



WINTER 2020

LETTER FROM
THE DIRECTOR

I write this note just as we slide into 2020, a year in which feminism may very well decide the future. Here in the US, an election looms and around the world the rise of highly misogynist and xenophobic political movements—in Russia, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, the Philippines, and the U.S.—is truly startling. Meanwhile, the most recent world Climate Summit in Madrid, despite the leadership of amazing young people like Greta Thunberg, did not end with enough concrete action and so the sea waters will continue to rise.

Faced with what can feel like the end of the world, feminist academics and activists continue to do the work that needs to be done. That's what we've been doing here in the Program in Gender, Sexuality & Feminist Studies. In October, Professor Carly Thomsen debuted her new documentary, *In Plain Sight*, and got everyone thinking about queer lives in rural spaces and what ideologies try to frame such lives as unimaginable. We have a wonderful new colleague, Professor Hemangini Gupta. As you'll read in this newsletter, Professor Gupta's work helps us think about the global economy with the tools of feminist theory. Her new courses on "Ladies at Work" and "Gender, Technology and the Future" are a huge addition to the feminist studies curriculum we offer here at Middlebury. Finally, I gave a presentation on my most recent book *Love Inc., Dating Apps, the Big White Wedding, and Chasing the Happily Neverafter* for a fundraiser for Northern New England Planned Parenthood

and WomenSafe at Stonecutter Spirits. The book looks at romance as both an economic as well as a highly gendered and raced ideology and it makes a terrible wedding gift. In November, Karin also hosted the very successful Gender Justice Institute with the leadership team of Malikah, headed by Rana Abdelhamid '15. Twenty junior organizers from Middlebury and beyond came together for an intense four-day workshop of organizing, self-healing, and self-defense. Karin also helped organize the Sister-to-Sister Summit, which drew more than 30 middle school girls from Addison County.

In the next few months, GSFS will be busy running a Winter Term workshop for faculty on feminist theory, seeing the play *Jane* produced (with Carly Thomsen's class), and running a feminist translation competition for our students where we encourage them to think about how to apply the ideas they learn in the classroom to the world they live in.

On April 24th we will host our annual Gensler Family Symposium on Gender in a Global Context. This year's theme is, of course, "Feminist World Making (at the End of the World)." This conference will bring together activists, academics, and artists to help us think through what kind of feminist work is being done and what kind of feminist work needs to be done.

We hope the optimism and feminist survival skills of the conference will carry us over into the Fall of 2020, when much about the future of the country and the world will be decided. We are already planning (in conjunction with the Office of the President) a major event about the election in October of 2020 with African American Studies scholar Carol Anderson, who will speak about her book *One Person, No Vote* and what lessons we can learn for the upcoming elections. We hope you will join us for some of our upcoming events, take a class, join a book group, or come listen to a talk.

Laurie Essig

*Director of the Program in Gender,
Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*

THE 2020 SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL

2020 marks the centennial of the passing of the 19th Amendment to the American constitution, which gave women the right to vote. Between 1848 and 1920, many women across the United States left their homes determined to gain the right to vote in all elections: municipal, state, and federal. This journey was long, 72 years, and convoluted; it included protests, arrests, imprisonment, injury, and heroic personal sacrifice. Like many social movements it was complex, impeded by racism and division, and resulted in a hard won, but incomplete victory.

Decades would pass before many others—including people of color, those with disabilities, or those with modest incomes—would gain the franchise. Even now, a multitude of barriers blocks access to the ballot box in many states. The 19th Amendment was a landmark victory in a journey that continues to this day.

Throughout this school year, the Feminist Resource Center at Chellis House has



Above: Middle school students making buttons of famous suffragists.

been devoting attention to this anniversary by hosting presentations and collaborating with different departments at Middlebury and in Vermont. On September 13, Chellis House hosted organizers of the Vermont Suffrage Centennial Alliance to discuss their work with members of the Middlebury community during a lunchtime talk. The Alliance is in the process of planning a celebration that will take

place in front of the statehouse in Montpelier on August 22, 2020. The day will highlight the women in Vermont who were involved in the movement as well as women whose efforts had a national impact. The celebration will include a parade, performances, and speakers who will also push attendants to think critically about where feminist activism is headed.

During the lunchtime talk,



Above: Sue Racanelli and Lilly Talbert (center) talk about the Vermont Suffrage Centennial Alliance.

the topic of who has benefited the most from woman suffrage was discussed. The conversation highlighted how women of color, disabled women, and/or working and lower-income women have faced difficulties when trying to vote. A modern day example was the 2018 gubernatorial election in Georgia, which was highly impacted by lack of early voting opportunities and accessible polling places. The gathering served as an opportunity for feminists of all ages to share viewpoints and exchange ideas as well as wisdom.

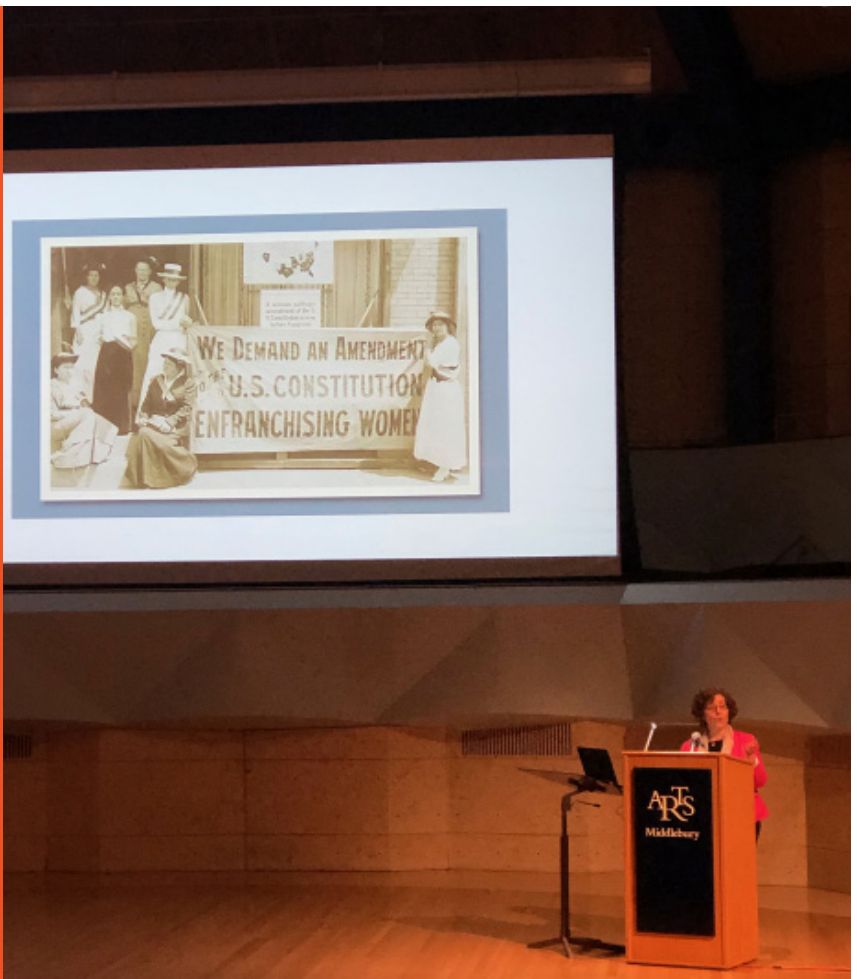
The Feminist Resource Center at Chellis House also supported the exhibition “Votes ... for Women?” at the Middlebury College Museum of Art, which opened a few hours after the lunchtime talk. Designed by Professor Amy Morsman (History Dept.) and the students of her 2018 first-year seminar, the exhibition was filled with historic photos, banners, and memorabilia documenting the protracted struggle of the suffrage movement and its uneven legacy for American women in the decades that followed ratification.

Middle school and sixth grade students who are participating the Sister-to-Sister Program were invited to tour the exhibit with Professor Morsman and museum docents on December 7. After the tour, the students learned about suffrage history in a hands-on activity in which they made buttons of famous suffragists such as Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells. Suffrage-related activities will continue in the spring with historian Lyn Blackwell speaking specifically about suffragists from Vermont.



ELAINE WEISS TALKS ABOUT THE WOMAN'S HOUR

RIGHT: Award-winning journalist Elaine Weiss.



Elaine Weiss, an award-winning journalist, started her lecture by sharing her motive for writing her book, *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*. "As an American woman, I didn't know how women obtained the right to vote. A typical misconception is that women were given the right to vote. In reality, they needed to fight for three generations. Thousands of them were harassed and many were incarcerated. The vote was not granted to them, they had to go out and put their lives on the line."

An extension of the "Votes ... for Women?" exhibition, the lecture took place at the Mahaney Arts Center on October 4. It was titled "The Woman's Hour: Sex, Race and

Money in the Fight for the Vote," highlighting that the suffrage movement was also marked by racial inequality and the class divide.

Suffrage for women was first discussed at the Seneca Falls Convention, the first woman's rights convention, in 1848, where abolition leader Frederick Douglass also spoke. "You MUST demand the vote; otherwise, it will not be given," he famously said. Many suffragists had first become politically active by working for abolition. In their struggles for freedom for black Americans and equal rights for all citizens, abolitionists and suffragists had a common goal. Yet, when it came down to prioritizing which constitutional amendment to pursue first—suffrage for

black men or women—things became more complicated. Abolitionists argued that it was more important to ensure that African-American men could vote and that "the woman's hour" had not arrived yet. Black men were granted the right to vote through the 15th Amendment of 1870. As a result, a rift in the movement occurred and suffrage leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony made racist statements even though they mended fences with Frederic Douglass down the line.

Even though first-generation suffragists worked for abolition, their movement also discriminated against black women. For example, white suffragists tried to prevent

African-American journalist and activist Ida B. Wells from marching with the Illinois delegation in a suffrage parade before the inauguration of president Woodrow Wilson in 1913. She marched with her delegation anyway.

Who was against woman suffrage? Many people initially. The movement was about voting rights, and therefore a political debate, but was also feared to trigger a significant cultural change in gender roles. Magazines and anti-suffrage campaigns often depicted suffragists as unattractive, masculine, bad mothers or wives. It is important to note that these images were also advanced by many women at the time who thought that political work was “dirty.”

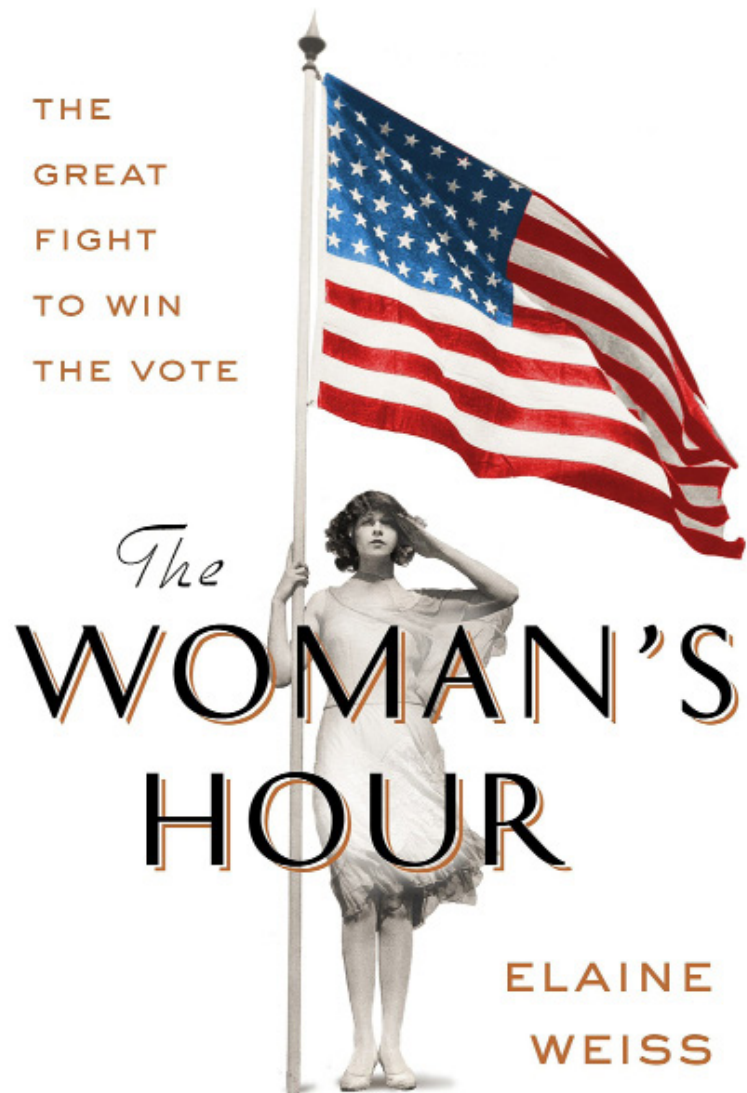
Another challenge that the suffrage movement faced was class division. Though known as an advocate for human rights, Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1910s didn't support the campaign because she herself wielded political power through her wealth. Another obstacle suffragists faced were owners of textile factories. They opposed the idea of voting rights for women because they feared women would regulate, if not ban outright, child labor on which their industry depended.

Nevertheless, suffragists' determination bore fruit

when the 19th Amendment was passed in 1920. A century has gone by, but the debate on voting rights is as crucial as it has ever been. Indigenous Americans living on reservations with no distinct address are often excluded. In some states, strict voter identification laws make it impossible for many people to vote. Weiss concluded her talk by reading an excerpt from a

letter to American women by Carrie Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association:

“The vote of yours has cost millions of dollars and the lives of thousands of women ... The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. Progress is calling you to make no pause. Act!”



RIGHT:
The cover of Weiss's book,
The Woman's Hour.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND THE DRAFTING OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

By Mikayla Hyman '20



Above: 32nd First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Drafted 70 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the cornerstone of international human rights advocacy and a foundation for the United Nations. Professor Blanche Wiesen Cook, Eleanor Roosevelt's foremost biographer (City University of New York), spoke about the former first lady's role in drafting this seminal document. This lecture was organized by the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom as part of a curriculum to advocate for peace by teaching about basic human rights. Wiesen Cook argued that Roosevelt's passion for human rights was born out of a deep well of compassion, and lessons about human rights advocacy are more important today than ever before.

Eleanor's Roosevelt's life work of improving conditions for all people was inspired by her early experiences in life. As a young girl, her home life was marked by tragedy. At the age of 8, she lost her mother and two years later, in 1894, her father. She was placed in the custody of her grandmother and lived with aunts and cousins who struggled with substance abuse. Roosevelt

met her mentor Marie Souvestre, a teacher at the Allenswood Boarding Academy, at age 15. Souvestre encouraged Roosevelt to see herself as a leader and revolutionary thinker. It was this mentoring that allowed Roosevelt to gain the confidence and the drive to share herself with the world. Roosevelt became a syndicated columnist, wrote for dozens of journals and authored eight books, and finally wielded substantial influence when, as the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she served as first lady from 1933 to 1945.

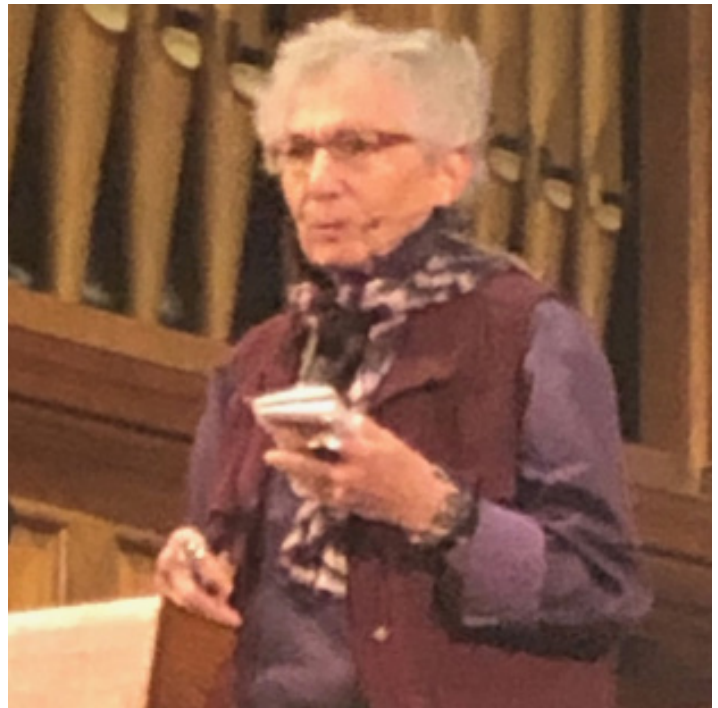
Eleanor Roosevelt had a long history of championing human rights. Her goal was to reignite hope in the nation during the Depression through supporting unions and civil rights. Roosevelt worked with the NAACP to pass anti-segregation laws. She agitated for the full representation of black Americans and women in the American military and shift public opinion about Japanese internment camps. During

World War II, Roosevelt advocated for Japanese Americans' rights to leave the internment camps, attend school, and enlist in the military. She thought that denying any part of a population enjoyment in life was a menace to the nation as a whole. Roosevelt said that one group cannot get ahead while leaving others behind. Either we go ahead together or we go down together.

Roosevelt's long history of advocacy informed her commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1940, she wrote a book entitled *The Moral Basis of Democracy*. In this book, Roosevelt laid out the basic tenets of democracy. She emphasized that in contemporary culture, political democracy does not exist without economic democracy. According to Roosevelt, as people are disaffected by poverty and racism, they have no stake in democracy. Additionally, she believed that it was necessary to appreciate the spiritual concepts that define democracy and focus on social cooperation instead of on material goods. Finally, it is necessary that people have the right to a secure a meaningful life with access to food, health, equal education and opportunity.

This vision informed Roosevelt's work for the United Nations. The United Nations was created to cultivate relationships and foster collaborations among nations. Eleanor Roosevelt became the chair of the Human Rights Commission, which drafted the Universal Declaration for Human Rights. It protects people's dignity and rights regardless of their sex, race, nationality, political opinion, socioeconomic status, or birth. Though it was ratified by the UN in 1948, the document has faced challenges of being incorporated into international and domestic law.

The work that informed Roosevelt's commitment to the UN Declaration of Human Rights is especially salient today. While the



Above: Roosevelt's foremost biographer and CUNY Professor Blanche Wiesen Cook.

US has traditionally had free education for all American children, public schools have recently been defunded. The current administration has increased the military budget to \$174 billion while trying to cut down funding for public education, television and radio, museums, libraries, and the National Endowments for the Humanities and Arts.

Today, more than ever, it is vital to understand human rights. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "The day of selfishness is over, and the day of working together has come. We must fight against intolerance. One group cannot go ahead leaving others behind. We go ahead together or we go down together." Professor Cook's talk emphasized that the best way to honor Roosevelt's memory is to fight for what Roosevelt believed in every day: equality and equity.



WHY ELECTING WOMEN MATTERS:

Professor of the Practice, Senator Ruth Hardy on a crucial topic of our times

by Akari Tsurumaki '23

“We were devastated after the 2016 election. That’s why we marched and ran for office,” this is how Addison County senator Ruth Hardy describes many women’s impetus to run for office over the last 4 years. On October 9, 2019, the Political Science Department and GSFS/Chellis co-sponsored her lecture as the first talk in the “Women and Representation” series. Making your voice heard is all well and good, Hardy said, but there is something distinct about being in the office. It gives you the power to make decisions.

Ruth Hardy is the former Executive Director of Emerge Vermont, an organization that encourages people who identify as women to run for office. In her presentation, she elaborated on the importance of having female-identified representatives in office because they can best address the different barriers they face.

What prevents women from being elected? Obstacles run the gamut from structural and

systematic to situational and personal barriers. Mixed in this toxic miasma are bias and discrimination. The lack of equal pay is one example for a structural barrier.

Because elections can get very costly, insufficient financial funds and connections with foundations have put women at a disadvantage, especially women of color. Since campaigns are usually time-

consuming, childcare and work hour inflexibility are situational barriers that women face.

Bias and discrimination take on many forms. The media’s focus on female candidates’ appearance illustrates gender bias. While Bernie Sanders appeared on television with his hair all messy, Hillary Clinton’s hair had to be perfectly groomed at every single public event. Surprisingly, voter bias towards female candidates is not necessarily significant as long as women are from the party voters support. Yet, this is not the case for when they run for the presidency.

Likability is another bias women face.



**Pictured:
Vermont
State Senator
Ruth Hardy.**



Above: Ruth Hardy pictured with VT Action Executive Director Sue Minter, representing Emerge Vermont.

Experienced and competent women are often perceived as less likable, pressuring female-identified candidates to be smart and sweet at the same time. Hardy spoke about this from her personal experience. When she was thinking of how to present herself at campaign events, she thought: “I need to get voters to like me first. That will make them listen to my main points.”

If running for office for women is challenging for these reasons, why does it matter that they run? Moving onto the title of the lecture, Hardy debunked some myths about women in executive positions. For example, characteristics

typically associated with women have qualified them as less able leaders, even though the opposite should be the case. Listening skills and empathy, for example, are foundations of inclusive decision-making. The point is not to essentialize the “feminine” qualities of female-identified candidates but to disrupt the societal narrative that disconnects femininity from leadership.

Moreover, since women tend to underestimate themselves when they run for office, they are often overqualified. Statistically, female representatives are associated with better health policies and better economic outcomes

for their districts. Studies conducted in India suggest that female politicians bring greater economic resources to a region. Last but not least, women should run because their lack of representation is essentially a social justice issue. If we really want a representative democracy, we cannot leave half of the population out.

Hardy concluded her talk by saying this: Do you identify as a woman? Run for office! Studies suggest that on average women need to be asked seven times before they feel confident to run for office. We can all start challenging the status quo by telling our amazing female-identified peers to run!

Getting to know Professor Hemangini Gupta

by Cat La Roche '21

Dr. Gupta arrived in Middlebury last fall and taught two classes: GSFS0200 Feminist Foundations and GSFS/SOAN 0324 Ladies at Work. She received her doctorate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Emory University and has taught at Colby College.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

CLR: What sparked your interest in Feminist Studies?

HG: I've always considered myself a feminist, mostly because I come from a family of feminists, but specifically, when I was a journalist, there was this event by a group called Blank Noise where they were responding to street sexual harassment and my editor said, "Why don't you go cover

it?" So I went; it was a street intervention, and there were people gathering on the street, each of them wore one letter of the to collectively spell out the phrase: "Why are you looking at me?" Every time the traffic stopped, there was this line of people that would gather at the red light with the letters spelling out that question. The intervention attempted to question the gaze of the spectator, and to think about why women are looked at in certain ways. It was a really powerful street intervention, because it took place on a crowded, busy street where women are frequently harassed. I joined in the intervention because I thought, "I'm covering it, I'll also do it and see what it feels like," and it

was a really significant moment to be part of something that was unfolding on the street. And so I did the interview, I wrote the story, and then I just couldn't stop getting involved with what the group was doing. The next thing they did I went to, and then the next thing, and then I joined them as a volunteer. When I moved to Delhi a few years later to work as a journalist, I started a chapter, and so I got involved in more feminist activism. In my journalism, as well, I began to cover gender and sexuality, which were not beats that were typically given to someone. At some point, I stopped wanting to be a journalist because it felt really rushed. I wanted to do a PhD and I was thinking about

what I would be interested in—



Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies was an obvious way to be able to theorize things that I was seeing every day. That was a move from activism to academia that I made self-consciously because it seemed like "this is the institutional



Above: Professor Hemangini Gupta by the water.

space that could give me the tools” to think about things I was grappling with in my activism.

CLR: Are there ways in which the PhD program in gender studies surprised you?

HG: Something that still surprises me is how interdisciplinary it is. When you are interested in gender from a certain perspective—

transnational feminism or anthropology—you assume that all of your classes will be tangentially related to that. Then you discover it is so many other things. I took classes in feminist philosophy, feminist legal theory, in psychoanalysis, in a range of things that I would not have immediately associated with feminism or feminist theory. It’s a profound moment when you realized this is really a wide and deep discipline. I think that was staggering. Even

in the classroom we didn’t have, necessarily, any research interests in common. My cohort was just five of us, and we were all interested in such different things. You get a sense of how this field can contribute to a wide variety of conversations.

CLR: What are you concentrating on in your research?

HG: My ultimate research, which is quite different from what I began my PhD, looks at how the city of Bangalore in south India began to shift from being a center where the world’s tech work was outsourced to being a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. Part of that is this postcolonial refashioning of the city that doesn’t want to be seen as the world’s backend site of labor anymore and wants to be seen as the center of the global workplace; it wants to be seen as a start-up city. I was interested in how that is entangled in questions of race, class, gender, because these aspects are made invisible by the focus on technology. The industry, or start-ups, more generally, are always speaking the language of ideation and innovation: “If you have a good idea, then you can make a million! Whoever you are!” You just have to love your job and love work. I was interested in interrogating these ideas to see whose ideas are valued, and how do questions of race and class play into how labor is valued, and how these are essentially forms of labor that are rendered invisible in the language of innovation and

technology and technocracy. I try to bring feminist theory in conversation with these ideas that seemed completely bled of gender, race, or any form of difference. It's therefore really an ethnography of start-ups. I did fieldwork in innovation labs and meetings where people pitch their ideas.

CLR: Interesting! I wonder how family factors into this.

HG: I did some fieldwork at dating events...earlier, middle-class men who were interested in technology had really high value in the marriage market because their salaries are good and there are raises; they have stable jobs. But with entrepreneurship, you really don't know how long your company's going to last, and it's your company so all of your money is pooled into it. The general fear is that entrepreneurs are not going to be able to find people to settle down with, so they had specific dating events where entrepreneurs would get together with other entrepreneurs. It was a very heteronormative space in which entrepreneurs were being produced as desirable subjects. This is an active strategy by networking groups and government groups who conduct "start-up festivals"

to encourage this ideal entrepreneur figure. The day will begin at 6 a.m. with some tai-chi or yoga class and then you go straight to meet a start-up entrepreneur, from there to a funding session, a networking meeting and then to a pitching session. These start-up festivals are designed to teach people what it means to be an entrepreneur. So it's not just about invention, it's about being a certain kind of desirable subject. It felt like a national project to create heterosexual citizens who are desirable entrepreneurs.

CLR: What are some pivotal texts that have really inspired you in the field of GSFS?

HG: I like classic texts from the late seventies/early eighties, and I really like Sylvia Federici's. She wrote about how to connect the work that women do at home with what's happening in the economy, one thing that Marx undertheorized. To me, that's a foundational contribution to gender studies, which is to think about how social reproduction, or how the fact that women are given the role of caring for families and raising children and doing housework is essential to how the world functions; it's invisibilized labor, and it's not accounted for in the formal

economy. I find her writing really powerful because she also gets us thinking about how love and sex are essentially just ways for the economy to function the motors that maintain and sustain heterosexual marriage. What I really value about that is: you take things like love and sex and you believe yourself to be really invested in them, and you think about it, sort of, with a feminist eye, and you think "yeah, this is something that I am told is amazing, but it serves a larger purpose." It can seem deeply cynical, but I think it's a really powerful way to make strange things that are everyday, and to make unfamiliar what seems to be natural.

CLR: What's one of your favorite places that you would want a Middlebury GSFS student to visit?

HG: Bangalore has a really great queer scene, and it has the most amazing dive bars that also become queer spaces after a certain time at night. It seems during the day that it's a city that's just like any city, really crowded, it's 11 million people, there's a ton of stuff happening everywhere. But at night, at certain spaces and at certain bars, things start to get really fun. So I think that people should go to Bangalore to experience queer nightlife.





Above: Professor Laurie Essig reading from her new book *Love, Inc.*

LOVE STINKS!

But Can It Be Redeemed?

by Christian Kummer '22

On Friday, October 4, 2019 Stonecutter Spirits was full of cocktails, delicious food, stylish clothing, and feminism for an event cleverly titled “Love Stinks!”. As a fundraiser for WomenSafe and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, over one-hundred Middlebury students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered to listen to GSFS Professor Laurie Essig give a presentation about her new book, *Love, Inc.* In this project, Professor Essig wanted to show how the ideals of love and romance have turned into a capitalist enterprise that enables and promotes ritualistic ways of defining love.

Professor Essig alternated between reading excerpts from her books and providing visual arguments. By way of introduction, Essig admitted to everyone that she herself is a true romantic and confessed that she has “spent a

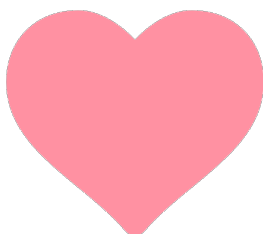
lifetime looking for ‘the one.’” However, the cynic in Essig knows that “environmental collapse and a global transfer of wealth to the billionaire class cannot be solved by seeing someone across the room and feeling our hearts beat faster until we finally lean in for the kiss and fireworks go off in the background.” Her argument rings out loud and clear - romance today serves as an escape from the catastrophes that are plaguing the world every day. With this foundational statement in mind, Essig continued to explore the many ways in which capitalism and love have created romanticized rituals that serve as a means to “escape.”

One overarching theme through Essig’s presentation was the idea that an individual must buy love in order for it to be real and sustainable. Since love is deeply intertwined with capitalism, these purchases are far from small. In a heteronormative context, the process of legitimizing one’s relationship to the highest level involves an engagement ring, an extravagant wedding with a beautiful white gown, and a marvelous honeymoon that allows the couple to get away from all of the stress they caused themselves by organizing a wedding.

Over the course of the talk, Essig poked holes in the validity of these practices and analyzed them

through a sociological, historical, and economic lens. For example, Essig looks at how the process of asking one to marry another human being has evolved over time. One-hundred years ago, proposals were far more intimate, conversational, and did not involve a ring. When the De Beers Diamond Corporation launched a media campaign in which a man fell to his knees to present an expensive ring to his bride, lavish proposals were popularized. In Essig's words, "the bended knee ritual came with a display of the now standardized Tiffany-cut diamond engagement ring, sparkling in its crushed velvet box." Initially, men would spend one month's worth of their salary on an engagement ring and expenditures have increased ever since. It is in this example that we can see how love has evolved into a spectacle driven by a capitalist agenda. Looking at proposals today, Essig dove into YouTube and watched extravagant proposal videos that incorporated massive flash mobs, live music, and much more. The pressure for a grand proposal is more present than ever, greatly due to social media, and men have to pay the price in order to impress.

Essig's talk was nothing short of captivating and thrilling. In the end, Essig did leave the audience with a central question: can love be redeemed? As an audience member myself, I would say that I left feeling hopeful. Love and romance can be saved if we reshape the ways in which we view it. If love were to be seen as a union between one or more individuals who want to engage in the social sphere and confront the world's injustices together, romance and marriage could be something socially just and comforting. If we are to truly confront the epidemics and crises that are facing us today, marriage and love can no longer serve as a way out from reality; they must be a way of joining together and diving in further.



Above: The cover of *Love, Inc.*

Below: Professor Laurie Essig.



THE POWER OF DEEP ACQUAINTANCE IN ORAL HISTORIES

BY CHRISTIAN KUMMER '22

On Tuesday, October 1, 2019 an intimate group of feminists came together at Chellis House for a talk by Professor Lana Povitz (History Dept.) titled, “Deep Acquaintance: Or, Can a Relationship Be A Source?”

During her talk, Povitz discussed her process in writing her first book, *Stirrings: How Activist New Yorkers Ignited a Movement for Food Justice* (University of North Carolina Press). In discussing her use of oral histories, Professor Povitz described the social dynamics that can arise between interviewers and interviewees. In some situations, particularly those where an interviewer is researching a subject for an extended

period of time, an element of “deep acquaintance” can develop.

Povitz described deep acquaintance as a relationship that allows for social insights outside and around living historical subjects. Compared to one-off interviews, conducting in-depth oral histories, sometimes over a period of months or even years, can give the researcher a more intimate understanding of her subject. Some scholars may argue a legitimate source may be lost due to a lack of boundaries, but Povitz sees it differently. In fact, Povitz’s work appears to defy what is expected of research methods and instead demonstrates what can be gained from deep acquaintance.

Povitz shared the example of Kathy Goldman, a food activist of more than fifty years who played a key role in *Stirrings*. Over several years of research, Goldman became more than a source—she became a friend and a confidante. The better they knew

each other, the more rich and complex the portrayal Povitz felt she could offer in her book.

When trying to write a history of a living subject, deep acquaintance can serve as an essential aspect of one’s research. Through building a relationship, Povitz was able to dig deeper and learn more about her subjects than one could in a standardized interview; through an intimate connection, Povitz’s deepest connections became her richest sources. At the same time, Professor Povitz also talked about the importance of staying true to her own point of view as a scholar. Her strategy, in order not to “betray” those she writes about by coming out with unexpectedly critical perspectives, is to engage her subjects in open disagreement well before any research gets published. Povitz even noted that some of her subjects encouraged her to be critical; she believes that this, too, has to do with the trust sown over the course of growing more deeply acquainted.





Above: A rapt audience attends Professor Kristin Bright's talk at Chellis House.

Out of Our Minds:

Sensory Ethnography and Felt Science

A "Life of the Mind Talk"
by Dr. Kristin Bright
By Mikayla Hyman '20

Dr. Kristin Bright, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Middlebury College, spoke about sensory ethnography and felt science as part of the Life of the Mind lecture series at Chellis House, which provides a platform for Middlebury faculty to present their feminist research. Dr. Bright told the audience about the student lab she directed at her last job at the University of Toronto. At Middlebury, she would also like to develop a lab and build a collaborative community with a strong focus on undergraduate research.

Dr. Bright conducts research on a range of topics from autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) to precision medicine advocacy. To study these topics, she uses two innovative methodologies: digital and sensory ethnography. Digital ethnography examines culture through the lens of human interactions and expressions online and through digital media. Through TheBodyOnline lab, her students have researched

what millennials and GenZ folks think about topics such as mental and sexual health and disability. Digital ethnography also disseminates results in formats that can travel long distances, such as videos and online resources. Sensory ethnography demands a rethinking of how researchers immerse themselves in topics and asks them to involve all their senses—touch, taste, hearing, and sound—to understand questions and produce creative, effective results.

Sensory ethnographers have, for example, examined how to create pill bottles for people with joint problems. In order to do this, they taped their fingers to reduce the range of motion of their own joints and ended up designing a pill bottle that was easier to grab and open.

Dr. Bright is the only anthropologist on campus specialized in sensory and digital ethnography. These methodologies are inherently feminist, as they break down traditional knowledge-making systems, which in anthropology include classic participant observations and ethnographic interviews. Sensory ethnography allows researchers to understand the experiences of the subjects in new ways and consequently creates solutions to problems that are relevant and accessible. With the help of digital ethnography, researchers can analyze readily accessible data and communicate their findings on open platforms.

THE MALIKAH GENDER JUSTICE ORGANIZING INSTITUTE AT MIDDLEBURY

By Akari Tsurumaki '23



ABOVE: Participants in the Malikah Institute summit.

From November 14 to 17, the Feminist Resource Center at Chellis House hosted a four-day Gender Justice Organizing Institute conceived by Malikah, a global grassroots movement started by Rana Abdelhamid '15. Malikah's mission is to empower female-identified leaders, especially those of color, to transform their communities into inclusive, safe, and just spaces. More than 20 women from across the U.S.—including seven Middlebury students—joined the 5-person Malikah team for intensive training sessions to learn self-defense, organizing tactics, financial literacy, and engage in self-care.

The inspiration for this curriculum dates back to when Rana was 15 years old. One day, as she was walking on the street, a stranger attacked her from behind and tried to tear her hijab off. Even though she felt unsafe and powerless at that moment, this incident motivated her to get a black belt in karate and to organize sessions for self-defense in her community in Queens, New York. As her initiative took off, these sessions turned into spaces where women found healing by sharing their stories and speaking their own truth. Over the years, the organization has grown, with workshops taking place all over the world. To this day, Malikah's philosophy emphasizes the effectiveness of community-based organizing. Locals know best which issues need to be addressed in their communities. Actions will be less effective if approached with a hierarchical mindset of "saving others."

One aspect of the curriculum that distinguishes Malikah is its openness. "Social justice spaces can be harmful," Rana says. Many social justice organizations, perhaps because they are too

high-minded, often forget to be critical of power dynamics in their group. When the group doesn't make a conscious effort, sexism, racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, and Islamophobia can still prevail in these spaces. Malikah acknowledges the risk upfront and encourages their participants to check their privileges and also ask the question of which marginalized identities are not yet represented in the room.

Malikah's great strength lies in its facilitation of organizing skills. According to the Malikah principles, organizing should have three goals in mind: 1) creating concrete improvement in a community, 2) making community members aware of their power and 3) shifting power dynamics. In other words, awareness campaigns or direct services are only a part of organizing, not the whole. Even though awareness raising campaigns are crucial, organizers must be strategic about other parts of their work as well. From frameworks like this to fundraising techniques, the program taught participants skills needed to achieve long-lasting change.

The most important outcome of the weekend were the strong bonds created between female leaders from Middlebury and other locations. The Malikah team asked the participants to reflect on whose shoulders they stand. All too often, we overlook the contributions of women of color and people from other marginalized communities. That is why Malikah must acknowledge predecessors and each other. The work of strengthening the community continues at Middlebury. A first Malikah self-defense session will be held on January 27, and everyone is welcome to participate!

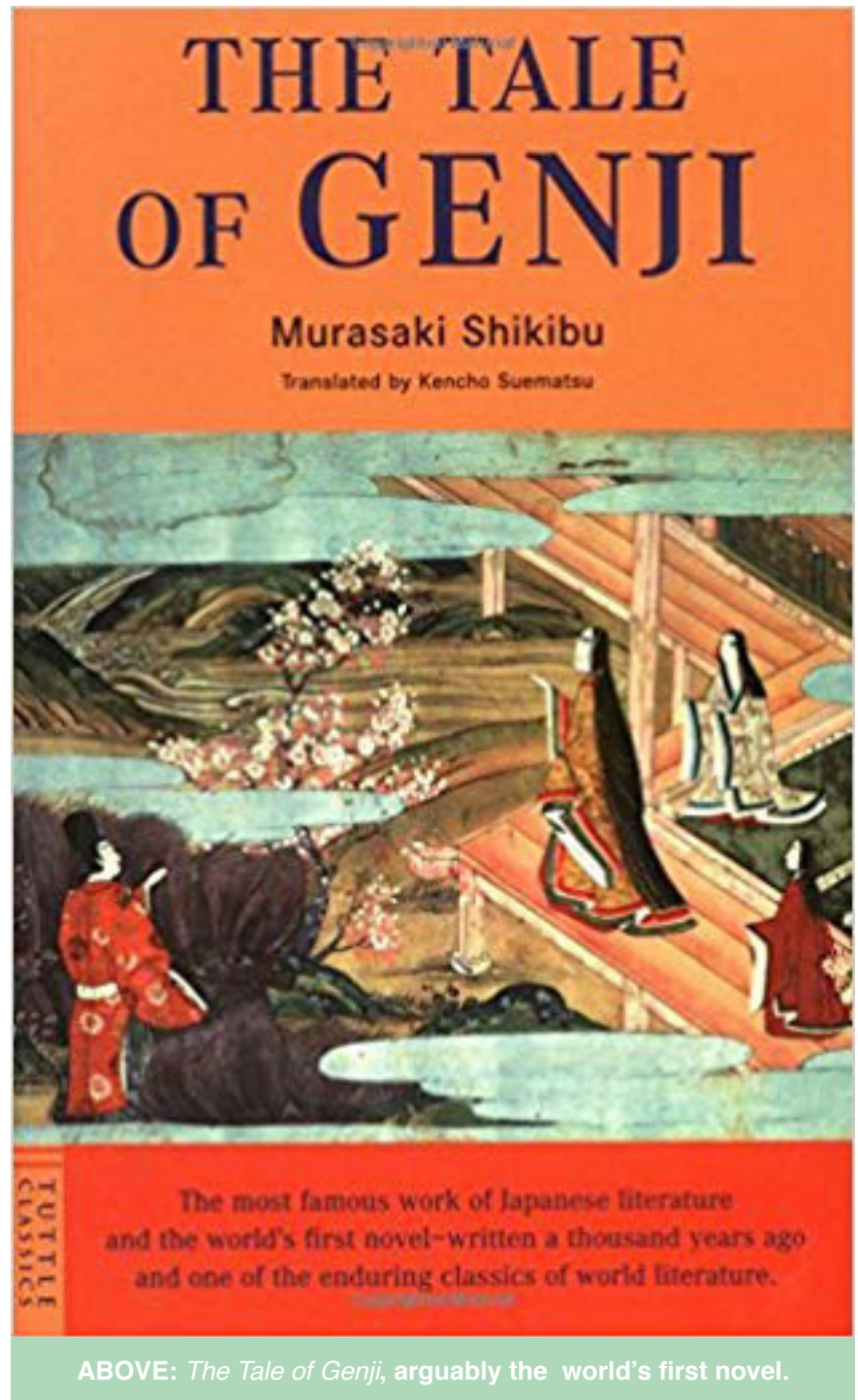
FOCUS ON JAPAN

Since last April, Chellis House and the Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies Program have organized and/or supported programming relating to Japanese history and culture. Two events focused specifically on sexual violence. In April, Assistant Professor Otilia Milutin (Japanese Dept.) gave a talk in the “Life of the Mind” series on *The Tale of Genji*, arguably the world’s first novel and one of the masterpieces of Japanese literature. It was written by the noblewoman and lady-in-waiting Murasaki Shikibu in the early years of the 11th century. It recounts the numerous consensual and non-consensual sexual encounters between its hero, the eponymous prince Genji, and long series of women. One thousand years of Genji scholarship, adaptation, and reception have barely touched on the tale’s representations of sexual violence, preferring the unmarred image of Genji as a romantic hero. Surprisingly, even contemporary renditions of the tale, in film, anime and manga are problematic in their rendition of rape and sexual abuse, keeping its female characters if not outright silent, then forever unheard.

In September, film-maker Miki Dezaki screened his documentary *Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue*, also zooming in on Korean women, whose voices were not heard for

Over the past two semesters, GSFS and Chellis House have (co)-hosted four events relating to Japanese history and culture.

By Karin Hanta, Hira Zeeshan '22,
and Yui Kato '23



decades. These so-called “comfort women” from Korea, China, and the Philippines were forced into sexual slavery during World War II by the Japanese army. This grand-scale abuse was cloaked in a veil of silence for many years. In 2015, South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe finally reached an agreement to declare a “final and irreversible” settlement. Japan agreed to pay into a fund supporting victims, and South Korea agreed to remove a statue for “comfort women” in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. However, this settlement was criticized for not having involved survivor testimonies. Survivors have also called on Japan to take legal responsibility for the fascist army’s actions. In his presentation, Mr. Dezaki explained that nationalists in Japan—who consider “comfort women” paid prostitutes—do not see this matter as a human rights but as a historical issue. In Korea, exactly the opposite is the case. Incidentally, on the day the film was screened at Middlebury, *The New York Times* reported that some of the nationalists interviewed for the film have sued Mr. Dezaki for misrepresenting their views.

Two other talks focused on Japanese pop culture. In another “Life of the Mind” lecture last April, Professor Louisa Stein (Film & Media Culture) analyzed the Japanese

sports anime television series, *Yuri on Ice*. Professor Stein examined how fans transform media through cosplay, the practice of dressing up as a character from a movie, book, or video game. She traces the transformative work of fans creating gender-bending cosplay music videos (CMVs). In their ongoing release of videos, these fan authors intertwine the narrative seriality of *Yuri on Ice* with serial narratives of their own lives. In so doing, they embody, recreate, repeat, and transform key emotional moments and images that, in their repetition, affectively bind together larger networks of community and self-authorship.

Laura Miller, Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, focused on the portrayal of noteworthy persons from Japanese history throughout the ages. As publishing houses try to make these protagonists appealing to younger generations, the historical accuracy of these figures gets watered down. While presented differently than in historical records, these figures can be identified through symbols adorning them. The presentation of queen Himiko (c. 170-248CE) is one such example. She is the first recorded female queen in Japanese history who came to the throne at a relatively advanced age. However, in anime and manga, she is



ABOVE: Professor of Japanese Studies Laura Miller.

portrayed as a beautiful maiden, weak yet sensual. Her bronze medallion mirror, a tooth necklace, and clothing patterns identify her. In contemporary anime, she is also drawn as a schoolgirl or a sexy sorcerer.

This change in representation is not limited to women in Japanese history but also extends to males rulers such as semi-legendary crown prince Shotoku Taishi (574-622CE), who is credited with establishing Buddhism in Japan. During his era, beauty standards dictated that men have chubby faces and small eyes. According to the old paintings portraying him, he is somewhat old and does not have a muscular build. However, in our day and age, in Japanese anime, he is portrayed as a tall, young, muscular man with a slim face and big eyes, appealing especially to girls.



Notes From Class: *Alison Bechdel Through the Lens of Queer Critique*

BY CAT LA ROCHE '21

On Wednesday, December 4th, 2019 Alison Bechdel gave a talk titled “Graphic Novels to Watch Out For” at Wilson Hall as part of the Vermont Humanities Council’s First Wednesdays series. Onstage, Bechdel was soft-spoken, witty, and charmingly disorganized, navigating slide after slide of comics. Bechdel began her talk with short but illuminating references to other historical works in the canon of graphic novels, including John Lewis and Andrew Aydin’s *March* trilogy, which documented the inside story of the Civil Rights Movement. (Incidentally, Congressman John Lewis gave a talk for the First Wednesday series in October 2019). Bechdel spoke to the potential of graphic novels compared to other, more conventional media, mentioning the success of *The Washington Post*’s six-part graphic novel-style explanation of the Mueller Report.

Bechdel’s own comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*, which was published from 1983 to 2008, is known for its humorous and lifelike queer characters whose flaws and convictions shine through as the characters navigate dating, jobs, and politics. Bechdel said that she sees herself in all of her characters—from the radical leftists to the more conventional, married, liberal lesbians. This reminded me of something that Professor Thomsen said in our “Intro to Queer Critique” class this past semester: we all contain contradictions despite our politics and our ideological convictions. Bechdel herself talked about how her community once opposed gay marriage on the grounds that it should be abolished, and now she’s married.

Bechdel spoke of the lesbian community she lived in when she started *Dykes To Watch Out For*, which existed entirely outside of the mainstream due to society’s disdain for lesbians, and which was radical by nature. Now, Bechdel admitted, being gay is not radical in and of itself,



ABOVE: Students and Professor Thomsen with Alison Bechdel.

and many queer people today don’t have radical politics, but instead live comfortably in the confines of a society structured around capitalism and white supremacy. To give dimension to this, Bechdel talked about one of her characters, Stuart, a straight man. Stuart embodies and practices radical leftist politics more so than some of her lesbian characters. One of my most significant takeaways from Professor Thomsen’s class was detaching myself from the idea that queer politics has anything fundamental to do with queer people—the queerness of the politics in question has to do with dissolving binaries and dismantling norms, and queer people, with their non-normative sexualities, are just a potential mechanism or tool for achieving these radical and transformational ends.

There is no dearth of praise in popular culture and at Middlebury for Alison Bechdel and her work, but I’ll still contribute some: Bechdel is a writer who has effortlessly communicated ideas from many fields—literature, film, sociology, art, and gender and feminist studies—to a mainstream audience. She’s a star!



Feminists of the Year Toria Isquith '19, Miranda de Beer '19, Professor Lana Povitz, Grace Vedock '20, and Mika Morton '19 with Chellis House director Karin Hanta (far left).

THE 2019 FEMINIST OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Every year on the Saturday before Mother's Day, the Feminist Resource Center at Chellis House celebrates all the nominees for the Feminist of the Year Award. On May 11, 2019, a large group of Chellis House friends gathered in

the backyard to celebrate the strides we made during another successful school year. Integral to making these strides are the many feminist activists and knowledge producers who never tire of investing their intellectual and emotional

energy towards making this world a more equitable place. After enjoying delicious treats and the poetry of GSFS major Sam Boudreau '19, we honored the award winners. Language in Motion Coordinator Kristen Mullins garnered the prize



ABOVE: Feminist of the Year Eliza Garrison, Professor of Art History.

in the staff category. Her nominator noted that “Kristen [had] devoted the past five years to promoting and deepening cultural understanding on this campus, in the local communities through her K-12 outreach, and in Japan through her Japan Summer Service Learning program. For years now she has led community-focused anti-bias response trainings. Students and staff alike have found them tremendously helpful.”

This year, the committee decided to distinguish two professors in the faculty category. Eliza Garrison, Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture, was lauded for “consistently bringing a feminist lens to her classes in the Art History department. In particular, her class ‘Medieval Bodies’ in fall 2018 analyzed how women and other (literally) marginalized people were treated in medieval art and what the social and

political ramifications of these representations were.” In all of her classes, Professor Garrison makes a point “both to assign feminist analyses of works of art and to discuss misogyny and othering in art.” The other professor who won the award was Lana Povitz, Visiting Assistant Professor of History. Her nominator highlighted her ability “to craft socially conscious and relevant syllabi in all of her classes, which require students to engage with the highly political world around them, allowing no one to remain apathetic or ignorant of the issues that dictate our lives. Her assignments allow students to self implicate, explore their own narratives, and counter traditional modes of history that sustain patriarchy.”

This year, the selection committee decided to distinguish five students with the award although many more had been nominated. Throughout their four-year career at Middlebury, Miranda de Beer '19 and Mika Morton '19 often engaged in activism in tandem. By conceiving the “Middlebury 5K: Steps Towards Reproductive Justice” three years ago, they created an event with staying power. The event now draws close to 100 people who learn about reproductive justice through signs on the golf course while running or walking. They expand their knowledge at t-shirt making activities after the event where the event leaders are on site to talk about reproductive justice and hand-out pamphlets. Mika and Miranda also created a template for other students to

continue their effort.

Mika and Miranda often collaborated with Toria Isquith '19, Grace Vedock '20 and Rebecca Wishnie '20. Toria raised awareness about the reproductive dangers associated with the proliferation of crisis pregnancy centers that pose as health care facilities to spread misinformation about pregnancy and abortion. For her senior project with Professor Carly Thomsen, Toria developed the “Bonefish” animation series, which brings to light the realities of abortion access and lived experience for women seeking reproductive healthcare.

In addition to being an activist against sexual violence and helping establish a digital archive for feminist activism at Middlebury, Rebecca Wishnie investigated the power dynamics of the Charles Murray visit throughout the past school year. In the course, “Gender and the Making of Space,” and at the student symposium, she examined how the architecture of McCullough helped to lend an air of legitimacy to Murray’s visit. For the 2018 Student Summer Symposium, Rebecca, together with Professor Sujata Moorti, investigated state-sanctioned violence and state-sanctioned mourning by comparing the film series *The Handmaid’s Tale* with the Charles Murray visit.

Over the past three years at Middlebury, Grace



ABOVE: Feminist of the Year Kristen Mullins, Language in Motion Coordinator.

Vedock has demonstrated a great passion for combating sexual violence. Tirelessly collaborating with Taite Shomo '20.5 in the “It Happens Here” speak-out, she also testified before the Vermont State Committee on Education in

favor of a bill that supports victims of campus sexual assault in Vermont. Grace also is a strong advocate on behalf of all queer students who were affected by this voices contesting their humanity on this campus.





Above: Actors in *The Three Musketeers 1941* at the 2019 Women in Theatre festival.

“All Women All Theater All the Time:”

This was the title of one of the first features written on The Women in Theatre Festival, a festival I co-created 5 years ago in an effort to fight my feelings of frustration with the all too slow shattering of the theatre industry’s glass ceiling. A few years before, I had encountered the recently released figures on the low numbers of women playwrights, directors, and artistic leaders. The aforementioned interview was published on Amy Poehler’s Smart Girls web site during the first year of the festival. It

would have been a great press item to get audiences interested in the work – all by women playwrights and women-led companies – as well as perhaps garner donors interested in the mission of a women-focused festival. However, and as often happens along the bumpy road of life in the theatre, this and indeed most of the festival’s interviews and reviews came out only after the festival itself had ended. The Women in Theatre Festival would have to wait until its 2nd year to really find its identity as part of the

inaugural season of the newest Off Broadway venue, ART/New York Theatres on 53rd Street in New York City, a space which remains the festival’s home today.

This past summer I spent half of May and all of June in planning, pre-production, rehearsals, and performances of Women in Theatre Festival, also known in hipper form as #witfestnyc.

As part of the festival, I had the opportunity to co-direct a commissioned adaption project, *The Three Musketeers 1941*, by playwright Meagan Monaghan Rivas. Inspired by characters from Alexandre Dumas’ classic adventure novel, this new play was set in the occupied Paris of World War II. The play asked questions like, “What happens when a group of women join together to fight against fascism

and injustice?” and “Can women and people of color fight against a ruling class in which they have little or no representation?” I was thrilled to work on a play – a feminist remaking of a classic tale – that put women front and center and as agents of change. The play was written to highlight an intentionally intersectional framework and the discussions between actors, playwright, designers, and directors often treated topics that mirrored questions many of us, theatre artists and citizens alike, were asking ourselves daily: What can one person do in the face of fascists in power? Are we stronger together? How do you create change in society?

Later in the festival, Amina Henry’s adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty* created another opportunity for young audiences to encounter a feminist adaptation of a classic tale. Using humor and cameo performances by characters from other fairytales, the play changed the focus from a sleeping princess awaiting rescue from a prince. While the Disney version features a kiss applied by Prince Charming, the fairytale originates from a story of the rape of a young woman who is awakened by the eventual birth of the resulting twins from said rape. The playwright and I spent last year discussing the various versions and deciding on the frame of the story so that the play could take on themes of sexual consent while still remaining appropriate for an audience of 6 to 13 year-olds. By working within the old tropes and then reinventing the



Above: Actors in *Sleeping Beauty* at the 2019 Women In Theatre festival.

relationships and situations to reflect a female-gaze – both the playwrights’ and my own – our *Sleeping Beauty* became the story of love between siblings and girls’ ability to become the lead actors in their own lives. As related in one review, “This retelling of the classic children’s story is a lighthearted romp that includes important, progressive messages for kids about gender roles, consent and the bond between siblings” (Theater That Matters).

The other 9 shows in the festival (yes, 9!) included fifteen other women playwrights, devised work, new play readings, and immersive work. While each year’s festival contains work that is innovative and genre-bending in nature, this past summer’s #witfestnyc struck a chord with many different audience members and artists, as all the plays seemed built to stimulate conversation and create community. I also had the special privilege of working with 3 Middlebury student interns—Stephanie

Miller ’20, Cole Merrell ’21, and Becca Berling ’21—on the festival. It was joyful to see them making connections with the playwrights, directors, and actors as they supported, managed, acted in, or led various projects and plays. Already I am planning this summer’s Women in Theatre Festival 2020. As I head into my 5th year of producing this festival, I am looking at ways to broaden the scope of the work and the reach of the audience. Feel free to check out the dedicated site to be part of it: <http://www.witfestival.projecttheatre.org>

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(#witfestnyc)