

## Milwaukee Public Museum Artists — Charles R. Porteus & George Peter

*For the record — Agenda Item 10, File No. 26-46 (Milwaukee Public Museum financial report) — expands Item 3 of the committee submission*

### Part 1 — Charles R. Porteus (1867–1943)

Charles R. Porteus was the Museum's wax figure modeler and scene painter from 1919 to 1940 and built many of its true-to-life historical group displays. The Museum's own wall text (Exhibit A) credits him with the majority of the miniature dioramas throughout the building, stating that between 1924 and 1942 he did the foreground and background work for 55 of them — scenes originally created because the old building lacked space, but kept in production because they proved so popular. Away from the Museum he was an accomplished painter of landscapes, Milwaukee scenes, and portraits. His works are credited in the records to "C.R. Porteus," and his legacy has been championed by his descendants, including his granddaughter-in-law Bonnie Porteus.

**Questions.** The dioramas in the inventory below are attributed to C.R. Porteus. Because the new facility describes its galleries as reimaged successors rather than relocations, we ask, for each numbered diorama:

1. **Ownership.** Is it classified as Milwaukee County property or as "MPM Inc. Personal Property"?
2. **Disposition.** Will it be relocated intact, recreated, sold, or otherwise disposed of? If not relocating, what becomes of it?
3. **Proceeds.** If it is sold, who receives the money?
4. **Attribution.** Where the artist is shown as uncertain or as another hand, confirm the artist of record.

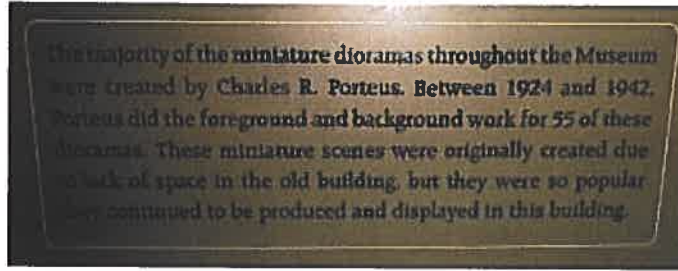
### Part 2 — George Peter (1859–1950)

George Peter was a Viennese-trained panorama painter who began his long association with the Museum in 1912 and in 1923 became its Art Director and head of the Department of Murals, a role he held until his retirement in 1940. He painted the expansive curved backgrounds behind the Museum's most famous dioramas and produced numerous murals depicting scenes from different cultures and time periods. The Museum's own wall text (Exhibit A) states that his paintings are now part of the Museum's collection.

**Works that may be unable to move.** It has been reported that the Museum has acknowledged it cannot relocate certain murals, and that a former Museum exhibit designer has publicly called for these historic artworks to be preserved. For the Peter murals and comparable fixed works, we ask, in addition to the three questions above:

5. **Relocation feasibility.** Which murals or works can be physically relocated to the new facility, and which cannot?
6. **Fate if not relocated.** For any work that cannot be relocated, what becomes of it when the current building is vacated and sold — preservation, transfer, or loss?

### Exhibit A — Museum placards installed in the current building



Top: the Museum's wall text crediting C.R. Porteus with the foreground and background of 55 miniature dioramas, 1924–1942.  
 Bottom: the Museum's wall text for a 1936 George Peter mural, stating his paintings are now part of the Museum's collection.

### Part 3 — Federal (WPA) funding and stewardship

From 1935 to 1941 the Museum was awarded more than a dozen projects funded by the Works Progress Administration and its predecessor, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, including federally commissioned murals. It has been reported that work by Museum artists of this era was completed with WPA support. Federally funded artwork may carry continuing federal stewardship interests. We therefore ask:

7. **Funding source.** For the Porteus dioramas, the Peter murals, and other exhibit artwork of the 1924–1942 period, what record exists of the funding source for their creation, including any WPA or FERA funding?
8. **Federal interest.** Has the County or MPM Inc. determined whether any such work is subject to a continuing federal interest, and has any federal agency been notified before disposition or sale of the building in which fixed works are installed?

### Inventory — Dioramas attributed to C.R. Porteus

**This inventory is incomplete.** The Museum's own wall text (Exhibit A) states that Charles R. Porteus did the foreground and background work for 55 miniature dioramas between 1924 and 1942. The list below identifies 29 dioramas attributed to C.R. Porteus, together with others of uncertain or different attribution — fewer than the Museum's own count of 55. We therefore request the complete record: an itemized list of every diorama attributed to C.R. Porteus, with the classification, planned disposition, and recipient of any proceeds for each.

Diorama #	Subject matter	Approx. dimensions	Artist of record
#?	Small Fox Hole & Rodent Nest – Underground burrows	4'w x 2'h x 16"d	?
#?	Buffalo Dancers Mural – 1936	Approx. 4'h x 10'L	George Peter
#1	Beaver Portal (oval shaped)	3'w x 2'h x 6'd	?
#118	California Coastal Indians	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus

Diorama #	Subject matter	Approx. dimensions	Artist of record
#119	The Spirit Helpers – Pomo Indians of Northern California	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#122	Modoc Harvest – Klamath Marsh	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#123?	Pomo Indian Village	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#134	N.W. Native American – Arts & Crafts – Southern Alaska	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#135	Framed Canvas Mural (wood carving scene)	6'h x 9'w	?
#136	Hamatsa Ceremony	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#140	British Columbia – Kawakuitl	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#21	Setting Up Camp – Native American small diorama scene	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#22	Mandan Indian village	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#24	Native American Dog Dancers	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#30	Indian Village Miniature – Village Life 1500 AD	3'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#31?	Inside Indian Lodge	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#37	Changing Wetlands	6' or 7'w x 8'h	?
#40	Moist Sandy Beach Prairie, WI	4'w x 3'h x 3'd	C.R. Porteus
#42	A Wisconsin Fen – Spring	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#43	Upland Meadow, WI – Late Spring	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#44	Oak Barrens WI – Summer	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#45	Oak Openings, WI – Early Spring	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#46	The Forest Margin – Early Spring	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#47	Beech Maple Basswood Forest, WI – Spring	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#61	WI Fields and Woods – Red Tailed Hawk	4'w x 3'h x 6'd	C.R. Porteus
#62	WI Riverways – Peregrine Falcon	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#63	Waterways of WI – Black Crowned Night Heron	4'w x 3'h x 6'd	C.R. Porteus
#64	WI Lake Country – Common Loon	4'w x 3'h x 4'd	C.R. Porteus
#68	Mesa Verde, CO. Cliff Palace	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#69	Village Life – Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#73	Cremating the Dead – Mojave Indians	4'w x 3'h x 6'd	C.R. Porteus
#92	Indian Village	4'w x 3'h x 6'd	C.R. Porteus
#94	Drab Flute Ceremony – Hopi Indians	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus
#96	Hopi Village Dancers	4'w x 3'h x 5'd	C.R. Porteus

### Records request — Wis. Stat. § 19.35

For the works above, we request any record stating (a) classification as Milwaukee County property or “MPM Inc. Personal Property”; (b) planned disposition and the recipient of any sale proceeds; (c) artist of record; (d) which works can and cannot be physically relocated, and the planned fate of those that cannot; and (e) the funding source for their creation, including any WPA or FERA funding, and any determination of a continuing federal interest. If no responsive record exists for any item, we ask that the County state that in writing.

# The Nunnemacher Arms Collection

*For the record — Agenda Item 10, File No. 26-46 (Milwaukee Public Museum financial report)*

One of the Museum's premier collections, originating in the bequest of Rudolph J. Nunnemacher (1872–1900) and grown to roughly 3,000 firearms — among the top publicly held arms collections in the country — together with edged weapons, military uniforms, insignia, and accoutrements spanning the War of 1812 to Desert Storm. We are not asserting that anyone has acted improperly. We ask how the collection is classified and what becomes of it, and we ask that the answers, or the absence of answers, be reflected in the record.

## Questions

1. **Ownership.** Is the Nunnemacher collection, in whole and by item, classified as Milwaukee County property or as “MPM Inc. Personal Property”?
2. **Disposition.** Will it be relocated intact, retained in storage, sold, deaccessioned, or otherwise disposed of?
3. **Proceeds.** If any item is sold, who receives the money?
4. **Donor conditions.** The collection originated as a bequest. What restrictions or donor conditions attach to it, and has any proposed sale or deaccession been reviewed against those conditions and against the Museum's charitable-trust obligations?
5. **Deaccession history.** The only published account is the 1928 Metschl catalog. Since that catalog, which items have been removed, sold, transferred, or otherwise subtracted — when, to whom, and for what consideration?
6. **Current inventory.** Will MPM Inc. produce a current, itemized inventory? The public presently has access only to the 1928 catalog.
7. **Conservation.** What is the funded preservation and maintenance plan — climate control, stabilization of firearms, and care of edged weapons and organic components such as grips — and has the cost of maintenance been cited, in any record, as a basis for sale or disposal?

## Records request — Wis. Stat. § 19.35

Under the Wisconsin Public Records Law, we request copies of the following records held by Milwaukee County:

8. The current itemized inventory of the Nunnemacher collection, and any inventory reconciling present holdings against the 1928 Metschl catalog.
9. Any record of items removed, sold, transferred, or deaccessioned from the collection since 1928 — including dates, recipients or buyers, and consideration received.
10. The donor instrument, will, or gift agreement establishing the Nunnemacher bequest, and any record of restrictions or conditions attached to it.
11. Any appraisal of the collection or any portion of it.
12. Any preservation or maintenance plan and associated budget, and any record in which the cost of maintenance is referenced in connection with a possible sale or disposition.

We ask that, if no responsive record exists for any item above, the County state that in writing.