

SEPTEMBER 15, 2016 (/ARTSANDENTERTAINMENT/2016/9/19/ART-MUSEUM-CELEBRATES-140TH-ANNIVERSARY)

# Art Museum celebrates 140th anniversary (/artsandentertainment/2016/9/19/a museum-celebrates-140th- anniversary)



Courtesy of the Mount Holyoke Art Museum

BY LINDSEY MCGINNIS '18

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (MHCAM) will celebrate its 140th anniversary with a year-long exhibit titled “140 Unlimited,” which opened on September 6. The exhibit blends the Museum’s permanent collection with new pieces acquired through the “140 Gifts Campaign,” a five year effort launched by former director John Stomberg.

According to Interim Director Ellen Alvord ’89, the campaign acquired over 300 new pieces.

The first piece received was “The Penitent Magdalene,” a 17th century painting by Abraham Janssens that depicts Mary Magdalene surrounded by jewels and fruit, holding a crucifix. The gift, donated in 2011, was dedicated to Art History professor John Varriano, who passed away in January 2016.

Wendy Watson, veteran MHCAM curator and Varriano’s wife, described the piece in the special edition of the Museum’s newsletter, which features a series of articles on the new collection’s highlights.

She wrote “Janssens’ depiction of the Magdalene offers the opportunity to consider and reconsider this important figure and her representations — from penitent sinner to influential disciple — in art through time.”

In 2015, Inge Heckel donated Robert Indiana’s screenprint “Eternal Hexagon 6” to the Museum in honor of Watson’s 41-year career at the Museum. Other highlights from the “140 Gifts Campaign” include “Gnomon’s Parade (Late),” an etched glass and steel sculpture donated in 2014 by Shelby Baier White ’59, and an Andy Warhol screenprint titled “Reigning Queens (Royal Edition) (Queen Ntombi).”

Over one hundred new pieces are currently on display throughout the Museum’s nine galleries. Curators say it will take several years to display every gift from the campaign, because they rotate artwork on a semester schedule that allows faculty to use the galleries with their lesson plans.

Founded in 1876, MHCAM is one of the oldest collegiate art museums in the nation, and the staff take that role very seriously.

“In the last 10 years or so we’ve really tried to broaden our reach and become a resource for faculty and students,” said Alvord. “We work with maybe 75 faculty a year and bring in usually 100 or more unique courses.”

“140 Unlimited” was an opportunity for staff members like Assistant Curator of Education Kendra Weisbin and Associate Curators Aaron Miller and Hannah Blunt to “refresh” the exhibits with student and faculty needs in mind. They introduced new wall text that summarizes the galleries’ themes, and rearranged old and new pieces to give the works new context as well as increase their educational value.

Miller is excited about the changes to the American Gallery, namely the addition of Native American photography and relics. A 1904 sepia-toned photograph titled “Souix sub chief Red Hawk - Oasis in the Badlands, South Dakota” now hangs near Albert Bierstadt’s 1875 painting “Hetch Hetchy Canyon,” the Museum’s first ever acquisition.

“It’s one of the first times we’re really thinking about ‘What is the American Gallery? Who is that representing?’” said Miller. “Traditionally we’ve had a lot of landscapes, some of them Western. Now with the photographs there are actual native spaces that are illustrated . . . so [we’re] trying to have new conversations.”

The Museum will host a 140th Anniversary Bash on Friday, Nov. 11. The gallery opens at 5:30 p.m. and guests are invited to enjoy music, cupcakes, art talks and a champagne toast. The Mission Cantina food truck will also be at the event.

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