

Request for Proposal: The Claudine Robbins Estate

Prepared by: Sarah Burry, Beth Rudig, Teresa Ferguson, Paris McGarry, Lisa Peck, Jenny Reisman

Date: December 15, 2021

1. Executive Summary

The Claudine Robbins Estate consists of a collection of sculptures, drawings, sketches, and sketchbooks. Ms. Astrid Nelson, the executor of the estate and Ms. Robbins' cousin, wishes to photograph and catalog these materials so that they can be donated to one or more museums. It should be noted that some of Ms. Robbins' sculptures have previously been donated to a museum in Milwaukee, WI. To aid Ms. Nelson with this task, our team will: (1) organize and assign an inventory number to each item in the collection, (2) photograph and take notes on the collection, (3) catalog the collection in Tropy, and (4) connect each catalog record to the corresponding photograph(s). The Tropy records can then be exported as JSON or CSV files; this will allow us to provide both Ms. Nelson and prospective museums with easy access to the collection.

2. Historical Background and Current Status of Materials and Constituents

Claudine Robbins, born 1942 in Janesville, Wisconsin, left a body of work spanning over 50 years in the care of her cousin, Astrid Nelson, after she passed away. Robbins' work left to Nelson includes 112 sculptures made with found materials such as wood, bottle caps, fabric, paint, and other materials. She has also left drawings, sketchbooks, and sketches documenting her artistic process and various stages of sculptural creation. Robbins' childhood in rural Wisconsin impacted her artmaking practice immensely. A self-taught artist, she began sketching and creating sculptures and assemblages out of found materials in her teens, having little access

to more traditional art supplies. Upon graduating high school in 1960, she moved to New York and attended Parsons, which allowed her to immerse herself within the new art scenes emerging in the city. In the mid-1970's she returned to her childhood farmstead home in Wisconsin after the death of her mother and converted the property into an intentional artists' community with many different living and studio spaces.

Nelson reports that Robbins donated many of her sculptures to the Milwaukee Art Museum in 2012, while the remaining 112 sculptures alongside drawings and documentation are currently scattered across the artists' community in Janesville, where she lived from 1976 up until her death in 2020. Due to the lived-in and chaotic nature of the sprawling property, the sculptures are currently stored in a barn that served as Robbins' studio as well as inside the main house, in the garden, and inside a shed that was used as another artists' studio space. The drawings and sketchbooks are stored inside the barn in boxes and flat files, the exact count is unknown at this time. Unfortunately, the shed in which many of Robbins' older sketchbooks are stored has a history of pest problems, so it will be imperative to investigate the space, excavate the materials, appraise their condition and make note of any problems before the collection can be photographed.

While Astrid Nelson is only superficially familiar with Robbins' career, she is familiar with the property and is hoping to assist our team in locating the works and cleaning out the studio. She has offered the use of the main house as a more stable storage space for the materials while they are being organized and cataloged. This will allow for our team to have a free workspace to store, catalog, and photograph the materials before they are packed up and moved to offsite storage after this processing project is completed, or, hopefully, shipped to buying institutions. Our aim is to establish control over the late artists' work so that the family may

establish an Artist Estate, and completely documenting Robbin's remaining body of work will allow this to happen.

3. Scope of Work

a. Project Overview

As mentioned in the Executive Summary, our team plans to achieve the following:

1. Organize and assign an inventory number to each sculpture, drawing, sketch, and sketchbook in the collection.
2. Photograph the collection and make note of each item's dimensions, material(s), etc.
3. Catalog the collection using Tropy, a knowledge organization application.
4. Connect the catalog records to the photographs and export the records as JSON or CSV files for the convenience of interested institutions.

b. Methodologies of Work

For our documentation of the collection, we will use the Dublin Core standard, which allows us to synthesize Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA) and Cataloging Cultural Objects (CCO). By cataloging with these standards, we can assure that the collection is properly described and documented in a way that is interoperable when ultimately donated or sold to museums. CDWA also provides multiple ways to clarify associative relationships, which is necessary for a collection that contains a large number of sketches and studies for sculptures. We have chosen these standards because they are widely known and used by major institutions and easily map together, as referenced in our metadata crosswalk. For the precise application of these standards, we have developed a tailored in-house cataloging strategy.

We will begin organizing the collection by assigning unique identifiers to each work.

Each item type will have a code made from letters. Drawings will begin with D, sculptures S,

loose sketches SK, and sketchbooks B. This is followed by a three-digit code, the lowest number marking the earliest work of the item type, and increasing in chronological order. The year of completion follows. If there are specific scans within the sketchbook that receive their own record, an additional three digital number will denote the page number. For example, B-001-1963-004 would be the item number for the fourth page of the earliest sketchbook in the collection, which was completed in 1963. SK-001-1963 would be the earliest loose sketch in the collection, also completed in 1963.

Next, for the appraisal and processing of the collection, art handlers will move items from the various locations on the property to the main house where they will be temporarily stored and photographed. Catalogers will begin by tagging items with inventory numbers. Once items have been identified and tagged, the catalogers will examine the condition of the materials and make note of any concerns, recorded in the notes section of a catalog record spreadsheet. This allows catalogers the ability to flag concerns and any conservation or preservation work can be completed at another stage outside of the scope of this initial proposal. After the large sculptures have been accounted for, the cataloger will shift to collecting and organizing the sketches, drawings, and sketchbooks, assigning inventory numbers, and assessing condition at the container level.

Art handlers will assist the photographer, moving works to an empty space. They will use batch photography methods, photographing a QR code that links to the identifier number before photographing the item. Using Adobe Lightroom, this identifier number will be attached to the digital photo's metadata, ensuring that it does not get separated from its record. Each sculptural work will be photographed from four angles, plus photos of signatures, inscriptions, or any pertinent details. Sketchbooks will be photographed from the front and the back as well as each

page. Sketches and drawings will be scanned on the flatbed scanner, both sides. While the photography process is being completed, catalogers will work simultaneously on fully cataloging the materials first in the spreadsheet used during appraisal. Processing materials directly into the spreadsheet will allow for catalogers to gain control over the collection, note condition or concerns, track locations, and make sure standards are being properly applied before the catalog records are generated and paired with their associated images in Tropy.

c. Technologies

Catalogers will create catalog records for the collection in Tropy, an open-source archival management system. It offers Dublin Core, a highly adaptive metadata structure. The Getty has an extensive crosswalk between Dublin Core, CDWA, and CCO. Tropy allows customizable metadata labels, so we have the option of using simplified language while still mapping to established fields in Dublin Core. Our fields include:

- Inventory #
- Classification (Artistic Work or Archival Material)
- Work Type (Sculpture, Drawing, Sketch, Sketchbook)
- Title
- Creator
- Creation Date
- Subject
- Dimensions
- Material
- Technique
- Notes

CDWA also allows us to expand upon the basic grouping. If they are preparatory for a larger piece, we can ensure to connect items with associative relationships.

After considering collective management software options such as Artstor and Open Access, we decided to implement Tropy, as it is free to use and does not require the Estate to purchase its own server. Our limited inventory (>200 items) allows our records to be reasonably

stored on a laptop and through cloud storage. Though Tropy does not support CSV importation, our fields are succinct enough that typing directly into trophy accomplishes the same task in a similar amount of time. The data can, however, be exported out of Tropy, should the Estate require a different software in the future.

Tropy allows us to record both the metadata for the art object and its digital surrogate. As Tropy is made for archival purposes, the sketchbook records are very easily integrated into the software. A book can consist of one main record with distinct inventory numbers and scans for every page. This is a vital feature, as cloud-based storage alone would not contain this organizational structure, and software like Artstor aren't meant to keep multiple photos in a series together, as the system treats them as individual records.

4. Staff and Supplies

We will be hiring two full-time catalogers for the project at an hourly rate of \$40 for a 40-hour week. Both catalogers will inventory, digitize, and catalog the collection over roughly 8 or 9 months. We will also hire two art handlers to assist in the transport of the larger sculptures in the collection to be photographed. The smaller sculptures will be able to be moved by the catalogers and the photographer. We will hire a photographer to document the 112 sculptures in the collection. This photographer should be able to provide their own equipment including a DSLR camera, lighting, and a backdrop setup.

Other equipment used during this process will include an Epson V600 Flatbed scanner for scanning drawings, sketches, and sketchbooks. We will also be using two (2) 2TB hard drives (one for housing the digital surrogates and one for backup), Tropy (free and open-source software for cataloging), and Wasabi Cloud Storage for a second backup of the digital surrogates. Wasabi works well with the relatively small size of the collection and does

not charge additional fees for downloading the entire collection.

This project will be completed with the staff and supplies of:

- 2 people to catalog the entire collection, as well as digitize the drawings, sketches and sketchbooks (\$40/hr)
- 2 art handlers to assist with the transport of very large sculptures (\$20/hr)
- 1 contracted photographer to document the sculptures (standard day rate: \$500 with equipment)
- DSLR Camera (from photographer)
- Lighting equipment (from photographer)
- Tropy (free and open source)
- 1 Epson V600 Flatbed Scanner (\$250)
- 2 external hard drives, 2TB (\$60 each)
- Wasabi Cloud Storage (\$143 per year for 2TB of storage)
- **Estimated total for operating budget: \$119,000**

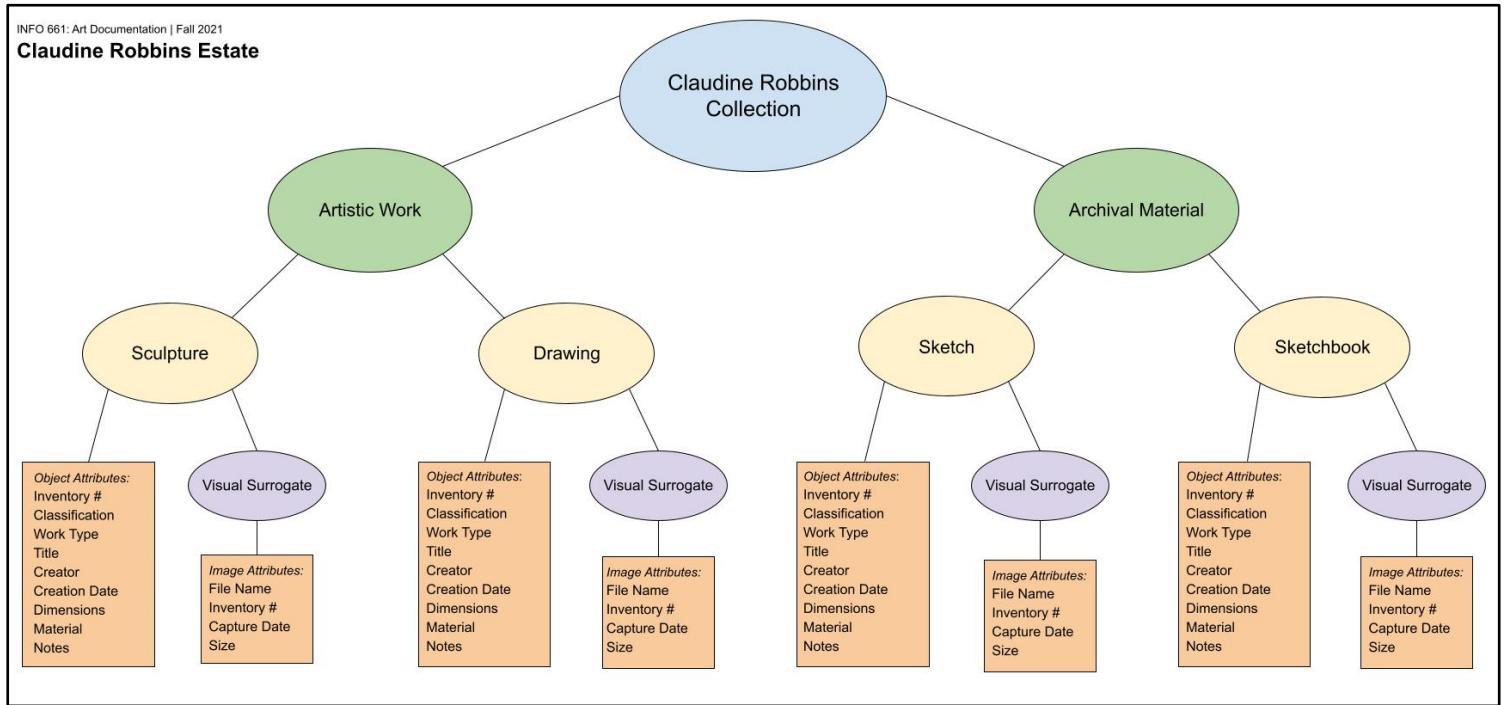
5. Timeline for completion

The first month will be dedicated to hiring staff and purchasing equipment, as well as familiarizing ourselves with the farm and its locations. The 2 catalogers will start by inventorying the sculptures so they can be photographed while the other materials are being inventoried. There will be 2 art handlers to help transport the larger sculptures to be photographed. We estimate that the larger sculptures will take 1 day to photograph. The rest of the sculptures can be handled by the catalogers and the photographer and should take 1 week, shooting 20 sculptures a day.

The inventorying of all the items by the catalogers, which should take place during the sculpture documentation, we estimate will take 1 month to complete. After that, the 2 catalogers will scan the drawings, sketches and sketchbooks as well as edit the images of sculptures and scans, which we estimate will take 1-2 months. Finally, the 2 catalogers will catalog all of the sculptures, drawings, sketches and sketchbooks into Tropy, which we estimate will take 4-6 months to complete.

- Assign inventory numbers and track in spreadsheet all sculptures, drawings, sketches, and sketchbooks (1 month)
- Photograph 112 sculptures with 2 art handlers for transport of the larger sculptures (1 day for larger sculptures, 1 week for the rest, roughly 20 sculptures per day)
- Scan drawings, sketches, and sketchbooks as well as editing images and scans (1-2 month)
- Catalog sculptures, drawings, sketches, and sketchbooks with their surrogate images into Tropy (4-6 months)

Appendix A: Concept Map



Appendix B: Screenshots of Records in Tropy

The screenshot shows a Tropy item record for a sculpture titled "Black Horse of Revelation" by Claudine Robbins. The record includes the following details:

Item
Creator: Claudine Robbins
Inventory Number: S-002-1985
Title: Black Horse of Revelation
Classification: Artistic Work
Work Type: Sculpture
Creation Date: 1985
Material: Paint on reclaimed wood with f...
Dimensions: 54x45x15 in.
Current Location: Barn
Cataloger
Is Part Of
Title: Black Horse of Revelation
Date Added: Dec 1, 2021, 3:05 PM
Modified: Dec 14, 2021, 3:44 PM

Photos
1 Photo: S-002-1985_001.TIFF

Notes
1 Note: Conservation: Snapped string at base

Add Photos <

Metadata Tags

Item

Claudine Robbins

Inventory N... S-001-1992

Title Button Tree

Creator Claudine Robbins

Classification Sculpture

Work Type Artistic Work

Creation Date 1992

Material Wood, cement, buttons, bottle ...

Dimensions 56 x 34 x 60"

Current Loc... Barn

Cataloger Jenny

Is Part Of

Title Button Tree

Creator

Date

1 Photo +



S-001-1992_001.TIFF

No Notes +

B I U O S | Q T² T₂ Add your notes here ...

The screenshot shows a digital cataloging interface with the following details:

Item
Claudine Robbins

Inventory N... B-001-1977

Title Sketchbook 1

Creator Claudine Robbins

Classification Archival Material

Work Type Sketchbook

Creation Date 1977

Material Watercolor and pencil on paper

Dimensions 9x12 in.

Current Loc... Office

Cataloger Beth

12 Photos

B-001-1977-i

B-001-1977-ii

B-001-1977-iii

B-001-1977-iv

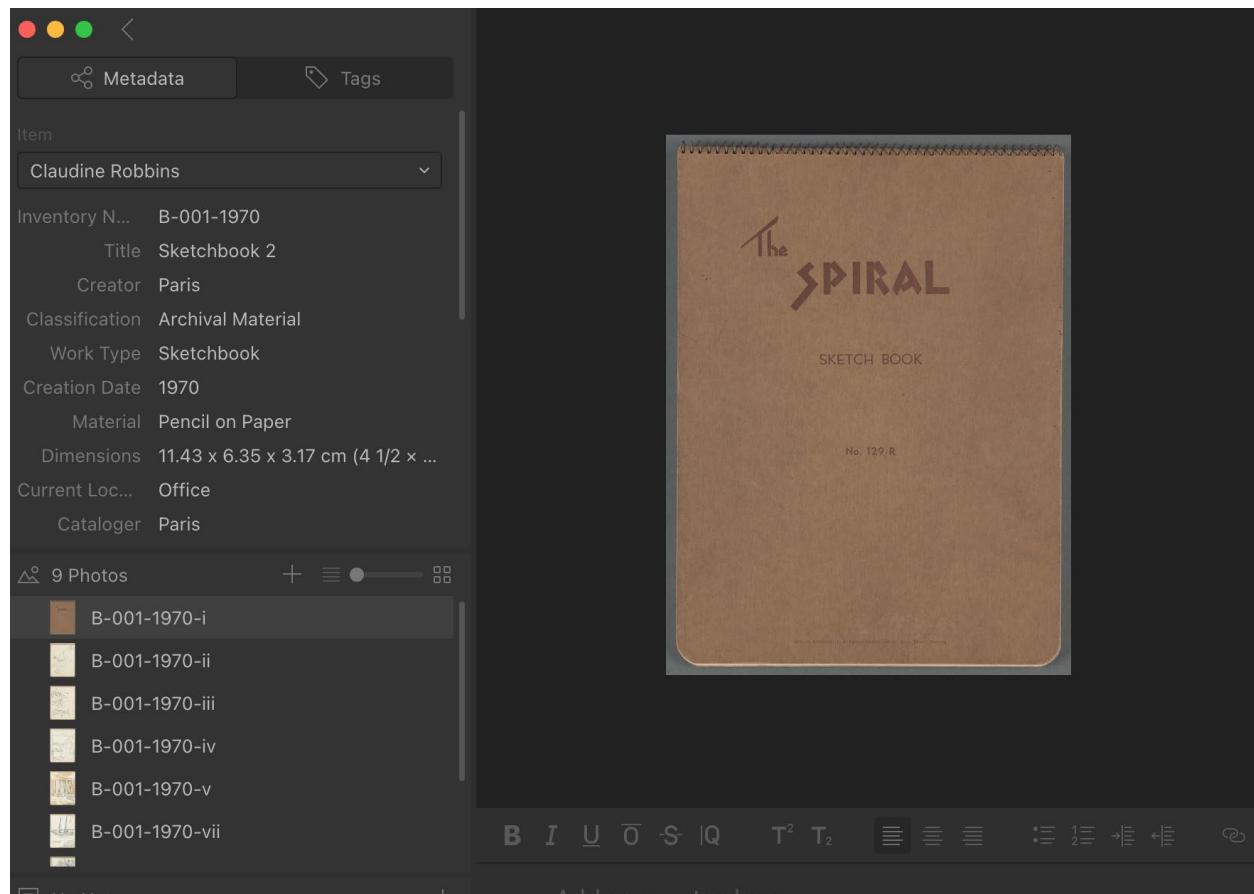
B-001-1977-v

B-001-1977-vi

No Notes

Add your notes here ...

The interface includes a toolbar with icons for bold, italic, underline, strikethrough, superscript, subscript, and other text formats. A large image of a dark green, textured sketchbook cover is displayed on the right side of the screen.



The screenshot shows a digital library interface for managing archival materials. On the left, a sidebar displays the following metadata for an item named "Claudine Robbins":

- Inventory N... B-001-1970
- Title Sketchbook 2
- Creator Paris
- Classification Archival Material
- Work Type Sketchbook
- Creation Date 1970
- Material Pencil on Paper
- Dimensions 11.43 x 6.35 x 3.17 cm (4 1/2 x ...)
- Current Loc... Office
- Cataloger Paris

Below the sidebar, a list of 9 photos is shown, with the first one selected: B-001-1970-i. The main area on the right displays the front cover of the sketchbook, which is made of brown paper and has "The SPIRAL" and "SKETCH BOOK" printed on it. The number "No. 129-R" is also visible. At the bottom of the interface, there are various editing and layout tools.

Item

Claudine Robbins

Inventory N... D-001-1964

Title Study for a Sculpture

Creator Claudine Robbins

Classification Artistic Work

Work Type Drawing

Creation Date 1964

Material Pencil on Paper

Dimensions 75.3 x 100.4 cm (29 5/8 x 39 1/2 in)

Current Loc... Office

Cataloger Teresa

1 Photo

D-001-1964.TIFF

B **I** **U** **O** **S** **|Q** **T²** **T₂** **≡** **≡** **≡** **≡** **≡** **≡**

No Notes

Add your notes here ...

The screenshot shows a digital interface for managing museum collections. On the left, a sidebar displays the following item details:

- Item: Claudine Robbins
- Inventory N...: S-026-2001
- Title: Untitled
- Creator: Claudine Robbins
- Classification: Artistic Work
- Work Type: Sculpture
- Creation Date: 2001
- Material: metal wire, paper, gold leaf, na...
- Dimensions: 11.43 x 6.35 x 3.17 cm (4 1/2 x ...)
- Current Loc...: Barn
- Cataloger: Lisa

Below the details, there is a section for photos:

- 1 Photo
- +
- ☰
-
- grid icon

The photo thumbnail is labeled S-026-2001.TIFF. The main content area on the right shows a photograph of a sculpture. The sculpture is a small, abstract form made of a combination of materials, including what appears to be a pinkish-red object (possibly a heart or a leaf) wrapped in or surrounded by dark, coiled metal wire and some gold leaf. It is mounted on a black rectangular base and a thin black stand.

Appendix C: Metadata Crosswalk

1	Tropy	CDWA	Expected Value	CCO	Expected Value	Local Guidelines
2	Inventory #					Drawings will begin with D, sculptures S, loose sketches SK, and sketchbooks B. This is followed by a three digit code, the lowest number marking the earliest work of the item type, and increasing in chronological order. The year of completion follows. If there are specific scans within the sketchbook that receive their own record, a roman numeral will denote the page number.
3	Classification	Classification Term	Authority or Controlled List	Class	Authority or Controlled List	"artistic work" or "archival work"
4	Work Type	Object/Work Type	Authority	Work Type	Authority or Controlled List	Type of work: "drawing," "sculpture," "sketch," "sketchbook"
5	Title	Title Text	Free Text	Title	Free Text	Title of work
6	Creator	Creator Description	Free Text	Creator Display	Authority or Controlled List	First and last name of the creator
7	Creation Date	Creation Date	Free Text	Display Date	Free Text	Year that work was completed
8	Dimensions	Dimensions Description	Free Text	Measurements Display	Free Text	For 2D works: length x width cm (length x width inches) and for 3D works: length x width x height cm (length x width X height inches)
9	Material	Materials/Techniques Name	Authority	Material	Authority or Controlled List	List with commas and stylize in all lower case: refer to AAT
10	Notes					A few sentences about the state of the work/its location