

Coming Home



Stars in dance, music, and art welcome alumnae back to campus

The four days of Reunion 2008—September 18, 19, 20, and 21—will feature more than 40 events that showcase the great intellectual and creative power of Mills faculty, students, and alumnae and celebrate the bonds that keep alumnae connected to the College and to each other.

On the following pages, we present a preview of three highlights of the weekend: Learn more about Convocation speaker Trisha Brown '58, who has created a lasting impact in the world of modern dance; the continuing legacy of composer Darius Milhaud and his wife, Madeleine, an accomplished artist to whom this year's Milhaud Concert is dedicated; and Professor of Studio Art Hung Liu, who will host a tour of the studio where she creates her monumental and thought-provoking works.

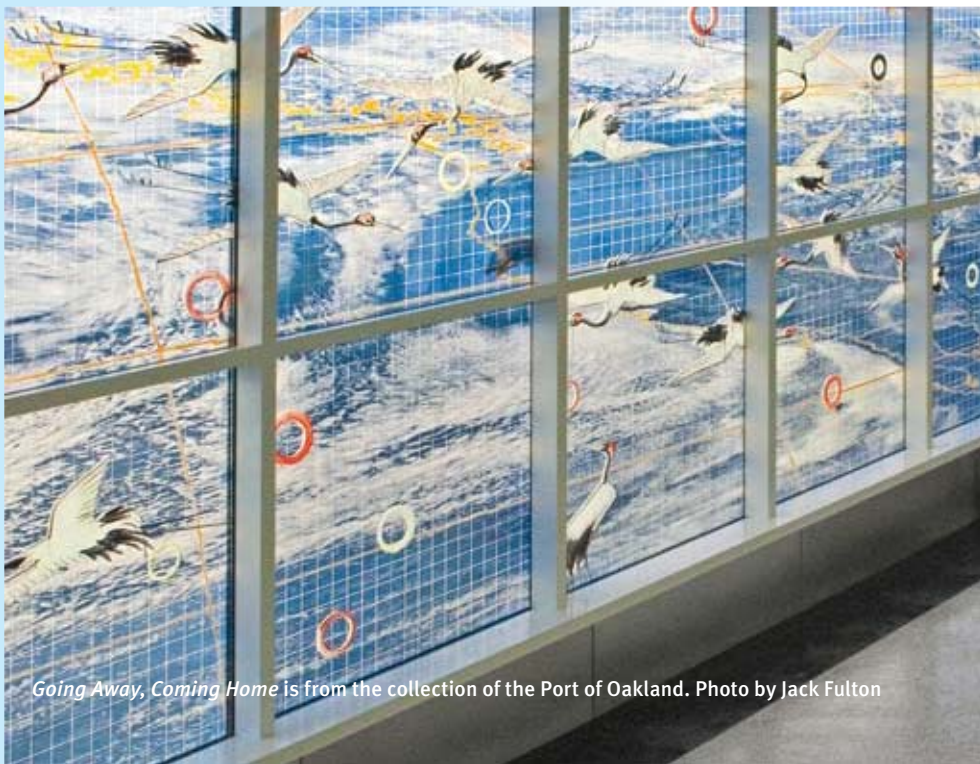
There are plenty of additional activities to choose from—including campus tours, a literary salon, panel discussions, and a chance to meet new Provost and Dean of the Faculty Sandra C. Greer—and there is still time to sign up to join in this memorable event. Go to www.mills.edu/reunion for a full schedule and online registration. A few activities during Reunion—such as Convocation, the President's State of the College Address, the Darius Milhaud Concert, and the AAMC Bylaws Meeting—do not require payment of registration fees.

ALUMNAE AWARDS HONOR THE BEST

At noon on Saturday, the Alumnae Association of Mills College will host the second annual Alumnae Awards Luncheon. Join your classmates to honor Trisha Brown '58 with the Distinguished Achievement Award. The Outstanding Volunteer Award will be presented to Peggy Weber '65 of Minneapolis, who has served with unparalleled enthusiasm as an alumna admissions representative, a Trustee of Mills College, and a volunteer on many AAMC committees; and the Recent Graduate Award will go to Ramona Lisa Smith '01, MBA '02, of Oakland, who has gracefully balanced service as treasurer and a member of the AAMC Board of Governors with family and career in the years since her graduation. Reunion registration required.

JUST ADDED TO THE SCHEDULE

Latin jazz pianist and composer Rebeca Mauleón '89, MA '97, and her quintet will entertain alumnae at Mills on Friday, September 19, from 10:00 pm to midnight. Reunion registration required. To learn more about Mauleón, who will perform the following day at the Monterey Jazz Festival, visit www.rebecamauleon.com.



Going Away, Coming Home is from the collection of the Port of Oakland. Photo by Jack Fulton



Dancing in the dorm

Lessons learned at Mills enabled Trisha Brown '58 to transform the modern dance scene

By Rachel Howard

No artistic movement in dance is more synonymous with New York than the Judson Dance Theater postmodernists, and arguably no choreographer from that movement is more influential and revered than Trisha Brown. Winner of the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grant," the National Medal of Arts, and practically every other accolade in her field, Brown—who will deliver this year's Convocation keynote address on September 19 and receive the 2008 Distinguished Alumna Award on September 20—jumped in with the other rebels presenting their work at Manhattan's Judson Church in the early 1960s and founded her Trisha Brown Dance Company in 1970.

She made dances with simple improvisational commands like "lie down" and "sit," dances that sent performers scaling the sides of buildings, dances whose startling torques and torsions changed the idea of how the human body could move. She became a star artist of a quintessentially East Coast intellectualism. But her maverick talent has its roots in the West, at Mills, with lessons that transcend any aesthetic camp.

"The women teaching me at Mills were very strong women, with their hair pulled back," remembers the 1958 graduate, writing via email during a performing tour this summer in France. "They worked like draft horses. I recall Eleanor Lauer saying, 'You are not tired.' The foundation of my work ethic to this day was learned at Mills."

So was the foundation of Brown's dance technique. After performing what she once called "Hollywood-style dance



Trisha Brown performing her 1985 piece, *Lateral Pass*.

routines" as a girl in rural Aberdeen, Washington, she dove into serious training at Mills, which at that time emphasized the methods of the mother of modern dance, Martha Graham. But some of Brown's favorite dance lessons took place in the dorm, where she and friends would throw on records after lunch. "The lunch period was highlighted by this dramatic, wild dancing," she says. "Almost daily, for years. It was wildly fun."

The work was serious in the studio, where professor Rebecca Fuller schooled Brown in basic composition. "I was buffaloes on the subject of choreography and wanting very much to learn more about it, and Becky took me in to the dance studio and said, 'OK,'" Brown says. "I said, 'OK, what?' I began developing small phrases. It was an arduous process, but one that gave me ideas I could go on to work with in the future."

The biggest step in that future arrived thanks to Fuller. Brown had graduated and was teaching at Oregon's Reed College when Fuller suggested she take a summer workshop with a woman named Anna Halprin, in Marin. Halprin taught radical new notions of improvisation, suggesting that a quotidian task like sweeping a deck could be a dance. Brown, along with now-famous Halprin students like Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti, soon moved to New York—and the rest is

dance history.

After nearly four decades of pushing the boundaries of dance in New York, Brown—still performing at age 71—looks back fondly on her Mills years. She remembers studying French with Madeleine Milhaud, wife of avant-garde composer and Mills professor Darius Milhaud; Brown worked in their house and would join the couple for Sunday teas. Madeleine Milhaud told her, "Patricia, get married." She didn't listen—and found the rest of her Mills education pushed her towards independence. Jewelry class taught her unexpected lessons: "The teacher was irritated that I didn't access abstraction at all," she recalls. "I think about that every once in a while, as I think about how later I slid effortlessly into abstraction." A lecture with iconoclastic composer John Cage, she says, was "a life-changing experience."

Continuing to make experimental new dances to rave reviews, Brown promises fresh insights in her Convocation keynote speech. "If I shirked my duty of telling the students at Mills all my secrets," she says, "I would be remiss."

Trisha Brown '58 will be the keynote speaker at Convocation on Friday, September 19. This free event takes place at 10:15 am on Toyon Meadow and is open to all alumnae. Reunion registration is not required.

Spirits of innovation

The French composer Darius Milhaud and his wife, Madeleine, created a lasting artistic influence at Mills and around the world

By Valerie Sullivan

One has only to look around the Mills campus and talk to people who knew Darius and Madeleine Milhaud to understand the powerful legacy of the composer and his wife. This year's Reunion will feature the annual Darius Milhaud Concert, in honor of the prolific composer who taught at Mills from 1940 to 1971, spending alternate years at Mills and the Paris Conservatoire after 1946. The concert is dedicated to Madame Milhaud, an artist and intellectual in her own right, who died in Paris in January.

Accolades such as "generous," "gifted," "gracious," and "open minded" regularly accompany reminiscences of the two. "The Milhauds were simply the greatest influences on our lives during those post-war years," Iola Brubeck, a graduate student at Mills in 1947, wrote in one such remembrance. Her husband, jazz great Dave Brubeck, studied under Milhaud in 1946–47.



Madeleine and Darius Milhaud

Anita Aragon Bowers '63, president of the Alumnae Association of Mills College, recalls presenting Milhaud with a blue beanie and Mills beer stein when he was made an honorary member of her Class of 1963, one of the classes being honored at Reunion 2008. "He was a thoroughly gracious and congenial man," she says.

The Milhauds arrived at Mills in 1940 after fleeing their beloved Paris when the Germans invaded France. They were invited to campus at a particularly creative time. "It was a golden age at Mills... an incredible time in the fields of dance, art, and writing," says Professor of Music David Bernstein. "Milhaud was just a perfect match for Mills. He contributed to the ongoing development of experimentalism in his own way through his personality, aesthetics, openness, teaching, and musical example."

The Mills Music Department is internationally known for its experimental tradition in composition, free improvisation, electronic music, and computer music. Bernstein credits this spirit of innovation to composers like Milhaud, who was unafraid to explore new musical techniques, including indeterminacy and noise. Milhaud also experimented with polytonality (writing in two or more keys at the same time), delighting in the audience's spontaneous and overwhelmingly negative response to one of his performances. As he explained in his autobiography *My Happy Life*, "It is the indifference of the public which is depressing: enthusiasm, or vehement protests, are proof that your work is *alive*."

Milhaud was a close associate of composers such as Erik Satie and Igor Stravinsky. He was also "an extraordinarily generous and gifted teacher" who encouraged students like Brubeck to find



their own voices. "His students adored him," Bernstein says.

While Madame Milhaud devoted much of her life to supporting her husband's work, she also was an actress, musician, intellectual, and close associate of some of the leading artists of the time. At Mills, she taught classes in French diction and literature. She wrote libretti for Milhaud's operas, performed speaking roles in works by Stravinsky and Arthur Honegger, and was among the first actresses to perform on the radio.

At one time, Bernstein and his family lived in the faculty house once occupied by the Milhauds. His interest prompted him to visit Madame Milhaud at her Paris home in 1994. Her apartment, filled with artwork by legendary artists such as Picasso, was a testament to a long life, well lived. "There aren't many of those people around today—people who have in their memories the experience of living in the entire 20th century," Bernstein says.

Bernstein recalls being struck by her wit, charm, and keen, penetrating eyes. "She was a woman intellectual who held her own during a time when that wasn't an easy accomplishment," he says. "She would not sacrifice her convictions for anything, but she also wasn't intolerant. She had strength of character without arrogance. And, like Darius, at the core of her personality was a profound humanism."

During the Darius Milhaud Concert at 8:00 pm, September 19, in the Mills College Art Museum, the all-women Eclipse Quartet will perform Milhaud's String Quartets 1 and 18. The performance will be filmed by the French-German channel ARTE for their upcoming documentary film on Darius Milhaud. Admission to the concert is free and does not require Reunion registration.

Creative space



JEFF KELLEY

Hung Liu with two works in progress (see the finished pieces on page 3); In front of her work *Going Away, Coming Home* (below), collection of the Port of Oakland.

Hung Liu works historical motifs and cultural themes into art on a grand scale

By Pamela Wilson

Hung Liu's studio, just over a mile from the Mills College campus, is a peaceful, bright oasis. High ceilings, abundant skylights, and impossibly white walls exude tranquility and order. There is room here for the imagination to take flight as well as room for Liu's enormous paintings, which require a great deal of space both to create and to appreciate. Her work is big—physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

The tranquility of her studio masks the artist's enormous creative energy. Liu combines her training as a muralist in the socialist realist style with a postmodern approach that questions all received knowledge, regardless of its cultural or political foundations. She sometimes places contradictory readings side by side or layers images and interpretations from different epochs and traditions. The cranes in Liu's *Going Away, Coming Home*, the piece that gives Mills' 2008 Reunion its theme, originally appeared on a 12th-century Chinese silk scroll; now they are superimposed on 21st-century satellite images. The mural, which is installed at

Oakland International Airport, integrates two other touchstones of Liu's style: multiple circles—a figure that symbolizes, in Chinese and other traditions, that the universe has no beginning and no end—and dripping paint, which introduces gravity and chance into the artistic process.

A second mural, *Take Off*, was installed at San Francisco International Airport in early spring. In May, two solo exhibitions opened in Beijing (see page 3) and another was mounted in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Liu's work is also included a show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art through October 6.

One might expect to find some evidence of this hustle and bustle in Liu's studio, but all is orderly and peaceful, creating an ideal environment for taking in Liu's art.

In the back of the studio, several pieces provide an overview of Liu's artistic explorations since coming to Mills in 1990. In *Modern Times*, from 2005, portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin vie with portraits Liu copied from Van Gogh to present two versions of the modern era—one that values the political above all and another that values the artistic. The canvas includes three working alarm clocks produced in China during the Cultural Revolution, each with a Red Guard waving a copy of Mao's *Little Red Book* on its face.

"The revolutionary clock is still ticking, even though we're now in a different century," Liu explains. Her stance is profoundly ambivalent: She appreciates the dreams and aspirations that underlie

both Chinese and Western political ideals, and exploring the ensuing contradictions is at the core of much of her work. Liu grew up in China in the midst of the Cultural Revolution; as a young adult she was sent to the countryside for re-education, where she began drawing and photographing peasants. Liu earned an MFA at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and began teaching there. She later earned an MFA at UC San Diego.

At the front of her studio, works in progress feature menacing, prehistoric-looking fish, representing subtle, ambiguous emotions: In one piece, they may embody unconscious memory as they swim into the forehead of a serene, thoughtful older woman. In another, one big fish lurks beyond the frame of a portrait of a bride on her wedding day. Photos taken by American visitors to China over a century ago provide the source material for these paintings. "I feel like somebody long ago from the West captured someone in the East, captured these Chinese women," Liu says. Her re-appropriation of those images, in a sense, reclaims those who have been objectified, along with the right to interpret their images.

The artist's trip to Beijing this spring allowed Liu glimpses into history in the making—including television coverage of May's massive earthquake in China's Sichuan province and preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games—which is supplying inspiration for several new works. As she comments on her website, www.kelli-liu.com, "History is not a static image or a frozen story. It is not a noun. Even if its images and stories are very old, it is always flowing forward. History is a verb."

Hung Liu's studio will be open to Reunioning alumnae on Saturday, September 20, by advance registration only. Space is strictly limited to the first 50 registrants. A bus to the studio will leave the Mills campus at 3:30 pm.



FREDERIC LARSON

The poetics and politics of identity

Kissing Dead Girls and other recent work

Daphne Gottlieb, MFA '01
Soft Skull Press, 2008
DaphneGottlieb.com



Standing six feet tall in black combat boots, with a sheaf of raven dreadlocks hanging to her waist and sporting a gallery of vivid tattoos, Daphne Gottlieb, MFA '01, cuts a striking figure as she reads from her latest book,

Kissing Dead Girls. But what's even more extraordinary than Gottlieb's physical presence is the poetry she shares with the several dozen listeners at Booksmith book store on San Francisco's Haight Street on a brisk July evening.

Informed by a mix of feminist theory and pop culture, Gottlieb's poems burst with humor and violence, longing and heartbreak, gritty reality and philosophical reflection, all pushed by an immediacy that leaves the reader breathless. She describes the origins of her new book, saying, "I wanted to take a look at the myths of Mata Hari and Helen Keller and Clara Bow and Josephine Baker—all these women who are dead and so well known and documented that there's nothing left of them but a name, which is a myth. I wanted to see if I could dig under the surface and tell an absolutely beautiful lie, written as a lover."

Born in Philadelphia and raised in upstate New York, Gottlieb started writing very early in life. "I had my first poem published when I was eight, in a library's journal for kids, and I thought, 'Hey, this is pretty cool!' We do the things we get a lot of approbation for early on, and I got that for my writing."

Since completing her MFA at Mills in 2001, she has published four volumes of poetry: her second, *Why Things Burn* (Soft Skull Press,

2001), received the Firecracker Alternative Book Award and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. She has also produced a graphic novel, *Jokes and the Unconscious* (Cleis Press, 2006), with cartoonist Diane DiMassa, the creator of Hothead Paisan. This summer, in addition to *Kissing Dead Girls*, Gottlieb has released *F***ing Daphne* (Seal Press), the second collection of stories she has edited, which gathers appearances of her own character in works of fiction by other writers.

"This anthology takes control over my own myth," she says. "There are all these portraits people have written about me...most of them are false. I see it in the papers, too—the promo for the reading called me a 'kinky sex poet.' Now I think I'm a lot of things, but I don't think I'm a kinky sex poet. The myth is there, but this Daphne 'character' isn't me, there was already a separation."

This is a natural progression for a poet who has always poked at the preconceptions embodied in all sorts of archetypes and stereotypes, from the femme fatale to the housewife to the other woman. Her 2003 book, *Final Girl* (Soft Skull Press), which won the Audre Lorde Award in Poetry, is constructed around the concept of the last surviving character in slasher films, who is frequently female and must make the choice to be killed or to stand and fight.

"I want to examine representations and push at them to see where they bend or if they can be broken," Gottlieb says. And that exploration is at the heart of Gottlieb's creativity. For her, poetry allows "a deeper searching, whether it's political or social or existential. It's a way of making sense of things," she says. "I write to make sense, or if there's something I need and can't find—you have to write it, finally, yourself."

—Linda Schmidt

"I want to examine representations and push at them to see where they bend or if they can be broken."

