

# DEMO

The Alumni Magazine of  
Columbia College Chicago

The stop-animation  
skeleton from  
1933's *King Kong*



Hear him  
**ROAR**

**Columbia**  
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Director Jordan Vogt-Roberts '06  
resurrects King Kong



# YOU CAN MAKE A DREAM COME TRUE

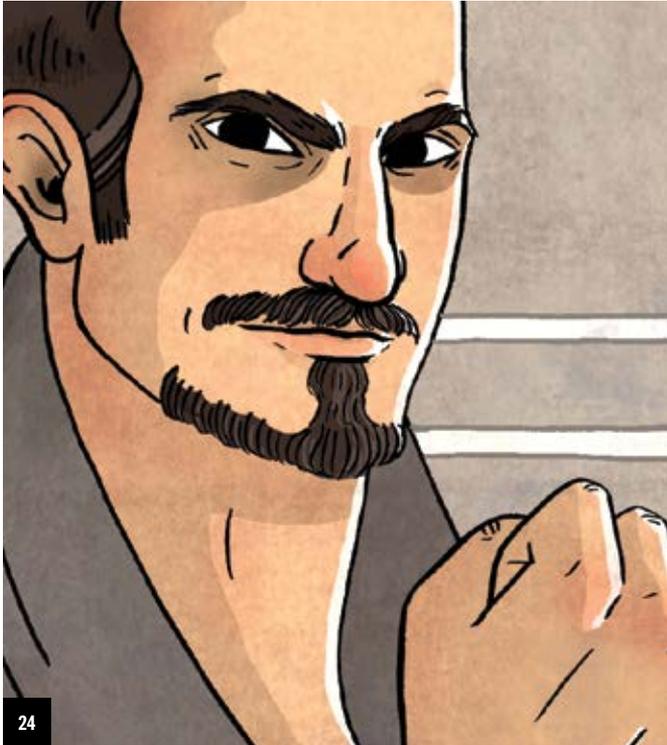
**Students dream of attending Columbia. Scholarships make that possible.** Will you give today and help a student start their professional career?

You can give securely right now at [colum.edu/giving](https://colum.edu/giving).

“I’m thrilled that I was able to pursue my love for animation and create two films focused on Asian American social issues. The generous scholarships I received made it possible for me to graduate this spring.”

**JASMINE HART '17**  
Scholarship Recipient

**Columbia**  
COLLEGE CHICAGO



## FEATURES

8 **Greetings from Hollywood**  
*Kong: Skull Island* director **Jordan Vogt-Roberts '06** gives *DEMO* a tour of LA.

16 **Achieving Balance**  
Three Creative Arts Therapies alumnae discuss using dance and movement to connect the body and mind.

24 **Speaking English**  
Under the stage name Aiden English, **Matt Rehwoldt '10** takes performance to the next level: World Wrestling Entertainment.

## PORTFOLIO

38 **Practical Magic**  
**Jessica Egan '12** crafts functional and beautiful ceramics with her Little Fire Ceramics brand.

42 **A New Narrative**  
**Ervin A. Johnson '12, Krista Franklin MFA '13, and Tonika Johnson '03** explore black identity through visual art.

## SPOT ONs

28 **Luis de la Parra '95** connects big brands with Univision's massive audience.

30 **Eduardo Vilaro MA '99** combines Latino tradition and contemporary choreography at Ballet Hispanico.

32 **Shea Coulee '11** uses her theatre skills to sashay her way through season nine of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

## DEPARTMENTS

3 **Vision**  
Questions for President Kwang-Wu Kim

4 **Wire**  
News from the Columbia community

35 **Alumni Shorts**  
Quick looks at cool projects

50 **Alumni News & Notes**  
Featuring class news, notes, and networking



# BE PROUD OF YOU

Visit [colum.edu/classnotes](http://colum.edu/classnotes) to submit your updates. You could even end up in the next *DEMO*.

**Columbia**  
COLLEGE CHICAGO

# DEMO

ISSUE 26 SPRING/SUMMER 2017

## MAGAZINE STAFF

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Megan Kirby

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Negesti Kaudo

JT Lachausse

### LEAD DESIGNER

Sarah Ettinger

### DESIGNER

Chris Reyes

### STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Philip Dembinski '08

### ALUMNI NEWS & NOTES MANAGER

Chuck Lira '08

### RESEARCHER

Amy Wilson

*Alumni Shorts illustrations by Erik Rodriguez*

## COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

### CHAIR, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

William E. Wolf

### PRESIDENT

Kwang-Wu Kim, DMA

### VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Deb Maue

### VICE PRESIDENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS

Shawn Wax

**CORRECTIONS:** In *DEMO* 25, the article "Just Bead It" was miscredited. The author was Stephanie Ewing MA '12. The issue's illustrations were created by Erik Rodriguez.

**DEMO** (volume 12, number 1) is published by Columbia College Chicago. *DEMO* is mailed free of charge to alumni and friends of the college two times per year. The ideas and opinions expressed are those of the writers alone and do not necessarily reflect those of Columbia College Chicago. ©Columbia College Chicago 2017.

**Contact us:** For address changes or deletions, email your first and last name, mailing address, city, state, zip code, and phone number to [demo@colum.edu](mailto:demo@colum.edu) and specify if your request is an address update or a request to stop receiving *DEMO*. For other inquiries, email [demo@colum.edu](mailto:demo@colum.edu), call 312-369-1000, or mail *DEMO* magazine, Columbia College Chicago, 600 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 527, Chicago, IL 60605.

[colum.edu/demo](http://colum.edu/demo)




---

# Questions

## FOR PRESIDENT KWANG-WU KIM

---

**DEMO:** You've identified Columbia College Chicago's alumni giving rate as a priority for the school. Can you share your thoughts on why alumni should support their alma mater?

**PRESIDENT KIM:** It has a lot to do with alumni perceptions of the value and meaning of the education that they received here. What Columbia provides is highly specialized and quite distinctive. That prompts the question, "Shouldn't this be available to future generations of students?" If you feel that your Columbia experience shaped your life in important ways, why not do what you can to ensure that those who come after you can have access to that same kind of education?

**DEMO:** The student center is another big priority. How will the student center change campus, and how can alums be involved?

**PRESIDENT KIM:** Adding a physical hub to the campus will make an enormous difference. Right now, we're a college without a center—literally. As a result, much of the student experience consists of figuring out how to work around this absence, this void. Once we fill that space with the wonderful new facility that we are getting ready to build, I hope that it will trigger a lot of casual, accidental conversations that are perhaps not happening now, and that these will lead to new forms of creative practice, new ideas. Eventually we will move the

Career Center into the student center, and I'm hoping that this will inspire many more alumni to make a commitment to mentoring current students.

**DEMO:** There's an adage that states, "The world needs creatives." How is this statement relevant today?

**PRESIDENT KIM:** We seem to be in a period in which we're facing very significant, complex societal challenges. As these challenges continue to grow, I don't see a lot of new thinking—at least from my somewhat limited perspective—coming from the people who are tasked with solving them. There is a real imperative for us to send young people into the world who inherently think differently, who see things that others don't see, who are really comfortable with working collaboratively, and who embrace the idea of engaging with the world. Since I arrived here, I've avoided describing Columbia as an art school. That term triggers a lot of traditional thinking about individuals who are focused solely on their artistic work and who are not well-equipped to succeed outside of that environment. In contrast, I see creatives as people who are eager to interact with the larger world, and who understand that the diversity they experience at Columbia prepares them to work with anyone. Those are the kinds of people that I think the world is sorely in need of right now—in other words, our students.



## INTRODUCING THE NEW STUDENT CENTER

After nearly a year of planning, Columbia's new student center is in its final stages of development. The five-story, 114,000 square-foot facility will include a variety of creative spaces, including dance studios, analog and digital maker labs, and an 800-person event area. "Our students have always sought out ways to collaborate and study in informal settings outside the classroom," says President Kwang-Wu Kim. "Now, students will have a place designed especially for them." The facility will extend from Wabash Avenue to Holden Court, running along 8th Street, and is slated for an October 2017 groundbreaking.

**"Now, students will have a place designed especially for them."**

**- President Kim**



## MATTHEW SHENODA APPOINTED AS DEAN OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Professor Matthew Shenoda has been appointed as the dean of Academic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), a new position created to advance diversity within the college's academic programs, hiring policies, and overall learning environment. Shenoda has served as the inaugural assistant provost for Equity and Diversity in the School of Critical Studies at CalArts, and has developed several courses on the intersections of race, culture, and literature. "Matthew is a nationally recognized expert on the study of diversity, equity, and inclusion," says President Kim, who appointed Shenoda in early 2017. Initially conceived through the college's 2015 Strategic Plan, the dean of DEI focuses specifically on enhancing curriculum, curricular programming, and faculty expertise. "I am incredibly pleased to take on this new position in a most relevant moment," says Shenoda.



## SEMESTER IN LA EXPANDS

Starting in fall 2017, Columbia's Semester in LA program (SiLA) will provide a full-semester immersive experience, allowing students to fully integrate into the entertainment, media, and communication industries. Hosted on Raleigh Studios—the longest continuously operating studio in the country—the program now welcomes juniors and seniors from all majors. Karen Loop, associate dean of Los Angeles programs, has restructured the SiLA program to place internships at its core. She is currently working with Los Angeles-based alumni who can provide internship opportunities and is seeking recent SiLA graduates to mentor incoming SiLA students. In addition, the Raleigh Studio office has begun collecting one-sheets from alumni-helmed television, film, and new media projects to decorate the space. Interested in getting involved? Get in touch at [semesterinla@colum.edu](mailto:semesterinla@colum.edu).

Here are a few companies where Columbia students have secured jobs and internships after completing the SiLA program:

- The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences
- Dreamworks SKG
- HBO
- Jim Henson Productions
- NBC
- Paramount Pictures
- Warner Brothers
- YouTube

## MOCP FEATURES AI WEIWEI'S FIRST SOLO CHICAGO EXHIBITION

Ai Weiwei's first solo exhibition in Chicago fused art, activism, and social media into a show that explored three decades of photographic work. Global artist-provocateur Ai has been censored, surveilled, and imprisoned for his art work confronting political and social issues. Ai designed and curated #AiWeiwei specifically for the Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP), which was displayed April 13–July 2, 2017.

The show featured more than 30,000 images, including a large wallpaper piece of more than 17,000 images addressing the current global refugee crisis. The oldest images were black and white photos of Ai as an international art student in his 20s; the most recent was a photo of the artist's hand giving the middle finger to Trump Tower in Manhattan.



**Top:** *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995, photo-triptych. **Bottom:** *Illumination*, 2009, color photograph. Photos provided by Ai Weiwei Studio.



## GETZ THEATRE UNDERGOING RENOVATIONS

The Getz Theatre will get a major makeover in 2018. Theatre students, faculty, staff, and alumni can look forward to the newly renovated theater being better suited for both teaching and theatre production. Led by Gensler Principal and Architect David Broz, the theater will be renovated as a courtyard theater that will be larger and more accessible to students working on projects. Most importantly, the theater will include a proper sidestage and backstage. The building will also have two production shops on the first floor, allowing production to be done onsite. The second floor will have dressing rooms, a makeup room, and a raised catwalk, which will be more conducive to teaching.

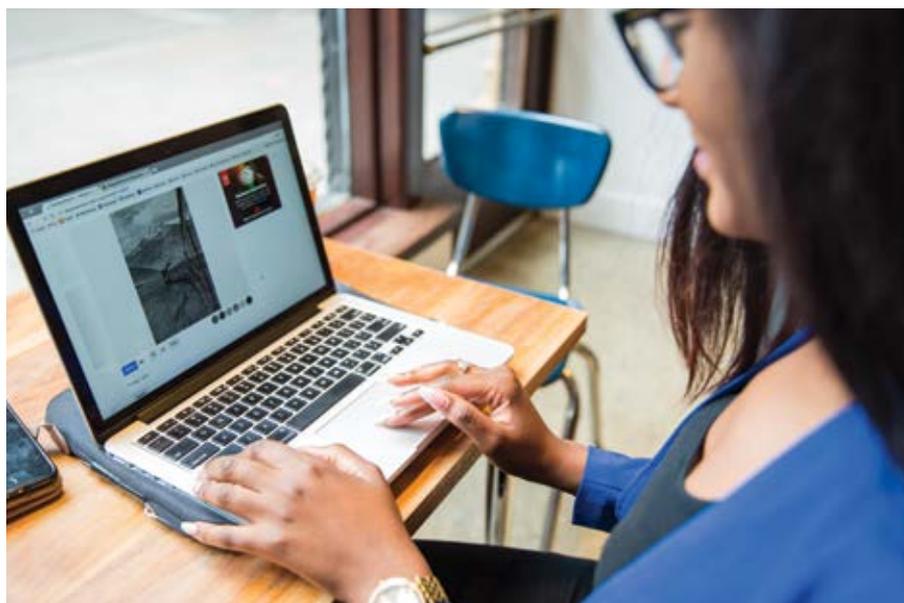
## CHICAGO FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATES SECOND YEAR

This March, Columbia College Chicago hosted the second annual Chicago Feminist Film Festival at the college's Film Row Cinema. Free and open to the public, the event featured short films created by individuals from around the world, including seven films from Columbia alumni and students. "The [festival] celebrates the work of under-represented filmmakers," says Susan Kerns, assistant professor for Cinema Art and Science. "Particularly women, people of color, and queer and transgender folks." This year, Chicago Feminist Film Festival received 800 entries for consideration, from which 57 short films from 22 countries were chosen. Among those films, Columbia alum Shayna Connely MFA '05 and students Adele Franck, Youngbin Song, Dana Jacobs, and others presented their directorial work. "The festival allows us to provide under-represented filmmakers the recognition they have earned," says Associate Professor Michelle Yates, who cofounded the festival with Kerns. "We are pleased to have Columbia's support in our efforts."

## COLUMBIA INTRODUCES ONLINE COURSE OPTIONS

In June, Columbia introduced a new online school by launching five online summer courses. Vice Provost for Digital Learning Rob Green and his team began establishing Columbia's stand-alone online courses last fall. "I wanted to develop a set of courses that could keep the students with Columbia, where we could control the quality of education, focus it on the arts, and make it affordable for the student," says Green.

The Digital Learning team worked with faculty to develop the online courses and create the best online experience. Cultivating an online community allows for high student engagement, similar to that of a physical classroom. In addition to the degree-earning credit courses offered in the summer, Green's team will begin exploring career advancement courses in the fall.





## HIP-HOP MINOR HITS COLUMBIA THIS FALL

Columbia College Chicago will introduce its Hip-Hop Studies minor this fall. Students from all programs can engage in hip-hop culture with classes in history, ethics, dance, fashion, visual art, community-based projects and internships, and more. Three professors provided sneak peeks at their syllabi for the launch of the program.



### Amina Norman-Hawkins

Course: Hip-Hop: A Sonic History

Material: *Midway: Story of Chicago Hip-Hop* (Archival Interview Series)

“[The interviews] help students understand the broad context of hip-hop and how it’s viewed and practiced in our

society. We all know that Kanye West is an international hip-hop figure, but really understanding that dynamic from a grassroots level to a national level is meaningful because students can see [his] journey.”



### Kelsa Robinson

Course: Hip-Hop Dance and Culture

Material: B-Series

“We bring the B-Series—a two-day festival celebrating underground hip-hop and street dance culture—into the

Dance Center. At the end of the semester, the students create their own jam. They get to sweat along with dancers in the community, dance to a live DJ, and build skills through the semester to test in a community environment.”



### Alex Fruchter

Course: AEMMP Record Label: Practicum

Material: *Hip-Hop Evolution* (Documentary)

“To work on a hip-hop label, you need to be well-versed in the history of the genre. I don’t think you can work at a hip-

hop label and not know Russell Simmons and Def Jam, or how the LA hip-hop scene got its start, or even further back: The Cold Crush Brothers.”



## DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS WELCOMES SHAWN WAX

Columbia College Chicago has appointed Shawn Wax, former vice president for the University of Iowa Foundation, as vice president of Development and Alumni Relations. Wax will work on matters of institutional advancement, donor participation, and alumni engagement. He talked with DEMO about what we need to know.

**DEMO:** What are eight things we should know about you?

**WAX:** My pride and joy are my three daughters: Courtney (20), Ashley (19), and Macy (7). The favorite places I’ve visited are Rio de Janeiro and Monte Carlo. I am uber-competitive in all things. I like great wine. I am unafraid of risk. The best part of my day always involves laughter. I believe people are what make an organization excellent. And, despite what anyone may tell you, my mom makes the world’s greatest sweet potato pie.

**DEMO:** What have you been up to since assuming your role on March 15?

**WAX:** A “listen and learn” tour—not just internally with our faculty and students, but externally with our trustees, volunteers, donors, and alumni. I’ve found that there is a deep affinity for Columbia, especially among faculty and alumni. If I was challenged to find one word that sums up what I’ve witnessed thus far, it would be “authentic.”

**DEMO:** How can alumni get more involved with Development at Columbia?

**WAX:** We need volunteers of all types: worker bees and connectors, visionaries and leaders. And as you may know by now, I’ll always find a way to ask for our alumni to make a gift in support of Columbia. If you have made a gift, thank you! If not, you can visit [colum.edu/giving](http://colum.edu/giving) to make a gift today!



Vogt-Roberts went from directing indie flicks to helming massive blockbuster *Kong: Skull Island*.

Director Jordan Vogt-Roberts '06 takes us on a tour of his favorite LA hotspots



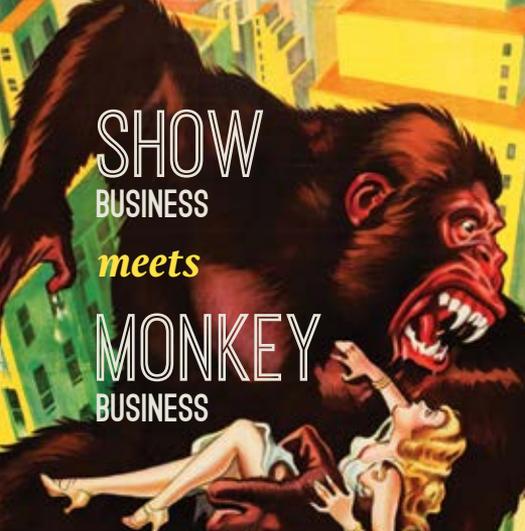
---

# GREETINGS FROM HOLLYWOOD

---

The first thing you notice about **Jordan Vogt-Roberts '06** is the beard. Dark and full and hanging down his chest, it's the beard of a well-groomed castaway or a member of ZZ Top. Vogt-Roberts calls it his "playoff beard," its first follicles begun at the start of directing *Kong: Skull Island*. It's a beard literally born of the jungle.

"This is almost, to some degree, the length of the film," Vogt-Roberts says as he gestures toward his facial hair. "I wanted to look how I felt. And at the time, **I FELT VERY WILD INSIDE.**"



## A Brief History of King Kong



1933

King Kong appears on screen for the first time in *King Kong*. Willis O'Brien's stop-motion animation inspires generations of filmmakers.



1939

During production for *Gone With the Wind*, the giant wall seen on Skull Island in *King Kong* is burned along with other old movie sets for the famous burning of Atlanta scene.

On March 10, 2017, *Kong: Skull Island* roared into theaters with Vogt-Roberts at the helm. The star-studded cast includes Hollywood heavy hitters Brie Larson, John Goodman, Samuel L. Jackson, and John C. Reilly as scientists, journalists, and adventurers setting out at the tail end of the Vietnam War to chart the mysterious Skull Island, home of Kong—a godlike protector or a dangerous monster, depending on who you ask.

At 32 years old, Vogt-Roberts had a string of indie successes, including 2013's quirky coming-of-age flick *Kings of Summer*. Then he directed Kong's triumphant return to the big screen—a blockbuster with a \$185 million budget.

When we met up with Vogt-Roberts in April, he was fresh from a 14-hour flight home from a press tour in Vietnam (where much of the movie was filmed—and where Vogt-Roberts was recently named as a tourism ambassador). By then, Kong had raked in \$565 million worldwide, making it a box office success, with good reviews to boot.

Vogt-Roberts has hustled in LA since his 2006 graduation from Columbia College Chicago's film program, which makes him the perfect tour guide. He took *DEMO* around some of his favorite Hollywood haunts to talk about resurrecting Kong, falling in love with Vietnam, and where to find LA's best grilled cheese.

### BOB AND KATHY BURNS' HOUSE

Vogt-Roberts holds the metal gorilla statue with both hands and whispers a single syllable: "Wow."

"Is it heavy?" someone asks.

He shakes his head. "I'm just holding history."

Our first tour stop: Bob and Kathy Burns' house in the suburb of Burbank, California. The Burns have been collecting Hollywood memorabilia for more than 60 years, and their home holds more than 1,000 props,

costumes, posters, and set pieces: *Star Wars* alien costumes, puppets from *Gremlins*, masks from *Planet of the Apes*, the actual time machine from 1960's sci-fi classic *The Time Machine*. But all those things are a distraction. Vogt-Roberts came here to meet Kong.

Legendary stop-motion animator Willis O'Brien built a series of metal armatures for 1933's *King Kong*, the giant ape's first appearance on screen. Today, only two of those armatures survive. One belongs to Peter Jackson—yes, that Peter Jackson, director of *Lord of the Rings* as well as 2005's *King Kong* reboot. The other belongs to Bob and Kathy Burns—which means Vogt-Roberts is holding it right now.

Vogt-Roberts made his first monster movie as a kid growing up in the Royal Oak suburb of Detroit. He built a block town, hid dog treats among the buildings, and set

the family pooch loose while he filmed the destruction. Back then, he was just a kid who loved blockbuster thrillers like *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *The Goonies*, and *Die Hard*. He didn't yet know that a couple decades later, he would direct one himself.

"The things that made me discover arthouse cinema, foreign cinema, and film history were what I had access to as a kid, which were studio films," he says. "I was just sending the message after *Kings of Summer*, 'Look, I wanna go make a studio film.' I want to show the types of things that made me love film when I was a little kid."

*Kong: Skull Island* serves as a love letter to movie monsters of the past. Working with concept artists, Vogt-Roberts carefully planned how his Kong would look: not hunched over like an ape you see at the zoo, but standing straight up on two legs. "We're not just a genre film—we're a monster movie," he says. "Kong is not a gorilla, he's not a Silverback. He's a movie monster."

Before *Kong*, Vogt-Roberts had indie notoriety. Short film *Successful Alcoholics* screened at Sundance, South by Southwest,

"I'M JUST HOLDING HISTORY."



Vogt-Roberts snaps a selfie with a piece of cinema history: the original stop-animation skeleton from the first *King Kong*.



Vogt-Roberts discovered a great spot to escape LA traffic: Aroma Golf, a driving range in Koreatown.

and AFI Film festivals in 2010; three years later, *Kings of Summer* premiered at Sundance and was picked up for distribution by CBS Films. On top of that, Vogt-Roberts directed television shows, commercials, and online shorts. So he was a young director, successful but still green by Hollywood standards. Then he landed one of the biggest movies of 2017. When Legendary Entertainment sent him the original *Kong* script, he questioned if the world needed another *King Kong* adaptation at all.

“Their version of the film took place in 1917, and I was like, ‘I just don’t know why you’d make this movie,’” he says. So the studio flipped the question: What movie would he make? He took a weekend to mull it over.

“I started thinking about choppers and napalm and Hendrix, like *Apocalypse Now* and *King Kong*, this idea of a creature feature and a Vietnam war film,” he says. “I’ve never seen that before. I would watch the hell out of that movie.”

#### AROMA GOLF

In the heart of LA’s Koreatown, we ride an elevator up six stories to hit golf balls over a parking garage.

We’re at Aroma Golf, a driving range where \$33 rents you a golf club and 200 balls. A net stretches around the parking garage roof, almost invisible against the night sky, so white golf balls fly and bounce like they’re suspended in the air.

Vogt-Roberts doesn’t golf seriously. That’s kind of the point. “My whole life is so controlled. I have so many super-specific decisions to make every day,” he says. “I don’t know anything about golf. I have no desire to get better. It’s cathartic to me.” (Plus, at Aroma you can smoke as many cigarettes as you want.)

Vogt-Roberts discovered Aroma Golf one day when he was trying to escape LA’s infamously slow traffic. The weirdness of the driving range appealed to him; it became a strange little oasis in the city. People ask Vogt-Roberts what his path has been, as if

his success can translate into a step-by-step guide. Of course it’s not that simple.

“That’s such a lie to think that there is a path,” he says. “You have to have this burning love of the art form within you, something that just says, ‘This is the only thing I know how to do, this is the only thing I want to do, so I’m just going to figure it out.’”

As a student in Chicago, he fell in with a group of comedians making names for themselves at places like Second City, iO Theater, and The Laugh Factory. Back then, they were nobodies. Now, they’re names on sold-out theatre marquees: Thomas Middleditch, Kumail Nanjiani, Hannibal Buress, John Mulaney, and fellow Columbia alum Kyle Kinane ’02, to name just a few. Even though he was still an undergrad, Vogt-Roberts started tagging along with his camera, turning stand-up bits into fleshed-out comedy shorts.

“I DON'T KNOW  
ANYTHING  
ABOUT GOLF.”

“I was learning filmmaking by being a one-man-band guerrilla filmmaker,” he says. “I would grab a camera and the sound equipment, I would light it, I would edit it, I would color it, I would mix it.”

He and his friends launched a video website,

blurds.com, which eventually turned into the 2012 show *Mash Up* for Comedy Central—a collection of stand-up acts and comedy shorts hosted by comedian T.J. Miller.

Right around his Columbia graduation, his comedian friends began scattering to either coast. Vogt-Roberts chose LA. “I loved people’s hustle here,” he says. “I loved the possibility and opportunity. You can meet some of the worst people on the planet, and you can also meet some of the most amazing, thoughtful, incredible people.”

At Aroma Golf, he looks toward the condos on the other side of the parking lot, protected against fast-flying golf balls by a wall of black netting. “I want to own that building,” he says. “In the morning you can stand naked, drinking tea with

1953

Visual effects creator Ray Harryhausen crafts the classic sci-fi film *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* using his groundbreaking “dynamation” technique. Harryhausen was greatly influenced by *King Kong* and even received some mentorship from O’Brien.



1954

Inspired by the success of *King Kong*, Japanese producer Tomoyuki Tanaka creates another giant monster movie: *Godzilla*. This film sparks the popular kaiju (“strange monsters”) genre.



1962

*King Kong vs. Godzilla*, the first of many monster-vs.-monster kaiju films, is released in Japan.



1967

Toho Co., Ltd releases *King Kong Escapes*, introducing the kaiju trope of a colossal beast fighting a robotic version of itself.



## DONKEY KONG

1981

A King Kong-like character stars in the Nintendo arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Like the original *King Kong* film, the game spawns several sequels and spin-offs.

1993

Stephen Spielberg draws on the *King Kong* dinosaur fight scenes while directing the CGI dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*.

1994

Game Boy releases the first handheld *Donkey Kong* game.



2005

Peter Jackson releases his *King Kong* remake with loving deference to the original.

2014

Warner Bros. releases a remake of *Godzilla* to kickstart its new MonsterVerse franchise.



2017

*Kong: Skull Island*, directed by Jordan Vogt-Roberts, sees box office success and critical acclaim.

2020

The King will face off against *Godzilla* once again in the Warner Bros. remake of *King Kong vs. Godzilla*.

these golf balls flying at you. It's like a metaphor for Los Angeles."

### ASTRO DINER

Here is how you eat a grilled cheese like Jordan Vogt-Roberts: First, you cut your pickle spear into as many chunks as you can. Then you open the sandwich and smash the pickles inside. Then you toss in a handful of French fries, close the whole thing up, and dip it into the side of ranch you had the foresight to order. Astro Diner, Vogt-Roberts' go-to LA grilled cheese spot, glows in warm colors, wood paneling, and orange vinyl booths. "People always ask me, 'What would your last meal be when you die?' And my answer is always, 'I just want a grilled cheese made by my mom,'" he says.

Astro reminds Vogt-Roberts of the kind of low-key, late-night diners he used to frequent in Chicago. Even as he's climbed the Hollywood ladder, Vogt-Roberts finds ways to connect back with the region where he grew up. *Kings of Summer* filmed in Ohio. In *Kong*, John C. Reilly's character is from Chicago—and though he's been trapped on Skull Island for decades, he hasn't given up on his beloved Cubs winning the World Series.

But Vogt-Roberts has a surprising new home base: Saigon, Vietnam.

Vogt-Roberts and the *Kong* team scouted filming locations everywhere from Iceland to Cambodia, but when he landed in Vietnam, he knew they'd found their setting. "Right away, I just knew there was nothing on the planet that looked or felt the same," he says.

Vietnam's lush jungles, rivers, and swamps were the perfect setting for Skull Island, a fantasy land full of vibrant and terrifying creatures inspired by everything from Pokémon to Miyazaki animated films. With its massive Blockbuster budget, *Kong* is the largest production to ever film in Vietnam. Filming in remote areas meant

the cast often took a helicopter to set.

"There was one day where we had to take a van, switch to a more off-road vehicle, get in a big boat, get in a smaller boat, go under a cave, and then get into another boat to get to where we were shooting," Vogt-Roberts remembers. "And John Goodman turned to me—he's a legend, right—and he says, 'That was the best ride to work I've ever taken in my life.'"

Vietnam has embraced Vogt-Roberts, too. *Kong's* opening weekend set Vietnamese box office records, with an estimated 162,000 moviegoers flooding theaters to see their country steal the show. In spring 2017, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism elected Vogt-Roberts as the country's next tourism ambassador. In addition to encouraging other filmmakers

to set their productions in Vietnam, he hopes to expand creative education and arts programs in the country's schools.

By now, the grilled cheese has been devoured. Vogt-Roberts' LA home sits a mere five-minute drive away, but at the moment, he's caught between two worlds. "My

"I JUST WANT  
A GRILLED  
CHEESE MADE  
BY MY MOM."

two biggest goals right now are to get a house back in Detroit and to get a house in Saigon," he says.

So what else is next for Vogt-Roberts? He's already connected to the *Metal Gear Solid* film adaptation—a beloved video game franchise that he grew up obsessing over. But after years on Skull Island, he's ready to take a break before jumping into his next projects.

Outside the diner window, a jacaranda tree blooms. "This has been two-and-a-half years of my life, and in those years, you go through every possible human emotion. Because *Kong* is film history, *Kong* is a piece of pop culture," says Vogt-Roberts. "The celebration now is in the freedom that I can have living my life and recharging my creative tank, so I can go and pour myself into something again." —Megan Kirby



What's Vogt-Roberts' Astro Diner order? Grilled cheese, fries, Diet Coke, and a side of ranch dressing.

# ACHIEVING BALANCE



Creative Arts Therapies alumnae

use the **body-mind** connection

to **teach** and **heal**.



Chen-Martinez rehearses *The Remains*, a performance for Chicago studio dropshift dance.

---

“You know how when you dance in your living room, you feel good?” asks **Julie Brannen MA ’13, CERT ’13**. “We start there.”

That’s the five-second “elevator speech” she gives when she talks about her work. Brannen is a dance/movement therapist, teacher, and dancer who trained at Columbia College Chicago. “We all have a body, and that body carries our memories and our experiences,” she says.

Columbia offers a number of majors and programs in Creative Arts Therapies, including an MA in Dance/Movement Therapy and Counseling (DMT) and a Graduate Laban Certificate in Movement Analysis (GLMA). Columbia is one of only a handful of schools in the US to offer master’s-level DMT and Laban training.



**JULIE BRANNEN** is a creative arts therapist at Glenkirk in Northbrook, Illinois, a facility for adults with intellectual disabilities which provides residential and day services and employment. She is also a dance/movement therapist at the Institute for Therapy through the Arts and a teaching artist with several organizations including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. “I always knew dance was my joy,” she says. “But there was this other part of me that really wanted to help people and go into the healthcare field.” Brannen earned a bachelor’s degree in Dance at the University of Florida, where she got involved in a “dance

in medicine” program and began leading a therapeutic movement class for people with Parkinson’s disease. “I had heard of art therapy, but I had never heard of DMT until someone mentioned it to me. I looked it up and I thought, this is *it*. I just *knew*. I didn’t hold back. I went straight from undergrad into grad school.”

---

“I have always seen art as the base of what I do.”

We talked to **BRANNEN** and two other alumnae, **WEI-CHIUNG “COCO” CHEN-MARTINEZ MA ’14, CERT ’15** and **ANDREA CERNIGLIA CERT ’15**—all of whom have performed together in Cerniglia’s dance company dropshift—about their creative paths, therapeutic dance parties, and self-care in uncertain times.

**DEMO:** What does Dance/Movement Therapy offer to your patients and clients?

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** DMT tells us that our emotions are revealed through how we present ourselves physically. When we are able to connect mind and body ... we are able to interact with the world using our authentic selves.

**BRANNEN:** We move and dance instead [of only talking]. We do have a traditional counseling background as well. I use three main words: connection, expression, and growth. Connection to your body brings you into the present moment, because your body can only exist in the now. Expression is the emotional regulation that comes with that—our bodies are the holders of our emotions. Growth is the shift that happens.

**DEMO:** What is Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)?

**CERNIGLIA:** Laban [based on the work of early 20th-century Hungarian dance theorist Rudolf Laban] is a taxonomy of vocabulary that allows us to describe the body in a nonjudgmental way. The language is very neutral—even if you don’t have a certification in LMA, you can understand what it means. I’m not a dance/movement therapist, but I use Laban Analysis in my pedagogy. In my professional company, it’s a tool that allows me to watch dancers, assess how they use their bodies, and offer them new ways of moving.

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** Laban’s language is very straightforward. When I’m performing or creating new work, it helps me clarify and describe movement. Without it, we really don’t have a common language. We only have very abstract descriptions. It’s difficult to objectively describe [movement], but if I use Laban’s terms, others understand what I’m talking about, instead of relying on my subjective descriptions.

“I ask them to notice if there is a shift—do you feel different now than you did when you came in?”

– Julie Brannen MA '13, CERT '13



## WHAT IS LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS?

Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is considered a universal language for movement. “It allows us to read and write movement on the page,” says Susan Imus, cofounder of Columbia’s Graduate Laban Certificate in Movement Analysis. “It makes dialogue about our bodies so much simpler.”

- Laban Movement Analysis is based on the work of Rudolf Laban, a dance artist and theorist credited as a pioneer of modern dance. His book *Modern Educational Dance* has been a standard text in British schools since the 1950s.
- Athletes, dancers, actors, and health professionals all use LMA. For example, in Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, upper-class Gwendolen Fairfax is costumed in elegant fabrics and lace. One way an actress may translate this profile is through “gliding” efforts: lightweight and freely flowed movement.
- In 1982, Janet Hamburg, an internationally known movement analyst, used LMA while working with the University of Kansas track and field teams. Hamburg taught Laban’s movement principles to two long jumpers, one of which improved her outdoor distance by 10.75 inches and later qualified for the 1984 Olympic trials.
- “For the most part, I have a ‘punching’ personality,” says Imus, who has studied Laban’s movement theories since 1979. “The timing and strength of my movements are sudden and strong. Using LMA, I can transcribe my energy onto the page and tell it like a story.”

# “Movement can be applied to anything.” - Andrea Cerniglia CERT '15



**DEMO:** What does a dance/movement therapy session look like?

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** In the therapy room, it's always different. I treat different ages, mental and physical abilities, and disabilities. I observe how people move, how their bodies present themselves while they talk about specific stories.

Sometimes we just have a dance party. It brings out a lot of joy, a lot of connection between people, a lot of positive memories. But a dance party is not *just* dance—there's a lot of intervention. I use a lot of symbolism, especially in group. I once had a patient who was very isolated. He refused to talk or even eat for a month. But in the group, he [opened up] and started talking and said he wanted to be a chef. The dance party then became a “cooking” dance. It was all gesture. We were “preparing” food, “chopping” along to music ... and at the end he was “serving” his food to everyone, using his hands to put it on our invisible plates. The dance fostered his connection with others.

**BRANNEN:** At Glenkirk, I'm working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They're adults, so they're learning to create meaning in their lives. On a typical day, I see individual clients for half-hour sessions. We warm up our bodies, move body parts. It's a lot of sensory integration. Many of them are nonverbal or have disabilities like being deaf or blind, or they're in wheelchairs. We might be just playing with a scarf. I have one client who can only move her left hand, so sometimes I engage in therapeutic touch to orient her to the rest of her body. I try to help [my clients] move in a different way than how they would normally move. Then there's some sort of closure ... I ask them to notice if there is a shift—do you feel different now than you did when you came in?

Through the Institute for Therapy through the Arts, I'm working with at-risk and traumatized youth in a residential program, doing more of what I think of as the “classic” style of DMT. One client is a dancer and so we're really “moving” through her stories, using her strength to kind of tap into memories and emotions around her past. But there's a whole range of what DMT can be. It could just be simply noticing your breath. It could be laying on the floor, noticing the weight of your body.

**DEMO:** What is kinesthetic learning, and how do you teach with dance?

**CERNIGLIA:** I do arts-integrated work within the Chicago Public Schools. Working with the curriculum, I figure out a way to “move” that material. Movement can be applied to anything. Math is a really good partner for movement. One time I did a unit where the kids were working on fractions, and I had them form a giant circle. They were dancing on the circle and I held up signage that directed them: for example, do a three-quarter turn, clockwise, hopping on one leg, and they would have to figure out where they were going to go.

**DEMO:** Why did you choose Columbia, and how did your experience help propel your career?

**BRANNEN:** They did a very good job of preparing us for the field, in terms of equally emphasizing us as both clinicians and artists. For me, art is what brings us into the field in the first place ... and then we learn how to heal with it ... through a lot of experiential learning and pushing us to our edges to help us grow.

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** I was looking for a creative place where I could continue dancing. I was an international student, so I needed a more diverse environment. I think Columbia has really solid training. The faculty are really open and supportive. The program was very intense for me, perhaps because English is my third language, but there was a lot of self-reflection.

**CERNIGLIA:** The [Laban] program is really supportive and adaptive. They have [younger] students that are just finishing the DMT program, but they also have people like myself who are doing just the certification program who are working professionals. The curriculum is taught in a way that’s compact ... so it’s manageable for all kinds of demographics.

**DEMO:** Tell us about your creative practice and your experience working with dropshift dance.

**CERNIGLIA:** My company dropshift is an experimental modern company. Mostly the work is multidisciplinary. I work with visual artists who incorporate projected elements of film, set elements, original costume design, and original musical compositions. It’s like a laboratory for collabo-



**ANDREA CERNIGLIA** is the founder and artistic director of dropshift dance, which she launched in 2009. She describes it as a “collaborative and investigative studio practice pushing the boundaries of the art form in performance.” Her ongoing *Imposter* series is an exploration of the audience/performer relationship. “I’m always trying to drive my process to a different place so it doesn’t become too static,” she says. “For myself, but also so I can create an innovative experience for audience members. We’ve been around long enough that people know that when they come to see a dropshift show it won’t be a

run-of-the-mill thing.” Cerniglia is also a faculty member at Dovetail Dance Studio and Zephyr Dance Ensemble. “Teaching is something I find really exhilarating, and the GLMA certification was just another way to add to my practice,” she says.

---

“I’m always trying to drive my process to a different place so it doesn’t become too static.”



## COCO CHEN-MARTINEZ

**WEI-CHIUNG “COCO” CHEN-MARTINEZ** works with a wide range of patients at Linden Oaks, an inpatient psychiatric hospital housed at Edward Hospital in Naperville, Illinois. She also serves as a therapist at Live Oak and as vice president of the Illinois Chapter of the American Dance Therapy Association. Chen-Martinez’s master’s thesis explored the effects of dance/movement therapy on short-term memory in adults with traumatic brain injuries. At the American Dance Therapy Annual conference in 2014, she presented her research in collaboration with five dancers. Their movements synchronized with her speech, serving as a sort of human

PowerPoint-slash-postmodern dance performance. “They embodied clients with brain injuries as well as the processes of working memory systems,” she says. “I don’t really like PowerPoint because I think it gets people into what we call a ‘remote state’ in Laban language. People just stare at the screen but they’re not *there*, not listening.”

---

“We are able to interact with the world using our authentic selves.”

rating artists to come together and have a dialogue. Something that is central to my work is an exploration of the audience-performer relationship. [We’re] pushing past the traditional norms of dance where you show up at a specific time and sit in a specific place. That’s not what I do. A lot of times the performance space is melded with the viewing space ... More of a gallery-type setting, much in the way that you’d view an art show.

**BRANNEN:** I have always seen art as the base of what I do, and it’s always been really important to me to keep the practice alive. Whether it’s yoga or dance, body-based practice has always been vital for me. I’ve always actively been part of either a company or a creative process. Some of my highlights have definitely been with dropshift. I danced with them for three years. I got the sense of what it truly means to be part of a very professional company, put on a multidisciplinary performance, and really collaborate with other artists.

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** [Performing] often really synchronizes with my life. One day, working in the hospital, I created an intervention for my patients—to dance their [psychological] journey between two points in the room, one being the present moment and the other being the point in their lives they wanted to show us. One person dropped to the floor and crawled to express being beat up by illness. A few days later I had a rehearsal with dropshift and Andrea had us reflect on our own journeys over the past ten years—what we have improved and what we’ve left behind. I was like, *wow*—I just used this as an intervention and then it came up in my life.

**DEMO:** Has your own creative work or your clinical practice changed due to America’s polarized political climate? What is the role of the arts and creative therapy in this new era?

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** So far, I haven’t noticed any impact on my work as a dancer. However, the political climate has absolutely influenced my clients’ sense of safety, which impacts my work as a dance/movement therapist and psychotherapist. The topics in my therapy room often include race and sexuality, especially my transgender clients who are concerned about their rights. I focus on building a sense of safety

in the body through movement and guide clients to explore their strengths from their multiple (racial, sexual, and immigrant/first-generation) identities.

**BRANNEN:** I consider myself a healer and a helper, and I am noticing all the pain that's coming up. It feels like the veil is being lifted on all the darkness in the world. I have to remember that I only have control of myself and stay rooted in my practice, in order to be available for whatever is to come. The arts in general transcend [news and politics]. They are absolutely important and always have been. If you feel powerless, what else do you have but your art and your voice? That's how you express, heal, and connect to things larger than you.

**CERNIGLIA:** I feel exactly the same way I've always felt about the arts. That there needs to be support and infrastructure for artists. The arts have infinite possibilities no matter what our communities are dealing with.

**DEMO:** Any advice for prospective students or recent graduates who want to pursue a career in dance performance, teaching, or therapy?

**CHEN-MARTINEZ:** Be open and brave, be willing to work on your own personal, deep issues. Without that process it would be very hard to "hold space" for other people in the future. The process [of training in DMT] is really difficult and we tend to criticize ourselves, thinking we're not good enough. We must learn to be gentle with ourselves. It's ultimately a gift we offer to our clients and our patients.

**CERNIGLIA:** I always encourage my young students who are interested in dancing professionally. The only way you can find out if it's the right path for you is to go through it. If you feel compelled, you should do it. Just like any other career, you learn as you go.

**BRANNEN:** Don't be held back by feelings of inadequacy. Take care of yourself first. I read [Shel Silverstein's] *The Missing Piece* to my clients all the time. You have to be whole and roll on your own. Give yourself space to discover that. —Audrey Michelle Mast '00

# “Without [Laban], we really don't have a common language.”

– Wei-Chiung “Coco” Chen-Martinez MA '14



**ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:** Creative Arts Therapies student Sarah Moore finished her thesis work in Nairobi, Kenya.

Read her story at [colum.edu/demo](http://colum.edu/demo).

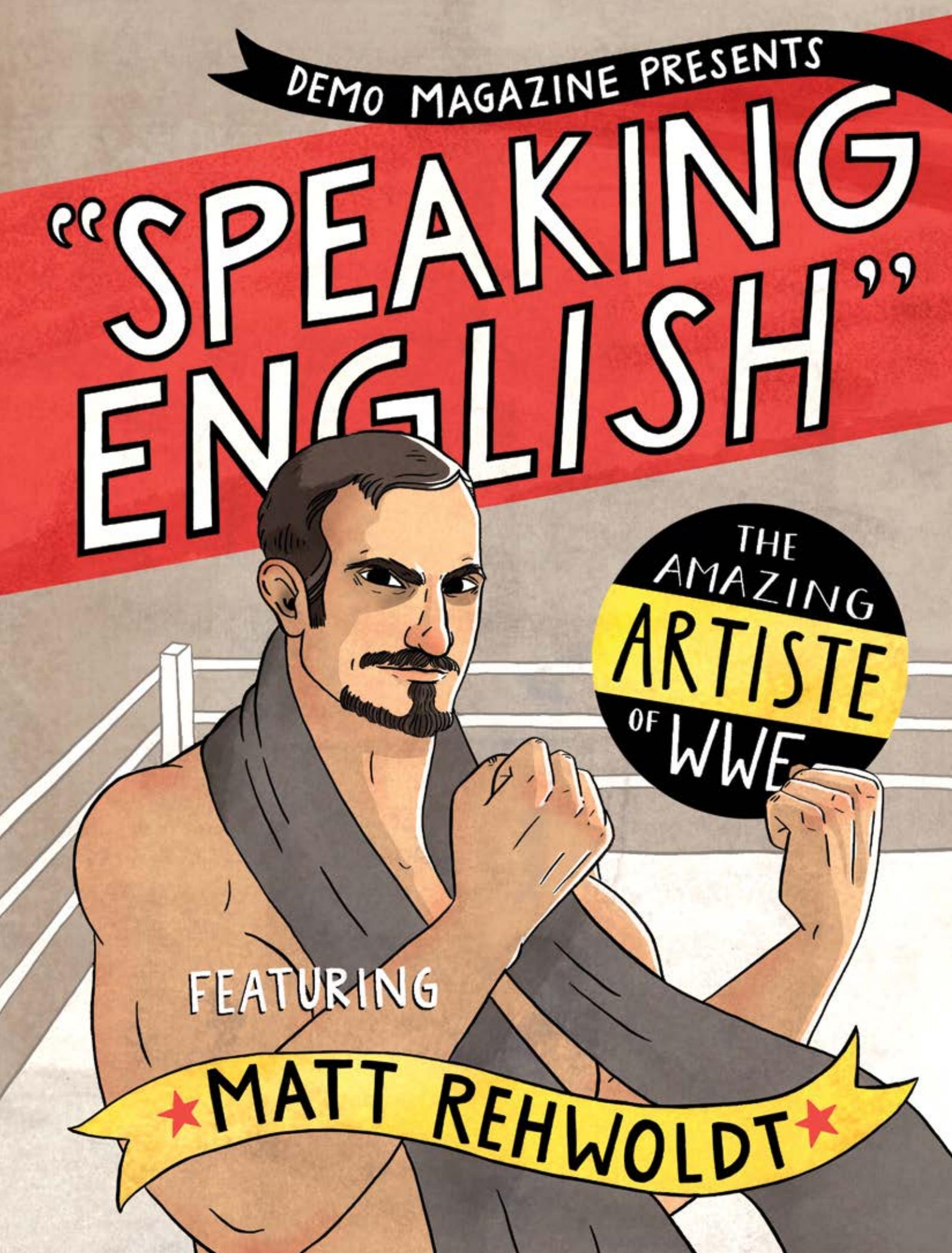
DEMO MAGAZINE PRESENTS

# "SPEAKING ENGLISH"

THE  
AMAZING  
ARTISTE  
OF  
WWE

FEATURING

★ MATT REHWOLDT ★



## Sometimes life is a stage. Sometimes it's a WWE wrestling ring.

Sporting a waxed moustache and an overcoat thrown over wrestling tights, Aiden English struts his lean and muscular frame down a runway alongside his tag team partner Simon Gotch, a strongman throwback you might find pressing barbells at a carnival. The arena music erupts into ragtime piano. Instead of exchanging high fives, The Vaudevillains magnanimously shake hands and pose for fisticuffs straight out of a silent film—a decidedly artistic entrance for the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) stage.

Approaching his wrestling persona as an “artiste,” English has been known to enter rings singing show tunes. Sometimes he croons out a lullaby as he brings an opponent into an inescapable headlock. And with the April 2017 news that Gotch has been released from the WWE, English will be flying off the ropes solo for a while. But the self-styled 19th-century thespian now works under the biggest bright lights of his dream career.

English, better known as Matt Rehwoldt '10 during his Columbia College Chicago years, has pursued professional wrestling



With a wrestling persona inspired by vaudeville days of yore, Rehwoldt has been known to enter the ring belting show tunes to intimidate his opponents.

since he was growing up in La Grange, Illinois. His parents didn't have cable, so WWE's *Monday Night Raw* became a sort of forbidden fruit. Rehwoldt was hooked from the moment he overheard grade school classmates raging about professional wrestling as they practiced fake fighting. The humor and dramatics appealed to him, and he eagerly took to the sport perhaps most associated with performance art. In fact, Rehwoldt only matriculated to Columbia to study Theatre after striking a deal with his parents, who discouraged him from going straight into wrestling.

Yet Rehwoldt says his four-year college detour thoroughly prepared him for the theatrics of WWE. In Chicago, he transformed himself from a shy kid to someone who could woo a live crowd. “You crave that sort

of attention and affirmation from an audience,” he says. “It’s a terrifying experience, but getting through it is very rewarding.”

The chance to forge his own artistic path at Columbia also appealed to Rehwoldt. He found his way through a stage combat class taught by David Woolley, developing a strong stage presence and learning a few performance tricks along the way.

Of course, he learned things about the importance of diction and the muscle memory required of live performance. “But the bigger thing was learning about taking beats and making moments really count,” Rehwoldt says. “You’re constantly trying to find the emotional arc of whatever story you’re trying to tell. Those are all the things we’re trying to do in the WWE today.”

“IT’S A TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE, BUT GETTING THROUGH IT IS VERY REWARDING.”



The stage combat skills Rehwoldt perfected at Columbia come in handy during WWE feuds.

Post-graduation, Rehwoldt scored a role in *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*—a Chicago-born dramatic comedy and finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama—which tells the story of the American world of professional wrestling. He also landed some professional stage time at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, where he performed in *Macbeth* as a non-singing character.

In January 2011, Rehwoldt moved south for a three-month course at Florida Championship Wrestling, a training ground for the WWE. After someone suggested he team up with Gotch, a sort of likeminded traditionalist, the idea for *The Vaudevillains* quickly emerged. The duo perfected their

craft in the Sunshine State for a couple of years and began wrestling on the larger WWE stage in 2016.

Nostalgic by nature, Rehwoldt holds the wrestlers who inspired him as a kid in high regard. Legends such as Ric “The Nature Boy” Flair, Shawn Michaels, and Stone Cold Steve Austin combined great theater with spectacular wrestling skills. He’s also a student of the game, learning about WWE greats like Gorgeous George and the villainous Killer Kowalski. “I have a great deal of appreciation for the legacy of wrestling,” he says. “A lot of these guys were wrestling in small armories with one light above the ring just to make a living.”

The armories are a stark contrast to today’s hordes of fans showing up for events inside venues like Madison Square Garden in New York. But this is English’s world today: on the road every week, in WWE primetime—as big as it gets in professional wrestling.

Still, he’s aware of wrestlers like Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson and John Cena, who’ve made the leap from wrestling ring to the silver screen. Rehwoldt, however, has a very classic, specific goal. “Part of me would love to do movies,” he says. “But I want to be the first WWE superstar to perform in a play on Broadway.” —William Meiners MFA '96

“I WANT TO BE THE FIRST WWE SUPERSTAR TO PERFORM IN A PLAY ON BROADWAY.”

“It’s a performance, sure, but it’s a damn good performance, and there’s real emotion out there. It’s a beautiful thing to watch.”

– Jack Edinger '06

## THE WILD WORLD OF CHICAGO FREELANCE WRESTLING

An aluminum ladder jabbed into a chest. A body slam into a blanket of mousetraps. One screaming crowd, an infinitum of weaponized props, and a line-up of 30 madcap performers: This is the magic of Chicago’s Freelance Wrestling. Ever since he was a kid, Photography alum Jack Edinger '06 has admired the art of wrestling. As a student at Columbia, Edinger spent his free time touring the gutsy Chicago wrestling scene, even writing his senior thesis paper on the aesthetics of underground wrestling. That’s when he met Nick Almendarez—better known by his professional wrestling name “Matt Knicks.”

“Wrestling is a huge part of my life,” says Edinger. “It’s no surprise that my obsession led me to Nick, and thus Freelance Wrestling.”

Edinger met Almendarez at Resistance Pro Wrestling, an independent wrestling company founded by vocalist and guitarist Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins. After several months of shooting video and photography for Resistance Pro, Edinger was approached by Almendarez with a wild idea.

“We both knew a ton of great wrestlers who weren’t getting gigs,” says Edinger. “Nick suggested we form our own ‘punk rock wrestling’ organization, and the only thing I remember saying was ‘hell yeah.’”

Launched in 2014, Freelance Wrestling hosts adult-only wrestling shows all across Chicago, from the grungy Bottom Lounge to the snazzy Logan Square Auditorium. Each night includes matches between various heroes and villains—known as “faces” and “heels” in the wrestling world—and as the de facto creative director, Edinger helps develop each character and plotline.

“Our most polarizing character is Stevie Fierce, another young hungry talent fighting to make a name for himself,” says Edinger. “He’s beautiful, he’s in great shape, and boy does he know it. On one side, girls in the audience love him. But on the other side, guys hate him.”

Known for bringing a small beauty mirror in the ring, Stevie Fierce will admire himself throughout the match. But just as the referee looks away, he’ll whip around and smash the mirror across his opponent’s head.

“It’s a performance, sure,” Edinger says. “But it’s a damn good performance, and there’s real emotion out there. It’s a beautiful thing to watch.” —JT Lachausse



**SPOT ON**



With more than two decades at Univision under his belt, de la Parra now works in their New York City office.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUBEN CANTU

---

# Luis de la Parra

## MARKETING MAVERICK

---

Luis de la Parra '95 connects big brands to massive audiences at Univision, Inc.

**“A GOOD MARKETING CAMPAIGN** can really propel a good series or film or story or company,” says Luis de la Parra '95. Today, de la Parra works as senior vice president of partner solutions at Univision, Inc., a leading American Spanish-language media company. He partners with agencies and brands like T-Mobile, Toyota, and Walmart to develop marketing strategies to connect his clients with Univision's massive audience: 108 million people monthly through various assets. Since starting as a Univision intern 20 years ago, de la Parra has climbed the company ladder—and it all started in Chicago.

De la Parra was a Communications student at University of New Haven in Connecticut when a professor told him about Columbia College Chicago's media industry focus. So he flew to Chicago to check things out—and landed in the middle of a Halloween weekend blizzard. Columbia's industry connections impressed him, though: In spite of the blizzard, he transferred the next semester to study Film and Video Producing.

While taking classes and working on student films, de la Parra felt drawn to the marketing side of the media world. “Columbia has really good courses on how to option your stories, how to merchandise them, and how to market them,” he says. “Once you start learning about the industry, you're learning about yourself and what you're good at.”

Right after graduation in 1995, de la Parra began an internship at Univision. The company had just purchased a Chicago television station, WGBO, to transform into

a Spanish-language station. De la Parra helped build a plan for the station's shift that earned him a full-time job as a promotional producer. Shortly afterwards, he developed a production strategy for a local newscast—including building a Chicago studio and hiring a team. Though he was new to the company, he approached the general manager with his pitch—and not only did Univision go for the plan, but they elevated him to a production manager after just six months at the company.

---

**“Internships are key for this particular industry to succeed—and this particular college to succeed.”**

Over the next 15 years, de la Parra moved around the country replicating his successful Chicago strategies at stations in New York City, Miami, Dallas, Houston, and LA (Univision's top Hispanic market). As marketing evolved alongside the internet, he stayed at the forefront “on a network level, local level, social media level, and digital level.” Five years ago, he moved to his current role in New York City. “That's one of the reasons I stayed with this organization: I was asked to do different things that kept me fresh and relevant,” he says.

Today, de la Parra works with brands to connect them with Univision's television programs and digital and social media platforms—often in innovative and unex-

pected ways. A recent T-Mobile partnership harnessed the power of social media and digital platforms with a takeover of Univision awards show Permio lo Nuestro that included a surprise concert from singer J Balvin. Fans were able to skip an entire commercial break by watching the concert through social media or T-Mobile sites.

“To engage in true marketing campaigns nowadays, you can't just do 30-second spots,” he says. “Experiential marketing travels back and forth between social media, digital, and linear capabilities.”

As far as his ongoing ties to Columbia, de la Parra is a triple threat: an alum, donor, and member of the Board of Trustees. While some Columbia students already intern with Univision's local Chicago affiliate, he hopes to establish more partnership opportunities between the institutions. “Internships are key for this particular industry to succeed—and this particular college to succeed,” he says.

In January, de la Parra organized Creating Branded Content That Sells, a marketing event at Univision's New York City office—perfectly timed for a visiting J-term advertising class to attend. Marketers from companies like NBCUniversal and Verizon offered expert insight about branding, storytelling, and connecting with consumers to the audience of students and alumni.

De la Parra remains impressed and inspired by Columbia's students. “There's a lot to learn from younger people and their creative vision,” he says. “Columbia is still very relevant in my professional career and life.” —Megan Kirby

**SPOT ON**



Vilaro serves as the artistic director and CEO of New York City's Latino-led Ballet Hispanico.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUBEN CANTU

# Eduardo Vilaro

## DANCE DIRECTOR

Ballet Hispanico Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro MA '99 combines Latino tradition with contemporary choreography.

**IN EDUARDO VILARO'S MA '99** *Danzón*, the Ballet Hispanico dancers' long lines and pointed toes demonstrate flawless balletic technique; their expressive, crisp movements are a hallmark of modern dance. But their salsa-esque stylings borrowed from *danzón*, Cuba's national dance, epitomize Vilaro's choreography—a union of ballet, modern, and Latin dance that speaks to his experience living as Latino in the United States today.

“The art [of Ballet Hispanico] has always been about the diverse, beautiful continued traditions of the Latino cultures. There's nothing like the joy of a Latino salsa or mariachi, but we take those forms, deconstruct them, and reconstruct them into a dance that shows the essences of the culture without it being a caricature,” said Vilaro, artistic director and CEO of New York City's Ballet Hispanico.

Much as he seamlessly weaves together varied dance forms in his choreography, Vilaro has crafted a unique and meaningful career out of dance, nonprofit leadership, advocacy, and education.

Vilaro, who was born in Havana, Cuba and grew up in the Bronx, fell in love with dance when he was cast in a middle school production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. Worried a career in dance might disappoint his parents, he hid his dance from them by registering for martial arts classes and then sneaking over to the ballet studio next door.

“I prepped bit by bit until I left school and I had to tell my parents that my passion is dance,” said Vilaro, who was accepted into summer programs with the prestigious modern dance programs at the historically

black Alvin Ailey American Dance School and the pioneering Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance.

In 1986, while he was finishing his studies at Adelphi University, Vilaro auditioned for Ballet Hispanico founder and then-artistic director Tina Ramirez, and she welcomed him into the company. During his nine years there, Vilaro rose through the ranks to become a principal dancer, but also grew as a leader, educator, and spokesperson.

“We take those forms ... and reconstruct them into a dance that shows the essences of the culture without it being a caricature.”

Connecting with Ballet Hispanico's mission through his outreach work energized Vilaro and helped him realize he wanted to go back to school. He enrolled in Columbia College Chicago's master's degree program in Interdisciplinary Arts. “I wanted to use some of those ideas [in] developing dance programs for everyone,” he said.

Columbia helped Vilaro clarify his vision for social justice: “I learned to be more of an activist as an artist. I learned how to utilize different tools in order to open access to the arts, how to bring my art to the community, how to utilize different art forms, how to bring that into my teachings.”

Once he graduated from Columbia, Vilaro brought his vision to life in Luna Negra Dance Theater, which he founded in 1999

to work in and with Chicago's large Latino community. Under his guidance, the organization flourished not only civically, but artistically. It moved into Millennium Park's coveted Harris Theater space, taught dance in the city's neighborhoods, and toured both nationally and internationally.

Ten years later, in 2009, Vilaro received a phone call from Ramirez of Ballet Hispanico, who insisted he was the only person who could run the organization when she retired. Even though it meant leaving Luna Negra, Vilaro leapt at the chance to lead the organization that formed his artistic identity.

“Ballet Hispanico has put me in a larger playing field for the impact that I can bring to my community and my art form, working in a well-respected, 46-year-old, Latino-led, -founded, -run organization,” said Vilaro.

Under Vilaro, Ballet Hispanico demonstrates his commitment to engaging the audience in important conversations. “We talk about the needs of diversity, racial equity, equality—and do it through the platform of dance, both the art that's on the stage and what we do out in the community.”

Whether he's connecting young Latino dancers to their cultural heritage in Ballet Hispanico's 750-student dance school, leading salsa classes for migrant workers in Santa Barbara, California, or bringing dancers into a juvenile detention facility to perform for and teach incarcerated young men, Vilaro continues to forge his own path radiating from the intersection of art and social justice. “For me, activist art is taking the art to the places that need it,” he says. —Stephanie Ewing MA '12



*RuPaul's Drag Race* star Shea Coulee channels her inner Grace Jones.

# Shea Coulee

## SLAY QUEEN

Chicago drag queen Shea Coulee '11 sashays onto *RuPaul's Drag Race* season nine.

**SHEA COULEE '11** enters the *RuPaul's Drag Race* work room in bedazzled sunglasses, a feathered coat, and turquoise platform heels. She turns to the camera with a sneer and delivers a promise for the season: "I didn't come to play, I came to slay."

Coulee was a finalist on season nine of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the massively popular reality show that brought drag culture to the mainstream. On *Drag Race*, queens go head-to-head in makeup, fashion, and performance challenges in the hopes of winning \$100,000 and being crowned the next drag superstar. Coulee got her start in Chicago clubs, building on skills she picked up studying costume design at Columbia College Chicago. Before the season aired, she talked to *DEMO* about Columbia theatre, drag's evolution, and how the character of Shea Coulee helps her speak her mind.

**DEMO:** Do you feel like you have an art school advantage over the other *Drag Race* queens?

**COULEE:** I feel like having an art school degree really did equip me for being able

"Shea Coulee is my muse. Everything that I want to say, artistically, I say it through Shea."

to navigate the unfamiliar waters that are *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Adaptability is really important, especially when you're going



After studying costume design at Columbia, Coulee began performing in gay clubs across Chicago, honing the skills that would land her on *Drag Race*.

through a competition as rigorous as *Drag Race*. You have to be able to roll with the punches. That was something that I learned going through the costume department at Columbia, because theatre is live. So many things happen, so many things change. You really have to be able to give your all, and do the best you can under the circumstances for the better of the production. It's very similar in the case of *Drag Race*.

**DEMO:** What productions stand out from your time at Columbia?

**COULEE:** My senior year, I was the lead designer on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. That by far was my favorite project, because I got to stretch my creative wings the most. With Shakespeare being so classic, it was

amazing that we got to push more of a modern aesthetic. At the time, Alexander McQueen had just died, and he was a huge inspiration to me. I took a huge page from his book as far as the direction that I took for the costumes for that show.

**DEMO:** How did you start doing drag?

**COULEE:** I started doing drag the summer after I graduated [from Columbia]. I had a foot injury and I had to be off my feet, so I started binge-watching *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Halfway through season three I was like, "This looks like so much fun. This looks like a combination of all the things I love to do." Fashion, performance, gender-bending. There were so many cool things about it, so I was like, "Why don't I just give it a shot?"

## SPOT ON

**DEMO:** Drag has evolved so much in the last 10 years, partly thanks to *Drag Race*. What do you think the future of drag looks like?

**COULEE:** I think the future of drag looks so bright. The show has taken drag from the underground, from the clubs you have to make an effort to find, and brought it right to your living room. Drag is a much more accessible art form now. I love it so much, and I'm so excited that I get to embark upon this journey where I get to share my drag with other people.

**DEMO:** In a couple of sentences, how would you describe Shea Coulee?

**COULEE:** Shea Coulee is an outward expression of a very authentic inward intent, you know? Shea Coulee is my muse. Everything that I want to say, artistically, I say it through Shea. In doing that, Shea has taught me so much about myself. It's this really amazing continuous study. I'm constantly still learning, still developing my drag. Thinking about how I can take my drag to the next level, and how I challenge myself as an artist. What is going on now in my life, what's going on politically or artistically in the world that inspires me, and what is it that I want to say? I say it through Shea. —Megan Kirby



The name Shea was inspired by the Swahili word for “beautiful boy.”

## READING IS FUNDAMENTAL

Fast-talking drag queens have your head spinning? *RuPaul's Drag Race* includes an unofficial dictionary of sayings, references, and jokes. Next time you confuse *sashay* with *shantay*, check out *DEMO's* handy vocabulary guide.

### LIP SYNC FOR YOUR LIFE

The episode-ending lip sync competition that sends one contestant home each week.

### READ

To criticize or wittily expose someone's flaws.

### SASHAY AWAY

The parting phrase RuPaul uses to wish eliminated queens on their ways.

### SHADE

The act of subtly dissing someone; introduced to mainstream culture in the 1991 drag documentary *Paris is Burning*.

### SHANTAY YOU STAY

A RuPaul phrase delivered to the winner of the lip sync.

### WERK

An exclamation reserved for when someone is doing a particularly fierce job.

# ALUMNI SHORTS

ALUMNI UPDATES AT A GLANCE



## WINDY CITY FOOD TOUR

As a food writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, **Joseph Hernandez '09** knows the city's food scene high and low. From fine dining to comfort food, Hernandez shares some of his favorite spots across the city.

### DRINKS

**FOR AMBITIOUS COCKTAILS:**

*Sportsman's Club*

Hernandez says the ever-changing cocktail menu always features something balanced, experimental, and modern.

948 N. Western Ave.

**FOR SUMMER FUN:** *Gene's Sausage Shop*

Gene's cozy rooftop beer garden is the perfect place to have a great craft beer, eat a bratwurst, and relax with friends.

4750 N. Lincoln Ave.



### DINNER

**FOR FUN FOOD AND WINE PAIRINGS:**

*Income Tax*

This new "tavern sexy" spot in Edgewater serves wines from ultra-small producers around the world, and Chef Ryan Henderson dishes up delicious, classic fare from those regions to match.

5959 N. Broadway Ave.

**FOR A QUICK BITE:** *Joong Boo Market*

For \$2 at this Korean market, you can get a delicious dumpling that's "bigger than your head."

3333 N. Kimball Ave.

**FOR COMFORT FOOD:** *smalls.*

Come here for Filipino turo-turo—a giant pile of garlic rice with two meats and two veggies. "It tastes like my mom's food, but just better," Hernandez says.

4009 N. Albany Ave.



## PHOTO FINISH

Snap a selfie in Martina Smith's '06 Social PixPod.



**Martina Smith '06** wants you to take a selfie. Your friends, too. She wants you to all gather in the Social PixPod and say cheese.

The Social PixPod is a social photo booth and Smith's brainchild for bringing people together. Intended for events, the Social PixPod includes a tent, backdrops, props, and most importantly, the AirPix Photo kiosk: a stand-alone tripod with high definition camera and the perfect picture lighting. Users can take solo or group photos, create photo strips, and even make their own GIFs to post online.

Smith's favorite events for the Social PixPod are festivals and weddings, where users can print out memories that literally last a lifetime—while also creating the perfect GIF to share on Instagram. She shared a few tips for snagging the perfect Social PixPod selfie.

### HOW TO TAKE

## *The Perfect Selfie*

#### 1. USE PROPS

“Wearing a crown and some fun glasses, maybe a nice boa, is always a great option.”

#### 2. PAIRED/GROUP PHOTOS

“You can't just take all the poses yourself! Doing a back-to-back with a partner is always a lot of fun.”

#### 3. LET LOOSE

“I think confidence is always a good thing—just having fun and letting loose.”

#### 4. DON'T BE AFRAID TO POSE

“Sometimes people don't know what to do, but just go with your gut! Strike a few different poses, whether it's a hand on your hip, a peace sign. Stick out your tongue or bring someone into the photo, do something funny and silly. Don't be afraid to do you when you're in the booth.”



Smith shows her selfie expertise in the Social PixPod.



## PRESERVING HISTORY

Cheryl Wilson-Batts '82 protects the history of Hot Springs, Arkansas.

“From 1863 until the 1960s, the Hot Springs African American community was the place to go,” says **Cheryl Wilson-Batts '82** of her Arkansas hometown, a thriving black community where she grew up surrounded by black doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Her family moved when she was 11, and she didn't return to Hot Springs until she was an adult. By then, the town had changed.

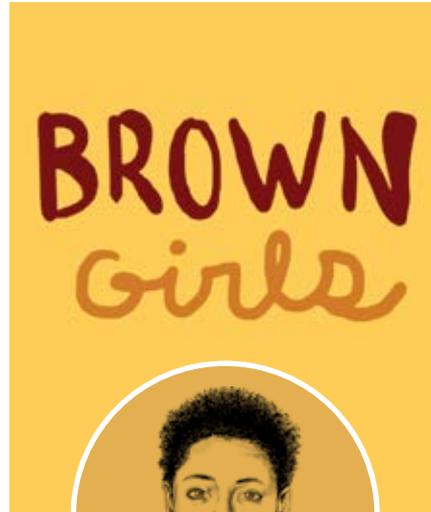
Through her grassroots organization, People Helping Others Excel by Example (P.H.O.E.B.E.), Wilson-Batts began to preserve Hot Springs' local history on film and in photographs. P.H.O.E.B.E. also trains middle school and high school youth to interview local senior citizens, collecting firsthand accounts from people who remember the town at its height.

Wilson-Batts says her Columbia training in media management, theatre, and theatre production gave her the tools and confidence to capture Hot Springs through oral histories and film clips. “The [Columbia] instructors helped me discover a stronger ‘me’ who was willing to move outside the boxes so often prescribed for women, ethnic minorities, and yes, even for Southerners,” she says.

P.H.O.E.B.E.'s current fundraising efforts aim to transform the historic John Lee Webb home into a photo gallery, museum of historic archives, and organizational headquarters.

## A CHICAGO PERSPECTIVE

Sam Bailey's *Brown Girls* web series heads to HBO.



**DEMO:** You studied Theatre with an acting focus at Columbia. Why did you make the jump behind the camera, to directing?

**BAILEY:** The wealth of roles for a woman of color, especially a young woman of color, that were nuanced and flawed and got to show everyone's abilities and mistakes—it wasn't really happening in theatre, or in acting in general. I was like, “Why can't we portray those roles?” If you're feeling this, then maybe you should just write [or direct] something.

[*Brown Girls* writer Fatimah Asghar] and I both were interested in showing these characters as regular people who live and love and fuck and hurt and all that stuff. We wanted to show this community of people that are very familiar to us, and I think very familiar to a lot of people around the world, but you don't ever see it in mainstream media.

**DEMO:** Why did you set the series in Chicago?

**BAILEY:** I grew up in Logan Square, so I feel like it's a natural thing. One of my overall goals is to show versions of Chicago that we don't see on TV, because so often it's just gangs or firefighters. Chicago's obviously very segregated, but there are these pockets of multicultural brown and black communities. So that's what we wanted to highlight.

Chicago has a blue-collar way of attacking art and work. I feel like there is always something I can get involved in, there's always someone I want to collaborate with. I don't think people go to Chicago to become famous. They go to Chicago to work.

The opening scene of *Brown Girls* pans over a bedroom: crowded nail polish bottles, an Alison Bechdel drawing, a potted plant. The objects form a collage of a woman of color in her mid-20s—setting the theme for the six-episode web series that highlights characters who are cluttered, bright, loud, contradictory, and ultimately very real.

*Brown Girls* follows the friendship of 20-somethings Leila, a South Asian-American writer, and Patricia, a black musician, as they struggle with life in Chicago. And the project got quite a buzz: In June 2017, HBO announced it was picking up the series. **DEMO** talked with former student **Sam Bailey**, the show's producer and director.

“I don't think people go to Chicago to become famous. They go to Chicago to work.”

# Practical Magic

From the pottery wheel to the dinner table, Jessica Egan's '12 ceramics fuse beauty and function.





**Left:** Egan in her Logan Square studio.

**Above:** “[It’s] really important to me that my ceramics are just as functional as they are aesthetically pleasing,” says Egan of her Little Fire Ceramics brand.

**IN CHICAGO’S LOGAN SQUARE** neighborhood, Jessica Egan ’12 can be found throwing on a pottery wheel behind a north-facing window, which (on a good day) floods the room with natural light. Behind her, three hanging shelves display neatly stacked green ombre washed mugs, terrariums, yellow and pink bowls, several potted plants, and one lonely orchid branching over the edge of a tiny charcoal pot. While her studio surroundings are neat, the clay dust covering Egan’s dark clothing reveals another story: one of passion and a willingness to get messy.

In high school, Egan began creating functional ceramics: objects intended for use, not decoration. (Though they look great, too.) After graduating Columbia College Chicago with degrees in Fine Arts and Environmental Science, Egan started her own company: Little Fire Ceramics (a name inspired by the Gaelic translation of her last name). Since the start of Little Fire Ceramics, Egan’s work has expanded from online custom orders to local boutiques and tableware commissions at some of Chicago’s hippest restaurants.

Egan’s ceramics journey began in high school in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, where she found herself in an art class with three pottery wheels that none of her teachers knew how to use. Determined to learn, she enrolled in art classes at Bryan Becker Clay Werks, a local studio. There, she found a mentor in owner and ceramicist Bryan Becker. Becker taught her traditional forms of throwing functional ceramics, but he also motivated Egan with his success as a full-time ceramicist. Soon, she was apprenticing for the studio and falling in love with the form.

At Columbia, Egan created sculptural ceramics while continuing to take functional ceramic classes on the side at Chicago’s Lillstreet Art Center. When Egan graduated in 2012, her professors encouraged her to pursue a career in functional ceramics.

In Chicago, her ceramics caught on for their contemporary, minimalist designs. These days, she spends eight- to 10-hour shifts working in her studio on custom planters, tableware, and terrariums (which are sold at Sprout Home, a modern home and garden center, where she also works full

## PORTFOLIO

time teaching terrarium-making classes). Her vases and tableware typically have splashes of color. She rarely uses texture, but when she does the patterns are precise: the impression of a leaf or shell, the holes in a colander, the printing of a name, or the texture of a coaster.

Recently, Egan began collaborating with Chicago restaurateurs on customized tableware. Her first commission was from chef Justin Behlke, the head chef of Thurk, an underground vegetable-focused supper club. The two Wisconsinites collaborated to create a set of tableware to match Thurk's earthy aesthetic: plates and bowls in yellow, gray, and green.

"My favorite part—and it does evolve—is collaborating and prototyping," says Egan. "That's where I get to explore new forms and work with other people, especially chefs or restaurateurs, because they're thinking about plating. They're thinking about these different aspects of functionality that maybe I wouldn't have thought of."

Egan was also commissioned by chefs Anna and David Posey, who own *Elske*, a Nordic-influenced restaurant in Chicago's West Loop. She created a set of cobalt blue ombre plates, pink and white dessert bowls, and a set of color-dipped vases.

Both Behlke and the Poseys plate their food on Egan's tableware, which gets plenty of love on their social media accounts.

In the future, Egan wants to collaborate with more restaurateurs and explore new techniques to further evolve her work. Still inspired by her hometown mentor's success, Egan continues to pursue expanding Little Fire Ceramics into a full-time career.

"I've always had this understanding that it is a tangible dream that I could own my own company, whether that is doing production ceramics full time or having my own studio," she says.

Egan's work can be found in-store at select Chicago vendors and online at [littlefireceramics.com](http://littlefireceramics.com). —[Negesti Kaudo](#)





2

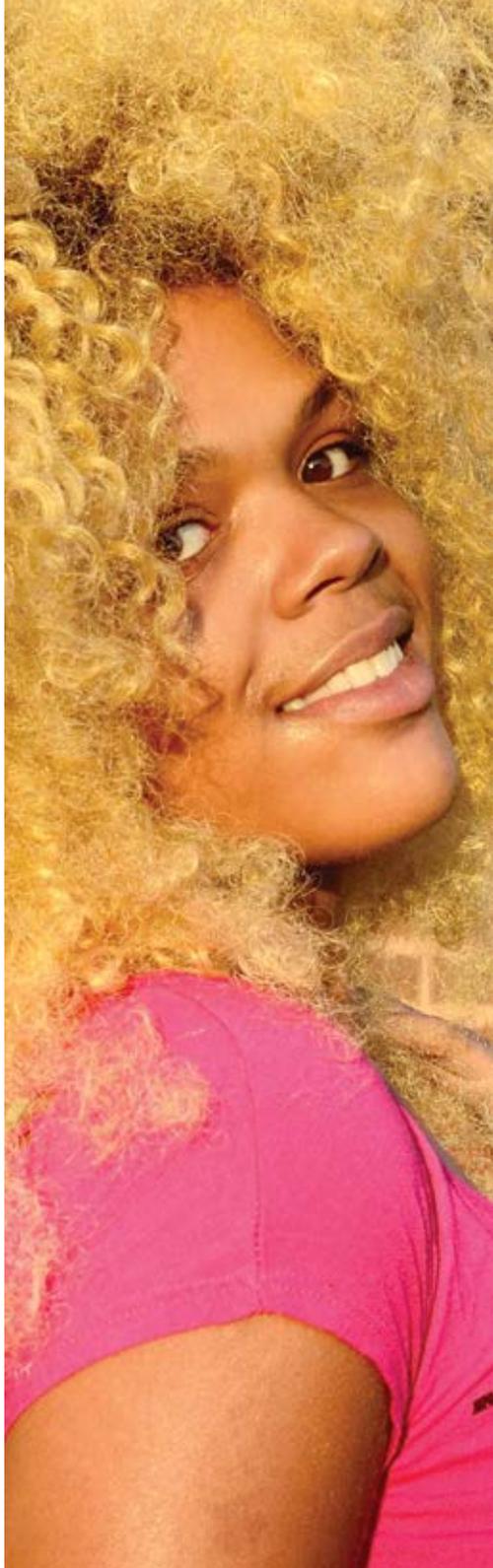


5

1. Glass Cloche Terrariums—The cloche glassware (intended for clocks) creates a closed system, allowing the terrarium to become humid and self-watering under the right conditions.
2. Bowls—Egan created these bowls for underground Chicago pop-up diner Thurk.
3. Raku Vase—This vase was fired using the Western Raku firing technique, where a vessel is put into a kiln and removed when red hot, then sprayed with water and intentionally dropped to create surface cracks.
4. Tabletop Planter—“I just love designing with the knowledge that somebody is going to use this for something that’s going to bring them so much joy,” Egan says.
5. Luna Mugs—Egan uses an air-compressor and spray gun to achieve the ombre color fade on her Luna mugs.



A  
New  
Narrative

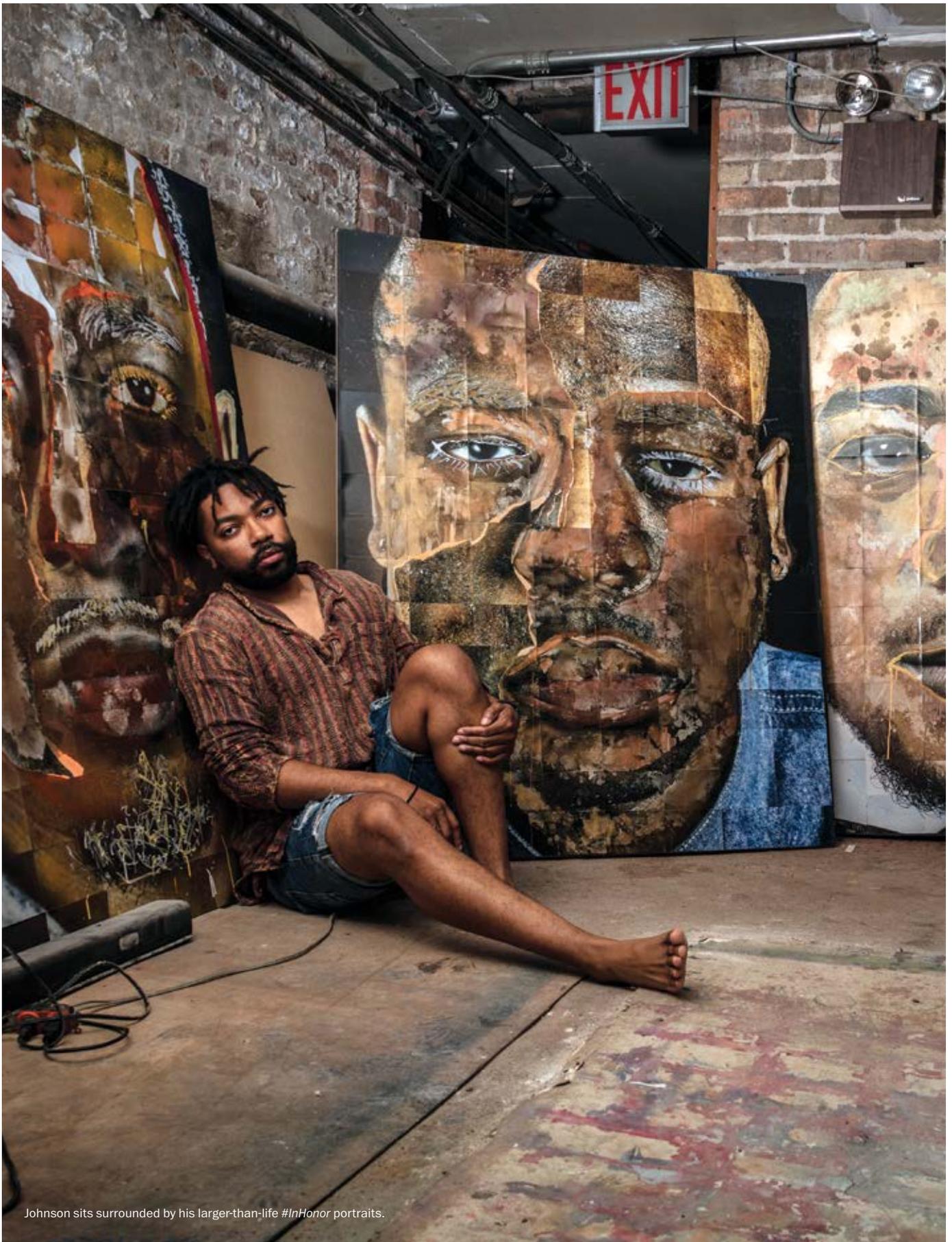


---

There is no one true definition of blackness in America today. As the country continues to diversify and change at a rapid pace, so too does our understanding of what it means to be black. Artists in particular continue to challenge our perceptions and understandings of blackness by creating work that speaks to their own lived experiences. They are telling new narratives of blackness, ones that center the minds, bodies, and environments of black people typically ignored. Here, three Columbia College Chicago alumni—**Ervin A. Johnson '12**, **Krista Franklin MFA '13**, and **Tonika Johnson '03**—discuss how they explore contemporary black life through their visual art.

## ARTISTS EXPLORING BLACKNESS

By Britt Julious



Johnson sits surrounded by his larger-than-life #InHonor portraits.

## ERVIN A. JOHNSON

**“I CAN’T SPEAK FOR ALL ARTISTS,** but I know for myself personally, I use my work to figure out how I want to exist and how I see myself,” says Ervin A. Johnson ’12.

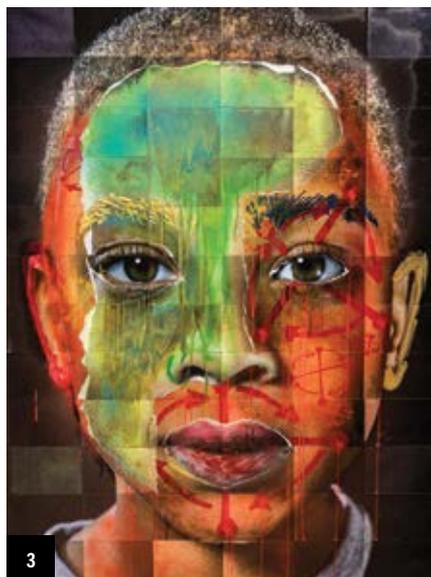
The multidisciplinary artist—best known for his deconstructed photo collages and colorful, abstract expressionist, mixed-media paintings—creates work that tries to disrupt and change the perceptions of black men and women. Specifically, Johnson is interested in depicting the femininity and humanity in the black body, two things that historically have been denied or ignored.

“I want to normalize how I see myself and how my friends present themselves to me,” Johnson says. “And then on a larger scale, how they present themselves to other people.”

Johnson cites his time at Columbia as a catalyst in the development of his artistic practice. At Columbia, Johnson learned the logistics of photography and experimented with painting. In 2016, Johnson also received the Diane Dammeyer Fellowship in Photographic Arts and Social Justice through Columbia and anti-poverty organization Heartland Alliance—which included a \$25,000 stipend to create socially conscious work.

An art history class introduced him to the philosopher Walter Benjamin and his concepts of art in the age of mass reproduction. “The notion of reproduction is important just because I’m trying to alter the perception of black men and women,” says Johnson.

As a photographer, Johnson creates mass reproductions of images of black people. Later, he cuts, paints over, strips, and reconfigures those photographs to create entirely new works. Johnson pulls back on the reconstruction, he says, when the original humanity in the image is no longer there. Johnson is renegotiating how people understand and interpret black bodies and their existence in this world. His work—large and evocative—tells a new narrative of blackness.



1. “Billy,” *#InHonor* series, photo-based mixed media, 2016—Johnson’s ongoing mixed-media project *#InHonor* began in response to the killings of Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner and will continue “as long as lives are lost from racism and police brutality.”
2. “Nicole,” *#InHonor* series, photo-based mixed media, 2016—The larger-than-life images portray various types of blackness and encompass different skin tones, genders, races, and sexualities.
3. “George,” *#InHonor* series, photo-based mixed media, 2016—Johnson photographs his subjects in Chicago, Atlanta, and New York City. He enlarges their portraits and recreates “skin” using paint, glitter, paper, and other media.
4. “Victor,” *#InHonor* series, photo-based mixed media, 2016—Johnson’s aggressive, hands-on process of creating his *#InHonor* portraits (including occasionally ripping the canvas) reflects the violence of police brutality and American society’s hostility toward black people.

**PORTFOLIO**



## KRISTA FRANKLIN

**“I DECIDED TO GO BACK** to school because I wanted to have more tools in my toolbox,” says Krista Franklin MFA ’13.

Prior to entering Columbia, Franklin worked almost exclusively as a writer and poet. She began making mixed-media collages to work through writer’s block. Although she never obtained a formal art education as an undergraduate (Franklin got her degree in Pan-African Studies), she took to the collage medium. Franklin often centers photographic images of black women or celebrated cultural figures like Run DMC in her work while playing with material as varied as magazine cutouts and craft ribbon. Soon, her collages found popularity among her peers.

“It was really the poets in my life—the writers in my life—who realized what I was doing visually and inspired me to put it in the public eye,” she says.

Her time at Columbia in the Center for Book and Paper Arts allowed her to master her new creative outlet in collage. “Let me think of this as a craft, as an art practice, and let me consolidate it and put it in the framework of what I already do with my writing as an interdisciplinary artist,” she says about her decision to go back to school.



Krista Franklin

Many of her pieces are inspired by her deep love of science fiction and fantasy. Franklin cites the science-fiction writer Octavia Butler as one of her biggest influences. Butler is one of the best-known African American writers of the genre. Franklin says her 2013 project, *The Two Thousand & Thirteen Narrative(s) of Naima Brown*, about a girl changeling on the precipice of young adulthood, was inspired by Butler’s work.

Like Butler before her, Franklin is interested in exploring the ways in which we find solace in our world and in the work we create. “How do we find peace in this chaotic landscape that we’re living in?” she asks. “What are the mechanisms and tools that we can use to find peace?”



1. *We Wear the Mask II*, collage on handmade paper, 2014—Franklin’s work emerges from her interests in science fiction, surrealism, fantasy, mythmaking, and black identity.
2. *To the Limit To the Wall*, album covers in handmade paper, 2016—Many consider Franklin’s work to be AfroFuturist: an aesthetic combining history, fantasy, science fiction, magical realism, and Afrocentrism.
3. *We Wear the Mask VIII*, collage on handmade paper, 2014—*We Wear the Mask* investigates negative perceptions of women by fusing female bodies with parts of animals, plants, and other organic entities.
4. *We Wear the Mask I*, collage on handmade paper, 2014—The series inspiration comes from 19th-century poet Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask,” which explores surviving in the world as a person of color.
5. *...voyage whose chartings are unlove*, altered book and mixed media in aquarium, 2013—In this case, her alteration and implantation of a book into an aquarium transforms an existing work into a new installation. The title pays homage to Robert Hayden’s poem “Middle Passage.”

# TONIKA JOHNSON

“I KNOW HOW TO TELL A STORY, and I know that because of Columbia and the resources it provided,” says photographer Tonika Johnson '03.

At Columbia, Johnson studied journalism and photojournalism. Her work focuses on capturing neighborhoods of Chicago that are typically only seen in one light. Johnson grew up in the city, largely in the Englewood neighborhood and on the North Side of the city. She began photographing her community while in high school.

Looking through her images, she realized the photographs she took were different than the typical depictions of her neighborhood. As an artist, Johnson aims to dismantle stereotypes of the city she knows and loves.

Social justice and art go hand in hand for her. “Photography is my form of social justice to shatter negative stereotypes,” she says. “I just really love being able to cut out a moment from a scene. I was able to perfect my vision of what I want to capture at Columbia.” The school taught her the fundamentals and technical aspects of working a camera and reporting that she continues to carry with her not only as an artist and a photographer, but as a storyteller.

In her most recent exhibition, *Everyday Rituals*, Johnson bridges the gap between



Tonika Johnson

the black secular and the divine. Churches, hair, self-care, cooking: These fundamental elements and ideas structure the project. In this exhibition, Johnson sheds light on the routines, rituals, and environments that encompass contemporary black life and does so through new mediums like film. She is both documenting the everyday and elevating it from its origins to fine art worthy of a second look.

“With the political climate of today, especially with Chicago being a focus and the neighborhood I photograph in being a kind of reference, I want people to find a space of healing and beauty and to be able to appreciate this city and the diversity that still exists,” she says.





- 1. *Rob and Lakeisha In Love*—A young couple walks hand in hand after purchasing a bag of snacks from the corner store on 66th and Morgan streets.
- 2. *Color of Money*—Lil Willie relaxes on a stoop at 64th Street and Racine Avenue.
- 3. *Barbershop*—A young boy gets the finishing touches on his new haircut at Longevity Barber Lounge on 68th Street and Ashland Avenue.
- 4. *Yoshi*—A young woman named Yoshi walks to her cousin’s house near 80th Street and Laflin Street in Auburn Gresham, the neighborhood next to Englewood.



# CAAN Updates

GET INVOLVED WITH THE COLUMBIA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AND NETWORK (CAAN)



1. **NYC Alumni Pre-Holiday Social**—Tons of alumni reconnected in Brooklyn, New York.

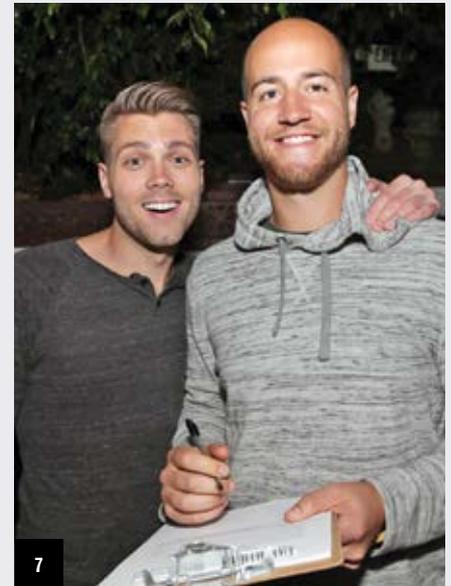
2. **LA Alumnae Entrepreneurs Panel**—Columbia hosted a panel of LA-based alumnae entrepreneurs: Nadine Velazquez '01, Niena Drake '02, Lara Marie Schoenhals '08, and Alyson Granaderos '04.

3. **Columbia Weekend 2016**—Our Alumni Social was held in the Design department's Fabrication Facility.

4. **Black History Month Alumni Panel**—Our Black History Month Alumni Panel brought together dozens of alumni, students, and guests.

5. **LA Alumni Oscar Party 2017**—LA alumni and guests gathered to watch the 2017 Academy Awards at the Downtown Independent Theater.

6. **Dinner with 12 Strangers**—Our first Dinner with 12 Strangers brought together Cinema Art and Science alumni for dinner and conversation at Filmworkers Club in Chicago.



7. **Columbia Alumni Filmmakers Night**—We screened short films by talented alumni in Los Angeles.

8. **Dallas Alumni Social**—We headed down to the Lone Star State and brought together a great group of alumni and guests to reconnect with Columbia.

9. **LGBTQ Alumni Panel**—Panelists (from left to right) Charlie Rice-Minoso '11, Justin Kulovsek '04, Kristen Kaza '07, student moderator Bree Bracey, Zuqy Cruz Marquez '06, Ervin A. Johnson '12, Sharon Zurek '76, and Robert Carnilius '15.

10. **30 Years of Graduate Journalism**—We celebrated three decades of Graduate Journalism at Columbia—including honoring Communications Professor Norma Green with a special recognition award.



# Class Notes

SUBMIT YOUR CLASS NOTES AT [COLUM.EDU/CLASSNOTES](http://COLUM.EDU/CLASSNOTES)

## 1970s

**VALERIE BURKE '76** won silver and honorable mention awards at the Tokyo International Foto Awards for her cyanotypes *City Dweller* and *Sailing*.

**MIKE FELTEN '72** released his sixth album, *Diamonds and Televisions*.

**DAVE KOHL '75** is now the publisher of *Real Estate Agent Magazine* for the Chicago-land area.

**JACQUIE LEWIS '75** co-edited the book *Working with Dreams and PTSD Nightmares: 14 Approaches for Psychotherapists and Counselors*.

**JOE POWERS '72** is working on a documentary photography project about Brooklyn firefighters called *The Red Hook Raiders*.

## 1980s

**JANE BISHOP LILLEGARD '85** was featured in an issue of *Real Estate Agent Magazine*.

**FELICIA COLEMAN-HAZZARD '88** is the founder and publisher of *Fragrance Belles-Lettres*, an online magazine about perfume.

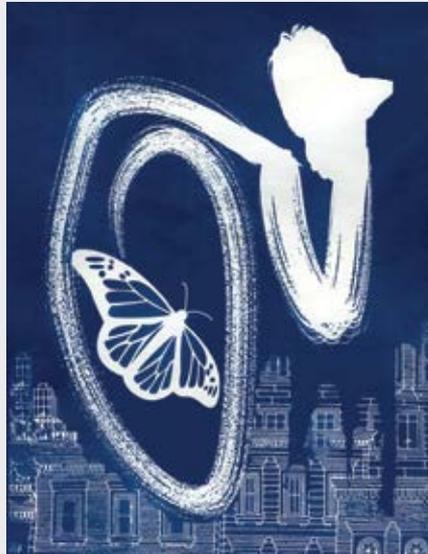
**MICHAEL GOI '80** worked as the director and cinematographer for the film *Mary*. He is also currently working as a writer, director, and cinematographer for forthcoming film *Guthrie*.

**DARREN JONES '86** starred as Alger Clark in the play *Never the Milk and Honey*, presented by MPAACT Theatre Company. He also celebrated his 25th anniversary on stage.

**KEVIN KOWAL '84** celebrated his ninth year with OnSite Audio of the Tri-States. OnSite Audio provides unique sound services for private, civic, and nonprofit events.

**TAGGART SIEGEL MA '85** directed *SEED: The Untold Story*, a documentary that follows the world of seeds and the people who protect them.

**PETER TESCHNER**, who attended Columbia in the 80s, was the editor for the film *Hidden Figures*.



*City Dweller*, cyanotype by Valerie Burke '76, was recognized at the Tokyo International Foto Awards.

## 1990s

**JEN ALBERT '97** won a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for Fight Choreography for the show *Punch and Judy*.

**GIOIA BEARDEN '90** was associate producer on PBS/ITVS docuseries *Party Girls: Discovering Politics Across America*, which follows first-time woman voters as they navigate the 2016 election. View all episodes of *Party Girls* at [reelroost.com/party-girls-series-1](http://reelroost.com/party-girls-series-1).



Gioia Bearden '90 worked as an associate producer on *Party Girls: Exploring Politics Across America*. Image provided by Marc Baptiste Photography.

**RONIT BEZALEL'S '99** film *70 Acres in Chicago: Cabrini Green* premiered on PBS this past spring.

**JOTHAM BURRELLO MFA '98** was named director of the Yale Writers' Conference in 2016.

**CURT CLENDENIN '98** and his band, Yachtley Crew, completed a tour of California. Clendenin also helped organize the 2nd Annual KaPow Intergalactic Film Festival.

**THURSTON COLEMAN '95** performed with the Cleveland Orchestra for their Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration Concert. He also staged an original gospel musical *The Gospel Nativity*.

**LORRI CHRISTOU '94** has been appointed vice president of public relations and external affairs at Choice Hotels.

**BRIAN DETTMER '97** showcased his *art of facts: Brian Dettmer* exhibition at Aurora University's Schingoethe Center in spring 2016.

**ERICA HUBBARD '99** was on an episode of NBC's *Chicago Med*.

**CHRIS MCKAY '91** directed *The LEGO Batman Movie*.

**MAX MCSIMOV'S '99** film *50 Feet of Song* was featured by Kodak.

**CARL SEATON '94** was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture (Television) for the film *Bad Dad Rehab*. Seaton also directed two episodes of the BET police drama *Rebel*.

**TIM STIPAN '99** did color correction on Martin Scorsese's film *Silence*.

**VANESSA VILLARREAL '95** worked as a volunteer writer for the US Army in Afghanistan for nine months, where she wrote more than 30 stories and was published in her community newspaper.

**ANGELA WILSON '94** published *Frannie Fireball & Sally Snowball* under pen name "Jay Wilson." The story tells the tale of two sisters who symbolize hot and cold weather.

## 2000s

**ALLISON BOSMA '07** cowrote and sold her first major studio movie, a Christmas comedy, to Universal Studios. She also wrote for the NBC sitcom *Undateable*.



Allyson Gonzalez '09 creates puppets from salvaged materials.

**RYAN BOURQUE '09** opened his first solo gallery exhibition at The ARC Gallery in Chicago in January 2017.

**KRISTY BOWEN MFA '07** published her sixth full-length book of poems, *salvage*.

**BRANDON DEPAOLO '08** wrote for *Super-Mansion*, an Adult Swim and Crackle sitcom.



Nomi Kane '06 created this illustration as a staff artist at Schulz Studio. All characters and content intellectual property of Charles M. Schulz, © Peanuts.

**ROBERT DICKE '09** traveled to India, where he played with the jazz trio Fared Haque and His Funk Brothers.

**JOHN FILIPKOWSKI '06** acted as CG Supervisor to the team at Sarofsky for the end title sequence of Marvel's *Doctor Strange*.

**JONATHAN FLYNN'S '08** band Diamond Hands released a self-titled LP through You Are the Cosmos Records.

**DENNIS GARCIA '00** will star in the 2018 feature film *Barrio Boy*. He also appeared in an episode of *Chicago Justice*.

**MICHAEL GODEK '08** launched a photography wet plate collodion product line called Modern Collodion.

**ALLYSON GONZALEZ'S '09** career as a puppeteer and process of creating puppets with salvaged materials was featured in DNAinfo Chicago.

**CARLY GROSE '09** is a producer on Tyra Banks' new talk show *FABlife*.

**RASHID JOHNSON '00** will direct an adaptation of Richard Wright's classic novel *Native Son*.

**NADINE JOHNSTONE MFA '08** published her memoir, *Of This Much I'm Sure*.

**NOMI KANE '06** is a full-time staff artist at the Schulz Studio in Santa Rosa, California, where she works on licensing, design, and illustration for *Peanuts*.

**LETSOMO LA TSHIPHA '03** appeared in the 2016 film *A United Kingdom*.

**ABBEY LONDER '08** was featured in *Los Angeles Magazine* for her work with Riot LA, the annual comedy festival she produces.

**TIFFANY MAGBY '09** is the associate producer for *The First 48*, an Atlanta documentary program.

**DAMON MALONEY '08** accepted a job as a multimedia journalist and reporter at WOIO-TV in Cleveland.

**NICK NUMMERDOR '07** codirected *Vannin*, a documentary about 1970s van enthusiasts. Nummerdor also coproduced and recorded sound for Hannibal Buress' documentary *Hannibal Takes Edinburgh*.

**WENDY PARMAN '03** created *Callie's Solo*, a semi-autobiographical musical/comedy web series about a voice teacher in Chicago. It was an official selection for Web Series Festival Global 2017.

**ILIANA REGAN '05** of Elizabeth Restaurant was nominated for a James Beard Best Chef award.

**BRIAN SCHAB '04** launched Schab Personal Fitness in Chicago.

**GARY MICHAEL SCHULTZ '01** wrote and directed the new action/crime thriller *Vincent N Roxxy*.

## ALUMNI NEWS & NOTES

**DEREK VAN PELT '06** is a partner in Mainstay Entertainment, a talent management and TV/film production company.

**JORDAN VOGT-ROBERTS '06** was the first American to be named the ambassador of tourism to Vietnam. He also directed *Kong: Skull Island*, which filmed in Vietnam.

**LENA WAITHE'S '06** drama television show *The Chi* was picked up by Showtime. She also wrote and starred in the *Master of None* episode "Thanksgiving."

**WHITNEY WELCH '08** is the coordinating producer for NBC's dance competition show *World of Dance*, produced by Jennifer Lopez.

### 2010s

**JILLIAN ADAMS '11** was promoted to coordinator in talent relations at DC Comics.

**CRISTINA AGUIRRE '11** is set photographer and web associate producer for the *Steve Harvey Show*.

**ALYSON BRODSKY '10** received a Forty under 40 award from *Pet Age Magazine* for her public relations work with Matrix Partners, a communications firm specializing in pet product marketing.

**JILLIAN BRUSCHERA MFA '14** is touring with arts education project The Mobile Mill: A Traveling Paper Studio, offering workshops in recycled hand-papermaking.

**JOHN CORCORAN '11** and **RAM GETZ '13** are writing a film based on former Chicago Cubs catcher David Ross' memoir, *Team-*

*mate: My Journey in Baseball and a World Series for the Ages*.

**EMILY DAHLQUIST '14** helped launch cultural venue Canvas Chicago, environmental organization Streets & Beats, and Dahl House pop-up shop. She is currently working at Mosaic, an experiential marketing agency.

**JAMES GIRARDIER '14** edits the *Philip De-Franco Show*, which won two 2016 Streamy Awards recognizing online video production.

**NOAH KLOOR '12** and **JEFF BLOOM '12** finished an interactive short film *Narrow Streets*. They also run a small commercial production company, Jeff & Noah, that worked on a series for LEGO.

**BRAD MEYER '15** received several Daytime Emmy and Golden Reel Award nominations for his work on *The Storybots*, *Future-Worm!*, and *Half Shell Heroes: Blast to the Past*.

**ALEXANDER MURFEY '16** currently serves with AmeriCorps in New Mexico, providing therapy and recreational activities to veterans and their families.

**ANGELICA MAZZA NIGAM '10** is a full-time producer at Google in San Francisco.

**AMYE ONG MFA '15** published a creative nonfiction essay in *Image Journal*.

**JESSEAL PACUBAS '13** produced a short web series pilot, *Sequins*, about a young woman's move from the suburbs to Los Angeles.

**SHANNON RYAN '12** was named the first Woman of her Word Disabilities Scholar, an

award presented by the British Academy of Film Television Arts.

**JESSIE SARDINA '14** accepted a position in scouting and development for Factor Chosen Model Management.

**JENNY SEAY '01, MFA '10** serves as a class giving officer in university development and alumni relations at University of California, Berkeley.

**CARLY SOTERAS '11** was a writer on the Fox police drama *APB*.



Luke Wieting MFA '10 scored the second season of *BLACK*.

**LUKE WIETING MFA '10** has scored and contributed music for numerous productions, including the documentary *Walking Man*, NBC's *The Island with Bear Grylls*, and sci-fi drama series *Convergence*. Wieting was also nominated for Best Original Score at the Indie Series Awards for the second season of the series *BLACK*.

### IN MEMORIAM

**LARRY BOWEN '10**  
**DEREK DZIAK '05**  
**WHITNEY PARCELLS '12**  
**ROBERT SCHNEIGER**, former student  
**DAVID J. STEINER MA '02**  
**DAVID ANDREW SZABO '70**

### MARRIAGES

**ROGER PERCY JORDAN JR. '97** and  
**ROBERT JASON CHENOWETH**



Jillian Bruschera MFA '14 is touring with arts education project The Mobile Mill: A Traveling Paper Studio.

**SUBMIT YOUR CLASS NOTES  
AT COLUM.EDU/CLASSNOTES**

# Upcoming Events

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND EVENTS,  
VISIT [EVENTS.COLUM.EDU](http://EVENTS.COLUM.EDU)



**MAY 12–AUGUST 18**  
**POLYDRAW: An Exhibition  
of Drawings and Prints**

ShopColumbia  
619 S. Wabash Ave., First Floor  
[shop.colum.edu](http://shop.colum.edu)

Cartoonist, frequent *New Yorker* cover artist, and Associate Professor Ivan Brunetti's illustrations and prints are on display at ShopColumbia. *POLYDRAW* opened during Manifest 2017 and includes a mural in the newly renovated ShopColumbia entrance.



**JULY 12–OCTOBER 1**  
**re:collection**

Museum of Contemporary Photography  
600 S. Michigan Ave.  
[mocp.org](http://mocp.org)

*re:collection* celebrates the Museum of Contemporary Photography's vast archive of photographs and explores how people perceive images. The exhibition spans the history of photography, with images organized in conversation with each other based on content and form.



**OCTOBER 12–DECEMBER 22**  
**Disruptive Perspectives**

Museum of Contemporary Photography  
600 S. Michigan Ave.  
[mocp.org](http://mocp.org)

In *Disruptive Perspectives*, artists use photography to explore gender identities in flux—rejecting a male/female binary to instead focus on human psyche, time, and the relationship between self and other.

**SEPTEMBER 21–23**  
**Chicago Human  
Rhythm Project**

The Dance Center, 1306 S. Michigan Ave.  
[colum.edu/dance-center](http://colum.edu/dance-center)

Internationally acclaimed artist-in-residence Dani Borak will premiere new works with the Chicago Human Rhythm Project, which showcases the breadth and depth of tap and contemporary percussive dance.



**OCTOBER 20**  
**Wabash Arts Corridor Crawl**

Wabash Avenue  
[wabashartscorridor.org/crawl](http://wabashartscorridor.org/crawl)

An integral part of Columbia Weekend, the Wabash Arts Corridor Crawl showcases the South Loop's dynamic, creative community with street art, open galleries, performances, music, pop-up experiences, and work from more than 200 artists.



# EASY WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED



## Columbia Connection

Subscribe to the monthly alumni e-newsletter. Sign up at [alumni.colum.edu/join](https://alumni.colum.edu/join) to receive info about upcoming events, career and networking opportunities, campus news, and more.



## Alumni Events Page

Check out the Alumni Events page at [alumni.colum.edu/events](https://alumni.colum.edu/events) and join us at an event near you!

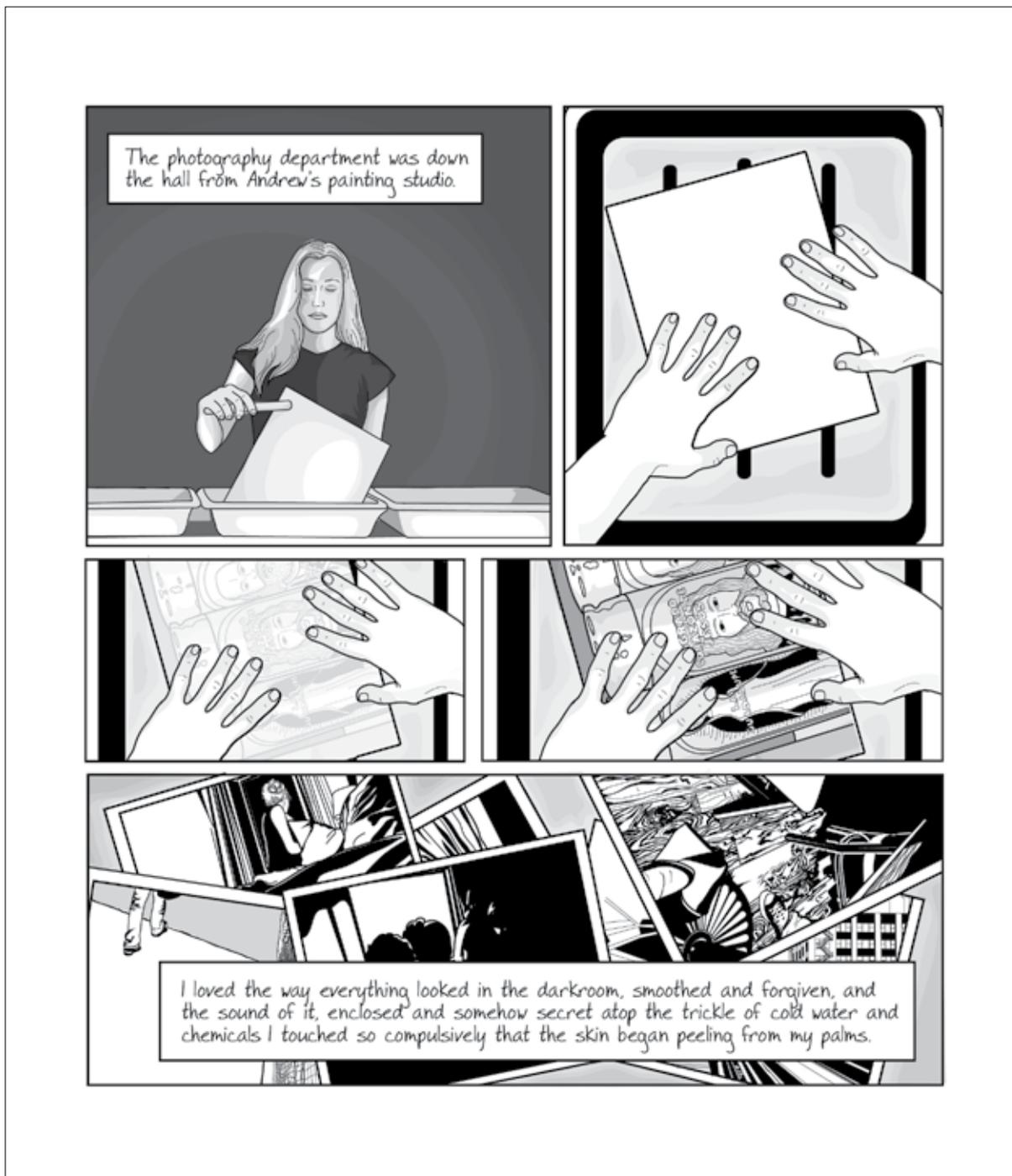


## Get Social

Follow the latest happenings on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, and **LinkedIn**.

## DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE

In her debut graphic novel, *Imagine Wanting Only This*, **Kristen Radtke '08** explores the many ruins of the world: the ruins of suburbia, of abandoned cathedrals and Icelandic plains, of old relationships and lamented ambitions. Radtke is no stranger to the publishing world: She's the managing editor for Sarabande Books and has also contributed to publications like *Oxford American* and the *New Yorker*. In this excerpt from *Imagine Wanting Only This*, Radtke remembers developing photographs in a Columbia College Chicago darkroom.



# DEMO

600 S. Michigan Ave.  
Chicago, Illinois  
60605-1996

[colum.edu/demo](http://colum.edu/demo)

Non-profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Woodstock, IL  
Permit No. 58



“I always wanted to go to college, but knew my mom couldn’t afford it. Everything changed the day I received my scholarship from Columbia.”

**WILL NICHOLSON '17**  
Comedy Writing and Performance

---

The Annual Fund helps students like Will succeed. You can change a student’s life right now when you give at [colum.edu/giving](http://colum.edu/giving).

**Columbia**  
COLLEGE CHICAGO