Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It is my pleasure to highlight some of the past year’s accomplishments in the Department of Art History and invite you to enjoy a fuller summation in the pages that follow. Among many faculty honors, kudos go first to Huey Copeland, recipient of the 2017 Absolut Art Writing Award. Also, Christina Normore was awarded the E. Leroy Hall Award for Excellence in Teaching, the highest teaching honor given by Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. The department conducted a search for a new faculty member in architectural history and looks forward to welcoming Ayala Levin to campus in Winter 2018.

Our newsletter reports many outstanding achievements of undergraduate and graduate students. To mention a few, five students completed the Ph.D. and, interestingly, the majority hold or are about to enter museum positions. This includes Emma Chubb, who will be inaugural curator of contemporary art at the Smith College Museum of Art. Current graduate students continue to garner prestigious awards including fellowships from the Northwestern Paris Program in Critical Theory, the Kress and Mellon Foundations, and two Fulbrights. Additionally, a number of undergraduate students are headed to advanced study in art history. It is a special pleasure to include here a report of the many accomplishments of our alumni. If you have not seen the survey of alumni placement since 2000 prepared by the office staff and posted on our website, I encourage you to have a look.

Programming in the form of lectures, exhibitions, and symposia this year was robust and often entailed cross-institutional collaboration, especially via the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded Chicago Objects Study Initiative (COSI), now entering its fourth year. This year’s newsletter highlights undergraduate initiatives in partnership with the Block Museum, collaborations with the Northwestern University/Art Institute of Chicago Center for Scientific Studies in the Arts (NU-ACCESS), and ongoing benefits to the department made possible by the Elizabeth and Todd Warnock Gift.

It was the department’s great fortune to see Mel Keiser promoted to the position of Department Assistant. As always, her work—including the design of this newsletter—has been exemplary. Enjoy the news of our department’s activities and please stay in touch.

Jesús Escobar
Department Chair
Kathleen Bickford Berzock
Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs,
Block Museum

Berzock co-curated the exhibition
Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory with Art History Ph.D. candidate Antawan Byrd and Block Museum curator Janet Dees. The exhibition was on view at the Block during Fall Quarter 2016. The museum received a National Endowment for the Humanities Planning Grant for Berzock’s forthcoming exhibition, Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Medieval Trans-Saharan Trade, which will open at the Block in January 2019. The grant provided resources for two meetings of an international and interdisciplinary scholarly committee that is advising on the project, as well as travel to the United Kingdom, Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria to meet with colleagues, undertake research, and review potential exhibition loans. In Winter Quarter, she and Christina Normore co-taught a 300-level seminar, “Expanding Medieval: West Africa and Trans-Saharan Trade,” which was informed in part by this work.

Richard Kieckhefer
Professor, Department of Religious Studies

Kieckhefer published his latest book, Hazards of the Dark Arts: Advice for Medieval Princes on Witchcraft and Magic (Penn State University Press, 2017) in the Magic in History Sourcebooks Series. It includes translations of two works, both by Germans who studied in Italy, came back to Germany, entered into service in the territorial princes, and wrote their advice literature for the princes. The first work is Johannes Hartlieb’s Book of All Forbidden Arts (1456). The second is Ulrich Molliton’s On Witches and Pythianesses (1489). The latter was reprinted many times along with the more famous Maleus maleficarum. But Molliton’s work is also important because it provided woodcuts illustrating the activities of witchcraft—the first fully developed cycle of such representations. The press reproduced all the woodcuts as full-page plates, in positions corresponding to those of the original.

Hamid Naficy
Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani Chair, Department of Radio, Television, and Film


Hamid Naficy
Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani Chair, Department of Radio, Television, and Film


Lan Releyea
Associate Professor, Department of Art Theory & Practice

In April 2017, Releyea’s essay “Realism’s Pencil Tip and How Easily It Breaks” appeared in the exhibition catalogue Adam McEwen: I Think I’m in Love (Aspen Art Museum, 2017). Also that month he delivered the keynote address for the symposium “Ros Publica, Public Thing,” organized by the University of Illinois Chicago Art History Graduate Student Association.

Marc Walton
Research Associate Professor, Senior Scientist at the Center for Scientific Studies in the Arts, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science

Walton began the academic year by hosting an international conference at the AIC entitled “Synchrotron Radiation in Art and Archaeology.” In addition, he taught the undergraduate seminar, Materiality of Art and Archaeology, at the interface of art and science. This seminar brought together students from the McCormick School of Engineering as well as from the Department of Art History to tackle issues surrounding materiality, often using hands-on examination of works at the Block Museum as a launching point. Next fall he will teach another seminar, this time in collaboration with the Classics Department, on the portraiture of Roman Egypt. The content generated from this course lays the foundation for a Winter 2018 exhibition at the Block Museum, Paint the Eyes Softer: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt. Walton also organized the first Cultural Heritage Research in the Netherlands trip, an international research experience for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students who work scientifically within the Rijksmuseum and the University of Amsterdam on projects about cultural heritage.

Bilha Moor
Postdoctoral Fellow

Staff News

Mel Keiser, Department Assistant  
During 2016, Keiser's work was included in the two-person exhibition A hole’s made of itself at Filter Gallery in Chicago, with Priya Kambli (Truman State University). In 2017, she was the Doing/Thinking resident at Wedge Projects with Matt Martin (Northwestern ATP), where she delivered the performance lecture “The Life and Deaths of The Mels: An Introduction” as her alter-ego, researcher Melga Blank. This performance lecture was also included in Danny Volk’s Submissive Exhibitions project at THE SUB-MISSION, and delivered as part of the Segal Design Institute’s Designing Your Life course with Pam Daniels (Clinical Assistant Professor and Design Innovator in Residence) and Bruce Ankenman (Co-Director, Professor of Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences). An exhibition of Melga Blank’s research materials was on display at the Segal Design Institute throughout the month of June. In the spring, Keiser received a grant from Northwestern’s Center for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts, which will support her ongoing multifaceted project, The Life and Deaths of The Mels. In conjunction with this grant, Keiser will collaborate with 3D designer Ian Nakamoto and the Rapid Prototyping Lab at Northwestern’s Segal Design Institute to memorialize past versions of herself, creating effigies of them which will be buried in local cemeteries. After a promotion in Fall 2016, Keiser now serves as Department Assistant.

Hana Thomson, Program Assistant  
Thomson joined the Department of Art History in November 2016. She moved to Chicago from New York, where she worked in the Diamond District at a small jewelry company. She was an Art History major at Dickinson College and has a Master’s degree in History of Decorative Arts and Design from Parsons/Cooper-Hewitt. Her specialty is American and European jewelry from 1850 to 1950 and American silver design from the same period. She has really enjoyed her time at Northwestern but will be leaving for an opportunity with a jewelry company based in Chicago at the end of July.