Conceptualizing Diaspora, Reconceptualizing Europe: Black Europe, or Diaspora Studies in Europe,
the 2007–2008 Fellows Program at the Warren Center, will focus on the newly emergent field of Black European Studies that has entered into conversa-
tion with various disciplines, periods, and methodologies within the academy. By engag-
ing black diasporic presence throughout Europe and the relationship between black his-
torical positions—as con-
querors, slaves, and colonial subjects, for example—the Fel-

Letters: In your proposal, you focused on the concept of ‘Black Europe’ as an emergent sub-field of African diaspora studies. Could you say a little bit more about the idea of Black Europe and about the cultural context that has led to its growing importance?

Sharpley-Whiting: I think we’ve been doing Black Euro-

cen-tralizing the concept of Black Europe, or Diaspora Studies in Europe,” the 2007–2008 Fellows Pro-

Letters Fall 2007 10/1/07 1:58 PM Page 1
I’m also very interested in another direction of this project, which is the consideration of something called ‘Europe’ on something called ‘Africa’.

Because the developments of both are inextricably related—and this stretches over several centuries of development—you can’t understand one without understanding the other.

Germany in particular the word is, well, synonimous. In France, people don’t typically recognize ‘race’, and so the idea that people would identify themselves as black French, black Germans, or black Europeans is radically different than the French position that everyone is simply French. So these studies challenge the idea of what it means to be French, to be German, to be Spanish, to be Italian. Equally, scholars are also trying to challenge this notion of European-ness because, of course, these countries had been individual nation-states uninterested in forging a collective identity, but the Euro has put them in an interesting position by which they function as a kind of United States of Europe by which they function as a kind of United States of Europe, in that context; there is a unique form of thought among human beings which then spreads across much of Europe. This is an absurd notion, but it’s a notion that has been definitive of the identities of peoples of Europe and North America, and it has been repli-
cated in universities. But what if we consider Greece and its relationship to a continent that we now call ‘Africa’? Once you look back and start retelling that story, the whole identity that has been lodged in that story of origins has got to be reworked. The result is equivalent to folk finding out that their father isn’t really their father. You had your identity tied to a father who looked a certain kind of way and had a certain skin color, and it turns out that your father has a very different skin color, a very different kind of hair, and so forth. Thus, I think a lot of these interdisciplinary intersections, explorations of these questions of origins, will be rather destabilizing to identities, histories, and supposed knowledge of origins. We may have to have some really serious counseling sessions before it’s finished.

Outlaw: This brings us back to a notion that gets a fair amount of play—particularly in the past decade, decade and a half—about the concept of ‘Eurocentrism’. There is a particular formulation that I hope we’ll work on and touch on in the seminar, because I’m sure that there’s a conception that covers a great deal of what we call ‘Europe’ and its component pieces, which becomes a fundamental assumption; there’s a certain version of ‘Eurocentrism’—and the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic.

Outlaw: Tracy Denea Sharpley-Whiting. I would love to get back to Loui’s point in his opening statements about Black Europe, what gaps or issues do you hope the group will attend to? Consider that this seminar is an interesting one; it becomes even more interesting when we consider that this seminar is bringing together scholars from English, French studies, history, and philosophy. How do you see yourself in that role of interacting with this year’s theme of ‘Black Europe’? How do they aid each other?

Outlaw: English departments have always had a position on the cutting edge of cultural studies—but, of course, they’re also English depart-
ments. If you’re trained in the languages, it aids you in moving across the languages and cultures in interesting ways, it’s different if one doesn’t necessarily have access to those languages and that kind of comparative work. Those who are involved in the seminar have that interest in moving across cultures and languages, so I think it will be quite fruitful because, again, they’re all doing stitting edge of research. Most of that work has been done so far in English and the Anglophone world, and that can limit accessibility and exchange when many scholars globally are writing in, say, French, or reading in French or English. So this is a nice way to intersect and learn. History is also an extremely important discipline for me—I’m just delighted with the number of historians participating— it’s one of those foundational disciplines that are absolutely critical to the enter-
tance of origins has got to be reworked. The result is equivalent to folk finding out that their father isn’t really their father. You had your identity tied to a father who looked a certain kind of way and had a certain skin color, and it turns out that your father has a very different skin color, a very different kind of hair, and so forth. Thus, I think a lot of these interdisciplinary intersections, explorations of these questions of origins, will be rather destabilizing to identities, histories, and supposed knowledge of origins. We may have to have some really serious counseling sessions before it’s finished.

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Letters Fall 2007 10/1/07 1:58 PM Page 2
‘I think a lot of these interdisciplinary intersections, explorations of these questions of origins, will be rather destabilizing to identities, histories, and supposed knowledge of origins.’

Lucius Outlaw

‘The black presence in Europe is not a new phenomenon, and that’s something that troubles the concept of European-ness.’

Sharpley-Whiting: Right? And you certainly wouldn’t be who you think you are without that other presence.

Outlaw: Again, it’s as I was saying before regarding the U.S., if most white people in this country really understood how powerfully generating the cultural creativity and contributions and appropriations of African peoples have been to who they are, they would really have to think about themselves very differently. The contributions and appropriations are so deep and wide that most white folks don’t know about all of this—just don’t know. And to come to know requires rethink- ing who one is. We would have to begin with a notion of white- ness that doesn’t include supremacy. Such rethinking is going to take a lot of work. The cosmic shocks from doing so are not going to be mild. Rather, they will be powerful, and we’re already moving forward through the shocks, which will be challenging. Very, very challenging.

Letters: How does this renegotiation relate to the renegotiations of identity and race?

Outlaw: It actually makes me think about my very first trip to Europe, when I was an undergraduate, which would have been the summer of 1966—a pretty decisive period given the sit-ins and the Civil Rights Movement. It’s during this moment, while I was out in Scandinavia, that we get this first call for “Black Power.” In response, the U.S. and western Europe were having a hissy fit.
O n April 10, 1975, the Lannoo Club, one of New York’s oldest private literary organizations, paid tribute to Robert Penn Warren with a state dinner in honor of his soon-to-be seventieth birthday. Lionel Trilling, John Palmer, and William Styron gave remarks that evening. The draft notes for Styron’s speech were included in a large donation of papers: Styron made to Duke University Library, and they were subsequently published in 1978 as a special edition pamphlets bearing the title “Admiral Robert Penn Warren and The Snows of Winter.” Styron later included the address in his volume This Quiet Dust and Other Writings, as simply “Robert Penn Warren” in a section headed “Portraits and Farewells.” The essay is a touching illumination of the friendship between these two Southern writers, and a thoughtful reminder of the power of Warren’s most celebrated work, All the King’s Men. I have been lucky to have known Red Warren well for quite a few years and to have been privy to certain personal matters known only between good friends. I am therefore aware of an interesting fact about Red’s early life that is not generally understood by less favored mortals. This is that, as a boy in his teens, Red’s simple but very sub- bloned American ambition was to become an officer in the United States Navy. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the truth, not an idle fiction. Indeed, it was more than an ambition; it was a goal very close of attainment, for Red had obtained his appointment and was all but packed up and ready to leave the bluegrasses of Kentucky for Annapolis when he suffered an injury to his eye which made it impossible for him ever to become a midshipman.

There is irony in this, for it always has seemed to me that Red at least looks like a sailor. If you will glance at him now you will see that seamed and weather-wise expression and craggy face which has gaunt, like Melville’s, into the briny abyss, that weather-wise expression and salty presence which have made him physically the very model of a sea dog; and, as a consequence, I have often become thoroughly bemused when speculating on Red’s career if he had gone off to the Naval Academy. I would like to consider this prospect for a moment. First, let no one underestimate the military mind; at the highest levels of command great brilli- ancy is required, and for this reason Red would have been what is known as a “rising star” from the very beginning. Thus I visualize the sce- nario—if I may use that awful word—like this. Number one in his class at Annapolis, Red becomes the first naval Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, where his record is also spectac- ular. He takes his degree in Oriental History, writing a thesis which is a revisionist examination of Genghis Khan, largely laudatory in tone. Or—maybe I am specu- lating—Red, now he wins his fourth Navy Cross, is made commander in chief of the Pacific fleet, is on the cover of Time magazine, has a temperamental though necessarily discreet affair with Ava Gardner. Through the dull and inane years between Korea and Vietnam, Red Warren plays golf with Eisenhower, haunt Thaisidyes and Clawsewitz, hobnobs with Henry Luce, Barry Goldwater and Mendel Rivers, and is appointed Chief of Naval Opera- tions under Lyndon Johnson.

I don’t know why my fantasy brightens and becomes happy at this point. Maybe it’s because I see Red Warren miraculously turn a major corner in his life, undergoing—as it were—a sea change. He becomes a dove! After all, a great Marine general, ex-Commandant David Shoup, did this: why not in my fan- tasy? Now as he reverses himself, the same grand historical imagi- nation which in his alter ego produced All the King’s Men, World Enough, and Time and Brother in Dragons is suddenly seized with the folly and tragedy of our involvement in Southeast Asia, so that on one dark night in 1966 there is a confrontation, many hours long, between the admiral from Kentucky—now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—and the Texas President, two South- erners eyeball to eyeball; and in this passionate colloquy it is the Knebworth who finally gains the upper hand with his forceful, humanitarian—argumen- tations founded on the ineluctable lessons of history of which he is master—that this war can only lead to futility, disaster, and national degradation. I even see the droplets of sweat on Lyndon

Photograph by Daniel Dubois.
So by that fateful accident years ago, America lost a master mariner but gained a major novelist and poet, a superb essayist, a literary critic of great breadth and subtle discrimination, a teacher of eloquence, a sly and hilarious storyteller, and altogether one of the best human beings to break bread with…

Johnston’s forehead as, after a grave long pause, he gives in, saying, “Good damn you soft-hearted hick, Admiral Warren, you’ve convinced me!” and immediately I see him getting on the telephone to McNamara: “Bob, git those advisors out of Vietnam and wish me good luck here dirty little war in the bud!”

But this kind of wish-fulfillment becomes almost unendurable, and so in my mind’s eye I bring Red’s naval career to a memorable close, seeing him as grim and cruel reason dictates he most likely would be today—not buckling in well-deserved homage at the Lotos Club but retired to the Pacific scattee at Commo, cataloguing his brilliant writing letters to the San Diego Tribune about stay dogs, queer flags, and sending monthly donations to the ACLU.

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In New York City during the famous blizzard of late December 1947 (which many of you here doubtless still remember), when I—a young and aspiring and pensively wise writer from the Virginia Tidewater living in a basement on upper Lexington Avenue—first read all the All the King’s Men, I think it is absolute and inexplicable anguish of life had been one of those priceless bulwarks against death in a time of too much dying. Just then I heard Red casually say, “Well, you bet he’s a little ashamed of his panic, but not of those thoughts, which also had included my heartfelt thanks to God that Red Warren never slid away and I had succumbed to the birds and to publish. He also tells us it is to live, and, by living, he explains. And, indeed, Erasmus traveled constantly, as it was in the exchange of intense conversation that ideas were born, horizons expanded, and reputations secured. Erasmus did not particularly enjoy travel, he complained about “all the time that must needs be spent on horseback in dull and unlettered guessing.” But at least on one occasion, while crossing the Atlantic slave trade. This project brings together scholars from four continents, and they have collectively revolutionized our understanding of the duration.

“The Best Things in Life are Free”

The Humanities and Money Lessons from Erasmus

By Helmut Walser Smith

The best things in life are free, but you can give them to the birds and bees. Money—that’s what I want.” So begins the hit song, first recorded by Barret Strong in 1960, then played by a number of groups, including the Beatles and the Flying Lizards. I remember the version of the Flying Lizards best, mainly because I sing it in a bus full of protesters headed to Washington to demonstrate a U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. This was in 1983. I know it was the version by the Flying Lizards because, for the first time, people brought boom boxes to demonstrations.

Why did we need money? I could not answer the question then, but I will try to answer it now—not, of course, for U.S. military policy, which then, as now, receives a great deal of money, but for the humanities, which did not and does not.

That humanists need money is not self-evident. In fact, many contemplative scholars have argued that the need of forced conversation, and as we pulped along in Indian file across the mountainous snowshoerds, each of us plunged in his own private meditation, it creepily occurred to me that we were far away from home, far away from the road, still miles and miles from any human body—and that, worst of all, it was almost night. I had a sense of terrible panic as I thought that Red and I, having unwarily strayed into the wilderness, were an easy pray—we are closest to the latter, and the latter is supposed to be the farthest from the world and its goods. The humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries went some way to rectify our distance from the world. Machiavelli, Erasmus, More—these men hardly shied away from wealth and power, and, indeed, they sought proximity to it. And power spread their counsel. But this world was buried by the passions of the men who pray, and, in Europe, the principles of religious men rolled over the agendas of the humanists like an avalanche over saplings. This is a simplification, to be sure. Thomas More was a man of principle and a humanist. Philipp Melanchthon was a reformer who understood compromise. Yet the catastrophic violence unleashed by the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries put an end to their world.

This world remerged during the Enlightenment, when humanists again did not shy from the world and its allure. Erasmus, Hume, Voltaire, and Smith all thought about the world as a great place of money. It was as a rule not clear that culture flourished in a care or in a monastery, but, rather, assumed that it burgeoned most fully in an age of luxury and refinement. Their vision, to be sure, was elitist, and in this sense they inherited assumptions from the humanists who preceded them. It is thus clear that subsequent eras have sometimes considered the most pitiful condition of thinking to be solitude or the experience of persecution. But we cannot take these as counsel for considering the structure of a university. For example, one who seeks to know why humanists spend money beyond funding for basic research in archives and libraries, it suffices to read the letters of Erasmus to his patrons. Erasmus, of course, needed money to live, “particularly because I am not even at liberty to live meanly, on account of my reputation, such as it is, for learning.” But there were four further reasons he needed money. The first was to buy books—no small expense. A lavishly illustrated Chronology of the World published in Nuremberg in 1493 cost the equivalent of five ozen, for example. Not all books were expensive, and Erasmus exchanged much knowledge via the handwritten letter, print still being in its infancy. The second expense was for travel. It is impossible for a fastidious man to go to Italy without a large sum of money. For example, not all books were expensive, and Erasmus exchanged much knowledge via the handwritten letter, print still being in its infancy. The second expense was for travel. It is impossible for a fastidious man to go to Italy without a large sum of money.
Books, ‘flying carpets of knowledge,’ are wonderful to this end, but young scholars need to fly with them.

What We Are Reading

LETTERS to colleagues in the Arts and Sciences to share what books they’ve recently been reading or revisiting.

Monica J. Casper, Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Women’s and Gender Studies: Two of my current favorites are Ethics of the Body: Postcolonial Chal-
genesis, edited by Margrit Shildrick and Roxanne Myki-
tiak (MIT Press, 2005), and The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton (Mariner Books, 1999). Ethics of the Body is a collection of essays that use postmodern, feminist, and critical race theo-
ries to challenge conventional bioethics. Ranging across a vari-
yety of substantive topics—HIV/AIDS, genetics, addiction, interest and reproductive tech-
nologies—the authors collec-
tively assert that standard bioethics has failed to ade-
quately grapple with, and thus to comprehend, the messy com-
plexities of embodiment. I’m reading Anne Sexton’s poems for an entirely different set of reasons—mainly because I’m intimately attracted to trou-
bled women’s writings about not only their own somatic, but also their spiritual lives. Anne Sexton can be one of those rare artists who studies the collective. And, of course, I’m fallible, but this is a very queer book of mine. My own credentials are not sufficient to make a good reader, so what I find appealing about her work is its profound and revealing. She’s a master of both the personal and the universal. Her insights are deep and her observations are sharp. I find myself constantly inspired by her singular voice and her unique perspective on the world around her. She’s a true original, and I’m grateful to have her in my life.

Edward Wright Rios, Assis-
tant Professor of History: I have been trying to get a handle on a pair of twentieth-century apparition movements in Mex-
ico. In one case, an indigenous woman talks to Christ, and, in the other, an eight-year-old Indian girls visits with the Vir-
gin Mary and an angel. In both cases, popular movements emerge around the acts, and the documentation is very spotty. Recently I read anthropologist Paolo Apolito’s Apparitions of the Madonna at Oliveto Citra (Pennsylvania State U. P., 1998). Apolito was on hand as recent Italian Marian visions were taking place, and he pro-
duced a sensitive exploration of how complicated these kinds of events can be. Among the most interesting aspects he details is how a group around the seers creates a single coherent narrativ-
emodel for present-day concepts such as colonialism. In addi-
tion, this book is typi-
cally well-written, with clear and comprehensive discussions of the relevant literature. It’s a must-read for anyone interested in the study of apparitions in Mexico.

Lynn Ramey, Associate Pro-
pressor of French: Sylvia Hauer’s Postcolonial Fictions in the Roman de Perséphone (Brewer, 2007) looks at a particularly difficult, poorly edited, multi-
volume medieval text, “Persé-
forest,” and reads it in light of postcolonial theory. Her critical analysis of the text is a fascinating reflection on current trends in medieval studies. Hauer insists on continuity rather than rupture at the time of the Renaissance, finding medieval models for present-day concepts such as colonialism. In addi-
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I have no further need of anything written by you, and I am convinced that the issue is long settled in my mind.

30. 

...will also be expected to be part of the fellowship. Graduate Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertations before the start of the next academic year. The Graduate Student Fellows program will meet in weekly seminars at the Warren Center, presenting their work to the seminar and discussing their research with the seminar participants. The Warren Center will also arrange for a number of book projects, including “The Ghetto Tax Since the Seventeenth Century” by Michael Sigmon.

KATHRYN T. GINES is a professor of philosophy and African American studies who specializes in African American philosophy, critical social theory, and African American studies. Her book, “Black Communism and the African American Tradition,” is forthcoming. She has also co-authored several volumes, including “The Women’s Movement in the United States” and “Women of the Petit Magasin.” She is a co-founder of the African American Studies Association and has been a member of the editorial boards of several journals, including “Women’s Studies: An International Journal.”

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If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

TINA MARIE CAMPT
Associate Professor of Women’s Studies
Duke University
MICHAEL CALLAGHAN graduated magna cum laude with high honors in English and Anthropology from Vanderbilt University in 1998. A Ph.D. candidate in archaeology in the Department of Anthropology, Callaghan’s research interests include the intersecting themes of gender, family, and political organization in prehistoric civilizations, the acquisition and deployment of social power among prehistoric elites and non-elites, and the application of ceramic analysis to investigate social, religious, economic, and political aspects of prehistoric civilizations. Prior to his work at Vanderbilt’s Houston project, Callaghan served as ceramicist, Lab Director, and Co-Director of the Vanderbilt Cancun Regional Archaeological Project in the Passion River Region of Guatemala.

JOSH EPSTEIN is a doctoral candidate in history. His dissertation, titled “Patriarchy in Practice: Women, Family and Power in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy,” examines the workings of patriarchy in late medieval and early modern Italy by investigating women’s interactions and relationships in family life. His work explores how culturally constructed gender norms intersected with the lived experiences of women and men in the prominent Florentine Spinelli family; he is particularly interested in exploring the fluid and dynamic nature of patriarchy, specifically how both male and female relatives actively collaborated, contested, negotiated, and resisted various forms of patriarchy as they participated in family affairs.

GEORGE SANDERS is a doctoral candidate in sociology. His dissertation, titled “Late Capital: Negotiating the New American Way of Death,” examines the distribution of capital in the funeral industry and the effects that it has on the construction of meanings around memory, death, and ritual. In particular, he is interested in the use of artefacts in the expansion of the American funerary apparatus while it engages in its unique forms of cultural management. He is the American Studies Fellow.

Historian S. Maier to Present Harry C. Howard, Jr. Lecture

S. Maier, Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History at Harvard University, will present this year’s Harry C. Howard, Jr. Lecture. His talk, “Making the Multinational: Territory and History Before Globalization,” Maier, a renowned scholar of European social and intellectual history, is the author of “Migrant Empires: European Absolonists and the Creolization of Social Thought” (2004, and again in autumn 2006). He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999. The Harry C. Howard, Jr. Lecture Series was established in 1994 through the endowment of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Nash, Jr. and Mrs. George D. Nash, Jr., all of Asheville, North Carolina. The lecture honors Harry C. Howard, Jr. (B.A., 1951) and allows the Warren Center to annually bring an outstanding scholar to Vanderbilt and deliver a lecture on a significant topic in the humanities.

Between Word and Image Fellows to Host Symposium

On October 25th and 26th, the Warren Center will sponsor a two-day campus symposium organized by its 2006-2007 “Between Word and Image” Fellows and designed to coincide with a Vanderbilt Fine Arts Gallery exhibition on view from October 5th to December 7th. This symposium will feature a keynote address by Arthur C. Danto, John S. and James L. Knight Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, and art critic for The Nation, entitled “Before and After: Two Decades After The Sinister Chapel Controversy,” the lecture will take place on October 25 at 4:10 in Wilson Hall 103. In addition, David Morgan, the Phyllis and David A. Hensley Professor in the Humanities and Visual Arts, will present “Between Word and Image, with John Danto, and the Vermont history of race and sexuality. He use the term ‘ethno- graphic writing’ to describe a series of mechanisms of representation (stereotypes, statements, tropes, syllogisms) whose primary function was the ideological, political and aesthetic construction of cultural and racial difference.

HEATHER TALLEY is a doctoral candidate in sociology. Her dissertation, “Facial Work: Cultural, Technical, and Surgical Interventions for Facial Disfigurement,” relies on analyses of reality television (Extreme Makeover...), biotechnological innovations (face transplant procedures) and related biopolitical, state and corporate processes (Operation Smile). Through an ethnographic study of the human face as a site of biopolitical intervention, she considers how the imperative to repair the human face is constructed and negotiated in each of the sites of intervention, and how the implications of these negotiations can be understood in terms of modernity and sexuality.

Newberry Library and Warren Center in Hosting Pre-Modern Race and Sexuality Symposium

On March 30, 2007, the Robert Penn Warren Center and the Newberry Library co-sponsored the interdisciplinary Pre-Modern Race and Sexuality Symposium in Chicago, Illinois. Drawing together scholars from across the United States, the conference was the product of the Warren Center’s 2005-2006 faculty fellows’ seminar, which had involved scholars from across the English, French, history, and Spanish and Portuguese departments. Organizers Leah S. Marcus (English, Vanderbilt) and Holly Tucker (French, Vanderbilt) put together four discussion-centered panels intended to raise and address questions regarding the overlap between pre-modern race and sexuality, and pre-modern and modern vocabularies of race and sexuality.

Throughout the symposium, panelists invited attendees to reevaluate their most basic assumptions about race and sexuality, they also raised questions about whether time boundaries exist that limit our ability to discuss such concepts, and about the costs of periodization. Geraldine Heng (English, University of Texas), for example, asserted that our post-9/11 culture calls for a “long history of race” that might reevaluate our present understanding of race and sexual identity. Her co-panelists, David Nirenberg (Department of Social Thought, University of Chicago), reiterated this idea. In his own presentation he pointed to methods of cultural reproduction that perpetuate racism; however, he also warned against the tendency of the historical imagination to think of ideas and concepts as having a discrete origin in a particular place. A search for connections, according to many at the conference, should not be mistaken for a search for origins. In this sense, the conference was a great success. The Warren Center and the Newberry Library’s joint effort was able to bring scholars, graduate students, and members of the Chicago area into a conversation about the important connections between race and sexuality. Such a conversation, in a concrete way, tied together the fellows’ original project of interrogating pre-modern cultures’ interactions with contemporary discussions of race, sexuality, and subjectivity as well as the breakdown of modern understandings of difference.

Erika Johnson to create an origi- nal installation to be included in the exhibition. The concurrent symposium will feature a keynote address by Arthur C. Danto, Jon- son Professor Emeritus of Philo- losophy at Columbia University and art critic for The Nation, entitled “Before and After: Two Decades After The Sinister Chapel Controversy,” the lecture will take place on October 25 at 4:10 in Wilson Hall 103. In addition, David Morgan, the Phyllis and Richard Dansberg Professor in Christianity and the Arts at Val- patria University, will present a round lecture on October 26 in Bunnic Hall 123. Following the Fine Arts Gallery exhibition, Johnson’s artwork will be on per- manent display at the Warren Center.