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BRAND-NEW BENTON MUSEUM OF ART AT POMONA COLLEGE OPENS DOORS TO PUBLIC



Aerial view of the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College

Pomona College is thrilled to announce the opening of the brand-new Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College. Made possible by a \$15 million gift from alumna Janet Inskeep Benton '79, the new museum was designed by Machado Silvetti and Gensler and completed in 2019. The Benton opened its doors for appointment-only viewing in May and is planning its ceremonial events for Fall 2021, when Pomona students are fully back on campus. The new building offers three times the space of the Montgomery Art Center, the previous home of the Pomona College Museum of Art; a direct relationship with its surrounding community; a design that fluidly blends inside and outside spaces; integrated collection study centers; and an elegant and inviting venue for both the permanent collection and today's contemporary artists. The Benton Museum of Art opens a new era in the institution's decades-long history as one of Southern California's most innovative art venues.

"The visual and performing arts are essential elements in creating connection and meaning, raising crucial questions, and envisioning new paths forward for society," said Pomona College President G. Gabrielle Starr. "As Pomona has always seen access to art as a central aspect of education for both our campus and wider community, it is only fitting that we have a new home for the College's art collection and the work of contemporary artists speaking directly to our times. The new Benton Museum of Art allows us to better fulfill our mission of serving our academic community and our neighbors in the region. I would like to thank Janet Inskeep Benton and everyone, from the museum staff to our campus facilities team, who helped us realize this new chapter for the arts at Pomona College."

"The true joy of this project for me goes beyond the beautiful new building and impressive collection of art objects," said lead donor Janet Inskeep Benton. "I am most excited for the social and intellectual engagement that will happen at the Benton as students, faculty, and

community members view exhibitions and consider how art helps us think about the world around us.”



Installation view of *In Our Care: Institutional History in Material Form* at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College. Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber '14

“It’s every museum director’s dream to be able to take up residence in a new building,” said Victoria Sancho Lobis, Sarah Rempel and Herbert S. Rempel '23 Director of the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College. “I’m grateful to Janet Benton, my predecessor Kathleen Stewart Howe, and the spectacular Pomona College staff for navigating this building process—as well as the challenges of the past year—so beautifully. I’m excited to see the galleries filled with art work, visitors, and the new energy that comes with a new home.”

The Building



Street view: the corner of College and Bonita Avenue. Photo: Richard Barnes

Pomona College’s commitment to the visual arts dates back to its earliest days, when Rembrandt Hall was originally constructed as a museum to serve faculty and students. In 1958, the College opened the Montgomery Art Center to house its growing collection, which

now includes approximately 16,000 works of art, including a deep collection of Renaissance painting (the Kress Collection of Renaissance panel paintings); works on paper including photographs, prints, and drawings; and more than 4,000 works from Native American cultures in North America. Despite expansions and renovations over the years, the Montgomery building could not keep pace with the growing collection, and the museum found it necessary in recent years to store its collection in multiple sites across campus.

The new Benton allows for a much more expansive, integrated, and technologically updated presentation of the museum's collection and its full program of temporary exhibitions. With the mandates to increase the museum's size, expand its educational capacities, and better address the community, architects Machado Silvetti and Gensler created a sophisticated and open structure of cast-in-place concrete, topped with a gently sloping roofline and accented throughout by red cedar and bronze. Drawing on the courtyard as a motif of the Pomona College campus, the architects designed the building for free passage of visitors and light from inside to outside, creating a subtle and dynamic sense of movement and porousness. Sited at the intersection of Bonita Avenue and College Avenue, the new Benton welcomes Pomona College and Claremont visitors with multiple entrances and creates a dialogue with its neighbors, which include Claremont's public library and civic center.

"From the beginnings of this project there was a perfect alignment between the Benton's mission and our most cherished professional interest and skills: to bring together—spatially, functionally, and aesthetically—higher education, art, and the constituent communities into a building crafted to host and promote the multiplicity of experiences that the visual arts offer," said Jorge Silvetti, Founding Principal of Machado Silvetti. "These goals were further enabled by the College's inspired choice to locate it on the border between the campus and the town, allowing us to weave together, architecturally and urbanistically, both social communities in an effective, as well as symbolic, intervention in the urban fabric."



Alison Saar, *Imbue* (2020). Bronze. Pomona College Collection. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

At 33,000 square feet across three levels, the new Benton is three times the size of the Montgomery Art Center. At street level, the main floor features six flexible galleries, the largest 1,500 total square feet; a visitor welcome center; a pavilion for events that opens out into the Bryson Courtyard with floor-to-ceiling glass doors; offices; collection storage and workspaces; and a loading dock—a first for the College’s art museum. The grounds include theater seating in the Bryson Courtyard; an interior sculpture court with a new commissioned and site-specific sculpture, *Imbue*, by Alison Saar; and ample benches and bike racks around the museum for visitors. Inside, a loft space above the main floor offers more offices; an archive room; and a large work area for study, collection preparation, and meetings. With the completion of the building, the museum staff is now, for the first time, under one roof.

At the Montgomery Art Center, a dedicated facility for studying the collection was open to students and faculty in 2003. Hampered, however, by a lack of space, that Collection Study Center was also used to store the art collection as well as materials related to temporary exhibitions. With the Benton, the museum can now fully meet its educational mission. The lower level of the building is a new educational hub, with vaults for Native American art and works on paper directly adjacent and connected to study areas or “portals.” These classrooms are fully equipped with digital and projection capabilities as well as informal display spaces that allow students intimate access to art from the permanent collection. With convertible furniture that allows for flexibility for both visiting classes and displays of objects, these portals were designed specifically to bring the objects of the past into conversation with the students of today. The lower level also contains additional storage spaces for the collection and exhibition equipment, and a registration office and workspace.



Collection vault. Photo: Randall R. Howard

Aligned with Pomona College’s commitment to environmental protection and responsible, sustainable buildings, the Benton received LEED-NC Version 3 Gold certification and has one of the lowest Energy Use Intensity scores of any museum built in California in the past decade. Under construction from November 2017 and completed in June 2019 with a total cost of \$44 million, the building is a new focal point for the visual arts in Claremont, with the mission of serving both the local and campus communities, an invitation embodied in the

building by three separate entryways that make the Benton accessible from nearly every vantage point.

The Collection

The collection of the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College extends from the vaults at the Benton across campus, where significant works by prominent artists can be found. In the building, the collection numbers approximately 16,000 works and includes the notable specific holdings of the Kress Collection of Renaissance panel paintings (8 paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries); more than 4,000 objects from Native American groups spanning from the pre-Columbian era to the 20th century; and works on paper, including four complete series of etchings by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya, prints by the German Expressionists, and works by the late textile artist and printmaker June Wayne. The collection also includes a growing representation of contemporary art, befitting Pomona College's legacy as an institution that has shaped some of Southern California's most significant artists, including Chris Burden '69, Marcia Hafif '51, Helen Pashgian '56, Peter Shelton '73, and James Turrell '65.



Helen Pashgian, *Primavera* (2020). Cast urethane. 45.5 in. diameter. Installation view at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College in April 2021. Pomona College Collection. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen. Restricted gift of Michael S. Segal '79 in honor of Trustee Emerita M. Helen Pashgian '56; Trustee Janet Benton '79; former director of the Pomona College Museum of Art Kathleen Stewart Howe; and Donald M. Pattison for their contributions to the Benton Museum of Art and to Pomona College.

On campus, visitors will find pillars of the Benton's collection that include Turrell's Skyspace *Dividing the Light* (2007) and the monumental mural by Jose Clemente Orozco, *Prometheus* (1930). The Benton's collection also includes preparatory drawings and sketches for *Prometheus*.

Exhibitions and Programs

With the additional gallery space, the Benton will be able to mount more exhibitions and transition from a semester schedule to a year-round calendar of exhibitions and events. It will continue to present the museum's renowned Project Series, an initiative devoted to showcasing emerging or underrecognized artists with a focus on those active in Southern California. The series, which now numbers more than 50 exhibitions since 1999, has featured such artists as Andrea Bowers, Mark Bradford, Charles Gaines, Ken Gonzales-Day, and Amanda Ross-Ho.



Installation view of حب / Love (2020) as part of *Alia Ali: Project Series 53*.
Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber '14

The Benton will also continue to mentor students and host a robust internship program in which students from The Claremont Colleges actively participate in all aspects of museum work including curation, interpretation, and educational outreach. The new collection study centers facilitate such faculty and student involvement, with the holdings of the museum woven into class curricula and student projects.



Third-grade class from the Claremont Unified School District in the Native American Collection Study Room. Photo: Justine Bae Bias

The educational reach of the Benton extends beyond the Pomona campus to local elementary schools as well. In 2011, the museum, working with museum educators and local teachers and administrators, developed a program that addressed the curricular needs of the third-grade common core standards. This Native American Collection Study Center Outreach Program introduces Native American culture—and museums themselves—to young students and allows the museum to create internships for college students seeking experience as teachers. These college students are mentored by many retired teachers who remain active members of the museum’s Rembrandt Club. Due to the generosity of that group, the Native American program is entirely free to schools.

With this new building, the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College is now better equipped to serve the campus community, the city of Claremont, and the region’s artists as a laboratory and a home for creative expression. The culmination of almost 10 years of planning and construction, the new Benton honors the past, interrogates the present, and shapes the future in its spacious and welcoming galleries set into the landscape of Claremont and Pomona College.

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About the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College

Now housed in the new Benton Museum of Art designed by Machado Silvetti and Gensler, Pomona College’s collection of art numbers 16,000 objects, including Italian Renaissance paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation; works on paper, including a first edition print series by Francisco Goya given by Norton Simon; and works in various media produced in Southern California in the twentieth century. In keeping with Pomona College’s reputation as a leading center of the visual arts, the collection also includes works by such esteemed alumni as Chris Burden ’69, Marcia Hafif ’51, Helen Pashgian ’56, Peter Shelton ’73, and James Turrell ’65. Recognized globally for its commitment to contemporary art, the museum is the home of *The Project Series*, which has featured more than 50 contemporary Southern California artists since it began in 1999. Through its collaboration with students and faculty, the museum encourages active learning and creative exploration across all disciplines of study within the liberal arts context.