STEVEN DOBBIN

Conceptualism to Meaning
On behalf of University of Maryland University College (UMUC) and the 90,000 students we serve each year, let me say what an honor it is to host Steven Dobbin: Conceptualism to Meaning. For more than 30 years, the UMUC Arts Program has supported our public mission of bringing affordable, quality education within reach for adult students in the workforce and military. In exhibitions such as this, in our gallery spaces, and in the halls of our administrative and academic headquarters in Adelphi and Largo, we are proud to showcase the talents of established and emerging artists, seeking always to introduce them to broader audiences, including our local and regional communities.

Steven Dobbin is one such artist. A Maryland native whose work is in private and public collections both nationally and internationally, he has taught in public and private art and special education programs for more than 20 years. His remarkable vision and creativity were first on display at UMUC as part of our 2nd Biennial Maryland Regional Juried Art Exhibition, and we are delighted to welcome him back for this more comprehensive exhibition.

Dobbin’s work is sometimes stark, sometimes whimsical, but always intellectually stimulating. Perhaps most importantly, it challenges us to think—and see the world—in new and creative ways.

I hope that you enjoy this remarkable exhibition and the vision that informs it, and as always, I thank you for your continued support of the arts and our Arts Program in 2019 and beyond.

JAVIER MIYARES
PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Over the past 41 years, the UMUC Arts Program has developed a tradition of showcasing creative works of art by some of the most talented emerging and established artists from across the country. In doing so, we have received more exhibition proposals than we can accommodate and earned a reputation as a prestigious gallery. With our latest exhibition, Steven Dobbin: Conceptualism to Meaning, we are pleased to continue this tradition.

Dobbin, a Maryland artist based in Frederick, creates thought-provoking works of art with found and discarded objects. Characterized as a sculptor, Dobbin works primarily in lead, copper, and steel with plaster and pigment, but he often incorporates wood and other mediums as well. Dobbin’s creativity enables him to see the beauty in what many would see as junk. For example, he can paint a multitude of paint container lids—sometimes reshaping them—and arrange them in such a way that the finished work of art resembles a quilt. In other instances, he has burned paper or shaped steel to create abstract paintings or figurative images that invite viewers to provide their own interpretations. Many of his works reflect movement, such as his walking figures, or serve as social commentary, but they are all conceptual and contemporary.

Dobbin first came to the attention of the Arts Program when his 2012 work When Did They Stop Drawing the Battle Lines in Crayon? was included in the 2nd Biennial Maryland Regional Juried Art Exhibition (2013–2014). Art Advisory Board member Nina Dwyer introduced us to the artist about two years ago, and we began planning this exhibition to acquaint our audience with him as well. This exhibition provides us with the opportunity to expose our audience to the creative works of another accomplished Maryland artist and to support the artistic career of an artist whose works warrant an exhibition in the UMUC Arts Program Gallery.

Dobbin’s works are in numerous private and public collections in the United States and the United Kingdom. He has shown his works in many solo and group exhibitions, including those at the BlackRock Center for the Arts, Silber Art Gallery at Goucher College, and Washington County Museum of Fine Arts (Maryland); Causey Contemporary (New York); and Monmouth Museum (New Jersey). The UMUC Arts Program is pleased to curate a show of the innovative works of Steven Dobbin in its exhibition space.

ERIC KEY
DIRECTOR, ARTS PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
BACKGROUND
Dobbin grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland. Participation in sports encouraged his self-described competitive nature. Exposure to his maternal grandfather’s artistic metal works made an aesthetic imprint on Dobbin’s own work, as did the subsequent visuals derived from stacking shelves in a grocery store as a teen.

Dobbin’s academic history includes an undergraduate stint at Ohio Wesleyan University and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Maryland, College Park in urban studies. He matriculated in the fine arts programs at Indiana University and the University of Southern California. At the George Washington University, he earned a Master of Arts in education, focusing on the severely emotionally disturbed adolescent population.

Dobbin’s exhibition history includes galleries on both the East and West Coasts. For years he was represented by Caesarea Contemporary in New York. Living and working in Frederick County, Maryland, he cites his long association with the Artists Gallery there as most significant to his career.

THE GRID
Dobbin uses a grid, similar to one he used for stacking grocery store shelves, as a utilitarian structure to organize and aestheticize his artwork.

The grid has long been an ordering system for graphic design- ers, urban planners, architects, and manufacturers of technology products. In Western art, the grid has served as an emblem of modernism. Early 20th-century Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, one of the leading figures in the development of modern abstract art, created his experimental compositions using grids. Mid-20th-century conceptual artist Sol LeWitt utilized the grid as an underlying element of his minimalistic works, and Carl Andre followed, paying homage to the grid with his conceptual site-specific land works. And Japan’s Kusama became popular for her repetitive marks and shapes exploring compulsion and obsession.

Dobbin admits both aesthetic and literal obsessions with the multiples that show up in most of his pieces. He lays claim to underlining element of his minimalist works, and Carl Andre followed, paying homage to the grid with his conceptual site-specific land works. Today, Chuck Close continues to use the grid as a struc- ture for transforming his photographs of people into optical mixture portrait paintings.

Dobbin understands the history of this sim- plified format in contemporary art. He often employs grids in his works, capitalizing on the power of the grid to capture and hold the viewer’s attention. Once he has our attention, he proceeds with his visual commentary.

REPetITION
The grid, of course, invites repetition, and Dobbin frequently utilizes this design element to enhance his subject matter to make it more visually accessible.

To thoroughly understand Dobbin’s use of re- peated imagery, one must understand his day job. After working for 15 years with severely emotionally disturbed adolescents, the artist now works with public school students who have been diagnosed as intellectually disabled. The repeated signs, symbols, and writings he incorporates into his grids are not just for casual viewers but also for his students.

When an object is repeated, the viewer slows down to con- template the object. By accumulating and repeating imagery, one can transform the mundane into something important.

In the classroom, Dobbin constantly repeats mundane lessons necessary for learning life skills, and he brings this learning retention strategy into his art. For example, his work Do Not Set Yourself on Fire offers concrete visual clues about how to safely maneuver through one’s environment. The information is provided through a mixture of shapes, symbols, and words that present data in ways that can be easily grasped. Dobbin uses his intellect and control of the language of art to manip- ulate these simplified elements until they become visually dynamic and important.

From early Islamic tile designs to Yayoi Kusama’s popular in- stallations today, artworks throughout the ages have demon- strated the power of repetition. In Islamic art, perfect geometric patterns represent the meaning and spiritual essence of things; it is believed one can find infinity in them. Fame came to Andy Warhol for his pop art multiples of soup cans and of Marilyn Monroe, as it did later to Andy Goldsworthy for his site-specific land works. And Japan’s Kusama became popular for her repetitive marks and shapes exploring compulsion and obsession.

Social Commentary
Most of Dobbin’s work has an element of social commentary. Like many artists working today, he observes, ponders, and translates hot topics. These visual translations typically rep- resent personal convictions and insights that serve to inform, critique, and raise awareness of our understanding of the world around us.
Art as social commentary often serves as a window to political discourse. With his work *An Awful Noise*, Dobbin jumps into the political conversations of 2019. Fond of watching political commentary on TV, he began to suspect from the images of the news reporters and commentators on MSNBC, CNN, and Fox that the negativity of the current news cycle is going to change the way politicians and the general public do business and conduct their lives. He started to visually examine the players, the “talking heads.” He focused on their facial expressions, the tilt of their heads, the way their mouths formed words. In front of the television, he photographed them with his cell phone thousands of times. From those images, he selected 135 for the final work. The subjects include Frank Figliuzzi, Bill Maher, Nicole Wallace, Judy Woodruff, and others. Nonpolitical commentators include sportscasters Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon. And an image of Robert Mueller is centrally located, just because.

Dobbin manipulated the photographed heads through a computer program until they became drawing-like. His initial photographs reflect reality; his “drawn” images lack that intimate, baggage-filled component, making it easier to digest his message of collective, unproductive noise.

**RECYCLING**

Given today's environmental concerns, it is common for artists to recycle materials or repurpose trash. Recycling items in art is far from new. Louise Nevelson, one of Dobbin’s favorite artists, created poetic reliefs from scrap wood in the 1950s. Also during this period, Robert Rauschenberg made some of his best work from trash (including a “combine” painting that included an old taxidermy goat and a used tire). A few years later, in 1961, the Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted an exhibition entitled *The Art of Assemblage*, solidifying the use of varied and recycled materials as a valid art process.

It is easy to recognize the formal aesthetic qualities of Dobbin’s series made of old paint can lids. Color, shape, texture—it’s all there, the beauty overriding any obvious narrative. But if we dig deeper, the materials contribute to a story. Paint can lids are clearly disposable and easily discarded. Dobbin makes a connection between this perception and the way many people perceive his students. Into the studio he carries his unwavering belief that his charges have worth, that they can be contributing members of our society. He turns his discarded paint can lids into visual quilts, giving them value and importance. For Dobbin, the metaphor could not be clearer—he is constantly working for his students, both in the classroom and in the studio.

**WORK**

Work is necessary for economic survival. It also gives us the opportunity for social engagement and personal and professional growth.

Part of Dobbin’s job as a teacher is to prepare his students for the work world. He understands that many of them will work as manual laborers, and he stresses that the dignity and importance of that labor rivals that of any other type of job. “Be present,” he tells them. “Show up. Do a good job. Feel good about it.”

*Dobbin* is a stunning work. A group of rusty metal silhouetted figures three feet tall are walking to work. They carry the tools of their trades: ladders, shovels, brooms. The figures are all easily recognizable as Dobbin. They exude strength, purpose, and a sense of self-worth. The visual message to his charges is clear: “If I can show up, you can too.”

How does Dobbin work in his own studio? He walks his talk. He shows up daily, most often in the early morning hours. He does his best. He thinks a lot. He is earnest. He is productive. And, with a nod to his sports background, this highly original, creative, and cerebral artist embraces deadlines, his personal competition with time.

**Workingman Collective**, 2019, steel, dimensions variable

Colors of Their Lives, 2011, paint can lids, paint, and metal, 72 x 48 inches
STEVEN
DOBBIN

The Things They Carry
2017
steel and paint
21 x 7 feet
Primary Triad
2019
crushed paint cans, paint, and metal
32 x 56 inches

Secondary Triad
2019
crushed paint cans, paint, and metal
32 x 56 inches
Box Boy
2007
mixed media
photograph 60 x 36 inches,
box and steel base
60 x 12 x 12 inches

Take Your Medicine
2019
mixed media
60 x 22 x 8 inches
An Open Letter to Zachary
1989
mixed media
60 x 24 x 10 inches

Do Not Set Yourself on Fire
2015
digital photo transfer on wood
72 x 80 x 2 inches
Chair Shadow 10 a.m.
2017
steel
8 x 25 x 3 inches

Chair Shadow
2011
steel
58 x 21 x 27 inches
ABOVE:  
Young Sylvia (closed)  
2001  
mixed media  
12 x 4 x 1 inches  

LEFT:  
Young Sylvia (opened)  
12 x 8 x 1 inches  

Walking Away  
2007  
mixed media  
54 x 50 inches
An Awful Noise
2019
digital photo transfer on wood
67 x 75 x 2 inches

ABOVE: Descent (detail)

RIGHT: Descent
2005
plaster and lead
60 x 18 inches
Sixty-Four
2007
aluminum, wood, and acid wash
40 x 40 inches

Toxic Trio
2003
mixed media
39 x 23 x 8 inches
ABOVE:  
We Are Making Enemies Faster  
Than We Can Kill Them (detail)  

LEFT:  
We Are Making Enemies Faster  
Than We Can Kill Them  
2005  
copper, plaster, and paint  
60 x 30 inches  

Don't Cry for Me  
2007  
mixed media  
22 x 22 inches
ABOVE:
When I Speak to People Who Are Deaf, I Repeat Myself (detail)

LEFT:
When I Speak to People Who Are Deaf, I Repeat Myself
2013–19
mixed media
68 x 67 x 37 inches

Traveling Through the Dark
2003
bronze
48 x 48 x 48 inches
Remnants
2007
wood, paint, water, and rust
36 x 60 inches

Legs
2016
mixed media
6 x 3 x 2 inches
Rusted Reclamation
2019
crushed paint cans, metal, and rust
37 x 34 inches

Reclamation Tapestry
2017
paint can lids, metal, and paint
9 x 6 feet
Blue Baby
2013
digital print
52 x 33 inches

Defining the Void
1989
woven steel
each piece 60 x 12 x 12 inches
Inverse
1998
wood and graphite
60 x 24 inches

Lead Inverse
1998
lead
24 x 18½ x 2½ inches
Tally Series #1
2016
digital photo transfer on wood
22 x 80 x 2 inches
Specimen 1–4
2017
mixed media
62 x 37 x 9 inches

ABOVE:
Specimen Taller (detail)

RIGHT:
Specimen Taller
2017
mixed media
62 x 6 x 9 inches
ABOVE:
Her Too (closed)
2001
copper and lead
12 x 3 x 1 inches

LEFT:
Her Too (opened)
12 x 6 x 1 inches

Walk Away #2
2007
steel and wood
29½ x 39½ inches
Motorcycle
2016
mixed media
photograph 4 x 6 inches,
sculpture 3⅛ x 5½ x 1 inches

Piercing the Mundane
2007
aluminum, acid wash, and paint
40 x 40 inches
Bury Me with Christenberry  
2007  
mixed media  
37½ x 48½ inches

ABOVE:  
Void Grouping 1  
2019  
steel  
dimensions variable

RIGHT:  
Void Grouping 2  
2019  
steel  
dimensions variable
Absence
1997
mixed media
60 x 12 x 8 inches

Your Move
2013
digital print
45 x 33 inches
Stacked Cans
2005
digital photo transfer on aluminum
36 x 58 inches

Home Less
1980
mixed media
60 x 24 x 10 inches
School of Taxidermy
2007
mixed media
photograph 38 x 56 inches,
lead sculpture and steel base
39 x 17 x 10 inches

Karl’s Barrow
2000
found steel
dimensions variable
ABOVE:
Hostage
2016
mixed media
7 x 65 x 1 inches

RIGHT:
Hostage (detail)
Immigrant
2016
digital photo transfer on wood
65 x 53 x 1 inches

Little Stoves
2011
wood and steel
53/4 x 6 x 4 feet
Broken
2015
glass jars, color transparencies, and steel
6 x 6 x 2 inches

I Repeat Myself
2016
timed, flashing neon sign
6½ x 38 x 4 inches
Sydney’s Doll
2016
mixed media
photograph 6 x 4 inches,
esculpture 5 x 3 x 1 inches

Big Stick
2007
metal, copper, brass, and wood
3 x 11 x 4 feet
The Better
2015
digital photo transfer on wood
29 x 44 x 1 inches

If Barbie Is So Popular, Why Do You Have to Buy Her Friends
2019
mixed media
screen 64 x 60 inches,
lead bag and steel base 54 x 9 x 6 inches
Colors of Their Lives
2011
paint can lids, paint, and metal
72 x 48 inches

ABOVE: Her (closed)
2001
mixed media
12 x 3 x 1 inches

RIGHT: Her (opened)
12 x 6 x 1 inches
Blind Faith and Broken Innocence
2019
Ovaltine cans and wood base
72 x 84 x 10 inches

Workingman Collective
2019
steel
dimensions variable
EDUCATION
1986–89  University of Southern California, MFA program (sculpture)
1981–82  Indiana University, MFA program (ceramics)
1979  BA, University of Maryland, College Park

AWARDS
2017  2nd Place, National Juried Exhibition, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2012  3rd Place, Annual Juried Exhibition, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2009  Maryland State Arts Council Award for Excellence in Sculpture
2004  Meredith Springer Award, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2017  I Repeat Myself, Silber Art Gallery, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland
2016  Then & Now, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2013  A Lot of Art Is Boring, Causey Contemporary, Brooklyn, New York
2012  Piercing the Mundane II, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2011  Impulse, Pulse Contemporary Art Fair, Los Angeles, California
2010  The Ordinary Expands, Silber Art Gallery, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland
2009  Art from Found Objects, Monmouth Museum, Lincroft, New Jersey
2007  As I See It, Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art, Brooklyn, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2016  Tally, Causey Contemporary, Brooklyn, New York
2014  Liminal Reclamations, SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York, New York
2013  Broad Spectrum, Delaware Center for Contemporary Art, Wilmington, Delaware
2012  Big Metal, ARTDC, Hyattsville, Maryland
2011  Towson Arts Collective 6th Anniversary Exhibition, Towson, Maryland
2010  As I See It, Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art, Brooklyn, New York
2009  Annual Juried Exhibition, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2007  Five Elements, Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art, Brooklyn, New York
2006  Annual Juried Exhibition, Delaplaine Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland
2005  Recycled, Zenith Gallery, Washington, D.C.
2004  The Ordinary Expands, Silber Art Gallery, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland
2003–10  Artists Gallery, Frederick, Maryland
2002  Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art, Brooklyn, New York
2001  Blue Elephant, Frederick, Maryland
2000  Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art, Brooklyn, New York

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY
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<th>Title</th>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Ovate line cans and wood base</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>digital print</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>If Barbie Is So Popular, Why Do You Have to Buy Her Friends</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>mixed media</td>
<td>64 x 60 inches, lead bag and steel base 54 x 9 x 6 inches</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>5½ x 6 x 4 feet</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<td>60 x 24 x 10 inches</td>
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<td>Inverse</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>wood and graphite</td>
<td>60 x 24 inches</td>
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<td>I Repeat Myself</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>timed, flashing neon sign</td>
<td>6½ x 38 ½ x 4 inches</td>
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<td>Piercing the Mundane</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Primary Triad</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>crushed paint cans, paint, and metal</td>
<td>32 x 56 inches</td>
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<td>Reclamation Tapestry</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>paint can lids, metal, and paint</td>
<td>9 x 6 feet</td>
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<td>Remnants</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>wood, paint, water, and rust</td>
<td>36 x 60 inches</td>
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<td>Rusted Reclamation</td>
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<td>Traveling Through the Dark</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>bronze</td>
<td>48 x 48 x 48 inches</td>
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EXHIBITION LIST, continued

Void Grouping 1
2019
steel
dimensions variable

Void Grouping 2
2019
steel
dimensions variable

Walk Away #2
2007
steel and wood
29½ x 39½ inches

Walking Away
2007
mixed media
54 x 50 inches

We Are Making Enemies Faster Than We Can Kill Them
2005
copper, plaster, and paint
60 x 30 inches

When I Speak to People Who Are Deaf, I Repeat Myself
2013–19
mixed media
68 x 67 x 37 inches

Young Sylvia
2001
mixed media
12 x 4 x 1 inches
(opened 12 x 8 x 1 inches)

Your Move
2013
digital print
45 x 33 inches

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McKissack & McKissack

Sharon Smith Hickson, Honorary Member
Artist’s Representative and Co-Owner, Holsten Originals
Evi, Key
Director, Arts Program
University of Maryland University College
Thomas Li, Honorary Member
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Collector and Patron of the Arts
Owner, Dianne Whitfield-Locke Dentistry
Sharon Wolpoff
Artist and Owner
Wolpoff Studios
Elizabeth Zoltan, PhD
Collector and Patron of the Arts

When I Speak to People Who Are Deaf, I Repeat Myself
2013–19
mixed media
68 x 67 x 37 inches

Workingman Collective
2019
steel
dimensions variable

Young Sylvia
2001
mixed media
12 x 4 x 1 inches
(opened 12 x 8 x 1 inches)

Your Move
2013
digital print
45 x 33 inches

EXHIBITION LIST, continued
ABOUT UMUC
University of Maryland University College was founded more than 70 years ago specifically to serve the higher education needs of working adults and servicemen. Today, UMUC continues that tradition online and offers more than 90 degrees, certificates, and specializations backed by the reputation of a state university and the University System of Maryland. For more information, visit umuc.edu.

ABOUT THE ARTS PROGRAM AT UMUC
Since 1978, UMUC has proudly shown works from a large collection of international and Maryland artists at its headquarters in Adelphi, Maryland, a few miles from the nation’s capital. Through its Arts Program, the university provides a prestigious and wide-ranging forum for emerging and established artists and brings art to the community through special exhibitions and its own collections, which have grown to include more than 2,900 pieces of art.

Artworks are on display throughout the College Park Marriott Hotel & Conference Center at UMUC and the Administration Building in Adelphi as well as at the UMUC Academic Center at Largo. The main, lower-level gallery in Adelphi is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week, and the Leroy Merritt Center for the Art of Joseph Sheppard is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week. More than 75,000 students, scholars, and visitors come to the Adelphi facilities each year. Exhibitions at the UMUC Academic Center at Largo are open to visitors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

ARTS PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT
The UMUC Arts Program is dedicated to furthering the university’s objectives by creating a dynamic environment in which our diverse constituents, including students and the general public, can study and learn from direct exposure to our art collections, exhibitions, and educational programs.

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