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News from the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

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Images available on request

### **Mount Holyoke College Art Museum showcases experimental object-based teaching**

New exhibition celebrates tenth anniversary of Museum's Teaching with Art program

SOUTH HADLEY, Mass. — The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum presents “Major Themes: Celebrating Ten Years of Teaching with Art,” an innovative, two-year display that brings object-based dialogues from the Museum’s teaching classroom into its public galleries. Opening August 11, the exhibition will be on view through June 21, 2020.

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum’s Teaching with Art program, which is one of the most active of its kind in the country, fosters collaborations with classes across the college curriculum with an eye toward experimental teaching methodologies. September 2019 will mark the tenth anniversary of this acclaimed program, which coincides with the second year of the exhibition. The program was initially funded by a major grant from the Mellon Foundation.



“Every day at MHCAM, our education curators facilitate unique thought-provoking encounters with objects for students and faculty, and that is the inspiration for ‘Major Themes,’” says Associate Curator Hannah W. Blunt. “We wanted to showcase the incredible activities and surprising juxtapositions of artworks that happen behind the scenes in our teaching classroom.”

Nearly 200 class sessions across 28 different disciplines are held each year at MHCAM. The Carson Teaching Gallery—a fully-mediated, seminar room outfitted to display two- and three-dimensional objects—provides a space where art, artifacts, and other unique materials can be combined in provocative ways that are not traditionally seen in public galleries.

In the Museum’s classroom, “faculty and students have an opportunity to engage with original objects in an intimate space that affords them time to look closely, share ideas,

and make insightful and creative connections with course topics,” explains Ellen M. Alvord, Weatherbie Curator of Education and Academic Programs, and the Museum’s first academic curator, hired as part of the 2009 grant. “Through the lens of different disciplines, each class models new ways of seeing and thinking about objects in our collection, greatly expanding our understanding of their interpretive possibilities.”

Drawn from these wide-ranging course materials and discussions, the exhibition presents five thematic sections. “Optics of Art” celebrates the fascinating insights gained through a rich array of scientific and mathematical approaches to analyzing artistic creation; “The Non-Human” illuminates the myriad ways we interpret, represent, and interact with animals, monsters, and machines, and includes works as disparate as a Dürer print and a parlor dome with taxidermied birds; “Afterlives of Objects” considers the biographies of objects—where they come from, the journeys they take, and how they end up at museums; “The Precarious Body” looks at representations of the human body in art, and how they both reveal and conceal who we are; and “Conflict & Commemoration” brings together objects and works of art that reflect experiences of war.

Labels written from the perspectives of faculty, students, and curators complement the diverse objects on view, more than a dozen of which are drawn from the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, a 20th-century cabinet of curiosities and a treasure of Mount Holyoke’s campus. Over the course of its two-year run, “Major Themes” will evolve through select artwork rotations and the introduction of new student and faculty voices.

### **MHCAM will host faculty conversations in conjunction with the exhibition**

The first of several lively faculty conversations in the exhibition will occur on October 11 at 4:30 p.m. Sohail Hashmi, Professor of International Relations on the Alumnae Foundation and Professor of Politics, and Kavita Khory, Ruth Lawson Professor of Politics, will discuss objects in the Conflict & Commemoration section of the exhibition.

### **About the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum**

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (MHCAM) aims to spark intellectual curiosity and creativity through direct engagement with works of art and material culture. Founded in 1876, the Museum’s collection comprises more than 24,000 objects, including exemplary Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiquities; art and artifacts from the indigenous Americas; paintings, sculpture and decorative art from Europe and the United States; photography, prints, ceramics and numismatics; and works by women artists. In recent years, the Museum has made significant acquisitions of global contemporary art, including works by Afruz Amighi, Ambreen Butt, Zanele Muholi, Kiki Smith, Alec Soth, Lin Tianmiao, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems and others. Through thought-provoking exhibitions and

educational programs, MHCAM serves as a nexus for experiential learning across academic disciplines and as a resource for the broader community.

MHCAM is free, open to the public and fully accessible. Hours are Tuesday through Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. For additional information, please visit [artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu](http://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu).

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Image: Professor Elizabeth Klarich and students in her course “Collecting the Past: Art and Artifacts of the Ancient Americas” examine Peruvian ceramics in the Museum’s Carson Teaching Gallery, Photo: Laura Shea.