

Build it, and it will grow

New space gives NMU's permanent art collection room to breathe

Art lovers in the Upper Peninsula had a lot to be excited about with the opening of the new DeVos Art Museum on Northern Michigan University's campus about a year ago. The museum has been "enjoying a phenomenal amount of interest," according to Wayne Francis, its director.

One of the largest benefits of the new museum is the designated display area for the permanent collection, which allows for a new exhibit each semester.

"Today, more people can see more of our permanent collection than ever before. Having the kind of space to display and store the permanent collection that we have now is incredible," Francis said.

With the opening of DeVos, Northern has also enjoyed an increase in donations to its permanent collection. While Northern had a substantial permanent collection before the new space, Francis said few had the opportunity to see it because the Lee Hall Gallery display space was primarily reserved for visiting and student exhibits. The tight quarters in the Lee Hall storage area also made moving art in and out of the area difficult.

The new storage area, on the other hand, is "to die for," according to Francis. "It's state of the art and environmentally controlled. We have plenty of security and room to store the art properly, so we know we can really maintain and care for pieces the way they should be."

Having the permanent collection regularly on display also has been a boon for a number of academic departments.

"Many classes find the permanent art collection to be a valuable learning tool. Of course art classes use the collection all the time to study technique and style, but there are other classes that use the collection, too. English composition classes come to the museum and use the art when learning to write descriptive and creative narrative. History classes come to explore art pieces to learn about culture and society of a particular time period. Both university and K-12 classes use the pieces in our large Native American collection to learn about that culture."

Art serving an academic purpose as well providing cultural enjoyment are the main reasons Francis believes NMU's permanent collection is attractive to donors.

"People who love a particular piece or collection are often those who want others to be able to experience the same pleasure, and when they know the art can be used by students, they are especially pleased," he said.

Dan DeVos, former chair of the NMU Board of Trustees, agrees.

"Our family is proud of the DeVos Art Museum on Northern's campus. Along with our personal gifts to the collection, we've encouraged friends and colleagues to contribute from their collections pieces that they would like to see placed in an outstanding art learning environment," said DeVos, whose family's foundation gift helped build the new museum and for whom the facility is named.

Francis said that through the efforts of the DeVos family, a num-

ber of new pieces have been recently added to the collection, including some Western and contemporary pieces. Additionally, the museum also received a significant corporate donation to buy art.

Over the next three years, Francis has three specific goals for NMU's permanent collection. These include adding more pieces by prominent regional artists, expanding both the Native American and Japanese collections, and acquiring more significant contemporary pieces.

"Since we serve the Upper Peninsula, we'd really like to have a large collection of work from the many fine U.P. artists," said Francis, who added that 30 pieces from U.P. artists were donated to the collection this past fall.

Persons who wish to contribute art pieces or collections to the university should contact Francis at wfrancis@nmu.edu or 906-227-1481. Gifts must be made "with no strings attached," said Francis. Northern rarely sells its gifted art, but it is standard procedure to have that option. Francis also said that it is up to the donor to give an appraised value on the piece, which will be what is used on the receipt provided to the donor for tax purposes.

"We've received incredible pieces over the years," said Francis. "Some people donate art for the tax benefits, but most gifts are made because donors want their pieces and collections to have a legacy beyond just sitting in someone's attic after they are gone. Here at NMU, their art can have a long and productive life."

—Cindy Paavola '84 BS

The permanent collection gallery at Northern Michigan University's DeVos Art Museum



Bear Mask
Johnathon Henderson
Northwest Coast Native American
Wood, fur, polychrome



Canto 17
Linda Ferguson
Oil on canvas



Shaman Dancer
Artist unknown
Inuit
Fossil whale bone



Man with Opium Pipe
Kunioshi
Japanese wood block print



Container
Julie Risak
Ceramic



Imaginations and Objects of the Future
Salvador Dalí
Lithograph, collage, etching

Photography by Bill Sampson