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INSIDE TRACK

# A Campus Art Museum Grows

BY KELLY COMPTON



As America's second-oldest institution of higher learning (1693) and top-ranked "Public Ivy," the College of William & Mary (W&M) possesses a fascinating history, a long roster of distinguished alumni, and the usual attributes of a liberal arts research university. Oddly enough, up-to-date facilities for the fine and performing arts are notably absent on its verdant campus in historic Williamsburg, Virginia. This situation is particularly curious in light of W&M's being the first American college to include the fine arts in its curriculum: in 1779, Rev. Robert Andrews (c. 1747-1804) was appointed as professor to teach "Sculpture, Painting, Gardening, Music, Architecture, Poetry, Oratory, and Criticism." He is commemorated in the name of Andrews Hall, where art history and studio art are taught today.

Opened in 1967, Andrews Hall stands on a site where considerable attention had been focused three decades earlier. In 1936, W&M hired young Leslie Cheek, Jr. to head its newly revived fine arts department. Scion of the family that sold Maxwell House Coffee to General Foods, Cheek had recently helped his parents create Cheekwood, the Georgian



A RENDERING OF THE MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART, DESIGNED BY ABBOTT ASSOCIATES (WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA) AND OPENED IN 1983

Revival estate in Nashville now operated as an art museum and botanic garden; after leaving W&M, he held long, colorful directorships at the Baltimore Museum of Art and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

In his second year in Williamsburg, however, Cheek staged an international competition to design his department's buildings, and the young Eero Saarinen's winning entry would surely have become a modernist icon had funds been raised to construct it. Daringly progressive in the context of 1930s Virginia, Cheek

DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ (1599-1660)

*APOLLO IN THE FORGE OF VULCAN*

c. 1630, OIL ON CANVAS, 17 1/4 x 22 3/4 IN.

ON LOAN TO THE MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART FROM THE LAURO COLLECTION (NAPLES, ITALY), THIS IS THE FINAL COMPOSITIONAL SKETCH FOR THE FINISHED VERSION NOW IN THE MUSEO DEL PRADO, MADRID.





FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE (1841–1870)

THE BEACH AT SAINTE-ADRESSE

1865, OIL ON CANVAS, 23 x 55 1/8 IN.

ON LOAN THIS AUTUMN TO THE MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART FROM ATLANTA'S HIGH MUSEUM OF ART

nonetheless succeeded in bringing such titans as Frank Lloyd Wright and Georgia O'Keeffe to lecture and exhibit.

Like many Southern universities, W&M lacked an art museum until well into the 20th century; in 1983, Joseph L. and Margaret F. Muscarelle '27 provided the lead gift needed to open the Muscarelle Museum of Art. This small facility's founding director was Dr. Glenn D. Lowry, who soon moved on to successfully lead other institutions, currently New York's Museum of Modern Art. The Muscarelle quickly became the repository of W&M's collection of official portraits, as well as the random — though often fascinating — artworks that any college inevitably acquires through gifts over many decades. After some years of being generally tangential, and then a 2002 budget cut of almost 90 percent, the museum perked up in 2005, when its increasingly active board hired as director Dr. Aaron H. De Groft '88, an expert in Renaissance and Baroque art who had worked previously at Sarasota's John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

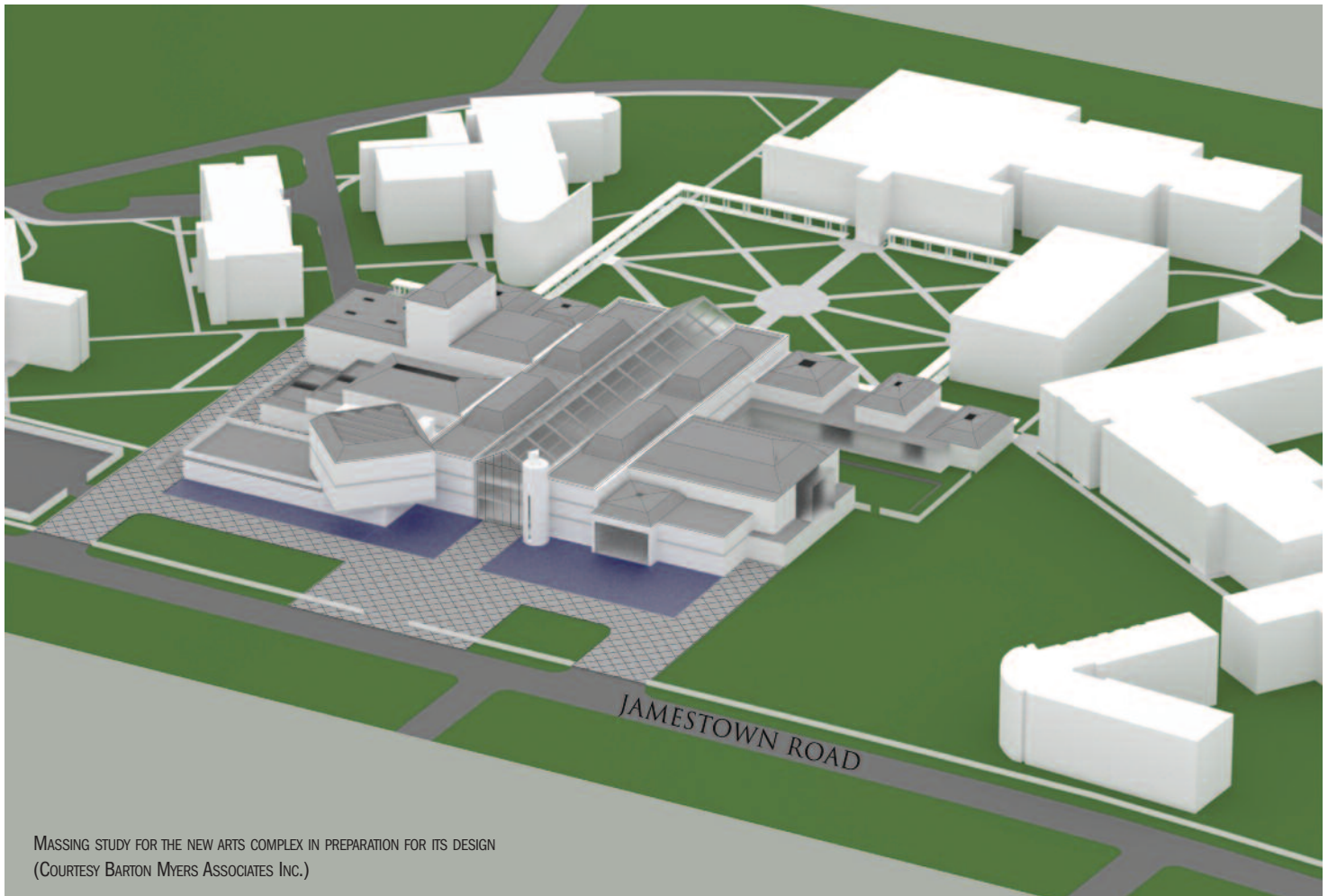
#### A BURST OF ENERGY

As an alumnus returning to campus with a fresh eye, De Groft saw that W&M's approximately 7,000 students should be more closely involved in the Muscarelle, as should the community growing rapidly around them. (Williamsburg now has 60,000 residents, while Richmond, to the west, has 800,000, and the Hampton Roads region, including Norfolk and Newport News, has 1.5 million.) De Groft began building momentum by securing the funds needed to organize and borrow more significant exhibitions; recent projects have highlighted Andy Warhol, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and the Wyeth family, and have contained important loans from Florence's Uffizi Gallery, Casa Buonarroti, and Medici Collections, as well as London's Dulwich Picture Gallery. In its full-page review of *Michelangelo: Anatomy as Architecture*, *The Wall Street Journal* rightly observed, "The advantage of seeing a show

of Michelangelo's drawings in Williamsburg, as opposed to Rome or London, is clear — even on a 'crowded' day, it is actually possible to have the drawings to yourself. This doubles the intimacy of the experience — you can see the artist at work, as if peering over his shoulder."

De Groft's knack for landing intriguing shows on Renaissance and Baroque art derives not only from his own connections, but also from the international goodwill generated in these fields by W&M professor emeritus Miles Chappell and John T. Spike, the Florence-based scholar who is spending 2011 teaching at W&M. Suitably impressed are the very private Neapolitan collectors Francesco and Oletta Lauro, who have agreed to lend 45 works late in 2012 (*Love and War: Masterpieces of Renaissance and Baroque Painting from the Lauro Collection*). Coming much sooner (October 22, 2011-January 22, 2012) is a show of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterworks from Atlanta's High Museum of Art, plus presentations of abstract paintings by Virginia native Judith Godwin (b. 1930) and of the Kiowa Five, a group of Native American artists who lived in the first half of the 20th century.

As a result of this more energetic programming, attendance at the Muscarelle has jumped by 50,000 people annually, while memberships have more than tripled within five years. Equally important have been the donation and purchase of roughly 700 artworks for the permanent collection (now totaling just over 4,600 pieces), including works on paper by Dürer, Rembrandt, Picasso, Warhol, and Hockney. De Groft considers the Muscarelle a laboratory for learning, so ever more



MASSING STUDY FOR THE NEW ARTS COMPLEX IN PREPARATION FOR ITS DESIGN  
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students now participate in scholarly research, exhibition preparation, collection management, and promotional activities alongside the museum's ten-person staff. The Muscarelle was the first university art museum in Virginia accredited by the American Association of Museums (its third is being completed now), and is proud to have published one book or catalogue per year in the past six.

#### BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

All this activity is particularly remarkable given the Muscarelle's small, awkwardly shaped spaces. Still less adequate are the aforementioned Andrews Hall and the adjacent Phi Beta Kappa Hall (1956), which houses W&M's theater, speech, and dance department, as well as the region's largest performance auditorium (used by the Virginia Shakespeare Festival every summer). Now under discussion is a brand-new arts complex that would accommodate — in a series of interconnected buildings — the Muscarelle (with twice its current floorspace and a 250-seat auditorium for lectures); a larger theater for major performances; a black-box studio theater; a large concert hall; art-making studios; additional performance and rehearsal spaces; a coffeehouse equipped for informal performances; a lobby for large receptions; and offices for the art history, studio art, theater, speech, dance, music, and film studies programs.

An astonishing 80 percent of W&M students participate in music, studio art, dance, or theater before they reach W&M, and the college's traditional curriculum mandates that every undergraduate take a class in at least one fine or performing art. Thus every student would use the new arts complex, as would ever more local residents. This state-of-the-art facility would also help recruit more talented students and faculty, and its bringing together of disciplines currently

housed separately would probably foster interdisciplinary collaborations such as musical theater, performance art, film scoring, and playwriting.

Like all universities and all states, W&M and the Commonwealth of Virginia face enormous fiscal challenges in the decade ahead. Upgrading arts facilities may initially seem an unaffordable luxury, but two national trends suggest otherwise. First, the U.S. economy's growing reliance on the creative professions — and the intellectual property they produce — makes it more important than ever to foster creativity in students. Second, the recent enhancement of arts facilities at major universities such as Yale, Princeton, and the University of Michigan confirms that W&M's competitors recognize how the imaginative and expressive capacities of the arts infiltrate every department, making their campuses more dynamic and enticing to talented students and faculty being recruited from around the world. Today, W&M president Taylor Reveley and the Board of Visitors see the new arts complex as an unrealized priority; alas, in light of ongoing cuts in state funding, their primary focus is on retaining the college's superb faculty and guaranteeing access to the most talented students.

Wherever they reside, readers of *Fine Art Connoisseur* should keep an eye on the Muscarelle's next steps, even as they ponder how fine art is faring on campuses closer to their own homes. ■

KELLY COMPTON is a contributing writer to *Fine Art Connoisseur*.

**Information:** Muscarelle Museum of Art, College of William & Mary, Jamestown Road, Williamsburg, VA 23187, 757.221.2700, [wm.edu/muscarelle](http://wm.edu/muscarelle). On September 23, President Reveley will bestow the Muscarelle's biennial Cheek Medal on art historian Everett Fahy and television/film production designer David Crank '82. Tickets for this gala evening are available at 757.221.2709 or [wm.tix.com/event.asp?event=374715](http://wm.tix.com/event.asp?event=374715).