

TABLEAU



THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | SPRING 2014

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ON THE COVER

Jason Salavon, *City (westward)*, 2008, digital C-print mounted to Plexiglas.

An artist, former programmer, and assistant professor in Visual Arts and the Computation Institute, Salavon makes art by amalgamating data. To produce *City*, he modeled Chicago’s Loop as semitransparent, textured rectangles and created virtual photographs from typical tourist vantage points.



Performing Images, an exhibition at the Smart Museum of Art, explored opera in Chinese visual culture. Charles Cohen, the Mary L. Block Professor in Art History, attended the opening with his wife Sondra, AM’75. Curated by Judith Zeitlin, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, and Yuhang Li, PhD’11, the exhibition was part of *Envisioning China*, a spring 2014 festival continuing through June 15.

Dear Alumni and Friends,

IN THE HUMANITIES there is a productive tension between the emergence of new fields and new technologies and the preservation of the integrity and boundaries of established disciplines. At the University of Chicago, scholars embrace this tension and thrive on identifying and addressing new problems.

The digital age offers us ready access to massive amounts of information and to modern tools that can enrich the scholarship of students and faculty members. To make the most of these opportunities and to build on the recommendations of a faculty committee that has surveyed our resources and needs, I announced the formation of a Digital Humanities Oversight Committee in March. This team of faculty and staff will assess the challenges that the digital humanities present and chart a course for how we can use digital technology to remain at the forefront of humanities research.

Digital humanities projects allow us to pursue new sets of questions in novel and fascinating ways and to study the impact of digital technology itself on culture and society. Digital-only publication, for example, forgoes the traditional monograph or printed edition and puts all sources, data, and conclusions online. One such project is *Florentia Illustrata* by Niall Atkinson (Art History), which combines quantitative, qualitative, and cartographic information about Renaissance Florence. Other projects are “born” digital, incorporating data sets of demographic or geographic information and combining them with hyperlinked text, images, and sound. Wu Hung (Art History) and Jason Salavon (Visual Art) have used 3-D models to document and “restore” the pillaged Xiangtanshan Buddhist caves. Yet other projects work within the realm of new media: Patrick Jagoda (English) has collaborated with a colleague in the biological sciences, Melissa Gilliam, to develop video games that encourage responsible health decisions by teenagers.

I think back to my own research and how digital technology might have changed it. As editor of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, which was completed in 2011, I worked with a team to assemble our data using the process established by the



project’s founders in the 1920s. We carefully compiled and categorized information using index cards, a system little modified from the one established by Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century. Starting a similar project today, we would make use of sophisticated databases to cross-reference data and quickly retrieve information. Instead of housing millions of index cards in wooden files, we would store data in computer servers or in the cloud. Moreover, the end products might be different—we might publish hard copies of edited volumes, make all our raw data available to scholars digitally, or create separate and simultaneous print and interactive online versions, as the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* is doing today.

This is a new world for humanistic scholarship, but it does not change who we are—researchers and teachers—or what we aim to accomplish: the production and transmission of new knowledge. This issue of *Tableau* highlights several faculty members, students, and staff who use technologically sophisticated tools for research to ask old questions in new ways. You will find that these tools and methods provide opportunities to enrich our mission of pursuing free inquiry and rigorous scholarship grounded in the disciplines of the humanities. We move forward with these principles firmly in place, turning the challenges of our time into opportunities for the future.

Sincerely yours,

Martha T. Roth

Martha T. Roth
Dean of the Division of the Humanities

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT KOZLOFF



VERSES

Poet and literary scholar Maureen McLane explores the hybrid spaces in writing.

BY LYDIALYLE GIBSON



Poetry surrounds Maureen McLane in her NYU office. She published her third collection of poems in April, a process that often begins with “unconscious” jotting in notebooks.



IT'S HARD TO GET A SIMPLE ANSWER out of **Maureen McLane**. Mostly it seems like there aren't any—and that's the way she likes it. A poet and professor at New York University since 2008, McLane, PhD'97, inhabits the in-between: the hybrid spaces that mix poetry and prose, past and present, lyric and narrative, the cosmic and the terrestrial. McLane's poetry is infused with her literary scholarship (much, but not all of it, on the romantics), and her essays are infused with poetry. There is an echo of formalism in her free verse. And her formal poems sometimes seem ready to break free from their harnesses.

Perhaps the book most emblematic of McLane's work as a whole is a 2012 collection of autobiographical essays called *My Poets* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). A finalist for a National Book Critics Circle Award, *My Poets* is disarming, luminous, and piercing; it feels at once experimental and old-fashioned. Interspersing her own prose with lines from poets canonical and contemporary—Shelley, Wordsworth, Dickinson, Bishop, Louise Glück, Fanny Howe, Frederick Seidel, Anne Carson—*My Poets* stitches together memoir and poetic criticism, charting McLane's reading life from young adulthood onward as it coincided with her private life: friends made and lost, a marriage that fell apart, new romance, college, graduate school, adulthood.

Tucked between chapters are two centos, poems made up entirely of lines borrowed from other poems; the centos offer their own summations of an intermingled life and library. An abecedary mid-way through the book presents a songlike alphabetical catalog of what she calls “My Translated,” works in translation that have been meaningful and important to her: Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, Dorothy Sayers's Dante, David Grene's Sophocles, David Hinton's Wang Wei. Explaining how *My Poets* came together, McLane returns to the idea of the hybrid: she's always been interested, she says, in writing that disrupts traditional concepts of genre. “I was thinking about poets who have mattered a lot to me and when and how they came into my life, and that snowballed.”

McLane grew up in a middle-class suburb of Syracuse, New York, the oldest of three children in a house full of books and music. “It was a very church-home-school kind of life,” she says. “Which had its pleasures and securities and also its limitations.” McLane took piano lessons and played the

organ (“very badly,” she claims) at two churches; she sang in community and school choral groups and still sings. She went to Harvard for college, where she studied poetry with the famous critic Helen Vendler, and earned a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford. In the early 1990s she came to the University of Chicago to study English and American literature and wrote a dissertation that became her first scholarly book: *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). In graduate school and afterward, she wrote book reviews for the *Chicago Tribune* and later the *Boston Review* and the *New York Times*.

After nearly ten years as a teaching fellow and lecturer at Harvard, McLane joined the English department at NYU, where she teaches poetry and romantic literature to undergraduates and

necessary predisposition to becoming a poet.” She wrote poems as an adolescent, but even before then she was composing, experimenting, putting one word next to another.

On the other hand, even now—with her third book of poems, *This Blue* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), in bookstores as of April 2014—she resists the label of poet. Some people have ready answers for when they crossed that threshold and became poets, fully realized, full stop. She could too, she says, but she believes that's not how poetry writing works. Instead, she says, even after one becomes a poet, “it's always a horizon, an always receding horizon.”

Over the years, McLane's poetry writing has crystallized into a process that's “messy,” she says, but more or less systematic. “I acquire poems like the British acquired an empire, in a fit of

Keats says a poet is the most unpoetical thing in existence, and I think that's a useful thing to sit with.

—Maureen McLane



leads graduate students through their “boot camp” seminar on literary studies. In 2008 she published *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge). She spent early 2014 on a London sabbatical with NYU classicist Laura Slatkin, with whom she is working on a new book. Tentatively titled “British Romantic Homer,” it will examine how Homer's poetry was received in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England and Scotland. “Was he a national poet?” McLane asks. “Was he an illiterate bard?” Romantic poets' conceptions of Homer, she says, illuminate their thinking about the poetry of their own period as well as their ideas about ancient poetry.

Somewhere along the way, McLane herself became a poet. If you ask her when and how, the answer is complicated. “Keats says a poet is the most unpoetical thing in existence, and I think that's a useful thing to sit with,” McLane says. “I could say that I always felt that I reverberated in a certain way to language and rhythm, and that was for me and probably for a lot of people the

unconsciousness,” she jokes. McLane keeps a series of notebooks, in which she records stray thoughts and images, snatches of overheard conversations, quotes from her reading, lists of books read or to be read, and the beginnings of lines and stanzas. After a notebook has gestated for a few months, she returns to it, to mine out the shards of what will become a poem.

All three of her poetry collections were written this way. The most recent, *This Blue*, meditates often on the idea of time and finitude and on a world that remains ancient even as it's made new, forever broken and also full of fresh possibilities. Poetry itself is a bit like that: proliferating in unexpected directions but always rooted to the same source, new poems perpetually in conversation with the poetry that came before, like the British romantics deciphering Homer. As she writes in “A Situation,” the poem that opens *This Blue*,

Take it up Old Adam—
every day the world exists
to be named.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SMITH

READ MORE ABOUT MAUREEN MCLANE in the May–June/14 *University of Chicago Magazine* and at tableau.uchicago.edu/mclane.

BACK, AND TO THE FUTURE

Digital tools transform the study of ancient civilizations.

BY ELIZABETH STATION

IN 1906, when Oriental Institute (OI) founder **James Henry Breasted** led an expedition to survey the temples of ancient Nubia, his team used state-of-the-art techniques.

Perched on wooden scaffolding, a photographer took pictures of inscriptions and developed them on the spot. Breasted compared the black and white photos with the temple walls, noting by hand any details that the camera had missed. The group carried the images by camel and by ship along the Nile, organizing their findings back in Chicago after the Egyptian season ended.

Today students and faculty in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) investigate the ancient world using tools that would have startled scholars even a generation ago. In fields from cuneiform studies to Egyptology, a digital revolution has begun.

In a darkened lab in Wieboldt Hall, a dozen grad students and faculty members sit quietly at computers as PhD student **Tytus**

Mikolaj-czak explains the basics of Adobe Illustrator, a software program used for drawing.

Experts in Sumerian grammar and Babylonian political history are learning different skills today: how to use a computer mouse to select a passage of cuneiform script, the first step toward making digital copies of cuneiform tablets.

The session is part of a workshop called Essential Graphic Design for NELC Students, which Mikolajczak, AM'10, taught this past winter with an innovation grant from the University's Office of the Provost. Before coming to Chicago to study the Elamite language—the key to pursuing his dissertation research on ancient Persian accounting texts—Mikolajczak worked as a graphic designer in his native Poland.

Skills from that job transferred easily to his scholarly work. He uses Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator software to manipulate digital images of ancient tablets from the OI's Persepolis Fortification Archive, for example, and to create digital drawings of seals from impressions made on clay tablets.

Publishers increasingly require scholars to submit articles with digital photos and drawings of objects they've studied, but academic programs don't teach those skills. Mikolajczak conceived the workshop to share his knowledge, hoping to “level the ground” so that even students without art training can produce high-quality images.

Last fall he also tutored **Theo van den Hout**, NELC's department chair and a professor who studies Hittite and Anatolian languages, in Illustrator. For a 2010 book featuring cuneiform tablet fragments from Boghazköi, Turkey, van den Hout made 254 drawings by hand, using pencil and ink.

That artisanal approach has long been standard practice, and van den Hout says he “loved the work,” but he plans to produce the next volume digitally. Using a tablet computer and stylus, scholars can trace digital photographs of ancient objects held in museum collections anywhere, making the documenta-

Once you have the drawing on
the computer, you can do anything
with it. You can shrink it, enlarge it,
and correct it endlessly.
—Theo van den Hout

Last summer in southeastern Turkey, a team from the OI's Neubauer Expedition to Zincirli sent a digital camera skyward, attaching it with Velcro straps to a helicopter small enough to fit in a backpack. Guiding the device by remote control, they captured photos and video of the site—which contains the ruins of a 3,000-year-old walled city—instantly creating digital records tagged with GPS data.

“In the past you would have to do hand sketches and measurements of the site on the ground,” says **Miller Prosser**, AM'01, PhD'10, a research database specialist and member of the Neubauer Expedition, which Associate Professor **David Schloen** directs. Digital images, by contrast, are gathered quickly and accurately, allowing scholars to ask questions of their data much faster.

Researchers can load images into a software program that generates 3-D computer models of

versity. NELC doctoral programs are designed to give students a broad and deep knowledge of history, languages, and archaeology, and new technologies build on that foundation.

Susan Penacho, AM'08, learned Geographic Information Systems in a graduate course on ancient landscapes; she's using it extensively in her dissertation work on Nubian fortresses. **Andrew Dix**, AM'06, AM'08, uses FileMaker Pro to maintain a database of more than a thousand neo-Babylonian legal texts he is analyzing for his dissertation. Working as research assistants on OI projects, other students have learned a technique called polynomial texture mapping (PTM) to create bright digital images that allow the virtual study of artifacts from every angle.

Young scholars at UChicago also gain valuable training in the “old ways,” says doctoral stu-

Opposite: An aerial view of the Neubauer Expedition dig site, shot by a camera mounted on a portable helicopter. Right: To produce digital drawings of an Elamite tablet, scholars use Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator software.



PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGES COURTESY MILLER PROSSER AND TYTUS MIKOLAJCZAK

tion process virtual, efficient, and accurate.

“Once you have the drawing on the computer, you can do anything with it. You can shrink it, enlarge it, and correct it endlessly, and it always stays nice and sharp,” says van den Hout. “I don't think anyone will go back to the old-fashioned method.”

At archaeological dig sites, technology is transforming every phase of research. Oriental Institute scholars pioneered the aerial survey of sites in Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, taking photos from airplanes and hot-air balloons in the 1920s and '30s and later from helium blimps.

Scholars around the world now use remote sensing, portable X-rays, 3-D scanners, and other sophisticated tools to map and analyze findings.

every square foot of a dig site. “Not only is it flashy, but it's an incredible step forward in the science of archaeology,” says Prosser. Each day of the expedition, the Zincirli team uploaded the data it gathered to the University's server, where it is housed in a database called OCHRE, or the Online Cultural and Historical Research Environment.

As a graduate student working on the Persepolis Fortification Archive—which also uses the OCHRE database—Prosser gained valuable training in methodology. “I got to see just how important it was to model data and keep it organized in a certain way,” he says. “That's part of my job now.”

Scholarly research on ancient languages and objects has a venerable tradition at the Uni-

versity. NELC doctoral programs are designed to give students a broad and deep knowledge of history, languages, and archaeology, and new technologies build on that foundation.

Topcuoglu is writing her dissertation about the art in seals found at Kanesh, a second-millennium commercial settlement in Turkey. Because she could not obtain physical access to most of the objects, she has relied on published photographs in books from the OI library, which she calls “the best Near Eastern library in the Western Hemisphere.”

She hopes to learn digital drawing techniques for future projects, and expects both younger and older scholars to adopt novel tools as the need and opportunity arise. “This new technology is coming in, gradually as it may be,” says Topcuoglu. “It has its foot in the door.”

READ MORE ABOUT DIGITAL DIGS at tableau.uchicago.edu/nelc.



VITAL SIGNS

Three scholars meet where gesture, sign, and language converge.

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

From left: Diane Brentari and Anastasia Giannakidou, professors in Linguistics; Susan Goldin-Meadow, the Beardsley Rumi Distinguished Service Professor in Psychology and Comparative Human Development.

WHEN SIGN LANGUAGE LINGUISTICS EXPERT Diane Brentari, PhD'90, joined the University faculty in 2011, she found herself among a growing group of linguists and psychologists interested in both established and emergent sign languages. Brentari partnered with UChicago semanticist **Anastasia Giannakidou**, who studies meaning in language, and psychologist **Susan Goldin-Meadow**, an expert on sign systems developed by deaf children of hearing parents.

In 2013 the three formed the Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language to investigate sign language, language emergence, and the relationship between the body and mind. With major funding from the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, they have launched

an ambitious three-year project, the Body's Role in Thinking, Performing, and Referencing. The project extends the trio's collaboration to involve scholars from many disciplines including the performing arts. They spoke with *Tableau* about the questions that guide their work.

What do we know about the difference between gesture and sign?

Susan Goldin-Meadow: Sign is a language. Gesture is not a language, but it works along with language to convey our ideas. Gesture is part of the communicative act, and it's important to psychologists who use it as a window into the mind.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM TIAN, AB'10

When isolated individuals come together
and use their hands as their primary communication,
that's where you see language spontaneously combust.
—Diane Brentari

Diane Brentari: When we talk about gesture, we're really talking about the contrast between what's codified in the linguistic system—sign language or speech—and this “window into the mind” as we use our hands and bodies to convey meanings over which we don't have as much control.

SGM: We do know that signers gesture. The hard part, though, is, because it's all coming out of the hand—

Anastasia Giannakidou: —it's hard to distinguish.

SGM: The studies that we've planned are trying to figure out where sign stops and where gesture begins.

With Sian Beilock, a cognitive psychologist, you're studying golfers. Why?

SGM: We're going to bring in golfers, ask them to swing, and then ask them to talk about their golf swing. When you talk about your golf swing, you will inevitably gesture. So we'll have gesturing—representational action—compared to real action.

We can begin to distinguish what gesture looks like, how much it gets its information from real action, and how much it differs from action. We'll then move to deaf signers, who we believe will also gesture when they talk about their golf swing. We will explore where their sign stops and their gesture begins.

Our plan is to use data from hearing golfers to figure out the boundary between gesture and sign in deaf golfers. Although it seems narrow, in fact our golf study will explore the entire continuum from action to gesture to sign language.

DB: We'll be using motion-capture equipment to get very precise measurements of each of these different manual expressive categories.

We can't perceive many of the subtle movement dynamics with the naked eye. The kind of information we get from motion capture will tell us a little bit about the prosodic structure—the melody—of gesture and sign language.

What is home sign and why is it important to study?

SGM: Diane and I have been doing research in Nicaragua looking at deaf people who interact only with hearing people and no other deaf people. Each deaf individual develops a sign language at home, called home sign. At one point many home signers came together to form the first stage of Nicaraguan sign language, and that first stage formed the basis for subsequent stages. Looking at each stage, our goal is to figure out when pieces of the system become syntactic.

AG: Often as linguists we receive the question, “How was language created?” Usually we cannot answer because we don't have the evidence. But with sign languages, we actually have the evidence of how, in stages, they become languages. We need to develop a theory to trace the trajectory from the gestural system to the home sign system and then the sign language system.

DB: Working with signers gives us the chance to study the emergence of language and of controlled, psycholinguistic tasks that we can't use for spoken languages. New sign languages are continuing to be discovered.

SGM: They're all over the world.

DB: When isolated individuals come together and use their hands as their primary communication, that's where you see language spontaneously combust.

How did you become interested in gesture and sign language?

DB: I grew up with a deaf cousin, and I was always fascinated by her worldview. I could tell that it was different from mine, even though we lived in the same town. As a child I wanted to understand how being deaf and using sign language might create a culture of its own.

SGM: I wanted to understand how children learn language, whether they need linguistic input and what kind. I was an undergraduate at Smith College, down the street from the Clarke School for Hearing and Speech. It's an oral school, which means that the students were not exposed to sign language at all. Everybody said that at the Clarke School, the kids tried to talk during the lessons, but out in the playground and elsewhere, they signed to each other all the time. That's what I wanted to study: the sign languages created by deaf children in hearing worlds.

AG: Susan approached me a few years back with some exciting data about negation in the home sign she was studying. Negation is expressed in English with little words like “no” or “not” that don't seem to refer to objects in the world the way words like “table” and “chair” do. It turns out that home sign and sign languages seem to represent those kinds of meanings in ways consistent with both the logic and the syntax of negation in natural language.

As a semanticist, I was interested in reflecting on these parallels as well as potential differences between home sign and spoken language. The driving question in my work with Susan is this: What are the essential building blocks that we can use as evidence to characterize a system of signs as being language-like or linguistic?

WATCH A VIDEO INTERVIEW and learn more about this collaboration at tableau.uchicago.edu/gesture.

OUTSIDE THE FRAME

A new generation investigates art across centuries and continents.

BY TOM POPELKA

“I DON’T LOOK like a regular art historian,” admits **Niall Atkinson**.

His shoulder-length blond hair says “surfer” more than “professor,” but Atkinson, a Neubauer Family Assistant Professor in Art History, isn’t referring to his physical looks. His area of study—the soundscape of Renaissance-era architecture and urbanism—falls outside the usual boundaries of art history. The five other recent hires in the department share his adventurous approach. “We all have that offbeat quality,” says **Cécile Fromont**. “It’s exciting to be a part of that cohort.”

Recruiting scholars is not a task the department takes lightly. Professor **Christine Mehring**, chair of the department, notes that faculty searches can take several tries before a committee finds the right candidate. Instead of hiring to fill a gap in the curriculum, Mehring

explains, they search for the best scholarship. “We seek quality, we seek a great mind—we seek great work that isn’t attached to ‘this’ kind of art history or ‘that’ kind of art history.” This open approach is something the new faculty members recognize as a strength. “We’re all a little quirky, and that’s something the department prides itself on,” says **Claudia Brittenham**.

During the 1980s and ’90s, Mehring argues, the department was known as a “hotbed” of theoretical and philosophical analysis. She believes that art historians in general are making a return to the object—“in many ways the shared ground of our discipline”—as a focus of study. Mehring praises the department’s assistant professors for building on the work of a previous generation of scholars to combine both “material object and conceptual sophistication” in their research.



Art historians Chelsea Foxwell, Claudia Brittenham, and Patrick Crowley (opposite); Niall Atkinson (left); Cécile Fromont (below).

The group’s research interests point to another shift. Art history today is “a more even field” than it used to be, observes Mehring, with thriving subfields that span the globe and cross centuries of civilizations. Incorporating artistic traditions from outside Europe or North America “is something our department is doing very well,” adds Fromont. She studies visual manifestations of cross-cultural connections in the early modern Atlantic world, from images in political and scientific texts to seventeenth-century crucifixes from the Kingdom of Kongo.

“My work is in between many fields,” says Fromont, adding that cross-pollination between subfields can only improve scholarship. Even within more traditional fields such as European or American modern art, she believes that research is “made more interesting by collaboration with those working on modern art elsewhere.”

Many of the assistant professors are not so much focused on one particular area of art but on the interplay between regions and peoples. **Chelsea Foxwell**, a specialist in nineteenth-century Japanese art, examines how cross-cultural exchanges after Japan’s so-called opening to the West affected the country’s art. Both Foxwell and **Ping Foong**, a scholar of early Chinese art, take advantage of what Foxwell says is “a special sense of energy and collaboration on campus,” working with colleagues in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Center for East Asian Studies. “I seek their advice all the time,” Foxwell says.

Brittenham, who studies Mesoamerica in the 3,000 years before the Spanish invasion, also finds it easy to connect with her colleagues. She and the newest member of the department,

Patrick Crowley, both work with the department’s Center for Global Ancient Art. Crowley’s research in ancient Roman visual culture looks at images of ghosts and how they play into ideas about the reliability of vision and notions of truth.

On the surface, Brittenham’s work on pre-Columbian mural paintings has little to do with Crowley’s investigations of ghost images on ancient Roman sarcophagi. But Brittenham finds that comparing methodologies, findings, and evidence—or even what counts as evidence—between their areas of study “shakes things loose” that she can take back to her own research.

For younger faculty members, it can be difficult to balance teaching with research, but they enjoy working with students who often surprise them with original insights. In art history, says Brittenham, “the barriers to access are so low. All you need is a pair of eyes to do original research.” The students are “so engaged, so fearless.” Discussing his recent Introduction to Roman Art and Archaeology course for undergraduates, Crowley notes, “even though no one in my class is an art history major, it doesn’t matter—they all have things to say.”

Despite their divergent research, the group shares “points of intersection and points of conversation,” says Brittenham. “We all like each other too.” Atkinson notes that their extended conversations also occur through students, with assistant professors regularly sending students to each other to “reproduce that ethos” of open exchange. “Students come in with conventional ideas about art history that I’m trying to undo,” says Atkinson. “I’m trying to get students to see that they can cross corridors.”

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We all have that offbeat quality. It’s exciting to be a part of that cohort.
—Cécile Fromont



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS KIRZEDER, ROBERT KOZLOFF, AND BETH ROONEY

FIND LINKS TO FACULTY BIOGRAPHIES at tableau.uchicago.edu/arhistory.

FROM GREAT BOOKS TO GIGABYTES

Humanities alumni offer tips for thriving in tech careers.

BY JEANIE CHUNG



A linguist who wrote her dissertation about Creole language in Suriname, Jackie Reber does data modeling for a West Loop tech firm.

WHEN JACKIE REBER WAS JOB HUNTING, she was struck by the job listing for Codifyd, a Chicago tech company. The firm expressed interest in humanities graduates, linguists in particular.

“Nobody asks for linguists,” says Reber, AM’07, PhD’11, who earned her degrees in that field. “Nobody knows what linguists do.”

As it turned out, the head of Reber’s division, **Gina Bulatovic**, AB’98, AM’03, PhD’08, is also a linguist who knew exactly what linguists could do for Codifyd. The consulting firm helps companies improve their websites and e-commerce presence by reorganizing and reclassifying the data they put online.

“The process reminds me a lot of work I did during my dissertation,” says Reber, an analyst. “You’re given a mass of data, and your job is to sort through all this information and organize it in a way that makes sense. It’s about organizing data to tell stories.”

Here, Reber and four other Humanities alumni offer thoughts and advice about finding fulfilling careers in the tech sector.

> The tech sector doesn’t just need programmers and entrepreneurs.

Reber advises humanists to cast their nets widely when applying for jobs. “There’s a shortage of really talented people,” agrees **Matt Percy**, AM’98, a graduate of the Master of Arts Program in the Hu-

manities (MAPH). Percy is director of strategy and business development for Microsoft in Redmond, Washington. “We’re super agnostic about where these people come from.”

“The tech community in general loves people who can think differently and who are really, really smart,” says **Mary Carello Senic**, AM’08, another MAPH graduate and a recruiter at Google’s headquarters in Mountain View, California.

The skills that students develop researching and writing about cinema or philosophy or eighteenth-century poetry do translate to the tech world.

“The secret of the tech industry is that it only works if there are lots of people who aren’t techies,” says **Jon Aronoff**, AM’95, vice president and distinguished analyst at the Research Board, a New York City think tank that is part of Gartner, the world’s largest information technology re-

search and advisory company. “There are brilliant engineers out there, but they tend not to deal with human complexity that well,” he says. “The world that we live in requires the skills you get in humanistic education.”

By that he means research, writing, persuasive, and analytical skills. For example, Aronoff might make recommendations to companies about how and whether to use an online file-storing service such as Dropbox. Where a financial analyst might evaluate the service’s cost-effectiveness, Aronoff—who studied English in graduate school—would

There are brilliant engineers out there, but they tend not to deal with human complexity that well.
—Jon Aronoff

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS KIRZEDER

research and analyze the cultural context in which it exists: how and why people use it and whether those reasons are likely to exist in the future.

“When people are trained to analyze companies from a business school background, they tend to do it from a financial standpoint,” he says. “The way we’re looking at it isn’t actually that different from the skills you use learning to analyze poetry or breaking a film down shot by shot.”

> The UChicago network is powerful: use it.

Codifyd is just one example of a UChicago grad hiring more alumni. Aronoff was the first UChicago graduate to join the Research Board, but thanks to his recruiting there are now seven on a research staff of 33. An alum interviewed Carello Senic for a position at Google several years ago; she wasn’t hired, but staying in touch ultimately paid off when she interviewed again last year and got the job.

First, of course, it’s important to reach out. “I think there are a lot of people who don’t put themselves out there enough,” Percy says. “I get a call from maybe one UChicago person a year.” If this story spurs more calls, he says, “that’s great.”

> Keep ties to the humanities.

Carello Senic, who wrote her master’s thesis on the green building movement, still does architectural research in her free time and has volunteered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Humanities training can help even when you don’t have a job. Before landing his current position as a product marketing manager for Facebook in Menlo Park, California—“a job I love”—**Jeremy Galen**, AM’07, had a few different tech jobs. Some were with start-ups, some not; some were full-time, some not, and he felt frustrated.

“I felt like I’d abandoned my vocation,” he says. What sustained him was creative writing—essays and fiction, including several book-length works—using the skills he’d honed in the MAPH program. He also started a blog of philosophical musings that he still maintains, which includes a defense of the idea of “overthinking” that would make any UChicago alumnus proud.

Percy, now at Microsoft, believes the intellectual approach he learned in graduate school informs everything he does, including his work on the company’s Xbox video games.

“I like to think the humanities is a huge part of who I am,” he says. “It’s really shaped the way I approach the world.”

IN MEMORIAM

TED COHEN 1939 - 2014

Ted Cohen, AB’62, a philosopher whose agile intellect and wry humor made him a campus legend, died March 14 after a brief hospitalization. He was 74.

A memorial service was held April 12 at the Quadrangle Club.

Over a 50-year career, Cohen, a professor in Philosophy, turned his eye to a vast range of subjects that included jokes, baseball, television, photography, art, and the philosophy of language and formal logic.

Cohen’s *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) offered a lively, accessible take on how and why jokes work. In *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* (Princeton University Press, 2008), he argued that the ability to think of one thing as another is an essential human capacity that makes sound moral judgment possible.

Widely praised for his engaging writing style, Cohen won the 1991 Pushcart Prize for his essay “There Are No Ties at First Base.” Among other honors, he served as president of the American Philosophical Association and the American Society for Aesthetics. He chaired the Department of Philosophy from 1974 to 1979 and won the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in 1983.

Cohen also made his mark as the longtime moderator of the University’s famed Latke-Hamantash Debate—though not an impartial one. “The hamantash is a very, very good thing of its kind,” he argued in the 1976 debate. “The latke, however, is a perfect thing. Now that I’ve laid the conclusion out, perhaps its transparent correctness is already evident to you.”
—S. A.

READ TRIBUTES, INTERVIEWS, AND MORE at tableau.uchicago.edu/cohen.

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WORK OF ART

An alumna who found her calling in the commercial art world helps future students find theirs.

BY CARRIE GOLUS,
AB'91, AM'93

WHEN AMY GOLD, AM'90, WAS DOING HER GRADUATE WORK in Art History, she had a part-time job as a student docent at the Smart Museum of Art. "It was a really enlightening experience," she says. "I had to not only use my knowledge of art history but also learn how to articulate that to a group of peers, or younger students, or older visitors."

Gold, now an independent art dealer, wanted future UChicago students to have similar opportunities. She is a member of the Smart's board and the visiting committee for the Division of the Humanities. Last year she and her husband Brett Gorvy, chairman and international head of post-war and contemporary art at Christie's, established the Amy Gold and Brett Gorvy Student Work Fund, supporting student staff at the Smart



Brett Gorvy and Amy Gold at home.

in perpetuity. The couple will also help to fund the Smart's K–12 education offerings over the next five years with an additional gift.

Gold and Gorvy's generosity extends to the Art History department, where their support will underwrite traveling seminars over the next few years. The faculty-led seminars give graduate and undergraduate students direct access to the artworks, cultural objects, monuments, or buildings they are studying. "Traveling seminars have figured at the top of our wish list for several years," says Professor **Christine Mehring**, who chairs the department. "They are a critical complement to study in the classroom."

In the past, traveling seminars were few and far between. In 2011 Professor **Rebecca Zorach** took a group to Paris for the seminar What Is an Archive? History, Theory, Practice. Besides visiting libraries, archives, and museums as a group, each student pursued an individual archival research project. This spring Associate Professor **Aden Kumler**, AB'96, is taking a group to London, Cambridge, and Oxford for The Art of the Parish in Medieval England. Students will also visit Canterbury Cathedral and get a once-in-a-lifetime chance to observe major renovations.

It's the kind of experience that Gold, who wrote her master's thesis on twelfth-century church

"I wouldn't ask somebody to give money for something unless I would do so myself."
—Amy Gold

space, would have savored. As a student she did engage directly with the art world: she held an internship at the Art Institute of Chicago. After graduation, the museum hired her as a curatorial assistant and she learned fundraising skills that would serve her well later in her career. In 2000 Gold was recruited to become the head of the Midwest region for Christie's, where she met Gorvy.

Fundraising and working in the commercial art world both require people to "believe in your product," says Gold. "I wouldn't ask somebody to give money for something unless I would do so myself. I'm unable to sell work unless I feel passionate about it."

After ten years at Christie's, Gold became a senior director at the New York gallery L&M Arts. Since 2011 she has been an independent art dealer, focusing mainly on twentieth-century masters. "The commercial art world has really changed," she says. "Art is thought of these days as an asset class, which 20 years ago, even ten years ago, I don't think it was so much. Values of art have become so substantial that you can't help but think about it that way."

In their personal collection, Gold and Gorvy focus on works on paper, beginning in the 1930s. "Other than maybe two works in our collection, we agree on everything," she says. Even when they flip through a stack of auction catalogs or walk through an art fair separately, "we'll both come to the same piece." But a downside of being such passionate collectors is that they have almost no wall space left in their Upper West Side apartment.

Gold has offered to facilitate access to private collections of contemporary art for faculty and students on traveling seminars, in addition to providing financial support. Seeing such art only in a museum setting can be a limiting experience, says Mehring: "Collectors, like artists, often have a very idiosyncratic way of looking at art that art historians might never think of. I would love for our students to see that."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LOOF; COURTESY ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

AT THE HEART OF OPERA

Between premieres and publications, Philip Gossett continues a lively career.

BY CLAUDIO VELLUTINI

PHILIP GOSSETT'S CAREER is captured in the title of his 2006 book, the award-winning *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*. Since his graduate studies at Princeton in the 1960s, Gossett has focused on the recovery and careful study of musical sources of operas by nineteenth-century Italian composers, and on understanding how the works function as dramas and in performance. A prolific scholar and frequent collaborator with opera houses and performers, Gossett has developed close relationships with many leading conductors and singers—the "divas" to which the title of his book refers.

Gossett, the Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in Music, officially retired in 2010. He serves as the general editor of two critical editions, *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi* (University of Chicago Press/Casa Ricordi) and *Works of Gioachino Rossini* (Bärenreiter). He is also a sought-after consultant.

Among the highlights of the past year, Gossett cites his work at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he was awarded an honorary degree. Students there were working on performing a little-known Rossini comic opera, *La gazzezza*, written in 1816. When the critical edition of the opera was published in 2002, one of the pieces, a quintet, was thought to be lost forever. Two years ago Gossett identified the missing quintet in Palermo, Italy, enabling the New England Conservatory to perform Rossini's work in its entirety for the first time ever.

This summer Gossett will be involved in the first complete professional production of *La gazzezza* in Belgium. Meanwhile, in Milan, La Scala will produce *Le Comte Ory*, a French opera Rossini wrote in 1828. That production draws on a critical edition for which Gossett and editor Damien Colas reconstructed all the music Rossini prepared for the opera. The director of La Scala's July produc-

tion, Laurent Pelly, "is absolutely convinced that this is the right version to do today," says Gossett. Similarly, he says, Riccardo Muti, the music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, "has done several performances based on our critical editions," including concerts featuring the complete version of Verdi's *Macbeth* last fall in Chicago.

Gossett's interests stretch to encompass more recent music. He helped an Italian group, the Ensemble Nuove Musiche, develop its project *Verdi nostro contemporaneo*, and the ensemble's US tour included a 2013 concert at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts. Gossett is working with the ensemble on a project inspired by Rossini's many versions of *Mi lagnerà tacendo*, a series of songs from a poem by eighteenth-century poet Pietro Metastasio. A group of contemporary composers, including **Marta Ptaszynska**, the Helen B. and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor in Music, will create new works based on the songs.

Gossett has collaborated with veteran opera singers such as Marilyn Horne, Samuel Ramey, and Renée Fleming, and newcomers like mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard. As Leonard prepared to sing the lead female role in the 2014 production of *The Barber of Seville* at Chicago's Lyric Opera, she and Gossett focused on the embellishments and vocal ornamentation to be added to her part. The structure of Rossini's music leaves room for the interpreter's imagination, he says: "During Rossini's era composers expected singers to add personal touches to their roles."

A constellation of side research projects supports Gossett's work on critical editions. One of the most recent is OperaCat, a database of autograph manuscript items related to the five major Italian composers of the nineteenth century: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Puccini. Directed by Daniela Macchione of Rome and carried out in collaboration with the Newberry Library, OperaCat will go online in 2014. The project has benefitted from the work of several former and current UChicago students.

Gossett is no less busy than before he retired. He remains active as a teacher—in fall 2012 he offered a graduate seminar on Rossini's vocal music—and currently advises three doctoral students. Wrapping up an interview, he is already making plans for his next flight to Italy. "Philip in 'retirement'?" wonders an amused Elizabeth Parker, coordinator of the University's Center for Italian Opera Studies and Gossett's close collaborator. "I think he can spell the word, but he doesn't know what it means."

READ AN EXPANDED ARTICLE
with photos and video at
tableau.uchicago.edu/gossett.



Music professor Philip Gossett (right) with family at his retirement celebration in 2010.

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A Conversation with Peter Selz

UnCommon Core session with art historians Peter Selz, AM'49, PhD'54, Christine Mehring, and Reinhold Heller

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