



Press Release

American Academy in Berlin Announces 2017–18 Berlin Prize Recipients

22 Scholars, Writers, and Artists Chosen for Semester Stays in Berlin

BERLIN—May 10, 2017—The American Academy in Berlin has awarded Berlin Prizes—semester-long fellowships in Berlin—to 21 scholars, writers, and artists for fall 2017 and spring 2018. An additional Berlin Prize in music composition was awarded for spring 2019, bringing the total of recipients announced to 22.

Academy president Michael P. Steinberg said: “We look forward to welcoming a particularly stunning class of fellows to the Academy. This group of scholars and artists will work with their peers and partner institutions in Berlin on projects that combine issues of ardent contemporary interest with the deep capacities of scholarship and the creative imagination. Their work will be of lasting value and, on the way, spark exciting conversations and connections between the US and Germany.”

The 2017-18 fellows, who were chosen by an independent selection committee, will explore an array of projects and topics—some, but by no means all, directly related to Germany. Projects include the effects of immigration on the social life of the United States, two novels-in-progress, the history of black musicians in Germany and Austria, a comparison of current European and American policing operations, sectarianism in the modern Middle East, and historical crises in the humanities.

The highly coveted Berlin Prize is awarded annually to scholars, writers, composers, and artists from the United States who represent the highest standards of excellence in their fields. Fellows receive a monthly stipend, partial board, and accommodations at the Academy’s lakeside Hans Arnhold Center in Berlin-Wannsee.

The Berlin Prize provides recipients with the time and resources to step back from their daily obligations to work on academic and artistic projects they might not otherwise pursue. The fellows are encouraged to work with local individuals and institutions in the Academy’s well-established network, forging rich connections and lasting transatlantic relationships. During their stay, fellows engage audiences through public lectures, performances, and readings, which take place at the Academy but also throughout Berlin and Germany.

The Fall 2017 Class of Berlin Prize Fellows

NANCY FONER

Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Hunter College and Graduate Center, City University of New York
In Berlin, Foner will examine how post-1965 immigration has reshaped the demographic contours and social life of the United States. Though focused on contemporary life, her project is infused with a historical sensibility for how changes generated by past immigration help to explain transformations in the US today.



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V.V. GANESHANANTHAN

Writer; Assistant Professor of English, University of Minnesota

At the Academy, Ganeshanathan will be working on her second novel, *Movement* (under contract with Random House), which draws on a decade of research on the Sri Lankan civil war, as well as her experience as a member of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The novel tracks its protagonist, Sashi, from her time as a young medic in northern Sri Lanka in the late 1980s to her career as an emergency room doctor in New York City in 2009. As the war hurtles to a brutal conclusion, the lessons of her history move her to a questionable act of political theatre.

DILIP GAONKAR

Professor of Culture and Communication; Director, Center for Global Culture and Communication, Northwestern University

Since Plato, Gaonkar argues, Western discourse has harbored a deep anxiety about collective political agency—the *demos*. His Academy project charts the trajectory of persistent anti-democratic thought about political crowds in the West, while also exploring the extent to which non-Western thinkers, including intellectuals in the global South, have been drawn to these long-held suspicions.

AGLAYA GLEBOVA

Assistant Professor of Art History and Film and Media Studies, University of California, Irvine

Glebova will examine five iconic yet little studied projects completed by Soviet avant-garde artists—El Lissitzky, Vladimir Tatlin, Vera Mukhina, and Boris Ender—in the years following Stalin’s rise to power. She argues that, despite the stringencies of “totalitarian art,” they succeeded in radically expanding pictorial means with their ideals of movement and mobility, including across national and ideological borders.

PAUL LA FARGE

Writer, Red Hook, New York

La Farge will work on *Way Out*, a collection of short stories linked by themes of confinement and escape. The book also looks at Carl Hagenbeck’s invention of the modern zoo—the likely impetus behind Kafka’s story “A Report to an Academy,” which inspired La Farge’s own musings for this collection.

JACQUELINE E. ROSS

Professor of Law, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Ross will compare how the United States, Germany, Italy, and France conceptualize and execute covert policing operations. Drawing on 300 interviews with law-enforcement officials conducted since 2001, her project focuses on investigations into organized-crime rings and emerging areas of undercover policing: sting operations against suspected terrorists, cyber-infiltration, and the use of undercover tactics against human trafficking.



PETER SCHMELZ

Associate Professor of Musicology, Arizona State University

Schmelz will study the roles of non-state networks in cultural exchanges of music across the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. He reveals how various cultural figures—including Russian pianist Maria Yudina, Ukrainian conductor Igor Blazhkov, West German musicologists Detlef Gojowy and Fred Prieberg, and West German publisher Jürgen Köchel—worked within and around the systems of their respective countries to advance their own political and aesthetic agendas.

A.L. STEINER

Multimedia Artist, Los Angeles and Brooklyn

A self-described “skeptical queer eco-feminist androgyne,” A.L. Steiner will work on the first monograph of her body of work, which ranges from collaged digital photographs to installation, videos, and performances. To produce the monograph, Steiner—who ethically objects to the systems and resources of traditional publishing industry—will use digital print-on-demand systems and biodegradable, post-consumer supply-chain materials.

KIRA THURMAN

Assistant Professor of History and German, University of Michigan

Thurman’s project traces the history of black classical musicians in Central Europe from the 1870s to the 1960s, including the Afro-Cuban Jimenez Trio playing Mendelssohn in 1870s Leipzig; contralto Marian Anderson, a celebrity in 1930s Austria; Afro-Caribbean Rudolph Dunbar conducting the Berlin Philharmonic’s first post-WWII concerts; and African-American soprano Grace Bumbry, who in 1961 became the first black singer at the Bayreuth Festival. Thurman argues that the presence of black musicians performing the works of “great German masters” complicated audiences’ understandings of national identity—and who had the right to express it.

THOMAS CHATTERTON WILLIAMS

Writer, Berkeley Heights, New Jersey

A frequent contributor to major American publications, Williams explores what it means to be a black man of mixed-race heritage with a white-looking toddler daughter. In Berlin, he will continue work on a personal narrative that will offer a powerful argument against the way race is defined in the United States.

The Spring 2018 Class of Berlin Prize Fellows

RAVEN CHACON

Composer, Performer, and Installation Artist, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Navajo Nation composer and music educator Raven Chacon will begin the work of composing a series of collaborative works for Indigenous woman musicians. His work during the residency will also include writings on the role of sound at the Standing Rock camp and other recent and current protest demonstrations. In addition to this work, Chacon will also be developing new sound installations and performance systems.



ANDREW HICKS

Assistant Professor of Music and Medieval Studies, Cornell University

Hicks's Academy project seeks to reframe the history of medieval Persian musical culture through a focus on the technical vocabulary, poetic imagery, artistic visualizations, and philosophical metaphors of music and musical experiences in medieval Persian literary traditions. It spans the period from the disintegration of the Samanid Empire, at the end of the tenth century, to the rise of the Timurids, near the end of the fourteenth century.

JOSH KUN

Professor of Communication and American Studies and Ethnicity, University of Southern California

From the US-Mexico borderlands to contemporary Europe, Kun's project explores what he calls "the migrant sound"—the impact of displacement, relocation, deportation, and immigration on the aesthetics, communication networks, and formal and informal industries and markets of contemporary global music practices. What, he asks, has been the impact of an estimated one billion migrants on the way music is made? How is immigration to Berlin shaping the city's cultures of music?

USSAMA S. MAKDISI

Professor of History and Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies, Rice University

Makdisi disputes two narratives about tolerance in the modern Middle East: the first idealizes harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims; the second stresses a continuity of sectarian strife between allegedly antagonistic religious communities. Rather than assuming either narrative as wholly accurate, Makdisi will historicize both. In so doing, he provides historical perspective on the contemporary sectarian tragedy—including in war-torn Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq—uncovering a complex but now obscured culture of social coexistence in a region rich in religious diversity.

CAROLE MASO

Writer; Professor of Literary Arts, Brown University

At the Academy, Maso will work on her novel-in-progress "The Bay of Angels," which incorporates a myriad of forms: fiction, essay, memoir, poetry, and graphics (drawings, photographs, maps). It is an encyclopaedic project, traversing time and space and utilizing a variety of genres and strategies to create resonant and overlapping narrative fields.

KRISTEN RENWICK MONROE

Chancellor's Professor of Political Science, University of California, Irvine

Monroe asks how Germany's twentieth-century experience can help illuminate the warning signs for democracies under stress, and how people can learn about democratic threats and respond positively to them. Based in part on interviews with German-Jewish exiles from Hitler's Europe, her project explores the importance of the narratives people construct to both help them understand politically traumatic experiences and compose a meaningful life after political trauma.



BARBARA NAGEL

Assistant Professor of German, Princeton University

Nagel takes up the study of affect in order to develop a historically nuanced, formalist argument about German emotions. Through the prism of realist and modernist writers such as Adalbert Stifter, Theodor Fontane, Robert Walser, and Franz Kafka, she seeks to understand German realism as a literary phenomenon and as part of the cultural history of social sublimation in nineteenth-century Europe.

RAN ORTNER

Artist, Brooklyn, New York

Ortner is taken by our primordial underpinnings—the fundamental, the elemental, the traces of time, the reverberating insistence of life. His work finds physical forms of these preoccupations in the oceanic and its infinite representations. Ortner will work on large paintings on the back of coarse rugs, and sculptures made of base materials, including steel, glass, and sand.

CHRISTIAN OSTERMANN

Director, History and Public Policy Program; Woodrow Wilson Center

Ostermann will work on a biography of Markus Wolf (1923-2006), the longtime foreign intelligence chief of the German Democratic Republic. Based on newly available sources, the biography will provide a unique prism to explore important facets of German and international history in the second half of the twentieth century: German-Russian relations, the Cold War in Europe and the global South, and the development of the GDR.

PAUL REITTER

Professor of German, Director of the Humanities Institute, The Ohio State University

Humboldt Universität's archives will provide Reitter's project the material to examine interactions between the humanities and bureaucratic rationalization, secularization, and democratization in nineteenth-century Germany. From a set of specific historical reconstructions detailing the ways in which German administrative and academic orders helped or hindered one another, Reitter aims to better understand contemporary crises of the humanities in American universities.

AMY REMENSNYDER

Professor of History, Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence, Brown University

Remensnyder will work on a microhistory of the tiny Mediterranean island of Lampedusa to explain how, over the centuries, it became a space of Muslim-Christian cooperation and trust. Relying upon a wealth of primary sources—sailors' logs, portolan charts and maps, chronicles, epic poetry, and consular correspondence—the project offers deep historical perspective on the current refugee crisis by tracing the genealogy of the outsized role played in that emergency by small islands that politically belong to Europe but that geographically hug the coasts of North Africa and Turkey.



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Spring 2019 Berlin Prize Fellow

WANG LU

Composer and Pianist; Assistant Professor of Music, Brown University

Attuned to the social, political, and environmental issues of our time, Wang's compositions for ensembles and orchestras also reflect a deep identification with Chinese opera and folk-music traditions, interpreted through the prism of contemporary instrumental techniques and new sonic possibilities.

The American Academy in Berlin was established in 1994 by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke and other distinguished Germans and Americans to foster greater understanding and dialogue between the United States and Germany. A private, nonprofit, nonpartisan center for advanced research in a range of academic and cultural fields, the Academy awards semester-long fellowships to about two dozen emerging or established scholars, writers, and professionals each year. It also brings American thought leaders to Berlin for briefer visits for a robust exchange of views between the peoples of Germany and the United States.

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