Auburn professor wins NSF grant for Antarctic art

Allyson Comstock, a professor in the Department of Art in Auburn University’s College of Liberal Arts, has been awarded a National Science Foundation grant through the Antarctic Artists and Writers Program.

Comstock is one of just two artists and the only awardee from Alabama to be selected this year. She will travel to Antarctica in October and will spend two months working collaboratively with researchers at Palmer Station to create a set of 30 total drawings to represent the Antarctic environment.

“The goal of the Artists and Writers Program is to promote the research being done in Antarctica,” Comstock said. “I think scientists are doing a number of remarkable things, but the layperson sometimes has trouble accessing it. Through this project, I feel like I become a conduit in a way; I present it in a visual form which I think is easier for people to enter into so they can appreciate it.”

The project, “Antarctica: Micro, Macro and In-between,” will consist of a series of 10 sets of drawings laid out in three panels: one will represent the average person’s broad landscape view; one, a research scientist’s microscopic view; and one will position between the two and represent Comstock’s interpretation.

“It’s a landscape view, but much closer – not such a broad vista,” she said. “I’m layering some of the larger landscape view and some of the microscopic imagery into that as well, so it’s sort of a merger of the two.”

Comstock said she visited Antarctica on an expedition cruise a few years ago, and that is how she learned about the NSF program. Experiencing the environment and taking a number of photographs helped her conceive the idea for her proposal.

“I will go there and photograph and do some drawing,” she said. “I took a number of photographs on my first trip, but now I’ll be photographing with more of an agenda. It’s really a two-part project: I’ll go there and conduct the research, then come back and spend many months in the studio executing the drawings.”

Comstock said she has already begun collaborating withJames McClintock, a University of Alabama at Birmingham professor and polar marine biologist, and looks forward to the opportunity to make his work and the work of other researchers more accessible.

— Carol Nelson

Clearing the way

Drivers and pedestrians on Gay Street now have a clear, though temporary, view across College Street of Funchess Hall from a block away as heavy equipment continues clearing the site of the former Heart of Auburn Motel to make way for a shopping center anchored by a chain pharmacy. On private property across from campus and next to the Auburn Alumni Center for the past two decades, the hotel had been a South College Street fixture for a half century but its appearance had deteriorated over the years. On the Gay Street side of the property, however, two houses from the early 20th century, including one of the city’s last remaining stone houses from that era, were also cleared to make way for the commercial development.

Auburn programs place in U.S. News top 10 for online education offerings

Online graduate programs in Auburn University’s College of Education, Samuel Ginn College of Engineering and College of Business are listed in the top 10 in the newly released U.S. News and World Report’s 2013 Best Online Education Programs rankings.

Auburn’s College of Education ranked second among online graduate education programs, with high scores in student engagement and faculty credentials and training.

“We’re delighted that U.S. News & World Report has recognized the excellence of our students, as well as our faculty’s commitment to providing quality instruction and keeping pace with ever-changing technological tools,” said Betty Lou Whitford, dean of the College of Education and Wayne T. Smith Distinguished Professor. “We pride ourselves on bringing out the best in our students, whether they happen to join us on campus or online. Those who choose the latter option due to family or career obligations will find that they will be engaged, challenged and well prepared by our faculty.”

The Samuel Ginn College of Engineering ranked sixth among online graduate engineering programs. The graduate computer information technology program, housed in Computer Science and Software Engineering, was ranked seventh among online graduate computer information technology programs.

“Auburn Engineering is well known for providing one of the nation’s top engineering graduate distance degree programs,” said Chris Roberts, dean of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering. “These rankings confirm that our program offers strong graduate instruction with a leading-edge delivery system that ensures our distance students receive an experience comparable to that of their on-campus peers. Our online graduate programs are vital to our overall educational mission, and we are proud to take our place among the finest programs in the country.”

The College of Business ranked seventh among online graduate business programs.

“We are pleased to be recognized as a leading, quality provider of distance graduate business education,” said Bill Hardgrave, dean of the College of Business. “For our college, the online strategy has been a mainstay since the late 1990s. Yet, our faculty and staff continue to push the distance envelope to deliver an innovative and quality education.”
Exhibition explores roots, legacy of Bauhaus architecture, design

Auburn University is the first stop in the United States for the exhibition, “Bauhaus twenty-21: An Ongoing Legacy – Photographs by Gordon Watkinson.”

The exhibition, which has toured internationally since 2009, will be on display through May 4 at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University.

“Bauhaus twenty-21” features photographs by Gordon Watkinson depicting examples of Bauhaus architecture along with building projects by up-and-coming as well as internationally renowned contemporary architects. Watkinson is a New York-based fine arts and commercial photographer who has worked for a broad range of clients from the fields of advertising, architecture, design and fashion.

Watkinson said the architecture and design tradition at Auburn University made Auburn a special place to start the North American portion of the tour.

“The great thing about Auburn is that you have one of the most important architecture, design and build studios in the country,” he said. “It’s a place for thinking and doing, much as the Bauhaus School was in its day.”

Marilyn Laufer, director of the Jule Collins Smith Museum, said the show helps the university build on these strengths. “Both the content and presentation of this exhibition are a little out of the ordinary,” she said. “For our 10th anniversary year, we sought out exhibitions that would not only be of special interest to our campus but also provide something a little special.”

In addition to the photographs, the exhibition features re-editions of Bauhaus furniture designed before 1933 and still manufactured today.

Creating a visual as well as theoretical dialogue between the timeless modernism of Bauhaus architecture and the visions of contemporary practitioners, the exhibition offers a unique perspective on Bauhaus design philosophy as it relates to architecture and its relevance in today’s society.

Translated from German, Bauhaus means ‘house for building’ and is also the name of the school founded in Weimar, Germany, in 1919 by Walter Gropius. Gropius and his successors, Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, are credited with introducing the guiding principles of modern architecture. Although the school was closed by the Nazis in 1933, its classic, minimalist designs remain an inspiration to architects.

“You will see pieces of furniture that are very familiar to you without realizing that they were actually designed in 1923, 1925 or 1927,” said Watkinson. “You also get to delve into the story behind the pieces and understand how good design can be used as a problem solver.”

Bauhaus architects considered the modern-day problem of sustainability even in the early 20th century, long before green was a buzzword.

“They dealt with ideas in passive solar in 1923 before anybody ever thought about it,” said Watkinson. “They were thinking about the occupants of the building. I think we’ve lost a lot of time thinking about the vernacular of the building rather than who was going to live there and how they were going to use it. That’s an important piece of modernism that we’re just rediscovering.”

Watkinson is now working on a series of exhibitions exploring some of the major expressions of modernism and their protagonists – from French Modernism (“E.1027: A Modernist Mystery” and “French Modernism: A Different Path”), to Midcentury Modern (“Midcentury Modern: America’s Turn”), as well as less explored areas such as Modernism in Central Europe (“Central European Modernism: The Forgotten Dream”).

“Bauhaus twenty-21” is presented under the patronage of UNESCO. The exhibition also received support from the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Goethe-Institut, as well as Alien Skin Software, Canson, Knoll, Picto and Tecnolumen.

The exhibition is organized by Foto+Synthesis. It was conceived by Gordon Watkinson and developed with the curatorial assistance of Michael Siebenbrodt, director of the Bauhaus-Museum in Weimar, Germany, and Professor Falk Jaeger in Berlin.

— Charlotte Hendrix

Campus Calendar

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25
MUSEUM EXHIBITION “Bauhaus twenty-21,” photography exhibition featuring significant examples of Germany’s Bauhaus architectural style of the 1920s-30s, a leading influence on 20th century modernist architecture, Jule Collins Smith Museum, through May 4

LITERTARY EVENT “A Reading of Sherlock Holmes Stories,” 10 a.m.-noon, Haley Center lobby; sponsored by the Department of English

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29
SPANISH LANGUAGE CINEMA “Antes del Estreno” (“Before Opening Night”), Spanish with English subtitles, 6 p.m., Jule Collins Smith Museum; part of the Spanish Language Club Film Series

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31
PANEL DISCUSSION “The American Whistleblower Tour: Essential Voices for Accountability,” 7-9 p.m., 113-A Lowder Business Building; panel includes prominent whistleblowers John Oberg, speaking on fraud in the student loan system, and Frank Casey, speaking on the Bernie Madoff scandal

SPANISH LANGUAGE FILM “Chico & Rita” Spanish with English subtitles, 6 p.m., Jule Collins Smith Museum; part of the Spanish Language Club Film Series

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1
MEETING Board of Trustees, AUM Library Tower, committee meetings start at 10 a.m., to be followed at approximately 11:30 a.m. by meeting of full board, times subject to change

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4
SPANISH LANGUAGE CINEMA “Las Marimbas del Inferno” (“Marimbas from Hell”), Spanish with English subtitles, 6 p.m., Jule Collins Smith Museum; part of the Spanish Language Club Film Series

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7
FRENCH LANGUAGE CINEMA “Les Contes De La Nuit” (Tales of the Night), 4 p.m., Student Center 2222; part of the Franco-phone Film Series

NEXT Auburn Report

Online rankings

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Online graduate degree programs were ranked based on student services and technology, faculty credentials and training, student engagement and admissions selectivity. Academic peer reputation was included in the calculations for engineering and business programs. Programs offering courses that are 100 percent online were considered for the rankings. U.S. News established rankings for each online master’s degree program in education, engineering, business, nursing and computer information technology.

— Carol Nelson
Student, recent grad named as finalists for Gates Scholarships

Auburn University student Jimmy Kaczmarek and 2012 graduate Paul Bergen have been selected as finalists for the prestigious Gates Cambridge Scholarship. Only four public universities – Auburn, UC-Berkeley, UCLA and Rutgers – can claim two finalists per institution.

Kaczmarek, a senior in chemical engineering who is conducting research under the direction of Mark Byrne, Breeden Associate Professor in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, will graduate in May. He holds a 3.97 grade-point average. If awarded the scholarship, he plans to pursue a master’s degree in medical sciences within the Department of Oncology at Cambridge. Last spring he was named a Goldwater Scholarship honorable mention, a national award for undergraduates in the fields of science, technology, mathematics and engineering.

“Jimmy has made a substantial impact at Auburn in a number of areas both inside and outside the classroom,” said Byrne. “He has done exceptional research work in my lab for the past two years while working on his honor’s thesis while at the same time serving as trumpet section leader in the Auburn University marching band.”

Bergen graduated last spring with a 3.97 GPA with a double major in microbiology and German. A current Fulbright Scholar in Germany, Bergen is continuing research at the Technical University of Munich that he began at Auburn under the guidance of Associate Professor Mark Liles in the Department of Biological Sciences. If awarded the scholarship, Bergen plans to pursue a Ph.D. in pathology at Cambridge with a focus on how bacteria express their genomes and how pathogenic bacteria cause disease.

“Paul has the kind of qualities that I look for in a student, someone who is curious about science and the larger world,” said Liles. “He was able to excel at both microbiology and becoming fluent in German. Not only did he earn bachelor’s degrees in both subjects, but earned top honors in both colleges.”

The scholarship program is funded by Bill and Melinda Gates through the Gates Cambridge Trust. This year nearly 1,000 applicants from the United States applied and from that number the Trust selected 90 to interview in Washington, D.C., in early February for 30 available scholarships.

Gates Cambridge Scholarships are awarded to college students and recent graduates based on four criteria: intellectual ability; leadership capacity; a desire to use their knowledge to contribute to society throughout the world by providing service to their communities and applying their talents and knowledge to improve the lives of others; and demonstrating a good fit between the applicants’ abilities and aspirations to the graduate program.

— Mike Clardy

Auburn office accepting applications for employee dependent scholarships

The Office of University Scholarships is accepting applications for the 2013-14 Auburn University Employee Dependent Children Scholarship.

Priority consideration will be given to applications received on or before March 1. A separate application should be completed for each dependent child.

A parent or guardian eligible for consideration must be a full-time, regular, continuing employee in any employee group in any division of Auburn University and be employed for a minimum of 12 months immediately preceding the application deadline.

A dependent child eligible for consideration must be an admitted, undergraduate student enrolled at the Auburn University main campus; be a dependent child as documented by an IRS tax return for the most recent filing period; demonstrate financial need as determined by the Office of Financial Aid through completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, also known as FAFSA, available online at www.fafsa.ed.gov by the scholarship application deadline; and have a minimum 3.0 cumulative high school GPA, depending on current enrollment status.

The number of $1,000 scholarships awarded for the 2013-14 academic year will be based on available funding. Applications are available online at www.auburn.edu/scholarship/resources. Completed applications should be submitted to the Office of University Scholarships located in 115 Quad Center or faxed to 844-7571.

Questions regarding the Employee Dependent Children Scholarship should be directed to the Office of University Scholarships at 844-7570 or scholar@auburn.edu.
Campus News Briefs

Electrical Engineering institute awards education medal to Irwin

David Irwin, the Earle C. Williams Eminent Scholar professor in Auburn University’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, has earned the 2013 IEEE James H. Mulligan Jr. Education Medal from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

The award recognizes an educator’s contributions to the vitality, imagination and leadership in the engineering profession. Irwin began his career as an assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering at Auburn in 1969 and served as department head from 1976-2009.

Irwin’s research interests include circuit analysis and design, network security and building large multidisciplinary programs.

Barth presents paper on “Too Big to Fail Problem” at meeting of associations

James Barth, Lowder Eminent Scholar in Finance in the Auburn University College of Business, presented a paper with Apanard (Penny) Angkinand Prabha titled “Just How Big is the Too Big to Fail Problem?” at the 2013 American Economic Association and American Finance Association Annual Meeting Jan. 5 in San Diego.

Architecture faculty publish book of case studies of affordable housing design

David Hinson and Justin Miller of the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture at Auburn University, have authored a new book profiling successful partnerships between architects, architecture students and Habitat for Humanity.

Hinson is head of the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture in Auburn’s College of Architecture, Design and Construction. Miller is an assistant professor of architecture at Auburn.

The book, “Designed for Habitat: Collaborations with Habitat for Humanity,” profiles 13 case studies from around the United States that illustrate innovative approaches to energy performance, alternative construction strategies and responses to site context. In addition to detailed plans, sections and photographs of each case study home, the book explores how the projects came about; the strategies used by each team to approach the design and construction process; and the obstacles they overcame to realize a successful outcome.

Two of the 13 case studies feature homes developed through collaborations between Auburn architecture students and Habitat for Humanity affiliates in Alabama under the DESIGNhabitat program, an 11-year partnership between Auburn and the Alabama Association of Habitat Affiliates led by Hinson and Miller. “Designed for Habitat” is published by Routledge and is available through a wide variety of bookseller sites on the web.

Mechanical Engineering graduate student wins NASA poster competition

Naveenan Thiagarajan, a doctoral candidate in Mechanical Engineering, won first place in a poster competition at the recent 2012 American Society for Gravitational and Space Research Conference held in New Orleans.

The poster was titled “Gravitational Effects on Bubble Dynamics in Pool Boiling on Asymmetric Surfaces” and was co-authored by Sushil Bhavnani, a professor in Auburn’s Mechanical Engineering Department, and co-investigators Logan Strid and Vinod Narayanan from Oregon State University. The poster was based on a collaboration between researchers at Auburn and Oregon State, which involved experiments aboard NASA’s reduced gravity aircraft in May 2012.

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