

TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE ARTS & HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | FALL 2025

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Deborah L. Nelson

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It is my pleasure to write to you as dean of the officially renamed Division of the Arts & Humanities, our new moniker reflecting the breadth of the critical and creative work undertaken by our faculty and students. As I mentioned here last spring and in *The University of Chicago Magazine*, we remain dedicated to leading by example in research and teaching in the humanities and the arts, even as all universities in the country face a changing landscape for support of higher education. Our newly expanded division builds on historical and emerging strengths to sustain the vitality, excellence, and innovation of our research, artistic practice, and teaching.

The interplay between the arts and scholarship is evident throughout this issue of *Tableau*. We have graduate students complementing their research by performing in John Cage's *Europera 5* under the directorship of 2025 Berlin Family lecturer Yuval Sharon, and undergraduates in the Media Arts and Design program drawing inspiration from their faculty instructors to forge innovative career paths that reflect their artistic and technical interests.

We have a PhD alumnus who draws on his own music practice while tracing compelling insights about the relationship between popular songwriting and Korean literature, and an alumna of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities whose grad school internship at the Smart Museum of Art led to a career in museum education. You can also read two of our faculty members—one from Art History, another from Linguistics—discussing the importance of cultural preservation, from artifacts to languages.

We also commend several Guggenheim Fellowship recipients from our community, including **Theaster Gates**, who has become one of the country's most prominent contemporary artists. To celebrate the history and future of the Division of the Arts & Humanities, I encourage you to visit his exhibition at the Smart Museum—his first-ever solo exhibition here in Chicago—which features repurposed materials from across campus. *Unto Thee* will be on view through February 2026.

These are troubling times, especially for universities and particularly for humanistic scholars and practicing artists. But the Division of the Arts & Humanities is a cornerstone of education at the University of Chicago and a worldwide leader in both research and artistic expression. I discussed our enduring commitment to these values in a recent opinion piece published in the *Chicago Tribune*, which I invite you to read at tableau.uchicago.edu/op-ed.

As we adapt and evolve in the face of new pressures and opportunities, we will continue our commitment to supporting the critical and creative practices of the students and faculty members who make our institution a distinctive destination for scholarship and art that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Deborah L. Nelson
Dean, Division of the Arts & Humanities
Helen B. and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor,
Department of English Language and Literature

The film Cavalcade by Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective, part of an exhibition of the same name that closed at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture & Society in July, inquired about extending human solidarity to other organic, mythic, and mechanical beings.

OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB (ROBERT HEISHMAN AND ROBERT SALAZAR); THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

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Korea remixed

Kim Jung Mi's Now (1973) is Ethan Waddell's favorite early psychedelic album from Korea.

BY CHANDLER CALDERON

Ethan Waddell, PhD'24, on how Korean authors use popular music to comment on culture

Ethan Waddell, PhD'24, has been playing in rock bands since middle school, but it wasn't until he came to UChicago that he figured out how to combine his passion for music with his academic interest in literature. Now an assistant professor of Korean at the University of Colorado Boulder and the bassist in a shoegaze band called Precocious Neophyte ("Two GRE words crunched together," notes Waddell), he studies how twentieth-century Korean authors incorporated popular music into their writing.

"I was fortunate enough to be encouraged by my professors to pursue this intersection between music and literature," says Waddell. A class he took on Japanese Cold War film, literature, and music with **Michael Bourdaghs**, Robert S. Ingersoll Professor in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, inspired his first writing on the subject.

He decided to explore the "genres of pop songs that had been least addressed in English-language scholarship." These included trot and psychedelic rock.

Trot is a "melancholy" and "melodramatic" genre that developed in Korea under Japanese occupation in the 1920s and 1930s but rose to prominence—and warmed up to sunnier compositions—in the 1960s with the development of the popular music industry.

The popularity of trot coincided with a time of major political change and urbanization under Park Chung Hee, president of South Korea from 1962 to 1979. Many "saw him at first as this figure of hope who could recover Korea's cultural tradition, as well as boost the economy," says Waddell.

However, that vision began to fade by the mid-1960s. "With the onset of these rapid changes, and what felt like the loss of the past in the name of a prosperous future, people really started to long for what was being lost," says Waddell. "And so literary fiction, along with music, became a means for people to reconnect with the vanishing spaces of their rural hometowns."

Trot's relationship to Korean cultural tradition is complex. "It was the first popular music genre in Korea developed under imperial Japan," says Waddell. "Since liberation in 1945, the genre has continued to stir controversies over whether it signifies authentic Korean identity or whether it's a vessel for the intrusion of foreign cultures."

"My goal was to see if I could somehow connect that broader history of the trot controversies and revival with what was going on within literary fiction," he adds.



Psychedelic rock developed its own internal codes that were recognizable and that transmitted certain stable meanings.

—Ethan Waddell, PhD'24

He found that references to trot showed up repeatedly in what he refers to as “narratives of rural homecoming,” which were popular in the 1960s. These were “stories about characters who are returning to their hometowns after going to the cities, perhaps receiving a college education.” Some of the stories even parallel the standard structure of trot songs, Waddell found, with sections of narrative exposition standing in for instrumental interludes, and extensive quotations—of song lyrics, for example—standing in for song verses.

As the protagonists have the bittersweet experience of seeing their hometowns through new eyes, they “become informal ethnographers, or self-ethnographers.” In the face of government censorship, references to trot music became a useful tool for authors to communicate the pervasive malaise of the time. “To hear the contradictions of trot itself manifesting through the voices of these authors I found really fascinating.”

Hoyt Long, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Japanese Literature in East Asian Languages and Civilizations and EALC department chair, says Waddell works “to get outside the boundaries of the study of literature as a discipline and try to think about how literature and stories and narrative circulate with visual, auditory, and other forms.” In Long’s words, “He really showed that to tell a history of either literature or music, you need both.”

By the early 1970s, says Waddell, “cultural policies in Korea were becoming more and more authoritarian.” Art featuring topics like drugs and sex, as well as foreign influences, was subject to censorship, and art-

ists who were critical of the government faced persecution. Nevertheless, a vibrant youth counterculture developed, with writers drawing inspiration from popular music, including psychedelic rock.

“Psychedelic rock developed its own internal codes that were recognizable and that transmitted certain stable meanings,” says Waddell.

He found parallels to these codes in the work of authors such as Ch’oe In-ho, who reproduces the heavily distorted jams used in psychedelic rock to “facilitate catharsis in the listener” by erasing the separation between individual and collective consciousness.” Ch’oe mimics this effect with “a big block of text that has random scraps from newspaper articles alongside indirect speech overheard on the street and then, perhaps, some song lyrics thrown in as well, all separated by ellipses.”

Another psychedelic code Waddell identified in Ch’oe’s writing is that of “upward flight,” meant to symbolize “a drug-induced trip to a higher plane of consciousness.” However, Ch’oe inverts this motif in his story “Deep Blue Night” (1982), in which a disillusioned author and a musician undertake an increasingly surreal journey from San Francisco to Los Angeles that parallels a bad trip. At the end, the author character collapses on a beach, feeling defeated—cynical about the rule of law and personally dissatisfied with his past vanity and pursuit of desire.

The story was published as the counterculture movement was declining and at a time of great political violence immediately after the assassination of

Park Chung Hee and a coup d’état by Chun Doo-hwan (president from 1980 to 1987), and Waddell interprets the climax of “Deep Blue Night” as Ch’oe’s deflation in the face of two consecutive military dictatorships and a dismissal of his cultural role as self-indulgent. In this sense, the story could be read as Ch’oe’s “apology for all of the countercultural literature that he had written previously,” says Waddell. Yet the story is unapologetically psychedelic and includes the first explicit depiction of drug use in Ch’oe’s work. In Waddell’s view, Ch’oe’s use of psychedelic rock codes became a way for the author to “express some form of dissidence even in this act of expressing defeat.”

Waddell sheds light not only on changes within Korean culture, explains **Kyeong-Hee Choi**, associate professor of modern Korean literature in EALC, but also on Korea’s relationship to the world. For Choi, Waddell’s work “has opened up a new path of interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary literary scholarship that does due justice to the complex ways in which Korean literature and culture have transitioned ... from being mere importers of popular culture of foreign origin to being notable catalysts for a newly emergent global culture.”

“The question of how to bridge this gap between literature and music is still something that I am wrestling with,” says Waddell, but what is clear is that music didn’t serve just as a tool of cultural criticism for authors. By incorporating musical lyrics and structures into their work, authors were also interpreting these songs for their readers. “Literature,” he says, “is shaping how people are hearing songs.” ■





Two perspectives on **cultural** **preservation**

AS TOLD TO LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

Lenore Grenoble and Wei-Cheng Lin, AM'99, PhD'06, reconstruct Arctic languages and Buddhist artifacts, respectively.

The Dispersed Chinese Art Digitization Project, led by faculty director Wei-Cheng Lin, digitally reconstructed this Chinese Buddha Hall dated to 1444 using ceiling panels and other fragments collected at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.



Lenore Grenoble is the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor in Linguistics at UChicago and director of the Arctic Linguistic Ecology Lab in Yakutsk, Russia.

I work on endangered languages. A lot of languages are lost because of language shift, which is when children don't learn their parents' language and learn another one—almost always a socially, politically, economically dominant language. Once you stop having future speakers, the language is in trouble. My research is mostly in the Arctic, but language endangerment is a global problem. People figure we're going to lose 50 to 90 percent of the world's languages this century.

Why should we care if these languages are lost? First, we are losing a huge amount of information about what human beings can do with language. Most of the world's big languages—big in the sense of most widely spoken—are Indo-European, plus there's Mandarin. They're structured in very different ways than, say, Greenlandic. Greenlandic is polysynthetic, so a word often translates to a sentence, and if you didn't know about languages like that, you wouldn't think the human brain could do it. Or, if you just spoke English and Spanish, you wouldn't imagine tonal languages could exist, right?

There are also studies showing strong links between access to your language and not just mental well-being but physical well-being: lower cholesterol, lower incidence of heart disease, lower blood pressure, lower diabetes. This is pretty sound medical evidence that access to your ancestral language is a protective factor in terms of well-being. And there are lots of data showing that people subsequently have remorse or grieve when a language is lost. Myaamia, which is spoken in Ohio, was completely lost, not spoken for generations, and then Daryl Baldwin, a member of the Myaamia tribe, decided to reclaim it and make it vital again. He got a master's degree in linguistics, and then he started partnering with a linguist who was already studying the language, and they took legacy materials and looked at sister languages to build up the Myaamia language from scratch.

I'm working in Siberia and Greenland. In Greenland I'm working with the language Kalaallisut, or Greenlandic. In Siberia I'm working in the Sakha Republic, a large subnational territory in the Russian Federation that is six times the size of France. When I started in Siberia, I met first with an Evenki woman, Nadezhda Bulatova, a linguist who grew up with other Evenki people. When I first started doing fieldwork, anywhere I went, we went together. So people saw me as not a total outsider, which gave me a tremendous advantage. Still, it has been years of building trust. When working in Indigenous communities, you have to explain what you're doing and why, and you have to be sure that it's somehow relevant to them.

People want different things. Bulatova and I produced a book of folktales in the language of Evenki and brought that back to the Evenki people. In the 1990s, the local people were not so concerned about language shift. But now people want to teach the languages in the schools. Some people are just happy to have somebody to talk to. They're in these isolated villages with no internet connectivity. I often get asked, "Why would an American come this far and study our language?" Once they see I'm genuinely interested, people love to talk about it. ■



Wei-Cheng Lin, AM'99, PhD'06, is an associate professor in Art History. He is faculty director of the Dispersed Chinese Art Digitization Project and a steering committee member at the Center for the Art of East Asia.

I'm trained as a historian of Buddhist art. I worked at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, which has a wonderful Buddhist sculptural gallery with all these fragments that were removed from Buddhist caves. I was stunned to see those fragments being displayed, so I studied them a lot. There are a couple of questions we have to ask. One is why the sculptures were broken. The second is why the fragments are here in the United States. During my doctoral research at UChicago, I went to China to a lot of the sites of origin of these artifacts. I studied the reasons and the time and space where they were taken away. Before I graduated from my program here, the Center for the Art of East Asia started the Dispersed Chinese Art Digitization Project. When I returned to the University to become faculty in 2015, I took over a lot of the center's projects. I'm very interested in digital technology, so it was really something I wanted to do.

A lot of Asian cultural artifacts were removed, transported, and dislocated by force during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then dispersed to different parts of the world into private hands or art collections. If you go to a museum, you see the artifact without the context. If you go to the original context, you don't see the artifacts. We want to present a more complete view of the objects' originality. We scan those dispersed artifacts and then digitally marry them with their sites of origin. If you go to the sites, you will see, for example, a Buddhist cave with statues without heads or with the arms broken. With digital technology, we can bring back those artifacts—not physically moving them but using digital 3D models to put them back in the 3D environment. So we can see the cultural heritage site with the missing artifacts again. We help students to study artifacts in context. We want to use this technology as a pedagogical tool. The younger students who are the natives of this digital world—this is the language of their visual knowledge.

When the project started, the challenge was more technical. The price of a scanner was really high, and the scanner was bulky and hard to move. Now the scanner is handheld, but challenges derive from the issue of digital property. Museums themselves are using the digital technology to document their collections. We make these 3D models. Who owns these files?

A lot of times we'll talk about cultural heritage in a very physical way: We just have to get these things back. If any museum wants to repatriate all these artifacts back to China, I will say, "Sure, go for it." But what's next? Cultural heritage for me is not just about the physical entity but about the cultural meanings and connection to the modern world—about how we can make those artifacts speak to us again. Digital technology can do so much right now to bring about a kind of modern or contemporary imagination of the past. The digital model provides a great number of possibilities and at the same time will help to preserve the physical artifact for a longer time. I think when we talk about sustainable cultural heritage, digital technology will be a major trend in the future. ■





The nimble minds of MADD

BY CÍAN FORD

Media Arts and Design program spurs creativity and careers in the College.

At the DuSable Black History Museum this past spring, **Josh Nkhata**, AB'25, performed a series of original poems as part of a project called the Community Synthesizer. He began by typing out compositions written for the synthesizer and then invited audience members to type freely to produce their own work. After collecting field recordings of words and phrases from friends, family, and community members in Chicago and Minneapolis, he had built an electronic instrument to play the archive of sounds like music.

A poet and musician, Nkhata completed this capstone project as part of the Media Arts and Design (MADD) program, which offers an undergraduate major and minor. He compiled the sound recordings and connected them to keyboard strokes using Max/MSP, a visual programming language, so that each letter or word played a selection of corresponding audio files. Far from an experienced programmer, he credits his

A visitor to the Media Arts, Data, and Design Center—a 20,000-square-foot collaborative space in John Crerar Library—tries out the VR painting app Tilt Brush.

coding competence to his MADD professors, who bolstered his skills with the digital dexterity needed for a project like his.

“The MADD program feels to me to be really engaged with entering your world,” Nkhata says. Through MADD, he explains, he learned to use technology to reinvent his poetic and musical practice, rather than conforming his work to an existing technological framework.

The program, built from a set of courses first offered in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies, allows students to learn to use technology to build projects that blur traditional boundaries of genre and form, exploring and analyzing experimental and interactive media, such as video games, with an academic lens.

“Conducting a close analysis of a video game has parallels to analyzing a poem in an English course, though it depends on a grammar and structure that is medium-specific to games,” says **Patrick Jagoda**, William Rainey Harper Professor in Cinema and Media Studies and English Language and Literature and program director of MADD, who has authored several books on new media and has his own art practice. “Taking a game apart, through analysis and iterative design, suggests how to push toward original frameworks or experimental game projects.”

“At a place like UChicago, where everyone’s an expert at writing papers, conveying a thought through virtual reality is a skill. You don’t nail it on your first time,” says **Jon Satrom**, an assistant instructional professor who directs the MADD capstone program. “Our classes are spaces to experiment with different ways to land your message or share what you want to share with the world.”

The classes—with eye-catching names such as Conscious Media Practices in the Age of Brain Rot and AI + Video: Glitches, Promises & Slop—are a huge draw for the program, Satrom says. Students can pursue one of five clusters—Creative Computing, Digital Sound and Music, Expanded Cinema, Games, and Media Performance—or design their own program of study.

Students come to the program from all fields and backgrounds. **Amber Auh**, AB’25, drew on her experience in a neuroscience lab to build Synapse, a virtual reality installation that used real-time electroencephalogram data from its participants to project their brainwaves on a screen.

“Before I started MADD, I didn’t really know that any of this was possible,” she says. “I always knew that I’m a creative person, but I’m also pretty analytical and technical, and I think I always struggled to find what major would be best for me.”

Satrom says this overlap of the analytical, the creative, and the technical is built into the structure of the MADD program, encouraging double majors and minors for students in other academic spaces. MADD students learn to be “nimble makers,” Satrom says—creative, curious minds with the technological dexterity to solve problems and articulate themselves in dynamic and inventive ways.

“Theory gives them the critical mind and ways of analyzing the media around them, history gives them the context, and then design, or practice, teaches them to get their hands in there,” explains **Riss Lawrence**, AM’19, the program administrator for MADD.

Lawrence credits the program’s rapid growth to its broad appeal for students—including those without a technological background, like Nkhata, or students who have computer skills but are seeking an outlet for untapped creativity. In 2020, its first year as a major, the program had one graduating College student; this spring, Nkhata was one of 74 MADD fourth-years in the Class of 2025.

These students are not just making things, Lawrence says. “It’s also about the iterative process of trying to make something.” Aptly, she compares the program to a game: “Video games are a place of safe failure, because if you fail and you die, you can just restart and keep going. And I feel that way about MADD.”

This creative dexterity makes MADD graduates uniquely resilient in an ever-changing job market. Alumni have built careers in media-related fields such as advertising or game development or have pursued advanced degrees in media analysis, intellectual property law, and business administration for creative industries. Like Satrom and Jagoda, most MADD professors are teaching artists, and their professional networks help students seek out their ideal path.

Nkhata is now a teaching artist too: After graduation, he started teaching in the Ryan Learning Center at the Art Institute of Chicago, a position that encourages him to continue writing poetry and making music. He says the MADD program helped him to build a home for his distinct, interconnected interests and to reimagine what poetry could be. ■



Conducting a close analysis of a video game has parallels to analyzing a poem in an English course.

—Patrick Jagoda,
MADD Program
Director



Your opera

BY KELLEY TATRO

Graduate student performers embody anarchy at the opera to cap off the 2025 Berlin Family Lectures.



With minimal rehearsal time and a sparsely set stage, three UChicago graduate student performers—**Jacob Reed** from Music and **Elena Rose Light** and **Clara Nizard**, who are both pursuing joint PhDs in English Language and Literature and Theater and Performance Studies (TAPS)—contributed to a lively and playful production of John Cage’s opera *Europera 5* at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts in May. The performance was the culmination of the 2025 Berlin Family Lectures, featuring world-renowned opera director Yuval Sharon.

“Cage did not want the piece to be overly rehearsed,” Sharon explains, “because he wanted performers to avoid getting too comfortable. It was meant to feel ‘on a knife’s edge,’ spontaneous and rehearsed just enough, requiring total concentration and commitment.”

The performance also required a willingness to experiment. Like the other operas in Cage’s *Europera* series, composed at the end of his long, provocative career, *Europera 5* has no plot. It does not unfold according to a conventional operatic score, nor does it sound like a conventional opera.

Instead, two singers and a pianist each perform different arias—selected from the entire canon of

European opera—during a precisely timed 60-minute work. Their entrances, the entrances of dancers Light and Nizard, and sound from nonhuman sources such as a radio and a record player were all determined by chance and notated in an ephemeral score created fresh for the performance.

For pianist Reed, this meant an unaccustomed commitment to not listen to the vocalists when they performed music that diverged from his own. Additionally, he had to play three of his six pieces as normal while only “shadow playing” the others. This was a technical challenge that required figuring out how to perform the music without depressing the piano keys—though a random, accidental key strike would have been a welcome addition to the chance array of sound.

Reed put a great deal of thought into his choices of works, deciding on three selections from recognizable warhorse operas for the audible performances and three more esoteric selections for the unsounded shadow play. Because Cage had described the *Europera* project as a way of “sending opera back” to Europe—by creating a novel, American approach to opera that draws playfully on the genre’s long European tradition—Reed liked the idea that his shadow play choices were European operas set in imagined

American settings, such as Puccini’s *La fanciulla del West* (The Girl of the Golden West).

When he first met with Sharon, Reed was interested to see what the director would make of his careful choices. “I was expecting him to offer more input,” Reed remarks, “but he just said, ‘Yeah, those will sound great.’”

Sharon was not uninterested in Reed’s choices but was attempting to follow in the composer’s footsteps by enacting what he termed “light leadership” as opposed to the all-powerful role directors tend to play in the opera house. Similarly, Cage had tried to disrupt a perceived hierarchy in which composers dominate, their expressive intentions shaping the performers’ actions and the audience’s experience of their work. By choosing the parameters of a piece through chance procedures, such as rolling dice or consulting the I Ching, Cage had attempted to downplay his own intentions while compelling performers’ and listeners’ active attention to sounds—musical or otherwise—that surrounded them.

Cage’s title emphasizes this as well as its reply to European opera. It can be heard as “your opera,” an opera in which performers and audience members are invited to choose how to interact with its various

The performance was “meant to feel ‘on a knife’s edge,’ spontaneous and rehearsed just enough, requiring total concentration and commitment.”

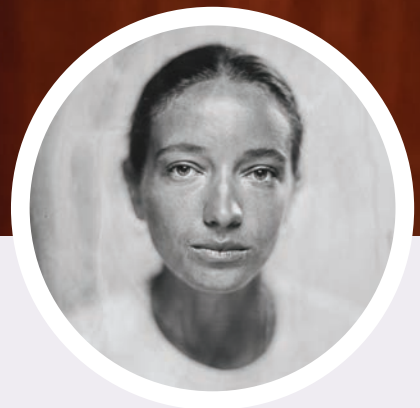
—Yuval Sharon



Jacob Reed



Elena Rose Light



Clara Nizard

components on a spacious set that allows them to decide where to focus their attention.

The dancers, whom Sharon had added to the cast, improvised their movements within the vast near emptiness of the performance space. Apart from a grid marked on the floor, the stage was dominated by a digital clock counting down the performance’s run time. Grouped together against the back wall, a few pieces of furniture suggested the living room of a comfortable home—an upright piano, a radio, a rotary telephone, and an armchair cozied up to a record player on a cabinet replete with a drawer full of records. Just above the clock at center stage, an image of an old-fashioned television set presided over everything, its screen variously presenting a baseball game, a tennis match, and two recorded opera productions.

As the dancers entered at different places along the grid—often carrying items claimed from the TAPS

prop shop to play with as they interacted with the other performers—they also had to watch the clock surreptitiously.

“Just on a performance level, you don’t want to look like you’re looking at the clock,” says Light. It was “like bureaucratic labor while doing the performance labor. We had these little sheets of paper with our score,” along with extra clocks backstage to help keep track of when they were scheduled to appear.

Titled “Anarchy at the Opera,” Sharon’s Berlin Family Lecture series, delivered over three weeks in May, argued for reimagining opera through the lens of anarchism. He defined the term loosely, flirting with stereotypical imagery of bomb-throwing—and potentially opera house-burning—political radicals while also drawing on the work of historical figures, such as philosopher and economist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and more contemporary scholars, such as David Graeber, AM’87, PhD’96, and David Wengrow, to ground his read-

ing of anarchists as egalitarians who, perhaps like Cage, prioritize “horizontal” over hierarchical relationships.

The audience seemed to enjoy playing along, making the opera theirs through an unusual level of interaction. During one vocalist’s aria, in the middle of a great deal of other action, the singer chose to bow as though receiving applause at the end of a performance. Noting the familiar gesture despite its unfamiliar place in the performance, a group of audience members began to clap. The vocalist continued to bow as he sang the rest of his aria. And they continued to clap each time he did so, their own performance having become a part of the action.

“People wouldn’t feel the agency to engage without some level of social script in place,” marvels Light, remembering the unexpected reaction. “Anarchy at the opera is just the right amount of safety, actually, and just the right amount of knowing what you can do and cannot do.” ■

VIEW THE 2025 BERLIN FAMILY LECTURES AND *EUROPERA 5*

at tableau.uchicago.edu/anarchy.





New Arts & Humanities faculty gather in front of Walker Museum. Front row (from left): Sean Kelsey, Anna Martine Whitehead, and Hans Thomalla. Back row (from left): Amanda Lanzillo, Yoonbin Cho, Soyeon Ryu, Alexander Cowan, and Sarah Edmands Martin.

The Division of the Arts & Humanities welcomes 10 new faculty members, representing a wide range of disciplines and ranks.

James Burgin, AB'06, AM'10, PhD'16, returns to UChicago as an assistant professor in Middle Eastern Studies (MES) and the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures. Previously a research group leader at the University of Würzburg and the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz, Germany, he studied Hittitology in MES for his graduate studies and Sanskrit in the College. A firm advocate for combining philology and archaeology whenever possible, he analyzed the economic, religious, and administrative history of the Hittite kingdom through its textual and material culture in his first books. He is the author of *Functional Differentiation in Hittite Festival Texts* (Harrassowitz, 2019) and the two-volume *Studies in Hittite Economic Administration* (Harrassowitz, 2022).

Yoonbin Cho, assistant professor in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, completed her PhD and MA in comparative literature and literary theory at the University of Pennsylvania and her undergraduate studies in comparative literature and culture at Yonsei University in Seoul. Her scholarship explores the interplay between aesthetics, society, and technology. In her dissertation, "Transnational Affects Reprised: Korean Cinema's Negotiations with Systems of World Cinema," she studies recent Korean film adaptations and remakes to examine the affects that emerge from the contact between disparate media forms. Her work brings affect theory into conversation with the film industry and uses Korean filmmaking to reconsider global cinema.

Alexander Cowan, assistant professor in Music, comes to UChicago from the University of Cambridge, where he was a research fellow at Jesus College. All his degrees are in music, including a PhD from Harvard, a master's from King's College London, and a BA from the University of Oxford. In his dissertation and current book project, "Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics," he examines the relationship between eugenics and musicology through their shared investment in the idea of talent, often thought to be innate and heritable. His work considers music's capacity to be imbued with political meaning.

New faculty fall 2025

BY COURTNEY C. W. GUERRA, AB'05

Sean Kelsey, professor in Philosophy, previously taught at the University of Notre Dame. He also held faculty appointments at UCLA and Iowa State University and semester-long visiting appointments at the University of Michigan as well as UChicago. A specialist in ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Plato and Aristotle, he studies their conceptions of nature, soul, truth, goodness, science, and philosophy. His latest book, *Mind and World in Aristotle's De Anima* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), was supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship. His PhD is from Princeton and his BA is from Thomas Aquinas College in California.

Amanda Lanzillo joins South Asian Languages and Civilizations as an assistant professor following a faculty appointment at Brunel University of London. Her PhD is from Indiana University, and she holds a BS in international history from Georgetown University. Her first book, *Pious Labor: Islam, Artisanry, and Technology in Colonial India* (University of California Press, 2024), draws on Urdu and Persian technical manuals to illuminate the construction of religious and class identity in early twentieth-century India. Two new book projects explore mobility between Afghanistan and India. The first, "Out of Empire: The India-Afghanistan *Hijrat* of 1920," tells the story of Indian Muslims who sought to reject life under colonial rule by migrating to Afghanistan. The second, "Peripheral Subjects: Pashtun Migration, Islam, and Subjecthood Across the British Empire," examines how communities of Pashtun migrants in India engaged Islam as a way of navigating British imperial control.

Ling Ma, AB'05, rejoins English Language and Literature as an associate professor of Creative Writing, where she previously taught as a lecturer and assistant professor of practice, and concentrated in English as an undergrad. Her MFA is from Cornell, where she also served as a lecturer. Her work has been translated into nearly a dozen languages. Her debut novel, *Severance* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), received the Kirkus Prize for Fiction, the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, and the VCU Cabell First Novelist Award, among others. Her story collection, *Bliss Montage* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022), received the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Story Prize.



Ling Ma, AB'05



**James Burgin, AB'06,
AM'10, PhD'16**

For her achievements as an author, Ma was honored with a Whiting Award, the Windham Campbell Literature Prize, and a MacArthur Fellowship.

Sarah Edmands Martin joins the Media Arts and Design program within Cinema and Media Studies as an associate professor with expertise in both media production and media studies. She was previously on the faculty of the University of Notre Dame and, before that, Indiana University. She holds an MFA from Notre Dame in visual communication design and two BAs, in English and studio art, from the University of Maryland. She also received a Fulbright Scholar award for a fellowship at the Center for Digital Narrative, hosted by the University of Bergen in Norway. Her solo or group exhibitions have included interactive games, poster design, and book design and have shown nationally in the US and internationally in South Korea, Poland, the UK, Mexico, and Norway.

Soyoon Ryu, assistant professor in Art History, recently completed her PhD at the University of Michigan; she also holds an MA in contemporary art from

the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and a joint BA in history of art and in government from Cornell. In her dissertation, "We Live Here, Now: *Yaoe Hyeonjang Misul* and a Communal History of East and Southeast Asian Art, 1967-1995," she discusses three artist groups that retreated to nonmetropolitan regions and their art's engagement with the social, natural, and built environments surrounding them. As a practicing artist, Ryu also uses her creative work to explore ideas of regionality, collectivity, and environmental artmaking.

Hans Thomalla, Helen A. Regenstein Professor of Composition in Music, is a composer with a background in dramaturgy whose work has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and, most recently, a fellowship from the Deutsche Akademie Rom Villa Massimo. He joins UChicago from Northwestern, where he cofounded the Institute for New Music. He holds a DMA from Stanford and an undergraduate diploma in composition (with instrumental minor in piano) from the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt. He has written four operas—*Fremd*, *Kaspar Hauser*, *Dark Spring*, and *Dark Fall*—and was formerly the assistant dramaturg and musical adviser for the Stuttgart Opera. He also cofounded the Chicago-based record label Sideband Records.

Anna Martine Whitehead joins Visual Arts as an assistant professor from the faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a former member of the Education Collective of the Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project (PNAP) and continues to collaborate with PNAP. Their MFA, in social practice, is from California College of the Arts, and they hold a BA in fine art and a certificate in black women's studies from the University of Maryland. Drawing on experimental interdisciplinary performance and collaborative improvisation, her practice is centered on themes of queer and gendered embodiment, black temporality, carceral surveillance, and speculative narratives. Their most recent project, *FORCE! an opera in three acts*, is the recipient of numerous national awards, including a NEFA National Theater Project award and several National Performance Network awards. ■





From visitor to leader

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, AM'99, found her calling in museum education.



Nenette Luarca-Shoaf, AM'99, fell in love with visiting museums as a college student in Los Angeles, but it was an internship at the Smart Museum of Art that helped her realize museums could also offer a career.

Today, Luarca-Shoaf is director of education and public engagement at the Huntington, a research library, art museum, and botanical gardens in San Marino, California. She previously held education roles at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles and the Art Institute of Chicago.

When did you realize you wanted to work in museums?

I remember the exact moment. I was doing my master's, and I had an internship at the Smart Museum of

Art in the education department. I was writing curricula for middle schoolers about art and music appreciation, and I had an amazing mentor. I was in Hyde Park, standing on one of those great Chicago balconies, when it hit me that art history could be my life's work—but what truly excited me was showing how it could matter to more people.

Did you always imagine yourself in learning and volunteer engagement roles?

At the time, museum education felt like it crystallized much of what I loved about art history. It has a social relevance that was important to me, because I didn't grow up with art or museums, and discovering them opened worlds for me. I continue to be motivated by

The Huntington's botanical gardens span 130 acres.

opening those worlds for young people and adults alike—because that kind of revelation can happen at any time in life.

Then I pursued more graduate study, earned a PhD, and tried many career paths: collection management, curatorial opportunities and fellowships, a postdoc in environmental and public humanities. And it was all of those things that made me come back to museum education in the end—because museums have evolved, and there is now more interest in the ways diverse perspectives can build bridges to art for different publics.

The Huntington is not only a museum—it has a research library and botanical gardens. What opportunities does that create for you?

It's a really special place and a really complex place to work. We've found that information delivery works best here when it's not so didactic. When people walk through the gardens, they want to know what plants they're looking at, but they don't want to be inundated with information. So we've been working on audio guides that help people opt in for different experiences.

Another unique thing about the Huntington is that multigenerational groups come—families connecting with each other and with the natural world or art. So we don't want to get in the way of that, and we want to provide education opportunities that allow visitors to increase that connection with one another.

More and more, we're looking for opportunities to bring different disciplines together, because people will connect with different aspects of the experience, and we want to allow and enable that.

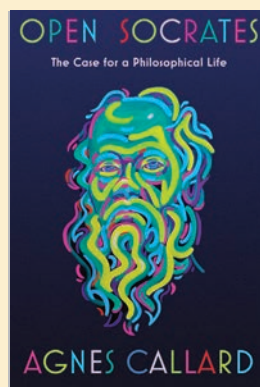
What advice would you give a young person starting out in museums?

Go to lots of different kinds of museums and make note of what excites you. Museums can be so different, because they serve so many constituencies and are so dependent on their contexts—their founding, their locations, their collections. Getting a sense of the landscape will empower you to take the path that's right for you.

I would also urge people to remember that there are many different careers in museums—you can go into finance or software development or digital media and have a lifelong career in museums. I work with folks in those areas every day. It takes all of us to make a place like this run. ■

READ AN EXPANDED VERSION OF THIS STORY
at tableau.uchicago.edu/luarca-shoaf.





SEE ALSO

Open Socrates: The Case for a Philosophical Life (W. W. Norton, 2025) by **Agnes Callard**, AB'97, an associate professor in Philosophy, places open-ended inquiry at the center of human existence. According to a January *New York Times* review, the book “encourages us to recognize how little we know, and to start thinking.”

“Even as the explosion of scientific and technological knowledge has created massive improvements in many areas of our lives, we remain at sea when it comes to managing politics, handling love affairs, and confronting our own deaths. Socratic ethics is the ethics of living a truly philosophical life, and it tells you that the way you should conduct yourself in each of these three domains is: inquisitively. It promises to make people freer and more equal; more romantic; and more courageous.”



Theaster Gates



Richie Hofmann

GUGGENHEIM FELLOWS

The 100th class of Guggenheim Fellows, announced in April, includes two Arts & Humanities instructors: interdisciplinary artist **Theaster Gates**, a professor in Visual Arts, and poet **Richie Hofmann**, a lecturer in the College's Poetry and the Human sequence. Gates will use the fellowship to continue studying Japanese ceramic craft traditions, while Hofmann plans to conduct archival research for a project inspired by French writer and photographer Hervé Guibert. The cohort of new fellows also includes composers **Tomás Gueglio**, PhD'16 (Music), and **Krzysztof Wolek**, PhD'07 (Music); author and theater scholar **Rachel Shteir**, AB'87 (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, now known as Middle Eastern Studies); documentary photographer **Nina Berman**, AB'82 (English Language and Literature); and **Marcus Kronforst**, a professor of ecology and evolution.

GATES EXHIBITION

Theaster Gates, renowned for his social practice installation art, is holding his first-ever solo museum exhibition in Chicago. Titled *Theaster Gates: Unto Thee*, the exhibition is open at the Smart Museum of Art until February 22.

READ MORE ABOUT CALLARD'S BOOK
at tableau.uchicago.edu/socrates.





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Berlin Family Lectures

The Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures bring to campus individuals who are making fundamental contributions to the arts, humanities, and humanistic social sciences for an extended series of annual lectures and development of a book for publication with the University of Chicago Press. The 2026 Berlin Family Lecture speaker will be the internationally acclaimed writer Yiyun Li, who is the author of 11 books that have been translated into more than 20 languages and a recipient of the PEN/Malamud Award, the Windham Campbell Prize in Fiction, and a MacArthur Fellowship. A professor of creative writing at Princeton University and a contributor to *The New Yorker*, Li is known for her psychologically nuanced fiction and essays that explore memory, solitude, and the emotional landscape of everyday life.

To learn more about the Berlin Family Lectures or view recordings of past events, visit berlinfamilylectures.uchicago.edu.



YEAR OF GAMES



The Year of Games is a UChicago-wide celebration of play, creativity, and collaboration unfolding throughout the 2025-26 academic year.

From game design showcases to scholarly panels to film series, exhibits, and playful public gatherings, the Year of Games invites students, faculty, alumni, and the broader community to explore how games shape culture, spark creativity, and foster connection.

To learn more, visit yearofgames.com.