

Impact Project: Barry Art Museum

Cataloging Objects and Creating Records for The Waitzer Collection Donation

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I was fortunate to be offered an internship this semester at the Barry Art Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Before I delve into the work that I completed and the skills I obtained during my time at the Barry, I would like to give a brief overview of the museum and the community it serves. The Barry Art Museum, founded in 2018, is “fledgling but growing fast” (Watson, 2021) says Executive Director, Charlotte Potter Kasic. Under the enthusiastic leadership of Kasic, I was able to witness this sense of momentum during my time as an intern. The building, situated on the corner of 43rd Street and Hampton Boulevard, marks the southern gateway to the Old Dominion University Campus. The museum and its collections exist due to the philanthropic efforts of Richard F. Barry III and Carolyn K. Barry. The Barrys are avid art collectors whose acquisitions once adorned their home in Suffolk, Virginia. They quite literally lived with their art. However, in 2015 the couple decided to donate their entire collection to a new museum whose construction they would also fund. They approached Old Dominion University’s President John Broderick with their idea of an art museum that could also serve the university. The Barrys created the Old Dominion University Museum Foundation, an independent non-profit organization, that would oversee its operations and work in partnership with the university. According to the Barry Art Museum’s webpage, Old Dominion University hopes the museum “will have an integral role in the school’s educational, research, entrepreneurial and community outreach mission across disciplines” (The Barry Art Museum, 2022).

The Barry Art Museum's mission statement further supports this partnership:

“The Barry Art Museum is a cultural hub at Old Dominion University that advances the understanding of art in its many diverse forms through collecting, display, interpretation and research. It strives to communicate the results of these endeavors to the widest possible audience through publication, exhibition, educational programs and collections stewardship” (The Barry Art Museum, 2022). Primarily visited by students, faculty and staff of the university, the Barry Art Museum is seeking to expand its audience. The museum frequently holds outreach events, community engagement events and encourages collaboration with ODU students through a Gallery Host and internship program.

The Norfolk community is also a driving force for the Barry Art Museum. The city is steadily becoming known as an important glass arts center. The nearby Chrysler Museum of Art houses the second largest collection of glass on the east coast. It is also home to the Perry Glass Studio, which coincidentally, Charlotte Potter Kasic helped to launch. The Barrys were committed collectors of glass and donated an impressive collection to the museum. And now the Barry Art Museum is about to cement its position as a leading destination for viewing glass art and sculpture in Hampton Roads. During my internship, the Barry Art Museum acquired its largest glass donation to date. The Waitzer Foundation donated the entire glass collection of the late Leah and Richard Waitzer to the Barry Art Museum. Consisting of 165 works, this acquisition more than doubles the museum’s glass holdings. The Waitzers were great patrons of the arts and

friends with the Barrys, so it is wonderful that their collection now resides at the Barry Art Museum. About the Waitzers, Carolyn Barry said, “We enjoyed the thrill of the hunt with them, they had an especially keen eye for art and were generous in sharing their expertise with others” (Old Dominion University, News @ ODU, 2022). The museum is planning a Spring 2023 exhibition featuring the collection and will dedicate a gallery to their philanthropy.

Having this collection available to the Old Dominion community was a goal of The Waitzer Foundation. Leah and Richard’s son Brad Waitzer said, “The donation also aligns with their lifelong interest in education, the arts, and the economic and cultural development of Hampton Roads” (Old Dominion University, News @ ODU, 2022). Old Dominion University President, Brian O. Hemphill, is excited for what the Waitzer Collection means for the university. He expressed, “This collection represents a bold step forward and will continue to captivate and inspire current and future generations” (Old Dominion University, News @ ODU, 2022). Before any of the art can go on display or be used in exhibitions, it must go through the accession process. This is where my Impact Project with the Barry Art Museum came into play. The entire Waitzer Collection needed to be cataloged and entered into the museum’s database. I was assigned this project to align with my M.L.I.S. focus in Archives and Special Collections and because the museum needed to complete this task so it could move forward with the planning stages of preparing the collection for its debut and exhibition.

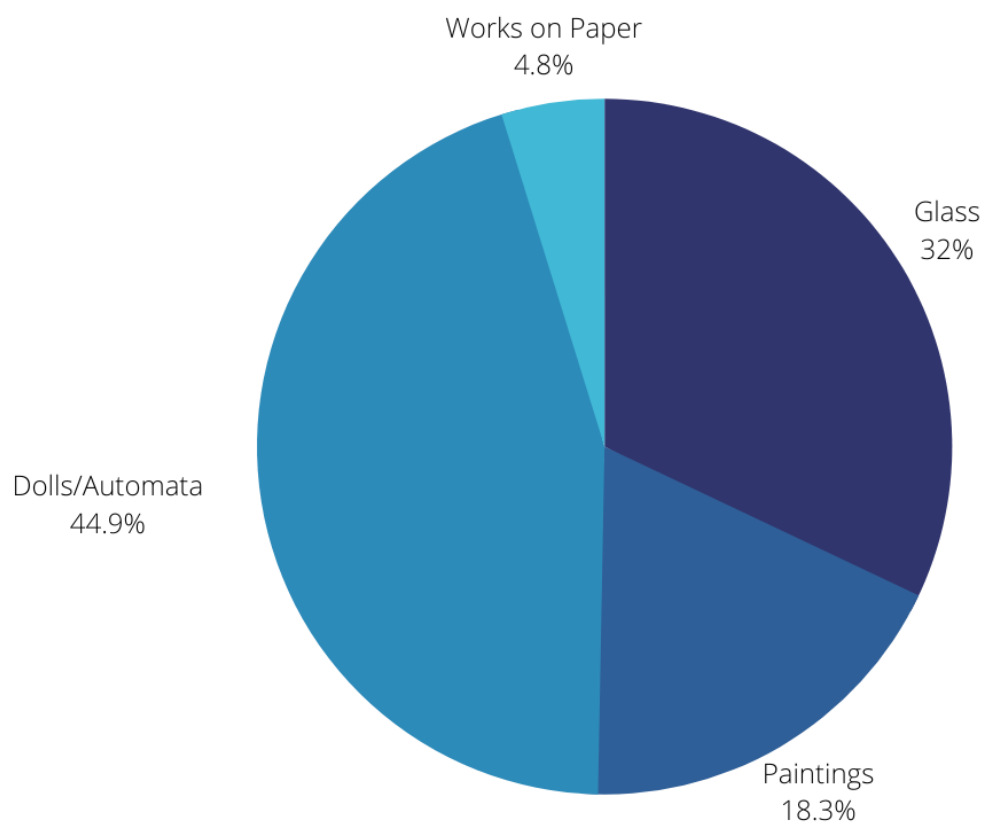
Impact Project Objectives:

One of my first learning goals and primary objectives in my Impact Project was to familiarize myself with The Museum System software. TMS is a leading online database system used for cataloging objects used by museums. As I hope to work in archives or in a museum setting upon the completion of my degree, gaining the practical knowledge of navigating TMS would be incredibly beneficial to me.

I would also not be able to move forward with data input until I learned how to utilize the software effectively. Several of my on-site days were data input “practice” in TMS so that I would be ready to comfortably input the Waitzer Collection when it came time to add the objects to the system. I would be creating a record for each of the 165 items donated to the museum. Essentially, I would catalog each item in TMS with all of the available information on the item. In addition to creating the record, I would research and supplement any further information about the object or artist I could find. In many cases, artists from the Waitzer Collection were not represented in the Barry Museum’s database. So I also learned how to create artist constituent files. I hoped to complete this project in several input sessions after I found that cataloging (and any additional research) on a single object was sometimes a lengthy process with more technical elements than I had suspected. While I was learning TMS at the Barry, I also began working remotely with Dr. Jutta Annette Page, the museum’s founding executive director, as a research assistant. I would be helping her find more information on some of the objects in the collection so that she could begin working on the exhibition catalog. I found myself coming at the Waitzer Collection Impact Project from several angles and it was a great learning experience to see what goes into creating and maintaining records in a museum setting.

Baseline Data

In terms of The Waitzer Collection, I was lucky that we were starting at ground zero. None of the items had been entered into the database, so I was able to track my progress adding objects to the collection by simply keeping track of how many items I entered per session. It is interesting, however, to look at the Project Baseline from a perspective of the impact on the glass donation on the overall glass holdings in the museum.

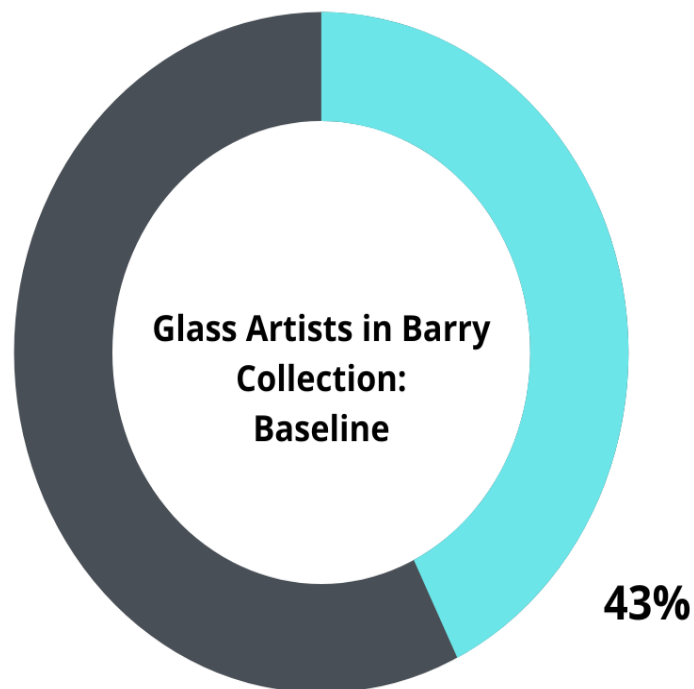


The Barry Art Museum currently focuses on four collecting areas. Prior to the Waitzer donation, Carolyn Barry's collection of historic dolls and automata made up nearly half of the museum's holdings. Carolyn has always been fond of dolls and began collecting as a young girl. She remained an avid doll collector for the rest of her life and appreciated the art and science of doll making. Part of her initial gift to the Barry Art Museum upon its founding were these dolls. Over 150 rare and historic dolls and lifelike automata fill two large galleries on the second floor of the Barry Art Museum. The Barry staff is looking to reconfigure the doll gallery later this summer so I was invited to sit in on a meeting discussing gallery reconstruction and exhibition design. It is always fascinating to me to see what goes on behind the scenes at museums to make exhibitions possible.

The next largest collection represented at the Barry Art Museum is glass art and sculpture. Thirty two percent of the objects in the museum before the addition of the Waitzer donation fell into this category. Considering that the Waitzer Collection consisted completely of glass objects, I was interested to see how these numbers and percentages would change upon input. It also made me think again of the implications of the Barry Art Museum having such a large and prestigious collection of glass in a community that is becoming a "scene" for glass artists and collectors. This addition comes at a fortuitous time. Just as Norfolk's Chrysler Museum of Art announced a major expansion to its Perry Glass Studio, the Barry Art Museum was able to hold its own with a monumental glass donation.

Making up roughly eighteen percent of the museum's holdings are paintings. The Barrys were mostly collectors of American Modernist paintings and marine paintings. The museum displays these paintings in the two downstairs galleries intermingled with the objects in the glass collection currently on view. The smallest percentage of collections represented at the Barry Art Museum are Works on Paper. These items are also displayed on the ground floor of the museum when they are on view.

Another baseline measurement that I wanted to keep in mind was how many artists in the Barry Museum database were glass artists and how that number would change after the completion of my Impact Project. I knew the Waitzer Collection had many artists that the Barry did not have currently represented in its existing collection. These artists would need to be researched and the information would need to be inputted into the TMS software. Prior to the addition of the Waitzer Collection, glass artists represented forty three percent of the artists whose works are in the Barry Museum of Art.



Project Planning

If I was to be adding the entire Waitzer donation to the database, I needed to understand how to use an online record management system and what sort of information we keep in object files. At the Barry Art Museum, I first taught how to input photographs into TMS. Files for dolls needed to be updated with new object

photographs in the system. So one of my first forays into the cataloging software was dragging and dropping photo files from one folder into a media field for each object. Christopher Norton, the Barry Museum's Manager of Collections and Exhibitions then taught me how to create new records and contribute to the object file by adding information to designated fields. It was a more complex process than I had imagined but I was grateful for the software because I knew once I finished cataloging an item from the donation, it would be fully accessioned in our system and viewable in the database.

Since I would be cataloging in a museum setting and had no prior experience doing so I decided to research how we create and care for records in cultural institutions and why it is important to do so. Prior to my internship, I was not so aware of the "archivist" or the "registrar" in the museum. These roles are often behind the scenes in a museum. Yet so much important work is done by these professionals. The Smithsonian Institution states that a record is "any official, recorded information, regardless of medium or characteristics which are created, received and maintained" by an institution. (Smithsonian Institution Archives, n.d.). When an object is accessioned into a permanent collection, a record is created that will be consulted and revised over the span of the object's lifetime in the collection. Starting with accurate records that provide provenance, condition and contextual information about the object is crucial.

While record keeping best practices may vary by institution or software the importance of keeping accurate records is agreed upon. In a panel session at the National Archives, representative of the Museum Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists Deborah Wythe affirmed "...without a clear understanding of what information is held by a museum, in which departments, and under whose control, research efforts will be seriously hampered" (Wythe, 2016).

When you look at a work of art you don't necessarily take a moment to consider the object record attached to it. Yet, while the object is at the museum, all information about the object's history, accession, and conditions will be stored in an online database. This is important because not only do we need records to transfer items in and out of institutions, they also help protect the items while they are in our care. Without proper record keeping, the preservation and security of the items could be compromised. Stakeholders have come to view museums as places where they can expect factual information about the objects they encounter there and hopefully leave having learned something new. Thorough research and accurate record keeping make this possible.

Site stakeholders for the Barry Art Museum include its founders Richard and Carolyn Barry. As friends of the Waitzers and glass art enthusiasts themselves they are invested in the smooth transition of the donation to their collection. Stakeholders also include a six member Board of Directors for the Old Dominion University Museum Foundation including the museum's executive director. These stakeholders share a goal to enhance the Barry's reputation as a leading art museum in the Hampton Roads

community. Board member, Lewis W. Webb III states, The Waitzer gift will complement the extensive glass holdings of the museum, creating one of the most prominent collections of 20th century and contemporary glass sculpture in the United States” (Old Dominion University, News @ ODU, 2022).

Students and faculty of Old Dominion University are also important stakeholders that must be considered at the Barry Art Museum. The strong partnership between the university and the museum often means that courses and assignments across disciplines are sometimes centered around or complemented by exhibitions and collections. Dr. Page said, “ A key objective for the museum is for it to be relevant to the ODU community, including its students, faculty and staff. We recognize that many of these constituents have never or rarely set foot into an art museum. Having an art museum on campus creates opportunities for exposure to original art, its creative processes and diverse cultural contexts that can instill in our students an appreciation for art that will resonate throughout their lives” (Tupponce, 2018).

The addition of the Waitzer donation will also attract glass artists and collectors. With the Chrysler Museum in close proximity to the Barry Art Museum, the collections could complement each other in terms of drawing visitors. Enthusiasts that are viewing the Chrysler Museum’s extensive Tiffany glass collection may be pleased to know new pieces by Tiffany will be on view at the Barry Art Museum as part of the Waitzer gift. Glass blowers and glass artists may be interested to see the techniques represented in

objects from the Waitzer collection by prestigious artists like Dale Chihuly, Dan Dailey, Harvey Littleton and more. The Waitzer gift may set a precedent for collectors who may wish to donate their pieces to a growing museum where there is room for them to be seen and appreciated.

Project Implementation

I mentioned above that before I began cataloging the Waitzer Collection into The Museum System database, I needed to be taught how to use the program. Through inputting images and data from existing objects in the collection leading up to the announcement of the Waitzer donation, I familiarized myself with TMS. That isn't to say there were no bumps in the road. Once I began inputting the Waitzer objects into the database, I kept in contact with Christopher Norton, the Collections and Exhibitions Manager at the Barry. Chris is normally the person in charge of managing the database and is the go-to person at the museum for TMS expertise and knowledge. He informed me of the best practices he employs while cataloging items at the Barry in order to keep entries as consistent and complete as possible. He let me know if there was anything I needed to go back and include or if I needed to research further to supplement the information we were given about the Waitzer glass collection.

The main technology I worked with for my Impact Project was the TMS database.

The Museum System software is run by a company called Gallery Systems. Gallery Systems was founded in 1981 with a goal of creating a software that will facilitate the care and management of cultural heritage and archival materials. TMS has grown to become the world's leading collections management system for museums and cultural institutions, like libraries, archives, and universities, on a web-based platform. TMS can also be utilized by private and corporate collectors and foundations to help manage their collections. The database provides a streamlined way to catalog and cross reference all of the information needed to accession, organize and deaccession items in a collection. On the Gallery Systems homepage there is a section dedicated to explaining how TMS can enhance workflow for various different professionals working in the fields of collections management. The software can be used by registrars, collections managers, conservators and curators. One of the benefits of the Archives and Special Collections concentration in an M.L.I.S. degree is that I could ideally take my career in any of these directions. Knowing how to use this software was an essential skill that I was grateful to learn in my internship for my future career.

Apart from objects themselves, TMS allows institutions to create and keep records on constituents, including artists and donors. There are other functions and features that I did not explore during my internship, like inputting insurance values for objects. Those tasks would later be handled by Chris. My primary focus was to get the object records created and as complete as possible during the remaining course of my

internship. I had to be granted remote desktop access and credentials to work on this project on a private computer which took about a week to secure from the team at Gallery Systems. While I wanted to get working right off the bat, this level of security is appreciated, as it helps protect the integrity of the records. Securing credentials ensures that only those working with the collections have access to the records and they are far less likely to be tampered with by an unauthorized editor.

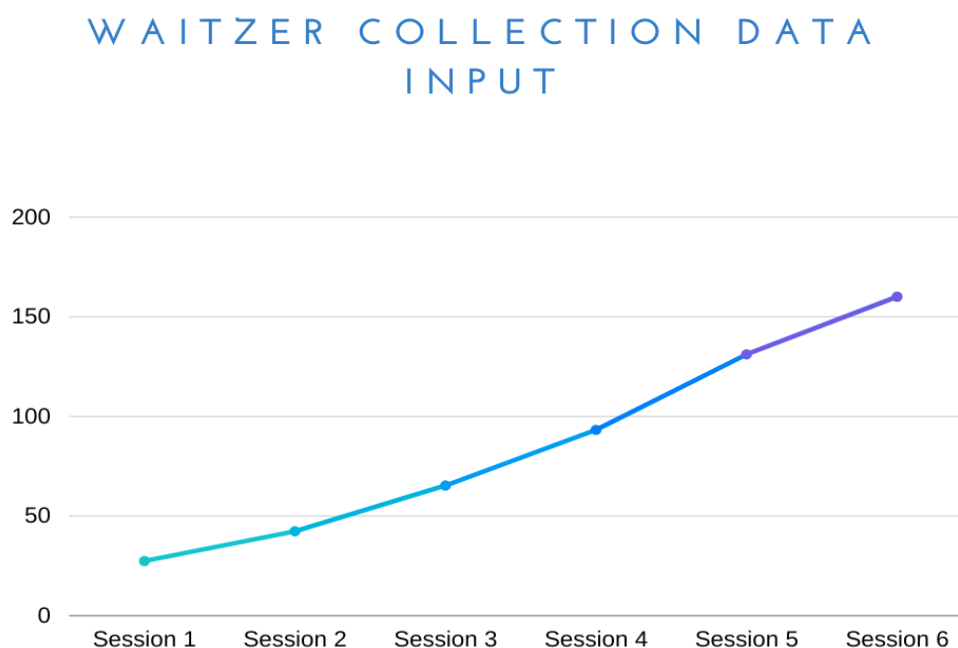
I stated previously that, while streamlined and user-friendly, the process of inputting some objects did take more time than others. It really depended on the amount of information we received on each item, if the artist profile was already in the database and whether or not I needed to dig deeper to uncover more information regarding the object. I knew after my first full day cataloging on-site and only completing records for 27 items that I would need to complete this task in sessions. The Barry staff lent me an authorized laptop that I could bring home, which would enable me to work remotely and help further the process along.

For each object in the Waitzer Collection, I entered fields for object identification into the TMS database. This information included accession numbers assigned to each object, accession dates, object titles, creation date of the object, artist/manufacturer/designer (sometimes there were multiple collaborators resulting in multiple entries), a description of the medium, dimensions for each piece, provenance

information (including donor constituent data), information on any markings, inscriptions or signature, notes about conditions of the object and images. For many of the works, I also needed to do background research on my own to uncover more about an artist or manufacturer to add to the files. I also worked separately with Dr. Page to research specific items in the collection that needed more information. To do this, I researched available volumes containing the information she was seeking and contacted Liz Weir, the Dickson Librarian at The Chrysler Museum of Art's Jean Outland Chrysler Library. This project has taught me that it takes an entire team of people to accession and process works into a museum system before they are ever ready for view. However, the importance of the process and its collaborative nature was a great learning experience for me. I saw how just the process of cataloging items to prepare them for a collection can include curatorial and collections departments along with registrars and independent researchers. It was also important to keep the museum stakeholders in mind. Accurately cataloging and researching the items ensured they will be accessible for further research, exhibitions and possible educational programming.

I was able to complete the project in six sessions. My first two sessions were on-site at the Barry (before I was granted access to use TMS at home). My first session was completed in tandem with Chris Norton, who guided me through the process of cataloging an object and then remained available to answer any questions I might have along the way. For this session, I was able to add 27 items to the database. My second session, also at the Barry Art Museum, resulted in 42 items total having been

completed. After my two sessions at the Barry, I was granted access to TMS to work remotely and my productivity increased at home. My third session brought the total number of items cataloged to 65. My fourth, fifth and sixth sessions brought the totals to 93, 131 and 160, respectively. (There were five items that needed further research before they could be added to the database). I was very pleased with my progress and proud of my work, especially since the actual data inputting aspect of this project could not be completed until roughly halfway into the semester. I was proud that in that time I learned how to utilize the online database and complete this task for the Barry Art Museum and its stakeholders. I have included a graph illustrating my progress of cataloging the items in the Waitzer Collection over these six sessions.



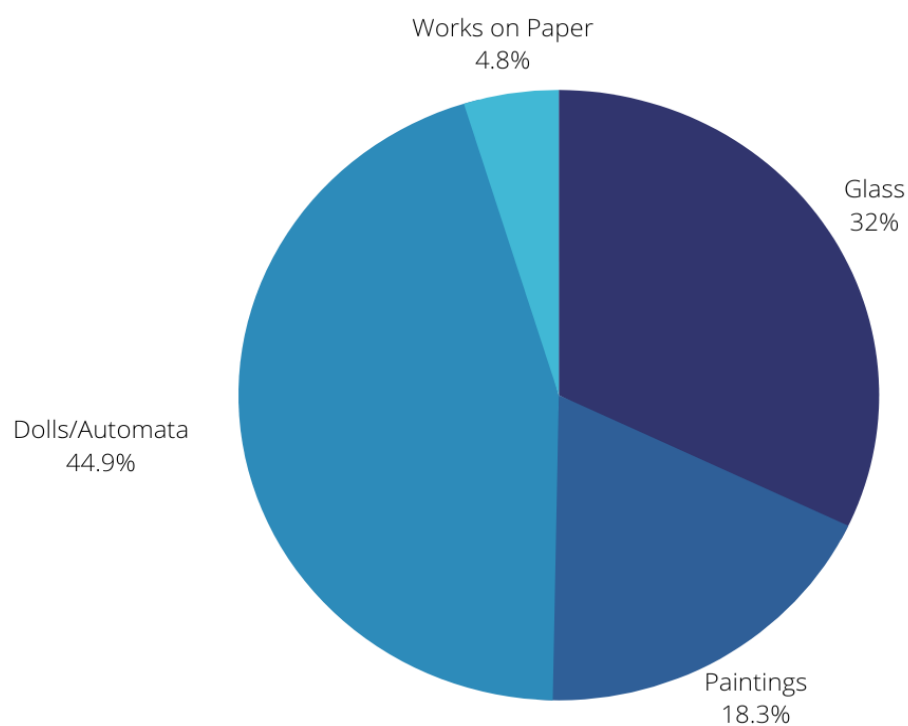
Session 1	27
Session 2	42
Session 3	65
Session 4	93
Session 5	131
Session 6	160

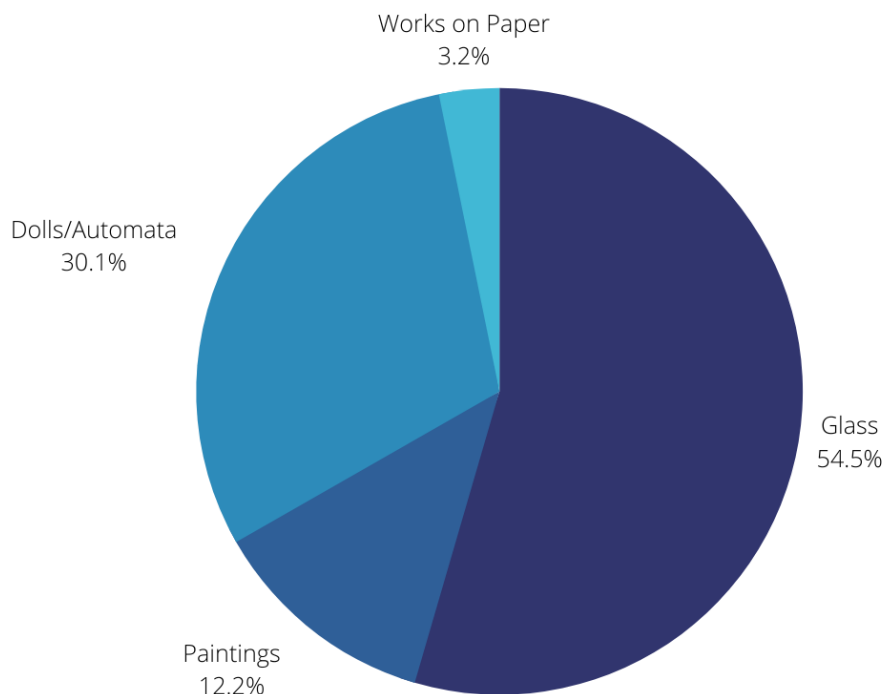
Assessment and Analysis of Data

Beginning this project with a clean slate made it easy for me to track my own progress creating records and cataloging the objects from the Waitzer donation. However, I was really interested in seeing how the addition of the Waitzer collection would impact the glass collection and the number of glass artists represented at the Barry Art Museum. I knew when we received the donation that it would have big implications for the museum in terms of its reputation as a “glass hub” for the growing

arts scene in Norfolk (and the United States). Knowing that I have been using the skills I have learned in my M.L.I.S. courses to become an integral part of this process has been so rewarding. First I would like to compare the information I presented in my baseline data with the data collected upon the project's completion. Then I will analyze the results to better illustrate the context and significance of the work I completed at the Barry Art Museum. The charts below show the impact of the new objects being added to the Barry's existing collections.

Baseline Data: Collections at the Barry Art Museum



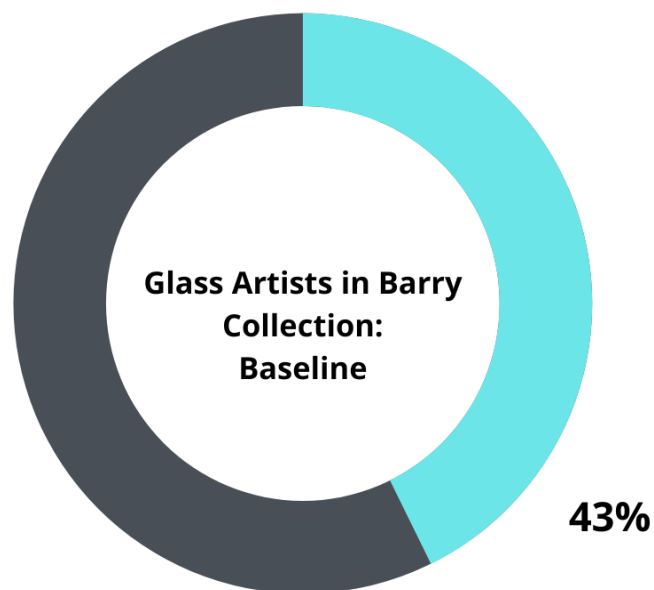
Assessment Post Project: Collections at the Barry Art Museum

Upon analyzing the data visually, it is easy to see that the addition of the Waitzer Collection donation has significantly impacted the amount of glass objects in the Barry Art Museum's collections. Glass objects are now the largest collection represented at the Barry Art Museum. Prior to the new acquisitions, glass objects were less than half of the amount of the museum's holdings. The Waitzer collection has more than doubled the glass collection. This a big shift in what the museum is able to display and offer,

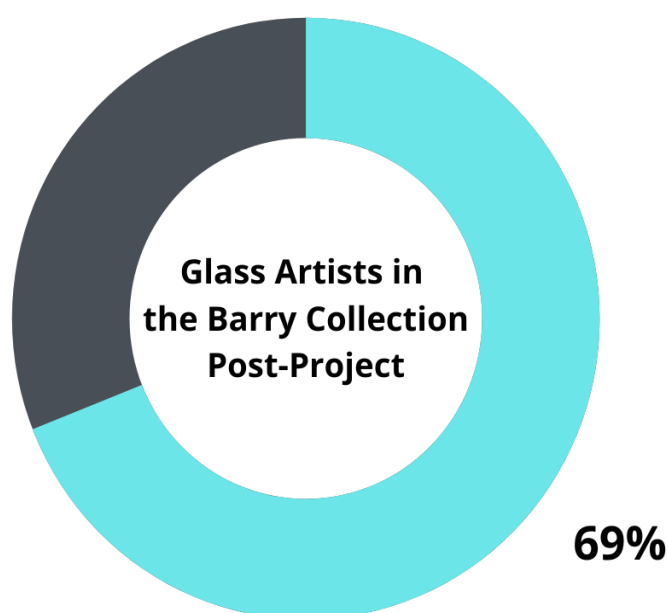
especially with the emphasis and goal of making the institution a leading site for glass collections.

Also, it is important to compare the baseline data of glass artists represented at the Barry Art Museum to the amount of artists after the completion of the project. Much of my research work was creating artist files and doing research on these individuals. Having files created for new artists is important for museum staff because if another object by that artist is accessioned, I have already captured all of the information about them and the person in charge of creating a new object record can simply click on the artist and add them to the record.

Baseline Data: Glass Artists Represented in the Barry Collections



Assessment Post Project: Glass Artists Represented in the Barry Collections



Looking at the percentages above, we now see that glass artists make up over half of the artists represented in the Barry Museum database and represented in the museum. At nearly 70% glass artists are now the majority of constituents in our TMS database. This is a fairly significant increase when compared to my baseline data of 43% pre-input. While the glass collection more than doubled, we do not see this in the percentages of artists because some of the artists included in the Waitzer Collection are

already in our database and have works in the existing collections. I began to see as I was creating artists files that there were many new artists being added. I realized that this data would be worth tracking to see how the percentage may change at the completion of my Impact Project. For a museum that is taking steps to become well known and appreciated by the glass community, this leap in glass artist representation is a huge step in the right direction.

Professional Learning and Reflection

Seeing this project to completion while interning at the Barry Art Museum was something that I feel proud to have been a part of. Being able to clearly see the difference my contributions made for the museum and its collections was highly rewarding. I mentioned earlier that a lot of the work at museums often takes place behind the scenes, yet is evident in the exhibitions, programming and initiatives that the institution undertakes. When I began my internship, I was given a project to assist the volunteer archivist with collecting data on the living artists in the Barry collection. While in the midst of researching artists and objects extensively at home and preparing to reach out to the living artists in the collection, my Impact Project and its focus changed entirely. The Waitzer Collection donation occurred during my internship and it became clear that creating records for these items and fully accessioning them in the database

was the primary goal of the Barry staff. I was worried about the time this would allow me to complete a meaningful project but felt confident that I would be able to get the work done and assist the museum with this task. Time management became a skill that I mastered while balancing working on this project onsite, remotely, taking another course at ODU, working and taking care of my family! I definitely advocated for myself and my project hours. When it became clear at the beginning that I may not have enough hours scheduled onsite, I made sure to work full days remotely, assisting with research and data input.

The amount of professional learning I obtained while working on this project and from the Barry Museum staff was highly appreciated. I currently work at the Chrysler Museum of Art as a gallery host. This is a very forward facing position that focuses primarily on visitor experience. I feel that gave me an advantage in sensing how this project and the addition of the Waitzer Collection would appeal to stakeholders, visitors and the community. I also knew that Charlotte and several other members of the Barry Staff are experienced glass artists themselves who have worked at the Chrysler Museum's Perry Glass Studio. The importance of the Waitzer Collection and its contents was evident through their excitement to have these items in the Barry's permanent collection. I began by stating that the Barry Museum is a fairly new institution and is keen to grow, expand and leave its mark on the community. I could see that receiving this valuable and significant collection felt like a big "win" for the Barry team. It was a pleasure to be a part of that.

Professionally, I am grateful for the skills I learned during my internship. With a concentration in Special Collections and Archives, getting to see how some of the processes involved in collections management was very beneficial. Proficiency in TMS is now a skill that I can add to my professional resume that will be a great advantage as I begin to search for career opportunities in museums and archives. During my time at the Barry, Charlotte also gave me advice on my resume that will help me stand out as a candidate in this field. She also said not to hesitate to use her as a reference when the time comes. The professional connections I was able to make during this internship were a lovely added benefit. Working closely alongside a collections manager, an executive director, an education and engagement specialist and the former registrar of the Chrysler Museum (now Charlotte's assistant) allowed me to see how varied a career in museums and collections management can be. I had not really known all that a registrar was responsible for until I became one myself during this internship! I now see how vital the creation and safekeeping of records is for the effective operations of a cultural institution.

Aside from the Impact Project, I was able to participate in meetings, conduct my own research and provide feedback on museum initiatives. I was invited to attend a meeting that included the entire management team, a representative from Old Dominion University, a curator and Carolyn Barry herself. The meeting was held to address plans

regarding an upcoming doll gallery redesign. Seeing the work that goes into exhibition design and the research required for such a move was exciting. I was also able to provide feedback and assist the curator with brainstorming how the physical space in the gallery should look and what design elements would enhance the new space. It was so nice to be included in the process and gave me a great appreciation for all of the work that goes into creating a meaningful experience at a museum. And what a treat to meet Carolyn Barry! She was very gracious to make me feel like a valued part of the conversation. I appreciated and valued my time at the Barry Art Museum, the professionals that I had the opportunity to work with and the skills I was able to learn and employ while working on this project. I am truly looking forward to the exhibition featuring these works of art. It will feel great to see them in on view and know that I was the person responsible for creating their records and formally “welcoming” them to the museum’s database and permanent collection.

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