

Art for historic passages: Moore curates Park Towne Place

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Meghan Dougovito of Tryba Architects works with Moore students at Park Towne Place. Image courtesy of Moore.

Think of it as artistic angioplasty: In early 2016, corridors of a landmark 20th-century building will be infused with art curated by 21st-century **Moore College of Art & Design** students.

Park Towne Place Museum District Residences, on Benjamin Franklin Parkway, is undergoing a renaissance with the assistance of neighboring Moore. The east building of the complex, one of four 18-story towers, is the focus this fall for undergraduates in a curatorial studies class.

Designed as Philadelphia became a laboratory for urban planning and renewal in the late 1950s, Park Towne Place exemplifies city living. Conceived by architect Milton

Schwartz as a sculptural cluster of streamlined towers, Park Towne was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2011.

Having secured historic certification, Park Towne's owner Aimco is renovating and rebranding the 56-year-old residences to cultivate a deeper connection with their spectacular cultural surroundings. "We want to take advantage of Park Towne's unique location among the nation's most treasured art and cultural institutions," says Patti Shwayder, Aimco senior vice president. "We now have a permanent art collection and rotational

exhibits...Our partnership with Moore aims to extend art to the corridors with unique designs that complement the art vibe of the complex.”

Problem-solving curation outside the gallery

“This is really different,” says Dr. Tienfong Ho, who teaches the Moore class, in which eight students have become curators for a semester, each with her own corridor, conceiving a theme, selecting art, and obtaining permission for reproduction as adhesive wall covering for elevator lobbies and halls. They will also write text for the displays. In December each student will present her concept to representatives of Aimco and Tryba Architects. Pending approval, installation will occur early next year. Public viewing and meet-the-curators opportunities are anticipated.

The project involves many challenges not encountered in galleries and museums, Ho notes. For example, art will not be acquired but reproduced and is to remain in place indefinitely. There is also the potential for damage due to activities like moving and deliveries.

In addition, Ho explains that “students have to get releases by contacting artists directly, and what do you do if an artist says no? They’re working with corporate representatives; it’s not a school gallery, and there is a real outcome. It’s an opportunity to learn how to be a professional. We work through the constraints and do problem-solving.”

Students supply artistic sensibility

Though the students come together periodically and Ho monitors progress, much work is done independently. “This has really been a student-driven project,” says junior Ava Mallett, who chose street art as her theme. “I like bringing art designed for a public space into a private space. It should be visually appealing, but without political content, which is common in street art...It’s been nice to have Moore and Aimco give us the responsibility and put us in a position to get real-world experience.”

Mallett hopes to use the work of Brooklyn-based printmaker Swoon, whose work features block printing, hand-coloring, and floral and female forms. Mallett has also contacted the wall painter Pejac, whose point-of-view content, Mallett says, would be relevant but not off-putting.

The class also solicited work from Moore students, faculty, and alumni, and are reviewing submissions. Other themes being curated include home, Philadelphia African-American artists, and work generated by Moore over its history. Founded in 1848, it is the first and only women’s art college in the nation, with coeducational graduate studies since 2009. Its **bachelor of fine arts in curatorial studies**, the first such undergraduate program in the nation, enables students to examine the theory and practice of creating exhibitions, managing collections, and building archives.

Not to mention infusing artistic currency into historic architecture.

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