

# News and Events

## LAMONT GALLERY: A SPACE FOR TEACHING

AROUND THE TABLE

Since joining Exeter in 2003, Lamont Gallery Director Karen Burgess Smith has worked to ensure that the gallery not only brings in high-caliber shows that appeal to the general public, but that it also serves as a resource for all academic departments. To that end, she has augmented the schedule of major shows by mounting smaller shows in the gallery's side bays that speak to particular community interests. The show "On Loan and Out of the Vault," for example, was born last year when a faculty member approached Smith about putting together something for a class on African history. For that show, Smith and gallery manager Christine Woods pulled African pieces from the Academy's collection and paired them with a tabletop Calder stabile on loan from West Coast collectors. "A show can offer classes outside of the art department an avenue to the study of culture—a bird's-eye view via art," says Smith. "Not only did students benefit from seeing the African pieces, it was also an opportunity for me to learn more about our collection and the role these pieces play in the cultures they come from."

"I feel tremendous support for what we do," says Smith, who recently began meeting with academic department heads to let them know what is being planned (the gallery schedules shows two or three years in advance) and to find out what kinds of shows will dovetail with their curricula. She has been very impressed with the quality of teaching she has observed at Exeter.

"Teachers here challenge students to find what inspires them, and more so than is typical at the high school level," she says. Art classes study exhibits to investigate technique and find inspiration, creative writing classes frequently use the gallery as a springboard for writing assignments and discussions about the creative process, and visiting artists often have more than their portfolios to share with Exeter students.

Last year, Oscar Caballero, a Venezuelan-born artist featured in the show "Aliens in America: Others in the USA," met with Spanish classes at the gallery to discuss his work in his native language. Summer school art and science classes spent time with the show "From Audubon to Wetzel," which featured a selection of ornithological prints from the Phillips Collection made available by Claire Phillips, widow of John Phillips '30.

Another important function of the gallery is to showcase student work, which not only generates dialogue within the campus community, but also serves as ambassador to communities outside the school. Area schools often bring students of all ages to the gallery, and what they discover is sometimes surprising. Telling one of her favorite gallery stories, Smith recalls watching a small group of special-needs children walk through a student show. One child was clearly not engaged until she saw the nameplate next to one of the pieces on display. "My buddy!" she cried, upon discovering in this new context the name of the student she had come to know through ESSO's Best Buddy program, which pairs Exonians and area special-needs children. She had discovered a new dimension to her own culture. In the interest of broadening the context of art at Exeter, Smith, Woods and the art department have begun framing and installing student works around campus and hope to plan a community show highlighting some of the "hidden talent" among Exeter's faculty and staff. ●

*A wooden bird mask from the Bobo people and a seated hunter bronze from the Senufo people in Africa, both gifts from James Perrin '46, are among the items that have come "out of the vault" at the Lamont Gallery for special exhibits designed to complement academic curricula.*

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