

## **The Teaching and Learning Museum at Hamilton**

The Museum at Hamilton will be a place guided by teaching and learning. Active engagement with uncommon objects of art and culture in diverse and inspiring spaces will occur everyday with transformative student experiences as the goal.

The experience of the building will be like that of a professional museum, but unlike traditional museums The Museum at Hamilton will be fueled with an experimental energy. The museum will propose questions rather than provide answers. The building will be a place of activity and interrogation. The storehouse or vault is not the model - the laboratory and studio are closer parallels.

A visit to The Museum at Hamilton will be marked by the discovery of unfamiliar things and filled with questions and new ideas previously thought to be concluded or set. Ideas and teaching will govern all decision making at the museum. This will often be accomplished through uncommon juxtapositions between exemplary objects. This dialogue will invite all types of teaching into the museum. The art historian, poet, biologist, economist, and athlete will all find a welcome space to use their own discipline's vocabulary to navigate the world of ideas.

### *History*

June 26, 1873 marks the official beginning of an organized art gallery and collection at Hamilton College. On that date the Trustees of Hamilton resolved to “...recognize the importance to a complete education of a Knowledge of the Fine Arts especially painting and sculpture, and appreciate the favorable influence which this Knowledge exerts upon the scholar and the citizen; As a means of furnishing this Knowledge, art collections are of great utility, and we deem this a fitting occasion to adopt some permanent method for promoting an object so desirable.”

From 1873 to 1914, a gallery existed at Memorial Hall with an art gallery on the second floor of Library. In 1883 Professor Oren Root's *cabinet of curiosities* was renamed the Knox Hall of Natural History, for James Knox (class of 1830) and soon later an edited version of the Knox Hall collection was installed in the lobby of the Science Building. From 1958 - 1982 exhibitions were displayed at the Root Art Center and in 1982 Emerson Gallery began operating in the spaces it now occupies.

The current facility can no longer meet the mission of object-based teaching and study for a wide percentage of the campus and a proper museum is planned to bring to fruition what has been under discussion for many decades. The proposal for the new museum is not solely to continue and improve the work of the past but to create an entire new program of visual interrogation, literacy, and debate.

### *The Hamilton College Collection*

The collections housed at the Emerson Gallery contain more than 5,000 pieces. It is a diverse teaching collection used regularly by a variety of departments at Hamilton, but is not easily or simply accessed. Holdings include ancient vases and glass; Greek, Roman, and Egyptian objects; Native American art; Pre-Columbian art; British 20th century art; Japanese prints;

modern and contemporary photography; and European and American painting and works on paper.

Far beyond the familiar print study room usually attached to collection storage rooms or a classroom within the museum, The Museum at Hamilton's collection galleries will always be changing and available to all daily visitors. A collection show of four objects can create an in-depth experience. Bigger is not necessarily better for the museum experience. Small, powerful, transformative experiences with objects will be the goal. Much of the collection will be viewable through glass walls and inventive open storage scenarios. Artists, faculty, and students will be invited to reinstall sections of the collection routinely. Moveable casework, contained shelving units, and glass walls will offer semi-transparent barriers and partitions for teaching spaces and sites for small, nimble, quickly changing exhibitions.

Curatorial imagination will always be encouraged and multiple voices will be invited to speak - the museum will be a site for diversity in all its forms at all times. The programming will be ethically aware - it will take a stand and interrogate those positions.

Flexibility, transparency, and transformation will guide the planning and activities of The Museum at Hamilton. The museum will be a factory for producing new teaching methods, new ideas, and new understandings.

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