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Mount Holyoke College Art Museum undergoes gallery renovations

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Photo courtesy of Lily Reavis '21

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum is undergoing a series of renovations aimed at revitalizing its galleries to be completed in the fall of 2026.

By Aspen Pearson '28

Staff Writer

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum is undergoing a series of renovations aimed at revitalizing its galleries and improving engagement and accessibility for visitors. These renovations began in July 2023 and will continue until Fall 2026.

According to Kendra Weisbin, the museum's curator, the gallery renovation has been an idea floating around for almost a decade, as the museum's last renovation was done in 2002.

Weisbin spoke about the project in an interview with Mount Holyoke News, describing plans for redesigned collection spaces and reorganization of the flow of both physical foot traffic and the order of artwork in the museum. Museum staff hope these changes will not only modernize the space but also improve accessibility and create a more comprehensive look into the museum's collection. While certain galleries are closed during construction, the museum continues to offer programming and remains open to visitors.

Weisbin said that the museum's "original permanent collection galleries are dedicated to specific regions" but "weren't allowing us to show the breadth and diversity of our collection."

The Art Museum will shift to a chronological approach, which means the gallery will be moving through time rather than region. "It's going to also allow for cross-cultural connections, connections to be made across time and thematic moments as well," Weisbin said.

Weisbin said the idea is to modernize the gallery. "For us, the key element of modernization is thinking really intentionally about accessibility," Weisbin said. "We're also thinking about how people move through the space and how different kinds of visitors might want to engage with art and material culture."

"Our greatest challenge has really been the space itself. Often when museums are renovating they are getting more space, but that's not the case here. So thinking about how we can improve flow and display and get a greater diversity of art on view, all in the museum's small footprint has been a challenge," Weisbin said.

The renovated galleries will also incorporate changes to the rooms themselves to better display art and make teaching in those spaces more accessible. The team began by focusing on which areas of the museum were used for classes and visitors to gather, as well as the most important teaching objects and the ways in which visitors would move throughout the space. To address these priorities, the galleries will include more open space and a rearranged layout to improve overall flow.

The museum held an open house on March 11, showing off their most recently reopened gallery, which holds early artwork up to 700 CE. The next gallery they plan to open will house art from 700 CE to the 1700s, and is anticipated to open in Fall 2025.

The museum remains open to both visitors and classes throughout these renovations. "Because we really are committed to being a teaching museum and being here for our faculty and students, we're staying open for as long as we can, though we will have to close in Spring of 2026 for the final phase of the renovation and reinstallation," Weisbin said.

The museum's main goal "is really to make sure that every student who comes in feels welcome and represented and engaged by what they see," Weisbin said. "We also hope our new galleries will provide new and improved opportunities for curricular connections and faculty engagement, while also providing our public visitors with space with learning, reflection and social moments."

The museum aims to be done with these renovations by Fall 2026, in celebration of the museum's 150th anniversary in November.

Quill Nishi-Leonard '27 contributed fact-checking.

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