

Expressions

Volume 22

SJSU | COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND THE ARTS

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SJSU's Glass Program Brings Students Together

by Cristina Shannon

On the second floor of the Industrial Studies Building at San José State University lives a very, very hot room. When the members of the Glass Program are meeting for weekly classes, it feels like summer no matter what time of the year it is. One large furnace and three smaller ovens bring artists together to create whatever masterpiece is on their agenda for the day.



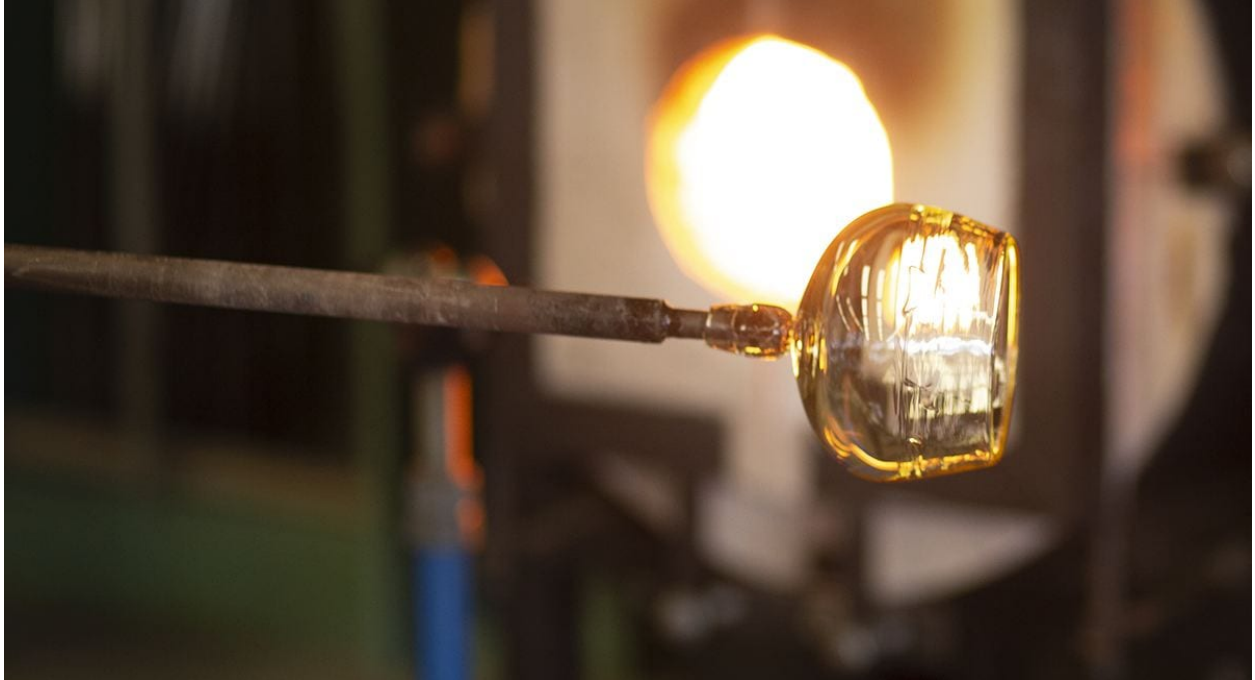
The Glass Program was established at SJSU in 1964 and was the first program of its kind to exist in the United States college system. The current Faculty Head and Studio Coordinator, Cassandra Straubing, began her position nearly 12 years ago and has spent 22 years of her life working with glass as her central medium.

Glass has been bringing people together since the early 20th century when glassmaking was done in industrial factories and the work was done in teams. Factories had large furnaces for melting glass, and the pieces themselves were quite large, requiring many hands. In the 1960s, the creation of smaller furnaces and the existence of the studio art movement drew glassblowing out of factories and into small, personal studios. While many artists then and now blow glass alone, the art of glass is still very much a team effort.

"It's really difficult to blow glass by yourself," Straubing says, "and not as fun. I try to create a community here." During a workshop, there are two students to a bench. One gathers the glass from the furnace and heats it up, then sits on the bench and begins to shape it. Their partner follows the open end of the pipe, blowing when instructed, and will occasionally walk around to the other side to help shape the glass with various tools. Thick stacks of wet newspaper serve as the artist's "hand" and help to shape the hot glass as the artist twirls it. There are also wooden paddles, tweezer-like tools called jacks, and large shears.



On one visit, students are busy making glass bowls. After shaping the bottom of the glass, the artist needs to transfer it to another pole. One student grabs glass on a new pole to mold onto the existing shape while the other cools down the tip with water in order to break it off of the first pole. The glass then goes back into the furnace and the two artists work together to create the opening for the finished product, using jacks to create a wide, thin mouth. Once the desired shape is created, the artists work together once more to break the finished product off of the pole. One student continues to roll the pole across their work station and add cold water to the base, while the other student squats underneath it with two large oven mitts. A game of hot potato ensues as the second student catches the bowl and rushes it to the cooling station.



From start to finish, Straubing and her students are intensely focused. In a shop full of dangerously hot materials and equipment, everyone is aware of each other as they maneuver around the room. When working with liquid glass, there's no time for breaks. "Once you start," Straubing says, "you have to finish." Straubing likens glassmaking to a dance. "It's addictive. . . it's seductive."

The [SJSU Glass Artist Guild](#) holds bi-annual sales to help fund the program and the guild. Visit their Facebook page for more information on how to support them.

Nufonia Must Fall—A Live, Multimedia Experience Unlike Any Other

By Cristina Shannon

World-renowned scratch DJ, music producer, and award-winning graphic novelist Kid Koala brought his production *Nufonia Must Fall*—based on his graphic novel of the same name— to the Bay Area this February. Those who experienced the show can attest to its magic. Appearing at the Hammer Theatre under the sub-brand Art Tech, *Nufonia* presents a unique marriage between art and technology that those of us living in Silicon Valley can appreciate.

Nufonia Must Fall, published in 2003, is a mostly wordless (“silent” in Kid Koala’s vernacular) graphic novel that tells the story of a robot fighting against its own obsolescence while falling in love with a female roboticist. Kid Koala says, “When I was writing *Nufonia Must Fall*, I always imagined the book being a kind of paperback silent movie.” His inspiration for the production stemmed from childhood memories of Charlie Chaplin films. “I remember my whole family, kids, parents and grandparents, huddled around the screen smiling and laughing along as the story unfolded. Since those days, something about the silent film format has always struck a chord with me.” The production itself is also largely silent—backed only by a string quartet, Kid Koala’s scratch music and sound effects, and his own occasional autotuned voicing of certain characters.

Kid Koala kicked off the night with a DJ set tribute to one of his biggest idols, Louis Armstrong. In the meantime, ushers at the Hammer Theatre passed out small bingo cards and pencils for a game of *Nufonia*-themed “Canadian Bingo” which followed the set. Two lucky audience members ended up winning a copy of his book, which details the production of *Nufonia Must Fall*. Kid Koala also gave an explanation of the word ‘nufonia’: “It’s backward for ‘no fun’,” he says, “so the robot has to go through his own sort of ‘nufonia’, that’s his journey.”



Nufonia brought a huge production team of puppeteers, technicians, and musicians who managed 5 cameras, 20 miniature sets, and 70 puppets to bring Kid Koala's world to life. The director, K.K. Barrett, is an Oscar-nominated production designer who's worked on *Her*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Being John Malkovich*, and more. The miniature sets were placed around the perimeter of the Hammer Theatre's main stage, giving a few nods to San José's downtown—Original Joe's, La Victoria's, Ike's, Cafe Stritch, Hotel De Anza, and San Pedro Square Market. A member of the crew explained that they often add those personal touches to the set for each town they tour in.

After the performance, the audience was invited onstage to get a closer look at each of the sets and the main character puppets, as well as chat with the crew members about the production. The San José Valentine's show ended *Nufonia's* run in the U.S. The production is now touring Asia.



Kid Koala and The Afiara Quartet

Though *Nufonia Must Fall* is a unique production, the Hammer Theatre typically brings in one or two Art Tech events per season. To learn more about Art Tech at the Hammer Theatre, visit the archive page at hammertheatre.com, and subscribe to our Applause e-newsletter for information about future events like this one!

A.I.M Brings Dance and Experience to SJSU

By Mark Thompson

The theater murmurs in collective anticipation. Behind the scenes, dancers shake off last-minute nerves and prepare for their entrance. The lights go down, the crowd goes quiet. The music starts and the dancers of A.I.M—shoulder to shoulder with SJSU students—take the stage in an explosion of movement and light.

A.I.M, or Abraham in Motion, is a NYC-based, award-winning dance company that brought their emotionally powerful and genre-defying energy to the Hammer Theatre in February. The dance company performed two of their newest works, *Drive*—grounded in hip-hop with a score by Theo Parrish and Mobb Deep—and *Meditation: A Silent Prayer*, along with postmodern choreographer Doug Varone's *Strict Love*. Led by Artistic Director Kyle Abraham, A.I.M is currently bringing the best of American dance to audiences around the world. "The work entwines a sensual and provocative vocabulary," says the company, "with a strong emphasis on sound, human behavior, and all things visual in an effort to create an avenue for personal investigation and exposing that on stage."

A.I.M's visit to the Hammer Theatre came with more than their cutting edge performances. Prior to these evenings of dance, the company held an intensive residency in the School of Music and Dance where they worked alongside SJSU students for two weeks of intensive dance instruction. Students participated in master classes, lectures, and demonstrations led by A.I.M dancers. Open rehearsals were held for the Hammer Theatre performance and a number of students were selected to perform alongside A.I.M. Regardless if they joined A.I.M on stage, all students participated in professional rehearsals, getting hands-on experience with all the work it takes to put on a dance performance like this. "We're learning it all," says SJSU dance student Kaitlyn Delacruz. "Dancing, lighting, costuming—it's basically being thrown into the deep end and seeing what we're capable of."





SJSU dance student Ryan Tucker agrees. “We’re part of a great department here, but there is only so much dance you can learn at one university. Dancers need many different perspectives. We’re connecting with people currently working in the industry, dancers from the East Coast as well as the West.”



Matthew Baker - A.I.M Dancer, Choreographic Associate

“Such a program is crucial to students planning on dancing professionally after SJSU,” says SJSU Associate Dance Director Heather Cooper. “During intensive sessions like these, students can learn more in two weeks than they can in two months of regular dance instruction.”

“In these residences,” she continues, “students get to work with the best of the best. Students learn from professionals who not only give them instruction and feedback, but something to strive towards, helping students to find their own places within the larger framework

of professional dance. Programs like these build bridges to the wider dance community.”

Rehearsal Director Tamisha Guy, one of two A.I.M dancers who came two weeks before the performance to work with SJSU students, also sees the value such exchanges provide. “As we teach the choreography,” she says, “I can see students learning to trust themselves and their instincts, as well as their fellow dancers. Our company comes from diverse backgrounds, like many of the students at SJSU. I hope we can show them that there’s a pathway for all kinds of dancers to express themselves professionally, no matter where they come from. Moving audiences emotionally by expressing ourselves. That’s the most important thing.”



Tamisha Guy - A.I.M Dancer, Rehearsal Director

Such programs bring practical job advice along with intensive training. “We’re not only learning movements and choreography, we’re learning about their experiences of moving from being a student to professional,” says Tucker. “Things like interviewing, auditioning, about how a dance company works, and what being a professional dancer really means day-to-day.”

DelaCruz points out that A.I.M is a boon to the dance program as well as students. “Bringing such high-caliber performers to San Jose State elevates the status of our program. The more we increase our visibility, the more opportunities we have as we graduate and move into the industry. We are so thankful to everyone in the community whose support and donations make this a reality for us, and help us to continue to make San Jose a center of dance on the West Coast.”



A.I.M's appearance and residency was made possible in large part by the generosity of the Virginia Ann Choreographer in Residence program, a wonderful benefactor of performing arts education.

To learn more about A.I.M, check them out at: <http://www.abrahaminmotion.org/>

To learn more about the dance program at SJSU, please visit their website at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/dance/>

The In-Between: Celebrating the Life of Professor Harry Powers

The College of Humanities and the Arts is saddened by the loss of Harry Powers, Professor of Art at San José State from 1958 to 1995, who passed away in December. He will be missed.

Harry Powers had a profound love for the natural world—the light of the stars above, shadows cast on the earth below, and everything in-between. As a child, he would venture with his father into the wilderness of Idaho to camp and fish. These experiences shaped him and his work; one childhood memory stood out in particular: a ceremonial Native American dance full of drama, intensity, and pride. This glimpse into the world of art and culture gave Powers a means of expression, an escape for the questions and emotions that swirled in his mind.



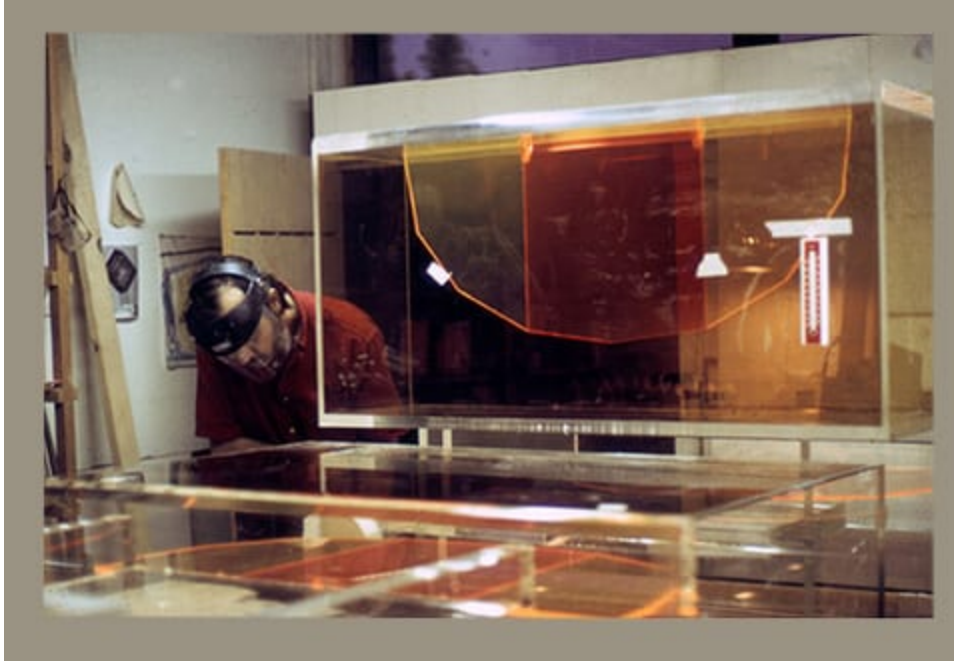
Indian Chase (1932) - Watercolor

Powers studied at SJSU, where he earned his undergraduate degree, and at Stanford, receiving his M.A. in Art in 1953. He began to work with “architectural art” such as mosaics, stained glass, and concrete facades for high-tech companies in the Silicon Valley. As he gained more experience, his repertoire continued to grow: sculptures, castings, paintings, even an entry in the 1975 San Francisco Museum of Art Soap Box Derby. His work can be seen throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia. Closer to home, his art is featured at the Palo Alto Art Center and the San José Museum of Art.



Harry's Car (1975) - Wood, Steel, Plastic

Throughout his artistic career, Powers continued to explore different materials and mediums. In the 70's, collaboration with industrial technicians led to his discovery of new techniques for sculpting sheet acrylic. The resulting sculptures appeared weightless, like "paintings of light". These sculptures reflected Powers' fascination with light and refraction. Other pieces celebrated the dignity of primal cultures and his love for the earth and the cosmos.



Solar Extensions 3 (work in progress, 1975) - Constructed Acrylic Sheet

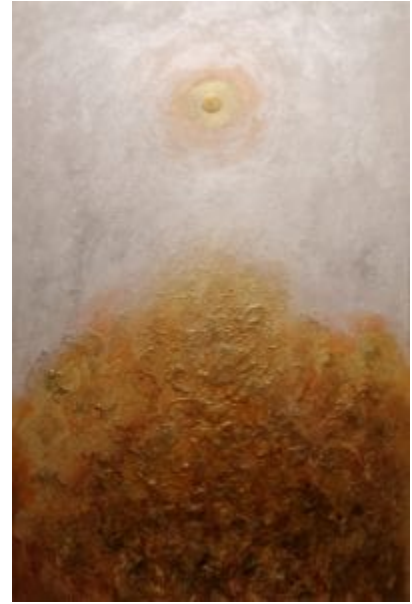


Penumbra (1992) - Cast Aluminum

In a short statement on his website, Powers writes:

"The definition of art that I like best is that of Susanne Langer who said, 'Art is that which makes the felt and the sensed tangible, so that others might contemplate it'. Intuition seems more valuable than deductive reasoning and I seek to make work which is provocative to the viewer's imagination. As in much of jazz music, the content is evoked rather than literarily narrated. I incorporate any techniques or materials which help articulate the works, ideas, and feelings".

Powers wanted his art to do more than please the eye; he wanted it to give the viewer a peek into his mind, to see things the way he saw them. He believed that art consisted of three things: the viewer, the idea or the "felt", and the work of art itself, in-between. It was up to the artist to communicate how they felt, to bridge the gap.



*Grianstad an Ghiemhridh 2 (2010) -
Acrylic on Canvas*

This philosophy extended into his teaching at San José State; for over 30 years, he encouraged his students to focus less on theory and to trust their imagination and instinct. He strived to find creative new ways to open his students to new ideas and new ways to see the world. Professor Emerita Dr. Charlene Archibeque recalls: "He asked me to come speak to one of his seminar classes, which he held in his own living room, about ways I use space in arranging my singers for rehearsals and performances. How many other art teachers teach space by bringing in a choral director?"

Powers served as an in-between for many people; he supported his students and fellow colleagues and attended alumni and emeritus events after his retirement. He was also a large part of the San José-Dublin Sister City Program, encouraging cultural relations between the two cities. In 2015, he won the Spirit of Ireland Award, a bronze sculpture he crafted himself.



Palo Alto Art Center (1973) - Constructed Acrylic Sheet

Everything Harry Powers did, he did with joy. Reveling in the wonders of the world around him, nourishing the talents and minds of the people who loved him, creating beautiful art to reflect the ideas that defined him, and everything in-between.



Harry and his wife, Lynn

Portrait: Allison Johnson

Join the College of H&A in welcoming Dr. Allison Johnson to the Department of English, where she has joined us as an assistant professor of literature. A Southern California native, Alli double majored in English and History at UC Riverside before earning her M.A. and Ph.D. in English at UCLA. She's had a lifelong love for American literature and history; her father was an American history professor and an early childhood viewing of Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* sparked a fascination for the Civil War and its repercussions.

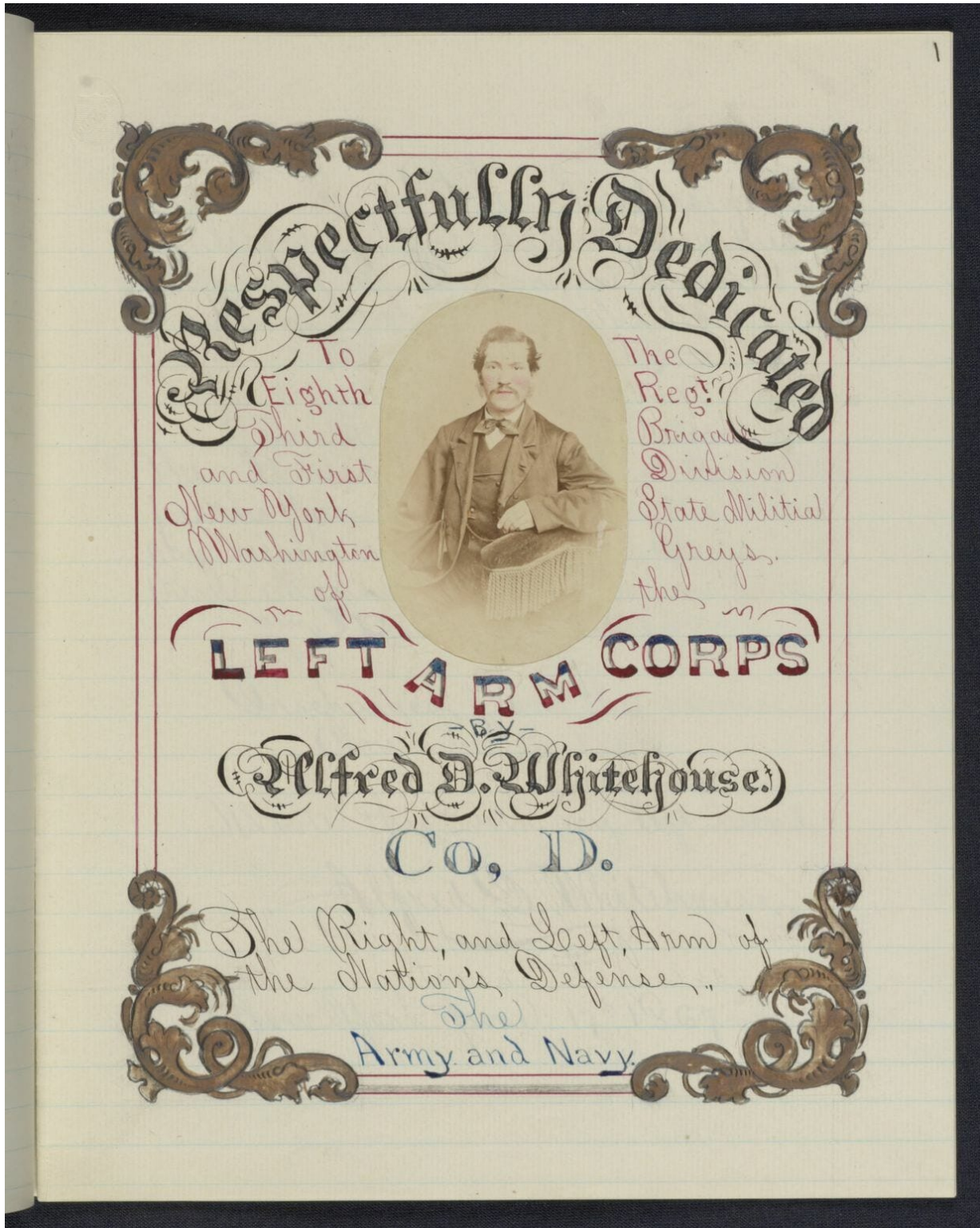
Teaching was a natural career choice for Dr. Johnson "It's the family business," she says. Her mother, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all educators; her younger sister is also pursuing a teaching career. Alli has an impressive resumé: she's taught at UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, and even had a short stint with the LAPD Police Orientation and Preparation program, preparing prospective cadets for a career in law enforcement.



This is Alli's second semester at SJSU, teaching literature classes and ENGL 100W in what she calls a more "open" style. "I don't like to stand at the front of the class and lecture the entire time," she says, "so I give my students more control in leading discussions and in my grad classes, they have opportunities to practice their teaching skills." And even though her graduate class (ENGL 254) ends at 9:45 at night, her students reflect their instructor's enthusiasm and energy.

After a night of teaching, Alli likes to kick back and decompress with TV, video games (she's currently working her way through the new *Tomb Raider*), and exercise. She also continues her research in historical topics. One in particular stands out, a topic found in her upcoming book *The Scars We Carve* (April 2019): amputees who overcame adversity after losing limbs in the Civil War. According to Alli, men who lost their right arms were able to re-enter the workforce by learning how to write with their left hands. These injuries frequently transcended the boundaries of race, providing common ground for white soldiers and African-

Americans immediately after slavery. But though some in the past may have overcome racial differences, Alli notes that the adversities themselves remain.



Left-handed writing sample by Alfred D. Whitehouse (1866)

English Majors! Professor Johnson will be teaching ENGL 190 - "Big Books" next semester, focusing on the longer classics like Moby Dick and Middlemarch. Look for it in your course catalog!

It's A Dean's Life Vol. 22

This issue of Expressions celebrates the amazing range of arts that we teach, create, and present in the College of Humanities and the Arts at San José State University. From the beauty of Professor Emeritus Harry Powers' work to the technical challenges of blowing glass to innovation on the stage at the Hammer Theatre, the articles testify to our students' talents and our faculty's commitment to arts education. Our focus in the College is providing rich experiences for our students. Our glass studio is one of only three in the entire CSU system, and it is the oldest one in the state of California. This means our students can add an entirely different media to their artistic repertoire; our other excellent facilities include ceramics studios, small metals facilities, and the foundry. That focus on work across media is especially clear in the work of Professor Emeritus Harry Powers: his work integrated sculpture, painting, collage, and metals to produce innovative and beautiful pieces.



In the dance area, we have been blessed by generous patron, Kyle Abraham, who has supported our artist-in-residence program over the last two years. Our students have benefited from master classes with Abraham's dance company, A.I.M, while the SJSU community and the city of San José and the South Bay have experienced the beauty of these companies perform; this last performance included our own students on the Hammer Theatre stage this February.

The Hammer Theatre Center is entering its fourth year as a laboratory space for our student performances and as a venue for diverse and innovative programming. Kid Koala's *Nufonia Must Fall* is a perfect example of what we can offer to our students and to the community with performances that expand traditional boundaries and understanding of the arts. As the article explains, puppeteers, musicians, a DJ, miniature sets, and a cinematographer shared the stage to show the audience the making of a "movie" in real time. Intellectually intriguing, technically fascinating, as well as genuinely heartwarming, the production offered an entirely new vision of what the performing arts can do.

We value the arts for how they can inspire and expand our view of the world. In our college, we leverage the arts and humanities to ask the most important questions

of our time. Our Deep Humanities and Arts initiative brings in speakers illustrating how the arts and humanities often ask ethical questions about technology before the science even exists. We will be bringing Jamie Metzl on April 10th to talk about the ethical issues in our growing ability to bioengineer human beings. Twenty-two years ago, the film *Gattaca* imagined and explored these very issues in the medium of film. Before Jamie Metzl's 7:30pm talk at the Hammer Theatre, we will have students across the university discuss the issues with Jamie, starting that conversation through this film. The arts are a fundamental part of imagining and creating an ethical world that places humanity at the center of the decisions we make.

This issue is dedicated to the wonderful College of Humanities and Arts emeriti faculty and to the memory of Professor Harry Powers, whose art pushes us all to imagine a better world.



Shannon Miller,

Dean