

# MDOCS

JOHN B. MOORE DOCUMENTARY STUDIES COLLABORATIVE

Spring 2015, 1.9



March 6, 2015  
A Bi-weekly Newsletter

## The Art & Science of Exhibit, with John Beckman '94

Skidmore learned on Feb. 18 & 19 that there's both art and science to designing for science museums. John Beckman, the Director of Exhibit Design and Development at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, shared his knowledge of evidence-based exhibition during a public lectures and class meetings.

A Skidmore art history/theater design alum, Mr. Beckman, '94, addressed an audience, composed primarily of documentary, science, art, and theater students. He was joined by Skidmore science faculty Mary Crone Odekon (Physics) and Ray Giguere (Chemistry) who had worked on exhibitions at the Frances Tang Young Teaching Museum, to discuss the collaborations that experts in form and in content developed to reach new audiences for important discoveries.

As Beckman explained, a major part of his job involves overseeing new and unique exhibits that tell stories in a new way but also have hands-on components, as well as branding attractions in order to appeal to certain prospective visitors. As he puts it, he needs to "understand how patrons engage intellectually, experientially, and emotionally.

Also, what can people see here that they can't see anywhere else?" His answer has included an exhibition on Leonardo DaVinci with impressive full-scale models, a presentation of numbers in nature that relies on visuals like photographs and an experience, like a maze, to engage and inform, and an exhibition on robotics opening this year. He also helps reinvent existing shows, for example bringing visitors inside a 19<sup>th</sup> century train to see its working parts.

Engaging students at lunch and in Physics and American Studies classes, Mr. Beckman described three "types" of museum visitor: scholars, strollers & sprinters. To reach all three, exhibits use size and placement of information — such as an introductory description with the "big picture" on one line in big font (sprinters), main content in a sentence or two (strollers), and detailed content in a smaller font paragraph (scholars).

Ideally, Beckman seeks to appeal to all visitors and a range of science knowledge. So he draws on his arts and performance background to design less device-dependent exhibits. Intent on providing the most visceral experience, not more screen time, Mr. Beckman incorporates "invisible technology" to create immersive and captivating learning. (ct'd p 2)

### Inside This Issue:

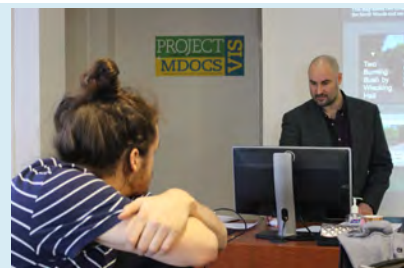
- **Art & Science of Exhibits**
- **Capital Connections**
- **A Nice Gesture (Photos)**

John Beckman, '94

A trip to the Cinema Exchange Lab

When 1000 words are not enough

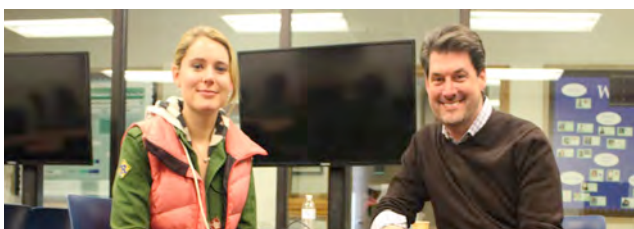
**Plus:** Doc Films & Events for March & April



## Art & Science (continued)

Focused on the museum's need to balance between information and entertainment, Mr. Beckman asked students what features would draw them to a science museum, which typically appeal to an audience of families with kids ages eight to twelve, to diversify the visitor base. Students suggested that lowering costs, more activities, and some evening hours would help, as would support for languages like Spanish, which might bring in new families. Many fondly recalled visits to science museums (both recent and from years ago)—a phenomenon Mr. Beckman said the museum relied on. Through the exhibitions he has designed, as well as the stories he shared with students, Skidmore's potential documentarians have been exposed to another outlet through which to tell truthful stories, in the most immersive way possible.

-- Sam Grant, '17



Paulina Phelps interviews John Beckman for the Memory Project.



## Director's Note

In past weeks, storytelling has gone high-tech. MDOCS learned about: digital map storytelling with Alex Chaucer in LI 113 and telling science stories with mazes, photography, ships and locomotives with John Beckman (who put art history & theater degrees to good use!). John's visit—with numerous student conversations, a talk bringing the Tang & science faculty together, and an interview for the archives, was an amazing energizer. We partnered with Academic Technologies to investigate Omeka, an open-source platform for hosting online digital collections and archives.

We're getting used to having Jocelyn Arem around, as she hosted her 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop on archival stories and hooked up with the Skidmore musicians who will perform March 26. Looking forward, we're also excited to partner with the Sociology and Asian Studies departments who are bringing Albany-based filmmakers Ira McKinley and Bhawin Suchak to campus March 11, and Chinese-born filmmaker Hao Wu on March 31/April 1. Plus, we host the sound recording studio's Cube on March 23. See you there!

## DOC ON CAMPUS

### *Sociology Presents:*

**Wednesday, March 11:**

7-9:30 pm, Davis Auditorium

### **The Throwaways**

& panel discussion with filmmakers

Bhawin Suchak & Ira McKinley



the story of homeless filmmaker, activist, and co-director McKinley, who channels his experience of living on the streets through the lens of a video camera

MDOCS Doc Date  
Conversation with Suchak & McKinley,  
Bolton 382,  
Wed, 3/11, 2:30-3:30 pm

### *Asian Studies Presents:*

**Wednesday, March 31:**

6:30-8:30 pm, Davis Aud.

### **The Road to Fame**

Q & A with filmmaker Hao Wu



a chronicle of the staging of the American musical Fame—China's first official collaboration with Broadway—by the senior class at China's top drama academy

MDOCS Doc Date  
Conversation with Hao Wu,  
Wed., 4/1, Ladd 307 3:30-4:30 pm



## Documenting Latin America A Film Series



**3/11** Marimbas from Hell  
Emerson Auditorium, 7pm

**3/23 The Cube returns...**  
**5pm**, JKB Theater Lobby



Meet Hugo Martínez, architect and designer of the portable sound recording studio the Cube

**3/26 From Storage to Stage**  
**8pm**, Filene Recital Hall



Jocelyn Arem, '04, caps her Carr Residency on March 26 with a visit with Magic Shop colleagues Steve Rosenthal & Jessica Thompson.

The trio will showcase the restoration magic with Caffè Lena's music tapes. Skidmore student, faculty and staff musicians will perform some of that music live in an evening of sound and music storytelling.

## Capital Connections



On March 1, Nicky Tavares, MDOCS/Vis Fellow, brought Skidmore students Sasha Abramowitz and Jasmyn E. Story to the Film Lab organized by Capital Cinema Cultural Exchange at the Linda, in Albany. A three-day workshop to support upstate NY documentary and narrative filmmaking, the fledgling initiative is the brainchild of Mike Camoin. MDOCS sponsored this year's

event; Tavares and Environmental Studies Prof. Nurcan Atalan-Helicke introduced Manislam, a Turco-Norwegian film about Muslim masculinities, and Story and Abramowitz attended a day of events. Abramowitz & Story report:

The Capital Cinema Cultural Exchange (CCCE), held in Albany from February 26th-March 1st, gathered professionals in the film industry. The CCCE offered attendees panel discussions on the business end of creative work, from international distribution, crowdfunding and financing, to scoring, composing, and cultural impact. Networking time and short films rounded out the program.

On Saturday, Sasha Abramowitz and Jasmyn Elise Story (both AN, '15) attended a workshop with Seed & Spark. Director of Crowd Funding and Community Manager for Seed & Spark Erica Anderson, on how to successfully crowdfund an independent film. She emphasized that it's not all money; in fact, crowd-funding is more about building interest to support and share news about the project with friends and networks. Plus, she warned, don't plan to be in production and manage a funding campaign at the same time...

After dinner and a walk along Central Ave, we headed back to the Linda for a networking event. We had the privilege of meeting and chatting with a number of established industry professionals, mostly about their experience with film and other storytelling media.

At around 8pm, we watched the US premier of Manislam, the third in a trilogy of documentary films about Islam in the Middle East. The final part of the night was the most exciting and engaging of all as the film's director, Nefise Özkal Lorentzen, Skyped in from Turkey for an insightful Q&A session moderated by our very own Professors Nicky Tavares and Nurcan Atalan-Helicke.

We represented Skidmore and the MDOCS program proudly, making a point to ask interesting questions, which Ms. Lorentzen answered eloquently and articulately.

-- Sasha Abramowitz & Jasmyn Elise Story, '15



## A Nice Gesture



TV & Radio Producer Jay Kernis visits DS classes on 2/24. Son Noah Kernis, '15, records the conversation. Afterwards Kernis chats with staff members/students in Intro to AudioDoc.



John Beckman chats with a student in Mary Crone Odekon's physics class, while students in a Skidmore Saratoga Memory Project making a doc film for Saratoga's Adult & Senior Center listen to the world for the 1st time.

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