

## “Constructed Light, Constructed Meanings” Visual Culture Graduate Student Conference

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#### Friday, April 11

##### The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

3716 Washington Boulevard (between Grand Boulevard and Spring Avenue)

St. Louis, MO 63108

phone: 314.754.1850

[Map and Directions](#)

<b>3:00 - 3:30 PM</b>	<b>Welcome, Opening Remarks</b>
<b>3:30 - 4:00 PM</b>	<b>Dan Flavin: "Constructed Light" exhibition at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts</b>
<b>4:00 - 4:30 PM</b>	<b>Matthias Waschek, Director, The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts "Installing in the Absence of Flavin at the Pulitzer"</b>
<b>4:30 - 5:30 PM</b>	<b>Reception</b>

#### Saturday, April 12

##### The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

3750 Washington Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63108

phone: 314.535.4660

<b>9:00 - 10:30 AM</b>	<p><b>Panel I: Material Cultures of Light Across Boundaries: From the Midwest to France and Back</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PANEL CHAIR: Dr. Susanne Wiedemann, Assistant Professor, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li> <li>• Brandy Swift, Saint Louis University: "The Gateway Arch As Artifact"</li> <li>• Julie Chun, San Jose State University School of Art and Design: "Colors of the Night – Signaling in Modernity Through the Effects of Gaslight"</li> <li>• Katie Moon, Saint Louis University: "Longing for Home: The Ideology of Domestic Stained Glass in the Early Twentieth Century"</li> </ul>
<b>10:45-11:45 PM</b>	<p><b>Panel II: Configurations of Light: Techniques and Technologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PANEL CHAIR: Michelle Cordone, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ari Lee Laskin, University of California, Irvine: "Nocturnal Omissions: Obscenity and the Historiography of Imaging Illumination"</li> <li>• Patty Rooney, Saint Louis University: "An Art of Pure Light: The Constant Aesthetic of Daniel Flavin"</li> </ul>
<b>11:45 - 1:15 PM</b>	<b>Lunch at the Contemporary Art Museum</b>
<b>1:30 - 3:00 PM</b>	<p><b>Panel III: From Twilight to Sunlight to White Light: Constructing Meanings, Constructing Identities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PANEL CHAIR: Eva Navarajo, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li> <li>• Jamie Schmidt, Saint Louis University: "Finding 'A Place in the Sun': How Crisis Photographs Shaped Public Opinion about Race and Reproductive Rights"</li> <li>• Nicola Mann, University of Rochester: "Tripping the Light Fantastic: Representing the Teenage Twilight in Sofia Coppola's <i>The Virgin Suicides</i> (1999) and Gregory Crewdson's <i>Twilight</i> (1998-2002)"</li> <li>• Maurice Tracy, Saint Louis University: "A Light to the World: Matthew Shepard's Image and the Politics of Gay Visibility"</li> </ul>
<b>3:15 - 4:45 PM</b>	<p><b>Panel IV: The Production of Lighted Space: Design and Its Consequences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PANEL CHAIR: Dr. Cindy Ott, Assistant Professor, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li> <li>• Laura Shields, Saint Louis University: "Finding Light in Darkness: Prisons, Nature, Containment and the Environment"</li> <li>• Ian Garrett, California Institute of the Arts: "The Ecological Sustainability of Theatrical Lighting"</li> <li>• Brian Greening, Saint Louis University: "Spectacular Disaster: The Louisiana Superdome and Subsumed Blackness in Post-Katrina New Orleans"</li> </ul>
<b>5:00 - 6:00 PM</b>	<p><b>Keynote Speech</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction by Dr. Matthew Mancini, Chair, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li> <li>• Dr. Shawn Smith, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "Seeing Sexuality: Another Look at F. Holland Day" Author of "American Archives," "Photography on the Color Line," and co-author of "Lynching Photographs".  <a href="http://shawnmichellessmith.com">http://shawnmichellessmith.com</a>  <a href="http://www.saic.edu/people/Smith_Shawn_Michelle.html">http://www.saic.edu/people/Smith_Shawn_Michelle.html</a></li> </ul>
<b>7:00 PM</b>	<b>Dinner with group at Duff's Restaurant, 392 North Euclid</b>
<b>9:00 - 11:00 PM</b>	<b>Optional trip to the City Museum</b>

**Sunday, April 13**  
**Saint Louis University Museum of Art**

3663 Lindell Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63108  
314.977.2666  
[Map and Directions](#)

<b>9:00 - 10:00 AM</b>	<b>Panel V: Contesting Scopic Regimes: Discourses of Race in Visual Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PANEL CHAIR: Greg Taylor, Department of American Studies, Saint Louis University</li><li>• Emmett McKenna, Saint Louis University: "March on Harlem: Marcus Garvey and the Vision of a Black Empire"</li><li>• Nanette Boileau, Saint Louis University: "I am the 'N' Word: An Interdisciplinary Look at Images and Words of Epithets and Euphemisms"</li></ul>
<b>10:15 - 11:15 AM</b>	<b>Roundtable/Workshop</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dr. Angie Dietz: Working with "Found" Photography: A Catalyst for Creativity</li></ul>
<b>11:15 - 12:00 PM</b>	<b>Closing Remarks</b>
<b>12:30 - 2:00 PM</b>	<b>Optional tour of St. Louis</b>

on Studies at Saint Louis University  
Arts and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

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### Bios and Abstracts

**Nanette Boileau**

*I am "the 'N' Word": An Interdisciplinary Look at Images and Words of Epithets and Euphemisms*

#### Abstract:

Where can we find this temporal life of language? Words so loaded with power society have created other sayings to "stand in for" the original word? Epithets and their corresponding euphemisms are one such place. This location is embedded within our everyday language but also used in the language within images in our visual world.

Unpacking the language of epithets becomes an intense locale for research both within the linguistic use and how this language is created within photographic images. Stephanie A. Smith, in her book *Household Words: bloomers, sucker, bombshell, scab, nigger, cyber* simply states how words change and are remade in our present time by stating: "Words make, unmake, and remake our world." This remaking of the epithet into a non-abrasive phrase becomes a new avenue for society to cover true thoughts with a veil, covering present day sentiments and a redirection of "polite" intention.

For the purpose of this presentation I will particularly work with images from 20th Century and a poem which documents the use of the word "nigger" versus "the 'n' word." Can a euphemism become the epithet? Can visual images portray both the epithet and the euphemism? While looking at this loaded area of language both spoken and documented I anticipate finding a new space for discussion on how we speak and how we see the world around us.

#### Biography:

Nanette Erika Boileau (M.F.A. Pasadena Art Center College of Design) lives and works in St. Louis, Missouri. She is a doctoral student at Saint Louis University in the department of American Studies with an emphasis on Visual Culture. Boileau received her Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1988, from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Curating for the last ten years at Saint Louis University and opening the Museum of Art for the University, Boileau developed exhibitions such as; *Time Play: A 25 year retrospective of Van McElwee Video Art*, Lampo Leong and Yueying Zhong; *Suspended Marks*, Jeff Carter; *Things Move*, Shirley Tse; *Encapsulated*, and Christina Shmigel, *Betwixt and Between*. Boileau has also been an exhibiting artist during the same period and has exhibited with the centre of attention, London, England, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, The Sheldon Art Galleries, Gallery 210, The Museum of Transportation Museum in St. Louis, Missouri and in Los Angeles, California at the Bradbury Building, I-KLEC/TIC gallery and the South Bay Contemporary. Email: [nboileau@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nboileau@sbcglobal.net).

## **Brandy Boyd**

### *The Gateway Arch As Artifact*

#### **Abstract:**

Built in St. Louis, Missouri in 1965 and designed by Eero Saarinen, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, more commonly known as the Gateway Arch, serves as a landmark to commemorate the westward expansion of the United States. The arch serves as an important piece of American visual culture, as a sky view of the city from the arch offers wonderful imagery reflective of the political, social, and economic realities of St. Louis and its surrounding metropolitan area. Further, the arch has often been the subject of considerable debate, from the suggested model for the very shape of the monument to issues of lighting the arch with pink lighting for Breast Cancer Awareness month.

In this paper, I examine the existence of the Gateway Arch as a readable piece of the visual culture of St. Louis, Missouri. I further argue that it is a simultaneously unifying and divisive monument by focusing on both the idea of the arch as a "Gateway" or entryway to the West and by examining its various political controversies in the past four decades.

#### **Biography:**

Brandy Boyd is a first year student in the American Studies doctoral program. I earned my B.A. in political science (with English and history minors) from Eastern Illinois University in 2004, and I received my M.A. in political science with an emphasis in international relations from EIU in 2006. Prior to coming to SLU in the fall of 2007, I taught an introductory course in American Government at a local community college. Since I am very new to the program, I do not have specific research topics narrowed down, but generally speaking, I am interested in American politics and the influences popular culture has had on the American political arena, both past and present.

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## **Julie Chun**

### *Colors of the Night – Signaling in Modernity Through the Effects of Gaslight*

#### **Abstract:**

France, at the brink of 20th century was an epoch of great changes. Industrialization and urbanization brought about sweeping transformations in the way people lived and viewed their lives. Accordingly, modernization was to distinctly alter the way art was conceived and created. Scientific discoveries and advances in technology served to further redefine the boundaries of form and content for artists seeking new ways of representation. With innovative progress in artificial light from the traditional oil lamp to the democratic gaslight, night had indeed become a brighter and colorful place providing intrigue to man. The purpose of my presentation is to explore the effects and relationship of gaslight on late 19th century French paintings and the prominent role the new light played in defining artistic modernity. By re-interpreting iconic work of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's *At the Moulin Rouge* and Vincent Van Gogh's *Night Cafe*, I seek to substantiate that gaslight served as an essential and critical element in unifying art with science thus providing the Post-Impressionist artists the innovative means for achieving their unique visions of the modern world.

#### **Biography:**

Julie Chun is a MA candidate of Art History at San Jose State University's School of Art and Design. She has lived in Asia for four years working as a translator while completing a year's worth of graduate studies in Asian History. Her academic research comprises of re-examining historical narratives through the visual arts. She explores iconographical works of art that have become emblems of society, nation, and era by engaging aspects of literature, science and political events to offer a renewed reading of the familiar. Most recently, she presented a paper at the 8th Annual International History Symposium at University of Laval in Canada.

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**Angela Dietz**

*Working with "Found" Photography: A Catalyst for Creativity*

**Interactive Workshop**

**Biography:**

Angela Dietz recently completed her Ph.D. in American Studies at Saint Louis University. Her dissertation work focuses on labor photography and labor as a visually mediated subject—a topic that has allowed for the exploration of both public archives and personal, family photographic collections (including found images). She is also a museum educator at the Missouri Historical Society, where she has worked closely with visual artifacts for the past eight years.

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**Ian Garrett**

*The Ecological Sustainability of Theatrical Lighting*

**Abstract:**

**Biography:**

Theatrical production is an inherently unsustainable process as all productions have limited lives. This impermanence exempts theatrical lighting from energy restrictions like California's Title 24 and most incandescent bans. Enforcing such a ban would devastate the industry because of the expense of replacing inventory, properties of light, and issues of control. Many large theaters and lighting providers already replaced their inventory within the past decade based on the benefits of ETC's Source Four. Non-incandescent sources cannot compete with the color rendering or focusability of sources that are incandescent, and they require specialized dimming equipment. Until recent turns to "green" marketing, efficiency and efficacy were improved to simply put more light on stage, not to save power. Alternative energy sources are not feasible full solutions: A solar array with current commercial technology for a standard professional show would easily require an investment of more than \$4 million and an acre of well-suited land. While implementing new technology and using alternative energy sources will contribute to the increased ecological sustainability of theatrical lighting, the most important factor will be the education of lighting designers so that they can be conscious of their choices. They will drive development by using efficient technology and practices, providing incentive for manufacturers and lighting providers.

**Biography:**

Ian Garrett is an artist, designer and producer from Los Angeles. He studied

architecture and art history at the Rice University in Houston, Texas, but has since come to work in live performance and installation art. After working with companies in Houston, New York City and Los Angeles he came to the California Institute of the Arts to complete dual MFAs in Lighting Design and Producing. Ian is currently collaborating with the Los Angeles Stage Alliance, the new Arts Earth Partnership and others to create sustainable, ecological and otherwise, infrastructure in the Los Angeles performance community and recently received the Richard E. Sherwood award for emerging theater artists from the Center Theater Group (CTG) to be used forming a working relationship consulting with CTG on the integration of ecologically sustainable practice into their production. More information can be found at his website: <http://www.toasterlab.com>

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### **Brian Greening**

*"Spectacular Disaster: The Louisiana Superdome and Subsumed Blackness in Post-Katrina New Orleans"*

#### **Abstract:**

Following Katrina's landfall in New Orleans, with the Superdome serving as a media-saturated microcosm of the city that spawned it, tuned-in world citizens viewed stories about roving murderous hoards, pedophiles raping infants and makeshift morgues storing bodies by the hundreds in the Superdome's sublevels. By using these shocking (and often aggrandized or falsifiable) tales of intrigue as an inroad for their abject positioning of the mostly black urban poor, journalists and willing subscribers allowed for blackness to be either repositioned or reified as a space where, without supervision, lawlessness prevailed. In this period of exceptional strain, many journalists reverted to archaic color-based stereotypes. Black people looted while white people salvaged; blacks were obdurate in their decision to remain in the city while whites were largely victims taken by surprise; blackness is temperamental and violent while whiteness is composed and unwavering. But the images from inside and just outside the Superdome often resisted these myriad divisive assertions, suggesting instead that government negligence and media malpractice produce negative portrayals of black citizens rather than the other way around.

This study adopts W. J. Thomas Mitchell's concept of sounding the idols to show how images from within the Superdome speak against widespread news stories that portrayed New Orleans' "so poor and so black" citizens as agents of their own displacement rather than victims of a natural/national disaster. By examining some rumor-laden accounts from in and around the Superdome during the weeklong ordeal following Hurricane Katrina's landfall and juxtaposing them with pictures that resist these assertions, I seek to problematize the polarizing news stories coming out of post-Katrina New Orleans. In the days after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the Superdome served as a site of contested visual space where whiteness faded into the background of images, out of consciousness, while black bodies bore the burden of white gaze.

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### **Ari Lee Laskin**

*"Nocturnal Omissions: Obscenity and the Historiography of Imaging Illumination"*

#### **Abstract:**

This paper is not just a history of various techniques and technologies of illuminating darkness, or the representation of such illuminations. Rather, it asks

how can illumination, as such, be conceived of as one of many possible historical configurations of light? What other non-oppositional configurations of light/dark, day/night, seen/unseen, visible/invisible have existed in scientific, visual cultural and art historical nocturnes? One hindrance to such an investigation is that illumination itself is already a trope/concept illuminated with, and within, the medium of light. The question becomes, what does illumination occlude? What omissions does sight require? Where in the literature and images on illumination are there disruptions which might 'reveal' moments of refraction in illumination itself? Representations of the dark tell us more (if not exclusively) about the day, whiteness, reason and vision, than they do about nocturnal alterity. Ultimately, what is revealed in such an investigation is revelation itself. Visions of the night reveal dynamics often naturalized in the visual economy of appropriating darkness for the configuration of visibility.

This paper explores some of the significant changes that have taken place in the history of representing both darkness and illuminating technologies/techniques such as the candle, ethnographic film, Argand lamps and Welsbach mantle, dark field microscopes, and streetlamps. I will also look at the obscenity of both structure and form in the early flash photography of George Shiras III, Weegee and the Paris Hilton sex tape; William Bartram's 18th century botanical and zoological drawings, the depiction of race and night in Frederic Remington's 19th century paintings, and night vision in the experimental films of Robert Rauschenberg's "Open Score", Chris Cunningham's "Rubber Johnny", Mike Metzger's "Predatorvision", and Jordan Crandall.

#### **Biography:**

Ari Lee Laskin received a BSc and an honors in Philosophy from the University of Victoria in British Columbia. Lee received his Masters in Environmental Studies/Social Political Thought from York University in Toronto. He lectures in the Political Science department at San Francisco State University and in the Art History and Visual Culture department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Lee is currently working on his dissertation on Blanchot and Night Vision in the Visual Studies department at the University of California, Irvine.

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#### **Nicola Mann**

*Tripping the Light Fantastic: Representing the Teenage Twilight in Sofia Coppola's The Virgin Suicides (1999) and Gregory Crewdson's Twilight (1998-2002)*

#### **Abstract:**

Whether presented in the form of golden beams from the headlights of an abandoned car, Morse Code signals from a Chinese lantern, or celestial portals of light from the sky above, both Sofia Coppola's film *The Virgin Suicides* and Gregory Crewdson's photographic series *Twilight*, manipulate light as a way to represent an unsettling vision of suburban disquiet. The frame for both works are well-tended front yards, intersections of little traffic, and rocking chairs on the wooden porches of pastel houses nestled into a soft landscape of gently rolling hills, all tinted by the warm evening sun of an endless Indian summer. Once twilight falls and the shadows deepen, however, this stability is replaced by abhorrent anarchy. Within this brief "middle space" before the impending darkness, Coppola's and Crewdson's teenage protagonists act unconsciously, performing eccentric, ritual-like acts as if under the influence of a quasi-religious force.

This paper considers the ways in which Crewdson and Coppola use light to form

narrative codes to represent what I shall call the “teenage twilight,” the very real anxiety-producing “middle space” between childhood and adulthood. I argue that this space of slippages transverges the rather predictable Freudian reading of the unconscious most often ascribed to Crewdson’s and Coppola’s work. Rather, I assert that the “teenage twilight” is both prior to and in excess of psychoanalytic evaluation. Partially lit behind a muddy ochre veil of net curtains, the quiet melancholia of the Lisbon sisters in *The Virgin Suicides* and the hypnotic rigor-mortis of the protagonists in the *Twilight* series, eschew psychological explication, rendering them forever liminal creatures, caught on the fence between this world and the next.

**Biography:**

Nicola Mann is a third year Ph.D candidate in the Visual and Cultural Studies program at the University of Rochester. She holds a first class undergraduate degree in Fine Art from the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and a M.A. in Painting from the Royal College of Art in London. Nicola’s current area of research involves a critical investigation of late 20th century popular visual representations of Chicago’s public housing. Last year she presented some of her work in this area at the Association of Art Historians conference, “Contestations,” in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Nicola will present a similar version of her “Constructed Light, Constructed Meanings” paper at the 2008 Gender and Women’s Studies Graduate Research Conference at the University of Rochester.

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**Emmett McKenna**

*March on Harlem: Marcus Garvey and the Vision of a Black Empire*

**Abstract:**

The failure of the Treaty of Versailles to grant independence to African colonies inspired Marcus Garvey to organize the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) with the goal of establishing an empire in Africa to defend the dispersed African peoples of the world. Garvey’s transnational movement sought to construct a single national identity for peoples scattered across the Black Atlantic. As a result, the Garvey movement hosted massive annual celebrations of the Negro people in Harlem that appealed to and attracted blacks throughout the world. Light served a necessary function in allowing Garvey’s movement to construct its sense of shared national identity. Meanwhile, the rise of fascist dictatorships in Europe provoked mass rallies that stimulated a sense of urgent national unity. These nationalist spectacles reminded several black intellectuals of the UNIA’s spectacles in Harlem during the 1920s, and Garvey went so far as to claim Mussolini and Hitler copied fascism from him. By analyzing photographs of the Marcus Garvey movement, I show how the ultranationalist visual effects included in the UNIA’s mass meetings, parades, rituals, and paramilitary marches in the early 1920s reverberated with the rise of fascism in Europe.

**Biography:**

I am graduate student in American Studies at St. Louis University. I am particularly interested in conflicts between race, nation, and class. After this semester, I will begin my dissertation, which will consider black nationalism during the interwar period through visual culture.

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**Katie Moon**

*Longing for Home: The Ideology of Domestic Stained Glass in the Early Twentieth Century*

**Abstract:**

Small, decorative stained glass windows, found in many turn-of-the-century bungalows throughout the Midwest, offer unique insight into the world of middle-class Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century. I will argue in this paper that although they are typically modest in size and unpretentious in design, these glass panels tell the story of a nation in the midst of transition—technologically, economically, socially and philosophically. Their construction, design, placement and popularity embody a changing ideology about the family and the home. The windows reflect a longing for a simpler, idealized past during a time when the nation was in a state of tremendous flux. Americans were looking for stability and a sense of place, and in large part found solace in single-family homes in newly formed suburbs. These windows, many of which are still intact, predominantly displayed natural themes, a physical demonstration of the popular ideology of the home as sacred space and nature as an unblemished source of beauty and inspiration. Even further, these windows served as evidence of the interconnectedness of disparate aspects of American society and culture, including advances in medicine and technology, widespread industrialization, immigration, and religion.

**Biography:**

Katie Moon is a first-year student in the American Studies program at Saint Louis University. Originally from Ohio, but with brief tenures in Wisconsin, Indiana, and North Dakota, she holds a Bachelor's degree in English Education from Cedarville University, and a Masters of Divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary. Her research interests include gender, community dynamics, and religion, to name a few

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**Patty Rooney**

*An Art of Pure Light: The Constant Aesthetic of Daniel Flavin*

**Abstract:**

Many American postwar artists constructed aesthetic discourses that expanded pre-war notions concerning the form and content of architecture, painting, exhibition models, and gallery spaces. Such discourses emphasized the need for deconstructive changes. These calls for change translated into fundamental shifts in materials, their uses, and the necessity of art to be sociological or historical signifying agents. Within these new forces of art production emerged artist Daniel Flavin. Flavin and other artists working in the 1960s advocated for a new more literal art. This loosely organized and highly individualized avant-garde group became known as Minimalists. Their art work broke away from established formal qualities and signified their reaction against the highly personal mark-making, aggressive gestures, emotionally charged, and enigmatic terms of the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s.

Overall, these new visual articulations reduced form to minimal terms of meaning, decoration, and adornment. For Flavin, art making became more of a mundane activity, using specifically mass-produced industrial fluorescent light bulbs for his material. He used a wide range of colors, arrangements, and repetitive patterns that articulated simple constructions of reduced abstract designs and geometric forms. Flavin's art was unmediated and non-symbolic within the context of

post-war Minimalist thought. Flavin's art offers the viewer ambiguous and enigmatic light constructions that translate into experiences of pure light enjoyment without mediated interventions. Without mediations the viewer is not only empowered to subjectively interpret the art forms themselves, but also constructs the aesthetic experience within the specificity time, place, and surrounding space. What then is the significance of his art when critiqued theoretically and historically? What contributions do Flavin's fluorescent light constructions make that account for the constant public interest and success they have evoked over time? In order to determine the significance and contribution Flavin's work brings to visual culture, I will trace from the over a thirty-year period from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. In this study I will interpret shifts in materials, style and construction, and in personal ideology and influences that help elucidate his work. I conclude that over time what remained observably constant in Flavin's work is his exploration and communication of an aesthetic of pure light.

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### **Jamie Schmidt**

*"Finding 'A Place in the Sun': How Crisis Photographs Shaped Public Opinion about Race and Reproductive Rights"*

#### **Abstract:**

Ten young women stare at the readers of *Crisis* magazine in 1929. The figures are young, possibly in their teens. Too close in age to all be sisters, they could be cousins or friends. One woman, in her lacy white dress, could pass for a bride. No narratives, blurbs, or future letters to the editor explain this photograph; no text describes the photo except for a charged outline: "Ten Richmond Reasons for Not Marrying White Girls." The emotion present seems directed toward a disappearance of the black family due to miscegenation. Editor W.E.B. Du Bois helps in interpreting: "We have an outlook toward a future of struggles; toward world-old effort to gain for ordinary human beings a place in the Sun." Similar to *Crisis* photographs of children read as signs of pride of reproductive rights, these young ladies may be a sign of hope. A photograph is not reality; there is motivation for capturing a moment. This photograph is a record of young black women in 1929 positioned as feminine, alluring beings. Writer bell hooks explains that black folks used photography to disprove representations created by white folks. The girls were joined by space, gender and dress in attempt to fight stereotypes of black women as former slaves. This paper explains that *Crisis* photographs in the 1920s fought racism and eugenics. I rely on Michael Harris, Du Bois and bell hooks to interpret the photograph as a statement about power relationships and readers' hope for "a place in the Sun."

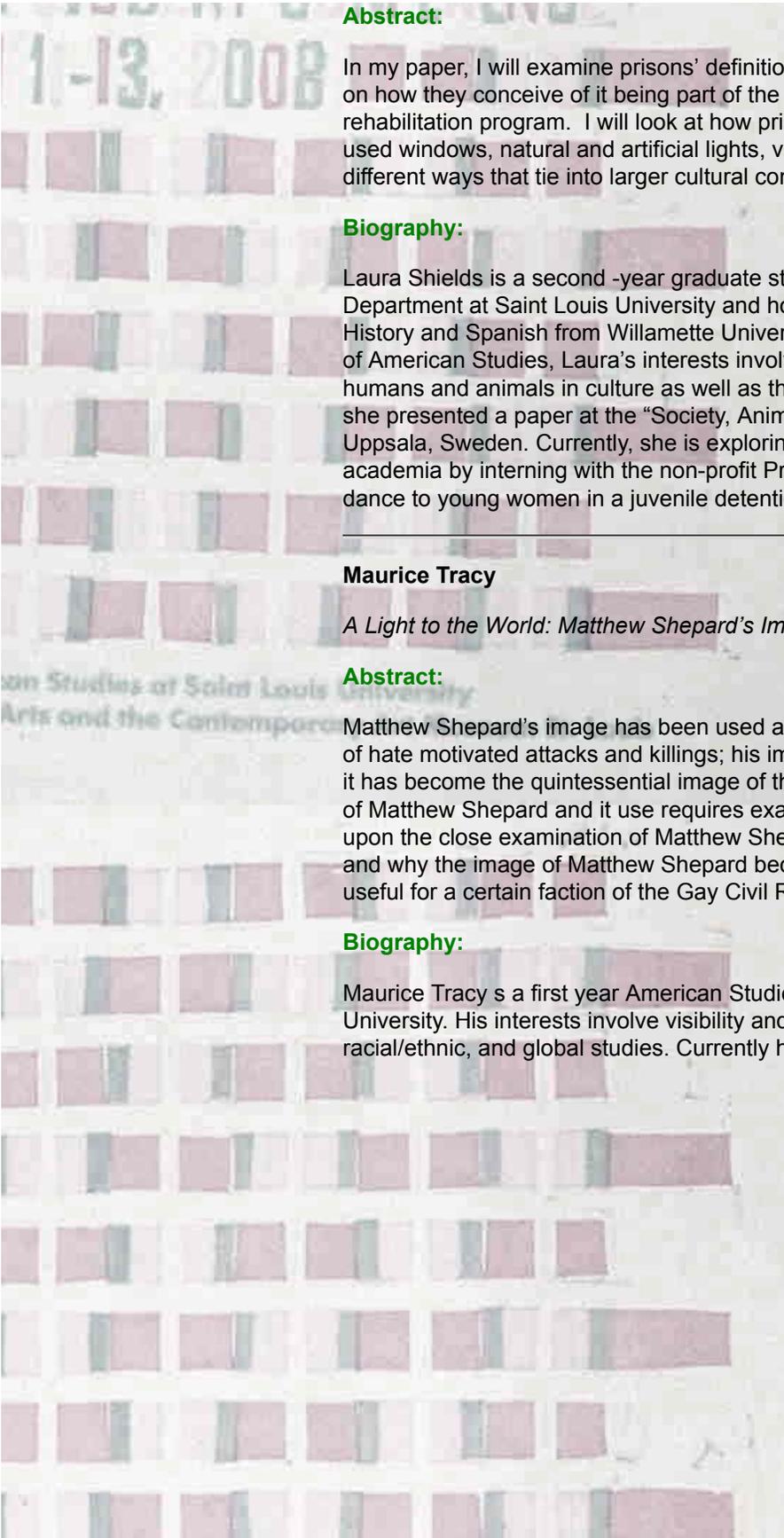
#### **Biography:**

Jamie Schmidt is a second-year Ph.D. student with research interests in debates over prostitution and public/moral hygiene in the 1920s and 1930s and concepts of purity and morality in American culture. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a master's degree in creative nonfiction writing from The Johns Hopkins University. She is a former newspaper reporter and has an article forthcoming in the *Journal of Urban History*.

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### **Laura Shields**

*Finding Light in Darkness: Prisons, Nature, Containment and the Environment*



**Abstract:**

In my paper, I will examine prisons' definitions of and conceptions of nature based on how they conceive of it being part of the prison experience and part of the rehabilitation program. I will look at how prison designers have conceived of and used windows, natural and artificial lights, views, landscapes and green space in different ways that tie into larger cultural concepts of nature and the environment.

**Biography:**

Laura Shields is a second-year graduate student in the American Studies Department at Saint Louis University and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Spanish from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Within the field of American Studies, Laura's interests involve looking at the relationship between humans and animals in culture as well as the role of prison in culture. Last August, she presented a paper at the "Society, Animals and Gender" conference in Uppsala, Sweden. Currently, she is exploring her prison interest outside of academia by interning with the non-profit Prison Performing Arts and teaching dance to young women in a juvenile detention facility.

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**Maurice Tracy**

*A Light to the World: Matthew Shepard's Image and the Politics of Gay Visibility*

**Abstract:**

Matthew Shepard's image has been used and re-used to represent the gay victim of hate motivated attacks and killings; his image has been used to the extent that it has become the quintessential image of the gay victim. Consequently, the image of Matthew Shepard and its use requires examination and explanation. I claim that upon the close examination of Matthew Shepard's image it will become clear how and why the image of Matthew Shepard became iconic and in what ways it is useful for a certain faction of the Gay Civil Rights Movement.

**Biography:**

Maurice Tracy is a first-year American Studies doctoral student at Saint Louis University. His interests involve visibility and the media, and queer, gender, racial/ethnic, and global studies. Currently he resides in O'Fallon, Illinois.

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ONSTRUCTED LIGHT, CONSTRUCTED MEANINGS  
VISUAL CULTURE GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

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### Introduction

The Department of American Studies at Saint Louis University invites papers for its 2008 Visual Culture Graduate Student Conference. This year's conference theme, “Constructed Light, Constructed Meanings,” coincides with the “Dan Flavin: Constructed Light” exhibition at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis. This interdisciplinary graduate student conference welcomes proposals from the humanities and social sciences that explore the diverse uses, functions, and meanings of light – in its natural, manufactured, and manipulated forms – in artistic expressions, cultural representations, and people's daily lives and experiences.

Renowned visual culture studies scholar Dr. Shawn Michelle Smith, Associate Professor of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, will deliver the keynote address, “Seeing Sexuality: Another Look at F. Holland Day”. Dr. Smith is the author of “American Archives,” “Photography on the Color Line,” and co-author of “Lynching Photographs”. For additional information about Dr. Smith, see

<http://shawnmichellesmith.com>

[http://www.saic.edu/people/Smith\\_Shawn\\_Michelle.html](http://www.saic.edu/people/Smith_Shawn_Michelle.html)

**Date: April 11-13, 2008**

**Location: [The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis](#), [The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts](#), and [Saint Louis University Museum of Art](#) in St. Louis, Missouri**

**Deadline for Proposal Submission: January 15, 2008**



**Paper topics may include, but are not limited to, the following themes:**

- visibility/invisibility
- epistemology of light
- technologies and hierarchies of light and lighting
- artificial and natural light
- lighted bodies/embodyed light
- metaphors of light and darkness
- shaded lights/shaded spaces
- uses of light in media
- iconography of light
- colors and shapes of light
- rhetoric of light



Please submit a 250-word abstract and a curriculum vitae by January 15, 2008 to [visualcc@slu.edu](mailto:visualcc@slu.edu). For questions, please contact Emmett McKenna

(visualcc@slu.edu)

