New Haven, Conn. (November 25, 2014) – The leveling of the tomb of Jonah (think: whale) in Mosul, Iraq, last July, was a striking reminder of the fragility of our collective cultural inheritance. Have we nearly come full circle? In 1943, as Nazi Germany laid waste to much of Western Europe, Monuments Men—a handful of soldiers whose job it was to protect cultural heritage during wartime—were dispatched to Europe, for the first time in history. Deane Keller, a painter and professor of art at Yale University, was among them. On Sunday, December 7, 2014, at 1 p.m., the New Haven Museum will open a special exhibit, “An Artist at War: Deane Keller, New Haven’s Monuments Man,” celebrating Keller’s life, his contributions to Connecticut culture, and the preservation of many of the world’s most iconic works of art.

Largely unknown until the 2014 release of the George Clooney movie, “The Monuments Men” (Sony, 2014), the real-life story of Keller and his cohorts is relevant and timely. “Today our shared global cultural heritage is being destroyed at an alarming rate in the Middle East, in the very places were civilization first developed 5,000 years ago,” says Guest Curator Laura A. Macaluso. “History is being rewritten, and not for the better.”

In conjunction with the exhibition’s opening on December 7, at 2 pm, William Keller will present a talk on his father’s work and legacy entitled, “Deane Keller: Serving His Country in Italy; Pursuing His Art in New Haven.” A reception will follow.

The exhibit, which will run through May 9, 2015, comprises several of Deane Keller’s works and photographic reproductions of material he collected while serving as a Monuments Man in Italy.
The images include drawings and memorabilia, including one of Keller’s dog tags, his military identity card an Army uniform patch, Fascist propaganda posters, and photos documenting both the destruction and preservation of many treasured art masterpieces.

Keller’s life changed dramatically in 1943, when President Roosevelt established a civilian commission to promote the formation of a Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (MFAA) section of the military—the Monuments Men. Keller’s prior experience as an art student in Rome led him to be posted to Italy, where he estimated driving 60,000 miles while leading preservation and restoration efforts that saved thousands of important works of European art. In Florence, for example, Keller supervised the return of 13 freight cars full of artwork—valued in the hundreds of millions—that had been stolen by the Germans.

After the war, Keller returned to his family and teaching career in New Haven, and became a successful portrait painter. His public works can be seen throughout New Haven—in City Hall, in the headquarters of the Knights of Columbus and the Fusco Corporation, in Sterling Memorial Library and elsewhere around Yale University.

Macaluso is a Ph.D. candidate in the humanities at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. She researches and writes about cultural heritage, art and identity and is finishing her dissertation, titled, "Art for the Elm City: Public Art in New Haven." She notes that there are many organizations—local, national and international—trying to stem the tide of current destruction in the Middle East, but much has been lost already.

William Keller is presently an independent researcher after having served as Fine Arts Librarian, University of Pennsylvania. He has been a librarian at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University; Maryland Historical Society; George Washington University and Johns Hopkins University.

The exhibition’s opening reception is sponsored by the Amity Club of New Haven, Inc., and the Italian-American Historical Society of Connecticut.
Support for the exhibition and its related programs is provided in part by The Howard Gilman Foundation.

**About the New Haven Museum**

The New Haven Museum, founded in 1862 as the New Haven Colony Historical Society, is located in downtown New Haven at 114 Whitney Avenue. The Museum is currently celebrating 150 years of collecting, preserving and interpreting the history and heritage of Greater New Haven. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs and outreach, the Museum brings 375 years of New Haven history to life. For more information visit [www.newhavenmuseum.org](http://www.newhavenmuseum.org) or Facebook.com/NewHavenMuseum or call 203-562-4183.

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