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# Arts on Fire

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**On the page. In strip malls. On the screen. On the streets. In gardens. On flip-flops. On walls. In the desert. On money. On subways. Even huddled with Walt Disney's legendary Imagineers designing the theme parks of tomorrow. In 2010, UCLA's renowned creative stars in the School of the Arts and Architecture, the Hammer Museum and the Fowler Museum supercharge their efforts to create works of lasting beauty that also play a powerful role in the ongoing experiment that is human society.**

Like beauty, "art" is fluid, infinitely changing in the eye of every beholder. We all celebrate the artistry — and artistic impact — of UCLA Live, the Hammer Museum, the Fowler Museum and other high-profile hotbeds of creativity that emanate from UCLA's School of the Arts and Architecture, but that's not good enough for the boundary-pushing, internationally acclaimed school. It wants to rethink the very definition of what people call beautiful ... and what's considered art.



A shot from Catherine Opie's series on mini-malls, which features people-less, black-and-white urban scenes shot in Los Angeles and Chicago at night or in the early morning without any human activity.

And in 2010, UCLA Arts, which houses disciplines as diverse as media arts and ethnomusicology, embarks on an ambitious mission to bring fascinating projects to life all across Los Angeles — and as far away as India.

The school is setting its creative sights on subjects as varied as AIDS education, urban renewal, rebranding Los Angeles and conceptualizing the theme park of the future, all while simultaneously pursuing traditional activities such as commissioning concerts, staging plays and curating gallery space. The goal: Create the future of how we engage with and rely on art in our lives.

"That's what it means to be a Bruin and an Angeleno," says Christopher Waterman, dean of the School of the Arts and Architecture. "This is a multicentric place of discovery and creativity. Do I mean UCLA? Do I mean Los Angeles? Take your pick. It's both ... or either ... art is never just about entertainment, solving societal problems, building community or self-expression. By definition, art is about all these things."

As a professional musician with a doctorate in anthropology, Waterman says he was "predisposed to look at art this way" when he arrived in Westwood six years ago, "but the sheer scope, energy, ambition and vision of our faculty amazed me from the start. It still does."

## IN WALT'S WORKSHOP

UCLA professor and renowned architect Greg Lynn is taking 14 students through a course whose final product will be ruminations on the evolution of resorts, ships and amusement parks, and whose partner is none other than Walt Disney Imagineering. "The company is already designing the roller coasters of the future," says Lynn. "What Disney is asking us to imagine is, what's the artistic and contextual experience that goes along with those rides: the eating, shopping, even waiting in line."



For example, Lynn's students spent the first quarter designing a dynamic park gateway that embraces digital media and robotic movement. This quarter they're redesigning the plaza, entry and movement around and through the Epcot sphere and a full array of resort amenities, from cafés to landscaping. They are reimagining and updating the global themes of Epcot with contemporary concerns for energy, environment, communication and technology. Lynn says that the Disney project stretches architecture students — and working professionals — because they're more apt to think about how a single person moves through a space, while Disney looks at families, groups and crowds.

Among the projects coming out of Arts is cityLAB's fascinating "WPA 2.0: Working Public Architecture" competition, in which teams from more than a dozen countries are asked to envision creative ways to use art to enhance infrastructure — such as these flights of imagination using city water resources to help revive depopulated cities, beautify urban beaches and pools and undo ecological damage.

"We're designing for a collection of people, possibly ranging in age from 2 to 80, with individual as well as collective needs and interests," he explains.

But is that art? Lynn thinks so. "Art and architecture have always been part of the Disney tradition," he says. "Think about Tomorrowland just for a moment. Back in the fifties, that whole thing was an amazing exercise of art and design in support of imagination."

## THE STRIP-MALL SENSIBILITY

Imagination is also at play in the work of School of the Arts and Architecture professor and famed photographer Catherine Opie. A series of photographs that she took of Los Angeles-area mini-malls back in 1995 are now on display through June at the Getty Museum as part of the *Urban Panoramas* exhibition.

"To take something as maligned as the strip mall and consider it as art certainly surprised some people," she says. "But art is meant to do that."

Opie included her inkjet prints from scans of 7x17-inch negatives of strip-mall photos as part of an "American Cities" series in which she crossed the country looking for "specificity of identity," a particular image that defines a place.

"In L.A., the mini-mall can be seen as the basis of community, allowing for the reiteration of the American Dream," the artist explains, where immigrants can get a toehold on the ladder and small-scale entrepreneurs can give neighborhoods a personality that suburbs lack when they "turn all their commerce over to Jamba Juice and Starbucks."

Opie, who's been teaching at UCLA since 2002, when she was "stolen away from Yale," is currently working on a new series of photos about high school football, conceiving of the players and their field of play as extensions of the American landscape. In Los Angeles, she's turned her lens on Fairfax and Crenshaw high schools.

"High school football is about people and place and event, every Friday night, and it's also about some shared values in America," she says. "You wouldn't believe how many fathers in this country want their boys to grow up to be football players," she says, adding a bit wistfully, "I wish I could say the same for art."

"It takes a lot of courage for students to pursue their passion for the arts," Opie concludes. "I notice it mostly with the undergrads. They can be very nervous about stating that they want to be artists. Many are terribly worried about what their parents will think."

Indeed, she says that many students she teaches can only manage to study art if they pursue it as a double major with, say, biology. UCLA Arts reports that about 10 percent of its undergraduate students double-major.

"Their parents want them to be something 'sensible,' so if they pursue art at all, many do it as an adjunct to science and other courses their parents want them to take," says Opie. "And it's really tough."

## HEALING ART

In the area of art as activism, few have done as much for so many as David Gere, associate professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures, director of the Art/Global Health Center at UCLA and, in 2004, the co-organizer of the first UCLA World AIDS Day, which has now become an annual December event. Gere melds art and medicine in a way that is both creating beauty and saving lives. The center, which he conceived of and proposed to UCLA administrators, was founded in 2006 and has as its stated mission, "To unleash the transformative power of the arts to advance global health."

Through the art that the center displays and inspires, patients learn that "they are not alone, that they can teach others and connect through art, and that their lives can be transformed," Gere says. The center has created a 14-day curriculum on AIDS awareness, treatment adherence and stigma reduction that it delivers to patients at a major hospital outside of Chennai, India — that nation's largest government hospital — in collaboration with a local theatre troupe. "We're not doctors, but we knew that through art and entertainment, we could get people to sit and listen and, hopefully, change their behaviors," he notes.

A recent evaluation of the program has found that it is working. Social stigma, which keeps people from seeking help, is down. Knowledge and behavior change, including adherence to drug protocols, are all up.

On the lighter side, perhaps, but with no less serious consequences, are two other center projects, Brazilian artist Adriana Bertini's traveling exhibit of dresses made of prophylactics (called *Condom Couture*) and New Delhi artist-duo Thukral and Tagra's flip-flop sandals, adorned with a graphic display of the proper method for donning a condom.



Among the world-famous faculty at UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television is Marina Goldovskaya, one of Russia's best-known documentarians. This shot is from her famous 1988 film *Solovki Power*, a searing film about the first Soviet prison camp, which became the model for the dreaded gulags that followed.

"You can look at these as art or education, as serious or silly," says Gere. "I don't care as long as we get people talking."

## THE CITY AND THE CITY IN THE VILLAGE

Harold Williams '46, chair of UCLA Arts' board of visitors and president emeritus of the J. Paul Getty Trust, adds, "Everything's different and dynamic here. The city's size, its diversity and lack of a rigid arts infrastructure, all this is what makes it great. 'What is art?' is a freer question here and that's what nourishes the university and the city."

In 2010, that bond will get considerably stronger.

The mash-up of urbanity and university, in fact, is an ongoing exploration in Westwood.

Architecture and Urban Design Professor Dana Cuff, director of the urban-renewal think tank cityLAB housed at UCLA, believes art should be integrated into the very fabric and



UCLA Design | Media Arts students used Intel chips to create biorhythmic subway straps that change color depending on the mood of the person holding onto them.

infrastructure of a city. CityLAB's "WPA 2.0: Working Public Architecture" project, for example, posits that "shovel ready" is much less important than "shovel worthy" and that federal stimulus dollars targeting crumbling city roads, bridges and sewer systems should emphasize beauty and design.

The urban think tank's open competition sought innovative, implementable proposals that place infrastructure at the heart of rebuilding American cities. Some of the ideas from nearly 200 submissions by teams from 25 U.S. states and 13 countries included proposals to use automobile emissions in tunnels for alternative-fuel production, to transform neglected city streets into neighborhood parks and to creatively use water resources to help revitalize depopulated cities, undo ecological damage, and develop urban beaches and pools.

"During the New Deal and the first WPA (FDR's Works Progress Administration), the government was actually hiring artists," Cuff notes. "The aesthetics of the projects were seen as central. I'm worried with the current programs that the main beneficiaries of these dollars will be companies that sell chain-link fences, concrete and security systems, and that would be a true shame."

Another competition UCLA Arts students are participating in emanates from the corporate world, which engages Professor Rebeca Méndez and her design students in a search for solutions and new ways to use available technologies. This year, DMA project sponsors include Nokia and Intel Corp.

"They like to work with us because the research that comes up through a company is often too narrow and only seeking to solve a very specific problem," she says. "With our students, they know they're going to get broader, more far-reaching ideas and brainstorm."



Flip-flops that show the proper way to don a condom are part of famed Arts Associate Professor David Gere's "Amp it Up!" teen AIDS awareness project.

Last fall, at the Intel University Expo, ideas as fantastical as glowing light flower gardens that measure your carbon footprint to sub-way cars that display the emotional disposition of their passengers through heat-sensing diodes that then project "mood colors" on the grips and posts the commuters touch came from some very simple questions asked by Intel project managers about innovative uses of existing technology.



"Companies know that these projects add value because they cultivate the mind of the beginner," says Méndez. "With the mind of an expert, you're always going to get less because they know too much to let their minds wander. With these students, so much more is possible."

Like money that explodes, for example. Another Méndez project, to design a global currency, not only produced stunningly artistic bills and coins — one team of students suggested legal tender that self-destructs if not used within 30 days. Their idea was not only to redesign the coins of the realm, but to rethink the entire concept of money and create a scenario that accelerated consumerism to see where hyper-spending might lead us.

UCLA Arts Professor Rebeca Méndez asked her students to create a global currency. This creation links denominations with a climate classification system that specifies "biomes": tropical, dry, temperate, cold, polar and aquatic.

## TOMORROW STARTS TODAY

TFT, of course, is already a major factor in the creative life of L.A. with the Film and Television Archive and renowned faculty like acclaimed Russian documentarian and Bruin film professor Marina Godovskaya, who guides her students through the documentary-making process, encouraging them to "tell their Los Angeles story."

So UCLA-created art will be showcased in all kinds of ways in 2010. Everything is connected, and art, film, commerce and building tomorrow's cities today are all part of the mix.

"Where does sculpture end and architecture begin? What's public and what's private?" asks architect Lynn. For a professor designing amusement parks, and his vastly talented colleagues, it's clear that these are not just idle musings. They're questions about who we are and how we live and create in this city, and they remind us that at UCLA art is everywhere, and it's never just academic.

*The Arts won't be the only UCLA creative star to shine in 2010. Over at the School of Theater, Film and Television, new Dean Teri Schwartz '71 has students and faculty buzzing about her ambitious plans. For 32 years, Schwartz was one of Hollywood's most successful producers. Then she was named founding dean of Loyola Marymount University's film and television school. She came to Westwood last summer, where she has found a whole new story to tell.*

## Q: What is your vision for TFT?

A: The vision is for TFT to serve as a premier interdisciplinary global professional school that develops outstanding humanistic storytellers, industry leaders and scholars, whose diversity of voices enlightens, engages and inspires for a better world. The first week of school, I gave a welcome speech to about 500 students, and when I talked about the philosophical underpinnings of where we are going, they burst into applause. I mean, pretty thunderous applause. I stopped my speech and thought, "Wow, this really resonates with them." This generation is very primed for that vision.

**Q: You emphasize that TFT is one school, not three separate disciplines.**

A: The university system was constructed in a different era and over time, departments and schools have become separated from one another. I don't think that's the world we live in. The great film and theater school has to get in front of the big questions of our time. We need to prepare our students for a world in which technology delivers content across a variety of platforms. The world of performance is very different now. There should be far more dialogue and creative interaction between all of the students in this school.



**Q: You were so successful in movies. Why do you want to do this?**

A: I had a really blessed career, but now it's time for me to help the next generation and to be of service. For me, it was a very easy switch to make.