Reimagining Art Futures for Recovery

BY CAROLYN RANDOLPH-KATO

Arts Impact, a research initiative within the College of Fine and Applied Arts (FAA), hosted a virtual panel discussion this fall to facilitate an important dialogue about the challenges and opportunities facing art, artists, and their communities as they look toward recovery from COVID-19 and systemic racism. The event featured guest panelists Jamie Bennett (Interim President & CEO, United States Artists), Dr. Cynthia Oliver (Professor of Dance and Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Humanities, Arts, and Related Fields at the University of Illinois), Dr. Jennifer Novak-Leonard (Associate Research Professor and Research Director of Arts Impact Initiative in the College of Fine and Applied Arts), and Kevin Hamilton (Dean, College of Fine and Applied Arts) as moderator.

In addition to his participation in the panel discussion, Jamie Bennett participated in a two-day campus visit designed to engage our college, campus, and community. This included four classroom visits with undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in courses across the college including Art and Design, Theatre, and Urban and Regional Planning. Here, Bennett provided a twenty-minute presentation that shared key insights from ArtPlace America, a ten-year creative placemaking initiative supported by the Obama Administration. Bennett presented several examples of how artists, using the range of their skillsets (i.e., artistic, scholarly, social, emotive, etc.) generated transformative change within their communities including enhanced social cohesion, community safety, racial healing, trauma recovery, and environmental protection.

These shared learning opportunities were critical for understanding the ways that artists can be brought more centrally into conversations surrounding city planning and how they can operate as social change agents to contribute to healthier communities. It also highlighted how cross sector partnerships across policy, philanthropy, and artists and culture can successfully work together to support arts-based efforts to enhance the way we work and live.

Jamie Bennett’s campus visit and participation on the panel is one of the ways that the FAA’s Arts Impact Initiative is grappling with the ‘question of tomorrow’ or how we collectively reimagine and then create equitable and just futures as we plan for recovery from COVID-19 and systemic racism. This visit, in particular, was a key moment for facilitating a much-needed dialogue about where we are as creative communities, where we aim to be, and what it will take to get there as a student body, college campus, alumni, donors – and as a collective, more broadly.

Central to our aim was to foster a deeper understanding about the vital role of art and artists in community development and in promoting social well-being to help guide arts practice and policy. This work begins at home. And, as Arts Impact looks toward the future, it is excited to build on this momentum with spring semester programming that will continue to grow our community of practice through panel discussions and public forums that will highlight Arts Impact-supported research currently underway that addresses key information needs about the arts and culture ecosystem in Illinois.

Want to get involved? We are committed to growing our local, regional, and national communities of practice. Visit dimension.faa.illinois.edu for the most up-to-date information on our research and ongoing efforts.

ARCHITECTURE
ART & DESIGN
DANCE
JAPAN HOUSE
KRANNERT
ART MUSEUM
KRANNERT CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE
MUSIC
THEATRE
URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING
Fall 2021 finds our FAA communities emerging from a year of disruption like no other. Like an audience emerging from a transformative performance, we’re checking our senses against reality, comparing what we’ve experienced and learned thus far, taking inventory, realigning our expectations of the world. We of course bring many a memorable success story in how staff, faculty, and students responded to the ongoing global health pandemic, and to a nation roiled by the renewed visibility of long-standing forms of racist oppression. But our learning process is far from over, and in many ways is just beginning.

Arguably, those in the arts are more aware than most of how crisis, loss, and trauma reveal the world anew: Such forms of revelation, however difficult, are at times exactly what we seek in the performances or exhibitions we create. Where the past year’s struggles found many an institution rushing to reassert their principles, identity, and goals, here in the arts we are used to having those things shaken. Through design, art, or research, we regularly seek destabilization as a way to discover who we really are.

To that end, our questions ahead as a college include some shared across higher education and some specific to the arts. With opportunity and income gaps widening in this country, what role does a residential college education play in social and economic mobility? How do the new forms of learning made possible by online education change who we serve? How does education in arts, design, architecture, and planning prepare one to be part of the deep cultural and structural transformation required to achieve lasting equity for all? What roles do the arts play in how cities plan for collective thriving in the face of climate migration, globalization, and rising calls for wealth redistribution and police reform or abolition?

For many an organization, such questions create division, confusion, or paralysis. Not so here in FAA. The past year has proven beyond a doubt that we are not only well prepared for a turbulent future, but uniquely suited to lead within it. Our programs did more than just get by during the past year of diminished opportunities for gathering. Faculty, staff, and students turned to the work of ensuring that we have the right systems and structures in place to support life. They applied their own disciplinary knowledge to improvise, critique, and design new forms of living and working together. We may not be where we want to be as a collection of opportunities for equitable creation and discovery, but we know where to start in that process. Our forms of craft lead us to begin with the particular in order to reach the global. The greatness of what our alumni and faculty produce pays testament as much to maintenance, care, and repair as innovation.

In this issue of Dimension, we highlight work by faculty, staff, and alumni that are particularly focused on the future. You’ll find here some pictures of not only vision but commitments, as we seek to make ourselves ever more accountable to the change of which we want to be part. My years in the dean role have taught me that what makes our college unique is not only our diversity of aesthetic approaches and disciplines, but the ways we propose new forms of living and follow through in delivery on those forms – all the way through to the long-term processes of reflection and correction required for matching words to actions.

As the flagship arts college in a state long known as a leader not only in the arts but in arts policy and advocacy, we stand to prepare not only ever better artists, designers, architects, scholars, teachers, and planners, but ever better neighbors. FAA has big plans to this end of which you’ll see a glimpse in these pages. May this transitional year of adjustment and reflection bring us into ever more effective and lasting partnerships with you in your own efforts to see change.
Dance at Illinois is getting a long overdue curriculum redesign. Built on a traditional conservatory model, the dance curriculum at Illinois was developed over 50 years ago with a bias toward ballet and modern dance forms. It became clear to the faculty and students that it was time to reimagine what Dance at Illinois could be. “We felt stymied by what we could do creatively due to self-imposed mandates that certain techniques had to be taught every semester over others,” shared Dr. Kemal Nance, assistant professor of dance at Illinois. The idea of decentralizing the curriculum became the focus of undoing the department’s history of systemic racism. By breaking down the barriers that existed within the current, outdated curriculum, its faculty and students now have the flexibility and freedom to pursue other forms of dance in their research and teaching. Nance, a master teacher of the Umfundalai technique of contemporary African dance; Professor Sara Hook, celebrated performer and choreographer; and Professor Linda Lehovec led the department’s curriculum redesign efforts.

“We were at the tail end of a faculty retreat in May 2019. At the end of a day-long conversation, it became really obvious that there was a need to do something. We weren’t clear what that something was at the time, but we knew something had to change. Our offerings as a body of specialists was so rich and yet that collective wasn’t reflected in the curriculum,” recalled Nance. Hook and Nance began meeting weekly over the summer to talk through some ideas. Department Head Jan Erkert officially charged them with redesigning the curriculum, and they formed an ad hoc committee of students and faculty called the Reimagining Team. Together, the department has redesigned the dance curriculum at Illinois to collectively support a progressive, equitable, and anti-racist dance program.

The Department of Dance at Illinois has made significant changes in regard to who dances since Jan Erkert’s tenure as department head began in 2006. Underrepresented minorities now make up 49% of the student body and 27% of the faculty, compared to just 7% and 10%, respectively in 2007. “In order to create a truly inclusive environment, our community continues to explore, confront, and expand our personal and embodied relationships to the effects of all types of oppression. We are addressing the systemic racism contained in policies, processes, and nomenclature of our curriculum. I believe that consistent and steady efforts are necessary to create transformational change,” said Erkert.

Changes in the dance curriculum at Illinois are already beginning to take place as a result of the efforts of Erkert, Nance, Hook, and the committee. The new curriculum better reflects Illinois’ role as a leading land-grant research university by exposing students to a global spectrum of aesthetics and dance forms to include contemporary African dance forms and diasporic dance, as well as urban social dance forms such as hip hop, house, and vogue. Nance added, “By diversifying the movement systems that inform what we call dance, we’re diversifying what it means to get a dance degree.” Prioritizing inclusivity for all, the department is shifting away from a “one size fits all” standard of pedagogy and championing the support of a much wider breadth of dance research and collaboration across the department. These curriculum changes are setting up dance students at Illinois to be creative problem solvers and innovators in their field – ultimately going on to make the world a better place once they graduate and leave campus.
Changing Who Writes History, One Op-Ed at a Time
BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

Jan Erkert – department head, professor, author, dancer, mentor, artistic director, and now a successful op-ed writer – joined 19 other Public Voices Fellows from the University of Illinois this past year as part of the national OpEd Project. The mission of the project is to change who writes history by training underrepresented professionals, women in particular, to write and publish op-eds that draw on their field of expertise. The unfortunate reality is that most opinion articles from our current traditional media sources are written by white men. How does that effect how we consume ideas and form our own opinions? A more inclusive media, one that incorporates the ideas and opinions of our nation’s top experts across disciplines and fields, regardless of gender or race, will lead to major change in public policies and the historical record moving forward.

Jan Erkert has been writing a book on leadership for the last five years. As a dance professor, leader, and expert on the body, she feels that it is her “mission to try to help share what we know as dancers in a broader way.” Most books, case studies, and articles on leadership focus on how to lead from a business perspective, or in other words how to increase productivity and profits. What if the goal is instead to create a transformative community that impacts change for a more preferable future? The Public Voices Fellowship provided Erkert with the knowledge, support, and connections with media insiders to not only write powerful opinion pieces, but also how to make sure her voice is heard. In the past year, she has published op-eds written on topics ranging from diversity education, racism, and George Floyd’s murder to the current political climate, COVID-19 mitigation, and the 2020 presidential election. Each of these was written from a unique perspective that uses part of the body or how the body functions as a metaphor to connect to current news or events. Erkert shared, “Everybody has a body full of wisdom. What can our body teach us about the way we live our life and lead? As a dance artist, I have had the privilege of cultivating messages from my senses, daily. It is a requirement of the job. I hope to shed light on how people can access the body to understand how they’re living their life and why they or others make the choices they do.”

Follow Jan Erkert at authory.com/JanErkert to read her current and future op-eds.

URBANITE Brings Live Performance Back to the Community
BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

URBANITE, a dance showcase featuring more than 15 groups ranging from hip hop choreography to Latin and contemporary dance, made its triumphant return to the stage this year. A little over one year after their last live performance at The City Center in Champaign, Memorial Stadium’s large outdoor venue provided an opportunity for the dance groups to bring live entertainment back to campus and the community. URBANITE is produced by Roxwell Curates, an event production company owned by School of Architecture alumnus Douglas Delayney Layne (BSAS ’01), in partnership with University of Illinois Student Affairs, College of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Illinois Athletics, and the Department of Dance. Organizers worked closely with campus’s public health experts to ensure the health and safety of the performers and attendees. Over 150 individual artists and dance professionals contributed to the performance including Kida The Great, Jabari Timmons, and Kendrick Willis. In addition to the 1.5K attendees that watched the show in person, URBANITE live-streamed to a virtual audience across the country via Instagram.
Instead of being an ‘escape’ through a colonial worldview – it’s structured to be an indigenous futurism through a young Native person’s mindset that offers us healing for the future.

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

Amplifying social equity requires us to take a critical look at how racism intersects with the stories we pass down to future generations. As a director, writer, and performer, Madeline Sayet believes that every story we put into this world has the power to harm or heal and that the stories we tell through theatre can build a better future.

Illinois Theatre is excited to be collaborating with Sayet on The Neverland, a new work of theatre written by Sayet which will make its world-premiere at the University of Illinois in the spring of 2022. An adaptation of Peter Pan, the play will be designed, performed, managed, and studied by University of Illinois students and faculty. Madeline Sayet, executive director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program and recipient of the White House Champion of Change Award, will serve as a resident guest artist with the Department of Theatre over the course of production. Funded by the University of Illinois System Presidential Initiative: Expanding the Impact of the Arts and the Humanities, this project will offer a new take on a classic story that strives to increase knowledge and understanding around Indigenous performance.

Lisa Gaye Dixon, professor and producer for Illinois Theatre, is thrilled to be bringing this new and unique work to the University of Illinois. “I am quite excited to be helping Ms. Sayet develop this work – supporting a critical reimagining of a popular (heretofore unquestioned) western fairytale, and updating it to ask and possibly answer questions about representation, while creating an imaginative tale for all ages is part of what Illinois Theatre is all about. As we move forward into supporting/producing more new works, while also reimagining classics, we are giving our students – and our greater CU community – a variety of theatrical experiences that can, I hope, open hearts and minds, and begin new conversations.”

Madeline Sayet has been named a Forbes 30 Under 30 in Hollywood and Entertainment, a TED Fellow, and an MIT Media Lab Director’s Fellow for her work. Sayet, a member of the Mohegan Nation, became the first Native American playwright to perform at Shakespeare’s Globe in London, debuting a solo performance of her work Where We Belong in June 2019. This year, it was released as a film adaptation from Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, DC, in association with the Folger Shakespeare Library. Her recent directing work includes a modern adaptation of Sophocles’s Antigone at Butler University, Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2 performed at the Connecticut Repertory Theatre, and the world premiere of Inupiat playwright Cathy Tagnak Rexford’s Whole Song performed at Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska.

The University of Illinois is committed to acknowledging its responsibility to the Native Nations for whom Illinois is their ancestral home. By recognizing and repairing past wrongs, while also developing new campus traditions, the university is dedicated to providing a better home to native students. Increasing knowledge and understanding around the experiences of Indigenous peoples through the performing arts is a small but important step in that direction. When asked about The Neverland and how it will differ from the traditional fairytale, Sayet shared, ‘Instead of being an ‘escape’ through a colonial worldview – it’s structured to be an indigenous futurism through a young Native person’s mindset that offers us healing for the future.”
Definition Theatre has been making a big impact on Chicago theatre since it was cofounded in 2012 by University of Illinois alumni Tyrone Phillips (BFA '12) and Julian Parker (BFA '12). The culturally diverse ensemble of directors, playwrights, administrators, and actors has grown to nearly 30 members including Academy Award-nominated actress Kiki Layne and a number of up and coming playwrights. The Definition Theatre team has made it a priority to work towards and represent a more equitable theatre industry that tells stories about and created with underrepresented communities in Chicago.

The small Chicago theatre company is getting a new, permanent home in the South Side neighborhood of Woodlawn. Selected in 2019 to receive $1.6 million in direct funding from the City of Chicago's Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, Definition Theatre is expected to break ground in 2024 on the corner of 64th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue. The new black-box theatre and community center hopes to kick off their inaugural season in Woodlawn the following year. Cofounder and Artistic Director Tyrone Phillips is dedicated to the theatre company’s mission of creating a diverse and inclusive space for all, “Our new theater will allow us to practice what we preach every day. Many of us first generation artists know well the obstacles to feeling you have a place in the theater. This is us creating a space of inclusion.”

The new space will also serve as a community center that will provide professional development opportunities for future generations of theatre artists and serve as a business incubator for women, black, indigenous, and other people of color-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. As Definition Theatre will soon celebrate its 10th anniversary, this new chapter will allow the company and its founders to fulfill their vision of providing an arts experience for every community member. While plans are still underway, Phillips is hopeful that their new building will expand the company’s work to include children’s theatre, a café, educational space, and a rehearsal room and visual art space.

This past year, Definition Theatre teamed up with UChicago’s Arts + Public Life’s Green Line Performing Arts Center in Washington Park to film scenes from works selected for their new play commissioning program, Amplify. Amplify was created during the pandemic to provide space and resources to underrepresented theatre creatives in the development of their new works. The company selected eight semifinalists out of 30 submissions to present in their Amplify Digital Showcase. Scenes from each of the eight new works were filmed in accordance with COVID-19 safety guidelines and premiered over two nights in February 2021. Four of the eight new works were selected and commissioned for full development, at least one of which they hope will be part of Definition Theatre’s inaugural season at their new home in Woodlawn once it opens to the public. Phillips commented on the announcement of Amplify’s new play commissions, “It is imperative to support Chicago artists by holding space for them to find their voice. We have great expectations for these incredibly talented playwrights and look forward to watching these four plays develop with great care.”

Definition Theatre has also been committed to working as activists and advocates to create a platform and a voice for underrepresented community members in Chicago. Cassandra Greer-Lee recently became an activist in her fight to demand justice for her husband’s death of COVID-19 in April 2021 while in the custody of Cook County Jail. In conjunction with Definition Theatre and other local artists, Cassandra created a powerful three-part animated short film entitled 132 Calls for the 132 calls Cassandra made to the county jail in an effort to save her husband. More about 132 Calls can be found at definitiontheatre.org/132-calls.

Coming this fall 2021 from Definition Theatre is Stacey Rose’s America v.2.1: The Sad Demise & Eventual Extinction of the American Negro. The play, set in a dystopian future, is about a company of actors that are “tasked with re-telling the history of the American Negro” and find themselves fighting for their own survival. As this dark, satirical comedy unfolds, the actors are “forced to confront the very systems of power that have dictated their existence, and the oppressive cycles which they have fallen into themselves.” To learn more about this and other upcoming Definition Theatre projects, go to definitiontheatre.org.

Illinois Alumni-Founded Company, Definition Theatre, Expected to Break Ground 2024

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS
Rethinking Access and Inclusion Through Non-Normative Perspectives

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

Krannert Art Museum (KAM) recently brought on visual artist and educator Liza Sylvestre (MFA ’19) as the museum’s inaugural curator of academic programs. In this new role, Sylvestre is responsible for connecting the university’s faculty and students to the museum – developing KAM into a vital teaching resource across all disciplines at the University of Illinois. Sylvestre is known for her intersectional and multidisciplinary work that explores the ways in which our senses alter our experience and perception of the world.

In her new position, Sylvestre is working to ensure that support and programming around disability, access, and inclusion extends beyond academics at the University of Illinois to also provide inclusive creative outlets for students with disabilities. “I am a person who has lived with a disability my entire life, so I understand disability as an identity category; a source of creativity; a fact that has often been painful, excluding, and isolating; a lesson in empathy; and a condition that has taught me about the ways non-normative issues connect people across seemingly distinct identities,” shared Sylvestre.

She has partnered with PACE, Inc. (Persons Assuming Control of their Environment), a service organization in East Central Illinois that supports the efforts of people with disabilities to achieve or maintain independence. The services they offer are designed by people who have personal experience with disability, as PACE is not only for people with disabilities, it’s also run by them. Sylvestre led the development of specialized tours of KAM that prioritize multisensory learning and experience for those that visit the museum. “My approach to institutional spaces is framed largely by issues of access related to my profound hearing loss,” said Sylvestre. “The experience of living with a disability allows one to clearly see the ways in which cultural institutions exclude non-normative bodies and marginalized identities. How we, as citizens, understand disability is formed largely by how institutions like museums broach the subject. Access should be thought of as something that extends beyond gestures of accommodation and considers non-normative perspectives in the way that content is framed and generated.”

Crip*, a group exhibition curated by Liza Sylvestre, is on view at KAM now through December 11, featuring artists who address disability and intersectional thinking. Some of the artists identify as disabled; some do not, but each has a relationship to (at least one) non-normative identity. The exhibition fractures and reassembles how we think about identity within the framework of our culture. Reverberations between Crip* works ask us to redefine and question our own ingrained thinking about what it means to move through a world that both rejects and capitalizes on experiences that are not perceived as normal. Go to kam.illinois.edu/exhibition/crip to learn more about this new exhibition.
Japan House Is Getting a New Annex to Accommodate Growing Interest in the Community

By Michael Darin and Lindsey Stirek

The roots of Japan House go back to 1964, when Shozo Sato, then artist-in-residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and now professor emeritus of the School of Art and Design, began a series of courses focusing on the art and culture of Japan. Eventually, he renovated an old Victorian house to teach classes. He continued to teach numerous courses there and began the tradition of open houses and welcoming the broader community to learn more about Japanese culture.

In the early 90s, the university absorbed the location of the original Japan House for the construction of the Alumni Center, and the dream of a permanent home for Japan House began. The current structure was funded primarily through generous private contributions and was dedicated in June of 1998 with Kimiko Gunji as director. The focus of the traditional Japanese-styled structure is its three authentic tea rooms surrounding a large activity and classroom. Under the direction of Professor Gunji, Japan House expanded its classes and offerings, also collaborating with other units and organizations to bring Japanese artists and performers to Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Krannert Art Museum, the Spurlock Museum, and the Campus Honors Program.

Over the past 21 years, Japan House continued to grow and welcome students and the general public to academic courses, workshops, public and private tea ceremonies, ikebana classes, shodo (calligraphy) classes, and a vast number of events centering on Japanese Arts and Culture including Matsuri festival, Moonviewing, open houses, winter bazaar, cooking classes, Girls’ Day Celebration, Children’s Day, and much more.

Japan House is incredibly blessed. The classes and workshops fill within the first day of release; most public teas sell out; and the events exceed expectations of attendance. Since 1998, Japan House has welcomed over 100,000 guests.

Due to the growth of interest and recognition of Japan House as a valued cultural organization for the community and campus, the consideration of expansion was necessary. In 2017, Dr. George Ogura came to Urbana-Champaign for a visit and was surprised by the beauty and tranquility of the Illinois prairie and the cultural offerings that Japan House shared. He attended every event that Japan House held, and he decided to relocate here from his longtime home in Denver, Colorado. George became an avid supporter of Japan House and stated that although he was Japanese American, he never truly embraced his Japanese heritage until he visited Japan House. He was amazed by the number of visitors that were in attendance at the events and asked what he might be able to do to support the future of Japan House. He generously decided to gift Japan House $2 million dollars to create an annex that would house a permanent classroom, offices, a fully accessible tea room, and storage. His gift, along with additional major gifts from Professor Shozo Sato, Alice Sato, and Nick Offerman (BFA ’93 Theatre), and additional gifts from over 140 other friends of Japan House, brings the total private support for this project to over $2.25M. These contributions, combined with additional funding support from the Provost’s office will fund the construction of a 6200-square foot annex. Without the friendship and generosity of Dr. George Ogura, the Ogura-Sato Annex was merely a dream. Japan House held a groundbreaking ceremony on October 17, 2021 and hopes to welcome all in 2023.

Read more at dimension.faa.illinois.edu/visual-arts/japan-house/

Japan House Shares

Japan House has always been committed to providing wellness in the form of quality and inspiring engagement for its supporters, students, and the community.

Healing Through Virtual Zen Meditation

This past year the stress of isolation and uncertainty has taken its toll on all of us.

New Japanese Aesthetics Minor Coming Soon

Japan House is excited to introduce a new Japanese Aesthetics minor that will be available to students starting fall 2022.
Community Engagement and Peace Building Through Krannert Center

BY JANET HUBER

Sam Smith, Krannert Center’s director of civic engagement and social practice (MSW ’94), works to capture the increasing social impact of the Center’s engagement practice in local, national, and international contexts and along the thematic lines that reflect the Center’s commitment to social justice. His role has been shaped by ideas and direction from the core engagement team including Co-Directors of Engagement Emily Laugesen and Monique Rivera (MS ’20 Info Sciences) and recently retired Director of Outreach and Engagement Crystal Womble.

In recent years, Smith’s work has been influenced deeply by Michael Smith’s ongoing projects in Centralia and Champaign, Illinois, to examine and rectify the hurt caused to vulnerable communities by the United States’ “War on Drugs.” Projects involve STEM teaching and learning, community assessment and design, and efforts directed toward economic development, youth engagement and development, and violence prevention.

Juvenile Justice Engagement

A series of projects and activities that explore the need and feasibility for a juvenile justice council in Champaign County, which would advise stakeholders in strategies to reduce incarceration among juveniles, address ethnic disparities, and identify resources to respond to increasingly complex individual and community trauma. Currently presiding over the Illinois Association of Juvenile Justice Councils and completing a multiyear, multicounty Southern Illinois Violence Prevention Project.

Presidential Initiative: Expanding the Impact of the Arts and the Humanities

Teresa Barnes, Maimouna Barro, Mary Cathogo, Erik McDuffie, Tekita Bankhead and Sam Smith (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign); and Lynette Jackson and Kirk Hoppe (University of Illinois Chicago)

The development of a joint Africana World Studies project on the Urbana-Champaign and Chicago campuses will help break down longstanding academic silos of African studies and African American studies. Through a three-semester sequence, the project is expected to lead students to new opportunities for language learning and community engagement, and...
Krannert Center Gets Major Accessibility Upgrades

BY JANET HUBER

Krannert Center holds a long-standing commitment to improving accessibility around the arts, seeking ways in which the facility itself can be more navigable for everyone in our community. Prior to the pandemic, plans were being made to begin a major construction project to provide improved accessibility in the Center’s theatres. Beginning in the summer of 2020 while the theatres were not in use due to COVID-19 restrictions, the university’s Facilities and Services staff fast-tracked this work, resulting in exciting renovations that offer greater inclusivity at Krannert Center events.

Completed accessibility upgrades to Tryon Festival Theatre include wider lower-foyer side entrances and new carpet in the lower foyer with a lower pile for easier wheelchair use. Inside the theatre, the “score” seats across the back of the main floor have been removed to create space for additional wheelchair-accessible spots across the back-left and back-right sides.

In the Foellinger Great Hall lower and upper foyers, the carpet was also replaced. Along the northwest wall of the lower foyer, a new opening and a ramp now allow wheelchair navigation from Krannert Center’s north elevator to this lower foyer. The Great Hall’s score seats have also been removed, along with the back row of seating, allowing wheelchair-accessible and no-step spots across the back of the main floor. In the balcony, select flooring and steps were leveled to allow more few-step and no-step seats and wheelchair-accessible spots. The public restrooms in the lower foyer have also been upgraded to fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

Made possible by a recent donation, Krannert Center has a new fleet of manual wheelchairs available in widths of 16, 18, 20, and 24 inches, further promoting the Center’s values of inclusivity and accessibility. They can be requested for use in advance through the Ticket Office or through Patron Services staff upon arrival, and staff members or volunteers are available to help transport guests to and from the parking garage and the theatres as needed.

Accessibility improvements will continue into 2022 with renovations to Colwell Playhouse next summer and the addition of push bars inside and outside the elevators.

Rohd, theatre artist and founder of the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, and his beautiful distinctions between artistic, social, and civic engagement-based practices. Essentially for Rohd, “civil practice” refers to projects that bring artists into collaboration and codesign with community partners and local residents around a community-defined aspiration, challenge, or vision.

Additionally, Theaster Gates, the preeminent social practice artist for Chicago, Illinois, is also a significant influence. Gates’s broad, expansive, and ambitious work in the Woodlawn community in Chicago and the underlying belief that “Beauty is a Right” bolsters the equity orientation of civic engagement and social practice at Krannert Center.

Smith said, “Current areas of interest, focus, and work include community peace building. The PEACE (Promoting Education, Arts, and Community Engagement) Project began several years ago to unite work happening in Sierra Leone with neighborhood and community work in Urbana. This project involves peacemaking and community development that promotes safe, vibrant communities, restorative justice practices, and reforms to the juvenile legal system. In June 2021, we celebrated a five-year milestone of work in the Urbana Vawter/Silverwood neighborhood.”

Left: Sam Smith (center), along with Sierra Leone YMCA CEO and Freetown Rotarian Christian Kamara (left) and YMCA Eastern Area Director Frances Amadu (right), commemorate the establishment of a hand pump water well in the Koyagwema Community. Photo provided by Sam Smith.

it will impact the curriculum at both universities. The project leaders anticipate that the primary participants will be undergraduate students.

**Diaspora and Border Racial Justice Youth Project**

A Call-to-Action project from the Office of the Vice Chancellor designed to unite United States minoritized high school students and immigrant high school students in a study and exploration of commonalities of racialized histories of colonization and racism. Using storytelling and other forms of expression, students will design and present work that captures their life stories and experiences.

**Thomas Paine Elementary School Summer Enrichment Camp**

In collaboration with Urbana schools, a two-week summer arts camp based on the “Viewpoints” work of Mary Overlie and VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) facilitated discussion practices of Philip Yenawine and cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen to promote learner-centered meaning making and community building.

**Music is a Healer: The Legacy of Oscar Braimah Sulley**

A project to study, preserve, and present the original compositions of musician, teacher, and composer Oscar Braimah Sulley, in collaboration with Dean Kevin Hamilton; PhD student Mark McKnight; Banks, Bridgewater and Lewis Fine Arts Academy; and Joshua Stuart Harris of University Library System Media Preservation.
Each year the College of Fine and Applied Arts honors both past legacies and emerging voices in the arts by recognizing our alumni and friends who have impacted their fields in transformative ways. This year we celebrate the following individuals and their invaluable passion and service to the arts.

**Distinguished Legacy Awards**

Catherine M. Bleck (BFA ‘78 Art & Design)
Dina Griffin (BSAS ‘86 Architecture)
Ralph Johnson (BSAS ’71 Architecture)

**Emerging Legacy Awards**

Sarah M. Bassett (MUP ’13 Urban Planning)
Juri Seo (DMA ’13 Music)

**Illinois Arts Legacy Award**

Daniel J. Perrino (BME ’48, MS ’49 Music)
Shozo Sato
John Charles Wustman

Pictures represent awardees listed above from top left to bottom right.

**Alumni Achievements**

**Dina Griffin Awarded Illinois Medal in Architecture**

Dina Griffin, FAIA, NOMA, IIDA, was selected to receive the 2021 Illinois Medal in Architecture. The Illinois Medal in Architecture, first awarded in 1981, was established to recognize prominent University of Illinois School of Architecture alumni that exhibit a lifetime of professional dedication and excellence in the practice of architecture. Griffin is currently the president of Interactive Design Architects (IDEA), a Chicago-based firm that has collaborated on prestigious projects such as The Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Barack Obama Presidential Center. She was the principal architect on the contemporary design of the new Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus.

**Nathan Alan Davis Awarded Prestigious Windham-Campbell Prize**

Illinois Theatre alumnus and playwright Nathan Alan Davis (BFA ’05) is one of eight recipients from around the globe to be selected for the prestigious 2021 Windham-Campbell prizes. The Windham-Campbell prizes are global English-language awards that call attention to literary achievement and provide writers with an unrestricted grant of $165,000 to focus on their work independent of financial concerns. The judges referred to Davis as “an artist whose work fuses depth of feeling and love of language, balancing the profound, the prosaic, and an overwhelming desire to reach through the fourth wall and pull his audiences towards him.”

**JP Ramirez Wins Award for Design**

Alumnus JP Ramirez (BFA ‘11 Art & Design) designed the 2020 and 2021 MFA exhibition catalogs and websites. His work has been selected by the Type Directors Club TDC67 Annual Communication Design Competition judges to receive the Certificate of Typographic Excellence. His designs will be included in the Annual of the Type Directors Club and The World’s Best Typography. The winning entries will also be included in exhibitions that will tour Canada, China, England, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam. Ramirez’s work was selected with 254 other winners from more than 1,600 entries from 57 countries.

Looking for more FAA?

Visit the Dimension microsite at dimension.faa.illinois.edu for extended content and the most up-to-date news throughout the year.
Faculty Achievements

Cynthia Oliver Receives U.S. Artists Fellowship

Dance professor Cynthia Oliver was one of 60 United States Artists Fellows selected for 2021 and one of five fellows in the field of dance. This competitive fellowship is awarded to recognize the accomplishments of artists across ten creative disciplines. Fellows receive a $50,000 unrestricted cash award to support their artistic and professional development. A celebrated choreographer and performer, Oliver has danced with several professional companies before joining the faculty at Illinois including the David Gordon Pick Up Co., the Bebe Miller Company, Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, and Tere O’Connor Dance. Oliver’s work is a blend of dance theatre and spoken word that incorporates Caribbean performance with African and American forms.

Kathryn Anthony Awarded 2021 AIA/ACSA Topaz Medallion

Kathryn Anthony was awarded the 2021 AIA/ACSA Topaz Medallion. Kathryn Anthony is an architecture professor and serves as the Assistant Dean of Education (DRES) and likely many more who are not registered, so it’s critical to develop programming in support of that community, in support of their voices and their experiences,” shared Liza Silvestre, multimedia artist, curator of academic programs at Krannert Art Museum, and project lead. The research team will work with students and community members to identify sites on campus and in Urbana to create an oral history or subjective storytelling that explores the experiences of a person who has a disability. Sylvestre added, “We’re excited for the Arts CO+RE support, and it comes at an important time. We have the chance to explore what art should become in thinking about long-term access and how the pandemic has forced us to reckon with what access is and what access should be.”

Presidential Initiative: Expanding the Impact of the Arts and the Humanities

Now in its second year of system-wide funding, this presidential initiative is providing up to $2 million in support of proposals that will expand the impact of the arts and the humanities. FAA-affiliated faculty are involved in the following four proposals that received funding this year totaling $619,000.

Crippling the Arts

Karyn Sandlos (UIC) and Jorge Lucero (UIUC)

Crippling the Arts will build an art-focused collaboration to allow students, faculty, and disabled community members across the U of I System to take advantage of the well-recognized educational opportunities for people with disabilities at universities in Urbana-Champaign and Chicago. The project will begin with an exhibition in Chicago and Urbana-Champaign that will serve as the launch point for new community partnerships, teacher training, and artist residencies. Project leaders plan to transform spaces dedicated to the arts as well as art education and studio practice through new ideas about disability. Students from UIUC and UIC will be involved in all stages of programming.

Informing and Enabling Illinois’ Arts Ecosystem

Jennifer Novak-Leonard, Andrew Greenlee, and Magdalena Novoa (UIUC)

This arts-focused project will highlight the impact of the arts in communities around the state and help identify factors that can better support the arts and artists in different regions. The project intends to help propel the newly launched Arts Impact Initiative within the UIUC College of Fine and Applied Arts in collaboration with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The project also will include a series of public forums, along with generating a series of evidence- and data-driven issue briefs and an applied workshop course in Urban and Regional Planning that will pilot curricula that explores how arts and artists are a part of community development.

The Neverland, or “Why Are there American Indians in Peter Pan?”: A Collaborative Work on New Theatre – Gabriel Solis and Terri Ciofalo (UIUC)

The project’s leaders plan to produce a new work of theater, The Neverland by Madeline Sayet, executive director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program, in spring 2022. Sayet will serve a residency as a guest artist as part of the project. The play will be designed, performed, and studied by UIUC students and faculty, leading to the production of undergraduate and graduate research. The goal of this project is to substantially increase knowledge and understanding about Indigenous performance. Please see page 6 for the full story.

Africana World Studies at UIUC and UIC

Teresa Barnes, Maimouna Barro, Mary Cathogo, Erik McDuffie, Tekita Bankhead and Sam Smith (UIUC); and Lynette Jackson and Kirk Hoppe (UIC)

The development of a joint Africana World studies project on the UIC and UIUC campuses will help break down long-standing academic silos of African studies and African-American studies. Through a three-semester sequence, the project is expected to lead students to new opportunities for language learning and community engagement, and it will impact the curriculum at both universities. The project leaders anticipate that the primary participants will be undergraduate students.
Why Illinois? What inspired you to pursue the role of director at the Illinois School of Architecture?

I was enamored both by its remarkable history and its incredible potential. I was also intrigued by the possibility of designing a unifying paradigm between memory and desire as we move forward to draw the next few lines in the collective canvas of our imagination. During the past decade, I have served as both the Dean of a School of Architecture and the President of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. My own research has gravitated around a series of symposia, interviews, and visits of over 100 architecture schools in five continents resulting in a book titled Chronologies of an Architectural Pedagogy.

What are your top priorities as director?

I look forward to leading the school into the twenty-first century as an epicenter of design, research, and innovation aimed at the challenges posed by the new millennium. The school is part of a major research university that was just ranked by Forbes as one of the top 50 in the world, boasting a stellar academic community of students and professors that can compete with the very best both nationally and internationally. On the other hand, being part of a large major research public university also limits the possibility of moving at the speed of innovation and changes posed by the new millennium. We have to design a way to remain flexible and relevant, or we will be condemned to the role of observers.

How do you hope to positively impact students and faculty in your role as director in the next five years?

I am committed to repositioning the school at the forefront of the academic and professional discourse, expanding our international footprint and relevance. I would also like to find effective avenues to communicate what is ostensibly the beautiful and exciting story of the Illinois School of Architecture.

How do you think architecture education can best keep up with changes in the profession as we look to the future?

My ideas about architectural education tend to stem from the perspective of a practitioner; therefore, I will inevitably extend any disciplinary reflections into the realm of practice, and the search within my own experience of a unifying paradigm between theory and practice.

It is not the only duality I will address as a director. In this academic institution, as in most, we offer degrees that revolve strictly around the arts and others around the sciences, but as architects within this millenarian tradition called university, or universe of knowledge, I believe we are privileged to engage a discipline that is as much about one, as it is about the other: architecture – ar or archos and techne. Granted, in some places the pendulum may be somewhat inclined to the humanities and in others, such as our own experience, it may gravitate to a more technological pursuit; nevertheless, architecture, as a unique and remarkable discipline, inhabits a special place that is rather eloquent in sometimes contradictory worlds.

Because of the fact that I originally arrived in academia as a practicing architect teaching design, I gravitated to inquire and acquaint myself on the origins of the university: Plato and the Academy, Aristotle and the Lyceum, Cassidoryus and the liberal arts curriculum of the trivium and the quadrivium in a monastery in his hometown of Vivarium, the predecessor of the monastic schools that eventually evolved into the first universities in Bologna, Paris, and Salamanca. A thousand years later, we are still speculating about our place within this complex, and yes, sometimes contradictory, interlocking scaffolding of degrees, credits, requirements, and accreditations that we sometimes take for granted.

Our schools have been the epicenters of innovation and change, and yet, innovation, on this day and age, occurs faster than our own institutional ability to digest it in our academic circles, which are mostly well-meaning but rather slow and bureaucratic. Change is no longer taking place because, but in spite of our best intentions, so we need to sit down as an academic community and have a thoughtful conversation about our continued relevance as a discipline and about the shared and diverse platforms that our students will inherit from our generation, hopefully falling in love with the process the same way we did sometime during the waning years of the previous century.

The School of Architecture recently brought in some new faculty members. How do they play a role in your vision for the future of the school?

We have four new faculty positions joining the school: the Gertrude Kerbis endowed professorship in the area of structures, materials, and technological innovation; a digital fabrication tenure-track position; a health and well-being three-year position; and an associate director for academic affairs. These, along with two additional new faculty hires, will transform the immediate future of our academic community. These remarkable academics and practitioners from four different countries all share common denominators of talent, innovation, and experience, and I am ecstatic about the prospects - especially as we move to occupy a more prominent international platform within our discipline.
This past spring, the Illinois School of Architecture hosted its first all-female lecture series that included well-known deans, professors, researchers, practitioners, and community activists. Among these prominent women lecturers were Mexican architect Tatiana Bilbao, American author and activist Adrienne Brown, Dean of the Pratt School of Architecture and pedagogic pioneer Harriet Harriss, founder of Community Planning and Design Initiative Africa Nmadili Okwumabua, and author and celebrated architect Ersela Kripa. Topics ranged from trauma-informed design and global urbanism to social and cultural factors in architectural design.

The all-women Spring Visiting Lecture Series was conceived after the success of the 2019 Women in Architecture Symposium and Exhibition held at Krannert Art Museum. Organized and curated by Professors Marci Uihlein (BA ’95 LAS, MArch ’00), Sara Bartumeus, and Andrea Melgarejo de Berry, the event brought together an impressive group of researchers and professionals, including nearly 200 alumnae. Coinciding with the symposium, the Krannert Art Museum opened the Revealing Presence: Women in Architecture at the University of Illinois, 1874-2019 exhibit, illuminating the breadth of architectural work by women and their contribution to the built environment. The symposium was awarded Honorable Mention for 2021 Diversity Achievement from the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. The vision and subsequent impact of the Women in Architecture Symposium planted the seeds for the first all-woman visiting lecture series that was held virtually this year. The first of many more efforts to come, the School of Architecture is committed to elevating the voices of women and underrepresented individuals within the school and the profession.

The Illinois School of Architecture welcomed internationally recognized architect Toshiko Mori as the inaugural César Pelli Visiting Lecturer last spring. The Pelli Lecture Series was made possible through the generous estate gift of world-renowned architect and celebrated alumnus César Pelli. Pelli received his Master of Science in Architecture degree in 1954 from the University of Illinois and went on to design some of the world’s most iconic buildings, most notably the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur.

Toshiko Mori, founder of the New York-based Toshiko Mori Architect firm and the think tank Vision Arc, kicked off the César Pelli Distinguished Lecture Series earlier this year. Mori, a member of the World Economic Forum’s Global Agenda Council on Design and the Robert P. Hubbard Professor in the Practice of Architecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, is well known for her research-based approach to design. Visiting Pelli lecturers, like Mori, engage students in multiday co-teaching efforts of graduate studio learning and discussion sessions with faculty and students. The gift supports a visiting lecturer once a semester.

Sumayya Vally, co-founder of the Johannesburg-based studio Counterspace, was the fall 2021 César Pelli Visiting Lecturer. Vally was named on the 2021 TIME100 Next list of people “poised to make history” as the most influential architect “who is shaping and defining the next generation of leadership.” Counterspace’s latest project, led by Vally, was the design of the 20th Serpentine Pavilion in London. Vally is the youngest architect ever commissioned for this prestigious and internationally renowned project. The School of Architecture is thrilled to host Vally on campus this fall.
The School of Music embarked on a year of transition as leadership was prompted to reflect on the direction of its conducting program in the wake of the retirement of Donald Schleicher after a long and storied career. Upon the conclusion of an extensive search in March 2021, the School of Music announced the appointment of Professor William Eddins as Visiting Director of Orchestras and Conductor of the UI Symphony Orchestra for the 2021–2022 academic year. This year with Eddins will be an important time for the School of Music’s conducting program to learn and grow. Director Jeffrey Sposato shared, “A central focus of our work right now is building diversity, both of our student body and the music we perform. In fact, these two things go hand-in-hand. We want a student body that reflects the diversity of our state, and to achieve that we need to embrace more than just Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. We are also now celebrating music both new and old by BIPOC composers, LGBTQ composers, and women composers. This not only reflects our commitment to diversity - it better prepares our students for the modern music marketplace. Conductors like Professor Eddins, who have performed with musicians both within and outside the classical world and who have experience with a broad range of composers and styles, help to remind our students that music is a living thing that grows and develops, and that embracing that ideal is essential for professional musicians today.”

In addition to conducting the school’s premier orchestra, the UI Symphony Orchestra, Professor Eddins will be mentoring graduate orchestral conducting students and providing his expertise in a faculty workshop that will explore innovative ideas for the programming of large ensembles, including orchestras, choruses, and bands. When asked about his upcoming conducting classes and seminars, Eddins commented, “For me it is always fun working with younger conductors who are trying to progress in what they do, because conducting is the art of the simple made difficult. At the same time, when you are conducting, it should be your job to make the difficult be easy.”

William Eddins began his conducting career as an apprentice conductor with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the tutelage of Daniel Barenboim. He has since served as a guest conductor for nearly every major orchestra and held the positions of Resident Conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1997 to 2003 and Music Director of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra from 2005 to 2017. He regularly conducts the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with soloist Wynton Marsalis, and he has collaborated with such renowned artists as Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Barenboim, Itzhak Perlman, Dawn Upshaw, Joshua Bell, The Kronos Quartet, and Edgar Meyer.

A native of Buffalo, NY, Eddins attended the Eastman School of Music, studying with David Effron and graduating at age 18. He also studied conducting with Daniel Lewis at the University of Southern California and was a founding member of the New World Symphony in Miami, FL. He has released a compact disc recording on his own label that includes Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” Sonata and William Albright’s The Nightmare Fantasy Rag.

In addition to his talents as a conductor, he is also a gifted pianist and chamber musician, as well as a savvy entrepreneur. One of his most notable entrepreneurial pursuits was becoming the co-founder of the MetroNOME Brewery LLC, a socially missioned brewery established during summer 2020 with the objective of Nurturing Outstanding Music Education in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The proceeds from MetroNOME go to providing musical instruments, lessons, and education for underprivileged youth in the Twin Cities metro area.

Photo provided by William Eddins.
ENCORE Illinois: Setting up students for success after graduation

BY ELIZABETH PETERSON

During the height of the pandemic and for the start of the spring 2021 semester, performing ensembles, especially bands and choirs, adhered to a strictly enforced set of protocols designed to keep students and faculty safe, making ensemble participation possible but different. Additionally, the conductors of these ensembles offered a virtual ‘ensemble’ option called ENCORE Illinois so students who remained off campus could participate and earn their ensemble credit. Led by conducting faculty, ENCORE included a diverse group of expert panelists from around the country who asynchronously explored a variety of timely topics including entrepreneurship, careers in the arts, cultural sensitivity, and the composition process.

Students were asked to select eight topics that interested them, submit questions to the expert panelists, and write a reflection on the presentation. The program was quite successful as it allowed faculty and students to examine these topics without the pressure of the next concert performance. One student shared, “I watched every video and learned a great deal from each session. I appreciated the topics that were discussed, as well as the diverse panel of speakers. They talked about difficult topics, but they did so in a way that was meaningful, relatable, and helpful for future educators and musicians.”

School of Music alumni have found success in a variety of music-related fields. ENCORE Illinois challenges students to explore relevant, real-world topics and careers in music so they can appreciate what full-time employment as a musician after graduation might look like. In doing so, the School of Music is preparing students to chart their own path in the musical world – producing graduates who will find new and innovative ways to serve the field of music and their communities. Watch all of the ENCORE Illinois panel discussions at go.illinois.edu/encore.

Lift Every Voice: PBS features University of Illinois Black Chorus in American Portrait Central Illinois Documentary

BY REBEKKA PRICE

On Monday, December 21, 2020, WILL-TV aired a special episode of American Portrait Central Illinois. Titled “Lift Every Voice,” this episode featured our very own Professor Ollie Watts Davis (MMUS ’82, AMUSD ’88) and the University of Illinois Black Chorus. This project grew out of the national PBS American Portrait series, which aims to showcase the lives of everyday people and what it means to be an American in today’s world.

“Lift Every Voice” tells the moving story of music-making for choral musicians amid the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and shows how Davis and the Black Chorus continued to inspire their community with creativity and spirit through weekly video diaries. The group documented the technical, emotional, and logistical challenges they faced: from rehearsing with specialty singer’s masks while navigating 10-feet spacing between singers to singing in the Krannert Center parking garage as a safe outdoor rehearsal space. The episode also follows the Windy City Gay Chorus and the Windy City Treble Quire, both led by William Southerland, and Jeff Thomas’s Danville High School Madrigals. It illustrates how each choral director found their own creative approach to guide their singers through unprecedented times.

While circumstances were often far from ideal, Davis recognized the importance of providing her students with an in-person choral experience and keeping the community that she has built in the University of Illinois Black Chorus at the forefront of her work. Most notably, “Lift Every Voice” shares an uplifting message of hope and perseverance through Professor Davis’s unwavering optimism for a brighter future. “The witness of Black Chorus is essential to the Illinois Experience,” shares Davis as she reflects on the experiences from this past year. “I am grateful to have been given sufficient grace to provide my students on-line and in-person with a navigation system during this time of uncertainty. Students were strengthened by coming together, grounded in one another’s presence, and empowered to carry the joy forward.”

Its timely release during the 2020 holiday season undoubtedly inspired its viewers to share this optimism and to believe in the powerful impact of the arts on the human experience.
School of Art & Design Offers

NEW FASHION CONCENTRATION

Students who study fashion with the School of Art and Design are offered a unique opportunity to bridge divides and engage practitioners across fields and areas of research. “For over ten years, only a couple of fashion-related electives have been offered, with students consistently asking for more,” says Susan Becker, clinical assistant professor. The new fashion concentration offers an opportunity to explore the wide variety of subject matter in the field of fashion, from history and social psychology to sustainable manufacturing and brand development. Students investigate the elements and principles of design as they apply to fabric and the body and explore fashion’s role in understanding, forming, and presenting identity and communicating culture. The fashion concentration encourages students to develop their own personal apparel design process, including a strong working knowledge of the various modes of research, ideation, and design sketching and illustration. Courses that emphasize sustainability introduce students to various aspects of the fashion industry, from design and production to manufacturing, promotion, branding, and sales. Projects like Found Object Fashion and Reclaim-to-Wear challenges students to create clothes made entirely from discarded materials and remnants, giving them the opportunity to exercise their own design process within the context of sustainability. Situated within Studio Art, the fashion concentration affords an interdisciplinary experience where students develop their own unique path. Students learn to critique work using multiple theoretical frameworks, explore contemporary art and crafts production, and acquire practical skills in apparel design and fashion industry best practices.

Design for RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

The School of Art and Design is now offering a Master of Fine Arts in Design for Responsible Innovation (MFA DRI) that prepares students to contribute to the field of design in the form of practice, academia, or both. Students can explore responsible futures through research in traditional print media and emergent technologies such as data visualization, digital interaction, information design, systems thinking, and visual narrative. Students can choose to focus on one of four specialized tracks of study: sustainable and regenerative design, urban sociology and critical race design, visual and cultural studies, or student-proposed applied research in responsible innovation, social impact, and engagement. As an interdisciplinary program, DRI faculty research addresses topics ranging from Afrofuturism and equity-centered design to sustainability and the fight against human trafficking. Fresh Press, a current ongoing project, strives to shift the paper supply chain from forest to farm. They make sustainable paper that renourishes the environment, a process that starts at the Student Sustainable Farm and ends in the studio. Professor Lisa Mercer recently codeveloped Racism Untaught, a toolkit for educators, students, and organizations that uses the design research process. Racism Untaught explores how design can assist in identifying racialized designs and critically assess anti-racist concepts. Mercer, along with DRI faculty members Juan Salamanca and Molly Briggs (BFA ’92 Art & Design, PhD ’18 Landscape Architecture), developed an interactive model or tool to help students think critically about the intended and unintended consequences of designed innovations. It offers designers a systemic perspective on the often-overlooked implications of innovative offerings and serves as a frame for developing sustainable solutions to complex social and environmental problems. Learn more about the MFA in Design for Responsible Renovation at go.illinois.edu/mfa-dri.
Art & Design Alum is Revitalizing Diversity in Storytelling with Graphic Novel Line Megascope

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

Megascope made its dynamic debut in the graphic novel world this year with the release of four new books ranging in genre from science fiction and horror to history and fantasy. Curated by University of Illinois alumnus John Jennings (MA ’95, MFA ’98), this new line of graphic novels is “dedicated to showcasing speculative and nonfiction works by and about people of color.” Megascope, while rooted in the genre of Afrofuturism, is releasing graphic novel adaptations of African and Caribbean folklore, crime fiction, horror stories, and more recently, historical fiction.

One hundred years after the Tulsa Race Massacre, Jennings memorialized the prosperous Black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma, with the release of Across the Tracks. Illustrated by Stacey Robinson, assistant professor of graphic design at the University of Illinois, Across the Tracks gives readers a unique perspective into the rise, fall, and rebirth of Black Wall Street. The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 has only recently gained public attention, despite the fact that a century has passed since a mob of armed white men descended on this affluent Black community in a deadly two-day assault. “The idea was to create something that was accessible for a younger audience. We wanted to celebrate the Greenwood district of Tulsa. We wanted to focus on the fact that the Tulsa race massacre did not end the Greenwood district. The people of Greenwood were superhuman. They rebuilt almost immediately the next year,” Jennings shared in an interview with Publishers Weekly.

John Jennings is a critically acclaimed comic artist and co-creator of the #1 New York Times bestseller Kindred, a graphical novel adaptation of Octavia Butler’s original 1979 novel. Now considered a pioneer of Afrofuturism, Butler’s Parable of the Sower was also adapted as a graphic novel by Damian Duffy (BA ’01 LAS, MS ’08 and PHD ’16 Info Sciences) and John Jennings. The name of Jennings’s new graphic novel line, Megascope, is derived from a recently found unpublished short story by W.E.B. DuBois called “The Princess Steel.” In this piece of speculative fiction, a Black sociologist invents a device called a megascope that allows its viewers to see across time and space into alternate realities, ultimately a critique on capitalism and the U.S. steel industry. “The fact that megascope as a concept was discovered in one of the greatest scholar’s papers just sitting there for us to discover, I think was just indicative of the type of stories we want to do,” Jennings said in a March broadcast of Boston’s NPR program Here & Now.

After the Rain, the inaugural Megascope comic published in January, is a graphic novel adaptation of alumna Nnedi Okorafor’s (BA ’97 LAS) short story “On the Road.” The original story, a work of “Africanfuturism,” is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture and history. The graphic adaptation is teeming with haunting imagery and an unnerving attention to detail that brings new life to this horror story. Other new releases from Jennings’s Megascope include Hardears, an Afro-Caribbean fantasy adventure, and Black Star, a story set in the future about an interstellar mission gone awry. Megascope, part of Abrams ComicArts, intends to continue releasing four to six graphic novels each year.
Planning and designing a public place that promotes health, happiness, and well-being should take into account the cultural heritage and perspectives of the people the space is intended to serve. Placemaking, done effectively, will strengthen the connection between people and the places they share – creating a sense of community ownership.

Dr. Magdalena Novoa, assistant professor of urban and regional planning, works on community development with the unique perspective of an artist who found a pathway into planning via cultural heritage studies and historic preservation.

“My path to urban planning wasn’t straightforward,” says Novoa, who grew up in Santiago, Chile. “I thought of myself since I was 10 as an artist, not as an architect or planner or urban designer, and I studied fine arts.” But while, and after, she was studying art, she engaged with the public spaces of her home city – marking her initial
development as a practitioner and researcher in community development. “From my training as a painter, I started working as a street artist, critically analyzing and reworking commercial advertisements in the city of Santiago from a feminist point of view.”

Novoa’s dissertation, Insurgent Heritage: Grassroots Movements and Citizenship in Chile, investigates the role of memory in placemaking. It perfectly captures an example of community-based heritage in Lota, an important mining and industrial enclave in central Chile for almost 150 years. After the mine that anchored the city’s economic base closed in 1997, the central government proposed economic rehabilitation plans, but these were both unsuccessful and unacceptable to many community members. Instead, these residents have relied on their cultural heritage to envision a sustainable alternative, recalling the violence of the mine owners but also the resilience of workers and women who developed and protected means of expression including theatre, art, and music. Novoa shared, “We all have histories in our neighborhoods, traditional practices of families and neighbors, and that’s important to bring to urban planning. Arts and culture and heritage studies connect people,” which should make them central to planning for community development.

“My vision of change is structural,” Novoa says. “We talk about participation and community empowerment, but in the end, participation and inclusion [can be] an alibi for deepening policies that reinforce inequality and exclusion. The change I’d like to see is for communities to exert change and have opportunities to set the terms of participation and engagement,” rather than professionals and practitioners setting those terms. “I’d like to see a change in the structure that perpetuates racism and white supremacy in how cities are built.”

Visit go.illinois.edu/novoa to read the full profile on Magdalena Novoa.
Meet Alumna, Professional Landscape Architect, and Assistant Professor Kelley Lemon

BY AMY KARAGIANNAKIS

Kelley Lemon was initially drawn to landscape architecture through her interest in the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois, but it wasn’t until she watched The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces by William Whyte in LA 101 that she realized that she had chosen the right program and career path. That film and an eponymous book by Whyte, published in 1980, launched a transformation in the planning and study of public spaces. For Lemon, the film and LA 101 marked her entry into landscape architecture as she was intrigued with how everyday spaces can be created through that design field and in turn influence human behavior.

The Department of Landscape Architecture is pleased to welcome Kelley Lemon back to campus as a new tenure-track assistant professor. As a new faculty member, Lemon’s research and teaching will address ecological/sustainable design, health and wellbeing, action research, and design technologies, with special focus on landscapes of the under-served.

Lemon graduated with a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Illinois in 2002. She then earned a Master of Architecture degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2007. As a designer, Lemon has 16 years of distinguished professional experience in leading interdisciplinary firms, including Hood Design, NBBJ, and Ratcliff. In those contexts, she has completed projects ranging in scope and scale from sustainable site/landscape design for the new Student Activity Center at the University of Texas, Austin; to conceptual design for a 500-bed hospital and campus in Kuwait; to landscape planning for food production at the Village Bottoms Community Farm in West Oakland, CA; to masterplan guidelines development in support of economic and environmental revitalization in the Hill district neighborhood of Pittsburgh, PA.

From 2013 until this spring, Lemon also held a Visiting Lecturer appointment in the Department of Landscape Architecture at UC Berkeley, where her courses focused on topographic form and design technology, studio design, and professional practice.

Looking towards the future of landscape architecture, Lemon believes that we have to make the profession and its work more accessible to everyone. All people, regardless of race, gender, religion, and socioeconomic status, share and interact with the landscape in some way or another. The built landscape should reflect that diversity. In a 2020 Q&A with the Landscape Architecture Foundation, Lemon shared, “Landscape is, in my opinion, a celebration of people and place. When landscape architecture is made accessible to everyone, it helps people realize they matter and have a role too. This, in turn, allows all of us to become stewards and protectors of our fragile environment. I can’t imagine landscape architecture being more powerful than that.”

The Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Design (BSSD) builds on the extensive existing environmental sustainability curricular offerings in the College of Fine and Applied Arts, incorporating courses and faculty from the School of Architecture, the School of Art and Design, the Department of Landscape Architecture, and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The new interdisciplinary major complements these with new courses that focus on the theory and practice of integrated sustainable design. Students are learning how design can contribute to solving problems of sustainability in a constantly evolving society and building equitable, healthy, and thriving places.

New Sustainable Design Major Prepares Students to Create a Better Future

BY DANIEL SCHNEIDER

Paper from elephant dung. Masdar City in Abu Dhabi. The Bosco Verticale in Milan. 3-D printed buildings. North Pond in Chicago. Students in the new major in Sustainable Design evaluated the sustainability of these design interventions for everything from products to landscapes. These students were taking the introductory course in the newest major on campus, the Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Design. The major in Sustainable Design offers an innovative, interdisciplinary course of study in design, with a focus on creating sustainable communities. Sustainable design calls on a student’s creativity to conceptualize, visualize, analyze, communicate, and build products, buildings, communities, cities, and landscapes that use energy and materials in a more environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

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BY DANIEL SCHNEIDER

Paper from elephant dung. Masdar City in Abu Dhabi. The Bosco Verticale in Milan. 3-D printed buildings. North Pond in Chicago. Students in the new major in Sustainable Design evaluated the sustainability of these design interventions for everything from products to landscapes. These students were taking the introductory course in the newest major on campus, the Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Design. The major in Sustainable Design offers an innovative, interdisciplinary course of study in design, with a focus on creating sustainable communities. Sustainable design calls on a student’s creativity to conceptualize, visualize, analyze, communicate, and build products, buildings, communities, cities, and landscapes that use energy and materials in a more environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

The Bachelor of Science in Sustainable Design (BSSD) builds on the extensive existing environmental sustainability curricular offerings in the College of Fine and Applied Arts, incorporating courses and faculty from the School of Architecture, the School of Art and Design, the Department of Landscape Architecture, and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The new interdisciplinary major complements these with new courses that focus on the theory and practice of integrated sustainable design. Students are learning how design can contribute to solving problems of sustainability in a constantly evolving society and building equitable, healthy, and thriving places.
Thank you!

The College of Fine and Applied Arts is so grateful for the contributions of our engaged alumni and friends. Each gift is as unique as our supporters. You embolden us to think big and reach far as we find new and innovative ways to prepare our students to enact positive and transformative change through their chosen field. Together we are building an equitable and more preferable future for all. Give online now at faa.illinois.edu/giving. You may also call 217-300-2869 or email us at faa-advancement@illinois.edu.

Impact in the Arts

BY ANDY BLACKER

As an interdisciplinary research initiative within the College of Fine and Applied Arts (FAA), Arts Impact seeks to foster understanding of the role of arts and artists in community development and promoting social well-being to guide arts practice and policy. The initiative is a three-year pilot program, supported by investment for Growth funding from the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, designed to build on a historic record of research, creation, and service across the college’s Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Krannert Art Museum, Japan House, and academic units dedicated to the study of the visual and performing arts, design, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning. To lead this effort, the college welcomed Dr. Carolyn Randolph-Kato (PHD ’16 Media) as visiting associate director and Dr. Jennifer Novak-Leonard as associate research professor and the Arts Impact research director.

The initial stages of this effort involve working with artists, arts organizations, and institutional partners across Illinois to address key information needs looking towards statewide recovery from the social and economic toll of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Through partnerships with Arts Alliance Illinois and University of Chicago, the three-year initiative Informing and Enabling Illinois’ Arts Ecosystem will address the impacts of art in communities and help identify factors that can better support the arts and artists in different regions.

Arts Impact is working in collaboration with the UIUC Extension on the Central Illinois’ Cultural Assets: Mapping Resources, People and Meaning to Propel Community and Economic Vitality, a two-year pilot project that will generate an expansive mapping of creative and cultural assets in Peoria, IL. This work stands to produce an iterative research process that will be shared with other communities interested in understanding their distinctive arts and culture ecosystem for the purpose of improved local and regional community planning and development.

Through this initiative, FAA is an institutional partner in the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP, snapaarts.org) which seeks to maximize the success and impact of creatives in society by driving evidence-informed change in training and illuminating the value of arts and design education. SNAAP addresses key information needs about artist training, work and quality of life, and is a leader in enabling scholarship and insights for bolstering the lives and careers of arts graduates.

The FAA Arts Impact Initiative will serve the University of Illinois’ land-grant mission through its focus on translation of data and research about art and artists into actionable strategies for enhancing how we work and live locally, regionally, and nationally.

Want to hear how FAA alumni are giving back?
Visit dimension.faa.illinois.edu/stories-of-giving to read about how our alumni are making a difference in the lives of students across the college.

Top: The School of Architecture’s robotic arm allows students in the Detail and Fabrication Program to be more involved in the construction of their designs – closing the gap between ideation and realization. Photo by Justine Bursoni.

Bottom: Fashion Design Instructor Chiara Vincenzi, leads students in her fashion illustration class as they use new tools to create glamorous runway dresses in a virtual world. As recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is just beginning, the roles of art and artists is ever-evolving. Photo by Fred Zwicky.
Nathan Alan Davis (BFA ’05 Theatre), award-winning young playwright, returns to Krannert Center for the Midwest premier of Origin Story. Tracing out the struggles and joys of Margaret, a young millennial working two jobs to pay off her student debt, Origin Story is a timely slice of American life. Sweet, funny, and with a bit of an edge, the production looks at the phenomenon of “quarter-life” crisis, without pulling punches, and without cynicism or naivete. Read more about the production at KrannertCenter.com.