

COOPER HUMANITIES POST-DOC: ALLISON LEIGH

CAROLINE YU (EE '15)

Last semester, Nicholas D'Avella and Allison Leigh joined the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Cooper Union. They are both postdoctoral fellows. Professor D'Avella specializes in anthropology and Professor Leigh specializes in art history. In describing the difference between HSS full-time faculty members and postdocs, Dean Germano says "a fulltime faculty member teaches three courses a term, participates in the important work done by committees, and contributes directly to the shape and objective of the curriculum. Having postdocs is a great way to supplement the quite small HSS fulltime faculty --we only have four fulltime faculty members teaching this spring..We do have an excellent adjunct faculty group, but they are very busy people, and most have teaching or other work commitments in addition to Cooper. A postdoctoral fellow comes for a year, teaches (though not as much as a full-time faculty member), and does research. The fellow is also on campus most days, and so has time to interact with Cooper faculty and with students. Time for studio visits, more office hour access, and a focus just on Cooper — these are some of the pluses."

The Cooper Pioneer sat down with both post-docs to ask about their research and experience at Cooper so far. Interviews were edited and condensed. This issue contains our interview with Professor Leigh. The next issue will contain our interview with Professor D'Avella.

rarely look at Russian art in isolation though – I do what's called cross-cultural analysis where I compare what's happening in painting in Russia with what's happening in France, what's happening in Germany, how Russian artists are looking at British artists. I have a sub-specialty in masculinity (gender studies but specifically about men). My dissertation was about a character type known as the "superfluous man" that existed in Russian literature in the 19th century. I started examining to see if he also showed up in paintings. I

fall continuing with me with a few new students now in the spring. I can try to guide them that whole first year sort of as a mentor. Not only for what art history is and what the basis of this whole system that we study is but how you write about art, how you think about art, how you look at art - all the methodologies that are around it.

I'm teaching a single artist seminar too, which is also a dream. I had the opportunity as a grad student to take a seminar on a single artist. This seminar is on a French Revolutionary period artist, Jacques-Louis David. It's

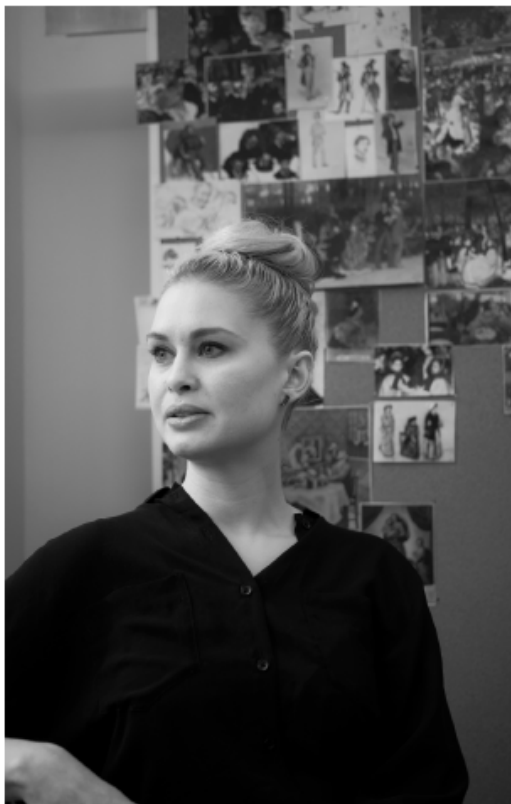


Photo Credit: Winter Leng (ChE '18)

The Cooper Pioneer: Can you tell me about your academic background?

Allison Leigh: Sure! I just got my PhD in May of last year, so I'm a very new doctorate. But I had been teaching for a few years before that. I was at Montclair State University. They scooped me up at Rutgers, which is where I got my PhD, to start teaching for them while I was still a grad student. I did almost two years (three semesters) teaching various courses there. When I knew I would be finishing I started applying for post-docs mostly

expanded that out because I felt like I was finding something similar in terms of the way men were represented in Paris in the same time period. Right now I'm working on transforming that dissertation into a book manuscript.

TCP: What courses are you teaching now?

AL: I'm teaching the HTA101/102 survey course, which is the course that all freshmen art students have to take. It's fun to teach because that's probably the course I taught the most prior to com-

ing the very beginning of the period I study. I feel that too often I don't return to that original space – so teaching it is getting me to think in terms of my own work. I think students are enjoying it – I hope so! It's such a vital, important moment in history. The French Revolution is really the turn - it's when so much changes.

TCP: Are there any big changes from Rutgers to Cooper?

AL: That's such a great question – Rutgers is huge and Cooper is much smaller, and it's structured completely dif-

ferent inside out trying to make myself available – when it's physically impossible. I don't like to wear myself that thin. I would rather have really intense experiences with students where I'm helping them learn not only about history, but about how it is vital to their own work. In many ways the smaller class size is huge in terms of me being able to be the professor and mentor I want to be. I feel so blessed.

TCP: What applications do your research and work have?

AL: At the core, it's something I ask myself constantly when I'm preparing a lecture, writing an article, or getting ready to give a conference talk. The buzzword that's always in my mind is "relevance." I'm not interested in producing scholarship in a vacuum about subjects that I think are only vital to specialists, who number very few in my very specialized field. I want to do work that speaks in some way to the human condition and is philosophically based. [It] is not straight-lined or hardcore history in its depths but is about how we can use history as a tool for understanding ourselves today. If I give a lecture on the French Revolution, I want it to be forcing us to think about revolutionary endeavors today and what we still care enough about that would lead us to act like they did back then. It's the same with my research. As much I'm studying a very troubled character type among men in St. Petersburg in the 19th century I see those men still on the streets today. I feel like I meet them out and about at the library, at bars,

at conferences. And I want to understand the "what went wrong" element. I think that images in particular can be this tremendous tool of going in and taking the machine apart like an engineer would.

I really hope that what I do speaks in a larger sense and that my students get from my courses that applicability where it changes their practice - whether they be an engineer coming up with things that will change our future or whether they be artists struggling to find their voice and their medium. I hope that the way that I teach them to

STUDENTS FORM COOPER'S WILL FOR CITY HIGH SCHOOLS

ANTHONY PASSALACQUA (ME '18)

Cooper's Will (hereafter CW), founded by Brice Lee (ChE '15), is an organization dedicated to volunteering time for high school students and giving them a greater chance at success and happiness in their pursuit of higher education. Brice describes CW "as an organization that provides volunteer projects to nearby high schools." Drawing inspiration from Brice's time helping Korean students in New York City, CW was formed after many discussions with Dean Delagrammatikas. Dean Delagrammatikas offered CW classrooms in the NAB and encouraged the organization to help students of any and all ethnicities: an idea that CW enthusiastically took up. CW ran their "Engineering Major Exploration" pilot project in February. Communicating with the administration of some of the top schools in New York City—Brooklyn Technical High School,

Stuyvesant High School, and The Bronx High School of Science—they helped the city's brightest get a handle on what to expect from engineering. Focusing on the branches of engineering found at Cooper Union, they told of what kinds of courses each major should expect to take, career opportunities that the students might find, and of mainstream companies that they may end up working for. By giving young students some guidance regarding engineering, CW hopes to make the decision making process of university much more transparent.

Of course, no program with high school students would be complete without fun, hands on activities. Hoping to pique students' interest in a specific major early, activities such as bridge building using gummy bears as adhesive and linguini as building material were run during the pilot program. ♦

AFTER "THE BOX": INVENTION FACTORY AND QUIRKY

BRENDA SO (CE '18)

On February 19, 2016, half of the participants of the 2nd annual Invention Factory successfully pitched their invention ideas and will eventually start their next stage of product de-

velopment with Quirky, a company that allows inventors to bring their inventions to life and to the market. Invention Factory is a six-week program over the summer holiday. Fifteen selected applicants are paired into teams to work on an invention of their choice, which they develop over the course of six weeks. When describing the six week program Jessica Marshall said, "Every week, my partner, Deanna Kovalcin (ME '16), and I set a high goal for ourselves to reach, and more often than not, we

portunity to have a real professional look at my stuff makes Invention Factory even more attractive." That night, each group presented their products to the audience and a panel of professionals, and was subsequently challenged on how useful the product would be. MinJoon So (CE '17), the inventor of the Easy To Clean Humidifier (ETCH), talked about his nervous experience at Quirky: "As it got close to our turn to present our idea and answer questions, I suddenly became ner-

vous and I suddenly became ner-

in this area but a little further north and a few further south. I was really hoping to stay in New York so Cooper Union was perfect for me. It really was the opportunity that I was looking for.

TCP: What did you research?

AL: I specialize in a couple of things. I have very broad interests in intellectual history and art theory. I'm generally considered in my field a specialist in Russian art history in the 19th century though I dabble a little bit earlier in the 18th century and then also push to about 1945 – right up to the end of WWII in Russia. I very

ing here, but it's structured very differently here. It's a very special class at Cooper. Usually it's a huge historical period – about 700-800 years from the beginning of the Renaissance to contemporary art, which in many ways is an impossible way of doing it. As much as I love it in terms of the comparisons you can do at the end of the semester, at Cooper it's an entire year. It's two semesters, and the course only goes from about the French Revolution in 1789 to now. It's a much more protracted period and it's exactly what I specialize in. I love that I have all of my students from the first section in the

ferently. I would say it's been a blast – I don't know how else to describe it other than I love the model of what Cooper is – both pedagogically and institutionally but also all of the passion that lies behind it. I believe in that. Being here more and more I see how special each of those brains are but how much there is that's the same. Having artists, architects, and engineers in my classes makes the discussions really exciting. Whereas at a bigger institution like Rutgers – teaching to a stadium of 100 students and not being able to have these one-on-one interactions was very difficult for me. I found that I was turning myself

think cracks everything open, spills it all out and then allows them to put themselves back together again. And then hopefully that process is not too painful – though I think it can be. Part of what you guys are here to do is that painful finding-your-voice. Finding what you want to contribute to society in the same sense that Peter Cooper hoped that everyone who was here would leave here better, changed, different. I want my writing and my lecturing to change you and if it doesn't I'm not doing it right...for me it's all about those lofty goals and ambitious ideals. ◊

did. We worked really well as a team." Jessica and Deanna invented the Snip-It – a tape dispenser that attaches to any roll of tape. "That partnership, along with a never-ending supply of free food and Diet Coke, made Invention Factory a really fun place to be this past summer."

This year, after Invention Factory, the inventions were submitted to Quirky for a special Cooper Union "eval" night. There were around 80 people present in the audience during the eval night and many more

vous and concerned about our invention—what if it doesn't make it through? But as Jihu Kim (ME '17) and I were presenting, we realized the audience really liked our idea, and then excitement filled up my mind instead of anxiety." At the end of the evening, a total of 4 inventions were accepted, Snip-It, ETCH, Dual Flush Retrofit kit and the Helmet Lock.

For more information about Invention Factory and this year's projects, visit www.inventionfactory.org/IFInfo.html. ◊

NEW DORM FOR ALL STUDENTS: UNIVERSITY HOUSE

MONICA CHEN (CE '18) | JOSEPH COLONEL (EE '15)

The Cooper Union's lack of sufficient dorms has been a source of difficulty and inconvenience for underclassmen. Currently, the dorm is primarily occupied by freshmen to facilitate their transition to college life in New York City. Come next year, current freshmen will be forced to move out to make room for next year's freshmen, leaving these students to face the world of apartment hunting. Because of this evident struggle, the Cooper Union will be offering a new dorm to students.

Controversy has surrounded the construction of these dorms, which will be named University House. Slated to be finished in 2016, these

dorms are being built at the former P.S. 64/El Bohio building located next to Tompkins Square Park between Avenues B and C. P.S. 64 was rescued in the late 1970s due to the work of activist groups Adopt-A-Building and CHARAS, who later named it "El Bohio." El Bohio served as a cultural center for the East Village, providing studio space and a performance venue for local artists. Icons such as Elizabeth Murray, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring all participated in benefits held at the space. Despite the distance from Cooper Union in comparison to the current dormitory, University House will make up for

it in its promised luxurious amenities. The dorm claims it will offer health and fitness centers, game rooms, quiet study lounges, art studios, music practice rooms, terrace areas, and even a café.

Currently, each floor plan dictates that the suite-styled apartments will each house 5-7 people. When the building is finally opened to students, it will house not only students of the Cooper Union but also students of Joffrey Ballet School. Though the project is still in its early stages of development, it is certainly an opportunity to look forward to for current freshmen and sophomores at Cooper Union. ◊



Photo Credit: Artist rendition of a room at University House, university-house.info

MENSCHEL EXHIBITION RETROSPECTIVE

EVAN BURGESS (Arch '15)

Every year, the Menschel Fellowship offers funding to third and fourth year students in order to allow them to pursue creative and personal projects over the summer that would not otherwise be possible. Many students use the money to travel, and often the experience from these trips ties into the larger art, architecture, or engineering practice of those students.

After the trip itself, participants are asked to produce a series of

patterns used in architecture, reminds me that the project ends up being much larger than just the time spent away from home. From the application process to the exhibition, I have been watching classmates follow through a major project from the planning/pitching phase through the execution, and on to the documentation and presentation.

While these projects often have a strong connection to the studio

between all of the groups of participating students, is one of the largest collaborative exhibitions that take place at Cooper. Here, the sheer variety of work comes to light, with photographs and models from the Mississippi River, to videos documenting various figures in Ghana, to sections of the fence around Guantanamo making an appearance in the school. As always, the show this year was well advertised and well attended.

