



The Bellarmine Museum of Art

An Inspiring New Venue at Fairfield University

FOR YEARS, IT HAS BEEN JUST A BASEMENT: A SPACE FOR FURNITURE THAT HAD OUTLASTED ITS USEFULNESS OR WAS IN NEED OF REPAIR; A HAVEN FOR FILING CABINETS FILLED WITH DOCUMENTS THAT ONE DAY MIGHT BE USEFUL; A STORAGE SPOT FOR PARTY CHAIRS HAULED UPSTAIRS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS. AND, MANY YEARS AGO, CHILDREN ROMPED IN THE BASEMENT AND TESTED THEIR SKILLS IN THE BOWLING ALLEY THAT HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED. BUT ALL THAT IS CHANGING IN OCTOBER, WHEN THE NEW BELLARMINE MUSEUM OF ART AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY OPENS ITS DOORS.

More than five years in the planning, the Museum, a key component of an initiative to enhance the teaching of art history and the humanities at Fairfield, is situated on the lower level of the University's signature building on campus, Bellarmine Hall. This grand residence was designed for Walter B. Lashar, a Bridgeport industrialist. Originally called "Hearthstone Hall", a nod to its 13 original fireplaces, the majestic structure features an eclectic range of period styles including Tudor, Gothic, Adamesque and *Chinoserie*. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) purchased the home from the town of Fairfield in 1942, and

renamed it Bellarmine Hall, in honor of St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., (1542-1621) cardinal and patron saint of the University. It was first used as a residence for Fairfield's Jesuit community. It now houses the offices of the President, the facilitator of Mission and Identity, and the staffs of the divisions of Advancement, and Marketing and Communications.

The total project cost for the Bellarmine Museum is \$5.7 million, including renovation and funds to endow staff positions, curriculum development and community outreach programming. The museum was designed by Jim Childress, FAIA, and Stephen Holmes, AIA, of Centerbrook Architects,

and Planners of Centerbrook, Connecticut, designers of the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College, the Williams College Museum of Art, the Kriebler Gallery of the Florence Griswold Museum, and the Fairfield Museum and History Center among others.

Commenting on the project, Childress says it was a joy to work within such a beautiful building. "The thick concrete walls in the catacomb-like basement of the original mansion conveyed a sense of mystery. When you step through the small basement door from the first floor lobby, you discover a place of refuge away from the world," he notes. "The gallery form we designed was inspired by an almost complete cruciform plan that we discovered in the basement."

He adds that the substantial change in elevation from the basement hall to the main gallery allowed for the design of large stairs reminiscent of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence. "So we transformed the stairs into a special entry to the galleries, and we exposed some of the original concrete arches leading to a side gallery. We also used modern materials and textures sympathetic to the original Bellarmine Hall and The Cloisters (the Medieval branch of

the Metropolitan Museum of Art)," says Childress.

The Bellarmine contains three principal galleries, and will display a rich and varied collection of paintings, sculpture and decorative art objects. The Museum's central gallery is known as The Frank and Clara Meditz Gallery, named in honor of the parents of the lead donor to the Bellarmine, John Meditz '70, a Fairfield trustee and Vice Chairman of Horizon Asset Management Inc. in New York. The Gallery, which evokes an early Christian basilica in plan, will showcase ten paintings from the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods – works that were gifted to the University by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation via Bridgeport's Discovery Museum. In one smaller side gallery and in a central corridor, a large selection of historic plaster casts after important works from ancient Greece and Rome, including eight casts that were recently donated to the University by the Acropolis Museum in Athens, will be displayed.

In a second side gallery, the Museum will showcase a range of non-Western art objects, including pre-Columbian vessels, 19th-century Southeast Asian sculptures and African masks. Through a unique partnership with the Metropolitan

by Martha F. Milcarek



1) Martin van Meytens (attrib.), *Portrait of a Boy*, c. 1725-30*. 2) Basilio Lasinio, *Rustic Scene*, c. 1780*. 3) Niccolò dell'Abate (circle of), *Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1550*. 4) Socratis Mavrommatis, *Victorious Athlete from Souinion* (photograph), 2005. 5) Niccolò di Segna (circle of), *St. Andrew*, mid-1400s. 6) Paolo de Matteis, *Andromeda and Perseus*, c. 1710*. 7) Lombard School, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1485-1490*. 8) Socratis Mavrommatis, *The Parthenon, North frieze, detail of male figure 3, block 2* (photograph), 1982. Gifted by the Acropolis Museum, Athens, Greece. 9) Anonymous, *Head of Buddha, southeast Asian, 17th-19th century*. 10) Bellarmine Hall, 1920, Fairfield University. 11) Priamo della Quercia, *Judgment Scene*, early 1440s*. 12) Anonymous, *Standing Female Figure, Indian, 19th-20th century*.

*Samuel H. Kress Collection via the Discovery Museum, Bridgeport, CT.

Museum of Art/The Cloisters Museum, the Bellarmine is also fortunate enough to be receiving twenty Celtic and Medieval objects on loans of various periods.

Fairfield's President, Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J., explains that the Museum's impact will be felt campus-wide and beyond. "The arts share a central role in Fairfield's core curriculum and in the aesthetic experience of all our students who seek out the nearly 500-year-old tradition of a Jesuit education steeped in the liberal arts. The Bellarmine will serve as a home for our growing art collection, and provide an invaluable resource of works of art available for study on campus. Additionally, the local community and the wider regional community will have opportunities to come learn, explore, and enjoy through special exhibitions, tours, lectures and workshops."

Jill Deupi, J.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of art history in Fairfield's Department of Visual and Performing arts and director of the Bellarmine Museum, says: "There is no doubt that the Bellarmine Museum will substantially enhance the art history program and what it has to offer. My colleagues and I already use many of the objects slated for the museum with great regularity and success. The process of hands-on learning will only be facilitated when these works are all gathered together in one central location—a location that will also feature a multi-media, smART classroom onsite."

As Father von Arx suggests, the museum is intended as a resource for all individuals on campus, as well as, indeed, the wider community. Deupi, for example, envisions temporary exhibitions, curated by unexpected departments on campus – such as nursing or sociology – in the Bellarmine, thus allowing faculty, students and casual visitors alike to

engage with and benefit from the museum's collections through novel approaches unique to a given discipline.

Deupi says Fairfield alumni, supporters and members of the surrounding communities will also be welcomed in the galleries during the Bellarmine's opening hours (M-F, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. while the University is in session). They will equally be afforded a growing range of learning opportunities, including tours, lectures and workshops, as the museum's programming develops and expands. To that end, Deupi is working with an intern to develop activities and events for younger children and their parents, as well as high school students, in which they may experience the art first-hand and, in some instances, be afforded the opportunity for longer-term, targeted learning.

The Bellarmine will join an already successful venue for art on campus, the Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery, housed in the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts. Walsh Gallery Director Diana Mille, Ph.D., said, "I can think of no better venue to preserve the integrity of Fairfield University's new, permanent and on-loan collections. As a highly visible symbol on campus, The Bellarmine Museum of Art will carry forward – with dignity and commitment – many aspects of Fairfield's mission and will serve as a complement to the Walsh Gallery's focus on Modern and Contemporary art. "I look forward to collaborating with Dr. Deupi in co-hosting a variety of temporary exhibitions that will maximize our individual resources to present a broader perspective of art, enhanced educational materials and accompanying lectures," Mille said.

The Museum will also be a valuable resource, complementing Fairfield's nationally recognized study-abroad

program at the Florence University of the Arts in Florence, Italy, where students from a multitude of universities interact in an academic environment almost entirely devoted to the humanities. The Florence program offers courses in art history and museum studies, subjects whose teachings can be put into practice by returning students through the Bellarmine's internship program.

The Bellarmine Museum of Art at Fairfield University is truly a collaborative venture. First came the vision from faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, then buy-in from administrators who understood its fit within the University's mission and strategic plan. Next, up stepped Meditz, a dedicated alumnus, a lover of history and art, and a self-confessed frustrated architect, who provided \$2.5 million to jumpstart the project. The National Endowment for the Humanities has also provided generous support through its award of a \$500,000 four-to-one challenge grant. Other donors include The Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the Charles and Mabel P. Jost Foundation. The University is currently seeking additional support for the project. For additional information on the project's funding and support, please contact Stephanie Frost, Vice President for Advancement at 203-254-4030.

The University community will celebrate the opening in early October with a dedication ceremony and a series of special receptions for Museum donors, the University community, educators and museum professionals. Doors will open to the public on Monday, October 25. For more information on the Bellarmine, visit www.fairfield.edu/arts.