Letter from the Chair

As we close the books on an intensely eventful and event-filled year, I marvel anew at the amazing energy of our staff, faculty, and students and all they have accomplished this year. We began the winter semester with a stimulating series of lectures and visits by distinguished colleagues Stephen Melville and Jean-Louis Cohen, and then moved quickly into an intensive season of graduate admissions and recruitment. During the winter “break” many of us attended the annual meeting of the College Art Association in Los Angeles, where Michigan’s presence was very much in evidence. Nearly a third of the faculty presented papers on an impressive range of topics. These and the many excellent papers presented by our alumni testified eloquently to the department’s high national profile and ongoing commitment to rigorous and innovative scholarship. As always, it was a pleasure to reconnect with the many former Tappanites who joined us for a convivial reunion at our CAA reception. In May, we welcomed fifty-six members of the Class of 2009 into our extended family of alumni at our annual commencement (see p. 6). We shall miss this fine group of students who have enlivened our classes, kept us on our toes, and given energy to Helicon, our vibrant undergraduate art history association. Professor David Doris, Interim Director of Undergraduate Studies, presided over the presentation of awards with warmth and memorable humor.

Commencement was one of many recent causes for celebration. David Doris’s promotion to Associate Professor with tenure was another high point—well done, David! In March we celebrated the reopening of the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA), our closest neighbor and a key partner in our instructional and research missions. The opening of the spectacularly renovated UMMA has given the Department quite literally a new face—including surprising new perspectives on Tappan Hall as seen from the Frankel wing—and a new address (855 South State Street) without having to move! More importantly, the expanded UMMA offers exciting new prospects for our use of its spaces and collections in our teaching and research. On a more bittersweet note, we bade farewell and heartfelt thanks to UMMA Director James Steward, who has seen this project through so wonderfully and now leaves us to take on the directorship of the Princeton Art Museum. Interim direction of the UMMA is in the hands of an excellent team that includes our colleague, Ray Silverman, Professor of African Art and Director of the Museum Studies Program. You can read more about Ray’s important work on museums and heritage tourism on the next page.

Last but by no means least, the exceptionally generous response to the President’s Challenge match for graduate support has given us more to celebrate. We are grateful to all who contributed, and wish to extend special thanks to two friends of the department for establishing significant new endowments for graduate support. First, we say thanks to our colleague Ilene Forsyth who has made a substantial gift that will create competitive recruitment fellowships (see p. 4). Second, we extend special thanks to alumnus Ted Lin and his wife Sharon Chang who have created a fund that will support the study of Asian art, particularly contemporary Asian art. Their gift will supplement our strong resources in Asian art, and is especially timely as Professor Joan Kee, a specialist in contemporary Asian art, joins us this fall after a productive fellowship leave at CASUA. All of this bodes well for the continued strength of the department, even in difficult economic times.

Let me close with best wishes for a wonderful summer, and an invitation to join us in the fall when we will be returning to UMMA for our annual symposium, “Contemporary Strategies in Documentary Photography” on October 3. We will also join the Museum in hosting a special lecture by art historian Stephen Bann on October 28 in conjunction with the exhibition, The Lens of Impressionism. We will be sending more details about these and other events in the coming months, so stay tuned. As always we look forward to your participation, and to seeing you live and in person.

Mark Your Calendar!

2009 History of Art Symposium

“Contemporary Strategies in Documentary Photography” with Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula. Saturday, October 3

Check our website events calendar, http://www.lsa.umich.edu/histart/events for updated information.

Museum Studies Offers Undergraduate Minor

“Over the last six years, we have had many, many inquiries from undergraduates asking if they could have access to the graduate courses,” explained Professor Ray Silverman, director of the Museum Studies Program. This spring, students got what they were asking for when the Museum Studies Program announced its new undergraduate minor. Interest was so high that the first course offered, Museums in Society, filled on the first day.

The primary goal of the minor is to teach students how museums work, both in historical and contemporary contexts. This involves learning to critically engage the historical, social, cultural, artistic and scientific dimensions of heritage, both tangible and intangible, within the museum. For more information, visit www.umich.edu/~ummssp/
Raymond Silverman is a professor of Art History and African and African-American Studies, as well as the director of the Museum Studies Program. Throughout his career he has worked extensively in Ghana and Ethiopia, and has developed strong interests in the history of museums in Africa as well as the translation of local knowledge in community-based cultural institutions.

In his work and travels in Ghana, Silverman had encountered many “cultural villages.” Ghana is a major heritage tourism destination, and Silverman sees these cultural villages as having a common aim of attracting visitors by offering a standard representation of “Ghanaian” indigenous culture. “People were doing the same thing over and over again,” he said, posing the question “How does one represent the culture of a nation comprised of over twenty ethnic groups, each with its own culture?” So when a group of chiefs from Techiman—the community in which Silverman lived in 1979-80 while he conducted research for his PhD dissertation—approached him several years ago for assistance creating a similar cultural village, he feared it would only offer tourists the same kind of experience they could encounter at other, more accessible locations in Ghana. He also was aware, having spoken with these leaders who serve the community as custodians of tradition, that they are very concerned about the loss of local customs and beliefs in Techiman in the face of globalization.

Silverman suggested an alternative to the Techiman chiefs: Rather than make a common cultural village whose primary audience was outsiders and tourists, why not create a cultural center that would serve, first and foremost, the people of Techiman?

The chiefs immediately embraced the idea. This type of cultural center would strengthen ties between the culturally diverse people of Techiman (Ghanaians from all over the country live there because it is home to the country’s largest agricultural market) by offering a space where all the different cultures could express their traditions. It could also, by being a site where a variety of unique local cultural practices are performed, become a major tourist attraction.

This summer, Silverman will return to Ghana, as he has several times since 2005, accompanied by four graduate students, to continue working with the people of Techiman on the Techiman Cultural Center. If all goes as planned, the center, when finished, will include a museum, art gallery, archives, library, artisan workshops, auditorium, restaurant, and more. It will be a social and cultural space where all the different cultures could express their traditions. It will also be a site where the community at large, the chiefs are learning to concede part of their decision making authority to promote involvement from the community at large. Here in Ann Arbor, in 2006, Architecture and Urban Planning professor Jim Chaffers dedicated a design studio class to developing plans for the center. Some of his students traveled to Ghana with Silverman and Chaffers, where they met with a group of Ghanaian students who had done the same thing. They all worked together and presented their designs to the Techiman community, which selected one for the cultural center. Although this type of collaboration poses challenges, the extra time and effort is part of an important process that Silverman hopes will result in the community and organizers learning new skills. It is a process that ultimately will strengthen civil society in Techiman.

These challenges also bring opportunity. Although this type of public scholarship is often not recognized as being legitimate academic work, a project like the Techiman Cultural Center gives Silverman the opportunity to explore an emerging paradigm that emphasizes the importance of engaging and collaborating with local communities in the production of knowledge. “We’re pushing the envelope with regards to how universities connect with communities, with the rest of society,” he explained, adding that the Fall 2009 LSA Theme Semester, “Meaningful Objects: Museums in the Academy” will include a lecture series exploring the ways local knowledge is translated and represented in the context of the museum.

This work is a far cry from the more traditional art history Silverman has pursued in the past. This work, Silverman said, “takes several steps back from the object and considers the social space in which history and tradition are performed and culture evolves.”

“One of the marvelous things about this project is that it’s been a terrific opportunity for me to engage in fieldwork in Africa that’s relevant to what it is I do here at the University of Michigan, which is primarily in the area of museum studies, and by extension heritage studies” Silverman said. He will continue to follow the development of the Techiman Cultural Center, even as his responsibilities in Ann Arbor extend to the interim co-management of the University of Michigan Museum of Art during the search for a new museum director.

—Stephanie Harrell
On April 20, the department held a reception in honor of Professor Emerita Ilene Forsyth to celebrate her recent gift establishing the Ilene H. Forsyth Graduate Scholarship Fund and to thank her as well for her many and generous contributions to the department over a period of many years.

Professor Forsyth joined the faculty of the University of Michigan, her alma mater, in 1961, having completed her PhD at Columbia University under Meyer Schapiro. She has played an influential role in the field of art history, serving on innumerable international, national, and local committees. An eminent medievalist, she has specialized in the study of Romanesque sculpture and is best known for her prize-winning and influential study *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France.* Honored by the University with a named chair, the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of History of Art, she is a celebrated teacher and mentor who continues to participate actively in the life of the department.

Professor Forsyth’s generous support of art history at Michigan has made possible visits of distinguished scholars and has enabled graduate students to attend conferences, travel abroad, and conduct dissertation research. The newly inaugurated Ilene H. Forsyth Graduate Scholarship Fund will help the department continue to attract outstanding students to the PhD program each year by creating competitive graduate recruitment fellowships.

Faculty and graduate students were delighted to have the occasion to express their gratitude.
More than Fashion Workshop Repositions Important Periodical

“More than Fashion: The Journal des dames et des modes (1797-1835)” workshop, led by Professor Susan Siegfried, took place on April 3-4 here at the University of Michigan. The workshop presented a group of lively, high-quality papers by scholars in different disciplines, and the group very productively exchanged ideas and information over the course of two days.

The workshop concluded with an enormously successful day of papers presented by graduate students, which were commented on by workshop speakers. Their research came out of a graduate seminar offered through History of Art and Women’s Studies on “Costume, Fabric, Fashion: Picturing Femininity,” which was designed to coordinate with the workshop.

Tappan Talks Foster Professionalism, Community

A highlight of the History of Art graduate program at Michigan is the Tappan Talks. Twice yearly, graduate students, usually in their third or fourth year of study, present a paper to the History of Art community. The thirty-minute paper provides an opportunity for each graduate student to present his or her dissertation research to the department. Pedagogically, the talk provides training for giving professional papers, and the half-hour discussion that follows allows faculty and other students to give feedback on everything from the argument and material to related issues and the way the paper was presented. Tappan Talks also foster communication among the History of Art community, giving the entire department a chance to learn about the interesting work graduate students are doing.

Kathy Zarur presents “Masculinity Represented, Nationalism Abandoned in Photographs by Tarek Al-Ghoussein.”

2008-09 Tappan Talks

Christina Chang, “Looking at/with Rauschenberg’s Photographs”

Jessica Fripp, “Friendship and Fantasy at the French Academy in Rome”

Lauren Graber, “Gruppe SPUR and the Situationist International: Assessing Subversive Avant-Garde Strategies in Cold War Europe”

Ksenya Gurshtein, “TransStates: On the Uses and Limits of Conceptual Art in Eastern Europe”

Anna Wieck, “Looking at Floating Figures: An Exploration of Alienation and Growth in Wols’ Early Watercolors”

Katy Zarur, “Masculinity Represented, Nationalism Abandoned In Photographs by Tarek Al-Ghoussein”

Generous support for the workshop was provided by Rackham Graduate School, Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Center for European Studies, Department of History, Office of the Vice President for Research, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, Women’s Studies Department, Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, Department of the History of Art, LS&A Office of the Dean.
Congratulations Graduates!

Our annual spring commencement reception was held here in Tappan Hall on May 1. Faculty, staff, family, and friends were there to offer congratulations to our wonderful graduates as they celebrate this important and exciting milestone.
This past February, Helicon, the undergraduate history of art association, traveled to New York City for our fifth-annual spring break trip. We were accompanied on this trip by a native New Yorker, Professor David Doris. These annual trips are an opportunity for history of art students to visit major museums, monuments, and architectural sites. Past trips have included Paris, Mexico City, and Madrid, but this was the first trip within the country. Of course, this made “getting there” much easier than last year’s trans-Atlantic trip to Spain that was almost derailed by a storm.

The morning after our arrival, we met Professor Doris at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where he spent the morning lecturing about the pieces in the museum’s African collection and pointing out resonances between pieces there and other works by contemporary artists whose works incorporate African influences. The phrase “there’s something for everyone” is a horrible cliché, but after his lecture we were free to explore the Met’s massive collections and soon everyone found a particular artist’s works, or a certain period or culture to explore. This happened again and again throughout the week as we visited museums like the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Professor Doris also lectured at the American Museum of Natural History. This time the subject was not art but rather issues of museum presentation and display and how these have changed over the past century. This is a topic that matters to students in art history, since many of us will be seeking careers in museums. We also got an extraordinary and very moving opportunity to see how museums make these design decisions when we met with the designers currently working on the World Trade Center memorial and museum in their offices which overlook the construction at Ground Zero.

Even though we visited one to two museums a day, we were only in New York for one week and it was impossible to see all that the city has to offer. Fortunately, we had free time to explore and visit the sites that were of interest to us. For some students, this was a chance to check out more museums like the Guggenheim. For others, it was a chance to explore the city. I’ve been interested in religious architecture for a long time, and I took the chance to see two of New York’s magnificent churches, the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine, which is the largest gothic-style church in the world, and St. Patrick’s Catholic Cathedral.

The whole week was an amazing opportunity to see many of the works of art that we’ve studied for years, like Les Demoiselles d’Avignon by Pablo Picasso at MoMA or Duccio’s Madonna and Child at the Met, while seeing other pieces for the first time. It was also a chance to see the city with someone who knows it very well, and even though he was editing his book at the time, Professor Doris took the time to lead us on walking tours throughout Manhattan, visiting landmarks like Grand Central Station and Times Square and sharing the history of the city and the people who built it.

—Brian Goodwin
We’re still in the same location (between the UM Museum of Art and President Coleman’s house), but our street address has changed. The new address is 855 South University Avenue. City, state, and zip code remain the same: Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1357.

History of Art Alumni: What’s New with You?
Visit our website to submit your updated info and tell us what you’ve been up to since leaving Tappan Hall.

http://wwwlsa.umich.edu/histart