Art Department News

A Letter from the Chair

Bernadine Barnes, Professor of Art History

Welcome to the first of what we hope will be a semi-annual message from Wake Forest’s Art Department. In each issue, we’ll highlight student engagement and faculty activities. As we hear from you, we’ll feature alumni as well.

This past year has been full of exciting opportunities and challenges. As some of you may know, the Transformative Arts Project has challenged the departments of Art, Music, and Theatre and Dance to work together in order to give much more visibility to the arts on campus. We have gotten to know our colleagues in Scales much better in the past year, and after brainstorming about new events, we realized that much of what we already do is remarkable—but we need to let others know about it. So this newsletter is a small attempt to do just that.

This fall, the Art Department has joined forces with Reynolda House and Hanes Gallery to present a series of exhibits and events focused on photography. You can read more about these exhibits in Professor Jay Curley’s report below. Some of the exhibits will be on display Homecoming weekend, so please plan a visit.

We welcome Di Luo, our new Teacher-Scholar Postdoctoral Fellow, who comes to us from Shanghai after receiving her Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. In the fall, Dr. Luo will be teaching a survey of Asian art and architecture, as well as a more specialized course in Chinese art. And we welcome back Page Laughlin and John Pickel from their sabbaticals. John’s report on his travels and work is below, and we hope to post Page’s report on our website soon. By the way, a new website is in the works—we hope it will be up and running in a few weeks. Please check it out at college.wfu.edu/art/

I will be teaching at Wake’s newest study-away campus in Washington, DC next semester. Like our programs in Venice, London, and Vienna, students will learn from the rich artistic resources of the city, while living and studying together with a Wake Forest professor (me!). The Wake Washington students will also have internships at some very exciting places like the White House Historical Society and the National Portrait Gallery. We’re looking forward to a great experience in the capital. If you happen to be an alum in the D.C. area, please get in touch.
Student Engagement

Jay Curley, Associate Professor of Art History

Our department believes that students learn best when they really engage with works of art. Recently students had the opportunity to curate exhibits that complement several important photography-related events planned in conjunction with the Dorothea Lange exhibit that opens at Reynolda House in September.

One of the exhibits grew out of an experience that Professor Morna O’Neill had this past spring. While teaching the History of Photography she challenged her students to make connections between Lange's Depression-era work and photographs in Wake's Student Union Collection of Contemporary Art. This resulted in the student-curated exhibition “After Documentary: Photography, 1980-Present.” It will be on display in the West Bedroom Gallery of Reynolda House.

Professor Jay Curley, who is teaching the History of Photography this semester, will integrate both shows in his teaching, as well as an exhibition he curated with student input of one of Lange’s contemporaries: “Walker Evans: Landscapes in Transition.” This exhibit will be in the Mezzanine Gallery of the Hanes Gallery, opening in late October. Professor John Pickel will also incorporate the Evans and Lange exhibitions in his Introduction to Photography course, which includes a service learning component tied to local initiatives to combat poverty.

Spotlight on Faculty

John Pickel, Professor of Photography

Travels with Char: In Search of America

Photography professor John Pickel will be returning from his Reynolds leave this fall. John spent this past academic year traveling the country in a motorhome with his German Shepherd, Char. He traveled to almost all the lower 48 states where he photographed people visiting tourist sites. John is interested in how photographs mediate experience. For example, while at the south rim of the Grand Canyon he overheard an elderly woman proclaim to her family, “It looks fake! It looks fake! It looks fake!” (See photo below)

John’s ultimate goal is to create a series of handmade photo books. You may have already guessed that the title for his book on the Grand Canyon will be “It Looks Fake.”

While at the Grand Canyon, he photographed a herd of elk as they passed through the campground. But that’s another story and another book.

John is very grateful that he could offset some of the cost of his trip with funds from his Hoak Family Fellowship and Christina W. Whitney Art Faculty Development Fund.