

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Clark Atlanta University Art Museum

Storing Up on Creativity

CHALLENGE

The Clark Atlanta University (CAU) Art Museum boasts two groups of items: a variety of African-American artwork and traditional African art. Together, there are more than 1,200 pieces in the university's permanent collection. Maurita Poole, PhD., is the museum's director. Trained as an anthropologist, she recognized the value in talking about art as a way of learning – about the art itself and about the culture that inspired it.

Much of the collection was stored on 44 art racks and a pair of flat files in the basement of the university's Trevor Arnett Hall. Two floors up, next to the art gallery, was a catch-all room crowded with outdated equipment and inconvenient casework. Given Dr. Poole's plans to create a hands-on "object study classroom," the older accoutrements in the room were inconvenient and served little purpose. Together, the two spaces were insufficient to achieve grander ambitions.

SOLUTION

After being led to Patterson Pope through Spacesaver, Dr. Poole connected with Sales Representative Dick Beery. Following several discussions with Dr. Poole and a survey of both of the spaces, the two agreed on a plan for the way forward.

In the basement storage area, 16 additional storage racks were added to the 44 already there. This allowed Dr. Poole to frame and hang many of the works that had previously been stored out of sight. The extra double-sided art racks, each measuring 8' x 7' allow special visitors to view hitherto out-of-sight works or pieces not currently being displayed in the university's 2,500 sq. ft. gallery.

Upstairs, in the room destined to be the object study classroom, out-of-commission conduits, casework furniture and even an old water cooler were removed. A 21' 7" long x 9' 2" high slat wall was installed along one side of the room. Here, framed paintings are hung, allowing for up-close study and analysis. In addition, 16 tables and 32 chairs – from KI – were brought in. The tables can be reconfigured according to the needs of the moment.

Additional changes are planned, as well, including glass-topped flat files



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"I'm so grateful to Dick and Patterson Pope. He was always patient, available, and was instrumental in helping me to be able to realize my goals."

Maurita Poole, PhD.
Museum Director
Clark Atlanta University Art Museum

ACHIEVEMENT

The object study classroom idea is not exclusive to CAU. Such rooms exist at schools like Yale, Cornell and Princeton to name just three. Its addition, here was something Dr. Poole felt would quickly prove itself to be an asset.

"It's important to let the students know that learning to talk about art is a process. You have to develop the curiosity and the questions the answers to which will slowly help you to understand art and what's going on in a particular piece," she said. "It's not about having all of the answers; it's a constant evolution that begins with asking new and interesting questions. This new room will let us do that that much better."



Future curators, special guests and even researchers use the classroom to study the artworks in detail and work through devising how a collection can be organized and displayed. The additional racks in the basement storage, meanwhile, allow for not only additional viewable space, but as an added showpiece for visitors and potential donors.

As for what's next?

"The difference has been so drastic. Some people are confused and think I'm done. But I think to myself, 'If you're impressed with this, just you wait.' There's so much that we need. As the room evolves, more and more people are beginning to share my understanding and my vision."

For Dr. Poole, the experience was a true success.

"I'm so grateful to Dick and Patterson Pope," she said. "Going through the whole process, he opened up a whole new world to me. He was always patient, available, and was instrumental in helping me to be able to realize my goals."

