

Spring 2018

Kahn Chronicle: Spring 2018

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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Recommended Citation

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, "Kahn Chronicle: Spring 2018" (2018). *Kahn Chronicle*, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

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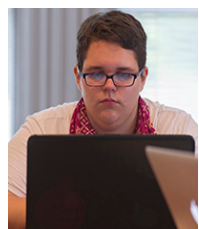


Students Invited to Apply for 2018-19 Yearlong Kahn Projects

Application Deadline: February 16; Info Sessions February 5 and 12

Student Fellows are an important component of Kahn Institute yearlong projects. Even though students have majors that are analogous to the disciplines in which faculty have expertise, students live an interdisciplinary life, moving from chemistry class in the morning to a government class in the afternoon, and screening a film at night. This innate fluidity in student curriculum helps everyone approach the broad topics explored in Kahn projects in more powerful ways, and the Faculty Fellows are aided and stretched by those different perspectives.

For Student Fellows, who conduct research alongside Kahn Faculty Fellows, participation in yearlong projects is a chance to deeply explore topics of their interest with the benefit of regular feedback from fellow students and faculty—while getting paid!



April Cheever

Each spring the Kahn Institute seeks Student Fellow applicants for the following year's two yearlong projects. Applications are currently open for student participation in the 2018-19 projects *Refugees*, organized by Darcy Buerkle, History, and Gregory White, Government; and *Food*, organized by Nancy Sternbach, Spanish and Portuguese, and Paul Wetzels, Center for the Environment (CEEDS).

Interested students should apply online no

Student Information Sessions for 2018-19 Projects:

The Kahn Institute will host two Information Sessions this month for students interested in applying for next year's projects, both at 5 p.m. at the Kahn Institute, 21 Henshaw Ave. All Juniors and Sophomores are invited.

- *Refugees*, Monday, February 5
- *Food*, Monday, February 12

later than Friday, February 16, at <https://form.jotform.com/KahnLiberalArtsInstitute/2018-19StudentFellow>

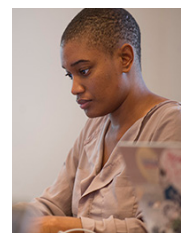
"Kahn is probably the highlight of my week," notes April Cheever '19, a Landscape Studies major and Student Fellow in this year's project *Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*. "I'm wrestling with the definition of spirituality and how spiritual land-based practices shift across geographical areas and cultures. I never thought

people from other disciplines would care about my work, but my fellow Kahn researchers value my insight and the exchange is fantastic. I've gained confidence in my work and layered it within all of the group's discussions."

Temar France '18, an Africana Studies major and Student Fellow in this year's project *War*, is exploring the concept of war through the medium of photography. "My Kahn project has been a great opportunity for me to experience the challenge of a rigorous and diverse intellectual community," she says.

"I'm so glad I've gotten the chance to develop my ideas and meet new friends and colleagues at the Kahn this year."

Read more information about next year's Kahn projects at: <https://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/future.php>



Temar France

Student Scenes from Fall at the Kahn Institute, 21 Henshaw Ave.



Kahn to Host Four Speakers on Diverse Topics This Spring

In conjunction with its yearlong projects, the Kahn Institute each semester invites a range of experts in fields related to the project topics to give public presentations on campus. Four Kahn visitors will come to Smith this spring:

Thursday, March 1



Hope Ginsburg is an award-winning, project-based immersive artist whose work captures the production of live events and the images, objects and installations generated by the events. Ginsburg's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and she is known most recently for her video work "Land Dive Team: Bay of Fundy," which premiered last year at Mass MOCA. Ginsburg is an associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts.

She will visit in conjunction with *Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*.

Monday, March 26

Zahera Harb, a renowned journalist who covered armed conflict in the Middle East and who trains journalists worldwide, is a senior lecturer in international journalism at City University of London. Her recent publications include edited collections, *Reporting the Middle East: the Practice of News in the 21st Century* and *Narrating Conflict in the Middle East: Discourse, Image and Communication Practices in Palestine and Lebanon*. She is associate editor of *Journalism Practice*.

In conjunction with *War*.



Monday, April 9



Perry Anderson, a preeminent historian, political essayist and specialist in intellectual history, is the former editor of the *New Left Review*, a longstanding political journal. Anderson is the author of numerous notable books examining history, including *American Foreign Policy and its Thinkers*, *The New Old World* and *The Origins of Postmodernity*. He is a distinguished professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In conjunction with *War*.

Monday, April 30

Kenneth Helphand, a prominent voice in landscape architecture, is the Knight Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon, where he has taught courses in landscape history, theory and design since 1974. Helphand, who has written extensively on topics in landscape history and theory with a particular interest in the contemporary American landscape, is author of the award-winning book *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime*.

Helphand will visit as part of a joint event between *War* and *Destroy then Restore*.



At the Kahn Institute, 2017-18

Mid-Year Project Reports

Destroy then Restore:

Transforming our Lands and Waters

Organizers: Andrew Guswa, *Picker Engineering Program*; Ann Leone, *French Studies* and *Landscape Studies*

Our discussions this semester have been as full of energy and questions as the project title suggests. All of us—scientists, social scientists, and humanists—are beginning to know what we didn't know by asking questions and getting answers across disciplines: How do we communicate with each other, given how differently we define and use terms like 'restore,' 'destroy,' 'place,' 'nature'? When is restoration destructive, and when is the inverse true? What is the role of humans in the cycles and conceptualizations of destroy and restore? How do fiction and art contribute to destruction and restoration of place?



**DESTROY THEN
restore**

TRANSFORMING OUR
LANDS AND WATERS

from the Landscape Studies lecture series ("Alternative Facts and New Realities") jump-started our thinking. Peter Kareiva, Director of the Institute of Environment and Sustainability, UCLA, reminded us that there are "uncomfortable questions and inconvenient data" in science as well as in humanistic studies. Joan Nassauer, Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Michigan, spoke of the integration of science and community-focused design in and around Detroit. Jungyoon Kim, founding principal in the urban design and landscape architecture firm PARKKIM in Seoul, South Korea, led our discussion of what she terms "Alternative Nature," design as a response to population density that leaves no room for parks.

Following these provocations, we have now paired ourselves off to continue these conversations and frame new ones. Some pairings are obvious and some are to challenge ourselves to find ways to confront disciplinary boundaries—psychology and landscape design, engineering and ecology, literature and historic preservation. We found that hierarchies break down completely when we are all wrestling with meanings—how many definitions for 'restore' and 'destroy' emerge from art, literature, engineering, psychology, landscape design, religion—and the functions of place. We expect our work to continue this spring with the same vigorous discussions and frequent surprising outcomes.

In addition to our project Fellows, we were fortunate to be joined this fall by Niall Kirkwood, Smith's Neilson Professor and Professor of Landscape Architecture and Technology at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. He introduced us to the evolution of landscape design practice along with what he calls "the new environmental reality."

A field trip to sites of destruction and restoration throughout the Mill River watershed and invited speakers

War

Organizers: Mlada Bukovansky, *Government*; Cornelia Pearsall, *English Language and Literature*

Throughout the fall, project fellows explored various definitions and meanings of war through shared readings, a film screening, museum visits and invited speakers. We began with a plenary discussion of our summer reading of Hassan Blasim's *Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*, a scathing series of short stories centered on the war in Iraq. Following this, we explored, through intensive consideration of a series of theoretical readings, boundaries and overlaps between the intersecting phenomena of war and violence.



The *War* project hosted a range of informative and provocative speakers. In September, Middle East Studies guest speaker Wendy Pearlman, Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University, presented work from her book *We Crossed the Bridge and it Trembled: Voices from Syria* at a public lecture followed by a dinner seminar. In November, we hosted Claire Finkelstein, Algonon Biddle

Professor of Law and Philosophy and Director of the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, who gave a public lecture titled "Is the US Becoming a Constitutional Dictatorship? Executive Authority and the Rule of Law in the Age of Trump," and the following day presented a paper to the seminar on "Contemporary Armed Conflict and the Non-State Actor." In December we hosted the controversial speaker Valerie Plame, former CIA operative, nuclear non-proliferation activist, and author. She participated in a public panel on "Social Media and US Foreign Policy" along with Paul Musgrave from the University of Massachusetts and Brent Durbin of Smith. *War* project fellows Darcy Buerkle and Mlada Bukovansky moderated the panel. Valerie Plame also participated in a Kahn *War* project seminar meeting, during which we focused among other things on her work with the CIA on counter-proliferation.

Over the course of the semester, *War* project participants formed into focus groups, each of which was responsible for organizing a seminar activity. These included wide-ranging readings, a film screening, and a visit to the Smith College Museum of Art to view and discuss a series of Francisco Goya prints and other art works representing the devastations of war. A highlight for many of us was a field trip to New Haven to explore two highly relevant exhibitions at the Yale University Art Gallery: *Artists in Exile: Expressions of Loss and Hope* and *Before the Event/After the Fact: Contemporary Perspectives on War*.

We look forward to continuing our exploration of war and its multitude of manifestations this Spring term.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A Fall Retrospective

Foremost within its mission, the Kahn Institute fosters, facilitates, and encourages broad and deep interdisciplinary discourse that propels ideas, thoughts, and people forward in collaborative, creative and often challenging ways. With this in mind, the Kahn hosted a panel, on December 11, on “Social Media and Foreign Policy,” in conjunction with our yearlong project exploring war. Among the speakers was Valerie Plame, the CIA covert operative illegally outed as retaliation when her then husband, Joseph Wilson, a former U.S. diplomat, blew the whistle on the George W. Bush administration’s false justifications for instigating a war with Iraq. The Kahn invited Plame to Smith on July 31. In late September, Plame infamously re-tweeted anti-Semitic material—ideas that the *War* project, the Kahn, and the college condemn. Plame eventually apologized on her Twitter feed, and the panel went forward, because we sought, in keeping with our mission—even in light of her claim to have mistakenly retweeted execrable material—to facilitate substantive dialogue. Given President Trump’s incessant attempts to govern via Twitter (a subject addressed by the panelists), it is hard to miss the insight that problems made on the Internet can rarely be solved on the Internet. Social media is too often not social at all, and wet knots like these need face-to-face, often profoundly uncomfortable conversations to untangle them. Plame’s presence on the panel was met with robust protests, organized by the Smith College Jewish Community student organization. The *War* project and the Kahn supported those protests as vital aspects of the often very difficult conversations that are at the core of the mission of both the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute and the Liberal Arts at large. One such intervention isn’t going to bring about the end of anti-Semitism, but it is part of a process. The Kahn Institute and other members of the Smith community will be working together to find the most effective ways possible to continue working and communicating together.

Both yearlong projects are engaging intensely with wicked problems. In the fall, *Destroy then Restore: Transforming Our Lands and Waters* organized itself around the presence of the 2017-2018 Neilson Professor, Niall Kirkwood (Harvard Graduate



School of Design), who was also a project fellow. His three public lectures offered everything from global case studies to larger frames for thinking about what landscape is, and important thoughts about how human beings can intervene in more sustainable ways—including knowing when not to intervene. I was struck that for someone who had spent most of his career in research universities, his relation to his students and their work seemed far more like that of a professor from a liberal arts college. The office of the Neilson Professor has been at the Kahn for quite some time, but in the new space, I have had the pleasure of hearing the buzz from Niall’s

office as he worked with Smith students, and that buzz carries in a way that one could not quite have heard in the old space in Neilson Library.

Our new space at 21 Henshaw Avenue has also given us the chance for revels, and the *Destroy then Restore* fellows pushed their weekly project lunches on the Kahn’s wraparound porch as far into the semester as they could. Our “parties on the porch” have been another delight, as they bring people together from across our disciplines for less heady pursuits. The chance to be together for pleasure, to raise a glass and enjoy a moment with friends and colleagues, near but not at work, is something we may not have had space and opportunity for since the Faculty Club closed. Even in December we were happily clustered on the porch, warmed by both the heater and our numbers (and Irish Coffee). We look forward to April, when we will restart our Happy Hours on the porch, and hope to see enough of you there to tempt, if not actually have to make, a call to the Fire Marshall.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Alexandra Keller, *Professor of Film and Media Studies*

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www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle