Visiting Scholar Explores Revolutionary Biotechnologies

From clay and stone to plastic and steel, basic building materials have always shaped our physical world and our sense of possibility. Today, we are at the cusp of exploring and exploiting a substance so groundbreaking that it challenges our very notion of what it means to build by using nature’s elemental building block—the living, human cell.

Nina Tandon, Ph.D., CEO and co-founder of EpiBone, and a researcher at Columbia University’s Laboratory for Stem Cells and Tissue Engineering, will explain in her lecture, “Super Cells: Building with Biology,” how new research is making it possible to engineer human cells without resorting to the use of controversial embryonic stem cells. Tandon’s lecture will begin at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 3, in Mabee Theater, Sedgwick Hall.

Tandon takes us on an eye-popping tour of the tantalizing array of inventions already being created. With great enthusiasm, Tandon contends that we are entering a technological revolution, one in which we can create smarter technologies by making cells our partner in design through the work of collaborative biohacking labs. At the same time, Tandon confronts important ethical questions that inevitably arise when playing with the power of life.

Together with colleague Sarindr Bhumiratana, Tandon founded EpiBone, a company that employs a revolutionary method of bone reconstruction that eventually will allow patients to “grow their own bone.” Using adult stem cells to create anatomically precise, patient-specific bone tissue replacements, Tandon seeks to create a world in which people can grow their own replacement knees or hips. She has been profiled in Wired and was named one of Fast Company’s most creative people in business.

Tandon is a TED Senior Fellow and adjunct professor of electrical engineering at The Cooper Union. She has a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from The Cooper Union, a master’s from MIT and a doctorate in biomedical engineering from Columbia University where she focused on electrical stimulation for cardiac tissue engineering. Tandon is the co-author of Super Cells: Building with Biology, which explores the new frontier of biotech. She is the author of numerous and frequently cited academic papers. She received a Fulbright Scholarship to Tor Vergata University in Rome, where she worked on an “electric nose” designed to “smell” lung cancer.

To register your attendance to this free lecture, call 816-501-4828. Parking is free in the north garage at 52nd and Troost Avenue and in campus lots. (rockhurst.edu/mabee-map)
John Allen Reports Global Christian Persecution
in Feb. 24 Lecture

The Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought & Culture, in partnership with the Visiting Scholar Lecture Series, will present a lecture by John L. Allen, Jr., who will discuss “The Global War on Christians: Anti-Christian Persecution in Today’s World.” The public lecture will begin at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 24, in Mabee Theater.


“Christians today indisputably form the most persecuted religious body on the planet,” Allen writes, and that persecution takes concrete form in “a rising tide of legal oppression, social harassment, and direct physical violence.”

Allen offers a survey of the extent of anti-Christian persecution as well as an analysis of its roots and exposure of the myths that surround religious violence in the contemporary world. In a Wall Street Journal review, Philip Jenkins praised Allen’s work for its importance in telling an often misunderstood story in a manner that is “by turns stirring, infuriating, and heartbreaking.”

Allen has earned a reputation as a knowledgeable and objective reporter on issues in the Catholic Church for almost 20 years. A native Kansan with a graduate degree in religious studies from the University of Kansas, Allen’s work has appeared in a variety of media outlets, including newspapers, books and television. Currently an associate editor of the Boston Globe specializing in coverage of the Vatican and the Catholic Church and an analyst on Vatican issues for CNN, Allen worked previously as Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter.


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Selected chapters from Charles Darwin's The Voyage of the Beagle, On the Origin of the Species and The Descent of Man will be the topics for the Monday, March 30, Return to the Classics discussion led by Tom Ventresca, '70. The group will convene at 7 p.m. in Massman Hall, room 241.

The group will base its discussion on the Norton Critical Edition (3rd) on Darwin, edited by Philip Appleman. This book includes selections from Darwin's works and essays about Darwin's influences on science, social thought, philosophy and ethics, evolutionary theory and religious theory.

The Voyage of the Beagle, published in 1839, refers to Darwin's nearly five-year expedition on the HMS Beagle. His observations greatly influenced his masterwork, On the Origin of Species. On the Origin of Species, published in 1859, lays the foundation of evolutionary biology. Darwin's book introduced the theory that populations evolve during the course of generations through a process of natural selection and that the diversity of life came about through a branching pattern of evolution. Within two decades of Darwin's publication, there was widespread scientific agreement that evolution, with a branching pattern of common descent, had occurred.

The Descent of Man, first published in 1871, applies evolutionary theory to human evolution, and details Darwin's theory of sexual selection. The book covers evolutionary psychology and ethics, and the differences between human races and the sexes. The book also covers women's dominant role in choosing mating partners.

To reserve a space for the Darwin discussion, contact The Center for Arts and Letters at 816-501-4607 or email cynthia.cartwright@rockhurst.edu. The cost, $25 per person, includes a copy of the book and refreshments; $10 for the discussion and reception only.

Iraqi Poet Dunya Mikhail Visits Midwest Poet Series Jan. 29

National Book award winner Marilyn Hacker writes that "Dunya Mikhail's new poems [The Iraqi Nights, New Directions Press] reframe, in a contemporary woman's voice, the great poet al-Sayab's cry from the heart: 'Iraq, Iraq, nothing but Iraq!' Here, myth alleviates the exile's longing, and exilic longing itself opens the poet's eyes to broad horizons."

Dunya Mikhail will present her poems during a 7 p.m. public reading Thursday, Jan. 29, in Mabee Theater as part of the Midwest Poets Series' 32nd season at Rockhurst University.

Mikhail was born in Iraq and immigrated to the U.S. in the 1990s. She recalls that in Iraq, a department of censorship carefully watches what everyone reads or writes. "Here in America, a word does not usually cost a poet her life."

She is the author of The War Works Hard (New Directions, 2005, and al-Mada), which was shortlisted for Canada's Griffin Poetry Prize and was named one of the "25 Books to Remember from 2005" by the New York Public Library.


"Mikhail's poems give voice to an often buried, glossed-over, or spun grief," writes Publishers Weekly. In the way of other great poets, Mikhail takes that grief and gives it a particular beauty, called honesty.

Admission to the reading is $3 at the door. Books will be available for purchase at the event. A reception and book signing follow the reading. For more information, call the Center for Arts and Letters, 816-501-4607.

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Music from two great 18th-century cities—London and Vienna—will be performed by Musica Sacra Chorus and Orchestra at its Saturday, Feb. 21, concert in St. Francis Xavier Church.

William Boyce (1710-1779) was a chorister at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London and a student of composer and performer Maurice Greene. Boyce received the title of Composer of the Chapel Royal in 1736 and was appointed organist that same year. His long relationship with the cathedral continued and when Greene died in 1755, Boyce was named Master of the King’s Music.

In addition to composing eight symphonies, Boyce also wrote a great deal of sacred music. His works demonstrate traits of both the baroque and classical eras. Musica Sacra will perform several of Boyce’s compositions, which include two anthems, “By the Waters of Babylon” and “Turn Thee Unto Me.”

Musica Sacra continues its examination of the voluminous body of rarely heard sacred music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). The ensemble will perform Mozart’s Missa Brevis in G Major, K. 49, composed in October and November of 1768.

The Mozart family resided in Vienna from September 1767 to January 1769, in the hope of having one of the young Mozart’s operas performed at the imperial court. However, the project was a failure. The composer’s father, Leopold, complained that palace intrigue hindered the project and handed the court a formal letter of protest in September 1768. The opera La finta semplice premiered in the Mozart’s native Salzburg the following year.

Nevertheless, the young Mozart completed the Missa Brevis while residing in Vienna, although the circumstances behind its composition are unknown. As is often the case with the brilliant prodigy, elements of the music are surprisingly mature and beautiful: the attractive string writing, for example, and the lovely descending chromatic passage in the Credo to the text “passus et sepultus” (“He died and was buried”).

Musica Sacra also will include two a cappella motets by English Renaissance composer William Byrd:

- A cappella motet “Ave verum corpus” (“Hail true body”), and the charmingly simple yet lovely English anthem “I Have Longed for Thy Saving Health.”