

***POETIC TRUTHS: HAWTHORNE, LONGFELLOW, AND AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE, 1840-1880* EXPLORES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LITERARY WORKS OF THESE TWO BOWDOIN GRADUATES AND THE ARTS**

Beginning Thursday, February 6 through July 20, 2025, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) presents the exhibition [\*Poetic Truths: Hawthorne, Longfellow, and American Visual Culture, 1840-1880\*](#), which marks the bicentennial of Bowdoin College's renowned Class of 1825. Members of this Class of 1825, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow created some of the most popular literature in nineteenth-century America. *Poetic Truths* features artworks inspired by Hawthorne's novels *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni* (1860) as well as Longfellow's epic poems *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847) and *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). Paintings, prints, photographs, and decorative arts from the Museum of Art's collection are featured alongside works generously lent by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Concord Free Public Library, the Howard University Gallery of Art, the Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, the Maine Historical Society, the McGuigan Collection, and the Peabody Essex Museum.

Curated by Laura F. Sprague, senior consulting curator at the BCMA, the exhibition explores how the two authors influenced American visual culture between 1840 and 1880. The works of these internationally celebrated writers inspired artists to create a wide range of paintings, sculpture, and prints. Conversely, the authors drew inspiration from art and objects of all ages, often using them as narrative devices. Through the poetic truths they expressed in poetry and prose, Longfellow and Hawthorne examined the human condition in ways that continue to offer meaningful insights today.

About the exhibition, Sprague observes: "Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Longfellow were brilliant storytellers who formulated ideas about their craft while Bowdoin students. In their desire to create a 'national literature,' they looked to America's past for their subjects. As the objects in *Poetic Truths* reveal, their compelling characters—from flawed Puritans to exiled French Catholics—inspired painters, sculptors, and printmakers for decades. Indeed, the rich imagery and complex moral themes explored in their work continue to resonate with readers nearly 200 years later."

In celebration of the bicentennial of Bowdoin College's Class of 1825, the exhibition was organized in tandem with the George J. Mitchell Dept. of Special Collections & Archives, which has recently launched its [Bowdoin College Class of 1825](#) digital project and an accompanying exhibition, *Before They Were Famous: The Student Days of the Class of 1825*, on view through June 6, 2025 at the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library. These undertakings use archival sources to

provide an overview of the daily campus life of this remarkable Bowdoin class, which included Hawthorne, Longfellow, three US representatives, and one US senator.

The Class of 1825 project was spearheaded by Director of Special Collections & Archives Kat Stefko, with significant assistance from Annabel Winterberg, Bowdoin Class of 2021, who served as Research Intern in Special Collections & Archives in 2021. Stefko notes: “The exhibition explores the quotidian as well as extraordinary moments of the Class of 1825's time at Bowdoin, from dorm room dramas to dating frustrations and from financial challenges to academic endeavors. Researching and curating this exhibition has deepened my understanding of the college's early history and opened up a window into what ‘going to college’ meant 200 years ago. I hope visiting the show and spending time with the materials on view inspire others to think anew about this famous class and the life-long friendships they forged at Bowdoin.”

Public talks and events will be presented in conjunction with *Poetic Truths*, including an opening [lecture](#) by Nicholas A. Basbanes on Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. in Kresge Auditorium in the Visual Arts Center. Presented in collaboration with Special Collections’ exhibition *Before They Were Famous*, the lecture will also coincide with Brunswick’s Longfellow Days programming. Other related events will be listed on the BCMA’s [Events](#) page.

Supported by the Lowell Innes Fund, *Poetic Truths* will be on view at the Museum of Art through July 20, 2025.

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