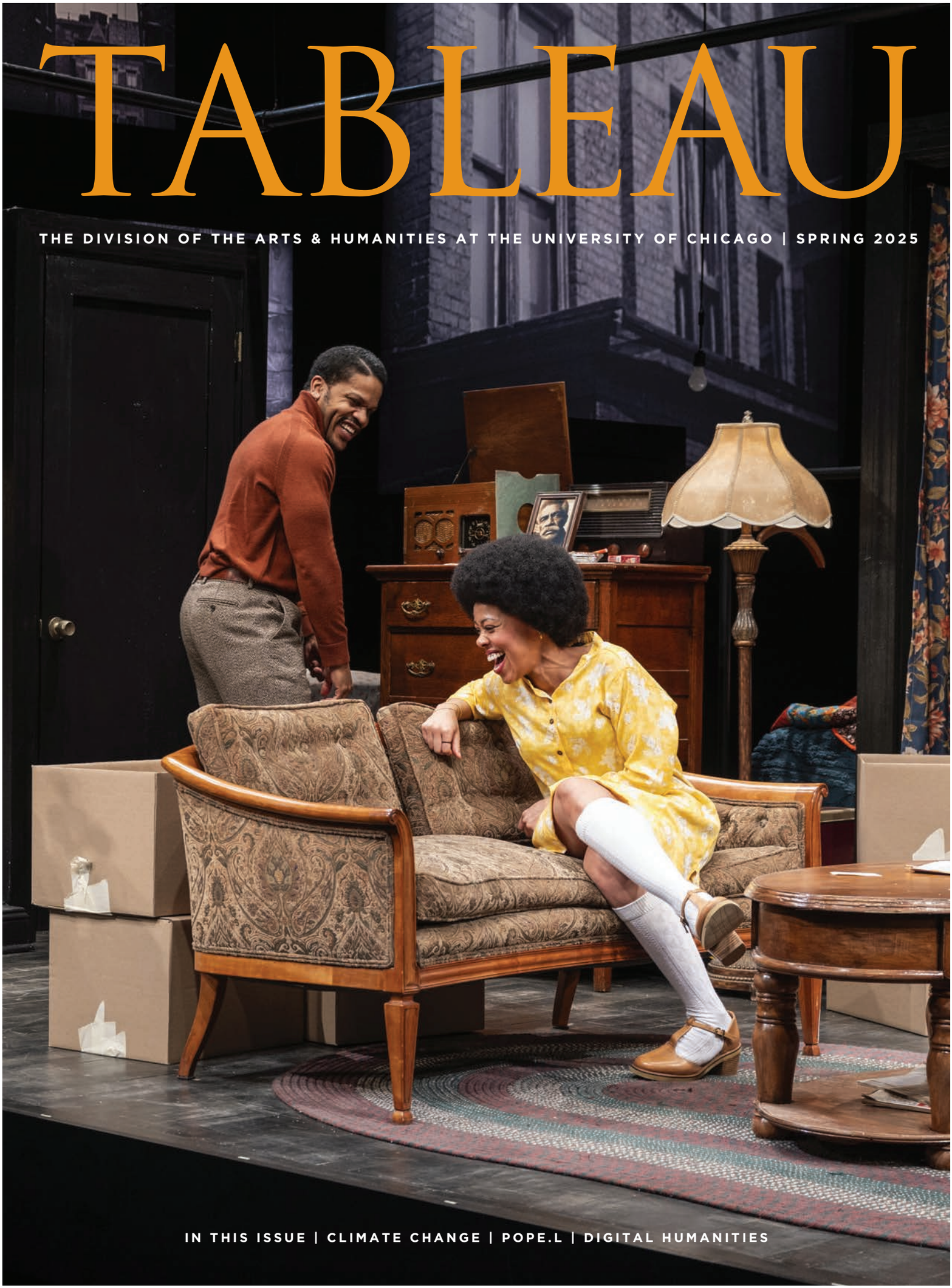
TABLEAU

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



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IN THIS ISSUE

ON THE COVER

Court Theatre's production of A Raisin in the Sun*, the story of a family fighting for housing rights and dignity on the South Side of Chicago, closed in March after receiving widespread acclaim, including 4/4 stars from the* Chicago Tribune*. Photography by Michael Brosilow.*

Moving image installation Mascon: A Massive Concentration of Black Experiential Energy *closed at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society in January.* Mascon *consists of a mosaic of images from the works of Senegalese auteur film directors Ousmane Sembène and Djibril Diop Mambéty, leading artistic voices of African liberation in the twentieth century.*

OPPOSITE: © THE OTOLITH GROUP. COURTESY THE ARTISTS, GREENGRASS, AND PROJECT88; THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

Deborah L. Nelson

Dear Alumni and Friends,

We find ourselves in a strange moment in history—one of intensified cultural clashes, geopolitical realignments, and challenges to higher education, including the humanities. This moment will undoubtedly be scrutinized extensively by future historians, but it remains challenging to contend with as it unfolds around us in the present tense. At a time of such uncertainty, I am gratified to lead a collection of scholars and artists whose work implores us to learn from our past and consider the vast possibilities that lie ahead.

This issue of *Tableau* reflects the breadth of wisdom and creativity our faculty and alumni have to offer: an alumnus recovering a bracing nineteenth-century emancipation narrative from obscurity, a new master's program integrating computational technologies with traditional research methods, and Philosophy junior faculty tackling complex questions about the nature of knowledge, action, and belief. We also explore the climate crisis from several angles, with two scholars examining its relationship to our ever-accelerating reliance on energy and two alumnae sharing their successes in sustainability work. There is much to celebrate as well: the 50th anniversary of the Smart Museum of Art, a student's receipt of a Rhodes Scholarship, and the recent return of **Jacqueline Stewart**, AM'93, PhD'99, to our campus. We also remember the life and legacy of Pope.L, one of the most important, provocative artists of our generation and a brilliantly compassionate teacher. Losing him is a tragedy that reminds us how fortunate we were to have him in our community.

Humanistic research and artistic practice continue to flourish at the University of Chicago, remaining integral to our institution even as they face decline elsewhere in academia. As you may have already noticed, we have changed our name to the Division of the Arts & Humanities, a move that formally recognizes what has long been true: The arts inform thoughtful scholarship, incisive research inspires artists, and the interplay between the two helps forge connections between academic inquiry and broader audiences. By bringing UChicago's performances and exhibitions into the fold of a single division, we are aligning our flowering artistic practice, production, and experimentation with the historical excellence of our departments. Incoming students in fall 2025 will matriculate in the Division of the Arts & Humanities. I wrote more about the rationale behind this change in the spring 2025 issue of *The University of Chicago Magazine*. You can also learn about the transition online at artshumanities.uchicago.edu.

Amid our current concerns and uncertainties, the humanities and the arts give us access to vital perspectives, groundbreaking ideas, and transformative beauty—things that will help sustain us as individuals and cultivate hope for our collective future. Thank you for sharing our commitment to these essential facets of the human experience and the work of our artists and scholars to analyze and embody them.

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

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John Swanson Jacobs, like his better-known sister, Harriet Jacobs, escaped from slavery and lived to write about it. His account was recently rediscovered by Jonathan D. S. Schroeder, PhD'16.

Fugitive records

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

A UChicago English PhD brings a forgotten emancipation narrative back to life.

In 1855 the Australian newspaper *The Empire* published a 20,000-word article under the byline "A Fugitive Slave." Arrestingly titled "The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots," it described the author's life under and escape from slavery. It also offered an unflinching critique of his home country and its framing documents, the Declaration of Independence and "that devil in sheepskin called the Constitution."

More than 150 years later, **Jonathan D. S. Schroeder**, PhD'16, who had just completed his doctorate in English Language and Literature at UChicago, found the article in an archival newspaper database while searching for something else.

Schroeder immediately recognized its importance—there are only about 300 written accounts of slavery in existence—and soon after, he recognized its author as well.

As he read the piece, names and other identifying details in the text suggested to Schroeder that the writer could have been only one person: John Swanson Jacobs, whose sister, Harriet Jacobs, published the canonical 1861 autobiography

Outside of American jurisdiction … [Jacobs] had more freedom to speak in an unfiltered way.

—Jonathan D. S. Schroeder, PhD'16

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself. Schroeder was able to confirm his hunch before long—Jacobs had inserted his real name into the second half of the narrative.

The article seemed to have been lost to time. Despite its power and obvious scholarly significance, Schroeder had never seen it referenced anywhere. Its rediscovery sent him into "a tizzy," he says. Before long, Schroeder had secured a contract to publish a new edition of the text, along with a biography of its author. That book, *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots: A True Story of Slavery; A Rediscovered Narrative, with a Full Biography* (University of Chicago Press, 2024), was published this past summer.

Jacobs's text is unusual among so-called slave narratives of its time, most of which were heavily shaped by White editors to incite sympathy for the abolitionist cause. *Despots*, by contrast, appears to have been written by Jacobs alone and edited only minimally by the staff of *The Empire*. "Outside of American jurisdiction and humanitarian authority," Schroeder says, "[Jacobs] had more freedom to speak in an unfiltered way and write in an unfiltered way." The result is a markedly different approach—one rooted in argument rather than mawkishness.

Schroeder says the text is also distinctive in that Jacobs doesn't include a narrative account of his own life focusing on his suffering. Instead, Jacobs "supplies readers with a revolutionary *performance* of his life," Schroeder says, "by virtue of his powers of communication." Understood this way, the text is itself an enactment and demonstration of liberation.

Biographical research offered a new direction for Schroeder, now a lecturer at the Rhode Island School of Design, who was trained as a literary scholar, not a historian. The original project that led to his serendipitous encounter with *Despots* was his dissertation, which explored the idea of nostalgia. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nostalgia was a medical diagnosis of pathological homesickness, often given to returned soldiers. Over time, the term's meaning shifted to the one we know today. "I was basically slowly and diligently tracing the way that this concept changed," Schroeder explains.

For one chapter of the dissertation, Schroeder was trying to answer the question of how enslaved people described their sense of displacement and, in particular, how they constructed their own versions of nostalgia.

For that chapter, Schroeder read Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*. In doing research about the book, he learned Harriet's son, Joseph, had died, seemingly by suicide, while working as a miner in Australia. He wondered if Joseph's death had been attributed to nostalgia—hence, the archival newspaper search that led him to John Swanson Jacobs and *Despots*.

Schroeder's research into Jacobs uncovered a fascinating life. Jacobs had been born into slavery and was, from an early age, intent on escaping it. When he was in his twenties, he finally got the chance. Jacobs fled from his enslaver, a North Carolina congressman, while they were on a trip to New York. He lived in the Northeast and held a variety of jobs over the next decade: sailor, abolitionist lecturer, oyster saloon owner.

The passage of the second Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed for the seizure of escaped slaves living in free states, upended Jacobs's life. Along with his nephew, Joseph, Jacobs went to California and then to Australia, seeking to outrun the reach of the law. Midway through his five-year stay in Australia, he published *Despots*.

In the narrative, Jacobs is openly contemptuous of American laws, politicians, and institutions. "When shown your oppressive laws, you point us to the Congress of the United States, as if something could be done there," he writes. "What has Congress ever done for freedom?"

He sees slavery as a sign of the country's essential moral deficiency: "If a man steals my horse, he is a horse-thief; but if he steals me from my mother, why he is a respectable slaveholder, a member of Congress, or President of the United States; while in fact he is as far beneath the horse-thief as I am above a horse," he writes. "I cannot agree with that statesman who said 'what the law makes property, is property.' What is law, but the will of the people—a mirror to reflect a nation's character?"

For Schroeder, Jacobs's forceful tone is reminiscent of his dissertation adviser, the late Lauren Berlant, as well as James Baldwin, both of whom were skeptical of the notion that feeling and sentimentality can communicate truths or reliably guide action. In fact, Schroeder sees the last quarter of *Despots*, in which Jacobs writes most about politics and least about the content of his own life, as "the most purely autobiographical, the most pure writing of the self."

That sense of the self is lacking in many of the extant historical records about Black Americans living under slavery. In fact, finding records of *any* kind can be challenging when writing about historically marginalized groups. Despite these challenges, Schroeder was able to amass a surprising amount of information about not just John but the entire Jacobs family, which he hopes to turn into a multigenerational biography. (He is also at work on *Lauren Berlant, A Reader* [Duke University Press, forthcoming] with **Lauren Michele Jackson**, PhD'19, and **Jean-Thomas Tremblay**, PhD'18, as well as a book based on his dissertation.)

Schroeder thinks a Jacobs family history will find a ready audience: The success of his edition of *Despots*, which received wide acclaim, taught him "how hungry people are … for Black history from below, and for strong denunciations of American tyranny." ■

OPPOSITE: JOSEPH WHITING STOCK, *A PORTRAIT OF JOHN SWANSON JACOBS* [CURRENTLY KNOWN AS *THE MAN HOLDING THE "LIBERATOR"*], 1848; COURTESY THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM IN PHILADELPHIA; THIS PAGE: PHOTO COURTESY JONATHAN D. S. SCHROEDER

LEARN MORE ABOUT SCHROEDER AND JACOBS at tableau.uchicago.edu/despots.

Both scholars ask how we conceptualize energy usage, including the relationship between the consumption of the Global North and Global South.

Two perspectives on representing climate change

A historian–postcolonial theorist and a literature scholar make sense of a global crisis.

Dipesh Chakrabarty *is the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History and South Asian Languages and Civilizations and is affiliated with the Committee on Environment, Geography and Urbanization. He is a founder of the editorial collective Subaltern Studies, a consulting editor of* Critical Inquiry*, and a founding editor of* Postcolonial Studies*.*

Victoria Saramago *is associate professor in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Her first book,* Fictional Environments: Mimesis, Deforestation, and Development in Latin America*, was awarded the Roberto Reis Book Award by the Brazilian Studies Association and was short-listed for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment Book Award in 2022.*

I came to the problem mainly as a historian. The discipline flourishes on the assumption that human history is different from natural history. In the nineteenth century they used to think that nature obeys its own laws, whereas humans have choice. So human history has been celebrated as the domain in which we effectively document, celebrate, and critique notions of human freedom.

Some geologists say that our impact on the planet is comparable to that of the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs. We consider ourselves to be more than a thing, but a geologist comes along and says, collectively, we, with our levels of consumption and technical capabilities, are like a huge thing hitting the planet. That questions the fundamental separation between natural and human history.

There was a time when we would say, "The planet is just too big. It'll take care of itself." And it may in the long run take care of itself. But in the short run we are changing it. Look at the history of technology through the last 500 years, the expansion of Europe, the colonization of non-European people's lands, the making of some people into slaves, the appropriation of the land of Indigenous people. To do that, Europeans had to build ships that could navigate deep seas, build technologies for warfare and communication across the globe. That produced the genealogy of today's connectivity—telephones, telegraph lines, oceangoing ships.

I have said that's what the *globe* is. The globe is human-made. Humans are the protagonists of that story. What we are waking up to through the climate crisis is another entity called the *planet*. We created an infrastructure through technology. That human-made infrastructure is sitting on—and now interfering with—another infrastructure nature produced, which is the life-support system of the planet, or what the scientists call the earth system. The globe is thus a story of the triumph of our technologies, including those that save human lives. But the state of the planet tells us about some of the downsides of that triumph. We are at a stage where we have to look at ourselves from both global and planetary perspectives.

Privileged humans in growing numbers have lived in the last 75 years as they never have in history. We didn't realize there was a bill to be paid for living this well. What gives me hope is that humans are a learning species. They can be collectively rational.

The undergraduate program of the Committee on Environment, Geography and Urbanization trains our students to question such a sense of complacency. And it is a good thing the University's Institute for Climate and Sustainable Growth wants undergraduates to go to places in Africa and India. If you go there, you will have questions. One is, "Don't the poor people need more energy?" And another is, "Do the rich make sustainable use of the energy that allows them to live 'the good life'?"*—as told to Lucas McGranahan* ■

Part of the challenge of making sense of climate change is that it happens in a highly diffuse way. We have not had one single cataclysmic event that changes everything. Instead, we see a progressive intensification of droughts, hurricanes, fires, and other events. This intensification enacts what has been called a "slow violence" through harmful conditions that often affect the world's most vulnerable populations. By centering fiction set in the Global South, I want to shed light on the varied forms of environmental and human exploitation that receive little attention from media outlets, even those based in large urban centers in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

In my first monograph, *Fictional Environments: Mimesis, Deforestation, and Development in Latin America* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), I was concerned with how fiction influences our perception of environmental change. When we think of rainforests, for example, many of the elements, images, and tropes we associate with them come from novels or movies. *Fictional Environments* focuses on novels by canonical mid-twentieth-century Latin American writers to understand how images of environments that appear in their books continue to shape our perception of these areas. Sometimes these works also sparked more direct interventions, such as the creation of national parks. By highlighting fiction from the 1940s to the 1960s, I also wanted to excavate the emergence of this environmental imagination before terms such as *climate change* gained currency.

Fiction's power to shape how we make sense of climate change is not limited to its informative role. Besides learning about what happens on different parts of the planet, we gain imaginative tools from fiction, which help us grasp an increasingly uncanny present. People who share their experiences of environmental devastation, such as those affected by the Los Angeles fires in January 2025, often describe scenes that recall dystopian literature or apocalyptic movies. Fiction mediates our connection to lived experiences that can feel unprecedented.

In my current book project, I turn to a component of contemporary life so ubiquitous that it has become nearly invisible to us—except when it becomes the cause of destructive environmental events, such as wildfires: electricity. I reveal how our increasing reliance on electricity to perform a multitude of tasks and to connect us to the world has been both celebrated and questioned within Brazil's twentieth-century cultural production. In contrast to the question of how environmental fiction can shape our perception of climate change, I now ask the opposite. Why have literature and cultural studies scholars not followed the lead of writers who have interrogated our dependence on electrical energy? How can we connect these interrogations to our narratives of climate change to help us better understand our present and potential avenues for action?*—by Victoria Saramago* ■

READ SARAMAGO'S VIEWS ON THE END OF THE WORLD
at tableau.uchicago.edu/saramago.

In his multipart performance The Great White Way: 22 miles, 9 years, 1 street *(2001–9), Pope.L crawled along Broadway in New York City in a capeless Superman outfit, occasionally flipping on his back to skateboard when the pain became too much.*

"Wrong and strong"

BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93

CAMPAIGN, a two-day event, celebrated the lasting influence of artist and scholar Pope.L.

This past October, more than 400 people gathered at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts to celebrate the life and work of internationally renowned artist Pope.L (1955–2023).

Pope.L, who joined the University as a professor in the Department of Visual Arts (DoVA) in 2010, called himself "The Friendliest Black Artist in America," a term he copyrighted. A conceptual and performance artist who explored many forms of media—drawings, paintings, photographs, sculptures, writings, and more—he made provocative, often humorous work that resists easy interpretation.

Most famously, for his multiyear performance art piece *The Great White Way: 22 miles, 9 years, 1 street* (2001–9), Pope.L crawled the entire length of Broadway, Manhattan's longest street, while wearing a Superman costume.

"Pope.L is something of an escape artist for those of us who compulsively want to know what a given artwork is about," says **Dieter Roelstraete**, curator at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, who worked closely with Pope.L on several installations and cotaught a course, Art & Knowledge, with him.

Even his name, Pope.L, seemed designed to confuse. In fact, it was a portmanteau of the artist's original surname and the first initial of his mother's.

The two-day event CAMPAIGN: A Celebration of Pope.L included an exhibition of works he created during his years at UChicago. Among them: *Cliff* (2012), a permanent mural on the windows of the seventh, eighth, and ninth floors of the Logan Center. The mural consists of a mountainous landscape and the words "On Strike for Better Schools."

"It's a beautiful conceit," says **Zachary Cahill**, MFA'07, CAMPAIGN co-organizer and director of programs and fellowships at the Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, "to look out through the windows onto the city and think about that statement."

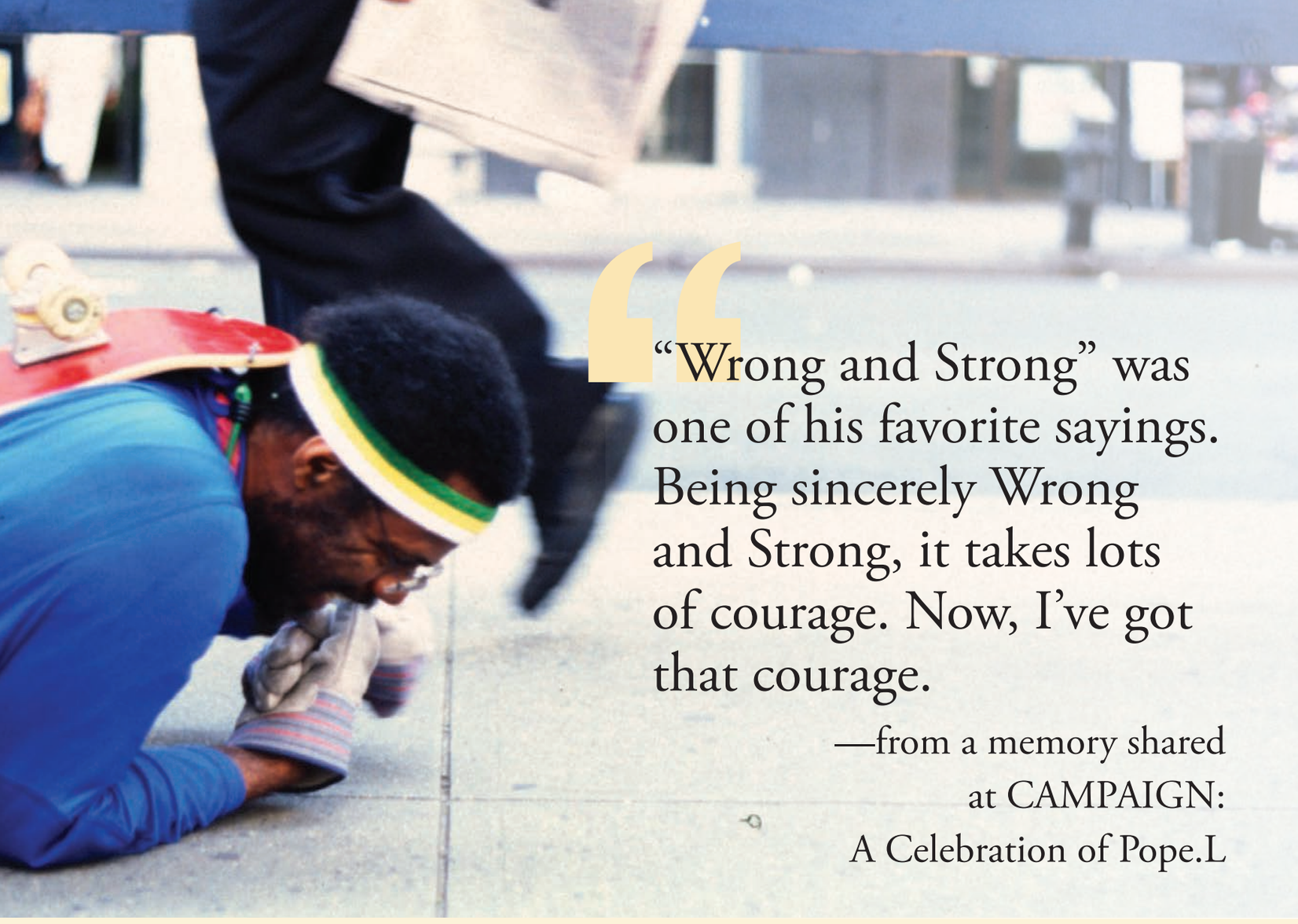
Another work installed for the memorial was *The Whispering Campaign* (2016–17), a sound piece Pope.L originally created for the art fair Documenta. (The memorial was called CAMPAIGN to reference "his pervasive use of the word in his work the last five or six years," says Roelstraete.) A loudspeaker was installed in a second-story window of Lorado Taft's Midway Studios, directed at the Logan Center's courtyard. The speaker played a recording, over and over, very loudly, of someone whispering, "Ignorance ... is ... a ... virtue."

"Very incantatory" is how Cahill describes it. "He was making a case for not knowing, I guess. Starting from a place of not knowing."

In the context of a research university, "It's a provocation," Roelstraete says. "He was a provocateur. 'A fisherman of social absurdity,' as he was once described."

The events of the first day of CAMPAIGN included "Show, Tell, and Ignore," a talk by Roelstraete and Cahill about objects and materials Pope.L used in his art. He often repurposed the foods of his childhood—white bread, peanut butter, milk, ketchup—to create his works, which were characterized by "have-not-ness," in Pope.L's terminology.

During their talk, Roelstraete and Cahill would show an object Pope.L had used, talk about it, and then suggest, "in the spirit of Pope.L, that the audience now ignore everything we just said," Roelstraete says. "Because, of course, we may have been dead wrong."



> "Wrong and Strong" was one of his favorite sayings. Being sincerely Wrong and Strong, it takes lots of courage. Now, I've got that courage.
>
> —from a memory shared at CAMPAIGN: A Celebration of Pope.L

VIDEO STILL COURTESY THE ESTATE OF POPE.L AND MITCHELL-INNES & NASH, NEW YORK. © THE ESTATE OF POPE.L

A party called simply "Tacos and Beer" concluded the evening. "We wanted joy," says organizer **Zespo**, MFA'18, program administrator of DoVA's Open Practice Committee. "We didn't want stuffy. Pope.L didn't like stuffy."

The organizers of CAMPAIGN also wanted to make space for the hundreds of students Pope.L had taught. So the second day featured a "collective sharing of memories of Pope.L as a teacher and mentor," according to the program.

Like "Show, Tell, and Ignore," the event was done "in the spirit of Pope.L," says Zespo, who, like Pope.L, uses one name. "Writing was very important, structure was very important—how you obey the structure and break the structure."

Alumni were invited to submit memories in writing, with a 200-word limit. Their memories were read aloud by other attendees at the event—an homage to the collaborative method of Pope.L's Hansel and Gretel Theater Workshop. Students in the workshop wrote, directed, and acted in their own version of Hansel and Gretel (a story also characterized by have-not-ness; under Pope.L's guidance, the play that resulted was very bleak). "We would write a scene, but then we would give it up," says Zespo, who took the course as a graduate student, "and other people would act in it."

A number of submissions mentioned the expression "wrong and strong," something Pope.L often said to his students in studio visits, during class, over email, and in written feedback. Once a student was ready to "embark on a creative journey to respond," Zespo says, Pope.L would encourage them to "do it wrong and strong."

One DoVA graduate sent in a memory about sitting in on a Chicago Booth course on nonprofit arts leadership. Of all the works in Chicago Booth's large art collection, the Booth students ranked Pope.L's piece—a teddy bear coated in paint and peanut butter—dead last on a list of those they liked. The professor announced the ranking, then brought in Pope.L as a guest speaker. "Unshockingly, he was utterly himself. He was completely unbothered that the class disliked his work."

Another DoVA alumnus remembered showing Pope.L a sculpture he felt particularly proud of. "Without even giving me a chance to explain my big, fancy ideas, Pope.L picked it up off the floor … propped it vertically in a corner, and said, 'Why don't you install it this way?' without any sort of reasoning. Honestly, I was annoyed. … But I did end up agonizing over his intervention and changing my original installation plan. I still think about this moment constantly as an artist and a teacher. Nothing is ever 'done' until I know exactly how I want to show it to the world."

"I'm (still) mad you are gone," wrote another former student. "How and why. But the Ideas remain, swirling around. Thankfully."

This spring the Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry will publish a special edition of its publication *Portable Gray*, a name Pope.L coined, dedicated to him and his work. Titled *Pope.L: The Chicago Years*, the issue features contributions by **Theaster Gates**, professor in Visual Arts; **Laura Letinsky**, professor in Visual Arts; **W. J. T. Mitchell**, the Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of English and Art History; **Tina Post**, associate professor in English Language and Literature; Dieter Roelstraete; Zespo; Pope.L's partner Mami Takahashi; and others. ■

READ MORE REMEMBRANCES OF POPE.L
at tableau.uchicago.edu/popel.

UChicago Humanities alumnae bridge the gap between the climate and the conference room.

Working for sustainability

BY KELLEY TATRO

How two Humanities alumnae built careers that confront climate change

Ann Goodman, AB'72, AM'73, PhD'81, and **Anne Stephenson**, AM'01, PhD'07, took skills honed through the study of the humanities and applied them to promote sustainability in the business community and through energy-efficiency technologies.

ANN GOODMAN, AB'72, AM'73, PHD'81

Author and educator

Goodman initially set out on a path familiar to many humanities graduates by teaching, even before completing her PhD in Linguistics and Comparative Literature. While researching her dissertation in Paris, she began giving classes in American studies at what is now the Université Paris Dauphine-PSL, a university with strong economics and business programs.

She returned to the United States several years later with the intention of embarking on a career in journalism and applied to write for a broad range of publications. When the editor of *Fortune* wanted her to explain her interest in the magazine, Goodman says her association with economics faculty and students at Dauphine came in handy. She landed a position with the magazine and went on to

build a portfolio of reporting for several business and finance publications, including *Business Week* (now *Bloomberg Businessweek*) and the NPR radio program *Marketplace*.

As she conducted interviews, she found that she kept encountering people who were interested in climate change. One interview took place with a Wall Street investor who wanted to create a carbon market. "I was extremely fortunate to learn about this whole field through journalism," she says. "I essentially got private tutorials with all the most important people in the field." Fascinated, she began to cultivate a beat dedicated to climate, business, and finance.

As her work drew her more deeply into those issues, she also began to hear from more and more business leaders—particularly women—that they were concerned about how their work intersected with the problem of climate change.

Goodman says she came up with the idea of starting a nonprofit where businesswomen could exchange ideas about sustainability: the Women's Network for a Sustainable Future, which she and several woman executives cofounded in 1999. Goodman secured initial funding from an investor she knew from her journalism work and went on to serve as the organization's executive director for its first 10 years.

Ultimately, her conversations with business leaders also resulted in a book that challenges the idea that businesspeople don't care about the environment. Since publishing *Adapting to Change: The Business of Climate Resilience* (Business Expert, 2016), Goodman has taken a proactive approach to the issue through speaking engagements and by teaching up-and-coming business and finance leaders about how becoming attuned to climate change is smart business strategy—an idea that has been gaining traction for some time.

Goodman welcomes this change. She remembers that when she first joined the Society of Environmental Journalists and ran for a spot on its board, a friendly colleague said to her, "I'm glad you got elected. But why is a business journalist interested in the environment?" She laughs. "Now the question would be, 'Why is a business journalist not interested?'"

Surveying changes like these in conversations about business and sustainability in the last several decades, she emphasizes that to address the climate crisis will "take everybody, from all points of view, and people in the humanities are very good at communicating."

> Energy efficiency is amazing. You are helping people save money, and you're making their houses more comfortable or their businesses more profitable.
>
> —Anne Stephenson, AM'01, PhD'07

ANNE STEPHENSON, AM'01, PHD'07

Assistant deputy director of operations, Efficiency Maine Trust

As she made her way into sustainability work, Stephenson was grounded by her interest in the built environment and the spatial intelligence she honed through her studies in art and architectural history.

While writing her dissertation about the preservation of historic residential architecture in Chicago, she became "interested in the larger built environment of Hyde Park." She was an active member in the Hyde Park Historical Society, and one of the highlights of her graduate school experience was teaching a class she designed on the history of 55th Street. "We followed decades of development just on that street through different buildings," she recalls.

But as she worked her way toward completing her PhD in Art History, she knew an academic career was not for her. Instead, she says, "I started doing some campus sustainability work while I was finishing my degree at UChicago. The University was just beginning to think about what sustainability meant to them," and the job pointed in an interesting new direction. She recounts her trajectory over the next few years: "I left Chicago and went to work in a nonprofit that did campus sustainability work, and then from there, I went on to work on some specific campuses, on energy management and sustainability work. I also began to teach energy auditing and weatherization as community colleges began to offer those sorts of things."

Today, Stephenson works as the assistant deputy director of operations for Efficiency Maine Trust, an agency that supports energy efficiency programs in the state. In addition to the teaching experience she garnered as a graduate student, her humanities training has proved useful.

"My boss tells me I'm a very good noticer," she says, explaining that the keen visual sense and observational abilities developed while training in Art History have served her well when looking not only at the built environment but also at how that environment shapes interpersonal dynamics, including "how you set up the conference room and how you read the dynamics in a meeting."

Her orientation to observation and detail also applies well to written work at Efficiency Maine Trust, where she has written and edited annual reports and triennial plans as well as reports on historic preservation and energy efficiency. "I'm involved in every big report that my office does because I have core document production skills from when I had to format my dissertation."

In her current workplace, Stephenson loves that there are many people who found their way into their work without the on-ramps available to younger people who now train for careers in sustainability—at UChicago's new multidisciplinary Institute for Climate and Sustainable Growth, for instance. "For most of my colleagues," she says, "they came to this from something else, and they want to do it. Everyone has a passion for energy efficiency."

She shares their enthusiasm. "Energy efficiency is amazing. You are helping people save money, and you're making their houses more comfortable or their businesses more profitable."

She urges all readers to look into energy efficiency incentives where they live. Asked how she would advise Humanities students considering how to contribute to sustainability efforts in their careers, she says, "We welcome new graduates into the field. There is work to do!" ■

OPPOSITE: ISTOCK; THIS PAGE: PHOTO COURTESY ANNE STEPHENSON

Out of the cave

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

Philosophy junior faculty explore knowledge, freedom, and human action.

"Their interests are diverse," says **Matthew Boyle**, Philosophy chair and Emerson and Grace Wineland Pugh Professor of Humanities, of his department's five assistant professors—three historians of philosophy and two specialists in contemporary analytic philosophy. "What ties them together is that their work is exceptionally innovative and of broad human significance."

John Proios is working on a book that unpacks Plato's famous allegory of the cave to argue that, according to the ancient philosopher, a search for truth is simultaneously a search for a different social order. Proios reasons that when a person escapes the cave—where chained prisoners mistake shadows on the wall for reality—they are not only being liberated from the world of sensory impressions, which Plato thinks are an unreliable guide to truth. They are also being liberated from Athenian society.

> I'm very interested in what it is to live a free life, and in whether the notion of living a free life is even conceptually coherent.
>
> —Maya Krishnan

From the heights of theology (upper right) spiraling down into Plato's cave: Maya Krishnan, Thomas Pendlebury, Mikayla Kelley, and John Proios

He is especially interested in radical, egalitarian readings of Plato. "I think one of Plato's most charitable readers was Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, who loved the cave and thought it was a wonderful depiction of life under racial capitalism," Proios says. He is also coediting a volume on race in Plato and Aristotle, and he has interpreted Plato as, if not a feminist, "not just another patriarchal Athenian."

Proios also studies an area of ancient thought that is harder to find in Western philosophy departments: Buddhism. "I'm very attracted to the idea that we're systematically wrong about what the world is," he says. "And that is something that I think both Plato and many Buddhist thinkers have in common."

Flashing forward 2,200 years: German philosopher Immanuel Kant, another towering figure, is a focus of two of the junior professors.

"The founding problem of Kant's theoretical philosophy," **Thomas Pendlebury** says, is that philosophers can't agree on the nature of reality. Compared to mathematics and natural science, Kant believes, metaphysics has produced an embarrassing lack of consensus.

Kant calls his solution to this problem a "Copernican turn." Previously, philosophers assumed that the mind knows objects by conforming to them; Kant reversed this position, arguing that the objects of our knowledge must conform to our minds. He thus reorients philosophy toward the mind and how it makes knowledge possible. Kant's position might seem to imply that familiar objects—say, stars and stones—are dependent for their existence on our minds, but Pendlebury doesn't think that conclusion is warranted by Kant's writings.

Pendlebury has addressed interpretive questions in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*—for instance, about the relation of sensation to concepts—that bring out new dimensions of a long-studied canonical text. He says his approach is to start from Kant's texts, analyzing how the problem is constituted and how the argument unfolds, as opposed to a more thematic approach that looks for certain topics in Kant in order to explore them.

Maya Krishnan leans toward the latter thematic approach, investigating theology in both Kant and Hegel. "I'm interested in what their views on God can illuminate about their philosophical systems as a whole," she says.

Kant is known for saying he must "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." He claimed that God, free will, and the soul can't be known—they aren't the sort of objects we can cognize—but that we are free to posit their existence beyond the reaches of human understanding.

"I'm interested in all the puzzles and questions that arise when you start asking what Kantian faith really involves," Krishnan says. "What exactly is Kant making room for?"

Theology has functioned for philosophers as a kind of "solution space," Krishnan says, "for thinking about what knowledge and freedom are." Kant gives the example of a divine mind to emphasize how finite and limited humans are, whereas his German successors seemed comfortable attributing more godlike capacities to humans—including a robust notion of human freedom that Krishnan finds in Hegel. She also examines freedom or autonomy in later thinkers such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, who emphasize the constraints placed on humans by social categories. "I'm very interested in what it is to live a free life," she says, "and in whether the notion of living a free life is even conceptually coherent."

Mikayla Kelley, a Neubauer Family Assistant Professor, studies action, which philosophers define as behavior that is guided by thought. "Think of the difference," she says, "between falling down and waving at your neighbor."

One puzzle for action theorists is about the formation of beliefs. Some scholars say this can't count as an action because you can't believe something by intending it. "For example," Kelley says, "I can't just believe at will that there's a God." But we can put ourselves in situations, such as attending church, that tend to bring about that belief. Kelley argues that this is an example of a nonbasic action—an action performed by doing other actions—a concept she thinks could help shed light on mental agency generally.

In ethics, Kelley argues for metanormative realism, the view that there are objective facts about morality and rationality. Indeed, she claims we must presume such standards to engage in inquiry at all: "You have to presuppose facts about what you ought to do."

Kelley even pursues ethical questions in virtual reality. She cites an episode of the British TV series *Black Mirror* in which two old friends, one of whom is married, form a romantic relationship within a video game. "Did these two have a genuine affair?" she asks. If we accept that a digital avatar can be part of us, she argues, responsibility for virtual actions seems to follow.

Ginger Schultheis views belief as a kind of bet. "For any proposition that you've entertained," she says, "you've assigned some probability to it," a wager on its likelihood of being true. She argues that when two people have the same prior beliefs—when they place the same epistemic bets—they cannot rationally reach different conclusions: "There could be no sense in which they agree to disagree."

Schultheis also works on semantics, analyzing the meaning of terms such as *or*, *not*, *if*, *then*, and *able*. "A lot of people say that abilities are inexact," she says. This would mean, for example, that a person could have the general ability to hit a dartboard without the specific ability to hit any given part of it. "Once you bear down on the inferences at play," she says, "you can undermine the plausibility of this view."

In a related project, Schultheis examines progressive sentences like "I was walking across the street." Here again she argues for specificity: If the statement "I was driving to the Twin Cities" is true, then, according to Schultheis and her coauthor, either it's true that I was driving to Minneapolis or it's true that I was driving to St. Paul. It couldn't be the case, they argue, that it's indeterminate which city I was driving to.

Schultheis says her work, which shares similarities with formal linguistics, looks different from many people's notion of the humanities. Still, in explicating concepts that she says are "central to our reasoning," Schultheis shares an interest with philosophers going back to Plato and Kant. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

READ ABOUT PLATO'S CAVE AND FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS
at tableau.uchicago.edu/plato.

Before joining the DIGS master's program, Liang-Chun Wu, AM'24, did some digging in Thuringia, Germany, as part of a project conserving stone walls and historic paths.

PHOTO COURTESY LIANG-CHUN WU

Humanities and STEM

BY SARA PATTERSON

New DIGS master's program upgrades Humanities students' digital tools.

Liang-Chun Wu, AM'24, studied architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong but lost her interest in designing modern structures of concrete and steel. Instead, she turned toward researching older structures such as an eleventh-century Spanish monastery.

Wu's burgeoning interest in historical buildings led her to work on archaeological excavations, and she discovered that she wanted to learn more technical skills. Through the Master of Arts program in Digital Studies of Language, Culture, and History (DIGS), she learned computational skills to conduct fieldwork.

"The DIGS program allowed me to apply computational skills to address research questions in the humanities, particularly leveraging LLMs [large language models] and NLP [natural language processing] for historical research," she says. "The coding and database management skills I developed in this program, combined with my past experiences, led me to my current role as the digital collections curator at the Center for the Art of East Asia."

DIGS is the latest master's degree program offered in the Division of the Arts & Humanities. Students can do either a one-year general master's or a two-year degree with a specialization and thesis project in one of the following areas:

- Artificial Intelligence and Language
- Digital Art and Archaeology
- Digital Media and Extended Reality
- Digital Texts and Culture

DIGS joins three other master's programs in the division: the one-year Master of Arts Program in the Humanities (MAPH), the two-year program through the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and the two-year Master of Fine Arts degree.

"Our pedagogical strategy is to integrate the teaching of digital methods with research and practice in the arts and humanities," says **David Schloen**, DIGS's faculty director and the John A. Wilson Professor of Archaeology and Digital Humanities in the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures and the Department of Middle Eastern Studies. "Computational methods can be responsive to the age-old concerns of humanities scholars to understand and interpret products of human culture."

For example, Schloen says the project Florence Illuminated—led by **Niall Atkinson** in Art History—illustrates what digital tools can do for humanists. The underlying technology for the project is the Online Cultural and Historical Research Environment (OCHRE) computational platform. Through OCHRE, the Florence Illuminated team generates connections between historical documents preserved from Florence in 1427, including tax returns, church records, itemized household inventories, service records of military families, memberships in professional associations, and more. The project brings together data from several digital humanities projects focused on historical Florence, supporting research in many fields—for instance, by visualizing bygone sites in ways that are meaningful to today's art and architectural historians.

DIGS students come from many backgrounds and experiences. For three years, **Luis Fialho** taught English to high school students while earning a master's of education degree from Springfield College. He realized the importance of developing a high school curriculum that incorporates digital literacy into the humanities.

But first Fialho needed to learn data-management skills. Now he is enrolled in the two-year DIGS program and finds the mixture of math and humanities compelling. Fialho says it was one of the few master's programs that aligned with his interests.

"Students in the humanities disciplines don't traditionally have a lot of engagement with computational science," Schloen says, "but their skills in languages and culture are great preparation to learn it." ■

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE FLORENCE ILLUMINATED PROJECT at tableau.uchicago.edu/florence.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Smart Museum of Art turned 50 in 2024. The second of two exhibitions tracing the museum's legacy, *Expanding the 50th: Shared Stories*, opened March 25. Here are some numbers of note about the Smart.

1974
Year the Smart first opened its doors

1 million
Dollar amount of the museum's founding gift from the Smart Family Foundation

17,000+
Number of artworks in the Smart's collection

5,000
Span of years represented by the museum's artworks

180+
Pieces showcased in *The 50th: An Anniversary Exhibition*, which ended March 2, the first exhibition reflecting the museum's evolution over the decades

I'D LIKE TO THANK THE ACADEMY

Jacqueline Stewart, AM'93, PhD'99, returned to UChicago in the fall as a professor in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies. For four years, Stewart brought her expertise as a film scholar and archivist to a wider audience at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, where she served as chief artistic and programming officer, then director and president. During her time in Los Angeles, she continued to host Silent Sunday Nights on the Turner Classic Movies network, a role she began in 2019—and which she now performs from campus, including a filming shoot held in Ida Noyes Hall in February. Stewart says she is eager to continue drawing on ideas and contacts shaped by her transformative experiences at the museum.

A HUMANISTIC RHODES SCHOLAR IN THE COLLEGE

In fall 2024, **Francesco Rahe**, a fourth-year student majoring in Religious Studies and Fundamentals: Issues and Texts, was named a 2025 Rhodes Scholar. Rahe aims to bridge cultural and religious divides through the translation of Sanskrit and Persian texts, noting that less than 3 percent of books published in the United States are translations, leaving many valuable interreligious conversations unheard. He will pursue a master's degree in classical Indian religions at the University of Oxford next fall. **Anqi Qu**, a fourth-year in Economics, was also named a Rhodes Scholar and also plans to enroll in a graduate program at Oxford.

READ MORE ABOUT STEWART'S MUSEUM EXPERIENCE
at tableau.uchicago.edu/academy.

ABOVE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SMITH; RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY FRANCESCO RAHE; BELOW: PHOTO COURTESY JACQUELINE STEWART

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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. This year, acclaimed opera and theater director Yuval Sharon delivered three lectures at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts. Through the theme Anarchy at the Opera, Sharon explored questions such as: Is opera a standard-bearer or a pallbearer for the status quo? What can an anarchic opera do to challenge the status quo? What aspects of elitism can an anarchic opera undermine? Sharon's lectures were titled "Anarchy at the Opera," "Burn Down the Opera Houses!," and "John Cage and Anarchic Opera."

This year's lectures will be made available to the public at youtube.com/@UChicagoAHD. For more information on the Berlin Family Lectures, visit **berlinfamilylectures.uchicago.edu**.

Humanities Day 2025

COMING THIS AUTUMN

Registration opens in mid-August for UChicago's annual Humanities Day celebration featuring faculty members from the Division of the Arts & Humanities.

Visit humanitiesday.uchicago.edu for program updates.