

WINTER/SPRING 2026

colloquy

HARVARD KENNETH C. GRIFFIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

The Power of Looking

Cécile Fromont uses art to interrogate what societies choose to see – or ignore



to note



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Save the date for Alumni Day 2026!

... Contact *Colloquy*: Send your questions and comments about the magazine to gsascomms@fas.harvard.edu. We'd love to hear from you!



COLLOQUY AIMS TO BRING TO LIFE

the research and experiences of our student and alumni community through impactful storytelling. I'm delighted to welcome you to our improved online platform, which includes interviews and news curated especially for our alumni.

Since I last wrote, the world has experienced a dramatic increase in the

use of artificial intelligence (AI), and, with it, effects on higher education that continue to evolve rapidly. At Harvard Griffin GSAS, we are carefully considering the dual nature of this technology. AI offers tremendous opportunities, but we must also remain keenly aware of potential challenges to the integrity of a graduate degree. What is foundational and will remain consistent is the very real importance of students demonstrating their deep mastery of a subject, guided by supportive faculty mentors and grounded in Harvard's research and training mission. As we anticipate that this topic may be of considerable interest to many of you, we have made AI the subject of the keynote panel for Alumni Day. I hope you will join me in April for "The Transformative Impact of AI on Medicine, Education, and the Economy" and other Alumni Day events.

Please enjoy this latest edition of *Colloquy* and thank you for your support of Harvard Griffin GSAS.

—EMMA DENCH
DEAN

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Some of the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences' remarkable students and alumni speak about their research, their lives, and their time at the School.

••• Read the full profiles and find many more at gsas.harvard.edu/news/topic/voices

QUANTUM FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Once you arrange atoms—using “optical tweezers”—and let them interact with each other, both the state of the atoms (spin, charge, position, etc.) and the interactions themselves carry information. Atoms not only “compute” in this way; they interact incredibly fast. Consequently, we were researching ways to optimize the atoms for computation. With this technology, we were also simulating very complicated molecules that could be used for research on practical problems, such as organic photovoltaics or molecules that could zap carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and ease global warming.

RODRIGO ARAIZA BRAVO, PHD '24
Physics



THE SOUNDS OF HEALING

I met the actor, playwright, teacher, and author Anna Deavere Smith, who became one of my primary mentors. She inspired me to start The Healing Project, an organization that develops artwork with communities across the United States that have suffered from structural violence. The project particularly focuses on the realities of the prison-industrial complex and is an abolitionist initiative. We also work with youth. Together, we create healing rooms, showcase the work of individuals healing from structural violence, and establish spaces where people can discuss and come to grips with that violence.

SAMORA PINDERHUGHES, PHD STUDENT
Music



WRITING BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION BACK INTO HISTORY

My work focuses on [the now-defunct historically Black] Avery College and what it reveals about the history of Black education, especially the parts we tend to overlook. When we tell that history, we usually focus on the institutions that survived—places like Fisk, Cheney, and Wilberforce. But there's a risk in telling history only through what's still here. The institutions that didn't survive—like Avery—still have stories to tell. They reveal different models of education, different relationships to community, and different visions of Black freedom. Ignoring them limits our understanding not just of the past, but of what education can be.

CASSONDR HANNA, PHD STUDENT
African and African American Studies



BLAZING A TRAIL FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE

I was an undergraduate at Radcliffe College. I really wanted to be a scientist, and it was clear to me that graduate school was the way to go. Harvard was a different place at that time, especially for female scientists, but I had a lot of faith in some of the professors and I knew Harvard was involved in lots of active and exciting areas of research. It was a rough six years in graduate school, but I stuck around in science because I believed that unless enough women made it into the life sciences then, we'd never bring enough women into the field in the future.

NADIA ROSENTHAL, PHD '81
Biochemistry



Alumni Support Next Generation of Researchers

With the future of traditional research funding uncertain, a group of Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) alumni has stepped forward to support graduate students – and to inspire others to do the same. The Research Accelerator Challenge seeks to raise 50 new endowed fellowships by June 30, securing a total of \$100M in funding for PhD students. “I am thankful for the partnership of our alumni

to help ensure that Harvard remains a magnet for exceptional scholars,” said FAS Dean Hopi Hoekstra. Because our students also go into industry (and not just in science fields), we’re wondering if you could inquire if she is willing to say “scientists, scholars, and industry leaders.”

New gifts to establish named fellowships will be matched through the

fundraising challenge, made possible by a \$50 million commitment from a group of dedicated donors. The funds will provide comprehensive student support, including tuition, health insurance, and a stipend. “Giving our PhD students the freedom to advance the boundaries of knowledge is where truly transformative discoveries happen,” said Harvard Griffin GSAS Dean Emma Dench.



“We want to do all we can to make sure our students remain supported so that they can continue to do extraordinary work.”

••• Read the full announcement at news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2026/02/alumni-rally-to-support-next-generation-of-researchers.

HEALTHIER MINDS



In findings released in fall 2025, Harvard students scored better than the national average on measures related to mental

health, belonging on campus, and awareness and utilization of resources and support services. The data, gathered through the Healthy Minds Survey conducted at Harvard in spring 2025, analyzed feedback on a variety of measures including anxiety, depression, disordered eating, suicidality, and binge drinking. With a response rate of 25 percent, more than 5,900 students across the University—including Harvard Griffin GSAS—completed the 25-minute survey. Harvard officials acknowledged the

positive findings while citing opportunities to increase awareness of specific mental health resources and build stronger connections among students on campus. “We need to continue our outreach to remind students of the services that are offered and to emphasize that they can get the care that they need in a timely manner,” said Robin Glover, associate provost for student affairs. “We may need to do some work about emphasizing specific services and consider different forms of outreach.”

FROM THE COLLOQUY PODCAST

“Democracy is difficult. It’s always messy, it’s always challenging. Therefore, when you have so many different interests, so many different communities, it is probably all the moreso.”

— HISTORIAN PHILIP C. MEAD, PHD '12, on the *Colloquy* podcast: gsas.harvard.edu/american-revolution-colloquy-podcast

A Victory for Academic Freedom

Last September, US District Court Judge Allison Burroughs ruled the federal government's freeze of \$2.2 billion in research funding to Harvard was unlawful. "The ruling affirms Harvard's First Amendment and procedural rights, and validates our arguments in defense of the University's academic freedom, critical scientific research, and the core principles of American higher education," wrote Harvard President **Alan Garber**, PhD '82, in a note to the University community. In the wake of the summary judgment, over 900 direct awards to Harvard faculty were restored, providing vital funding for research. While Harvard's administration welcomed the action, Executive Vice President **Meredith Weenick** cautioned that "the relationship between research universities and the federal government is changing in fundamental ways." In the future, Weenick said, Harvard must be prepared for this partnership to be less stable. "We've encouraged investigators to resume activity necessary to fulfill our commitments under the grants," she said, "but we're also advising prudence, particularly in making new long-term or multiyear commitments. Our goal is to sustain the pace of discovery while planning responsibly amid uncertainty."



ALUMNI RECOGNIZED FOR CANCER BREAKTHROUGHS



Harvard Medical School professors **Gordon Freeman**, PhD '79, and **Arlene Sharpe**, PhD '81, were awarded the inaugural Gretener-Thürlemann Prize in December 2025 by the University of Zurich. The prize, worth approximately \$625,000, recognizes outstanding researchers in medicine, chemistry, and physics for foundational and pioneering

research of societal benefit. Freeman and Sharpe were honored for decades of discoveries that proved pivotal for the development of immune checkpoint inhibitors, which have transformed cancer treatment for millions of patients worldwide and infused newfound energy into the field.

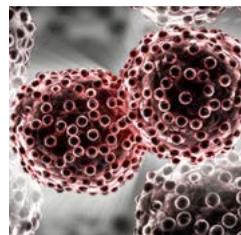
••• Find out more at hms.harvard.edu/news/gordon-freeman-arlene-sharpe-receive-inaugural-gretener-thurlemann-prize.



OF TIME, THE MOON, AND MEMORY

Three Harvard Griffin GSAS PhD students have been awarded the 2025–2026 Bowdoin Prize, one of the University's top honors for essays of high literary merit. **Jing Hwan Khoo** (philosophy) and **Byron Otis** (history of art and architecture) were recognized in the English-language category for their respective works on temporal ritual and early modern lunar imagery. In the Natural Sciences category, neuroscience student **Elisa Pavarino** was honored for her exploration of the "spacetime of memory." Established in 1791, the Bowdoin Prize includes a cash award of \$5,000, in addition to a medal and a certificate, to scholars who bridge the gap between technical expertise and public engagement. The names of this year's winners will be printed in the annual Commencement program this May.

FDA APPROVES FIRST CANCER DRUG BASED ON BROAD INSTITUTE SCIENCE



In November 2025, the US Food and Drug Administration approved a new cancer drug based on discoveries by a team at Harvard/MIT's Broad Institute that included lead scientist Matthew Meyerson, PhD '96. The drug, sevabertinib, is a pill approved for a type of lung cancer that previously had few treatment options, a product of the longstanding oncology research alliance between the Broad and Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals. The drug's approval is based on data from Bayer's Phase I/II clinical trial, which found that over 70 percent of the patients studied in one cohort saw their tumors shrink or disappear. Many patients experienced profound and durable responses.

••• Read more about the new medicine at broadinstitute.org/news/fda-approves-first-cancer-drug-based-broad-institute-science.



WHO DECIDES WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS?

NIKOLAS BOWIE, PHD '18, IS THE LOUIS D. BRANDEIS PROFESSOR OF LAW AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL (HLS) AND A LEGAL HISTORIAN WHOSE WORK EXAMINES DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTIONAL POWER. HIS FORTHCOMING BOOK, *SUPREMACY: HOW RULE BY THE COURT REPLACED GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE*, CO-AUTHORED BY HIS HLS COLLEAGUE, DAPHNA RENAN, ARGUES THAT THE MODERN SUPREME COURT'S CLAIM TO FINAL SAY OVER THE CONSTITUTION IS NEITHER REQUIRED BY THE DOCUMENT NOR INEVITABLE. THE ALTERNATIVE HE OFFERS—"DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONALISM"—WOULD RESTORE CONGRESS'S ROLE IN DEFINING AND DEFENDING AMERICANS' RIGHTS.

You've written that the United States Supreme Court often invokes "history and tradition" selectively. How do you assess modern originalism?

Originalism in its modern, rule-like form surged after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Critics asked whether the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment intended to end school segregation. The historical record is complicated. Congress in the 1860s passed sweeping civil-rights statutes; the Supreme Court soon invalidated many of them. When NAACP lawyers litigated *Brown*, they relied in part on the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act—Congress's instruction to federal courts to remedy constitutional violations by state actors. Opponents spotlighted fragments suggesting the framers did not speak specifically to schools.

That pattern persists. Take the affirmative-action cases: a concurrence argued that Reconstruction-era legislators would not have approved race-conscious remedies—yet those same legislators extended the Freedmen's Bureau and enacted statutes that expressly protected "freedmen," a race-conscious category if ever there was one. Or consid-

“The Constitution does not require judicial supremacy; the Court seized it.” —NIKOLAS BOWIE

er New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen (2022), where the majority read centuries-old English sources to invalidate a modern licensing regime while discounting contrary evidence and practice.

The point is not that history is irrelevant; it is that treating contested snippets as dispositive often masks normative choices. Historians are trained to contend with all the evidence, not proof-text their way to a preferred outcome. Judges, too often, do the latter.

Your forthcoming book with HLS professor Daphna Renan argues that “judicial supremacy”—the Court’s final say over constitutional meaning—is neither required by the Constitution nor wise. What is the alternative?

The Constitution nowhere grants the Supreme Court power to invalidate federal statutes. For much of our history, such a claim would have been viewed as tyrannical: five lawyers setting aside the work of hundreds of representatives. The first blockbuster invalidation of a federal law—Dred Scott—barred Congress from restricting slavery’s spread and was celebrated by slaveholders as constitutional truth. Republicans responded politically: they passed laws directly contrary to Dred Scott’s holding and protected those laws from judicial sabotage.

Reconstruction embodied a different settlement—what we call democratic constitutionalism. Congress and the people, not an unelected judiciary, would define and defend constitutional rights. Congress passed the first civil-rights and voting-rights acts, stripped the Court’s jurisdiction to block Reconstruction when necessary, and treated enforcement power as belonging to the political branches.

Since then, the Court’s record in

reviewing federal statutes has been lopsided. It has struck down child-labor laws, income taxes, minimum wages, and major civil-rights protections, while green-lighting some of the federal government’s most unjust policies, from Native dispossession to Chinese exclusion. More recently, decisions have narrowed the Voting Rights Act and campaign-finance limits and expanded presidential insulation from accountability.

A stark example is Trump v. United States (2024), where the Court held that a president is criminally immune for “official acts.” What counts as “official”? Under judicial supremacy, whatever five justices say. That move invites a government of individuals rather than laws.

If judicial supremacy is not inevitable, what can Congress do—especially in a polarized era?

History supplies a toolkit. Congress can legislate constitutional meaning and insist the courts respect it. When Federalists packed the judiciary after Jefferson’s election, the new Congress abolished the new judgeships—and the Court acquiesced. During Reconstruction, when the Court threatened Congress’s program, Congress stripped jurisdiction over core questions and enacted enforcement statutes that directed federal courts to remedy state violations.

Those instruments remain available. Congress can define and protect rights legislatively (for example, in voting and election administration) and tie federal jurisdiction to those definitions. It can adjust the Court’s structure and process by requiring a supermajority to invalidate federal statutes; limiting the emergency docket; regulating remedies; setting recusal and ethics rules; and, yes,

CURRICULUM VITAE

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2022–Present

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Reginald Lewis Law Teaching Fellow,
2017–2018

Berger-Howe Legal History Fellow,
2016–2017

Supreme Court of the United States

Law Clerk to Justice Sonia Sotomayor,
2015–2016

US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit

Law Clerk to Judge Jeffrey Sutton,
2014–2015

Harvard University

PhD, History, 2018
JD, 2014

Yale University

BA, History, 2009

altering the number of justices. Congress can also use jurisdictional tools, channeling certain constitutional questions to three-judge district courts with direct appeal and limiting or removing Supreme Court review in specified statutory contexts consistent with Article III. Finally, they can condition federal funding and enforcement to ensure that civil-rights statutes operate as enacted, not as narrowed by judicial invention.

None of this requires agreeing with the Court’s constitutional theories. It requires confidence that, in a republic, the people acting through Congress have primary responsibility to say what our fundamental law means and how it is enforced. 🍷



PTHEwer of Looking

Cécile Fromont uses art to interrogate what societies choose to



see—or ignore. By Paul Massari | Photographs by Kathleen Doohar

“Are you a monster?”

The large language model (LLM) to which Harvard History of Art and Architecture Professor Cécile Fromont, PhD '08, posed the question in preparing the syllabus for her first-year Harvard College seminar, *Making Monsters in the Atlantic World*, responded defensively. Why would she call it a monster, the LLM wanted to know. And what did she mean by “monster” anyway?

“It was imitating a human affect,” she says. “It needed to create a distinction between what it was and what a monster was, right? In that way, it was such a good reflection on the subject matter of the seminar itself, which explores different ways of challenging or changing our idea of what—and who—a monster is and what—and to whom—the notion of monster does.”

Inspiring students and scholars to look in new ways at questions, imagery, and themselves is central to Fromont’s research and teaching at Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Studying the visual, material, and religious cultures of Africa, Latin America, and Europe in the early modern Atlantic world, Fromont uses art and visual culture to interrogate what societies choose to see—or ignore. In so doing, she hopes to make visible often overlooked aspects of history and enable communities shaped by cultural difference to interact based on a common understanding of the past.

Invisible Traces

Just as an object can change our thinking, Fromont says our thoughts and life experiences can also change the way an object exists in the world. “In some cases of Chinese scroll paintings, for instance, the commentaries of viewers actually become part of the work,” she explains. “Even when you don’t have viewers writing their experience of seeing in ways that become physically attached to an object itself, that history of encounter and interaction become part of the texture and the patina of that object. A lot of my work is about finding those often invisible traces.”

Fromont focuses on how global exchange—through the intertwined histories of Christianity, empire, and the slave trade—shaped artistic practices and ideas about power, identity, and spirituality across continents. “What I’m interested in at the core is how looking at images, objects, and visual and material culture allows us to understand better how people meet, and how in meeting they find ways of establishing commensurability so that they can have a conversation about everything from the relative value of trade goods to the shape of the cosmos,” Fromont says. “By looking at the ways images and objects move from one context to the other, interact with different environments and people, I am able to see one situation, one set of circumstances morphing into another. In other words, paying close attention to material and

visual culture helps me better map and understand historical change.”

Objects and images play a critical role in enabling these exchanges of perspective across cultures in a more sophisticated way. “The abstract can only come into play in a conversation through something concrete,” Fromont says.

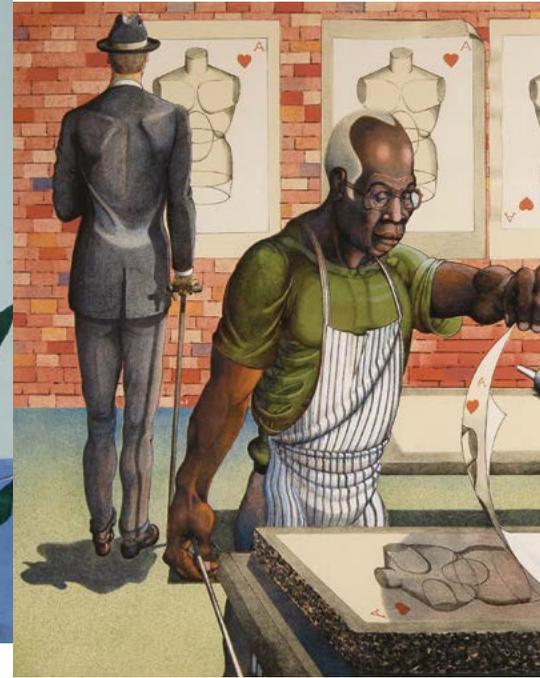
Spaces of Correlation

In her 2014 book, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo*, Fromont looked to the early modern period to find traces of how objects were changed by new ways of seeing. Hoping to find new trading partners—as well as precious metals and Christian converts—Portuguese merchants, missionaries, and government officials traveled to the Kingdom of Kongo in Africa, bringing with them their sacred objects. The elite of the African kingdom appropriated the new religion and its imagery, mixed and merged them with local thoughts and artifacts, creating an entirely new genre of Christian art.

“Embedded in a crucifix, for example, is the idea that Christ is dead,” Fromont explains. “So, the crucifix is also a reliquary because it holds the space of death. Ancillary figures surrounding Christ suggest the idea that some intercessors going between life and death are part of the crucifix.” Kongo people combined centuries of local cosmology with new faith in the Christian story using their shared notion of cyclical life and death. “The new sacred objects they created functioned as spaces of correlation, mixing, merging, and redeploying the once distinct and now interrelated elements. And once the Kongo crucifix is created, all of the other



“Even when you don’t have viewers writing their experience of seeing in ways that become physically attached to an object itself, that history of encounter and interaction become part of the texture and the patina of that object.” —CÉCILE FROMONT



crucifixes of Christianity change because the perimeter of what it means to be Christian has changed.”

Elements from different cultures that come together by choice and for a particular purpose to create something entirely new, create what Fromont calls “a space of correlation.” Joseph S. Koerner, Harvard’s Victor S. Thomas Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, says his colleague’s concept is critical for understanding global art history.

“Spaces of correlation bring together stories, material artifacts, visual images, ideas, forms, and ritual and political performances belonging to entirely different realms,” he says. “As in the spaces of a political assembly, the parts can confront and potentially contest each other, but in the process they assemble new systems, and these systems can travel to new spaces of correlation.”

The Congado festival of Brazil, for instance—one of many related historical festive traditions existing across the Americas from Argentina to New York—grew out of a political ceremony in the Kingdom of Kongo in which rulers engaged in a mock battle to defeat “heathens” and

claim their status as Kongo Christian kings or governors. “This worked very well with the European history of the Roman Emperor Constantine making the empire Christian, or St. James Santiago defeating Muslims in the Portuguese Battle of Ourique (1139 CE) or the Spanish Battle of Clavijo (844 CE), reinforcing Christianity,” Fromont notes, “but it also worked with Central African foundation myths in which you have a newcomer with a new philosophy or a new religion coming in and then conquering a new land.”

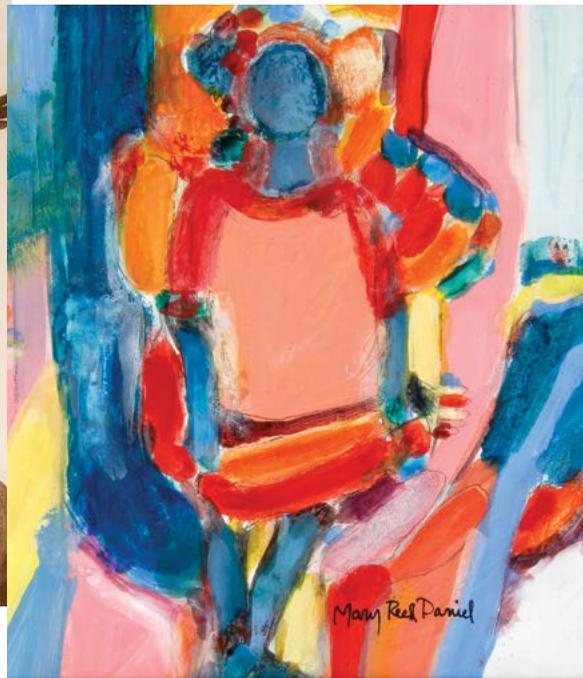
In Latin America, the ceremony has become both a festival celebration of the Christian church and a declaration of sovereignty by Afro-Latin Americans. In that new context, Fromont explains, “The gesture of affirming sovereignty on the part of the descendants of Central Africans in Latin America creates a new part of the Latin American church that is Afro-Latin American—a Black church that has its own perimeter connected to, but not controlled by, the Latin American church. The objects that they’re using—European crowns, musical instruments—are integrated with the

already mixed Kongo Christian ceremony to become that important festival that is still being staged today.”

Threads of History

Fromont’s current project, *The Discrete Charm of the Old Indies*, takes on a set of baroque tapestries considered monuments of French decorative arts. The tableaux feature tropical plants and animals mixed with figures that are either indigenous to the Americas or African, in a seductive set of scenes threaded between the late 17th and late 18th centuries to support France’s colonial ambitions—and slavery. “It’s a way of giving visual form to an ideology where those ambitions seem naturalized and also less vulgar,” she says. “In the tableaux, exploitation takes on a seductive, perniciously charming guise.”

The tapestries’ flattering depiction of colonialism and chattel slavery in the Americas appeared in French public spaces around the world as late as the 1920s, including the French Academy in Rome where artists and scholars study and diplomatic events take place. In



recent years, however, there has been a debate in France and in Italy about whether these tapestries should be shown in that context.

“This is an important question to ask and to answer,” Fromont says. “As a society, we all need to be able to see what is being pictured in those objects—or at least understand what others are seeing—so that we can make a decision about whether we want to show them or live among them.”

Creating common ways of seeing and understanding is a complicated endeavor; objects contain layers of meaning that often contradict one another. The *Old Indies* tapestries, for instance, reflect not only France’s colonial ambitions, but also, at a level that is harder for contemporary viewers to identify, the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Kongo, according to Fromont.

“The figures presented as enslaved people are actually drawn from portraits of Kongo ambassadors to Dutch Brazil and Holland,” she says. “Aristocrats from Kongo were received at European courts with all of the honors of being diplomatic envoys from a powerful, independent

Christian kingdom. So, the tapestries are also documents about Kongo sovereignty and about its activities of diplomatic and self-representation in the Atlantic worlds.”

Fromont says that a recognition of these layers can create opportunities for Europe and Africa to redefine their relationships today. “The relationship between the Kongo and Europe at the time could be an inspiration for a new future that we imagine. We don’t have to start from scratch. We can draw from a history that is more complex than we think.”

One herald of that future could be *Rethreaded Indies*, Fromont’s collaboration with Sammy Baloji, a contemporary artist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Commissioned by Framer Framed in Amsterdam as part of the *Shapeshifters: On Wounds, Wonders, and Transformation* exhibition (October 15, 2025–January 11, 2026), the duo’s project recreates the *Old Indies* tapestry to tell a very different story from the original.

“The tableau we’ve created depicts the reception by the King of Kongo of a set of ambassadors from Holland in 1642, which is an event that actually happened,” Fromont says. “It’s the same technique or

Renaissance, Race and Representation in the Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art

(LEFT TO RIGHT FROM OPPOSITE PAGE):

- Sharecropper, 1952
- Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012)
- Jitterbugs V, 1941–42
- William Henry Johnson (1901–1971)
- Blackburn, 2002
- Endangered Species II, 1991
- Ron Adams (born 1934)
- My Friend, 1981
- Mary Reed Daniel (1946–2006)

very similar technique as the original tapestry, using its visual language in terms of the color palette and the framing. And so, the fantasy of the 17th- and 18th-century French tapestry is countered by a historically accurate depiction of the relationship of power in that moment when the king received in majesty the Dutch officials.”

Renaissance, Race, and Representation

Fromont brings her approach to art and history to campus not only as a teacher in courses like Making Monsters in the Atlantic World, but also as the inaugural faculty director of the Alain Locke Gallery of African & African American Art at Harvard’s Hutchins Center for African & African American Research. Robert Woods Bliss Professor of Latin American History and Economics Alejandro de la Fuente says that his Faculty of Arts and Sciences colleague is uniquely well prepared to lead the gallery, which is named after the African American educator, philosopher, and scholar who received his PhD from Harvard in 1918.

“Like Alain Locke, Cécile’s art historical interests transcend geographical and temporal boundaries, connecting objects, and the social worlds they contain, in

novel, frequently unexpected ways,” he says. “The gallery is a diasporic art historical space; you need a scholar with singular vision and ambition to lead it.”

For Fromont, the classroom and the gallery are parallel discovery spaces. “As an exhibition space on campus, the Locke Gallery is a place where students, faculty, and the public at large can encounter a visual argument about an object, a moment in history, or an aesthetic set of propositions,” Fromont says. “That kind of exploration can enrich a wide variety of thinking in our community on many different topics.”

The gallery’s current show, *Renaissance, Race and Representation in the Harmon and Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art*, on view through June 6, 2026, includes works on paper that coincide, according to the visual artist Dell Hamilton’s curatorial statement, “with the centennial anniversary of the publication of ‘Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro,’ the path-breaking special issue of the social science journal, *Survey Graphic*, in which Alain Locke outlines his vision for Afro-modernist aesthetics.”

As someone whose expertise is in

an area other than early 20th-century US visual art, Fromont says she takes great pleasure in approaching the exhibit with fresh eyes. One piece that captured her attention was a print by the artist Paul Keene (1920–2009) of a seated female figure. Fromont immediately saw the work as a take on the so-called *Bangwa Queen*, one of the most well-known African sculptures, which was the subject of a 1934 work by the photographer Man Ray.

“It comes from one of the Bangwa chiefdoms of western Cameroon, whose title-holders are now seeking its return from France,” she says. “At a formal level, it has this long, striated headdress and features that are very strong. The sculpture stands dynamically, but we can recognize her in the print as the seated figure. So, you can approach Keene’s image as one of an African or African-American woman that is sitting with dynamism, beauty, and grace. But you can also think of it as a sophisticated expression of the multifaceted connection of the diaspora to the African continent. It’s one of my favorite works.”

During a fall term meeting of Introduction to the History of Art, a course she co-teaches with colleagues in her

“The relationship between the Kongo and Europe [in the early modern period] could be an inspiration for a new future that we imagine. We don’t have to start from scratch. We can draw from a history that is more complex than we think.” —CÉCILE FROMONT



TWO QUEENS

Fromont finds in a print of a seated female figure by the artist Paul Keene a new take on the so-called Bangwa Queen (right), one of the most well-known African sculptures. The original sculpture (above).



Inspiring Wonder

Fromont says her students' experience at the Kelley Collection exhibit underscores the power of art to create community and conversation and to inspire wonder—even in a digital age of short attention spans and fleeting gratifications.

"Students are bombarded by imagery and demands on their attention constantly—as I am too," she notes. "Our looking labs are moments where we're all together, in person, engaging with a work of art. If you spend time with these objects, these images, these artworks, you find they do offer you something right away. But the more time you spend with them, the more they reveal themselves. And that is tremendously rewarding."

Like the gallery's namesake, Fromont tries to model how educators, scholars, and champions of the arts can have an impact on the academy—and beyond.

"We can create conversations with faculty, researchers, and students; with our colleagues here and at other institutions; and with the larger community," she asserts. "All of these conversations reach different people in different ways. Then they carry forward, stretching the perimeter of what community means for us on and off campus, and of the nature of knowledge."

Koerner, the chair of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, says Fromont's research, teaching, and curatorship model what scholars mean—or ought to—when they say the words "global art history."

"It encompasses more than what traditional art history understood as art," he says. "It includes actions and social arrangements, as well as material things. Cécile's work engages with all of these, and also powerfully with images, the stuff of most art history, as indicated by the title of her second book, *Images on a Mission*. I wish I had read Cécile sooner. But now that she's with us, I can learn from her, as I know we all will today." 🍷

department, Fromont and her students visited the exhibit for a discussion of printmaking and the idea of the Black Atlantic. The undergraduates were fascinated in particular by the sophistication and playfulness of another work: Ron Adams' lithograph, *Blackburn*, a depiction of the African American master printmaker Robert Blackburn at work.

"It's a print about printmaking where you see a lithograph being made," Fromont observes. "It's a self-aware image that shows what it is and

what you see. It immediately captured students' attention, and they brought into it so many layers and connections from what we had discussed during the term."

Students delighted, for instance, at the playful ambiguity of the cityscape at the corner of the print. "Ostensibly, the view from a window, the rectangular portion of the lithograph also functions as a tableau in itself, recalling similar visual effects we had encountered earlier in the class in the works of Jan van Eyck and early Netherlandish panel painting."



Historian Jill Kastner explores why states

A MEASURE

SHORT

engage in subversion—

and why they're unlikely to stop.

OF

WAR

BY PAUL MASSARI

WHEN US INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES CONCLUDED IN 2017 THAT “RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election . . . [in order] to undermine public faith in the US democratic process . . . ” both voters and elected officials were outraged. The Justice Department launched an investigation into Russian interference headed by former Federal Bureau of Investigation Director

Robert Mueller. Beginning in 2018, Congress appropriated more than \$1 billion in Election Security Grants to help states modernize voting infrastructure. The event set off a wave of concern about election integrity on the political right and left that still echoes nearly a decade later.

While she certainly supports the measures taken to improve election security, Jill Kastner, PhD '99, a historian and visiting research fellow at King's College London, confesses she was a bit chagrined by much of the "hand-wringing" in the United States.

"Those of us who have studied the Cold War for a long time were sort of scratching our heads and wondering what all the fuss was about," she says. "It was like people had forgotten what things were like before the fall of the Soviet Union. If you dial back and look at the way things played out in the decades and centuries before, you realize that this sort of thing has been happening forever."

To refresh the collective memory, Kastner and her co-author, Dartmouth government professor William C. Wohlforth, wrote the 2025 book, *A Measure Short of War: A Brief History of Great Power Subversion*. In it, the two scholars trace how states have employed subversion alongside diplomacy and open warfare as a tool of statecraft from ancient Greece through the digital age. Kastner says that, while technology has changed, great powers continue to engage in subversion for the same reasons their ancient predecessors did: it's a better option than war.

The Space Between Diplomacy and War

Kastner defines subversion as "targeted, hostile action by a state on the territory of its rival with the intent of weakening it or changing its foreign policy somehow." While such action is hostile, she insists that it is best understood as a morally neutral instrument of statecraft, distinct from both warfare and diplomacy but overlapping with each.

"Subversion is not open warfare," she explains. "Conventional war is organized state armies using conventional weapons and tactics—it's organized violence. And subversion is not diplomacy. Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation and representation; it's transparent and not covert. It might be aimed at public opinion in the target state, but it doesn't act covertly on the territory of the target. Subversion occupies the space between diplomacy and war—it's all measures short of war, from information ops to funding the opposition to sabotage."

While technologies have evolved, the basic methods of subversion have largely stayed the same throughout history: information operations like propaganda and disinformation, support for opposition groups, bribes, election meddling, sabotage, assassinations, and paramilitaries, among others.

Of course, subversion carries risks: the possibilities of retaliation, escalation, or reputational damage. Democracies in particular can face "domestic blowback" when the public discovers what their government has been up to. So why do nations continue to engage in subversion? Cost and flexibility. "It's much cheaper than massing troops on the border or lobbing artillery across it," Kastner says. "And it's flexible

“SUBVERSION IS NOT OPEN WARFARE.”

[It's] targeted, hostile action by a state on the territory of its rival with the intent of weakening it or changing its foreign policy somehow." —JILL KASTNER



PLUS ÇA CHANGE: Kastner says that, while technologies have evolved, the basic methods of subversion have largely stayed the same.

Protestant and Catholic rulers supported fellow believers in each other's countries, and communists, fascists and even democratic states did the same."

Subversion Across the Centuries

If you grew up watching James Bond movies or laughing at *Get Smart* reruns on TV, it can seem like subversion began with the Cold War. One of the revelations of Kastner and Wohlforth's research, however, is how long great powers have been trying to get the better of one another through fair means and foul. In fact, because of the persistence

of war in their era, ancient states may have engaged in subversion more frequently than modern ones. "In classical Greece, which we devote a full chapter to, you had constant conflict," Kastner says. "The more war you have, the more subversion you see. Rivalry opens opportunities."

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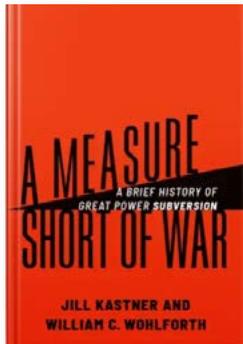
The methods employed by Athens and Sparta, for instance, would be recognizable to any modern student of subversion: bribery, support for internal factions, secret payments to orators to sway public opinion. "History is littered with examples of someone being bribed to open the city gates to an invading army," Kastner notes. "There was even fear of fifth columns (groups of enemy agents working to sabotage a country from within) 2,000 years before the phrase was coined."

History is also littered with examples of subversion's failures. One of the most prominent is the conflict between early modern European powers England and Spain.

King Philip II of Spain became the titular king of England when he married Queen Mary I. Mary produced no heirs, though, and when she died, Philip lost his crown—and the Catholic Church's hold over England—to Mary's Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth I. Determined to bring England back into the

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Habsburg dynasty, of which he was a member, Philip was constrained by geography and politics. “The English Channel was a big obstacle—it made England a hard target. So, for a while, he pursued diplomacy—marriage negotiations, alliances,” Kastner explains. “But when those failed, he turned to subversion:

fomenting Catholic uprisings, plots to overthrow or assassinate the queen.”

Elizabeth retaliated, supporting Dutch rebels fighting Philip in the Netherlands. Eventually, war broke out between the two powers. “The Spanish Armada of 1588—Philip’s attempt to invade England and restore Catholicism—was the result of subversion not working,” Kastner says. “Neither side could get what it wanted. It’s the classic pattern: when subversion fails and the issue sparking the conflict is considered existential by both parties, war follows.”

When subversion succeeds, however, it can forestall war. Kastner points to the 19th-century German chancellor Otto von Bismarck as an example. “Bismarck used a press and propaganda campaign, augmented by well-placed bribes, to nudge the French public toward keeping a republic in the 1870s,” she says. “He thought a restored monarchy would be dangerous to the newly unified German state. In the 1880s, he tried to discredit British Prime Minister William Gladstone the same way.”

Bismarck also used his notorious slush fund—the aptly named *Reptilienfond* or reptile fund—to buy journalists and newspapers. “It’s a perfect illustration of how subversion can work on the cheap. It’s like fertilizer if you’re a farmer: you can’t always tell how much it matters, but it can tip the balance.”

For Kastner, Bismarck’s tactics highlight both the power and ambiguity of subversion. Sometimes, she says, subversive activity can have positive consequences. “Any subversion that prevents war is a huge success. [War] is the last thing you want, and if you can head it off by nudging a narrative or funding an opposition group, that’s a win.”

Ideology, Virtue, and the Digital Age

In the 20th century, ideology—specifically the struggle between capitalism and communism—replaced religion and nationalism as the dominant justifications for meddling. Despite rhetoric championing national self-determination after the First World War—and support for the United Nations after the second—the United States engaged vigorously in covert action to achieve policy goals, often with disappointing results.

“Look at the 1980s,” Kastner says. “The Reagan administration spent treasure and diplomatic capital trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government of Daniel Ortega. After years of clandestine flights and arms shipments, ex-Marine Eugene Hasenfus gets shot down [delivering weapons to the *Contra* rebels], the whole thing unravels—and who’s president of Nicaragua today? Daniel Ortega.”

Undertaken jointly by the US Central Intelligence Agency and the British secret intelligence service MI6, the 1953 operation to overthrow the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, was initially a success. The pro-US Shah was restored to power, resulting in 25 years of strategic advantage. Then came the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the hostage crisis, and 45 years—and counting—of enmity. Similarly, US efforts to support the mujahideen in Afghanistan helped push the Soviets out in 1989. But the vacuum left behind gave rise to the Taliban. “Every time you intervene, you have to remember: if you break it, you own it,” Kastner says.

The 1990s brought a new twist to international statecraft: subversion in the name of virtue. “After the Berlin Wall fell, non-governmental organizations were suddenly doing overtly what the CIA had done covertly,” Kastner recalls. “Media training, democracy assistance, support for civil society—all things we see as good. But from Moscow’s perspective, especially under Putin, it looked like subversion.”

The “Color Revolutions” that toppled authoritarian regimes in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine 2004, and Kyrgyzstan 2005 each produced Western-leaning governments. But from Russia’s viewpoint, Kastner notes, the march of democracy looked like a brilliant active-measures campaign marching inexora-



“DEMOCRACIES NEED TO GET THE LEVEL OF THREAT

right. Underestimate subversion and face strategic losses at the hands of autocratic rivals; exaggerate it, and you’ll end up subverting yourself by needlessly repressing suspected subversives and foreign agents.” — WILLIAM WOHLFORTH

bly toward Moscow. “It doesn’t make [the Russian’s] reaction right, but it makes it understandable,” Kastner says.

Today, cyber tools and social media make it possible for great powers to reach into each other’s information spheres quickly, cheaply, and with devastating results. But while the technology has changed, Kastner says that the calculus for subversive acts hasn’t.

“In 2016, Russia was confronted by an implacable rival, an existential issue around Ukraine, a new technology promising great advantage, and the US asleep at the wheel after 25 years of unipolarity,” she says. “It was the perfect storm.”

But if Moscow’s goal was to weaken the United States or shift its foreign policy, Kastner believes the effort largely failed. “Exposure led to better cybersecurity, new institutions, and a stronger security culture. Technology isn’t really a game changer in the long term because whatever is used to subvert is also used to defend. You’ll always be on the back foot if you’re the good guy, but tech is our friend as well as our foe. Democracies are more robust than we give them credit for.”

Learning from History

Kastner and Wohlforth’s colleague Dr. Michael Poznansky, author of *In the Shadow of International Law: Secrecy and Regime Change in the Postwar World*, says the way the duo puts in context contemporary events like Russia’s election interference is a model for how to do applied history.

“It would be natural to assume that the 2016

election heralded a new and frightening glimpse into how state-on-state competition looks in the 21st century,” he says. “But Kastner and Wohlforth convincingly show that, while the methods may have been novel, the act itself was not. Their framework for thinking through the different types of subversion, its pros and cons as a tool of statecraft, and the surprising resilience of democracies when they are targeted should help decision-makers craft smarter policy.”

Students of international relations often imagine a straight-line progression from diplomacy to subversion to war. With *A Measure Short of War*, Kastner wants them to embrace a more dynamic metaphor. “It’s tempting to picture a ladder,” she says, “but when you climb a ladder you leave the lower rungs behind. In reality, these tools stack. You can have diplomacy without subversion, but if you start subverting, you’re still doing diplomacy. And you can’t have war without subversion—it’s always there, running alongside the kinetic fight.”

Wohlforth notes that such clear-eyed understanding of subversion and its history can ultimately strengthen democratic institutions.

“Democracies need to get the level of threat right,” he says. “Underestimate subversion and face strategic losses at the hands of autocratic rivals; exaggerate it, and you’ll end up subverting yourself by needlessly repressing suspected subversives and foreign agents and undermining free speech and the rule of law. The historical perspective our book provides helps avoid both errors by putting today’s subversive statecraft in perspective. We’ve been there, done that. Don’t freak out but keep vigilant!” 🍷





BETTER together BETTER

Rohan Murty partners workers with artificial intelligence and brings classics of Indian literature to modern readers. **BY KELLY HAHN** | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATHLEEN DOOHER

B

Y NOW, MOST OF US ARE FAMILIAR

with artificial intelligence (AI) as a one-to-one helper: the chatbot that summarizes an article or answers a question, the virtual assistant that sets a reminder or sends a text, the embedded copilot that cleans up a document or spreadsheet. But what if AI worked alongside rather than for us? What could it reveal about the complex nature of office work, and what could we accomplish together?

These are the kinds of questions that inspire Rohan Murty, PhD '11, the founder of two companies focused on leveraging the power of AI to improve office work. “For the last 100-plus years, manufacturing has had a very detailed, scientific way of optimizing how we produce things,” Murty observes. “Office work, on the other hand, has not had a scientific way of understanding and improving it.”

Today, there is widespread anxiety about what the future of AI holds, including fears that it will displace human workers. Murty has a different outlook. Rather than viewing AI as a rival, he sees it as a partner that can give us a deeper understanding of how we work—and how, with the right information and context, we can move past our current limitations and do better.

AI as Team Player

Traditional management consulting has long been the go-to solution for corporate leaders who are looking to improve business practices in their organizations. But consultants are often forced to gather data through surveys, which are completed by only a tiny fraction of a company’s total workforce. This can result in recommendations that are largely guesswork, without a robust connection to the specific details of how employees across the company actually get things done.

That’s where Murty and his business partners come in. “We realized that if you use AI to directly tap into how humans and machines inside an organization interact with each other—keeping things anonymous, without tracking who does what—you

could reverse engineer the underlying patterns and flow of work,” he explains. “You could turn the art of understanding how office work happens into a detailed science and create the first computational discipline for improving it.”

Soroco, the first startup that Murty founded after completing his PhD in computer science at Harvard’s Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (Harvard Griffin GSAS), was designed to do exactly that. The company created Scout, an AI platform that reveals how work gets done in an organization by mapping and analyzing anonymous user interactions across software systems, accurately identifying inefficiencies and bottlenecks at a scale that would have been previously unimaginable.

“AI can help us learn how an entire 100,000-person company works, just by directly seeing how they use software,” Murty explains. For example, if staff at a large insurance company are resolving claims in a hundred different ways, through diverging processes and various workarounds, Scout can identify this issue and help diagnose the problems driving it. “With this hard data, we can help leaders determine whether they should invest in training, whether they should automate something, whether they should invest in technology, whether a process should be redesigned,” Murty says. “Without this kind of data, it’s very hard to make those decisions—and you may not get them right.”

Soroco’s success in the corporate world—across hundreds of clients, including a significant number of Fortune 500 companies—led Murty to a critical realization: for AI to be truly useful, it needs to be grounded in the nuances and patterns of work particular to each company.

“One thing we learned in our Scout journey is how different every organization is,” Murty says. “You could be two companies in the same industry, building



“FOR

the last 100-plus years, manufacturing has had a very detailed, scientific way of optimizing how we produce things. Office work, on the other hand, has not had a scientific way of understanding and improving it.”



HOME LIBRARY: Murty recalls that it was more common as a boy growing up in India to read great works from the Western canon than the literature of his own country. The realization, along with Murty's encounters with the humanities at Harvard, inspired him to launch the Murty Classical Library.

the same products, but internally, you work in totally different ways.” This is why generic AI solutions on the market today—like AI agents designed to help with sales, or finance, or operations, broadly speaking—tend to fall short of expectations: they don’t “know” the idiosyncratic ways that work actually gets done in the organizations where they are deployed.

“We realized that by leveraging the technology we invented through Soroco to understand how specific organizations work, we could do this last-mile grounding of AI models inside organizations,” Murty says. “By learning from how teams work, we can get AI to behave like a member of the team.”

This insight was the genesis of Murty’s second startup: Workfabric AI. The com-

pany offers a platform, Context Fabric, that learns how work gets done in a specific organization and then trains AI agents to join teams within that organization. Just like any new coworker, the AI goes through an onboarding period, learns the ropes—and then becomes a source of institutional knowledge, task support, and collaboration for the whole group.

For Murty, this technological leap opens a new way of thinking about the potential of AI. “Can AI accelerate entire teams?” he asks. “Can it be a productive member of a team? Can it be a colleague you can rely on?”

According to Ravi Kumar, the head of Cognizant, a Fortune 500 multinational information technology services compa-

ny that uses Workfabric AI, the answer is a resounding yes. Cognizant’s partnership with Workfabric is helping them build an emerging discipline called context engineering, focused on ensuring that AI has the right data and structure to perform complex, multi-step tasks—paving the way for AI agents that can work independently, effectively, and securely.

“The greatest potential of this type of technology is that it’s not about replacing jobs: it’s about augmenting and amplifying human capability,” Kumar says. “We’re at an inflection point where software is no longer just a tool for organizing work; it’s becoming a participant in how work is done. With the right context embedded, AI systems can reason with purpose and collaborate with human teams to unlock new categories of services and economic value.”

This focus on value and the power of teamwork is a through-line for Murty.

“When you accomplish great things, it’s never because of a single individual,” observes George Nychis, who co-founded both Soroco and Workfabric AI with Murty; the two have been working together since graduate school. “It’s always because of a team of individuals coming together to produce something. Once you start thinking about how AI can unlock team productivity, it becomes something much greater. That’s one of the things that I’ve learned from working with Rohan: he’s always had a very sharp focus on making sure that what we do drives value for teams and organizations.”

Unexpected Journeys

Murty’s career launching Soroco and Workfabric AI might seem like a natural extension of his PhD at Harvard, but in fact it was a radical departure.

“I was quite certain, by the time I was in sixth or seventh grade, that my life path was to get a PhD, and then to become a professor,” Murty says. He grew up in India, the child of two computer scientists, in a household where teaching was,

as he puts it, the “family business.”

“For six or seven generations on my mother’s side, and for four generations on my father’s side, my family have been teachers,” Murty says. “My grandfather was a professor of medicine and a gynecologist, one of the earliest ones in my state in India. The environment in which I grew up was very academic. My father would talk to me about mathematicians like Alan Turing and George Boole; I would spend hours doing math with my mom. So, I thought, that’s it: being a professor is the best form of existence.”

Something unexpected happened when Murty was finishing his PhD. “I began to realize that an academic career was not what I wanted,” he says. “I had never before questioned whether I wanted to do something else; the first time I started asking that question was when I was literally in the middle of my academic job interviews.”

After a year as a postdoc at MIT and two in the Society of Fellows at Harvard, his interest in a life outside academia had not abated, and the idea for Soroco was born. “Through a series of accidents, and talking to some of my friends, we came up with this question: Could we build automated consultants using AI? I had a vision, I latched onto it, and I didn’t look back.”

A New Perspective

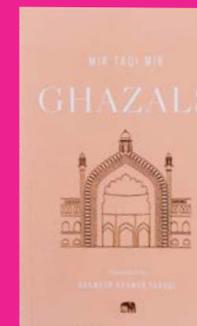
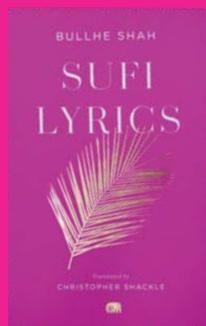
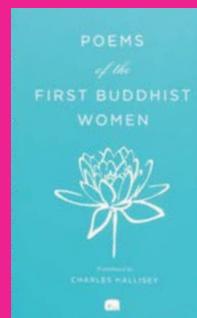
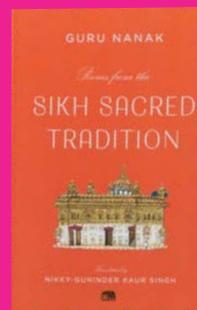
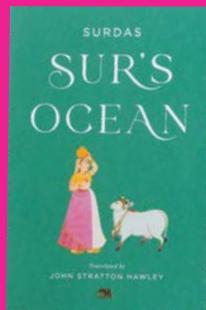
Murty’s career shift was not the only time he was inspired to venture off the beaten path at Harvard Griffin GSAS.

“I had an unusual experience as a graduate student,” Murty says. “Most of my friends were not from my department—they were in history, philosophy, economics, math—and the more I hung out with them, the more I was exposed to other ways of thinking that otherwise I would not encounter.”

Through these connections, Murty befriended Parimal Patil, Wales Professor of Sanskrit and Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy, and took several

A Hundred-Year Project

Published by Harvard University Press through an endowment Murty established, the Murty Classical Library (MCL) presents great works of Indian literature with original texts alongside English translations. With 50 volumes published to date, the MCL has enjoyed success across India, the United States, and Europe.





“THE HUMANITIES

started to give me a multidimensional perspective of life. Until then . . . the reason to solve a problem was because I found the problem interesting. . . . Through my study of the humanities, I began to feel that was not enough.”

courses with him. He was typically the only computer science student in the class, but Patil was supportive. Murty gained his first exposure to classical Indian philosophy—and a deeper appreciation for the humanities.

“That experience, perhaps more than anything else, opened my eyes to different schools of thought, different ways of making arguments, and made me an even better researcher in computer science,” says Murty. “In India, our educational system is heavily geared towards STEM, so I didn’t have an appreciation for most of these things growing up. And in my first year at Harvard, I was a very intense grad student; I was in my office seven days a week. But somewhere along the way, for the first time, I started to ask myself: Why am I doing this?” He went on to take many courses in history, art history, and philosophy at Harvard, much to the surprise of his academic advisor.

“The humanities started to give me a multidimensional perspective of life,” Murty explains. “Until then, for me, the reason to solve a problem was because I found the problem interesting. And sometimes that’s perfectly reasonable. But through my study of the humanities, I began to feel that was not enough. What is the value of my work? What is its impact? What difference does it make to someone’s life? Does it make other people’s lives

better? I felt like I finally had a better perspective on how I should approach life.”

Expanding the Pantheon

Murty’s experience with the humanities in graduate school helped create what is perhaps destined to become his most enduring legacy: the Murty Classical Library of India, published by Harvard University Press through an endowment Murty established.

Inspired by the Loeb Classical Library, the Press’s definitive collection of Latin and Greek texts, the Murty Classical Library is dedicated to publishing great works of Indian literature—written in 14 different languages over the course of millennia—with original texts in their original scripts presented alongside new English translations.

At the outset of the project, most people, including translators, typesetters, book designers, and sales partners, thought it was an impossible challenge. “They were right, of course,” quips Sharmila Sen, editorial director of Harvard University Press, who has been involved with the series since its inception 15 years ago. “It is a form of madness to publish such a complex series that involves so many languages, so many different writing systems, so many people, and aims to attract read-



ers around the world.” But the Murty Classical Library—with 50 volumes published to date—has enjoyed success across India, the United States, and Europe.

Murty recalls that, when he was growing up in India, it was more common to read great works from the Western canon than India’s own literature. “We read Shakespeare: two years of *Merchant of Venice*, and two years of *Hamlet*,” he says. “We read Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’: ‘To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.’ We read Whitman’s ‘O Captain! My Captain!’ but we had no cultural understanding of what any of this meant. And when I came to the US, in my undergrad and PhD days, I met



students from around the world who seemed to know so much about their cultures, their classics, their poetry, their literature. I kept thinking: we don't seem to know as much about our heritage today in India."

This is an imbalance that he hopes the Murty Classical Library will help shift. "My ultimate hope for these books is two-fold: for India, and for the world," Murty explains. "For the world, I would love to see Indian texts included and celebrated in the pantheon of classics, along with Greek and Latin. And for India, my hope and ardent desire is that these classics are read by students in India as examples of the wonderful intellectual history and en-

vironment we all come from—that it adds to a collective national confidence."

The Loeb Classical Library is now 114 years old and more than 550 volumes strong. Murty describes the Murty Classical Library similarly, as a "100-year-project," and one founded on the deep appreciation for the power of universities and education that he has carried with him since childhood.

"I was very clear from the beginning that I didn't want this to be a two- or three-year project," Murty says. "Our goal is to make these classics accessible to the entire world, and in doing so, broaden the very definition of classics. If you're going to do this, it should be built as an

institution that should outlive all of us. And the best way to do that is to bet on the university."

Murty's path has wound through very different kinds of knowledge work, but his AI companies and the Murty Classical Library both rest on the same belief: that education is a collaborative act. By asking what we might do with more context, more memory, and more time, he invites us to imagine a future in which technology is not a force of isolation or replacement, but a partner in widening the circle of who gets to participate—in meaningful work, in shared stories, and in the long, collective project of understanding the world. ❖❖

A NOBEL FOR INNOVATION, “CREATIVE DESTRUCTION”

Philippe Aghion, PhD '87, joined colleagues Peter Howitt and Joel Mokyr as winners of the 2025 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel “for having explained innovation-driven economic growth.” It’s a world where new entrants and new talents constantly challenge existing ones,” explained Aghion. “They expect that if they innovate, they will get innovation rents – extra earnings firms get from an advantage others can’t yet

copy.” A longtime member of the Harvard economics faculty, now a professor at the Collège de France and NSEAD, Paris, Aghion hopes his insights will help policymakers better understand the dynamics of “creative destruction,” as well as the need to manage that process so that incumbent firms don’t stifle new innovations – and workers aren’t left out in the cold.

... For more on Aghion and the 2025 Nobel Prize, visit gsas.harvard.edu/news/how-growth-happens.



Gbemisola Abiola, PhD '23, African and African-American studies, was selected for the Empowered Leader Program. Run by the Women's Impact Alliance, the program combines executive coaching, trusted peer-to-peer forums, and leader-lab workshops to strengthen the leadership capacity of the next generation of women driving change. Participants are chosen based on the scope of their impact, their potential to accelerate change, and their commitment to self-development.



Nobel laureate **Abhijit Banerjee**, PhD '88, economics, will join the University of Zurich's (UZH) Faculty of Business, Economics and Informatics in July 2026. Banerjee will hold an endowed professorship, studying how policies in areas such as education, poverty, and health care can drive social change, and will co-lead the Lemann Centre for Development, Education and Public Policy, an initiative backed by a CHF 26 million donation from the Lemann Foundation.



Ray Jayawardhana, PhD '00, astronomy, an accomplished academic leader and renowned astrophysicist who currently serves as provost of Johns Hopkins University, was named the next president of the California Institute of Technology, the 10th in the school's 105-year history. Jayawardhana will assume his new position on July 1, 2026.



Joanne Martin, PhD '77, social psychology, a 2002 Centennial Medalist, was cited as a Pioneer of the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB) on the occasion of the school's centennial. The first woman to receive an endowed chair at Stanford GSB, Martin studies organizations as cultures, using qualitative analysis alongside quantitative research. She has also been honored by the Organizational Theory Division of the Academy of Management.



John Preskill, PhD '80, physics, of the California Institute of Technology, was honored with the Quantum World Congress Academic Pioneer in Quantum Award for 2025, recognizing his pioneering work on fault-tolerant quantum computing protocols that enable reliable operation of noisy quantum devices. Since 1983, Preskill has led research into quantum error correction, attracting a generation of young scientist-leaders.



Rhine Samajdar, PhD '22, physics, was named one of 12 recipients of the 2025 Boeing Quantum Creators Prize. The award recognizes early-career researchers whose work contributes new ideas to the fast-growing field of quantum information science and engineering. Samajdar, now a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton University, conducts research at the interface of quantum information science and condensed matter physics.



Jack Thorne, PhD '12, mathematics, was named one of the Fellows of the Academy for the Mathematical Sciences in the United Kingdom. Thorne will join an inaugural cohort of 100 fellows that brings together the UK's strongest mathematicians across academia, education, business, industry, and government to help solve some of the nation's biggest challenges.



Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, PhD '99, economics, received an honorary doctor of science degree from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. An economist at the Paris School of Economics and EHESS and co-editor of the *American Economic Review*, Zhuravskaya explores how political institutions, media, and economic policies shape societies, with a focus on development, conflict, and media.

AUTHOR PROFILE

ELDERCIDE—AND HOW TO STOP IT



In American Eldercide: How It Happened, How to Prevent It, cultural critic Margaret Morganroth Gullette, PhD '75, argues that what unfolded in US nursing facilities during the first year of COVID-19 was a preventable rather than unavoidable tragedy, produced by policy choices, market incentives, and a culture that too often devalues older, disabled, and poor people. In this conversation, Gullette explains why she uses the stark term “eldercide,” what distinguishes facilities that protected residents from those that failed them, and why even the reformers’ wisest fixes won’t work without a moral and civic shift she calls “the education of the heart.”

In this conversation, Gullette explains why she uses the stark term “eldercide,” what distinguishes facilities that protected residents from those that failed them, and why even the reformers’ wisest fixes won’t work without a moral and civic shift she calls “the education of the heart.”

You argue that the term “eldercide” is appropriate for what happened in the early months of the pandemic in nursing facilities. Can you explain what you mean by that?

I chose “eldercide” to indicate deaths that were not simply tragic or inevitable, but avoidable—the product of policy failures, institutional neglect, and systemic biases. Older and disabled adults residing in nursing homes made up fewer than 1 percent of the US population, yet among those 1.4 million residents, estimates of total deaths in the first year of the pandemic ran from 112,000 to 152,000. The brutal fact is: residents of nursing facilities died at a rate 26 times higher than people living in the community.

Now, some residents were frail—but hundreds of thousands who got the virus recovered, resiliently. And the fact that 1,950 facilities (out of 15,744) reported zero COVID-19 deaths in 2020 shows that it was possible to protect them. Therefore, this catastrophe isn’t about biology or age—it’s about money, choices, and systems. That’s why I use “eldercide”: to shift the conversation from “the old die” to “these older adults died because we failed them.”

You argue that system failures—federal, state, and private—made the disaster possible. What were the most consequential?

Responsibility begins with the federal government, which has unique obligations to nursing-home residents. In 2020, it did not provide PPE (personal protective equipment) or establish national standards for facilities, although from the first the risk to residents was known to be extreme. Congress could have mandated masks for nursing-home staff promptly. Instead, procurement devolved to the states, which competed with one another; hospitals were prioritized while the facilities, housing a relatively small, highly vulnerable, and geographically concentrated population, were left to scramble.



THREE STEPS TO SAVE LIVES: Morganroth Gullette says increased staffing, greater transparency, and expanded home- and community-based services could prevent another tragedy in the nation’s nursing facilities.

Regulatory choices compounded the danger. Inspections related to chronic understaffing—the main cause of neglect—were curtailed just when oversight mattered most. Owners took note: if there is no PPE, and rare inspections, there is less pressure to improve either. Meanwhile, relief funds were distributed with few strings, and many facilities did not use them to hire additional aides or raise wages—precisely what was needed to sustain safe staffing through a crisis.

Finally, we must address ownership and incentives. A significant and growing share of beds is controlled by chains and private-equity-backed entities that can use complex, “nesting-doll” corporate structures to move money—paying related-party real-estate trusts or management companies—while pleading poverty. The Medicaid system pays per resident, per day, almost regardless of outcomes. Unless regulators enforce staffing and transparency, these incentives reward what critics call “plundering,” not care.

Some facilities did extraordinarily well. What did they do differently—and could those practices have scaled?

They treated residents as protectable. That meant acquiring PPE early and in sufficient quantities; maintaining stable, adequately paid, and often unionized staff; limiting room occupancy and using architectures like “Green House” models; and applying rigorous infection control. Many of the strongest performers were mission-driven—religious orders or non-profits—rather than profit-driven chains.

Could it have scaled, despite the chaos in the nation? Yes, because the population in question—the 1.4 million people then in nursing homes—was small enough and

concentrated enough to prioritize. If the federal government had coordinated supply chains and standards for this sector, if states had enforced staffing and transparency, and if owners had been required to show where every relief dollar went, the US could have saved many lives. The proof is in the outliers that succeeded.

What policy changes would make the greatest difference—soon?

First, staffing. Congress should set and states enforce meaningful hourly-care minimums, as President Joe Biden tried to do in 2024, for the first time in sixty years. Wage floors and fair working conditions retain indispensable aides. Whenever aides are overworked, medications arrive late, wounds go untreated, call bells ring unanswered, and burnout drives turnover—the core of neglect.

Second, transparency and accountability. Require public, standardized, audited reporting that follows every dollar—real-estate rents, management fees, executive compensation, related-party transactions—so regulators (and families) can see whether money is going to care. Tie payments to compliance. Stop rewarding opacity. Raise fines.

Third, shift the default. Expand home- and community-based services so that indigent, chronically ill, disabled, and older adults can avoid institutionalization, as most people wish. Where congregate care remains necessary, prefer smaller-scale, private-room models and mission-driven operators over financialized chains. And align federal-state authority for any emergency: coordinated procurement and enforced standards for a population that is cherished, and small enough to prioritize. 🍷

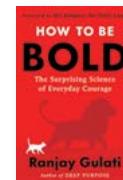
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SAVE THE DATES!

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Celebrate the Harvard Griffin GSAS community!

Reconnect with friends, colleagues, and mentors at Harvard Griffin GSAS Alumni Day. This annual event brings alumni, faculty, students, and friends together to take part in conversations with some of the world's leading scholars, engage with alumni across the disciplines, and hear from Dean Emma Dench about the future of graduate education.

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- [Grzegorz Ekiert](#), PhD '91, on "**Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Second 'Great Transformation'?**"
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- [Evelyn Hu](#) on "**Opportunities for Quantum Technologies in an Imperfect World**"
- [Rebecca Henderson](#), PhD '88, on "**Reweaving Ourselves: Learning to Lead with Love and Power**"
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WHAT GENEROSITY MAKES POSSIBLE

Growing up, I never pictured myself as a researcher. It wasn't until I had the chance to work in a lab as an undergraduate that something clicked for me. Hands-on work felt like solving small puzzles that add up to what we see every day.

I chose Harvard for the chance to access incredible resources and to learn from scientists I admire—including Professor Michael Baym, whose microbiology lab I now work in. Our lab is the only one in the world that uses our technique. It was developed by a postdoctoral researcher who saw that bigger questions could be answered with this tool.

That's one of my favorite parts of the academic system. We're constantly passing on knowledge and lifting up the next generation. I am so grateful to the many mentors who took the time to show me what is possible.

—SOPHIA, PHD CANDIDATE IN SYSTEMS, SYNTHETIC, AND QUANTITATIVE BIOLOGY

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