‘I would appreciate the food hot’

His right foot, clad in a blue slipper, shook nervously . . . After officials began administering the drugs at 12:09 a.m., Johnson blinked three times and let out a breath through puffed cheeks. His foot stopped shaking. His eyes slowly dimmed, became glassy and closed to a crescent . . . He asked for a final meal of three fried chicken thighs, 10 or 15 shrimp, tater tots with ketchup, two slices of pecan pie, strawberry ice cream, honey and biscuits and a Coke.

From The Norman Transcript

When Julie Green began collecting notices of the final meals requested by death row inmates, her source was the local newspaper in Norman, Oklahoma. Since then numerous websites have been created that give details of executions as well as final meals.

“What seems to be missing, however, is interpretation of the final meal,” said Green, a Research Fellow and associate professor of art at OSU. “Why does this tradition exist, and what does the selection of each meal tell us about the individual’s race, region, and economic background—or even about his feelings on life and death? And what should it tell us about our feelings?”

Green began addressing these questions in 1999 through works of art, collectively called The Last Supper, consisting of blue and white paintings on porcelain plates, which illustrate actual last supper choices. The work has been exhibited widely in the United States, as well as in Britain, often accompanied by a lecture delivered by Green. She also has lectured on the subject in various art schools and institutes in China, and the project has been featured in a nationally distributed Associated Press article and on the public radio program The Splendid Table.

At the Center, Green is turning from painting to the writing of essays in which she will consider various aspects of capital punishment in questions in 1999 through works of art, collectively called The Last Supper, consisting of blue and white paintings on porcelain plates, which illustrate actual last supper choices. The work has been exhibited widely in the United States, as well as in Britain, often accompanied by a lecture delivered by Green. She also has lectured on the subject in various art schools and institutes in China, and the project has been featured in a nationally distributed Associated Press article and on the public radio program The Splendid Table.

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Center calls for 06-07 proposals

The Center is now accepting applications from scholars interested in 2006-07 fellowships for the resident research program. Applications for visiting fellowships must be postmarked by Monday, December 12, 2005, those for OSU fellowships by Monday, January 13, 2006.

Each year the Center brings together a new group of faculty fellows from OSU and other universities, as well as independent scholars, to pursue research and writing in an environment designed to be stimulating as well as protected from the usual daily demands of academic life.

Applications from both OSU and visiting scholars may be for any humanities related research, which should be understood to include not only traditional humanities disciplines but also those projects within the social and natural sciences that are historical or philosophical in approach, and that attempt to cast light on questions of interpretation or criticism traditionally found in the humanities. This also includes interpretations of science and technology.

Awards to visiting scholars are generally for a full academic year, while those for OSU scholars are
Modern America is rooted in nature reform

In the late nineteenth century, hundreds of American towns became congested, polluted industrial cities. The vast forests of the Great lakes were cut down. Millions of acres of grassland were transformed into farms and ranches. In response to these profound changes in the environment, citizens—including many newcomers to activism—organized to stop pollution, conserve natural resources, and preserve wild places and wild creatures.

“Their efforts led to laws, institutions, and government agencies that still shape the American landscape,” said Adam Rome, a Center Research Fellow, Associate Professor of History at The Pennsylvania State University and a former Rhodes scholar. “The environmental reforms of the period also had far-reaching political, social, and cultural consequences. To cite just one example, environmental activism was one of the principal ways women entered the public sphere in the years around 1900, and the energy of women in addressing environmental problems strengthened the campaign for suffrage.”

Rome is working on a book, Sustaining the Nation: Environmental Reform and the Emergence of Modern America, in which he aims to tell the story of the formative period of environmental reform—roughly 1865 to 1915—as part of the story of the emergence of modern America.

“In addition to changing the way scholars understand the history of environmental reform, this project will shed light on the political, social, and cultural history of the United States in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. I hope to demonstrate that the insights of my specialty—environmental history—are critical in understanding the emergence of modern America.”

Standard surveys of the period give little space to environmental issues, said Rome. “Though a few classic works about resource conservation and wilderness preservation addressed issues of great significance for political and cultural historians, much of the recent work on those subjects has sought to explain the roots of contemporary environmental problems, not to contribute to a deeper understanding of the historic transformation wrought by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.”

In what he describes as a “holistic” approach, Rome is analyzing the various forms of activism that prevailed at the time, including the conservation movement, wilderness preservation campaigns, anti-pollution efforts, and attempts to “green” the urban landscape. Most scholars have focused on only one form of activism, said Rome, even though at the time “many people participated in multiple reform campaigns. Activists in different causes often used similar strategies and made similar arguments. By analyzing similarities and differences among all forms of environmental reform in this period, I hope to make fresh arguments about their significance.

“Though some people argued between 1865 and 1915 for a new ethic to guide decisions about land use, the common denominator in the activism of the period was a sense that the vast transformation of the environment wrought by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration had unintended consequences that threatened the nation’s future. In different ways, most environmental reformers sought to sustain the nation materially and spiritually.”


Invitation: Nature & Culture colloquium

During Winter Term, the Center will host a biweekly colloquium on Nature and Culture co-led by visiting Research Fellows Robin Schulze (English) and Adam Rome (History) of Pennsylvania State University.

The colloquium will begin by considering how Americans thought about nature in the decades around 1900, when many “modern” ideas about nature first were articulated. “Nature writing” became a popular phenomenon then. The relationship of humans to the non-human world also was an important subject for
He removed the wall between the gallery office and the exhibition space, which remained empty. He named the lobby of the Los Angeles Museum of Art after himself. He published a catalogue of works that the Museum of Modern Art had removed from its permanent collection, thereby causing the curator serious discomfort.

He is Michael Asher, an internationally known Los Angeles artist and the subject of Kirsi Peltomaki’s current research.

“Asher does not physically make objects. Instead, he works through the removal, displacement, substitution, and reconstitution of objects that already are situated within the institution,” said Peltomäki, a Research Fellow and an assistant professor of art at OSU. “Asher’s site-specific installations, often associated with minimalism and conceptual art, are made exclusively for their site, typically a museum.”

Based in Los Angeles, with work dating back to the late 1960s, Asher is considered to be one of the three most influential artists of the first generation doing “institutional critique.” Peltomäki defines the term as “art that investigates its institutional frame of reference, for example by calling attention to the ideological underpinnings of a museum or gallery context.”

While in residence at the Center, Peltomäki will complete much of the first draft of a book about Asher and the role of the human subject in his work. The artist is cooperating with Peltomaki, and has granted her access to his personal archives.

“This project is significant for two reasons. It will provide a comprehensive critical account of Asher’s materially ephemeral artistic practice, and it will be among the first studies in contemporary art history to center upon the role of the subject—the artist, viewer or curator—as opposed to the object of art. It will also be the first book-length study of this influential artist’s work.”

The anti-material aspect of Asher’s practice has often been analyzed by critics and art historians in the context of the “dematerialization” of the art object in the 1960s and 1970s, said Peltomäki. “On a formal level, however, Asher’s works are more concerned with the participatory role of the human subject than they are with the definition of an object.”

The study will focus on four primary aspects of the role of the human subject in the artist’s work. One will be the way in which he constructs a phenomenological experience for viewers by manipulating the physical properties of the exhibition space. “In his untitled work for the 1970 group exhibition *Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, Asher soundproofed his allocated room so that, by

The figures in this work by Michael Asher are paid participants, hired to view the most-reproduced and the least-reproduced work for 30 minutes at a time, at the 74th American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1982. Photo by Luis Medina.

*Continue on Page 10*
A woman “who raised her head above the parapet was a woman who would not win.” So wrote Irish writer Maeve Binchy about life for women in Ireland in the 1930s.

“By the end of the twentieth century, one would have thought that the situation would be drastically altered, not only for women in general, but also for theatre artists,” said Charlotte Headrick, a Research Fellow and professor of communication and theatre arts at OSU. “But it has been a long and continuing struggle in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic for women to gain the recognition they deserve.”

Headrick is devoting her Center Fellowship to collecting, editing, and contributing to a book of essays aimed at filling in the gap in Irish theatre history where women writers belong. In explaining the need for such a book, Headrick described a controversy that followed the appearance of a three-volume set of what was touted as the “best” of Irish writing, published as a project by the Field Day Theatre Company founded by five Irishmen.

“What happened next is the stuff of academic legend,” Headrick recounted wryly. “After the third volume appeared in 1991, it seemed that Ireland had been blessed with only male writers.” When scholars raised an outcry, a fourth volume was promised to “give women their place in Irish letters.” The years went by, the Field Day Theatre ceased to be a force in Irish theatre, and there was no fourth volume.

A group of Irish scholars, all women, took up the task, and in 2002 a fourth volume was published by Cork University Press, followed by a fifth volume when a single book proved insufficient. In addition to poetry, drama, and literature, the anthology included women’s contributions in the social sciences, history, theology and oral tradition. While this was “an excellent beginning in reclaiming the position of women in Irish letters, more needs to be done. There are women playwrights, directors, designers, stage managers, actresses, company managers, critics, and artistic directors who have shaped what Irish theatre is today.”

A prime example is the all-female Charabanc Theatre Company, founded in 1983, which changed the face of Irish theatre history. “These women, along with emerging artists, are prime forces in both the historic and contemporary Irish theatre scene—they are the movers and shakers of Irish theatre.”

Headrick is also the author of the forthcoming book *Women of Ireland: Irish Dramatists*, which, when published, will be the second anthology of Irish women dramatists in print. As the past president of the American Conference for Irish Studies, Western Region, Headrick organized a conference, “Women of Some Importance,” which was held at the Center for the Humanities in October. The presentations included papers by scholars from France, Northern Ireland and throughout the U.S., as well as the performance of a dramatic monologue about Irish-American suffragist Clara Dillon Darrow, a screening of short films from Ireland and Northern Ireland, and the Elizabeth Kuti play *Treehouses*, directed by Headrick and performed by The University Theatre.

Charlotte Headrick and Bantry

_Filling the gap in Irish theatre history_ continued.

Many writers who seemed not to be writing about nature at all. Though the colloquium will begin with the United States in the decades around 1900, professors Schulze and Rome hope that the discussion will range widely across time and place.

The organizational meeting for the colloquium will be at 4 p.m., January 17, in the Center’s conference room. Humanities faculty members with teaching or research interests in environmental issues who may wish to participate, please email robin.schulze@oregonstate.edu or adam.rome@oregonstate.edu.
Poets reimagined nature to fit scientific age

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, many Americans sensed that modern, urban-industrial life was exacting a painful price—the loss of a direct relationship with nature.

“As more and more people traded the nature-centered rhythms of rural life for the rush of industrial urbanity, white middle-class Americans began to sense that their modern lives were becoming increasingly artificial,” said Robin Schulze, a Center Research Fellow and professor of English at The Pennsylvania State University. “The ‘conquest’ of nature that Progressives heralded as the basis of American achievement brought with it disconcerting unnatural consequences. Spurred by a growing sense of detachment from the organic world, middle-class white Americans turned their minds and bodies to nature in record numbers.”

The resultant nature craze produced a “sprawling set of popular institutions and artifacts,” including the Nature Study Movement, the Country Life Movement, the rise of “organic” architecture, the popularization of nature books, a vogue for hiking, and a dramatic increase in visitors to national parks.

The nation’s emerging sense of the loss of its former relationship to the natural world was a much-debated subject of modernity, said Schulze, and among those deeply engaged in the debate were certain modernist poets. The poets and their response to the shifting popular attitudes about the human relationship to nature are the focus of her current book, “Beyond the Yawp”: Nature, Natural History, and the Origins of Modernist Poetry.

Continued on Page 10
The 21st Annual Meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies, Western Region, met at the Center in October. Drawn by the theme “Women of Some Importance,” participants came from across the country, as well as Northern Ireland and France. Keynote speaker Northern Irish dramatist Nicola McCartney, a Creative Writing Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, delivered a talk titled “Accidental Playwright.”

In addition to academic presentations, the conference included a performance with original words of the song “Women of Ireland” by OSU musicians, a one-woman dramatic presentation on the life of Suffragist Clara Dillon Darrow, a revival of the OSU Theatre Department’s play Treehouses, directed by conference organizer Charlotte Headrick, a reading of selections from McCartney’s plays, and screenings of several short films. Prior to the film Field of Bones, which is based on an Irish poem, part of the poem was read in English by Headrick and in Irish by Êmer Deane, the Consul General of Ireland.

The conference was sponsored by the Center, the Consul General of Ireland, the National Conference of Irish Studies, the OSU President’s Office, the College of Liberal Arts, the University Theatre, and the departments of English, Women Studies and Speech Communication.

Women of Some Importance draws Irish Studies scholars to the Center

Scott Palmer, Nicola McCartney, and Irish Consul Êmer Deane

Mary Martin, Audrey Eyler, Helen Lojek, and Tramble T. Turner

Charlotte Headrick
Center Research Fellow
Conference Organizer

Northern Irish dramatist Nicola McCartney delivers the keynote address, “Accidental Playwright.”

Helen Lojek
Center Program Advisory Board

Kerry Ahearn, English
Maureen Healy, History
Jonathan Katz, History
Maria Olaya, Foreign Langs and Lits
Michael Scanlan, Philosophy
Robert Wess, English
Jun Xing, Ethnic Studies
Ex-officio
David Robinson, Center Director
Wendy Madar, Associate Director

Singer Emily Thielen and flute player Tina Bull, preparing to perform “Women of Ireland,” with original lyrics by Michael Russell

Unidentified conference participant, Jennifer Cornell, and Neil Davison,

Kathleen Heininge, Virginia Mack and Shannon Hopkins

Kevin Drummond and JohnnCountryman
Julie Green: *I paint to point*

Julie Green’s artist statement begins: “I wanted to be a stewardess until age four, and then I wanted to be an artist. Born in Japan, I moved with my family to the U.S. I have lived in fifteen states, all suburban areas until college. Contact with nature was limited. Our only family pet was a guppy in 1970.”

The Center’s current show, “Paintings 1996-2005, Julie Green,” will be on exhibit through December. Green is also a Research Fellow at the Center this year (her project is described on Page 1). Since no paraphrasing could tell the tale so well, here is the rest of her artist’s statement: “My undergraduate degree is in design. At twenty-three, bidding farewell to high heels and an office with a red leather couch on the thirty-third floor of Rockefeller Center in New York City, I quit my job as a designer for Time/Life. With two undergraduate painting classes behind me, and all the museums in New York available, I began to paint.

“In the past twenty years, the work has been influenced by where I live: Kansas, Japan, New York City, Oklahoma, and now Oregon. Much is small-scale egg tempera or oil painting. The figure, be it human or animal, is a continual source of fascination. While the paintings have personal meaning, viewers often have their own interpretations. I am driven by the mysterious and the ephemeral. There is a word in the Japanese language, kehai, which is the feeling something has just happened or is about to occur: a footstep, a whiff, a stirring. I attempt to make a lasting image out of kehai—the fleeting moment.

“When visiting a museum I look for pentimento, which is when certain colors become transparent over time. Pentimento allows the viewer to see under-painting: for example, the gesture of the hand before it was repainted. X-rays of paintings found in art history texts inform these works. Examples of these technical influences can be seen in the paintings *Before Tea* and *Mike*. By working in thin layers, the process of change and correction is apparent in the finished paintings. I generally work without models or photographic references because of a fascination with memory; specifically, that which we choose to remember and that which we choose to forget. The alterations of memory give some of the paintings a dream-like quality, though dreams are rarely used as subject matter.

“Books and periodicals provide subject matter for the some of the paintings. I attempt to set up my life in a way that promotes creative practice. For example, as an adult I have never had a TV. Studio time is divided between personal narrative paintings and a five-year project called *The Last Supper*. Using mineral paint fired onto porcelain, *The Last Supper* illustrates 250 final meal requests of U.S. death row inmates. As a Center for the Humanities Fellow, I am working on an essay about the ritual of final meals. While the plates are quite different than the paintings, both are observations of contemporary society. I am driven to the studio to make some sense of our world: painting as questioning and meditation. Andy Warhol said the artist of the future will simply point. I paint to point.”
### Calendar

#### October

**Fall Term Art Exhibit**
*Paintings 1996-2005*
Julie Green

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<td>3</td>
<td><em>From the Monthly Review to Amazon.Com Customer Reviewers: Citizen Reviews, Technology, and the Circulation of Cultural Power.</em> Lecture by Lisa Ede, Center Research Fellow, Professor of English, OSU. 4 p.m. Autzen House.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>‘Political Hermaphrodites’: <em>Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America.</em> Lecture by Adam Rome, Center Research Fellow, Associate Professor History, The Pennsylvania State University. 4 p.m. Autzen House.</td>
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#### November

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<td>7</td>
<td>‘Women of Some Importance: Irish Artists who Influenced Theatre in the 20th Century.’ Lecture by Charlotte Headrick, Center Research Fellow, Professor of Speech Communication/Theatre Arts, OSU. 4 p.m. Autzen House.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>The Last Supper: Final Meals of U.S. Death Row Inmates.</em> Lecture by Julie Green, Center Research Fellow, Associate Professor of Art, OSU. 4 p.m. Autzen House.</td>
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Julie Green

*Our State Motto*, Julie Green, 2005
*Our State Motto*, Julie Green, 2005

*The New Mrs.*, Julie Green, 1998
*The New Mrs.*, Julie Green, 1998
Asher continued . . .

suppressing any kind of sound, it interfered with the exhibition viewers’ ability to coordinate their spatial experience.”

A second aspect of Peltomäki’s focus will be Asher’s use of actual objects, including removing the wall between a gallery office and the exhibition area, “thus displaying the gallerist and the managerial function of the gallery in an otherwise empty space.”

The third aspect will be the use of the artist himself as a culturally and historically specific subject position. “For example, in an untitled 1983-85 installation, Asher named the lobby of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art after himself, negotiating a contract with the museum that positioned him as the museum’s landlord for a period of eighteen months.”

The fourth focus in Peltomäki’s study is the manner in which “Asher positions and repositions discursively defined subjects in order to manifest their institutional constraints.” An example is his piece in the 1999 group exhibition The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect, at the Museum of Modern Art.

“Asher asked MoMA to compile and publish a catalogue of the works of art that it had ‘deaccessioned’—that is, removed from the collection—from the museum’s Department of Painting and Sculpture. The institution’s response to this project demonstrated symptomatic discomfort.”

Although Asher’s published catalogue of the removed works was produced internally by MoMA, it featured a disclaimer by the chief curator disavowing the accuracy of the listings on the grounds that it was not an official museum publication.

“Asher’s catalogue hinged upon a discursively specific set of intersubjective relations,” said Peltomäki. “The artist spoke from the museum’s authoritative position, while the ‘real’ curator performed a frantic disidentification, again in the name of the museum.”

Other contemporary art historians tend to focus on the material aspects of art, such as the status of the art object itself, and fail to account for many changes regarding the subject, said Peltomäki. “Increasingly, visual art is manifest as events, gestures, or acts instead of stable objects or images. Performance, installation, collaborative projects, public art and temporary projects are among the types of contemporary art that rely on interrelated subjectivities, or the subject relations of the artists, viewers, critics, and institutions. Asher’s works are central to these developments because they focus specifically on the viewer’s experience, either through challenging the viewers’ expectations or soliciting participation.”

Asher continued . . .

The cultural drive in the early twentieth century to remake nature as a subject fit for a scientific age left the emerging poets in a difficult position. While they felt the national pull to reconnect with the natural world, they also were affected by awareness of the importance of nature to the nation’s literary heritage, “the orphic, mystical attachment to American nature” that had first stamped American literature as unique and important.

“These young writers sensed, however, that if their own art was to be taken seriously as a twentieth-

Continued on next page
In general, said Green, the requested meals are modest, and typically include American diner-type food such as French fries, hamburgers, and chicken fried steak. The meals include few fruits or vegetables, and only rarely gourmet or international foods apart from Mexican dishes requested mainly by Hispanic inmates. Green found no requests for such specialties as sushi or Godiva chocolate, though some requests contain striking details: “An Oregon request for fried eggs and bacon closed with ‘I would appreciate the food hot.’”

The numbers of executions as well as the rituals and rules surrounding last suppers vary from state to state. At 336, Texas leads the nation in executions, followed by Virginia with 94. The total number of state executions to date is 994. Few states allow family members in the kitchen or at the meal, though in Louisiana the inmate’s family can bring food to the prison and eat with the condemned. In most states there is a twenty-dollar spending limit, said Green, who has encountered reports of taxpayers complaining about the expense.

“It is a curious ritual, the last supper. An inmate has been locked up for a decade, with little opportunity for choice in food or anything else. Then, immediately prior to execution, we ask, ‘What can we cook for you?’ Does a meal offer dignity to an otherwise degrading situation? Is the meal truly for the inmate, or is it a way to alleviate some of our guilt and discomfort about capital punishment? . . . One wonders how much of the meal the inmate is able to eat. One wonders about the occasional request for communion, or Rolaids, or a Diet Coke. One wonders about the irony of sustenance—nourishment to support life—being carefully prepared and served just before death.”

In Beyond the Yawp, Schulze will argue that these questions proved central to the creation of American modernist verse during the early decades of the twentieth century.
The Center was established in 1984 as an outgrowth of the Humanities Development Program, which had been creating innovative interdisciplinary courses since 1977. The Center’s focus has broadened to a concern for improving the quality of humanities research as well as teaching at OSU. This is accomplished through the awarding of resident research fellowships to both OSU and visiting scholars, as well as by sponsoring conferences, seminars, lecture series, art exhibits and other events. The Center occupies Autzen House, 811 S.W. Jefferson Avenue.