



# THE HOUSTON SEMINAR



SPRING

2024



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# THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

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The Houston Seminar was founded in 1977 for the purpose of stimulating learning and cultural awareness. Each spring and fall the nonprofit group offers lectures and study tours focused on varied topics that may include art, architecture, literature, music, theater, history, politics, philosophy, psychology, religion, the natural environment, and current trends and events.

## A NOTE TO OUR PATRONS



We are excited to continue offering study tours, along with a combination of Zoom and in-person courses in Houston. Most Zoom courses will be recorded, and you will be able to register for and view them on our website for the duration of the semester. Please note that by registering for Zoom courses, you are understood to be giving your permission to be recorded.

## Spring 2024

Study Tour		PAGE
	Before Texas: Historic Ranches and Towns of Nuevo Santander	4
Daytime		
	Modern Women and Myth	5
	Behind the Headlines: Matthew Rojansky on Russia	6
	Houston's Wards: Third Ward Full-Day Tour	8
	Project Trinity: The Myth, the Legend, the Legacy at Los Alamos Laboratory	9
	Houston's Wards: Fourth Ward Half-Day Tour	8
	She Space: The Inside Story	11
	The Art of Biography	12
	Carbon Capture and Sequestration	13
Evening		
	Absence Of Evidence Is Not Evidence Of Absence: (Un)covering the UFO Mystery	6
	Behind the Headlines: Jim Krane on Saudi Arabia and Tony Payan on Mexico	6
	Houston's Wards: Then and Now Overview Lecture	8
	Screening Shakespeare	12
	Stones and Bones: The Gault Site	10



Zoom In-person Study Tour Daytime Evening



Courtesy:  
The River Pierce Foundation

 STUDY TOUR

For trip pricing and further information, or to place your name on an interest list, please call 713-666-9000 or email [registrar@houstonseminar.org](mailto:registrar@houstonseminar.org).

## Before Texas: Historic Ranches and Towns of Nuevo Santander

Tuesday, March 12–Sunday, March 17

The Houston Seminar will continue the in-depth study of historic ranches and towns (Nuevo Santander) when we explore the shared history and culture of Texas and Mexico.

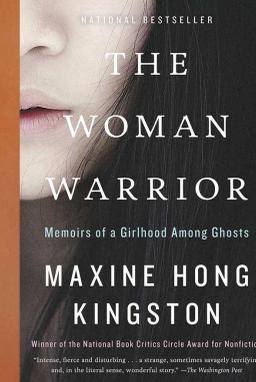
This tour will begin in San Antonio and will focus on the river ranches between San Agustín de Laredo and Brownsville. Only after the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848 was the southern tip of the state incorporated into Texas. From 1748 until 1824, this territory comprised the northern half of the Spanish colonial province of Nuevo Santander. In 1824, when it became a state of the Mexican Republic, Nuevo Santander was given the indigenous name of Tamaulipas. Highlights will include a welcome dinner in San Antonio with guest speaker Mary Margaret McAllen, acclaimed author and historian; a private tour of the River Pierce Foundation in San Ygnacio, named one of the nation's most endangered historic sites by the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and a visit to the World Birding Center, which is part of a major bird migration corridor.

Our guides **Stephen Fox** and **Rafael Longoria** are uniquely qualified for this tour. Architectural historian Stephen Fox grew up in Brownsville before attending Rice University. His work focuses on Texas architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rafael Longoria, a native of Nuevo Laredo, is an ACSA Distinguished Professor of Architecture at the University Houston. His areas of research include economic determinants of urban form and architecture and planning in the cities of the American Southwest and Mexico, with a particular interest in sustainability, cultural hybridity, urban context, and public spaces. Together they will bring new insights to our perceptions of the Texas Border region.

The trip will begin in San Antonio and conclude in Brownsville. Adventure awaits!



World Birding Center  
Courtesy: Lake|Flato



Courtesy: Deborah Mouton

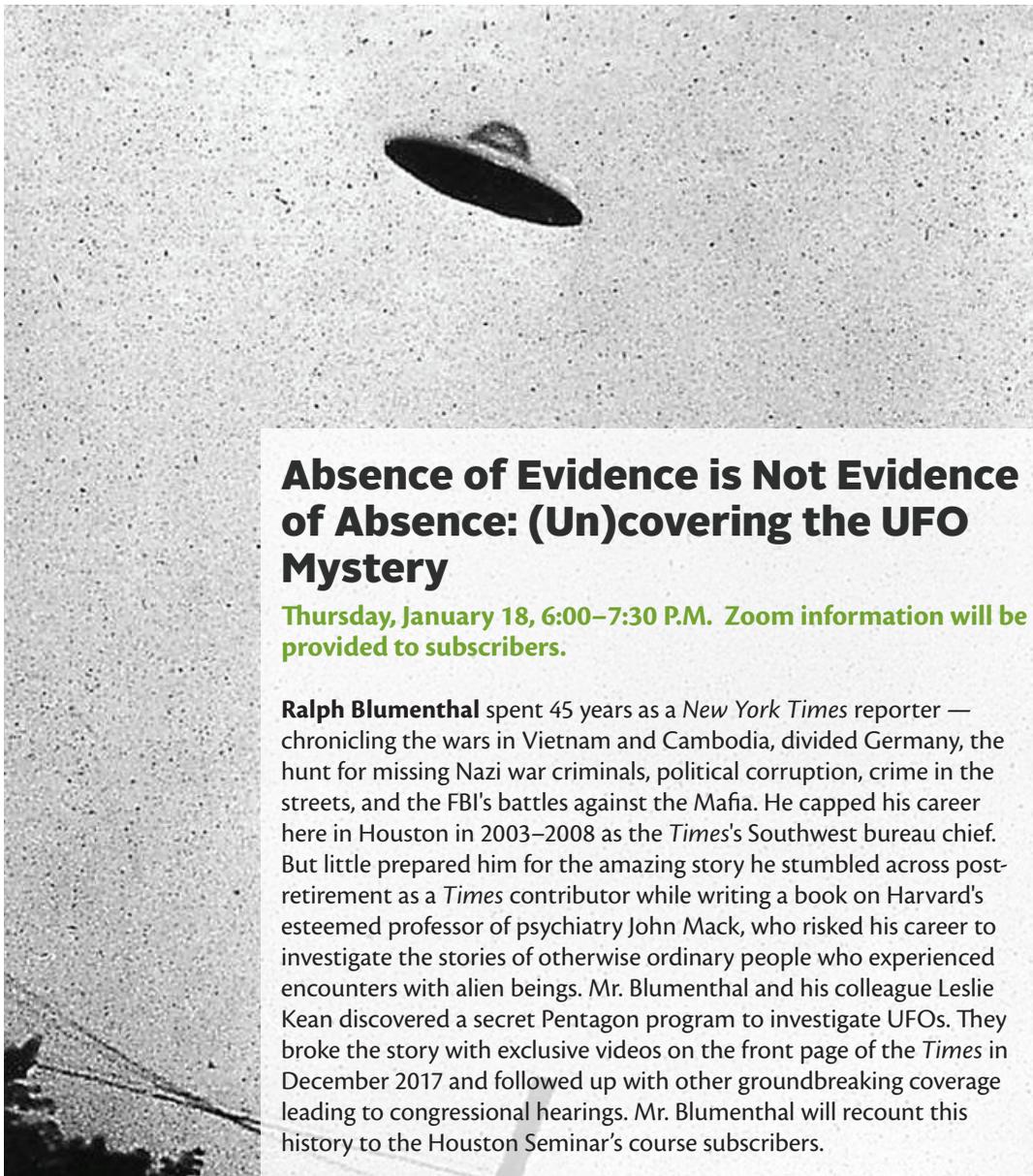
COURSES

## Modern Women and Myth

Three Wednesdays, January 17, 24, and 31, 12:00–1:30 P.M.  
Directions will be provided to subscribers.

Ever wonder about women's place in modern mythology? From faces that launch a thousand ships to visions of beauty, Greek and Roman myths leave a long legacy of powerful women. But where are those mythological models today? From books like **Deborah D.E.P. Mouton's** most recent memoir *Black Chameleon*, to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* to Audre Lourde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, women are redefining what it means to be mythological while simultaneously adding colorful social commentary on our world today. Join Houston's Poet Laureate Emerita, Deborah D.E.P. Mouton, for this lecture series on how women are reclaiming the genre.

Deborah D.E.P. Mouton is the first Black Poet Laureate of Houston, Texas. This seven-time National Poetry Slam Competitor, and Head Coach of the Houston VIP Poetry Slam Team, has been ranked the #2 Best Female Performance Poet in the World. Her work has appeared in *Black Girl Magic* (Haymarket Books), *Houston Noir* (Akashic Books), and *I AM STRENGTH* (Blind Faith Books), to name a few. Her collaborations with the Houston Ballet, the Houston Rockets, and the Houston Grand Opera have opened new doors for performance poetry. She had the pleasure of performing and leading a workshop at the Leipzig in Autumn Literary Festival in 2018, where she bridged the gap between the slam and formal publishing communities. As the executive director of VIP Arts Houston, she seeks to build more bridges that amplify the voices of artists in and around the nation. Her love for community transcends the classroom and the stage, making her a mentor to many and a notable force to be felt.



## Absence of Evidence is Not Evidence of Absence: (Un)covering the UFO Mystery

Thursday, January 18, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Zoom information will be provided to subscribers.

**Ralph Blumenthal** spent 45 years as a *New York Times* reporter — chronicling the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, divided Germany, the hunt for missing Nazi war criminals, political corruption, crime in the streets, and the FBI's battles against the Mafia. He capped his career here in Houston in 2003–2008 as the *Times's* Southwest bureau chief. But little prepared him for the amazing story he stumbled across post-retirement as a *Times* contributor while writing a book on Harvard's esteemed professor of psychiatry John Mack, who risked his career to investigate the stories of otherwise ordinary people who experienced encounters with alien beings. Mr. Blumenthal and his colleague Leslie Kean discovered a secret Pentagon program to investigate UFOs. They broke the story with exclusive videos on the front page of the *Times* in December 2017 and followed up with other groundbreaking coverage leading to congressional hearings. Mr. Blumenthal will recount this history to the Houston Seminar's course subscribers.

## Behind the Headlines: Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Russia

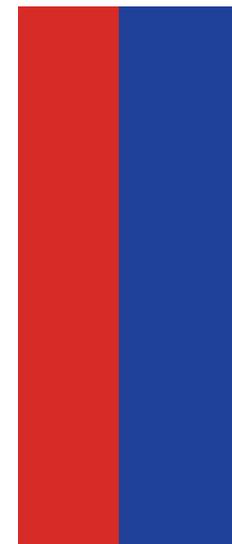
Three Thursdays, February 1 and 8, 6:00–7:30 P.M., and 15, 12:00 – 1:30 P.M. Directions and Zoom information will be provided to subscribers.

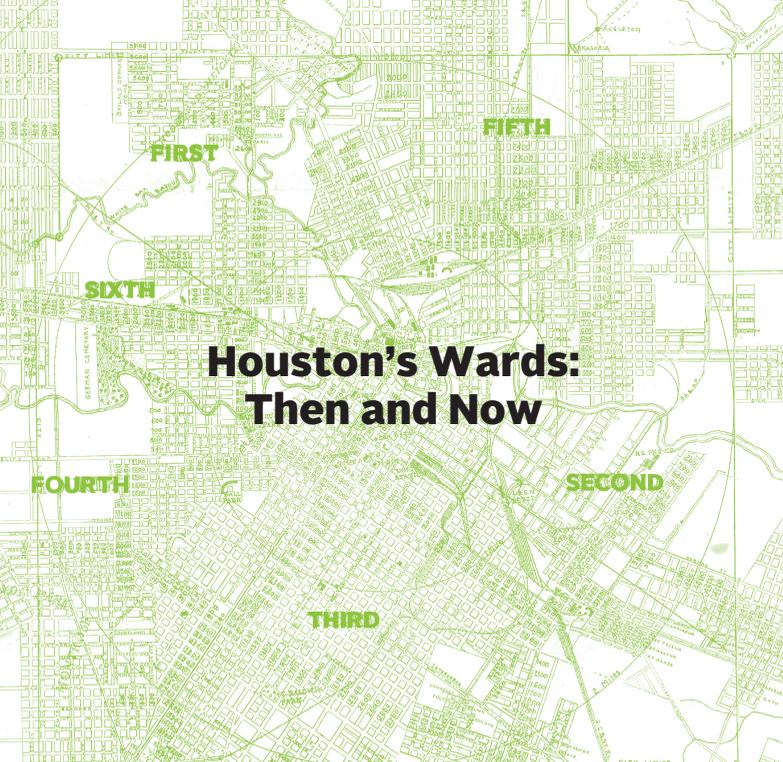
**FEBRUARY 1:** Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil exporter and the only country to consistently maintain spare oil production capacity, which it reserves for reducing turmoil in global oil markets. This lecture covers the factors that have put Saudi Arabia into the leadership position in the

oil market and how that role has created a close working relationship with Washington. It will also cover the future of Saudi-Israeli relations. **Jim Krane**, of Rice University's Baker Institute, will examine the factors that could undermine the Saudi role and U.S.-Saudi relations. Mr. Krane is the Wallace S. Wilson Fellow for Energy Studies at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, where he specializes in energy geopolitics with a focus on the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. He is also an award-winning journalist who reported from the Middle East for more than five years, writing for numerous publications including the *Associated Press*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist Intelligence Unit*, and the *Financial Times*. He has written two widely acclaimed books on the Middle East, one on Dubai and the other a definitive study of energy demand and political survival in the Gulf region.

**FEBRUARY 8:** There are no two countries more intertwined in their affairs than Mexico and the United States. The year 2024 is likely to be another demonstration of how complicated their binational relationship is, as both countries will hold general elections. Featured during the campaigns will be the issues of trade, nearshoring, and the state of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement; immigration and human mobility; border governance collaboration; security drug trafficking, especially fentanyl; and other key issues affecting bilateral relations. **Tony Payan**, of Rice University's Baker Institute, will discuss each of these themes, contextualizing them around the elections of June (Mexico) and November (the United States). Mr. Payan is the Françoise and Edward Djerejian Fellow for Mexico Studies and director of the Center for the United States and Mexico at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. He is also a professor of social sciences at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. In 2020 he edited a book of essays entitled *The Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations: Strategic Foresight* that offered policy recommendations on key issues such as trade, immigration, the environment, drugs, health, and security. Mr. Payan is also a member of the Greater Houston Partnership's Immigration Task Force and the Mexico Energy Task Force.

**FEBRUARY 15:** On the two-year anniversary of Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine, **Matthew Rojansky** returns to the Houston Seminar via Zoom to discuss what it has meant for the protagonists and their allies and adversaries, what the challenges have been for the United States in Europe's biggest and bloodiest conflict since the Second World War, and what the future may hold. Mr. Rojansky is president and CEO of the U.S.-Russia Foundation, a private grant-making foundation established to promote the development of a healthy and independent private sector and the rule of law in Russia. In his work with USRF, Mr. Rojansky stands with brave Russians who continue to speak out against the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine despite increasing repression. That support includes grants to Russian independent media, human rights defenders, and civil society, including those who are now in exile outside Russia. He previously served as Director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute and as deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he founded Carnegie's Ukraine Program.





## Houston's Wards: Then and Now



Courtesy: Photographs Do Not Bend (PDNB)



**Tuesday, February 27, 6:00–7:30 P.M.** Zoom information will be provided to subscribers. **Two Fridays, March 1, 10:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M. and March 22, 10:00 A.M.–2:00 P.M. (Friday, March 29, 10:00 A.M.–2:00 P.M. rain date).** Limited enrollment. **Tour fees for March 1 and 22 are non-refundable.**

Why in Houston do we refer to certain neighborhoods as “wards”? The six wards as they exist today no longer describe voting districts but rather cultural designations. Each ward exemplifies elements of urban strength and vulnerability, and each has evolved distinctly as a result of transportation, land ownership, employment opportunities, and population.

**FEBRUARY 27:** In the leadoff to this course, architectural historian **Stephen Fox** will provide an overview, charting the evolution of the term “ward” from an 1839 political boundary, through its demise as a description of governance in 1905, and into its current use.

**MARCH 1:** Our first visit on the full-day tour by motorcoach of the Third Ward will begin at Texas Southern University where we will meet with museum curator **Alvia Wardlaw** and view a multimedia installation by artist Nathaniel Donnett. The day will end with a talk and tour of Project Row Houses and refreshments at its recently renovated Eldorado Ballroom. In between, our tour will encompass several sites relating to the establishment of Emancipation Park (1872), life in the Third Ward during segregation, the Civil Rights era, and the current balancing act of preserving the neighborhood as it gentrifies. Lunch will be provided.

**MARCH 22:** We will meet at the African American Library at the Gregory School to begin our half-day walking tour of the Fourth Ward. Curator **Danielle Burns Wilson** and photographer **Earlie Hudnall, Jr.** will have a conversation, presenting some of Hudnall’s powerful images of life in the Fourth Ward. Neighborhood guide-activist **Charonda Johnson** will lead us on a walking tour that will incorporate the burial place of the Allen Brothers, the Freedmen’s Town Museum, and end with a meal at a private home.



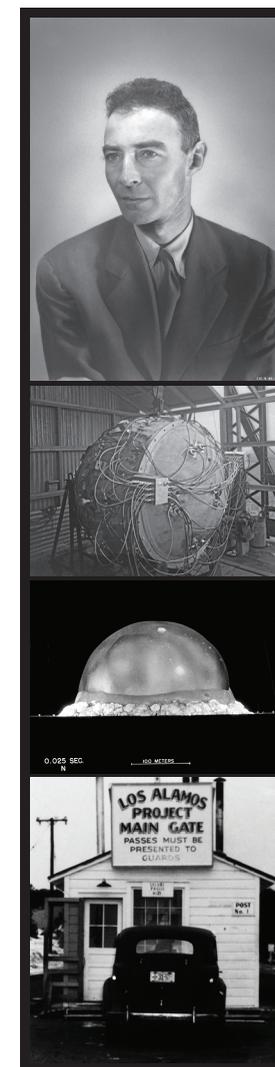
## Project Trinity: The Myth, the Legend, the Legacy at Los Alamos National Laboratory

**Monday, March 11, 11:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M.** Directions will be provided to subscribers.

The Trinity test of July 16, 1945, was arguably history’s greatest scientific experiment. It represented not only the culmination of the Manhattan Project, but the culmination of decades of discoveries in physics, chemistry, metallurgy, and other scientific fields. Led by J. Robert Oppenheimer, the Los Alamos technical staff of approximately 1700 employees designed, built, tested, and helped deliver the world’s first nuclear weapons in combat only 27 months after the Los Alamos National Laboratory held its first major technical conference.

The technology tested at the Trinity site would be used to help bring history’s deadliest conflict, World War II, to an abrupt and victorious conclusion. Though the advent of nuclear weapons has apparently helped render global wars between the great powers obsolete, it has also made it possible for mankind to destroy itself. This delicate balance between scientific discovery, technological innovation, political progress, and the potential for unimaginable destruction is all part of Trinity’s legacy.

Our speaker, **Alan B. Carr**, currently serves as a program manager and the senior historian for Los Alamos National Laboratory. During his tenure as a laboratory historian, which began in 2003, Mr. Carr has produced several publications and lectures pertaining to the Manhattan Project, nuclear testing history, and the historical evolution of LANL. He has lectured for numerous professional organizations and has been featured as a guest on many local, national, and international radio and television programs. Before arriving at Los Alamos, Mr. Carr completed his graduate studies at Texas Tech University.





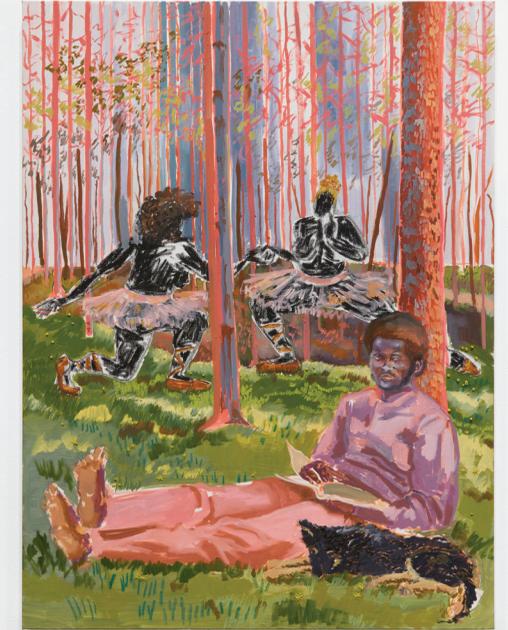
© Kenneth Garrett

## Stones and Bones: The Gault Site

Thursday, April 4, 6:00–7:30 P.M. Zoom information will be provided to subscribers.

The Gault site, located 45 miles northwest of Austin, was known as a place where amateur archaeologists could “pay to dig” ancient artifacts. Professional archaeologists wrote off the plundered site as a lost cause. In 1991, Mike Collins, PhD archaeologist at UT Austin, saw clues others had missed. He and his team discovered stone tools and other evidence of people living in Central Texas 20,000 years ago, making the Gault site a game changer in the long and fierce debate about when and how people lived in the Americas during the last ice age. With the help of an army of volunteers, Collins risked his career and his personal wealth to wage a daunting 30-year quest to protect this land from looters. In 2007, he purchased it with his own money and donated the land to The Archaeological Conservancy to preserve it for research and public education.

Intrigued by this complicated tale, filmmaker **Olive Talley** is close to completing a documentary film about Mike Collins and the Gault site, now regarded as one of the most significant archaeological sites in the Western Hemisphere. She will tell us about the making of the film and show excerpts from this yet-to-be-titled film. Talley is an award-winning producer, writer, and journalist whose career spans documentary filmmaking, network television, and news reporting for newspapers, United Press International, and radio.



## She Space: The Inside Story

Four Wednesdays, April 10 and 24 and May 1 and 8, 10:30–11:45 A.M. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

Four female Houston-based artists invite us into their studios to learn about their practices, creative processes, and inspirations. While the artists employ a broad range of media, their work speaks generally to their personal perspectives on identity, representation, belonging, and our relationship to the outside world and our natural environment. All four artists are transplants to Houston but are fully committed to their practices here due to the deeply supportive patronage and breadth of opportunities.

**APRIL 10:** Studio visit with **Karen Navarro** who specializes in photography, collage, and installation.

**APRIL 24:** Studio visit with **Erika Blumenfeld** who works in photography and painting.

**MAY 1:** Studio visit with **Anna Mavromatis** who employs varied media, including paper, recycled materials, mixed media, and sculpture.

**MAY 8:** Studio visit with **Alexis Pye** who integrates mixed media, such as fiber, within her paintings.

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1

Courtesy: Karen Navarro

2

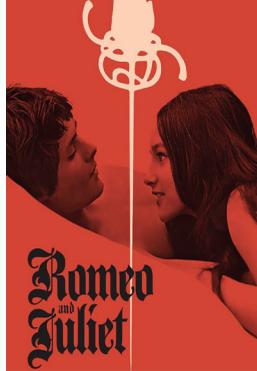
Anna Mavromatis  
*Listening to Blues*, 2023  
Courtesy: Anna Mavromatis

3

Erika Blumenfeld  
*Tracing Luminaries: Plate No. 126070 (Before the Novae Geminorum of 1903 & 1912)*, 2023  
Courtesy: Erika Blumenfeld and Inman Gallery, Houston

4

Alexis Pye  
*Make like a tree and be shades of pink*, 2023  
Courtesy: Alexis Pye and Inman Gallery, Houston

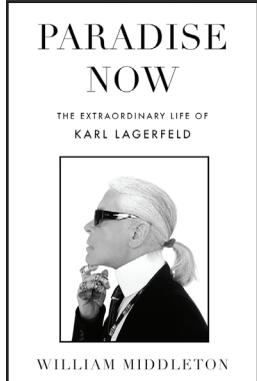


## Screening Shakespeare

Three Tuesdays, April 2, 9, and 16, 6:00–7:30 P.M.  
Rice University. Directions will be provided to subscribers.

Shakespeare seems to be everywhere: on stages and on pages but also, as frequently, on screens. On silent screens and silver screens of old, but also on television screens, live-streams, YouTube, Tik Tok, and the ever-tinier confines of a mobile device. How do we account for 125 years of Shakespeare on screen, from the silent era to the present? What happens when works designed for live theater over four hundred years ago are translated to an entirely different time, medium, and context? What are the obligations of and the opportunities for a director remaking Shakespeare? How do sonnets become movies? Over three sessions we will consider these questions and more with **Joseph Campana** of Rice University. We will look first, broadly, at the evolution of Shakespeare on screen before focusing more closely on multiple versions of frequently adapted works like *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Joseph Campana is the William Shakespeare Professor of English and the Director for the Center for Environmental Studies at Rice University. He is a poet, arts writer, and scholar of Renaissance literature and has composed essays on Spenser, Shakespeare, Nashe, Defoe, and Middleton. Professor Campana is the author of *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (Fordham UP, 2012) and has written three collections of poetry.



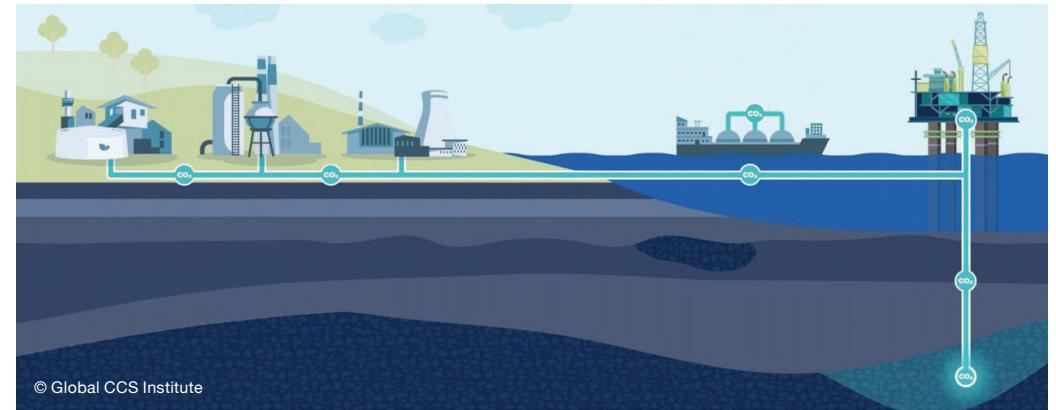
## The Art of Biography

Tuesday, April 23, 10:00–11:30 A.M. Directions will be provided to subscribers. Limited enrollment.

**William Middleton**, author of the recent acclaimed biographies of Karl Lagerfeld and Dominique and John de Menil, draws on his background as a journalist to research the private lives of public figures. His fascinating books illuminate his subjects and their milieu, celebrating their influence and laying bare their humanity. In this course we will hear how Middleton approaches his subjects and weaves compelling and complex narratives from their lives. Already at work on another art-related book, he will give us a glimpse into his next project.

Prior to becoming an author, William Middleton enjoyed a long career as an editor and journalist based in New York, Paris, and Houston, writing for the *New York Times*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *House & Garden*, *Esquire*, *Texas Monthly*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Departures*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. He was the fashion features director for *Harper's Bazaar* and the Paris Bureau Chief for Fairchild Publications, overseeing *W Magazine* and *Women's Wear Daily*.

Courtesy: William Middleton



## Carbon Capture and Sequestration

Thursday, May 9, 12:00–1:30 P.M. Bayou Bend Kilroy Center, Bailey Room, 6003 Memorial Drive, 77007. Lunch is included. Limited enrollment.

Many agree that climate change is the single greatest environmental threat that we face and that human driven emissions of greenhouse gases are the primary cause. As we strive to prevent devastating global temperature increases, there is a massive undertaking to reduce such emissions in a way that impairs neither the security nor the affordability of our energy supply.

While there is a very significant focus on shifting from the combustion of hydrocarbons to carbon free energy, most experts will agree that the shift cannot happen overnight. In the meantime, it is imperative that we reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and methane emissions while continuing the production of hydrocarbons.

This course will spotlight two companies and one nonprofit that have CCS projects in the works: Occidental Petroleum, whose approach includes a massive Direct Air Capture Project; EOG Resources, which captures pure stream CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from its field facilities; and

BCarbon, whose nature-based solutions provide a pathway to achieve net-zero goals, strengthen rural economies, and realize numerous environmental co-benefits. There will be ample time for questions from the audience.

**Brad Pollack** serves as Deputy General Counsel and is Vice President of Oxy Low Carbon Ventures with a particular focus on CCS projects. He holds a B.S.E. in systems engineering from the University of Pennsylvania and a J.D. from the Syracuse University College of Law.

**Gordon Goodman** leads EOG's sustainability and emissions reporting and works on the development and execution of emissions reduction strategies. He holds a B.Sc. in environmental science and Masters in environmental design and environmental science, both from the University of Calgary.

**Jim Blackburn** is a practicing environmental lawyer, a professor in the practice of environmental law in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at Rice University, and the CEO of BCarbon. He is a Rice faculty scholar at the Baker Institute and is the co-director of the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disaster (SSPEED) Center at Rice. Mr. Blackburn received a J.D. from the University of Texas at Austin and an M.S. in environmental science from Rice University.



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© J. Pellgen



© Jennifer Wetzel

Coming in Fall 2024

## Where is Kansas City? What is Kansas City?

OCTOBER 2024

Missouri? Kansas? The answer is both. This holds true for many aspects of the region that will be brought to light during our visit to Kansas City, Missouri.

Kansas City is a conglomeration of neighborhoods. We will delve into how George Kessler's greenway plan and J.C. Nichols's real estate developments were realized and refer to how they are reinvented in Houston's Hermann Park and River Oaks. Our study tour will include visits to private collections as well as the world-famous Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Olmsted Brothers' Swope Park, the WWI Memorial, and Loose Park, located on the site of a Civil War battle and former home of the Kansas City Country Club.

The legacy of post-Civil War segregation led to a rich jazz scene in the 1920s and '30s. It also allowed for the growth of the Negro Leagues. Today these eras are immortalized in American Jazz and Negro Leagues Baseball museums in the famous 18th and Vine neighborhood. Led by architectural historian **Stephen Fox**, travelers will learn about contemporary Kansas City and its civic commitment as a sports destination for the KC Chiefs, Kansas City Royals, college basketball finals, women's soccer, and the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Do note: Kansas City BBQ is on the itinerary!

To place your name on an interest list for these study tours,

### Discounts

Teachers and students with a school I.D. may attend classes for a discounted fee. Please call the registrar for details.

### Refunds

For refund requests that occur at least two weeks before a course begins, a 20% cancellation fee will be charged. If others have been turned away from a limited-enrollment course, no refund will be issued unless your place can be filled. Refund policies for courses involving travel will differ.

### Enrollment

All courses are available on a first-come, first-served basis. You may enroll by mail, email, phone, or online.

### Gift certificates

These are available for a single session, a specific course, or a dollar amount, which the recipient may apply toward any course(s). Please call for more information.

### Connect with us!

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## Course List and Reservation Form

Please send reservation form and payment to

### THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

P.O. Box 22764  
Houston, TX  
77227-2764

(713) 666-9000

registrar@houstonseminar.org

Register online at [houstonseminar.org](#)

### Amount Enclosed

\$

- Check
- Visa
- MasterCard
- American Express

PLEASE ENROLL ME/US IN THE FOLLOWING COURSES:

#### Before Texas: Historic Ranches and Towns of Nuevo Santander

Tuesday, March 12–Sunday, March 17

For trip pricing and further information, please call 713-666-9000 or email registrar@houstonseminar.org.

#### Modern Women and Myth

Three Wednesdays, January 17, 24, and 31, 12:00–1:30 P.M., \$40 per session

-  January 17
-  January 24
-  January 31

#### Absence of Evidence is Not Evidence of Absence: (Un)covering the UFO Mystery

Thursday, January 18, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$30

-  January 18

#### Behind the Headlines: Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Russia

Three Thursdays, February 1 and 8, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$40 per session, and February 15, 12:00–1:30 P.M., \$30

-  February 1
-  February 8
-  February 15

#### Houston's Wards: Then And Now

Tuesday, February 27, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$30  
Friday, March 1, 10:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M., \$200  
Friday, March 22, 10:00 A.M.–2:00 P.M., \$100

-  February 27
-  March 1
-  March 22

#### Project Trinity: The Myth, the Legend, the Legacy at Los Alamos National Laboratory

Monday, March 11, 11:30 A.M.–1:30 P.M., \$40

-  March 11

#### Screening Shakespeare

Three Tuesdays, April 2, 9, and 16, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$40 per session

-  April 2
-  April 9
-  April 16

#### Stones and Bones: The Gault Site

Thursday, April 4, 6:00–7:30 P.M., \$30

-  April 4

#### She Space: The Inside Story

Four Wednesdays, April 10 and 24, May 1 and 8, 10:30–11:45 A.M., \$50 per session

-  April 10
-  April 24
-  May 1
-  May 8

#### The Art of Biography

Tuesday, April 23, 10:00–11:30 A.M., \$50

-  April 23

#### Carbon Capture and Sequestration

Thursday, May 9, 12:00–1:30 P.M., \$60

-  May 9

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# THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

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[HoustonSeminar.org](http://HoustonSeminar.org)

## Daytime

Modern Women and Myth

Behind the Headlines: Matthew Rojansky on Russia

Houston's Wards: Third Ward Full-Day Tour

Project Trinity: The Myth, the Legend, the Legacy at Los Alamos Laboratory

Houston's Wards: Fourth Ward Half-Day Tour

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## Evening

Absence Of Evidence Is Not Evidence Of Absence: (Un)covering the UFO Mystery

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Stones and Bones: The Gault Site

## Study Tour

Historic Ranches and Towns of Nuevo Santander



Spring  
2024