Bringing Art to Students by Bringing Students to Art

The Art Bus makes its last gallery tour of the fall term

By Sharon Kasper

On Saturday, Nov. 19, about 30 Columbia students from a wide range of backgrounds gathered for an afternoon of intense gallery-hopping. It was the last in a series of Art Bus trips started this fall by the CU Arts Initiative.

The week beginning Oct. 17, groups of Columbia students have been spending their Saturday afternoons exploring New York City galleries under the guidance of the University’s art experts, including Gareth James, chair of the Visual Arts Division, and five graduate students at the School of the Arts (SOA).

Miwako Tezuka (GSAS’05) admires working at Zazhu Hashi at Rosa Pacia in Chelsea.

SOA M.F.A. candidate Ranjit, focused on her area of study—contemporary South and East Asia art—particularly pieces that explore women’s experiences and perspectives.

Of the hundreds of galleries to choose from, time and geography restricted Ranjit to just four: Blommons Gallery (555 West 25th St.), to see the work of Chinese female artists Wu Pei-Ching and Jun Shuo; Ceres Gallery (547 W. 27th St.), to see the group show by 10 artists in the Asian American Women Artists Alliance; Bos Pacia (508 W. 26th St.), to view pieces by Indian artist Zarna Hashmi; and Sundaram Tagore Gallery (137 Greene St.), to contemplate works by another Indian female artist, Sekhar Quarti. Ranjit’s whirlwind tour included some non-art students who’d never been to a gallery before—some had not even been to Chelsea or SoHo. Ranjit said she hoped she’d been successful at providing the kind of short and quick introduction that would give them the confidence to explore the city’s gallery scene on their own one day.

A few students admitted they did not appreciate all of the pieces Ranjit showed them. Tanuja Genghali, who studied at the Columbia School of Public Health, said she judged the pieces largely on the basis of aesthetics—whether she liked the way they looked.

For art students, by contrast, Ranjit’s tour provided an opportunity to expand their knowledge of the international art scene. Miwako Tezuka, a graduate student in art history, said she had been taking the Art Bus tours to gain a wider exposure to the city’s best artists, as recommended by other art students.

While this was the last Saturday for the Art Bus, the organizers hope to repeat the event series next fall. Meantime, students can keep visiting galleries on their own. At least one member of the Nov. 18 expedition is already planning to do just that. Li Tang, an ‘07 student at the School of International and Public Affairs, declared he would go gallery-hopping again, “by myself or with a friend.” For more information on the CU Arts Initiative, go to www.cuarts.org.

Scholar Presents Nabokov the Translator

Long after gaining renown for his fiction, Vladimir Nabokov began the less glamorous work of translating great Russian writers into English.

The Russian language is notoriously resistant to translation, said preeminent Nabokov scholar Brian Boy at a Harriman Institute lecture on Nov. 14—which proved an irresistible draw for the celebrated author and butterfly expert.

“I loved difficulty, in a way,” said Boy, a professor of English at the University of Auckland. “He loved the challenge of translation.”

Boy, whose two-volume biography of Nabokov has won numerous awards, began his presentation by reading part of the introduction to his forthcoming collection of the novelist’s verse translations, Verses and Versations—and co-reading it with Stanislav Shubrin.

Fielding a question about what it was like to study Nabokov’s translations, Boy said he was constantly reminded of one of the writer’s most enduring characterizations: “an almost moral passion for precision.”

Still, there were times when the mental exercise of translation stymied him. Boy said, particularly when he was working on verses by Aleksandr Pushkin, Nabokov’s greatest muse—and frustration.

Pushkin’s “Ya sas lyubit” is considered one of the greatest Russian love poems—but reading a misguided translation by Carol Ann Duffy might not leave that impression, Boy said. A 1929 version by Nabokov was an improvement, he argued, in that it preserved the original rhyme, but still rather “trite.” Boyd’s third example flowed from his own pen, and he explained his complicated decision of which word to end with, conveying a sense of the layered obstacles translators typically face.

Finally, Boy read Pushkin’s original lines in Russian while the audience followed him on copies of the text, which included a literal word-for-word translation into English. “How often do we get to hear Pushkin, in Russian, with a New Zealand accent?” he asked, drawing one of several rounds of laughter from the group.

Columbia would have foregone this unique opportunity altogether if it had not been for Rebecca Jane Stanton, an assistant professor of Russian at Barnard College and fellow New Zealander, who invited Boy to participate in the Harriman event, which was co-sponsored by Maison Francaise and the depart- ments of Slavic languages, English and comparative literature, and French and romance philology.

The lecture was also timed to correspond with the worldwide celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Nabokov’s most popular work, Lolita. This year has brought a flurry of Nabokovian activities, including a forthcoming book, Visiting Nabokov, by Nina Khurshcheva, an adjunct at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs.

Rolex Program Celebrates International Artists to Columbia

A standout cast of international artists—including author Toni Morrison, theatre director Sir Peter Hall, filmmaker Mira Nair and choreographer Saburo Teshigahara—is treating Columbia students to a week of lectures, readings, performances and other events.

All of these talented individuals have been taking part in the Rolex Mentor and Protege Arts Initiative, a program that seeks out young artists and pairs them with recognized masters for a year of one-on-one guidance and instruction.

According to Rebecca Irvin, executive director of the program, “The heart of this initiative is the intense, personal interaction of artists, which by nature is something that happens in private. How can we share these interactions, and open them to the public?”

“The answer, we felt, was to form a partnership with Columbia University: an educational institution of international stature, which has integrated the arts into all aspects of its life, using them as a bridge between the campus, the community and the world. When we began to explore this possibility with President Bollinger and with Judith Shapiro at Barnard College, we thought they wanted us to invite us to present the Rolex program at their schools.”

The artists have been invited to Columbia by President Bollinger under the auspices of the Columbia University Arts Initiative and the Columbia University World Leaders Forum, and to Barnard College by President Shapiro.

Calendar of Events

Luncheon Lecture and Book Signing

Wednesday Nov. 30, 1:00 p.m.

Avery 6 Slave Session 114

Sahel Al-Hiyari, architect from Amman, discusses his book, Projects, his experiences with his mentor, and his current projects and the practice of architecture in today’s Middle East. Sponsored by Columbia’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. Open seating. For reservations and information, contact RolleMoistanProtecte@grovesdev.com

Public Reading

Thursday Dec. 1, 6:30 p.m., Millicent McIntosh Student Center, Barnard College

Author Julia Leigh, Rolex protege of Toni Morrison, reads from her first novel, The Houston. Morrison joins Leigh in a discussion of their mentoring relationship. For reservations and information, contact RolleMoistanProtecte@grovesdev.com

Arts Symposium

Sunday Dec. 4, 3:00 p.m., Miller Theatre

Various Rolex program mentors—including choreography Trisha Brown, authors Tahar Ben Jelloun, Ariel Dorfman and Maria Vargas Llosa; stage and screen director Peter Hall; artist Geraldine James; and filmmaker Mira Nair—discuss the cross-disciplinary nature of the mentoring function in a panel moderated by Gayatri Spivak, Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities, Columbia. For reservations and information, contact worldleader@columbia.edu or (212) 854-2037.

One Act Play

Sunday Dec. 4, 8:00 p.m., Miller Theatre

Rolex, Columbia University Arts Initiative and World Leader’s Forum present Tshewang, a play from South Africa, written and directed by Lara Foot Newton, Rolex protege of Sir Peter Hall, and starring Mucdseede Shabangu and Kholeka Qhawe. Complimentary tickets provided by Rolex; ticket price per person General seating by prior reservation only. www.cuarts.org/tshewang.htm. (646) 530-8298, or at the Miller Theatre box office starting Nov. 19.

Dance Workshop

Tuesday Dec. 6, 10:30 a.m., Strong Studio, Barnard Annex, Barnard College

A choreographer and Rolex mentor Saburo Teshigahara and his Rolex protege Jusaid Jemal Sendi, with Sang Jijia, Rolex protege of William Forsythe, consider the mentor’s role in the choreographic process at a workshop session of Mary Chayes’ Workshop: A New Framework of Composition. Limited space is available for the public to observe by prior reservation at (212) 581-2646 or RoleMoistanProtecte@grovesdev.com.

Rolex Mentor Protege Arts Initiative