

# BLAFFER ART MUSEUM UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

## FY 2015 SFAC Request

### 1. Executive Summary: Mission and means of accomplishing goals; justification of Blaffer Art Museum's student fees allocation in terms of student benefits.

Blaffer Art Museum's mission is to further the understanding of contemporary art through exhibitions, publications, workshops and public programs. As the gateway between the University of Houston and the City of Houston, Blaffer Art Museum is a catalyst for creative innovation, experimentation, and scholarship. Its exhibitions and programs are free and open to all, create community through dialogue and participation, and are aimed at inspiring an appreciation for the visual arts as a vital force in shaping contemporary culture. As a contemporary art museum affiliated with a major public research university, Blaffer takes very seriously its educational responsibility and opportunities. Since the reopening of the museum in the fall of 2012, Blaffer's stated priorities for exhibitions and programs have been greater academic integration through faculty participation, greater reach and impact through strategic collaborations with other colleges, departments and units on campus and increasing the university's national recognition. To this end we have significantly revised and increased communication and marketing around museum activities both on and off campus and through media outlets. In addition to enhancing awareness of existing program, Blaffer has conceived of new programs that have and will significantly enhance students' experience of the arts on campus. Student centered activities include but are not limited to:

- The presentation and origination of exhibitions and publications of the highest aesthetic caliber, coordinated with participation from a corps of student employees/volunteers;
- Lectures/ performances and in-class visits through our *Visiting Artist and Scholar series* which bring world-renowned contemporary artists, scholars, and arts professionals to the university's campus
- Artist lead workshops and classroom visits for University of Houston students
- Docent-led tours of our exhibitions for classes, student organizations, and dormitory residents
- Critically acclaimed and innovative film screenings through our *On Screen @ Blaffer* series
- Social gathering opportunities through our strictly social *First Thursdays*
- Collaborative programming for and by students in the newly renovated museum via organizations like the Student Program Board and Council of Ethnic Organizations via our Blaffer Student Association;
- Formal internship program where students can receive credit hours for their work
- Hosting and programming onsite classes and residencies lead by Blaffer artists like IART which function as laboratories for discussions and learning; often documented and archived as part of the artist's body of work

One of the most important and visible services the museum affords for UH students are the presentations of the *School of Art Annual Student Exhibition* and *School of Art Masters Thesis Exhibition*. These important annual events are important markers in these emerging artists' careers. These exhibitions not only offer an important learning experience for the exhibiting students but also showcase the incredible talent of UH students to the campus community and beyond that support the reputation of UH as an educational institution of excellence and distinction.

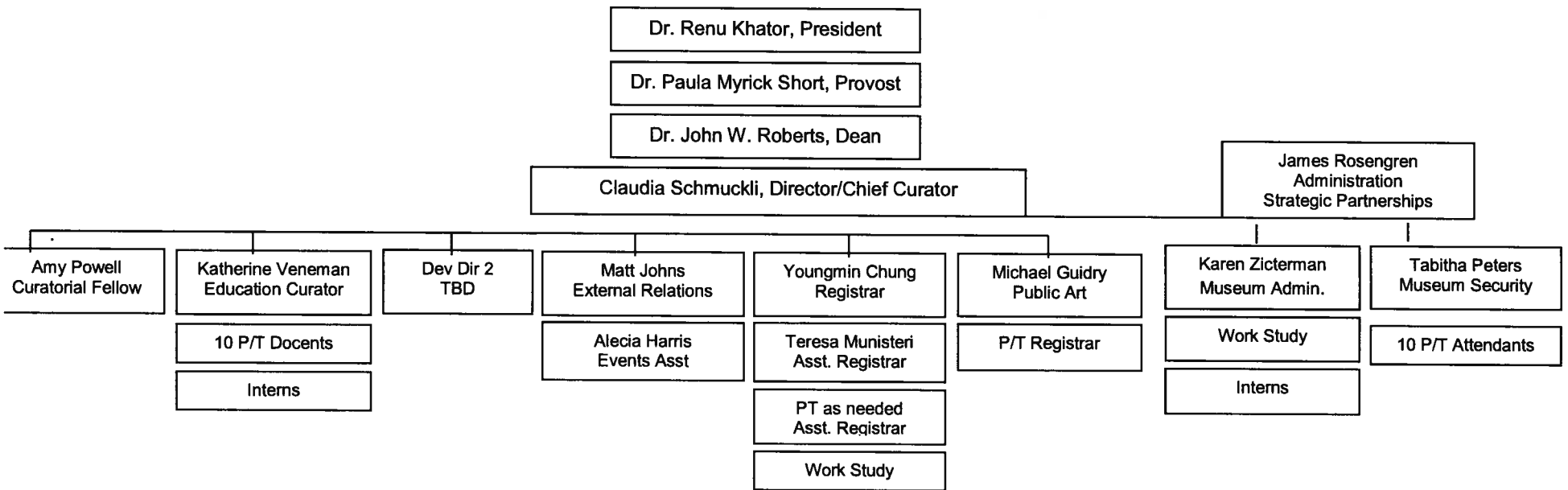
The Blaffer Student Association (BSA) has been an integral part of Blaffer's student engagement since 2005. The student-led, all volunteer BSA exists to increase student participation in the museum community and promote the arts on campus. The organization provides opportunities for UH students to get involved in planning and promoting Blaffer educational programs such as Gallery Tours and Studio Saturdays, as well as the semi-annual Red Block Bash, a campus-wide celebration of arts on campus held in conjunction with UH Arts Family Day and Open Studio.

A new collaboration with resident Life has will offer monthly tours and workshops to students living on campus, an unprecedented program which is still in its pilot phase.

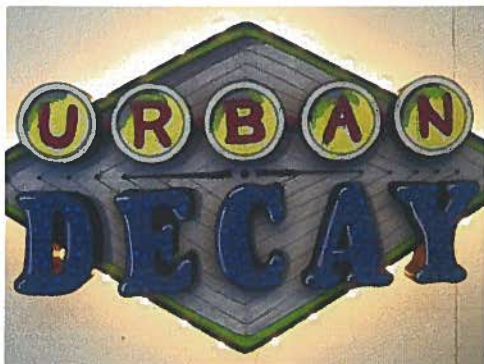
Blaffer Art Museum respectfully requests \$21,150 in base support to fund the annual Student and Masters Thesis Exhibitions, the programmatic initiatives of the Blaffer Student Association, and the expansion of the museum's student tour program and its integration into the Department of Student Housing & Residential Life.

## 2. Organizational Chart

Blaffer Art Museum currently employs 17 students per semester as docents, installation crew, curatorial, marketing, development and education assistants as well as museum gallery attendants. Student employees provide invaluable assistance and gain employment and/or professional development experience at Blaffer.



3. Objectives provided with SFAC 2013 request; success in achieving objectives; any changes in objectives, rationale, and success of additional objectives.



For academic year 2012-2013, Blaffer Art Museum set the objectives to present and promote the Student and Masters Thesis Exhibitions and to provide a professional, hi-caliber experience for University of Houston's emerging artists and art students. The re-opening of the museum after a 16 month renovation, allowed for the opportunity for this highly-anticipated exhibition to return to the museum. Its reputation and high regard in the community and on campus helped to contribute to the over 700 guests that attended the opening reception, introducing an even larger audience to the burgeoning talent being fostered at the university through the graduate art department. Blaffer also co-presented the UH *Annual Student Art Exhibition* featuring over works by 40 undergraduate and graduate student artists from the School of Art. Blaffer also worked with the School of Art to hold a large

and festive open house with curated student work on display in the Fine Arts Courtyard and surrounding studio areas during the Blaffer Student Association's Red Block Bash. In addition to supporting these exhibitions, SFAC funds were used to promote these events on- and off- campus and hold gallery talks by exhibiting student artists;

As we have previously done, Blaffer Art Museum staff collaborated with the Graphic Design department to produce exhibition marketing materials for the Thesis Exhibition. The resulting promotional package included attractive invitations, posters, banners, print and web advertisements, as well as flyers that were posted across campus and in area businesses. Blaffer and the School of Art plan to continue this collaboration as a regular part of the MFA program in the future.

During the run of the exhibition, the MFA candidates also spoke about their work during *Brown Bag Gallery Talks*. Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow Amy Powell and Curator of Education Katherine Veneman each moderated panels of six exhibiting artists who shared information about their works and practice with an audience comprising both members of the campus population and the community at large. These gallery talks are geared towards the professional development of the students, providing them with an opportunity to practice their public speaking and presentation skills while at the same time bringing their work and the school's program to the attention of the art community in Houston.

In FY 13, KUHF 88.7 FM was again secured for media sponsorship, reaching 250,000+ listeners per week. Advertisements were also placed in the *Daily Cougar*, *Houston Press*, and *Glasstire*. We are pleased to report that the most recent Masters Thesis Exhibitions drew nearly 1,000 visitors. Continued marketing with outlets that have tremendous reach in the arts community and beyond such as KUHF and *Glasstire* ensures that our numbers will continue to grow as we're able to consistently promote our many lectures, screenings, and participatory projects accompanying our exhibitions and residencies.

SFAC funds were also used to provide operating funds for the Blaffer Student Association (BSA), the student-run organization on campus that works to bring art into the lives of the student body. Formed in 2005, the BSA works to create awareness of Blaffer exhibitions, events, and educational outreach programs, while creating and implementing new endeavors in collaboration with its members and the Blaffer staff. *BSA* strives to unite students by building a community that supports the arts and inspires creative enterprise, and *BSA* welcomes and encourages involvement from students in all disciplines.

The *BSA* began with a team of leaders who together created a logo, outlined its mission, and put into practice a plan to create awareness of Blaffer on campus. Each officer of the *BSA* is responsible for specific duties and collaboratively maintaining the group's goals. Through the *BSA*, students promote Blaffer through participating in university events; distributing announcements and invitations to students; and brainstorming on ideas to attract and reach the campus population with evolving programs, workshops, and events. *BSA* regularly participates in campus events including opportunities for partnership with the Student Program Board and the *BSA*'s own *Red Block Bash*, a twice-annual welcome back event held in the courtyard of the Fine Arts Building.

4. Discuss means for evaluating success in reaching objectives; their importance as compared to other objectives; data for number of persons served; any assessment measures used to evaluate program success.

Blaffer Art Museum tracks tourist and visitor participation through our newly created Visitor Relations in which we have the daily opportunity to actively engage visitors. The renovation afforded us a new reception desk area which made it essential to create an experience that is not only enjoyable but engaging. As the face of the organization to the average visitor, this individual is our most dedicated and reliable source of tracking visitor participation, assessing demographic information, as well as ensuring that the visitors will return.

Blaffer Art Museum feels that it is important to capture feedback from visitors after every program and event in order to help us learn more about what our audience is responding to positively in order to grow our organization in the right direction and focus our exhibitions, programs, and events. We measure this as well as demographic information through the audience survey which is attached.

This year we also implemented a voluntary sign-up sheet for our museum e-blasts, powered by Constant Contact, in which guests provided their name, mailing address, and phone number and select which specific notifications they would like to receive ranging from Special Events to Programs to Exhibitions. The museum sign-in sheet located at the welcome desk will include questions that will allow us to send more targeted e-communication so that Blaffer's e-newsletter doesn't begin to feel like junk mail in addition to capturing information about demographics. Through this and other efforts, including making the same sheet available during Free Press Summer Fest, we were able to grow our contact list on Constant Contact to just under 5,000 people. This venture has not only facilitated the means in which we're able to disperse information to our followers, but has also provided another invaluable way for us to capture information.

We relied on varying methods of tracking attendance for our off-site ventures. Opening receptions for our satellite exhibition, *Window into Houston*, were measured by a staff member counting the individuals who attended. We also occasionally used Blaffer stickers divided into packs and rows of ten and counted the number of empty packs we had left at the culmination of an event. For the additional impact these exhibitions had while we were unable to monitor it ourselves, we relied on official municipal estimates of walker and drive-by traffic on that stretch of Milam. For both the opening receptions and the overall attendance, we have no reason to believe that the demographic breakdown of attendees would be substantially different than the demographic breakdowns of Blaffer attendees FY13. Guests who attended the *Feast: A Dinner Series* events were measured through ticket purchases where we also captured mailing address, phone numbers, and emails. The demographics for these dinners were assessed by staff members in attendance. Visitors and guests who attended the Blaffer Art Museum Tent during Free Press Summer Fest were tracked through the number of Fancy-Pants tickets purchased which totaled 15,000 per day. The metrics for demographics for this event were calculated using the breakdown of Blaffer attendees FY13 as well, while we are aware that this is an imperfect method.

Qualitative measures are also taken into account in assessing the success of the programs SFAC funds. Each fall art students, faculty, and museum staff discuss the overall exhibitions presentations and work to establish tactics that accommodate both student and museum goals. And bi-weekly programming meeting among Blaffer's curatorial, education and external relations staff as well as weekly BSA meeting will facilitate the development of programming that will more deeply engage a broader swath of students in art on campus. The record-breaking attendance as this fall's Red Block Bash suggests that such collaboration is already paying off.

5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes from your last SFAC request, their impact on your programs, and your reason for implementing them.

Blaffer's FY13 budget was increased from a pre-renovation average around \$1.4 million to \$1.6 million to account for the higher costs of operating the museum post-renovation. The new facility was designed for flexible use and the introduction of new and additional exhibition and programming spaces. The museum reopened with three new programs including the *Visiting Artist and Scholar Series, On Screen @ Blaffer*, and an *IART* class taught by an artist in residence. In addition to these educational programs, Blaffer also introduced *First Thursdays*, a student-targeted

mingling opportunities which put the emphasis on social interaction in the beautiful setting of the museum's new lounge and lobby.

The *Visiting Artist and Scholar Series* presented in collaboration with the School of Art, is a lecture series composed of public presentations and in-class component to directly benefit the students in the School of Art. Entitled *Materiliaty*, the FY13 series brought world-renowned artists like Tony Feher and Diana al-Hadid, contemporary art curators and writers like Helen Molesworth and Dan Cameron, and scholars like Kathleen Stewart and Christian Scheidemann to campus providing students with the opportunity to interact with these preeminent professionals on a personal level whether through lectures or class workshops. This program was established in view of giving students and adult audiences regular access to leading figures in the field and to increase UH's competitiveness with other arts programs around the country.

*On Screen @ Blaffer* brings for the first time experimental cinema to campus, filling an important gap in the educational offerings at UH in the areas of arts and media. One of the films shown in that context was also part of the Houston Cinema Arts Festival where Blaffer screened Gregg Bordowitz's *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*. Day-time and night-time screenings of all selected film throughout the year made the program accessible to both students, faculty, staff and an off-campus population, increasing reach and influence. The program will continue at Blaffer, featuring different curators throughout its run.

During the fall 2012 semester, Blaffer, along with the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center, offered class credit through IART by hosting multi-disciplinary artist Lynne McCabe in residence for a class cum exhibition exploring the potentialities and limits of social sculpture called *Room to be (Ms.) understood*. The class explored the origins of these practices by looking to a different, often neglected history of feminist writing, performance, and site-specific interventions from the 1970s. McCabe's class transformed Blaffer Media Gallery into an incubator where McCabe lead participants through a series of lectures, performances, and workshops in collaboration with visiting artists and scholars that sought to restore this history and also enact it as a living archive for relational practice and for conversation in the present. This class-as-exhibition builds upon important precedents such as "Night School" at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, "Public Engagement" at the Hammer Museum at UCLA, and will remain an integral part of Blaffer's programs each year in an effort to further integrate the museum's programs with academic goals of the university. It will continue in the spring of 2014 with a residency of the artist collective *Antena*.

Blaffer Art Museum respectfully requests \$21,150 base-funding for the coming fiscal year towards the presentation and promotion of the 2013/14 Student and MFA Exhibitions, the programmatic efforts of the Blaffer Student Association which have been expanded to specifically include the promotion of the new public programs outlined above, and a new monthly tour and workshop program with Resident Life. In FY 15, Blaffer anticipates spending \$15,000 on the two School of Art exhibitions, \$2,000 for BSA programming by and for students including lunchtime performances with students from Creative Writing, the School of Theatre and Dance and the School of Music, film screenings co-hosted with the SPB and the COE in the museum and Fine Arts Courtyard, and an additional \$4,150 on a new initiative with Resident Life that offers monthly tour and arts workshops to all first and second-year residents on campus.

#### 6. Please list your FY 14 strategic initiatives and action steps.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, Blaffer Art Museum will continue its overarching initiative to use art as a bridge to link widely different disciplines on the UH campus. This interdisciplinary strategy, begun as a series of pilot projects in 2010, is largely unprecedented at public research universities in the U.S. It places Blaffer and the University of Houston in the vanguard by accepting the challenge of educating the 21<sup>st</sup> century student to be both critical viewers and critical producers of visual culture and by exploring links between visual art and disciplines ranging from design to mathematics, technology and business.

Initiatives include

1. Graduating MFA candidate art exhibition and catalogue
2. School of Art undergraduate and graduate art exhibition
3. Blaffer Student Association (BSA)

4. Guided tours of Blaffer Art Museum for students in resident halls led by residential faculty
5. Hands on art-making workshops taught in resident halls
6. Student gallery attendants
7. Student museum docents

MFA graduate student art exhibition. (DSASI 1, 2, 3). Blaffer's objectives are to present and promote the Masters Thesis and Student Exhibitions. This creates opportunities for student success through active engagement with one of the nation's respected academic art museums. Students work with the museum's professional staff to select and install works in Blaffer's galleries and to develop a 4-color exhibition catalogue. To announce the exhibition, printed invitations, posters, banners, and flyers are distributed on campus in addition to advertisements in print and online media. Students also give public gallery talks which provide them an opportunity to practice public speaking and presenting in a professional environment. The entire museum is turned over to these student exhibitors during this time which harnesses one hundred percent of the financial, human, technology, and facility resources of the Blaffer. Beginning in 2014, the museum is working with the School of Art and designating a graduate student to organize the exhibition under the supervision of Blaffer staff.

The two exhibitions are scheduled to run April 4 through May 6, 2015. Anticipated attendance at the exhibition openings is 1,500 persons with an additional 600 expected to visit during the run of the shows.

Blaffer Student Association (BSA). (DSADI 1,2,3,6): Blaffer Student Association (BSA) is a student run organization that since 2005 has created awareness for Blaffer exhibitions, events and educational outreach programs. Each semester the BSA hosts the half-day long Red Block Bash. The wholly student organized and run event brings students from all the performing and visual arts to share with fellow student the arts at UH. Attendance each semester can top 500.

Guided tours for student residents (DSASI 1, 2, 3): New this year, resident faculty in SLRH will each bring a group of students from their resident hall to Blaffer for a docent led tour of the current exhibition followed by a light snack. In the fall of FY2014, residential faculty member, Dr. Temple Northup, School of Communications, led a pilot group of 30 students to Blaffer for a tailored guided tour of the exhibition, *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*; following the tour, students took part in one of the museum's participatory activities. In FY2015, Blaffer will engage all five residential faculty for regular visits. These events acquaint residential students with the UH arts corridor, provide an excellent opportunity to use art to engage critical thinking across disciplines, and strengthen arts partnerships with the Division of Student Affairs

Hands on art-making workshops taught in residents halls. (DSASI 1,2,3, 5): Another new program begins this year. This fall Blaffer staff worked closely with Zachery Wortzel, RLSH Coordinator of First and Second Year Programming, to design a pilot project for hands-on art making staged in the residential. The program will consist of one hands-on workshop per month and take place on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evening during the semester. Lasting between 1-2 hours, Blaffer staff will guide students through art making using various media. Each workshop will relate to a current exhibition at the Blaffer Art Museum giving students an incentive to visit the museum as part of the project. Individual and collaborative projects will be developed, and some of the resulting artwork will be selected for display in the resident halls to build an ongoing connection between SLRH and the UH arts corridor. The first of the pilot programs will take place Tuesday, November 19.

Student gallery attendants. (DSASI 1, 3): Student gallery attendants are a mainstay of Blaffer's public face to the university and Houston community. Blaffer employs 15-20 students each year to provide a human touch to the museum's art galleries, assure that visitors navigate safely throughout the space, and are Blaffer's first line of safety for works of art on display. Students go through a training program of videos and personal professional instruction in both museum security and Disney-style customer service training. This training has been very popular for international students looking to gain a better understanding American culture.

Student museum docents. (DSASI 1, 2,3,): Each year the Blaffer education curator hand picks students who meet academic criterion (advanced undergraduate or graduate students in art, art history, and education) to serve as paid museum docents. Typically about half of the museums 10-12 docents are students; the others are professional artists and educators. Training for the program is rigorous, incorporating extensive reading assignments, a meeting with artists and/ curators, and docents compose tour outlines and share resources through the use of iPads. Docents

typically lead free tours to groups of 10-20 visitors on a tour of the exhibitions museum, or public artworks on campus. Tours are tailored to a range of groups—university classes, school and community groups—and are booked in advance or offered on a drop-in basis in conjunction with selected museum and university events

7. What are other possible sources of funding available to your unit and what efforts are being made to access them?

Blaffer Art Museum raises 100% of funds required to cover exhibitions, publications, education, and programming costs, with University support limited to indirect facility and partial salary support. Grants from public agencies, corporations, foundations, and individuals are solicited and received for specific programs and exhibitions on an as-needed basis. These funding sources are often earmarked as restricted use funds, unavailable for student exhibitions. SFAC funding is the only resource available to fund programs and activities devoted specifically to the UH student population. The School of Art has no direct fundraising staff and is unable to contribute any financial support for its student-related projects. Blaffer recognizes the importance of the student exhibitions and dedicates significant time and effort to achieve an excellent presentation, and the museum is greatly appreciative of support from the Student Fees Advisory Committee, which is vital in ensuring the success of these two exhibitions, as well as to the success of the Blaffer Student Association (BSA).

8. List any overlap between the Blaffer Art Museum and other units providing services to students.

Blaffer Art Museum is the sole professional art museum on the main campus of the University of Houston and the only public university museum in the region. Blaffer presents programs and exhibitions that are relevant and intellectually stimulating to the university community. Blaffer works diligently to provide cultural programs of the highest quality for all the student body, and our exhibitions and programs are not merely attended by students, but they are often integrated into their curriculum. These year-round offerings are unique to Blaffer in that no other unit has the professional staff, fundraising ability, or secured facility to present professional art exhibitions of this sort on campus.

Blaffer regularly collaborates with other campus departments to create stimulating programs that maximize our impact on campus and the community. In the past, Blaffer Art Museum has collaborated with the School of Art; the School of Theatre and Dance; the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts; the College of Education; the College of Law; the Bauer College of Business; Honors College; Student Program Board; Office of Human Resources, among many other departments. In the upcoming months, Blaffer will be pleased to add the College of Optometry, the Hilton College, the LGBT Center, and the Council of Ethnic Organizations to that list. In 2012, we entered into a mutually beneficial relationship with the Student Program Board to increase both organizations presence and opportunities to maximize outreach on campus.

The museum also reaches the university community through the *Committee on Visual Culture (CoVC)*; a volunteer group of university faculty and staff from various departments who work together to promote the museum and educate students through collaborative programs and curriculum enhancement. The *CoVC* meets once a semester to talk about upcoming exhibitions and discuss opportunities to encourage further university involvement using the museum as an “educational resource.”

Blaffer Art Museum is proud of its success in fulfilling its mission of serving as an educational resource for all UH students, and is excited about the continued growth of campus interest in the visual arts via the Tier One message of student success.