

# TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | SPRING 2019



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ON THE COVER

Louis Feuillade's *Le secret du corsaire rouge* (1911) and other early color films form the basis of Joshua Yumibe's research. Courtesy George Eastman Museum—Davide Turconi/Josef Joye Collection.



A sculpture depicting philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was presented along with a replica of his hut this spring. The hut was part of *A Curating Case Study: The Hut*, an Art History course taught in tandem with an exhibit at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society.

## Dear Alumni and Friends,



Anne Walters Robertson

During the last several months, scholars in the Division have received accolades from around the world for their work. We are proud of all of them, though we regret we can only mention a handful here.

A notable example is **David Wellbery** (Germanic Studies), upon whom the Goethe Society in Weimar, Germany, will bestow its Golden Goethe Medal in June for his lifelong study of Goethe, which has transformed our understanding of the author.

New faculty often revise their dissertations in their first books. Last fall, the Modernist Studies Association honored **Adrienne Brown** (English Language and Literature) with its First Book Prize for *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race*, showing how the skyscrapers that altered American skylines also changed our comprehension of race. Another first book, *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* by **Benjamin Morgan** (English) received the Sonya Rudikoff Award for the best first book in Victorian Studies from the Northeast Victorian Studies Association. And in January, **John Muse's** (English) *Microdramas: Crucibles for Theater and Time* won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism for its analysis of an intriguing genre—plays less than 20 minutes long.

Other scholars chart different paths. Moving away from his dissertation on contemporary composers, **Seth Brodsky** (Music) produced a history of musical modernism through the lens of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. Last fall, *From 1989, or European Music and the Modernist Unconscious* received the Lewis Lockwood Award of the American Musicological Society. And in literature, **Ling Ma** (Creative Writing,

English) won the 2018 Kirkus Prize for Fiction for her first novel, *Severance*.

Subsequent books illustrate scholars' ever-increasing breadth of knowledge. **Orit Bashkin** (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations) tackles Iraqi Jews' resettlement in newly created Israel in *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel*, co-winner of the 2018 Nikki Keddie Book Award of the Middle East Studies Association.

**C. Riley Snorton's** (English) *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, which underscores the importance of black trans narratives, was honored twice in 2018–19: with the William Sanders Scarborough Prize of the Modern Languages Association and the John Boswell Prize of the American Historical Association. Snorton shared the stage at MLA with **Deborah Nelson** (English), whose *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* earned the association's top award, the James Russell Lowell Prize, for its exploration of the subjects' antisentimental depiction of suffering in their work.

In April, *Tough Enough* also received the University of Chicago Press's annual Gordon J. Laing Prize, recognizing the book published in the past three years that brought the Press the greatest distinction.

All of this outstanding scholarship would not be possible without your support. Thank you for your generosity.

*Anne W. Robertson*

Anne Walters Robertson  
Dean, Division of the Humanities  
Claire Dux Swift Distinguished Service  
Professor, Department of Music

GOSHKA MACUGA, LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, 2018. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH



# BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE

BY JEANIE CHUNG

Joshua Yumibe shows  
early film's true colors.

Think about old movies, especially silent ones, and you imagine them in black and white. But most silent films, according to **Joshua Yumibe**, AM'00, PhD'07, had at least some color.

Before the heyday of feature-length Hollywood movies, most early films were fiction and nonfiction shorts; some were magical “trick” or “fairy” films, where the filmmakers exploited the new medium to make characters disappear or change shape, and color was part of this wonder.

An associate professor in English and the director of the film studies program at Michigan State University, Yumibe explores not just how early color films were made, but why they are significant. His latest book, *Chromatic Modernity: Color, Cinema, and Media of the 1920s* (Columbia University Press, April 2019, cowritten with Sarah Street), illustrates what Yumibe describes as “a very chromatic decade—not just in film but from automobiles to fashion to printing.”

The study of color film touches on topics including modernism, aesthetic theory, chemistry, and feminism, Yumibe says. “You can spend your life going down rabbit holes. You start pull-

IMAGES COURTESY GEORGE EASTMAN MUSEUM—  
DAVIDE TURCONI/JOSEF JOYE COLLECTION.



Left: The Davide Turconi Collection included films from around the world such as *Les Tulipes (Segundo de Chomón, Segundo de Chomón, 1907)* and *Das Geheimnis von Chateau Richmond (Willy Zeyn, Karl Werner, Germany, 1913)*.

ing one strand, and you end up moving from Derida to the German aniline colorant industry to the Greeks.”

Yumibe came to UChicago to earn a master's degree at the Divinity School and studied the intersection of literature and religion with **Françoise Meltzer**, the Edward Carson Waller Distinguished Service Professor in the Humanities, chair of Comparative Literature, and professor in the Divinity School. Though he'd never taken a film course, Yumibe's job at the Film Studies Center archive, combined with Meltzer's early work on color in the occult and in symbolist poetry, sparked an interest in early color film.

“He was really moving into a territory that was very neglected by most people,” says **Tom Gunning**, the Edwin A. and Betty Bergman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in Cinema and Media Studies and Art History, Yumibe's dissertation adviser, and one of his coauthors on *Fantasia of Color in Early Cinema* (Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

During Yumibe's dissertation research, **Yuri Tsivian**, the William Colvin Professor in Cinema and Media Studies, Art History, and Comparative Literature, helped arrange for him to spend a summer internship at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York. The museum is one of a small number of archives in the world that can preserve highly flammable and sometimes explosive nitrate film. Yumibe helped to preserve the Davide Turconi Collection: a massive assortment of two- or three-frame snippets of different color films mostly dating from about 1905 to 1912.

Color is connected historically to the decorative, as opposed to form, which is thought to be pure.

—Joshua Yumibe, AM'00, PhD'07

That summer led to a long-term project for Yumibe, and also to his current area of research. Yumibe describes these fragments, with their depth of color, as being “like dazzling little jewels,” but their artistry is only part of the story.

Take, for example, gendered labor practices: the coloring of early films was usually done by women—sometimes using stencils, or at other times hand-painted frame by frame, or even dipped in dyes to tint whole scenes.

“There was a long-held assumption that women were both better at handicraft detailed work like that and also had a better aesthetic sensibility when it came to color,” Yumibe says. As a result, women were often employed for this coloring work from about 1895 on: “It was, in fact, the first type of production work available to women in the film industry.”

From an aesthetic standpoint, Yumibe became interested in color itself, or the lack thereof, particularly in relation to the idea of “chromophobia,” a term coined by artist and critic David Batchelor. Generally framed as a Western concept—early color both in film and in general in non-Western cultures merits much more research, Yumibe says—chromophobia is less an overt fear of color than a refusal to take it seriously. From Kant, who valued form and line over color, to the persistent belief that ancient Greek statues represented pure form because they erroneously were thought to be unpainted white marble, chromophobia spills out from art critics and theorists into mainstream thinking.

“Color is connected historically to the decorative, as opposed to form, which is thought to be pure,” Yumibe says.

Aspects of chromophobia also run through chemistry. Yumibe says the same scientists who made color dyes also made pharmaceuticals both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as in the ancient Greek pharmacy where both pigments and medicines were mixed. As a result, color was associated not just with psyc-

delia but also with “the lack of inhibition that follows from that kind of experimentation,” he says.

In many ways these negative associations of color affected the lack of preservation of the color in many early films. Yumibe says some archivists “just didn't think it was important” and did not take the extra (and often costly) steps to keep color from fading.

But color does have meaning in these films. An otherwise black-and-white silent film might have one colored element, like a red dress or golden coins, for emphasis. Scenes might be tinted blue to indicate night or red for the devil's lair, as in the 1912 French film *Physique diabolique*.

In *Fantasia of Color*, Yumibe writes about the 1914 Belgian anti-war film *Maudite soit la guerre*: “The alternations in the film between naturalistic color and saturated destruction point to the ways in which modern color, like modern warfare, was deeply indebted to technological modernity, and the promise that technology held in the early twentieth century to enrich nature could also produce wastelands.”

Gunning says understanding the technological aspects of color film is important, but “it's much rarer to have someone who will think about what it means.”

Yumibe credits that thinking to UChicago, where he learned to consider the developments of past eras as “a kind of prognostic on the present and on the future.” Looking at the use of color in its earliest days, he says, “allows us to think about the ways in which media transformations occur” today.

Consider Instagram filters, he says. Or a movie like 2005's *Sin City*, primarily in black and white with spots of saturated color.

“Anybody at home working in iPhoto can hypersaturate or desaturate,” says Yumibe. These technologies remind him of the early twentieth century, “when films were spectacular and colorful. Color wasn't just about a realistic world, but it was about a world of fantasy and a world of craft and creativity.” ■

WATCH SOME OF YUMIBE'S FAVORITE COLOR FILMS at [tableau.uchicago.edu/yumibe](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/yumibe).

# ARTISTIC DIRECTION

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

## How three MFAs made their way in the art world

**John Preus, MFA'05; sculptor and furniture-maker in Chicago; 2019 Interpreter in Residence at the Smart Museum**

Memorable project: *The Beast*, a 2014 installation at the Hyde Park Art Center. The interior of the massive structure—the belly of the beast—was an event space, outfitted with repurposed school materials. To Preus's delight, it became a favorite hangout for local teenagers. He also built the huts for *Hutopia*, an exhibit this spring at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society.

*Why did you choose UChicago for grad school?*

I was more interested in being at a university than an art school, because I wanted to study outside of the discipline of art. My grades weren't

good enough to get into U of C as an undergrad, so I was excited to be able to take fantastic classes like the Wittgenstein workshop with Jim Conant, and the politics of taste with Lawrence Rothfield, surrounded by PhD students. And of course, the art department itself, which housed some amazing artists and teachers.

*How do you keep going when your motivation flags?*

There are days when I'm looking at a piece that's not turning out well, and the thought occurs to me that I could be sitting at home right now, reading to my son. Sometimes art is a really difficult thing to justify, when those kinds of pressures exist. But my work as an artist is a lens onto the world, which includes what I do as a parent.

I've always thought of my work as a conversation with the dead and the not yet living in addition

to the currently living. Being engaged in a conversation that releases me from the present feels absolutely critical. I would be miserable and hopeless without it, and maybe not a very good father. That's been one justification for spending all day trying to decide if the color pink is right on that piece of canvas.

*What advice do you have for aspiring artists?*

I struggle with this question, because most of what happened to me feels like dumb luck. But when luck hits, the work has to be ready! You have to keep making the work and developing it, and then maybe you'll get lucky. That's my only advice: keep making work, say yes to everything when you first get out, and make yourself indispensable wherever you go, and try to imagine whatever it is you are doing as "your work."

IMAGE COURTESY SARA BLACK



Sara Black's *Le Musée du Grand Dehors* was part of the 2018 Thailand Biennial.



**Sara Black, MFA'06; sculptor and assistant professor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago**

Memorable project: *Le Musée du Grand Dehors* (2018) at the Thailand Biennial, an installation in Than Bok Khorani National Park. The piece, created in collaboration with UChicago Visual Arts lecturer Amber Ginsburg, centers on a carbonized white oak tree and aims to supplant “our human-centeredness in favor of something else: explorations of deep time, or pushing outside of our physical scale or time scale,” Black says.

*When did you know you wanted to be an artist?*

I have had a one-track mind since I was quite young. I was lucky to have, in the small Wisconsin town that I grew up in, teachers who exposed me to the history and practices of contemporary art in middle and high school. I spent most of my

time loitering around art and art history classrooms, letting as much rub off on me as possible. I imagined myself as an artist even then. I have maintained a certain sense of drive in my practice that I would attribute to both temperament and necessity in the arts.

*How does teaching shape your work?*

I feel as much an educator as an artist. To me they are not separable. I love them both equally and passionately.

Being an educator in the arts in many ways supports my practice, in that I’m in a very current discourse all the time with my students. There’s also the practical consideration of my tenure expectations. A certain level of activity in my practice is expected. I have, every week, two dedicated studio days. And it’s not just pressure from the outside—my internal motivation is supported. I feel really lucky about that.

**Danny Volk, MFA'14; multidisciplinary artist and host of *Made-Up with Danny Volk***

Memorable project: *The News Gallery* (2019) at SPACES in Cleveland. Volk collected artist proposals rejected by SPACES and, with the artists’ permission, reprinted them in a weekly newspaper. It was an “opportunity to make opportunity for even more people,” he says.

*What stands out about your UChicago days?*

There wasn’t any coddling. There wasn’t a professor who takes you under their wing and

opens up the road to success for you. You’re seeing them as role models, and they’re all so different in terms of the path that they’ve taken. You have to figure out what success means to you. I learned to be scrappy.

*Any advice for recent MFAs?*

Rejection is really difficult and can discourage people from even wanting to continue in this field. We often don’t know why rejection is happening. There could be a very specific reason for your work not being selected, some parameter that you don’t even know about that a gallery or funding institution needs to meet. I would just say to not take rejection too personally. Keep putting your work out there.

*For your series *Made-Up with Danny Volk*, you interview artists while they do your makeup. How did that idea come about?*

Artists often have to get in front of people and talk about their work and their process of making. If you’ve seen artists do this multiple times, sometimes you’re getting a very similar conversation. My work is interested in shuffling the dynamics within relationships, or the relationships between people and institutions, and so I’m breaking down what an artist talk is and playing with the elements. Having artists play with color and material while they’re talking about their work shifts the intimacy and leads to an interesting exchange. Artists bring totally different perspectives to the way they interact with this project. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY VOLK; PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM VAN EVNDE

READ MORE FROM THESE ALUMNI at [tableau.uchicago.edu/artists](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/artists).

# MIGRATION, BELONGING, AND DESIGN

BY SARA S. PATTERSON

## The US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale examines citizenship and borders.

During its May to November run, the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale drew 275,000 visitors from 63 countries. Then, from late February through April, the Biennale's US Pavilion, *Dimensions of Citizenship: Architecture and Belonging from the Body to the Cosmos*, came to Chicago, on display at the Wrightwood 659 gallery in Lincoln Park, almost exactly as it was in Venice.

**Niall Atkinson**, associate professor in Art History, was one of three curators of the US Pavilion, part of the team of curators, commissioners, and directors from UChicago and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) who designed *Dimensions of Citizenship* in response to the Venice Biennale's theme of *Freespace*.

"The link between citizenship, space, and architecture is an increasingly urgent topic in the United States and the world," Atkinson says. Envisioning the design of space as a set of

practices constitutive of certain modes of citizenship, the US project team wanted to "set the tone to stimulate creative and expansive ideas about how citizenship could be mobilized by architectural principles predicated on the issue of scale," working from the belief that the transformation of space for humanity necessarily involves architecture, community engagement, and imagination.

It also encompasses collaboration among urban designers, visual artists, art historians, policymakers, lawyers, and scientists.

Because of the planet's population explosion and the number of people displaced by conflicts worldwide, "it is urgent for UChicago leaders and faculty members to think about the design of built space, the transformation of space, and the future role of people in space," says **Bill Brown**, cochair of the University's

new Urban Architecture and Design Committee and the Karla Scherer Distinguished Service Professor in American Culture. Brown served as a project director for *Dimensions of Citizenship*, as well as on its advisory board.

Cities as different as Venice and Chicago, Atkinson says, face related challenges around abandoned buildings, public housing, and the effects of forced displacement and migration of populations—all of which are central concerns of citizenship, architecture, and borders.

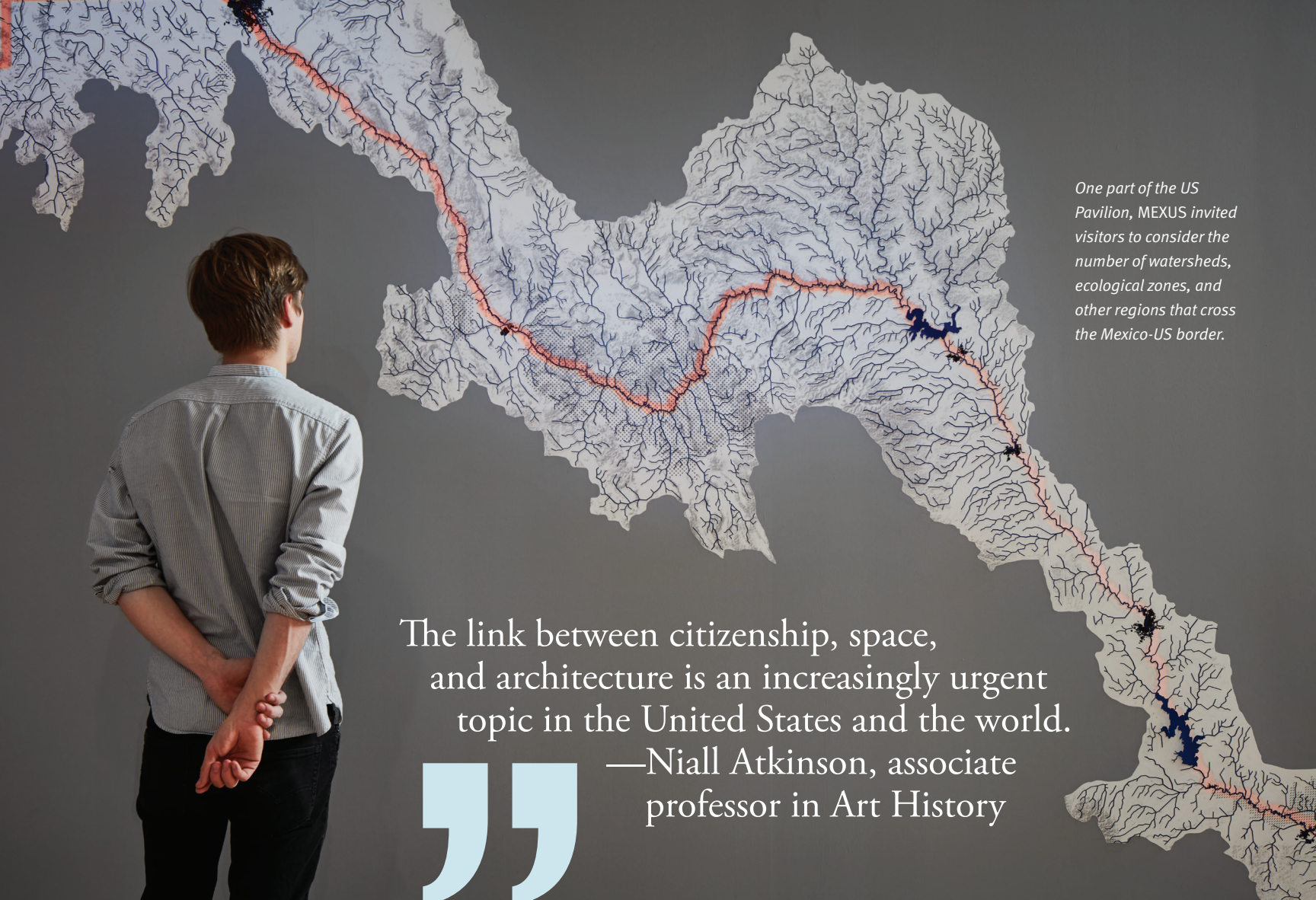
"The notion of citizenship is at the core of many important social and political issues of our time," says provost **Daniel Diermeier**. "*Dimensions of Citizenship* explores these concepts and issues in all their complexity."

In the exhibit, instead of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's "less is more" maxim, Atkinson says, the designs embrace the concept of "more is more," reflecting an inclusive approach to citizenship in contrast to the idea of isolationism. His cocurators—Ann Lui from SAIC and Mimi Zeiger, independent critic, educator, and writer—along with associate curator Iker Gil from SAIC, choreographed an expanding range of architectural issues and ideas.

Created by seven different architectural firms and art and design studios, the installations consist of a series of images and responsive texts to explore the changing form of citizenship and its relationship to the built environment. Divided among seven scales—citizen, civitas, region, nation, globe, network, and cosmos—the images and words show each scale's relation to citizenship and to each other. Spatially and contextually, the exhibit moves from the body to the city to the heavens.

Each scale inhabits its own space, encompassing multimedia displays. *Stone Stories*, an installation at the scale of the citizen by architect Jeanne Gang, includes stones from Cobblestone Landing in Memphis, Tennessee, a landing on the Mississippi River where both cotton and enslaved people were sold—and where Studio Gang has developed a new plan for the city's riverfront. A display for the globe, *In Plain Sight*, shows satellite images of Earth, dramatizing the discrepancy between concentrations of energy (identifiable by lights) and concentrations of





One part of the US Pavilion, MEXUS invited visitors to consider the number of watersheds, ecological zones, and other regions that cross the Mexico-US border.

The link between citizenship, space, and architecture is an increasingly urgent topic in the United States and the world.

—Niall Atkinson, associate professor in Art History



people. It illustrates, for instance, the radical distinction between the return of light, in the aftermath of hurricanes, to Houston and Puerto Rico. In Venice, the exhibit as a whole was represented by a vibrant green Palladian dome, divided by the seven scales of the exhibit.

The pavilion's classifications position citizenship as a crucial global concept, Atkinson says, reflected in the four films shown in the "Transit Screening Lounge" section of the show. As a result, *Dimensions of Citizenship* embraces a wide range of artists, architects, and urban designers who are engaged and connected to how architecture both hinders and creates relationships with different types of communities."

### REDEFINING URBAN CITIZENSHIP

Through urban design experiments dating back 1,000 years, Venice is a treasure trove of architectural history. Since the twentieth century, Chicago has been one of the world's great architecture cit-

ies—which is why bringing the exhibition to Chicago was a priority, says **Bill Michel**, AB'92, MBA'08, associate provost and executive director of the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts and a project director of the pavilion exhibit.

Chicago is also the home of the institutions that created *Dimensions of Citizenship*. "The partnership between UChicago and the School of the Art Institute combines the best in the program from both institutions," Michel says. The US Department of State and the National Endowment for the Arts provided funding for the Venice project, and the Alphawood Foundation supported its Chicago installation.

Collaborations have extended outward, with a range of public programs with community organizations exploring citizenship and belonging. Even before the exhibit came to Chicago, members of the pavilion's team held a public panel discussion on "Un-free Speech" at the Chicago Cultural Center, illuminating the role architecture plays in citizenship.

As another example, in November the Mansueti Institute for Urban Innovation and UChicago Arts sponsored a conference on "Migration, Citizenship, and Urban Space."

The conference and other projects around *Dimensions of Citizenship* ask questions that resonate in both Chicago and Venice, according to Brown: How might architecture apprehend the abstraction of citizenship? How can it confront the materialization of that abstraction, past and present? How does it understand the state of being-apart, the state of being-together, within or beyond the nation-state?

"Chicago is one of the last really segregated big cities in the country," says Atkinson, who discussed migration, public housing, and abandoned buildings with social and educational communities in Venice and Chicago. "By uniting activists and architectural advocates, architecture can be a bridge to the conversation about desegregation. The *Dimensions of Citizenship* exhibition brings people together locally and globally." ■



# TWO PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT CLIMATE CHANGE

*Catherine Kearns's work in Cyprus began with a traditional archaeological survey, studying surface details across a landscape, often in the form of ceramics but sometimes architecture.*

AS TOLD TO MAUREEN SEARCY

In the past 30 years, much has been written about climate's effects on ancient civilizations, but paleoclimatology has driven the narrative. Humanists wonder: what if we put the focus on the people rather than their environment?

Coping with Changing Climates in Early Antiquity (3CEA) brings together researchers from UChicago, the University of Michigan, and Purdue University to investigate the social and cultural implications of a changing climate in the Bronze and Early Iron Ages (third to first millennium BC). Archaeologists, bioarchaeologists, and text specialists focus on Egypt and Nubia, the Eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia, and Mesopotamia to examine human agency in the narrative of ancient climate change. Two UChicago researchers discuss their methods of inquiry and what they hope to find.



**Hervé Reculeau**, assistant professor in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and 3CEA principal investigator, studies the environmental and social histories of Syria and Mesopotamia in the second millennium BC.

Unlike present-day climatologists, paleoclimatologists cannot directly measure parameters like temperature and precipitation. They use proxy data, such as ice and sediment cores, to build models, which can then be compared to modern climate patterns.

As humanists, we use our own proxy data, looking for ways ancient people responded to climate change from multiple angles. The 3CEA researchers work with datasets including human and artefactual remains, settlement patterns, and texts. My specialty is Assyrian cuneiform. From this information we investigate whether social change coincided with episodes of abrupt climate change.

It is commonly assumed that Assyria saw a wet late Bronze Age followed by an abrupt aridification during the twelfth century BC, and that these climatic trends match the chronology of a flourishing Assyrian society followed by a rapid collapse. While scholars often try to look at such tipping points, it is in fact more interesting to study the period leading up to that, because “abrupt” climatic events span generations, and the so-called “wet” Late Bronze Age was already quite arid compared to the preceding centuries and to the present climate in the region. The assumed “tipping point” was but the final aggravated event of a long-lasting trend. We want to complexify the picture beyond “good climate, societies flourish; bad climate, societies collapse.” For paleoclimatology, 100 years is a blip, but within that blip could be the rise and fall of kingdoms.

The Assyrian Kingdom in the thirteenth to eleventh centuries BC left administrative accounts that we can search for signs of crisis, such as harvest records. The thirteenth century was a time of expansion for Assyria—in newly conquered lands, the kingdom invested in irrigation, building great canals, particularly along the Khabour River. Despite the infrastructure improvements, harvest yields were terrible. It is possible (yet remains to be proven) that this construction was a response to changing climatic conditions that proved unsuccessful.

These efforts were not forgotten by the Assyrians: when King Sennacherib built long-distance canals in the seventh century BC for the capital of Nineveh, the city and its surrounding fields prospered. While the discrepancy in success between the two periods of Assyrian investment in large-scale irrigation could be attributed to climate change (the seventh century was more humid), it could also be due to a lack of human resources and/or expertise to build or manage the thirteenth-century BC canal system. More probably, it’s a combination of both.

There is still much we don’t know, and the aim of this project is to make room for a nuanced narrative. Too simplistic a view unfairly frames ancient civilizations as either all-powerful beings who destroy themselves or poor fools who can’t or won’t save themselves. At the end of the day, what makes a society thrive or change is going to be human agency. ■



**Catherine Kearns**, assistant professor in Classics, studies human-environment relationships, landscape practices, and concepts of space and place in the Mediterranean during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

When scientists study climate in antiquity, they often approach the past in a reconstructive, descriptive mode—an understanding of physical climate that helps improve projections for future climate change, but which can render societies static or simplified. Humanists ask fundamentally different questions: What does it mean for societies to experience, imagine, or respond to climate change?

In the past century, most questions in ancient environmental history were geared toward learning why civilizations collapse. In the last couple of decades, we’ve seen a more capacious way of thinking about the human dimension of environmental change, looking at, for example, relationships between the state, infrastructure, taxation, and unstable climatic conditions.

My work for the 3CEA project involves an archaeological focus on Cyprus during the Iron Age. I wanted to really think about how people inhabited this region during a shift in regional climate, so I needed a paleoclimatic study. I conducted carbon stable isotope analysis on charcoal—to create an indirect proxy for precipitation—to identify periods of wetter and drier climates. Much of what archaeologists and ancient historians tend to study are big episodes of societal collapse caused by increased aridity, but I was particularly interested in how communities would have experienced a shift to wetter conditions.

I then looked at textual and archaeological evidence for this wetter time period, revealed by the isotope analysis, to ask questions about the social and political dimensions of that environmental change. On a semi-arid island like Cyprus, one societal development you might see is a reinvestment in agriculture due to increased water availability. This type of response can be seen in material signatures such as terrace walls, which serve multiple functions but are particularly associated with soil erosion mitigation.

These walls can indicate how some communities might have taken advantage of wet, opportune conditions by expanding cultivation into newly arable soils on hillsides. But they can also indicate an attempt to retain soil moisture in drier times. There are no generalizable explanations in archaeology; the reasons behind certain responses are contingent on the context, including the climate at the time, but also potentially important political and social factors, like the aims of local leaders or the pressures of regional markets.

What’s interesting about terrace walls is that some that we think were built during the Iron Age are still used. Studying them provides long-term observations about the ebbs and flows of landscapes and how different human populations use them in varied or similar ways.

This project doesn’t attempt to draw blueprints for modern climate change scholarship or policy. We’re trying to illuminate parts of our past where these same issues were at play, building a historical perspective that could help contextualize our widespread anxiety about climate change and our concerns about the future. ■

IMAGE COURTESY CATHERINE KEARNS; PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

LEARN MORE ABOUT HUMANITIES WITHOUT WALLS, WHICH SUPPORTS 3CEA, at [humanitieswithoutwalls.illinois.edu](http://humanitieswithoutwalls.illinois.edu).

Will Boast, Augustus Rose, Rachel DeWoskin, and Ling Ma (opposite) all have recently published novels.

# THE WRITTEN WORD

BY JEANIE CHUNG

Creative Writing faculty grows to meet popular demand.

Creative Writing became an undergraduate major during the 2017–18 academic year and quickly expanded beyond expectations: more than 100 majors as of February, with talk of an eventual graduate option.

Program chair **John Wilkinson** plans to add four full-time positions in 2019–20, joining a quartet of new faculty hired during the past two years: assistant professors of practice in the arts **Will Boast; Rachel DeWoskin; Ling Ma**, AB'05; and **Augustus Rose**.

All four have recently published novels. Boast's *Daphne* (Norton/Liveright, 2018) is a modern retelling of the myth of Apollo and Daphne. DeWoskin has two books out this year: *Some-day We Will Fly* (Viking Penguin) and *Banshee* (Dottir Press). Ma's debut, *Severance* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), a dystopian workplace coming-of-age novel, earned the 2018 Kirkus Prize. Rose's *The Readymade Thief* (Viking, 2017) is a speculative thriller about a teenage girl who stumbles into a mysterious secret society.

These newest additions to the Creative Writing faculty told *Tableau* about their favorite classes to teach, their next books, and what they've learned in and out of the classroom.

## NOTABLE COURSES

Faculty members lead standard workshop courses but also can develop their own classes according to their interests and passions, promoting what DeWoskin calls “a deep and sustaining conversation with each other and our students” about the craft of writing.

At the end of her class *Constructing the Full-length Novel*, students are expected to have a

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH



It's better to be a 'civilian' for a long time before you write about it, simply because there's more material to draw on.

—Ling Ma, AB'05

chapter breakdown and at least two written chapters. She also teaches a course on literary empathy, focused on imagining and evoking “experiences that are radically different from our own.”

One of Boast's courses, *Between What's True and Truth*, “looks at works that straddle the line between fiction and nonfiction in interesting ways,” including writing by John D'Agata, Katherine Boo, James Baldwin, and Kathryn Harrison.

“The lit world has asked, ‘What if we make our genre categories hazy?’” Boast says. “At the same time, our larger culture, and those in power, are also actively smudging the lines between truth and almost truth. Should writers, then, re-invest in our categories? Or is it more provocative to jettison them completely?”

Ma's course *Testimony* examines first-person testimonial narratives, including those by Kafka, Patricia Lockwood, Richard Pryor, and William Maxwell. She's also teaching an advanced workshop on alternative plot lines in short fiction, using works by writers including Anton Chekhov, Lucia Berlin, and Carmen Maria Machado.

Rose spent five years researching *The Ready-made Thief*, which touches on, among other things, Marcel Duchamp, unified field theory, and urban exploration. Out of that experience he developed a course on research and world-building, a term often used in science fiction and fantasy but equally applicable to making convincing worlds in realistic fiction.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND TAUGHT

Rose started out as a film student, and when he switched from writing screenplays to fiction, people described his writing as cinematic—which he only later realized was not always a positive.

“If you're writing just cinematically, in a way that a reader can see everything, that's fine,” Rose says, “but you're not using all your tools as a fiction writer.”

His temporary ventures back into screenplays have helped his fiction not by teaching him to write cinematic descriptions but by teaching him plot: “how to have a real forward momentum without sacrificing character and characterization and character development.”

Ma's most frequent advice to her students has to do with content rather than technique: “It's better to be a ‘civilian’ for a long time before you write about it, simply because there's more material to draw on.”

### BEYOND CAMPUS

Both Boast and DeWoskin have done work around immigration. Boast began volunteering at a refugee resource center during a fellowship at the American Academy in Rome in 2015, and since then he has traveled back regularly to teach English and to help refugees navigate the immigration process.

In researching *Someday We Will Fly*, set in the Jewish refugee community in Shanghai before and during World War II, DeWoskin became interested in stories of migration.

“Everybody has a migration story,” she says. DeWoskin and professor of practice **Rachel**

**Cohen** edited an anthology, *Migration Stories*, compiling nonfiction stories from the UChicago community and neighborhood high schools. They hope to continue the project.

*Someday We Will Fly* also led to a conference in March, *The Shanghai Jews: Risk and Resilience in a Refugee Community*, and an exhibit at the Regenstein Library.

### COMING UP

Boast's work with refugees informs both of his current books in progress: a second short story collection and a new novel. The short stories focus on travel and migration in the twenty-first century. He describes them as being “about statelessness from a few different angles, and about encounters between people who are nationless by choice and not by choice.”

Although DeWoskin nowadays prefers to write within “the elastic margins of a book,” she started out as a poet, having studied at Boston University with **Rosanna Warren**, now the Hanna Holborn Gray Distinguished Professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought. Still enamored of the form, DeWoskin is putting together her first collection, tentatively titled “Two Menus.”

Ma is working on new fiction, but isn't sure yet what form it will take. “Fiction is a way for me to grapple with certain questions I have,” she says. “It's hard to predict where the story is going to go, but if it's not surprising me in some way, then I know the story is dead.”

Rose is turning a screenplay he wrote years ago into a novel. He describes it as “a dark coming-of-age story” about an introverted teenager who falls into the orbit of a sociopathic classmate. ■

# LAUREN MICHELE JACKSON DOES NOT DO HOT TAKES



At the end of 2018, **Lauren Michele Jackson**, a graduate student in English Language and Literature, made a list of the 10 favorite pieces she had published that year. It included essays that ran in the *Paris Review Daily*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Atlantic*. At number one: “Who Really Owns the Blaccent?” for *Vulture*, a 2,000-word essay inspired by actress Awkwafina’s speech patterns in the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Jackson’s collection of essays, *White Negroes*, which focuses on the appropriation of black culture, will be released by Beacon Press in the fall. A prolific writer, she is also in the final stages of her dissertation, “Black Vertigo: Nausea, Aphasia, and Bodily Noise, 1970s to the Present.”

## *How did you start writing for mainstream publications?*

In the spring of my first year, 2014, I had an idea for a piece. It was about how my body as a black person is interpreted in and around Hyde Park, and how this compared to my undergraduate experience at the University of Illinois, a quintessential college town.

In Champaign-Urbana, no matter what you look like, it’s assumed if you’re a certain age,

you’re a student. In Hyde Park, based on the way I would dress, I was perceived as either a local or a student. It turned into a larger piece that ran in the *Atlantic* about what happens when a university is situated in an urban neighborhood, and what the history of that looks like on other campuses in Philly and New York.

I started freelancing a lot more during my third year, when I was reading for orals. My development as an academic and as a public voice are intertwined. I couldn’t do the public writing without the research I do, pushing me to challenge the clichés we take for granted in culture, particularly around race. And my advisers have told me my public writing has improved my academic voice.

## *Do you ever write personal essays?*

No. I like using anecdotes, and I’m very forthcoming about the use of the “I.” But I am not a personal essayist. Editors will sometimes say, it would be really nice if you had a poignant personal story to put here. And I’m like, no. I’m a scholar, I’m telling you this because it’s backed

by research that I can cite for you if you want, but you’re probably going to end up cutting it.

## *How did your essay collection, *White Negroes*, come about?*

I wrote a piece in the *Awl* a couple years ago about [rapper] Drake—this digital native who makes his persona preemptively meme-able. He anticipates the pulse of the internet in a way that has led to this meteoric success. From that essay, I got an email from the person who’s now my agent.

## *Ever think about becoming a public intellectual?*

Media right now is no more stable or predictable than the academic job market. It feels like almost every other month we’re hearing about some publication laying off all their staff writers, just out of nowhere. Media can’t really be a plan B. It has to be like, Plan A point five.

—Carrie Golus, AB’91, AM’93

READ MORE FROM JACKSON at [tableau.uchicago.edu/Jackson](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/Jackson).

# GIVING VOICE

Faculty book explores the many dimensions of voice.

“Nothing could be more elusive than a human voice, nothing more confounding,” write **Martha Feldman** and **Judith Zeitlin** in a forthcoming book they’ve coedited. In psychoanalytic terms, the voice is uncanny: somehow both intimately familiar and impossible to pin down.

Feldman, the Mabel Greene Myers Professor of Music, says *The Voice as Something More* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) is in part a tribute to Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar’s psychoanalytic theory in *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT Press, 2006). But as the subtitle “*Essays toward Materiality*” suggests, the revisionist thrust of the volume is toward materiality: how the voice is embodied, extended, and mediated.

This focus on the material is meant both to balance and challenge psychoanalysis’s more abstract emphasis on mental and familial structures. The voice may be an elusive object of desire, Feldman says, but it is also “fleshy and concrete.”

*The Voice as Something More* showcases seven UChicago faculty members as well as other prominent scholars hailing from disciplines including music, classics, film, media studies, philosophy, Germanic studies, and East Asian studies. The book grew out of an interdisciplinary faculty research seminar sponsored by the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society. “The Voice Project,” begun in 2013 by Feldman and **David Levin**—Zeitlin took over for Levin in 2014—resulted in a daylong symposium in 2014 and an international conference in 2015.

The book’s contributors chase the uncanny voice across disciplines and genres, cornering it again and again to show how it materializes

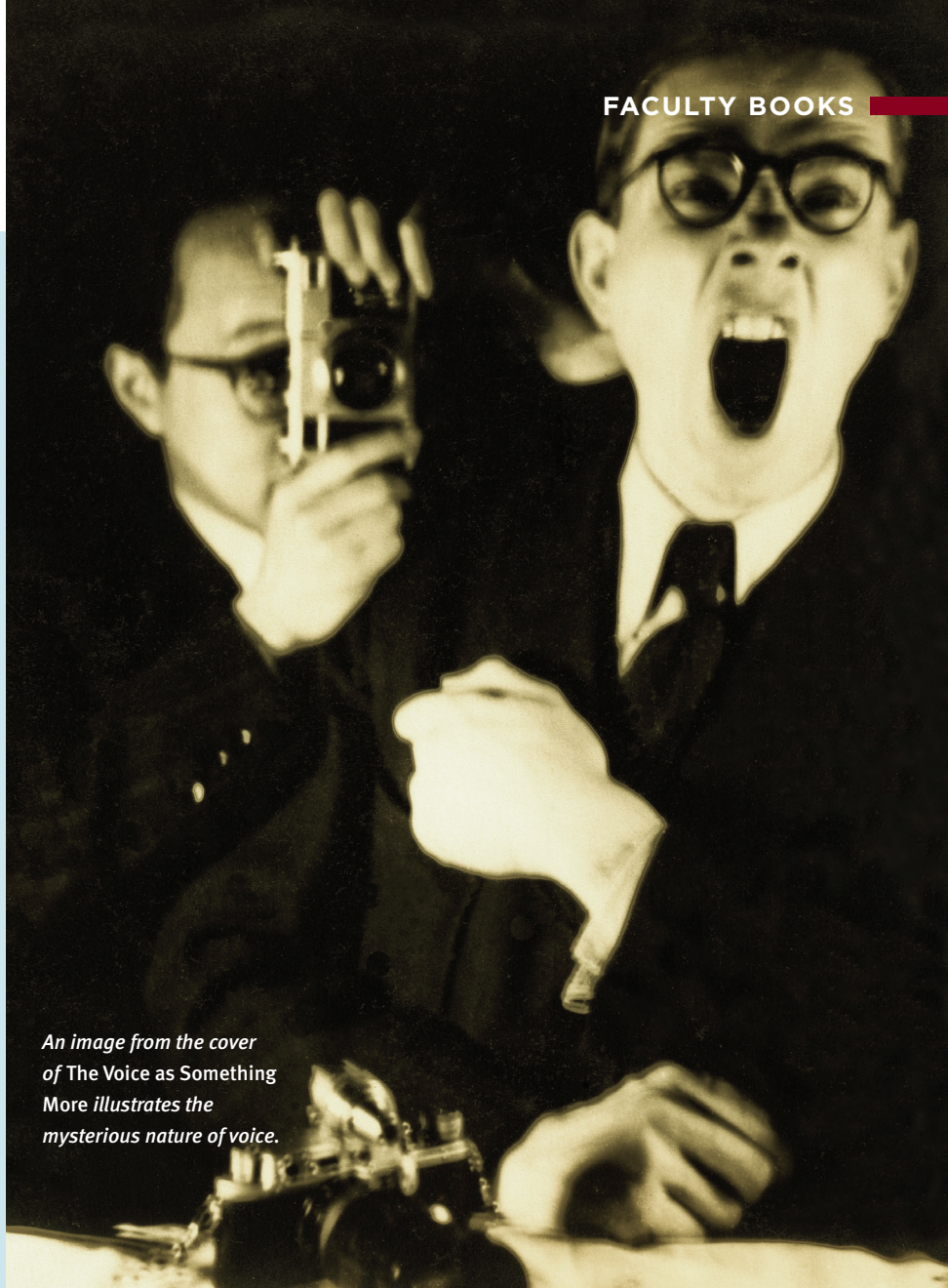
within specific cultural and technological contexts. For instance, Levin, the Addie Clark Harding Professor in Germanic Studies, Cinema and Media Studies, and Theater and Performance Studies, analyzes the use of staged vocal failure as a narrative device in opera, as when the Dwarf in Zemlinsky’s *Der Zwerg* elicits audience sympathy when his poor singing is ridiculed by the Infanta of Spain. Meanwhile, associate professor in music **Seth Brodsky** and poet Robert Polito question the very idea of an artist’s voice in their respective fields.

An essay by Northwestern University media scholar **Neil Verma**, AM’04, PhD’08, on the role of screams in vintage radio horror analyzes the voice in starkly material terms, says Zeitlin, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor in East

Asian Languages and Civilizations and Theater and Performance Studies. “How did you produce the scream? . . . What happened when you got near to the microphone? How was it written into the screenplay?”

These technical considerations have psychoanalytic and sonic implications, as one of the volume’s contributors, renowned film and sound theorist Michel Chion, has stated. For instance, uncertainty about whether a scream was a recording or a live performance adds to its “acoustic” quality, or the sense—almost parodically illustrated in film, Feldman notes, by the unseen wizard’s voice in *The Wizard of Oz*—that the ultimate source of any voice is hidden.

—Lucas McGranahan



*An image from the cover of *The Voice as Something More* illustrates the mysterious nature of voice.*

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE BOOK at [alumni.uchicago.edu/voicebook](http://alumni.uchicago.edu/voicebook).

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