



Massillon, Ohio
September 19, 2014

News Release: Massillon Museum Receives IMLS Grant for Its *Imagining a Better World* Project

The Massillon Museum has received a “Museums for America” award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to facilitate a traveling exhibition, *Imagining a Better World*, based on the exhibition of artwork by Dr. Nelly Toll presented in the Museum’s main gallery in the spring of 2014.

Imagining a Better World chronicles the art and early life of Dr. Nelly Toll, an artist and writer who survived the Holocaust as a young child in Nazi-occupied Poland.

“The exhibit will be designed for access to all ages, with 21st-century learning in mind,” says Massillon Museum Executive Director Alexandra Nicholis Coon. “It will present Toll’s story through multi-disciplinary interpretation, including the display of her art as archival-quality reproductions of watercolors created as a child in hiding during World War II and an animated documentary film—in both full-length and edited-length for inclusion in a gallery setting. Interactive elements will engage the visitor in Toll’s story, art, diary and imagination.” She hopes the exhibition will prompt the discussion of contemporary issues relevant today at multiple levels, from bullying to present genocides.

The life themes seen through the lens of the Holocaust continue to impact our world, and the story and art of Nelly Toll will inform the choices that individuals, communities, and cultures make to overcome adversity. The development of the exhibit will also preserve the full story of a young girl who not only survived those terror-filled days, but has thrived in her maturation and has given back to the world around her.

The exhibit will be available for loan to both small and large communities across North America. Individuals and communities will be able to consider the role that choices play every day within their sphere of influence and be reminded that art and hope can bring light to the darkest of situations. “Children will be exposed to the helpful role imagination can play in difficult circumstances,” Coon says. “Through access to Toll’s work, the preservation of her story, and in the spark that catches flame in the lives of viewers, individuals and communities can vow to work toward a more just world, to learn new ways to talk to each other about the hard issues of life, and to make choices that will value imagination and fight against abuses of power.”

This year IMLS received 554 applications requesting \$56,247,161. Of these, reviewers selected 196 projects to receive funding totaling \$20,405,211. The Massillon Museum will receive \$125,000 specifically for the Nelly Toll traveling exhibition and documentary film, a project spanning three years. Venues confirmed to host the traveling exhibition include the Holocaust Memorial Museum in San Antonio, Texas; Goodwin Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Cherry Hill, New Jersey; **University of Alberta, Canada**. “This significant funding allows us to provide international exposure not only to Nelly’s story, but to the efforts of the Massillon Museum.”

Reviewer comments included:

The museum has conducted a great deal of research for this project for over six years including attending Holocaust workshops and involving a variety of stakeholders and even Dr. Toll, herself.

The museum has created a project that provides a gateway for the exploration of universal themes such as hope, optimism, and resiliency that exist beyond time and place.

The concept of recreating Dr. Nelly Toll's hiding space during the Holocaust not only explores the desperation of her situation, but shows how creativity can flourish even under the worst possible circumstances.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Massillon Museum relies primarily on funding from local property taxes. It receives additional operating support from The Ohio Arts Council and ArtsinStark as well as contributions, sponsorships, and memberships from the community. This is the second “Museums for America” grant received by the Massillon Museum from the Institute of Museum and Library Services; the *Faces of Rural America* project, documenting the life and work of photographers Henry Clay Fleming of Ravenswood, West Virginia and Belle Johnson of Monroe City, Missouri, was also developed into a traveling exhibit which debuted in Massillon summer 2011. The IMLS also funded two separate phases of the collections storage renovation project on the Museum’s third floor.

About IMLS

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Our mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Our grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit www.ims.gov <<http://www.ims.gov>> and follow IMLS on Facebook and Twitter.

About the Massillon Museum

The Massillon Museum, where art and history come together, is a center for cultural excitement in Northeastern Ohio. Main gallery exhibitions rotate six times a year. Visitors can always see permanent collections galleries, a photography gallery, The Immel Circus, the football gallery, a Civil War display (through 2015), and regional artwork in Studio M—all change regularly. In the lobby, guests find a unique shop, an operating vintage photobooth, and the new café—Anderson’s in the City.

Media Contact: Alexandra Nicholis Coon, Massillon Museum Executive Director - 330.833.4061



Dr. Nelly Toll



Watercolor childhood self-portrait, Nelly Toll

Images: Higher resolution available—apond@massillonmuseum.org