

University of Hartford

Spring 2024 Humanities Center Lecture Series

FICTION, FABULATION, FUTURITY

The University of Hartford Humanities Center Lecture Series for Spring 2024 focuses on the theme of “**Fiction, Fabulation, Futurity**,” developed and led by **Rashmi Viswanathan**, Assistant Professor of Art History. Five University of Hartford Humanities Center Faculty Fellows and three distinguished presenters will speak on Monday evenings from 5:00-6:00 p.m. between February 5 and April 8 in Hillyer Hall 229 (unless otherwise noted). All lectures are free and open to the university community.

February 5: Kristin Comeforo (Associate Professor of Communication, A&S) will speak on their project “**Quarantine Constellations: Queer Resilience, A Covid Love Story, and Critical Nostalgia as a Path towards Futurism and Queer Worldmaking.**” This will be a reworking of a critical autoethnography they did during the Covid lockdown that explored this period, juxtaposed with the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and early 1990s, as an experience of “*déjà vu* all over again” for many marginalized queer, trans, Black and brown individuals. For their talk, Professor Comeforo will reimagine this work by leaning more heavily into speculative literary fiction (in the vein of Octavia Butler and Jewel Gomez) as a method that will more tightly tie these past traumas to present realities and point to futures of queer worldmaking that inform, and activate, the present.

February 12: Marco Cupolo (Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies, A&S) will present “**Autocratic Rises and Falls through the Dictator Novels of Carpentier, García Márquez and Roa Bastos.**” Focusing on Alejo Carpentier’s *Reasons of State* (1974), Gabriel García Márquez’s *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1976), and Augusto Roa Bastos’s *I, the Supreme* (1974), each of which, by focusing on real or imagined dictators, serves as a critical reference within the Latin American genre of dictator novels and contributes to a critical analysis of dictatorial power. Through these narratives on the rise and fall of Latin American autocrats and political leaders, Professor Cupolo will examine how they point to a persistence – and even strengthening – of autocratic tendencies in the present and potential futures of late capitalism.

February 19: James McDonald (Associate Professor of Physics, A&S) will speak on “**Marriage and Family on the Final Frontier,**” exploring potentially new forms that marriage and family units may take in the future as humankind colonizes nearby bodies such as Mars and the Moon. Based on teaching Robert Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* in a class on science fiction, as well as his class “The Martian Way” (UIST 155) which examines the colonization of Mars from scientific, political and social viewpoints, Professor McDonald will assess various family arrangements present in popular science fiction and consider them for their effectiveness in a “real life” colonial situation where resources are scarce and the risk of mortality is high.

February 26: Benjamin Grossberg (Professor of English, A&S) will present “**Ars Octopoetica: New Poems of Fabulation,**” consisting of a “poetic manifesto” that articulates methods based in fabulation, sexual otherness, alienation, and the challenges of intimacy that have long shaped his work, as well as poems from his book *Space Traveler* and new poems. Professor Grossberg’s new poems, which explore romantic engagement with an octopus, are the latest in his expansive oeuvre that speak to the joys of fabulation, speculation, and imagination, all the while juxtaposed with a raw meditation on the queer experience.

March 4: Amanda Carlson (Associate Professor of Art History, HAS) will present “**Writing into the Future with African Scripts,**” which forms part of her current book project. Her lecture will examine films (such as *Black Panther*), artworks (such as Wilfred Upkong’s installations), and novels (such as those by Nnewi Okorafor) that incorporate nsibidi, an indigenous African writing system rooted in the Cross River region of West Africa, within broader intellectual movements from Afro-futurism to African Futurism. Here, she will explore how these bodies of work become part of a dialogue about blackness, gender, and the space of Africa and the diaspora. Furthermore, she will speak to why nsibidi offers such a powerful iconography for imagining a future where African knowledge is critically important.

March 25: Stephanie Sparling Williams (Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art, Brooklyn Museum) will speak to “**Toward Joy: Black Feminist Speculation and the American Art Museum.**” In advance of the landmark transformation of the Brooklyn Museum’s American Art wing, Sparling Williams will offer a conceptual and methodological sneak preview into the Black Feminist frameworks that will shape contemporary visitor experiences within the Museum’s historic collection galleries. Building on a rich legacy of Black women’s rigorous space-making practices, Sparling Williams will posit a capacious understanding of representation within American art museums, and more speculative and experiential encounters with the collections therein.



April 1: A conversation with **Shahzia Sikander**, an internationally renowned visual artist (M.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design) widely celebrated for taking Central and South-Asian manuscript painting traditions as points of departure into ground-breaking feminist explorations of the contemporary moment. Among her many notable awards, she is the recipient of a MacArthur “genius” award (2006) and has exhibited at the Morgan Library (New York), the Guggenheim (Bilbao, Spain), the Hirshhorn Museum (Washington, D.C.) and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Join us for a conversation with her online (details TBA).

April 8: Željka Blakšić, a visual artist and filmmaker (M.F.A., The School of Visual Arts), will give a lecture entitled “**Collective – Poetic – Refusal,**” which references some of the interdisciplinary projects that have defined her art practice. By collaborating with musicians, activists, urbanists, and students, through workshops and performances, she has created sites where she can engage in collective practice within a framework of contemporary art. Arriving at her artistic practice through music and performance rooted in the ‘90s-era youth subculture of Yugoslavia (Croatia), she learned that this experimental environment offered the principles and methodologies of resistance that continue to shape her work. Centering spontaneity, rebellion and play, she will discuss how art remains crucial in creating unconventional spaces for evolving collectivity, debate and imagination.

The Humanities Center at the University of Hartford supports interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on the humanities through arts, sciences, technology, media, music, psychology, history, film, philosophy and literature. For more information, contact Nicholas Ealy (director) at ealy@hartford.edu, visit our [web page](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#).

Image: “Pleasure Pillars” (2001) by Shahzia Sikander