

Teaching and Learning in the Hamilton College Museum

A Unique Facility for Learning

The Teaching/Learning Museum at Hamilton College has two parts. About half of the Museum provides flexible Kunsthalle-like exhibition space. The other half is a unique open-storage/study space that embodies the central principles of the Hamilton College Mission Statement by encouraging student-centered teaching and learning.

A Facility for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The Teaching/Learning Museum is not just for Art and Art History, it is a facility for the entire College community. Many of the most important recent exhibitions in the Emerson Gallery have involved the Departments of French, Russian, Biology, Classics, Asian Studies, English, Religion, Music, American Studies, and History. These include: *Native Perspectives* (current); *The Music Stand: Jazz as a Unifying Social Force* (Jan. 27-April 10, 2005); *Nature as Refuge: From Rousseau's Cascade to Central New York's Trenton Falls* (June 2-August 28, 2005); *Inside the Floating World: Japanese Prints from the Lenoir C. Wright Collection* (Sept. 23, 2004-Jan. 2, 2005); *Suzanne Anker: Origins and Futures* (Feb. 28, 2004-April 11, 2004); *Nuremburg 1493* (Feb. 28, 2004-April 11, 2004); *1968: You Say You Want a Revolution* (Dec. 5, 2003-Feb. 15, 2004); *Terry Adkins: Later Coltrane* (November 2 - December 14, 1998); *The Buffalo Soldier: The African American Soldier in the U.S. Army, 1866-1912* (January 12 - February 22, 1998); *Proper, Improper, and Heroic: Women in Nineteenth Century Japanese Art* (October 30 - December 16, 1997); *War & Peace: Russia in the Age of the Napoleonic Invasion* (September 14-October 27, 1996); *Towards the Bright Future of Communism: Soviet Propaganda Posters from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (November 10- December 17, 1995); *Portraits in Jazz: Photographs by Milt Hinton* (September 26- November 8, 1991); *Day of the Dead* (September 15 - November 4, 1990); *The Schambach Collection of Musical Instruments* (October 1-November 13, 1983).

Learning by Doing

The permanent collection is used every semester by introductory and upper-level courses for student research into connoisseurship and attribution, iconography, techniques of printmaking, formal analysis, etc. Students publicly present their conclusions to their peers. The Teaching/Learning Museum provides students with an opportunity to explore beyond the usual textbook level.

A Contextual Laboratory

As George Kubler noted long ago, the isolated work of art stubbornly resists interpretation. Works of art are inevitably experienced in relation to surrounding objects, space and time.¹ Flexible spaces in the Teaching/Learning Museum allow students to change the physical contexts of artworks, while wireless internet access in the galleries

enables students to immediately call up the historical, biographical, stylistic, literary and social contexts that inform their understandings of the artworks.

A Forum for Student Research

The Emerson Gallery has recently been experimenting with student-curated exhibitions, providing students with professional museum experience. Recent student-curated exhibitions include *Elihu Root, Jr., Class of 1903: Lawyer-Painter* (June 4, 2004-Sept. 5, 2004); *Nuremburg 1493* (Feb. 28, 2004-April 11, 2004); *Krieg: Käthe Kollwitz "Images of War"* (Dec. 5, 2003-Feb. 15, 2004); *1968: You Say You Want a Revolution* (Dec. 5, 2003-Feb. 15, 2004); *Whistler and His Contemporaries: Prints of Venice* (January 13, 2003- March 30, 2003).

Untapped Opportunities for Collaborative Student/Faculty Research

We are entering a new era of undergraduate education most dramatically illustrated by the remarkable sophistication of joint faculty-student research in the sciences. The Teaching/Learning Museum at Hamilton College will provide corresponding opportunities for the collaborative study of art and material culture.

The existing permanent collection of the Emerson Gallery includes hundreds of objects that are suitable for research projects, exhibitions, senior projects and interdisciplinary work (Classical terra cotta sculpture, American prints, Italian prints, Northern European prints, early modern art of Britain, Egyptian faience, and Mayan ceramics, American photography, etc.). In addition, newly available internet tools (the Beazley Archive, the Illustrated Bartsch, the Archives of American Art, etc.) make advanced research in art history possible for the first time at Hamilton College. Unfortunately, because of severe limitations on space, the permanent collection of the Emerson Gallery is not available for extended student research.

A Unique Mission

The mission of the art museum has been a topic of debate since the 19th century, with opinions divided between the “aesthetic model,” most famously championed by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and “educational model,” proposed by (among others) the Brooklyn Museum.ⁱⁱ While every serious modern museum has an education department, no other art museum takes the active learning experiences of undergraduate students as its central mission. The centrality of the pedagogical mission distinguishes the Hamilton College Museum from the nearby Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute and from the museums of peer institutions.

ⁱ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (Yale University Press 1962), p. 36.

ⁱⁱ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, (Routledge 1995) pp. 48-71.