

DOOR TO DOOR



PHOTO BY DANA MAXSON

Linwood Lewis teaches about the social context of health and illness.



Survey says: Students at work in Cottage Place Gardens.

PHOTO BY QUYEN NGUYEN

Home Improvement

“When I go into Cottage Gardens, I see the people I grew up with,” says Linwood Lewis (psychology). “Worthwhile people dealing with a lot of problems. This is the poker hand they were dealt—most of the possibilities that are before them are bad ones.” Lewis grew up in public housing in the Bronx and has been volunteering for social justice causes in Yonkers for almost two decades. Now he’s part of a team that’s working to revitalize the Cottage Place Gardens public housing and the surrounding area of Yonkers.

Public housing, often pejoratively referred to as “the projects,” was established by the federal government to provide decent and safe rental housing for low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is responsible for these units, but decreased funding over the years has taken a toll. Cottage Place Gardens, which includes 14 low-rise buildings on the west side of Yonkers, has suffered from poor infrastructure, high crime rates, and isolation from the surrounding community, Lewis says.

Yonkers recently received a substantial grant from HUD to transform Cottage Place Gardens and the surrounding neighborhood. The city will build two new, mixed-income apartments on an old public school site, and eventually demolish and rebuild two deteriorating buildings at Cottage Place Gardens. But first, Lewis is partnering with Community Voices Heard (CVH)—a member organization of low-income people, predominantly women with experience on welfare—to gather community feedback about the project. Four of his students who had prior experience working in Yonkers are assisting as well.

Working in Yonkers is a challenge, Lewis says, because the city government has historically ignored people’s needs, even during previous revitalization efforts, so people are wary of

participating. But for this project, the Municipal Housing Authority is prioritizing the opinions of current residents and confronting the lack of empowerment. A number of residents are active on the planning team (which includes representatives from the Municipal Housing Authority, Yonkers Department of Planning and Development, CVH, and Lewis).

Gathering evidence is also critical. Lewis partnered his students with CVH members, and the pairs went door-to-door in Cottage Place Gardens, equipped with a questionnaire on an iPad, to survey residents about their current housing concerns and their ideas for improving the neighborhood. The problems residents are reporting are complex and systemic, Lewis says. The surveyors have heard from residents about vermin problems, the difficulty of raising a family on minimum wage, and safety issues in the neighborhood.

The planning team is now working to collate the survey data and identify the most salient strengths and challenges facing the community. Lewis is optimistic about the project’s potential to make a positive and sustained difference to the area. “In the long term,” he says, “if we are able to empower the residents to speak up, and provide them with the avenues and resources to do so, then I would consider that a success. It’s all about empowering the people to take back control of their own neighborhoods.”

—Katharine Reece MFA '12

ART WORDS

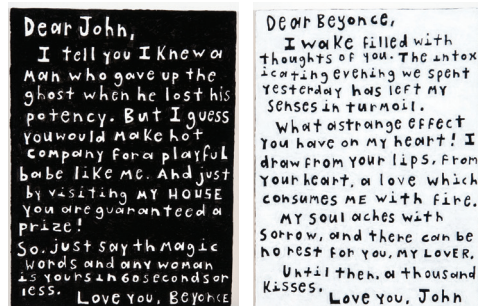
Language of Love

The first panel of “Love Letters (Diptych)” by John O’Connor (Visual Arts) is a hybrid spam message; the second is based on a historical love letter from Napoleon to Josephine. Spam writing is intriguing because it seems personal but is not, O’Connor says: “It’s not a type

of language that expresses some feeling of the person writing it, but is meant to compel the receiver to respond.”

The paintings were part of The Machine and the Ghost, O’Connor’s solo show at the Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn in November. The panels were used as

the covers for a catalog of O’Connor’s work over the last decade, which was published in conjunction with the show and featured essays by Rick Moody and Robert Storr. —S.W.G.



LIFE AFTER SLC

Against Type

Look at this sentence.

Did you notice anything about the letterforms that make it up?

Probably not. As 21<sup>st</sup>-century humans, with smart phones attached to our palms, we’re used to a typeface being purely functional, a practically transparent way of conveying information.

But David Bernstein (art history faculty emeritus) knows that sometimes a letter is more than a letter, and text can convey meaning beyond the word itself. He is researching the connections between three examples of words-as-art: medieval illuminated manuscripts, late 60’s concert posters, and Google “Doodles.”

It all began in the summer of 1968, when Bernstein was strolling around San Francisco and noticed posters advertising concerts by Janis Joplin and The

Grateful Dead at the Fillmore West. The letters and words created wild, whimsical, spontaneous imagery that didn’t just convey information, but also seemed suggestive of the music’s tone and the cultural atmosphere of the time.

Later, as he studied medieval illuminated manuscripts, he wondered if they anticipated the graphic arts of the ’60s. In the early medieval period, monks began designing and illustrating original manuscripts of the Gospels. Breaking from the Roman convention of writing with a uniform script, the monks would change scale, using a large letter and then a small one, or change the pace so the letters tumbled over one another. Often, the letters became “historiated,” meaning they contained a scene or figure, usually related to the

text. These manuscripts would have been open on the altar of a church, and they were meant to be displayed, much like posters.

Bernstein sees a similar dynamic in Google “Doodles,” the wacky versions of the Google logo that celebrate holidays, anniversaries, and the lives of various famous artists and scientists. (For example, to celebrate the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the company, illustrators added an L, turning the logo into GoogLIE.)

What do these three things have in common? They all break with convention, Bernstein says, and add extra layers of meaning to the words themselves. In time his research will become a book. By drawing connections between art-words across the



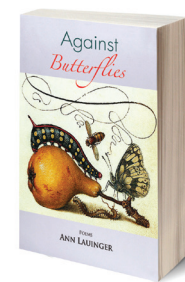
Google Doodle for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2014 by illustrator Christian Robinson



centuries, he hopes to remind us that all of art involves a human being making specific and intentional choices, and help us engage more deeply with something as mundane as a letter.

—Katharine Reece MFA '12

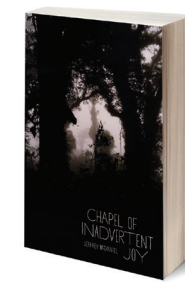
NEW BOOKS AND MUSIC



Against Butterflies

Ann Lauinger  
(LITERATURE)  
POETRY / LITTLE RED TREE, 2013

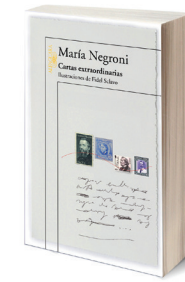
Lauinger’s new book of poems also contains 25 full-color images taken from the “Mira Calligraphiae Monumenta” by the Renaissance artist Joris Hoefnagel.



Chapel of Inadvertent Joy

Jeffrey McDaniel  
(WRITING)  
POETRY / UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, 2013

Major Jackson calls McDaniel “probably the most important poet in America” and describes his work as “a fine antidote to realism.”



Cartas Extraordinarias (“Extraordinary Letters”)

Maria Negroni  
(SPANISH)  
FICTION / ALFAGUARA (SPAIN), 2013

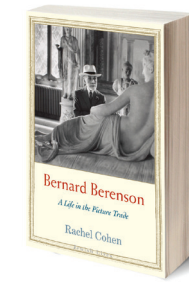
In this series of apocryphal letters by the authors Negroni loved when, she creates a tribute to the magic of the books that constituted her first library.



La Sangre de la Aurora (“The Blood of Dawn”)

Claudia Salazar  
(SPANISH)  
FICTION / ANIMAL DE INVIERNO (PERU), 2013

This novel tell the stories of three women during the internal armed conflict in Peru.



Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade

Rachel Cohen  
(WRITING)  
BIOGRAPHY / YALE, 2013

When Gilded Age millionaires wanted to buy Italian Renaissance paintings, the expert whose opinion they sought was Bernard Berenson. His way of seeing helped lay foundations for the new field of art history and to build many of our most important art institutions.



Amasi Trio Piano Trios

Sungrai Sohn  
(MUSIC)  
CLASSICAL / CD BABY, 2013

Sohn plays violin on piano trios by Rachmaninoff, Chaminade, Parker, and more.



Corps Exquis

Daniel Wohl  
(MUSIC)  
MUSIC / NEW AMSTERDAM, 2013

Wohl composed and conducts this large-scale performance piece that’s part classical, part electronic, and part avant-garde video installation.