

MAINE Destination

By Laura Beach



With the new addition of the Alford-Lunder Pavilion, the Colby College Museum of Art confirms its importance for art lovers and its commitment to arts education in the wider community



Sharon Corwin remembers her first introduction to Maine in 2003. It was April. And dark. “Moose Crossing” signs punctuated the indistinct landscape as she headed north on I-95.

In the light of day, Corwin, a Berkeley-trained art historian who came to the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville as its first Lunder Curator of American Art and stayed to become the institution’s director, discovered something altogether more magical. Far from the world’s acknowledged art capitals was a small school with a grand ambition for a major collection of American art. Its progressive spirit and intimate scale fostered imaginative intellectual exchange. “I knew that it was a collection that I wanted to work with for years to come,” Corwin says.

Colby will accomplish its longstanding objective in July when it opens the Alford-Lunder Family Pavilion, a debut formally marking the transfer of Peter and Paula Lunder’s collection of more than five hundred works, most of them American, to the museum. Budgeted at \$15 million, the new wing, a three-story glass and granite box designed by Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects of Los Angeles, adds twenty-six-thousand square feet of new space.

Despite its proximity to the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture about twenty miles north, the central Maine museum, a little over an hour from Portland, is no homage to home-grown talent. Neither is a visitor deprived of local views, which range from Virgil Williams’s high-key rendering of Mount

Fig. 1. Neoclassical sculpture was one of the Lunders’ first collecting interests. *Undine* by Joseph Mozier (1812–1870), a marble of c. 1866, dominates this view of “The Seasons” gallery. The central painting is *Spirit of Autumn* by George Inness (1853–1926), 1891.

Fig. 2. *Fishing* by Winslow Homer (1836–1910), 1878. Signed and dated “HOMER 1878” at lower right. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 7 by 8 ½ inches. In this ode to boyhood, Homer, one of the collectors’ favorite artists, uses opaque pigment to heighten the sensation of sunshine.

Fig. 3. The opening of the Alford-Lunder Family Pavilion, a mixed-use space designed by Los Angeles architect Frederick Fisher, marks the transfer of the Lunder art collection to Colby College. *Wall Drawing #559*, a three-story conceptual work by Sol Lewitt (1928–2007), 1996, redrawn in 2013, is visible through the glass. At the right is the Lunder Wing, completed in 1999. *Rendering courtesy of Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects.*



American Myths

Fig. 4. From left to right are *Hudson Valley from Catskill Clove* by Alfred Thompson Bricher (1837–1908), 1861; Charles Bird King's *Red Jacket A Distinguished Seneca Chief* (Fig. 5) and *Au Pantan Go Mahas Chief (Big Elk) Great Orator*, 1834; and *Landscape with Fisherman* by George Caleb Bingham (1811–1879), c. 1845–1850.

Fig. 5. *Red Jacket A Distinguished Seneca Chief* by Charles Bird King (1785–1862), 1833. Oil on wood, 17 7/8 by 12 3/4 inches. This is one of three depictions of great American orators commissioned by J. B. Dunlop, a Scot, in 1833. The Lunders acquired the paintings, which remained in a Scottish castle for 166 years and are still in their original frames, in 2002. The pragmatic chief wears a British red coat with the silver peace medal (now in the Buffalo History Museum) given to him by George Washington.



Katahdin, painted in 1870 (Fig. 8), to recent oils by Richard Estes and Alex Katz, a museum benefactor and member of its board of governors. *Fishing*, a sun-dappled childhood idyll of 1878, is a tiny triumph and one of a handful of works in the collection by Winslow Homer, one of the Lunders' favorite artists (Fig. 2).

The couple, Maine residents who began collecting in the 1970s, look to tell a bigger story. If the collection, valued at more than \$100 million, has a gravitational center it is art made in the decades before and after the Civil War, when America came to terms with itself, embracing a potential as expansive as its frontiers and finding its footing on the world stage, at home

reckoning with the savage costs of liberty for all.

It is a story that resonates at Colby. Since 1820 the two-hundred-year-old institution has welcomed all religions. It formed the original campus antislavery society in 1833 and became the first New England men's college to admit women in 1871. The Civil War depleted its ranks and left it nearly destitute.

Colby's 714-acre campus is dotted with traditional red brick buildings. In winter, the long view from the 1939 Miller Library down Mayflower Hill—a name that underscores the privilege that inevitably separates the elite school, one of the so-called Little Ivies, from working-class Waterville—recalls Frederic Church's panoramic *View*

Fig. 6. *Agathon to Erosanthe (Votive Wreath)* by John La Farge (1835–1910), 1861. Inscribed “Erosanthe is beautiful” and “L.L.F MDCCCLXI” at lower center. Oil on canvas, 23 by 13 inches. LaFarge’s floral still life has been variously interpreted as a tribute to his new wife and a memorial to war. The Greek inscription refers to Plato’s *Symposium*.

Fig. 7. A symbolic nod to the abolitionist movement, *The Party in the Maple Sugar Camp*, left, is by Eastman Johnson (1824–1906), c. 1861–1866. The bronze in the corner is *The Wounded Scout: A Friend in the Swamp* by John Rogers (1829–1904), 1864; to its right hangs *A Twilight in the Adirondacks* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880), 1864.

Fig. 8. *View of Mt. Katabdin from the West Bank of the Penobscot River* by Virgil Williams (1830–1866), 1870. Signed and dated “V. Williams 1870” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 26 ¼ by 40 inches.



The Civil War and Its Echoes

from *Olana in the Snow* (Fig. 11), an oil sketch of around 1871 that is a gift from the Lunders. With its loosely brushed surface and moody attention to atmosphere, it is one of many pictures, says Connecticut art dealer Thomas Colville, that illustrate the couple’s sheer love of artistic process and appreciation of nuance.

Colville belongs to the circle of dealers and curators who advise the Lunders, who settled in Waterville in 1959. A 1956 Colby graduate and member of the museum’s board of governors, Peter Lunder succeeded his uncle Harold Alfond as president of the Dexter Shoe Company. The family sold the business to Berkshire Hathaway in 1993 and has





since emerged as a major philanthropic force in Maine and elsewhere, with a highly developed commitment to education and the arts.

One of the Lunders' first acquisitions, purchased in 1972, was Henri Fantin-Latour's *Carnations of All Sorts*, an elegant 1872 oil that anticipated their taste for refined meditations on beauty, from the luminous Hudson River school canvases of Alfred Bricher and Sanford Robinson Gifford to the overt aestheticism of James McNeill Whistler and Thomas Wilmer Dewing and the graceful sculptural silhouettes of Joseph Mozier, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Elie Nadelman. "Peter and Paula joined a patrons group here and then there was a kind of moment," says Elizabeth Broun, the Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, who has

The Seasons

Fig. 9. The sculptures are *Dancer and Gazelles* by Paulanship (1885–1966), bronze, 1916, and Mozier’s *Undine*. Left to right on the walls are Inness’s *Spirit of Autumn*; two versions of *Evening on the Beach* by Homer, a drawing of 1871 and an oil of c. 1871–1878; Gifford’s *The Marshes of the Hudson*, 1878; *Pittsburgh, Winter*, a charcoal by Joseph Stella (1877–1946); and, at the far right, Inness’s *Summer Evening, Montclair, New Jersey*, 1892.

Fig. 10. *East Boothbay Harbor, Maine* by Willard Leroy Metcalf (1858–1925), 1904. Signed and dated “W.L. Metcalf, 04” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 26 by 29 inches. This impressionist landscape is among a handful of Maine views in the Lunder Collection.

Fig. 11. *View from Olana in the Snow* by Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), c.1871. Oil on paper, 13 ½ by 21 ¼ inches. This study was painted about six months after Church began construction at Olana, his house on the Hudson. It is the largest and most dramatic of his twenty surviving winter scenes, none of which seems to have been publicly exhibited or sold.



known the couple for two decades. “They are personally very modest but love the state of Maine. Once they decided that their collection would go to Colby they wanted only the best.”

A petite woman with a warm, inclusive manner who reared her children in Waterville, helping out in the public schools, Paula Lunder began volunteering at Colby’s museum in the 1980s. She familiarized herself with the collection, now more than eight thousand objects, by entering records into a vintage Apple computer, and enjoyed auditing Colby classes.

“I really got a sense of what was going on. What impressed me most, truthfully, was the passionate engagement of students and professors. The museum’s director at the time, Hugh J. Gorley III, drew us all in. He had an eye for art and a talent for developing friendships,” Paula Lunder says.





By the 1990s the Lunders had committed to underwriting the cost of a new wing, completed in 1999. They promised their entire collection to Colby in 2007. With an accompanying gift from the Harold Alfond Foundation, Colby began planning the new Alfond-Lunder Family Pavilion. “I’ve invested my life in making spaces for art,” says Frederick Fisher, who, as architect of the original Lunder Wing, was given the task of blending existing structures into a redesigned museum complex. With the pavilion, he created a building whose glass-sheathed surface by day reflects the changing landscape and by night, third-floor studios ablaze, offers a window onto what Corwin calls “a laboratory of creativity, exploration, contemplation.”

No one is more alert to the power of such a *tableau vivant* to frame the conversation than Colby College president William D. Adams, a

philosophy scholar who notes the brilliance with which Steven Jobs—whose Apple stores, one might add, likewise make effective use of the well-lit glass box—harnessed the power of visual imagination. Adams regards visual literacy, what he calls the ability to understand and interpret visual imagery and information, as fundamental to a liberal arts education in the twenty-first century and sees the museum as an essential component in the college’s mission to serve both Colby’s students and the wider Maine community.

An endowed travel fund helps bring roughly thirty-five hundred school children to the museum each year. “Maine is a deeply poor state. Some of these kids travel three hours or more to get here. This may be their first engagement with art of this caliber,” Corwin says. Of the “aspirational” campus tours coordinated by the admissions office, she



The Poetic Mode

Fig. 12. A centerpiece of this installation devoted to aestheticism is *The Song* of 1891 by Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851–1938). The other paintings in this view are (from the left): *The Pink Feather (The Brown Veil)* by Joseph Rodefer DeCamp (1858–1923), 1908; *Mount Monadnock*, a watercolor by Abbott H. Thayer (1849–1921), c. 1887; Dewing's pastel *Standing Woman*, c. 1926, and, at the far right *Study in Grey for the Portrait of F.R. Leyland* by James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), 1870–1873. The sculptures are *Diana*, a bronze by Frederick MacMonnies (1863–1937), 1890, and, at the far left, a bronze *Head of Victory*, 1904, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907).

Fig. 13. *Amor Caritas* by Saint-Gaudens, 1880–1898, this example cast in 1899 or after. Bronze; height 40, width 17 ½ inches. An allegorical representation of love and charity, this sculpture is a reduction of the eight-foot Saint-Gaudens bronze that won the grand prize at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900.



Fig. 14. *Chelsea in Ice* by Whistler, 1864. Oil on canvas, 17 ¾ by 24 inches. The painting is from a series of impressionistic renderings of the Thames River that the artist created after he settled in London.

adds, “We want children, some of whom may be the first members of their families to go to college, to look out at the campus and say, ‘Wow, I could come here some day.’”

In mid-February, before the Lunder Wing closed for final renovations, undergraduates sprawled on the floor of a gallery devoted to the art of the Civil War. They had been asked to select an object and write about it, then reduce what they had written into wall text. Working from primary sources, performing arts students fashioned audio guides to the collection. “The Civil War and Its Echoes” is one of the most powerful galleries in the inaugural installation of the Lunder Collection, which, thematically presented, suggests persistent

currents in the American experience. A show stopper, John La Farge’s *Agathon to Erosanthe (Votive Wreath)* (Figs. 6) of 1861, is both elegiac and hopeful, prescient in its anticipation of Georgia O’Keeffe’s 1922 abstract pastel *Lake George in Woods*, a recent acquisition mounted in a gallery devoted to early modernism.

A century after the Hudson River school, the monumental strain in American landscape art resurfaces in Ansel Adams’s 1960 gelatin silver print *Moon and Half Dome*, an iconic Yosemite view displayed in the gallery “Multiple Modernisms,” and in the disconcertingly beautiful *Pin River—Kissimmee* of 2008, a straight-pin construction by Maya Lin that assails our environmental recklessness. Painted in 1864, Sanford Gifford’s *Twilight in the Adirondacks* distills the sense of loss felt by a nation ravaged by war, a conflict whose political roots are covertly addressed by the Maine-born painter Eastman Johnson in his large oil sketch *The Party in the Maple Sugar Camp* of about 1861 to 1866 (see Fig. 7). Maple sugar was championed by abolitionists as an ethical alternative to cane sugar, says Colby curator Hannah W. Blunt.

If America found the courage to free its slaves, there is no evidence that it atoned for the violence and despair visited on its first inhabitants. Instead, the Lunder Collection chronicles our burnished if changing views of the West, from Charles Bird



Fig. 15. The Lunder gift includes 211 paintings, drawings, and prints by James McNeill Whistler. Seen in this view of a gallery devoted to his work are views of London, including *Chelsea in Ice* (Fig. 14) and, on the right three Venetian views: *The Red Doorway*, an 1880 pastel; *Calle San Trovaso*, a chalk and pencil drawing of c. 1879–1880; and the etching and drypoint *The Doorway*, 1879–1880. The collectors also founded the Lunder Consortium for Whistler Studies, a partnership among the Colby College Museum of Art, the Freer and Sackler galleries, and the University of Glasgow.

Whistler Gallery

King's 1833 portrait of the Seneca chief Red Jacket (Fig. 5) to the romanticizing early twentieth-century Taos School pictures that were among Peter Lunder's first loves (see Fig. 18).

The sensibilities of the collectors are seldom more apparent than in "The Poetic Mode," a gallery devoted to art for art's sake that showcases Thomas Wilmer Dewing's lyrical oil *The Song* of about 1891, an ethereal if psychologically fraught rendering of the artist's wife and mistress (see Fig. 12). Most of the pictures in the collection are enclosed in original or period frames, many supplied by specialist dealer Eli Wilner.

The mood continues in an adjacent gallery hung with selections from the Lunder Collection's more than two hundred works, many of them prints, by the American expatriate artist James McNeill Whistler. Fisher had the luxury of designing galleries with the collection in mind and here the room's small scale is well suited to the close examination of engravings and lithographs in multiple states. "I'm really not a print man but I think these will be very useful for teaching at Colby," Peter Lunder told the New York dealer of prints Susan Schulman. He later warmed to the works which, in aggregate, reveal much about the artist's ambitions and techniques over the span of his career. One acquisition often suggested another. Having assembled the Whistler prints, the Lunders in 2012 purchased a cache of early works



Lunder-Colville Chinese Art

Fig. 16. Tripod (*du*), Chinese, Early Warring States period, 499 BC–400 BC. Bronze; height 5 1/8, diameter 6 3/4 inches. "The Lunders recognized that this was an opportunity to provide Colby with material that would further knowledge of Asia," says art dealer Thomas Colville, who worked with the collectors to develop the Lunder-Colville Chinese Art Collection at Colby.

A Man's World

Fig. 17. *Buffalo Hunt with Lances* by Alfred Jacob Miller (1810–1874), 1858. Oil on canvas, 32 3/8 by 44 7/8 inches. The Maryland artist probably painted this picture for Baltimore collector William T. Walters in 1858. It is among the earliest depictions of the American west in the Lunders' gift to Colby.



Art of the West

Fig. 18. *Pueblo Priestesses* by Gerald Cassidy (1879–1934), c. 1930. Signed “Gerald Cassidy—” at lower left. Oil on canvas, 40 by 30 inches. Art of the American Southwest, particularly Taos school paintings, was one of the Lunders' first collecting interests. “It is so profoundly elegant and powerful,” says Smithsonian American Art Museum director Elizabeth Broun, citing *Pueblo Priestesses* as one of her favorite works in the Lunder trove.



on paper by Mary Cassatt, among them a series of proofs that taken together, says Martha Tedeschi, deputy director of the Art Institute of Chicago, place Cassatt at the vanguard of modern printmaking.

Similarly, the Lunders helped the college acquire forty ancient Chinese sculptures, mostly bronzes, from Thomas Colville, who assembled the group in the early 1990s, when works of quality were still surfacing in the Hong Kong market. In what she sees as a necessary corrective to our increasingly “virtual” engagement with art, Ankeney Weitz, a professor of art in Colby's department of East Asian Studies, makes extensive use of the trove in her teaching.

Although there is no prescribed route for touring the museum, most visitors will enter the new Pavilion on the first floor, which arrays Colby's eclectic and growing collection of modern and contemporary art. The Lunders entered the market for postwar sculpture in 2004, acquiring major works by John Chamberlain and Donald Judd. Claes Oldenburg's *Typewriter Eraser* followed in 2007 (Fig. 20). “They are important examples of the defining movements of their time—abstract expressionism, minimalism, and pop art,” Corwin says of the three pieces, which, coincidentally, all date to 1977. *In Blue*, a 2008 oil on linen by Terry Winters, is the first major contemporary paint-



Art After 1945

ing added to the Lunder Collection but almost certainly not the last. The scale of Colby's still-unfolding project is documented in an accompanying catalogue, *The Lunder Collection: A Gift of Art to Colby College*, containing essays by nearly two dozen contributors.

The Lunders remain an understated presence in the new galleries, where only about half of their gift of art is on view. Over time, Colby's curators will integrate other works, eventually merging the Lunder material with the permanent collection. The couple—who recently emptied residences in Boston, West Palm Beach, and Maine in anticipation of the opening—seems untroubled by the prospect of relinquishing what has been a consuming passion. On the contrary. “This is something we wanted to do, something that our children understand and support in full. We have been fortunate. We want Colby students and the wider Maine community to enjoy what we have enjoyed. It's that simple,” says Paula Lunder.

The inaugural installation of the Lunder Collection as shown here will remain on view for a year, after which the works will be integrated into the Colby Museum of Art's full collection.

Fig. 19. *City of Brass* by Romare Bearden (1911–1988), 1965. Inscribed “Romare Bearden ‘City of Brass’/1965 357 Canal St.” on the reverse. Photostat and gouache on board mounted on panel, 29 by 40 inches. This figurative collage with African masks dates from the Civil Rights era, when Bearden opened his studio to fellow artists and activists Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, and Hale Woodruff.



Multiple Modernisms

Fig. 20. *Typewriter Eraser* by Claes Oldenburg (1929–), 1977. Acrylic on aluminum, stainless steel and ferroce-ment; height 35, width 35, depth 28 inches.