A Walk in the Park: deCordova in Lincoln

by Jack Curley and Phil Radoff

(This is another in a series of occasional pieces describing area walks of potential interest to BOLLI members. The deCordova is spelled with a small “d.”)

Looking for a bit of exercise in beautiful surroundings to get the juices flowing on a lazy afternoon? You could do worse than to pay a visit to the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, just eight miles from the Brandeis campus in nearby Lincoln. The modest admission fee ($12 for seniors, with discounted passes available from area libraries) entitles you to park, stroll through the magnificent 30-acre sculpture park with stunning views of Flint Pond, and visit the museum.

DeCordova is home to an eclectic collection of works comprising contemporary painting and 20th century photography. But it is the sculpture park, New England’s largest with more than 50 large-scale pieces, for which deCordova is probably best known. Most of the items in the park have been loaned by their creators, often for indefinite periods. Other works on display are a rotating selection of pieces from deCordova’s permanent collection.

According to Jennifer Schmitt, the museum’s head of technology and digital engagement, decisions regarding pieces to be displayed are made by the curator and the director with the approval of a committee of the board of trustees. Siting of individual pieces in the sculpture park is determined by the curator in collaboration with the artist. Although the loaned pieces are, in theory, subject to recall by the artist-contributors, Jennifer insists that “some pieces are too beloved to ever be replaced.” Among them are Jim Dine’s “Two Big Black Hearts” (1985) and Paul Matisse’s (grandson of Henri) interactive “The Musical Fence” (1980), which the artist says “came out of my enthusiasm for being able to make music without having to know exactly how to do it.” His success becomes quickly evident to all who walk past his sculpture with children in tow. (Continued on page 8)

Artist Jim Dine (“Two Black Hearts”) says his work often reflects memories of his grandparents’ hardware store.

The popular “Musical Fence” is an interactive sculpture by Paul Matisse.
The Director’s Corner

By Avi Bernstein

BOLLI is growing. In committees, working groups, editorial meetings, fundraising campaigns, book groups, poetry circles, and theater groups, members are building it, brick by brick, and we are rising tall. Moreover, as a learning community, we are thriving not only in fall and spring but in every season. Summer saw electric activity in the building—with vigorous participation in our June and August lecture series, New Yorker Fiction Salon, Writers Guild, current events, and book discussions, among others. Here is a brief glimpse into what makes Fall 2016 a remarkable time to be a BOLLI member.

* As of this writing, we are 412 members strong and have the pleasure of welcoming 55 new members. We thrill at every opportunity to welcome new members into our distinctive approach to a lifelong learning community. This data reflects a ten percent level of growth as opposed to this time last year. Go BOLLI, Go!

* In August, BOLLI completed its inaugural “BOLLI Lectureship Campaign” to provide modest stipends for graduate student lecturers and teachers. Like past Lecturers Craig Smith (Abigail and John Adams: A Revolutionary Marriage) and Georgia Luikens (Four Nights at the Symphony: Dvorak, Shostakovich, and Other Musical Luminaries), our 2016-2017 BOLLI Lecturers will spearhead complimentary lecture series of broad topical interest and high academic quality during the winter and summer terms. A special thanks to Chair Ruth Bramson and Treasurer Charlie Raskin for their unflagging commitment and sense of purpose. We are proud and pleased to announce that the campaign raised $12,000. As a result of the generosity of the BOLLI community, we will be able to fund eight graduate students to teach at BOLLI over the succeeding twenty-four months.

* Our summer leadership retreat on June 8 provided a welcome opportunity for deep and constructive conversation about the BOLLI of today (we love it!) and the BOLLI of tomorrow (we can be even better!). Twenty-two people participated. A highlight to my mind was a vibrant discussion on the issue of homogeneity and diversity at BOLLI. In due course, we touched on the ethnic, religious, racial, class, and sexual orientation dimensions of this topic. I would remark that this issue has been on the minds of our program’s leaders since BOLLI’s inception and was a special priority of the founding director Bernie.
Reisman. From my perspective, our 2016 summer leadership retreat participants tackled it with particular conviction. As a consequence, I am announcing the formation of a working group on diversity and inclusion to be up and running by January 2017. Stay tuned, and please contact me if you are interested in participating!

* I am pleased to announce that as of July 1, Megan Curtis was promoted to Assistant Director at BOLLI. Megan has distinguished herself in her time with us; indeed, we could not hope for a more committed, competent, or caring professional. As AD, Megan will oversee BOLLI operations and logistics and will also take the lead in the development and operation of BOLLI information systems (i.e., data base, registration, financial reporting). She will continue to be a key contributor in the area of marketing and communications. Please join me in congratulating Megan and welcoming her into her new role.

* BOLLI has a brand new assistive listening system! This system, installed by the university in our main gathering space at 60 Turner Street is designed to help anyone struggling with hearing during lecture series and other events taking place in our main room. Receivers and headsets are available to borrow, or if you have a hearing aid equipped with a telecoil (“Tcoil”), try relying on the receiver and your hearing aid alone. Please see a staff member for more details, and spread the word. This is a major benefit of membership!

* Our fall study group curriculum is perhaps the richest in our history. From American poetry to native studies, from economic history to modernist literature, from classical music to museum studies, our fall curriculum is testimony to academic ambition, pedagogical energy, and curricular innovation. Kudos to the many people at BOLLI responsible!
An Embarrassment of Summer Riches

Stimulating Series and Seminars by the Banner Staff

BOLLI’s 2016 summer program included two lecture series and five faculty seminars on topics including literature, music, religion, photography, film, and even, for the first time, studio art.

John Burt, Robert Penn Warren’s literary executor and long time Brandeis Professor of English, set us off on our summer sojourn. His lecture series, The Prose, Poetry, and Politics of Robert Penn Warren, took us on a sweeping historical, political, and literary journey through America’s South. With racism and demagoguery woven into the fabric of our country, it is not surprising that these concerns are central to the works of many of our greatest authors, Penn Warren among them. Under Burt’s tutelage All the King’s Men was shown to be much more than the story of a demagogue’s rise to power, with race, self-hatred, free will vs. determinism, and class structure all contributing to the complexity of the novel. Then, he turned to Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices, a lengthy narrative poem about the Kentucky “Rocky Hill Tragedy” in which two of Thomas Jefferson’s nephews murdered a slave. This difficult but powerful work features Penn Warren and Thomas Jefferson as two of the poem’s multiple voices locked in a struggle to gain an understanding of the evil side of humanity. Burt’s depth of knowledge and his talent for storytelling were evident to all.

Sonia Almeida provided BOLLI’s first studio arts seminar, Introduction to Drawing: Still Life and Landscape. Almeida, who teaches drawing and painting courses in the Brandeis Department of Fine Arts, is a native of Lisbon, Portugal and has exhibited her work throughout the world. She has served as an artist-in-residence at programs in Greece and Italy, and she was awarded an artist fellowship by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in 2014 as well as a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in 2015. In the studio, a carefully arranged array of furniture, sculpture, plants, and other objects was placed “center stage,” providing us with still-life subjects that would help us to develop, practice, and hone our skills. Sonia encouraged us to work at our own pace as she provided gentle, quiet guidance along the way. We began with contour line-drawing, working at remaining entirely focused on the objects before us rather than on our easels. When she moved on to the use of negative space and other drawing techniques, it became apparent that she was really helping us to look like artists—literally. We began to view those objects and our surroundings in new ways. After this grounding in observation, we were ready to spend the last two days of the week “in the wild” on campus doing landscape drawing, which we enjoyed so much that we have even planned future outings for landscape drawing.
While BOLLI artists were grappling with graphite pencils, a group of BOLLI music enthusiasts was engaged in a listening venture. Gil Harel has led numerous BOLLI seminars on a variety of musical subjects since his days as a Brandeis graduate student in 2009. After writing his thesis on the Bach cantatas and the St. John Passion, he received his Ph.D. in 2012 and joined the faculty at Baruch College in New York where he has also served as assistant director of Baruch’s Jewish Studies Center.

Gil illustrated his lectures on *Music, Religion, and the Human Experience* through the ages with numerous compositions written for performance in religious venues. The selections began with the medieval period, including the first millennium Gregorian chant and 14th century polyphonic works of Machaut. Next, Gil focused on Renaissance masters like Josquin des Prez and the magnificent motet, Sicut Cervus, of Palestrina before proceeding into the Baroque, featuring works by Schütz and some of Bach’s religious cantatas. He then moved to the Classical period with illustrations from Haydn and Mozart, transitional works by Beethoven, and the full-flowering of the Romantic era with the Verdi *Requiem*. Most of the works written before the 20th century were sung in Latin, but Gil ended by presenting two pieces written in the 20th century that were sung in Hebrew: Bernstein’s rhythmically exciting *Chichester Psalms* and *Kol Nidre* by Schoenberg, written shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Overall, this was an exciting and informative survey of devotional music through the ages.

A week later, instructor Jamie Bryson took BOLLI members on an exploration of a very different aspect of religion. A fifth year Ph.D. student in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis, Jamie has developed expertise in the ancient Near East and the Dead Sea scrolls. In *The Jewish Jesus and the Foundations of First Century Christianity*, his goal was to explore how Jesus fit into the Judaism of the first century C.E. As he discussed the very close relationship between the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, we learned that the New Testament contains 350 quotations and 2500 allusions to the Old Testament. According to Jamie, early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism were “like twins.” He also shared some of his research about the Qumran community which produced the Dead Sea scrolls, especially the belief in a Jewish apocalypse that is echoed in Jesus’s teaching. Our discussions of the New Testament concentrated on the Gospel according to Matthew, considered the most Jewish Gospel because it contains so many references to the Old Testament and presents Jesus as a prophetic new Moses. By aligning Jesus so closely with the Old Testament, Matthew aimed to make him acceptable to Jews of that era. Though the writers of the scrolls were not followers of Jesus, these documents give much insight into the cultural atmosphere in which Christianity emerged.

For BOLLI photographers, Scott Weiner returned to the digital lab in the Goldman-Schwartz Fine Arts building for a challenging *Introduction to Photoshop*. Scott, a lecturer in the Brandeis Department of Fine Arts, spent his early life moving from one military base to another, never spending more than four years in any one place. He says that his own digital photography work is “an attempt to hold onto time and place—to stabilize it.” In July, over the course of a week in the lab, the group focused on editing photographic images using Adobe’s Photoshop program. We learned that, with both the digital camera and the editing system, we can control contrast and color as well as a variety of other image elements, making it possible for us to move beyond simply “taking” pictures to the more sophisticated process of “making” art.
Brandeis Professor of English Billy Flesch has long been a favorite with BOLLI seminar participants. His literary expertise spans the worlds of poetry, the Renaissance, and Romanticism, but he also has a penchant for film. “I work on the nature of literary experience, from Homer through present day movies,” he says. In early August, a group of BOLLI movie lovers joined Billy for a look at Screwball Comedy: “His Girl Friday” and “The Lady Eve.” According to Billy, the definition of comedy, “starting with Shakespeare anyway, is that there’s a marriage and a happy ending.” He also indicated that the word “screwball” originally referred to a reverse curve ball pitch used in cricket and baseball. So, what is “screwball” isn’t just “wacky” but actually carefully planned and executed. He went on to say, as well, that the “Noir” and “Screwball” genres overlap. In each, there’s a debonair, charismatic leading male and a strong female who is usually competing in some way with a less tough woman. Often, it’s “femme fatale vs. the girl next door.” The story goes, Flesch says, that Howard Hawks and a group of friends were reading The Front Page aloud, with a woman reading the Hildy role (a male in the stage play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur). It worked so well that Hawks was inspired to create His Girl Friday. Flesch’s extensive knowledge of filmmaking and camera work contributed to a rousing and entertaining seminar.

The summer closed with Georgia Luikens’s August lecture series, Four Nights at the Symphony. A Brandeis Ph.D. student currently writing her thesis on the works of Leonard Bernstein, Georgia is an Australian native with undergraduate and graduate degrees in both music and English literature. It is perhaps that grounding in both traditions that gives her lectures such an engaging flair. In her talks, Georgia focused on four well-known works of the orchestral repertory. The four pieces--by Berlioz, Mussorgsky, Dvořák, and Shostakovich --differ markedly from one another in style, but all are examples of “program music.” Each was conceived to illustrate a particular set of objects or events. The fact that all are slated to be performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall during the coming season gave the series a spark of immediacy as well. Georgia, a witty and entertaining lecturer, added to the enjoyment of the music by discussing some of the lesser-known aspects of the lives of the composers and the circumstances under which the pieces were composed. A particular highlight was her sharing of musical passages rooted in homage to (or, as she indicated with a grin, “ripped off from”) Beethoven. After Luikens’s entertaining lectures, BOLLI members will be even more prepared to enjoy the Boston Symphony’s upcoming events.

It was, indeed, a stimulating summer at BOLLI!
David Diamond’s “Open Door” Policy

by Jack Curley

Study Group Leader David Diamond is a practicing psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who for many years was director of Outpatient Psychiatry at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. While committed to his career, David always left the door open to new influences capable of steering his life toward other, perhaps equally rewarding, pursuits. His openness paid dividends in mid-life when two unrelated events led him in different life-changing directions. The first was an evening out with friends; the second, a serendipitous book club assignment.

It was Karaoke Night at a Cambridge nightspot. Friends, laughs, a drink or two, and suddenly there he was, microphone in hand, standing front and center and belting out a pop standard. David was surprised to find that he actually enjoyed singing in front of an audience; he was even more surprised when he saw that the audience actually enjoyed hearing him do it!

David soon took his karaoke success to a quite different stage when, at age 58, he enrolled in a course of operatic training at New England Conservatory. Over the past several years, he has performed both classical and popular pieces with Longwood Opera, New England Light Opera, and the Boston Association of Cabaret Artists.

The second change of direction came in 1995 with David’s rediscovery of The Scarlet Letter, assigned as a book club reading. Like many others, he first encountered Nathaniel Hawthorne’s writing in high school. But this time, after years of psychoanalytic study and practice, the novel resonated in a new way. Recalling Freud’s dictum, “Not I, but the poets discovered the unconscious,” David quickly perceived Hawthorne’s intent to open a window to the human mind. Although published six years before Freud’s birth, The Scarlet Letter, he believed, clearly anticipated the Freudian view of unconscious longings and conflicts. He has since taken his psychological insights around the world as a regular speaker at conferences of the Nathaniel Hawthorne Society. His approach proved especially helpful in 2000 in Russia. Since psychoanalysis had been forbidden in the country for the previous 75 years, he invoked the works of such writers as Dostoyevsky and Turgenev to introduce students to Freudian ideas and psychoanalytic methods.

David’s first course at BOLLI was the well-received The Haunted Mind: Psychoanalytic Reading of Hawthorne’s Romances. This fall, he will offer a new course, The Haunted Mind in Hawthorne’s The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun, which will build upon the themes previously presented. Among the readings for his first class was his favorite Hawthorne novel, The House of the Seven Gables, which he savors for its humanity, the ability of its central characters to overcome past traumas, and its happy ending (at least by Hawthorne’s standards). He demurs when asked to name a favorite Hawthorne character, saying that he “wouldn’t want to offend any of the others,” though he does feel great sympathy for The Scarlet Letter’s Reverend Dimmsdale, whom he believes the author depicts as suffering from deeply-rooted psychological difficulties and whose motives have been “largely misunderstood” by readers.

Next up is the completion of a book of essays devoted to Hawthorne’s romances plus a compilation of the many photographs taken during a lifetime of travel. But David also continues to leave the door open to other ideas, since deciding what’s next can be a complicated matter in a world where serendipity sometimes shows the way.
A Walk in the Park, continued...

The eponymous Julian DeCordova, a summer resident of Lincoln, was a wealthy businessman and passionate art collector. During his lifetime, his 30-acre estate on the banks of Flint Pond was a repository for the many pieces he and his wife Elizabeth accumulated in decades of European travel. As called for in his will, the Town of Lincoln took ownership of the property following DeCordova’s 1945 death.

Not long thereafter, town leaders decided that the property could be better managed with a different governance structure and a repurposed mission. Aware of Greater Boston’s lack of exhibition space for contemporary art, the trustees opted to fill the void. Partly funded by the sale of DeCordova’s original collection (some pieces can still be seen at the Corning Museum of Glass in New York), deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum was born with a new focus on living regional artists.

While most of deCordova’s gently sloping grounds are easy to explore on foot, certain areas may pose a challenge for some. Jennifer notes that accessibility is an important part of the museum’s mission. Funded in part by grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s “Up” program, the museum and park have made great progress with inclusivity, including the recent addition of resources for those with dementia, hearing loss, and vision impairment.

This fall and winter promise to be exciting times for strolling deCordova’s grounds. The museum’s Biennial Exhibition featuring works by 16 prominent New England artists is scheduled to run from October 7 through March 26. Detailed information about the museum is available at www.decorodva.org. To enquire about accessibility resources or make a reservation for an accessible tour, contact Donna Berube at dberube@decorodva.org or 781-259-3603.

Leaf sculpture by environmental art pioneer Alan Sonfist graces the deCordova hillside.

Campus Events: At the Rose Art Museum (Now through Dec.11)
Compiled by Nancy Alimansky

DAVID REED: PAINTING PAINTINGS (far left)
Early brushstroke paintings, not seen together since they were first exhibited in New York City in 1975.

DAVID SHRIGLEY: LIFE MODEL II (left)
Scottish artist David Shrigley transforms the gallery into a classroom and viewers into participants.

SARAH SZE: TIMEKEEPER (far left)
Intricate landscapes from the ordinary minutiae of everyday life, yet on a grand architectural scale.

SEAN LYNCH, ADVENTURE: CAPITAL (Rose Video Gallery) (left)
Irish artist Sean Lynch’s Adventure: Capital traces an historical journey from myth to minimalism.