16J Life On a Tabletop
An ancient art form thrives at the Puppet Showplace Theater

16B Extracurriculars
Events on and off campus through the end of 2015

16D The Art of Juxtapositions
Lorraine O'Grady's outlook

16M Winterland
Nature walks and talks at the Arnold Arboretum

16N Dinner Without the Din
A little quiet...please!

16P Picking Up a Hobby
The Fuller's fine folk art
Extracurriculars

Events on and off campus during November and December

SEASONAL

The 132nd Game
www.gocrimson.com/sports/fball/index
The annual competition takes place in New Haven. (November 21)

Harvard Ceramics Program
Holiday Show and Sale
www.ofa.fas.harvard.edu/ceramics
Works by more than 80 artists range from dinnerware, mugs, and teapots to wall hangings and sculptures. (December 10-13)

The 106th Memorial Church Christmas Carol Services
www.memorialchurch.harvard.edu

(From left) River Running Between Pastures, c. 1850, by Christopher Pearse Cranch, Div 1835, at the Fruitlands Museum; vocalist Angélique Kidjo lectures at Harvard; and a glimpse of George Kuchar’s holiday video diaries at the Harvard Film Archive

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Lorraine O’Grady first drew attention in 1980 as her own rebellious creation, Mlle Bourgeoise Noire. The whip-wielding beauty queen, gowned in white dinner gloves, showed up at events, guerilla-style, to protest racial and class divides, notably in the New York-centered art world. At 81, the conceptual artist and writer is still mining the timely themes of racial identity, cultural legacies, and what it means to be female—as seen in Lorraine O’Grady: Where Margins Become Centers, at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA), October 29-January 10. (O’Grady will discuss her life and career on November 17 at the Harvard Art Museums.)
The Carpenter show offers selections from five bodies of work (dating from 1980 to 2012) and highlights O’Grady’s use of “images and ideas that are seemingly disparate, juxtaposing them to reveal and inform new perspectives,” says CCVA director James Voorhies. On display are diptychs from The First and the Last Modernists (2010) that pair Michael Jackson with Charles Baudelaire; a 2010/2011 video, Landscape (Western Hemisphere)—essentially close-up footage of O’Grady’s hair moving in the wind; and a photographic montage, The Fin-Palm (1991/2012), in which a tree rooted into a curvaceous brown body under a wide sky streaked with clouds forms a sensuous landscape. In a work from the Miscegenated Family Album series (1980/1994), left, the young woman is Kimberly, a daughter of O’Grady’s late sister, Devonia Evangeline O’Grady; the statue is of Nefertiti. It is among 16 diptychs that compare the heterogeneity and legendary conflicts within ancient Egypt’s royal families to O’Grady’s own mixed-race heritage (she was born in Boston to middle- and upper-class Jamaican immigrants and graduated from Wellesley) and fraught relationship with Devonia. O’Grady works with personal and public images, collage, and text; she is not a traditional photographer, Voorhies notes. “She uses art as a means of cultural criticism.”

Devonia Evangeline O’Grady; the statue is of Nefertiti. It is among 16 diptychs that compare the heterogeneity and legendary conflicts within ancient Egypt’s royal families to O’Grady’s own mixed-race heritage (she was born in Boston to middle- and upper-class Jamaican immigrants and graduated from Wellesley) and fraught relationship with Devonia. O’Grady works with personal and public images, collage, and text; she is not a traditional photographer, Voorhies notes. “She uses art as a means of cultural criticism.”

A diptych from O’Grady’s Misecegenated Family Album series shows Kimberly O’Grady and a statue of Nefertiti.

The annual event features the Harvard University Choir. (December 13 and 14)
Harvard Film Archive www.hcl.harvard.edu/hfa
The Vintage Holiday Show includes cartoons, TV shows, and live-action short films suitable for all ages. (December 13)
Dear Video Diary: Christmas with Anne Robertson and George Kuchar. Auto-biographical footage reflects “contrasting visions of sugar plums.” (December 18)

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POETRY

Woodberry Poetry Room

www.bc.edu/woodberry

Alicia Jo Rabin reads from her award-winning collection, Divinity School, and performs with her band, Girls in Trouble, whose music is inspired by stories of women in the Bible. At Harvard Hillel. (November 16)

Reel Time: On the Astoundment Tapes elucidates the life and work of poet Robert Blaser, who, among other things, sparked the influential Berkeley Poetry Renaissance in the 1940s with literary companions Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer. (December 6)

THEATER

American Repertory Theater

www.americanrepertorytheater.org

One Child Born: The Music of Laura Nyro, starring Kate Farber, celebrates the soulful singer-songwriter and pianist. Oberon theater. (December 2-4)

EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS

Harvard Museum of Natural History

www.hmnh.harvard.edu

The new exhibit Marine Life features a floor-to-ceiling model of New England’s coastal waters and a special focus on the “world of jellyfish.” (Opens November 21)

Cooper Gallery of African & African American Art

www.coopergalleryhc.org

The new gallery at Harvard’s Hutchins Center offers Black Chronicles II, a stunning set of newly discovered portraits of black subjects, ranging from artists to missionaries.

1960s tea-pot mills by Danish designer Jens Herold Quistgaard (Dansk Design) at the Concord Museum

Spotlight

Look closely through the monumen
tal portal drawn on the wall just inside Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art. What appears to be a fearsome ocean vessel chugging madly toward the horizon is actually an aircraft carrier-cum-St. Paul’s Cathedral in London (and a few other fantastical bits). The illustration, Seastead, is by the Boston-based artist Ethan Murrow, best known for creating massive, photorealistic graphite drawings that often depict (with humor and a whiff of melancholy) man’s earnest struggles with forces of nature. Seastead is based on digital projections of found photographs; it took Murrow and three assistants two weeks—and 400 Sharpie markers—to complete the piece, which is essentially composed of countless infinitesimal marks and cross-hatchings. Seastead begs to be narrated; playfully, the illustration tells a story of an oceanic vessel chugging madly toward the horizon, evoking a world of jellyfish.

In Harvard Squared

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Institute of Contemporary Art

www.icboston.org

Through November 27

HARVARD SQUARED

HARVARD SQUARED
to royalty (see harvardmag.com/cooper-15), from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain. (Through December 5)

Harvard Art Museums
www.harvardartmuseums.org
In conjunction with Corita Kent and the Language of Pop (see harvardmag.com/kent-15), NYU professor Thomas Crow looks at works by Kent and New Zealand’s Colin McCahon, in “Reinventing Religious Art in the 1960s.” (December 10)

Houghton Library
www.hcl.harvard.edu/info/exhibitions
The World of Walter Crane highlights the English illustrator, painter, interior designer, and decorator who was aligned with the Arts and Crafts Movement. (Through December 19)

Fruitlands Museum
www.fruitlands.org
Hidden Hudson. Rarely seen Hudson River School landscapes by George Inness, Sanford Gifford, and Frederick Church, among others. (Through November 22)

Currier Museum of Art
www.currier.org
Maxfield Parrish: The Power of Print reveals the incalculable impact this classically trained artist had on the rise of mass media. (Through January 10)

RISD Museum
www.risdmuseum.org

The Harvard Museum of Natural History’s new exhibit, Marine Life, includes the hardy Northern Puffer. (Through January 24)

Events listings are also accessible at www.harvardmagazine.com.

Full listings and details for the above are also available online at harvardmagazine.com.

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A native of Springfield, Massachusetts, Myhrum began acting lessons locally at the Drama Studio in third grade, then discovered puppetry. At 13, she had a "mind-blowing experience: telling the story of the universe and of Chinese totalitarianism— with puppets" as the youngest person chosen to work on Hua Hua Zhang’s The Bell, based on mythological Chinese characters, at the National Puppetry Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater in New London, Connecticut. Myhrum also directs and produces opera and theater and has worked as a puppetry director or coach at almost all of Boston’s regional companies, in addition to serving as resident stage director of the Lowell House Opera.

Her role at the Brookline Village nonprofit, she says, is like running a church-cum-startup: “Our theater is a cathedral of joy and wonder—and the audience is our congregation,” and yet “so much has changed economically for puppeteers, and we are in danger of losing this unique art form. It’s a huge priority for us to recruit new talent and support innovation and experimentation.” The theater was founded in 1974 by the late Mary Putnam Churchill ’52, who first began using puppets to engage students when she was a reading tutor. During 23 years she built the organization from a few weekend shows in her repertoire, including Janay’s interactive Cardboard Explosion! and The Holiday Season also brings Margaret Myhrum with the unflappable star of Bonnie Duncan of Bonny Duncan (about a girl’s imaginary journey to reclaim a beloved article of clothing), to be performed on November 27-29. The holiday season also brings Margaret Myhrum with the unflappable star of Bonnie Duncan (about a girl’s imaginary journey to reclaim a beloved article of clothing), to be performed on November 27-29.

The Puppet Showplace Theater is a cozy space, it seats 95 and offers more than 300 shows annually, along with educational programs in schools, a summer youth camp, and year-round classes and workshops like “Introduction to Shadow Puppetry” and “Furry Monsters 101” for adults and children. The theater is by outside artists—local, national, and international—and are geared toward younger audiences. Bonnie Duncan often combines puppetry, dance, and acrobatics in original works like Squid Sock My Underpants (about a girl’s imaginary journey to reclaim a beloved article of clothing), to be performed on November 27-29. The holiday season also brings Margaret Myhrum with the unflappable star of Bonnie Duncan (about a girl’s imaginary journey to reclaim a beloved article of clothing), to be performed on November 27-29.

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in the use of puppets in psychotherapy, the theater (where she has also performed) is a critical forum for children and adults to “experience human creativity, firsthand,” free of the onslaught of commercialism and technology. “Puppeteers are swimming against a cultural tide,” adds Linn, who also founded the nonprofit Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood. “So many children are immersed in the mainstream culture that basically run by three or four companies like Disney, Nickelodeon, and Fox. Frozen was a good movie, but then there is Frozen everything: apps, video games, zillions of toys. Everything: Nickelodeon, and Fox...”

And so that creates an unfortunate norm for what people think children need in order to enjoy themselves. The puppet theater is a whole different experience.

At a recent performance of The Swan, an original, wordless work by Quebec’s Théâtre de Deux Mains, puppeteer Louis-Philippe Paulius played all the parts amid an intimate stage set with handmade trees and a pond (in fact, a monitor that changed colors) inspired by a Tiffany glass window. After the show he answered questions from the preschool audience.

“Was the water real?” “What is the bird doing now?” “How do they talk?” To that, Paulius gently answered, “When I make the mouth move, I have to make the sound at the same time.”

Like many puppets, the swan emitted not words but raw vocalizations that reverberated emotionally. That ability to engage in nonverbal communication, says Myhrum (who, like all serious puppeteers, had to learn the art of speaking gibberish) makes puppetry especially accessible to children and useful in therapeutic contexts and cross-cultural communications.

The art form is more akin to dance and pantomime than to traditional theater.

Puppets, Myhrum asserts, “can say and do things that human actors [and audiences] wouldn’t dare. That’s what makes them so powerful.” And not just for kids. Although caregivers can and do enjoy shows with simple themes, the theater’s “Puppets at Night” events, like “Bend, are strictly for adults. The bimonthly Puppet Slam (the next falls on January 16) offers a wide range of acts, including a bloody reworking of the classic tune “My Little Lamb.” The theater began the slams in 1996; the movement has since expanded across the country and is financially supported by the Puppet Slam Network, founded by Heather Henson, daughter of the Muppets’ creators Jim and Jane Henson.

The Muppet Show and Sesame Street were a popular catalyst for the development of American puppetry in recent decades. But the art of animating inanimate objects has ancient origins across the globe, and at one time was restricted to a culture’s healers and religious figures. “There is always an invisible puppeteer creating ‘Finelli,’” she says. “A puppet is a visual placeholder for the invisible, for the idea of what is not there.”

In 2014 the theater premiered the adult show Revuze Cascade, by Anna Fitzgerald, a wordless story about circus performer Judy Finelli’s struggle with multiple sclerosis. Several black-clad near-invisible puppeteers create ‘Finelli,” the only character in the play, by tying together four slacks of scarves (the type jugglers use). The audience sees “her” miraculous circus tricks, the scarves moving in graceful arcs and dance steps, before her little body starts to fail—terribly. Cello music plays, the artist flails and flops, trying to gain control of her body, which is fragile because it’s composed of scarves. Through a slow and painful process she manages to pull herself up to balance on aerial circus rings, but soon those rings become the wheels of her wheelchair. “The audience sees that this woman is greater than her body because he has knots in her leg—the abstraction becomes real,” Myhrum notes. “A puppet is a visual metaphor for a human struggle that takes place on this little tabletop stage.”

Winter is the best time to get out and see New England’s trees in all their naked glory. The Arnold Arboretum, open year-round, offers just such a feast with “Fall into Health” (November 1), a brisk walk along lesser-known paths, and a “Winter Wellness Walk” (December 13), when the landscape is, perhaps, at its loneliest. Those preferring an unguided jaunt followed by a sit-in solitude to view nature on paper and canvas might enjoy Drawing Trees, Painting the Landscape: Frank M. Rines (1892-1962), on display through February 14. Lectures and classes are also on tap. Writer, designer, and historian Kathryn Aalto reveals the magic, at least in the mind of A.A. Milne, of England’s Ashdown Forest in “The Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh: The Forest That Inspired the Hundred Acre Wood” (the topic of her new book) on November 15. And on December 8, MIT physics professor Frank Wilczek explores “A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature’s Deep Design.” Check the arboretum’s website for full details.

ARTS

The Monkey King (top left) features traditional Chinese puppets. At the Puppet Slams, almost anything goes: witness “Monsters 101” (for adults); and an “On-Camera Puppetry Intensive” with Ronald Bonion (at far left).
Dinner Without the Din
In search of Greater Boston’s quieter restaurants

AFTER SPENDING the evening at an unnamed establishment, hel-tering at fellow dinner guests just to be heard, we were inspired to find a few reliably conversation-friendly haunts. A call to the Massachusetts Restau-rant Association, seeking guidance and maybe the names of a few of its 1,800 members who had successfully assuaged customer’s concerns over noise levels, prompted an e-mail from president/CEO Bob Luz. “I think restaurants purposely manage their environment to meet the expectations, needs and desires of their prospective guests,” he wrote. “Most want to create a room that will exhibit a buzz and a certain level of excitement, and acoustically work towards achieving that goal within the buildout, furniture, music systems, genre of music and volume. Others want to create a more businesslike atmosphere, where deals business or more intimate moments can occur.”

Given that full industry disclosure, the following is a select list of places that we found—at least on the nights we were there (i.e., no guarantees)—conducive to conversation without feeling like a monastery. The town of Belmont, it turns out, offers two such spots. For fresh, solid Italian food and evening themes—Wednesday is Girls Night Out and Thursday is reserved for live jazz—try Savino’s Grill (www.savinosgrill.com). The place has a friendly staff and warm-toned decor (creamy whites and au-tumnal rust), along with inventive-ly triangular-shaped partitions that jut out from the main walls, offering privacy to many tables, and welcome dimen-sionality in the otherwise boxy space. Most important: the bar, close to the entrance, is tiny, which precludes any gathering of loud drinkers.

Across the street is Kitchen On Common (www.kitchenoncommon.com), where chef-owner Joh Kokubo serves simple, fresh meals in a casual setting with eight tables. There is no music. At all Soft talk among diners seems to be the rule—except when the phone rings at the hostess station. (That jarring sound could be turned down.)

More polished and a little less muted is West Newton’s Lumiére (www.lumiereres-taurant.com). From a nuanced color scheme and velvety curtains to flattering mood-lighting, this establishment French bistro fosters calm consumption of its meticulously pre-prepared food. Plan for an early movie at the West Newton Cinema, down the street, then linger over dinner and dessert. We recomend the dark chocolate crèmeux with coconut cream and salted rum caramel (s).

Sycamore (www.sycamorenewton.com) is newer, and newly lauded with a 2013 nod from Boston Magazine’s “Best of Boston” list. The Newton Centre restaurant has a hip vibe amid naturalistic decor—lots of wood, exposed brick, and a few soft brown ban-quettes. Mature Newtonians mix with younger folks, all seem devoted to chef Da-vid Punch (formerly of Ten Tables in Cam-bridge) and his inventive Mediterranean-style dishes, which bring out the best in any vegetable. Pickled ramps, fried okra, charred Japanese eggplant, and a chantenelle mush-room soup topped the menu. Even smaller and quieter than Sycamore, however, is the nearby Farmstead Table (www.farmsteadtable.com). This modern space was washed in white tones serves food with a rustic New England bent—slow-cooked meat and pota-toes—and folksy desserts, like the “vines tart,” dressed up with ganache (s).

For quiet and cozy, the Beacon Hill Bis-ter, on the first floor of the eponymous ho-tel (www.beaconhillhotel.com), is a good bet. Even with 60 seats in a relatively small storefront space, the restaurant rarely seems overcrowded. Enjoy the French-styled com-fort food in peace, then take a stroll down Charles Street, where window shopping at night may be more pleasurable than buying. Late nights at the Museum of Fine Arts (Wednesday through Friday) are also the best time to view exhibits. Crowds have likely waned at the turn of the new millennium. The cafe these days has a two-story entrance hall and back bar that face south and almost doubles its seating capacity. There are a few small tables, a few central tables, and generous outdoor seating. There is a village-like feel up the stairs. Enjoy the Brabant Cafe’s crusty breads, pastries, and light lunch. There is a table set up outside, which is a definite plus. Even small-real estate. We’ve got a unique location at our disposal. It is surrounded by 16.5 acres of mixed woods and open spaces; surrounding the home offering complete privacy within a 5 end of wooded private driveway on Historic Craftsbury Common.

Peace on Earth in sought-after, Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Remarkable home, unique location at the end of wooded private driveway on Historic Craftsbury Common.
changsresta.com), another cherished standby, snug On Massachusetts Avenue a short walk from the Square, the restaurant seats upward of 180 people amid large-scale Chinese accoutrements that include vases, paintings, and string instruments. Yet Changsho is homey, thanks to all the family diners and to its well-spaced tables, warm spot lighting, and the large-pattered carpet that invisibly soaks up spilled tea and soy sauce. Somehow the acoustics here dull sounds—even those emanating from the large parties of chin-wagging academics often in attendance. For those desperate for serious quietude surrounded by floors of utter silence, there’s always the Boston Public Library’s Courtyard Restaurant (www.theateraffair.com/bplcourtyard). It’s not open for dinner, but does serve a lovely, if pricey, lunch. Try the poached hen egg and bitter greens (14) or the more grittled open-face salmon sandwich (21). And the afternoon tea—the sample menu mentions raspberry thumbprints, scones with lemon curd, and savory cucumber and lemon cream-cheese sandwiches—might please even the pickiest Anglophile. But no bustling munching, or exclamations! Please! —N.F.B.

CURIOSITIES: Picking Up a Hobby

William Blake saw “a World in a Grain of Sand.” Stan Munro saw the Taj Mahal in a toothpick—or, more precisely, thousands of toothpicks stuck together with Elmer’s Glue. He also envisioned Stonehenge, the Eiffel Tower, and the International Space Station, and reproduced them, too, along with more than 200 other architectural wonders, at a scale of 1:164 in the basement of his home in North Syracuse, New York. “We decided these would be very intriguing to see,” says Michael McMillan, associate curator at the Fuller Craft Museum. And so 22 of Munro’s structures, including models of Boston landmarks Trinity Church, Fenway Park, and Hancock Place, will be on display at the Brockton, Massachusetts, museum in Toothpick World: From Silver to Skyline, starting December 19.

Photographs don’t do the work justice. Adults and children alike, looking for a day trip during school vacation especially, will enjoy seeing these astounding works up close. They are educational—lessons in architecture, engineering, and charm—but also testy to a capacity for zeal. “We spend a lot of time, whether because of academic gravitas or the stigma often attached to a museum, which is to highlight the power of the arts,” says McMillan. “What Stan does gets to the core of what we do at the museum, which is to show people can relate to.” Munro has worked as a TV reporter, true-crime writer, and hospital administrator, and has been “toothpicking” (his term) for fun since fifth grade. It became a vocation around 2003, when he was staying home to care for his wife, who had been diagnosed with polycystic kidney-liver disease. She is now doing well—yet toothpicking stuck for Munro, and is now his full-time job. The iconic Basílica de la Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, for example, took him about nine months to construct, but he erected the Washington Monument in one very long day. He sold his first collection, Toothpick City—I—50 of the world’s tallest buildings—into a museum in Spain in 2006; it was later acquired by Ripley’s Believe It or Not! in Baltimore. He currently has two traveling exhibits—Toothpick City II, which includes Yankee Stadium, Tokyo City Hall, the Queen Mary II, and Burj Al Arab (the luxury hotel in Dubai)—and the larger but equally eclectic Toothpick World. Where else could the Stratosphere Tower (Las Vegas), Grand Mosque (Mecca), and headquarters of MI-6 (London) be corralled? In all, Munro has employed more than four million toothpicks (now bought wholesale), along with untold vats of glue. “Stan’s used to showing a lot of his work in libraries, more casual places, a bar or a restaurant,” says McMillan, who is excited to widen the audience for fine folk art. “When he came here to visit, and I looked around and said, ‘Oh, this is a real museum.’”

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