Steele Hall Gallery exhibits contemporary black artists and showcases Bennett’s extensive collection of paintings, sculpture, and African artifacts through an innovative curatorial lense. Our mission is comprised of three main goals.

1. To exhibit interdisciplinary artwork that can attract students of multiple departments at Bennett College.

2. To find innovative ways for the students and public to connect with Bennett’s art collection.

3. To showcase contemporary artists who engage with the students and public through workshops, lectures, and hands-on demonstrations.
Kim Anno, a nationally renowned artist from the Bay Area came to Bennett College to collaborate with over sixty students to create a new collaborative film/video, a contemporary environmental take on Dante's Purgatorio.

The collaboration explored how the next generation of young women of color can present a metaphorical call to action to shape the global future. Students were artists, actors, dancers, and musicians in this new production.

Flag Making Workshop

Students created flags to be part of the set of Kim Anno’s film Earth/Sky/Canto 2. The film works with youth to highlight the generation who will be responsible for the coming disaster due to climate change. Through this workshops students made flags to empower them to harness and take ownership of the future.
Choir, Performance, and Screening

Before the screening of the film Earth/Sky/Canto 2 there were readings by students from the Africana Women’s Studies department. The students were asked to choose texts that they feel defines their generation. Kim Anno also worked with the theater classes to create a choir based on Dante’s Inferno. The students performed the choir piece during the screening of the film.

Photographs

Anno’s photographs are part of Men and Women in Water Cities, which is a series of large format photographs and short films about cultural adaptation and resiliency in the face of climate change and sea level rise, particularly for those in coastal communities. Anno works with young people, actors, athletes, musicians, and dancers from the local areas where sea level rise will become a real challenge including Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Diego, Miami, Durban, Key West, and Havana.
To honor graduation and alumnae weekend, we organized nine meetings between graduating seniors and alumnae using nine different prompts. The conversations revealing the perspectives of the two generations of Bennett college grads were recorded and were playing throughout the duration of the exhibition.
Time Capsule

A time capsule was also present in the gallery which all Bennett students, alumnae, and the public could contribute to. This particular time capsule was focused on sound. A microphone was be set up for visitors of the gallery to speak into. Their words were be recorded, put onto a USB stick and placed inside the time capsule. Ten years into the future the time capsule will be opened, becoming a source of reflection for the class of 2016, and inspiration for future students.
Selma Burke was a renowned African-American sculptor who created the portrait of FDR on the Roosevelt Dime. Her sculpture of Mary McLeod Bethune in Bennett College’s permanent collection was used as a prompt to explore the life, legacy, and artwork of this incredible women.

Selma Burke Film

During the exhibition there was a projection of a video donated to Bennett College from the Mooresville Public Library. The video shows a fourth grader interviewing Selma Burke shortly before her death. Burke talks to the young women with an incredible gentleness and patience that sets the mood of the exhibition and perfectly illustrates what an incredible educator Selma Burke really was.
Selma Burke was a passionate supporter of figurative sculpture, so much so that she dedicated her life to teaching it. Her unwavering love of sculpture inspired her to open two different schools devoted to teaching this medium, the Selma Burke School of Sculpture in New York and the Selma Burke Art Center in Pittsburgh, PA. Burke wanted her students to understand the context for their art, how it reflected social issues, and how art could change the world and the direction of it.

To carry on her legacy, and to truly harness the spirit of this incredible artist, we re-opened the Selma Burke School of Sculpture here at Bennett College. Showcased here is student work that was created throughout the duration of the exhibition.

During the one week course students learned how to realistically sculpt the human form from a live model. Students learned about basic anatomy, sculpting facial features, and the history of figurative sculpture. Guest artists attended during the week to teach different activities including charcoal drawing and blind contour exercises.
Selma Burke Monument

Selma Burke created the relief sculpture of FDR on the dime. This piece was created to be a monument of Burke's incredible legacy. On top of this structure are the Roosevelt dimes placed in succession from 1946 to 2015. We come across the dimes numerous times every single day. In this monument the dimes are mediated for the audience in order to experience them in a new light. They are elevated on a pedestal for the public to see these objects as powerful pieces of art. As the years of the dimes rise from 1946, they climb higher and higher onto this solemn structure. They rise into the future, mimicking how a legacy grows and carries on day by day, year by year. This monument lets us contemplate the power of an incredible African-American educator, sculptor, and pioneer.
Bennett College
STEELE HALL GALLERY
Spring 2016 Exhibitions

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