**Mead Reimagined:**

**A Fresh Look at Amherst College's Art Collection**

AMHERST, Mass. – On Sept. 8, the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College unveils its renovated main gallery and opens new exhibitions and installations that offer a fresh perspective on the college's art collection. All are invited to attend the opening and reception on Thursday, Sept. 8, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., which is free and open to the public.

Central to the grand reopening are architectural and design changes that encourage deep and immediate visitor engagement with several centuries of world art in a range of media. "This reinstallation is a pivotal opportunity to rethink the collection," says David E. Little, Mead director and chief curator, "allowing us to engage students, professors and the public in new ways with art across time and the globe."

**"Accumulations" in the renovated main gallery**

The Mead's main gallery, Fairchild Gallery, has been opened up to reveal a bright, expansive and contemporary space. Here, the exhibition "Accumulations: 5,000 Years of Objects, Fictions, and Conversations" showcases a selection of artworks and cultural objects from the Mead's wide-ranging collection. It underscores how museum collections are built, in part, by chance, creating an accumulation of diverse art spanning centuries, largely thanks to the individual collecting passions and generosity of supporters.

"Works are displayed in a space that situates visitors as active 21st-century viewers and interpreters," Little says. "In the spirit of the liberal arts, we want to create a museum that sparks the imagination and inspires debate."

**African, American, European and Russian collections on view**

The remaining galleries feature curatorial reinterpretations of the Mead's well-regarded holdings of African, American, European and Russian art.

"Art From Africa: A Selection of Works Given by Amherst Collectors and Scholars" presents an array of African art, including many ritual objects used in divination rites in Central and West Africa. The majority of the works on view were gifts of two brothers, both Amherst alumni, who collected African art: Barry Maurer, Class of 1959, and Evan Maurer, Class of 1966. Evan Maurer, the former Director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, is a respected scholar of African and Native American art.

American art, the foundation of Amherst's collection, is showcased in "The American Collection: Two Centuries of Art at Amherst College." Amherst's American art collection actually predates the Mead, says Vanja Malloy, curator of American art. "George Dupont Pratt and Herbert Lee Pratt, two Amherst alumni who were brothers, donated hundreds of significant American artworks to the College in the 1930s and '40s," Malloy says. "The Mead opened to house those works, and hundreds more, in 1949." Representing over two centuries of American art and artistry - and of changing culture, artistic styles and perspectives - the works on view chart the early days in the building of a nation, and a museum.

The founding of museums is also a theme of "Precious: Finding the Wondrous in the Mead's European Art Collection," organized by Nicola Courtright, William McCall Vickery 1957 Professor of the History of Art. The exhibition looks at how, in the past, European princes, scholars and merchants gathered objects that fascinated them. From these private collections, museums as we know them today emerged.

Russian art is the focus of "From Russia With Love: Selections from the Thomas P. Whitney, Class of 1937, Collection of Russian Art." Owing to his knowledge of Russia and the Russian language, Thomas P. Whitney got a job in the foreign service that brought him to Russia during World War II. "His experience of life in the Soviet Union and his encounters with Russia's cultural elites planted the seed of his collection," says Bettina Jungen, Thomas P. Whitney, Class of 1937, Curator of Russian Art. Late in the twentieth century, Whitney gave most of his collection of art, books and manuscripts to Amherst College.

**Contemporary artist projects**

The Mead also launches two contemporary artist projects this fall.

The museum's historic Rotherwas Room meets contemporary art in "Rotherwas Project 1: Amanda Valdez, Ladies' Night." The works of Seattle-born, New York-based artist Amanda Valdez bring a new palette and iconography to the historic wood-paneled room. Influenced by feminism, quilt design and non-Western as well as Western art, Ms. Valdez creates abstract forms using paint, fabric and embroidery on canvas. The Rotherwas Project is slated to be a biannual series.

"Hall Walls: Rico Gatson" marks another first for the Mead, inaugurating an annual project of site-specific installations that activate a previously uncurated space in a hallway. "We want students to think about art in every nook and cranny of the museum," says Little. Working throughout the fall, Rico Gaston will install the mural in collaboration with Amherst students.

**Opening and Reception on Thursday, Sept. 8, 5:30-7:30 p.m.**

The Mead invites the public to attend the opening and reception on Thursday, Sept. 8, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Admission to the Mead is free.

**About the Mead Art Museum**

Situated in the vibrant Five Colleges academic community of Western Massachusetts, the Mead Art Museum serves as a laboratory for interdisciplinary research and innovative teaching involving original works of art. An accredited member of the American Alliance of Museums, the Mead participates in Museums10, a regional cultural collaboration.

The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round, and until midnight on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday during the academic term.

Admission to the museum is free and open to the public. For more information, including a searchable catalogue of the collection and a complete schedule of exhibitions and events, please visit [amherst.edu/mead](http://www.amherst.edu/mead), or call 413/542-2335.