And the beat goes on

A historic future: the Chicago Architecture Biennial

Four degrees of combination

Engaged, for good: making artful history at UIC
Glenn Gould, the eccentric and brilliant Canadian pianist, once stated that the purpose of art is the lifelong construction of a state of wonder. In the College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts, the creative imagination and wonder are very much alive and embedded in all we do. Our faculty and students imagine new structures for human interaction; new ways to design, produce, and interact with the domains we inhabit; and new interpretations of historical artifacts. We imagine new kinetic performance practices, more just and inclusive communities, and discover new potentials and insights into human-computer interactions. We are the historians and theorists opening new provocations on how, when, where and design and artistic speculations shaped our lives. Much of our creativity is increasingly propelled by the intersections today with science, technology, literature, social studies, and healthcare advances. If the 20th century was about integration, the 21st century is all about increasing integration. Integration is not only the ability to put things together, to make new connections, but also to find new ways in which knowledge carries new meaning for our lives. We live in a world in which the discreet, siloed forms of knowledge remain some of the most powerful driving forces in our lives. History is our teacher, but the future can’t always wait until we can clarify the lessons for our current circumstances. As artists and scholars, we have to keep making, keep formulating new ideas, and keep conceiving new ways of expressing them. We desire original thought, after all.

If this issue of the College newsletter has a theme, it’s the artist’s use of past and present to shape the future. As educators and students, we already understand that knowing our history is critical; it helps us to not only correct the record, but also to hone our ability to conceive and implement positive change. These pages thus document a range of ways that our students and faculty are making an indelible impact on their immediate communities and the world at large, right now, with the future in mind. This year’s theme for the Chicago Architecture Biennial, “Make New History,” for instance, reflects the very cause of looking back while designing forward. The biennial is presenting work by 141 practitioners from more than 20 countries, an impressive 10 of the architects affiliated with the College’s School of Architecture. Meanwhile the Caterpillar Lab, housed in the UIC Innovation Center, is bringing together student minds of many disciplines to integrate the past into the present by contributing to the company’s rapid response capabilities in the Creative Economy. Lisa Yuen, rector of the School of Art & Art History, talks to Carrie Rabora Barratt (BA, 1981) about her memories of the College and her current work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and as the College looks back on its accomplishments, including 70 years of performing arts excellence, we are adding important new degree programs to meet the interests and needs of our evolving student community. Please also take a minute to read the impressive list of recent awards received by faculty and students across our member schools, and join me in congratulating them. The future will benefit from their work.

Finally, I hope you will consider attending the launch of IGNITE, UIC’s new capital campaign on October 28. The campaign will help advance the University’s strategic priorities, which are centered on student achievement, faculty leadership, and exemplary civic engagement. Your participation will help ensure that the College and University that you hold dear will remain a vital voice in the history-making conversations of the future. Not only looking but also acting forward — in teaching and learning, across disciplines and discoveries — remains the most viable path to a better world.

Cordially,
Steve Everett
The title of this year’s Chicago Architecture Biennial — Make New History — is succinct, yet robust. From the declarative verb make, to the tenet of innovation embedded in new, to the respect for past and future indicated by history, the exhibition promises to present work of currency and consequence while calling the architecture community to further action.

Ten members of the UIC School of Architecture faculty are participating in the biennial, which runs from Saturday, September 16, 2017, to Sunday, January 7, 2018: Paul Andersen (Independent Architecture) and Paul Pfeiffer (Paul Pfeiffer Architecture); Sarah Dunn (UrbanLab); Sam Jacob (Sam Jacob Studio); Anna Javorska; Stewart Hicks and Allison Newmeyer (Design With Company); Thomas Kelley (Norman Kelley); Robert-Somol (UIC School of Architecture); and Andrew Zago (Zago Architecture).

In their program statement, the biennial’s Artistic Directors Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee write: “Today, history represents neither an oppressive past that modernism tried to discard nor a retrograde mind-set against unbridled progress. Instead, at a time when there is too much information and not enough attention — when a general collective amnesia perpetuates a state of eternal presentness — understanding the channels through which history moves and is shaped by architecture is more important than ever. A generation of architects has noted a renewed interest in precedents of architecture. Committed to progress, but always from within an architectural tradition, these architects are producing innovative and persuasive works grounded in the fundamentals of the discipline, and rooted in the fabric of the cities where they are built, without feeling pressured to keep up with micro-trends or being accused of cultural appropriation."

The assertion that architects are working “at a time when there is too much information and not enough attention” frames the biennial with some urgency, as an exercise in looking, and judging architecture itself as an intervention against the “collective amnesia” that “perpetuates an eternal presentness.” Architecture’s future seems newly and fearlessly drawn by the lines of historical understanding intersecting with entirely new lines of inquiry in the current age of sustainability, accessibility, speed, and the constant flow of information.

The advantage for students of architecture would seem to be the discovery that being able to know anything, anytime remains less important than what you understand. Expectations can be successfully subverted only when they are grasped.

In this spirit of close looking within the context of both an omnipresent past and impending provocation, faculty members and biennial participant Sarah Dunn, advises architecture students and recent graduates to go, and go often, to the biennial. Students in the School of Architecture are fortunate to be learning their profession in one of the great modern cities of the world, but the biennial brings a host of other cities and projects to Chicago as well. Dunn says the phrase “make new history” is “an interesting one that makes you think twice. How does one do that? It’s a process of both looking forward and looking back.

For details about the biennial, visit: chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org.
A legacy of responsibility

As the Print Shop Manager at UIC, Daniel Mellis has a job with a long heritage of disseminating information, for both activism and posterity. Not one to shirk responsibility, he is currently preserving a relevant piece of UIC history: five posters printed by students for the protests on the streets of Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. At the time, the students posted some of the posters up beneath a skylight in the Art & Architecture building (now Architecture and Design Studios), where they remain today. The letterpress shop in which they were printed is now part of the School of Design, enabling Mellis to reprint them using the very same fonts of metal and wood type, sometimes down to the individual letter. With slogans such as “All power to the people” and “Free Huey, support the Panthers,” the posters refer to another thing vital and ongoing — the University’s commitment to social and political engagement.

Currently on view at the Cultural Center, the Chicago Architecture Biennial carries the theme “Make New Work” (see page 3), thus positing history’s perennial role in art making. The biennial asks questions about the precedents of architecture and acknowledges a resurgence of interest in the history of the art form, but is squarely committed to showing groundbreaking initiatives such as public engagement events such as public engagement events. Of note will be a culminating exhibition at UIC’s Gallery 400 in spring 2019, along with a publication.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, the UIC campus and various neighborhoods will host Garden for a Changing Climate, led by Lorelei Stewart, Director of Gallery 400 and lecturer in the School of Art & Art History, and Hannah B. Higgins, Professor of Art History and founding Director of CADA’s Interdisciplinary Education and the Arts Program (IDES). Created by the National Resource Defense Council’s (NRDC) first artist-in-residence, Jenny Kendler, Garden for a Changing Climate is a community-driven participatory public art project that engages Chicagoans a dynamic and tangible experience of the central effects of climate change.

Through the competition “The Work of the Humanities in a Changing Climate,” the Humanities Without Walls Consortium, based at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has granted support to two relevant UIC projects: Political Ecology as Practice: A Regional Approach to the Anthropocene and Garden for a Changing Climate. Ömür Harmanşah, Associate Professor of Art History, is the Lead Co-organizer of the 2015–17 UIC working group. Political Ecologies: Nature, Place, Heritage, which includes Molly Doane, Associate Professor of Anthropology; Ralph Cintron, Associate Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies and English; Beate Geisler, Associate Professor of Art; and David H. Wise, Professor of Biological Sciences, Associate Director of the Institute for Environmental Science and Policy, and Co-Chair of the Chicago Wilderness Science Team. Faculty and graduate students from the fields of art history, art, anthropology, English, rhetoric, environmental sciences, Latin American studies, urban studies, and geography are also on the team, collaborating with counterparts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison).

Political Ecology as Practice reflects time—best practices within humanist inquiry: exchanging ideas across disciplines, and rigorous fieldwork. The project is investigating the reciprocal relationship and the disjunction between the metropolitan theories of the Anthropocene — the current geological age, defined by the dominance of human activity on the earth’s environment — and local ecological conflicts in various micro-regions around the world.

How are these conflicts related to the current vibrant theories of the academic/metropolitan center? And how might these theories be affecting various communities in their relationships to their land, its resources, biodiversity, and cultural heritage? Therefore, the project has two interrelated pursuits: first, to bring together scholars to examine not only global theories of the Anthropocene and its new ontologies of time and materiality, but also their links to regional practices and discourses, and second, to investigate place-based politics — pressing issues of the environment explored through local and far-flung fieldwork, from the study of industrial row crop farming in northern Illinois and the water system in Cochabamba, Bolivia to hydropower dams and large-scale industrial tree plantations in Cambodia, and a coal-fired power plant in West Central Turkey. Developed from existing projects of graduate students and faculty at UIC and UW-Madison, these initiatives will be carried out by small teams through field observations and interviews, visual documentation, and creative interventions such as public engagement events or art installations. The eight field initiatives will be represented in a culminating exhibition at UIC’s Gallery 400 in spring 2019, along with a publication.

As our climate warms, seasons and ecosystems shift more quickly, and extreme weather conditions to housing instability. The educational ambitions of the project also extend to UIC’s student population. IDEAS students, who participate in practice-based group projects, will be involved in design, app development, sonification and visualization, and writing for the Garden during the 2017–18 academic year.

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Engaged, for artful history
at UIC

(continued on page 6)
Carrie Rebaro Barratt: I worked at the School of Art and Architecture during my junior and senior years at UIC, and kept that job during the summer until my departure for sunny Los Angeles, where I continued my art history studies at UCLA. UIC set me up perfectly for the rigorous master’s degree curriculum and also for three years in the sun, so sorely needed after growing up in Chicago.

LYL: I remember the moment I read the Bhagavad Gita in college. It totally blew my mind. Do you remember a particular text that you read at UIC, or a work of art that you encountered as a student that has stayed relevant to your life and work and why?

CRB: Learning from Las Vegas by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, given to me by the architecture student (Michael Barratt) whom I would marry several years later, so a book that formed my thinking about practice and theory in the arts overall and also a token of love.

Leda and the Swan by Leonardo da Vinci, our brutalist campus sometimes gets a bad rap. Do you have a specific memory of a moment from your life as a student at UIC?

LYL: Our brutalist campus sometimes gets a bad rap. Do you have a specific memory of a moment from your life as a student at UIC?

CRB: Quotidian, but sliding across the floor, the real problems to solve, to rapid prototyping, testing, and reiteration.

CRB: Great art museums, like the Met, are really vestiges of imperialism, with a vast number of artifacts in their collections acquired due to oppressive and unjust systems of power.

CRB: Hmmm. The Met will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2022, founded in 1870 by a group of New York art collectors and artists who wished to bring the art of the world to the city of New York. The Met had a building before it had a collection (not so different than the Art Institute of Chicago or the entire Smithsonian, both of which were founded on a passion for culture and art and the great effect art would have on visitors). Today, we can tell a meaningful story of how each and every work in the collection was acquired and how each teaches and inspires.

CRB: Diversity and inclusion are top considerations in Met governance, visitation, and in our collection. We consider this in every acquisition we make, from the ancient world to the modern, from Asia to America, in contemporary paintings and musical instruments.

CRB: Every class should make one a better person, if the learning is true, applied judiciously, and extrapolated into other areas.

LYL: Why do you think institutions like the Met are relevant to society today?

CRB: Every class should make one a better person, if the learning is true, applied judiciously, and extrapolated into other areas.

LYL: How would you respond to critics that our brutalist campus sometimes gets a bad rap. Do you have a specific memory of a moment from your life as a student at UIC?

CRB: Design

“The thing I like the most about the CAT Lab are the people. We are a tight group with varied backgrounds. This brings new and constant ideas to the table and elevates your thinking. It’s like bouncing the ball in the air and making sure it never touches the floor; someone else picks up from where you left off.”

Karan Patel (MS MIS ’17)

Today’s college students are launching their professional lives amid the realities of the digital age. The pursuit of ongoing information, innovation, and iteration. They will be working for organiza-tions that have a constant stream of data, but doing so the age-old reality that data doesn’t solve problems or seize opportunities; people do.

So given the pace of launching new prod-ucts and services in the digital age, what kinds of educational experiences are going to best prepare UIC students? And how might businesses benefit from the relative ease of the students’ negotiations in the digital world sooner, rather than later?

To the benefit of both these sides of the knowledge exchange, Caterpillar has staffed a research laboratory on campus, in the UIC Innovation Center. A multidisciplinary team of students — graphic and industrial designers, business majors, ex-perts in computer science, data analytics, and information systems — are being mentored by Samantha Melchiori, Cater-pilar’s Digital and Analytics Site Director, and Beth Ladd, the company’s Analytics Research and Development Manager, as well as the Innovation Center’s Executive Director, Peter Pfanntz; CADA faculty member Don Bergh from the School of Design; and Caterpillar Professor Ugo Buy, from the College of Engineering.

Caterpillar has already moved well beyond the opening gambit — What about a con-struction site could be construed as digital? — and is imagining what the connected worker looks like 10 years from now — that worker being part of a broad ecosystem in which machines, people, workflow materials, and the weather conditions are all ingredients to making a safer and more productive environment. On the one hand, we are asking questions about big machines, construction sites, efficiency, and a multitude of other factors present, you begin to understand why you need a lot of different minds in the room.

Now entering its second year, the lab grew out of an interdisciplinary product develop-ment course CAT launched with UIC two years ago as a way of taking students from asking open-ended questions to identifying the real problems to solve, to rapid proto-typing, testing, and reiteration.

Andrew Kunk (BDes ’18) explains his expe-rience in the lab: “Before working at the CAT Lab, I was unsure about what kind of design I wanted to practice. The lab has helped me realize my interest in taking a user-centered approach. I had a wonderful experience, for example, traveling to a job site in Texas to do observational research and user testing with fuel truck drivers. We have been developing an optimization solution, and seeing the students from the lab solidifying their interest in the lab with solidifying her interest in user-centered research: “Before this I had taken design research classes under Robert Zolna and Susan Stirling at UIC. Being able to apply the methodology and seeing how it worked was exciting and mind-opening. Working closely with the computer science students who are on our team has also heightened my awareness of how fast the fields of CS and design are converging. I see a lot of opportunity in this experience for future professional goals.”

We have also had a fine record over the past years of special exhibitions devoted to female artists.

LYL: Just as many of us would’ve loved to see a woman president, I think we would also love to see a woman director at the Met. Only one of the country’s 13 largest museums is run by a woman (Brooklyn Museum).

CRB: It’s time, and also worth saying that a woman director at the Met would be joining a senior team on which all CFO, General Counsel, Head of Strategy, Head of Exhibitions, and VP for Human Resources are all women, not to mention the extra-ordinary balance of men to women across the staff of the museum.

LYL: I know you are so busy, and so please know that UIC and I really appreciate this interview.

CRB: Did I make the deadline? Phew!

Note: This interview has been gently edited.
Of note at the College

1. School of Architecture and Art & Art History: In memoriam

D. Ross Edman, 1936–2017
Assistant Professor Emeritus in Asian Art, Department of Art History

Ross Edman taught at UIC from 1965 to 1995, and then became an esteemed emeritus faculty member. Edman was also an Honors College fellow from 1995 to 1998. Although he was especially valued for his expertise in Asian art, he taught courses across the curriculum, including survey and introductory courses. During his time at UIC, Edman was a much beloved teacher and mentor to undergraduate students, winning the coveted Silver Circle Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1988. In recognition for his engagement with his students, the Department of Art History established the Ross Edman Fund to support undergraduate students in art history through scholarships and travel for undergraduate research.

The College also mourns the loss of two members of the emeritus faculty of the School of Architecture: John Macsai and Louis Rocah.

John Macsai, 1926–2017
Professor Emeritus, School of Architecture

John Macsai, a renowned Chicago architect who spent more than 20 years on the faculty of the School of Architecture and served as the school’s head of housing design, passed away on August 9. Macsai also designed for the twin apartment building on the east side of Chicago Avenue between Church and Clark Streets, Evanston.

Louis Rocah, 1926–2017
Associate Professor Emeritus, School of Architecture

A prizewinning architect who taught in the School of Architecture for five decades, Lou Rocah had a profound impact on his fellow faculty and students alike. One of his former students, James Gwinner (BA ’00 and MArch ’04), delivered a heartfelt eulogy to Rocah, recalling, “He was a natural teacher who taught for 50 years — 50 years — for the simplest reason of all: he loved it. He loved sharing what he knew and what he had learned from his many years of practice, he loved getting to know his students and hearing what they had to say and what their experiences were, and he loved seeing them progress and succeed, which is what kept him teaching well past the point when many would have traded in their slides and laser pointer for golf clubs or a fishing pole.”

2. UIC: IGNITE capital campaign launch

On October 28, UIC will launch the IGNITE Campaign and UIC Alumni Association (UICAA). These initiatives will benefit UIC’s students, faculty, and community, and renew the University’s commitment to alumni. UIC’s unique position at the intersection of research and urban life has led its institution to become one of the premier urban research universities in the nation and a model for diversity and public service in the 21st century. Honoring UIC’s legacy and promise of unwavering commitment to public education, IGNITE will take on the challenges of our time: personalizing medicine; improving the urban infrastructure; reducing community disparities and social inequality; unraveling the mysteries of the human brain; harnessing the power of big data; and curing devastating diseases — all pursued with the goal of understanding who we are and who we will become. The festivities will include a launch rally and after-party on UIC’s campus.

3. Theatre & Music: Latin American music course now online

As of the current academic year, CADA’s most popular general education class, “Latin American Music,” is offered as an online course. This pioneering text offering will help the College in its ongoing effort to leverage technology to increase avenues to higher education. The course lecturer is Elbio Bariliari, co-founder and co-director of the Chicago Latino Music Festival.

4. Art & Art History: Signature Move

In July, the Los Angeles–based nonprofit Outfest awarded its US Grand Jury Prize to the 2017 film Signature Move, directed by Jennifer Reeder. Associate Professor, Department of Art. Screenings of the film are taking place throughout the country, including a preview in September at the Music Box Theatre, Chicago. Signature Move is a story of love and some of its modern-day corollaries, combining a new romance between Zaynab (Fawzia Mirza), a Muslim lesbian lawyer, and Alma (Sari Sanchez), a confident Mexican-American woman, with a look at Zaynab’s complicated relationship with her new roommate Parveen (Shabana Azmi), who is also her recently widowed mother. Zaynab’s newfound interest in wrestling and her fascination with Alma’s mother add to the comedy — and to the drama.

5. Architecture: Architect magazine, sabbaticals

The August issue of Architect, the journal of the American Institute of Architects features an extensive article on the School of Architecture and its faculty. “Letter from Chicago: UIC’s Instagrammable Moment” by Zach Mortice discusses the compelling ideas, work, and influence of the school in the digital age. Mortice notes, “The school has emerged as a hotbed for exploring how the rise of the internet and rapidly shifting visual media are shaping ideas about buildings.”

Penelope Dean, Associate Professor, is Scholar-in-Residence at Chicago’s Newberry Library for the 2017–18 academic year. Dean will be consulting the Edith Farnsworth Papers and the Robert Hunter Middleton Archive as part of her on-going project “So Different, So Appealing: Clients, Objects, Architectures.” Also currently on sabbatical for the fall semester, Associate Professor Paul Pralinsen is examining a selection of strangely organized small American cities for a treatise on alternative forms of cities and their spaces.

6. Design: Entrepreneurs in training

The course “Entrepreneurial Product Development,” led by School of Design faculty members Ted Burdett and Craighton Berman guided students through the creation and marketing of new products, including advice on how to use crowdfunding through kickstarter. Particularly successful products included the Iron Apron, created by Brennan Murphy Gudmundson (BDes ’17); Sindr: The Strike-Anywhere Candle Holder by Ariel Lynne (BDes ’16); and Finch: The Ceramic Carry Flask, by Michael Regan (BDes ’17). See the “Always Be Hustling” blog on Tumblr for more information about all the products developed and marketed through the course.
Artist and Professor Emeritus Tony Tasset’s public artwork, Artists Monument, moved to its permanent UIC campus home on August 30. First exhibited at the 2014 Whitney Biennial in New York, the work has also been displayed in Chicago’s Grant Park. It measures 80 × 8 × 8 feet and bears the names of 392,486 artists on brightly colored acrylic panels. The artists mentioned range from Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, to emerging artists, some with only a single exhibition to their credit — all drawn from an existing database that Tasset has not disclosed.

Artists Monument serves as a welcoming entryway to the UIC campus. As Dean Everett explains, “It lists artists more democratically by listing their names alphabetically, rather than by fame…. We thought in some ways the idea of this piece captured a lot of what UIC endeavors to do for the city. It strives to be a unifying, leveling opportunity for students of all economic and social demographics to be able to come to a public, urban university.”