

THE VIEW FROM HERE

DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Letter from the Chair

Dear friends of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures,

On this beautiful late summer day, as we prepare for another *ereignisreiches* academic year, I think back to the many messages that have reached me from departmental alumni as far away as New Zealand and Germany, but also from around the GTA. We captured some of their impressions in our website series "Where are they now?", organized by our tireless, award-winning Departmental Alumni Ambassador and Executive in Residence, Joan Andersen. Among other things, we asked: How have your German Studies equipped you with the skills you need to do your job? We got great answers. The response from Rene Samulewitsch, who made a career for himself in communication and public relations following graduation from U of T, struck a special note with me:

German is a critical thinking language. It has grammar rules and sentence structure that are complex and require quite a bit of retention. You can't "wing" German. This background has helped me better review client materials, ask the right questions, and review written materials for grammar, context and understanding. Speaking German has helped me win new business when the client team had a German connection, helped me deal with international (German) media and even brought me to Munich for a client product launch.

"Critical thinking" is, of course, a skill that most especially the disciplines of the Humanities inculcate. Rene's remark highlights how the process of learning German trains students to think critically, and indeed, to see both the forest and the trees. A deep competence in German language and culture can become a key opening international career opportunities. And yes, "you can't 'wing' German," which many students, alumni, and instructors would agree is actually a good thing. This might be one of the reasons why our Department has one of the highest German program enrolments in North America despite generally declining enrolments throughout the Humanities. Our students like complexity, and they like becoming conversant in a "critical thinking language."

We hope this newsletter, edited by Angelica Fenner and produced and coordinated by Helena Juenger, will convey to you the excitement of 'things German' at the University of Toronto. It features thrilling new ventures gaining momentum, such as our iPRAKTIKUM initiative, which provides international work-integrated learning experiences in Germany and with German companies, educational institutions, and NGOs. As well, undergraduate and graduate students pursuing Yiddish studies in our program displayed creativity and ingenuity in assembling the Robarts Library exhibit, "Discovering the Mame Loshn," the first such installation at U of T in 20 years. Also featured are no less than four conferences that took place last year, including: the Frankfurt-Toronto Graduate Colloquium, the graduate conference "Pulver möchte ich schreiben," the annual Toronto German Studies Symposium spearheaded this year by Prof. Stefan Soldovieri on the topic of the Environmental Humanities, and the international conference "Transnational Perspectives on Black Germany," coordinated by Prof. Angelica Fenner in collaboration with the Black German Heritage and Research Association.

External support plays a vital role in the transformative activities organized within our Department. Gifts from the wider community of the Department's friends, colleagues, emeriti, and alumni have, for example, been crucial to the creation of undergraduate and graduate scholarships that enable us to attract the best and brightest students to our department. Please continue to keep these and other forms of support in mind. I also invite you to come to our many events in the coming year and to connect in this and other ways with the Department.

Markus Stock
Chair of Germanic Languages & Literatures
Associate Professor of German & Medieval Studies

NEWSLETTER 2018/19

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Symposium

iPRAKTIKUM

Graduate Student Conference



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HIGHLIGHTS IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

by Professor Erol Boran, Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies

A healthy undergraduate program is the backbone of any department. Our department continues to thrive and has even succeeded in increasing enrolment over the past decade. We are proud of this but remain aware of future challenges and strive to address them through continuing curriculum renewal and by introducing new courses, textbooks and pedagogical approaches. Here are some highlights of the past year.

- Prof. Hang-Sun Kim organized the workshop “Animating the Language Classroom,” featuring speakers from the University of Waterloo, McGill University, the University of British Columbia and the Goethe-Institut Toronto on topics such as technology in the classroom, online teaching, reading skills, grammar and classroom management.
- Prof. Stefan Soldovieri organized the 11th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium on the topic of environmental humanities. Panels explored the role the humanities can play in imagining paths to a sustainable future.
- Prof. Soldovieri’s engagement also led to the establishment of a new undergraduate course, “Global Issues,” which explores the contemporary character of globalization patterns and problems.

- Prof. Christine Lehleiter won the highly competitive and prestigious Faculty of Arts and Science Outstanding Teaching Award for her excellent pedagogical work in the classroom and for “spearhead[ing] significant curriculum development and redesign, which has helped to reshape undergraduate education in German” (FAS website).
- Our department continues to collaborate with Woodsworth College’s summer abroad program in Berlin. As in past years, we offered the course “A Tale of More than Two Cities,” which introduces the German capital as a space of cultural diversity, national memory and constant transformation. In addition, an intensive language course was offered in Berlin for the first time this past summer 2018.
- The German Embassy in Ottawa recently featured an article entitled “On Stage with German-Speaking Dracula” about Erol Boran’s course “German Theatre Production,” which introduces undergraduates to acting and staging techniques as well as to leading 20th-century theories of theater – and all in German. It concludes with three public performances.

As the above highlights reveal, 2017-18 was a rich and productive year for undergraduate studies in our department.

UNDERGRADUATE PROFILE: NOT YOUR TYPICAL SCIENCE MAJOR

by Anastasia Liu

As an “artistic type” studying Developmental Biology, I wearied of my classes which, by nature, pushed memorization and regurgitative testing, with “creative projects” limited to writing lengthy literature reviews, proposals, or lab reports. I missed my Vic One courses which emphasized classroom discussion, critical thinking, collaboration, and an overall marriage of Art and Science all within 25-student classes (compare to your typical Convocation Hall-sized science courses), meaning not only would you get to see what the lecturer looks like, they might know what you look like too! Kidding aside, these characteristics are almost exclusive to non-science courses and so, combined with my natural-born propensity for learning languages and age-long interest in German culture and media (ie. I listened to way too much Rammstein in high school), I took a placement test into GER101 and embarked on my journey towards a German Studies minor. Yes, a specialist plus

minor is probably overkill, but I figured I loved the intimate class sizes and Andrew Warren’s endearingly dry humour so much, that I might as well blast through all the German language courses and get a program out of it.

Now in third year, taking GER200, I decided to sign up for GER310 because I enjoy inconveniencing die *Verwaltungsbehörde* about not meeting prerequisites. To my surprise and delight, Professor Soldovieri approved my enrolment and proceeded to blow me away with his course deceptively generalized as “Contemporary German Culture and Media”. GER310 embodied everything I cherished about Vic One; every class was an analysis/roast session on current environmental literature, showcased the intersectionality of science and the humanities, and Soldovieri not only allows for but encourages creative freedom. The class allowed me to make an artistic video (group project), record a song (final project), and establish myself as a jaded nihilist for marks, all while fast-tracking my German abilities beyond the GER200 level to the envy of my peers.

In summary, I am grateful that my German minor offers me a well-rounded undergraduate career and provides an engaging, personal atmosphere created by passionate lecturers. It is something the typical science student will, unfortunately, never know.



ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH

by Professor Angelica Fenner, Associate Chair, Graduate Studies

It has been another industrious year for our Graduate Program in German Literature, Culture, and Theory. Last Fall we hosted a two-day graduate colloquium in coordination with Professor Carola Hilmes of the Goethe-Universität, bringing four students from Frankfurt am Main to our campus to join four of our own - Laurence Côté-Pitre, Veronica Curran, William Ohm, and Tobias Wilzcek - in sharing research in progress, capped by a thesis writing workshop sponsored by the School of Graduate Studies. Reflecting their program’s access to the Frankfurter Buchmesse with its emphasis on “das literarische Verfahren,” the Frankfurt students brought out unique angles on the marketing of the authorial persona and performative qualities of self-inscription in contemporary literature.

In April, our students took the lead in organizing a graduate conference that drew presenters from four continents to the Munk School of Global Affairs to deliver talks whose topical range spanned “schwules Schreiben,” vitalism in Schiller’s work, Schlegels poetics of the fragment, and Yiddishkayt. Closing with Dr. Peter Schweppe’s keynote on activist graffiti in Berlin, the event was also enhanced by access at Robarts Library to the remarkable travelling exhibit “Calliope” –a display of two centuries of Austrian

women’s social and literary engagement brought to our campus through PhD student William Ohm’s coordinated efforts with the Austrian Cultural Forum.

Our students continue to secure important external funding for their research. Second-year doctoral student Veronica Curran garnered a SSHRC grant for her upcoming thesis on social ethics in nineteenth-century German drama, and incoming international PhD student André Flicker has been awarded a Connaught Fellowship. MA student Livia Rrokaj and PhD student Laurence Côté-Pitre received travel funding from the DAAD for their researches on East German topics: respectively; the musealization of industrial landscapes and the literary avant-garde in Prenzlauer Berg.

Following on the heels of no less than six dissertation defenses that took place a year ago, our program is replenishing its ranks again this Fall with five new PhD students and six MA students, all domestic, with the exception of one international joining us via UBC’s MA Program in Germanic Studies. We look forward to another full and productive year ahead, beginning with the seven highly diverse graduate courses on offer from our faculty this Fall.



ON HIDING A PHD

by Christin Bohnke, PhD

despite it. To my own surprise, it worked. After four weeks of job hunting I signed a contract with a Berlin-based NGO as their new partnerships and projects officer. I was lucky that my employer understood that my PhD gave me great transferable skills and that they trusted me to apply them to highly diversified tasks. The good economic climate in Germany certainly also helped.

I now spend most of my time writing grants for projects that aim to give refugees access to higher education in Germany, Jordan and Lebanon. The team and I are responsible for all aspects of our future projects: content, funding, budget, partnerships. Every day is different, and I enjoy the variety and responsibility. I am also a project manager myself and, in that role, I am organizing community events such as a female empowerment week for refugees in Berlin. These tasks seem removed from my PhD, but they really aren’t: the writing skills that I learned as a PhD student are crucial for my work, so are my abilities to prioritize and to work under pressure.

Do I need a PhD for my work? The short answer is no - although the title helps when negotiating with external partners - but without the skills that I acquired during my graduate work, I would not have gotten my current job. So my advice to current graduate students is this: be confident in your skills and pursue the non-academic track if that feels right to you. And don’t hide your PhD.

“Hide your PhD!” That was the advice I was given when I attended a U of T panel on non-academic career paths. Three years into my graduate studies, I had made the decision to leave academia, partly because I knew working conditions would be less than ideal upon graduation, but also because I no longer saw my beliefs and values reflected in the academic world. Yet hiding my PhD, hiding something towards which I had worked so hard, not only felt wrong, it felt impossible.

Upon graduating in summer 2017, I launched my job search with an overly optimistic resolve: I would be hired because of my PhD, not



'BUILDING BRIDGES' PROJECT: THE *WHERE ARE THEY NOW?* SERIES

by Joan Andersen, Alumni Ambassador and Executive in Residence

This project was led by Joan Andersen in her volunteer position as Alumni Ambassador and Executive in Residence. The objective was to create a forum or a bridge between current German students and those who have in the recent or more distant past completed studies in our program. A second objective was to create a method for students to connect with alumni to inquire about specific careers. Joan herself moved into a career outside of German studies after graduating with an MA in German from the University of Toronto. Her aim with this most recent initiative was to conduct a telephone or

email interview with each participating alumnus as the basis for a 5-8 minute long article profiling his/her career. The project launched in June 2017 with email solicitations to German alumni regarding their willingness to share their career stories with current students in German studies. The response was very positive, resulting in thirteen who were interviewed and their career stories compiled into articles that were then published on the departmental website beginning in September 2017, with a new posting every 2 – 3 weeks. Students gained a sense of the myriad career paths that potentially await them upon graduation.

Interesting statistics about our alumni interviewees:

- 6 are working in academia – 2 in teaching roles abroad
- 7 are working in business – 2 in government positions, including one with an agency of the United Nations; 4 are working abroad; 3 work in Canada
- 2 have careers in law – one is studying law in Canada; the other practices law in the US

All interviews have been archived on our website. We hope readers find them informative, even inspirational. They have certainly proven that studying German equips students with skills and cultural insights leading to very exciting and diverse careers.

AN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION: TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK GERMANY

by Professor Angelica Fenner

Last May, the University of Toronto was host to the conference Transnational Perspectives on Black Germany. A collaboration with the non-profit organization *The Black German Heritage and Research Association*, this two-day event was spearheaded by an organizing committee that included Prof. Angelica Fenner (German and Cinema Studies, U of T), as well as Rosemarie Peña (BGHRA president and doctoral candidate in Adoption Studies, Rutgers), Prof. Emeritus Sara Lennox (German, University of Massachusetts), and U of T doctoral candidate in Cinema Studies,

Karina Griffih. Attracting both a university audience and general public into the into the capacious Innis Town Hall, the panels, keynotes speeches, and cultural evenings fostered international engagement with the social and cultural history of Black Germans, acknowledging that the Black German community is now understood to include all people of African descent living in Germany, both populations with German citizenship as well as immigrants and more transient groups from

elsewhere. Building on the transnational affiliations of diasporic communities in the GTA and of faculty and students at the University of Toronto, including co-sponsor units such as the Centre for Transnational and Diaspora Studies, the Women and Gender Studies Institute, the Cinema Studies Institute, and the DAAD-funded Joint Initiative in German and European Studies, the Toronto setting also continued the ongoing rethinking of the parameters of Black Studies, opening it to further national and transnational contexts, including Black Canadian Studies, Black European Studies, Diaspora Studies, and German Studies.

In addition to scholarly and life story panels, two keynote speakers were featured: Dr. Fatima El-Tayeb (University of California, San Diego), speaking on the topic “Beyond the Black Paradigm? Afro-Diasporic Strategies in the Age of Neo-Nationalism,” and musician, artist, activist, writer Dr. Noah Sow, with a talk titled “Visions and Challenges for Black German Studies 2.0.” Two cultural evenings included a screening coordinated with TIFF Higher Learning, for which Berlin-based German-Nigerian director Sheri Hagen was in attendance at TIFF’s Bell Lightbox. Her acclaimed feature *Auf den zweiten Blick* (*On Second Glance*, 2013) stars a dynamic Black cast in a story about love, betrayal, the visually impaired, and the literal and figural dimension of this trope. Also featured was a performance by the academic/artist, Dr. Layla Zami, collaborating with dancer Oxana Chi on a choreographed performance involving musical accompaniment and spoken word in memory of the late Afro-German poet, activist, and scholar May Ayim.



“DISCOVERING THE MAME-LOSHN”

A YIDDISH BOOK DISPLAY AT ROBARTS

by Miriam Borden and Jessica Pollock

Installed in five glass cases on the ground floor of Robarts Library from August 1 - September 1, 2017, “Discovering the Mame-Loshn: The Hidden World of Yiddish at Robarts” was the first exhibit at U of T in 20 years to feature Yiddish. Curators Miriam Borden and Jessica Pollock, both M.A. students in the Yiddish field of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, collected over forty books from Robarts’ Yiddish collection, which is one of the largest in North America. On display were selections from the Yiddish press, literature for and by women, sacred texts in Yiddish translation, volumes of historic dictionaries and lexicons, and beloved works from Yiddishland’s rich body of literature.

A bold Bauhaus design aesthetic framed explanatory descriptions of the objects on display, while large-scale black-and-white photographs supplied by the Ontario Jewish Archives depicted Toronto’s local Yiddish past. To enable interaction with the display, the curators placed nearly every book open to a page, inviting visitors not only to view the books, but to actually read the printed Yiddish word.

The five themes of the exhibit showcased the breadth of the library’s collection and pivoted on the complicated and often

unique existential struggles of the Yiddish language. Affectionately referred to as the mame-loshn (mother tongue), Yiddish was nonetheless subordinate to the holy Hebrew tongue, the language of prayer and the Bible. What was the significance, then, of a Yiddish translation of the Bible? Subordinate, too, to the great European languages – Russian, Polish, and its closest cousin German – Jewish writers were often reluctant to write in Yiddish, a language considered by some to be a derivative and inadequate version of German sometimes referred to as Jüdische-Deutsche or zhargon (jargon). By the early 20th century, however, Yiddish had emerged as a vital wellspring of cultural identity for Eastern European Jews, with a vibrant international press, provocative modernist art and literature, and groundbreaking Jewish scholarship. “Discovering the Mame-Loshn” provided a glimpse into the enduring legacy of this language and its literature.

The curators are grateful for generous funding and tremendous support from the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies.



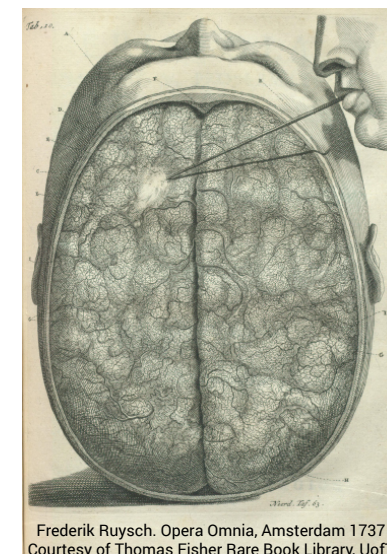
NEUROHUMANITIES RESEARCH: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE 18TH CENTURY?

by Professor Christine Lehleiter

In summer 2016, I participated for the first time in a conference on Neurohumanities organized by Pierre-Louis Patoine (Sorbonne) and Deborah Jenson (Duke University). While fascinated by the conference topic and the ways it brought together scientists from the fields of psychology, neurobiology, and literature, the conference also left me puzzled for two main reasons: I was astonished by the ease with which researchers who presented work undertaken by what we would consider empirical methodologies (e.g. brain scans) draw on historical concepts without revealing their origin and evolution. I was also (pleasantly) surprised to see that so many of the questions and the concepts employed to address them were related to questions and models familiar to me from my work in eighteenth-century literature and thought.

The project *Neurohumanities: What Can We Learn From The 18th Century?* researches mental processes depicted and discussed in literary and medical texts from the eighteenth century. Some of the questions I raise are: What do

eighteenth-century literary texts reveal or claim about the workings of the mind? How does the knowledge produced in the literary texts relate to knowledge produced in eighteenth-century medical treatises? Is there a way to connect today’s neuroscientific insights to ideas that emerged in the eighteenth century, and what does the answer to this question tell us about the process of knowledge production? These questions are particularly relevant when considering subjects such as emotion, cognition, and memory about which literary production has generated enormous knowledge throughout the ages.



Frederik Ruysch. Opera Omnia, Amsterdam 1737
Courtesy of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, UofT

The SSHRC Insight Development Grant is not only financing research stays at archival sites in Germany, but also affording me the opportunity to advance undergraduate and graduate research by hiring students to assist with the project. It is gratifying to see young researchers honing their skills while participating in ongoing studies.

THE 11TH ANNUAL GERMAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM
TOWARDS A LIVABLE FUTURE:
ENVIRONMENTAL
HUMANITIES AND
GERMAN STUDIES

by Professor Stefan Soldovieri

The 11th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium (April 12-13, 2018) brought together over 25 emerging and established scholars working in the area of environmental humanities. The speakers from Canada and abroad hailed from a breathtaking array of disciplines, from anthropology, architecture, and arctic studies, to literary and cultural studies, environmental studies, education, public and indigenous health, and religion. Prof. Sabine Wilke (Washington University), one of the pioneers of ecocritical work in the field of German studies, delivered the keynote on human-nonhuman interactions and performance.

The Symposium engaged many of the key issues in current environmental humanities work. Panels explored sustainability and world-making, human interrelations with plants and animals, water ethics, cultures, and politics, memories of petrocultures and industrialization, and littoral spaces in built, natural, and literary environments. Two energizing roundtables explored pedagogical approaches to environmental humanities as well as institutional and conceptual contexts of environmental humanities work – both at the U of T and elsewhere.

NEW INITIATIVE IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

by Helena Juenger & Professor Stefan Soldovieri, Project Leads

iPRAKTIKUM is an internationalization and experiential learning initiative dedicated to connecting U of T students who are studying German to internships in the GTA and abroad. Regardless of a student's major field of study, if they are taking German, iPRAKTIKUM is ready to help find work-related placements designed to deepen skills acquired in the classroom, provide language practice, and promote connections to local and global communities.

A lot has happened since our kick-off networking event in March 2017! Last fall, we launched a successful 'German in the City' pilot with the University of Toronto Schools (UTS) that is being continued through the support of the Milestones & Pathways fund. This next phase will include advanced undergraduates, who will be mentored by grad student interns and our fabulous lead teacher on site, Nicola Townend. Everyone wins! Students gain valuable experience in education and make career contacts; the school benefits from enhanced instruction through enthusiastic U of T students, enriched extracurricular experiences, and support in bridging teaching gaps.

A grant from the Advanced Teaching and Learning in Arts & Science (ATLAS) program has supported our project development, which has included an environmental scan, research on best practices in experiential learning, the creation of a comprehensive database of potential GTA partners, and student focus groups. iPRAKTIKUM has also secured funding from the Career-Ready Fund to develop an exciting, green-themed internship program based in Germany: *ecoHub Freiburg* will target businesses, NGOs, and university institutes in the southern German city, which is a hotspot of environmental research and policy and the location of one of the world's most sustainable urban developments. Students in fields such as environmental studies, urban studies, German studies, architecture, engineering, business, and international studies will gain valuable field experience in a range of areas related to sustainability and the environment in a cutting-edge, international context. Very cool!

Check our website for the latest news and opportunities as well as links to some of the media coverage iPRAKTIKUM has enjoyed.



A highlight of the event was the presentation of an installation – commissioned especially for the Symposium – by environmental artist Paul Chartrand. Playing on the German homophones säen (to sow) and sehen (to see), 'hoffnung sehen / see(d)ing hope' takes up a number of the artist's central concerns: the idea of plants as living collaborators, the relationship between nature, culture, and perception, and the effort to create scenarios in which humans engage in a productive exchange with the vegetative. In this work, viewers see the text in the form of living, speckled pea shoots visible through etched glass.

In his contribution to the kick-off panel, 'Sustainability in an Imaginary World', Prof. John Robinson, U of T Presidential Adviser on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability, offered hope of a positive way forward in a notion of 'regenerative sustainability'. Prof. Robinson urged us to shift our focus from doing less bad to doing more good, from damage control to creating benefits, from making sacrifices to making contributions. If there was a single theme that emerged from the symposium, it was that the humanities have a crucial role to play in helping to imagine this path to a livable future.



2018 GRADUATE CONFERENCE ENCOURAGES SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

by Livia Rrokaj

This year's graduate conference, "*Pulver möchte ich schreiben*": *Engagement in the German Tradition* was inspired by the work of Theodor Mundt. In a passage from *Moderne Lebenswirren* in 1834, he states, "Pulver möcht' ich schreiben, in die Zeit hinaus, und auf dem Streitroß meiner kriegführenden Gedanken möchte ich als ein Held ausziehen in das Schlachtgetümmel der Geschichte." Here, Mundt expresses his passionate desire to change the world through art, deconstructing it to ensure its progressive future. Bringing together an international group of scholars from Germany, the United States, China, and Nigeria, the conference asked its participants: What can the German tradition teach us about the role of the Arts as a means to shape the world?

Across two days of presentations and discussions, each participant demonstrated their singular affinity for Mundt's statement. Attendees were confronted with various manifestations of the written, spoken, sprayed, and glued word that enable social engagement. Beginning with the vitalist *Lebenskraft* present in art as much as in humans and other living beings, participants were propelled into a realm of fragmentation, which may, after all, be quite universal, but also violent. Fragmentation, whether linguistic, cultural, or personal, brings into focus new perspectives on our personal engagement. We gained inspiration from a visit to the

CALLIOPE exhibit at Robarts Library, installed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Austrian Republic through a focus on women's suffrage that serendipitously coincides with the recent #METOO campaign.

Professor Peter Schweppe's keynote address introduced artists like "Barbara" and Irmela Mensah-Schramm, whose work breaks with the popular perception of graffiti as vandalism and instead democratizes resistance to social hate, violence, and inequality. Discussions across our two-day gathering revealed that we live in times of great change. As students and scholars of the humanities, we study authors and artists of the past as a means to generate new knowledge with which to improve our future. Every individual who has or is currently contributing to this field does so to articulate their ideas and be heard by others. They wish to motivate people, to engage in dialogue, to exchange thoughts and beliefs, and create partnerships. If society in the past has valued force over the power of reason, and authority over the gift of community, many people are now moving towards more autonomous forms of being, identity, and culture. We are coming to terms with the fact that standing up to hate, socio-political violence, and environmental injustice also means continuing to organize gatherings like this one.

SPECIAL NOTE

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