UNH Museum of Art Reopened For Student-Run Exhibition

On April 19, the Museum of Art opened its second student-run exhibition since closing due to university budget cuts.

Cassandra Chabot, Staff Writer

On April 19, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Museum of Art held one of its first notable exhibitions since its closure. The museum is one of the major highlights of the Paul Creative Arts Center (PCAC) at UNH but was shut down in late January following university budget cuts.

The exhibition, titled “The Senior Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition,” was the second showcase since the budget cuts announcement and the first largely student-run showing.

“We have had to do this installation pretty much alone. Usually, we have a collection’s manager and the director of the museum helping us put everything up, do all the measurements, help curate the show and now it's all fallen on us,” said Erin McKeen, a fourth-year fine arts undergraduate student.

This means that the work is being done without the guidance and facilitation of experienced staff. In addition to a lack of professional direction, the museum’s traditional protections are also absent, including heating, cooling and lighting maintenance, as well as insurance for the pieces being displayed.

Yet the space spoke for itself, with a wide-open layout, high ceilings and a staircase to the bottom floor, illuminated softly by spotlights. From downstairs, the sound of music traveled through the opening in the middle of the floor. To the right of the entrance, an enormous octopus began the visitor's walk through the showcase, almost taking up the entire length of one wall; many of the pieces related to water and nature, though some ventured into the abstract, like the way light travels through objects.
Before being shut down, the museum was open for nearly 60 years, offering a wide variety of exhibitions throughout its time. Since the Director of the Museum of Art, Kristina Durocher, published her farewell address on January 26, the space has gone largely unused. That is until students banded together to present their achievements.

“The art museum is no longer a museum,” McKeen said. “It is a gallery space with no current dedicated stewards. It is under the control of the department, which has enabled us to work in here.”

For many students in the Fine Arts program, this will be one of the only times their work will be showcased in a professional manner. Students have the ability to sell their works, gain recognition from professors and peers and feel a sense of completion as the year comes to an end that they would not have gotten otherwise.

McKeen and other students participating in the exhibition worked tirelessly to make the event happen; hanging pieces, taking down pieces, rehanging pieces, painting walls and moving walls until everything looked perfect.

The work paid off. The Museum of Art saw high foot traffic at the opening of the exhibition on April 19 from 5 to 8 p.m. and it will run until May 11. Bouquets of flowers sat at the bottom of paintings as people congregated on viewing benches. The chatter of families and professors filled the room with whispers of “Congratulations” and “I’m so proud of you.”