Lauren McCune ’06 spent much of her final year at Whitman in a senior art studio in a building that could double as a Halloween haunted house. Senior art majors have the privilege of staking out workspace in this aging apartment house on the edge of campus next to a former funeral home. The makeshift studios offer lots of room and walls the student artist can draw and paint on, but it is an “extreme environment,” says McCune. The building is cold and drafty in winter and hot in early fall and the spring. And yet, for seniors these studios are a little slice of heaven not accessible to younger art students, who vie for work and storage space in the crowded Olin art wing.

By the time art majors in the Class of 2009 are seniors, their studios could be in a modern building with a wall of windows welcoming the campus in and extending the artists and their work out into the lush green landscape. Younger students won’t have their own studios, but will have more room to work and to showcase their talents.

If fund raising goes as expected, the college will break ground on the Center for Visual Arts in the spring of 2007.

Lauren McCune ’06
Austin, Texas
Sheehan Gallery senior art installation

The Art: The installation incorporates different layers or walls that are representative of “the socialized aspects of personality, sexuality and community that filter our experiences.” It draws the viewer into Olin Hall, into Sheehan Gallery, then into a room, and ultimately, into a closet. The private space of a closet is perceived in many ways, says artist Lauren McCune ’06. She invites the viewer into the closet to learn about aspects of her personality and her art. She reveals herself through paintings, drawings, photography and journal entries accumulated during her Whitman experience. Open dresser drawers reveal her private thoughts. Hangers hold paintings and drawings, yet some hold nothing so the viewer can wonder what is missing.

The Artist: McCune came to Whitman with theater and environmental studies on her mind. On the advice of her residential assistant (RA), an art major, McCune took studio art design and loved it. “I didn’t think art was something I could do in an academic setting,” she says. She has been encouraged by a study abroad trip to the Studio Art Center International in Florence, Italy, and the senior art majors’ visit to New York. She believes the discipline she learned in the Whitman art program will help her pursue her art after she graduates. She hopes to earn an apprenticeship in an artist community where she can continue her art education. Teaching is also an option for McCune, who likes to show middle-schoolers their art doesn’t have to be like what they see in art books.
Opportunities to explore and develop artistic potential are links, as are tools of the trade, mentors and teachers.

Challenges of the past

Whitman is home to two art galleries and informal art displays around campus, and is known for its outdoor sculptures. Yet for Whitman’s young artists — the students who take classes for enjoyment and for serious endeavor — art is something frequently experienced behind Olin’s bunker-like walls. For non-art students, the Olin art wing is just the beast that eats Frisbees and soccer balls and is known for its outdoor sculptures. Nevertheless, says art Professor Keiko Hara member of the art faculty. “The color palette is limited for ceramics by the toxicity of the chemicals” that must be mixed, he says. Ventilation issues also limit the types of metal that can be welded. “Awareness of health and safety factors for artistic work has grown exponentially in the last decade,” Timm-Ballard says. While ventilation has been brought up to code for the art wing, the new center — by virtue of the fact it is a new structure — will have even higher standards. The new facility, for instance, will have spray paint booths. “It’s not OK just to take paint outside as we do now,” he says. “Spray drifts, and it lingers.” In spite of the challenges, Timm-Ballard explains. Only a handful of students can work at one time in the metal and woodworking areas because space is tight around the equipment. The glaze-mixing area for pottery wheels, is essentially a chemistry lab. “The color palette is limited for

Matt Jungmann ’06
Walla Walla
Sheehan Gallery senior art installation

The Art: “To me, art is about connecting and immersing oneself in everything that we witness in life and then genuinely embracing each of those experiences.” Matt Jungmann ’06 writes in his artist’s statement. “I wish to project to the viewers the level of awe and respect that I have for the power of our minds. Even more, I hope that I can persuade the viewers to reflect upon their own perceptions of this force that inherently makes us human.” The art installation is a schematic of the brain, and the media used includes a tractor engine, clear tubing, water and food coloring, pre-made plexiglas boxes and their frames, which were created by Jungmann. “The engine is the brain of the automobile; it acts as the brain stem in my installation,” he says.

The Artist: Jungmann grew up in Walla Walla and chose Whitman partly to keep his local band alive. He plays rhythm guitar and sings lead vocals. He discovered another artistic outlet in his first college art class. He has explored a variety of art media at Whitman, but finds that as a sculptor, he has the freedom to incorporate any medium in his art. While he continues his pursuit of art, he also will seek success with his band, and perhaps, pursue graduate school.

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The Center for Visual Arts will sit on the site of the former health center, south of Reid Campus Center.

A facility that provides access, centralization, safety, collaboration and visibility is a vital link in the chain.

S. Schomburg '85
J. Rasmussen '71

OPPORTUNITIES for the future

So what can the new building offer that the old one could not? For starters, the 12,000 square feet in the current art wing will more than triple to 36,000 square feet in the new facility. “It will be great not to have people working on top of each other and stumbling over each other,” says Timm-Ballard.

Separate studios to house drawing, painting, sculpture (ceramics, wood and metal), printmaking and book arts mean the curriculum will not be as limited by space. About 500 students enroll in art classes now, but first-year and sophomore non-majors sometimes have difficulty getting into classes. “It is extremely important for non-art majors to be exposed to art,” says Susan Schomburg ’85, owner of the Schomburg Gallery in Santa Monica, Calif. “Ideally art enhances, sharpens or deepens the individual’s awareness of himself and the world surrounding him,” she says.

In the new building, space will be dedicated to digital design and photography, two mediums housed in a tiny room in Olin. A lab devoted to digital media will allow more courses, and an additional faculty member will lead that emerging program.

Specialized air quality systems and wider clearance for woodworking and metalworking equipment will be in place. The new facility will have a separate area for mixing ceramic glazes, and kilns will be located in an outside yard with room to use loading jacks to lift artwork into the kilns. Expanded loading and storage areas will also make larger scale artworks possible.

Art major Matt Jungmann ’06 would have welcomed that feature. He has a large sculpture sitting on the overgrown grass outside the current art wing, and “the plant maintenance crew has been after me to move it so they can mow,” Jungmann says. Seniors who follow Jungmann by a few years also won’t have to lug equipment, canvases and other materials across campus on their bikes and their backs. Senior art majors and faculty will have studios at one location, which will allow for more collaborative learning and less juggling of equipment and time.

“Lounges will be built in so students don’t eat and drink in the studios,” says Timm-Ballard. The lounges will have digital access and feature student art displays, which also will be prominent throughout the building. He and Hara expect opportunities for visiting artists to increase with more and improved office space, equipment and facilities to offer. Wireless and hard-wired technology will be available throughout the building. “It’s an almost impossible situation in the current building,” says art major Matt Pearson ’07, who dabbles in everything from painting to digital art and Web site design. “You can’t put cables through brick walls. It wasn’t designed to support this type of infrastructure.”

Perhaps, the most exciting aspect of the new facility is that its wall of windows facing Reid Campus Center will make art part of the campus community. “I am thrilled to see art finally being more incorporated into the Whitman infrastructure,” says Schomburg. “Art has the power to enrich the lives of those individuals who are exposed to it.”

Jack Rasmussen ’71, director and curator of American University Museum in Washington, D.C., agrees. “Whitman’s commitment to the arts will be visible with the new art building,” he says. A statement by Rasmussen is true on many campuses, but at none more than Whitman: “In the end, the teachers and students you live with and work with form the quality of your educational experience,” says the Whitman alumnus. This new facility simply will be another means to improve that experience at Whitman, he says.

Ashley Lau ’08
San Francisco
Medium: Ceramics

The artist: Ashley Lau ’08 found at Whitman different techniques to pursue her ceramics art and “professors and students who learn from each other.” Her latest art pieces reflect her fascination with marine biology. “Rich colors exist under the sea; colors you don’t see normally,” she says. The flowing forms in underwater life lend themselves well to ceramics as she draws from research and embellishes with imagination. She used a combination of techniques from throwing clay to hand sculpting to finish her underwater coral formation. Learning about materials and how to mix and create her glazes has been a new and worthwhile experience.

The artist: Matt Pearson ’07 paints a still life in the painting/drawing bay in the Olin art wing.

The artist: Ashley Lau ’08 talks about her coral sculpture in the ceramics and pottery room in the Olin art wing. The finished piece is shown at left.

The artist: The art: Matt Pearson’s art interests encompass media from drawing and painting to digital art and Web site design. With his digital work, he has a clear picture in his mind of what he wants to create and transfers that to the computer, much like he would use a pencil or paint brush on a drawing or painting. With other art forms, the picture isn’t as clear: “I get an idea, and I go in a direction. I use anything and everything as my utensil,” he says. Even when creating with paint or pencil, he uses his technical savvy to enhance the work.

For a self-portrait painting assignment he used a cell phone camera to shoot a photo of himself in a dark room as he looked into a mirror, lighting the shot with a penlight. He transferred the photo from cell phone to computer and manipulated the photo in Photoshop, then painted the image that emerged (see inset).

The artist: Pearson’s passion for art began in high school in Yakima, Wash. Using random materials for his drawing and painting is a “very organic experience,” while his technology and Web design work is “a more rigid, structured experience.” The random and rigid aspects of his art and design works create balance in his life, he says. His technical expertise will drive him toward a Web site or digital graphics career, with painting and drawing always a part of his life for enjoyment.

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A supportive environment in which the arts can flourish is a link.

Ties to the COMMUNITY

The Center for Visual Arts will be ideally situated at the edge of campus as an anchor to Walla Walla’s planned art corridor. The community has spent the past decade revitalizing downtown, promoting tourism and growing a base of wineries and art galleries, earning it recognition as one of America’s “100 Best Small Arts Towns.”

Whitman’s arts center will build on this base, says Timothy Bishop, executive director of the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation. “It will be a tremendous asset to both Whitman and downtown Walla Walla. The proximity of the building to the emerging arts district will continue to strengthen and enhance the long history of successful partnerships between the Whitman campus and downtown,” he says.

“The new visual arts center will raise the standard and expectations of arts in our community,” says Mark Anderson ’78, owner of the Walla Walla Foundry. “The arts district is a concept. Whitman’s ‘78, our community,” says the standard and expectations of arts in campus and downtown,” he says. partnerships between the Whitman the long history of successful

Colin Robinson ’06
Olympia, Wash. Medium: Ceramics

The art: Colin Robinson has had his hands in clay for more than a third of his young life. During his first ceramics class as a high school freshman, he realized he enjoyed working with his hands and creating something beautiful that people could enjoy. At Whitman he explored design principles and added the component of artistic impression. “The artist makes choices that can elicit a certain reaction from the viewer,” he says.

The artist: A politics major and outdoorsman, Robinson hasn’t set his future course yet. His work with the Outdoor Program at Whitman — teaching climbing — garnered him a summer job as a logistics coordinator with Outward Bound, an experiential recreation company. Beyond that may lie work with political campaigns or political action committees and, eventually, graduate school. His art will continue to be a key element of his life.

In her office, surrounded by more than 50 pieces of student artwork (a collection that will be displayed in the new Welty Health Center), Hara talked with great pride about her past students, although she also hinted that she wasn’t an easy teacher. “I wanted to push my students beyond what they thought they could do. I wanted them to grow and become more creative and inventive. I wanted them to find true confidence in themselves.”

Longtime art professor ‘graduates’

By Dave Holden

After 21 years at Whitman, Keiko Hara was finally ready to graduate. At least that’s how the 63-year-old professor, sitting in her Olin Hall office a few days before Commencement, was viewing her pending early retirement.

“I am so excited,” Hara said, a smile exploding across her face. “I feel just like one of my students. I am graduating into the real world now. I can focus all my energy on my own art. I will give it my best shot.”

While teaching was her No. 1 priority over the past two decades, Hara also made her mark as a highly regarded artist. Her works have graced galleries from Chicago to New York to Finland, Germany and England. Early this year, her exhibit at Chicago’s Perimeter Gallery featured “Topophilia-Imbuing Inert,” a breathtaking oil-on-linen that pays tribute, both in scale (three panels, 74-by-168 inches each) and appearance, to Claude Monet’s “Water Lilies,” a painting she has long adored.

Born in Korea to Japanese parents, Hara came to the United States as a graduate student in 1971 and polished off three degrees in three years, including a master of fine arts from the Cranbook Academy of Art. She earned permanent resident status in 1983 and settled at Whitman a few years later.

With plans to keep Walla Walla as home base, Hara already has solo exhibits planned at the Walla Walla Foundry and American University in Washington, D.C. And while thrilled about working as a full-time artist — calling it the next phase of her life — Hara was bracing for the downside, knowing she will miss daily contact with students. In some respects, she seldom shed her teaching role over the years. She worked most summers with student interns, and she set aside break time to take art majors on inspirational treks through New York City art galleries and museums. “Teaching young people is what kept me refreshed,” she said.

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Building a NEW ERA

Completing the fund raising for the Center for Visual Arts is a top priority for Whitman. With groundbreaking tenta- 

ively planned for spring of 2007, the college now enters the final, and most challenging stage of fund raising with almost $3.5 million left to go.

“Special thanks are due to the many who have endorsed the importance of a high-quality facility to inspire students in their artistic endeavors through their donations to this project,” said President George Bridges.

The total cost of this roughly $15 million project includes not only the 38,000-square-foot Center for Visual Arts but also a new facility to house the health and counseling centers, named the Robert and Elizabeth Welty Health Center. (See the back cover for a photo.)

For more information on the Center for Visual Arts, see www.whitman.edu, select Giving, then Capital Projects. For information on the Schomburg Gallery, visit www.schomburg-galler.com. For more information on Jack Baamusem, visit www.american.edu/museum.