

Smith College Museum of Art
Permanent Collection Interpretive Plan
2013

Interpretive Plan

Guiding Institutional Statements

- Smith College Mission
Smith College educates women of promise for lives of distinction. A college of and for the world, Smith links the power of the liberal arts to excellence in research and scholarship, developing leaders for society's challenges.
- SCMA Mission
An integral part of Smith College and its mission, Smith College Museum of Art educates and engages our academic and broader communities through meaningful and memorable encounters with exceptional art.
- SCMA Impacts
 - *SCMA promotes transformative experiences with art objects*
 - *SCMA cultivates museum and visual literacy*

As stated prominently in our mission statement, the Smith College Museum of Art is first and foremost an integral resource for the work and teaching of Smith College. As a central part of our mission-driven work, the Museum's interpretive programming seeks to engage all of our visitors in "meaningful and memorable encounters with exceptional art" to promote "transformative experiences" and cultivate "museum and visual literacy."

Guiding Principles

- We affirm that original works of art possess the following qualities that provide for meaningful learning:
 - They connect to a person emotionally and spiritually.
 - They are tangible primary sources from a particular cultural moment.
 - They provide a human connection to another time and place.
 - Active looking (including observing, describing, analyzing, and interpreting) builds visual literacy skills.
 - They can provide a clear focus and starting point to build a meaningful, wide-ranging discourse.
- We respect and acknowledge the value of multiple perspectives and viewpoints and seek to create interpretation, exhibitions, and programs that embody a collaborative, non-authoritative, participatory model.
- We strive to work collaboratively, both internally with our museum colleagues and externally with our academic colleagues and partners.
- We strive to make the Museum a center for cross-disciplinary learning, collaboration, and connection.

Audience

We view Smith students as our primary audience, and the work and programming for secondary audiences serves our learning goals for Smith students. In creating programs for our broader communities, we seek to serve as a model for how museums can engage students throughout their lives.

Interpretive Goals

Our interpretive goals seek to define the ways in which transformative experiences with art objects can engage with the largest goals of the Smith curriculum and the lifelong learning of our broader communities.

With the recognition of the unique value of art at their core, our interpretive goals are structured around the capacities that Smith faculty have identified as essential for students to develop during their time at Smith, through experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.¹ We believe these goals are relevant to all the audiences we serve. They form the foundation for the layered interpretive strategies we employ to achieve our impacts for the full spectrum of our visitors.

SCMA's interpretive programming and the presentation of the collection (i.e. object display, interpretation, programming, and marketing) should be fully integrated in concept and practice in support of these goals as they apply to disciplines across the Smith curriculum and to lifelong learning of all SCMA visitors.

Goal: Cultivate the ability to think critically and analytically and to convey knowledge and understanding.

In support of this goal, SCMA's collection will be presented:

- To encourage close, analytical looking with interpretive materials that draw visitors' attention to visual details and multiple perspectives;
- To accommodate different points of view with information presented in a layered fashion, allowing visitors to form their own interpretations and to bring their own point of view to an encounter with a work of art;
- To deepen visitors' museum literacy skills for analyzing and critiquing the museum as an institution;
- To provide opportunities for visitors to share knowledge, experiences, and ideas with each other.

Goal: Create meaning through a historical and comparative perspective.

In support of this goal, SCMA's collection will be presented:

- To clearly situate works of art within cultural and historical frameworks;
- To encourage comparative understanding of works of art;
- To support multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to thinking and learning;
- To reflect the history and intentionality of the way the collection was formed and continues to develop.

Goal: Develop an informed global citizenry.

In support of this goal, SCMA's collection will be presented:

- To engage with Smith's global curriculum and the diversity of its student body and surrounding communities;
- To encourage meaningful connection with cultures and communities beyond one's own;
- To demonstrate a respect for diverse value systems and complex cultural histories;
- To encourage tolerance of diverse perspectives by making the Museum a welcoming space for dialogue.

¹ See *The Smith Design for Learning: A Plan to Reimagine a Liberal Arts Education*. Smith College, 2007; p. 5.