



Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

THE INSIGHT LECTURE BRINGS POLITICS TO CAMPUS: A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY KISSINGER

JACLYN NOVATT

On Tuesday, January 19, Rockefeller University hosted Dr. Henry Kissinger as the first speaker in a series of Insight Lectures dedicated to politics. If the emails back and forth over the university's political listserv are any indication, Dr. Kissinger is a highly polarizing figure. Kissinger served as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon, and continued to advise subsequent administrations on foreign policy. As Secretary of State, Kissinger oversaw the negotiations of the Paris Peace Accords, ending the Vietnam War. He was also involved in many controversial events, such as the bombings of Cambodia and Laos in the early 1970s and the CIA's support of Chile's Augusto Pinochet in 1973. Despite such controversy, Dr. Kissinger is highly respected by many, winning the Nobel Peace Prize and the National Medal of Freedom. President George W. Bush appointed Kissinger head of the committee to investigate the September 11 terrorist attacks, and relied on Kissinger's advice about the subsequent war in Iraq. Because of his involvement in these events, this man brings out very strong reactions in people, both positive and negative.

While walking to Caspary Auditorium that Tuesday evening, I met a small group of people protesting his talk by handing out fliers detailing the "real Henry Kissinger." This reading material in hand, I joined the line of people anxiously waiting to be let into the auditorium. As the minutes ticked by, people filled the lobby and spilled out onto the sidewalk. Finally, the doors opened and we filed in. Shortly thereafter, Kissinger entered the room, set his cane down, and proceeded to sit in the front row. President Paul Nurse gave a brief introduction, in which he mentioned that Dr. Kissinger and his wife were both long-time members of the Rockefeller Board of Trustees and were generous supporters of the university. I interpreted this to mean "Please don't piss him off too much!" The public talk was to be a conversation between Kissinger and *New York Times* editor and columnist Dr. Leslie Gelb. The conversation began on a light note as Gelb revealed that he was Henry Kissinger's Ph.D. student: "that's where the 'Dr.' came from!" The two then began what seemed like a well-rehearsed conversation covering a wide range of issues. The main focus seemed to be on two of the major economic and military powers in the world—the USA and China—and their different self-imposed roles. According to Kissinger, America sees itself as a global leader, "indispensable" in solving the world's problems. China, on the other hand, does not see the need to be a global leader, and instead acts only in the best interest of China. The implications of these differences in attitude became apparent during the recent climate discussions in Copenhagen.

When asked how the world today compares to the world of the

past, Kissinger spoke about the way sovereign nations are identified. I thought this was a fascinating way of thinking. According to Kissinger, today there are four worlds. There's the post-modern Europe which, although the nations are sovereign, features more cooperation than competition since the formation of the European Union. In the Asian world, nations see their neighbors as potential rivals and approach them with more caution. The Jihadist world does not rely on national boundary lines, but rather ideological and religious boundaries. Finally, there is the world that exists irrespective of any boundaries: climate change, trade, and nuclear proliferation.

After the formal conversation, the audience had the opportunity to ask questions. The first person asked for Dr. Kissinger to clarify how USA bombings of civilians differs from terrorism. After initially balking at the question, Kissinger stated that unlike terrorists, the USA does not intend to disrupt civilian life or kill innocent people.

Subsequent questions were not as antagonistic: asking about environmental policy and the importance of the value of the dollar. One questioner, referring to Kissinger's earlier reference to America as "indispensable" in fixing the world's problems, wondered if America was truly indispensable, why it did not intervene in the crises in Darfur and Rwanda. Kissinger replied that while America is indispensable, that does not mean it can or should intervene in every conflict. I respected that Kissinger directed each answer at the person who asked the question, looking straight at them for the duration of the answer. After a polite final round of applause, the audience filed out, excitedly discussing amongst themselves what they had just witnessed, passionately supporting or criticizing the men on stage.

After the public conversation, a small group of students, post-docs, professors, and trustees adjourned to the President's House for dinner and more discussion with Dr. Kissinger. I was lucky enough to attend the dinner, where conversation at my table ranged from foreign policy and covert spy operations, to choosing a post-doc and teaching undergraduate immunology. Following dinner, President Nurse initiated a second round of Q&A. My table was "it" first, so I raised my hand. I brought up again Kissinger's description of America as "indispensable" and his claim that it cannot and should not get involved in everything. My question: what criteria are/should be used to determine when to intervene and in what capacity? As he did in the public talk, Dr. Kissinger looked right into my eyes during his entire answer to my question. While a bit intimidated by this, I found myself captivated. He started off by saying that every time there's a change in administration, the new president starts off with promises to change the answer to

my question. However, within six months, every administration ends up doing approximately the same thing. Following the expected chuckle, he went on to say that, first and foremost, America must intervene when a conflict affects our national security. In other conflicts, it's not as clear-cut. According to Kissinger, America must decide as a society what it wants to protect at any cost, and what it wants to prevent at any cost. Once those parameters are set, they are used to determine when and how to intervene.

Further questions followed. One questioner referred to Kissinger's books and asked him to compare today's leaders to well-respected political leaders of the past. Kissinger noted that it is very difficult to compare them because their circumstances are completely different—specifically, Metternich (1773-1859) never had to explain his actions on nightly news shows. Kissinger was also asked what advice he would give to President Obama, and what role science and medicine should play in foreign policy. Kissinger acknowledged that he doesn't know much about medicine, but that he feels the logical approach of scientists would be very useful in politics. At this point, Rockefeller President Paul Nurse gave his view on the subject. Dr. Nurse suggested that scientists have a very important role in foreign policy because science is a universal language. Cell biologists from Iran ask the same questions as cell biologists from Russia, South Africa, and America. As highlighted in a

biography of Rashid Sunyaev in a recent issue of *Science* (Vol. 327, no. 5961, pp. 26 to 29), some of the few exchanges across the Iron Curtain at the height of the Cold War involved visiting scientists. With this in mind, President Nurse suggested that scientists have a responsibility to act as ambassadors or communicators between different societies.

At one point, Dr. Kissinger was faced with something he apparently didn't expect—someone confronted him about the war crimes accusations levied against him. Referring to Christopher Hitchens' book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, the questioner asked if Kissinger was afraid to speak with foreign diplomats for fear they would accuse him of war crimes. Kissinger responded by denouncing the validity of Hitchens' book. Kissinger said that if the questioner would do some research of his own, rather than relying on Hitchens' book, he'd realize that the book was only 10% accurate.

Is Kissinger's animosity valid? Is it a case of "the lady doth protest too much?" It surprised me that Kissinger seemed so unprepared for questioners who didn't agree with him. It almost seemed as though he'd never been asked questions like this before. Knowing how controversial many of his actions were, I would have expected him to have answers ready, justifying his positions.

I am grateful to the organizers of the Insight Lecture series for giving us opportunities like this. Watching Kissinger was fascinating to me—he would squirm

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selections.rockefeller.edu
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out from under some intense questions while at other times he would completely amaze me with his insight. This experience showed me once again that the leaders of this country and the world are all human beings like you and me. For me, constantly seeing political leaders on television somehow makes them seem superhuman. I'm always surprised that these people are not fifteen feet tall when I see them in person. I'm grateful to live in America, where we can freely agree or disagree with our political leaders, and we are able to express those opinions in a public arena. ☉

A March Through Time

EUGENE MARTIN

After escaping slavery and devoting himself to the church, St. Patrick had a vision where the Irish called out to him, "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us." A foreigner in Ireland, he went across the nation converting the people to Catholicism, symbolically driving out the snakes. St. Patrick died on March 17, late in the 5th century. For well over a thousand years the Irish have celebrated him on the day of his death, with one of the most notable celebrations being the St. Patrick's Day parade in New York City.

On March 15, 1762, *The New York Herald* had a small item, nestled amongst the destinations of recently ported captains and rewards for the capture of runaway indentured servants, announcing "The Anniversary Feast of St. Patrick is to be celebrated... at the house of Mr. John Marshall... Gentlemen that please to attend will meet with bess Usage." Irish soldiers in a British regiment, home-sick for the Emerald Island, got together in the midst of "severe cold weather," and marched to the feast. With that, they started what some report as the first St. Patrick's Day parade; one

that has continued annually, without interruption, ever since.

Future parades continued as British regiments with strong Irish contingents placed celebration notices in the city's newspapers announcing that gatherings and toasts would be held at various taverns. These parades were marked with Green and Gold attire and, as the *New York Mercury* noted in 1766, the playing of "fifes and drums, which produced a very agreeable harmony." The parades grew in size and scope, with the addition of marching bands, horses, and carriages. At the taverns, the participants would toast to the King and to the prosperity of Ireland.

As large numbers of Irish Catholics immigrated to America from 1820 to 1860, the parade broadened from a military procession to include participants from social and fraternal Irish organizations. In the 1850s, at the height of Irish immigration, the Irish were "begging on every street" and were largely scorned and ridiculed. Many of the Irish Catholics were in poverty, and the infamous "No Irish Need Apply" signs were being posted at workplaces across the city. In this atmosphere, the parade became a source of

pride for the Irish and a representation of their strength. Political leaders sought association with the parade, while Irish social leaders would preach acceptance of the Irish Catholics. With parallels to immigration debates of today, in 1855 *The New York Times* quoted a social leader as saying, "George Washington... was an advocate of foreign immigration. In place of thinking it inimical to the interests of this country, he did all he could to encourage it. Nay, he went so far as to advocate and encourage 'pauper immigration.'"

Despite this, tensions were building between the predominantly Protestant populace and the numerous Irish Catholics. In the same issue, *The New York Times* reported "one daily paper of the day had an article condemning the celebration of the day because Patrick was a Catholic saint.... While up the river... Patrick's effigy was hung by the neck to a tree."

Towards the mid 1860s, newspapers expressed the public's fears that either Catholic Irish Nationalists, or interference from the Protestant Orange party, would cause the parade participants

to riot. In 1866, *The New York Times* replaced its usual kind words about the Irish with: "Unlike the Germans, the French, the Spanish, in fact, every other foreign element of our population, [the Irishman] insists upon carrying the flags of double-nationality... He is always an Irishman, except on election day, when he is the fullest kind of full-blooded American, and sometimes discharges the duty of half a dozen American citizens by voting early and voting often."

While all prior parades were peaceful and without violent incidents, in 1867 the tension broke and a serious fight between a social organization and the police left a score of officers seriously wounded. After a lambasting from the press (and likely many others), the social and fraternal organizations made a conscious effort to embrace the city populace, and encouraged the thought that on St. Patrick's Day everyone is Irish. It took a generation for the trust to rebuild, but during that time the parade morphed into what we know now—a parade of pomp and music as seamlessly combined as the American and Irishman. ☉

The Crack

J.L. SMITH

The crack emerged from the wall on Wednesday, during prime time. Though Carl normally didn't get off the couch until the news came on, he stood and leaned over the television to examine the crack. It smiled. "Hi," the crack said. It licked its lips. "Can you help me?" Carl found a tube of wax balm in his pocket and rubbed it over the edges of the crack. "Mmm," the crack said. It smacked its lips together. Carl put balm on his own chapped lips. Carl smiled.

Carl changed the orientation of his living room so he and the crack could watch television. They laughed together at the Thursday night comedies. On Friday Carl brought home a case of beer and he and the crack each drank half. Carl told the crack he loved it and the crack smiled. "No, I mean it, man," he said. The crack said he loved Carl, too. They sang "99 Bottles" until Carl fell asleep on the couch beneath the crack. When he woke the crack was snoring. Carl wiped drool from the wall with a kitchen towel and went to his bedroom.

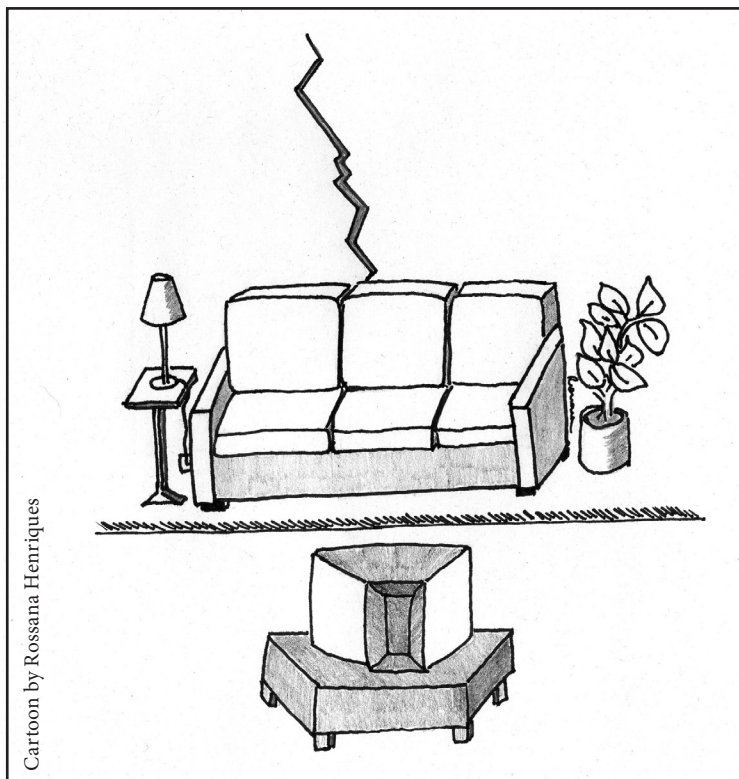
Carl told the crack, "I have to go out." The crack begged him not to go. Carl insisted and left the television on so the crack would have company in his absence. The crack tried to stay up for Carl but he fell asleep. Carl came home late with a woman. The crack cried out when he saw the half naked woman on the couch. The startled girl covered herself and ran to the bathroom. Carl was displeased. The crack winced as Carl hammered a nail in the

wall. He moved a picture over the crack. The crack tried to look around the frame but it was too big. The crack raised and lowered his eyebrows until the picture fell, gashing the wood floor. Daylight streamed in through the windows. The crack called out, "I'm sorry," but got no answer.

Carl came home on Monday to find the crack in tears. He wiped the tears from the paint-streaked wall with a kitchen towel. Carl swept up the plaster flakes with a hand broom. He turned on the television and drank a beer and shared a pizza with the crack. Before going to bed Carl made a phone call. The crack couldn't hear what Carl said into the phone.

The crack watched soap operas all morning. In the afternoon, when Oprah came on, a man in paint-covered jeans entered the apartment and studied the crack. He moved the couch away from the wall and covered it with a blanket. He laid a clear plastic sheet on the floor. Using a hammer

and chisel, he chipped out the crack's teeth and dropped them in a bucket. He sealed the eyes with paper tape and plucked the eyebrows with pliers. The man screwed drywall into the gap between the edges and filled the crack with plaster which dried before the crack could protest. With a hand sander he smoothed the wall. Fine plaster dust filled the air. The crack wept dry tears as it was covered with paint. ☉



Cartoon by Rossana Henriques

I'm with the Clowns

JESSICA WRIGHT

"I'm with the clowns," I answer, as a doctor asks me why I'm standing hesitantly, and hopefully unobtrusively, in the back of a room in a pediatric intensive care unit (PICU). The statement has the same effect as the clowns themselves: he relaxes; he smiles. I am left to observe. I am standing next to a very small child, less than six months old, lying by himself in a crib. Propped up next to him is a portable DVD player. Between quiet cries, he claps his hands to a baby video. Watching him entertain himself is heartbreaking, but, on the other side of the room, a boy is enjoying the human interaction of a pair of visiting clowns. "Do you want to leave?" asks "Dr." Doodle Doo, wearing a Doctor's coat, a bright red nose, and a painted buck tooth on his chin, "say the word, we'll bring a boat alongside, lower you with bed sheets,"—the hospital room overlooks the East River. The boy is extremely pale, clearly weak, but he is smiling and laughing. The family members with him are grinning. "Dr." Wedgie, a perky clown in a red polka dot dress with two pig-tails sticking out of her red bowler hat, tugs on her hair. The boy stirs for the first time, gently stroking his own head. His mother's smile deepens. Later, when I talk with the clowns, they will each have stories of parents saying, "I haven't seen my son smile for weeks," and even, since families travel to this hospital from all over the country, "I haven't seen my child smile since Minnesota."

At the Rockefeller University (RU) cafeteria I had often asked myself why there were clowns, in full costume, lunching amongst the scientists. Answering this question has led me here, to Weill Cornell University Hospital, and Clown Rounds run by the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit (CCU). Clown Care is a charity arm of the not for profit Big Apple Circus. Founded in 1986 by Michael Christensen, the goal was to bring the healing power of laughter to children in pediatric facilities. It now employs 80 clowns who conduct visits in seventeen hospitals around the country, including six in New York City. I will meet four Big Apple Circus clowns this day: "Dr." Doodle Doo and "Dr." Wedgie, who I shadow during their morning rounds, and "Dr." E.B.D.B.D. and "Dr." Ukulele Lady, who will join us for lunch. Doodle Doo has been with Clown Care for eleven years, Wedgie for only three, while both E.B.D.B.D. and Ukulele Lady have been working in hospitals for over twenty years. The clowns involved in

the program come from various backgrounds, but all have a true commitment to clowning as a profession: these are not just volunteers donning funny costumes. Doodle Doo, for example, attended

clown college and traveled for several years with the Ringling Brothers Circus, before joining the program. There are auditions for Clown Care and even university degrees dedicated to hospital clowning: clowning in hospitals requires training in hygiene and the psychology of what is called therapeutic clowning—in addition to the standard juggling and magic skills.

As we enter the ICU we wash our hands at a nurse's station, a ritual that will be repeated several times that day. Doodle Doo then consults with a nurse, who tells him which patients he is cleared to visit. In the first room on the list, a toddler is entertaining himself on the floor. His brother lies asleep on a cot, while his father stares unmoving out the window. Across the room a mother lies across two chairs turned into a makeshift bed. Her son, bandaged and propped up on his bed, plays a video game. Soon the younger boy is popping bubbles blown by Wedgie. The clowns join him in his efforts, but fail comically. The clowns end the brief visit with a magic trick. The older boy puts down his Wii and leans forward; he watches along with the parents,

who seem alert for the first time. It is a happier place. We move on to the next room on the list. "Leaving is sometimes the hardest part," Doodle Doo tells me.

When I first set out to write this story, I intended for it to be a humor piece: about the absurdity of lining up for my meatloaf next to a clown, or a Ph.D. who is too scared to get coffee if there are clowns at the coffee cart. Later, as I learned more about what these clowns do, and especially now, as I experience it first hand, I feel badly for not taking them seriously. But that is the power of a clown, they are not serious, and this allows them to take light-heartedness and humor into the most serious of places. I spend one morning visiting the Pediatric Oncology, Burn Unit, and PICU (among other wards), and some of the things I witness will stay with me forever. The people involved in the care of these children, the parents who often stay 24 hours a day in their rooms, and even the support staff, see it every day.

I watch as the clowns I'm shadowing enter the pediatric oncology



Dr. Wedgie, Dr. Doodle Doo, Dr. E.B.D.B.D., and Dr. Ukulele Lady pose outside the RU cafeteria. Photograph provided by the author



This Month Natural Selections interviews Galadriel Hovel-Miner, a Postdoctoral Associate in the Laboratory of Lymphocyte Biology (Papavasiliou Laboratory). Country of Origin: United States

New York State of Mind

1. How long have you been living in New York? Seven and a half years.

2. Where do you live? SoHo

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? West Village

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? Cupcakes—Magnolia and others. No matter how good it is, it's just a cupcake. **And underrated?** The outer boroughs.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? Walking around the streets downtown.

6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? Improve the living conditions of the homeless population.

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC.

Friday night: movie at the Angelika Film Center in SoHo. Saturday: brunch at The Cowgirl Hall of Fame in the West Village, dance outdoors at PSi Warm Up in Queens, Greek

dinner in Astoria. Sunday: yoga at Sonic Yoga in Hell's kitchen, day in Central Park reading and playing cards, early dinner and ice cream Sundaes at Serendipity, home in time to watch *Nature* and *Masterpiece Theater* on PBS.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? My first flight over Manhattan and knowing I had to live here.

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? Riverside Drive on the Upper West Side or Park Slope in Brooklyn. Oh you mean outside of New York ... well I "could live" many other places, but I would rather not have to.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?

Why? Tough question, but the short answer is yes. I consider myself a New Yorker because I've been through what I consider to be the required stages: overwhelmed (1st year), honeymoon (2-3rd years), disillusioned and bit-



Photo by Robbie Busch

ter (4-6th years), and finally acceptance (7+ years). At this stage I see all the pros and cons of life here and I don't have to consider them anymore because New York is simply where I live. ☺

waiting room and go up to a chalk board: "Dr. Wedgie was here" writes Wedgie. "You mean Dr. Wedgie has bad hair?" asks Doodle Doo. They squabble and clown; they are funny. People look up from their magazines and laugh. Laughter in a pediatric oncology room, I would guess, is rare. There is a visible change in the energy of every room the clowns enter: nurses smile; a man delivering packages hands one jokingly to Doodle Doo; a woman with a cleaning cart laughs and Wedgie engages her: "Do you have a present for me?" The lady looks puzzled, then her face lights up with an idea. I expect her to produce some toilet paper, maybe some soap—she pulls out a chocolate bar from her lunch bag and hands it over with a big smile. Wedgie, of course, does not accept it, but the gesture is touching. Ukulele Lady uses music in her clowning. When asked about her most rewarding experience, she tells me of a time she played her ukulele in a ward. A mother began to dance; others joined in; people appeared in doorways to watch. A father of a patient told her afterwards "This place was so sad. But for a moment, just now, it was beautiful."

We meet one adult who has a fear of clowns. She chats with Wedgie briefly, by the end she is making eye contact and smiling. Many find the canonical image of a clown to be frightening, and there is concern that clowns in hospitals could be disturbing to some children. Much has been made of a British study that showed images of circus clowns to patients and concluded that children find clowns more frightening than the hospital setting itself¹. The Big Apple Circus clowns, however, are cute and approachable. Their minimal make-up and colorful costumes are a license for humor and silliness in the face of authority, not the macabre mask of a scary clown. Most importantly, they are not still images, but laughing, smiling human beings who are perceptive to the individual needs of each patient and each situation. For a child undergoing chemotherapy, who is feeling

unwell, they play a lullaby; for a toddler in the burn unit clinging to his father's legs and staring in fascination, they juggle; for an older boy reading a child's magazine in the day surgery recovery room, they tell jokes: "What's a deer with no eyes? You don't know? Neither do I. No I-deer." During my morning with them, no child shows fear or anxiety. If they had, I have no doubt the clowns would have simply left the room. Doodle Doo once encountered a parent with a deep fear of clowns. Despite this, she didn't want him to leave: the mother hid behind the bed-curtains, while the clown made her child laugh.

In opposition to the British survey, there are many controlled studies demonstrating the value of hospital clowning². Therapeutic clowning has been shown to decrease children's anxiety before and during procedures, and there is the tacit hope that laughter may truly be healing. The clowns are well aware that there is nothing they can do to make the children well, something that they clearly struggle with, but they do what they can to make a difficult situation just a little bit easier. Doodle Doo explains to me how he works to empower the patients, serving as an antidote to the strict and regulated hospital environment. Not only are the children in charge of each interaction, but often it is Doodle Doo himself, despite wearing a doctor's gown and badge, that needs help. He approaches several children by asking them, "Do you have any questions?" I watch as each child says "no," clearly tired of this query they've heard so many times before, and then laugh along with them when he replies, "What about answers? Do you have any answers for me? I really need answers!!!"

The clowns may not have the answers, but what they do have is their humor, their playfulness, and with that, a sense of normalcy. When the founder of the program first entered hospital wards in costume, he was told by an older doctor that "Clowns do not belong in hospitals." His response was "Neither do children." A few days later I will attend the Big Apple Circus show in the big top behind

Lincoln Center. I will watch as hundreds of children are entertained by clowns and see, on their smiling faces, the same expressions as on these children, watching from their hospital beds. Maybe, if only for a brief moment, the clowns have transported them outside of the hospital and into the happy world of a Circus big top—where they belong. That, at least, is what I hope. Which is why the next time I get my meatloaf next to a clown, I will still be laughing, but I will also take them seriously. ☉

You can learn more about the Big Apple Circus and the Clown Care program at: <http://www.bigapplecircus.org/community/clown-care.aspx>

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Talent on Campus: The Photographs of Manuel Zimmer

BERNIE LANGS



Watchtower, Beijing, China 2006. Photograph by Manuel Zimmer

The task of a photographer as an artist is a difficult one, in that they are called upon to enhance the vision of their audience while showing something they all can see with their own eyes. They are called upon to improve our vision. As I've grown over the years to appreciate more and more the representational paintings of the past and good, well-crafted, abstract pieces of art, I've been attracted less and less to photography when I visit galleries

and museums.

So, having set the bar high in what it takes to impress me in this medium, I was stunned at the 2009 Employee Art Show at Rockefeller University when I stumbled upon the photographs of Manuel Zimmer. It wasn't just that he'd chosen to show the grittier side of China in the works he had chosen to exhibit, but there was such an immediacy, clarity, and vibrancy to his work that I soon contacted him

and arranged to attain several photos for my office and home, and gifts for friends.

Mr. Zimmer is a native of Osnabruck, Germany and he studied Biochemistry in Berlin. He attended graduate school in Heidelberg and Munich and arrived in the U.S. in 2004. He has been in the laboratory of Dr. Cori Bargmann for the past six years. His travels, well-documented in his photography, include trips to India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and China. His early work examined the industrial ruins of his hometown. Mr. Zimmer notes that “In my view, all faces of human urbanization have something aesthetically very appealing.” He states that “With my photography, I want to challenge people, in the same way the works of the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher inspired me many years ago: transform the viewer's aesthetic perception and open their eyes to see as beautiful, what is ostensibly not noteworthy, and at the same time provide a document of urban architecture.” One colorful photo of his that I viewed reflects this ideal. Taken in Hong Kong's botanical garden, it wonderfully contrasts the sculpted greenery of the gardens with the austere backdrop of the modern glass skyline of the city.

My favorite work of Mr. Zimmer's that I've seen in his portfolio would have to be the “Watchtower” taken in the Forbidden City in Beijing. What grabs the viewer is not just the beautiful colors of the green, manicured lawn and majestic tree, or the precision of the buildings in the background. What is captured here is a lightness of soul, a transcendence of the solid nature of material, a feeling that the tree's leaves, which bend gracefully to the right, are a reflection of a shimmering world, akin to the bejeweled trees that grace the Buddhist Shambhala heaven. The tree scintillates. The clarity of vision is simply stunning.

I also keep in my office a photo of monu-

mental Buddhist Temple mountain-sculptures that Mr. Zimmer took in 2006. In all the years I was a member of the International Center of Photography, I had never seen in a photograph such a precision of line, such focus, giving an immediacy of texture that I can say is akin to what the art critic Bernard Berenson dubbed an almost tactile sensation. The effect is arresting—you can't help but stare and be taken off to a non-religious spiritual plane.

MACHo Woman

JEANNE GARBARINO

One might infer from the title that the content of this article is about a feminized Village People rendition, or even the female counterpart of the infamous WWF superstar from the 1980s. But this is not the case. This clever acronym stands for Movement Against Childhood Obesity—a noble program initiated, in part, by Weill Cornell's own Nakesha King. On top of taking one year off from medical school to pursue a research project at the Rockefeller University Clinical and Translational Science Center in the laboratory of Jan Breslow, this rising third year student spends every Saturday teaching healthy lifestyle habits at the Settlement Health Center to the children of East Harlem (just because there isn't enough on her plate).

MACHo is a pilot program designed to meet head-on the growing childhood obesity epidemic, with the rationale that small steps at the local level will yield huge results. The basic blueprint of the MACHo curriculum centers around three essential elements: nutritional education, exercise, and lunch. When the children, who range from 10-14 years old, come in for their weekly lesson, they are met by Nakesha who, alongside her fellow MACHo volunteers and Weill Cornell peers Nii Kooney and Jermaine Myers, begins the session focusing on choice—food choice to be exact. The nutritional education component of this program is geared towards teaching children about different food groups, how to read nutrition labels, the concept of a proper serving size, as well as how to prepare the food itself. In addition, they have assigned each child what they call a “scholarly project” where they choose a topic on how they can implement change for a better life. Nakesha and her co-volunteers try very hard to educate the kids without actually putting them in the traditional teacher-student setting. For instance, they have taken the participants on a field trip to the grocery store where they were able to choose ingredi-

Also of note are the photos he took in Macau. Finding himself off-the-beaten-track and exploring narrow alleys and declining housing projects, he took several exceptional pictures. “During that time of year, there is a lot of rainfall,” he notes, and there is a humidity “exaggerating the colors of the partly moss covered stones.” One startling image captures a man on a scooter racing down an alleyway decorated with colorful flags carrying mysterious symbols. Another photo of a myriad

of balconies with various laundries hanging down captures the essence of the city.

Although Mr. Zimmer believes that scientists generate many beautiful images in their work, he notes that “My passion for science does not mix much with my passion for photography. I think that in our modern times science and art are very different things.”

I hope that future Employee Art Shows reveal such great talent as I discovered with Manuel Zimmer. ☉

ents (not to exceed their \$5 per person budget) to be taken back to their facility and used for making lunch. Another effort to teach proper nutrition outside of the classroom has been to invite a parent or caregiver to share their traditional family recipes for a healthy revamping.

In addition to learning healthy nutritional practices, these children are given the opportunity to participate in both structured and free-form physical activity. Although most of the structured classes are led by MACHo volunteers and involve the use of workout videos or creative strength training exercises, a yoga instructor has been hired to come in two times over the duration of the program (a volunteer-based program geared towards inner-city kids doesn't exactly allow for personal trainers). As for the free play portion, picture recess: tag (including freeze or T.V. variations), basketball, and jump rope—just to name a few. After working up an appetite, the kids quickly settle back down and are provided with a healthy and nutritious meal (either made together or pre-made, depending on the day's curriculum) that exemplifies all they have learned.

The evolutionary timeline of the MACHo program begins with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, via the Institute of Multicultural and Minority Medicine (IAMMM). Specifically, the IAMMM has allotted funds to be used towards the design of a project that directly addresses tackling childhood obesity at the local level, both within schools and in the neighboring communities. Under the auspices of IAMMM, the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) chapter at Weill Cornell decided to design and test the MACHo program so that it could one day be implemented in local communities throughout the United States. After months of planning, the program was launched in December 2009 and ran to the end of February 2010. The results of this program will be presented at the national SNMA meeting in the spring of 2010 where it will be decided if MACHo will see another run.

When I asked Nakesha what drives her to participate in such a program, she answered simply, “I am owning up to what I initially set out to do—help people.” As one can imagine,



Photograph by Nakesha King

the course load and study obligations for the typical medical student are immense. When under such pressures, the once idealistic undergraduate student studying for the MCAT so that they can “save the world” can easily transform into a machine and eventually lose sight of their original vision. Nakesha is resisting this, and doing so very successfully. She is trying to show that you do not need to

forfeit your studies and academic standing to get involved in your community. The example being set by Nakesha is one of honor and dedication and, although it can be hard to juggle these enormous responsibilities, the outcome is nothing short of fulfilling. She has gained my utmost respect and I truly hope that there will be others to follow in her footsteps. Nakesha King certainly is a Macho Woman. ☉

Life on a Roll



My Backyard by Jeanne Garbarino

In Our Good Books

The reading suggestions have been kindly provided by staff members of the downtown bookstore McNally Jackson.

***Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens**

I'm probably correct in assuming that it's been a while since you've read a book that topped 800 pages. You're off the hook if I'm wrong, but if I'm right, you should seriously consider reading this book. There's a definite, distinct reading pleasure that just can't be found in books that couldn't double as a door-stop. Also, *Little Dorrit* happens to be one of Dickens' best, and the critically acclaimed BBC and WGBH miniseries was just released on DVD. Here's your chance to read the book first.

***The Adderall Diaries* By Stephen Elliott**

I swallowed this book whole in a single night. Part memoir, part true-crime investigation, *The Adderall Diaries* plumbs the depths of memory, family, writer's block, study drugs, wounds both emotional and physical, and murders confessed and denied. Gripping, gripping stuff.

***Inside the Painter's Studio* by Joe Fig**

It's almost too good, this book. The collection of images of artists' studios might have been enough for its scope and the insight it provides alone, but, then, we also get interviews with each artist where they talk about process and influence and intent and reveal themselves just the way you'd want if you're the kind of person who gets all fired up by just looking at images of someone's workspace. Oh, and those images—not just photos, but actually photos of miniature replicas of the studios made by Joe Fig. What's funny is that that's how this whole thing came about, he was so into process that he scaled down and duplicated the process of creating (and working in) each space and interviewed the artists to support that work. Extraordinary.

***George's Secret Key to the Universe* by Lucy & Stephen Hawking**

A delectable middle-readers book. It is also a great way for adults to touch up on their astronomical comprehensions. The second book of this series, *George's Cosmic Treasure Hunt*, has recently hit the shelves, as well.

McNally Jackson independent bookstore is well worth a visit, they have a fantastic selection of books on their shelves. The store is located in NoLiTa at 52 Prince Street between Lafayette and Mulberry. Visit them on the Web at <http://mcnallyjackson.com>. ☉

