

Winter 2023



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UO Students Experience Black History and Culture in US Capital

BY ED DORSCH, BA '94 (ENGLISH, SOCIOLOGY), MA '99 (JOURNALISM) • FEBRUARY 23, 2023 • FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Fourteen visit Washington, DC as part of a trip sponsored by the UO Lyllie Reynolds-Parker Black Cultural Center

After a transformative trip, the smallest memory can sometimes leave the biggest impression. For University of Oregon senior Tamia Joseph, it's an unremarkable (but devastating) image of an engagement ring that stands out from their recent trip to Washington, DC.

When Breonna Taylor was killed in her Kentucky home in 2020, the twenty-six-year-old medical worker was not engaged. But her boyfriend had a ring and was planning to propose. Amy Sherald—the artist who painted the official portrait of Michelle Obama—added the ring to her [portrait of Taylor](#).



Sherald's iconic painting is part of a new exhibit at the [Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) titled "Reckoning: Protest. Defiance. Resilience." Fourteen UO students visited the museum in January during a trip to Washington, DC, sponsored by the UO [Lyllie Reynolds-Parker Black Cultural Center](#).

"The painting was very simple, but details like the ring really stood out," says Joseph, a sociology major and cadet in the UO Army ROTC program who plans to study urban planning and development in graduate school, then work on behalf of communities struggling with housing security and gentrification.

"A wave of emotion hit me. I think sometimes we turn these people into icons and heroes. They become statues, rather than the humans they were. A lot of things changed because of Taylor's death, but it shouldn't have happened. She had a lot more life to live."

During the five-day experience, the students also volunteered for a youth organization called the [Hustlers Guild](#) and visited UO alumni, the [Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art](#), Howard University, and the National Mall.

“The Black Educultural Connection was an opportunity for Black students at the University of Oregon to explore their own Black identities in a place where they were not the minority. We hope to continue this initiative each year in different US cities where there is rich, nuanced Black culture and history. The LRP BCC wants to celebrate, enrich, and educate Black students while also building a community for them, both in and out of the classroom.”

—Aris Hall
Coordinator, Lyllie Reynolds-Parker Black Cultural Center



The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, covers six hundred years of African American history. The students began their visit with a trip in a huge glass elevator, descending seventy feet underground to the [“Slavery and Freedom” exhibit](#)—a journey that begins in fifteenth-century Africa and Europe and progresses through time as visitors progress upward.

Through sights and sounds, the students travelled through the founding of the United States, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. The museum also highlights segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, and more-recent history—as well as modern, changing exhibits.

“I think sometimes we turn these people into icons and heroes. They become statues, rather than the humans they were. A lot of things changed because of Taylor’s death, but it shouldn’t have happened. She had a lot more life to live.”

—Tamia Joseph
Sociology, Army ROTC



“We learned how Black families were organized on plantations,” recalls Skyler Davis, a global studies major who helped organize the trip as the center’s graduate student employee. “As soon as families formed, they were split up—because families were considered dangerous to slaveholders and threatened their ability to control people. That was interesting to me, given the state of families in Black America today.”

After completing her master’s degree, Davis plans to pursue a career in social and community impact, working with outdoor and athletic brands. She hopes to shed light on the experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) individuals in the outdoors.

“The museum—and the entire trip—gave us something you can’t find in a textbook,” Davis says. “Traveling is one of life’s best teachers, and the experiences hit all five senses. It’s important to give Black students opportunities to learn more about, and experience, their culture. They got to interact with different cultures, eat new foods, navigate unfamiliar spaces, and go beyond their comfort zones.”

Another benefit of the trip, adds Davis, was building community among the participants. The students bonded, despite differences in majors, ages, and backgrounds.



“The museum—and the entire trip—gave us something you can’t find in a textbook. Traveling is one of life’s best teachers, and the experiences hit all five senses.”

—Skyler Davis
Global Studies

Most of the people on the trip were older than undergraduate Brooklyn Cicero, who is majoring in biology and psychology and hopes to become a counselor for marginalized youth.

“It was just me and one other first-year student,” Cicero says. “But we all had one common thing: we’re all part Black. By the end of the trip, I’d become really close friends with all of them. We’ve gotten together for a game night since returning to Eugene. Now that we’re back on campus, I feel more comfortable getting involved with the Black Cultural Center and joining activities—and also just more comfortable being myself at a predominantly White institution.

“Visiting Howard University was really fun,” Cicero adds. “We saw the fine arts department, which is named for Chadwick Boseman, one of their alumni. And there’s a museum of African art. It was very new to see a university that’s predominantly Black. I didn’t know much about Black fraternities and sororities, but it was Founders’ Weekend for the Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha sororities. Everyone was dressed up, and there were flags everywhere.”

Five of the “Divine Nine” historically Black sororities and fraternities were founded at Howard University. The main quad on campus—known as the Yard—is the nexus of student life, as well as hallowed ground for these national organizations.

“We just stood in the Yard while everybody was going to class,” recalls Meraf Tenaw, a graduate student in the College of Education. “We said, ‘Wow, over here we feel like we belong!’”

Tenaw, who aspires to become a school superintendent, also relished the opportunity to meet UO alum Cory Mainor, BA ’05 (English), MEd ’09 (teaching and learning), an assistant principal at Arlington Public Schools in Virginia and one of four alumni who joined the students for dinner and conversation.

“That was a cool experience,” recalls Tenaw. “He was very inspirational, because he’s doing the things I want to do. He talked about how he connected with people through the Black Student Union when he was a UO student.”

Mainor also found community through the UO’s Multicultural Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, Inc., and connections with other members of the Divine Nine Black Greek Letter Organizations.

“They built a community for themselves and made lifetime friendships,” Tenaw says. “That was good to hear, because I feel like I’m on the same path as him.”

On January 16, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the students visited the [National Mall](#), the site of the [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#) and King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, both on August 28, 1963.

“I was standing there looking at the [Lincoln Memorial](#) and imagining how he made this speech that changed the world,” Tenaw recalls. “We recite this speech to this day. It makes me feel like I can complete my dream, too. It was a very inspirational place to see.”

“I was standing there looking at the Lincoln Memorial and imagining how [Martin Luther King Jr.] made this speech that changed the world. We recite this speech to this day. It makes me feel like I can complete my dream, too.”

—Meraf Tenaw
College of Education



Snapshots from January, 2023



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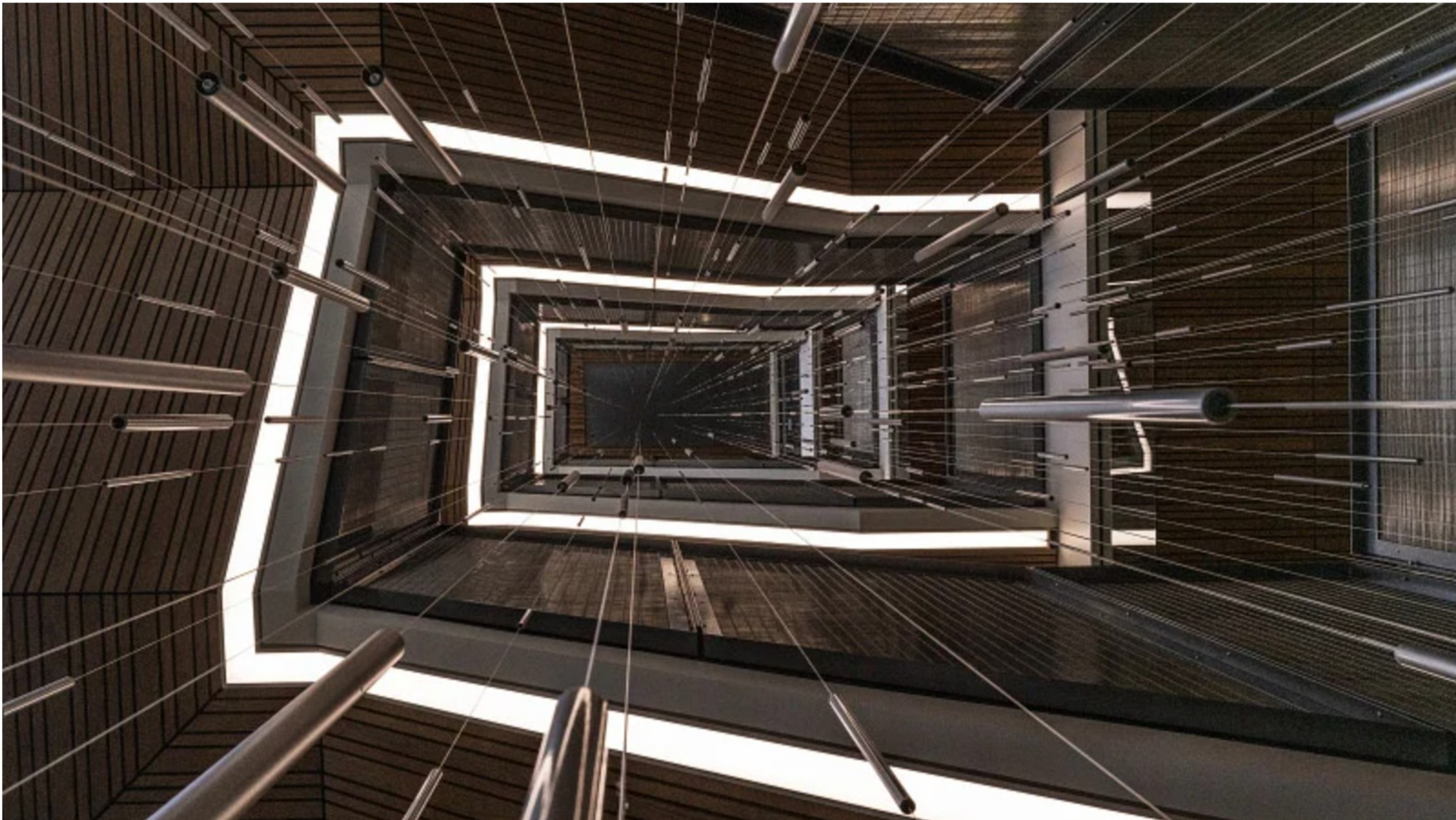
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Spiraling Into the Matrix—Merit Award, 2022 AIA National Competition

WINTER 2023

Eye-Catching Photos Attest to Alum’s Camera Skills

Prize-winning photography became a second calling for Michael Wilkes, a College of Design alumnus and devoted Duck

By Ed Dorsch · Photos by Michael Wilkes · January 18, 2023

5 min read



Michael Wilkes, BArch ’71, started fresh out of college as an architect at the San Diego firm that would later become Delawie/Bretton/Wilkes Associates. That’s also where he started to learn photography.

As the newest employee, Wilkes assisted photographers shooting buildings designed by the company. The firm wanted an architect to make sure photos were composed well, but Wilkes also helped lug the gear, including film, lights, and heavy Hasselblad cameras. It was challenging, says Wilkes, but he got to work with superlative photographers.

“They would tell me what they were doing and why,” he says. “I quickly learned that perspectives—especially those that are exaggerated—could tell a story.”

Wilkes became a principal architect in 1980 and his name was added to the firm (today called Delawie). Under his leadership, it grew from thirty-five to more than seventy architects and other professionals. The emergence of digital cameras spurred Wilkes to pursue photography more seriously, and he continued after retiring in 2012.

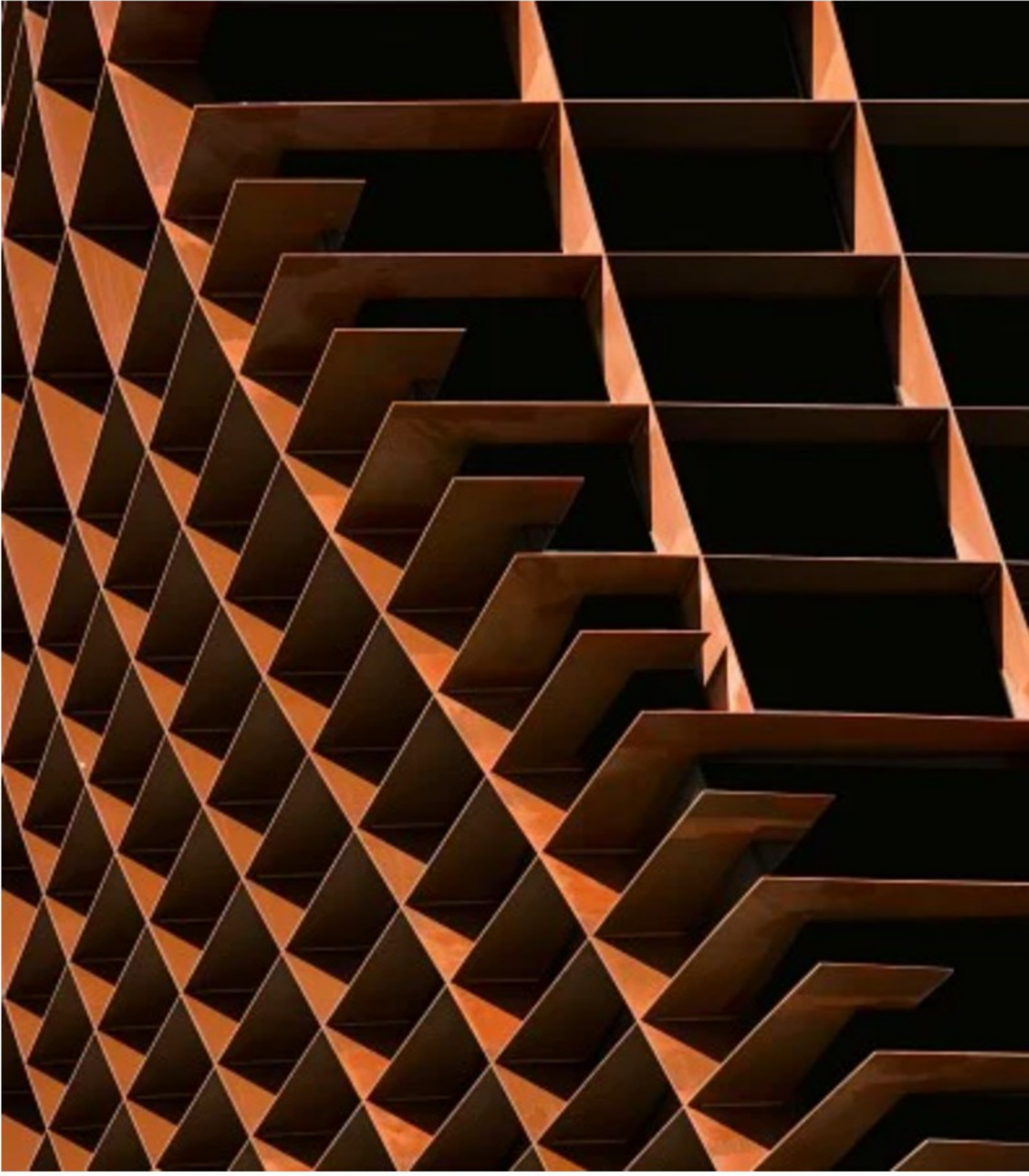
In 2008, Wilkes received his first award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) national competition, the premier fine art photography contest for architects. He received six awards in the 2022 competition.



Michael Wilkes (photo: Dustin Whitaker, University Communications)

Orange Twist—Second Place Honor Award, 2022 AIA National Competition

This rusting steel building is part of Culver City’s Hayden Tract, a redevelopment project that transformed a Los Angeles industrial area into an architectural experiment. “Imagine a rectangle with the texture of an egg crate on the outside,” says Wilkes. “Then you twist it. That’s this building.” In this photograph, Wilkes emphasizes the overlaying patterns and textures. He discovered the structure while participating in a photo-finding excursion with two colleagues. They call these outings photo safaris, or “photo-faris.”

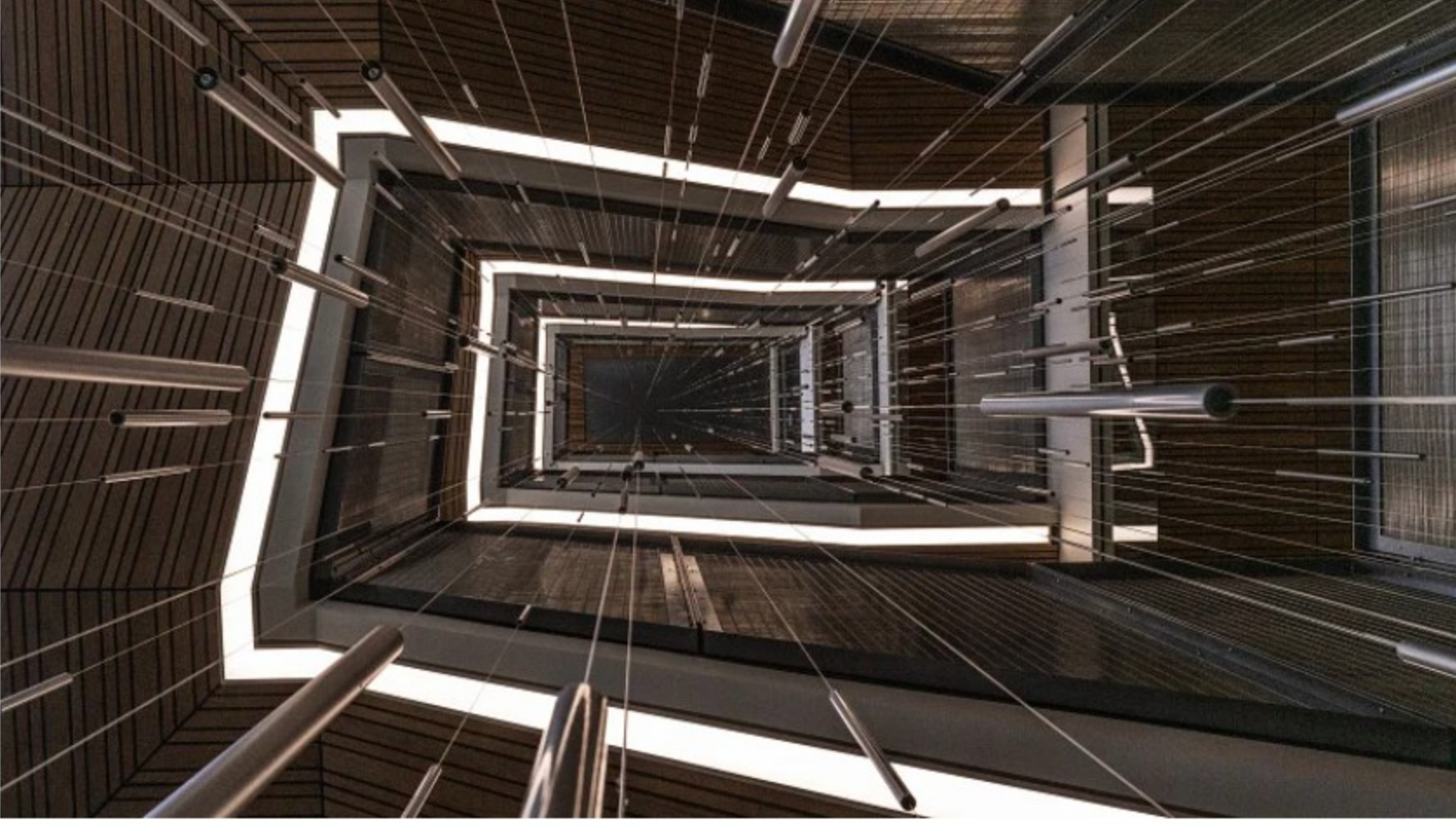


Halprin’s Maze—Fuller Award, 2022 AIA National Competition

This image of Vaillancourt Fountain in San Francisco’s Embarcadero Plaza captures the well-known landmark in a rare state—without water. Wilkes named his photograph after Lawrence Halprin, the landscape architect who helped plan the plaza in the 1960s. “It’s a modernist fountain, a sculptural piece,” says Wilkes. “I had photographed it previously, but that turned out to be a postcard photo and I didn’t think too much about it. On this day, it was shut down for renovation so I could shoot from an angle that’s not normally accessible. You could wander through it. It was like a three-dimensional maze.”

Spiraling Into the Matrix—Merit Award, 2022 AIA National Competition

Wilkes was part of the design review committee for Willie and Donald Tykeson Hall, home of the UO’s College of Arts and Sciences, which opened in 2019. “Reflectance Field,” an art installation by Narduli Studios, located in the building’s Herzog Staircase, inspired Wilkes to try shots from the bottom, as well as the top. He took this image holding the camera out, without looking through the viewfinder. The name is based on the *Matrix* film franchise because it reminded him of the characters falling into a different world.

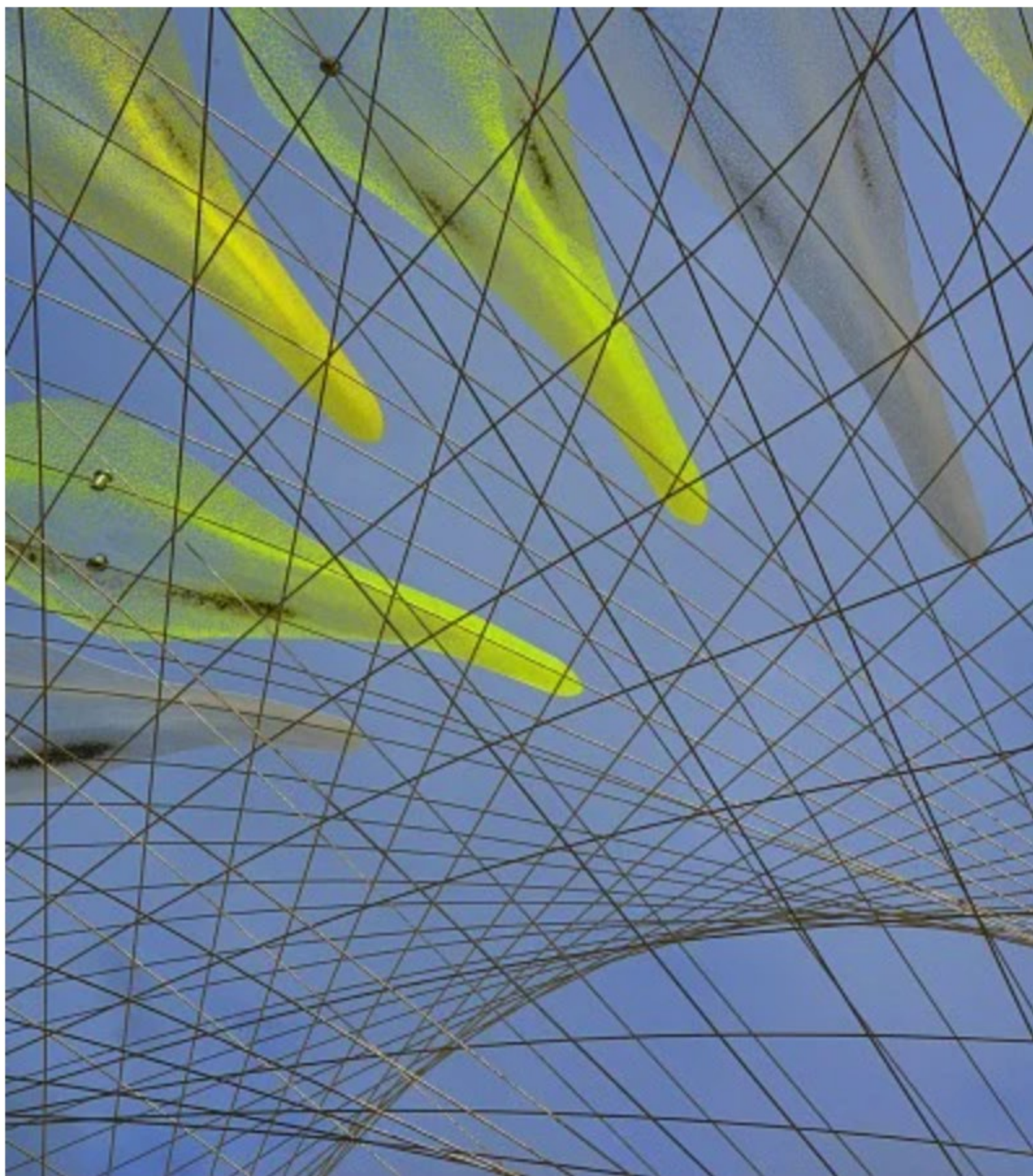


Not Mellow Yellow—Fuller Award, 2006 AIA National Competition

Wilkes was visiting Seattle for a Ducks football game when he discovered this construction site. The yellow tubes are vertical air ducts for an underground tunnel. The picture is almost void of detail, he says, which makes the small details—like the joints in the tubes and the metal frame—pop. “I was about six blocks away when I saw it,” Wilkes says. “Often when you’re exploring and you have a target you’re heading for, you discover a better angle along the way. There was a fence around the construction site, but I found my peekaboo spot and got the photo.”

Reflection—2006 publication, AIA

This image from the Baths of Doña María de Padilla in the Royal Alcazar Palace of Sevilla, Spain, is Wilke’s favorite among these photos for OQ. It required a lot of patience. Every time a school tour passed, children touched the water, creating ripples. He waited hours for a smooth reflection. “I didn’t have a tripod and it was dark,” Wilkes recalls. “I had to use a slow exposure, so I just put the camera on the wall and took different shots. Finally the water settled.”



Seven Ducks in a Spider Web—2016 Juror’s Commendation, AIA

Wilkes spotted this sculpture outside a hotel in San Jose while attending the 2014 Pac-12 Championship, when the Ducks defeated Arizona. “I don’t think many people pay attention to it,” Wilkes says. “They’re catching the bus or light rail, going to the hotel, or heading to a meeting. But if you look, you see photo subjects. Sometimes, I see something and I have a feeling. I think maybe if I shoot it this way, or during a certain time of day, there’s the possibility for an interesting photograph.”

Michael Wilkes has served as president of the American Institute of Architects, San Diego chapter, as an officer of the AIA California Council, and as a member of national committees and task forces. He was a trustee for the UO Foundation from 2008 to 2016 and was a co-coordinator of the fiftieth anniversary for his class; he has been a member of the College of Design Dean’s Advisory Council since 2006. Penny and Michael Wilkes, who live in La Jolla, California, have given generously to the university, supporting scholarships for architecture, nature writing, and theater students.

Ed Dorsch, BA ’94 (English, sociology), MA ’99 (journalism), is a staff writer for University Communications.

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Damien Geter is known for infusing his works with musical styles of the Black diaspora



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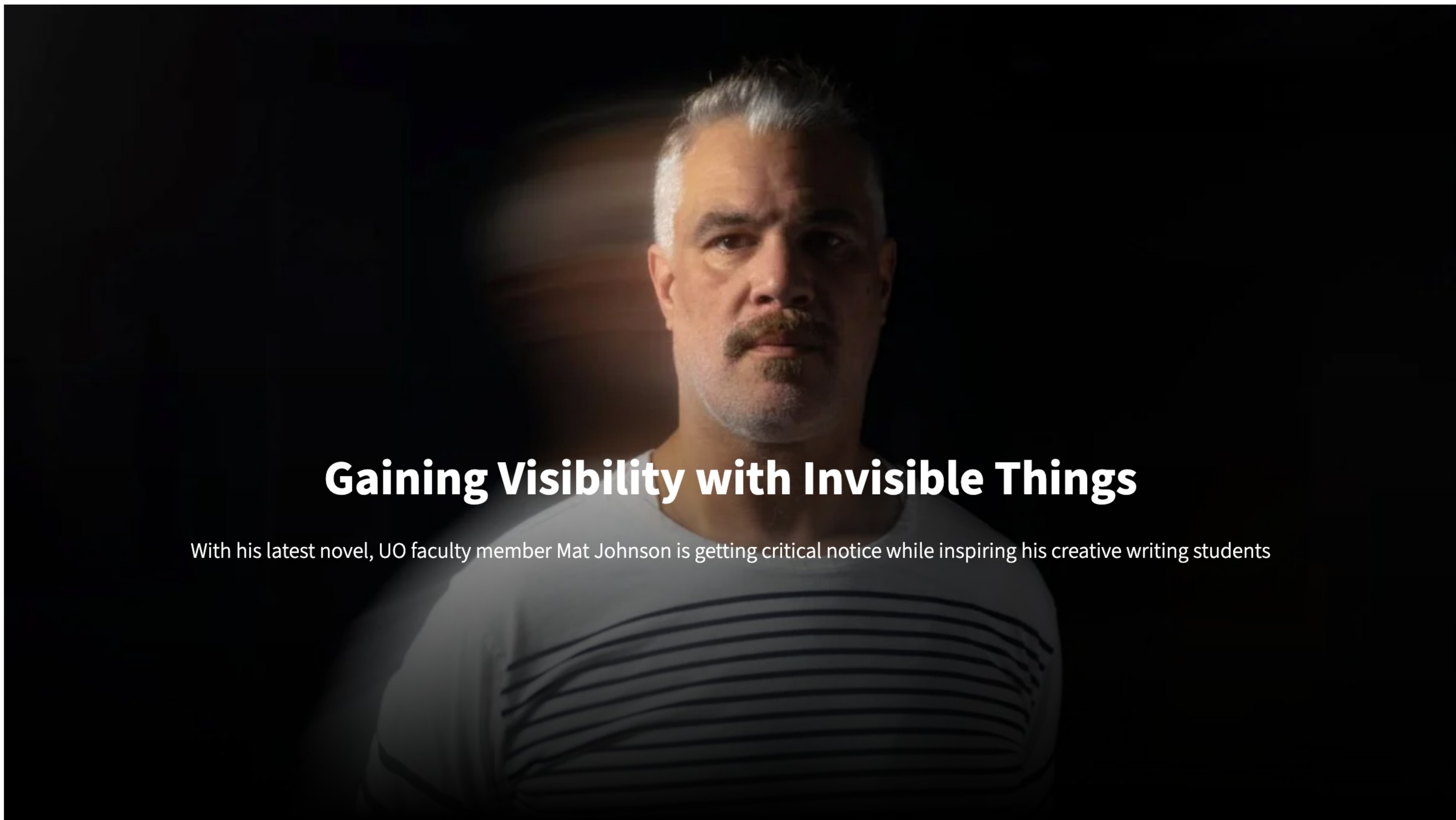
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Gaining Visibility with Invisible Things

With his latest novel, UO faculty member Mat Johnson is getting critical notice while inspiring his creative writing students

WINTER 2023

By Anna Glavash Miller • Photos by Dustin Whitaker • December 12, 2022

5 min read



Turns out that even in space, politics feel just like they do at home.

Partisan tribes living on a moon of Jupiter shout at one another in the sci-fi world of *Invisible Things*, the new novel by Mat Johnson, an author, screenwriter, and Philip H. Knight Chair at the University of Oregon.

The bubble city of New Roanoke functions like any American city, protagonist Nalini Jackson explains, “with a largely bifurcated political culture.”

New Roanoke is dominated by the Founders Party and the Party of the People. But Jackson, a sociologist, realizes the two-party system is a fallacy—she’s observed nuanced political subgroups: the miserable Malcontents, the “don’t care” Floater majority, and the privileged, upper-class Beneficiaries, for example. Power belongs to whoever can control the narrative about the city’s origin.

But how far will they go to push their agenda? How far will Americans go?

“I go into a book with a question, and if I’m lucky I get closer to the answer by the end,” says Johnson, whose literary talents are gaining visibility and supporting his work as an educator. *Loving Day* (2015) graced the cover of the *New York Times Book Review* and 2022’s *Invisible Things*, his fifth novel, won praise from the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *NPR’s Fresh Air*, where he’s become a regular contributor. Johnson is a recipient of an American Book Award and the United States Artist James Baldwin Fellowship. When he’s not on campus, Johnson’s *at work on scripts* for Apple TV+ and Netflix, among other producers.

Johnson wrote *Invisible Things* partly in 2020 and 2021, as Americans fought over the facts of a global pandemic, human-caused climate change, the integrity of the voting system, and the nation’s legacy of slavery. Some accepted widely held truths; others doubled down on denialism.

Johnson asks: what will wake people from their partisan trance and accept the existential crisis facing many Americans—and especially Black Americans such as him?

How about invisible forces crushing skulls?

Johnson orients the allegorical *Invisible Things* around deadly, unseen, all-powerful aliens as surrogates for the inconvenient truths that underpin our society and influence our lives. If we try to deny they exist, they might just kill us. In fiction as in real life, whether we choose to acknowledge these truths places us with a group, a tribe. Facts wax political.



Invisible Things is oriented around deadly all-powerful aliens as surrogates for the inconvenient truths that underpin our society (credit: Shalom Yemane-Berhane, art and technology major, class of 2023)

From Columbia University, with a Style Tailor-made for Twitter

Born in Philadelphia in the early '70s to a White father and a Black mother, Johnson says mixed-race identity wasn't an established concept. Though he saw his father regularly, he mostly grew up with his mother in a Black neighborhood. Light-skinned, Johnson looks White, but because he was raised culturally African American, he says, the White world was largely inaccessible to him.

Books, however, were.

"I had a lot of time alone, and I got really into story," Johnson says. "I was not a strong reader early, so my mother got me to finally learn to read and keep it going by buying me comic books."

Comics were his first literary love, eventually leading to paperbacks. Johnson earned a bachelor's in English at Earlham College and a master's in creative writing at Columbia University. Needing cash, he started teaching soon after, first at Columbia, then Bard College. He taught creative writing at the University of Houston from 2007 to 2018, then joined the English and creative writing departments in the UO College of Arts and Sciences.

Johnson was surprised to find himself a professional writer. "I didn't decide I really wanted to write," he says, "until I realized I just didn't want to do anything else nearly as much."

For people of color, getting recognition as a writer used to be about satisfying a specific taste at the publishing house, Johnson says—and there wasn't a huge appetite. "I didn't fit into the mold of what a Black writer would be; I didn't look particularly Black," Johnson says, "so I was not going to be that one."

At first, attention came not from the literati, but from social media.

"The style of writing I was doing—satirical, quick, funny—translated really well to Twitter," he says. With more than [80,000 followers](#), Johnson used Twitter to circumvent the literary gatekeepers who dictate what is promoted to critics.

The Twitter reaction ultimately helped Johnson embrace his voice.

"One of the things I try to emphasize with my mentees is that you don't get to be the writer you want to be; that your success is based on how well you become the writer that you are," Johnson says. "It was a big moment for me to accept that, to accept I'm not Toni Morrison."

More about Mat Johnson

[Mat Johnson, Philip H. Knight Chair, College of Arts and Sciences](#)

[UO names writing professor Mat Johnson its newest Knight Chair](#)

[Creative Writing Program](#)

[Invisible Things, Penguin Random House, 2022](#)



Inspiration in the Creative Writing Program

A. J. Rodriguez, a mentee who graduated last spring with an MFA in creative writing, says Johnson's ability to help writers hone their voice was invaluable to him, especially as a Chicano writer who wanted to tell his community's stories.

"Mat understands that each writer has a different heart beating within their work," Rodriguez says. "So rather than fashion his students' art along some uniform standard of craft, he allows it to come to life by helping the writer tap into its emotional pulse."

“*You don’t get to be the writer you want to be; your success is based on how well you become the writer that you are.*”

Jen Li, another 2022 MFA graduate, calls Johnson “brilliant” and says as a writer of color, she’s fortunate to have worked with him.

“He encouraged me not to give up—to keep writing because these are the stories that are important to me,” Li says, “which means that they are important to the world as well.”

Showrunner for Showtime

Along with teaching creative writing to undergrads and graduate students, Johnson is also a faculty member in the first-of-its-kind Comics and Cartoon Studies program (he’s published five graphic novels).

Johnson’s chops as a visual storyteller and budding screenwriter have deepened his teaching. After *Loving Day* was optioned for a series by Showtime, Johnson learned to be a showrunner, a role that made him the story director. The project was discontinued but the experience taught him he enjoyed the work of leading a writers’ circle. Now regularly working in Hollywood, he’s developing several scripts for series.

Johnson believes screenwriting keeps him relevant for students today.

“Research institutions like the UO want people who are actually doing things in the field in a big way,” Johnson says. “So it’s not like I have a side job. I’m doing something else that makes me more attractive to the students who are here and to grad students who are going to be applying.”

Anna Glavash Miller, MS '18 (journalism), is a public information representative in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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Composer Reimagines a Classic for Bach Fest Project

Damien Geter is known for infusing his works with musical styles of the Black diaspora



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Video: Pianist Keith Brown fuels the dreams of students in UO's thriving jazz studies program



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Literary Sisters: Two Years That Changed Our Culture

English professor’s new book captures pivotal moment for Black feminist writing

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Daisy-O’lice Williams and Digital Collage Inspire Architecture Ideas

Associate professor specializes in architectural visualization and the role of digital collage in the student design process

By Matt Cooper • Photo by Dustin Whitaker • Illustration by David Gill • January 4, 2023

3 min read



In Greek mythology, the chimera is a fire-breathing hybrid creature—part lion, part goat, part snake. This three-headed monster embodies a concept: disparate parts can create a uniform whole.

Chimera is the name that Chicago architect Marshall Brown gave to his 2016 exhibit of photomontages, each showcasing his creation of intricate worlds from samples of published photos of buildings. The project inspired Daisy-O’lice Williams, an associate professor in the School of Architecture & Environment, who has reimagined Brown’s art as an assignment for her architecture students.

Williams specializes in architectural visualization and explores the role of digital collage in the student design process.

Collage is invaluable, according to Williams, because it forces students to think creatively. “When designers are saying, ‘What should this building be like?’ that’s a cognitive process—they’re working through ideas, gaining clarity,” she says. “Collage allows for that thought process of development. It’s the thinking that allows you to push a design forward.”

She teaches a digital collage course that features an exercise based on that three-headed monster from myth. Using image-editing software, students stitch together fragmentary pictures of buildings, places, and patterns to create “architectural chimeras.” The students’ products can be striking: images of trees, a ladder, duct work, a shopping mall, and a mosque come together [in a fanciful ideogram](#); a dam removal site [transforms into a wandering waterway](#) lined by onlookers seemingly lost in thought.

“The goal,” Williams says, “is to generate something new from what is existing, both graphically and intellectually.”

Power and perseverance

Working with architecture professor Azizi J. Arrington-Slocum of Indiana State University, Williams is writing a book on African American women in architecture. In interviews, the academics have heard powerful stories of perseverance: a midcareer architect determined to provide the mentorship she never received; a firm owner who for years endured being made to feel “invisible” during meetings; a retired educator moved by her former students’ ascendance into positions as presidents and project managers at firms.

The interviews were, at times, extremely personal and emotional. “There was a release that was occurring,” Williams says. “It was cathartic. While we were asking questions from an academic basis, they felt validated, recognized. There was a lot of trust that was given to us.”

Honoring Paul Revere Williams

Williams oversees a data visualization project on Paul Revere Williams (1894–1980), an African American and one of America’s most prolific architects. Paul Revere Williams was deemed “Architect to the Stars” for his work with Hollywood A-listers—he built a bachelor pad for Frank Sinatra—but the title obscured Williams’ importance as a leader, community figure, strategist, and businessman. In 1923, he became the first Black architect to join the American Institute of Architects and in 1957, the first Black member inducted into the institute’s College of Fellows.

Williams undertook an estimated three thousand-plus projects. The [PRW Career Mapper](#) designed by Daisy-O’lice Williams consists of an interactive timeline and a corresponding map that displays the geographical distribution of the architect’s projects.



Meet Pixel the Pembroke Welsh Corgi

When Williams has down time, she spends it with her ten-month-old Pembroke Welsh Corgi. Given Williams’ fascination with digital collage and computer-screen images, the dog’s name should come as no surprise: Pixel.

“My husband is ‘one of those Corgi people,’” Williams says, laughing. “I married into it and have become one as well.”

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*. Photo illustration by David Gill; Daisy-O'lice Williams portrait by Dustin Whitaker, University Communications.

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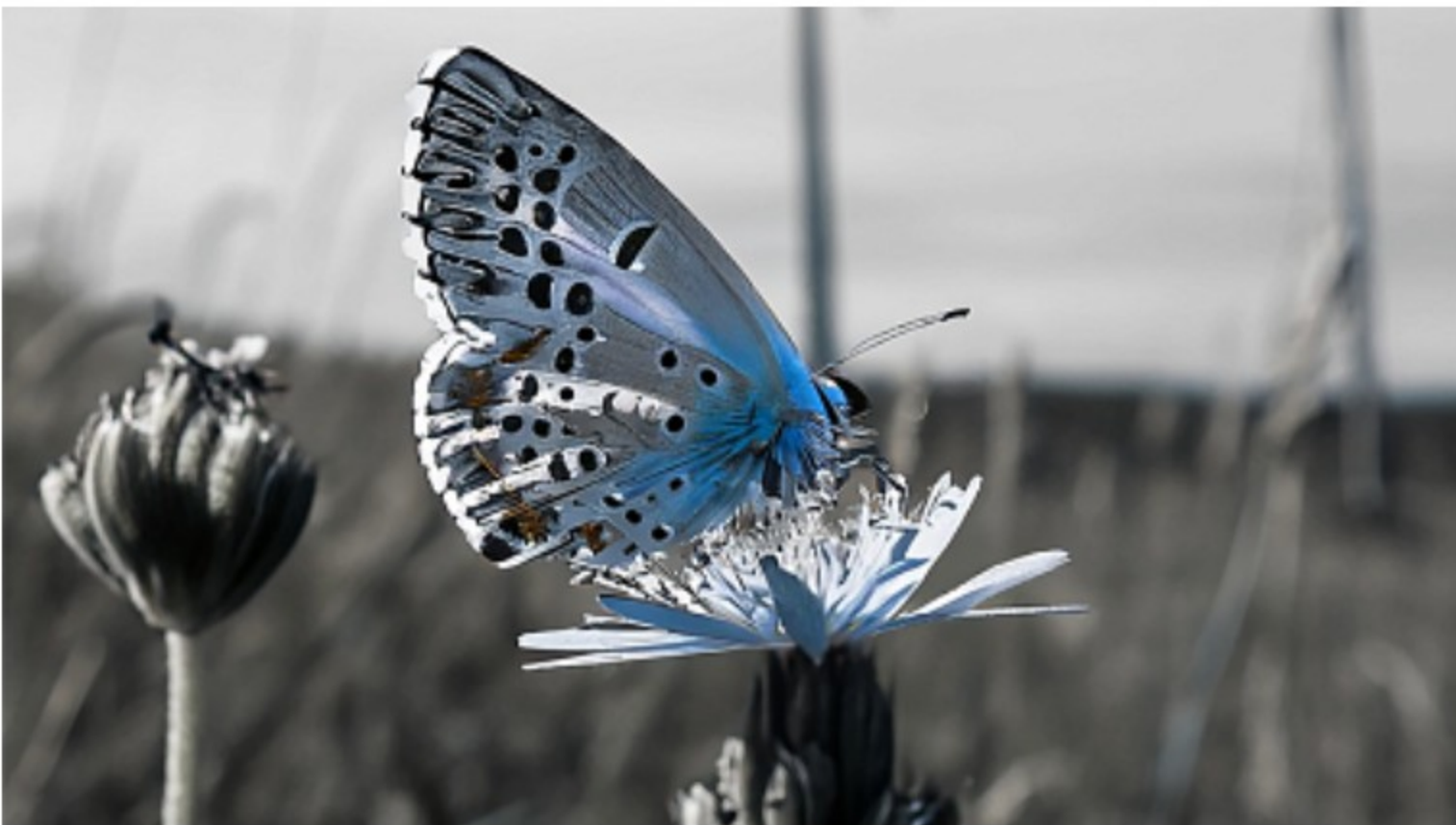
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The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

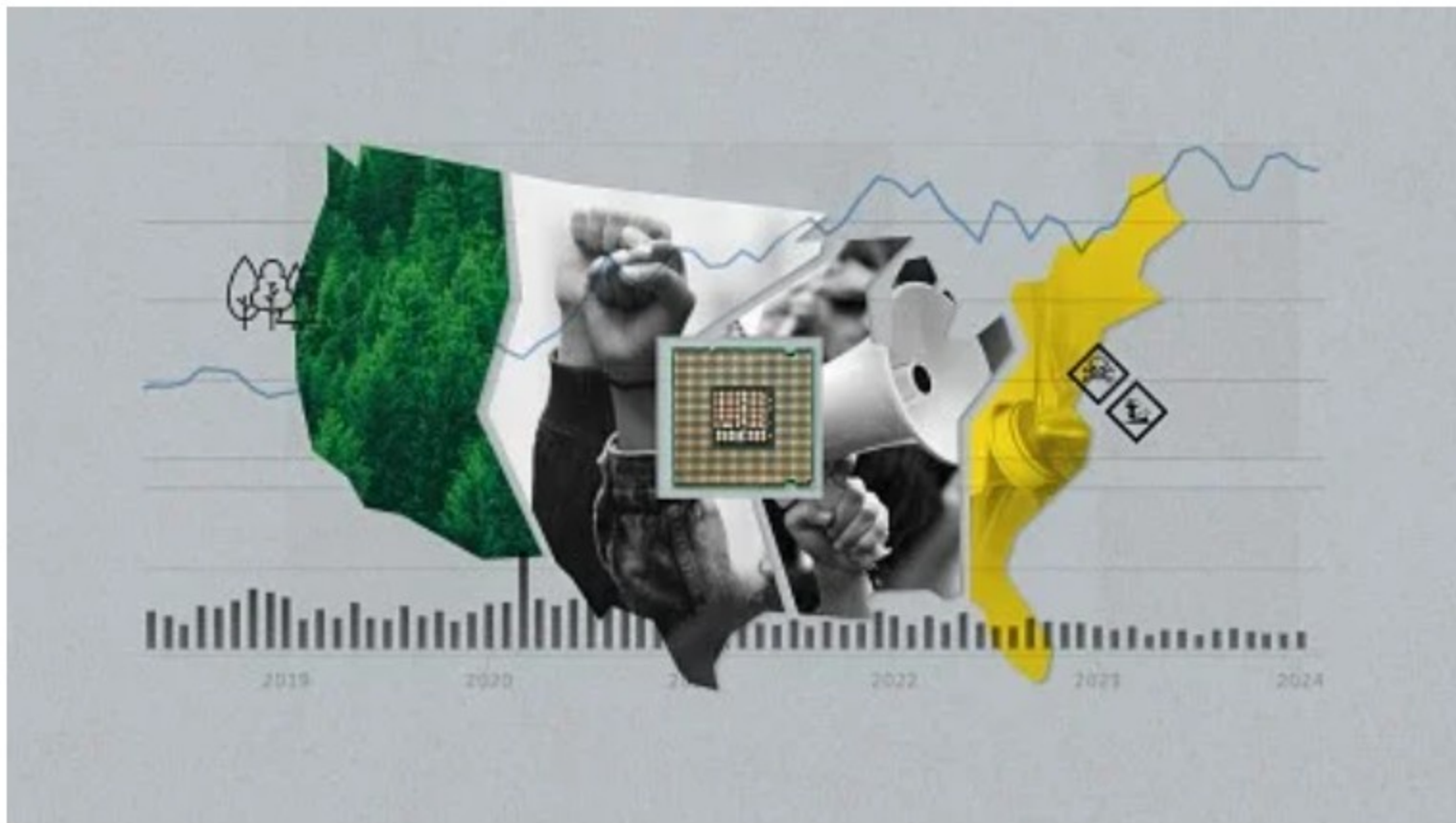
Native species, thriving transplants, and majestic memorials contribute to the UO experience



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Spinning Stories of Climate Change and a Fragile Planet

Alum Ross West pens cli-fi collection with provocative questions but no easy answers



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The past holds lessons regarding workplace conditions, labor rights, and the environment

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Students in the invertebrate zoology course of the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology take field trips to places such as Cape Arago State Park to study tide pools

Letters to the Editor: Wildfire inaccuracies and marine biology kudos

Criticism of “inaccurate” feature on wildfire filmmaker and praise for the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology

Photo by Kelley Christensen • December 4, 2022

4 min read



Wildfire Story Missed the Mark

I am among the survivors of the Oregon Beachie Creek Fire (now named the Santiam Fire) in Gates, September 7, 2020. In “[An Elemental Approach to Wildfire](#)” (Autumn 2022), a glib accounting of the fatal devastation, *Oregon Quarterly* asserts inaccurate things.

The article quotes alumnus and wildfire filmmaker Trip Jennings, whose thinking about wildfire changed after a conversation with a scientist about prescribed burns: “So the solution has to come from the home out, and that’s what the science says.” What is the science? My completely burned home had attic screening, state-of-the-art window glass, new roof, hardscape all around, and was sheathed in HardiPlank siding, a concrete-based product that didn’t burn (just as advertised); it just crumbled.

The article asserts: “ . . . but the two percent of fires that can’t be controlled cause rampant damage and loss of life.” An apt definition of the conflagration that was Oregon’s wildfires, which firefighters are minuscule in defeating. Prescribed burns are exactly what should be implemented policy, thanks to the wisdom and heritage of our indigenous ancestors, but they are resisted by government. But even that would not have protected communities from the inferno these wildfires became in 2020.

In the pending class action lawsuit against PacifiCorp, parent company of Pacific Power, alleging negligence in not de-energizing downed power lines, this conflagration is described as an historic wind event, with extremely dry fuel. The result was unprecedented in intensity and destructiveness. The Santiam Wildfire was no ordinary wildfire or forest or house fire. Wildfires are so named because they are unpredictable, propelled by wind vagaries, reaching incredible temperatures, vaporizing glass, melting aluminum, twisting steel roofing, refrigerators, furnaces, wood-burning stoves into the earth. This describes my home after the fire.

The article quotes Jennings: “What we need to do is think about the values that are most important to us . . . and that’s homes, communities, and people.” Simplistic and naive and hardly a new idea or discussion. “We just have to have the will to do it.” This shows inexperience and a decided lack of research.

Besides all the misinformation, *Oregon Quarterly*, in publishing this article, missed the important opportunity to extend understanding, compassion, and a useful discussion about wildfires, the product of global warming.

Donna Preston Loveland, BA ’72 (psychology), MA ’73 (counseling)

Gates, Oregon

“Lucky and Forever Grateful”

I always look forward to receiving my *Oregon Quarterly* because it’s a reminder of how fortunate I was to have matriculated there. I grew up in Grants Pass in the forties and fifties. My mother had taught school briefly after graduating from college in North Dakota, but my father didn’t go beyond the eighth grade and was a house painter.

As an average kid without a scholarship, I worked summers pulling green chain in a lumber mill, set cable chokers behind caterpillar tractors taking logs to the landing, checked groceries, and stocked shelves at night for Safeway stores to earn money that covered my yearly tuition and fees. I graduated with a BS ’65 (general science), got a teaching certificate and then an MS ’71 from Arizona State University, and was the only child of six to get a college degree.

I lived in married student housing in the old Adair army barracks on Patterson Street when my youngest daughter was born, the same year I stepped from a class in geologic history to learn of President Kennedy’s assassination, and where I had witnessed the death of a friend the year before when part of the roof of Roosevelt Junior High School blew into our building during the Columbus Day storm in 1962. I live with these memories.

After a rewarding career teaching high school science classes I count myself both lucky and forever grateful for getting to spend my years at Oregon taking some amazing classes during a period when college tuition and fees at state schools made it possible for a poor kid to realize a dream and graduate from college with no debt.

Richard Thompson, BS ’65 (general science)

Prineville, Oregon

OIMB is World Class

My wife, Peggy, and I, along with fellow U of O alumni Alice Brooks and her husband, John, visited the [Oregon Institute of Marine Biology](#) August 30–31. The OIMB campus is truly an important asset to the university, the state, and the nation. We discovered there is an important heritage and legacy of the work done in Charleston, Oregon, for the field of marine life science and pioneering work in sea life research and discoveries in the reproduction cycle of microscopic marine life and their impact on higher life systems and the ecosystem. OIMB is indeed a legacy program, with all of the history and romance of the remote scientific research stations of the world, and it is truly world class. OIMB assets [include] the scientific discoveries, [instructional and research opportunities](#), a marine life museum/aquarium, and more.

Tom Hudson, BBA ’71 (marketing)

Springfield, Oregon

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4 ways to avoid polluting the social media ecosystem

March 22, 2023



Students in Whitney Phillips' J-397 Media Ethics class explore ethical problems in media such as privacy, violence, pornography, truth-telling, objectivity, media codes, public interest and media accountability. They learn about the complexities of making a moral decision and gain greater insight into the workings of the mass media. All photos by Jeremy Parker.

Every day we are faced with choices about what to share on social media and how to share it. Bad sharing choices have all kinds of wide-reaching effects on our politics, our relationships and our mental health. Given these stakes, what can we do to share better?

The first step is to take an ecological approach and consider connections between our technologies, our social groups and ourselves. The concept of information pollution is central to this effort and can be broken down into two types:

- “Polluted” information is information that is in itself toxic. It can take the form of “classic” political disinformation, but it also includes images that are Photoshopped to mislead audiences or memes that spread false rumors.
- “Polluting” information is a broader category that makes us feel gross, because it’s stressful, there’s too much of it or it’s simply mean. Polluting information might be true; what makes it polluting is the impact it has on audiences.

A polluted information ecosystem frame asks us to reflect on what we’re putting into our networks and, in the process, allows us to think differently about the question, “To share or not to share?”

When people reflect on this choice, their decision often hinges on whether the information in question is true. We should definitely equip social media users with the skills to distinguish true and false information. What the concept of information pollution helps us understand is that truth alone does not guarantee positive sharing outcomes.

The following tips are meant to encourage social media users to reflect on the kind of information they’re sharing — and how to avoid spreading pollution.

Tip #1: Be aware of the relationship between well-being and social media sharing.

This insight comes from social psychology research on the effects of stress and overwhelm, including in the context of social media. The more stressed out, overworked or overwhelmed we become, the worse our online sharing tends to be. This is because stress and overwhelm make it more difficult to maintain perspective and assess “downstream consequences,” a key element of ecological thinking. Practicing mindfulness and self-care is therefore a powerful way to improve our sharing practices.

Tip #2: Understand network dynamics.



Whitney Phillips, assistant professor of media studies for the School of Journalism and Communication, is the co-author of “Share Better and Stress Less: A Guide to Thinking Ecologically about Social Media.” The book offers strategies and tips to help people avoid causing accidental harm online, drawing on ecological, social justice and storytelling frameworks to explain how and why information pollution spreads across social media.

It’s helpful to examine the tools, economic influences and assumptions that shape what we know online and, just as important, what we don’t know. When we better understand these dynamics, we can assess our sharing options with more perspective. For example, social media users might assume that making jokes about an unfolding controversy is harmless. But when they reflect on how quickly jokes can travel online and the unintended audiences that could see their posts, they might decide it’s better to keep the jokes to themselves.



Media ethics is an important topic in journalism, and Whitney Phillips, assistant professor of media studies, works to familiarize students with the tools needed to make moral decisions and better understand the ethical dilemmas facing mass media today.

when we forget that the content creators we encounter online are people with feelings, it is very easy to step on toes without realizing it — or forget that there are toes to watch out for in the first place.

Ultimately, each of these tips asks us to explore how we are connected through our networks. That is the multidimensional perspective we need to fully assess the question, “To share or not to share?”

—By Whitney Phillips, Assistant Professor of Media Studies, School of Journalism and Communication

Whitney Phillips is an assistant professor in the UO School of Journalism of Communication and the author of four books about internet culture and politics. “[Share Better and Stress Less: A Guide to Thinking Ecologically about Social Media](#)” is her most recent book. She and her co-author, Ryan Milner, wrote it with middle-grade readers in mind, but the underlying ethical concerns apply across age groups.

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