Dear Alumni and Friends

This issue of Tableau examines the life of the arts in the Division, as they are studied and as they are practiced. Throughout these pages, you will note recurring words that designate efforts in combination—words like “conjoin,” “conjunction,” “yoke,” and, of course, “and,” with its cousins, the ampersand. Our students, past and present, recognize that rigorous work in different disciplines with distinct methodologies often requires crossing boundaries and bringing seemingly disparate areas of knowledge together. More than this, however, the insistent presence of conjoining terms in this issue points to our recent efforts to bring the arts more centrally into our intellectual enterprise. One of the most exciting markers of this effort is also a priority of the University’s recently announced fundraising initiative: a new performing arts center, located adjacent to Midway Studios. Besides renovation of the sadly dilapidated but historic and vibrant Midway Studios, the performing arts center will make available new music practice rooms and rehearsal spaces, a medium-sized (500-seat) theater for student productions, and dedicated facilities for film- and video-making. By conjoining a number of arts facilities in one location, the center will also make possible the kinds of exciting collaborations that characterize contemporary artistic endeavors. As a priority, the arts center joins other Divisional objectives that, while more familiar, are no less crucial to sustaining the excellence of the Humanities Division at Chicago: faculty endowments and graduate student fellowships. It is difficult to think of these separately. Students come to the Division to work with the best minds in their fields, faculty want to work with the most promising students in the nation. To attract promising students in the nation, to attract the best minds in their fields; faculty want to work with the most promising students in the nation—words like “conjoin,” “conjunction,” “yoke,” and, of course, “and,” with its cousins, the ampersand. Our students, past and present, recognize that rigorous work in different disciplines with distinct methodologies often requires crossing boundaries and bringing seemingly disparate areas of knowledge together.

We are very grateful for the loyal support of our alumni and friends, and look forward to a continued partnership as we enter this exciting moment in the Division’s history.

With cordial greetings,

Janel Mueller

Janel Mueller is Professor of English and of the Humanities and William Rainey Harper Professor in the College. She has been teaching at Chicago since 1967. Her publications include The Native Tongue and the Word: Developments in English Poesy Style (University of Chicago Press, 1984), The Second Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Revenge (Renaissance Text Society, 1990), and The Secret Lives of Photographs (University of Chicago Press, 2001). She was awarded the University of Chicago Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching in June 1996.

In the Theater of the Classroom

Artists on Campus

Showcasing the art of our faculty artists.

Artists on Education

Alumni artists on their University of Chicago experiences.

Proof

Gerald Kowsky reviews David Auburn’s acclaimed play.

Onward & Upward

Recent Job Placements

Art and Social Change

Painting and Literature

Three faculty members explore the relationship between two art forms.

What Matters to Me and Why

Another Chicago School

By Wu Hung

By Lauren Berlant

By Philip Gossett

Social Change and Contemporary Chinese Art

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Student Spotlight

Underworlds

The Secret Lives of Photographs

ACROSS THE MIDWAY PLAISANCE, the five faculty-artists on the Committee on Visual Arts combine a deep commitment to their craft with an equally large commitment to teaching. In the following pages, we focus on a single piece from each artist and reflect on some of the ideas and concerns that animate their work.

By William Orchard
Channeling Chamisso’s Bottle

HELEN MIRRA

I was born in 1946, in Detroit, Michigan, and grew up in a family whose designs and efforts to conserve material resources partially inspire this project. My father, an architect, and my mother, a painter, instilled in me a love for nature and the environment. My father taught me to read maps and to appreciate the beauty of the natural world. My mother taught me to see the beauty in everyday objects.

While working in my studio, I often pick up a piece of driftwood or a piece of shell and wonder about its history. What was it used for? How did it come to be where it is now? These thoughts lead me to think about the way we perceive and interact with the world around us. Our expectations of natural objects are often based on what we see or what we know about them. But, if these images are familiar, they also evoke an unfamiliarity, an Unheimlichkeit, that again recalls Freud. The familiar in these photographs becomes uncanny, perhaps, because they are not what we expect to see. The material under pressurization can lead to any number of forms: here a song or a poem, there an intersection of thought. Although Mirra is often termed as a conceptual artist, the body of work she produces is not limited to a single idea, but rather a mixture of them all. She is interested in creating a space for multiple interpretations and possibilities.

The materials used in her work are derived from natural sources. She uses driftwood, shells, and other found objects to create abstract forms that are both beautiful and mysterious. These forms are created through a process of pressurization, which she likens to the way in which natural objects are formed. The materials are encapsulated in a vacuum and then allowed to expand, creating a sculptural form. This process allows her to transform ordinary objects into something new and mysterious.

In her work, Mirra is interested in the idea of transformation. She is interested in the way that natural objects can be transformed into something new and unexpected. She is also interested in the way that these transformations can be read as a form of communication. The forms she creates are not仅仅 a form of communication, but also a form of expression. They are a way for her to express her ideas and to explore the possibilities of the natural world.

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My friend regards the photograph: “It’s beautiful. It makes me sad.”

Letinsky’s title with its mélange on an essay of Freud seems to anticipate this response. While Freud is concerned with loss and the space it occupies, Letinsky refers to the moment (or “morning”) after desire’s fulfillment, when shadows of what has been consumed haunt the scenes. Here desire disappears even as the scene inspires a nostalgia and longing for what has passed. The project partially origi- nalized Letinsky’s stay in East Berlin, where the unfamiliar context made her aware of her own material and cultural relationship to food. Berlin’s evening nightlife often postponed the normal clearing of dishes and countertops until early the next day, when Letinsky would discover unexpectedly beautiful tableware bathed in morning’s kind light. In an introduction to Letinsky’s last series, Venus Infrerd (University of Chicago Press, 2002), which shows couples in moments of love, tendereness, desire, and regret, Lauren Bernat remarks on how the photographs capture the “beautiful and estranged brances that desire leaves on the landscape.” The Morining and Chamisso’s Bottle images similarly reveal traces in objects that, as Letinsky notes, “form the texture of intimacy.”

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The moral (if there is one) of music as part of history and culture acquired an intellectual component. Also, it must use protection the arts in theory and practice that have no competitive qualities in commerce and the marketplace. At the University, music evolved for me not only into an essential language of meaning and expression, but a form of life at the center of critical inquiry and experience. It is ironic that in 1996, at the age of my junior year, I was interviewed by the Chicago Daily News after being asked to illustrate photographic images for their magazine. I had been working on a project involving music and art, and the interview was part of a larger series of articles on the active musical life in which we participated. We did not find ourselves impressed in a museum of the musical past. The moral (if there is one) of my experience is that the University has an obligation to integrate the making and study of the arts into the curricula, not as an aspect of decoration, but as a central component. Also, it must use its resources to nurture and protect the arts in theory and practice that have no competitive quality in commerce and the marketplace.

**Leon Botstein, ad ’72, CHORUS CONDUCTOR, AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

My own particular debt to the University, with respect to music, is perhaps greater on the practical side. I was offered an opportunity to play and to conduct with and to work closely with composers, and musicologists who, though they did not separate the study of music from its recreation in live performance, and most important for many aspiring students who hope to dedicate their lives to the arts? The emphasis on rational argument. Why, then, is it attractive to create abstractions that follow the movement of the live action. Once the pornographic elements in the video are identified as such, our minds become receptive to a number of bad puns by numbers born to be wild; a punomusia of chromatic delights, not to mention all the double entendres relating to ‘Nutcracker’. This type of joking is not ancillary to Ruttan’s work. Indeed, it may be central. She uses humor to draw us close to the image but then twirls and flips our expectations and understanding. Is the benign Disney-like animation of benign as we like to think? Do the abstract images require the kind of formal initiation that some elitists would require? And is the distance between an inviting children’s cartoon and a formally difficult “high” art as great as we are trained to believe?

Ruttan’s work also takes a novel and refreshing stance in relation to the pornographic image. Public discourse about pornography often reduces to legal questions of obscenity or to feminist critique. In both domains, sex nearly disappears as abstractions come to dominate the discussion. By contrast, Ruttan’s work moves discussion about pornography from a distance abstraction back into a sexual experience.

**ALISON RUTTAN**

My administrative skills were developed through my experience as an administrator of the Contemporary Chamber Players, because as a student I was given the opportunity to learn how to bureaucratic skills, such as unions, fundraising, and logistics. And finally, by living in Chicago, I was exposed to the very heart of the arts, and this provided a stimulating and important experience for me.

**Deborah Dratell, Ph.D., ’82, CHOREOGRAPHER, CHROMOPLIA**

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**ALISON RUTTAN, CHROMOPLIA (C), digital seminar.**

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I went to Chicago, I took the standard major’s degree program in literature. Good courses with Eldridge, Robert Tornoe Sackett, and Harper W. But also brilliantly, Historiography, Anglo-Saxon. Those classes were not for me. I got to know the people who ran the Chicago Review. George Starbuck was poetry editor (and later my first editor, at Houghton Mifflin). Chicago Review published one of my first stories, unpublished, in a small, semi- professional publication outside of the Bucktown Literary Magazine. It’s a story by someone who wrote twenty years ago. That’s all you really say about it.

I had nothing to do with any boy literary or bookish people. I should say bookish guys. With women I was more eccentric. Heiny Carson? I suppose I would qualify. High-strung, Volatile, Expressionist, Argumentative. Playful, I suppose. Some time I was more unconsidered as a classmate. I had this sort of retarding, retarding sort of seriousness. Chicago didn’t make me like that, but it didn’t stand in my way. I was a sort of student ever it was frantically about writing and books. I couldn’t understand ordinary and unremarkable, I mean, 20 years ago. That’s all you really say about it.

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In one direction, the nature of that conversation is clear: literature provides an archive of stories for painting to represent. In the other direction, however, the conversation is more varied and complicated: how does painting inform literature? Three scholars in different departments in the Division presently have their ears tuned to this conversation, examining episodes in this exchange from early modernity through the late twentieth century.

In the late months of 1569, a twenty-two-year-old Spaniard named Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra ventured to Rome and entered into the service of the man who would become Cardinal Acquaviva. During his brief sojourn in Italy, Cervantes was exposed to the art of the great Renaissance painters, which beautifully yoked the pagan with the Christian in a way that would excite the young poet who lived under the repressiveness of the Counter Reformation.

According to Frederick A. De Armas, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, this early journey left an indelible impression on Cervantes, whose work exhibits a persistent desire to return to both Italy and the Renaissance. In Cervantes, Raphael, and the Classics (Cambridge UP, 1998), De Armas examines Cervantes’s early play La Numancia and considers how its form, structure, and themes are influenced by Raphael’s Vatican paintings and the interpretations of antiquity offered in those artworks.

De Armas’s current project, Quixotic Frescoes: Cervantes and Italian Renaissance Art, broadens the scope of his original investigation by examining the influence and appearance of a range of painters in Cervantes’s work, from his early pastoral La Galatea (1585) through his posthumously published romance Persiles y Sigismunda (1617). Cervantes uses Raphael’s Triumph of Galatea to fashion the eponymous heroine of his pastoral romance. Sharing the work’s Neo-Platonic aesthetics which exalt Galatea’s chastity over Venus’ carnality, Cervantes’s Galatea departs from Raphael’s in two ways. First, he situates Galatea in an ekphrasis that assigns her the role of Venus in Botticelli’s Primavera. Second, he depicts her playing the zampoña, a wind instrument that is not only symbolically at odds with her chastity but also the instrument played by Polyphemus, the cyclops who is enamored of her, in the painting by Sebastiano del Piombo that hangs adjacent to Raphael’s Triumph. Combined with a blush that Cervantes bestows upon his Galatea, the effect of these overlapping references, in De Armas’s reading, sustains Galatea’s chastity toward men while subtly incorporating her into a transformed homosexual tradition that acknowledges erotic currents between women. This complexity is representative of Cervantes’s technique, which never resorts to simple imitation but rather plays upon the features of the archive, fashioning something novel and creating an alternative museum in language.

Two upcoming exhibits at the University are advancing De Armas’s investigations. He and Smart Museum Mellon Projects Coordinator Elizabeth Rodini will curate an exhibit called “The Painted Text: Picturing Narrative in European Art,” which will be shown at the Smart Museum from spring through summer 2003. With Alice Schreyer, Director of the University of Chicago Library’s Special Collections Research Center, De Armas will...
I wanted to do something different from my previous work on modernist poets and the art world. I was drawn to the idea of exploring the relationship between art and literature in a way that went beyond traditional literary criticism. My research focused on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), a group of English painters and poets who were active in the mid-19th century. The PRB was known for its innovative approach to art and literature, and I wanted to study how they were able to create such a unique and memorable body of work.

The PRB was formed in 1848, and its members included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and John Ruskin. They were inspired by the works of the Italian Renaissance and the French Baroque, and they were interested in creating a new kind of art that was both beautiful and meaningful. They believed that art should be a form of moral instruction, and they sought to create paintings that were both visually stunning and conceptually complex.

One of the key figures in the PRB was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was interested in the relationship between art and literature. He believed that a poet turning to prose was like the shift from a gallop to a trot, and he saw the relationship between the two as a kind of travel. He was interested in the way that the written word and the visual image could work together to create something greater than the sum of their parts.

The PRB was also interested in the relationship between art and music. They believed that music was a major form of expression, and they were interested in the way that music could be used to enhance the meaning of their paintings. They were especially interested in the works of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, and they studied Mozarabic chant and listened to the works of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti. They were interested in the way that music and art could work together to create a new kind of experience for the viewer.

The PRB was focused on the more proximate term “Art”. While influenced by excursions abroad, they were more interested in the visual and literary forms of the works of the PRB and within the oeuvres of its individual members makes ripper compared to the relationship between art and literature. In her current book project, Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Poetry, Painting, Collection, and Design in the 1860s, Garrott focuses on areas of Pre-Raphaelite inventiveness, examining, among other things how they employed color as an expressive, tonal, and structuring feature; how Moritz’s used pattern and visual forms principle of literary composition, and as way of comprehending art’s social function; and, the effects relationships between the productions of this fraternity. The PRB made art about art, and they believed that music was a major form of expression. They were interested in the way that music and art could work together to create a new kind of experience for the viewer.

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As Wordsworth noted, “to make metaphysical poetry more metaphysical than spiritual, these experiences are of a distinct order. In contrast to the joycean epiphanies in which deep spiritual understanding follows from serendipitous encounter with unusual objects, the “artistic epiphanies” require the stimulus of a visual masterpiece. The visual masterpiece conjoins in a single instant sensory realization a rush of emotion and understanding which seems, on the one hand, to be a short-circuit in the network of the mind. The whole world is there in one second.”

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Garrott notes in “The Nature of the Gothic,” when art was (in Moritz’s words), “the expression of man’s pleasure in labor.” The PRB’s understanding that labor and object are both parts of the work’s “art” came at a time when the success

I study nineteenth-century Italian opera, and I teach it to my students, both undergraduates and graduates, because it is my passion. I love the emotional and dramatic intensity of its characters; the beauty; the grace; and power of its music. My passion for this repertoire dates back to my teens and has only intensified through the years. When I told my own teachers in graduate school that I wanted to work on bel canto opera (the works of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti) they looked at me with bewilderment, as if to say: “Why is a bright young man like you ruining your career?”

I have been told by many people that Italian opera is not for everyone, and that it is too complex for modern audiences. But I believe that this is not the case. I think that Italian opera has a timeless quality that makes it relevant to all people, even those who are not familiar with it. I have found that the music of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti is not only beautiful, but also incredibly complex. It requires a lot of listening and study to fully understand and appreciate.

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Art is sometimes seen as a special reserve, a pastoral scene into which we retire to assuage the harsher edges of modern life. In times of crisis and great social upheaval, it often operates in this way by offering familiar images which feel strangely out of time. But, as the writers acknowledge in the following essays, art also becomes in these moments a medium through which political and social arguments, otherwise unspoken, find articulation. Wu Hung considers how Chinese art since the late 1970s has been a barometer of the social and economic changes introduced by Deng Xiaoping’s reforms and open-door policy, while Lauren Berlant examines why Americans turned to the writing and reading of poetry as a therapeutic response to September 11.

"If contemporary Chinese art has anything to do with social change, such change cannot remain simply an external frame, but must be internalized as intrinsic features and qualities of this art."

"This is to say that post-traumatic narrative always fails to contain the overwhelmed feeling that motivates it: we follow the rhythm of trauma rather than orchestrating it like so many maestros."
macro-narrative has little impact on these cura-
tors, who rarely select artists and works based on
a textbook, but are guided, often spontaneously and
intuitively, by what they find new and compelling
in visual forms. We must realize that such spontaneity
and intuition, though alien to many academic art
historians, play crucial roles in advancing contem-
porary art by leading to the discovery of new styles
and promoting new trends. For example, this is how a
European curator selected as many as twenty young experimental Chinese artists
for the 1999 Venice Biennale, more than the
combined number of American and Italian par-
ticipants. More generally, visual spontaneity underscores any exhibition of experimental art:

write the supposed novelty or such explosions
defy historical determinism, their stimulating
while the supposed novelty of such exhibitions
typical between the past and the future, capturing
what makes something traumatic is that no par-
ticular event can be said to have "caused" the
post-traumatic sense of personal and social nega-
tion that characterizes many individual's sense
of witnessing the numbered events—9-11,
other words, when does turning to poetry sub-
movements that have brought about a growing alienation
subordinated populations are just as likely to seek
borders that we believe and die in;

Another definition of trauma locates it not in
"America's lost innocence," just as it is easy for
"In Memory of W. B. Yeats"
the Congress gave to the airline industry, a number of
issues and citations of imperialism. In this
case soft patriarchy in the U.S. looks liberating,
Our Monica,
ANOTHER Chicago SCHOOL

NOW IN ITS FOURTH YEAR as a Ph.D.-granting program, the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies (CMS) has witnessed continual growth in student and faculty activity. Regular events such as reading groups, film series, and conferences organized in the past few years have fostered a formidable intellectual environment for the creation of original work in the field. One particularly rich area of inquiry in the University of Chicago community is the study of spectatorship in relation to multicultural modernity, a concern that has become one of the signatures of cinematic scholarship at Chicago. Tom Gunning, Professor of Art History and in the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies, was one of the first to balance a concern with cinema’s narrative dimensions with a concern for its appeal to spectators. In his influential essay, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde,” Gunning asserts that “every change in film history implies a change in its address to the spectator.”

Spectatorship is also a major concern in the work of Miriam Hansen, the Ferdinand Schüfftan Visiting Professor in the Humanities and founding chair of CMS. In her recent work, “classical Hollywood” filmmaking was defined by the imperative of telling a story and creating the impression of a closed fictional world. The dominance of this system worldwide has been a key topic in academic film studies since the late 1960s. What Hansen questions is the monotechnical definition of cinema as simply the most modern system, a concern with cinema’s narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both home and abroad. “Hansen argues, “It did so not because of its universal narrative form but because it meant different things to different people and publics, both home and abroad.”

She suggests that since at home Hollywood had to forge a rather robust idiom to appeal to diverse ethnic constituencies in the domestic market, even as it practiced racial exclusion, it offered a greater translatability to diverse publics abroad than other national film industries. The study of the varied ways in which diverse groups of spectators make sense of particular stars, theaters, spaces, and film genres shows how deceptive the mono-ethnic conception of classical cinema can be.

In a forthcoming article in Critical Inquiry, Hansen asks: “Is it better to think of American cinema as one homogeneous entity occupying the same boarding house all along, or should we ask ourselves, ‘Who’s on First?’” She concludes with the observation that it may be “impossible to determine the impression of a closed fictional world.”

The conference will open on May 17, with a screening of Lonesome (Paul Fejos, 1928). For more information on the conference and the upcoming international symposium sponsored by the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies, call 773-702-5563 or by phone at 773/834-1077.
A WOman — her negligee slipped off her left shoulder, her legs encased in boldly striped stockings—sits on a chair, leaning enough on a nearby table to angle her glance toward a glass of rye whiskey she holds up in her right hand, almost as though she were about to lead a toast, almost as though she were making a connoisseur’s assessment. This image stares out from the pages of the New York Times Magazine, reproduced for an article on a recent exhibition of E. J. Bellocq’s photography at New York’s Julie Saul Gallery. Bellocq’s “Storyville Portraits” consist of photographs that he took of prostitutes in New Orleans in the early twentieth century. In discussing these photographs, the reporter for the Times incorporates Bellocq’s work into a history of the prostitute’s appearance in art beginning with Manet’s casting of a recognizable courtesan as a Titianesque Venus. But this proposed history also insists on the naturalness of the images (and, by extension, the transparency of the photographic medium).

Emily Shelton, a graduate student in the Department of English Language and Literature, such accounts of these images are blind to the their “secret lives.” Bellocq’s “Storyville Portraits” fetishes transgress privately and criminal photographs transgress publicly.

Shelton was awarded a Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, enabling her to perform the kind of empirical, archival work that, in the words of Berlant, make the project “persuasive and memorable.” Shelton investigates three case studies from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Victorian barrister and minor poet Arthur Munby collected photographs of working women, most notably his maid-servant and lover, Hannah Cullwick. Victorian philanthropist Dr. Thomas J. Barnardo maintained a photographic studio at the heart of his charity empire of mission homes for street urchins. Finally, there is the aforementioned Bellocq. “Who Framed Hannah Cullwick? Authenticity and Anxiety in the Arthur Munby Archive,” the chapter that resulted from Shelton’s research at Cambridge University, was awarded the Center for Gender Studies’ Ruth Murray Essay Prize in 2000.

Elaine Hadley, Associate Professor of English, notes that, in addition to the uniqueness of the archive and the originaity of the ideas, Shelton’s work is marked by an artfulness of expression that recalls the critical writing of a poet-critic like Susan Stewart. It will not come as a surprise that Shelton has also recently completed her first novel, Memphis. Memphis is based on a true crime story of three socially outcast adolescents from West Memphis, Arkansas, who were convicted of murdering three seven-year-old boys as part of a Satanic cult ritual in a wooded area bordering Interstate 55, known as the Robin Hood Hills. While researching the novel, Shelton made several trips to Arkansas to attend court proceedings, conduct interviews (including several with Damien Echols, the central defendant who now sits on Death Row), and examine case files. She has already begun another novel, Alice Christie, about an inventor’s daughter who disappears in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1896 and the two young women who surface in Detroit fifteen years later claiming to be Alice.

These images reorganize what it means to live, to desire, to have social value, producing personhood that is endangered and dangerous, existing where the boundaries between public and private are flexible and desirably ambivalent. In Shelton’s reading, social and visual relations to the photographic image are animated by a “melancholy realism” which, while born at the conjunction of photography’s origins and the underground’s visual accessibility, finds further articulation in such contemporary genres as “true crime.” According to Lauren Berlant, Professor of English Language and Literature, Shelton’s work “reconceives the history and conventions of sensationalist discourse in the public sphere” by asking what the norms are against which such things as found unlabelled and defaced many years after his death—are examples of images that come to renovate personhood through an interplay between the developing technology of the camera and the coming into visibility of “low” life. These images reorganize what it means to live, to desire, to have social value, producing a personhood that is endangered and dangerous, existing where the boundaries between public and private are flexible and desirably ambivalent. In Shelton’s reading, social and visual relations to the photographic image are animated by a “melancholy realism” which, while born at the conjunction of photography’s origins and the underground’s visual accessibility, finds further articulation in such contemporary genres as “true crime.” According to Lauren Berlant, Professor of English Language and Literature, Shelton’s work “reconceives the history and conventions of sensationalist discourse in the public sphere” by asking what the norms are against which such things as marked by an artfulness of expression that recalls the critical writing of a poet-critic like Susan Stewart. It will not come as a surprise that Shelton has also recently completed her first novel, Memphis. Memphis is based on a true crime story of three socially outcast adolescents from West Memphis, Arkansas, who were convicted of murdering three seven-year-old boys as part of a Satanic cult ritual in a wooded area bordering Interstate 55, known as the Robin Hood Hills. While researching the novel, Shelton made several trips to Arkansas to attend court proceedings, conduct interviews (including several with Damien Echols, the central defendant who now sits on Death Row), and examine case files. She has already begun another novel, Alice Christie, about an inventor’s daughter who disappears in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1896 and the two young women who surface in Detroit fifteen years later claiming to be Alice.
Molière’s dirty dishes in the kitchen. Valentine’s Day is the most loathed day on the calendar. Although this year has seen a mild winter in Chicago, the over-the-top gestures and material goods associated with Valentine’s Day are as prevalent as ever. The day is marked by a barrage of staccato images: the sound of grapefruit on the kitchen table, the stark table with its built-in sink dripping tepid water, the sound of everyone reading and me wanting to talk. For Coleman, such particular images bridge that crucial gap between the narrative urge to tell a story and the epistemological longing to know what is being represented.

These brief examples open into a consideration of the family, which is germane not only to the day’s theatrical text but also to the critical text that has been assigned, Claude Levi-Strauss’s The Savage Mind. In chapters on family, marriage, and kinship, Levi-Strauss explores how these categories are historically, economically, and geographically contingent, never “natural” in themselves but always occupying a core position in the structure of a given society. Students then consider the possible range of family formations and how those might be represented in their particular society. Conversely, they consider what specific images allow us to know about a given family. Moving between the loci of family life and a photograph is an experience familiar to participants in “Text and Performance” a class that continually asks how critical analysis can be a performative practice and how performance can serve as a critical endeavor.

By problematizing and destabilizing the family, the discussion prepares the students for staging scenes from The Miser. Molière’s play presents the family in vapid terms; blood ties fail to produce the expected familial feeling while economic considerations and other common interests do. The scene is rarely straightforward; instead, it is a complex web of emotions and motivations. This necessitates a careful analysis of the text to understand the relationships between the characters and their actions.

The entrance of a black-jacketed, fedora-hatted figure slowly petting a cat begins to answer the question. With almost magisterial privilege, the figure sits behind the table and motions to the others to enter. These figures, crowned in green fedoras (perhaps coloring the scene in awe), escort a young man who takes a seat in front of the seated figure. The seated figure speaks in a gravelly voice not unlike Marlon Brando’s Don Corleone, informing us where we are: in the world of the mafia, another family structure superior imposed upon the array of kinship structures already at play in Mafia. The Godfather, seated and directing the action, becomes the figure through which the scenes portray the Miser’s absolute authority and the stakes of his authority. The cat that the actor uses to complete the scene is laudatory, a symbol of power and control.

The Godfather/ Miser is a figure of endurance, but the cat’s increasingly apparent tamed state points to the menace of the Miser’s avarice (in the play, he steals oats from his horses). When the Godfather’s son finally proclaims, “I have loved Marianne,” the Godfather/ Miser is reduced to the role of bystander in the face of the Miser’s authority. The cat that he compulsion-
Enlightenment and pride in Proof’s Chicago connections along with the play’s other attractions.

The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis was one of the first regional theaters to stage Proof, which opened in New York two years ago and at this writing is still on Broadway and on national tour. I saw the St. Louis production twice first during its opening weekend for a cable television review, then later in the run at a University of Chicago alumni event. I found the play even more satisfying the second time.

Some of my extra enjoyment came from being part of the alumni group. A crack about an infinitesimal Ph.D. program drew a knowing response from the audience with the U of C contingent, and it was fun to speculate with other former Hyde Parkers about the street on which the house in the play might be located. The play itself, however, produced most of my additional satisfaction. The central question in a first viewing of Proof concerns the authorship of a brilliant mathematical proof discovered in the home of a revered University of Chicago professor who began a long mental decline in his mid-30s. Is the proof the work of the professor himself or his daughter, Catherine, who dropped out of college to live with her father when his mental illness required him to have a full-time caregiver? Suspense builds around other questions, too. Is Catherine showing signs of her father’s instability now that she has reached the age at which his symptoms began to appear? Will Catherine succumb to pressure from her older sister, Claire, to move to New York, where Claire can keep tabs on Catherine’s mental condition? Will a bond grow between Catherine and Hal, a student of her father’s who has been through the professor’s notebooks?

An indication of Proof’s nature is that knowledge of the outcome enriches the play instead of spoiling it. In a second viewing, when the authorship of the proof and other questions are no longer at issue, one can focus on how the construction of the play produces more than just suspense. Proof works as a mystery, but it also rewards close attention to the development of Catherine’s relationships with the other three characters. For example, Catherine’s fascination with the correspondence between two of her mathematical idols, Sophie Germain and Carl Friedrich Gauss, has more bearing on her choices than one might recognize at first.

The St. Louis production, directed by Susan V. Booth, was an distinguished effort. Susan Pourfar (Catherine) and Birk Berkus (Hal) were believable as young academics whose intellects do not help them deal with matters of the heart. William Bogert’s performance as Catherine’s father was so well attuned to different states of mind that Patrick Stewart’s portrayal of Claire, the outsider, impressed me more in my second viewing, when it was easier to understand a character who tries to manipulate someone so different from her.

The set by Todd Rosenthal meticulously recreated the back of a brick house that might be found near the University. Theater companies do not need the resources for such an elaborate scenic design, however, to stage Proof successfully. The human story in the play will move audiences for years come in productions by companies at all levels. The story seemed to crystallize the mystery of storytelling and the passion for teaching that marked Stern’s presence and contributions as an English professor for forty-six years at the University of Chicago.

Richard Stern has had a long and distinguished career. After earning a B.A. from the University of North Carolina (1947), an M.A. from Harvard (1949) and a PhD. from the University of Iowa (1954), Stern took his first American teaching position at Connecticut College. Before that, he had taught at the University of Heidelberg and the College Jules Ferry in France. In 1959, Stern began teaching at the University of Chicago with responsibilities both in the Committee on General Studies in the Humanities and the Department of English Language and Literature. Over the years, Stern has been a prolific and well-respected writer, a chairman of the faculty committee of the Chicago Review, and, of course, an educator teaching writing as well as courses on the novel, drama, and contemporary criticism both on campus and abroad. He has brought many notable authors to interact with students and faculty on the University of Chicago’s campus including Ralph Ellison, Norman Mailer, and Flannery O’Connor. At the time of his retirement on January 1, 2002, Richard Stern held the title of Helen A. Regenstein Professor of English and of the Humanities.

What constantly strikes me, as a former student of his, is that Richard Stern represents a legacy not just in the literary influences of his writing—figures such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the early F. Scott Fitzgerald—but also in the sheer list of distinguished writers that Stern has communicated with over his career. I recall a response for first-year Ph.D. students, including myself, in the English Department. We were privileged to hear Stern’s tale of his meeting with Pound in Venice and the circumstances of his receiving a bust of Pound, which now occupies a corner of the English Department’s lounge. In the midst of my eagerness to begin the intellectual exchanges that characterize the University of Chicago experience, Stern’s presence reminded me of how these exist alongside many other meaningful exchanges that extend beyond the university’s geographical boundaries. He embodies what he loves most about Chicago, this “brutal yet gorgeous” city with its rich and diverse ethnic communities; the interdependence and interconnection of people and institutions on all levels, from politics to the neighborhods to the university. This is a quality that he shares freely as a teacher, inspiring his students, especially his writing students, to see themselves as a valuable and contributing part of this legacy.
RECENT JOB PLACEMENTS FOR HUMANITIES GRADUATES

Looking for other Chicago alumni at your institution or in your area? Curious about where last year’s class of humanities graduates got their jobs? Here is a list of recent graduates, with thesis or dissertation titles and job titles, who have accepted full-time employment that exercises their graduate training.

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

HUMAN RIGHTS

"Situating Sheila-na-gail: The Female Body and Social Significance in Romancenesque Sculpture," Assistant Professor, Middlebury College.

KARIN CARTER

"L’Age de l’Affiche: The Reception, Display, and Collection of Illustrated Posters in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," Assistant Professor, Macalester International College (Japan).

LISA DEAP

"Mapping the Past: Thal Hufu des Historien (Brussels, Bihistayiq Rqgg, 9323-9352) in the Context of Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Historiography," Assistant Professor, Vassar College.

LINDA CRAMOND

"Private Objects, Public Institutions: French Art in the Nineteenth Century," Assistant Professor, Sabançi University, Istanbul.

STEVEN BROOKS EGGLESTON

"Origins of Matag: The Natural Human Body in Literature and Art of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," Assistant Professor, Washington University.

KATHERINE ELBRANDT

"Poor Impostors, Public Objects: French Art in the Nineteenth Century," Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

AMANDA EWINGTON

"The Qur’anic Exchange of Power: The Impact of Poet-Critic to Russian Philosopher," Assistant Professor, Davidson College.

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

JARED GRIFFITH

"Models of Exile Kosmopolis, Nabulus, Kurdistan," Lecturer, Western Michigan University.

YUHUA HAN

"Theatrical Dislocation and Dancing Caudets Annuis Vealodes and Sixteenth-Century Popular Culture," Postdoctoral Fellow, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin).

NEHA JADHAV

"Songs – and next recent vie– mepolgy: Historical Context and Fictional Truth in Dramatic Poetry from the Time of the Hundred Years’ War," Assistant Director, University Writing Programs, University of Chicago.

MARCOS KATILI

"The Politics of Nostalgia: An Essay on Ways of Remembering the Past," Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor, University of São Paulo (Brazil).

COTTON KELLY

"The Anxiety of Trauma: Representations of Disaster in Colonial and Contemporary Latin America," Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

MARK PETERS


DANIEL F. FOSTER

"The Hollowing of Politics as Postmodernism’s Ring Cycle and the Greeks," Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Texas, Austin.

JOSHUA DAVID HOLSTEIN

"Modernism Meets Nationalism: Bala Bantli and the Musical Life of Pre-World-War-I Hungary," Assistant Professor, University of Richmond.

RECENT JOB PLACEMENTS FOR HUMANITIES GRADUATES

If you or someone you know should be listed here, please contact your department. The Division is working to maintain accurate records of job placement.

Alumni Affairs
ACTIVIST ART has a rich history in Chicago, one that has been marked in recent decades by artists who use conceptually-based practices to address complex social issues. Currently the mix includes artists and collectives who have been working here for years, newcomers from other cities, and emerging artists. Their work is sustained in part by a critical mass of artists who share information, debate ideas, and collaborate on projects. This is not a self-defined or regionally-identified group, but rather a series of overlapping clusters of artists who have chosen to base their practices in Chicago, but often work in far-flung places. To reflect the importance that communication, dissemination, and collaboration have on this work, the structure and content of Critical Mass are being developed through close collaboration among artists and curator. The project will consist of interventions into the museum and other sites to create a series of interconnected spaces and activities. Since activist art is often motivated by the desire to escape the confines of institutions, this project offers an opportunity to highlight current socially engaged art in Chicago while exploring the possibilities and limitations of the museum. Among the artists featured in this exhibition are COFA faculty member Bob Peters and recent COFA graduates Marc Fischer (MFA ’96) and Brett Bloom (MFA ’96).