Midway through the spring semester, the arts schedule shows more than a thousand words could ever say. The De Pree Art Center is showing “The Printed Image,” curated by students working with Dr. Anne Heath and exhibiting materials collected by the late Dr. Richard Wunder and made available to the college by Dr. Maurice Kawashima. The Knickerbocker Theatre is hosting the department of dance’s major annual concert, Dance 35. In Dimnent Memorial Chapel, the Orchestra and Symphonette are performing. And in the DeVitt Center, theatre is staging Big Love, a modern take on Aeschylus’s The Danaids. All on the same day.

Throughout the school year, there are seldom more than a few days when there isn’t at least one arts event taking place at the college. The volume works because the arts are not only at Hope, but of Hope. Yes, the events involve a core group of students who are majoring in the arts, but that nucleus is complemented by hundreds of others college-wide for whom participation is a serious avocation even as they study with other careers in mind.

Crucially, Hope presents students with the opportunity because creating and enjoying art matters. “I think that the arts are really important to society,” said Dr. William Reynolds, dean for the arts and humanities and professor of English. “Celebrating the creative process through art, dance, music and theatre is essential to the richness and fullness of every human spirit.”

“They play an essential role in a liberal arts college, and we’re very fortunate to have four arts departments and a creative writing section of the English department that operate at such a high level—and at such a high level that we forget that it is a high level compared to other institutions,” he said.

Throughout the college’s arts programs, students work—sometimes with faculty collaborators, sometimes independently—to bring their vision from concept to reality. Here, juniors Gabriel Rubio of Holland, Mich., and Quinn McIlhargy of Grand Rapids, Mich., examine student ceramics in the kiln in the De Pree Art Center.

Larry Figueroa ’11
Holland, Mich.
Music
“Spending time with the music faculty has been one of the most astounding experiences of my life. The music faculty at Hope, apart from possessing complete mastery over their art, are exceptional instructors of the instrument or discipline. Spending time with them is like standing underneath a waterfall of knowledge and passion. They’ve all taken the time to help me make steps toward my personal musical growth.”

Karie Luidens ’09
Altamont, N.Y.
Art
“Before my studies at Hope, art, to me, was just about developing the technical skill to produce an appealing image. Over the past few years that’s changed. I’ve come to approach my own artistic endeavors deliberately, conscious of both my historical context and my own identity.”
Michigan Solo Competition sponsored by the Michigan String Teachers Association.
• Theatre's original production of Rose and the Rose was one of only three full-length college- or university-staged plays invited to be presented during the 2008 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival in Washington, D.C.; and Hope Summer Repertory Theatre is so highly regarded that it draws theatre professionals and student interns from throughout the U.S.

Maggie Oosterhouse '09
Holland, Mich.
Creative Writing

“I have found the workshops to be very helpful and I feel that the discussion with fellow students in workshops is stimulating in both helping me develop new ways of thinking about my writing pieces and clarifying what the common reader might think in regard to a particular piece. Equally as helpful and a core strength of the writing program are my professors’ reflections and the responses that they have made on my pieces.”

Laura Van Tassel '09
Spencer, Iowa
Theatre

“I found the acting classes that I took to be interesting and beneficial to my acting career. That acting career was short lived in college, though, because the theatre department is small, and more importantly, opened my eyes to the other areas of theatre production that exist.”

Amy Weber '09
Hoffman Estates, Ill.
Art History

“In found all of the opportunities that I have been afforded by the depth of art as a student, such as curating the Lyman Jellema show. Students are able to walk away from the department with experience already in the field in which they would like to work.”

Sarah Williams '09
Indianapolis, Ind.
Dance

“The dance department offers so many incredible opportunities to its students. At any given time, there are performance opportunities from studio classes, the semi-annual Student Choreographed Dance Concerts, and the Faculty Dance Concert. With all of our dual major programs, they make it possible for me to pursue interests outside of dance, for example, I am graduating in four years with two majors and two minors having studied abroad.”

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“Historic Christian Faith”

In some cases, the arts’ linkage to the college’s faith tradition is expressed directly. It’s made manifest through events like the fall-running Christmas Vespers, presented by the department of music; and through organizations like the student-run Sacred Dance group, which participates in the college’s Chapel services. More deeply, however, the connection is made through the issues that the faculty and students in the arts explore, and how they explore them.

“All theatre is spiritual in that it’s basically examining what it is to be alive—which means to be in relationship to other people,” Dr. Robins said. “It explores the meaning of life and beyond as humans seek answers. “When a student makes a decision to be an artist, they can choose the direction that they want to take, and if they have social issues or issues of faith that they want to address, they can approach them through their art,” Dr. Robins said. “I really admire students who are willing in their writing to grapple honestly with their questions, maybe even their doubts, about their faith and spirituality, and who are and who they want to become,” Professor Visser said.

The explorations can happen because faith is part of the institutional mix. Discussions regarding faith aren’t discouraged, they aren’t even merely tolerated. They’re encouraged, and even expected.

“We can approach pieces from many perspectives—technical, spiritual, human. Often times at many places one of those is left out for whatever reason,” Dr. Coyle said. “We can talk about the spiritual. We can talk about the technical. We can talk about the human. I think that’s what’s really special about this place.”

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“I think there are a good lot of life lessons to be learned in the workshop, apart from what you might learn about your specific poem,” said Carla Visser ’88, who coordinates the Jack Ridl Visiting Writers Series and is an adjunct assistant professor of English. “If you’re open to it, you can learn a lot about being a generous spirit, about being a good listener, about humility, and about kindness and gentleness, and above all about honesty, because the workshop only works when people are being honest.”

“In a Global Society”

All of the arts programs are deliberate in reflecting the diversity of human experience through their activities on campus and in encouraging students to look beyond campus to enhance their understanding of the world and, ultimately, to enhance themselves as artists as well as members of the global community.

Students can pursue internships in any of the arts through programs in Chicago, Ill.; New York City; and Philadelphia, Pa. Students have studied art history in France, dance in France and Mexico, music in England and France, and theatre in England and Ireland—and the list goes on.

“Every one of our exhibitions fits into a package that looks at the broad spectrum of human experience,” said Professor Steven Hoffman.

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