instructor Gertrude Ross gave a demonstration on preparing glazes in conjunction with an exhibit of ceramics.¹⁵¹

Though the University never exhibited a retrospective exhibit of the photographic work of Alfred Stieglitz, who was an artist in his own right, Ruth retained her ties with Stieglitz the dealer. On the heels of his support of the Fine Arts Room project, she convinced him to loan to the University works by the artists that he represented for an exhibit in February of 1936. Works by O’Keeffe and John Marin, lent by Stieglitz, were included with an exhibit of the work of 68 artists with ties to the Midwest, identified as having been born in, lived, or taught in Minnesota, Iowa, or Wisconsin. The exhibit titled, *The Twentieth Century*, also included works loaned from other galleries in New York. In order to engage the student body with the exhibit, a vote was held each day of the three-week long exhibit to gauge student opinion. Cards were placed next to each painting, and any visitor to the Gallery was welcome to make a selection of their favorite. Results of the voting were reported regularly in the *Minnesota Daily*, which helped to drive up publicity for attendance at the show. At the end of the exhibit, which ran through the month of February, Georgia O’Keeffe’s “Western Landscape” was announced the winner.¹⁵²

In 1937, Stieglitz lent to Ruth a selection of works that had never before travelled for an exhibit. Titled, *Contemporary American Artists*, the exhibit signaled the first major Midwest display of the artists that Stieglitz represented in the 1930s: Arthur Dove, John Marin, Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and of course, O’Keeffe. James Gray of the St. Paul Dispatch praised the exhibit and alerted readers to its importance,

Nowadays art is shipped to us by express. We have only to be aware of the local agencies for cultivation of the spirit. Through them the wonder of the world are poured into our laps... Such an agency is the Little Gallery, which periodically brings to its rooms in the Cyrus Northrop Memorial auditorium on the University campus strikingly interesting and important exhibitions. The current one... is as

¹⁵⁰ “Gallery Curator Talks on Water Colors Today,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), January 15, 1936, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 28, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁵¹ “Instructor to Talk on Pottery Show,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), January 15, 1936, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 28, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁵² “O’Keeffe Winner in Gallery Voting,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), February 28, 1936, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 31, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

fine a collection of its kind as this community has ever been permitted to see. It should bring the disciples of modern art from every nook and cranny of Minnesota.”¹⁵³

Gray continued with a lengthy review of the artists and their paintings, and ended with, “This is without question the most important art show we shall see this season.”¹⁵⁴

The exhibit was held at a rare time in which the University was in a position to make yet another purchase of original art. The unanimous vote of the Fine Arts Committee would be the impetus for the acquisition of another O’Keeffe oil painting titled, “Oriental Poppies,” which was acquired for the fee of \$2,500, and included Stieglitz’s “University discount.”

In addition to forging individual relationships with dealers, Ruth took advantage of the emerging exhibit service organizations of the time – associations and organizations that had developed travelling exhibition services. In addition to arranging for coordinated exhibits from the College Arts Association, the Smithsonian Institute, and the Arts Club of Chicago, Ruth frequently contracted for exhibitions from the Museum of Modern Art’s (MOMA) Travelling Exhibition Service, where she developed a working relationship with Elodie Courtier, program coordinator. Frequent correspondence was exchanged in order to relay shipping information and document the condition of objects when they were received and again when they were sent along to the next organization. Exhibitions were also loaned from the American Federation of Arts, as well as from private collections, and collections of other universities and colleges.

Many exhibits held at the Gallery over the course of its seasons featured native art of different cultures, not commonly displayed in the Midwest, which included Latin American, Native American, African, and Eskimo Art, as well as Japonisme (the influence of Japanese art upon Western artists). Along with this approach, a naiveté was revealed in regards to the accuracy of interpretation and identification of materials when a visitor to the Gallery, who had travelled extensively in Asia, noticed that Japanese art objects on display were labeled incorrectly as Chinese.

Many of the Gallery’s exhibits, particularly those loaned from MOMA, exposed students and the greater community to emerging trends and forms of art, and were aligned to the Gallery’s

¹⁵³ James Gray, “Interesting Art Exhibitions to Be Seen on U Campus,” *St. Paul Dispatch* (St. Paul, MN), January 29, 1937, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 52, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

focus on contemporary works. Two exhibits held during the 1936-1937 academic year introduced machine art, and the art of dada and surrealism, three emerging styles that gained much attention and allowed for greater discussions and development of art appreciation.

On loan from the MOMA's traveling exhibition service, the exhibit, *Machine Art*, was held from October 16 - November 10, 1936 and displayed machines, scientific instruments, and other objects useful in daily life (including airplane propellers, watch springs, cocktail glasses, screw drivers, carafes, clock crystals, and modeling tools, amongst others). *The Minneapolis Tribune* reported that the exhibit showed that "wheels and cogs have beauty as well as utility."¹⁵⁵ A catalogue that included photographs and descriptions of the objects in the exhibit was available for sale in the Gallery. To supplement the exhibit, a smaller display of kinetic sculptures loaned by the art department of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, was exhibited in glass display cases that were acquired in the previous year, and were set outside the main entrance to the Gallery. The sculptures were powered by electricity and were described by the *Minnesota Daily* as a "sort of mechanized puppet show... the forms move about in all directions and fall into harmonious relationships with one another."¹⁵⁶

To finish out the 1936-1937 season, Ruth arranged for an exhibit from MOMA that had created much attention in the East when it was first exhibited there, and would draw just as much attention when it opened in Minnesota. In an article for the *Minnesota Daily*, student reporter June Schulze warned readers about the exhibit,

If you have jangled nerves and a weak heart, stay away from the University Gallery June 26 to July 24. But if you have a flair for the bizarre, the spontaneous and the irrational – and a strong constitution – make it a point to see the exhibition of fantastic art, dadaism and surrealism showing those 4 weeks.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ "Beauty In or At Machine?" *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis: MN), October 22, 1936, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 44, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁵⁶ "Gallery Plans Kinetic Show," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 15, 1936, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 44, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁵⁷ June Schulze, "Fantastic Art Exhibit Will Include Fur-Lined Tea Cup," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), June 15, 1937, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 57, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

Titled, *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism Exhibition*, the display included nearly 500 items created between the years of 1450 - 1936 by over 150 artists from Europe and America. The objects included in the exhibition were described by Schulze, “Among the objects which upset the more conservative museum visitors are a fur-lined tea cup; a drawing by a psychopathic patient; a sketch entitled ‘Manypeoplia Upsidedownia,’ and a piece of sculpture ‘trimmed’ with zippers and moving-picture film.”¹⁵⁸ The *Minneapolis Journal* reported that the items displayed in the exhibit, “must be seen to be fully understood—and then they will not be. But opportunity for study of the movement as well as for the satisfaction of a natural curiosity about it is offered by the exhibit...”¹⁵⁹ The *Journal*, as well as the *Minneapolis Tribune* and *Minnesota Daily*, extensively covered the exhibit, and included large photographic spreads that printed a picture of Salvador Dali’s famous work, “Persistence of Memory,” as well as students pictured holding Meret Oppenheim’s “Object 1936: Fur-Covered Tea Cup, Plate and Spoon.” The *Journal* even published an editorial cartoon titled, “Surrealism Display at U. Has Them Puzzled,” which included illustrations of scenes from the exhibit that captured quizzical looks on visitor faces, an artist painting in his sleep, and a woman fanning a man that fainted.¹⁶⁰ The exhibit drew an estimated 2,000 visitors in the first week it was on display.¹⁶¹

Dada, an art movement that developed out of Zurich, Switzerland, in 1916 as a reaction to World War I, was characterized by public demonstrations and expression through art and literature that upheld irrationally and rejected logic. Surrealism, which developed out of the Dada movement in the early 1920s, formed in Paris through artist collaborations based in experimentation with automatic drawings and abstractions. To help to educate visitors on the dada and surrealist work exhibited, daily lectures were held in the Gallery, and a convocation

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ “U. Gallery To Open with N.Y. Exhibit,” *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), n.d., found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 57, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁶⁰ Gustav Krobmann, “Surrealism Display at U. Has Them Puzzled,” *The Minneapolis Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), June 29, 1937, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 59, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁶¹ “Art Exhibit Draws 2,000 Spectators But Only One Poet,” *University Summer Session Reporter* (Minneapolis, MN), n.d., found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 59, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

presentation was held to reveal the “inside story,” or historical background and significance of the movements, given by the speaker James Johnson Sweeney, an art critic and editor from New York City.¹⁶²

Following the excitement of the surrealism exhibition, Ruth departed in August 1937 for another annual collecting trip to prepare for the 1937-1938 season of exhibitions. This time she headed to the West Coast for inspiration. Ruth’s trip reports, which were submitted to Willey, reveal a rigorous schedule packed tightly with meetings with museum directors, as well as with artists. The reports also include Ruth’s candid appraisals of the work being done by other institutions, revealing the discerning professional standards that she had acquired. Of her visit to the Sacramento Art Gallery on August 22, 1937, she wrote in her notes,

The collection was donated and is a very spotty one. Much 19th and a lot of obvious fakes. Nice Flemish primitive. Good celadon pottery; costumes – all badly displayed. Lot of fake Dutch painting, 17th Century. Here and there a good painting creeps in... Don’t believe there is much ability here.¹⁶³

The following day, Ruth met with Mr. and Mrs. Corvoisier at the Corvoisier Gallery to arrange to make a selection of works for an exhibit, and settled on several that would be packed by the Corvoisiers with the University covering insurance and shipping costs. Ruth commented about their exchange, “I saw a great many painters who were not interesting – took us until 1:00 to make this selection... This was a long and hard three hours.”¹⁶⁴

Ruth also made appointments with artists directly. On the afternoon of August 23rd, she met with German American artist Lyonel Feininger, a well-known painter and cartoonist who is considered a leader in the development of expressionism in Europe. Feininger had previously taught at the Bauhaus, an influential arts and design school in Germany, and was then teaching at Mills College in Oakland, California. Ruth noted the meeting in her report,

¹⁶² “Surrealism to be Convocation Topic Thursday Morning,” *University Summer Session Reporter*, June 30, 1937, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937, 59, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 213/University Gallery Press Book, 1934-1937.

¹⁶³ “Report of Mrs. Lawrence’s Trip,” August 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Met Mr. Feininger at the Victoria Hotel – learned he had gotten [through] for the summer at Mills and was about to go back east. He will send me a fine retrospective exhibition in March or April. He is a very modest man and an utterly charming person. Met Mrs. F. too. She is Jewish, probably one reason they left Germany. He told something of his Bauhaus experience.¹⁶⁵

In April of 1938, the Gallery had the distinction of holding the first retrospective exhibition of the work of Lyonel Feininger in America, comprised of 19 oils and 40 watercolors painted by Feininger between the years of 1909 to 1937.

Ruth also visited other institutions of higher education to see what could be lent in a collegial exchange. Her comments bring insight into the work being done at other colleges and universities throughout the country through her trained – yet biased – eye. During her visit to Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, she was not impressed, as she noted,

Art Gallery decreped [sic]. Old basket and Indian work in hodge podge [sic] in hallway. Spreckled [sic] collection of painting in main room. Typical 19th Cent. taste of wealth... Nothing arresting, same old stuff. Met Asst. Director who discussed types of exhibits in dead level voice – no life or enthusiasm... Certainly not vitally interested in Stanford's Gallery judging from what was seen there... Next went to Science Museum... Never saw such a collection of pure junk and works of art... junk one sees on arriving at a commercialized resort. Then a few fine things in spite of all, but inferior often in grade... This museum is a disgrace to any educational institution, and I would think Stanford was too fine a school to countenance this!¹⁶⁶

On August 25th she travelled to Oakland, California where she visited the California College of Arts and Crafts, which inspired her to hold an exhibition of student work created elsewhere, and made arrangements with the daughter of the college President, who also gave Ruth a tour, to ship 16 paintings to Minnesota later that year. Ruth's accounts of her meetings suggest the informal nature in which these arrangements were conducted and in which organizations agreed to loan their materials.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Mills College in Oakland, in contrast to Stanford, was judged by Ruth to be “a lovely place – fine plant – doing very interesting things in art line.”¹⁶⁷ At Mills, Ruth met with Alice Brewer, an instructor and textile designer, who showed Ruth around their gallery, which was closed for the summer. Ruth commented, “They are up and coming out there – all very much character and different from anything seen elsewhere. Has an outstanding staff.”¹⁶⁸ Ruth made arrangements for the loan of textiles, as well as the loan of artwork produced by students and faculty of Mills College. An exhibit titled *California College Water Colors* was held at the Gallery in January of 1938, and the *Mills College Student Exhibit* followed in March of that same year.

In addition to these examples of student work from California, in an effort to demonstrate to U of M students work produced by other art students, the Gallery also exhibited the *Big Ten Exhibition*. Organized by Iowa State University and circulated amongst the nation’s large land-grant institutions, the exhibit contained work created by students from each of the universities that participated.

Ruth continued to patron travelling exhibition services and exhibits assembled by individual artists to supplement her exhibition schedule for the remainder of the year. On loan from MOMA, a photograph exhibition titled *Modern Architecture in England* displayed the interiors and exteriors of British buildings (January 1938). Circulated by the British artist Eileen Holding, *The International Show of Abstract Sculpture and Painting*, which contained works by Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, and the mobile constructions of Alexander Calder, was exhibited in March 1938. This exhibit was followed by a display of textiles circulated by the American Federation of Arts.

The exhibition service organizations through which Ruth frequently loaned materials requested her opinion on the development of their programs. A survey was sent to Ruth from the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) regarding an interest she may have in an exhibition of utilitarian objects, which started with, “more should be done to aid the development of greater

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

aesthetic sensibility in regards to articles of everyday use.”¹⁶⁹ In her reply, Ruth responded favorably to such a suggested exhibit,

I am whole-heartedly in sympathy with the training of people to appreciate beauty in the objects which they use everyday, since the University Gallery operates on the theory that its only usefulness is to be an educational one to help train art appreciation in the University of Minnesota. We, therefore, would heartily go in with you on this proposed project and would be happy to take exhibitions from time to time.¹⁷⁰

Monroe Wheeler from MOMA replied to Ruth, “It was necessary for us to learn, before proceeding with the plan, whether it would meet with the approval of progressive museum curators like yourself.”¹⁷¹

Wheeler’s choice of adjective in referring to Ruth was an apt description, as Ruth strived to develop relationships with gallery directors and artists in order to bring the best materials for display. The relationship that Ruth and Willey had developed with Alfred Stieglitz, who loaned his works to Minnesota on several occasions, produced a rare occurrence, as during the 1930s many Eastern galleries were apprehensive about loaning works of art to galleries outside of their region. Ruth fervently advocated for her Midwest gallery to receive exhibits and individual works of art from established organizations in the East and delicately pursued her cause upon meeting Eastern gallery directors on her collecting trips.

During her meetings, Ruth promoted and praised the University Gallery in order to prove the quality of her program. She referenced her relationship with Stieglitz, and promoted the success of the Gallery’s exhibitions, which included works loaned by him. Stieglitz served as a role model to Ruth, as she designed her own sense of sincere salesmanship in accordance with his example.

By the summer of 1938, Ruth had four years of exhibition credentials upon which to stand—credentials which she promoted during her collecting trip from July 11 - August 19, 1938

¹⁶⁹ Museum of Modern Art to Ruth Lawrence, September 16, 1937, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

¹⁷⁰ Ruth Lawrence to Monroe Wheeler, September 21, 1937, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

¹⁷¹ Monroe Wheeler to Ruth Lawrence, October 6, 1937, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

to the East Coast. As Ruth reported to Willey from her trip, she utilized the Gallery's accomplishments to convince the museum and gallery directors with whom she met to loan works to the Gallery. She described to Willey a particular meeting with the director of the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.,

He was most interested in our Feininger exhibit, for they, at the Phillips, had an exhibit almost at the same time. Luckily I had our photos and showed him what we had and he was much amazed that we had a very much better show than they had had and said so, very frankly... He was impressed. Tactfully, as possible, I approached the subject of loans from their Gallery (in spite of the ruling, of which I well knew, that the [New England] galleries would not loan outside of New England.) And – we made the grade! We can borrow almost anything they have! Since we can say they will loan to us, I think we have a lever with the other galleries to open their doors to us. We shall see!¹⁷²

Ruth also developed a network of colleagues – other progressive museum curators – from across the country with whom she would share ideas and opinions on themes for exhibitions. Regular correspondence with Mary E. from Berea College in Kentucky (her last name is never indicated in the available correspondence) captures the candor of the two curators, who shared personal reflections and educational philosophies. Ruth assisted Mary E. with securing an exhibit at Berea of works by artist Lyonel Feininger, and Mary E. may have inspired an annual exhibit theme at the University Gallery. In November 1938, Mary wrote to Ruth and provided details about a recent exhibit held at Berea,

You should have seen our last show! It was a double decker, with plans and materials of the builder on the first floor and *Trash or Treasures?* The college plumber made some good Picasso sculpture from pipes and joints, and sneaked it in after the show had opened... Our big excitement this semester is a new course entitled, 'Materials, Tools and Techniques.' It is helping a small group of students to a respect and understanding of materials, which seems to be essential to any honest practice of art. And it is a strong test of my own philosophy of teaching. (I can hear you laugh over that. I think I hear big Jimmie laughing too.)¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, July 16, 1938, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1938.

¹⁷³ Mary E. from Berea College to Ruth Lawrence, November 19, 1938, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/Ruth Lawrence correspondence, undated, personal and sabbatical, 1937-1951.

This personal touch, in reference to Ruth's deceased husband James, indicated a relation to this source that is undocumented and unclear from the records. However, this correspondence is a key indicator, or inspiration, into a series of exhibits that were implemented at the Gallery by Ruth during her tenure.

On January 25, 1946, the *Minnesota Daily* student newspaper reported upon the latest Gallery exhibit in the article, "Lame Chair Clinic: Gallery Shows Exhibit on 'Home Hints.'" The article reported, "Broken chairs, wrecked tables, cushions with the springs and stuffing sticking out, all reminiscent of the after-effects of a bar-brawl in Dodge City, are part of the 'Hints and Ideas for Your Home' exhibit being held at the University Gallery, Northrop auditorium."¹⁷⁴

In 1946, Ruth mounted an exhibition titled, *Hints and Ideas for Your Home*, (January 17 - February 20) in which the objective of the exhibit was "to give a visual picture of the different stages in home repair problems."¹⁷⁵ The exhibit was divided amongst three themes, "Repair," "Refinish," and "Revive Living" and focused not only on home repair, but also on interior decoration.¹⁷⁶ There were demonstrations of furniture remodeling, picture framing, and simple electrical repair and maintenance. From March 5 - April 25, Ruth gave bi-weekly instructional lectures on topics related to the exhibit. The lectures, as announced by the *School Bulletin* of the Department of Art Education were titled the following:

'Pardon Madam, Your Antiques are Showing,'
 'Space for Living' – what makes a room good,
 'Tuck Yourself Away' (bedrooms and storage rooms),
 'What's Cooking' (plans for kitchens, duplication of steps, etc.,
 'Our Porches, Bathrooms, and Garages are Out of Date,'
 Two lectures on Rules –
 (1) 'No Pot Luck About It,'

¹⁷⁴ "Lame Chair Clinic: Gallery Shows Exhibit on 'Home Hints,'" *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), January 25, 1946, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

¹⁷⁵ "U Gallery to Show Hints for Your Home," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), January 17, 1946, 2, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1946/01/17/read>.

¹⁷⁶ University of Minnesota, "Department of Art Education," *School Bulletin*, January 24, 1946, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

(2) 'More Rules – Follow the Recipe.'¹⁷⁷

Demonstrations were given daily by Carl Hawkinson, Gallery Mechanic. Students wishing to try 'to do it' had tools and materials available to them in the arts craft workshop in the student union.¹⁷⁸



Figure 3. *Hints and Ideas for Your Home*, 1946, photograph. These chairs were used to demonstrate reupholstering and other basic furniture repairs during the *Hints and Ideas for Your Home* exhibit.

Source: University Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Hints and Ideas for Your Home again demonstrated the way in which Ruth designed exhibits that were relevant to the lives of University students. By 1946, these students – many of whom were by that time veterans of WWII – would soon graduate, and were preparing for their future adults lives, whereupon they would be setting up, decorating, and maintaining an apartment or home. This exhibit drew wide attention from the local newspapers, and was even mentioned in the editorial section of the *St. Paul Dispatch*, which featured two photographs: one of students building bookshelves, and another that pictured Carl Hawkinson instructing a young man on how to reupholster a chair.¹⁷⁹

President Morrill sent Ruth a letter to acknowledge the attention that the Gallery had received in the *Dispatch* article,

This must be heartening to you, indeed and I feel the whole University is indebted to you in that your enterprise leads to a very broad commendation and statement of appreciation by the *St. Paul Dispatch* of the central educational integrity and service of the whole institution... This kind of publicity can't be bought – it just has to be deserved.¹⁸⁰

Other exhibits that were inspired by colleagues, but were re-envisioned by Ruth's philosophy and aesthetic, focused upon the relationship of artists to the materials that they used to produce their work. A series of exhibitions featured this theme, to include, *Tools, Materials, and Art* in 1946, *Materials and Tools of Art* in 1947, and *Materials, Tools, and the Artist* in 1948. Ruth explained her philosophy regarding this exhibition series, "It, in my opinion, merely emphasized again 'how it's done.' 'They say' if you want to get a point over to an uninitiated mind it must be repeated in new form seven times."¹⁸¹ The raw material, the functional tool, and the completed artwork were displayed in juxtaposition to each other to demonstrate the sequence of artistic production. In the 1947 exhibit, *Materials and Tools of Art*, oil pigments, brushes, and a

¹⁷⁹ "U Gives Home Beautification Tips," *St. Paul Dispatch* (St. Paul, MN), January 24, 1946, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

¹⁸⁰ President Morrill to Ruth Lawrence, January 28, 1946, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery correspondence, 1935-1950.

¹⁸¹ Ruth Lawrence to William Saltzman, September 28, 1947, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/Ruth Lawrence correspondence, sabbatical and collecting trips, 1946-1948.

palette knife were displayed next to original oil paintings executed by two different artists—Paul Sample and Josephine Lutz Rollins. Sample utilized a brush as his tool in order to produce a stroke that visually contrasted with Rollins’s manipulation of the palette knife, which she used to create her work.¹⁸² Mounted to the wall next to Sample and Rollins’ work was a deconstructed oil painting: an empty frame, and un-stretched canvases.

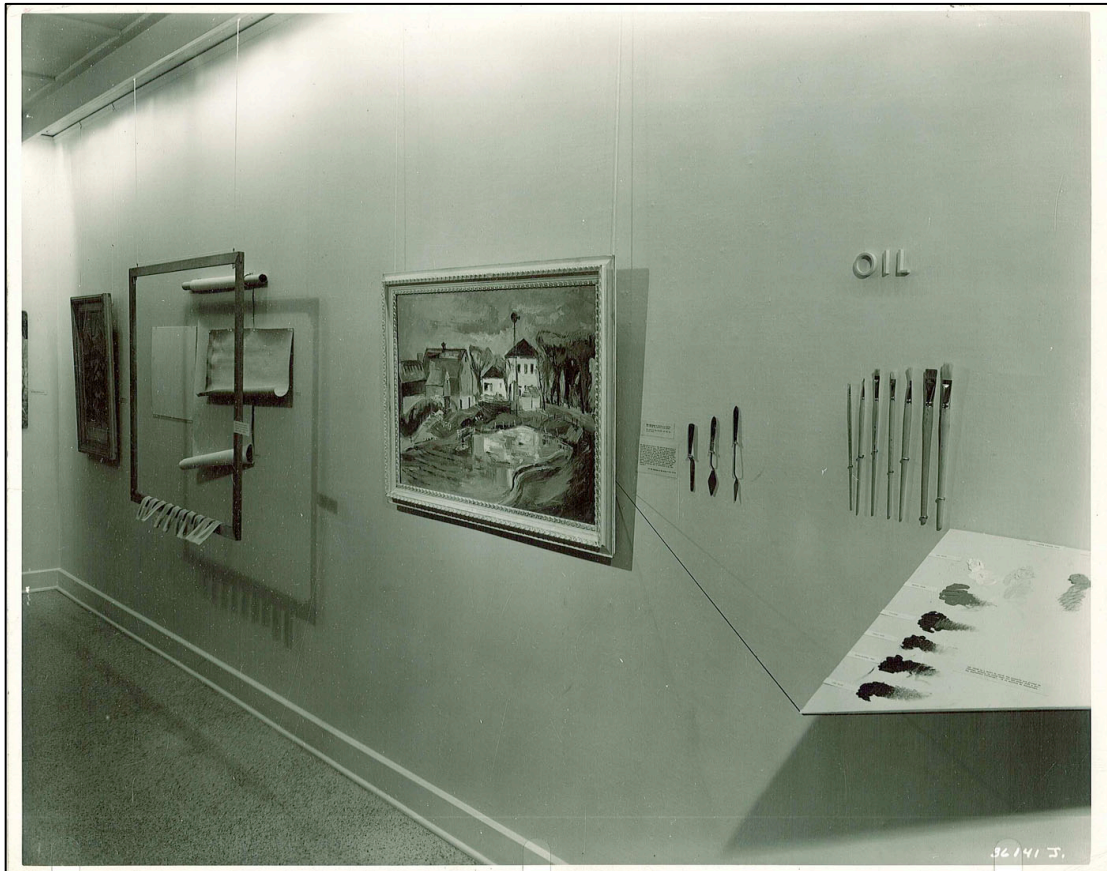


Figure 4. *Materials and Tools of Art*, 1947, photograph.

Source: University Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

¹⁸² Stan Hieta, “Old Techniques On Display,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 23, 1947, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum Records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

CHAPTER 6

OUTREACH AND EXTENSION

In addition to mounting exhibitions and planning programs and lectures, Ruth also oversaw the Gallery's student loan collection, the basis of the art rental program available to students of the University. For twenty-five cents a term, students could rent print reproductions to hang in their dormitory or in their rooms at home. The program was established in 1934 with a gift of 600 print reproductions that were donated by the Carnegie Corporation. The prints were framed by a commercial art gallery in Minneapolis and were first made available to students in January 1935.

In a reflection upon the initial year of the student art rental program, Ruth observed that more students rented the modern print reproductions than the classical works. Ruth also noticed that more students who lived outside of the Twin Cities rented from the program than did local students. She offered a theory to Willey as to why this was the case,

a goodly number of our students are Twin Cities students who live at home. Their rooms are probably already full of things they know and like and they aren't particularly stimulated enough in interest to which to change. The student from out in the state (about 45% I believe) is from pioneering stock, who if they knew or had good things before they came west, didn't bring a painting or print or any works of art so far, therefore, these boys and girls have not inherited a love of these things from a familiarity with them. I think they can be [lead] to appreciate them because they do have their crafts and our students are mostly from stock [that] does have a delight in the beautiful.¹⁸³

In line with this observation, Ruth articulated an idea for the Gallery to reach out to the "pioneering stock" and provide arts resources to not only university students and instructors but to the greater community as well, an idea in concert with the very mission of a state land grant institution. She informed Willey that she

[hoped] to build up by a clipping system, a most helpful cross-section of the life of each individual period, so that if an English instructor, a history or political

¹⁸³ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, June 25, 1935, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 4/Art Gallery, 1935.

science teacher wanted to illustrate his lecture showing better the background of a certain time we could give him material showing the sort of houses they lived in, the furniture and decoration – the dishes off which they ate, the dress, the manners and customs and the art – music and literature also. I think it would greatly add understanding of a period to see these things.¹⁸⁴

Within her first few years as curator, through the assistance of her small staff of federal students, Ruth devised a modest clipping system that utilized a small collection of articles and reference images that she kept for personal research and study. These resources, though scarce at the start, were made available to University professors, schoolteachers, and others interested in art. However, due to lack of a regular workforce to be dedicated to build a collection of arts reference materials, the resources remained disorganized, and were under-utilized.

With the support of the Fine Arts Committee, Ruth appealed to President Coffman for funding to help build the reference materials into a pictorial library and art resource center. In May of 1937, Willey informed Ruth that the Gallery would receive \$1250 to acquire materials and supplies to develop a formal pictorial library that would provide illustrative materials to aid in instruction. Three hundred dollars was set aside to purchase a hot press, paper cutter, mounting board and tissue, \$140 was afforded for magazines, photographs, and second-hand books, and an additional \$800 was allocated to supplement the print reproductions in the student loan collection.¹⁸⁵ Though the added supplies were appreciated and much needed, it would take much time for the clipping system to be developed in an organized manner, as the skeleton staff comprised of Mrs. Lawrence, her student assistants, and a part-time secretary could barely handle routine Gallery activities, let alone additional projects.

The workforce issue in the Gallery was likely noticed by university administration, as a series of reports found within the archival records indicated that Ruth was asked to submit an account of her daily activities for evaluation. In a cover letter included with her formal report, Ruth indicated to Willey that Mrs. Johnson, head of the employment bureau, requested that Ruth make a list of all of her activities in the Gallery within a two-day period.¹⁸⁶ In two attached

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, May, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

¹⁸⁶ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, December 13, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

reports, each titled, “Chronological Record of Mrs. Lawrence's Day,” Ruth detailed her activities on December 9th and 10th, 1937 down to the minute, with a second column that denoted work completed by the Gallery secretary, “of which Mrs. Lawrence would have had to attend to had the secretary not been there.”¹⁸⁷ The reports were also supplemented with an annotated list of all the correspondence Ruth prepared in the two-day period, which noted the word count of each letter (30 letters in total). The report of activity comprised an exhaustive list of tasks, including telephone appointments, writing correspondence, giving dictation for letters, looking for materials misplaced by students, meeting with faculty, editing content for radio broadcasts, arranging for the arrival of an express shipment of exhibit materials, and repeated instances throughout the course of both days of addressing student questions and supervising their work.¹⁸⁸ On December 10th, the report indicates that from 9:36 am - 9:39 am, Ruth’s activity was “Talking To Acting President Ford.”¹⁸⁹ After Acting President Guy Stanton Ford received the reports from Willey, he replied directly to Ruth, “Thank you for the opportunity to look through the check of your labors over a two-day period. It certainly gives a picture of a very busy lady. I note almost with remorse that I took three minutes of your time.”¹⁹⁰

To get much needed help for the “very busy lady,” Ruth and Willey completed an application for emergency relief work assistance with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in February 1938, requesting 20 workers to develop and organize the clipping system of art reference materials and to provide additional assistance in other aspects of gallery work. The application report began with the following statement,

The Gallery was established in the belief that the great state universities did not stress enough the cultural side of the student’s education, and it was hoped that a development of art appreciation and of the more cultural aspects of life on our campus could be developed through the Gallery exhibitions. Sufficient funds out of the budget for any kind of staff are out of the question. All the work which has

¹⁸⁷ Chronological Record of Mrs. Lawrence’s Day, December 9, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

¹⁸⁸ Chronological Record of Mrs. Lawrence’s Day, December 10, 1937, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1937.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. President Coffman was at the time on a medical leave of absence following a heart attack in the summer of 1937.

¹⁹⁰ President Ford to Ruth Lawrence, December 15, 1937, Office of the President Records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 46/Art Gallery, 1937.

been started and has been flourishing so beautifully, indicating that great growth is possible, would have to be abandoned completely... if we did not get support from some such agency as the government support under WPA.¹⁹¹

The request described the need for workers to continue the work being done with the library of pictorial files that was established in Room 317 of Northrop Auditorium. The work required collecting articles and images from newspapers, books, and magazines to build mounted materials that described the history of major and minor art disciplines. Workers would also be assigned the task of composing bibliographic and biographic materials (catalogues, lectures, publicity scrapbooks) based upon research on the artworks the comprised the student loan collection as well as the collection of original artworks. Other workers were needed to produce a series of inventories that documented all of the art materials owned by the University amongst the departments that offered courses in art (to include lantern slides, prints, textiles, sculptures, etc.), as well as all the material on art found within the book and magazine collections of the St. Paul Public Library, James J. Hill library, St. Paul School of Art Library, Minneapolis Public Library, the library of the MIA, and the University Library. The final request, for a worker to perform a study of how students were utilizing these resources, indicated Ruth's interest in better understanding and proving the value of the work being done in the Gallery.

The WPA, an economic recovery organization instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt under the New Deal legislation in 1935, employed millions of Americans in public works projects that varied from the construction of roads and bridges to mural painting and theatre production. The WPA also supported many projects on the University of Minnesota campus that employed nonstudents in positions that were funded primarily by the federal government, outside of the regular University budget. During the first three years that the University received WPA assistance (1935-1938), 400 workers were employed to provide research assistance to a large major project, as well as provide clerical and technical assistance on two sub-projects that provided assistance to nurses in the University hospital, and helped the Municipal Reference Bureau with surveying.¹⁹² Ruth and Willey's application to the WPA was made upon the assumption that a sub-project could also be established for the Gallery.

¹⁹¹ Mrs. J.C. Lawrence, "February 1937 Report," Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Project Proposals, 1937-1940.

On February 6, 1938, WPA Project 5738, described as “preparation of museum exhibits – University Gallery” was added to the WPA project program at the University. Twenty workers were assigned to the Gallery to fulfill multiple roles in the development of exhibitions, programming, and outreach.¹⁹³ The annual Gallery WPA work-relief projects, which ran for four subsequent years from 1938-1942, provided outreach to educational entities statewide. The WPA built a collection of slides, pamphlets, art reference materials, and traveling exhibitions.

The Art Reference Pamphlet File consisted of a collection and classification of current and historical literature on all aspects of art and constituted an essential resource available to faculty, students, and the greater community for use in research and in the classroom. In order to organize and catalog the materials, a classification system was developed based on an amended organizational scheme modeled from the standard Fogg Classification System.

Dedicated staff were assigned to prepare copy for scripted radio announcements, and sent releases to local newspapers, bulletins and magazines. A carpenter shop prepared frames and mounts for exhibitions, and also outfitted gallery workspaces with tables, chairs, desks, and cabinets – needed furniture in the progression of the gallery program.

Due to the additional programming initiatives and extended workforce during the WPA project years, the Gallery was able to expand into additional space in Northrop Auditorium to encompass the entire third and fourth floors, as well as a room on the first floor where shipments of artwork and exhibit materials could be received and unpacked.¹⁹⁴ The fourth floor became the primary exhibit spaces, and the third floor was developed into offices that supported the major divisions of WPA work. Room 306 was reserved for storage of the student loan and originals collection. The Arts Reference Room, 308, served as a study room where reference materials could be viewed by instructors and students. An adjacent room, 309, was where the Arts Reference Pamphlet files were stored. The Gallery office was in room 310. The Records office in 318, was where all of the exhibition records and bookkeeping files were kept in addition to the Lantern Slide Index, a documentation of all of the instructional slides held in the collections of

¹⁹² University of Minnesota, “The Biennial Report of the President, 1936-1938,” 1938, University of Minnesota, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 318, <http://purl.umn.edu/91583>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ University of Minnesota, “The Biennial Report of the President, 1938-1940,” 1940, University of Minnesota, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 406, <http://purl.umn.edu/91585>.

various departments throughout campus. All orders for materials and supplies were also made through this office. Within room 315, dedicated workers clipped, mounted, and classified the illustrative materials to be used for study. By January 1940, Ruth was in charge of 21 federal students, a full-time stenographer, and approximately 60 WPA workers, who all contributed to the growth of the University Gallery.

On January 17, 1940, a memorandum sent from President Ford's office to all Deans, Administrative Officers, and Department Heads reminded University employees that in order to prepare the request for legislative funding from the State of Minnesota by the state deadline, any special funding requests would need to be submitted to the President's Office by February 15, 1940. This required the completion of four separate forms for consideration of adjustments to salary and wages, expenses for equipment and supplies, or major improvement projects to land or buildings. Filed with records of the President's Office that were kept on the Gallery, next to this request, was a typed transcription of a letter from Ruth, undated, but estimated as being written on January 23, 1940. The transcription consisted of a disorganized list assumed to be of items for the legislative request, which included,

1 Bulletin typewriter
 More File cases? in two more years?
 Pictorial, Pamphlet, etc. budgets.
 Putting 308 into shape – cabinets, painting, more chairs, etc.
 Materials for the shops for 2 years to come.
 Travelling exhibits we are going to prepare.
 We ought to have at least \$3,000 minimum...
 Any equipment replaced?
 Our present budget as you know is \$5,000...
 Our special funds you have also...
 Any replacements needed in the Gallery?

...With our operation and enlarged project we need more money over and above our \$5,000. We haven't had it and have had to cut down on gallery running expense and exhibitions.¹⁹⁵

Following this transcribed list within the archival record was found an original letter dated February 1940. Ruth wrote to Willey from Woodstock, New York, where she was apparently on

¹⁹⁵ Ruth Lawrence, Memorandum from Mrs. Lawrence's letter, n. d. (approximately January 23, 1940), Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

vacation while on leave from the University. There is no indication as to why Ruth was on leave, but from her words to Willey within the correspondence, a concern for the Curator is raised,

In spite of your good and well intended [advice], you find me in Woodstock. I hope you don't think I appreciated lightly your advice and am just perverse. It wasn't that, but I knew what I needed better than anyone could imagine and it was after quite months of a build up, yes, perhaps years – that I had to do just this. I needed to get away where I wouldn't hear a human voice or see a soul, days on end. So in spite of the rumor in the village that there are wild cats, bears, and sundry other things in these hills – when night comes I tuck myself in and am now beginning to sleep soundly the whole night through. I think I was a bit more down than most people realized.

I draw water once a day at the spring, do my chores of getting fuel night and morning and when food becomes a necessity I walk to the village and pick up my mail. About three miles to six is my quota of walking per day. Its fun to walk through the woods and see all the various little animal [tracks], I don't know. I'm the only one that has desecrated the snow, besides (with my footsteps). It would be pleasant to know I had neighbors a little closer than 1/2 mile away when night comes, but you can't have everything and thus it seems I have a perfect set up, if I'd dreamed it up it couldn't be better... I needed the impact of physical hardship and battling to keep alive and warm by my individual effort, otherwise it would make me too soft and for high thinking (If I ever get to that point) in this retreat – seems to me to be the outcome of simple and independent living and it must be in utter quietness, it comes, where nothing can break in upon you. Well enough – but I did want you to try to understand why I seemed to go against sound advice.

Things at the office seem to be going along nicely according to reports from there, and they tell me not to think about them. Of course, my mind carries on and they do send me things every day or so.¹⁹⁶

Willey sent a letter to Ruth in reply to express his concern of her lingering absence from the Gallery, and indicated,

The normal four weeks of vacation period for you have now passed and I have begun to wonder about your return. If you are still feeling ill and unable to carry on at the Gallery, I think we should make some provision for the granting of sick

¹⁹⁶ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, February 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

leave dating from the expiration of the vacation period. Won't you write me frankly how things are so that I may make whatever plans seem necessary here.¹⁹⁷

Ruth responded to Willey that she too was concerned about the Gallery work during her absence, and expressed that she had been experiencing a problem with insomnia, stating, "last night I slept for twelve hours—dead to the world, the first night for eight days that I've had more than two or three hours sleep."¹⁹⁸ From the letter, it appears she had left the wilderness and returned to New York to visit museums and galleries to make arrangements for exhibitions, and stated that she stopped in to visit Stieglitz at An American Place. He wished for Ruth to express greetings towards Willey for him. She also relayed,

A peculiar thing happened when I came down. I turned the radio on one day to an art program and was in time to hear the man mention energetic Ruth Lawrence at the University Gallery, U of M and the fine program being developed in student appreciation out there. Apparently it was a talk on the development of art consciousness in America. He mentioned our exhibitions in the Gallery and the travelling exhibitions. It was the end of the broadcast and there was no announcement at the end except that the broadcast came from New York over N.B.C. Did you happen to hear it?¹⁹⁹

With little input from Ruth during her absence, Willey completed the legislative request forms for the 1941-1943 biennium, and requested an allotment of \$8860 for the Gallery to support the positions of a Director of the University Gallery, a Professor and Director of Fine Arts, and a clerk stenographer to support the work of both. The description for this request stated,

The gallery now has one major employee, Mrs. Lawrence as curator and instructor. Her functions and abilities have been outlined in detail in the report to the president on instructors. She is creatively minded, excellent in her public contacts, and highly valuable in arranging exhibitions, conceiving their display, preparing the catalogues, etc. There is a marked weakness however, in carrying the [day-to-day] routing of the gallery, much of which although routing calls for

¹⁹⁷ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, February 20, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

¹⁹⁸ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, February 23, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

knowledge and abilities above those of the clerical staff. A gallery is complex in organization, and doubly so here, where WPA workers are involved in the program. The pressing need is to relieve Mrs. Lawrence of this organizational and administrative work, which she does not do well, and to free her for the creative work in which she excels. This can only be done if there is a regular staff member who will assume the administrative and budget responsibilities. Without such a staff member, there is grave danger of a collapse of the present gallery organization and the work it is doing.²⁰⁰

Wary that WPA project support may be suspended, the legislative request also included a consideration of \$3,000 to supplement the Gallery budget, and indicated the need to support the Gallery with a budget adequate for the work being done by the unit, stating that, “Under Mrs. Lawrence guidance a full-fledged program has emerged...”²⁰¹ The request was made in consideration of requests for funding made each year to supplement the regular Gallery budget, which would not need to be made if an adequate budget was established that was sufficient to support the Gallery program.

In a letter to President Ford, Willey indicated the circumstances of the legislative request and shared Ruth’s letter from Woodstock, in which he stated,

The fact is I have been somewhat disturbed of late because of her health. My own fears are also shared by those with whom she works most closely in the Gallery itself, her secretary Miss Ames, and the WPA supervisor, Mr. Snider. Mrs. Lawrence has developed a state of mind which leads me to wonder how much longer she can continue to carry the responsibilities of the Gallery without either a collapse of the Gallery program or a collapse of herself.²⁰²

Willey went on to report that over the course of several months, Lawrence had been placing “bit by bit” more responsibility upon Miss Ames and Mr. Snider “without her being conscious of it,” and alerted Ford to the fact that Ruth had been absent from the Gallery for more than six weeks,

²⁰⁰ Legislative Requests 1941-1943, Support Fund, Salaries and Wages, Additional Over 1939-40 Printed Budget, University Gallery, Dept. 113, University of Minnesota Comptroller Form 17, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²⁰¹ Legislative Requests 1941-1943, Support Fund, Supplies, Expense and Equipment, Additional Over 1939-40 Printed Budget, University of Minnesota Comptroller Form 19, University Gallery, Dept. 1133, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²⁰² Malcolm Willey to President Ford, February 26, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

which placed much of the responsibility of Gallery work on Ames and Snider's shoulders.²⁰³
 Willey's letter to Ford continued in a frank manner,

The fact is, as I have called to attention each year in my annual report on Mrs. Lawrence's work... that she does not organize well, does not care for administrative detail. Hers is a creative mind and as we are aware, she has an unusual ability for conceiving exhibitions, meeting people to arrange for them, and in developing the displays, the catalogues, and similar activities. The routine administrative work bogs down on her. She does not organize workers well. There is no clear allotment of functions and details of budget irk her. The University Gallery under her guidance has developed to a point of influence both on campus and off of it. I am becoming clear in my mind, however, that some rather drastic reorganization is necessary if the work is to be preserved and Mrs. Lawrence is not to crack.²⁰⁴

Willey further suggested that the only reason the Gallery was able to continue to function at its expanded level was through the support of WPA Supervisor, George Snider, who in addition to being assigned by the WPA program merely as a supervisor for project work, had taken on many additional responsibilities in the Gallery. When making the legislative request for additional funding for the 1939-1940 budget year, Willey made a consideration for a support position to assist the Gallery curator, with the idea that the University might hire Snider and support his work through a formal position funded by the University budget.²⁰⁵

Without a reason that is clear from the archival record, Ruth returned to the Gallery in March of 1940, and with a stern purpose, wrote to President Ford regarding the state of affairs in the Gallery,

It has become increasingly evident in the past six months that the University Gallery cannot under the status quo, be expected to function any longer. My seven week's leave and return here to work convinces me that the University cannot expect Miss Ames and myself, at present the only members on the staff, to exhaust our energies in the continuance of a program as large as this without a different set up. Demands have been made through our natural growth of servicing our arts departments, students, and state that now are more than we can cope with, and these demands are ever increasing... Mr. Snider, as you know, is

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

the superintendent of our WPA unit. He has given generously of his time and energies to the work in our office which could in no way be expected of him, simply because he saw Miss Ames' and my burden too heavy and because he was genuinely and vitally interested in our Gallery program... it is increasingly clear that with the amount of work going on here, he should be taken over full time on our staff and another supervisor for our WPA unit be assigned.²⁰⁶

Included with the letter were a series of extraneous reports that outlined, "The present set up and the problem," which stated the current activities of the Gallery, and asserted that although there were as many as 80 persons at one time devoted to the work (to include students and WPA workers) they were all unskilled, and required repeated training. Turnover rates were also high amongst both the student staff and WPA staff, which resulted in work being left unfinished. "The proposed division and set up," reported upon the ideal division of work amongst a Gallery Director, Administrative Director, and Secretary. "A Look Ahead," called for a unified arts "division," or department at the University to centralize all of the arts instruction, and proposed the development of an art extension service. The final report, titled, "A Further Step Into the Future," proposed the need for a Coordinator or Director of the Arts at Minnesota, and she even named a man for such a position.²⁰⁷

Ruth prepared yet another report in March of 1940 that addressed the successes of the WPA program thus far, and outlined additional proposed activities for the workers, including creation of a series of exhibitions of illustrative aids for teachers. Ruth indicated, "We could do for Minnesota what no state university has visioned [sic] yet. I believe such a program would be of material benefit to the University; also, such a service performed would build a knowledge of and respect for a richer way of life."²⁰⁸ Visual aids for teachers were prepared into eight separate exhibitions for elementary and secondary schools that were distributed by the Junior League Clubs of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth. The exhibits consisted of ten reproductions of

²⁰⁶ Ruth Lawrence to President Ford, March 11, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Possible Extension Activities for next year in Art, March 1940, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

classic and contemporary art that were mounted to boards, covered with a plastic called lumarith, and were constructed to be able to rest in the grooves of the chalk well of classroom blackboards.

The Gallery WPA project also prepared five travelling exhibitions of original works, comprised of objects from the University's permanent collection, which travelled to 13 locations during the 1939-1940 season.²⁰⁹ Microphotographs prepared by V.P. Hollis of the University Photographic Laboratory travelled to Missouri and other states, the Daumier Lithographs were lent to the Oliviet College Art Department in the spring of 1940, and an exhibit titled, *Some Individuals*, composed of the Gallery's works by O'Keeffe, George Grosz, and Thomas Benton, amongst others, travelled to Pennsylvania and were also displayed at the Dubuque Public Library, on loan to the Dubuque Art Association. The Gallery's outreach work extended throughout the country and received broad recognition.

By the end of the 1938-1939 academic year, the expanded Gallery program under WPA had also resulted in the expansion of Ruth's duties as Curator. In June of 1939, Ruth wrote to President Ford with an appeal regarding her title,

May I make the suggestion that the present title of the person in charge of the University Gallery is a misnomer? Consequently, I should like to suggest that when action is taken on appointments and reappointments for next year this title be changed to clarify the standing of the person in this position.

In museum parlance the name 'curator' is the title given to a specialist in one field devoting his whole time to the work in that particular field, such as 'curator of circulating exhibitions,' 'curator of Oriental art...' Since the present curator of the University Gallery is in no sense a specialist, I feel that the title is not warranted. The title 'director' is in common usage for one who manages and directs the activities of a gallery, and it would clear up a great deal of confusion when visiting museums and galleries if the title could be changed. This is not a matter of pride, for a curator is a scholar more than an administrator, and he has as much if not more standing than a director.²¹⁰

Willey replied to Ruth to indicate her letter was received by the President's office,

²⁰⁹ University of Minnesota, "Biennial Report of the President, 1938-1940," 1940, Annual and Biennial Reports of the President, 407, <http://purl.umn.edu/91585>.

²¹⁰ Ruth Lawrence to President Ford, June 27, 1939, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

President Ford has passed on to me your letter concerning the title of the person in charge of the University Gallery. I think your point is well taken and so does he. We shall file the letter so that it may be given consideration when the next budget is made, since this is the appropriate time for the change of the title.²¹¹

The time for a change in title for the Curator of the University Gallery was not now, but it would soon be coming.

In April of 1940, the American Association of Museums (AAM), the established organization of museum and gallery professionals, to which the Gallery did not yet belong, invited Ruth to give a paper at the annual conference to be held in Michigan that year. Ruth wrote to President Ford (who succeeded President Coffman after his death in 1938) to emphasize the importance of this invitation, and requested that the gallery become a member in the organization,

A letter has just come from one of the chairmen of AAM, asking me to deliver a paper before the AAM meeting at Ann Arbor this spring, in spite of the fact that we do not belong to the Association, which I feel, is rather significant. If we have grown to such stature that they recognize us for our work here, it seems to me that we at least ought to belong to the association.²¹²

The Board of Regents of the University approved membership in the AAM, and funds were made available for Ruth to attend the conference.²¹³

Yet despite having acquired nearly six years of experience in gallery work, Ruth's hesitancy and humbleness remained. After she received approval to attend the AAM conference, she replied to a conference organizer that she was not yet prepared to participate and would only like to observe, writing that, "I have decided that for this time I should prefer to listen to the

²¹¹ Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, June 28, 1939, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²¹² Ruth Lawrence to President Guy Stanton Ford, April 6, 1940, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

²¹³ President Guy Stanton Ford to Ruth Lawrence, April 12, 1940, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

various papers rather than give one, since our Museums Science courses here are still in a rather formative stage.”²¹⁴

The recognition of Ruth’s contributions to the curatorial profession and invitation for inclusion in a national conference of the field likely informed President Ford’s recommendation to Willey in that same month that Ruth should receive an adjustment in title, “In running over the budget and indicating some preliminary and tentative amendments for next year, I had put down Mrs. Lawrence for the title of Director of the University Art Gallery. The term Curator is distinctly not applicable to the services she performs.”²¹⁵ By a vote of approval by the University’s Board of Regents on June 14, 1940, Ruth’s title and salary were adjusted from Curator and Instructor at an annual rate of \$2,400 to that of Director and Assistant Professor, at \$2,700.²¹⁶ Necessary budget considerations were also made in order to hire WPA Supervisor George Snider to the University position of Assistant to the Director, which would begin to address the perceived administrative inefficiencies of the Gallery, and of its Curator/Director.

Despite Ruth’s hesitancy to speak in front of museum professionals from across the nation about the work being done at the Gallery, the contributions that she had made to build the Gallery program were noted – and promoted – locally. The reference resource built up by the WPA program had become an established service, and was relied upon by not only University faculty, but also by other educational entities throughout Minnesota and neighboring states. On February 9, 1939, Mrs. H.A. Brandes of Bismark, North Dakota wrote to Ruth, “The topic of ‘Surrealism, is it art?’ has been assigned to me for a club paper. I am unable to obtain any pictures except a few from magazines to show as a comparison. Have you any that are used to send out in this way?”²¹⁷ In March of 1939, H.W. Harm sent a letter from Willmar to request an

²¹⁴ Ruth Lawrence to Chauncey Hamlin, May 8, 1940, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 110/Memberships, 1935-1938.

²¹⁵ President Guy Stanton Ford to Malcolm Willey, April 19, 1940. Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²¹⁶ University of Minnesota Board of Regents, “Minutes: Board of Regents Meeting and Committee Meetings: June 12, 1940,” 413, <http://purl.umn.edu/42950>.

²¹⁷ Mrs. H.A. Brandes to Ruth Lawrence, February 9, 1939, copy, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

exhibit of scenery.²¹⁸ Alice Huffman from Canby requested illustrative material for a small club talk on “Art Objects in the Home.”²¹⁹

Myrtle Glasser, Director of Art in the Public Schools of St. Cloud, who regularly utilized the Gallery’s visual aid services to supplement her teaching, wrote an article about the service that was published in the October 1939 edition of the *Minnesota Journal of Education*. Writing to her audience of fellow schoolteachers, Glasser asked,

Have you wished sometimes that a collection of pictures and clippings on every subject might be at your fingertips? I know I have. How often have we heard an English or history teacher remark that if only materials were available, he would like to correlate his subject with fine arts... The University of Minnesota has overheard our conversations...²²⁰

Glasser described the process for requesting the materials, and indicated the associated costs (postage both ways, in addition to the fee for insuring parcel post).²²¹ Requests continued as a result of Glasser’s promotion.

In October of 1941, the *Minnesota Daily* reported that in the 1940-1941 academic year there were 284 requests for materials, and 413 pamphlets were dispersed as a result. At the beginning of the 1941-1942 academic year, 9,251 pamphlets had been produced since the start of WPA assistance to the program, and 56,052 articles had been clipped and mounted to 10x15 boards at a rate of approximately 2,000 articles per week.²²²

This service, and the unique classification system devised to organize it, also influenced others in higher education. Ray Faulkner, head of the art department at Columbia, and former U

²¹⁸ H.W. Harm to Ruth Lawrence, March 13, 1939, copy, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²¹⁹ Alice Huffman to Ruth Lawrence, March 27, 1939, copy, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²²⁰ Myrtle Glasser, “A New Source for Visual Aid,” *Minnesota Journal of Education*, October 1939, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1938-1940, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 214/University Gallery Press Book, 1938-1940.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² “Teachers, Students Put Art Gallery Pamphlets to Work,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), October 8, 1941, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

of M art faculty member, wrote to Ruth with his thanks for sending along her explanation of the “Minnesota Classification System,”

Thank you very much for sending me the most impressive copy of the Minnesota Classification system. This really is a major contribution in an exceedingly neglected field, and I feel that your name should be preserved in bronze some place for having carried this through to completion. We must very soon face the problem of filing materials in our library and I cannot tell you how much help this will give us.²²³

Ruth shared Faulkner’s letter with President Ford, who replied with scolding encouragement,

Thanks for letting me see the letter from Ray Faulkner. At one point it reinforced what I have said to you a number of times, that I think the quicker you put into published form your Minnesota classification system the better it will be, both for retaining credit where it belongs and for making available very important aid to other people in need of it.²²⁴

There is no record that the “Minnesota Classification System” was ever published, but a description of the classification exists in the archival records.

Credit was extended to Ruth, however, when she received attention and professional acknowledgement for her work at the outset of the new decade. She received an invitation from Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, to serve as state chairman of National Art Week (NAW), 1940. The week-long recognition of the arts, held November 25 - December 31, 1940 was designed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to promote the arts throughout the country. The aim was to raise public awareness of the work being done by the nation’s artists, and to promote the purchase of artwork. As the chairman of NAW in Minnesota, Ruth was charged to select and form members of the state council and designate chairs to form local communities to implement National Art Week programs. City chairmen were tasked with hosting individual events to promote the work of local artists. Ruth travelled

²²³ Ray Faulkner to Ruth Lawrence, May 28, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

²²⁴ President Ford to Ruth Lawrence, June 17, 1940, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1940.

the state to coordinate NAW activities with committees in Stillwater, St. Cloud, Rochester, Winona, Duluth, and others.

In the Twin Cities, the Walker, MIA, and the St. Paul School of Art were sites for special exhibits, and downtown stores dedicated their storefronts and window displays to show artists' work. The committee chairman for the city of St. Paul, Thomas Ellerbe, expressed the overall spirit in which the event was held,

During these times peoples of warring [nations] do nothing for the advancement of the finer things in life, and even after the present conflict has passed, these nations will spend at least a decade in rebuilding their cities, factories and schools and will have no time for cultural achievement... it is the duty of the American people to preserve this culture until the time when the people of other nations again can take their place in the Arts of the World.²²⁵

The national celebration of the arts initiated by President Roosevelt, was held not only to support American artists, but also to promote American ideals and unity while war was being waged in Europe.

Since the invasion of Poland by the Nazis in September of 1939, the news from Europe was comprised of an ever-growing list of countries that had fallen under Hitler's control. Bombings and invasions were captured in the headlines of American newspapers. In staying in line with her philosophy of displaying exhibits that reflected current events, Ruth arranged for a series of exhibits during the 1939-1940 academic year that brought about cultural awareness and that addressed military action and the aspects of war. One such exhibit, which was held in June of 1940, had a salient title, *Can America Be Bombed?*

The exhibit, which was created by the Science Museum of St. Paul and the Saint Paul Institute in cooperation with Minnesota Governor Harold Stassen, the state defense coordinator, and the WPA, was comprised of three colored globes, approximately six feet in diameter that included markings of the areas occupied by world powers. Actual size paper maché models of bombs were displayed with a description of the bomb type and the length of its range. To answer the question posed by the exhibit, didactic labels suggested three answers, or three regions of the United States that were most prone to attack. One of the answers indicated,

²²⁵ "MN Artists Open Exhibit Here," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, MN), October 23, 1940, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

“distances across the northern hemisphere are significant if danger can come to this continent by way of flights from Asia.”²²⁶ This answer would be confirmed to the entire nation on the morning of December 7, 1941, in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

²²⁶ “Gallery War Exhibit Opens,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), May 27, 1941, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

CHAPTER 7

THE GALLERY IN WAR

On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the United States at Pearl Harbor. The response of the student body to this event is documented in a radio broadcast given by Mary Jesness.²²⁷ Each Wednesday, a prepared talk was given on an art topic and a blurb was presented to promote the latest Gallery exhibition on a regular broadcast on the University's radio station, W.L.B. A transcript from the Wednesday, December 10th broadcast, given just three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, indicates that Ruth introduced Mary at the start of the program,

The other day your Gallery Commentator, Mary Jesness, came to me and said, 'What is going to happen to our world? What is going to happen to the art that we know as well as the other things?' She felt that you too might be wondering about it so she would like to tell you about her answer and how she got it. And now here she is... Mary...²²⁸

As the transcript indicates, Mary commented upon the tone and tenor on campus and addressed the mood felt by University students in reaction to world events,

Since last Saturday... a great many things have happened. Our nice safe little comfortable world was suddenly in upheaval. Everything we once thought of as good and beautiful was subordinated by war. So, on Monday afternoon I sat at my desk and said to myself, you've got to write an art broadcast, but what had art to do with this new world?²²⁹

Mary continued to describe the reaction to the events in Hawaii – “I have a brother at Pearl Harbor” – and indicated that she tried to go about her regular schedule with great difficulty, as much was on her mind. When she sat down to write her art broadcast, which she found to be difficult, she sought advice,

²²⁷ Mary Jesness, “Art in Wartime,” December 10, 1941, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

My heart wasn't in it so I went to Mrs. Lawrence with my first page of script. She shook her head. 'No this won't do Mary. Why do you try to write your regular art broadcast [?] Sit down and let's talk it over.' We talked for almost an hour. Because something she said impressed me greatly, I'd like to pass it on to you.²³⁰

Mary went on to recall Ruth's advice,

Mary, has life ever struck you as a great 'stirrer-upper'? As I go on living, one thing is clearer and clearer to me. Paradises aren't good for us – we get lazy, slothful, and sleepy – worst of all we get self-satisfied and self-centered.

Human beings are a lot like moths. We labor and grub to spin a chrysalis or enclose a world around us. Cozily we wind swaddling threads, blissful, content, and smug we rest in that state. Then life comes along at the right time, shakes us and awakens us to new ideas. We burst our shell which can no longer contain us. Put again into air we go with winds and water to battle where we learn tremendous things, things which urge us to see a better, broader world, things which urge us to make ourselves more beautiful and skillful creatures.²³¹

Taking further inspiration from Ruth's words, Mary asserted,

I think that Mrs. Lawrence summed up this thing very well when she said what we must do to fight back. She said, 'Probably the best way to win is for us each to appraise his activities day by day – choosing those things to do which make a contribution no matter how little or how great – just do the day's job today with the best of our ability. What our future job will be will come all in good time and then we will be ready and prepared to do it well, too.'²³²

In mid-January of 1942, over a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entrance into WWII, Ruth prepared for the Gallery to go on, uncertain of the University's financial situation, as well as the future of the country. She submitted to President Coffey the legislative budget request for the 1943-1945 biennium and included comments about the future of the Gallery in light of the present war conditions,

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

Due to war conditions, we all realize that the request for funds for the coming two years must be more closely scrutinized than ever before. There are those who believe that it will be necessary for the University to save the amount it costs to run the University Gallery. If that is the case, we can do nothing but bow to it. Naturally, I am not the one to say whether the University Gallery is vital to the life of the University student or not.²³³

Whether through the formality of politeness or through respect to the priorities of the University during war, from her words to Coffey, it is disappointing to read her outright concede the importance of the Gallery. Ruth further acknowledged the fact that the federal WPA and NYA programs would likely be cut, and that workers from these two programs formed the very foundation of the Gallery program, further placing the future of the Gallery in an uncertain light. Due to this reality, she requested \$5,500 to run the Gallery for each year of the next biennium.

She finished her letter to Coffey with a reversal in tone to her opening statements in regards to the importance of art and of the Gallery,

When every agency is 'all out for defense,' irrespective of inconvenience and loss to the individual, the question will arise in many minds – What of Art? But do we have to make a case for the Arts? Personally, I do not believe that we have to, in this war, justify them, because we are beginning, more than ever before, to realize the importance of the spiritual factors in man. Have we a right to suppress, that which the arts make real or tangible, his desire for the good, the beautiful, and the true, those things [that] make life bearable and worth the struggle.²³⁴

She referenced the importance of art galleries to the citizens of England, where the paintings in the National Gallery in London were moved to a quarry in Wales for protection against bombing. Through the appeal of London citizens, who desired to be exposed to the arts for emotional reprieve, the National Gallery instituted a “Picture of the Month” program, and removed one painting from storage each month for display in order to provide cultural enrichment to cope in a time of uncertainty. Ruth asserted to Coffey the importance of the arts during war based upon England’s experience,

²³³ Ruth Lawrence to President Coffey, January 15, 1942, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²³⁴ Ibid.

England has found it necessary to reopen her art galleries and art schools. They are crowded, unprecedented in the whole history of art schools and museums...

From their experience, as well as from our own most costly one since the last war, doctors, psychiatrists, and even military men in America are beginning to recognize the value of the arts in their health giving and curative benefits. It has cost the Government approximately \$25,000 per man to support those who were broken by the last war. So anything we can do to raise the [morale] of civilians and soldiers alike is not only money in our pockets but is soothing to a conscience-[stricken] world.²³⁵

As a supplement to the budget request, Ruth included a proposal for how the Gallery may be useful to support the war effort, titled, "Suggestions for a Defense Program Utilizing the Art Facilities at Minnesota." Suggestion "A" proposed the continuance of the Gallery exhibition program with an emphasis for exhibits to reflect themes of consumer education, principles of democracy, citizenship, and civilian defense education. Suggestion "B" was titled, "Possibility of clearing house," and proposed that the Gallery's program change to support the University's defense committee, and amend the arts reference service to clip, mount, and file not only art-related materials, but also materials related to the war. She further suggested that the Gallery could be a coordinating center for the Red Cross, or could serve as the site of an artists' bureau, where artists would be registered, their skills documented, and their willingness to volunteer determined. She also acknowledged the need to make an inventory of "irreplaceable objects in the various collections in Minnesota," and proposed working with the Minnesota Historical Society in order to index the state's fine arts objects. She also voiced her support of similar suggestions proposed by her colleagues in the General College as well as the other arts divisions on campus to provide arts programming that would encourage the morale of servicemen and civilians at the University and throughout the community.²³⁶

Willey was supportive of Ruth's plan for the Gallery, which he read prior to submitting it to Coffey, to whom he wrote that,

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ruth Lawrence, "Suggestions for a Defense Program Utilizing Art Facilities at Minnesota," January 15, 1942, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

I am in favor of the trend her thinking is taking. I think the Gallery can play an important part during the war period both on and off the campus because I am convinced that we have not made as much as we should in our war efforts of the possibilities that lie in visual presentations. I think there ought to be at numberless points on the campus display posts and cases in which one or two items can be shown that relate to the war so that people will see them as they pass by, have their attention arrested for a moment, and learn a fact.²³⁷

Though the role of the Gallery within the University during the war period remained to be determined, it is evident by Willey's comments to President Coffey that Willey would continue to support its functioning.

As Ruth predicted, and/or feared, in the spring of 1942, the University's WPA work program was reorganized to focus on projects directly related to support for the war effort. The work performed in the Gallery was not deemed eligible under this reorganization. The Fine Arts Committee, which oversaw the Gallery, met on April 6, 1942, to discuss how the Gallery would proceed after WPA assistance was withdrawn. The committee agreed that the Gallery program should continue on a reduced scale, and limit its activities to providing resources in support of the fine arts department in the General College and other arts courses on campus.

Faculty members wrote letters in support of the Gallery to Willey, and addressed the essential role that the Gallery played not only in their instruction, but to others as well. The resounding appreciation and praise evident in their letters of support provide insight into the valued institution that the Gallery had become. Ruth Raymond, Chair of the Department of Art Education and member of the Fine Arts Committee wrote that,

It would be a major catastrophe if the University Gallery should have to cease rendering its valuable services... The generosity of the Gallery in lending to our student teachers good pictures of effective size has spread the 'civilizing,' cultural influence into the Public Schools of Minneapolis. The cultural influence cannot be overestimated. The Gallery is beginning to perform in the visual area a service comparable to those provided by our Orchestra, our Theatre, and our Convocation addresses toward the development of our great student-body-at-large. The widened horizons will be a source of joy and a cause for gratitude long after information gleaned in courses is forgotten.²³⁸

²³⁷ Malcolm Willey to President Coffey, January 24, 1942, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

Ernest Ziegfeld, instructor in the General College, revealed the specific purposes for which Gallery materials were utilized,

I wish to express not only my enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm of the entire General College Art Department staff, for the educational work which has been done by the University Gallery. The exhibits and the wealth of reading and illustrative material [that] the Gallery has put at our disposal have become an indispensable part of the instruction in all the courses in the arts area in the General College... In addition to its great value as an adjunct to classroom teaching, the University Gallery has become an important source of cultural stimulation for the campus at large. Thousands of students whose curricula do not allow for the inclusion of art courses have an opportunity, through the University Gallery, for first-hand experience with the visual arts... The Gallery has made an important contribution to the central life of the University, and its loss would be a serious loss indeed.²³⁹

Despite the evocations and reassertions of University faculty in regards to the importance of the Gallery, University budget realities became evident due to the decrease in enrollment from enlistments following the outbreak of war, amongst other factors. Many Gallery activities were scaled back in order to accommodate.

Due to no affordances made to staff the arts reference room during the 1942 summer term, the reference service ceased operations and all of the paintings from the student loan collection that were rented by students and University offices were called back to the Gallery. Troublesome letters reveal that students, faculty, and staff had come to rely upon the Gallery for instruction, as well as for decoration. Clifton Gayne, an instructor of Art Education, expressed his disappointment to President Coffey, "It has come as a great disappointment to me that the services of the University Gallery have been suspended... It would be unfortunate if illustrative material, which is significant now, were stored until after the war when much of it will be obsolete..."²⁴⁰ A letter from Margaret Harding, Director of the University Press, to President

²³⁸ Ruth Raymond to Malcolm Willey, April 6, 1942. Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²³⁹ Ernest Ziegfeld to Malcolm Willey. April 10, 1942. Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

Coffey indicated the role that the art rental service played to her office, and requested that an exception be made, “We should be very grateful if that could be arranged, for nail holes in the middle of dirty bare walls are anything but attractive to live with or to show our numerous visitors.”²⁴¹

Despite these setbacks, the limited Gallery program was still of use to the University during the war years. Funds were allotted within the College of Science, Literature and the Arts for the 1942-1943 academic year to fund the position of a part-time teaching assistant to allow the reference service to continue to be available to faculty members in support of their courses. Exhibitions continued, but were not changed as frequently due to cancellations, postponements in shipping, and limited staff. After the reassignment of the WPA workers in 1942, the termination of the NYA federal student program in 1943, and Assistant to the Director George Snider being called into military service, the Gallery staff was reduced to three: Ruth, Carl Hawkinson, Gallery Mechanic, and Elvie Berggren, secretary.

A *Minnesota Daily* article from May 1943, with a headline of, “Director Needs Help: Says There’s An Art in Hanging Art,” reported upon the status of the Gallery during the war years. Ruth confirmed, “Yes the war has [affected] the galleries. We aren’t sure how long the wire and nails we have will last!”²⁴² She further commented upon Gallery usage, “Attendance in the galleries decreased immediately after the outbreak of war, but is picking up. The camouflage exhibit was unusually well attended, especially by servicemen.”²⁴³

The “camouflage exhibit” referred to the April 1943 exhibition titled, *Camouflage for Civilian Defense*, on loan from the Pratt Institute in New York. The exhibit included illustrated panels and models that described methods of camouflage, to include special painting techniques

²⁴⁰ Clifton Gayne to President Coffey, June 17, 1942. Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁴¹ Margaret Harding to President Coffey, June 25, 1942. Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁴² Marilou Stannard, “Director Needs Help: Says There’s An Art in Hanging Art,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), n.d., found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum Records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁴³ Ibid.

and textures, elimination of shadows, and how to divert attention with the use of fog.²⁴⁴

Exhibitions that Ruth arranged during the war period again addressed current events in order to relate to and educate University students. The exhibits reflected war themes, promoted service and American infrastructure, and emphasized cultural relations. In cooperation with the Army Specialist Training Program (ASTP) on campus, an exhibit of photographs of China in war and in peace were displayed at the request of the army, with the expressed purpose of educating student soldiers about parts of the world where they might serve.²⁴⁵ Other exhibitions that reflected war themes included: *Art of the Armed Forces*, October 1942; *Defense Housing*, January 1943; *War Posters Today*, May 1943; *Image of Freedom*, August, 1943; *Army P-39 Airacobra Exhibition*, December 1943; *Naval Aviation*, December 1943; *China at War*, April 1944; *Our Navy in Action*, July 1944; *Emblems of Unity and Freedom*, August 1944. Additional exhibits were mounted that related to service and American infrastructure: *Regional Building in America*, February 1942; *Tennessee Valley Authority Architecture and Design Exhibition*, 1942; *Conservation*, 1943; and *Built in USA*, April 1945.

In order to understand the war itself, Ruth determined it was essential to also understand more about the world – specifically the different cultures that comprise it. In outlining the exhibition schedule for the 1943-1944 academic year, Ruth explained to Willey,

We are bringing, for the area and language groups, and the people interested in cultural relations, exhibitions on Latin America, China, the Netherlands, Balis, South America, Mexico and Central America, as well as exhibits, of course, showing our own country's past and present. The exhibitions are planned to be informative and to help in breaking down barriers produced through not speaking the same language, differing ideologies and cultural backgrounds, differing religious concept[s] and ways of living under conditions unfamiliar to us.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ “War Exhibits to Be At U Gallery,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), April 29, 1943, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum Records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁴⁵ “Army Specialists at ‘U’ Aided By Art Exhibits in Visual Education,” *Minneapolis Daily Times* (Minneapolis, MN), n.d., found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁴⁶ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, October 7, 1943, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

In addition to loaning exhibits from the Travelling Exhibition Service of the Museum of Modern Art (which continued during the war, though many others exhibitions services ceased operations), Ruth worked with the Netherlands Information Service and U.S. China Relief in order to obtain materials for the cultural exhibits.

In addition to providing exhibitions to help University students understand the time in which they lived, Ruth personally wanted to do more in order to contribute to the war effort. She wrote to Willey in 1942, “Could I be more useful at the University in doing footwork and perhaps a little headwork to relieve others now overloaded[?] You may feel that I am flexible enough to adapt myself to other activity. I might be able to take brush-up courses which would help, and I would be happy to take those at night.”²⁴⁷ She realized that there might be an application for artists skills during the war, and indicated to Willey that,

In October I started a course in engineering drafting, isometric and perspective drawings, and technical sketching and reading engineering blueprints. I am continuing on with that. I understand that there is no one here who teaches the new plaster mock-up work and model making for airplanes. As a sculptor I might be helpful in that.²⁴⁸

Ruth’s extra effort was manifested in a war time study of artists in industry. She wrote to top war industry representatives to survey how artist skills could be used to design instruments and mechanics for the war effort. Letters were sent to U.S. based corporations involved in the aircraft industries – Lockheed, North American Aviation, Boeing, Northwest Airlines, General Motors, etc. She also sent letters to officials in all branches of the military, as well as local officials and educators at technical training schools, and the federal housing, transportation, and employment divisions to collect opinions on how artist skills could be applied to use in industries directly supporting the war effort.²⁴⁹

Ruth’s study was profiled in a *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* article in May 1943 titled, “Personality Sketch: Gallery Head Proves Artists Possess Valuable War Skills.” In the article,

²⁴⁷ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, December 2, 1942, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, October 3, 1942, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

Ruth is quoted speaking to the reason why she started the study, “I’ve just had a hunch all along that artists have certain skills and techniques which would be useful in the war program.”²⁵⁰

Through her night courses in engineering, Ruth trained herself in the technical skills needed to develop and produce equipment for aircraft and naval machinery. Ruth stated, “Artists have been afraid of machines. They’ve been afraid the machine would destroy their creative ability. I feel the machine might be a new tool in the hands of certain artists.”²⁵¹

The author of the profile article, *Tribune* writer Mary Brown, provided an editorial comment regarding Ruth in the article, “It’s not too hard to get Mrs. Lawrence to talk about her work or about the University Gallery of which she is extremely proud, but its another thing when it comes to talking about herself.”²⁵²

That Ruth did not like to speak about herself is evident in her letters and confirmed by countless observations made by others. However, the letters found amidst her general Gallery correspondence reveal deep personal reflections upon the world in which she lived. In October 1943, an editor of *LIFE* magazine sent Ruth a letter to announce new materials that were available for circulation through the organization – a series of Japanese artwork. The letter indicated that the materials were to be studied for “the possible clue they may give as to why the Japanese behave as they do.”²⁵³ Ruth replied to *LIFE* magazine and criticized their solicitation of exhibit materials,

I wonder if this type of propaganda does not defeat its purpose in certain [people’s] minds, and whether it does not have a reverse affect than you had anticipated. I realize that we find it necessary to inflame the populace with hatred against our enemies, but it occurred to me, when I saw this material, whether we could be put in the same position as being ruthless and blood thirsty if such dramas as King Lear or MacBeth were used to show what sort of people we are. I think that quite a number of us regret that such devices must be used in a war period. When one looks at certain things our artists create – social propaganda

²⁵⁰ Mary Brown, “Personality Sketch: Gallery Head Proves Artists Possess Valuable War Skills,” *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), May 9, 1943, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ *LIFE* Magazine to Ruth Lawrence, October 26, 1943, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

and those things depicting the life of our times – I think most of us would regret being judged by those who do not know us through this method.²⁵⁴

The *LIFE* magazine Japanese art series would not be obtained for display in the Gallery as the spirit in which it was organized, in Ruth's eye, was in direct opposition to her exhibition philosophy, which focused on the understanding and appreciation of the arts of different cultures, regardless of politics.

Like so many others, Ruth was personally affected by loss during WWII. Ruth's only son, James C. Lawrence, Jr., an aviation cadet in the U.S. Army Air Force, died tragically in an airplane crash south of his base near Shaw Field in South Carolina on December 14, 1943. He was 22.²⁵⁵ Ruth spent time away from the Gallery following this personal loss.

²⁵⁴ Ruth Lawrence to *LIFE* Magazine, November 9, 1943, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁵⁵ "South Carolina Death Records, 1811-1955," database and digital images, Ancestry.com (<http://ancestry.com>), search for James Lawrence, died December 14, 1943; death certificate 015089, Sumter County, Shaw Field, Virginia, State of South Carolina Bureau of Vital Statistics, State Board of Health.

CHAPTER 8

POST-WAR INSPIRATIONS

By April of 1945, in light of the tenor of the times, Ruth had formed a theory based upon the war experience, which she put in writing and sent to Willey: “It has been said ‘when one is to dream, let them be big dreams!’ Enclosed is certainly an immense dream on inter-racial understanding.”²⁵⁶ Ruth went on to explain her dream of a “well-knit national and international organization” that would implement and guide policies for inter-racial understanding. She acknowledged organizations already in existence – the campus International Student Organization, Bureau of War Information, Museum Association, and Reader’s Digest – that organized and circulated exhibits based on cultural awareness. Ruth’s attached proposal to Willey called for the establishment of a Bureau of Inter-Cultural Relations on campus that would build programs to promote cultural understanding through student and faculty exchanges, and would include divisions that regulated understanding of the different cultural forms of drama, music, art, and the sciences. The proposed Bureau would also develop exhibitions for different age levels, the content of which would illuminate certain aspects of many cultures, such as “the home”—the family that lives in it, what it is constructed of, the furnishing it contains, and the family activities that are enjoyed within it. Ruth explained that the exhibit materials would show “similarities in races, show that they are people much as we are, having the same basic qualities of affection, love, the same joys and sorrows, with their concepts of the beautiful and pride of country, birth, race, the good.”²⁵⁷ The proposal envisaged that after the Bureau was established at the University, it would be presented to the federal government in Washington, D.C. as a model to be implemented at a national level.

Ruth’s proposal was an expression of her observations of the cultural changes that were occurring as a result of the changing world, and an application of her propensity and willingness to be useful to the University. In advancing it to Willey, Ruth asserted the following,

²⁵⁶ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, April 2, 1945, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

Mr. Willey, I have been told many times and experience bears it out that since I am only a woman, my ideas won't be taken seriously by men. Therefore, I am wasting time and energy. This is said without any bitterness and I'm only coming through with it because you asked me to think about it.

Laurence Schmeckebier gave me good advice that I believe I should follow – 'Ruthie, why do you wear your heart and energy out on something you can't control? Now, go to work at sculpture or something creative [that] isn't dependent on others carrying through. Make or build something tangible that you can complete here and now, through your own drive and personal efforts and don't go gallivanting off for a rainbow.'

Following the good advice I started to work on the ceramic study. It is a tiny subject and pretty limited but one of these days I can point to it and say, there it is—finished, tangible, Minnesota clay made into homely pots, but I did it the best I knew how.

So with tongue in cheek, and with many mental reservations, I've tackled another thing since you asked for it, [which] has prevented my working at my pots. Please sir, now may I go back to my pots?²⁵⁸

Next in the sequence of materials found in the archived folder containing her proposal was a clipped newspaper article, with "Mrs. Lawrence" written in pencil on the top, and "(MMW)" – the abbreviation for Malcolm Macdonald Willey – written below Mrs. Lawrence's name, indicating "To" and "From." The article, titled, "World Study Unit Set Up For Schools: Prominent Educators Form a Bureau to Help Promote International Amity," outlined that a similar program to which Ruth had proposed, was already being pursued at the national level, and that multiple agencies were already collaborating to approach the topic of inter-racial understanding. The next letter within the sequence, from Ruth to Willey, indicated that Willey returned Ruth's proposal to her with the attached news article, to which Ruth, who wished to further her case, rebutted,

The implication in your returning the proposal means that it is either a further challenge or it is a most tactful agreement with my thesis in my first letter. For the present, let us say, it is the former – just for the fun of further correspondence with you and more paper wasting business which it verboten.

²⁵⁸ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, April 2, 1945, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

True, as you point out there are existing agencies, organizations and programs already operating—as you say, ‘in a fragmentary fashion...’

Bear with me while I illustrate even though I should know I’m lost before I begin with this particular illustration for it is completely outside my field, but it is used because of the clipping you sent ‘World Study Unit Set Up For School...’²⁵⁹

In her reply to Willey, Ruth rebuked several of the ideas patterned in the article that he presented to her, and offered commentary that touched upon the power of the youth movements in Germany and Italy during the early 1930s, “I was in Germany and Italy and saw the Youth movements get under way in those countries in 1931-32. I watched it in England where my son Jimmie was in school for almost 2 years... This proposal is not a figment of my own imagination wholly... But paper wasting is not patriotic so I send this merely as a parting shot.”²⁶⁰ A Bureau, in the vein that Ruth had suggested, was not developed at the University. However, Ruth’s “big dream” would be implemented on a smaller scale in the Gallery through her continued emphasis on multicultural exhibitions and lectures that were specifically designed for young adult audiences.

In addition to her continued work in the Gallery, Ruth, who was “only a woman,” returned to her “pots” – as she forecast to Willey. After decades of study and research in emerging art trends and methods, Ruth finally got the opportunity to seriously develop her personal interest in the use of ceramics, giving special attention to the use of native clays from Minnesota. During the 1946-1947 academic year, Ruth was granted a sabbatical leave from the University to attend the Cranbrook Academy in Michigan in order to earn a Masters of Arts degree with a specialization in ceramics.

Ruth pursued her passion for ceramics on lunch breaks and during the weekends in between her work in the Gallery. A feature article published on Ruth in the *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, reported that visitors to Northrop were likely to hear a thump – the noise made from a block of clay hitting the floor of the foyer after Ruth threw it from the mezzanine. The article described that this action was to “wedge the clay” to test its consistency.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, April 18, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

In addition to running the “working laboratory,” of exhibitions in the Gallery, Ruth set up her own clay laboratory, where she tested over 316 varieties of clay samples with the hope “to develop some simple recipes whereby Minnesota laymen, who have no potter’s wheels or previous experience in ceramics, can fashion from natural products of their own state beautiful articles for their own homes.”²⁶² She worked with professors from the department of geology and mineralogy to acquire samples of clay from various regions of Minnesota in order to test the samples for their suitability in ceramics. In her lab, which was set up in a former janitor’s closet in Jones Hall and outfitted with a kiln and other supplies, Ruth kneaded her clay samples to draw out moisture, and then formed small tiles, which were dried in order to measure their shrinkage.²⁶³ She then submitted the clay materials to firing tests in order to measure the effects of two types of firing – oxidation and reduction – on the coloring of the clay. Though she learned the firing processes of oxidation during her study at Cranbrook, the method of reduction – an ancient method of firing clays – was little used in the U.S. at the time. In order to educate herself on the method, she acquired an out of print 19th century French book from the Library of Congress with the assistance of the University Library.²⁶⁴

After her return to the University from Cranbrook, Ruth curated an exhibition at the Gallery titled, *Selected American Ceramicists* (July 1 - August 21, 1947). The exhibit included works by 13 artists that had consistently won national awards and competitions in the field. Throughout the exhibit’s run, Ruth gave daily demonstrations on how to “throw on the wheel” in the Gallery. A potter’s wheel and a supply of clay were placed in the Gallery and made available for any student to try. The passion she developed for this art form is evident by the way she spoke of the material she studied, “Without clay we would have no automobiles, telephones or

²⁶¹ John Sherman, “Minnesota’s Clay in Her Hands,” *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, n.d., found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ William Saltzman to Ruth Lawrence, October 3, 1947, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004 109/ Ruth Lawrence correspondence, sabbatical and collecting trips, 1946-1948

²⁶⁴ Herbert Morton, “Beauty from Minnesota Mud,” *Pioneer Pictorial*, April 6, 1952, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

electricity. Clay is used in the enamel on your stove and bathtub, in paints, rubber tires, sidewalks, roadways, and in countless other ways.”²⁶⁵

Minnesota Daily student reporter Dick Fryklund received an impromptu introduction to ceramics when he was assigned to report upon the ceramics exhibit. In his article titled, “Feat of Clay: Reporter Loses Face Making Vases,” Fryklund relayed the circumstances that landed him the reporting assignment,

‘Go over to the University gallery in Northrop and get a story on the ceramics exhibit,’ said the city editor.

I woke up and ambled out of the Daily office.

I stopped. I returned. I asked the editor what ceramics was – or were.

‘Ceramics,’ he said, ‘is the art of making pottery. Now beat it!’²⁶⁶

Ruth tried to impress upon Fryklund the experience of creating pottery during the visit, “Mrs. Lawrence just handed me a lump of clay the size of my head and told me to get to work.”²⁶⁷ Fryklund described his venture into the process, “My fingers worked swiftly and surely. I deftly shaped the clay into a ball and then into a tall hollow cylinder. Then my flying fingers began to move the aides of the spinning cylinder outward into a graceful curve. The vase was taking shape... And then – well, I’d rather just forget.”²⁶⁸

It is likely that Ruth took sure joy in this interaction – a University student, assigned to report upon an exhibit, uninitiated in artistic processes, who attempted but failed to achieve the desired result of his efforts. Yet the experience – the exposure, according to Ruth’s philosophy – was all that was needed to initiate an appreciation for art, and for the Gallery to remain relevant to the students of the University.

²⁶⁵ “Clay Rivals Food as Staff of Life: ‘U’ Expert to ‘Throw on Wheel,’” *Minneapolis Daily Times* (Minneapolis, MN), July 28, 1947, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁶⁶ Dick Fryklund, “Feat of Clay: Reporter Loses Face Making Vase,” *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), July 23, 1947, found in University Gallery Press Book, 1940-, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 215/University Gallery Press Book, 1940-.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

Ruth furthered her study of ceramics during a subsequent sabbatical leave in 1953-1954 when she accepted a grant from the Hill Foundation to complete research and publish a book on the subject.

Change in Structure and Composition

For most of the first decade of its existence, the University Gallery relied upon a workforce provided by federal work-relief programs. Through the assistance of NYA students and WPA workers, Ruth was able to build a robust gallery program: exhibits rotated frequently, and the repository of arts reference materials was built at a resounding speed. After the reassignment of WPA workers in 1942 and the conclusion of the NYA program in 1943, Ruth found herself with only a skeleton staff of two: Gallery Mechanic Carl Hawkinson, who assisted with building displays and mounting paintings, and Elvie Bergrenn, a clerk stenographer, who typed correspondence and copy for publicity, and assisted with record keeping. It was not enough. In order to add to her personnel, Ruth needed the University to support additional positions through the Gallery budget.

The staffing shortage was made readily apparent at the beginning of the 1944-1945 academic year, when no provision was made to staff the Art Study Room, which housed the art reference materials that were relied upon by University instructors and students. For the previous two years, a teaching assistant from the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts (SLA) was budgeted to staff the room, but the position was not budgeted for the 1944-1945 academic year. As instructors started to plan their courses for the upcoming year, they found that the room was closed. The President's Office began to receive letters of complaint from instructors from a variety of disciplines, who were limited in their instruction due to the inability to access the resources in the room. Hilma Berglund wrote to Dean Willey in October,

When I tried to get textiles at the Art Room in Northrop I discovered that there is no attendant and I could get no one to show my classes in the Dept. of Art Education. Also I expect my students to study the Munsell Book of Color there. This book is not available anywhere else in the Twin Cities. When do you think the Art Room will be opened?²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Helma Berglund to Malcolm Willey, October 16, 1945, Office of the Presidents records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

Instructor Joseph Beach relayed his disappointment,

Several of our instructors have found that excellent results may be had in teaching literature by illustrating texts with pictures available in the university collection. I should like to urge the very great desirability of providing an attendant who may make this treasure house available without danger of loss to the [University].²⁷⁰

English instructor Robert Moore reacted with a perspective that related the Art Study Room to the services of other institutions,

This seems to me a grievous and tragic oversight. The print room represents an investment of several thousands of dollars, and contains a wealth of materials far surpassing Yale, for example, where I have been teaching. To lock up the room when a student attendant might be provided is not only to deprive the Department of Fine Arts of an essential adjunct to their instruction, but seems to me to deny that painting and drawing are integrally related to literature, to history, and to other phases of culture... It would be a great service to the entire University if you would provide the room with even a part-time attendant, but a crippling blow to our abilities as educators if such an attendant is not provided.²⁷¹

The correspondence continued: the photography instructor in the General College voiced his need to access the photo illustrations provided in the arts reference books, and the Acting Head of the Department of Art Education, Clifton Gayne, made an appeal on behalf of all of the instructors in the department that the necessary arrangements be made for the room to re-open.²⁷²

At the end of October 1944, Willey met with Ruth and several heads of the various art departments on campus to discuss the possibility of re-opening the Art Study Room. As a result of their conference, Willey recommended to President Morrill (James L. Morrill succeeded President Coffey in 1945), that rather than budget for another teaching assistant in SLA, a new full time position should be created that would fall under the authority of the Gallery, and would

²⁷⁰ Joseph Beach to Malcolm Willey, October 19, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁷¹ Robert Moore to Malcolm Willey, October 19, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁷² Clifton Gayne to Malcolm Willey, October 19, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

be dedicated to managing the art reference service and maintaining records for the student loan and originals collections. He provided the new President with a background,

The University Gallery was established to provide services to the teaching departments as well as to offer general exhibitions to the student public. There is little question in my mind that the Gallery has served an exceedingly useful purpose in drawing together into more of a working team the scattered efforts of the University in the field of fine arts.²⁷³

He continued to describe the growth of the materials due to the WPA project, and how they had become an essential service to instructors and students. Willey requested Morrill's approval for a study to be done by the Civil Service division to properly classify the proposed position, with a budget expenditure of \$1500 for the remainder of the academic year.²⁷⁴

Morrill approved the request and a new position was created and classified by the Civil Service division as "Junior Librarian." Betty Maurstad was hired to fill the role.²⁷⁵ The position included a starting salary of \$149 a month, and included the responsibilities of managing all Gallery records, maintaining the organization and care of all books, pamphlets, prints, teaching aids, artworks, and other materials for class and individual study purposes, facilitating the student art rental program, and identifying and describing all objects within the Gallery's collections.²⁷⁶ In 1948, the position was reclassified as Museum Assistant, adopting the professional moniker of "museum" within the title of the position.

In 1946, the position of Assistant to the Director, which was vacated by George Snider during the war, was filled once more upon the hire of William Saltzman. Saltzman would go on to direct much of the Gallery's affairs during Ruth's sabbatical. Saltzman also completed the annual collecting trip during the summer prior to the start of the 1946-1947 academic year, during which he received the very type of professional development that Ruth obtained in each of her previous years. As Ruth prepared for her sabbatical study, Saltzman wrote to her from his

²⁷³ Malcolm Willey to James Morrill, October 25, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Malcolm Willey to Hedwin Anderson, October 29, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 34/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

²⁷⁶ Hedwin Anderson, "Civil Service Committee Record of Action," November 9, 1945, Office of the President records, 1911-1978, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-841, 46/Art Gallery, 1941-1945.

trip. His letters reported that he attended the national convention of the American Association of Museums, where “very little was offered which concerned our type of gallery.”²⁷⁷ Saltzman also mentioned, “Oh yeah, by the way, we actually got to shake President Truman’s and Mrs. Truman’s hand while at the White House.”²⁷⁸ His letters also reviewed possibilities for exhibitions and indicated that through his meetings with museum directors, he planned to arrange for a comprehensive exhibit of primitive art. He wrote to Ruth for advice,

Should primitive show in such a Gallery as ours – try to reach beyond one continent and include such primitive expression throughout the world – of Alaska, Mexico, Oceania, Central America, India, etc. I think it will be too much – Just what do you try to say in a Primitive show? How would a show of contrasts be?²⁷⁹

Ruth replied to Saltzman with advice that was once given to her in her early days of eager collecting,

Just do not commit yourself definitely for anything until you can see it in the light of a whole program back here. Because I found one can easily be carried away by enthusiasm while on the ground; but when its value is studied on the basis of the whole program – scheduling, time, work involved, etc., you may find it [won’t] work in properly... Do not run over your travel allowance (as is so easily done)... A travel requisition is the only one which must not exceed the amount set forth in the requisition and authorization... for if it does, it has to come out of one's own pocket! How often I have done this!²⁸⁰

After Saltzman’s return from the collecting trip, he was the main contact that reported Gallery affairs to Ruth during her sabbatical. The news included the addition of another staff member – an Assistant Gallery Mechanic – that would lend help to “Hawkie” (Carl Hawkinson) in assembling exhibits.

²⁷⁷ Bill Saltzman to Ruth Lawrence, May 15, 1946, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁷⁸ Bill Saltzman to Ruth Lawrence, May 18, 1946, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁷⁹ Bill Saltzman to Ruth Lawrence, May 22, 1946, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

²⁸⁰ Ruth Lawrence to Bill Saltzman, May 27, 1946, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

In the late 1940s, a formal proposal was made to unify the diverse offerings of arts courses on campus, which resulted in the formation of a central Department of Art in the College of Science, Literature and the Arts (SLA) in 1947. H. Harvard Arnason, who was also the Director of the Walker Art Gallery, served as chair. The new department combined courses offered in the School of Architecture, College of Education, departments of the Institute of Technology, and additional subjects within SLA. The Gallery was organized structurally within the University as part of this department, and was awarded funds with which to expand and remodel its space in Northrop Auditorium. Ruth, who had advocated for the consolidation of the arts from the first year she became Curator, recalled in a report on museum history that the relationships that formed amongst faculty throughout the decade resulted in the change, “This change might not have come except for the war. These had been years of patient cultivation, a building of confidence between departments into a sincere desire to do what was best for the University.”²⁸¹ Malcolm Willey wrote to Ruth while she was on her sabbatical at Cranbrook about the re-organization of arts courses into a new department, acknowledging her contributions to the unification,

As we look back over the years, we have made a good deal of progress and I am of the belief that the development of the Gallery itself was a very healthy factor in bringing that progress about... It was a part of your philosophy and your program to work with all of the departments, drawing them together into a common understanding of problems if not into a physical amalgamation. I think that has succeeded very strikingly and that the departments have thought in terms of each other and have been willing to work together in a way that was not possible in the early thirties.²⁸²

Again unable to accept personal acknowledgement for her efforts, Ruth responded to Willey with a self-deprecating comment,

The plan to eliminate duplication, the coordination of the arts and to make a strongly organized body of the arts is near to my heart, as you know... Does this new set up really mean that we are to be given real food and not crumbs? We

²⁸¹ Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 15, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

²⁸² Malcolm Willey to Ruth Lawrence, April 17, 1947, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

need adequate up to date equipment, we need more unified space but above all we must have the right kind of 'up to date' instruction...

Let me close by saying I am for any art program that means vision for the students. If I personally don't fit into the new scheme please don't hesitate to say so. Too many colleges have to keep people on who stand in the way of their progress. I believe in the integrity of your people back there and know you want the best you can have.²⁸³

Whether Ruth's comments were formed by modesty or fear of change, Willey's reply to her letter did not address Ruth's meek closing statement.

The unified Department of Art ushered in a closer relationship between University faculty and the Gallery. The Department implemented a visiting artist program in 1949, and invited a prominent artist each quarter to serve as an instructor at the University. Each visiting artist's work was displayed in a solo exhibition in the Gallery. Ruth worked with the contemporary artists Paul Burlin, Ralston Crawford, Arnold Blanch, Philip Guston, Seong Moy, and Cameron Booth to arrange for exhibits of their work in the Gallery.

In 1950, the Gallery's first curator, Hudson Walker, who remained a longtime patron of the Gallery since his departure in 1934, placed on permanent loan to the University his private art collection, comprised of the works of Marsden Hartley, Alfred Maurer, and other contemporary artists. The Gallery was able to circulate a travelling exhibition of Hartley paintings throughout the country.

In 1952, sculpture instructor John Rood established a special collection fund along with his wife, from which to purchase sculpture to add to the permanent collection of the Gallery. Twelve works of sculpture, to include David Smith's, "Star Cage," were added to the collection through this program.

Continued Outreach

The Gallery retained the outreach character it established during the WPA era through several exhibitions and programs pursued as a result of University initiatives and relationships.

To coincide with the celebration of the Minnesota Territorial Centennial in 1949, the

²⁸³ Ruth Lawrence to Malcolm Willey, April 26, 1947, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

exhibition, *Hand-done Handsome Things*, was held in the Gallery from July 15 - October 7. Ruth, who served as the chair of the arts division of the University's Territorial Centennial Committee, selected county chairmen to choose handicrafts and other art objects representative of their regions to recommend for the exhibition. Ruth travelled across the state to meet with the chairmen and view potential exhibit objects culled from county historical societies, as well as the personal possessions of Minnesotans. She described the objects – which included hand crafted rugs, shoes, tools, knitted garments and house wares – as, “interesting not only as examples of the social and cultural history [of the state], but also as a part of the daily lives of our state’s pioneers, something beautiful which made their restricted lives fuller and spiritually more satisfying.”²⁸⁴ The exhibit was attempted with the hope that others would be inspired to study the folk arts in Minnesota as well as bring awareness to the importance of craftsmen in society.

In order to preserve the assembled items and make a record of the exhibition, Ruth received a grant of \$200 from the Graduate School in order to photograph each of the objects presented in the exhibit. The photographs were compiled into a manuscript complete with descriptions of each object. Ruth wrote in the foreword:

There is positive value in these objects, not only though their historical implications but also as they may inspire and aid future craftsmen... The East holds the philosophy that the artist is not a special kind of man but every man is a special kind of artist. With more leisure time coming this philosophy of the East might well be pondered here.²⁸⁵

To continue outreach to schoolteachers and students in local elementary and secondary schools, the Gallery collaborated with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra – who shared quarters with the Gallery in Northrop Auditorium – on the Symphony Art Project. Initiated by orchestra conductor Antal Dorati in 1949 to encourage the expression of music and art amongst school children in the Twin Cities, the project featured an annual exhibit of student artwork in the Gallery. Students in elementary and secondary schools throughout the Twin Cities created

²⁸⁴ Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 16, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

²⁸⁵ Ruth Lawrence, “Hand-done Handsome Things manuscript,” 1949, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 3/Hand-done Handsome Things manuscript, Jul. 15 – Oct. 7, 1949.

original works of art based on the inspiration they derived from listening to original symphony compositions that were played for them in their classrooms.

In a corollary to a cooperative agreement arranged between the University of Minnesota and Seoul National University in Korea – established to strengthen ties in Agriculture, Medicine, and Engineering – the Gallery embarked upon a mutual art exchange, which resulted in an exhibition of the work of Korean students and faculty at the Gallery in the winter of 1957. Several of the works within the exhibit were presented as gifts to the University from Seoul National University, and are now part of the museum's permanent collection. The exhibit was one of few that circulated throughout the country in the late 1950s.

Career Closure

Ruth retired at the end of 1956-1957 academic year. To commemorate, as Willey described, “almost a quarter of a century of devoted and imaginative service,” close to 200 prints from an exhibition of works of the artist Harry Sternberg – which comprised the last exhibition that Ruth curated – was donated as a gift to the Gallery by Hudson and Ione Walker from their private collection.²⁸⁶

In an article that profiled Ruth at her retirement, she is quoted as stating, “It’s high time someone else took over. Saying goodbye to things you’ve loved is always hard. But I think you have to look ahead—and I’m sure everything will be as interesting as my earlier years have been.”²⁸⁷

Following her retirement, Ruth was awarded a residence fellowship at the Huntington Hartford Foundation in Pacific Palisades, California to continue her research on clays and publish a book on ceramics.²⁸⁸ She also travelled to Mexico (“I’ve always wanted to see Mexico and I think I’ll have all sorts of fun there.”), and later resided in California, where she continued to throw pots.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ University Gallery. *The Prints of Harry Sternberg* (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota, 1957).

²⁸⁷ Bev Mundrum, “The Artist in the Gallery,” 20.

²⁸⁸ University of Minnesota News Service, “Ruth Lawrence Wins Fellowship in California” *Press Releases, January-April, 1958*, Jan. 22, 1958, <http://purl.umn.edu/51373>.

²⁸⁹ Bev Mundrum, “The Artist in the Gallery,” 20.

In the 1956-1958 biennial report to the President, it was indicated that by June 1958, the Gallery had acquired 4,843 original works of art in its permanent collection and 562 works in the student loan collection.²⁹⁰ The report summarized Ruth's retirement with the following statement, "Mrs. Lawrence has brought the gallery from a struggling infant to its present healthy adolescence."²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ University of Minnesota, "Biennial Report of the President and of the Board of Regents, 1956-1958," 1958, Annual and Biennial Reports of the University, 128, <http://purl.umn.edu/91594>.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

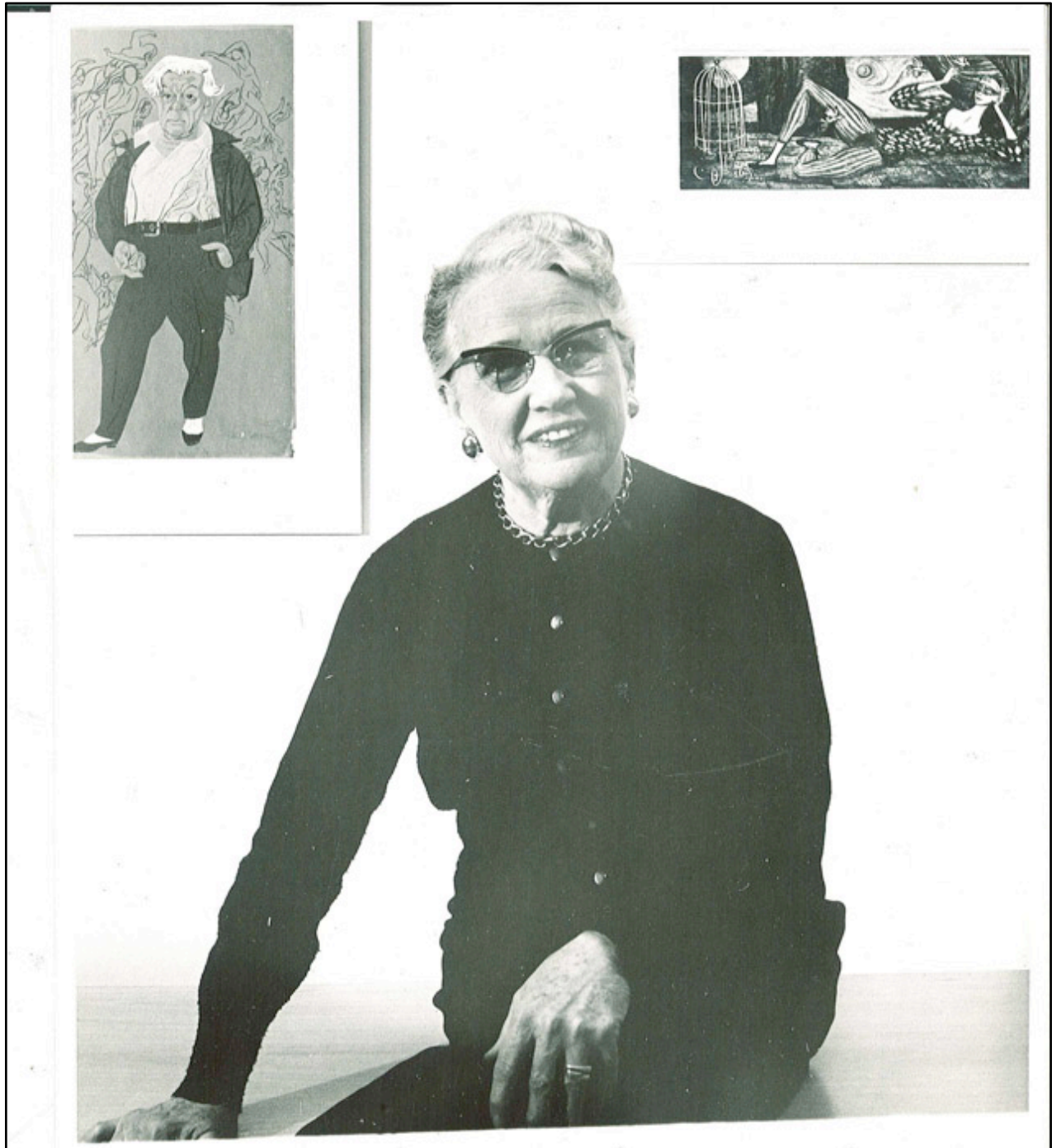


Figure 5. *Portrait of Ruth Lawrence, 1957, photograph.* Ruth is photographed sitting in front of a print created by the artist Harry Sternberg. The print was part of the last exhibit that Ruth curated in 1957, and was one of approximately 200 donated to the museum from the private collection of Hudson and Ione Walker to commemorate Ruth's retirement.

Source: University Archives, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

CHAPTER 9

RUTH LAWRENCE REMEMBERED

Following Ruth's retirement, administrative changes within the University reshaped the role of the Gallery. The College of Science, Literature and the Arts was restructured and named the College of Liberal Arts in 1962. In 1966, the Department of Art was separated into the Studio Art and Art History Departments. The Gallery became part of the Art History department during this reorganization. Faculty members under the new departments served concurrently in the role of Director, the first to succeed Lawrence being Sidney Simon, followed by Charles Savage, Allen Davis, Barbara Shissler, and Lyndel King.²⁹² In 1972, Elmer L. Andersen, Chair of the Board of Regents, charged a committee to reconsider the role of the Gallery within the University to that of an all-University teaching resource. This resulted in another restructuring, with the Gallery becoming an independent unit under the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs in July 1974.

An additional cause not yet mentioned in Ruth's tale was her continued annual quest to obtain a permanent building dedicated solely to the University Gallery. Though the four unused rooms in Northrop set aside for the "fine arts experiments" in 1934 grew to encompass the entire third and fourth floors of the auditorium by 1947, the space wherein gallery activities were performed was plagued by persistent physical limitation. In almost every biennial report of Gallery accomplishments that Ruth prepared and submitted to the President, a qualifying statement, followed by a plea for consideration of the hardship endured by employees of the Gallery, was inserted.

In a draft prepared for the report to the President, Ruth acknowledged that within the 1948-1950 biennium, the Gallery had "completed 15 years of service to the University. At such a milestone we would like to pause long enough to revise and make appraisal of our position and record what has been accomplished."²⁹³ As the draft continued, Ruth described Gallery accomplishments, noted the success of the WPA program, and listed the number of various

²⁹² Sidney Simon (1958-1965); Charles Savage (1966-1969); Allen Davis (1969-1971); Barbara Shissler (1972-1975), Lyndel King (1975-1978, Acting; Director 1978-Present).

²⁹³ Ruth Lawrence, "Biennial Report to President, 1947-1948," 1948, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 3/Biennial Report to the President, 1947-1948.

works in the permanent collection, as well as the individuals and organizations that had donated them. On the final page of the draft, Lawrence asserted a serious appraisal of position in regards to the state of Gallery facilities:

The Gallery is located on the [fourth] floor of Northrop in an inaccessible place. Many interested visitors cannot or will not climb the four flights of stairs. There is no elevator for such people nor any way of getting our exhibitions up to the Gallery except by carrying everything by hand. This entails making many trips daily. Certainly it is not only a waste of time but of valuable energy for all of us. There is no adequate storage space and our materials are spread into 12 rooms on the various levels of this huge building.²⁹⁴

She acknowledged the additional funding that was granted to the Gallery to expand in conjunction with its consolidation into the Department of Art in 1947,

With this allotment of funds this year, however, there will be improvements through consolidating most of our activity on the [third] and [fourth] floors. For relatively a short period only can this growth for strength in the arts go on without our being stunted for lack of physical space. It hampers all our activity even now. Thus in any plans which are being made for more building by the University we fervently urge that we be included.²⁹⁵

In a report upon the 25th anniversary of the Gallery, it is evident that another decade had passed without much improvement in its physical plant. Ruth commented upon the hardship,

Northrop is a severe test of endurance for any staff, the difficulty is truly a physical problem... It has been necessary for those working in the Gallery to rise above lack of tools and equipment, the handicaps of stairs, long corridors, the long halls and all the rest of it. All those have to be disguised and hidden under the garment of a smooth and quietly running, vital, constructive, program... Northrop begins to drain the energy, eagerness and enthusiasm after a number of years. Many strong and [able-bodied] persons have left the Gallery's employ simply because of the hurdles encountered, the stairs, the heights, the distances.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Ruth Lawrence, "Biennial Report to President, 1947-1948," 1948, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 3/Biennial Report to the President, 1947-1948.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ruth Lawrence, "University of Minnesota Gallery of Art," 1959, 23, University Art Gallery, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 38/Gallery History Notes, 1983-1984.

Ruth concluded, “The miracle of a Fine Arts Center, with class rooms, adequate studio space, a library, a gallery, office and work rooms, was always on the horizon.”²⁹⁷ Space issues were encountered long after Lawrence’s retirement, and were experienced by subsequent directors, all of whom echoed Lawrence’s early requests for new quarters during their leadership.

Ruth passed away on January 25, 1977 in Santa Barbara, California. A memorial exhibition was held at the University Gallery from July 6 - August 18, 1978 titled, *Ruth Lawrence Remembered*, arranged by Director, Lyndel King. A checklist of the exhibition featured the purchases of art that were accessioned during Ruth’s leadership, and reinforced her contribution to the Gallery. The exhibition checklist included works by an impressive listing of early contemporary American artists represented in the Gallery’s permanent collection to include Georgia O’Keeffe, Lyonel Feininger, and Cameron Booth, amongst others acquired during her tenure.

Cameron Booth, who was also Ruth’s colleague as the long-time Director of the St. Paul College and School of Art, donated his painting “Spring (After Rain)” in her honor. Artist William Saltzman, former Assistant to the Director, donated his lithograph, “Garden Window.”

In a draft composed for the exhibition brochure, King eloquently related Ruth’s career and accomplishments to the quest to establish a permanent fine arts center, and stated,

I wish I could say today that Ruth Lawrence’s miracle had been realized, but unfortunately, it’s still only on the horizon. The University Gallery’s fine art collection, which in great part owes its origin to Ruth Lawrence and an enlightened University administration, and to generous patrons, and the Gallery’s tradition of exhibits for the education of the University and the Community, still need an adequate home. This indeed, would be the finest memorial to Ruth Lawrence’s spirit.²⁹⁸

It would be King – who herself will constitute a significant chapter when the full story of art at the University is fully told – who would achieve the creation of a permanent museum building for art at the University of Minnesota. After decades of fundraising and building the

²⁹⁷ Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 6.

²⁹⁸ University Gallery. *Ruth Lawrence Remembered 1890-1977* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1978).

case for a permanent museum space on campus, the Gallery, which became the University Art Museum in title in 1983, moved from its confined quarters in Northrop Auditorium to a permanent museum building in 1993.²⁹⁹ Designed by internationally known architect Frank Gehry, the museum was constructed on a site overlooking the Mississippi River on the East Bank of the Twin Cities campus. When the museum opened, the very early purchases selected by Ruth – hallmarks of the permanent collection – were prominently displayed on the museum’s walls, where they remain today.

²⁹⁹ University of Minnesota Board of Regents, “Minutes: Board of Regents Meeting and Regents Committee Meetings: May 12-13, 1983,” 1983, 428, <http://purl.umn.edu/1761>.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

In a section of a report Ruth compiled on the Gallery's 25-year history regarding the "Exhibition Program in W.P.A. Days," Ruth began her description of the rather long section with the following disclaimer, "Details of the exhibits cannot possibly be given here for the list would be too long."³⁰⁰ A similar statement should be inserted within several of the previous chapters of this monograph, as all of the details of Ruth's life in the Gallery – the exhibits arranged, relationships made, and outreach performed – cannot possibly be given, for it would be too long. Additional chapters will need to be written – in another volume – in order to fully encompass all of the details of her life's work.

In a 1943 article in the *Minnesota Daily*, in a regular feature section titled, "Know Your University," the headline, "Mrs. Lawrence Made U Gallery a Success," appears alongside a small photograph of Ruth. A brief report of how she came to the University, developed an interest in art, and was given a position as curator of the University Gallery is reported. In the article, she recalled her introduction to the position and her primary task, "I was to make an experiment of the gallery to find out whether it was a worthwhile project. I told President Coffman that I knew nothing about running a gallery. He replied that if the University was satisfied with my running it, I should be."³⁰¹

The satisfaction and confidence that Coffman and Willey first asserted with respect to Ruth's suitability to guide the University's experiment was serendipitous. The role required knowledge of art and the ability to identify with the student population. The cultivation of fine art instruction and appreciation at the University – and the success of the Gallery – was ultimately determined by its relevance to University students, which Ruth maintained through her practices.

³⁰⁰ Ruth Lawrence, "University of Minnesota Gallery of Art," 1959, 8.

³⁰¹ Marilyn Roble, "Mrs. Lawrence Made U Gallery a Success," *The Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis, MN), November 17, 1943, 4, <http://www.mndaily.com/archives/pdfs/1943/11/17>.

The early decision to focus on a particular field, first suggested by Hudson Walker, served to set the Gallery up on the appropriate course to be received by students. As witnessed by the attendance figures, as well as exhibit reviews that were published by students and local critics alike, contemporary art was embraced by the student population, as well as the greater community. Ruth reflected that, “‘Modern Art’ was truly fresh, stimulating, exciting and thought provoking. It was controversial and would keep the Gallery’s exhibitions in the limelight. It was news.”³⁰² The decision, as revealed by Ruth, was also practical, “[Contemporary art] was much closer to the student’s world, and hardly any modern art was to be seen in this part of the country. It would be easier to borrow, and not as expensive to insure and handle.”³⁰³

In the introduction to this narrative, Ruth’s description of her profession in response to Corporal James Thompson’s inquiry about a career in gallery management included a list of qualities required of person within her field. The first pre-requisites she identified were, “fund of knowledge, scholarship, and research ability.”³⁰⁴ Ruth knew of these qualities because she epitomized them. Through methods of trial and error, the capacity to learn about emerging processes and styles of art, and through the acquisition of research materials – her daughter’s course notes and personal subscriptions to museum publications – Ruth was devoted to her occupation through her appreciation of education. She reflected,

Art has been my life’s work and prime interest. I should be paying the University for the fun I have. The University has given me the opportunity to obtain a liberal education, for I acquire more learning as each exhibit comes in. I’m interested in everything. I’ve found life a voyage of discovery. My mind has been the kind that’s loved to taste and touch many things and many experiences. My work is sheer joy.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 7.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Mrs. J.C. Lawrence to Corporal James Thompson, September 20, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

Ruth's work was not merely an occupation, but avocation, as evidenced by her desire to continue her education in order that it may be applied to support others: her enrollment in engineering coursework to discern how artists could be used for the war effort; acquiring a master's degree in ceramics; and subsequent study on how native state clays could best be utilized by Minnesotans. Ruth's journey, from the moment she first developed an interest in art, became a lifelong dedication to interdisciplinary education.

This journey might not have been if circumstances in her personal life had not taken an unexpected turn. The untimely death of her husband was a key transformation in Ruth's life, and through her dedication to art, she was able to establish a new life for herself beyond that of the title Mrs. J.C. Lawrence. In 1944, Ruth wrote a letter of welcome to incoming University President James L. Morrill, who she knew from her time in Ohio as a young adult. In the letter, she wrote that her life had followed a path that she never could have imagined:

Dear Mr. President or Dear Louie:

Which way should one address one's new president?

When the news came that you were to be our next president at the University of Minnesota, my mind couldn't take account of the years between, but went hurtling back to college days when we were on the Ohio State campus.

As I look backward there is such a sharp break between my life there as Ruth Williamson and my marriage with Jimmie Lawrence and then his death and my life since in the University Art Gallery, that it hardly seems possible that you will recall or know me when you see me again; for I myself can only think of the years since 1930 as those belonging to a totally different existence.³⁰⁶

In her description to Thompson of the qualities one needed to manage a gallery, Ruth also listed, "Drive, coupled with social suavity, grace, tact." As the wife of a University administrator, Ruth endeared herself to University faculty and staff, forming bonds as Mrs. J.C. Lawrence. When she became the curator of the University Gallery, Ruth strengthened those relationships while building new ones, making the support of faculty work a top priority. Her drive and dedication to the fine arts curriculum quelled any reservations held about her abilities.

³⁰⁶ Ruth Lawrence to James Lewis Morrill, December 9, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

Yes, Ruth was “only a woman,” and she habitually apologized for her gender. Yet, I wonder, were her modest implications of unsuitability simple assertions of “knowing her place,” or were they affectations of her suave and tactful personality, a personality that made others reluctant to turn down or offend the “very busy lady” when she approached them with a funding request or proposal? Ruth’s drive also pushed her to the point of exhaustion, as inferred by her seven-week absence from the Gallery in 1940. Yet, upon her return, she approached her work with renewed dedication and enthusiasm.

Ruth’s assertion that a gallery manager should also possess “The ability to make the right social contacts, a charming personality and good presence,” as well as the ability to “talk frequently and easily about most any subject,” was evidenced by her collecting trips, where she developed relationships with other gallery directors, dealers, and artists, and convinced them to loan their works to Minnesota. Ruth reflected, “Our reputation gradually grew to the point where we could borrow from any dealer or museum. The exhibits went back in such excellent condition and so beautifully packed.”³⁰⁷

The final qualification in her response to Corporal Thompson indicated the ability to “Raise money, [and] draw in gifts.” From the outset, Ruth convinced university administration to support her efforts, and for the first few years funding not expended from the University’s budget was allocated to the Gallery to purchase original works of art. The strategic use of existing federal work-relief programs (NYA, WPA) supported her vision for the Gallery, which otherwise could not have been funded through the University budget. Due to the reputation she built and the relationships she nurtured with artists, faculty, and other patrons, the Gallery received many donations and gifts of artwork in its so-called infancy.

Ruth’s overall response to Corporal Thompson’s solicitation of, “perhaps you could tell me of some schools where it is possible to get a degree in gallery management,” asserts the confidence and authority that Ruth developed within the first decade of her career.³⁰⁸ She began her letter of response by stating, “It is difficult to answer your question without knowing you or

³⁰⁷ Mundrum, Bev, “The Artist in the Gallery,” 20.

³⁰⁸ Corporal James Thompson to Mrs. Lawrence, September 16, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

what your educational background is.”³⁰⁹ She continued to outline that a pre-requisite for museum work was a Bachelor of Arts degree, and confessed, “I know of no college which gives a degree in museum management, as such.”³¹⁰ She then indicated that training was given at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, and suggested to Thompson that he write to Laurence Vail Coleman, the Director of the American Association of Museums, who might have a list of other schools where Thompson could enroll to acquire his credentials. It is after this brief introduction that Ruth asserted those aforementioned qualities required of a gallery manager – fund of knowledge, drive, social suavity, personality, etc. For it was the cultivation of these qualities in Ruth, above formal credentials, that lead to the development of an established art gallery at the University of Minnesota and to her successful career in gallery management.

Ruth concluded her letter to Corporal Thompson with the following words of encouragement:

You already may know of these requirements and have the necessary capacity and I may to you therefore sound stuffy and it may seem a bit beside the point because you did not ask for this information.

But I did want you to know that this field is a truly exciting one, but a most difficult one to break into and I certainly do not want to discourage you. I wish you all the best of luck if you decide to go into this museum work. If there is anything else I can help you with, I shall be most happy to do so.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Ruth Lawrence
Director.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Mrs. J.C. Lawrence to Corporal James Thompson, September 20, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ruth Lawrence to Corporal James Thompson, September 20, 1944, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum records, University Archives, University of Minnesota, uarch-004, 109/University Gallery Correspondence, 1935-1950.

Salute to Ruth: A Personal Reflection

On Tuesday, February 8, 2011 I began work on a collaborative project between the University Archives and the Weisman Art Museum (WAM), to organize and make accessible the Archives' collection of museum administrative records, which dated back to WAM's founding as the Little Gallery in 1934. The Archives – the official records repository of the University of Minnesota – had a collection of approximately 176 boxes of museum records that were transferred to the Archives from the museum in a series of accessions over the course of ten years. This was in addition to an existing collection comprised of the records of the University Gallery that were transferred to the Archives in 1957. The majority of these records were unprocessed, meaning they were not arranged or cataloged to archival standards, did not have a finding aid, and were documented only by an incomplete folder list of box contents. It was as a processor on this project that I met Ruth, and as I spent six to ten hours per week over the course of nearly two years re-folding, culling duplicative materials, and logging folder title entries into a spreadsheet, I became intrigued by the story that emerged from her records. My appreciation for her methods grew, along with a determination that her contributions be shared with others.

As I began to read her correspondence and reports, I found the candor of her narrative and the formal yet informal nature of their content and composition to be sincere, purposeful, and hopeful. Through closer examination of the exhibition records from the 1930s - 1950s, as well as her personal and Gallery correspondence, new insights and meanings were revealed.

There was a story here that went beyond what was summarized in the existing handful of dusty published exhibition catalogues and University histories that made mention of her – histories which implied that she was a charity case of Coffman and Willey, who supported her in the memory of their deceased colleague. Though much of the reason that Ruth came to assume the position of Curator can be credited to Coffman's foresight and financial support, as well as Willey's administration, Ruth's methods, determination, and vision deserve recognition. She is an unsung contributor to the cultural legacy of the University of Minnesota.

Ruth's life story, and her contributions to the University, as well as those of many others, fade after years go by, just as the names of those deemed important enough to have a building

named after them fall in disuse as time passes. (Willey is pronounced “Willie,” not “While-ie” as it has come to be pronounced on campus, of which I am guilty but have since corrected.)

Kept beneath the University, in underground caverns that plunge seven stories deep, are records that document the actions of many individuals who have contributed to the legacy of the University of Minnesota, individuals who should also each receive ten chapters of dedicated consideration. Additional volumes could be written on such women as Ruth Raymond and her developments in the field of Art Education, Ruth and Harriet Goldstein’s practices of the “home arts” on the “farm campus” in St. Paul, Betty Maurstad, an “art librarian” turned Curator, as well as Ruth’s daughter Betty Ruth (known as Elizabeth Cless after marriage) who in 1960 helped to implement the Minnesota Plan for the Continuing Education of Women, which was later established as the Minnesota Women’s Center. The records of their work are preserved by the University Archives, are accessible for research, and invite consideration.

Today, because so much of our administrative work is conducted online, a future study that uses paper records, hand written correspondence, clippings, etc. will probably not be possible. But technology does offer some benefits to the historian. Through the creation of a digital finding aid, as well as an interpretive website, Ruth’s story is made relevant and accessible.

In her “25-Year Report” of the history of the Gallery, Ruth provided commentary regarding the reception received from the audience that the Gallery was most dedicated to:

Student Appreciation

There is no way to measure value given or benefits received. There are no box office returns. But years later a student returns, happy to find the Gallery alive and given still to the service of art. Those now and then wander in to express gratitude and tell how the Gallery started them on a new interest [or] made them aware of art... Only in these little, quiet, and undramatic [sic] ways, can the Gallery's usefulness be gauged. It is only when people care enough to turn aside for a moment to express their gratitude.³¹²

Student workers still support the professional staff of the museum – they greet visitors, guard the galleries, write and design content for publicity, and assist with exhibits. Student interns contribute to education and outreach programs and help to implement special projects designed

³¹² Ruth Lawrence, “University of Minnesota Gallery of Art,” 1959, 23.

to fulfill the museum's mission: to make art accessible to the University and to the community. I have had the privilege to serve in both of these roles, and I submit this MLS project as a *little, quiet* way of expressing my gratitude for the education and engagement that the museum and the University has provided to me. It is through the museum that I *started on a new interest* that made me *aware of art*, and introduced me to the archives and to Ruth Lawrence. It is difficult to find words to convey my sincere appreciation for the experience that the museum has given me. And so I will echo Ruth's sentiments and simply say that... it has brought me *sheer joy*.

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