

Proposed New Gallery Initiatives
January 14, 2008

General Summary: This initiative proposes the transformation of the Spencer Museum from a canonical, taxonomic, and largely chronological series of galleries into an engaging network of social spaces that provides visitors a richly varied, experiential methodology with which to investigate art, visual culture and seeing in the 21st century. We propose retro-fitting the existing third floor galleries as a series of interconnected, interactive, and responsive spaces that draw both on the resources of existing collections, issue-driven projects, commissions, and the interplay of artists, curators, and the KU community broadly conceived. The fourth floor would focus on the collection and explore fundamental topics relevant to contemporary visual pedagogy and scholarship across a broad range of geography and history through thematic displays developed by a lead curator in consultation with museum staff, KU faculty and community experts. The intended goal of this proposal is to transform existing spaces with minimal structural alteration and fiscal cost by redirecting current resources and infusing new technological, conceptual and programmatic approaches to art and visual culture.

A Five Tiered Approach

1. **Responsive Space** (Artist-Museum-Viewer): The “Central Court” would serve as an artist project space. By allowing artist to occupy the core space of the museum and one of the key arenas of visual engagement, we underscore the prominence of artists and the promotion of new art at the Spencer. Furthermore, the program guidelines for this space would guarantee optimal social functionality.
2. **Interactive Space** (Interdisciplinary Laboratory): The existing “Medieval Gallery” would be refitted as laboratory for transdisciplinary investigation into the collection. Since this space would be driven by programmatic guidelines; there are a number of innovative approaches that could be taken. Exhibition proposals from a broad section of the KU community could be solicited, or the program could be limited to faculty working in conjunction with students, producing more traditional, published catalogues (and utilizing Stokstad Funds). The goal would be to generate new insight, understanding and scholarship on the collection.
3. **Media Space** (New Media Gallery): The “Asia Gallery” would become a center for exploring the intersection of art and technology. Most likely, an underlying programmatic foundation would need to be established—perhaps in conjunction with other KU academic units—allowing the space to operate as an interaction zone, or as a display gallery for new media.
4. **Classroom Space** (Teaching Gallery): Current plans for the Teaching Gallery are promising. Further programmatic and conceptual definition could allow for more innovative use. Participatory terminology along the lines of “classroom” or “laboratory” are more interactive than “teaching.” Further technological utilization such as providing online registration and information dissemination via the website would be optimal.

5. **Thematic Spaces** (Collections): The entire 4th Floor would explore the permanent collection through a series of thematically developed displays. Over the course of the next year, a range of proposals would be developed by curators and educators for reinstallation. The scale of each of proposal is open-ended; however, ideally, three large, encompassing themes would be identified and developed with organizational subsets. Each thematic display could provide a different type of viewing experience, incorporating a cross-section of media, explorations in accessibility to collection (open-storage/database etc), and relationships to KU curriculum/faculty/teaching needs.
6. **Issue Spaces** (Temporary/Special Exhibitions): The current “Renaissance Gallery” would serve as the main temporary/special exhibition space. Depending on the scale of the project, adjacent spaces (Medieval/Asia/CC) could be utilized as needed. The current proposal has not designated the two 4th Floor balconies. These could either be subsumed in the thematic reinstallation of the 4th Floor or could be used similarly as “issue spaces” for highlighting selectively, works in the collection and providing for the display for more rotationally-intensive works in the collection (i.e. paper, fabric).