The overarching theme for this year’s Creative Thought Forum, “Tradition and Innovation,” encapsulates an important quality of SAR itself. As the article “SAR and Archaeology: A Precious Legacy” explains, SAR has reinvented itself several times in its 111-year history. With each change it has emerged stronger and more relevant to the social realities of its time while continuing to honor its institutional history.

Today SAR is responding to Santa Fe’s desire to recast itself as an incubator of ideas and entrepreneurship, as well as a city that nurtures the arts. We are upgrading and expanding our public programs to make them more appealing to the city’s growing population of adult learners. Our Latino Studies initiatives, supported in part by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, represent a long-overdue acknowledgment of the important place of Hispanic traditions in northern New Mexico.

The programs of the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) have increasingly focused on communities, who help us conserve and interpret the collections that we steward so excellently. In its southwestern activities,” Hewett wrote in SAR’s 1918 annual report, “the duty confronts the School to help save from oblivion the native Indian ceremonies and art.” Such sentiments strike us as patristical today, but in Hewett’s time they reflected an earnest desire to move SAR beyond an exclusive focus on archaeology toward collaborative engagement with contemporary Native American communities, a commitment that SAR has sustained and intensified ever since.

Recognizing this problem, Edgar Lee Hewett, the organization’s founding director, changed the institution’s name to the School of American Research in 1917. He pursued a broadened mission that embraced linguistics, cultural anthropology, and Native American art, as well as archaeology. “In its southwestern activities,” Hewett wrote in SAR’s 1918 annual report, “the duty confronts the School to help save from oblivion the native Indian ceremonies and art.” Such sentiments strike us as patristical today, but in Hewett’s time they reflected an earnest desire to move SAR beyond an exclusive focus on archaeology toward collaborative engagement with contemporary Native American communities, a commitment that SAR has sustained and intensified ever since.

Archaeology has deep roots at SAR, which was founded in 1907 as the School of American Archaeology. In its early years, the organization trained and employed such important figures as Adolph Bandelier, Charles Fletcher Lummis, A. V. Kidder, and Sylvanus Morley. Within a decade of its founding, however, archaeological training was beginning to shift to the nation’s universities, raising questions about the relevance of a stand-alone school of archaeology in a location as remote as Santa Fe was then.

Douglas W. Schwartz, the president who between 1967 and 2001 almost single-handedly made SAR the institution that it is today, expanded SAR’s mission still further, advocating a global vision even as he directed an important archaeological excavation at Arroyo Hondo, located five miles southeast of Santa Fe. Under his leadership, SAR published scholarly works that transformed archaeological understandings of Chaco Canyon, Peruvian coastal civilizations, and the ancient Maya.

Although archaeology now plays a less prominent role at SAR than it did a century ago, SAR has sponsored nearly a dozen professional seminars in the Schwartz Seminar House over the past five years that were directly or indirectly related to archaeology. In addition, we’ve offered ten membership lectures focused on human evolution and prehistory. In 2016 the Indian Arts Research Center organized several public talks on the emergence of indigenous archaeology and issues related to the repatriation of Native American cultural property. Recent archaeology-focused field trips have included a memorable tour of Muyil sites in the Yucatán and a trip to Amazonian archaeological sites scheduled for January 2019. Archaeologists of the caliper of John Ware and SAR senior scholar David Stuart have offered mini-courses in experimental archaeology of the present. We are the authors of the present.

Tradition and Innovation at SAR

The programs of the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) have increasingly focused on communities, who help us conserve and interpret the collections that we steward so excellently. The IARC’s innovative approaches are setting a new best-practice standard for museums across the nation.

The writer W. Somerset Maugham insisted that “tradition is a guide and not a jailer.” We at SAR are proud of our traditions and our historic campus, but we are moving with the times and responding to the changing interests of New Mexicans and the worldwide scholarly community of which we are a part.

I look forward to seeing you at El Delirio and at one of our many lectures, discussion salons, field trips, or IARC tours.

Michael F. Brown, President

The 2018 Staley Prize was awarded to archaeologist Jason De León for The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail (University of California Press, 2015). Through an examination of the experience of undocumented migrants moving across the US-Mexican border, The Land of Open Graves integrates archaeological and ethnographic techniques to expose the tragedy of border-protection policies that turn the harsh Sonoran desert into a zone of death. His prose draws readers into a politicized landscape and offers the vivid testimony of people who have survived their desert crossing. Using forensic techniques and the photographs of Michael Wells and others, De León also reconstructs the stories of those who perished, in the process inventing an experimental archaeology of the present.

Although SAR has long defined its mission as one that promotes understanding of human creativity and adaptation on a global scale, archaeology—and especially the archaeology of the Southwest—remains one of the pillars of our programming now and into the future.

J. I. STALEY PRIZE

2018 AWARD: ARCHAEOLOGIST JASON DE LÉON

The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail (University of California Press, 2015) provides a stunning ethnographic and archaeological account of those who live and die at the US-Mexico border. Through a combination of testimony, photography, and archaeological insight, this groundbreaking book explores the experiences of undocumented migrants across a landscape that has been transformed by border policies. Through his work, De León has helped to redefine our understanding of archaeological research as a tool for exploring contemporary social issues.
In Hopi culture katsinam are spiritual friends and guides who serve as intermediaries between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Versions of the beings have long been carved by Hopi people to represent the spirit world. While at SAR, Quotskuyva will sculpt a piece that has been years in the making. The Gnarly Root Project represents Quotskuyva’s effort to carve an unusually large four-and-a-half-foot tall piece of cottonwood root. Quotskuyva’s plan is complex. He intends to develop a series of female katsinam in flight on the face of the wood to honor the matriarch within Hopi society. The reverse side of the piece will be carved in a dioramic fashion to depict agricultural practices around a ruin site. “While I may have the initial vision, I always allow myself the freedom to follow whatever guides me, be it a creative flash, or sometimes a casual comment by a visitor,” he adds.

SAR’s Native Artist Fellowships offer artists the time and space they need to explore projects like Quotskuyva’s. For three months, artists live and work on the SAR campus in the King Residence and Dubin Studio. Each artist has access to the Indian Arts Research Center collections for inspiration, open studio space for creative exploration, and support from IARC staff and other museum professionals. During each fellowship, SAR asks the artists to share their work with the public via a presentation and open studio. Quotskuyva’s artist talk and tour will take place on Thursday, November 15, 2018, at 5:30 p.m. at SAR.

The program has a lot to live up to in its second season. Over thirteen hundred people attended the first year of lectures and salons. Speakers included Pulitzer prize–winning author Elizabeth Kolbert, who addressed humanity’s role in climate change and its impact on the planet. The salons have enabled participants to delve deeper into the topics of the lectures and have proven to be an engaging aspect of the program. SAR president Michael F. Brown notes, “The salons of SAR’s Creative Thought Forum are an effort to promote lively face-to-face discussions with important thinkers. Many of these events address issues of broad public concern, a goal consistent with SAR’s 111-year-old commitment to offering access to the best in contemporary social thought and artistic creativity.”

In July, author and conservationist William deBuys closed out the first year of the program with a summer salon based on his recently expanded Enchantment and Exploration: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range. DeBuys guided participants through a conversation about changing habitats, forest fires, and the human impact on the environment. As deBuys noted in reference to his salon, “With a group of this scale there was a real opportunity for creative energy and the chance to kick around some ideas that helped us get to issues in these underdiscussed elements related to landscape change.”

This year’s Creative Thought Forum follows the theme of “Tradition and Innovation” and takes audiences on a journey exploring the intersection of technology and historic practices. Biologist Christina Agapakis presented in September on the evolution of engineered living cells. She shared her work on creating scents from fabricated DNA inserted into yeast cells. Her talk and corresponding salon asked participants to question their assumptions about the line separating practices in biology that are accepted as commonplace and those that are still deemed controversial. By exploring the topics presented as part of this year’s Creative Thought Forum, SAR continues to offer the Santa Fe community access to new perspectives that illuminate the world around us.

The Creative Thought Forum is made possible by the generous support of SAR’s Founders Society members, several business sponsors, and the newly established Luke J. and Betty M. Vortman Endowment Fund. The fund was created by Betty Vortman, a former SAR board member who along with her late husband, Luke, has supported SAR for more than thirty years. They have enabled programs aimed at improving the collections of the IARC and inviting audiences into a world of new ideas:

LUKE AND I BOTH RECOGNIZED THAT OUR LIVES WERE ENRICHED, INTELLECTUALLY AND SOCIALLY, THROUGH OUR ASSOCIATION WITH SAR. WE WERE GRATEFUL THAT WE COULD, TO SOME EXTENT, REPAY THE SCHOOL FOR THE BENEFITS WE HAD RECEIVED.

Their support means that SAR is able to host nationally and internationally recognized speakers who examine diverse aspects of the human condition in provocative ways.

LAUNCHING A SECOND SEASON: THE CREATIVE THOUGHT FORUM

CHRISTINA AGAPAKIS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF GINKGO BIOWORKS, PRESENTS AT THE JAMES A. LITTLE THEATER, SEPTEMBER 2018.
Supporting Research on Women in the Global South

For the past eight years, SAR has directed significant resources toward strategies for improving the lives of women and girls in the developing world. Between 2010 and 2017, with the support of former board member Vera Campbell and the Vera R. Campbell Foundation, SAR offered six Resident Scholar Fellowships to women whose work documents the experiences and problems of women in what social scientists increasingly refer to as the “Global South”—those nations now emerging from colonization and disproportionately located in the southern hemisphere.

The work of the first Campbell Resident Scholar, Moroccan anthropologist Jamila Bargach, garnered international attention because of her project’s originality. She developed and implemented a simple technology that harvests potable water from fogbanks and delivers it to Berber women and girls, who are traditionally assigned the task of fetching water from distant locations. Other Campbell-funded projects have aspired to enrich girls’ education in Ethiopia, reduce gender-violence in Ecuador, and improve medical treatment for women suffering from obstetric injuries in Nigeria. This year the program shifted its efforts to an Advanced Seminar. Ten women representing six countries met in SAR’s Schwartz Seminar House to address “Marital Rape in a Global Context.” In the words of the seminar’s organizers, “Collaborative international research on rape within marriage demonstrates that women in widely divergent cultural and social contexts experience forced sex in their marital and cohabiting relationships, with significant negative emotional and physical consequences.” The seminarians drew on a range of research methodologies to develop policies that aim to reduce gender violence.

Thanks to donor-funded initiatives like this one, SAR continues to interweave local and global perspectives in ways that maximize the practical impact of the social science research supported by SAR’s Scholar Programs division.

The most recent Advanced Seminar volumes from SAR Press focus on reimagining the relationships between the different subfields of anthropology. New Geospatial Approaches to the Anthropological Sciences and Puebloan Societies: Homology and Heterogeneity in Time and Space both attempt to break through the silos that have come to define—and sometimes limit—anthropological theory and methods.

“Anthropology’s strength,” writes Peter Whiteley, editor of Puebloan Societies, “lies in its unitary capacity to explain human social evolution and variation. . . . Accounting for patterns of similarity, difference, transformation, and continuity entails systematic comparison in time and space. . . . That requires the explanatory capacities of all anthropological subfields, each with its own analytical strengths.”

J. I. Staley Prize // continued from page 1

A powerful work of witnessing, The Land of Open Graves has profound relevance in an era of vast social displacement and global migration.

Since 1988 SAR has presented the J. I. Staley Prize to a living author for a book that exemplifies outstanding scholarship and writing in anthropology. Named for long-time SAR board member James Irven Staley Jr., who was a generous patron of cultural organizations in Santa Fe and in his hometown of Wichita Falls, Texas, the award recognizes innovative works that go beyond traditional frontiers of thought in anthropology and add new dimensions to our understanding of the human species. Any scholar may submit a nomination, and authors in any field are eligible to receive the prize if their work has had a significant impact on scholars and practitioners in the field of anthropology. Books may remain in contention for up to eight years after publication and are chosen each year by a new panel of scholars representing a wide range of expertise. “Soon after Eric Wolf received the first award in 1988 for Europe and the People Without History, the J. I. Staley Prize was recognized as one of the field’s most prestigious awards. Some even nicknamed it the ‘Pulitzer Prize’ of anthropology,” write Nancy Owen Lewis and Kay Leigh Hagan in A Peculiar Alchemy: A Centennial History of SAR, (1907–2007).

Anthropology and AI: Algorithms Need Humans Beth Semel, 2018–2019 Weatherhead Fellow

When most of us think about artificial intelligence (AI), we generally think (1) that the technologies are completely autonomous and can make connections on their own, with no human intervention, and (2) that using AI to do the work a human would typically do (such as assessing a person’s psychiatric state) paves the way for machines to replace humans in the workforce. Additionally, we struggle with AI’s ethically questionable role in scenarios like breaches of privacy or political corruption. These situations affect almost all of us, but what of the scientists and technologists who create AI? What issues do they face, and how do their biases influence the technology itself?

“Many of the choices that researchers make and subsequently build into their technologies happen at the very early stages, even before artificial intelligence comes into the mix specifically, when researchers gather and categorize the data that they will use to ‘train’ their algorithms,” says Beth Semel, the 2018–2019 SAR Weatherhead Fellow. “Algorithms are never fully autonomous.” She adds, “algorithms need humans.” Understanding the people behind the AI—particularly engineers and mental health researchers and practitioners—and encouraging technology users to think critically about the work that makes AI appear autonomous are the goals of Semel’s work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“So many of my informants are pursuing their research because they recognize the state of crisis that the US mental health care system is in and how inaccessible mental health care resources are to most people in the US,” Semel says. The difficulty is that engineers and psychiatrists have very different ways of defining mental illness. When they collaborate on research, they often have to be reductive in exchange for producing findings that make sense to their disciplines. Semel feels that her study is part of the solution: “Anthropology can help budding scientists and technologists think more expansively about their day-to-day work, consider the broader context within which they work, and question how (and demand that) things could be otherwise.”

AN ENGINEER LISTENS TO AN EXCERPT OF A RESEARCH SUBJECT’S CONVERSATIONS WITH A CLINICIAN.

A GROUP OF WOMEN IN RURAL NORTH KARNATAKA SHOW SOLIDARITY DURING A PROGRAM AIMED AT REDUCING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG SEX WORKERS.

P3 AUTUMN/WINTER 2018
A visit to the open-shelf storage vaults at SAR’s Indian Arts Research Center (IARC), which display nearly twelve thousand works of Native American art dating from the sixth century to the present, has been described as “life-changing” by visitors and artist fellows. Soon, the contents of these vaults, their impacts on scholarship, and links to their communities of origin will be available to anyone with Internet access.

This spring, the IARC will launch eMuseum, which will initially comprise approximately five hundred records, including photographs and catalog data from some of the collection’s most significant works from the pueblos of Zuni and Acoma. The number of available records will continue to grow over time. While many institutions have made collections accessible online, the IARC is a leader in a community-based approach. The information for all items included in the launch represents over a decade of collaboration between the IARC and members of Zuni Pueblo and the current work with representatives from Acoma.

Brian Vallo, director of the IARC, explains, “The intent of eMuseum is to offer expanded access to the IARC collections while educating the user about the thoughtful, mutually rewarding, collaborative work we’ve done to enhance collections documentation. This work will continue to improve research and has strengthened our relationships with tribal communities represented in our collection, as well as other Native Americans.”

In 2009 IARC staff and representatives from Zuni initiated what would become a seven-year process of evaluating collections identified as Zuni, as well as all associated documentation. Working together to examine the collection, they formalized a way to “correct the record.” Their initial work resulted in a process through which staff can recognize and privilege cultural knowledge in the documentation and care of the collection.

Since the inception of these collections reviews, the IARC has included additional tribal groups and initiated the development of guidelines for communities who wish to access collections and for museums seeking partnerships with Native American tribes. The Guidelines for Collaboration (www.sarweb.org/guidelinesforcollaboration) offer critical considerations, best practices, and case studies for collaborative work. The work is garnering national attention and has already been adopted by universities, museums, tribal communities, and organizations in the private sector. Trainings around the use of the guidelines have led to new partnerships for the IARC, including joint work with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the UCLA/Getty Program in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation in Los Angeles, and the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

A recent session with representatives from Acoma Pueblo illustrates the importance of the reviews and their relationship to online-collection access. A wooden item cataloged since 1961 as a shovel was revealed to be a bread paddle used for baking. While humorous as an example, such a basic misidentification could easily result in an inaccurate record that might appear in publications, leading to the broad dissemination of misinformation. The IARC is dedicated to accurate data collection and appropriate representation, both of which are crucial in preparing materials for online access and bringing them within reach of a global audience.

Through eMuseum, the IARC looks forward to providing Native American communities, artists, and other researchers a way to access the institution’s collections and associated documentation in support of educational, intergenerational, and community-based projects in the fields of anthropology, art, art history, historic and cultural preservation, and Native American studies. With this new tool, SAR and the IARC will become host to one of the finest online resources for Southwest Native American art collections in the country.