

# TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | SPRING 2022



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**ON THE COVER**

*7000 Marks*, a sculpture by DoVA lecturer Amber Ginsburg and Sara Black, appeared in the Logan Center's exhibition *ON DRAWING DRAWING ON* during Winter Quarter. Photography courtesy SPACES gallery, Cleveland, Ohio.



*Cherry, South Haven (1909), a cyanotype negative by Bertha Evelyn Jaques, is part of the exhibition Unsettled Ground: Art and Environment from the Smart Museum Collection. The exhibition, which runs at the Smart Museum through June 26, was organized by Teaching Fellow in the Humanities Katerina Korola, PhD'21, in collaboration with her fall 2021 class Picturing the Earth: Art and Environment in the Modern Era.*

## Dear Alumni and Friends,

Last fall our new president, **Paul Alivisatos**, AB'81, asked each major unit in the University to prepare an “immersion day” for him. On December 3, he met more than 70 of the Humanities Division’s faculty members, students, staff, and key volunteers; heard about the work of our departments, centers, and institutes; and visited our physical spaces. Although we touched on multiple topics, the day’s discussions centered on two things: the distinction of our division and the quality of our graduate education.

Perhaps the Humanities Division’s most obvious mark of distinction is its legendary interdisciplinarity. Productive interactions among departments within and outside the division proliferate in our “no walls” environment. To maintain this culture, the division strives to hire and retain the most promising junior faculty and the most accomplished senior scholars. With the pursuit of important new knowledge as our principal mission, our 210 faculty regularly make exciting new discoveries and develop new interpretations that propel their disciplines to the next level.

While research is our primary goal, educating the next generation of humanists is also imperative. The University of Chicago is fully committed to supporting doctoral students as they complete their degrees, allowing them to thoughtfully work through their dissertation subjects. The COVID-19 pandemic, on top of the already challenging job market for humanities PhDs, recently prompted



Anne Walters Robertson

us to create new placement options for our graduates. Thanks to your generosity, we are able to offer several teaching fellowships and named post-doctoral fellowships. These fellowships provide our new PhDs up to two years of support, giving them teaching experience and time to begin publishing their work as they seek employment within and beyond academia.

Finally, as we emphasized to the president, the Humanities Division is creative and resourceful. We meet challenges head-on, we implement visionary programs, and we work to underscore the crucial importance of the humanities in the world. It is a testament to the excellence of our faculty and students that our division maintains its superior standing—not least because UChicago’s endowment is 20 percent of the size of our wealthiest peers’. And here is where our supporters, time and again, make all the difference. Your involvement in the UChicago community adds immeasurably to our success. For everything you do for the Humanities Division, we are extremely grateful.

*Anne W. Robertson*

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

*Paul Durica (opposite) is director of exhibitions at Chicago's Newberry Library.*

# AHA!

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Paul Durica, public historian at the Newberry and in the pubs

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNE RYAN, COURTESY THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY

” You’re not encountering just the narrative—  
you’re also encountering objects that remind  
you the story actually occurred in space and time.

—Paul Durica, AM’06, PhD’13



When Paul Durica, AM’06, PhD’13, was researching his dissertation on hobos and tramps as figures in American literature, he kept discovering stories that didn’t quite belong in his scholarly work but were too fascinating to keep to himself.

So in 2008 he founded Pocket Guide to Hell, a public history effort that took many forms—reenactments, performances, walking tours—and combined intellectual heft with, on occasion, pure silliness. (For instance: Chicago’s 1855 Lager Beer Riot was restaged as a dodgeball game.) The project, which has reemerged after a multiyear hiatus as a monthly pub trivia event, reshaped Durica’s career plans. Instead of becoming an academic, he wanted to find ways to bring history to wider audiences. Today, after four years at Illinois Humanities, he is director of exhibitions at Chicago’s Newberry Library.

#### *What makes a great museum exhibition?*

A strong, relevant, captivating story that has people at its center but then uses collection items as a way of adding physicality and tactility to that story. You’re not encountering just the narrative—you’re also encountering objects that remind you the story actually occurred in space and time.

For me, the most compelling exhibitions always have some “aha” item that changes your perspective on whatever the story is. I can give an example from the Newberry that precedes my time here: an exhibition on Herman Melville that coincided with the bicentennial of his birth. One

of the galleries had a letter he wrote from Illinois—he was visiting an uncle who lived here—in which he thought about becoming a Mississippi riverboat sailor rather than making the decision he ultimately did, which was to go out on a whaling voyage.

It changed the way I thought about Melville, because I never thought of him as having any connections to the region I call home. It also made me think about how his life and his writing could have taken a very different direction if he had made a different choice.

#### *Do you have a favorite Pocket Guide to Hell event?*

I still have a very special place in my heart for the first one, because it was the silliest by far: we marked the 24th anniversary of the broadcast of *The Mystery of Al Capone’s Vaults*, which was a live television event hosted by Geraldo Rivera. We did that at the now-defunct Op Shop in Hyde Park, which used to be a credit union and had a vaultlike space in the basement. We got to explore this crazy pop cultural moment, but also provide the historical context around it.

The other one is the 125th anniversary reenactment of the Haymarket Affair, because we did it at the original site, to scale, with thousands of people. Being able to do it on that particular anniversary at that particular site so you could really experience what the moment was like—that remains pretty memorable.

#### *Do you ever get to just browse the Newberry archives?*

I love every opportunity I have to look through the collections and find things. I did have one of those “I have to share this” moments recently.

The Newberry, like many institutions, was marking the 150th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire. We have among our materials an amazing collection of stereoscope cards—which are kind of like a Victorian ViewMaster—that belonged to the poet and writer Carl Sandburg.

There’s a subset of scenes of the Great Chi-

cago Fire, and I’m flipping through them, and it’s ruined building after ruined building—and suddenly, I come across this image of a cat. I thought, “What is this doing here? It must be misfiled.” But I turned the card over and there’s a little description on the back saying, “This is the Post Office cat.”

Apparently, in the 1870s, the clerks at the Post Office in what is now the Loop had a pet cat. In the midst of the fire, they weren’t able to get the cat out of the building. But a couple days later, one of the clerks went back to explore the ruins and see what had happened and found the cat alive. So they decided to photograph it.

It’s one of those stories about the fire that was forgotten over time, but we were able to weave it into some of the work we were doing around the anniversary. It’s moments like that that I love.

#### *You’re a fount of amazing Chicago history knowledge. What’s an example of a person or story you wish more people knew about?*

I’ll give you a serious one and a more playful one.

A figure I think people should know more about is Lucy Parsons, who was a pioneer in the labor movement. She had a tremendously long career that extended from the end of the Civil War all the way to her death in 1942. The fact that she was a formerly enslaved woman who after emancipation devoted herself to the rights not just of the formerly enslaved, but also to the rights of women and workers, makes her a singular figure.

A weirder story I came across recently: I was reading a book called *Bullets for Dead Hoods: An Encyclopedia of Chicago Mobsters, c. 1933*, which is basically an A-to-Z encyclopedia of underworld figures from the early 1930s. In one of the entries, there’s reference to something called “the clairvoyant trust.” So I started doing some research.

Around 1910 there was an attempt to organize all of the psychics, mediums, fortune-tellers, and tarot readers in the city so they could share information and fleece people more efficiently. There was one guy who was running it and took some money off the top, and it eventually got exposed. This is classic Chicago. ■

READ AN EXPANDED VERSION OF THIS STORY at [tableau.uchicago.edu/durica](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/durica).

*Christian thinkers like Bernard of Clairvaux sometimes described themselves as the bride of Christ.*

# TWO PERSPECTIVES ON QUEERING THE TEXT

AS TOLD TO JEANIE CHUNG

Queer theory, broadly speaking, means analysis outside a heteronormative framework. Here, two scholars explore texts through a queer lens via research and pedagogy.



**Kris Trujillo** is an assistant professor in Comparative Literature. He specializes in medieval Christian mysticism, Latinx literature, and queer theory.

My interest in queer historiography and queer engagements with premodernity rests in their potential to reimagine sexuality, desire, eroticism, intimacies, and the body as heterogenous and capacious concepts. The emergence of homosexuality and heterosexuality is but one of the ways that stories about sex and sexuality have been told.

For example, Christian mystical poetry often turns to the figures of the bride and the bridegroom, which derive from the Song of Songs, and commentators on that text often take the role of the bride as the lover of Christ or of the Christian God. Of course, this produces different meanings when the author of a text identifies as a man or a woman. For some scholars, the assumption of the role of the bride by a thinker like Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Cistercian, or John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century Carmelite, might render the trope of mystical union as queer. They read these texts as “literary drag,” gender inversion, or a seemingly homosexual sex act described in figurative terms.

However, the question that concerns me and animates my first book, tentatively titled “Mystical Poetics,” is how the excessive and often self-shattering desire between the divine and the human challenges our assumptions about what sex is. Premodern theories of language and music are fundamentally tied to the body, the senses, and desire, and queer theory offers a useful vocabulary in analyzing the erotics of mystical poetry.

In general, I’m much more interested in the act of queering than the ontology of queerness. What if we imagine the production of queer theory as the cultivation of certain aesthetic and political desires and devotions? In other words, what if we analyze the practices of queer theorizing in the same way we analyze the devotional practices that organize Christian contemplation? Are there continuities between the practices of reading and writing, for example, that shape these contemplative traditions? And might these continuities across historical periods challenge the assumed secularity of queer theory?

I address these questions in another book project, tentatively titled “Queer Melancholia,” which understands the very practice of writing queer theory as an act of mourning. The book begins with the observation that Sigmund Freud’s 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” became such an important text in the 1980s and 1990s to critical projects like feminist theory, queer theory, the study of race and ethnicity, and postcolonial studies.

The book then examines what it might mean to think about that body of readers as a community affectively bound to this text, to each other, and to shared grief. I suggest that to understand queer theory as the work of mourning—especially in light of the early AIDS crisis—renders it just as invested in caring for the dead as it is in imagining the flourishing of new queer futures. By framing queer theorizing as a practice, we might undo the assumed distinction between the contemplative and active life, between theory and political action, or, in Douglas Crimp’s terms, between mourning and militancy. ■

**Leslie Buxbaum Danzig** is an assistant professor of practice in the arts and the director of undergraduate studies in Theater and Performance Studies. In Autumn Quarter 2021, she taught a Humanities Signature Course in the College, *Queering the American Family Drama*.

For the past couple of years, I’ve been working on a script that will likely turn into some form of musical: a queering of the American family drama. In the process, I’ve grown more attentive to the varied presences—and lack of presence—of queer families on stage. Which drew me to look for more examples, which of course then led to the question of what actually constitutes such a family. Is it something literally on stage? Or is it created/conjured through active spectatorship? Do we in a sense bring what we are looking for to our encounter with a staged production?

That process led me to want to spend more time with these questions and develop a course around them.

Each class took the form of a seminar-studio, where we moved between discussion and performance activities. We’d take a question from that week’s readings such as, how do these plays “play with” the idea of normal? Then students would choose a fairy tale and perform the story over and over again, each time queering a different element. Or they’d create family trees working with ideas of queer kinship. Or create audio pieces orchestrating conflicting experiences of a single event.

We read both queer theory and plays, and within all the plays we read, there were characters who identified as queer. But the plays also experimented with form and challenged how we think of spectatorship. We’d often start with, “This is queer because of this character,” and then say, “Let’s take that off the table. How else would we think about it?”

One way to look at a play is that there’s stasis, a kind of stability of a world or a situation. Then there’s intrusion, the thing that disrupts the stasis and sets off this domino effect of conflict until you get resolution; then you either restore the old stasis or you’re in a new stasis at the end.

It’s a very graspable way to think about plays. But it gets complicated quickly, because where the stasis is depends on where you put your frame of analysis. If you expand beyond the fictional world of the play and you think of the whole theater, then your stasis could also be the expectations your audience brings in for what the starting “normal” is.

In the last play we read, *Hir* by Taylor Mac, a few students explored framing. It’s a queer, disturbed world—that is the stasis. The intrusion is when the son comes home from serving in the military, and he imposes this “normal” onto the queer family home life.

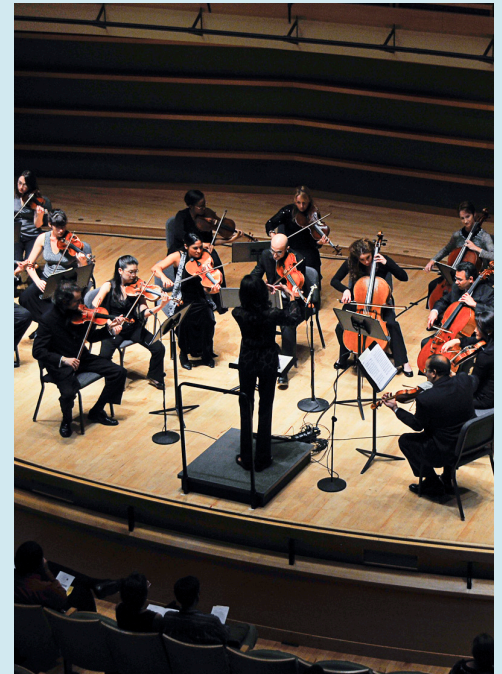
As the quarter progressed, we started to use the verb “to queer” in a fairly loose way. But then it felt like it lost its tether to the stakes of more radical thinking and to power and justice and inequality. I feel like we went on a ride to let it expand—and then we had to rein it in.

I’m eager now to go back and think about my script in ways I’ve done for all these other plays. Mine already has a playfulness in terms of its form, but I’m recharged to push things even further. ■

OPPOSITE: SAINT BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX. JEAN MORIN. COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. HARRIS BRISBANE DICK FUND. 1945. ABOVE: PHOTO COURTESY DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE; PHOTO COURTESY LESLIE BUXBAUM DANZIG.

CHECK OUT SOME TEXTS DANZIG AND TRUJILLO USE IN RESEARCH AND TEACHING at [tableau.uchicago.edu/queer-texts](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/queer-texts).

# GRIT INTO GRACE



*In addition to conducting, Jeri Lynne Johnson helps to shape arts fields by heading up DEI Arts Consulting.*

BY MAUREEN SEARCY

## Jeri Lynne Johnson, AM'05, defies and diversifies expectations of a musical maestra.

In 2008 conductor **Jeri Lynne Johnson, AM'05**, who studied music history and theory at UChicago, founded the Philadelphia-based Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra. The ensemble was designed to be a model for twenty-first-century orchestras, with a mission to transform classical music spectators into participants. In 2016 Johnson established DEI Arts Consulting to help not just orchestras but also other arts, cultural, and educational organizations build and maintain diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments.

Johnson, who became the first African American woman to win an international conducting prize

when she was awarded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship in 2005, has upcoming guest conducting engagements with the Florida Grand Opera in May, São Paulo's Orquestra Sinfônica Municipal in July, the Santa Fe Opera in October, and more.

### *What inspired you to found Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra?*

Instrumentalists audition behind a screen, but conductors communicate silently with the orchestra; we must be seen to demonstrate our skill. I auditioned for numerous orchestras and didn't land the jobs—that's just the life of a mu-

sician—but one of the orchestras offered an opportunity for feedback. The gentleman was quite complimentary about my work but said, "You don't look like what our audience expects 'the Maestro' to look like."

Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra was founded out of this kind of rage against the system, as a vehicle for tempering that rage provoked by the realization that no matter what my experience and expertise were, I would always be running up against this perception of who a conductor is. I wanted to address perceived and real barriers to participation in classical music, like issues of accessibility, whether financial, physical, or

PHOTOGRAPHY BY E. A. KENNEDY III



”  
No matter what my experience  
and expertise were, I would always  
be running up against this  
perception of who a conductor is.

—Jeri Lynne Johnson, AM’05

cognitive. I also wanted to challenge the perception of elitism—that this music isn’t for everybody.

#### *Where does the name come from?*

Pearls are objects of great value and beauty created by a living organism. Grit gets inside, and layers upon layers of mother-of-pearl protect the oyster. The orchestra is a way to transform grit into grace, through programming, community engagement, and music-making. People sometimes assume that we’re all Black musicians, but we’re Black, White, Asian, Latinx—we’re everyone—world-class musicians from the Curtis Institute, the Peabody Institute, Juilliard, and beyond.

#### *What kind of outreach programs does Black Pearl offer?*

The idea that the orchestra reaches out into the community assumes an insider versus outsider relationship. We want a reciprocal partnership—for the community to be able to reach *into* the orchestra, too. Our “inreach” programs provide hands-on opportunities to partake in the music, with a goal to remodel orchestras from gatekeepers of an artistic product into facilitators of the creative process.

Our engagement and education programs are a direct link to the statement that I don’t look like what the audience expects. I decided to turn that idea on its head. I’m going to make everyone a conductor, just for that!

Our most popular event is iConduct!. In its initial iteration, we performed Beethoven’s Sym-

phony no. 5 at venues around Philadelphia, and we invited people from the audience to a conducting lesson. No prior experience necessary. It was an opportunity to demystify what goes on in orchestras. The mystery is part of the allure, but we want people to feel like they can connect and relate to classical music personally.

#### *What exactly does a conductor do?*

If I could explain, I would have a million dollars! The first thing I try to explain is that, as a conductor, my musical instrument is the entire orchestra. The way I make music is fundamentally different from the way a horn player makes music. My technical proficiency is what people would call “soft skills” in terms of corporate leadership. It’s communication, the way that I inspire and motivate people, the way I build my team. It’s the way I share responsibility and leadership to build greater responsibility among everyone else. My power and strength as a leader are demonstrated by the fact that I’m giving away my power and strength through the orchestra, giving the musicians space to shine.

#### *How did your UChicago education prepare you for your current work?*

A lot of people ask me, why wouldn’t you go to Curtis or Juilliard? I felt like I needed every ounce of factual information, historical knowledge, and musical analytical ability in my quiver of arrows to shoot down any possibilities of questioning my authority. I needed answers to people’s legiti-

mate, pointed, and deliberate questions. I’m grateful to the University for giving me those tools, which serve me in great stead even to this day.

#### *How was DEI Arts Consulting established?*

Classical music has been grappling with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion for decades. The murder of George Floyd and the widespread reckoning with systemic racial injustice in America have accelerated this process.

DEI Arts Consulting started about five years ago, focusing on audience development—how can we attract younger, more racially and ethnically diverse listeners? Now my work also involves helping not just classical music but arts, cultural, and educational institutions look at their organizational structures and policies, procedures, belief systems, and behavioral patterns that together create a system of exclusion. Why is that happening, and how can they fix that? Because the first part of this work is becoming aware.

#### *What’s the future of classical music?*

In my opinion, classical music’s future depends upon America’s future. When people come to see a Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra performance, they’re not just hearing music—they’re watching a group of highly trained people of different ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and races being led by an African American woman: democracy in action. An orchestra is a worldview. ■

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**WATCH JOHNSON CONDUCT HAYDN’S SYMPHONY NO. 44 IN E MINOR** at [tableau.uchicago.edu/johnson](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/johnson).

# NEW ANGLES

BY JEANIE CHUNG

Art History's junior faculty look at the discipline from shifting perspectives.

*The study of both text and imagery, as shown in this grave stele, is central to Seth Estrin's scholarship.*

Art History's three junior faculty members study vastly different regions and time periods. What the three researchers share, according to department chair **Niall Atkinson**, is "knowing the limitations and potentialities of their sub-fields"—and then pushing the limitations and mining the potentialities.

Here is a look at some of the questions these assistant professors are asking.

*After more than two millennia, are there new ways to look at ancient Greek sculpture?*

What we know about ancient Greek culture comes primarily from two sources: the scribal tradition that has preserved Greek literature, and the archaeological discoveries of Greek art. While they are often studied separately, **Seth Estrin** brings them together so that "we find the Greek language—such a conceptually rich and densely poetic language—animating the objects that survive in ways we could never anticipate if we just applied ways of thinking we have inherited from our own time and place."

For example, his current book project, "Grief Made Marble: Funerary Sculpture in Classical Athens," studies not just the sculptural components of funerary monuments but their inscriptions as well, examining how—through both their text and their images—they compelled public viewers to engage with an emotion like grief. A central focus of the book is the Greek concept of "recognition" (*anagnorisis*), which is normally deployed in the study of Greek tragedy. Here, though, it is rooted in

GRAVE STELE OF MYNNIA, ARTIST UNKNOWN, GREEK (ATTIC), ABOUT 370 BC, J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM.

Art History junior faculty members Seth Estrin, Tamara Golan, and Megan Sullivan.



the practice of looking at art of the same period.

Another book project, tentatively titled “Art and Embodiment in Archaic Greece,” explores the shaping of the sense of self through artistic practices in early Greece—including constructs of gender and sexuality and the relationship between emotion and the body.

Estrin, who joined the faculty in 2017, notes that the term “classical” tends to evoke restraint and distance. “When we look at an ancient work of art,” he says, “we often try to be as objective as possible in using our own eyes to see through those of someone in the past. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that in ancient Greece, there was no objective way to look at a work of art.”

Like art of any era, Estrin says, ancient Greek works “could look different to different people. But ancient artists were aware of this and worked to cultivate forms of subjective experience that you and I come to share by looking at the same objects—forms that can still be accessed even 2,500 years later.”

### What can art history learn from two rather unsuccessful artists?

**Tamara Golan** is at work on “Unnatural Evidence: The Rise of Expertise and Fate of Artifice in Late Medieval Switzerland.” Based on her dissertation, the book centers on Hans Fries and Niklaus Manuel, two sixteenth-century Swiss artists who became involved in the inquisitional trial of four Dominican friars accused of faking a series of miracles. They testified on, among other topics, whether a substance was paint or miraculous blood.

A widely publicized event—Golan refers to it as “the O. J. Simpson trial of the sixteenth century”—the trial drew the attention of Erasmus, the pope, and Martin Luther, among others.

She uses the trial as a way to rethink the field of art history by examining the definitions of pictorial naturalism and the ability of art to depict the supernatural. At the same time, it’s an opportunity to appreciate the ambition of Fries and Manuel.

“They’re working in a time and place that is typically viewed as the birthplace of the modern Artist, with a capital A,” says Golan, who arrived at UChicago in 2019. Yet in contrast to works by Dutch and German artists of the period, Fries’s and Manuel’s images were dismissed as medieval, derivative, provincial.

“We should be taking their work as seriously as that of someone like Albrecht Dürer or Jan van Eyck,” she says.

Where the work of Dutch and German artists like van Eyck and Dürer aimed to portray nature as it appeared to the eyes, Fries’s and Manuel’s work was characterized by distorted perspective, unusual modeling, and heavily tooled gold ground. They were, in fact, committed to faithfully reproducing the appearance of not the natural but the *supernatural*.

Regardless of its merits, Golan says, “this mode they develop is ultimately a failure” in that it fails to reproduce itself and become an enduring pictorial tradition in the mode of the Dutch Masters or other movements. That aspect, however, is also interesting to her.

“So much of my particular subfield is about tracing a genealogy of modernity,” she says. “But how do we account for a style that just fails completely?”

### What does modernism mean?

**Megan Sullivan’s** *Radical Form: Modernist Abstraction in South America* (Yale University Press, forthcoming) examines four central figures in the history of abstract painting in South America. She hopes the book serves as a “reassessment of the stakes of abstraction”: to see the movement not just as an aesthetic style dominated by European masters but as a global phenomenon and a catalyst for new social imaginaries.

Abstract painting in Latin America has been seen as a symbol of modernization and process employed by elites. But Sullivan, who joined the faculty in 2014, argues that, in its most ambitious form, abstraction reflects deep anxieties about the place of individuals, the grounds of truth and meaning, and possibilities for new kinds of collectivity within the modern world.

Her next book project, focused on the history of Peruvian modernism, continues to explore how modernism relates to modernity outside of the North Atlantic but wanders further from the more Western conception of modernism in *Radical Form*. It explores how, in Peru, modernist painting developed in a tense but dependent relationship with craft and indigenous traditions of art-making. The central question it asks: How might charting the “others” against which modernism is defined in particular places help us account for an expanded, global notion of modernist practices?

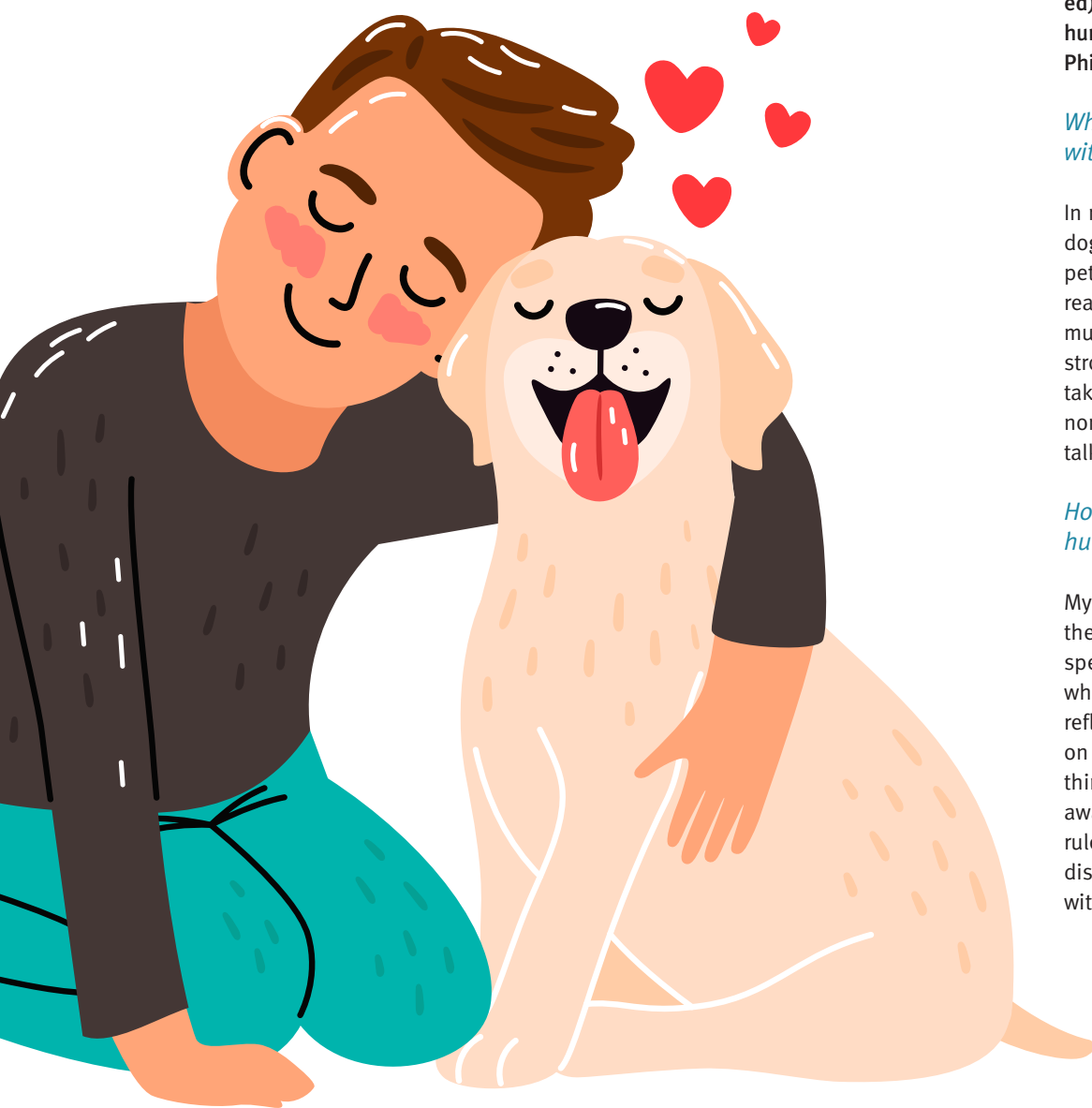
“The artists I look at in the first book were largely refusing to engage with questions of indigenous culture and race,” she says, “and those become the really essential issues in this second book.” ■

READ GOLAN’S AND SULLIVAN’S REFLECTIONS ON REMOTE TEACHING at [tableau.uchicago.edu/remote-teaching](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/remote-teaching).

# ETHICS UNLEASHED

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

A philosophy PhD student explores ethical theory, therapy, and the bond between humans and dogs.



**Claudia Hogg-Blake**, a doctoral candidate in Philosophy—and one-time candidate for European Parliament—doesn't buy the idea that humans can only love other humans. Her dissertation, "Loving Gracie: An Account of Human-Animal Love," attempts to do justice to the experience of countless people (herself included) who have profound relationships with non-human animals. In spring 2020, she taught the Philosophy course *Loving Animals*.

*What led you to study human relationships with animals?*

In my second year of grad school I adopted my dog, Gracie, the first dog I'd had. I had lots of pets growing up—mostly rodents—so I was already into animals, but I was struck by how much I fell in love with her. I didn't realize how strong it would be. Around the same time I was taking a course on the philosophy of love, and none of the philosophers we were reading were talking about this. I saw an area for research.

*How do you approach your argument that humans can love dogs?*

My main target is philosophers who argue that the only other beings that we can, properly speaking, love are what they call *persons*, which means beings that are capable of self-reflection—of assessing whether the reasons on which they act are good or bad, that sort of thing. That would rule out (as far as we're aware) all nonhuman animals. It would also rule out infants and probably some cognitively disabled adults. So there's clearly a problem with these views.

Ask any person who has a relationship with a



”  
I’m not just arguing that we  
can love dogs. I’m asking what  
this demands of an account of love.

—Claudia Hogg-Blake

dog and they’re going to say, obviously I love my dog. There is a whole load of *New York Times* best sellers that are memoirs about people’s relationships with their dogs. We don’t want a philosophical view that will just deny the testimonial experiences of huge groups of people.

#### *What are the implications of your view?*

I’m not just arguing that we can love dogs. I’m asking what this demands of an account of love. By developing a new account of love that allows for the love of dogs, I want to show how it’s in fact a more plausible account of our love of other humans as well. It’s a kind of love we can have for what I call a *somebody* but not a *something*. You can care about a *somebody* for their own sake, and relationships with them are possible.

#### *Is the love mutual?*

What’s going on on my dog Gracie’s side: can we call that love? I want to say yes. The relationship has got to be emotionally laden on both sides. We should be aware of one another as living beings with intentions and emotions. I draw on the most recent scientific literature on dog cognition that shows they are capable of such things.

It doesn’t have to be totally symmetrical. When I’m away from Gracie, I often will think about how wonderful she is. I don’t think Gracie is out there thinking about how wonderful I am, but I also don’t think that matters so much.

#### *So, dogs and humans love each other in different ways.*

Yes. And it’s not just a deficient version of what we have with other humans. It’s different.

#### *What is your dog like?*

Gracie is a five-year-old whoodle, which is a wheaten terrier-poodle mix. She is wonderful. I adopted her when she was about six months old with my then-husband. She’s been with me through a separation and divorce, then into a new relationship, and now into a new marriage. She’s been my stable relationship through all of that.

We hang out together, play together, walk together, nap together. We sleep in the same bed. She really takes up a lot of space, both literally and metaphorically. My life is very much oriented around meeting her needs and making her happy. But there’s definitely give-and-take—she provides me with a lot of emotional support. I suffer from various mood disorders, and sometimes when I spiral with anxiety or depression she’s the only one who can really comfort me and bring me back to earth. She is such a profound source of joy.

#### *You are also interested in another relationship involving emotional support: the relationship between therapist and client. How does this connect back to philosophy?*

I believe that philosophy should be, in some way, continuous with the way we think about actual dilemmas and commitments in our real life. Originally, the question for ethics in ancient times was, how should one live?

I have a great therapist in Chicago, and she and I have wonderful conversations. It’s actually in therapy that I feel most highly tapped into my philosophical brain. It’s a real skill of a therapist to be able to do that, where the space is so safe and open. For me, it’s all about my anxiety and self-doubt. These barriers to clear thinking are internal, but they are also caused by external circumstances.

#### *Your dissertation committee includes two women, Martha C. Nussbaum and Agnes Callard. Given that philosophy is still a heavily male field, are you able to find solidarity working with other women?*

When I started hanging around more with women philosophers, I felt like I gained a sense of my ability to go forward with a project that feels like my own. One of my best experiences at the University was the class I took on love with Kyla Ebels-Duggan, a visiting professor from Northwestern. It was her and six women graduate students. It was just an amazing seminar, and it really boosted my confidence.

#### *You got your bachelor’s degree at Oxford. Has the British style of philosophy instruction influenced your approach to teaching?*

When I was an undergrad we had the tutorial system, which I really love. We would write a paper a week for a course. You could either submit it beforehand or you could read it aloud in the tutorial, and you’d have peer and professor feedback. In spring 2020 I taught a course, *Loving Animals*, and I had only two students in it, so it was quite similar to an Oxford tutorial. It was at the beginning of the pandemic, so it was online. We got to peer-review each other’s work and really got time to go through it.

In general, it’s quite different in Britain because we are graded on a month or two of final exams at the end of a three-year program. So I didn’t have a GPA, and I wasn’t graded on my papers. And that’s nice in some ways. It means you can experiment a lot and not worry about grades—although the last two months are obviously hell, so in that way it’s worse! ■

# HOW TO READ A BOOK

*In The Printed Book in the West, taught by Michael F. Suarez, students gained firsthand experience of some of the rare books in the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center.*

BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93

## A course on bibliography and book history taught students to understand the entire book—not just the words.

The syllabus for **Michael F. Suarez, SJ's** Winter Quarter course, *The Printed Book in the West: Evidence and Inference from Bibliography and Book History*, was 27 pages long. It listed book after book that students would have the chance to see for themselves at the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center. The course, Suarez says, was like “an art history course given in a great museum. The holdings are that good.”

Ordinarily Suarez teaches at the University of Virginia, where he is a professor of English and director of its Rare Book School. A scholar of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature, bibliography, and book history, Suarez came to UChicago during Winter Quarter as the inaugural Visiting Scholar in Paleography and the Book.

The new visiting scholar program, made possible by the support of **Hanna Holborn Gray**, Harry Pratt Judson Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of History and former president of the University, will bring a guest professor to campus for one quarter each year. Visiting schol-

ars—whose areas of expertise might include manuscript history and reception, paleography, epigraphy, philology, codicology, the history of the book and readers, or the evolution of print culture—will teach one course, deliver a public lecture, and conduct student workshops.

In December 2021 Suarez made a two-week reconnaissance trip to Special Collections, looking through its holdings and drawing up a short list for his syllabus. Each class session was primarily taken up with examining these rare books in detail. The oldest: a 1472 edition of Pliny's *Natural History*, “printed in Venice by Nicolas Jenson in an elegant type beautifully reminiscent of Roman epigraphy,” says Suarez. The most recent: the 1930 Lakeside Press edition of *Moby Dick*, “powerfully designed and illustrated by Rockwell Kent,” he says. “This book, quickly issued in a trade edition by Random House, reinvigorated Melville's reputation.”

The goal for the course was to teach students to read “the *whole* book,” Suarez says. “Not only the words on the page, but the page itself. The letterforms, paper, illustration, and mise-en-

page.” Students learned about each book's format, binding, publisher, and provenance (the history of its ownership), as well as the historical context in which it was published, circulated, and received.

“Bibliography is a form of literacy,” says Suarez. “Students who know how to read textual artifacts historically are able to marshal an interpretive richness and complexity that makes them better at what they do.” Although the course was listed in English Language and Literature and cross-listed in History, it attracted students from many other disciplines, including art history, music history, mathematics, history of science, and biochemistry and molecular biology.

Suarez's public lecture as visiting scholar, “The Book as Museum in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” held at the Rubenstein Forum in February, focused on richly illustrated books of antiquities. The books, which were often styled as “museums” on their title pages, flourished at a time when public museums were becoming significant cultural institutions, he says: “It's a fascinating chapter in cultural and intellectual histo-

READ MORE ABOUT SUAREZ'S WORK AS A TEACHER, SCHOLAR, AND PRIEST at [tableau.uchicago.edu/suarez](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/suarez).

# EXCERPT: **CRUEL OPTIMISM**



BY LAUREN BERLANT

*In memory of influential cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (1957–2021), who was the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, Tableau presents an excerpt from their book Cruel Optimism (Duke University Press, 2011). In this excerpt, Berlant sets the stage for a critical analysis of fantasy and desire in contemporary liberal-capitalist society.*

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

All attachment is optimistic, if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene. But optimism might not *feel* optimistic. Because optimism is ambitious, at any moment it might feel like anything, including nothing: dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, the whole gamut from the sly neutrality of browsing the aisles to excitement at the prospect of “the change that’s gonna come.” Or, the change that is *not* going to come: one of

optimism’s ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formulate. But optimism doesn’t just manifest an aim to become stupid or simple—often the risk of attachment taken in its throes manifests an intelligence beyond rational calculation.

Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. But, again, optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming.

This book considers relations of cruel optimism ranging from objects or scenes of romantic love and upward mobility to the desire for the political itself. At the center of the project, though, is that moral-intimate-economic thing called “the good life.” Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies—say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at



work—when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds? Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world “add up to something.” What happens when those fantasies start to fray—depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash?

*From “Introduction: Affect in the Present,” in Cruel Optimism by Lauren Berlant. Copyright 2011, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder, and the Publisher. [www.dukeupress.edu](http://www.dukeupress.edu). ■*

HEAR BERLANT DISCUSS THIS TOPIC FURTHER ON THE **BIG BRAINS** PODCAST at [tableau.uchicago.edu/berlant](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/berlant).

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SAVE THE DATE

# HUMANITIES DAY 2022

Saturday, October 15

Mark your calendar for UChicago's annual Humanities Day celebration, featuring faculty members from the Division of the Humanities and a keynote address by Kenneth Warren, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature.

All events—lectures, tours, and exhibits—are free and open to the public. Registration opens in mid-August. Visit [humanitiesday.uchicago.edu](https://humanitiesday.uchicago.edu) to sign up for email alerts and program updates.