

# Expressions

## Volume 21

**SJSU** COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND THE ARTS

# Table of Contents

<i>American Night: Seeking the Corazón of the American Dream.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The Art of Storytelling with Professor Robin Lasser; Dream Boats: San José Stories - Vietnamese Diaspora .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Opening Doors: SJSU Gets an Original Copy of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Profile: Sara West.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Profile: Avizia Long.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Profile: Diane Lee .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Profile: Yoon C Han .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>It's A Dean's Life Vol. 21.....</i>	<i>19</i>

# American Night: Seeking the *Corazón* of the American Dream.

by Cristina Shannon

This November, the San José State University Department of Film & Theatre performed *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* for their fall production. This satirical fantasy follows the main character, Juan José, as he feverishly studies for his citizenship exam. He falls asleep and dreams of several wild moments in history and meets a few very poignant members of society along the way. The play was originally written by Richard Montoya in 2010, but director Sean San José added a few timely references to modern injustices that many immigrants are facing today.



The play was introduced by Elisha Miranda, Chair of the Department of Film and Theatre for SJSU, who touched on some of the important themes that would be presented in the play. She emphasized that it was a satirical performance meant to address the real political implications of immigration and the treatment of Mexicans in the United States. She describes Juan José as a character “like everyone else, with dreams, and hopes, and emotions as he works hard for a better life.” She continues, saying

“My hope is that we stop seeing each other as alien to this country and begin to view one another with the understanding that someone like Juan José is a person, a father, a partner, a human being.”

Lead character Juan José (played by Savannah Garcia, Francheska Loy, and Caroline Basha) encounters several historical scenes that the play brings magically to life. Throughout his night of dreaming, Juan meets historical figures and pop culture icons like Sacagawea, Lewis & Clark, Teddy Roosevelt, Bob Dylan—and even an Elvis impersonator. The play mixes satire with biting social commentary that both entertains and carries serious political messages.

*American Night* takes the conventional wisdom about racism, immigration, and the political state of America and turns it on its head. It pokes fun at those who believe that building a wall to keep people out is more important than compassion and builds a case for a more inclusive future that accepts immigrants not as invaders but as fellow humans seeking a better life



for themselves and their families. "It is essential to ask ourselves: how do we resist the dangerous narratives of immigrants that have been presented to us, and instead see and uplift the humanity and rights of individuals," Miranda says.

Originally written to be performed during the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2010, author Richard Montoya had words of advice for the cast of the Hammer Theatre production. "[P]lay hard, play for keeps," he writes. "Don't get lost in the romp and fun, that will happen no matter; this beast is built for talented young actors and skilled directors with *corazón*. Which is what you have in SJSU. Lucky you." Though *American Night* was written at the beginning of the decade, the topics it explores may be even more relevant today. Montoya continues, "I know you will do my play proper and as you play, consider the very real terror struck in the heart of detained and separated children at our nation's borders."

Though the play works on the themes of division that have polarized the debates around immigration, Elisha Miranda notes that there is also a sense of unification in experiencing these dramatized conflicts in a room full of other people. "Theatre reminds us to leave our solitary experience from the solitary existence that represents one of the few areas in our society where people can come together to share the experience," Miranda says, "even if they see the world in radically different ways. We need more multi-dimensional, complex stories like *American Night*."

---

To learn more about upcoming shows at SJSU, including the spring musical *Urinetown*, visit [sjsu.edu/filmandtheatre/production-season](https://sjsu.edu/filmandtheatre/production-season)

# The Art of Storytelling with Professor Robin Lasser; Dream Boats: San José Stories - Vietnamese Diaspora

Small paper boats, each carrying a story, float on the koi pond at historic Kelley Park. A zither plays in the background and participants of the Áo Dài Festival showcase the traditional fashion of Vietnam. As the sun begins to set, the dream boats light up the pond with multi-colored LEDs and the trees come to life as projectors cast migration stories upon them.

[Dream Boats: San José Stories- Vietnamese Diaspora](#) from [Robin Lasser](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Last September, Robin Lasser, Professor of Art and Coordinator of the Photography Program at SJSU, presented an installation documenting the refugees of the Vietnamese Diaspora as part of the *Migratory Cultures* video projection mapping project. The project—a collaboration between Lasser, Professor G. Craig Hobbs, and many other local and international partners—highlights individuals who want to share personal migration stories with the world. Through *Migratory Cultures* and her many other projects, Lasser seems to have mastered the art of storytelling.

The stories begin in the physical world, as something tangible. “I create events, and or social sculptures, spaces, audio experiences that have been aestheticized as a bridge or a link between our stories and something that we’re exploring in the culture, the act of migration,” Lasser says.

The boats floating in the pond, fashioned after the fishing boats used by many to escape Vietnam, the traditional clothing, the trees themselves—all become physical metaphors that can be interacted with.

“The reason we project [the stories] into the trees is that it’s a way of rooting the migration stories, because those who are sharing the stories are living here in San José and this is now their roots,” Lasser says. “With the boats in the foreground, we’re creating one large dome or diorama, including all of us who are coming as spectators, into one arena to experience these stories.”

*Dress Tents*, one of Lasser’s other projects, uses a similar method. The tents combine fashion, architecture, and interactive experiences to create spaces where different messages can be examined and explored.

Once the guests are fully “captured” within the arena, the mood is set, the stories begin. With little editing done to the video projections, the voices and the emotions of the migrants are allowed to show. “As somebody who is an outsider of sorts, I hope that I’m a respectful listener, so I try not to interject my own thoughts and feelings about people’s stories, and rather present them as closely as I heard them being shared with me.”

But there is more to the art of storytelling than knowing *how* to tell a story. Another thing to consider is: *why* do we need to tell these stories? And why should we tell them now?

“Today we are experiencing the largest waves of human migration since the Second World War,” Lasser says. “So, generally speaking, it’s really important for us to be empathetic towards that condition, because it’s going to be—and is—a major way of life. And it’s extremely important now to have the very powerful voices of those who were brave enough and had the opportunity to make their lives better for themselves and their children.”

The migration stories also allow migrants a form of release. Professor Lasser explains: “One of my biggest desires would be if these stories could allow for a bridge and healing between generations of those who have immigrated earlier in the mid-70s and those who have immigrated yesterday. I think that kind of healing is really important and should happen globally. Healing around our acceptance of who we may consider the ‘other.’”

“As a visual artist, my mode of communication is through aesthetics,” Lasser says. “And that’s really the skill I have to offer, that’s how I enjoy and research and experience the world, and that’s also the gift I have to offer back to the world. It was an extreme honor to be able to listen deeply to these stories and to be able to work with the greater Vietnamese community.”

*If you missed the event, please watch the migration stories [here](#).*



So what's next for Professor Lasser and *Migratory Cultures*?

She'll be busy over the next few years with two other installations in the Vietnamese Diaspora series. These projects, curated by Rory Padeken, Associate Curator of the San José Museum of Art, take place on March 21, 2019, 8:30-9:30 PM at the San José Museum of Art and March 23, 2019, 8:30-9:30 PM again at the Viet Museum in historic Kelley Park.

A new *Dress Tent*, created in collaboration with Adrienne Pao, is scheduled for some time in 2020 (20-feet tall, with a functional swing!), this time in Brazil. The tent will feature the stories of women living in intensely dynamic cities like São Paulo and their potential power and safety in public spaces.

She'll also share a solo art exhibit at Oklahoma State University Museum of Art with fellow artists Marguerite Perret and Bruce Scherting in August 2020. But before that, in June 2019, Lasser will be traveling to Paris with Perret to be one of three installations at Sorbonne University. The event, curated by Patrick M. Lydon (an SJSU alum), Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, and Carmen Bouyer, will be a preview, of sorts, for her next project, *The State We're In: Water*. The project focuses on what water means for those in urban environments, farmers, or for third-world nations where the need for fresh water is a huge concern. Like *Migratory Cultures* and *Dress Tents*, *The State We're In: Water* will utilize social sculptures (a

fully-functional wooden dock inscribed with water stories!), sound pieces, photographs, and video projections as a platform to get a larger message across.

---

*The Dream Boats: San José Stories-The Vietnamese Diaspora installation was commissioned by the San José Museum of Art and made possible with support from California Humanities, a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. In partnership with Chopsticks Alley Art and the Áo Dài Festival.*

*Professor Lasser would also like to thank G. Craig Hobbs, the SJSU College of Humanities & the Arts, those willing to share their stories, and everyone involved in making this project possible. Thank you!*

---

*If you want to learn more about Migratory Cultures or any of Professor Lasser's other projects, check out these links:*

[\*Migratory Cultures Main Site\*](#)

[\*Dress Tents Main Site\*](#)

[\*Robin Lasser's Main Site\*](#)

[\*Robin Lasser's Vimeo Page\*](#)

# Opening Doors: SJSU Gets an Original Copy of Beethoven's 7th Symphony

*Allegretto* begins. Its soft, haunting rhythm demands your complete attention.

We all know those famous notes: *Dunn dun dun dunn dunn.*

The rhythm slowly begins to swell as the entire orchestra joins in. The music shifts before falling back into quiet mystery.

For over two hundred years, scholars, musicians, and psychologists have studied the world-famous second movement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony. Other composers strive to recreate it. Filmmakers have used it to amplify emotions on screen. Citizens of East Berlin moved with it as they walked over the remains of the Berlin Wall. *Allegretto* has a seemingly endless ability to captivate and there are a million different theories as to why.

And now it has come to SJSU. Literally. In October, the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library purchased a signed, first-edition score of Beethoven's 7th, addressed to a woman named Antonie Brentano, who many believe to be Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved". The center, with the largest collection of Beethoven-related manuscripts and artifacts outside of Europe (over 31,000 items!), was eager to acquire the score, as it directly related to an original manuscript the Center already maintains. With the help of many generous donors, the Center raised the funds needed, successfully making sure the score remains available to the public.

But apart from adding an impressive artifact to the collection, what is the significance of the score? Doctor Fred Cohen, Director of the School of Music and Dance, has some thoughts. "Beethoven is an iconic figure who is used in all kinds of ways, manipulated by different people to present different perspectives," he says. "So to have original data about Beethoven on hand lends credence to fresh perspectives on how to understand Beethoven, and by that, I mean his music."



Thinking about these perspectives can add context to the music; it helps us understand what the music is about and offers new potentialities and interpretations.

“Was he really in love with Brentano?” Cohen asks. “And if so, does that seep into the music—is it expressed in the music? You could make an argument for it, but who knows? He’s not around to say. But it brings up these possibilities.”

In general, when we talk about understanding music, or putting it into context, we tend to think of emotion, or musicality, first. How does the song make us feel? Is this what the artist was feeling? But that’s only part of the response, Cohen explains: “The emotion in music can inform a person’s perspectives and the way you play, the way you listen; it doesn’t have to, but it can. And that opens up the color of what music can do.”

Beethoven’s 7th has emotionally affected audiences since its debut in December of 1813, when it was performed during a series of concerts to raise money for Austrian soldiers wounded in battle against the French armies of Napoleon. The Austrian army had suffered a number of defeats against Napoleon and Vienna was occupied by French forces in 1805 and 1809. By 1813, however, the tides of war were turning against the French. Austrian victories in 1813 marked the beginning of Napoleon’s downfall and a wave of optimism once again swept across Vienna. In the newly energized city, the performance of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony was immediately celebrated and public demand ensured it was frequently performed over the next weeks. That it is still recognized and performed to this day attests to the timeless emotional qualities Beethoven affixed to his score.

“You can spend your entire life learning about yourself and what you respond to,” Cohen says. “Be open to whatever you’re listening to, if you can. And if you have a response to it, it’s worth figuring out *why*.”

---

*SJSU’s School of Music and Dance provides many opportunities to explore and learn about music. The College offers a wide-range of academic degrees that prepare students for successful careers. Explore music outside of class at one of the many events organized by the college! Check out their event page here: <http://events.ha.sjsu.edu/musicanddance/>*

*We’d like to thank those who donated during the Beethoven’s 7th fundraising campaign! The signed 7th Symphony score is available for viewing at the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies until **December 15, 2018**. The center is*

*located on the fifth floor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library. Come back in January 2019 and say hello to the incoming director, Dr. Erica Buurman!*

*For more information, visit the Beethoven Center's website: <http://www.sjsu.edu/beethoven/>*

## Profile: Sara West

by Mark Thompson

Join the College of H&A in welcoming Dr. Sara West to the Department of English, where she has joined us as a professor of professional and technical writing. Sara comes to SJSU from the University of Arkansas, where she earned her PhD in English with a specialty in technical and professional communication. Sara's research interests include social media pedagogies and methodologies, technical and professional communication, new media studies, community formation in online spaces, digital literacy and access, and rural literacies.



Sara joins a growing technical writing program with many connections to the tech industry in the Bay Area, and credits this relationship as one of the reasons she came to SJSU. "While Silicon Valley is a hub for technological innovation, it is also a hub for technical and professional writing. I feel really grateful to be able to teach courses in my specialty to students who understand the importance and can readily see professional applications of the skills we're practicing."

A veteran of teaching college-level professional and technical writing, Sara has also designed and taught courses about online writing, social media writing, and multimodal composition. She plans on bringing this experience to her SJSU classroom. "I hope to soon add a course related to my specialty of social media writing, somewhat based in my social media-related research right now that, broadly stated, focuses on the functionality that platforms provide corporate users."

"The students have really been the highlight of my time at SJSU so far," she says. "My students are engaged and interested, not just in the content but in each other, in me, and in their futures. I've never seen such great discussion anywhere else, and they continually impress me."

Sara's move from Arkansas to San José has been a smooth one. "So far I've really enjoyed SJSU as a whole—the campus, the students, and my colleagues. Everyone has been extremely accommodating and welcoming, making the transition to this 'big city' a lot easier than I thought it would be! San José itself has been a lot of fun. I've explored street fairs, festivals, hiking trails, and, of course, delicious restaurants. I love that there's always something to do."

When she's not teaching, researching, or exploring the city, she's cheering on the Sharks or volunteering at The Dancing Cat, a San José institution that lets patrons come hang out with cats—or even permanently adopt them.

Welcome, Sara!

# Profile: Avizia Long

by Mark Thompson

The College of Humanities & the Arts welcomes Avizia Long to the Department of World Languages and Literatures! Originally from Marion, North Carolina, Avizia completed her PhD at Indiana University and has taught at IU, North Carolina State, University of Guam, and Texas Tech. She has also co-authored a book, *Sociolinguistics and Second Language Acquisition: Learning to Use Language in Context*, and her work has been published in several academic journals.



Her research interests include the acquisition of variation by second language learners of Spanish, the role of instructor characteristics in classroom-based language learning, and task-based language teaching for second language pronunciation learning. As far as teaching goes, her interests include Hispanic linguistics and all areas of Spanish-related language teaching.

"Prior to joining the SJSU community, I was most excited about the diversity of the student population," she says. "I see myself in my students in so many ways, and I've really enjoyed working with them and learning from their stories with each passing week." Avizia is also impressed by the diversity and expertise of her departmental colleagues. "I'm constantly humbled by how hard everyone works to facilitate the success of our students. I'm very happy and proud to be a member of the SJSU community, and I look forward to offering my expertise and service for many years to come." And we're happy to have you!

Welcome, Avizia!

## Profile: Diane Lee

by Mark Thompson

Join us in welcoming Assistant Professor Diane Lee to the Department of Design! Diane comes to us from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) where she earned her MFA in Graphic Design and subsequently taught undergraduate graphic design classes. Diane also holds a BSc in Graphic Design from the University of Cincinnati (DAAP) and has taught at Clark University in Massachusetts.

In her first semester teaching at SJSU, Diane is impressed with the engagement of her students. "This semester, I have been teaching Introduction to Typography, the class that, as a student, made me realize I wanted to become a graphic designer and woke me up to the beauty of the visual form of the written word," she says. "It has been such a thrill to find shared enthusiasm among my students at SJSU."



Informing her classroom approach through her professional experience, Professor Lee is a multi-disciplinary designer whose work spans print, video, writing, sound, code, and physical space. She works independently with a diverse range of clients, collaborating with small businesses, non-profits, independent artists, and cultural institutions, as well as firms like Vanderbyl Design and Apple, Inc. Drawing on her experience, she sees an ethical dimension to teaching design in the Bay Area. "Situated, as we are, in such proximity to Silicon Valley's tech giants, where young designers can find steady, paying work, it is so important not to take for granted that designers have a significant cultural role to play," she says. "My hope is that I can contribute to developing discerning and critical designers who extend their practice beyond commercial problem-solving."

Professor Lee also looks forward to working with her colleagues in the college and beyond: "Since design is, by its nature, relational, I'm eager to meet potential collaborator-colleagues whose words or research might benefit from shepherding toward visual, graphic forms."

We're sure her students are appreciating the experience and knowledge she brings to an already excellent department.

Welcome, Diane!

## Profile: Yoon C Han

*by Mark Thompson*

The College of Humanities & the Arts proudly welcomes Professor Yoon C Han to the Department of Design. Yoon is an interaction designer, multimedia artist, and researcher who holds a PhD in Media Arts and Technology from UC Santa Barbara. Prior to her doctoral work at UCSB, she studied Graphic Design and Interaction Design at Seoul National University and achieved two Master degrees at SNU and Design|Media Arts in UCLA.

Yoon has taught interaction design and computer programming at the Academy of Art University, the University of San Francisco, and California State University, Fullerton. She's excited to be teaching at San José State. "SJSU students have great talent," she says. "They are so kind, sweet, and humble but very passionate in creating their designs. I can't wait to get to know more about them and support their life journey!" As a lifelong learner herself, Yoon hopes to share her own journey as an artist with her students. "Life is a never-ending learning process. I am hoping to share my previous experience and any knowledge I have with them."



Yoon's research includes data visualization, biometric data visualization and sonification, new interfaces for musical expression, and mobile user experience design. She worked at Samsung Electronics, Experimental Visualization Lab in UCSB, and SENSEable City Lab in MIT as a Visiting Researcher. Considering that her creative work and research are an intersection of technology and art, San José is a perfect place for Yoon. "SJSU is at the heart of Silicon Valley where art/design and engineering meet," she says. "I think it will be beneficial for me to continue my research with a wide variety of collaborators both within and outside of the university. I am planning to conduct research on making data-driven designs and artworks using new media technology and disseminate the work in various exhibitions in the new few years."

Yoon recently participated in an art show "Intersections" in Fort Mason in San

Francisco (<http://codame.com/events/intersections>) and has two upcoming art exhibitions in 2019, Alliance of Women In Media Arts and Technology (AWMAT) 2019 (<https://awmat2019.wordpress.com/> ) at UC Santa Barbara, and Association for Computer Machinery (ACM) SIGGRAPH DAC exhibition (<https://urgency-reality.siggraph.org/>).

## It's A Dean's Life Vol. 21

As our Fall semester comes to an end and the holiday season begins, we have much to celebrate in the College of Humanities and the Arts. We have had an exciting semester as our faculty and students engaged the themes in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published 200 years ago but amazingly relevant to our world here in the Silicon Valley. Successful panel discussions on the novel, on the films of *Frankenstein*, a radio play that was broadcast on our own KSJS on Halloween night, and a musical piece involved almost all of the disciplines in our college. Faculty members were not only involved in these college activities, they were participating in other Frankenstein activities across the country. Professor Michael Locher designed the set for Chicago's Guthrie Theater fall production of *Frankenstein - Playing with Fire*.

Our *Frankenstein@200* programming joined our *Deep Humanities* initiative which brought in three speakers from diverse fields to explore the importance of orienting technology within humanistic and artistic values. Students, faculty, and community members came to Hammer4 for talks on gender, the politics of Silicon Valley, and notions of "the human". The *Deep Humanities* initiative will be one of the College of H & A's programming themes for 2019-2020 and we look forward to even more opportunities to hear about groundbreaking work in this area.



Our second programming theme for the college will be migration, borders, and identity. Our goal is to integrate arts and humanities events into our curriculum to allow students across the university to engage these timely topics. This theme was beautifully explored by two events this fall at the Hammer Theatre: the fall mainstage production of *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* and *The Dreamer Project*. You can read more about *American Night* in this issue, which explores Juan José's dream-filled night before he takes his American citizenship test. *The Dreamer Project* is based on

interviews of SJSU's own undocumented students. This issue discusses migration further with Professor Robin Lasser's work on *Dream Boats: San José Stories-The Vietnamese Diaspora*.

The theme of migration is also central to the Camino Chronicles project sponsored by the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies. The Center, in collaboration with El Camino Arts, has commissioned a symphony by Gabriela Ortiz, a major Mexican composer. The symphony will explore the themes of the El Camino, a road that transverses two countries, extends the length of California, and is both home and history for many of us. This work will be performed by the Silicon Valley Symphony in Spring 2021.

The arts and humanities continue to find ways to unify us, to inspire us, and to broaden our perspectives. Programming by our students in the Hammer Theatre, our University Theatre, and our School of Music and Dance Concert Hall are just some of the ways that we spread the power of our fields. Our upcoming spring musical, *Urinetown*, produced by the Department of Film and Theatre, explores the timely issues of social justice and economic inequality. Please join us as the College continues to leverage the arts and humanities to explore the important issues of our time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Shi', is located in the lower-left quadrant of the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small dot at the end.