



Maryhill Museum in Klickitat County opened to the public May 13, 1940. The museum is celebrating 70 years of art collecting.

Photo by Jeanie Senior

Eclectic Art Eccentric History

For 70 years, Maryhill Museum has offered world-class exhibits from near and far

Founder's Day Coming in May

Maryhill Museum will hold a Founder's Day celebration May 15 at the museum, 35 Museum Drive, Goldendale, Washington.

- ▶ Annual membership meeting: 1 p.m.
- ▶ Founder's Day program: 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Remarks and reminiscences from Sam Reed, Washington secretary of state; Bonnie Beeks, president of the Klickitat County Historical Society; Michael Oros, president of the Romanian American Society; Pat Courtney Gold, Wasco basket weaver and artist; Robert Douglas Hunter, painter; and Elizabeth Ives Hunter, executive director of the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Boston.
- ▶ Family fun events: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- ▶ Outdoor sculpture garden walk: 4 p.m., led by Curator Steve Grafe.
- ▶ Northwest Wine Auction: 6 p.m. Food and wine. A chance to bid on a specially curated collection of Northwest wines and other items. Proceeds support the museum. Tickets are \$100.
- ▶ For a calendar of 2010 events or more information about the museum, go to www.maryhillmuseum.org.



Two items in Maryhill Museum's permanent collection are unlikely companions. Above, a Klickitat basket of cedar and beargrass by contemporary artist Nettie Jackson, which was a gift from Mary Dodds Schlick. Opposite page, a small plaster sculpture of "The Thinker" by French artist Auguste Rodin. The statue, created several years before Rodin finished his famous large-scale bronze of "The Thinker," was a gift from longtime patron Loie Fuller.

Photos courtesy of Maryhill Museum of Art

By Jeanie Senior

Maryhill Museum of Art celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, opening with the exhibition “70: Seven Decades of Collecting at Maryhill Museum of Art,” which includes seldom-seen items from its notably eclectic collection and favorites from permanent displays.

The display, which continues through May 31, is a reminder of the museum’s remarkable history and exotic quartet of founders: wealthy Quaker businessman and Good Roads advocate Sam Hill; modern dance pioneer Loie Fuller; San Francisco socialite Alma de Bretteville Spreckels; and Queen Marie of Romania, a granddaughter of Great Britain’s Queen Victoria.

“What Sam and Loie really wanted to do was provide opportunities for people in rural Washington and Oregon to experience the best things in human culture,” says Colleen Schafroth, the museum’s executive director.

Even regular Maryhill visitors probably will see new things in the anniversary exhibit, which includes paintings, Indian art, religious artifacts, Romanian textiles and more.

There are, for example, two small planks of wood from the Mayflower and the ancient iron chest Hill used to transport the wood back from England; scrimshaw cribbage boards made from walrus tusks; several small ivory crucifixes, a gift from Fuller, who received them from the cardinal archbishop of Mechelen, Belgium; and a recently-acquired Plateau Indian beaded vest.

Part of the exhibition is in two rooms on the museum’s top floor. The rest, identified by display cards, is part of permanent exhibits throughout the museum, including Queen Marie’s coronation crown and Auguste Rodin’s “The Thinker” sculpture.

Curator of Art Steven Grafe, who came to Maryhill last autumn from the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, put together the Seven Decades exhibit.

“It gave Steve an opportunity to be really familiar with the collection,” Colleen says. “As someone new, he brought a different view to the collection.”

The anniversary celebrated this year marks the day in May 1940 when the museum opened to the public.

“Maryhill has so many anniversaries for different reasons,” Colleen says, smiling.

The museum owns 5,300 acres of land along the Columbia River that Hill bought, beginning in 1907. He planned a model Quaker farming community, established the original town site of Maryhill and after World War I built a replica of Stonehenge as the nation’s first World War I memorial. He started

construction of the mansion that houses Maryhill Museum in 1914.

Hill’s model farming community was not a success. The house was an unfinished shell when Queen Marie visited in 1926 to dedicate Hill’s now-incorporated Maryhill Museum of Art. In her tactful, much-quoted dedication speech, the queen called it “a curious and interesting building.”

“There is a dream built into this place,” she said.

Hill died in 1931. When his estate was settled in 1938, Maryhill “finally got some of the cash it needed to finish the museum,” Colleen says.

Financially, Maryhill’s prospects brightened considerably in 2009. Despite 2009’s weak economy, the museum recorded a 17 percent attendance increase, with almost 46,000 visitors between March 15 and November 15. Part of the reason was a conscious effort to boost the calendar of events available to visitors, Colleen says.

The museum also has a new source of income through its partnership with Cannon Power Group, owner of the Windy Point Wind Farm, whose windmills dot the horizon north and east of the museum. Fifteen of the wind turbines are located on land leased from Maryhill.

“The turbines just started turning at the tail end of 2009. We could see revenues in excess of \$200,000 a year,” Colleen says, noting the museum’s operating budget last year was \$1.1 million. “We won’t know that until we’ve been through year one.”

Besides a 20-year lease agreement, Cannon donated concrete to improve the parking area in front of the museum and walkways along the bluff.

Maryhill also received a \$2 million bequest last year from the estate of Mary Hoyt Stevenson, a former museum board member and longtime supporter.

“We’ve been trying to build our endowment, and one of the reasons Mary’s bequest was so wonderful is that getting (windmill) revenue coming in off the ranch lands is almost like having a significant endowment to draw money from,” Colleen says. “It took the edge off what we needed to do, in order to maintain and enhance what we offer to the public every year.”

Long term, Maryhill would like to expand, building space for education programs as well as for preservation. Colleen says staff and trustees are looking at the idea “very closely and carefully.”

The land the museum owns has rich cultural and natural histories.

“People who come here are just stunned by the views,” Colleen says. “We want to take better advantage of the south side of the museum, so people can wander around and learn about the area.” ■

