

Art history professor boosts Asian art program and texts

By Ming Rodrigues
Emerald Contributor

Her first foray into what was to become a vigorous career in East Asian art history happened when, as a political science major at the University of Chicago, she felt her courses didn't quite satisfy her curiosity and interest in the creative aspects of culture.

Today, Esther Jacobson is not only an art history professor at the University, but she recently became the second faculty member to hold the School of Architecture and Allied Arts' Maude Kerns Professorship of Oriental Art.

Jacobson, who has taught at the University since 1966, takes over the post from Ellen Johnston Laing, another professor of art history who retired last June.

"I'm happy to be acknowledged in a way that's supportive of what I'm passionate about," she said. And Jacobson has been committed. Before 1979, she was responsible for all academic offerings in Chinese, Japanese and Indian art history. She also developed the department's regular offerings in Asian art history as well as the fundamental library holdings in Asian art-related books, photographs and slides.

Jacobson was also the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and head of Asian Studies 1974-77 and head of the Art History department 1978-1984.

With the Kerns professorship providing support for faculty research and teaching, student assistance and library acquisitions, Jacobson is working toward further boosting the already flourishing Asian art history program at the University. Currently, the department has two specialists in both Chinese and Japanese art history.

On a personal level, she will be able to extend her research into field work in the Altay Mountains in South Siberia and Mongolia where she will collaborate with Russian and Mongolian archaeologists on a project on the art and archaeology of the Bronze and early Iron Ages.

Jacobson is not just a specialist in Asian art history; her work, which keeps taking her back to earlier, exotic periods, allows her to explore a lesser-known culture that spawned from two worlds.

"I call myself an Inner Asianist," said Jacobson, who has a doctorate in Chinese art history. "I'm attracted to the interconnection between what was essentially the sedentary culture of the Chinese and their northern nomadic neighbors. I'm curious about the artistic indicators that stemmed from that slurring of cultures."

The people she studies inhabited the region from the borders of China and Mongolia, across South Siberia and present-day Kazakhstan, to the Black Sea in the first millennium B.C.

The nomadic artists are best known for gold work, wood carving and bronze sculpture, as well as for impressive stone ritual monuments and petroglyphic (rock carving) art, Jacobson said.



Photo by Anthony Forney

Esther Jacobson, a University art history professor, pioneered the Asian art history program and is the second faculty member to hold the University's Maude Kerns Professorship of Oriental Art.

But the mutual influences between the art of both cultures are evident. Both bear emphasis on animals as primary carriers of meaning. In her recently published book entitled "The Deer Goddess of Ancient Siberia: A Study in the Ecology of Belief," Jacobson wrote about the themes and motifs in nomadic art.

The deer is a central motif, Jacobson said, and a study of its changing formulations over time allows understanding of the ecology of belief in cultures where there are no texts.

The fascination with "the other culture" goes further. "In bronze casting, the Chinese mimic the techniques, texturizing and stylistic elements common in the precious metal casting of the nomadic people," Jacobson said. "Also, their landscape representation is rooted in the fascination with the wild, untamed realm of nomadic life."

Currently working on three books, Jacobson also serves as project director on a recently completed two-year University project that integrated Asian materials into the general humanities curriculum. From 1988 to 1990, she directed the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies at the University. In 1979, Jacobson was awarded one of the University's Ersted Awards for distinguished teaching.

Taking in the latest



The Crying Game

A Miramax Films Release

Directed by Neil Jordan

Starring Stephen Rea and Forest Whitaker

Venue Bijou Art Cinemas

Rating ***

MOVIES

Review by
Lisa Kneefel

They say love is blind.

The Crying Game, writer and director Neil Jordan's (Mona Lisa) seventh film, proves love is not only blind, but revealing as well.

Part thriller, part love story but mostly biting satire, *The Crying Game* examines the powerful ways friendship and love can conquer prejudice.

In South Armagh, the heart of Republican activity, a British soldier is taken captive by the Irish Republican Army. The soldier, Jody (Forest Whitaker), and the IRA volunteer assigned to watch him (Stephen Rea) hide out with the others as they wait for word of release of an IRA soldier.

The two develop a strange kind of intimacy in the following days. Jody, in bondage and held at gunpoint at all times, can no longer do anything for himself. Fergus must feed him, wipe his face and even help him urinate.

Slowly the two transcend roles of captive and captor. They trade playful remarks and jokes and share intimate conversation. One outburst of laughter even catches the attention of Fergus' superiors, and he is swiftly chastised.

But the friendship is ended when, in an ironic turn of events, Jody is killed. Fergus, compelled to fulfill a promise he made to Jody, flees to London to find Jody's girlfriend.

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Under cover from the IRA, Fergus locates Jody's girlfriend, Dil (Jaye Davidson), at the hair salon where she works. Dil is even more beautiful than the picture Jody showed him when he asked Fergus to see her. Fergus finds himself intrigued and attracted to her.

Cautiously, Dil submits to Fergus' advances and their attraction becomes mutual. As the two spend more time together, Fergus grapples with the double dilemma of wondering whether he should tell Dil how Jody died and whether he should remain loyal to his cause in Ireland.

Before Fergus can decide, he is thrown for a surprise from Dil that is equally shocking for the audience. The film gains tempo and builds to a climax that resolves both of Fergus' predicaments.

The Crying Game superbly explores the complexity of human emotion. Fergus, a



terrorist with the IRA, finds he no longer has the will to kill. He grows weary of the IRA's gruesome tactics. And for the first time, his enemy has a human face, in the form of Jody. Abandoning his previous convictions, Fergus finds another side to himself removed from the violence of terrorism.

Dry humor is found throughout the film, which is otherwise powerful drama. Rea and Whitaker both turn out stunning performances. Miranda Richardson is excellent as the IRA member who follows Fergus to London, and Jaye Davidson makes an impressive film debut.



Courtesy photos
Stephen Rea (above) and Miranda Richardson (left) in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*.

Breaking the color barrier

Since the 1870's, baseball has been America's favorite sport, churning out heroes such as Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. But the big leagues were lily white until the 1940s, when Jackie Roosevelt Robinson broke the color barrier and signed on with the Dodgers.

As the first African American to play major league baseball, Robinson helped make the sport "all-American." He was Rookie of the Year in 1947, and two years later he was named the National League's Most Valuable Player. He is remembered, in Red Smith's words, as "the unquarrelable doing the impossible."

Play to Win, a Theatreworks/USA production, bunts Robinson's story into the Soreng Theatre Saturday, March 20, as part of the Hult Center's family series.

The play recalls Robinson's determination to succeed over prejudice in baseball. It faces the painful moments of his life, from the pitchers who threw at his head to the hotels that wouldn't admit him, from the name-calling he endured to the fields that were closed.

The show runs in the ballpark of an hour, following Robinson from his college days to stardom with the Dodgers — a 10-year journey of struggle and sacrifice ending in triumph. In this compressed version of his life, Robinson breaks a hitting slump with a home run immediately after he hears the news of a second black major leaguer, Larry Doby, signing on with the Cleveland Indians.

With story narration by Robinson's good friend Satchel Paige, legendary African American pitcher, and a musical score that ranges from blues to barbershop quartet, the play is fun as well as educational.

Theatreworks/USA seeks to provide young people with role models, pride in their heritage and confidence in their own potential. The company is one of the foremost children's theaters in the country and has performed in the White House and on Broadway.

Tickets, available at the EMU and the Hult Center, are \$6 with reserved seating. The show begins at 2 p.m.



Courtesy Photo
Marcus Olson (left), Christine Campbell and Raymond Anthony Thomas in *Play to Win*.

1992 movie season third best, but ticket sales slip again

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The 1992 movie season was the third highest-grossing in history but ticket sales also declined for the third straight year, the Motion Picture Association of America reported Tuesday.

Year-end receipts totaled \$4.87 billion, trailing only 1989 and 1990. MPAA President Jack Valenti said in a Las Vegas address to theater owners. But the 1992 figures were boosted by the costliest ticket prices ever, an aver-

age of \$5.05 nationally. "We have to increase the theater audience — we just have to do it," Valenti said in a telephone interview.

He said he expected movie makers would try to increase their family audience by producing pictures with "less violence, less sensuality and less (raunchy) language."

Ticket sales fell almost 2 percent from a year ago, to 964.2 million. In 1989, the best year at the box office,

1.132 billion tickets were sold for a total gross of \$5.03 billion. In 1990, 1.056 billion tickets were sold for a total gross of \$5.02 billion.

Valenti said the industry must control costs and theater owners must make the movie-going experience, comfortable, affordable and safe.

"A lot of people don't go to the movies for safety reasons," he said.

Regarding cost, he said, "I do believe that when you get into \$7 tickets, a baby

sitter, popcorn, soda and parking, that's a pretty good investment for a night."

Columbia Pictures Chairman Mark Canton said in a keynote address that 16 percent of moviegoers surveyed by Columbia said they had a "bad experience" with a theater presentation in the last three movies seen.

"This is a failure on a large scale and on a very basic issue," he said. "We must do better."

Valenti noted that admissions have

fallen only 5.6 percent from 12 years ago, when home video was still in its infancy. The VCR and rented videocassettes were supposed to destroy theater business but have failed to do so, he said.

Home video has actually doubled the overall audience for feature films, Valenti said. Last year retail video stores reported an estimated 4.5 million rentals and sales of about 386 million prerecorded videocassettes.

The average cost of producing and distributing a studio film increased 5 percent from a year ago to \$40 million. That figure includes production costs of \$28.8 million per movie and more than \$11 million for prints and advertising.

Only 36 of the 431 movies released last year — 8.3 percent — brought their makers more than \$20 million in net proceeds. When factoring in foreign markets and home video and television, four of 10 make money.



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