

Fall 2014

Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2014

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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Kahn Chronicle

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Kahn Institute Celebrates 15 Years Galileo, Shakespeare Invited for Gala Event

To help celebrate its 15th anniversary, the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute is inviting Galileo and Shakespeare to join a public fete that will also celebrate the 450th birthday of both these luminaries, on Thursday, Nov. 13.

That is, Smith faculty members will take on the roles of Galileo Galilei and William Shakespeare as well as other historic figures during a novel celebration of the Kahn Institute's 15th year in Neilson Library, and will speak on a panel.

The November 13 celebration will begin at 5:30 p.m. with a panel discussion, "The Place of Liberal Arts in the 21st Century," among the Kahn Institute's three directors, Marjorie Senechal (the original Kahn director, 1998-2005), Math & the History of Science; Rick Fantasia (director, 2005-2011),

Sociology; and Rosetta Cohen (2011-present), Education & Child Study. The panel, moderated by Nalini Bhushan, the Kahn Interim Director this year, will take place in the Kahn Institute meeting room and is open to the Smith community.



LOUISE W. AND EDMUND J.

Kahn

LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTE

The directors' panel will be followed by a reception in the Kahn Gallery. Shakespeare, Galileo et al will speak as part of a panel beginning at 7:15 p.m. in Neilson Browsing Room. The panel is open to the public.

In fact, the Kahn's 15th anniversary celebration is one of three events in a series this year noting the 450th anniversary of Galileo's birth, on February 15, 1564.

A Kahn Institute short-term project, *Contested Cosmologies: Our Place in Space*, October 31-November 1, will consider the life and works of Galileo. And art historian Nick Wilding, of Georgia State University, who prominently discovered a forgery of a copy of Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius*, will visit campus on Thursday, November 20, for a public lecture, "Forging the Moon: or, How to Spot a Fake Galileo."

Watch for more news on upcoming fall Kahn events. Meanwhile, mark the calendar for November 13 and help us celebrate 15 years of Kahn Institute research and discovery.

Introducing the Kahn Gallery

It's free, it's easily accessible and it's a showcase of art and research by Smith and Five College faculty, students and staff.

The Kahn Gallery is a new display venue located just inside the entrance to the Kahn Institute on the third floor of Neilson Library (take a left when you enter the floor from the stairs or elevator).

The gallery will exhibit research-related art and photography, as well as archival and informational displays throughout the academic year, and is seeking exhibitors among Smith and Five College faculty, students and alumnae who have participated in Kahn projects.

If you have an idea for an exhibit, please contact the Kahn Institute, ext. 4292, or kahninstitute@smith.edu.

Meanwhile, stop by the Kahn Institute to view what's on display in the new Kahn Gallery.

Upcoming Kahn Institute Public Lectures

Check smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle/events.php for a complete calendar of events and more details.

October 21, 2014, 5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room, Neilson Library

Tehching Hsieh, Artist

In conjunction with *The Power of Disappearance*.

October 31, 2014, Noon: Campus Center Carroll Room

Michael Benson, Artist

In conjunction with the short-term project *Contested Cosmologies*.

November 22, 2014, 4:30 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room,

Neilson Library

Martin Kaste, NPR Commentator

In conjunction with *The Question of Privacy*.

Faculty Fellowship Opportunities

Smith and Five College faculty and staff are invited to apply for faculty fellowships for the Kahn Institute's long-term projects for 2015-2016. Brief descriptions of the two projects, as well as the schedule for the information sessions for each one, appear below. Full descriptions and online applications for each project can be found at www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/future.php. The deadline to apply for either long-term project is October 10, 2014.

Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility

Yearlong, 2015-2016 :: Organizing Fellows: Dawn Fulton, French Studies; Adam Hall, Biological Sciences

Memory is crucial to human thought and reasoning; fundamental to daily function, to the construction of personal identity, to social interaction, and historical documentation. Fields as varied as religion and computer science, literature, linguistics and anthropology have long grappled with the nature of memory and how it functions. Recent research in neuroscience has added new levels of complexity to our understanding of memory and its reliability, and to questions that cut across all disciplines: What is the relationship between memory and an event? Now are collective memories constructed and sustained?

This year-long project aims to consider the great range of mechanisms, uses and representations of memory across disciplinary fields, with a particular focus on how the limitations of memory, and the ways in which memory can be manipulated, impact both the individual and society.

We hope to explore the disciplinary intersections generated by the question of memory, its reliability and unreliability. Neuroscience research on confabulation, for example, has implications in criminology. History can be manipulated for political ends. Collective memory is constructed by archival research, acts of commemoration, and literary and artistic representation. Technology is an overarching concern in numerous disciplines, as the rise of virtual communities in the 21st century and the increased digitalization of information has dramatically affected our understandings of individual and collective memory as well as our fundamental relationships to one another. Finally, we aim to bridge teaching and research through an ongoing reflection on the impact of memory in learning and in pedagogical practices. Have advances in digital access to information weakened our capacity to memorize and remember, and does it matter?

Play

Semester-Long, Spring 2016 :: Organizing Fellow: Michael Thurston, English and American Studies

Spend five minutes watching a small child on the playground. She finds a set of stairs she has not navigated before. Tentatively and painstakingly, she figures out a combination of moves and holds that enable her to get to the top. What does she do then? She makes her way back down and does it again, more confidently, more quickly, more effectively.

Play is an essential part of being human, critical to cognitive growth, social development and emotional health. It is a process by which we gain mastery over elements of our environment and a key factor in our relations with one another.

One interesting aspect of play is the way that difficulty or chal-

lenge is often inherent in playful activities. For example, it might be argued that much of what we do at Smith, from scientific experiments to theoretical writing and artistic creation, is simply (or not so simply) an elaborated and codified form of intellectual play.

Indeed, the Kahn Institute itself might be seen as one of the important locations of play on campus. Here, we gather with no requirement to produce but, instead, with an imperative to play.

This one-semester project aims to approach play from a variety of disciplinary perspectives in order to enrich our understanding not only of what play is but also of what we might gain by seeing as play some practices currently defined in other ways.

Kahn Project Information Sessions

Faculty and staff interested in applying for fellowships in Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility or Play are invited to attend open information sessions about each project (see times and dates on right).

These meetings will include an opportunity to speak to faculty organizers about the project's intellectual focus and about how individual research intersects with its overarching theme. Interested faculty will also be able to speak with the Institute's Director and staff to learn more about research grants and other types of support provided for Faculty Fellows in its long-term projects.

There is no need to pre-register. Faculty or staff may attend one or both information sessions. Sessions are approximately one hour long.

INFORMATION SESSIONS AT A GLANCE:

Memory Information Session:
Monday, September 22, 2014, 5 p.m.
Kahn Institute Colloquium Room

Play Information Session:
Tuesday, September 23, 2014, 5 p.m.
Kahn Institute Colloquium Room

Each information session will include a wine and cheese reception. For more information about Kahn Institute Faculty Fellowships visit the Faculty Fellowships page on our website: www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/fellowships_faculty.php.

2014-15 Long-Term Projects

Student Fellowships Awarded

The following Smith students have been awarded fellowships in connection with the Kahn Institute's 2014-15 long-term projects.

The Power of Disappearance

Fellows in The Power of Disappearance project, organized by Maria Rueda, Spanish & Portuguese, and Frazer Ward, Art, will explore the forms, means and valences of disappearance, of people, things, buildings, ways of life, species, memories and other entities, and the implications and meanings associated with their disappearance.

Haley Crockett '15, American Studies
Tanvi Kapoor '16, Study of Women and Gender
Sarah Lerner '15, Film Studies
Katherine Lopes '15, Philosophy
Alice Wolff '15, Medieval Studies



The Question of Privacy

The Question of Privacy project fellows will examine the controversial nature of privacy, our right to it and our ability to protect it, while building conversations across disciplines about the pros and cons, limits and definitions of privacy in the modern world.



Emily Dixon '15, Engineering
Elizabeth Heise '15, Government
Waka Kobayashi '15, Government
Marianna Mapes '16, Philosophy
Alina Tomeh '16, Economics
Sarah Walton '15, Government

2013-14 Long-Term Projects: Final Reports

Placing Space

Organized by Suzan Edwards, Astronomy; and Cornelia Pearsall, English Language and Literature

The Placing Space project offered an extraordinary journey through the spaces shaped by our enthusiastic participants and visitors as well as the variety of physical spaces we shared during the year. Site visits included MassMOCA, the UMass Fine Arts Center, the MacLeish Field Station in Whately, and several facilities on the Smith campus. Visitors included Middlebury's Anne Knowles, Harvard's Sharon Harper, MIT's Anne Whiston-Spirt, writer Dava Sobel, and University of Chicago's Julie Cooper.

The theme of expanding space was with us throughout the year, both literally, as in the expansion of the universe post-Big Bang or the expansion of the British Empire in the Victorian era, and also figuratively, as we each expanded our own understanding of the depth and the multi-dimensionality of space on which our projects were founded. We marveled at the mathematical patterns that emerge in the spiraling growth of plants, we reeled at the emotional spaces opened by visiting Buchenwald, we assimilated distant landscapes brought to life by poetry, and we recognized similarities in confrontations that arise in contested spaces from such diverse environments as school playgrounds and classrooms, the streets of Northampton, remote mountain tops, and the Middle East. We were intrigued and somewhat wary of the miniature drones that are entering our skies, and had fun actually flying (and crashing!) some. We soared in the spaces opened by moving the body in dance or visualizing the new architecture along New York's High Line.

In addition, many of us gained new insights into our own projects that we incorporate as we carry them forward. The organizers are grateful to the Kahn Institute for its attentive support and to our colleagues in the seminar for their depth of engagement and expansiveness of spirit.

Regarding Images

Organized by Frasier Stables, Art; and Nicholas Howe, Computer Science

During spring 2014, a group of 16 faculty and students undertook an intellectual journey: Regarding Images. In weekly sessions we explored the nature of images across diverse disciplines, the challenges they present in their many forms, and the varieties of meaning they encompass. The project generated a rich shared understanding of visual culture.

Visiting fellows included writer and curator Marvin Heiferman, who discussed ways in which photography impacts our world; MIT's Bill Freeman, who described recently developed techniques that allow images to reveal information; and artist Penelope Umbrico, who led our group in a discussion about the proliferation of images within the digital era and the ways in which types of photographs, such as images of common subjects may be thought of as part of a collective practice.

Group presentations incorporated extensive visual input. Through the semester we shared and considered independent work with much greater depth and attention, focusing on just two projects per week. In the final weeks, a field trip to the Springfield Museum's exhibit on art forgery gave a chance to apply the thoughts and vocabulary developed over the course of our meetings in a real-world context.

The concluding meeting provided an opportunity to reflect upon what we had accomplished. Images are too diverse a phenomenon to admit to a single unifying view, but we identified a number of common lenses that cut across different disciplines and forms of inquiry. All members of the group expressed a collective desire to continue our collaborations into the future, as we each take what we have learned over the semester and apply it to our continued investigations.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Nalini Bhushan

Greetings to all in the new semester! I introduce myself as the newly appointed Interim Director of the Kahn Institute for 2014-15 and look forward to productive interactions with many of you in the Smith and Five College Community over the course of the year.

The Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, on the third floor of Neilson Library, is a place and space that fosters intellectual interactions, collaborations and cross-disciplinary conversations among members of the Smith community primarily through faculty-inspired short and long-term projects. These projects are intentionally broad and open-ended, designed to draw together fellow faculty, students and other colleagues from different disciplines and perspectives with the goal of engaging critically and reflectively on the topic at hand. Past projects have included themes such as *Altering Bodies and Minds*; *Evil*; *Sustainable Houses, Home and Communities*; *Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment*; and *Mothers and Others*.

This year we are running two exciting long-term projects: *The Power of Disappearance*, co-directed by Frazer Ward, Art, and Maria Rueda, Spanish and Portuguese, throughout the academic year; and *The Question of Privacy*, co-directed by Judith Cardell, Engineering, and Alice Hearst, Government, through spring 2015. In addition, we have two short-term projects scheduled for the fall semester: *Contested Cosmologies: Our Place in Space*, co-directed by Suzan Edwards, Astronomy, and

Cornelia Pearsall, English Language and Literature, October 31–November 1; and *Celebrating Kahn: The Place of the Liberal Arts in the 21st Century*, November 13. Be on the lookout for public lectures and theatrical performances related to each of these projects!

Throughout the Fall I will be looking to extend the reach of the Kahn Institute to more faculty, students and staff than ever before. In this connection, we will have two long-term projects on offer for 2015-16: *Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility*, co-directed by Dawn Fulton, French Studies, and Adam Hall, Biological Sciences; and *Play*, directed by Michael Thurston, English and American Studies. The call for proposals is being distributed this month; an analogous call will go out to students in early February 2015. I encourage all colleagues, especially those who have not participated in a Kahn before, to consider joining these exciting projects. Please feel free to contact me if you have a question about the fit between your particular area of research and the projects being offered by the Kahn for the year 2015-16.

I look forward to hearing from many of you in the coming months.



A Journal for Women Around the World

Voices & Visions to Publish Second Edition

The voices and visions of women studying around the world will again be on display when the second edition of a journal designed specifically with them in mind is published this month.

Voices & Visions, an online journal of creative work by students worldwide, was launched last year with its inaugural publication on September 30, 2013. *Voices & Visions* is designed by Smith students in partnership with students at Lady Shri Ram University in New Delhi, to provide

a forum for young women to express themselves creatively and share insight about their lives.



The 2014 edition, which will also be published on September 30, will feature more than 40 works of prose, poetry, art and photography, around the theme "Home."

A call for submissions for the 2015 edition of *Voices & Visions* will be distributed in the spring. Meanwhile, watch for the publication of *Voices & Visions* 2014, at voicesandvisionsjournal.com.

Find More Information Online:

This printed Kahn Chronicle offers a quick overview of what is happening at the Kahn. For more details about this year's projects, upcoming events, opportunities for fellowships, the ongoing work of current and past Fellows, project reports and more, visit the Chronicle Online at:

www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle