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# the eye

## STATE OF THE ARTS

by Christine Jordan





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# STATE OF THE ARTS

looking deeper into Columbia's arts  
programs, pg. 07

*by Christine Jordan*  
*cover image by Thuto Somo and*  
*Anthony Clay*

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## LETTER *TO* THE EDITOR

### **Regarding the Sept. 29 article “Art on the Streets”:**

Thanks for the article on Hani, the sidewalk artist. Now I know whom to thank for the chance to step on Thomas Sowell's face when I go shopping. (However, I would still like to know who funds the MIT Research Fellow that funds the artist.)

For those who have never heard of Sowell, he is a right-wing libertarian

economist who like the rest of his ilk mainly favors policies that free the advantaged to become yet more advantaged and opposes government policy against societal ills. According to Wikipedia, he has influenced Rush Limbaugh and Clarence Thomas among other notables who share his beliefs.

Herbert J. Gans  
Professor Emeritus, Sociology

## LETTER *FROM* THE EDITOR

One of my favorite parts about going to school here is bragging about all the art I can see on the cheap.

I saw the NYC Ballet do *Sleeping Beauty* for \$12, *Wicked* for free, and *Avenue Q* for \$10. My CUID is a constant friend when it comes to museum admission: I almost feel guilty to have paid virtually nothing to see the works at MoMA and the Met.

The cultural perks Columbia students get simply for being students here are not to be underestimated: we're extremely lucky, so much so that a recently-graduated alum I know has invented a sly maneuver that will acquire him a “FALL 2011” sticker

for his ID.

Columbia's arts umbrella, CUarts, is widely viewed as one of the best university arts programs in the country, as Christine Jordan points out in this week's cover story. But outside acclaim, in some areas of the Columbia arts scene, overshadows internal problems. Budget cuts and a perceived lack of student input are issues that Melissa Smey, executive director of CUarts and Miller Theatre, must contend with, so that artistic traditions Columbia students take for granted may continue, and that new ones may begin.

Amanda Cormier  
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# EXCUSES, EXCUSES

BY P.J. SAUERTEIG

*So, you didn't write your first paper. You misread the calendar, you had one too many G&Ts over the weekend, you really felt that it was better for your mental health to sit in the MoMA sculpture garden. Whatever the cause, the clock*

*is ticking, your eyes are twitching, and you're not going to finish that essay on The Odyssey by 10:25 a.m. It's time to send The Email, but because we know you're low on creativity this week, we've made it easy for you:*

Dear Professor,

I'm sorry that this email is coming to you on such short notice, but I was hoping to get a \_\_\_\_\_  
(double digit number)

day extension for our first Odyssey paper. I know that extensions should be requested at least a \_\_\_\_\_  
(Copernican measurement of time) in advance, but I had a little bit of a \_\_\_\_\_  
(Medieval-era adjective)

weekend. I was planning on finishing up Homer on the plane to \_\_\_\_\_  
(ex-Eastern bloc country) for my sister's wedding, but I ended up having to sit next to a \_\_\_\_\_  
(member of any religion) on my flight. We \_\_\_\_\_  
(verb, past tense)

for a little while, but after a half an hour I thought I made it clear that the hokey pokey needed to stop; I even told him how much work I had to crank through. However, my new friend wouldn't stop talking to me about his \_\_\_\_\_  
(obscure religious ceremony) and how his wife's been in and out of the hospital for surgery on her \_\_\_\_\_  
(underappreciated body part). Thanks to him, I ended up finishing the book the day of my sister's \_\_\_\_\_  
(cult ceremony), but when I tried to log onto the \_\_\_\_\_  
(previous US president)-era computer in the lobby, I about \_\_\_\_\_  
(verb denoting excrement, past tense) my \_\_\_\_\_  
(winter clothing item) because they didn't even have Microsoft Word! I got back this morning with no time to do anything, so please \_\_\_\_\_  
(facial expression) and give me even \_\_\_\_\_  
(your age) more hours and I promise it'll be a \_\_\_\_\_  
(famous historical catastrophe) of a finished product.

Best,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(your name)

## FIVE REASONS TO SEE "THE LION KING: 3D"

BY ANNA MARCUM

- |   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| 1   | 2   | 3   | 4  | 5   |
| You still haven't seen the end because when you were four you ran out of the theater screaming and crying after the stampede scene. Hopefully, like wisdom, bravery comes with age. | You'll (finally) be able to fully pick out all of the "Hamlet" references, as well as the (alleged) racist, sexist, and homophobic overtones. Or, you know, just ignore that and keep on singing along to "The Circle of Life." | The \$8 for an AMC Gold Pass is a lot cheaper than that semester abroad in Africa! Plus, the theatre is air-conditioned, equipped with massive quantities of Milk Duds, and the animals on-screen can talk. | And maybe—just maybe—if you hear "it means no worries for the rest of your dayssssss" enough times, you'll stop thinking about looming mid-terms and those 100 pages of reading you put off. | BONUS: After the movie, you can punch out the lenses of your 3D glasses to create an instant pair of thick-rimmed hipster frames—knit beret not included. |

# SERIOUSLY, MARK? AN OPEN LETTER TO ZUCK

BY ANNELIESE COOPER

Mark, we need to talk.

First, it was that awkward second location of Chat. Then, you started sorting my friends into these mysterious "Lists." Soon enough, my every sidebar was filled with bizarre tidbits of information, ranging from the humiliating (e.g., "More Photos of Person You're Already Shamelessly Stalking!") to the just plain hateful (believe it or not, I'd rather not be reminded that, on September 23, 2007, I happened to think my lunch was "awesum!! <3").

Still, I bore those changes with little protest, because I understand: evolution is as much a part of Facebook as it is of life so, if only for the sake of my FarmVille, I was prepared to tough it out.

But now, Mark, things are getting serious. Now, you've come into my homepage.

Honestly, let's take a close look at what you've done here: a newsfeed embedded in my newsfeed to remind me, moment to moment, what I might be missing in the adjacent newsfeed, the title of which taunts, "Top Stories Since Your Last Visit," as if incredulous that I could be so behind. I'm sure you imagine you're being helpful somehow because, really, who wouldn't want to know right now what song lyrics that girl from eighth grade Bio finds poignant these days? In practice, however, such constant updating can only serve to trap your users in a Sisyphean frenzy of instant gratification. If you keep this up, before long even the half-successful Facebooker will amount to no more than a screen-rapt vegetable, slack-jawedly "refresh"-ing until our eyes bleed—the mere thought of which sends me into an existential tailspin of epic proportions (read: Natalie Imbruglia on repeat and a sincerely inhuman amount of Rice Chex).

In short, it's complicated, Mark, but my request is simple: get yourself under control, or I will be forced to officially list myself as Single. On Google Plus.

Like,  
Weary Collegiate

P.S. While we're on the subject, could you nix "poking"? Everyone's eight year old cousin/ eighty year old great aunt can find more effective ways to reach out to us, I'm sure.

Reply



# The New Patronage

how will corporate sponsorship change the gallery space?

BY DANIEL MERRITT  
PHOTO BY VITALY DRUKER

Where there is great art, there is generally a great sponsor footing the bill. And where there's a sponsor, there's usually some tension, as artists seek to protect their creative freedom, and patrons seek to protect their financial investment. This messy arrangement is on full display at LES gallery The Hole, which is showing former Deitch artist Evan Gruzis' "Exotic Beta," a collection of striking paintings, multimedia installations, and video, with a heavy dose of Pop art and a dash of Dada ready-mades. The show, which is sponsored by True Religion jeans, focuses on exoticism in mainstream culture and the relativity of taste. In the adjoining shop, the gallery sells denim pieces customized by Gruzis in collaboration with the brand. "My first response was to find the sponsorship annoying—an unwanted intrusion," John Miller, professor of Art History at Barnard, says. But is it possible that this "intrusion" is less inevitable than people think?

Artists have relied on patrons for centuries. Even da Vinci received seven years of financial assistance from original art world celebrities—the Medici family. From the Renaissance to the turn of the 20th century, patrons, who were generally wealthy collectors, would commission portraits and landscapes, keeping themselves in great art, and great artists in business. The relationship was usually formal and involved little creative dialogue.

But in the late 1990s, artistic sponsorship became much more diverse. Companies, most likely fueled by the economic boom, began to dabble in the arts by sponsoring museum shows. Eventually, sponsors began commissioning artists to create works that related specifically to their companies. Artists like Jenny Holzer, Takashi Murakami, and Barbara Kruger have collaborated with Keds, Louis Vuitton, and Gap, respectively. But it is only recently that corporate collaboration has trickled down to the gallery scene.

**"I THINK THAT PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP CAN BE A REALLY POSITIVE THING, BECAUSE YOU CAN TAKE GREATER RISKS."**

This new manifestation of patronage, a mandatory act of artistic reciprocity, suggests a much closer relationship between artist and sponsor. For that reason, The Hole has been careful to draw boundaries. "We wanted to make sure that it wasn't something too intrusive," says Laura O'Reilly, an associate director of the gallery. "You don't see True Religion's name in here except for



Installation shot of Evan Gruzis' "Exotic Beta" at The Hole Gallery on the LES

on our postcards. The art comes first." But the gallery is not ashamed of the brand's contribution: "It's not like we're hiding it. We're happy to work with them," O'Reilly says.

For The Hole, it seems to be about preserving balance and preventing that feeling of "unwanted intrusion." In the gallery space, there is no visible branding—the white walls remain a space for the art. The gallery shop allows True Religion and the gallery to sell Gruzis' customized denim pieces—and make some money. According to Mary Train, a gallery shop employee, the denim is important in drawing customers. "People see the jeans and come right in to the store," she says. But according to Miller, the appearance of corporate sponsors in galleries is "capital's attempt to monetize culture in even finer gradients."

However, the new arrangement in the artist-patron relationship doesn't bother Gruzis. "The thing about sponsorship is that it's not like there's corporate sponsorship and then there's patronage," he says. "It's all sort of the same thing. From the Medicis to Saatchi to Brice Marden appearing in a Gap ad, there's a spectrum of a patronage of artists. Any sponsor who approaches an artist knows that there's going to be some separation, but also a creative dialogue."

In a way, the association with the brand may even have been an aesthetic liberation. "They allowed me to make some more ambitious work," says Gruzis. While museums and non-profits are often working with limited amounts of public money, corporations have no such restrictions. "I think that private sponsorship can be a really positive thing because you can take greater risks than you could with public sponsorship or museum

sponsorship or even a single collector's patronage. Traditionally, in the '80s and '90s, it wasn't like that ... I feel like it could be a growing trend under the right conditions."

Gruzis points to the potential art holds to help businesses. "You have to wonder how beneficial it was, Warhol's use of the soup can, for Campbell's soup. In a way he is sponsoring the brand," he says. He believes that True Religion's sponsorship was at least somewhat motivated by an interest in his message about the relativity of taste. "Whenever someone patronizes an artist, they're doing that so they can learn more through the artist," Gruzis says.

Of course, the relationship between corporate sponsors and artists comes with certain implications about the content of the pieces. Gruzis' work, while sophisticated and fully developed, is not exceedingly controversial. Artists who aim to push the boundaries, innovate mediums, or push institutions' buttons may be less likely to receive beneficial sponsorship—even from private parties. Because corporations (even those similar to True Religion) have myriad connections in the business world, artists most likely have to choose corporate approved concepts and themes. Bringing controversy to a brand that is trying to appeal to the masses could have disastrous consequences for all parties involved.

This new patronage may change the way art is not only paid for, but conceived and created as well. Still, in the vortex of artistic collaboration, it may be hard to separate whether artists are changing sponsorship or sponsorship is changing artists. Professor Miller puts it best: "Everything is connected to everything." ●

# The Next Big Thing

taking on american apparel, the corporate giant

BY MOLLY SPEACHT  
PHOTO COURTESY OF NANCY UPTON

*With international lawmakers proposing to ban overly-slim super models from fashion shows, the days of the size-zero American Apparel model may be behind us as well. Last month, the clothier began a campaign searching for the “Next Big Thing,” a face for their new XL line (yes, pun intended). Offended by the campaign’s cutesy and insulting language (“For those who need a little extra wiggle room, be the next XLent model”), 24-year-old Nancy Upton from Dallas decided to do something about it. She entered the contest not with typical glamour shots, but with photos of her eating in various states of undress, a clever twist on AA’s insincere attempt at inviting plus sized women into their elite club. And she won. Nancy Upton talked to us about beauty and size, ranch dressing, and taking on the corporate giant.*

**How did you come upon the American Apparel “The Next Big Thing” campaign and how did you react to it at first?**

I had always thought what American Apparel did was really gross, but I just never did anything about it. But this I just couldn’t get out of my head, the fact that they were singling out plus-sized women like they were trying to make them feel included. But they were actually excluding them. It was like they were saying, “Hey, now you can be cool like us.” I was lying in bed one night and thinking about the stereotype that fat women are just lazy and are con-

stantly eating. And then I got the idea: what if a woman was trying to be sexy but just couldn’t stop eating because she was plus-sized?

**What were your expectations when you entered the contest?**

When I clicked submit and it said “We are going to review your submission and get back to you in about six hours,” I thought, “Oh no, a human is actually going to look at these.” My expectations at point were that my friends and I would just laugh about it and people would look at the photos and hopefully get something out of it.

**Why do you think you won?**

If American Apparel didn’t have the reputation for being exclusive and creating some drama in the media, I don’t think my campaign would have gotten as much attention. I also think because plus-sized women are often heavily airbrushed, the fact that my photos were realistic and we used natural light got attention from people.

**Tell me more about the shoot. How did you come up with the idea for the photos?**

Basically what I was thinking about was: what are stereotypical foods that people that are overweight or depressed because they’re overweight go for? I thought, well, they go for Ben & Jerry’s. Also I wanted food that wouldn’t necessarily look sexy. And it had to look like real food.

**In one photo you literally bathe in ranch dressing. What inspired that photo?**

I feel like ranch dressing is just one of those things, like fried food, that has just come to

represent obesity and food epidemics in America right now. And it’s just such a weird thing that people love.

**And the roasted pig photo?**

It’s not a huge logical jump to go from fat person to pig. I also don’t feel like it’s a huge logical jump to go from this photo and how fat women are objectified in the American Apparel campaign.

**What were the responses like to your campaign at first?**

I think within 24 or 48 hours there was a 600-comment spread about it, starting out with comments like “What do you think?” to “Is she hot or not?” “Is she really a size 12?” “Do you think she has ranch dressing in her lady parts?”

**“IT’S NOT A HUGE LOGICAL JUMP TO GO FROM FAT PERSON TO PIG. I ALSO DON’T FEEL LIKE IT’S A HUGE LOGICAL JUMP TO GO FROM THIS PHOTO AND HOW FAT WOMEN ARE OBJECTIFIED IN THE AMERICAN APPAREL CAMPAIGN.”**

**How did you feel when American Apparel refused to name you the winner of the contest even though you received the most votes?**

I never really expected to hear from the company. Even though I was trying to make a statement in a way, it was something I had mainly done in the vein of being silly. If they had asked me to do the campaign I would’ve said no. When you put your face or your body on something, you become the spokesperson and that’s not something I would be interested in doing for that company. I don’t think they’d be interested in me doing it for them either.

**What did you take away from this experience? And what if anything do you hope American Apparel took away from this experience?**

It’s still kind of ongoing. Like, they’re flying me out to L.A. this weekend to meet with the creative director and tour the factory. For me, as an artist, it was really excited to make a statement and to have it heard by people. I just hope that, not even specifically American Apparel, but companies that market to plus-sized people or even any other demographic that’s under-represented in media, fashion or whatever, will realize that you don’t need to single these groups out to make them feel included. Just include them in a normal, respectful way and that’ll do it. You don’t need to ask for pats on the back for it and you don’t need to make them feel like now they’re good enough to join. On a broader level, beauty and size are not mutually exclusive. You can beautiful and big, and not just be beautiful for a big person. You can just be





# Like a Rolling Stone?

the “nyc nomad” roams the city for neighborhood stories

BY EMILIA SHAFFER DEL VILLE  
ILLUSTRATION BY ZHOUNAN XIE

Every Sunday, the New York City Nomad collects his belongings and treks uptown, cross-town, and downtown to his home for that week, eager to add to the list of 44 neighborhoods and five boroughs he has lived in so far.

Ed Casabian is not homeless, but rather adventurous and curious about the city he calls home. When a breakup left Casabian uncertain about his living situation, he realized he has been “happiest when traveling,” and decided to exchange the confines of traditional living for a nomadic existence. Inspired by his experiences as an international “couch surfer” in Dubai and Hong Kong, Casabian dubbed himself the NYC Nomad and set out to explore the city and its suburbs.

I shadowed Casabian one afternoon during a stay in Midtown East, entering his ephemeral world and observing his attempts to unearth the quirks and unique aspects of the neighborhood. He explained that his hosts often play a vital role in this exploration, being the first personal interaction he has with his temporary community. These friends, friends of friends, and due to recent press and his Tumblr, interested strangers, are eager to open their homes and share their experience as residents. “I take little ideas from each place I stay. I have a constant flow of ideas from the people I stay with.”

The other aspect of his stay in each neighborhood is the time he spends walking the streets—shopping in local markets, eating at neighborhood restaurants, and talking to locals. During this past week in Midtown East, Casabian browsed the rows of vintage ports and oaky reds at Ambassador Wines and Spirits, talking to the store’s third generation owner about the constant shifts in residents and clientele. He listens intently to all those he meets, fascinated by their stories. These encounters capture the essence of Casabian’s project: personally connecting with the locale.

A new online component to the project strengthens the connection with his readers by making his stories accessible to the public. He has partnered with Sound Cloud, a website that allows anyone to create sounds and share them via most online mediums, to share what he calls “City Stories.” He asks his hosts and other locals for the “most interesting person in the neighborhood,” whether it be a decades-long resident or a member of the neighborhood council. The city stories are refreshing perspectives offered by those who define the community’s tenor. In describing Carroll Gardens’ Smith Union Market and its owner Vinny Tallercio, Casabian recalls, “You walk in and think, what is this place? [But] you spend 10, 15 minutes in there and you get it. He knows the history of the neighborhood. Those are the kinds of places that keep the character of the place.” These stories

**“IT’S SO EASY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN DOING THE SAME THING ALL THE TIME, GOING TO THE SAME RESTAURANTS.”**

add depth and personality to the project, and enhance Casabian’s written accounts by enabling readers to more tangibly engage with the community. Hearing enthusiastic locals describe their favorite restaurants make the nomad’s experiences relatable. Casabian is passionate about the importance of these stories for him and his readers. “It gives me a sense of the neighborhood, but also I’d love to get other people involved in the project,” he says. “Get people to record other stories about their neighborhoods.”

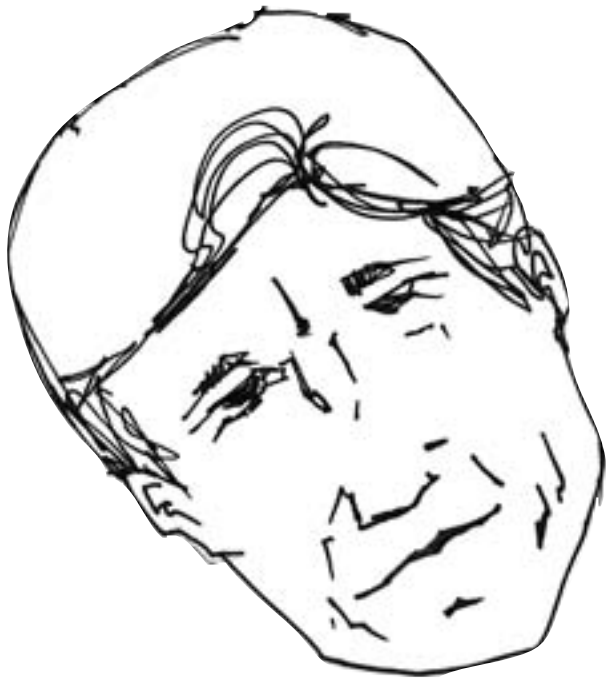
Casabian’s goals and hopes for this social experiment reflect a trusting and idealistic viewpoint; one antithetical to an individualistic American culture. “[The goal] is to explore your city. It’s so easy to get

caught up in doing the same thing all the time, going to the same restaurants. I hope it inspires people to get outside of their comfort zone and check out some new places, and talk to some new people,” he says. “I like trying to connect people.”

Although Casabian’s project is rooted in principles of connectedness and understanding, his endeavors are paradoxically naïve and individualistic. His nomadic lifestyle, untainted by financial and familial hardships, does not reflect that of the majority of New Yorkers. It also must be noted that Casabian may be missing the diversity that defines New York City by staying with predominantly white and middle class hosts. Although he is the creator of a blog with the potential to be a commentary on urban studies and neighborhood dynamics and appears interested in this angle, he seems uncertain of how to incorporate this subject into his project. He is less driven by urban studies than he is by a simple, and important, desire to connect—people with people, neighborhoods with other neighborhoods, and New Yorkers with their own neighborhoods. In talking to Casabian, it becomes clear that for him, the most important and rewarding aspects are those related to his interactions with others. “I didn’t understand the city before I started doing this project. I liked it, but now I love it. I think about all the people I’ve met, the different perspectives on life.”

Regardless of which direction his blog will take, Casabian is still deeply invested in his project: the people, the stories, and New York itself. Although unsure of how much longer he will remain in his transient state, he has a long list of neighborhoods he still hopes to inhabit. “I’ve just had such a unique ability to see New York City. And there are still so many interesting neighborhoods.” Inwood, Battery Park, The Financial District, Coney Island, Queens, Sheeps Head Bay, and Brighton Beach all remain unexplored by the Casabian. “The instant I get to the new neighborhood ... I have energy. That’s what gets me going and what excites me.” ●





# state *of the* arts

looking deeper into  
Columbia's arts programs

by Christine Jordan  
*illustration by Thuto Somo*

In his 2002 inauguration speech to the University, President Lee Bollinger highlighted three critical areas for development. The first was research and collaboration across Columbia's campuses; the second, globalization. The third is the clear outlier, if only for what it lacks in buzzword appeal: Columbia's relationship with the arts.

"This required the same kind of creativity that the arts themselves call upon," Bollinger says, reflecting upon this mission statement. "It's endless, the amount that we can do to integrate the arts more into the University and into the undergraduate program, in particular."

Zero score and seven years ago, directive became reality when Bollinger established the Arts Initiative at Columbia University, known as CUarts, to encompass student, faculty, and alumni programs that enable access to the arts. Though some may just know it as a ticket booth, CUarts has become the most visible driver of student engagement with the arts, both on and off campus. Columbia's cultural arm secures free and discounted admissions to museums and shows, provides grants for students' artistic and

cultural projects, and links campus arts groups, classrooms, and the New York arts scene.

In November 2009, CUarts quietly moved from the Office of the President to merge with the graduate School of the Arts, shadowing a move Miller Theatre made four months earlier. Major budget and staff cuts followed. And in October 2010, founding director Gregory Mosher resigned after six years of service to focus on his work in the theater. His position remained unfilled for nine months, until July of this year, when Miller Theatre Director Melissa Smey was given a joint appointment as executive director of Miller and CUarts. For the first time, a conversation about CUarts' prioritization, accountability, and transparency within the University gained and sustained campus attention.

To many, these moves represented a focus on a new, much larger University arts initiative: one calling for the construction of a unified, integrated, collaborative University presence for the arts under the wing of School of the Arts Dean Carol Becker.

"It's the next iteration. Things have to evolve. They have to grow, or they die," Becker says of the

repositioned arts institutions at Columbia. "The next iteration for CUarts was to become much more integral to all of the other arts on campus."

But getting everyone on the same page is easier said than done. Some students remain wary of the impact this vision could have on the popular arts program as an independent entity. In response to the merger's announcement, a group of students, alumni, and community members formed Advocates of the Arts Initiative to publicly question the institutional change. "It was very obvious that students' interests were not being taken into account at all in the process, which is a constant problem at Columbia," Barry Weinberg, Columbia College senior and lead advocate, says. "We want students to have a voice in the Arts Initiative to make sure that it still serves their needs. We're still just not seeing that."

Smey acknowledges that, with the new program, she was also handed a murky range of popular perceptions of CUarts' current state and future. "I want to throw off the cover, take away the mystery, and be clear about what we're doing," she says, "and about the fact that what we're doing is really cool."

A Brief History of CUarts

Before CUarts and its public presence, the Ticket and Information Center, opened their doors, the arts were quite literally shoved into a corner. Without a centralized place for ticket distribution and production promotion, students swarmed a concrete crevice in the Lerner Hall lobby—the precise location of today’s shiny, glowing TIC booth.

“It was a space about 9 by 6 feet with a window. The grate wasn’t there and it looked like a closet. It was horrible,” Mosher explains. “If you were putting on *Waiting for Godot* you would cut your English class, go climb over the thing, and yell, ‘Get your *Waiting for Godot* tickets! Get your *Waiting for Godot* tickets!’” Mosher is fighting laughter at this point, sitting at a back table in the Hungarian Pastry Shop. He reels himself back to recall that it was preposterous in an institutional sense, too.

“Your show was only being promoted as often as you could get there,” he says. “Sometimes there would be five people trying to elbow each other

“I WANTED TO BUILD IT SO DEEPLY INTO THE FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSITY THAT IT WOULDN’T OCCUR TO ANYONE TO GET RID OF IT.”

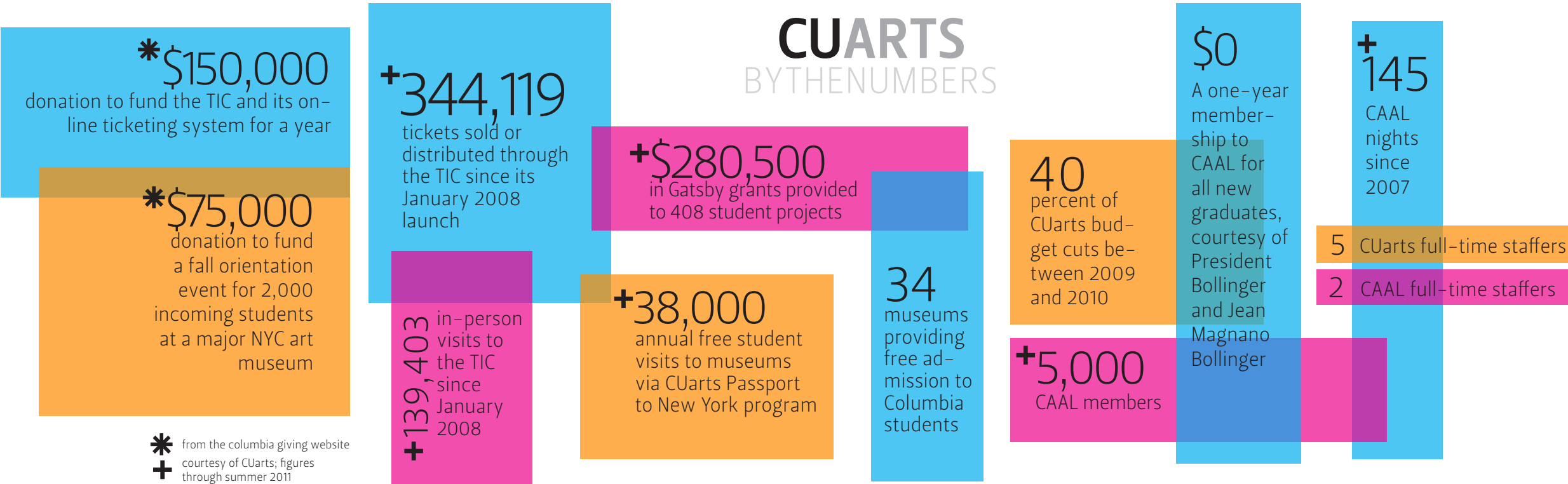
out of the way.”

The story of how Mosher built CUarts using only an appointment to the post from President Bollinger and “the freedom to improvise,” as Mosher calls it, is treated reverentially within the organization. It embodies, in their eyes, the spirit of the program. “It sprang out of what the students wanted,” Darcy Zacharias, CC ’10 and a former full-time CUarts staff member, says. “Gregory just spent months walking around campus and talking to students, asking, ‘Hey, if we had an Arts Initiative, what would you want it to be?’”

For two months Mosher wandered, trying to take the pulse of the campus arts community. “All of the comments I got were simple: ‘We don’t know what’s happening on campus.’ ‘We came to New York partly for New York City culture and we’re clueless on how to access it.’ ‘The arts organizations think they have these great student deals, but they don’t understand that \$25 is a lot of money for us.’”

“The questions very quickly fell into a few buckets,” Mosher explains, and within a year, CUarts crafted its foundational pillars: to enliven the arts on campus, to connect the campus to New York City and ultimately global culture, and to link the arts with other ways of understanding the world. From these, CUarts developed its signature offerings, including Gatsby grants to fund student art projects, a website listing arts groups and how to get involved, and the TIC.

Mosher, a Tony Award-winning stage director who remains a professor in the School of the Arts Theatre Arts program, says that directing CUarts



was the polar opposite of directing for the stage. “Being the director of a theater, your job is to have ideas and make tough choices,” he said. “This was all about that horrible word ‘empowering.’ This job was about creating tools. And we needed to do that in a somewhat unconventional way.”

Unconventional was a good look for CUarts. It was the first of its kind and remains a model for peer institutions. A white paper on the state of the arts at MIT references CUarts’ Lunch with the Arts Initiative program to solicit student feedback, while CUarts staffers field regular questions on best practices for parallel start-ups by other institutions.

Nonetheless, Mosher had a persistent eye on CUarts’ station on campus, knowing full well how its existence could easily become tenuous: “I wanted to build it so deeply into the fabric of the University that it wouldn’t occur to anyone to get rid of it any more than they’d think to get rid of the Core Curriculum.”

He pauses, and I catch a glimpse of Mosher as theater director for just a second, when he says, “Now, that was a fairly grand thing to say, so you have to say, ‘Gregory said that laughing.’”

**Behind the Curtain**

Over the Election Day holiday in 2009, after an inquiry from the Spectator, the University released a statement clarifying the integration of CUarts and Miller Theatre with School of the Arts. Rather suddenly, CUarts’ location within the Columbia community was more nuanced than “in the corner of Lerner lobby.”

The original statement billed the move as an administrative shift in reporting lines. President Bollinger said that neither he nor then-Provost Claude Steele had much time to spend on managing the program. There would be no change to CUarts. Students had no reason to worry.

But they found reasons. The timing of the announcement alongside a lack of student input led to the formation of Advocates of the Arts Initiative.

Their concerns centered on a lack of communication, the unclear effect of the move on CUarts’ well being, and the implications of the move on its relationship to the University community.

Weinberg believes that these issues still reverberate. He and other group leaders rallied hundreds of students to join their Facebook group, primarily circulating press about CUarts to garner support, attention, and involvement in the cause. The Advocates’ first meeting to discuss the changes with School of the Arts Dean Carol Becker wasn’t attained until April 2010; their most recent was in mid-September with new CUarts Executive Director Melissa Smey.

“Each meeting made me further committed to the cause,” Weinberg, who also chairs the Student Governing Board, explains. “This is a problem now with the debate over the College and the University. In these processes, no one’s asking Columbia College students.”

The Advocates’ first move was to collect signatures in the wake of the merger to show support for the integrity of CUarts. Advocates founding member Aries Dela Cruz, GS ’09, delivers 400 of these names in a 20-page packet. He flies through the papers, stopping excitedly as he spots his favorite messages written by its signatories. One is by a Barnard student who had been accepted early decision that year and didn’t want the program to change before she arrived. “People felt very deeply,” he says, clutching the notes.

But Dela Cruz is hesitant to forget that those feelings stemmed from what he calls “this bureaucratic thing, this fucked-up process.” He references the University’s response to the resignation of Columbia College Dean Michele Moody-Adams in August, saying that the administration similarly didn’t offer enough transparency.

Zacharias, who joined the Advocates while still on the CUarts staff, says that a lack of input

GATSBY CHARITABLE FUND	ADVOCATES OF THE ARTS INITIATIVE	FACULTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
A CUarts student arts grant-providing program made possible by a donation by Lord David Sainsbury, MBA ’71, and Lady Susie Sainsbury.	A group formed in response to the CUarts merger with the graduate School of the Arts to call for more student involvement in matters concerning CUarts.	An informal group of 15 faculty members assembled by CUarts founding director Gregory Mosher to solicit feedback on programs.
	CAAL	CAA
	The Columbia Alumni Arts League. A program to provide continued benefits and discounts for students after graduation. Known for its CAAL Night cultural events for members, CAAL was founded by CUarts but is now a CAA program.	The Columbia Alumni Association. An umbrella organization for all university alumni.

into the merger betrayed the student-driven spirit of CUarts. “That was very contradictory to everything that CUarts had built up,” she says. “No one had any clue what was going on. I worked there and I had no clue what was going on.”

Becker, an artist with an array of research interests ranging from cultural criticism to feminist theory, tells me that her first book was about the anxiety of change. She sees a similar pattern in the climate that befell campus at the time. “People think that change means that something’s being taken away,” she says.

Indeed, many of the messages in Dela Cruz’s petition express a grave fear of the shift being the first step towards razing the program. Smey responds with shock that students ever thought this was a possibility—“it still has the heart and ear of the president,” she says. Despite the shift in reporting lines, Bollinger says he remains invested in its permanence within the University: “All we’re getting for a very small contribution here ... makes it, I think, extremely successful and not something that it would be wise to cut as the result of significant downturn in the economy.”

**Creative Control**

With the merger in the deep past, the Advocates still haven’t found trust. To them, the miscommunication and suddenness of the change highlight CUarts’ institutional vulnerabilities. They responded in April 2010 with a proposal for a CUarts advisory body, mirroring after parallel boards for the Core Curriculum, Lerner Hall, and Housing. “These are the channels that students go through to have their voices heard,” Weinberg explains.

CUarts’ existing formalized bodies do not fulfill the Advocates’ objectives. From its inception in 2008 through Mosher’s departure, a faculty Advisory Committee of 15 hand-selected professors from a variety of departments and schools convened approximately once per semester.

“It was primarily a sounding board for Greg-

ory, which was fine with us—we were happy to play that role,” says Committee member Stuart Firestein, chair of the department of biological sciences. “The board, much to Gregory’s credit, was not dragged into any of the politics. It’s not like he came to us and said, ‘They’re screwing me; you have to stand behind me.’”

These issues reverberate with the item at the top of Smey’s agenda: listening. “Listening across the campus—it’s about listening,” she says. She hopes to foster a close relationship between CUarts and its constituents, students, faculty, and staff included. But of any formal student and faculty advisory bodies she plans to use, she says only that it is “to be figured out.” She continues, “I’m interested in my first semester of my leadership in listening to as broad of a constituency as possible and then deciding from there what makes sense about next steps.”

**“IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF SHE CAN LIVE UP TO THAT POTENTIAL AND REALLY ENGAGE THE STUDENTS—NOT JUST ENGAGE BUT MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THEM.”**

The Advocates’ proposal gained early momentum, but ultimately stalled, despite support from Mosher. “The Dean told the Advocates who came to her a year and a half ago that their opinions would be solicited,” Mosher says of Becker. “That turned out not to be the case.”

The proposal submitted by Dela Cruz to Becker cites similar boards to the Columbia Law School and Columbia Alumni Association, among other University institutions, as its models. It calls for a host of ex-officio and elected representatives from the program, the University, and the student body. As a supplementary measure, the proposal suggests six committees to focus on more specific issues, such as finance and public outreach.

“They claimed it was too complicated, too big,” Weinberg says of the proposal’s reception. “We had also included faculty and administrators ... If they thought that was too big, then, fine, we’ll just have students and alumni.”

Becker shows little interest in the Advocates and where things left off, stemming from what she explains is a desire to not rehash the past and focus instead on the future. She says of the Advocates: “They met with me last year, but now they’re Melissa’s,” noting that CUarts’ relationship with the group is at Smey’s discretion.

Dela Cruz expresses disappointment in the lack of progress the Advocates made with Becker and School of the Arts. Becker, he says, also promised student involvement in the process of selecting the next CUarts director, which never materialized during the nine-month period in which CUarts was without a leader.

Becker bends her policy on discussing the past in this instance, however, to clarify that Smey’s appointment was a promotion and consolidation and that therefore no search committee was





Melissa Smith, Executive Director of Miller Theatre and CUarts

formed. “If we had a different situation, it might have looked different,” she says.

Weinberg rejects this line of thinking. “That’s baloney, for Columbia. It’s very common practice at Columbia to form search committees, even if you’re promoting internally,” he says. “They want to make sure they’re actually picking the best person, and not just saying, ‘Oh, this person can do it, we have them already.’”

Despite qualms over the details of her appointment, Weinberg is optimistic about Smey’s leadership. At their mid-September meeting, Weinberg spoke with Smey on behalf of the Advocates to discuss the stalled advisory body proposal. “Melissa Smey is a bright spot and a spot of hope in a situation that is very, very dire,” he says. “It remains to be seen if she can live up to that potential and really engage the students—not just engage, but make a commitment to them.”

Smey plans on encouraging student involvement by convening student focus groups throughout the fall and reviving Lunch with the Arts Initiative, which offered free lunch events to connect students with CUarts. Weinberg says that he or another Advocate will attend the first Lunch, scheduled for Oct. 14, in addition to the first focus group, for which participation interest forms also opened in early October. “I think if we can have those focus groups run as a trial, that could provide good groundwork for getting the committee we’d agreed upon,” Weinberg says.

Wearied from his experiences in student government and in major campus debates, including ROTC, Weinberg qualifies his optimism some: “The Advocates honestly won’t stop until students have formal institutional input.”

#### Art Market

There’s a hole in Dean Becker’s office wall.

There’s a good reason behind it; the University is working on restoring some deterioration. But, eyeballing the beautiful space, the plastic-covered gaping hole delivers an unexpected reminder of the starving artist—a fitting thematic backdrop for our conversation about the operational health of the arts at Columbia.

“American society has never been one to support art in a great way, except for individual donors,” Becker explains. “Artists are the people who do best at times when you have to be really innovative. They do best with little—always can

make something happen with nothing. That’s the nature of the arts: no one ever hands anybody anything. You have to figure it out yourself.”

CUarts has had much to figure out in the last three years. In 2009, CUarts confirmed that it had been ordered to cut 10 percent of its budget by the Office of the President. In 2010, an additional 30 percent budget cut had been issued, with both cuts to remain indefinitely for the foreseeable future. A generalized anxiety over the fitness of CUarts followed suit.

“It was supposed to be a central initiative of President Bollinger’s,” Weinberg says. “You’ll notice nothing in Manhattanville is getting cut. You’ll notice that we’re still opening global centers in Peru and Chile. ... It’s small enough; it can be protected. And even so, nothing else got cut by 40 percent.”

Bollinger notes that the cuts were not aimed at only CUarts. “Everybody suffered through cuts during that period of time. And now the hope is that we can rebuild it,” he says.

To date, the TIC and the Gatsby Charitable Fund—among CUarts’ other core programs—remain unaffected by the cuts. According to Smey, CUarts has been able to maintain the same level of services despite the reductions by approaching their situation smartly. For example, they eliminated some costs associated with printed materials by using social media more effectively.

The overall budget of CUarts, like many University-funded programs, is not public information. What known metrics and money

## “IT’S OUR JOB TO MAKE IT RELEVANT, TO MAKE IT INTERESTING, TO BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS TO GET STUDENTS TO BE HERE.”

trails exist provide only a rough sketch of CUarts’ limits. According to the Columbia giving website, a donation of \$150,000 funds the TIC and its online ticketing system for one year. CUarts is otherwise understood as a small program with a big impact.

One change to CUarts’ with speculative financial impact was the discontinuation of its new student orientation event at a New York City art museum. This year for orientation, CUarts hosted in its place an on-campus re-creation of The MP3 Experiment by prevalent public performance group Improv Everywhere. For the first time, CUarts’ orientation event invited returning students as well as first-years to participate. “A small but important step,” Smey says of the inclusiveness.

The previous museum events were held annually from 2005 through 2008, with its first year at the MoMA and the following three years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After the successive budget cuts, Mosher says the museum event seemed, to him, “virtually impossible to fund.” He says of the decision to discontinue the event beginning in 2009: “We were pretty much down to bone and a museum NSOP event would have meant cutting even deeper. I chose not to do it.

Tough call, but my concern was not to wound the core programs.”

According to Mosher, funding sources for the event changed based on each year’s particular circumstances. He explains that the bill was split in varying fractions between individual donors whom he approached, the Office of the Provost, and the CUarts annual budget. The Columbia giving website indicates that a donation of \$75,000 would fund the 2,000 incoming students’ reception at a city art museum.

Smey gestures towards inconsistencies in the perception of CUarts’ finances: “Conflict-ing things have gotten out into the press and the public record,” she says. “It’s been said that the new student orientation event was one of the casualties of the cut. That’s not accurate.” She cites the lack of a donor as the reason it wasn’t put on again: “It’s not part of the budget allocation we get from the University. It was funded by an outside donor. It would be amazing if there were a one-time donor that wanted to come back and fund it again, but it was never part of the core budget of the Initiative.”

Mosher remembers the summers the staff spent preparing and managing the museum events as the biggest, yet most intangible, investment the organization made. Changes to staff size are as big of a roadblock, in Mosher’s mind, to the event—and, for that matter, to the organization’s big picture.

“Almost nobody who was there when I was there—only a year or two ago—is still there,” says Zacharias, who was the events and outreach associate from September 2008 to May 2010. In the spring of 2008, CUarts had nine full-time staffers. By 2010, it reached its low of five full-time staffers tasked with those jobs. Today, Smey says that they are back up to seven full-time staffers, counting the two Columbia Alumni Arts League associate directors who report to the CAA, since CAAL was moved to CAA in 2010.

Weinberg points out that Smey’s dual appointment also means that two historically separate posts have been collapsed into each other. He prefaces that he is excited by her track record and enthusiasm, but says, “She just can’t do the job of two people the same way two people would without hiring additional staff, which there was no money for, apparently.”

“You could see it uncharitably that I’m running both things,” Smey says of concerns surrounding her dual appointment. “I think that campus has to listen to me and to give me a chance to say what it is that I hope to accomplish. They need to be able to come back and ask questions if they think I’m not taking things in the direction that I said I would.”

Smey continues, “But there has to be an element of trust that things aren’t changing and that programs that people love aren’t going away.”

#### The Third Branch

Melissa Smey asks that we meet to talk about Miller Theatre during a second appointment, to give CUarts and Miller each our full attention. She takes the two hats she wears very seriously—including, it seems, in switching them.

When we reconvene, Smey speaks excitedly about Miller, looking entirely at home in her office

atop the venue's lobby, where an entire office wall is dedicated to CDs. This is the post from which she is currently managing both institutions, just below the School of the Arts administrative offices in Dodge Hall.

Of the three institutions involved in the merger, Miller may be the most enigmatic. While a national leader in the contemporary music world, the University's professional presenter is sometimes perceived as removed from or irrelevant to campus life.

The previous incarnation of Miller was known as McMillan Theater, an academic venue that hosted poetry readings by T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas, ballet danced by Merce Cunningham, and a pioneering electronic music performance by Vladimir Ussachevsky. The space, open since the early 1920s, had fallen into disarray. Smey says, "There was no full department or person in charge of overseeing it. It was kind of a mess."

Notably, Columbia didn't have a campus presenter in the way that universities across the country do. In the fall of 1988 the University completed a renovation of the space and Miller Theatre opened its doors. According to Smey, the goal in giving the space this new chance was, "to ensure that it didn't become a mess again, to protect the University's investment in renovating it, but then also to create a life for the arts on campus."

Firestein, the biologist who sat on the faculty Advisory Committee to CUarts, speaks of Miller in a familiar tone—that of the outsider, who feels an incomprehensible, invisible boundary between the venue and campus. "If Miller Theatre moved 30 blocks south, very few of us here would know the difference," he says with a shrug. In his eyes, the institution's best move, perhaps, has been the times it has offered the space up to first-year Frontiers of Science lectures: "Otherwise, you could easily go through four years of this place and never set foot in Miller Theatre or have any idea of it as something other than a bus stop."

Having worked at Miller for over ten years—two as director beginning in 2009 and eight before that as general manager—Smey is keenly aware of this viewpoint. "When I took over as director there was a perception that students aren't coming to Miller, that they're not coming to performances, and 'What are you going to do to change that?'" But the metrics she discovered tell a different story: 20 percent of Miller's tickets are sold to students, which is twice the national average of 10–11 percent for campus presenters.

Still, Smey accepts this perception as a challenge. "It's our job to make it relevant, to make it interesting, to break down the barriers to get students to be here," she says. Smey plans to continue holding student focus groups for Miller, as well as inviting student groups en masse to attend pre-show gatherings and talks to work Miller into existing social structures, a new initiative piloted in the last year.

Even though Miller could potentially benefit from CUarts' close involvement with the student body's day-to-day lives, CUarts remains out of discussions about student engagement at Miller. Miller's Outreach Associate Charlotte Landrum, who piloted the first Miller focus group in 2010 says, "CUarts has to have editorial independence. If CUarts just becomes a mouthpiece for us just to



Gregory Mosher, founding director of CUarts

talk about what we're doing [at Miller], it's kind of a failure."

Becker says that the key to connecting Miller to students who "haven't understood what goes on there" lies in re-imagining the possibilities and reach of the space. She says, "Miller Theatre—the whole notion of it—is expanding. Now Miller's not really just a music professional venue, it's a professional venue for ideas, also." Becker is referring to the film screenings, conversation, and symposia now happening at Miller in collaboration with School of the Arts. In September, the space was transformed for a showing of the film *The Interrupters*, followed by a talk-back with the director, an event that was free and open to all students. "Everything that's happening now is happening for everybody, which is, to me, the way it always should have been. ... I'm grateful that we've gotten to this point," Becker says.

Both Becker and Smey, however, stop short of saying that the space will be opened for more use during off-hours, instead saying that they want to break down the barriers to campus, not change the mission of the institution as a venue for professional presenting. Smey notes that Miller does not receive student activity fee funding, as spaces regularly used by students for performances and practices do.

In 2009, for the sesquicentennial of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Firestein says that he and fellow Advisory Committee member, then-astronomy department chair David Helfand considered performing for the University community a two-man show that Firestein had seen and loved about Darwin and his American colleague Asa Gray. "I went to David, who's also a bit of an actor, too, and I said, 'David, why don't you and I take a chance and make a couple fools of ourselves for the students?'" In his mind, it had simple, but campus-wide appeal: "You can come watch two funky professors make fools of themselves, but you'll learn something about evolution."

"We thought we'd do it at Miller Theatre. Impossible. Impossible! Unless David and I wanted to put up about \$3,000 each to do it," Firestein said. "So it never happened."

Smey reminds us that there is a price tag on everything in the arts world, even on interdepartmental collaboration. "In the same way that we have to raise money to put on events here, other departments have to be able to raise the money to

hold events here," she explains.

Nevertheless, pointing out red tape doesn't always make it easier to digest. "I don't know; it was such an obvious thing. You'd think that Columbia University—one of the great centers of genomics and genetics, right in the middle of the 2009 celebration of Darwin—would see that," Firestein says. "We did bupkis for it here."

### Where arts thou?

"What I am calling for is about more than support for the arts," Bollinger said in his artistic call to arms during his inauguration speech. "It is about building relationships between the various kinds of creativity a University and the contemporary art world have to offer, and creating something new in the process."

Strengthening and creating these channels has been long and, in many ways, unfinished process. For Smey, the openness is a blessing. "We're all sitting at the table and we all have a voice at how we're going to shape this amazing thing. We have the opportunity to make the arts at Columbia a national leader," she says.

Bollinger, today, continues to focus on CUarts as connector and enabler for the arts, especially in its interaction with the University and the city surrounding it. "We have a great School of the Arts, we have very, very great faculty who are concerned with the arts, and ... we live in New York City," Bollinger says. "To take advantage of all of that and to increase its intensity—I think that's the hope that I've had for the Arts Initiative."

Underneath any question about the future of CUarts undoubtedly lies a deep appreciation for what progress has been made towards fulfilling Bollinger's goal. "The first few years of the Arts Initiative were so promising and so effective at building the arts not only as an interest and a resource to students and faculty but also in building a community around that," Weinberg says.

Looking back on his time at the helm of CUarts, Mosher remembers the community response most fondly. "You asked me what the most rewarding part was," he says. "It was when the hundreds and hundreds of people said, 'What did you guys do before?'"

"And the answer is that people did just fine," he continues. "They just didn't do quite as well." ●



# A Civic Mind

how can civic education become part of collegiate life?

BY LAURA BOOTH  
ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ LEE

Civic education is a notion many of us leave behind with the Thanksgiving pageants or Columbus Day celebrations of grade school. But several Columbia alumni, and one alumnus in particular, are taking the idea of civic education and its status in America into consideration every day.

David Feith, CC 09 and an editor at The Wall Street Journal, is the editor of a new book called *Teaching America: The Case for Civic Education*. The book sets out, in an anthology-style format, to remind Americans of something they seem to have misplaced in the midst of the longstanding school-reform battle: the importance of teaching what it means to be a good citizen.

The book is a combination of essays written by redoubtable American voices such as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Senator Jon Kyl, and education reformer Eugene Hickok. This project, as well as its companion endeavor the Civic Education Initiative, were both conceived while Feith and his close friend Jordan Hirsch were students at Columbia, working for the politically-minded campus publication *The Current*. "It was the spring of 2008 when the initial idea for a book came about," Feith says. "The discussion over the Iranian president's visit to the school invoked questions about the role universities should play in public life. When there was no ROTC program at Columbia, it was a sign—not a good one—of the way the university saw itself in relationship to the country. I think it's a great thing that ROTC is back at Columbia. These circumstances and others like them led me and others to think deeply about the purpose of education."

**"A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE ABILITY TO DEBATE AND THE KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY TO PROPOSE A VIABLE ARGUMENT MAY BE LARGELY A RESULT OF CORE CLASSES."**

While much of Feith's book discusses the dismal status of civic education in the American K-12 public school system, several questions are also raised about the quality of civic education in higher education. In the essay "Don't Believe the Hype," for example, Mark Bauerlein writes about the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, which administers a Civic Literacy Exam to college students across the country. In 2006, 14,000 college fresh-

men and seniors took the test—and, "52 percent of freshman and 53 percent of seniors failed." This figure is used to demonstrate that many seniors in college leave school knowing less about the history of America than they arrived knowing, a phenomenon Feith calls "negative learning."

According to Feith and Hirsch's experience, Columbia is not immune to negative learning. While they generally agreed that the University and the Core provide an excellent environment for heated intellectual debate, they felt that the knowledge to support claims made in these debates is sometimes lacking. "Is America an imperialist country, a beacon for democracy?" Hirsch says. "Columbia helps us ask these questions, but I still found there to be a lack of knowledge behind assertions made in debates over such issues. Part of the motivation for these projects is to make sure that those conversations happen in a smart way."

This discrepancy between the ability to debate and the knowledge necessary to propose a viable argument may be largely a result of Core classes such as Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization. While both of these classes aim to make students think about Western ideas of citizenship, they are primarily designed to help students think critically rather than to provide a specific context for the issues.

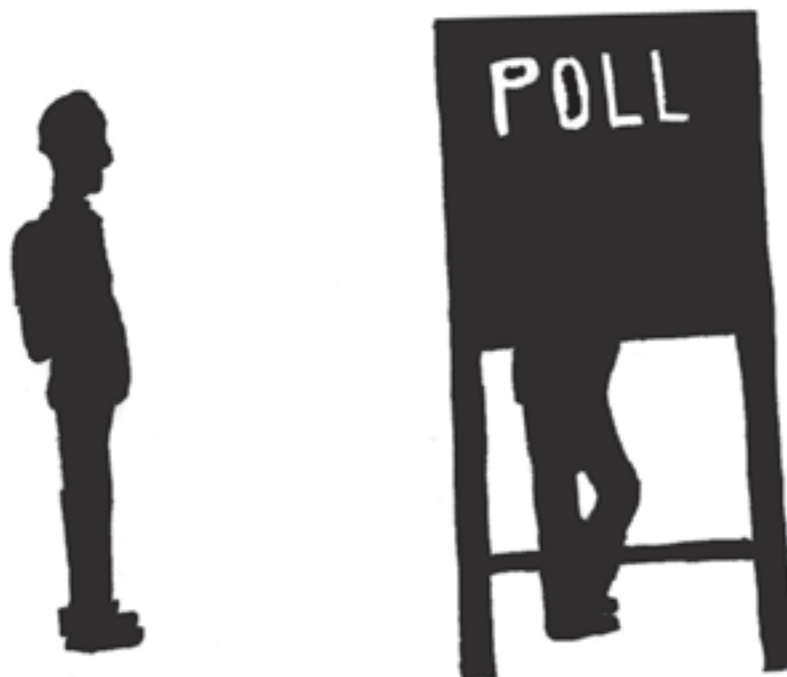
Professor Matthew Jones, Chair of Contemporary Civilization, describes the Core's movement in the last fifty years—away from a content-based approach in favor of a "great books" approach—as

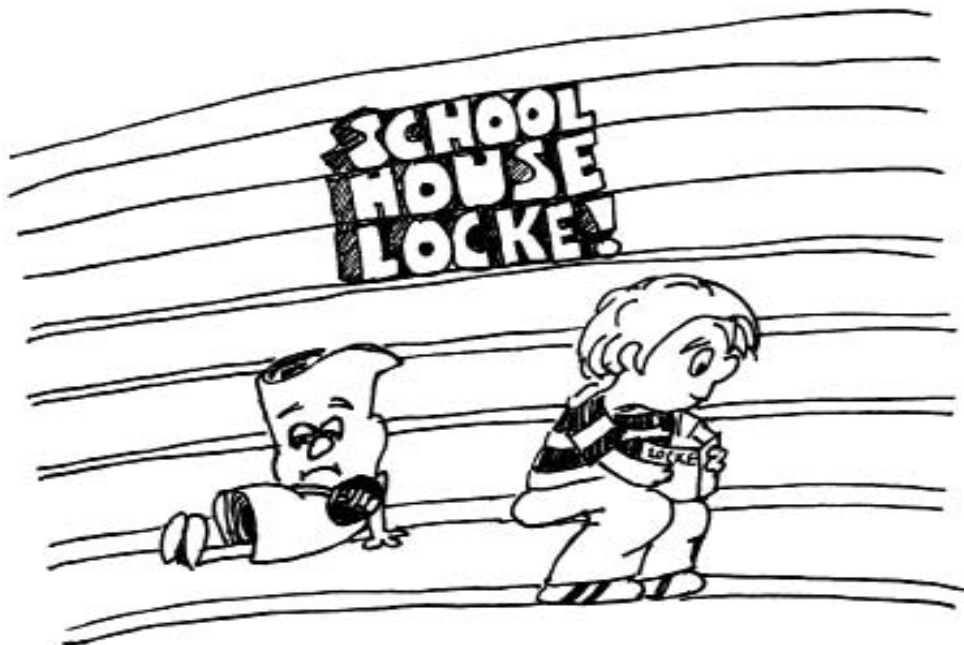
a positive one. Jones believes that this is integral to the inquisitiveness generally associated with Columbia and its students. "The reason that it's in a seminar style is precisely that we want to develop your thinking, articulating, debating," Jones says. "And those lessons don't lend themselves to a sort of informational lecture format."

Incorrect presumptions about the incoming class' baseline knowledge may occur, he says. But he argues that this seminar format gives students the, "tools for thinking through things, so that if you're going to read the Constitution, which you may or may not read in CC, or you're going to learn about the judicial system, or the place of the free press, you're going to do so from a more elevated perspective, a more reflective ability. I'm not sure that I would want to sacrifice the sort of more collegiate-level reflective skills, in favor of imparting information at a fairly general level."

However, such rhetoric-based learning does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with real political action. "I think that people aren't as involved in the processes that affect them as they could be, and I think that was especially evident on a micro-scale even in the class council elections," Jared Odessky, a freshman in Columbia College who was recently elected class president, says. "People just vote based on what they see. We only had about 40 percent turnout."

Voter turnout is a statistic that has been used to measure civic engagement for decades. The





statistics for the class of 2015 in the most recent class council election are considerably lower than the approximately 62 percent of U.S. voters who cast ballots in the 2008 presidential election. This figure seems troubling, especially given that the entire class had a voting population of little more than 1,000 students. So what is keeping Columbia students from applying notions of civic responsibility in Plato and Homer to their own lives?

“Obviously people are busy, people are reading their Lit Hum books, people are writing their University Writing papers,” Odessky says. “But that’s the problem.” Indeed, in troubling economic times, the question comes to mind whether people can still afford to worry what it means to be a voting American citizen, in the midst of trying to do well in school or in their profession.

But this is exactly the concern Feith is most urgent to combat. “This is a crucial question, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of the education system’s responsibility to cultivate informed citizens, and it doesn’t have to be. It’s not a “zero-sum” game,” Feith says.

Although it is difficult to decry the value of texts such as Marx and Sophocles, this shift in the Core is worrying for the future of civic education. Reading Plato’s Republic in a seminar setting may teach students how to argue and think, but it does not necessarily make students think about how to be better citizens in contemporary society. “It is negligent to assume that the American civic order will perpetuate itself without conscious effort from political and cultural figures, teachers, parents, and others,” Feith says. ●

# CIVIC EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

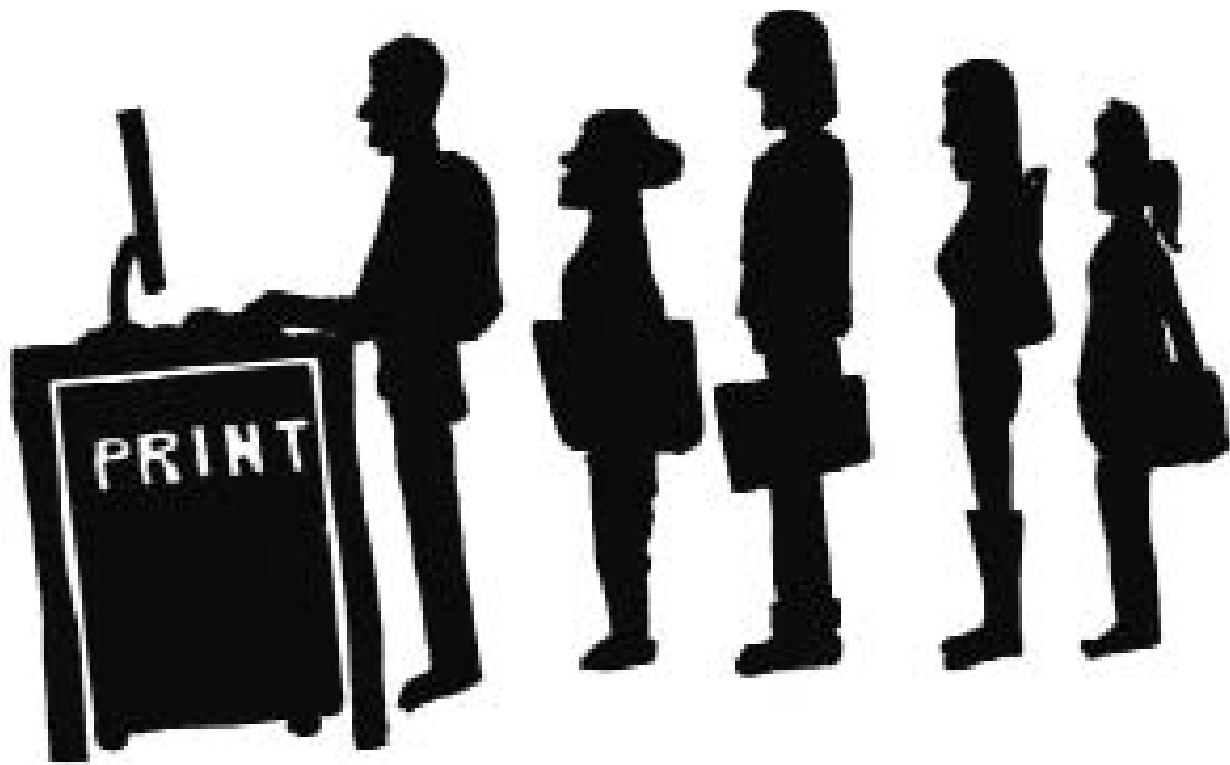
more than 50%  
of students in history and world civilization classes had teachers who neither majored nor minored in history.

more than 2/3  
of students scored below proficiency,  
not even 1/3  
of eighth graders surveyed could identify the historical purpose of the Declaration of Independence, and

less than 1/5  
of twelfth graders could explain how citizen participation benefits democracy.

40%  
think that the Constitution permits the president to ignore a Supreme Court ruling if he believes that doing so will protect the country from harm.

Source: Justice Sandra Day O'Connor from her essay “The Democratic Purpose of Education”





# A Visit to the Sperm Bar

using art and food to question the business of birth

BY ANNA MARCUM

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRUNE NOURRY

It was a shoddy-looking food cart: dented metal with two flimsy light blue umbrellas. Standing opposite to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the cart appeared like any other. When I began to cross the street, the faces of the pedestrians clustered in front of the cart slowly came into focus. No longer were they a mass of indifferent people mindlessly clustered on the sidewalk. Their faces contorted into expressions of disgust, shock, confusion, and amusement as they read the name on the banner: “Sperm Bar.”

Sperm Bar is not just an extremely odd, borderline inappropriate food cart—it is the brain-child of French performance artist Prune Nourry. Inspired by the unique sperm bank business of the United States, Sperm Bar playfully investigates the commoditization of the creation of life. Housed in an everyday New York City food cart, Sperm Bar has an almost uncomfortable air of accessibility. However, the product for sale is not literal sperm, but rather a symbolic manifestation of the unique genetic makeup of each donor represented through mixed juice. The artist collaborated with New York-based mixologist Cristian Molina to assign each trait a unique flavor, creating a unique mixed drink for each symbolic donor.

As I made my way through the crowd I noticed four or five “lab technicians” standing in front of the cart. Each had an iPad equipped with a unique “donor selection” app. At first the categories were standard and expected: height, eye color, hair color, ethnicity, blood type. Then I was asked to answer more invasive questions about things like religion, education, occupation, personality traits, and—most importantly—celebrity look-alike.

I settled on donor number 17, a tall, blue-eyed college graduate. He worked as an analyst and considered himself to be creative and artistic. He was an ideal donor. Hold on a second ... this was entirely metaphorical. Why did I let myself get so caught up in it? The thrill of finding a good donor was starting to match that of finding an exquisite handbag. Once I decided on 17, the lab tech wrote me a “prescription” for the syrup: a watermelon, pomegranate, basil mix. I went to the counter and they removed a vial of pink liquid from a cloud of dry ice, bringing to mind scenes of futuristic movies and images of aliens. As I began to sip the mocktail, I felt simultaneously embarrassed and intrigued. I could feel the scandalized crowd’s judgment. For some inexplicable reason I felt the need to explain myself to every raised eyebrow in the crowd.

Nourry has spent the last three years as the artist in residence at the Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn, where she became interested in the business of baby making and mixing it with gastronomy. In 2010, Nourry’s “Procreative Din-



At Prune Nourry’s Sperm Bar, customers chose “donors” that are linked to fruit juice flavors.

ner” toured the country. The piece asks spectators sit down for an “a la carte meal,” meant to make them think about the artificial selection of children in assisted reproduction. When asked to explain what interested her in this subject, Nourry largely attributes it to the difference between sperm-banking in America and other countries. In America, she says, there is a much stronger emphasis on choice than in other countries.

**I SETTLED ON DONOR NUMBER 17, A TALL, BLUE-EYED COLLEGE GRADUATE. HE WORKED AS AN ANALYST AND CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE CREATIVE AND ARTISTIC. HE WAS AN IDEAL DONOR.**

“Especially in the United States, as opposed to other countries where you have less choice, and less possible selection online, here you can have a lot of services and the more you pay the more [information] you get,” she says. “You have services such as donor’s religion, even though the donor’s religion is not genetic. You have also information like donor’s celebrity look-alike. If you want your donor to match Brad Pitt, why not? You also have face match services if you want your donor to match someone you know. You send in a picture of that special someone and through a mathematical formula, they match you to a donor. All of these processes are here,

symbolically, placed in parallel with gastronomy. Each person is a unique cocktail.”

The Sperm Bar Project puts the every-day consumer in the hypothetical situation of sperm bank patrons in search of an ideal donor for their future child. According to Barnard’s President Debora Spar, who wrote a book on the business of assisted procreation called *The Baby Business: How Money, Science, and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception*, the baby business is secretive and almost taboo. “It was the only business that I’d ever looked at where nobody in it wanted to acknowledge that they were in business,” Spar says.

It is not just the businessmen and women who feel a sense of taboo, according to Spar. “I think particularly for parents or would-be parents that are going through this process, they don’t want to acknowledge that they are engaged in a commercial enterprise, because they are just desperate to have a baby,” she says. “Therefore, the folks who are providing the services very quickly slip into that mode of talking about things like providing a family, and working with compassion, and using language that is all about love rather than about commerce.”

Nourry translates the sensitive issues of the assisted procreation industry into a playful and approachable, yet thought-provoking medium using gastronomy. “There is a certain element of frivolity that enters the process,” she says. According to Spar, “It is very easy to get sort of carried away. I’ve watched people select sperm—‘Oh he plays volleyball, I like volleyball.’ Well, that’s probably not a genetically-carried trait. People say things like ‘oh, but I like dimples,’ or ‘my grandfather played the cello’—it’s trivial.” On the Sperm Bar, Spar concludes: “I think that because it was so playful and these were flavored syrups, that she captured some of that tension.” ●

# Drive the Game

in search of wild dogs on the kenyan savanna

BY ALIZA GOLDBERG

ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE WANG

Life in the Laikipia District of central Kenya is not quite the plenitude of nature pictured on PBS's NOVA feature. Looking out the van window on the way to a field research site at the Mpala Ranch there was neither the overly enthusiastic BBC-inspired narrator, nor the requisite percussive symphony over the trumpeting of an elephant herd or the galloping of Grant's gazelles. This definitely wasn't television. When six hyenas bombarded a pack of African wild dogs, running off with their mangled carcasses, rather than narrative instrumentation, all I heard were the breathy curses of my classmates who were taking E3B's Tropical Biology Field Course with me this past summer.

For such a remote wilderness, the fast-paced lifestyle is unexpected and remarkable. Whenever we would receive a radio alert about a rare, endangered, or elusive animal, we would dash to the van and drive, and with only thin dust roads showered with pebbles, speeding is the safest choice. Swerving off into the brush after an aardvark or honey badger hardly impacts our ride.

**"DOGS ARE NOT EXOTIC MAMMALS, AND THE ONES IN KENYA ARE ONLY, PRESUMABLY, 'WILD' BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT DOMESTICATED, UNLIKE THEIR GOLDEN, RETRIEVING COUSINS."**

That night, after I finished a pre-dinner bucket shower using a friend's leftover hot water, I emerged from the hut to find the van's headlights on. Afraid I had forgotten about a scheduled game drive, I grabbed my fleece jacket and hurried into the van with my professor, Dr. Dustin Rubenstein, at the wheel. The radio call was for wild dogs, an otherwise dull creature in nature to me. Dogs are not exotic mammals, and the ones in Kenya are only, presumably, "wild" because they are not domesticated unlike their golden, retrieving cousins. But I decided to give them a chance, so I zippered up my jacket and climbed up to the crevice between the van's trunk and the raised safari roof.

Beyond the three electrified fences that enclose the campground, Mpala is open space with indistinguishable boundary; locations and

directions require careful consideration, such as "by the stagnant pool where hippos sometimes bathe," "near the abandoned air strip," or "that place where we saw the lion yesterday." But animals move. This came as a surprise to me since I had been treating Kenya like a zoo. I had traveled to Kenya to observe animals, and yet most of them I could observe safely from behind double-paned glass. At a zoo, a desire to observe wild dogs would lead me down a nubby carpet to the wild dog area. Kenya has no wild dog area.

The sunlight fades fast at the Equator. Brightness does not linger in the clouds; it shifts from a clear white to muted gold to dusty red to black. As the atmosphere transitioned from gold to red—illuminating the dust particles that would soon adhere to my skin—we began shouting out the window at passing drivers: "Excuse me, have you seen a pack of wild dogs around here?" Some shook their heads, probably too engrossed in their research niches to worry themselves with another species. Others emphatically carved routes with their arms and urged us to hurry.

Dusk turned to night, and we took turns scanning the roadsides with a handheld spotlight. We could only see one side at a time, so our pace slowed considerably as we surveyed the ranch, the spotlight dancing as the van gracelessly clambered over pebbles. Sitting on the roof disqualified me from holding the heavy spotlight, and I was thankful for the lack of responsibility. Uncertainty was a constant companion: if the dogs were on the left while the shaky circle of light was on the right, we would likely miss them and keep driving. However, luck was on our side because the van's headlights climbed the body of a wild dog from paw to rounded ear. Too stunned to react, Dr. Rubenstein did not stop the van until the whole pack felt the heat of the glare. A limbless crimson dik-dik carcass lay glistening in the road. Six wild dogs, resembling regal German shepherds with long, copper fur spotted with black and grey, gnawed on the dik-dik torso, while 30 waited behind them eagerly. The motor, purring like a cheetah, did not faze the grazers, but the vigilant ones noted our presence and quickly turned their heads away from the fracas.

In that instant, six hyenas ransacked the scene, with one, flanked by an entourage, swiftly grabbing the carcass in its jaw and rushing into the nearby bush. The wild dogs, so accustomed to the warm treat, looked

at the bush, bewildered. A few nosed the road, coating their bloody snouts in dust. Some ran to the edge of the bush, barking. One snarl from a hidden hyena sent the whole wild dog pack trotting down the road.

The headlights and spotlight soon revealed nothing more than mica-speckled rocks. I heard bones cracking somewhere to the left of the van, but the verdant shrubbery concealed the ugly, snarling faces of the victors. The sound of shattering ribs verified the bandits as hyenas, since their teeth uniquely allow them to pulverize bone. Hyena feces are distinctly white in color as a result of this trait—as a biologist-in-training, it is my business to notice every stick bug, every chameleon, even every characteristic discoloration in fecal matter. But where did the hyenas come from, and how long had they been there?

It seemed as though we were the missing link to their master plan. We made it known to the humans we passed that we were looking for the wild dogs, but how did the hyenas know to distinguish our van's distinct path towards their prey, from all the other ones? Either the hyenas had been waiting lazily for a random distraction or followed our noise to the meat. If so, Dr. Rubenstein and I interrupted natural behavior. Our ecological experiment, which we performed in the name of biological inquiry, disrupted instead of protected. ●



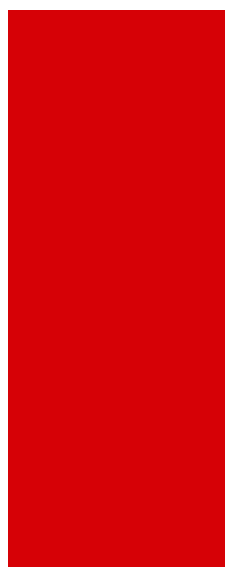




# Work for The Eye



We're looking  
for writers,  
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illustrators, and  
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