The FMS Newsletter has gone electronic!

You can find our current, past, and future newsletters on our Film and Media Studies Department website: https://film.ku.edu/newsletters

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The Film and Media Graduate Council (FMGC) is proud to host Dr. Daniel Herbert of the University of Michigan Screen Arts & Cultures program as its keynote speaker for the 19th Annual FMGC Research Symposium. Dr. Herbert will present a talk focusing on the educational value that video stores offer their communities. The event is free and open to the public.

Keynote Address: Dr. Daniel Herbert  
Date: February 12, 2016  
Time: 7:00 p.m.  
Location: Alderson Auditorium, KU Memorial Union

The FMGC Research Symposium will take place on February 12 and 13 in the Alderson Auditorium. Panel discussions will include graduate students from FMS, Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; Communication Studies; and the English departments at UMKC and Kansas State University.

The Department scholarship application is available online and in 204 Oldfather Studios through March 1, 2016. Applications are due March 1, 2016.

Criteria for Department of Film and Media Studies scholarships and awards are available at http://film.ku.edu/scholarships. Some of these scholarships may be used to provide funding for scholarships awarded by the University so may not be offered through the Department’s awarding process.

The Department of Film and Media Studies requires students applying for departmental scholarships with a financial need component to have filed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or KU’s International Student Need Analysis Worksheet (ISNAW) by March 1, 2016. Students may access the 2016-2017 FAFSA applications directly through the U.S. Department of Education website at http://www.fafsa.ed.gov. The 2016-17 ISNAW is available on KU’s Financial Aid & Scholarships (FAS) website at http://affordability.ku.edu/forms. Please contact the FAS if you have questions about which form to fill out.
Recognitions and Accomplishments

The Commons awarded $9,946 to a faculty research project in the fall 2015 cycle of its Interdisciplinary Starter Grants competition.

Joo Ok Kim, American Studies; Joshua Miner, Film and Media Studies; Chris Perreira, American Studies, and Magalí Rabasa, Spanish & Portuguese, received funds for their research, which will investigate the relationship between new media practices and activist movements.

Their interdisciplinary project, Trans/forming Activist Media in the Americas, brings together activist communities, artists and scholars from Mexico, Canada and across the United States to investigate how the arts, new media technologies and activist discourse and knowledge production intersect. The events, which include performances, film and media exhibitions, roundtable events and a keynote lecture, will take place in fall 2016.

The Commons is a partnership of the Biodiversity Institute, the Hall Center for the Humanities and the Spencer Museum of Art. Its mission is to bring together scholars and students from the sciences, humanities, and arts to explore the reciprocal relationships between natural and cultural systems. Interdisciplinary Starter Grants are made possible through the support of the KU research.

Copied from: https://news.ku.edu/2016/01/04/commons-awards-starter-grants
Out & About

When University student and filmmaker Savannah Rodgers was 12, she was inspired to become a screenwriter. It was all because of one movie: “Chasing Amy.”

Rodgers, who is from Olathe, said the film's plot and narratives drew her into the story.

“I was so inspired by it on a multitude of levels that I really wanted to become a writer,” Rodgers said. “Ever since then I have just wanted to create movies that make people feel something.”

Before college, Rodgers wanted to move to California to pursue a career in film but realized it wasn’t financially reasonable, so she came to the University to learn as much as she could about film. Initially she wasn’t going to attend college, but is now she is a junior and pursuing a degree in film and media studies.

Though Rodgers knew at an early age she wanted to be a writer, it wasn’t until she was 16 that she realized her passion for filmmaking. Rodgers said she thinks film is a powerful medium that allows for a lot of creativity with dialogue and translates life’s subtleties.

“[Film] is a very interesting way to connect with an audience because I think a lot of people learn through what they see and hear,” Rodgers said. “If you have a great movie you can inspire people one way or another, not that I’m necessarily inspirational. It’s just my goal to make people feel happy or sad, hopeless, or whatever.”

During her time at the University, Rodgers has directed seven films. One of them, “Politically Correct,” has been in 15 film festivals, including Free State Festival, KC Fringe Festival and Merlinka International Queer Festival in Serbia. The film has also won a multitude of awards.

“Politically Correct” is a short film about TV writers who try so hard to be respectful that they can’t get any work done.

Rodgers said the film comes down to political correctness.

“I feel like we are at a time in our culture where people are very opposed to the idea of political correctness, but all it really means is being respectful of one another, so I thought it would be funny to write a short film about TV writers who try so hard to be respectful that they can’t move forward with their careers,” Rodgers said.

The short film is six minutes long, and Rodgers said she can’t believe it’s been in as many festivals as it has. She said she thinks it has been a good experience and said she’s met a lot of talented people she would have never met otherwise.

Rodgers said she keeps a running list of dialogue on her phone of things she hears and thinks would be hilarious for her screenplays.

“There is a great quote that says, 'If you are going to tell people the truth, you better damn well make them laugh.' That’s pretty much how I feel,” Rodgers said.

She said she bounces a lot of her ideas off of her writing partners at the University, and by the end of the week she has a script to show them. While the script may prove to be its own task, Rodgers said the process of filmmaking is a “pain in the ass.”

“Making movies is a difficult process on any level, especially on a professional level, but it’s very hard when you have no money,” Rodgers said. “It’s a lot more time than people think, and it’s very grueling at times, but if you don’t love it, what’s the point?”

Rodgers said that when she makes her short films, a shoot usually takes two days, but she has also shot a micro short film that only took about an hour.

The location of a film also plays a big role in films. Rodgers said she loves shooting in Lawrence because it’s a “great community” that supports the arts and her fellow filmmakers.

In the future, Rodgers said she hopes to run a TV show and would like to do more directing.

“I want to work and work hard, and I want to make stuff that makes people happy,” Rodgers said. “If I make the audience feel something very strongly one way or another, whether it’s good or bad, I did my job.”

Copied from: http://www.kansan.com/search/?t=article&nsa=eedition&q=savannah+rodgers&x=9&y=14
Out & About

Professor Kevin Willmott participated as a judge for the 5th annual KCWIFT/KCFF* Short Screenplay Contest which was sponsored by Kansas City Women in Film & TV and the Kansas City FilmFest.

Other judges include Morgan Dameron of Bad Robot Productions, and Kerri Yost of the Citizen Jane Institute and Film Festival.

The contest has 2 goals: (1) Encourage more women to write screenplays. (2) Encourage all writers to develop female protagonists.

Please see http://www.kcwift.com/contest/

Professor John Tibbetts had a showing of some of his portraits at the Kansas Memorial Union in January. The signed portraits among the 25 paintings by John Tibbetts include Jim Carrey, Sophia Loren, Clint Eastwood, Lauren Bacall, Leonard Nimoy, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Costner and Lillian Gish. A reception was held on January 21. The display closed on January 22.

See the next page for more information about the exhibit.

Congratulations to Courtney and Zack Sanchez on the birth of their son! Ezequiel Cruz Sanchez was born on January 31 and was 8.5 pounds and 20 inches tall.
Out & About

KU professor — and former journalist — used multi-disciplinary education to connect with celebrities

For journalists, interviews can sometimes be the most daunting part of the job. How one breaks the ice can set the tone for the rest of the interview.

However, John Tibbetts, a former journalist turned film and media professor at the University had the perfect ace up his sleeve for just that. Tibbetts painted portraits of celebrities, often as a character they portrayed, and had the portraits signed during the interview.

“Many of the portraits come from my time working at CBS television and NPR,” Tibbetts said. “I had access to musicians, actors, directors and all sorts of celebrities. Many times they would ask for copies of the paintings and people like Schwarzenegger, Michael Douglas, Julie Andrews and Gene Hackman were all people who had a lot of experience doing artwork themselves so it made the interview very friendly and fun.”

Tibbetts’ exhibit entitled “Stargazing” is held at the Kansas Union until Jan. 22 and features a collection of those signed paintings of artists, musicians, and actors in their prime. Tibbetts also has video footage of interviews he conducted where he showed his creations off to the stars.

He said that, in addition to his work as a journalist and professor, he has always been an artist. Josh Wille, a graduate student who studied under Tibbetts, said that the paintings perfectly show the professor’s multi-disciplinary skill and his ability to incorporate multiple forms of media together.

“They represent his many years of work as a film critic and journalist,” Wille said. “He’s always been an advocate for getting out into the field and opening a dialogue. They’re not just a conversation, but a creative exchange between an artist and the celebrities, who are artists themselves which elevates the whole interview.”

Tibbetts received his Ph.D. in multi-disciplinary studies, to include art history, theater, photography and film from the University in 1982.

“I just have a general fascination with the human face as a landscape and ever since I was a little kid I’ve always been drawn to faces,” Tibbetts said. “It didn’t matter if they were famous or not, it was just the nature of the face that attracted me.”

Tibbetts included the footage of ten interviews he had conducted to help show the faces in motion rather than only having them frozen in the paintings.

“The interviews take you back to the ‘80s and ‘90s and it’s interesting to see these people back then and you can see Jim Henson, of course before his untimely death,” Tibbetts said.

Tibbetts said that the paintings, often completed the night before the interview, would enhance the interaction and help the celebrities to open up.

“I have a painting of Christopher Reeve as Superman with the American Flag behind him,” Tibbetts said. “He was a wonderful person and what a tragedy his life turned out to be, but here he is at his peak as Superman and the interview with him was very moving and he was very sincere about his association with his role as Superman.”

The painting used for the poster promoting the gallery, four images of Robin Williams as four different characters, helped to create an amazing experience for Tibbetts as well.

“He was always ‘on’ all the time,” Tibbetts said. “But seeing those images allowed him to switch back and forth to different characters during the interview.”

Wille said that it’s Tibbetts’ ability to see the connections among art, music, literature, and artistic media as a whole that allows him to make connections with people more openly.

“I think he really embraces the idea that we have to look across disciplines to enrich our artistic study and practice,” Wille said. “That’s what I really respect about him.”

Out & About

KU junior starts animation club to introduce animation basics and pursue collaborative projects

A new club at the University of Kansas is seeking to attract students with a passion for animation.

Ricky Smith, a junior from Lansing and the president of the KU Animation Club, began the organization last summer. Smith said he’d always been interested in animation, but didn’t have the opportunity to start a club until college. Smith said the Animation Club will welcome people who are learning to animate as well as those who are well-versed.

“I wanted to find more people who wanted to learn how to animate, or to just come make little animated shorts and stuff,” Smith said.

The club helps students with the basics of animation, but after the basics are covered, Smith said they plan to pursue bigger, more collaborative, projects.

“After a while we can start a really big project, like a little short film, and submit it to a film festival,” he said. “[We’re] just trying to work together so we can build our portfolios.”

This semester, the club will be holding meetings at the Union, instead of off-campus at Oldfather Studios, where meetings were held last semester. Smith said he hopes that a more convenient location will encourage more students to join.

Stephen Swart, a senior from Dallas and treasurer of the club, said he hopes it leaves people with a better understanding of animation.

"I just hope that people can appreciate that it’s an art form," he said. "You have a lot more creative control over it than you would with real people, so you can just do basically anything you want with it.”

Smith said both the hardest and most rewarding part of animation is having patience with the process.

“If you look at how many drawings you’ve already done, you’re going to go crazy and think you can’t go any higher,” he said. “It pays off in the end when you see how cool it turns out, like you can’t believe that you turned an inanimate object into something that’s real.”


In December Professor Cathy Joritz held a four-day silhouette animation workshop in Germany at the Koppfuessler Art Studio. Studio director, Elena Neustadt, and 20 students, ages 8-18, made this happen. Joritz’s lesson included a Lotte Reiniger silhouette animation before students began animating. Watch the result, "Crazy Christmas," on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hreH-.
Out & About

Two films with KU ties to show at Slamdance Film Festival

A short film directed by film and media studies student Savannah Rodgers is an official selection of Slamdance. Rodgers’ film, “Sketches,” is one of 14 films selected for the second edition of the Fearless Filmmaking: Art on Your Own Terms category sponsored by Digital Bolex.

Brock Chart, music composition graduate student, wrote and recorded sections of music in the film “Savasana,” which will open at Slamdance on Saturday. “Savasana” is one of 23 films featured in the Narrative Shorts category and was selected out of the more than 3,700 films submitted to Slamdance.

Held in Park City, Utah at the same time as the notable Sundance Film Festival, Slamdance is focused on emerging filmmakers and low-budget independent films.

Rodgers and Matt Jacobson, associate professor of film and media studies and director of photography on “Sketches,” were both invited and will attend Slamdance.

“As a young, independent filmmaker, getting into Slamdance is a huge honor,” said Rodgers, Olathe junior. “This is the first time my work has been accepted into such a renowned film festival, and I am thrilled for the experience.”

Rodgers’ film follows two women who struggle with domesticity and their opposite personalities after falling deeply in love. Along with other students from film and media studies, the film features two actors from the Department of Theatre, Ashley Kennedy and Laurie Winkel.

“It is so exciting and rewarding for the entire department to have professional-level films like Savannah’s receive recognition on an international level,” Jacobson said. “It’s an opportunity to show the world what kinds of projects are created here in Kansas, at KU.”

Jacobson added he thinks some people will be surprised that a student from KU produced and directed a film with both the quality and subject matter of “Sketches.”

Rodgers has been directing, writing and producing short films since 2014. Her debut short film, “Politically Correct,” is presently on the festival circuit.

Rodgers is a filmmaker based out of the Kansas City and Lawrence areas. Since 2014, she has been producing short films, web series, PSAs and television pilots. Rodgers is a production freelancer, and she serves on the board of directors for Kansas City Women in Film and Television as well as the See/Saw Film Festival. She also runs Professional Amateur Productions.

“Savasana” is a 10-minute film about a middle-age man who goes to yoga class, has a traumatic experience and returns home shaken. Chart and the film’s director, Brandon Daley, are grade school friends from Salina. Daley invited Chart to collaborate on the film.

Slamdance was established by a wild bunch of filmmakers in 1995 who were tired of relying on a large, oblique system to showcase their work. Slamdance is an ongoing experiment that has proven, year after year, when it comes to recognizing talent and launching careers, the independent and grassroots communities can do it themselves.

Slamdance continues to grow and exemplify its mantra: By Filmmakers, For Filmmakers

Copied from: https://news.ku.edu/2016/01/22/two-films-ku-ties-show-slamdance-film-festival

Check out the FMS Student Stories section on Vimeo: https://vimeopro.com/kufms/student-stories/video/148241174
Kansas filmmaker talks about Hollywood’s diversity problem

Next month’s Academy Awards has a brewing controversy over the lack of diversity among the 20 acting nominees for the second straight year, an issue that has some prominent people in Hollywood opting out of attending the ceremony.

Among those taking issue with the all-white slate of nominees and Hollywood’s diversity issues in general is director Spike Lee.

Lee’s writing partner, Kansas filmmaker Kevin Willmott, said it’s more than just an issue about awards.

Lee and Willmott’s movie “Chi-Raq” generated some Oscar buzz when it was released late last year, but the nominations didn’t come.

“It always sounds a little selfish when you’re complaining about awards, but I think it’s deeper than that,” Willmott said.

Willmott, who is also a University of Kansas professor, has made several movies about race. One of them, “CSA: The Confederate States of America,” offers a satirical look at the country had the south won the Civil War.

In 2016, Willmott said Hollywood is behind the times.

“I think people think they’re hipper than they really are sometimes, and they think they’re more progressive than they really are,” he said.

In an interview on ABC’s “Good Morning America,” Lee said his decision to not attend the Oscars this year isn’t a boycott.

“This goes further than the Academy Awards. This goes to the gatekeepers,” Lee said, saying responsibility lies with the studios that have the power to greenlight films.

Academy President Cheryl Boone Isaacs has responded to the controversy with a promise to make the organization’s membership more diverse.

“The thing I really love about Spike is that he’s a change agent. A lot of people really can’t do that,” Willmott said.

Jada Pinkett Smith was also one of the first stars who said she would avoid the Oscar ceremony because of the controversy. Oscar winners Whoopi Goldberg, George Clooney and Michael Moore have also spoken out about the need for more diversity in the acting nominees.

Out & About

Kansas City visual effects artist credited with creating first Internet viral video

After 10 years in Los Angeles, Branit made his move back to Kansas City, where he has been since 2004.

He says his access to Google Fiber at his crossroads office has given him a leg up on some of his competition.

“The work we do for television in the visual FX realm, we can get up two hours earlier and upload things directly to Hollywood faster than somebody in Santa Monica can upload something to Hollywood,” said Branit.

When he isn’t working on a project for Hollywood, Branit just may be working on the next viral hit. Having roughly five videos with nearly 10 million views.

“The viral videos I’ve done recently are much shorter. People’s attention spans are a lot shorter,” said Branit.

Branit is expanding his body of work beyond visual FX and viral videos.

“When I made 405 it was a reaction to wanting to take what I knew about visual effects, what I knew about filmmaking and just make something. And I am very much at that place again,” said Branit.

Branit is currently working on a short film project and is looking for financing to complete the 10 to 15 minute short film.

Branit filmed scenes for a teaser of “Bully Mech” in the west bottoms with local actors and crew.

“It’s a short film that’s really kind of an inspiring story about a girl who meets a robot and together they kind of make each other whole in a world that’s not very friendly,” said Branit.

Want to see more films?

To see more of Branit’s videos:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxEAIrI4dQrYXV71AWJDjSw

With 'Chi-Raq,' Kansas Filmmaker's Uncomfortable Jokes About America Keep Coming

Spike Lee (with Sharpie in mouth) and Kevin Willmott, among others.

The new movie Chi-Raq, about gang violence in Chicago, opens Friday. It caused controversy long before it opened. Some Chicagoans don’t like their city being compared to Iraq, while other critics have said the premise is sexist. It’s making national headlines as Spike Lee’s new movie, but that’s only partly true. The script was first written by Kevin Willmott, a film professor at the University of Kansas.

Willmott’s connection with Spike Lee goes way back – as does his tendency to make provocative films.

More than a decade ago at the Sundance Film Festival, Willmott screened C.S.A.: Confederate States of America. Filmed in a style that parodies Ken Burns’ PBS series The Civil War, it’s a mockumentary, supposedly filmed by a British news network, depicting the history of America after the South won the Civil War.

Willmott includes commercials for businesses (such as the Coon Chicken Inn) and products (Darkie toothpaste) that actually existed, or that would be sold today in the Confederate States of America. For example, there’s an ad for the Slave Shopping Network.

Willmott’s films are layered with these types of seriously uncomfortable jokes. His point is we’re not far from that reality.

C.S.A. was the movie that got Spike Lee’s attention. Lee asked Willmott if he’d written anything else, and the two talked about a script Willmott had written based on the ancient Greek play Lysistrata, where the women withhold sex until their men stop making war.

"I was in Lysistrata in college, as an undergrad," Willmott notes. "It just stayed with me. I thought it was really funny and really smart."

Willmott grew up in Junction City, Kansas. He went to New York University film school and stayed in New York City for a couple of years. But he wanted to make a movie about Junction City, so he had to come home. In 1999, he released Ninth Street, which he says is about "how everyone is precious and everyone is worthy of respect, including wine drinkers and prostitutes and people on the margins of society."

Willmott’s been making provocative movies in Kansas ever since.

The Battle for Bunker Hill (2008) was, he says, his response to the culture of fear after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Only Good Indian (2009) explored how forced assimilation in boarding schools robbed Native Americans of their culture. Jayhawkers (2014) is a reminder that Lawrence and the University of Kansas were segregated before Wilt Chamberlain arrived to play basketball.

He’s currently finishing The Association, which, Willmott says, "is about the other side of major league sports, the corruption that’s interwoven in it, and how young black athletes and athletes as a whole not understanding the gift they’ve been given and blow their money."

There’s also 2013’s Destination: Planet Negro.

"The film starts out in 1939, and black people are so desperate for equality and fairness and justice, and for the bad things to end, that they’re willing to go to Mars," Willmott says with a laugh. "So George Washington Carver creates a rocket fuel with a peanut and sweet potato and they take off."

But something goes wrong, and they pass through a time warp and end up here today, with a black president.

Willmott’s time travelers discover the same thing as the rest of us: A black president doesn’t mean the end of racism or a lot of other problems, such as the black-on-black violence he tackles with Chi-Raq.

Being based in Kansas, and working out of KU, has been a way to get his movies made. Willmott says he can’t wait for Hollywood.

"I can’t wait for the money to come, or for them to figure out that a film is actually pretty cool. If I’d been waiting for permission, none of my movies would have been made. Nobody wants to make my films. Ever."

Except, now, Spike Lee. That’s the good news.

Read the full story here: http://kcur.org/post/chi-raq-kansas-filmmakers-uncomfortable-jokes-about-america-keep-coming#stream/0
Alumni in the News

Mike Gabrawy, Chief Creative Officer of Arclight Films and a 1992 graduate of the KU Theatre and Film department, reports that he is a producer of the new action-thriller “Lights Out” for Arclight Films and Huace Pictures. The film will be directed by Brian De Palma.

Gabrawy's two latest films, Outcast (starring Nicolas Cage and Hayden Christensen) and Reclaim (starring John Cusack, Ryan Phillippe and Rachelle Lefevre) are available for streaming from Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Gabrawy is also the executive producer of “Nest,” the Chinese-Australian sci-fi action film that is now in production.

Dreams of Rene Sendam Announces Kickstarter Campaign

Bringing the haunting and provocative tale of love, poetry and the capacity for evil to the big screen

Award winning director Joshua Zev Nathan [2011 BGS in FMS] and producers Cortney Kammerer and J.S. Hampton announce their Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign (launching on February 10) to film and produce their first feature length film.

The Dreams of Rene Sendam follows eccentric poetry graduate student Rene Sendam on his journey to find meaningful relationships with those around him. Rene is full of love, yet troubled. He has lived a fantasy life of great wonder and beauty, and a real life of isolation and rejection. The story follows Rene’s relationships with three other students and a dog. Rene’s dream world eventually overtakes his reality, resulting in a slow but total mental breakdown.

“My hope is that ‘The Dreams of Rene Sendam’ adds to the difficult dialogue on the problem of evil and the urgent need to understand the subtle yet crucial differences between a person who commits evil, and the many who don’t,” stated director Joshua Zev Nathan.

“Because of its content, ‘The Dreams of Rene Sendam’ will be a thought provoking film for viewers with its controversial subject matter, potentially heinous acts and the lead character navigating the fine line between love and evil.”

The film has secured initial funding but the filmmakers are in need of your help to bring their cast and crew together for the production of this film.

Rewards for the backers of the film will run the gamut from early copies of the film to high-quality photography prints to acting roles in the film, and even a private sail with the filmmakers in Santa Monica Bay.

For more information on the film and filmmakers or to make a pledge to the project, please visit the Kickstarter campaign page. https://www.kickstarter.com/

Contact Information:
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See more:
www.TheDreamsOfReneSendam.com
www.JoshuaZevNathan.com
Film Festivals, Contests, Local Film Jobs, Call-for-Papers
Announcements of film festivals, contests, local jobs, call-for-papers, etc. are kept in a binder in the reception area at Oldfather Studios (room 204). Check it out!

Academic Calendar
Monday, February 8 — Last day to withdraw/drop without a “W”
Monday, February 15 — Last day to add or swap a class
Tuesday, March 1 — Last day to submit Application for Graduation and assure inclusion in the Commencement Program and July diploma delivery

http://www.registrar.ku.edu/calendar/

Equipment Check-in: 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
Equipment Check-out: 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
Sign-up to check-out equipment in the binder on the table near the equipment room.

Sign-up for editing rooms by signing the edit room schedule posted on the editing room doors.

The computer lab is available for use during the following times:
Monday from 2:30 – 5:00 p.m., Tuesday from 12:00 – 4:00 p.m.,
Thursdays from 8:30 – 5:00 p.m., and Friday: 8:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Are you a Film & Media Studies (or Theatre & Film) alum? We’d love to hear from you. Click HERE to update your information with us, so we can add you

Follow us

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