

## IN A NEW LIGHT CAMPAIGN



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## NEH Grant Challenges You to Support Conservation at the BMA

Gifts toward the five-year, \$2.25 million challenge recognize the importance of maintaining the collection for future generations.

March 2012

In 2010, the BMA received a prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant that recognized the leadership role the BMA has played in the field of conservation. The \$750,000 NEH grant required that the Museum raise a total of \$2.25 million from private sources over five years. For the second year, the BMA has successfully raised the annual match toward this 3-to-1 grant, and the Museum is currently seeking gifts toward the third-year goal of \$750,000.

According to Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs Jay Fisher, this grant, the largest the BMA has ever received from the NEH, “recognizes the BMA’s distinguished record for collaborations between curators and conservators. We’ve done a number of very important projects that have advanced conservation research and presented that research in compelling exhibitions and publications that deepen visitors’ appreciation and understanding of art.”

An X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometer purchased with matching support from The Richard C. von Hess Foundation has made it possible for the Museum to undertake research that has been showcased in recent BMA exhibitions, including *Hand Held: Personal Arts of Africa* and *Print by Print: Series from Dürer to Lichtenstein*. This sophisticated equipment is used to identify the elemental compositions of artists’



Associate Objects Conservator Christine Downie, in the BMA’s Conservation Lab, examines a covered bowl from the Tuareg peoples of North Africa, which was featured in *Hand Held: Personal Arts of Africa*.

materials, adding a degree of specificity to the Museum’s understanding of works of art, which can then be shared in interesting ways with visitors. Christine Downie, Associate Objects Conservator, used the XRF to analyze metal decorations on a wooden bowl from the Tuareg peoples of North Africa. The discovery that silver alloy was the decorative element in the bowl informed her treatment of the object before it went on view in *Hand Held* this fall. Removing the tarnish allowed visitors to see this beautiful object with its silver decorations gleaming, as the artist originally intended. A similar analysis of the artist’s materials comprising a colorful set of Renaissance-style playing cards in *Print by Print* helped provide

a relative date for the tiny prints. The identification of Prussian blue, a pigment that was introduced in the 1700s, indicated that the cards could not have been colored earlier. Director of Conservation Thomas Primeau explained that “the style of playing cards did not change much over the centuries but the materials used to color them did.”

“We expect to do more object-by-object study as we finalize plans for the African reinstallation,” added Fisher, “and curators and conservators are now collaborating on projects related to Matisse’s printmaking that will bring attention to the Museum as a center for Matisse studies.”