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## Art School: Margaret Aiken strengthens Connections between Museum and Community

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# ArtSchool

## MARGARET AIKEN STRENGTHENS CONNECTION BETWEEN MUSEUM AND COMMUNITY

Margaret Aiken is all ears.

She studied art at Yale and museum education at Tufts, then worked at the Center for Engineering Education and Outreach at Tufts, the Great Lakes Science Center, and the Science Museum of Minnesota. Now, as the Linde Family Foundation Coordinator of School and Family Programs, Aiken has set her sights on the already robust outreach efforts at the Colby College Museum of Art, with plans to:

- **Expand on an already ambitious schedule of museum educational programming by masterminding workshops, coordinating with area teachers, and arranging school and public tours.**
- **Develop a teacher advisory board for levels K through 12, which will help shape the direction of new projects.**
- **Facilitate the creation of programs such as story time for preschoolers and art making for veterans and seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's. Especially targeted for inclusion are underserved members of the community.**

For all these things to succeed, Aiken understands she'll need to build a foundation with outreach. "My philosophy about these programs is that you can't have a build-it-and-they-will-come kind of approach," she said. "You really have to have these conversations with members of the community to see what assets and needs they have. That just tends to create more fruitful experiences for everyone."

She'll also be working with volunteer and student docents. "I already told [the docents] I'm going to train them like I trained engineers and scientists," she said. One of the professional development experiences Aiken delivered at Great Lakes was called Portal to the Public, teaching museum educators how to help professional scientists and engineers translate their work for the public.

Though she has been at Colby only since August, Aiken had in just a few weeks already met with the superintendent of AOS92—the school district that comprises Waterville, Winslow, and Vassalboro—as well as principals and teachers who serve the K-12 community. She's looking forward to helping them boost their curriculums by showing them ways to engage with the museum's collections.

Seeing the Alex Katz paintings in the Paul J. Schupf Wing, for instance, starts her thinking "about Holden Caulfield, or Ralph Ellison, and I'm able to understand these really period-specific tensions," something she feels would be extremely beneficial for students.

In a larger sense, Aiken sees art as a cultural touchstone. "It's not necessarily for survival, but it's not really a luxury either," she said. "It's the way that people make sense of their experiences, how they relate to each other and their history, and how they find meaning in their lives."—*Pat Sims*