

Spring 2017

Kahn Chronicle: Spring 2017

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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LOUISE W. AND EDMUND J. KAHN LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTE

Kahn Chronicle

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Kahn Visiting Speakers to Address an Array of Topics This Spring

Occasional visits by outside experts from around the world are essential components of Kahn Institute long-term projects. This spring, five artists and scholars will visit Smith to deliver lectures related to topics being explored in this year's projects, *Shaping Perception* and *Modes and Models of Making*.

Here is a preview of this spring's five visiting speakers hosted by the Kahn Institute. All are invited to these lectures.

Christina Sharpe, Tufts University

Monday, February 20, 5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room

In conjunction with Shaping Perception



Christina Sharpe, associate professor at Tufts University in English and programs in Africana and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, is the author of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (November 2016), named by the Guardian and one of last year's best books, and of *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (2010). Sharpe is the recipient of a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship and a Tufts University Deans' Research Semester.

Sharpe's lecture will reflect her latest book's interrogation of literary, visual, cinematic and quotidian representations of Black life that comprise what she calls the "orthography of the wake."

Boris Kayser, Theoretical Physicist

Thursday, March 2, 5 p.m., Seelye 106

In conjunction with Modes and Models of Making

Boris Kayser, a particle physicist and a pre-eminent expert on neutrino physics, is passionate about the subject of his research.

"If one wants to understand the universe, one must understand neutrinos," Kayser has said. "If there were no neutrinos, the sun and stars would not shine. There would be no energy from the sun to keep us warm, no atoms more complicated than hydrogen, no carbon, no oxygen, no water, no us."

Kayser will discuss and explain the science and meaning of neutrinos as well as aspects of theoretical physics and its impact on our understanding of reality.

Alice Finch, Lego Artist and Master Builder

Thursday, March 23, 5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room

In conjunction with Modes and Models of Making

Alice Finch made a splash among the national AFOL (Adult Fan of Lego) community in 2012 when she unveiled her model of Hogwarts Castle, a detailed, 13-foot version of the grounds inspired by the "Harry Potter" series, comprised of 400,000 colored Lego bricks, and taking top awards at Brickcon, the annual Seattle convention for Lego aficionados. The following year she won again for her model of Rivendell, a relatively more modest (only 200,000 bricks) rendition of the Elven outpost from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

Finch will discuss her building process and the importance of girls and women using Legos to acquire a range of skills. A Lego

demonstration may be part of her Smith itinerary.



Lamonda Horton-Stallings, U. of Maryland

Monday, April 10, 5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room

In conjunction with Shaping Perception

Lamonda Horton-Stallings is a professor of women's studies at the University of Maryland. Her research explores the intersection of literary studies, feminist theory, queer of color critique, sexuality studies and cultural studies. She seeks to produce new knowledge about race, sexuality, class and gender by venturing into cultures and communities beyond the boundaries of normativity and respectability.

Horton-Stallings is the author of *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (2015), and *Mutha is Half a Word!: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture* (2007).

Michael Singer, Artist and Designer

Thursday, April 20, 5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room

In conjunction with Modes and Models of Making

Michael Singer has designed and created a vast and diverse body of artistic and architectural works in his four-decade-plus career, drawing widespread accolades and awards for his sculptures, site specific art, and architectural designs that reimagine and redefine space as models for urban and ecological regeneration. He has won fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. His art is included in collections worldwide, including the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum in New York; the Australian National Gallery, and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, Denmark.



The Syntax of Choreographic Performance

A Q&A with 2017 Neilson Professor Bebe Miller

Bebe Miller, the 2017 William Allan Neilson Professor, is a celebrated choreographer and performer, founder of the Bebe Miller Company, and professor of dance at Ohio State University (recently retired). Miller is presenting three lectures during the spring semester. She recently responded to questions for the Kahn Chronicle.

Kahn Chronicle: What are your primary goals for your Neilson Professorship this spring?

Bebe Miller: I'm looking forward to spending time among students, faculty and friends, at a much different rhythm than my time at Ohio State University. Meeting the day with (only!) my current interests ahead of me is tremendously exhilarating; my curiosity is charged and many faceted. I've read markers on trees and buildings I've passed, I've picked materials from the library at random, I've had conversations over tea midafternoon. Primary goal: furthering my work on a current choreographic project, *The Making Room*, during rehearsal residencies on campus. Next: organizing my archival videos and texts with the help of dance department students. And meanwhile: catching up on reading, anything and anywhere.



Chronicle: What main theme/s do you hope to impart during your lecture/performance series?

Miller: We have been thinking a lot about syntax: as the shape and tone of information received and imparted, as the heft and dynamic 'voice' of particular writers (David Foster Wallace, Toni Morrison, Gertrude Stein), and as the system of choreographic delivery we're investigating. This is pretty much the basic drive for *The Making Room*. My aim is to bring an audience along into our process as we continue to craft this work. Bringing them into our process means bringing them into our perspective as makers along with their own perspective as readers of human movement and event. That is to say, we don't go there without them (the audience).

Chronicle: Much of your work explores relationships. What might relationships among dance performers suggest about human relationships in other (non-performance) settings?

Miller: They're built of the same cloth. We all have learned a sophisticated, intuitive system of how to watch humans in action. We know what a three-dimensional body can do, we understand what effort a gesture might take, we understand what gestures are completed as well as those that are considered and almost as instantly rejected. (And by gesture I mean the whole body, from the ground up.) We're good at this, as people. I've spent my creative life noticing these things and trying to hold onto them and redeliver that information. That's what I see and what I think is often breathtaking. How and when my view is crafted is the work of the work.

Chronicle: How is 'relationship' expressed in your solo works, such as *Rain*? Of course, there is literal relationship with audience, but are there other metaphorical, reflexive or metaphysical relationships influencing and/or coursing through your solo works?

Miller: Yep. I'm up there imagining, remembering, feeling the texture of the grass, listening to the music, remembering to listen to the music, counting the seconds before I get to stop running in a circle, counting through the next REALLY hard part of keeping breathing when I'm tired, waiting until I get to sit down and be in that grass, reminding myself when to get up, what it feels like, thinking of nothing at all. And that's all in real time. It's all in relationship to the time being spent.

Neilson Professor Lectures, Spring 2017

- **Friday, February 3**
"Syntax and Flow: Dimensional Meaning-Making Through the Body in Motion"
4:30 p.m., Theatre 14, Mendenhall Center
- **Wednesday, March 8**
"Body as Archive: Regarding the Persistent Essential Friction of Gesture, Attention and Memory"
5 p.m., Neilson Browsing Room
- **Tuesday, April 4**
"Performing memory, Conuuring Body"
5 p.m., Hallie Flanagan Studio Theatre, Mendenhall

Kahn Gallery Exhibition Links Science and Art

Reception for Art Works of Michael Barresi Wednesday, Feb. 15, Noon, Kahn Gallery

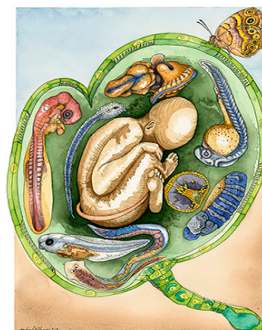
The works of art in *Imaging and Imagining the Mysteries of Life*, an exhibit of works by Michael Barresi, associate professor of biological sciences, now on display in the Kahn Gallery, highlight the "interplay between science and art," Barresi explains. As a developmental biologist, Barresi has devoted his career to

understanding the basis of life. However, "to glean insight into the unseen biology I have leavedged my artistic imagination to broaden our understandings of what may be possible in the development of living things."

All are invited to an open reception of Barresi's exhibit at noon on February 15.

Refreshments will be served.

At right:
"Development"
(2014)—Pen and watercolor



At the Kahn Institute, 2016-17

Mid-Year Project Reports:

Modes and Models of Making

Organizers: Alex Keller, *Film and Media Studies*; Dana Leibsohn, *Art*

Fellows in the yearlong project *Modes and Models of Making* spent much of the fall questioning models of making by tapping both intellectual and physical ways of working. Of particular interest were practices of knowledge-making, which we approached from different angles. We explored how making is different from buying, and how making dinner is different from creating a dance or writing poetry. (We also made dinner and dance and wrote a few lines of poetry.)



Most weeks we focused on readings and issues raised by small groups within the seminar. The BBC program, *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, offered a prompt for thinking about the relationships between tools and objects, how museums function as sites for knowledge-making, and what kinds of knowledge podcasts create. We also read about war rugs created in Afghanistan and

dance schools in New York. We debated models of creating zoos and, in the wake of the election, we debated different ways of making communities.

Four guest speakers worked with us: Ellen Watson, director of the Smith Poetry Center; Rod Francis, planning director for the city of Brattleboro, VT; Donna Cohn, assistant professor of applied design at Hampshire College; and Serin Houston, assistant professor of geography and international relations at Mount Holyoke College.

We also visited Stone Soup Concrete in Easthampton, where Mike Paulson walked us through his production spaces and helped us understand how custom-made objects are made and marketed. We observed various steps in the design and fabrication process, and talked about the way this particular material, typically thought of as more popular and base, had been elevated to the level of higher design and implementation (e.g., the \$8,000 bespoke two-person concrete tub). This returned us to discussions of what is made by whom for whom and the question of making and accessibility.

We ended the semester by considering how we know when something is “well made” and this is one of the questions we are pursuing this spring semester. We are hosting a suite of speakers this spring (see page 1), including a physicist who works with neutrinos, a sculptor-architect who builds with Legos, and a renowned sculptor, architect and designer. It is our individual research projects, however, that will anchor our future work and discussion.

Shaping Perception

Organizers: Chris Aiken, *Dance*; Daphne Lamothe, *Africana Studies*

Shaping Perception has had a vibrant and productive fall semester, beginning with a plenary discussion of selected readings on the science of perception and the film *Memento*. Using these common texts, we focused on how we rely upon perceptual systems to remain in touch with our bodies, our environment and each other.

Seminar participants then shared works-in-progress, exploring the role perception plays in keeping us in touch with ourselves and our environment, controlling and refining movement and detecting meaningful information that allows us to engage in purposive behavior. Presentations covered a lot of ground from scientific, aesthetic, cultural and sociological perspectives. We discussed how we perceive artifacts of our culture and technology, focusing on issues like cognition, language, imagery, sound, food and aroma. We continue to discuss how perception is shaped by power, culture, language and experience.



We invited two gifted speakers to campus in the fall. Aline Newton, a certified advanced Rolfer, spoke about the relationship between perception and our sense of self and the world. Newton emphasized the interrelations between the perceptual and emotional systems, and also the awareness of selfhood as a relational concept that involves engagement with otherness. Our second speaker, the visual artist Spencer Finch, presented a retrospective of his work as a painter and sculptor. Finch described how his interest in perception was fueled by his curiosity about the relationship of light to color. His presentation on the subjectiveness of perceptions of color, dependent on time of day, weather, and even the acuity of the individual observer, led to a fascinating discussion of how the specificity and uncertainty of perception creates endless opportunities for imagination, play and experimentation.

The fall seminar closed with a visit to Mass MoCA's exhibition of Nick Cave's immersive installation *Until*. As we moved collectively and individually through the different galleries, we experienced the themes of the semester in visceral and inspiring ways.

This spring, we look forward to welcoming to the seminar renowned choreographer Bebe Miller, the 2017 Neilson Professor. We also look forward to hearing more from fellows and visits by guest speakers LaMonda Horton-Stallings and Christina Sharpe (see page 1).

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Thank You!

I want to use this last director's note to thank all of you, dear colleagues, for making the Kahn Institute into such a vibrant center for research and intellectual exchange. One of the great privileges of directing the Institute is that one becomes acquainted with the remarkable work of so many faculty; another, is to witness their pleasure in learning from and utilizing the work of others.

When Marjorie Senechal started the Kahn 17 years ago, she believed (rightly, it turned out) that Smith faculty across all three divisions would have sufficient curiosity and broad-mindedness to devote a year's time to open-ended discussion and collaboration. The model of inquiry championed by Marjorie had almost no precedent at the time. Yes, there were humanities centers and science centers, but few colleges or universities had attempted to build a center that brought all areas of research together around a single idea; a center that asked only whole-hearted participation from its fellows; and one that believed that the work of the Institute participants should be compensated and celebrated. That vision was expanded by Rick Fantasia, Kahn's second director, who created short term projects as incubators for year-long ones, and who helped ready our students for Kahn participation by instituting a summer student research "boot-camp." By the time I took over directorship, Kahn had become a vital part of Smith's intellectual life and for many of us, a crucial piece of our scholarly lives.

As my term comes to an end, I can tell you with confidence that the Kahn is thriving. In the last five years, we have doubled and sometimes tripled the numbers of faculty and staff applying for



projects. Five College faculty now apply in large numbers, allowing our Smith organizers to draw their fellows from across an exceptionally wide swathe of fields and specializations. Our Kahn space has been renovated into a welcoming center for student and faculty study and our new gallery space showcases faculty and student work created outside the boundaries of their own disciplines. A great annual partnership now exists with the museum, and our online student journal, *Voices and Visions*, borne out of the Kahn project "Why Educate Women," and sustained by students and staff here at the Kahn, has grown into a forum for women's voices, worldwide. The latest issue has been viewed in over 45 different countries.

Though I still believe the ongoing success of the Kahn is grounded in the fact that we have stayed true to our original mission-- without overreaching or diluting what we do best-- I know that there will always be room for us to change. It will be wonderful to see how the Institute evolves as technology continues to enrich our work, and as the new library provides us space and possibilities for even deeper collaboration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosetta".

Rosetta Marantz Cohen, *Professor of Education and Child Study*

New (Temporary) Digs for the Kahn Institute This May

Come May, the Kahn Institute will vacate its long-time home on the third floor south wing of Neilson Library and take up residence at 21 Henshaw Avenue, in a small, stand-alone Victorian house behind the Davis Center and next door to the Design Thinking Initiative in Capen Annex.

The relocation is necessary during the extensive redesign and renovation of Neilson Library slated for the next three years. The new Kahn Institute residence

will effectively accommodate all the center's services, hosting weekly seminars for yearlong projects as well as regular short-term projects throughout the year. The center will also house offices for Kahn Institute staff and a director (a new Kahn director will be appointed this spring).

The Kahn plans to host occasional campus events, open houses and casual fetes on the wrap-around porch. As always, the Kahn in its new location will be open for visitors, so stop by after May and check out the new Kahn digs.



Read the *Kahn Chronicle* Online:

www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle