The College of Fine Arts and Communication at Towson University invites you to join us as we explore the arts through the lens of politics and change. From art exhibits and lectures, to plays and special presentations, our theme has inspired collaborations, some interdisciplinary and others within departments and across colleges.1 Observes Susan E. Picinich, dean of the College since 2011: “The adoption of an annual theme is an exciting new COFAC venture, especially in light of the breadth and depth of faculty-initiated programming at Towson. I hope that everyone will take time to attend at least one of these events. After all, an emphasis on politics and change is most timely given the tenor of this year’s election cycle.”

Timely it is and yet, in regard to this year’s roster of events, the dean’s implicit reference to the U.S. presidential elections must be read both forward and backward in time. Only in this way, can the Symphonic Band’s spring performance of Lo Presti’s “Elegy for a Young American,” composed in memory of John F. Kennedy shortly after his assassination, co-exist alongside the Asian Arts & Culture Center’s fall exhibition. While the political resonances of Lo Presti’s work might be more readily “heard,” Joanna Pecore, Director of the AA&CC is pleased to introduce a broader consideration of cultural politics through the ceramics of minority groups in China. Exhibit visitors can explore the folk pottery created by China’s diverse ethnic groups whose traditions are affected by the policies of the Chinese state.

Moving beyond an emphasis on electoral politics, the roster of events features an engagement of the politics of identity; to wit, the Department of Theatre Arts will produce The Bluest Eye, adapted by Lydia R. Diamond from the novel by Toni Morrison. In this tale from the end of the Great Depression, the memories of two African American sisters reveal their childhood perceptions of racialized society and socially constructed “beauty.” The twin prongs of race and justice are reflected also in two plays that will be presented in the spring of 2017, as a culmination of the department’s three-year collaboration with The Acting Company: X, a new play by Marcus Gardley, and William Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. In X, the assassination of Malcolm X is brought to vivid, lyrical life. Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar provides a framework for Gardley to deepen our understanding of one of America’s most complex, compelling historical figures and explore the tumultuous landscape of ideology and activism in the 1960s. Shakespeare’s timeless political masterpiece itself has great relevance to the theme of politics and change. Through the story of Julius Caesar, a rising political star torn down by his most trusted allies, audiences witness the art of persuasion, the ugliness of backroom politics, and the historical patterns we can’t stop repeating.

Understanding, and tolerance across identity categories is at the core of Jennifer McMillan’s arrangement of Don’t Be Afraid, a work that takes its title from the hate-inspired attack on Scott Jones in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in 2013. The event prompted the formation of Don’t Be Afraid, a LGBTQ awareness campaign with the goal of using music to affect positive change in society by eliminating homophobia and transphobia. Don’t Be Afraid is one of many works that will be featured on the program of the TU High School Choral Festival, led by Dr. Arian Khaefi.

Whereas some COFAC offerings incorporate the theme of politics and change in ways that are obvious, in the case of others, the connection is more suggestive. The opening concert of the Department of Music entitled “Music for the Royal Court and the Fountain” is illustrative of the former. The Towson Brass Faculty Quintet presents a multimedia-rich evening of music spanning five historical eras. Henry VIII’s royal court of England is represented with music by composer Thomas Tallis. Notwithstanding his six marriages, the King of England is remembered for his role in separating the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church. Music of Jean-Phillipe Rameau and Jean-Joseph Mouret invokes the last epoch of the French monarchy and start of the French Revolution serving as a segue to the Department of Art + Design’s invited lecture by artist
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POLITICS AND CHANGE THROUGH THE ARTS

Marilyn Huling, Perhaps by coincidence, Huling’s “Further Tales of Young Marie Antoinette,” does its own work as a narrative on paper and dioramas creation. We seldom think of the future Queen of France as a child or young girl; Huling’s fascinating creations provide no foreshadowing of Marie Antoinette’s ride to the guillotine in October 1793. Huling, whose work is featured in a one-person exhibition this semester in the Holtzman Gallery (September 9-October 15) entitled Marilyn Huling: Les Historias, is a professor at Temple University’s Tyler School of Art.

The second half of the Tomson Brass Quinter program includes music of early America, the antebellum period, and the Civil War. Noteworthy composers include Philip Philé, John Hill Hewitt, and lastly, Francis Johnson, described as the first black American composer to have his arrangements published as sheet music. Johnson is also credited as the first African American bandleader, an important milestone in the history of American music. He was a professor at Temple University’s Tyler School of Art.

The College’s 2016-17 array of programming offers something for everyone. An examination of the arts through the lens of politics and change reminds us that they are most frequently mobilized for uplift and the greater good. Departmental offerings are testimony to the power of the arts to reflect the world of peace and healing continues with the four day residency of monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery in India, founded after the destruction of most of Tibet’s monasteries in 1959, is home to over 3,000 monks observing the Buddhist philosophy that is manifest in this artistic practice. The Drepung Monastery was established in Lhasa in 1416. Visitors will experience the transcendent nature of these beautiful works of art as they are created and then destroyed in a manner that is highly symbolic, inviting reflection on the ephemeral nature of life. A lecture on the history of the Tibetan diaspora will illuminate how Tibetans have maintained their sense of national cultural identity in the face of human rights abuses, systematic threats to their culture, and restrictions on religious freedom.

Voter registration is a critical component of an election year. To support the effort, and echoing the “Politics & Change” theme, the Graphic Design faculty curated posters from the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) Get Out the Vote campaign. On display in the Center for the Arts, the show will grow over time to include Towson University graphic design students’ solutions. The “Vote” poster shown here located on the third floor, and the program between the second and first floor atrium — will be displayed until the 2016 election.

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1 Thanks to all COFAH faculty who contributed entries included in this overview.
2 See Article of the Week: Genetic Shary http://ttuakt.ttu.edu/article-of-the-week-geneco/ .
3 For more about Audra Buck-Coleman see http://www.towson.edu/faculty/buck/.

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Faculty have worked hard to make not only intelligent choices but to provide a series that addresses the theme of politics and change from different vantage points.

The theme of “change” figures prominently in the TU Pop Ensemble’s change of performance venue. Under the direction of Brian Simms, the ensemble moves its show from the Harold C. Kaplan Concert Hall, a site more regularly associated with programs of classical music, to PAWS, the student-friendly open space that is adjacent to the sandwich station and grill in the Union Building. Students rock out at the concert have a hard time believing that this is a class, but as Jim McFalls, director of the Jazz Orchestra maintains, “Performance practice means practicing the art of performance. We’re got to be where people are. We try to teach our students to play in such a compelling way that they can’t possibly go unnoticed.”

The Department of Art + Design hosts a series of lectures that provide fascinating glimpses into the ever changing world of studio art. Photographer Ginsu Shy maintains that her artistic practice has been influenced by her living in Baltimore which she describes as “an expansiveness of space, of vacant, and crumbling buildings — but growing out of all that is a strong and unceded spirit is a living change agent as her influences include architecture, urban planning, graphic design, typography, and dance. She is part of the group exhibition Referencing Mattalow (September 9-October 15 in the Center for the Arts Gallery), which highlights the continued influence of Modernism in today’s art world. Reinforcing the theme of politics and change, the Department welcomes graphic designer and University of Maryland professor, Audra Buck-Coleman, whose design research focuses on social innovation and, as she describes, on the ethical considerations of today’s design practice. Buck-Coleman has directed numerous design projects including Sticks + Stones, a collaborative graphic design project that investigates stereotyping and social issues.

The connection between the Mozart Requiem, a choral masterpiece dating from the late 18th century, and its association with the theme of the politics of peace, lies in its performances at high profile events such as the memorial Mass for John F. Kennedy in 1964 and as part of a concert conducted by Zubin Mehta during the siege of Sarajevo thirty years later. Director of Choral Activities, Artan Khajati and Director of Bands and Orchestras, Chris Cicconi, join forces for the performance of this perennial favorite. In addition to selections from the U.S. patriotic repertoire, the Symphony Orchestra’s spring concert features Copland’s Lincoln Portrait written to commemorate the ideals and achievements of America’s sixteenth president, and Karel Husa’s Music for Prague 1968, a work that memorializes events after the Soviet Union crushed the Prague Spring reform movement. The composer’s work is an example of program music, meaning that it draws on symbolism and allusions that would be well known to those versed in Czech culture.

The theme of world peace and healing continues with the four day residency of monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery including opening and closing ceremonies, daily chants, lectures, and mandala creation, one of the most ancient practices of Central Asia. Hosted by the Asian Arts & Culture Center, the Tibetan Buddhist monks are based in Atlanta, Georgia at the Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies, Practice & Culture, but the Drepung Loseling Monastery in India, founded after the destruction of most of Tibet’s monasteries in 1959, is home to over 3,000 monks observing the Buddhist philosophy that is manifest in this artistic practice. The Drepung Monastery was established in Lhasa in 1416. Visitors will experience the transcendent nature of these beautiful works of art as they are created and then destroyed in a manner that is highly symbolic, inviting reflection on the ephemeral nature of life. A lecture on the history of the Tibetan diaspora will illuminate how Tibetans have maintained their sense of national cultural identity in the face of human rights abuses, systematic threats to their culture, and restrictions on religious freedom.

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