MAD MEN ALUMNI
A LEGENDARY SHOW WITH A UNIQUE TROJAN CONNECTION

RESEARCH@SCA
CHANGING THE WORLD IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

PLUS:
SCA GETS AN IMAX
COMEDY@SCA GOES LIVE!

THREE NEW CHAIRS
The Pioneering Faculty Who Are Heading Up the Production, Animation and Media Arts + Practice Divisions
MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

In once again ranking the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) as the best film school in the United States, The Hollywood Reporter described us as “the uncatchable Moby Dick of film schools.” Our future-facing curriculum goes beyond film and television production, of course. In fact our game design program is enjoying a fifth straight year of being ranked the best in North America by the Princeton Review. And just two years in, the Division of Media Arts + Practice (MA+P) is already internationally recognized for remarkable, leading-edge research.

These accolades are important because they recognize that our efforts combine to create something special. The School of Cinematic Arts is successful because of all that you pitch in to make it so. This year marked the 85th anniversary of the School’s founding and each of those years has been dedicated to making strides in enriching the way we teach practice, in improving the facilities and resources our students use, and in innovating research that can transform the way moving images impact culture. Hard work, in each of these areas, is what’s required to stay ahead.

This issue of In Motion is filled with stories about how and why we work to stay ahead. The three newest Division Chairs who grace the cover—Holly Willis of Media Arts + Practice, Mike Fink in Production, and Tom Sito in Animation—are focused on reconstructing media. As you’ll see in their discussion, it’s all about teaching the necessary skills while encouraging rampant creativity. SCA students aren’t intimidated by rapid changes in the media landscape—they’re excited by them!

Also in these pages, we visit our alumnus Matthew Weiner, who is in the final season of Mad Men, the show he created that has been universally hailed as one of television’s best. You’ll also find photos of our brand new Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Lab, a gift to our students from the Douglas family and the IMAX Corporation. And you’ll go on a journey through our research labs, which are facilitating partnerships with some of the world’s best companies to make innovative discoveries about the potential of bringing the cinematic arts to new fields.

You’ll also read about our efforts to increase student support at the School. This is undoubtedly one of our most important goals. From our interactions with students around the country, we know there are many of them who are talented media makers who just cannot afford an SCA education without our help. Student support doesn’t have to be in the millions of dollars; every bit counts and every dollar we raise benefits our students.

An Anniversary year doesn’t just inspire reflections about the School but also reflections about everyone who has come through our programs—as students, faculty, parents, staff. We hope you are doing well and that you will seek occasion to strengthen your connection to SCA.

And I hope you have a wonderful holiday season!

Elizabeth M. Daley
Steven J. Ross/Time Warner Professor and Dean

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ON THE COVER:
Chair of the John C. Hennessy Division of Animation & Digital Arts Tom Sito. Chair of the Media Arts + Practice Division Holly Willis, and Chair of the Film & Television Production Division Mike Fink in the Performance Capture Stage at the Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts.

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Martine LaDouceur
Associate Dean of Communications & PR
In Motion Managing Editor
Kristin Borell
Communications & Development Writer/Editor
In Motion Story Editor
In Motion Design
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Kathleen Bugni
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2

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Throughout the year, the USC School of Cinematic Arts welcomed guests, alumni, lecturers, and friends from the entertainment, technology, and video game industries to speak to students and faculty. In addition to these guests, the calendar included the installation of five new endowed chairs, the second Comedy@SCA Festival, and the opening of the Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Lab.

**Commemoration 2014, Mary Pickford Alumni Award Recipient Kevin Feige, President of Marvel Studios (left) with Frank Price, Chairman of the USC School of Cinematic Arts Board of Counselors.**

(Left) Guests at the Meldman Family Cinematic Arts Park.

(Left) Alumni Matthew Weiner and Erin Levy from Mad Men visit Leonard Maltin’s Film Symposium.

(Susan Downey, alum and producer of The Judge and the Sherlock Holmes films, visits Leonard Maltin’s Film Symposium.

(Left) Alum Andrew Dodge (left) and actor Jason Bateman at a screening of Bad Words presented by Comedy@SCA.

(Left) Producers Anne Popolizio, Garry Ashton, Mansan Luc, Michael Maas (right) with Maria Bluford, Otto Peterson and John Beard.

**SCA Emmy-winners for their public service announcements—Power of PSA and Help a Soldier Heal—(Top row) Eric Talesnick, Massey Shesstreet, Anne Popolizio, Garry Ashton, Mansan Luc, Michael Maas (bottom row) Maria Bluford, Otto Peterson and John Beard.

At the premiere of the documentary Milius (From left) Ethan Milius, alum John Milius, alum Amanda Milius, and Stephanie Milius. (Below) Milius with alum John Singleton and Milius waving to the packed house at the premiere.
The second Comedy@SCA Festival attracted luminaries in the comedy world including (Clockwise from left) Lisa Kudrow, Lawrence O’Dare, Conan O’Brien, Greg Daniels, and Al Jean; Barry Paskell, David Sanver, and James Barner; Joanna Cherryholmes, Dana Fox, Tracy Oliver, Jen Statsky, and Kate Dippold; Tom Sizemore, James L. Brooks, Vicky Jenson, David Silverman, Matt O’Callaghan, and Richard Appel; Mitchell Hurwitz, Jay Sandrich, Tony Thomas, and Paul Junger Witt; and Betty White.

(Left to right) Screening of the film Neighbors presented by the SCA Network and Comedy@SCA; A student takes a selfie with Jerrod Carmichael, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, and Dave Franco; Mintz-Plasse, Carmichael, Professor Barnet Kelman, and Franco.

Professor David Isaacs with Director Jake Kasdan at a screening of Sex Tape.

Demo Day, USC Games’ twice-yearly exhibition of student video games, attracted large crowds to hands on demonstrations of the student video games.

From top left: Artist Jack R. Smith, actor Grant Show, actress Katherine LaNasa, Marin Hopper and Crash show runner Glen Mazzara at the opening of Part of Being an Artist: The Dennis Hopper Collection - Selected Works and Ephemera.

Provost Elizabeth Garrett, Distinguished Professor/Chairholder Mark J. Harris, and USC Trustee Verna Dauterive at the Dedication of the Mona and Bernard Kantor Chair in Production.

Chief Executive Officer of Pixar Ed Catmull signing a copy of his book Creativity Inc. and being interviewed by Andrew Millstein from Disney.

Dino and Martha De Laurentiis Endowed Professor Mary Sweeney interviews award-winning director David O. Russell.

(Left to right) Kevin Douglas, Michelle Douglas, Steven Spielberg, Dean Elizabeth M. Daley, IMAX CEO Rich Gelfond, and President of IMAX Entertainment Greg Foster at the opening of the Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Lab; Guests at reception; OptiTrack performers in the Performance Capture Lab; A demonstration of IMAX 3D for guests.

Editor Dean Zimmerman (left) with alumni/director/producer Shawn Levy at a screening of This Is Where I Leave You.
In what is arguably the coolest course offered this year, directors and writers from the USC School of Cinematic Arts, production students from Trojan Vision, and actors from the USC School of Dramatic Arts produced a sketch comedy show—filmed before a studio audience and broadcasted live on television.

In other words, USC’s version of Saturday Night Live.

The academic project was complete with high-stakes pitching in the writer’s room, last-minute schedule shifts, drama in the control booth, and actors dealing with fast set changes. The project’s three episodes featured professional guest hosts: Jim Staahl (SCTV, Curb Your Enthusiasm), Misty Monroe (The Groundings, How I Met Your Mother), and Horatio Sanz (SNL).

The idea was dreamed up by Jack Epps, Jr. (who served as the “Lorne Michaels” of the show), Barnett Kelman, and David Isaacs, principals of the Comedy@SCA initiative. The three have major Hollywood credits as key players behind Frasier, Cheers, The Simpsons, MADAM’S HUSBAND (Isaacs), Murphy Brown, Mod About You (Kellman) and Dick Tracy, Turner & Hooch, Top Gun (Epps).

The USC School of Cinematic Arts is serious about comedy, offering twenty courses throughout its divisions for students focusing on the genre. For the Comedy@SCA Live project, the logistics were daunting and collaboration was key. It involved sixty students in four classes—eleven students in a sketch-comedy directing class taught by Phil Ramuno, who co-wrote the book on directing sitcoms (The Sitcom Career Book) and has helmed many, including Nine to Five, Gnomeo & Gnomeo and Soo; twelve students in a Dramatic Arts sketch-comedy acting class taught by Kristin Eggers ’01, a veteran of The Groundlings and Fox Comedy-Hour; and twenty-five students in a Trojan Vision production class taught by Joel Parker, who oversees eleven hours of live programming each week at the station.

For the first show, filmed on March 7, the four-hour dress rehearsal was mostly chaos. Chatter from the four camera operators to the control booth was constant. “They keep moving, and it’s hard to keep them in focus,” one writer said. “Which camera should he be looking at? It’s a waist shot!” So we’re going straight from shot 1 to shot 4!! “I can’t hear through my headset.”

Sketches included Staahl playing Tim Gunn (Project Runway) on the red carpet and actor Sheridan Pierce doing a spot-on impersonation of Zooey Deschanel as a perky prison counselor (The writers made use of her Deschanel impersonation in the next two shows, showcasing her as a perky murder investigator and a perky marriage therapist.) At show’s end, actor Riley Smith, who also was consistently funny summed it up best. “I honestly thought it was going to be a disaster, and it honestly wasn’t.” Then it was promptly back to work, with the writers pounding out new sketches in the writer’s room that Veasey ran like one at a production office. Senior Kenny Martin estimated that he and others each wrote or punched up about eighty sketches for the class. “From what Pam’s told us, it’s a pretty accurate experience in that we have to work with other divisions that may have their own take on the sketches.” Veasey was pointed in her critiques, occasionally giving praise and occasionally being very funny herself. “I love doing this,” she said. “The students want it so much. They have my whole career ahead of them.” Dress rehearsal for the second show was smoother, despite some students being starstruck by the host. “Oh, my God. I was floored,” said Kevin Vaughan, a second-year student in directing. “Horatio Sanz is among my all-time SNL favorites. I was very nervous talking to him. I’m still shaking.”

Sanz did the cold open with cue cards—another learning experience for the production staff—and appeared in one sketch, “Street Eats.” Other sketches included Staal playing Tim Gunn in a sketch-comedy writing class taught by Pam Veasey, whose lengthy producing and directing experience in that we have to work with other divisions that may have their own take on the sketches.” Veasey was pointed in her critiques, occasionally giving praise and occasionally being very funny herself. “I love doing this,” she said. “The students want it so much. They have my whole career ahead of them.” Dress rehearsal for the second show was smoother, despite some students being starstruck by the host. “Oh, my God. I was floored,” said Kevin Vaughan, a second-year student in directing. “Horatio Sanz is among my all-time SNL favorites. I was very nervous talking to him. I’m still shaking.”

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While architectural spaces have often served as characters in film, using constructed space as the actual platform for storytelling is a more recent development that has emerged from the interdisciplinary nature of the Media Arts + Practice Division (MA+P). What started as a specific collaboration between the School of Cinematic Arts and Professor Greg Otto at the USC School of Architecture, to study the practical applications of interactive architecture, has become a greater partnership. Faculty and students have been crossing over from one school to the other and at least one course is being developed in tandem between the two schools. In addition, funded research projects with Intel, Steelcase and other companies, as well as a recent influx of architects into MA+P’s Ph.D. program, are all helping SCA explore the potential of architecture as a cinematic medium.

For example, Farahi is particularly interested in “exploring how the kinetic and physical reconfiguration of space can help communicate with the user—maybe calm them down or make them excited.” She explains the relationship between inhabitant and an interactive built environment as similar to “the relationship you might have with your dog. You’re telling them what to do, but they have this intelligence in the system. They can interact with you and they can build on learning.” Eventually she hopes to create a system that can organize and sustain itself, while interacting with its user in a constant feedback loop, moving beyond static architectural scenarios and into the realm of storytelling.

Is this the new intersection of cinema and architecture? “Suddenly we have a confluence of people, materials and funding around this particular question,” says Holly Willis, Chair of MA+P. “Everything we do now is very non-linear, distributed. It’s participatory, collaborative, and immersive. So how do we create new ways for that to function?” In the collision of two rigid and linear...
set, the world develops organically and is capable of delivering a multitude of narratives within the space as students interrogate its rules based on a variety of interests. Catastrophic events, fuel source acrimony, and the inevitable plague have all played a part in the development of this fictional world.

Students pull out individual narratives with more or less architectural results. Terraforming, where the city grows itself, has been one productive outcome on a variety of scales. There are also Oculus Rift projects where a virtual reality experience is created. Like its initial concept, McDowell’s class has also grown organically. It has essentially become open source as schools from around the world have started working with the framework that the class developed. (A story on SCA’s research labs is on page 32.)

While MA+P is most certainly leading the way in defining the intersection of architecture and the cinematic arts, other explorations are emerging. Block, an interactive city-building game was created by Jose Sanchez, a Professor at the USC School of Architecture who works with SCA’s Game Innovation Lab and whose construction game Bloom was featured in London during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Block encourages users to think of architecture in its relationship to environmental and ecological systems, rather than purely by design and appearance. City data from Los Angeles, such as transportation and energy costs, is used as a structure for players to create cities and neighborhoods that will efficiently and economically meet the needs of real populations.

This fall, two additional architects joined the MA+P Ph.D. program. Their presence adds even more architectural perspective to the division’s research on storytelling across multiple forms of media. Arosaik Gabrelian is exploring how the time and motion based medium of cinema can express the temporal nature of landscape and built environment. She uses Google Street View to create new landscape design fictions and hopes to eventually manipulate the raw imagery such that her viewers can actually travel through the story space. Biayna Bogosian is looking at how different environmental and media inputs can be used to design a more efficient living environment. She sees architecture as a series of data, and media as the act of translating such data. Combining media with architecture gives her a much larger platform to create a narrative and customize the environments she creates.

Throughout MA+P students and faculty are attempting to transcend the two-dimensional screen, turning the audience from passive observers into active participants in the story-making process itself. As narrative becomes more immersive and less linear, why wouldn’t the architectural space of this immersive experience be an integral part of the story?

“The best thing an academic program can do is offer a space for asking, answering, pursuing and researching a set of questions.”

“The best thing an academic program can do is offer a space for asking, answering, pursuing and researching a set of questions.”

At the Mobile Environmental Media Lab (MEML), Dean of Research Scott Fisher and Researcher Jen Steen have been working with enormous amounts of data generated by four thousand sensors built into the School’s Interactive Media Building, which houses the Division. Most of these sensors track climatic data, but there are also sensors that capture the behavior of its residents, such as their movements through its spaces. “We were curious if there was something we could do with that in a narrative sense,” explains Fisher. “Could we make the building a character that tells stories about what happens in the building?” In fact, almost all of the lab’s current projects explore the narrative capabilities of the built environment in some way. MEML’s eventual goal is to create architecture that not only broadcasts heart rates, could the room perhaps intervene in a discussion, pull up a similar conversation from three years ago and then make a new suggestion, or maybe, as it gets to know people, feed them information tailored to their interests.

As part of the project, MEML is working on an emotive response interface, where a room knows that you have walked in and acknowledges your presence. At the moment it is just a lighting change (they have created a threshold that illuminates when it recognizes a friendly face) but Steen adds, “we are exploring how it feels to have a wall that might hug you or might move away from you. It’s a good way to start thinking about what the next form of architecture will be.”

In trying to determine which architectural platforms work for which narratives, Professor Alex McDowell’s World Building course is a good place to start. McDowell teaches students how to create the kind of worlds that will influence rich narratives, regardless of genre. To instigate the explorations, McDowell asks “What happens when you introduce a narrative conceit to a fictional world?” In their latest project, students have developed a specific set of rules for a city named Riaoa set on a steep island in the South Pacific that is too small for its current population. Once the logic is

disciplines, the traditional paradigm of narrative is being rewritten. Cinema is being re-imagined by re-imagining architecture.

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All digital writing is not created equal. A student writing for the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) website might be happy that the illustration of her blog post is just one embedded movie or game trailer. But when working on her thesis project she needs to reference so many different kinds of media that linking, embedding and referencing become a new-media nightmare.

by Desa Philadelphia

Enter Scalar, a web authoring and publishing platform designed specifically to accommodate digital writing for academic purposes. It was designed with scholars or students in mind, to think about new ways to do academic writing but it can be used by anybody,” says SCA Professor Tara McPherson, who spearheaded the development team. “It’s a way to think about new kinds of writing for the 21st century, and that includes multiple kinds of media as well as text.”

The platform allows users to create long form writing that is born-digital. It’s like taking an e-book and turning it upside down, side-to-side and inside out because user can choose their own “path” through the materials, sometimes based on her interests using “tags” that group related content. “It’s a small set of relations between the content but it’s really powerful and really flexible,” explains Erik Loyer, Scalar’s Creative Director. Moreover, as its name suggests, the Scalar platform offers the user “(it’s tempting to say “reader”): the ability to consider the world on different scales, whether contemplating the project as a whole presentation, or focusing on its various parts—a video or photo for instance. (Compare it to the way a user can zoom in and out when using Google Maps.)

Another exciting development is that Scalar is already showing promise beyond academia. “Scalar is now being used by creative writers and by artists interested in new, interactive forms of documentary. We’re pleased to see this broader uptake and look forward to having creators take Scalar in directions beyond what we initially designed it for,” says McPherson. After its beta release in early 2013, Scalar won an Editor’s Choice award from PC Magazine.

Considering that the demand for online journals is only growing, the Scalar platform should have an exciting journey as it is frequently reinvented to facilitate scholarly communication online. “There’s a real demand for a format to write this kind of work,” says Loyer, a media artist who specializes in interactive essays (he is also the Creative Director of Vectors). “The way Scalar links to media creates a chain from the scholar to the archive to the public that can be really seamless,” he says. “And that’s what we see people getting really excited about.”

For more information or to view these and many more projects in action, visit: scalar.usc.edu/scalar/showcase
We found that Trojan family ties at Mad Men were indeed strong, as represented by the list of USC grads listed in these pages. The visit also gave us a chance to catch up with Mad Men creator and principal writer Matthew Weiner, SCA alum and winner of many awards, among them several Emmys and the Mary Pickford Award (which is given to an SCA alum who has made transformative contributions to the entertainment industry).

We asked Matthew what he looks for when hiring new staff, especially among graduates from the alma mater.

MW: I’m one of those people who believe there’s more to education than getting a job—that it has other purposes, like enriching your life and making you a better artist, a better audience member, and that it informs all aspects of your experience of living. And one of the things that I like about the people from USC is that they seem to be educated. And that’s much more what I’m interested in. Someone who, with or without academic success, knows something about the world, has seen a bunch of movies, has read a bunch of books, and I also think it’s just the kind of person that goes to USC. I feel like I get curious people who can contribute in ways other than just doing their job.

MW: I only taught for one semester.

IN MOTION: Well, I guess it’s made a lasting impression there because people talk about it as if you were there longer.

MW: Well, it’s kind of the fantasy on some level because two of the people who were in the class of eight people actually came to work with me.

IN MOTION: I think that’s why it’s become the stuff of legend.

MW: I didn’t have a show I was on. The Sopranos when I did it. But that program [SCA Writing] was so hard to get into and there’s a lot of talent in it, and they are young people who worked for a few years before they came to work for me.
and they worked their way up here. The interesting thing is that having talent and being able to execute something based on talent or having the tenaciousness to stay in it, that’s a personality thing. Part of my teaching mission was to not just emphasize writing, but also staying with writing, because your time becomes divided very quickly into the show business part of your career, which is networking and hearing about jobs and getting interviews and writing spec material and judging the marketplace and all these things that are kind of hard to learn.

**IN MOTION:** If you are a student in the writing division now, what should you be doing in terms of analyzing what’s on television right now, to prepare yourself?

**MW:** I think that you’re best served by paying attention to storytelling in general and not thinking about the form so much. It is networking and hearing about jobs and getting interviews and writing spec material and judging the marketplace and all these things that are kind of hard to learn.

**IN MOTION:** What do you think of web product? Because a lot of people now are trying to create some kind of TV on the web.

**MW:** I think, as was proved by the Writer’s Guild strike, there is no difference whatsoever except for access to an audience. I have little kids who do not know that Netflix is an internet-based company. The button is on the remote, so that’s all there is to it. YouTube, Google, depending on what happens with Net Neutrality, we’ll see how much access we really do have to the audience. Let’s take something like The Sopranos, which was first on paid-TV, a very small slice of the audience but an audience that paid basically by the episode to get it for three months and they watched all the episodes. Then they watched it on videotape, then DVD, then on HBO Go, then on Netflix, then on iTunes. Once you have this possibility, it’s just a matter of who’s going to put up enough money to produce a show the way it’s been done on the network—then on pay cable, then on basic cable—on the internet. And we saw Netflix do it; there’s nothing that smacks of incredible production value and big name talent like House of Cards. So someone will do that on YouTube. Someone will do that on Google. So when I think about the web, it’s just another channel. People watch Mad Men on their phone. No one foresaw that when we started the show.

**IN MOTION:** Do people sit around and talk about SCA around here, or are you guys too busy?

**MW:** Is there talk about film school? Oh my God, of course there is. We had four people on the writing staff out of ten that went there. So there’s some conversation.

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**HEATHER JENG BLAIDT**
SDA, Writing for Screen & Television, 2005
Mad Men Job Title: Writer and Assistant to Matthew Weiner
What she’s up to now: Currently writing projects of my own and looking to write on another great show.

**MELISSA BLY MOSORLEY**
Dornsife, Psychology, 1985
Mad Men Job Title: Food Stylist/Prop Assistant
What she’s up to now: I am currently working on State of Affairs for NBC.

**BARTHOLOMOW BURCHAM**
SDA, Critical Studies, 2004
Mad Men Job Title: Assistant Editor
What he’s up to now: I would love to learn at USC in the future.

**KENDRA SHAY CLARK**
SDA, Stake Producing Program, 2006
Mad Men Job Title: Casting Associate
What she’s up to now: Casting Director on Aquarius, a new show for NBC.

**STEFANIE DRAKE**
Dramatic Arts, Theatre, 2006
Mad Men Job Title: Actress (Played “ Meredith”)
What she’s up to now: Recently enjoyed a great trip to Italy and will be busy looking for my next great role!

**MATTHEW D. EGAN**
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Mad Men Job Title: Propmaker
What he’s up to now: Currently Go-Resident Set/Lighting Designer and Asst. Technical Director at Spokane Civic Theatre

**MICHELLE FELLNER**
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Mad Men Job Title: Assistant Editor

**GARY FREUND**
USC Department of Cinema, 1949
Mad Men Job Title: Father of property master/supplier of materials of the period such as film commercials, stationery, mops, and instruction in movie operation.
What he’s up to now: Seriously retired, but enjoyed revisiting my own past.

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What he’s up to now: Seriously retired, but enjoyed revisiting my own past.
The School’s Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Media Lab, made possible by donations from the Douglases, IMAX’s largest shareholders, and the IMAX Corporation, was unveiled as the newest addition to the state of the art Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts on June 4th of this year.

There’s no doubt that the gargantuan 46’ x 26’ IMAX screen will push students out of their comfort zones and broaden their understanding of how to visualize their work. The 50-seat theater and immersive lab houses every tool necessary for learning and experiencing the medium: ceiling-mounted grids for overhead lights, cameras, and sensors; sophisticated 3-D projectors for the left and right eyes; built-in OptiTrack motion capture cameras; and high-speed network connectivity that enables streaming of events in real-time.

“This gift is not only transformative for the research efforts of the School but, most importantly, puts the cutting-edge immersive storytelling, large-format filmmaking, and virtual production tools in our students’ hands,” said SCA Dean Elizabeth M. Daley. With the Zemeckis Center already boasting an impressive Performance Capture Stage and a World Building Media Lab, the addition of the IMAX theater underscores its standing as one of the most advanced learning facilities in the country.

Speakers at the launch event included director Steven Spielberg, IMAX CEO Richard Gelfond, and Kevin Douglas. Spielberg praised the School’s forward-thinking curriculum and highlighted the vital importance of embracing new technologies in a constantly changing industry. “Film students do work on the small screen,” Spielberg told the audience that had gathered to see a 3D presentation highlighting the capability of the IMAX system. He added: “Everything they do starts on a small screen. They take their work home, and the small screen becomes whatever they can work on—their iPads, their iPhones. They’re used to seeing things tiny. The result of that is, film students shoot too many close-ups. The result of this is they’re going to stop shooting close-ups, and they’re going to start expanding to the horizons that IMAX demands.”

At the IMAX Theater and Immersive Lab, students will get access to tools and emerging technologies to build expertise in the format’s newest techniques. They will be creating immersive 3D films, integrating IMAX into virtual production, and even experimenting with how to use the technology in multiplayer game design. These fields are changing so rapidly, students themselves may even help shape the future of the technologies. “The students’ exploration of IMAX filmmaking and immersive storytelling will push the boundaries of the medium, creating experiences we cannot even imagine yet,” Robert Zemeckis said in a statement.

That pioneering spirit of invention and creativity is something that IMAX CEO Gelfond knows well. “IMAX has been a cinematic innovator since its inception more than 45 years ago,” he said. “We take our commitment to the future of entertainment very seriously and believe that through this gift we can help educate future filmmakers of the world on how to use technology to express their vision in new ways.”
LEADING THE WAY

{ Three New Division Chairs Take Over }

The School of Cinematic Arts’ seven divisions are distinct entities, each growing rapidly with respect to teaching practice as well as innovating research. But in order to make great media the divisions also collaborate a great deal, sharing talent, ideas, and resources. The job of keeping all the parts working together—fluidly and progressively—is a massive undertaking that wouldn’t happen without the nimble orchestrations of the divisions’ Chairs.

The Division Chair must wear many hats: part visionary, part fundraiser, part accountant, and part politician (the politician personality might be dominant). It sounds like an intimidating position so we decided to ask the School’s three newest Chairs about their approach to tackling it. This is also our way of introducing them to the SCA Family.

By Desa Philadelphia

Photography by Roberto A. Gómez
**OUR LAUGHTER-FILLED CONVERSATION ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN AN SCA DIVISION TOOK PLACE IN THE VOLUME OF THE SCHOOL’S NEW PERFORMANCE CAPTURE LAB, LOCATED IN THE ROBERT ZEMECKIS CENTER FOR DIGITAL ARTS.**

**IN MOTION:** I’m going to start with a loaded question because I’m not sure that everybody knows what a Chair does. What’s so impactful about this job that made you say yes to the gig?

**FINK:** I did it for the money. [Laughter]

**WILLIS:** The role of the Division Chair is incredible in part because you get to have an oversight of the big picture of the division and the relationship among the divisions and thinking about how that relationship then feeds the larger vision of the entire School of Cinematic Arts. So it’s this really wonderful way of navigating between the local and then the larger, global picture of our future for the School. I think for me, also, thinking about it in terms of curriculum, teaching practices, research, funding—all of those things are kind of under your domain and things that you get to think about, worry about, strategize about, and try to help move everything forward. It has tremendous creative potential with the possibility of having an incredible impact. That part is great. The other part is that it’s really hard, navigating all those things and the day to day of having oversight of all these different domains that require a hundred different skills—I think I’ve got three of them. I count on my team to help fill in where I don’t have the skills that are needed, but I think it’s that big picture of navigating again the local to the division and then to the vision of the School.

**IN MOTION:** Is that something you can relate to Mike, having worked in a field where you have to oversee so many people who work together to create a vision?

**FINK:** Well, there are some similarities between being out in the world of feature film production and then coming here. But the thing that really rings true for me is that I’ve spent most of my career gathering groups of people together, all with their own needs: directors of photography, production designers, directors, craft service people, grips, gaffers, producers—gathering them together and encouraging them to move on a path they can’t see that lets us achieve the things that we need to tell the story. So gathering people of all kinds, sometimes with conflicting viewpoints, and bringing them together to move forward in a unified way is something I’ve always done—and it didn’t hurt that I was an army officer. [Laughter]

**IN MOTION:** Tom, you’re the new kid on the block in this group. What’s exciting to you about going from being primarily focused on your own creative work to now having this big-vision role?

**SITO:** Like Mike, I’ve also worked with large groups of people to make good films. The fun part about working in a career as specific as Animation is that you have people who consider themselves individual artists or individual creative minds, but we’re all aware that we have to work in a group. It’s always been about collaboration. The finished film is the work of art and everything else is a process to get to that point. I think of the division in the same way. Each instructor has individual, specific talents. Some instructors are better at experimental filmmaking. Some are from the traditional Hollywood type of animation; yet the sum of everybody’s efforts creates a broad learning experience for the students.

**IN MOTION:** And that’s ultimately what it’s all about. When you start thinking about what it is that the students need to know when they walk out the door at graduation, how do you prioritize?

**FINK:** Well for us, it’s not too hard to think about this because we’re storytellers. If you just keep that one thing in mind—that you’re there to help these young people find ways to tell compelling stories—you’re on the right path. So, if you hold that as the course you stay on—Does it help teach people how to tell a story? Does it help them get their voice out there to the world?—it’s not difficult then, to know what to do. We have faculty who are experts in the entire process, and we rely on them to help set these priorities. Storytelling binds us all, no matter what our expertise.

**IN MOTION:** Animation has changed so much, Tom, not just in the way you do it, but also in areas of storytelling where it’s become integral. Does it seem like the field is just mushrooming to the point where it’s hard to rein it all into curriculum?

**SITO:** One of the strengths of our program is how to adapt animated filmmaking for the new technologies. In my own personal case, I was mindful that I began my career when a lot of golden age artists were ending theirs. I was able to interact with Chuck Jones and the Nine Old Men and Hanna and Barber. I knew all those guys. When they taught you, it was sort of a master and apprentice kind of thing. And they didn’t teach you because they liked you personally. [Laughter] They did, luckily, but also they wanted what they’ve discovered, and what they’ve learned, to move on to future generations. I feel that’s a mission for me, to make sure that no matter how technologically advanced the new technologies get, there’s still a strong emphasis on the basic skills.

**IN MOTION:** And Holly, your Division has a reputation of trying anything. [Laughter] Well everything that seems like a great idea, intellectually. Is that freeing or is it something that keeps you up at night?

**WILLIS:** I think both. I mean, what’s exciting right now is that we’re at this moment of such tremendous change and we’re getting to witness the transformation of cinema, which has been relatively stable for 100 years, into this proliferation of storytelling that moves beyond the screen into the world around us. The idea of storytelling and user experience, all of that is up for grabs and our students get to really chart the way. They’re really on the boundaries and the edges of what’s been done, kind of taking the legacy of what we know so well about cinema but moving it to all these new areas and thinking about it not just in terms of new technologies—immersive reality, virtual reality, mobile, social media—but also into new domains: education, business, architecture. So, for me,
I think that’s what’s most important right now, is trying to reckon with this shift.

IN MOTION: The School as a whole is not just teaching students how to master the skills that are already in the toolbox of the professionals out there, but also working to think critically about what the next innovations might be. The idea is that we’re always moving forward, that in addition to taking from the industry, we’re also contributing to the industry. How does that impact your own work, and how you instruct the faculty to think about their work with students?

FINK: That’s really interesting. I’ve found that we, without knowing it or working at it, get a lot of guidance from the students. You can’t help but do that.

IN MOTION: We have a large number of adjunct faculty, primarily because we can hire working professionals who can’t yet commit to a full time academic career, but are really happy to share what they’re learning on their jobs and what they’re experiencing with. This is invigorating for both full time faculty and for students, and enlivens the conversation. There’s pressure internally within the faculty to just do better on every level, whether it’s creative pedagogical issues or practical, every day issues such as learning to operate an Avid, and remembering it. [Laughter]

SITO: I always forget.

IN MOTION: That’s a discussion. We have a faculty meeting it becomes from students up to the faculty about it, get a lot of guidance from the students. We were moving at a pace that we, without knowing it or working at it, had just realized it too late for it to pan out on that one project. But it was a clear signal that we had to address it, I felt, by working collaboratively particularly with Tracy (Fullerton) in Interactive Media & Games. Because what we’re finding is that students have great technical chops, understand a lot about how to get an image on a screen in a new way, but know less about production design, pacing, and cinematography - what a real camera might shoot so that it feels natural. Those kinds of skills, which we develop naturally in Production kind of come later in Interactive, so we’re trying to bring our students together to make it all work, and Tom and I have just started to work with a major studio, and with Jack Epps in the Writing Division, to create a new course which will bring in writers and animators and live action students to really dive into creating new, compelling characters, whether they’re animated or live action, or environments for those characters or whatever it is. I’m pretty excited. It’s a lot of fun.

IN MOTION: You’re talking about divisions working together and students being adept at many things. How do you walk that line at giving students an interdisciplinary experience while still nurturing expertise within some area.

SITO: I think it’s varying the faculty so it’s not heavily weighted in one area. That’s very important. And giving the students choice. Your choice of faculty becomes almost like casting a movie. I know in animation, when you’re putting animators on an assignment, you say, “This person’s good at comedy.” This person’s good at drama. This person’s good at animating animals. We have teachers that are steeped in traditional techniques, or are more experimental, or whose specialty is non-objective like installations and things like that.

WILLIS: The other thing we’re experimenting with is thinking about the kind of community that we’re building outside of the classroom and the ethos and the kind of person that we want to graduate from the School and the ethos that we’re in.

So take the example of the game that we’re making, whatever division you’re in. That’s a clear signal that we had to address it, and we’re looking for people who are innovative, who have that kind of freshness, that kind of passion. We’re looking for people who have that kind of freshness, that kind of passion. There are movies happening now that we call hybrids. A hybrid is a movie like Ted or like Guardians of the Galaxy, a live action movie with animated characters in it, so both disciplines are working side by side. We have to prepare our students for that kind of work.

IN MOTION: How does the School of Cinematic Arts work with the Ph.D. students. For the undergrads, we’re looking for people who are innovative, who are working in different areas. They don’t have to have any particular skills in media offering, but maybe they’ve done sculpture and music, they’ve combined different creative forms and they’re willing to go where there is no pathway yet. So we look for that kind of passion for doing something that hasn’t been done yet.

SITO: We’re looking for people who have a fire in their belly to want to make animation, who love the medium as much as we do. And that’s what’s enjoyable is seeing the collaboration between the students. I’ve taught at other schools where students are working on their own projects, kind of like [crosses arms across chest]. From when I started teaching at USC in 1994. I enjoyed watching how the SC students would aid one another. If one had a problem another one would help them out. Seniors would pause to answer the questions of freshmen and juniors. I liked that kind of calmer, I’d like to continue to encourage that.

IN MOTION: Like, I feel like it’s probably most difficult for you because everybody feels they’re a filmmaker these days because the technology is so accessible. What are you looking for?

FINK: We’re really looking for a freshness. Which is hard to find because young people today are media saturated and quite often what we see is work that is really accomplished. Seventeen year olds, eighteen year olds, applying as freshman, with seriously skilled films. The sound is the images are good. Everything is pretty slick. But I’d rather see something a little rough around the edges that is trying to push into new territory and trying to take some risks. We’re looking for people who have that kind of freshness, that kind of edge and risk-taking, and a real commitment to story. We look for it both in the undergraduates and graduates. We’re not looking for people who have really high sets of technical skills. We can deal with that. Technical skills can be taught.
A touchstone for Bob’s work is that he’s worked the same on all of them. I try to remain I see it. ’It’s very simple yet it what I want to see, when I think you have to I was stunned. I hadn’t worked in film for twenty years and I just didn’t want to do that again. I didn’t want to wake up at seventy and be working on two or three year films. It can wear you down so I retired and somewhere around the week I retired I got a call from USC asking if I wanted to come down as a professor and teach,” says Jones. “What surprised me most is being able to convey my feelings and thoughts on editing. I thought I wouldn’t know how to explain it, but I think I have a better handle on that now and things seem to work pretty well.”

James’ style of filmmaking has shaped an entire generation of Trojan professionals. “My mantra is, ‘Cut to what I want to see, when I see it.’ It’s very simple yet it works,” says Jones. “I think you have to become aware of your instincts and trust them. I make my cuts as they come and work the same on all of them. I try to remain honest and work on performance.”

“A touchstone for Bob’s work is that he’s always searching for the character moments and how they fit into the story, no matter what the style of the pieces,” says Norman Hollyn, the Michael Kahn Endowed Chair in Editing at SCA. “As Bob often says, to be editors we have to be clones because we have to take on the persona of the film that we’re working on. And if anything Bob’s [unique talent] is the ability to do just that. All of his films have fantastic character.”

Jones’ films (as both a writer and editor) are a survey of American cinema including Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? Shampoo, It’s a Mad Mad Mad Mad World and Love Story. His work has spanned several genres and budget sizes. He won the Academy Award for screenwriting in 1978 for Coming Home. In 2014, Jones received the ACE Career Achievement Award. It seems like no one was surprised Jones would receive the editing guild’s top prize—except Jones himself.

“I was stunned. I hadn’t worked in film for fourteen years. I never expected it,” he jokes. “It was a wonderful evening I treasure the evening, but I never expected it!” Jones is a beloved educator at USC. Although he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legendary resume, he still claims that his entry into teaching was a bit of a fluke and he has a legend
In September, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, known around the world for the Golden Globe Awards, pledged $100,000 endowment as part of its ongoing effort to support film preservation and education. HFPA President Theo Kingma says supporting the next generation is part of the organization’s mission. “We try every year to give as much as we can to these highly deserving organizations,” he said in a statement. “It is gratifying to know that our efforts are appreciated.”

SCA student support contributions come in all shapes and sizes. As Kickstarter and other 21st century grassroots funding models have proven, donations of any size can translate into remarkable success stories. Bay Area lawyer Tim McCaffery and his wife Claudia, for example, gave money to SCA’s Parent Project after their two sons began attending USC. “Sometimes I think, people figure ‘Oh USC is doing fine,’ they don’t need my small donation. But those small donations help students stay in school in circumstances where maybe otherwise they wouldn’t be able to.”

The McCafferys were moved to help after observing first-hand the quality of their children’s experience, one son is enrolled at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism while their younger son attends SCA. “Parents and alumni might start to feel almost intimidated to reach out with a smaller contribution but I think that’s wrong,” Mr. McCaffery says. “A gift of any financial amount can make a huge difference. Claudia and I decided to take whatever small steps we could to help ensure that every student can go to school uninterrupted, whether or not their parents had financial success.”

For SCA alum Rich Bluestein, the desire to help students in need gained urgency after she was diagnosed with terminal stage four breast cancer. To benefit students at SCA, Writing for Screen and Television Division or the Bryan Singer Division of Critical Studies, she has now created the Rich Lynn Bluestein Endowment Fund in honor of professors Richard Jewell and Michael Renov. Bluestein, who enrolled in Critical Studies at the age of 38 after working as a production accountant for Cannon Films, remembers SCA as “a nurturing experience that really changed my life. I have learning disabilities, so just being acknowledged by these professors for having a beautiful mind is something that influenced me as a person.”

Bluestein’s bequest also serves as a pay-it-forward gesture. She attended SCA on a scholarship that helped fund study abroad in Paris. “I’ve had a lot of adventures and I’d hoped to write something of my own but I have my bequest as creative director, Fogelman and FactoryMade this fellowship in 2010 in honor of Rodriguez after he was introduced to Dean Daley by SCA alum Guillermo Rodriguez, who in turn encouraged Paul hesburgh, CEO of Princeton Firms to get involved with the School. Pandelon, co-owned by Liongate and Television, has released movies ranging from the Spanish-language hit comedy Instructions Not Included to the Diego Luna-directed Caesar Chavez: A Stonewall biopic. Feltheimer and Presburger established two student support initiatives at SCA: The Lionsgate and Television Fund for Student Support and the Pandelon Screenwriting Contest both aimed at nurturing students interested in creating content that features Latino perspectives.

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EVERY WAY IS FORWARD

by ERIC LICHTENFELD

The islands that form the city-state of Rilao seem to rise out of the sun-kissed Pacific. A few quick glances at the homes built into the high, sheer cliffs reveal a novel architecture. But a closer study of the archipelago exposes something else—the lingering fingerprint of a long-ago trauma: an epidemic that gored the local population. The plague ravaged Rilao for half of 1919. It killed one out of every five Rilaoans. And it was started by researchers from USC.

IN THE YEAR 2014.

The islands which Rilao now calls home were started by researchers from USC. The Research program is about exploring many futures at once, adds Holly Willis, chair of SCA’s Media Arts + Practice Division, to Dean of Research Scott Fisher, one purpose connects them all: “Reimagining storytelling and what story means in the 21st century.”

SCA’s ten research laboratories. Staffed by students and faculty, these labs—which also include the MxR (or Mixed Realities) Lab, the Stereoscopic 3D Lab, the Change Making Media Lab, the Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Media Lab, the Game Innovation Lab, the Mobile and Environmental Media Lab, the Creative Media & Behavioral Health Center, the Transient Media Lab and the Scalar Lab—are outposts on the frontiers of technology and content.

Collaborating with industry partners including Google, Sony, Intel, BMW, Activision, and others, the labs are deployed on a number of fronts that have tantalizing, even romantic rings to them: immersive cinema; virtual production; neurocinematics; interactive architecture, the Emerging Cities Project, and more. But to Dean of Research Scott Fisher, one purpose connects them all: “Reimagining storytelling and what story means in the 21st century.”

RILAO IS A CREATION of the World Building Lab, one of SCA’s ten research laboratories. Staffed by students and faculty, these labs—which also include the MxR (or Mixed Realities) Lab, the Stereoscopic 3D Lab, the Change Making Media Lab, the Michelle & Kevin Douglas IMAX Theatre and Immersive Media Lab, the Game Innovation Lab, the Mobile and Environmental Media Lab, the Creative Media & Behavioral Health Center, the Transient Media Lab and the Scalar Lab—are outposts on the frontiers of technology and content.

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Add’s Holly Willis, chair of SCA’s Media Arts + Practice Division, “the research efforts are a way to leverage what’s happening at the School, and for the School to take a leadership position not only in the industry, but also in the culture.”

Rilao, the Leviathan team has been designing its world within the Unity engine for viewers—or better still, participants—to explore at will through the Oculus Rift. Emphasizing immersion and interactivity, the project first drew students from the Interactive Media & Games Division. Soon after, they were joined by students from Production, Writing and Media Arts + Practice, and from Fine Arts, Engineering, Architecture, and the School of Dramatic Arts. To lab producer Oshea Myers, a self-proclaimed “film dog,” the collision of disciplines is what gives the lab its vitality. But the collaboration does not end when the various sites within SCA or from across USC come together. It extends to the user: “Our end goal is to create an experience, but every individual experiences it differently. That’s when the user becomes a collaborator; a builder, as well,” she says. “It’s not a film; it’s not a project I’m producing a living entity.”

ACROSS TOWN, in the warehouse that is home to USC’s Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), associate professor Mark Bolas also investigates what it means to immerse living users in virtual worlds. And it scares him. Bolas (who admits to having read too much dystopian science fiction) is the associate director of the MxR lab at ICT. He also runs the lab’s sister space, the MxR studio, in the School’s Cinematic Arts Complex. In both locations, Bolas is furthering what he calls his “25-year quest” defining VR as its own medium. What unnerves him is finally seeing virtual reality becoming a practical one. “It’s one thing to try to convince everyone that it’s great;” he says. “It’s another to actually see that it’s going to influence culture across the board.”

Bolas views his research as an extension of his master’s thesis, for which Scott Fisher was his advisor. In the 1980s, they pioneered the field of VR using Fisher’s lab at NASA. Fisher later brought Bolas to USC. Here, Bolas was influenced by working with one of ICT’s directors, psychologist Albert “Skip” Rizzo, a research professor at the USC Davis School of Gerontology and of the USC Keck School of Medicine. Bolas supplied head-mounted displays to Rizzo, who used them to research PTSD treatments combining exposure therapy and virtual reality.

The MxR lab is now exploring the future of communication and collaboration in virtual worlds. “We’re figuring out how to enable you to be present in multiple meetings at once, using a virtual representation of yourself,” says Bolas. “People will feel like you’re there, while in fact, you’re texting from somewhere else, controlling three virtual humans.”

“Artifacts” from the island of Rilao on display in the Interactive Media Building as part of the Science of Fiction exhibit.

housing the story—or more accurately, the story possibilities. They can include the world’s politics, geography, geology, history, architecture, fashion, and even its physical laws. And as creators develop a world in such fine detail, various facets point not only to different stories, but also to different media.

Consider Rilao. Conceived as a hybrid of Rio and Los Angeles, Rilao and its history have inspired stories, songs, and poetry. But they have also inspired other, more elaborate media projects. In the lab, these pieces are a tool for examining societal achievements and challenges; in the world of Rilao, they are artifacts. One is a virtual reality experience that was once a right-wing religious group’s propaganda piece. Another is a video installation based on the 1919 epidemic and the shocks it sent over subsequent generations. The lab’s Rilao team spent the summer testing these and other projects, including the first full-scale virtual model of the city. The model will turn users into visitors as they don the Oculus Rift head-mounted display and take their own self-guided tours of Rilao.

Virtual reality—or VR—is a pillar of the lab’s research, particularly for its flagship project: expanding the world of Scott Westerfeld’s bestselling novel, Leviathan. This world is filled with adventurers, steampunk technologies, and flying whales. As with Rilao, the Leviathan team has been designing its world within the Unity engine for viewers—or better still, participants—to explore at will through the Oculus Rift. Emphasizing immersion and interactivity, the project first drew students from the Interactive Media & Games Division. Soon after, they were joined by students from Production, Writing and Media Arts + Practice, and from Fine Arts, Engineering, Architecture, and the School of Dramatic Arts.

To lab producer Oshea Myers, a self-proclaimed “film dog,” the collision of disciplines is what gives the lab its vitality. But the collaboration does not end when the various sites within SCA or from across USC come together. It extends to the user: “Our end goal is to create an experience, but every individual experiences it differently. That’s when the user becomes a collaborator; a builder, as well,” she says. “It’s not a film; it’s not a project I’m producing a living entity.”

Bolas views his research as an extension of his master’s thesis, for which Scott Fisher was his advisor. In the 1980s, they pioneered the field of VR using Fisher’s lab at NASA. Fisher later brought Bolas to USC. Here, Bolas was influenced by working with one of ICT’s directors, psychologist Albert “Skip” Rizzo, a research professor at the USC Davis School of Gerontology and of the USC Keck School of Medicine. Bolas supplied head-mounted displays to Rizzo, who used them to research PTSD treatments combining exposure therapy and virtual reality.

The MxR lab is now exploring the future of communication and collaboration in virtual worlds. “We’re figuring out how to enable you to be present in multiple meetings at once, using a virtual representation of yourself,” says Bolas. “People will feel like you’re there, while in fact, you’re texting from somewhere else, controlling three virtual humans.” How

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the virtual humans act, look, and sound
will provoke emotions in the real ones—
which is why, to Bolas, SCA’s involvement
is so important. “What I get from my
cinema students is well trained muscle that
is sensitive to, and can articulate,
people’s emotional reaction to content,
and then use that reaction to change the
to, or the technology.”
But the lab’s most impactful project might
also be its most informal: the Unity Study
Group, a largely peer-led group open to
any student who wants to learn the
game engine. Some of the most important
figures in VR today emerged from summer
2012’s study group. James Iiff and Nathan
Burba formed the VR company Servos.
Lab assistant Palmer Luckey invented
the Oculus Rift based on the lab’s open-
source designs. He then helped found
Oculus, a company that Facebook
acquired in July for $2 billion. And
Nonny de la Peña, a former Newsweek
correspondent and now a doctoral
candidate in Media Arts + Practice, built
something else: a new field.
The seeds of this field, “Immersive
Journalism,” were planted in 2007, when
Hoberman founded the lab with Scott
Fisher and SCA professor Michael Peyser.
“Originally, the lab was established to get the
whole School up to speed on stereoscopic
filmmaking,” says Hoberman, whom Fisher
It’s become more fluid. We’ve moved into
areas that have more to do with other kinds
of imaging, such as virtual reality.”
(Closeup from top) Researchers develop games in the
USC School of Cinematic Arts’ Game Innovation
Lab. (Bottom left) A user interacts with the
head mounted display for Project Syria at the
World Economic Forum in Davos. (Middle right)
The virtual Syrian refugee camp in Project Syria.

People were bawling,” she remembers.
“People were down on the ground, trying
to hold up the head of a body that wasn’t
there.” Later, Bolas appointed de la Peña
as the research manager of the VR lab.
There, the visiting head of the World
Economic Forum asked her to create a
VR project to immerse users in the
experience of Syrian refugees. This effort
would become Project Syria, which uses
VR to transport participants first to the
capital, then to a refugee camp.
To de la Peña, Immersive Journalism
represents the best hope for helping
people become better informed
as traditional journalism wanes and new
media expands. But de la Peña
acknowledges that, as a medium, virtual
reality is still too new for anyone to get
completely comfortable with it. “We need
to be thinking about best practices,” she
says. “How far do we push users? What
do we show them? What are the limits?
What’s right?” For de la Peña and the
students she oversees, these questions are
just as central to their research as is the
technology.

CLOSELY ALIGNED
with the MoV studio is Perry Hoberman’s Stereoscopic 3D
lab, a less formal but highly active arm of
SCA’s research program. Like Bolas, Hoberman is searching for the
strategies and language that are specific to his
medium. “Most movies aren’t designed just
for 3D. They’re designed for 2D and 2Q,” he
says. “The things that work really well
for 3D are excluded.”
Hoberman founded the lab with Scott
Fisher and SCA professor Michael Peyser.
“Originally, the lab was established to get
the whole School up to speed on stereoscopic
filmmaking,” says Hoberman, whom Fisher
It’s become more fluid. We’ve moved into
three-dimensional objects that is tracked as
it moves. Viewers can watch an object—
including a person—degenerete, renew, or
otherwise transform, depending on where
it is in space. ‘We’re just experimenting
with that now,’ he says, ‘and with the
expressive possibilities of these media.’
Like Hoberman, Interactive Media &
Games Chair Tracy Fullerton puts the
ultimate premium not on the tools, but
on the experiences they can be used to
create. Fullerton’s medium is play itself, not
rooted in any one technology, and always
leaving itself to new applications. This
is the foundation of her Game Innovation
Lab. Its overarching goal is to investigate
and push—the boundaries of what games
can be. This includes what games mean
for entertainment, but also for art, science,
and education. Fullerton, who earned an
MFA in Film and Television production
from SCA, grants this as a large umbrella.
It encompasses health and wellness,
sustainability, innovation in the arts and in
aesthetics, social justice, civil participation,
and more.
If the lab embodies a diverse slate
of interests, it also represents a diverse
group of researchers. Projects are developed
by division students and also by students
from computer science, communications,
fine arts, education, and other disciplines.
“A lot of USC buildings are represented in
the research we do,” Fullerton says. As
for the lab’s own space (located in SCA’s
newest building and just down the hall
from the MoV studio), she describes it
as filled with games and toys, curves and
crazy colors. “We wanted the space to
reflect the playful methodology we work
in. You can tell when you’re in our lab! The
lab also has open spaces and a few barriers
separating work groups. ‘I like the vibrant interchange,’” Fullerton
says. “We invite students to come in
and work even if they’re not part of the lab—
as long as they don’t leave their lunch
there.”
At the Game Innovation Lab, some
projects are conceived internally and then
executed with outside support; others
begin as concepts that are hatched by
other entities, which then enlist the lab’s
help. An example of the former is Fullerton’s
Walden, a game. Supported by an Arts
and Humanities grant from USC, as well as
a grant from the National Endowment for
the Arts, Walden, a game invites players
to recreate Henry David Thoreau’s
experimental living at Walden Pond. Chronocards,
the other hand, began as a history project
proposed by Microsoft. Seeking to build
a game that would mark the centennial of
World War I, Microsoft brought its
components to the Game Innovation
Lab, which would launch not one game,
but two. (‘Because that’s the way we
do things around here,” says Fullerton.)
Both games were designed for young
students and their teachers. And because many classrooms lack regular access to technology, the games were printed on opposite sides of a deck of cards.

Also for young students—and at the request of NASA—the lab is developing a game based on USC research into new forms of life on Earth, or extremophiles.

“The idea that something but through allowing them to do this all you want, but when they play the game, they realize how critical it is to take action based on the drama.”

Like his counterparts at SCA’s other labs, Kagan enjoys the lab’s cross-discipline collaborations. “We’re availing ourselves to take action based on the drama.”

2009 based largely on the entertainment-education model espoused by Winter Institute/Producer/Researcher Miguel Sabido in the 1970s, and considers the lab to be both a production facility and a research organization. Its mission is to create media that alter awareness of, and containing precisely the same information and creativity in fact—and compared the lab's impacts. “Did the audience get the same amount of information? Yes,” says Kagan. “But the more important aspect was the motivation to actually do something. Statistically, more viewers were motivated to take action based on the drama.”

Like his counterparts at SCA’s other labs, Kagan enjoys the lab’s cross-discipline collaborations. “We’re availing ourselves to take action based on the drama.”

A prime example is a game that helps underserved high school students navigate the college application process. The game sets many goals for the players: including filling the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). “You can tell them to do this all you want, but when they play the game, they realize how critical it is to their future plans,” Fullerton says.

Tracking how many players filled for aid reveals another dimension of the lab’s research. “In general, research is always about proving an intervention,” Fullerton notes. “Games can act very well as testable, provable interventions in communities, provoking or creating possibilities for learning or behavior change. Not through showing them something but through allowing them to experience it.”

THE IDEA THAT an emotional experience can spark change is also advocated by a former occupant of the Oval Office. Or at least a replica of it. Professor Jeremy Kagan, a veteran film industry and television director who counts The West Wing among his credits, launched SCA’s Change Making Media Lab on this principle. Kagan established the lab in

A number of the films have played in festivals and garnered awards, and many are influencing the communities they were designed to reach. Kagan cites Winter and the City, made for Tree People; Tamole Lesson, a drama (in both English and Spanish-language versions) that encourages at-risk women to get screened for cervical cancer; and We! Plowed, a short narrative film about ADHD, which has been shown at conferences in China and Turkey, and that is now in use as a tool by psychologists and sports trainers. In addition, the lab is now developing Bite Me!, a forty-part web series designed to dedicated to giving opportunities to SCA filmmakers. On almost every project, we employ USC grads, if not also current students.”

FOR MANY of the artist-researchers of SCA—whether as directors, game designers, animators, scholars, or anything else—their canvases are imagined environments and virtual spaces. At the Mobile and Environmental Media Lab, the canvas is the physical world. MEMIL is inverting our traditional relationship to our surroundings by investigating how humans, what would it mean to have a lifelog for a building? Or a car?”

MEMIL’s home is in the Interactive Media Building. Equipped with 4,000 sensors and an information management system that reports on temperature, air quality, and more, the building can generate huge amounts of data. “We wanted to figure out how to have the building tell stories using that data,” Fisher says.

Jen Stein, who was then a doctoral candidate in what would later become the Media Arts + Practice Division, began by creating an iPhone app for participants and a Twitter account for the building. The building tweeted information about energy consumption, foot traffic, what movies were showing in which screening rooms, which plants needed watering, and more. And as participants came in contact with the eight iPads that Stein had installed, the building also knew who had interacted with it, how, and how often. This enabled the building to send participants personalized digital gifts and even arrange seemingly serendipitous encounters among users. “To Fisher, this made the building a character. ‘You get to know it. It gets to know you. It’s a colleague,’” he says.

Stein, now an assistant research professor and the co-director of MEMIL, next explored ways to give the building a life outside of its walls. One project involved building a table using wood from the original MGM studio lot, and from a podium found in an old lecture hall. “We were trying to create an

‘Lifelogging,’” says Fisher. “But then we started thinking if we can do lifelogs for humans, what would it mean to have a lifelog for a building? Or a car?”
object that had a very deep backstory, that had a lot of memories of where it came from,” says Fisher. “And she set it up so that if you walked by it with Bluetooth enabled, it would dream these images to you of its past lives.”

In 2010, BMW joined this exploration of “ambient storytelling” by enlisting MEML to make its Mini Coopers similarly interactive. Each year, BMW supplies the lab with one new Mini. (Last year’s was named Nigel.) Like those of the SCA building, the Mini’s sensors—some 300 of them—provide the raw material for its lifelog. The car generates data on everything from the wheel rotation speed to the windshield wipers. It can then communicate the data in a concise, but distinctive, voice. “Seat-warmer on, sunroof open. California winter,” quotes Fisher; smiling. MEML has also experimented with making the cars send a teen play-tester on quests, recover lost memories, and message its future owner from the assembly line. As a result of all of this work—or play, depending on how you view it—Fisher expects some version of lifelogging to be part of cars in the near future. “Which is great,” he says. “It’s exciting to see stuff get out of the lab.”

These successes are even more remarkable given how the program’s approach to research differs from the one typically taken by large research universities. Fisher notes that such schools are “very engineering-oriented,” whereas SCA’s approach to research “is more about the culture of making. Just trying stuff. Prototyping.”

The Creative Media & Behavioral Health Research Unit, led by founder and director of the labs because the research done by its Ph.D. students is “practice-based,” or “thinking through making.” The point, he says, “is to design something and then reflect on the design process.”

“I do more important than focusing on the technology. Because ultimately, it’s what you do with the technology.”

On a practical level, SCA’s programs do a great deal with technology—not only pioneering it, but also obtaining patents and granting licenses, a valuable revenue source. More fundamentally, they use technology as a vehicle for progress: to transform storytelling, adapt our environments, and evolve our ideas of what a cinema school can be. Fisher expects some version of this work—or play, depending on how you view it—to transform the world of cinema. “I feel like we’ve been experimenting with cinema since the very beginning, and that’s way more important than focusing on the technology. Because ultimately, it’s what you do with the technology.”

In 1980, he moved to Los Angeles in pursuit of a professional screenwriting career. Over the next twenty years, Gorden worked extensively in television, writing for The Golden Girls, A Different World, ALF, Full House, Saved by the Bell, and City Guys. Eager to share his knowledge and abilities with the next generation of screenwriters, he dedicated part of his storied career to being a professor at the USC School of Cinematic Arts. He was beloved by students of the Writing Division who admired his commitment, talent, and passion toward his work.

He is survived by his three children, Zachary, Kelsey, and Shea, his brother, Mark Gorden, in addition to ten nieces and nephews.

Scott Gorden
(1957–2013)
Screenwriter & Professor

Sears was born in Columbus, Indiana. After earning a BA from DePauw and MFA from USC’s School of Cinematic Arts, Sears helped found Boulder Valley Institute in Colorado.

Moving to California to pursue a professional editing career, Sears worked on many feature films and in television. He was sound editor for Academy Award-winning Amadeus, picture editor for films including The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Jacob’s Ladder, and Henry & June, and worked with multiple notable directors. In 2005, Sears joined the faculty of the film department at the Savannah College of Art and Design, where he became a beloved professor of post-production, teaching editing classes and serving as consultant for hundreds of thesis films.

He is survived by a sister, Susan Sears; brother-in-law Greg Sundberg, and nieces, Kelsey and Sayre Sundberg.
Danny Abramovitz ’11 has created a comedy web series that recently earned its second season before completing by the network online. The show has been picked up by the online network, following the lives of three long-lost friends who have reconnected in the 21st century. Patric Aison ’03 has sold an untitled drama to 20th Century Fox TV about a woman who, seeking revenge, becomes entangled with a master assassin who begins to question his own morality. Danny Abramovitz ’11 has created a comedy web series that recently earned its second season before completing by the network online. The show has been picked up by the online network, following the lives of three long-lost friends who have reconnected in the 21st century. Patric Aison ’03 has sold an untitled drama to 20th Century Fox TV about a woman who, seeking revenge, becomes entangled with a master assassin who begins to question his own morality.

Gaz Alazraki ’01 will direct a 13-episode comedy series for Netflix. The show, about the up-and-downs of the career of a professional soccer team manager, will be written and directed by J.C. Cohen, creator of the Netflix comedy The Chair.

Victoria Aveyard ’12 has scored a three-book deal with New Leaf, which includes a film option for her debut novel Red Queen, a young-adult fantasy story set in a world where social class is divided by blood color.

Jake Amett ’07 and Jon Amett have launched Indigenous Media, a digital video company.

Joe Ballarini ’99 has produced and directed the feature film about cardboard monsters magically coming to life for Fox Animation.

Bryan Burk ’91 will executive produce, and Andre Fabrizio ’02 will produce (I/I/236/3), an adaptation of John Scalzi’s novel, which is currently shooting in Budapest. Universal & Legendary Pictures will release on August 12, 2016.

Karen Croner ’87 will write the adaptation for the Ellen Shanman novel To My Daughters’ Future Therapist.

Lorenzo De Maio ’01 will executive produce the upcoming Starz series based on the novel The Man Who Fell to Earth by Walter Tevis, which will be directed by J.C. Cohen, creator of The Chair.

Nahatchakan Khan ’44 has written and will executive produce the documentary Print The Legend, to released in film festivals on September 26, Kortchak’s company, Austris, has also produced Moonlight: a film about an FBI agent who travels to a colony on the moon to investigate its first death, and TIm Krup ’88 has created DIG with Gideon Raff, a six-episode series for USA. Netflix in New York City for the show’s first season.

Barbara Burch ’74 has created a drama series about the complex ups-and-downs of a professional soccer team, which has been picked up for Lifetime.

Joe Bivens ’00 has co-created and written the script for the show, which will be directed by J.Cohen, creator of The Chair.

Dana Fox ’00 is producing the MGM comedy Don’t Miss With Finals.

Ian Fried ’08 has written and directed the film, which is currently shooting in New York City for the show’s first season.

Dana Fox ’00 is producing the MGM comedy Don’t Miss With Finals.

Sam Friedlander ’06 will direct and executive produce the pilot for the Amazon pilot with Ice Cube and Michael Ross Dinerstein ’05 executive produced the Amazon series The Big Easy.

Lorenzo De Maio ’01 will executive produce the upcoming Starz series based on the novel The Man Who Fell to Earth by Walter Tevis, which will be directed by J.C. Cohen, creator of The Chair.

Jason Lust ’00 is co-executive producing the Christopher Wheeler-penned script Nemesis through Warner Bros.

Andrew Marlowe ’92 will executive produce a drama series for ABC, based on the mystery novels by Richard Castle, the fictional author whose work is the subject of the ABC crime drama Castle.

Nora Dunn.

Kerem Sanga ’10 is writing an untitled directed by Anthony Holeczy, a six-episode event series for USA Network. Tim Kring ’88 has created the dramatic two-hour pilot for USA, which will be directed by J.Cohen, creator of The Chair. 11/22/63 by Richard Castle, the fictional author whose work is the subject of the ABC crime drama Castle.

Cyrus Nowhrasteh ’77 will direct Christ the Lord, an adaptation of Anne Rice’s fictional novel about a young Jesus Christ coming to terms with his identity.

Justin Ostrom ’03 is currently the Staff Post Supervisor at Dreamworks Studios (Live Action).
24: Live Another Day — Evan Katz ’86, Writer/Executive Producer
A to Z — Ben Queen ’94, Writer/Executive Producer
The Blacklist — James Foley ’79, Director; Executive Producer
Homeland — Bob Yezdani ’86, Editor
Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. — Kari Skogland ’95, Director; Executive Producer
Sleepy Hollow — Gideon Raff ’05, Writer/Executive Producer
The Grand Budapest Hotel — Bob Yezdani ’79, Director of Photography
Night At The Museum: Secret of the Tomb — Shawn Levy ’94, Producer/Director
Non-Stop — English, October 10, Writer
The Other Woman — Melisa Stack ’94, Writer
Ouija — Liat Schwartz ’95, Writer
Nightcrawler — Robert Elswit ’75, Director of Photography
The Amazing Spider-Man — Andrew Garfield ’02, Supervising Sound Editor; James Vanderbilt ’91, Story
The Amazing Spider-Man 2 — James Vanderbilt ’91, Director; Producer/Director
Annie — Tia Nolan ’91, Editor
The Big Short — Adam McKay ’90, Director; Producer
22 Jump Street — Shawn Levy ’94, Producer/Director
The Grand Budapest Hotel — Bob Yezdani ’79, Director of Photography
Nightcrawler — Robert Elswit ’75, Director of Photography
Non-Stop — English, October 10, Writer
The Other Woman — Melisa Stack ’94, Writer
Ouija — Liat Schwartz ’95, Writer
Rich Hill — Troy Durotz Tragos ’93, Producer/Co-Director
Ride Along — Tim Story, Director
Search Party — Neil Montz ’85, Producer
Think Like A Man Too — Tim Story Director
This Is Where I Leave You — Shawn Levy ’94, Producer/Executive Director
Transformers: Age of Extinction — Don Murphy ’88, Producer
Vampire Academy — Don Murphy ’88, Producer
A Walk Among The Tombstones — Scott Frank ’94, Producer/Director
White Bird in a Blizzard — Gregg Araki ’95, Writer/Producer/Executive Director
Winter’s Tale — Cape Ditchand ’98, Director of Photography
SCA NETWORK MEMBERSHIPS

The SCA Network is a great way to stay connected to fellow SCA Trojans and make a difference in the School’s future. Through exclusive screenings and mixers, the SCA Network provides an outlet for USC School of Cinematic Arts alumni and current students to gather and network. Best of all, Network benefits are complimentary with an annual donation to the USC School of Cinematic Arts. Recent screenings have included Wolf of Wall Street, American Hustle, Ride Along, Non-Stop, X-Men: Days of Future Past and Guardians of the Galaxy.

$25 Level
Invitation to exclusive SCA Network only screenings and mixers plus website recognition

$50 Level
SCA Military Style Cap*

$100 Level
Print SCA Alumni Directory (printed annually) and access to the online SCA Alumni Directory through Community*

$250 Level
SCA Network Athletic T-shirt and Reality Ends Here History book*

$500 Level
Exclusive SCA Embroidered Fleece Jacket and Reserved Seating at SCA Network screenings and events*

$1000 Level
Invitation to SCA Special Events as part of the Annual Leadership Circle membership*

*Denotes you also receive gifts from lower levels. For a full list of benefits and more information please visit us online at cinema.usc.edu/Network

Make a gift online at cinema.usc.edu/onlinegiving

SCA NETWORK MEMBERSHIPS

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cinema.usc.edu/Network