

Expressions

Volume 13

SJSU | COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND THE ARTS

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Hammer Theatre: Ramping Up for a New Year

Hammer Theatre: Ramping Up for a Happy (and Exciting!) New Year



It's hard to believe that 2017 is already upon us, but the year looks especially exciting for the Hammer Theatre staff, who have added some new faces to the mix. Maria Bones and Andrew Sutton have jumped on board as full-time staff, and university employees Nina Nolan and Jim LeFever continue to offer their expertise and support.

Says Executive Managing Director Chris Burrill, "The Hammer Theatre Center has added several important staff. Lisa Laymon; Director of Client Services, is formalizing the activity of client services. Maria Bones, Director of Patron Services, provides service to the theatre

patrons attending productions, as well as box office and ticketing services. Our new Technical Production Manager, Anthony Sutton, provides technical and design service in the areas of stage lighting and sound. Our staff works together with our Director of Technology and Facilities, Jim LeFever, to create a venue of limitless opportunities, while providing excellent service." In addition, Nina Nolan has come to help with accounting—another crucial piece for keeping the Hammer successful.

Maria Bones comes to us from St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San José, where she directed the children's ministry, oversaw volunteers, and managed big church events. As director of patron services, she's responsible for meeting with clients of upcoming shows, helping to set up the online ticketing sales structure, managing the box office staff, recruiting and managing volunteer ushers, and overseeing emergency preparedness and safety for Hammer patrons. "Every day brings a new set of challenges," she says, "depending on what kind of event or performance group is in the house. I recruit, organize, motivate, and manage a corps of volunteers who serve as ushers for the various performances and events. We have people of all ages and experiences, so I get to meet, and work with, a wide range of personalities."

"My goal is to provide a fantastic experience for every person who walks through our doors," she adds, "whether they are attending a theatre, film, music, or dance performance, or just coming for a reception on our Rooftop Terrace. Our box office is open weekday afternoons, noon to 5 pm," she continues. "It's great to watch the SJSU community walk...or skateboard...or bike by on their way to classes."

While Maria works with the public, Anthony Sutton works backstage as Technical

Production Manager. "My number one job," he says, "is to make sure that artistic visions come to life with all of the tools that we have at our hands." Anthony has been doing technical theater since the 5th grade, and was brought on staff to both manage the technical aspects of the theater and to keep everything updated. "The first time I walked through the Hammer, I knew that this theatre was in need of help. None of the lighting, sound, or A/V systems had been upgraded since 1997, when the building opened. I saw this as an amazing opportunity to show the community what this great space could be with the right support."

Major upgrades have been made to the Hammer's lighting, sound, and A/V systems in a few short months, for which Sutton expresses gratitude. "This is really where my 'light shines.' I get such joy out of making things better than they were and implementing and learning new technology. This is such a cool thing for the students as well. Our student technicians get to work on top-of-the-line equipment, allowing them and the theatre community to make art to its fullest extent."

Hammer Theatre Director Chris Burrill says, "In 2017, we will hit our stride in providing for cornerstone uses from San José State University departments of theatre and music and dance, while developing working relationships with area arts organizations and local businesses and corporations. In addition, we expect to announce an initiative to present carefully curated presented activities from across the nation and abroad."

Upcoming events at the Hammer Theatre include Cinequest, Elijah, An Hour with Bryan Stevenson, The Catalyst Quartet, a continuation of National Theater Live—and so many more. Check out the [Hammer Theatre website](#) for a complete list of events and dates!

San José Shines a Light at Hammer Theatre

San José Shines a Light at Hammer Theatre



On January 19, over 150 students, faculty, SJSU employees, and community members met in the Hammer Theatre to participate in the Ghostlight Project, a nationwide gathering in theaters, universities, and community centers designed to create “light” in the uncertain times that lie ahead. Joined in spirit with a gathering at the San José Stage Company a few blocks away, the Hammer Ghostlight event was one of dozens across the Bay Area that brought residents together to support the values of inclusion, justice, and equity.

The Ghostlight Project draws inspiration from a tradition of theaters leaving a “ghost light” on

when they go dark. By participating in the lighting ceremony at the Hammer, participants pledged “to stand for and protect the values of inclusion, participation, and compassion for everyone—regardless of race, class, religion, country of origin, immigration status, (dis)ability, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

Dean Lisa Vollendorf and Theatre Arts Professor Buddy Butler welcomed the crowd from a staircase in the Hammer lobby before turning on the Ghostlight. The single bulb was filtered through colored glass bulbs and reflected by a rotating disco ball. The Hammer foyer was alive with color as Dean Vollendorf roamed the audience, mic in hand, soliciting audience members’ statements about who they are and what they believe.

Signs printed for the event read “I am _____, I fight for _____”, leaving blank spaces for participants to fill out and announce. “I am a teacher, a mother, and a woman,” said one attendee, “and I fight for our children.” “I am hanging on to hope,” said another participant, “and I fight for a world that has room for all of us.” These signs are now displayed in the Hammer Theatre windows facing the *Paseo de San Antonio*, testifying to the diverse perspectives and shared hopes of Ghostlight participants.

Says Dean Vollendorf, “SJSU is committed to serving a diverse student body and the diverse communities that contribute to the cultural richness of our city and our region. The Ghostlight Project afforded us an opportunity to express our core values—diversity, inclusion, and compassion. I was thrilled to see so many students, faculty, staff, San José Stage patrons, and other community members at the event.”

To learn more about the national event, please visit [the website of the Ghostlight Project](#).

See SJSU's involvement with the Ghostlight Project here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRL3H-ave6w>



Time and Place: Speaking Through the Arts

Time and Place: Speaking Through the Arts

The College of Humanities and the Arts is thrilled that Professor Robin Lasser has been awarded a Eureka Fellowship for 2019. Sponsored by the Fleishhacker Foundation, Eureka Fellowships support projects by Bay Area artists. Unlike many monetary awards, the Fellowship is not restricted to a specific project, allowing artists more freedom to pursue the work they want to create to make a difference in the world.

Joining the ranks of those Bay Area artists who have been awarded the Fellowship presents a unique distinction. "I'm really grateful and honored," Lasser states. "Some of the other awardees, like Guillermo Gómez-Peña, I have personally admired for most of my career as an artist. So I feel like I'm in great company." The upcoming Fellowship presents Lasser with an opportunity to continue doing what she does best – making art that explores issues of identity, culture, and borders. By addressing topics through artistic means, Lasser allows people to connect with the larger issues around them, giving them more intimate glances into stories from around the world.

Lasser's work focuses on time and place, the movement and flow of human migration, and the traces that are left behind when people migrate. Her art is characterized by an interdisciplinary, collaborative process that encourages viewers to participate in the creation of art. *Dress Tents* provides one example of Lasser's typical process. This ongoing series is a collaboration with Adrienne Pao, a former SJSU graduate student who currently teaches at the Academy of Arts in San Francisco. Built for a specific place, the Tents serve as social sculptures, combining photography and architecture, as well as fashion and performance art.

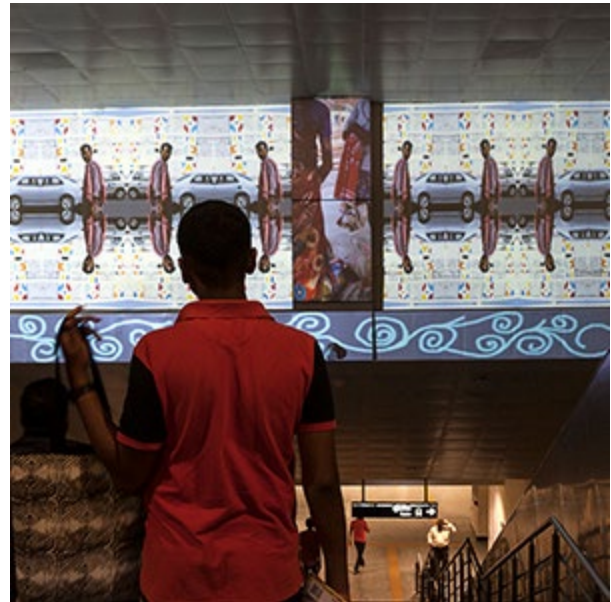


One such sculpture, [Ms. Homeland Security](#), was built and performed by Lasser herself at the border between San Diego and Tijuana, a place which holds specific significance to Lasser, who was raised in San Diego. Visitors who happened by the sculpture were invited into the tent itself, which contained only an army cot. Lasser explained, "If you're a visitor, you're encouraged to do graffiti on the cot, prompted by the question: 'How do you feel about border issues?' Sometimes people answered that question around their own identity and sexuality, and where that border

lies, and others dealt directly with the scene at hand -- the border between Mexico and the United States. All the dress tents are created for a particular place, and they playfully and open-endedly prompt all of us to engage in our own reactions to the geopolitics of place."

In another collaboration, this time with SJSU artist G. Craig Hobbs, Lasser produced [*Migratory Cultures*](#), a project that uses large-scale video in public spaces to celebrate and share unique stories of migration. Iterations of this project have been presented around the Bay Area, including onto the San José Museum of Art in July of 2016. Most recently, the project has gone global as Lasser and Hobbs traveled to India to work with students from the Srishti Institute to create six installations in the Bangalore metro station. Those whose stories were being told were closely tied to the metro station, as they worked there in an effort to better their lives. "It was an honor to be able to map and project their stories onto the station itself, and to have those that labor at the station be celebrated and have their voice heard," Lasser said.

"The students at [*Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology*](#) are much like our students at SJSU," Hobbs elaborated. "They are global citizens, and are remarkably talented young artists, representing the future of India. The students were committed to working with us as international visiting faculty, but also as young artists willing to work diligently as collaborators to make sure our project presented in the [*Art in Transit Festival of Stories*](#) exhibition at Cubbon Park Metro station was a resounding success." *Migratory Cultures* is to be exhibited again both locally, in San Francisco, as well as internationally, in Goa, India at the *Story of Space* Festival in 2017. "Every single person who migrates has a story. As artists we are interested in hearing and sharing those stories as an antidote to the fear, xenophobia, and emerging strains of fervent nationalism."



Lasser is currently working on creating a project entitled *Project Iceships: Love Letters in the Time of Climate Change*. Speaking to the all-encompassing phenomena that is climatic change, *Project Iceships* aims to bring a monumental issue to a scale that people can relate to by asking students and members of the community to draft love letters to the Earth. Lasser elaborated, pointing out, "When we love, ultimately we care. So if we thought about the Earth and everything on it as a place we love, and about creatures that we care about, this brings this issue, which is so large and so scary for so many of us, one step closer. Then we're provided an opportunity to look towards it, and reflect upon it, and potentially make the changes that we all need to make as a global race in order to continue the human presence on this Earth as we understand it now."

Like much of her art, *Project Iceships* provides a space for audience members to collaborate in the creation of art. The nature of the art, and the act of co-production, opens an internal space for reflection, compassion, and love. Lasser's generous approach to her art reflects her fundamental belief that art can bring people together in ways that

promote social change. "Ultimately I think when we share each other's stories, it's like walking a mile in somebody else's shoes. It's almost impossible not to relate to them differently than if we had never sat down at a dinner table with them and shared a meal. And that meal is their story."

From Vision to Reality: Telling the Story of Kepler's Dream

From Vision to Reality: Telling the Story of Kepler's Dream



Director Amy Glazer

Determined to create a work of cinematography that was not based on a theatrical play, Professor Amy Glazer spent her last sabbatical bringing to life *Kepler's Dream*, the coming-of-age story of a young girl, Ella. Working alongside Sylvia Brownrigg, the author of the novel on which the film is based, with support from screenwriter Mitch Glazer (*Scrooged*, *The Recruit*, *Great Expectations*), Patricia Resnick (*Nine to Five*), and Cinco Paul (*Despicable Me*) to adapt the film into a screenplay, Glazer knew this was a story that needed to be told.

"It was about forgiveness. It was about an 11-year-old girl and it spoke so directly and deeply to the 11-year-old girl inside of me," Glazer recalled. "When I finished the read, I was in tears, but also elated because I knew I had found my next feature film."

As the director, Glazer worked tirelessly to assemble a cast that would do the story justice. Kerry Barden of Barden/Schnee Casting in Santa Monica helped her work through the arduous process. The duo put together a cast led by a young girl who reminded Glazer of a young Sylvia Brownrigg, the author of the book. From there, Glazer added Kelly Lynch (*Drugstore Cowboy*, *Curly Sue*), Holland Taylor (*Two and a Half Men*, *The Truman Show*), Sean Patrick Flanery (*The Boondock Saints*), and Steven Michael Quezada (*Breaking Bad*), among others, to the cast. Additional cast was hired in New Mexico, where *Kepler's Dream* was being filmed, in an effort to recreate and reflect the world of Santa Fe.

While complications arose at every turn, including increased difficulty finding and putting together a production team, Glazer endeavored to make her vision a reality. She connected with cinematographer Nancy Schreiber, who understood Glazer's sensibility and aesthetics as well as her focus on performance. Glazer's commitment to the story, alongside her philosophy stemming from her long experience directing for the theater, were key to her film directing philosophy; Schreiber and Glazer created quite the collaboration.

Several students and former students of Glazer's were involved in the film, including Associate Producer Oscar Arguello, who contributed significantly to the success of the film, and Vijay Rajan, who worked closely in the process of developing the script and earned a writing credit on the film. Student responses to each version of the project also helped Glazer shape the film during its creation, and they remained involved in the experience of adapting source material into a screenplay. "Because it was a film about young people and for young people, their feedback and input was enormously valuable,"

Glazer remarked. With her students and cast behind her, the monumental effort that Glazer put into creating *Kepler's Dream* did not go unrewarded. Her dedication to the project, three years time from the inception of the idea to post-production in England, speaks to her commitment to her craft. She also gained a wealth of experiences and opportunities that came from long days of filming and revision, which ultimately came together to tell the story of *Kepler's Dream*.

To those looking to get involved in film direction, Glazer advises: "Do as much preparation before you start shooting as you possibly can, because shooting a film feels a lot like going into battle. You are battling the environment and the weather, a schedule that's often unrealistic and much shorter than you need, as well as the money people who are standing over you with great concern that every choice and every change will "up" the budget. Also, when you are doing a union shoot, as this was, there are many rules and regulations that must be adhered to that also compromise your ability to improvise or react more spontaneously



and more creatively as one might in on a smaller budget film. And through all this you have to set the tone and the culture for collaboration that will motivate your team to do their finest work. Because at the end of the day what you have, what is captured, is all there is. And there is no going back. So it is necessary to keep the spirits up and to motivate this diverse team of artists from the art director and production designer, to the people serving us our meals, to the location folks, and finally, to the actors. It is a tricky dance and takes a great deal of tenacity, focus and sheer force of will!"

Following her own advice, *Kepler's Dream* is a film to be proud of, provoking audience responses that ranged from excitement to tears. At the 39th Annual *Mill Valley Film Festival*, the film received an *Audience Favorite Award, Silver Medal*, in the Family Film Category. Glazer explained, "For me, telling meaningful stories is what I'm about, and what my life's work has been about. This was a story for all the little girls in the world who have to face the harsh realities that life sometimes deals them. I hope it helps them face life's trials and tribulations, and I hope it helps them forgive the imperfections of families and parenting. I also hope it teaches them to be brave and courageous and to believe in the power of all kinds of family. Finally, it is an homage to 'great books' and the love of reading as a powerful source of inspiration"

For more information about the film, visit [ID](#) and the [film's web page](#).

Welcome to SJSU Sheryl Spann

Welcome to SJSU Sheryl Spann



The College of Humanities and the Arts is proud to welcome Sheryl Spann as the new Director of Marketing for the college. In her new role, Sheryl will oversee day-to-day marketing needs for the college and its many departments, as well as develop long-term strategies for expanding public awareness and community involvement in the multitude of riches that H&A has to offer.

“Having the opportunity to be the college's first director of marketing is a great honor and responsibility,” says Ms. Spann. “I was attracted by the opportunity to create and implement highly strategic and creative marketing efforts for the College of Humanities

and the Arts as well as the Hammer Theatre. With its diverse departments, from World Languages and Literatures to Philosophy and Music and Dance, the college tapped into my academic, professional, and personal background. The multi-cultural strengths of San José State University and the region made this position a great fit for me!”

Sheryl comes to us from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where she was the director of marketing for the College of Music and the Arts. At LSU, she oversaw publicity and marketing for over 300 yearly events, as well as numerous initiatives to build national and local awareness of the college's academic programs, community outreach partnerships, fundraising efforts and alumni achievements. Her marketing created a strong print and digital footprint to reach a broad audience.

Asked about the transition from the Deep South to the West Coast, Sheryl says, “LSU has its beautiful live oak trees, fragrant magnolias, and humid heat; the SJSU campus is a beautiful alternative. Its palm trees and conifers swaying in the sunny climate of northern California is a welcome change. I am confident that the diversity of the SJSU community will provide a variety of world perspectives resulting in great new work-related partners and friends.”

Sheryl looks forward to collaborating with others to shine a light on SJSU's College of Humanities and the Arts. “I am thrilled and eager to partner with Dean Lisa Vollendorf, the professors and staff of the College of Humanities and the Arts, and the talented student marketing team to review the established strategic goals and make a significant, positive difference for the college and the Hammer Theatre. I will seek to build partnerships and work with the marketing team to develop creative, targeted, effective marketing to achieve college and theater venue goals.”

Long a proponent of the humanities, Sheryl is impressed with what she's found at SJSU. "The College of Humanities and The Arts is the heart and soul of the university," she says. "The college's departments are varied and have their own creative beat. The Hammer Theatre, with its state of the art staging capabilities, perfect mid-size audience seating, orchestra capable stage and multiple event catering spaces, is a dream theater opportunity."

"My goal," she concludes, "is to develop strategic, creative marketing that powerfully showcases the strengths of the college and Hammer Theatre to San José, California, and the world."

She's already making us sound great. Join us in welcoming Sheryl to the team!

SJSU Opera Theatre Takes Third

SJSU Opera Theatre Takes Third



The College of Humanities and the Arts is proud to announce that the Opera Theatre's Spring 2016 production of Dominick Argento's *Postcard from Morocco* has tied for third place in Division 1 of the National Opera Association Annual Competition. Made up of workshop directors from colleges and universities all over the United States, the yearly competition encourages programs and students to push themselves to reach new heights.

Professor Layna Chianakas, the director of the SJSU Opera Theatre program, explained that "our particular category, category one, had over 20 people who submitted. To have that many

people submit and get third place, with very little budget, was amazing."

Working with a modern piece such as *Postcard from Morocco*, which is considered a contemporary opera, created its own set of challenges for the cast. The piece is based in surrealism, and as such has a plot that is not entirely defined. This left the piece open to interpretation by Professor Chianakas and students like Robert Nico Sanchez, who took on the role of assistant director. For Nico, it was an opportunity to experience a new side of the theatre. "I have always loved performing, but I found an affinity for theater production; I now have this great, contemporary opera that I know inside and out, but beyond that I have a whole new skill set I can use to explore theatrical direction and production." From recording staging notes and lighting cues to writing rehearsal summaries, Nico's involvement in the production helped him grow alongside the cast on stage.

The process of putting together such a production brought the members of the Opera Theatre program closer together. Marisol De Anda Martinez, who played the role of the Lady With a Hand Mirror, noted that despite the stress of learning and rehearsing the piece, the members of the production were able to rely on one another. "We were all in it together," she explained. "We all knew that nothing in *Postcard from Morocco* would be easy, so it was great to have everyone come together to support each other and lend a hand where and when needed."

Joci-Patrice Houston, cast as The Foreign Singer, was encouraged to confront the intricacies of her role under the careful tutelage of many supportive professors and staff members. Despite the unusual sound of the scales and the fictional language her character sang in, Joci-Patrice adopted an open mindset, which enabled her to collaborate with a dancer who accompanied her singing. Ultimately, she remarked, "this

work inspired the cast and our director to transcend our abilities and dig deeply into our own vulnerabilities to make art. It really blew me away.”

“I’m really proud that we can call ourselves award-winning,” Professor Chianakas said. “The thing that makes me the happiest is our students, who really rose and reached their full potential and even a little bit more. To me, that’s beautiful.”

This semester, the Opera Theatre program looks forward to the production of Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* in April, as well as Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* in May. *Elijah* is a fully staged production involving members of Dance, Concert Choir, Opera Theatre, Orchestra, Digital Media Arts, and soloists from the community, all on stage in the Hammer Theatre. The performance is sure to be remarkable!

For more information on upcoming performances, visit
<http://events.ha.sjsu.edu/musicanddance/events/>.

It's a Dean's Life Vol. 13

January 2017



Happy New Year!

As we begin the spring semester at San José State University, this is a perfect time to give pause to give thanks for all of the faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, and community supporters who make the College of Humanities and the Arts strong.

While national politics are in a state of change, here at San José State we remain true to our core values of accessible, affordable, high-quality education. We had the opportunity to celebrate those values and commit in unity diversity, inclusion, and compassion during January's [*Ghostlight Project*](#).

Nowhere are the impacts of public higher education on display more than in the California State University system. In an inspirational article on the impact of public education on social mobility, the [*New York Times*](#) reported that four Cal State universities are in the top ten institutions nationwide for raising the income status of their graduates. San José State University ranks #8 in the nation for upward mobility as measured by percent of students from the bottom fifth of the income distribution who end up in the top three-fifths. This study represents one of the clearest measures of the social impact we have on students, families, and communities. All of it thanks to the commitment we all have made collectively to supporting public higher education.

We have many things to look forward to this semester, including [*Bob Woodruff receiving the Steinbeck Award*](#) February 21; [*Cinequest*](#) at the Hammer March 1-13; [*Seminar*](#) at the Hammer March 21-25; the Catalyst Quartet at the Hammer April 5; [*University Dance Theatre*](#) April 15; and [*Elijah at the Hammer*](#) May 12 and 14.

The [*Paseo Public Prototyping Festival*](#) will be an exciting, all day arts and technology festival at the Hammer and on the *Paseo de San Antonio* on April 8, 2017. This is one of the most high-profile events to date at the Hammer, and will include speakers, art installations, and displays by the 25 student teams who have created prototypes to make San José a better place to live, work, and play.

We continue to hire to support student success, which is core to our mission and our values. I am pleased to announce that we now have a total of six advisors in our Success Center, which means we are in a great position to help our 4,200 majors navigate their way through the university toward graduation successfully.

We also have hired a Marketing and Communications Director for the college to help us continue to bring attention to the great work being done by faculty, students, staff, and alumni. Ms. Sheryl Spann will start work overseeing our [Student Marketing and Communications Team](#) at the end of February. In addition to the searches for new professors being done throughout our departments, these hires will help us serve everyone in H&A more effectively by supporting faculty and staff in all areas of the college.

There is much to be grateful for as we enter 2017. [President Mary Papazian](#) continues to lead the university toward stronger integration with the city and our surrounding communities. The [Hewlett Foundation](#) announced an infusion of \$8M in funding to Bay Area non-profit organizations to commission new works over the next three years.

The [Hammer Theatre](#) has strong programming for spring, including the continuation of this season's [National Theatre Live](#) screenings and performing arts productions by SJSU. Please help us get the word out about the possibility of renting the Hammer for corporate meetings, product launches, VIP parties, and even weddings. We have an incredible team of staff at the ready to make every event, performance, concert, or party a success. Please refer people to contact hammer-theatre@sjsu.edu for more information or to get on the mailing list.

As you can see, we have much to celebrate here in the College of Humanities and the Arts in 2017. We continue to do the important work of helping students achieve their dreams, but that work is only possible when we all come together to stand in support of public education, humanities, and the arts.

I hope to see you at one of our many events this semester so I can thank you in person for your support.

Warmly,



Lisa Vollendorf