

PRESS RELEASE

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Williams College Museum of Art Presents The Matter of Theology A Conversation with the Collection

March 22, 2008 and ongoing

Williamstown, Mass. — The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) presents The Matter of Theology, an exhibition that pairs selections from the museum's permanent collection with theological questions that aid viewers in seeing art from a different perspective. Here, art objects, originally created for various religious purposes, are placed in a new context, allowing the viewer to consider larger questions about spirituality and meaning. This long-term installation was organized by Amanda Hellman, Williams College Graduate Student in the History of Art, Class of 2008.

The Matter of Theology poses questions such as "What makes a place sacred?" and "How do objects serve as intermediaries between the human and the divine?" Based on these questions, various peoples and cultures have created objects to use for ritual, ceremonial, and everyday functions. The theological inquiries can apply to all the objects in the exhibition although they are grouped with specific artworks. For instance, "From where does spiritual inspiration come?" is placed in the context of an alabaster sculpture of St. John the Evangelist from the 15th century and a Lula Standing Power Figure from the

Congo, from the 20th century.

"The Matter of Theology was an exciting challenge," said exhibition curator, Amanda Hellman. "Rather than explaining different religions with the objects devotees create, this exhibition considers how humans have visually worked through underlying theological questions. I tried to initiate a conversation among the art and hope viewers can engage in this dialogue when they enter the gallery."

"Each object in this collection, when created, was intended to foster or provoke some kind of encounter with the largest human questions - meaning, purpose, self-transcendence, destiny," comments Richard E. Spalding, Chaplin to the College and Coordinator of Community Service. "By articulating some of those questions in the context of their display, the exhibition invites us into an eternal conversation."

Visitors are asked to bring to the exhibition what they know and believe, what they wonder and doubt. The exhibition asks that viewers take time to consider the conversations between the objects in the gallery and the questions that are asked, as well as raised. A gallery guide provides additional context for the function of the object in its originating culture.

At WCMA, several galleries are devoted to displaying works from the museum's permanent collection. Often, these permanent installations are used by Williams faculty in teaching. As a teaching museum, WCMA strives to find lively and innovative ways to teach with art; educating students and the public through art objects, creating learning opportunities for Williams students by allowing them to curate exhibitions, and providing access to the 12,000 works in our collection through scheduled times in the Rose Study Gallery, a museum classroom.

Williams College Museum of Art

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. Contact: Suzanne A. Silitch, Director of Public Relations and External Affairs, 413.597.3178.