



invited by her mentor Damian Woetzel, M.P.A. '07, to show new work at the Vail International Dance Festival last summer, a duet became the centerpiece. Her piece "Solitaire" begins with three male dancers dexterously spinning a female soloist into various positions, then supporting her in triumphant, acrobatic lifts with her limbs fully extended. Then two of the men exit; in Schreier's telling, "It goes from very presentational and very regal, and all of a sudden, everything goes awry." Scored with Alfred



Schreier works with New York City Ballet soloist Unity Phelan in preparation for *Solitaire* (left); the piece culminated in a duet between Phelan and fellow NYCB soloist Zachary Catazaro (top).



Schnittke's dissonant strings and tinkling music-box piano, the woman gets maneuvered, almost manipulated, into different shapes by her partner. He holds her in what comes to seem like Svengali-like sway; at one

point, she's almost completely hidden from the audience's view, encased in his arms and torso. The romantic ideal so central to many *pas de deux*—of femininity made virtuosic, and put on display—takes on a disturbing cast. This is one of Schreier's most narrative works, and in it, exploration of form gives way, just a little, to feeling.

This summer, Schreier will return to the Vail festival, and present two evening-length performances of her work at New York's Joyce Theater. Only recently has she gained a stream of commissions sufficient to enable her to leave her day job in arts administration and pursue choreography full-time. (Her work has also been enabled by a program at the New York Choreographic Institute and a fellowship from NYU's ballet center, both offering financial support and studio space.) Dancers, Schreier jokes, can be fatalistic, and she's come to accept that her career will be unpredictable. She sees her recent successes less as growing momentum than as a run of good luck: "It makes me appreciate the moment more, because it's not promised." A recent knee injury—and her thirtieth birthday—triggered another realization about her craft: "The beauty of it is, it can be forever. Dancing, I would be done by now." As a choreographer, her career is just beginning.

After the last run-through of that day's rehearsal, the Columbia dancers wait for Schreier's notes. She begins by thanking them for their good work; her biggest critique is that everyone is anticipating the music too much, so they're a little ahead of the count. Instead, she tells them, "Sink into it."

How Buildings Move People

Museum exhibition designer Justin Lee

by LILY SCHERLIS

THE MUSEUM GALLERY is a space designed to be in permanent flux. In 2008, artist Michael Asher sat down with 10 years of exhibition blueprints from the Santa Monica Museum of Art, reviewing the designs of 44 shows that had gone up in the main gallery. He then reinstalled the underlying armature of each and every temporary wall, now only metal skeletons stripped of the drywall that for-

merly gave them substance. All past configurations were present simultaneously, filling the room with a dense metallic labyrinth. The original walls had been built to disappear into the background, in order to highlight the art they displayed; Asher's reconstructions exposed the transience of that art, and the off-putting flexibility of the space it inhabited. Looking at images of the work feels like catching a glimpse of

something the institution wants to hide: the bones of the gallery itself.

A similar sensation comes up in conversation with Justin Lee, exhibition designer at the Harvard Art Museums. He knows the new museum better than anyone, having designed the building as project architect while affiliated with the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, which Harvard hired to renovate the museums. Lee earned a master's in architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design in 2004, so when the workshop took on the project, he was the natural pick for the job. (As a student, Lee lived on the corner of Prescott Street and Broadway, mere feet away. Each morning and evening, he strolled past the museums' previous incarnation, unaware that he would effect a

drastic change in the landscape of his design education.)

To Lee, the museums' activities fall roughly into two categories. First, there's the internal: the business of collecting items, and then researching, storing, and preserving them. Then there's the more visible task of making these works available for visitors to experience. Harvard Art Museums' attachment to a university further complicates matters: the museum caters first to the needs of students, classes, and instructors, and second to those of the general public. The space was specially designed to facilitate each of these functions without inhibiting any of the others, he explains. The building channels different groups—staff, students, and the public—along distinct routes, designed so each type of museum-goer becomes invisible to the others. You see only what you are supposed to see.

He points out the elevators as an example: if you visit frequently, he says, you'll notice that one set of doors never opens. Though it looks like the other two, this particular lift is for staff moving art between the research centers on the upper floors and the compact high-density storage below ground. The button visitors press will never call it. On days when one of the other two public lifts is out of service, a flip of a switch makes that special third lift available to museum-goers, none the wiser that they've been given special access to something normally off-limits. Lee's work requires him to deeply consider how people move through buildings—or rather, how buildings move people. His explanation is reminiscent of the body's circulatory and lymphatic systems: two entirely separate circuits of sealed-off channels carrying distinct substances through a single body. Good architecture makes navigating a space fluid and unconscious.

Justin Lee



After the renovated museums complex opened its doors, Lee stayed on to design the exhibitions. He's responsible for translating vast curatorial dreams and concepts and narratives into concrete physical space. Exhibition designers are always playing catch-up, he says. By the time he arrives on the scene, the curator has already been researching and conceptualizing an exhibition for months, if not years. Usually there are far more pieces that fit well with an exhibition's theme than can actually fit into the space. Every piece has a different story to offer, a whispered message which, together with all of the other works, crescendos into the overarching narrative of the show. It's the curator's job to decide which message to send; Lee's is to make sure each little voice is heard.

When he's designed an exhibition well,

he says, no one can tell he's done anything at all. When he's visited spaces by designers who flaunt their personal style, his experience of the art got lost beneath thinking about the layout. This isn't his way. If his gallery space does its job right, it enables visitors to get lost in the artwork, oblivious to the room around them, and then to find their way out again.

Lee has worked on diverse exhibitions, including "Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia," which ended this past September, and "Inventur," a show on 1940s and '50s German art that will open in February. On view in May is "The Philosophy Chamber: Art and Science in Harvard's Teaching Cabinet, 1766-1820" (see "The Lost Museum," page 42), featuring some of the earliest items Harvard collected. In the beginning, the museum was a single large room. Well-to-do patrons and ordinary citizens who traveled the world would return with mysterious trinkets and artifacts and add them to the College's holdings. Rarely did these early collectors know anything about the items on display; objects were categorized merely by their date of arrival. Knowledge of the world, as embedded in these artifacts, was not yet differentiated. As the collection grew, its caretakers learned more about its contents and about how to classify and categorize them accordingly; the campus grew and divided in tandem with its museum. Vari-

Justin Lee's rendering of an exhibit on Iranian art, opening next fall



ous buildings sprang up to house the newly distinct departments, and the museum's contents were scattered across campus. In the exhibition, Lee is interested in breaking down these barriers to allow these objects to once again inhabit the same space, centuries later.

Indeed, permeability is a major ethos of the post-renovation museums. Passers-by should be able to tell clearly from any

vantage point what the building contains, and be able to enter from both sides. The individual rooms of the galleries should melt into one another, facilitating a seamless viewing experience. Daylight is crucial: Lee doesn't want a labyrinth of sealed, artificially lit ice cubes. For him, blocked daylight provokes suffocating claustrophobia that disorients visitors and detracts from the art.

The building has its own set of rhythms.

Visitors float in and out; Lee's exhibitions materialize and dematerialize on seasonal cycles. The museum itself gets renovated and eventually will be renovated again. The institution is designed to accomplish the paradoxical task of harnessing transience to ensure permanence: it has to make the slice of the past with which it has been entrusted both secure and accessible. Lee makes it look effortless.

Making Liberal Democracies

Lessons from Europe

by DANIEL J. SOLOMON

IN THE WAKE of Brexit and last November's U.S. election, with many citizens and scholars fretting over the fate of the liberal order, a Harvard government professor is offering a novel argument about how that order arose in the first place. According to Daniel Ziblatt's *Conservative Political Parties: The Birth of Modern Democracy in Europe*, the continent's liberal democracies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lived or died not as a result of rising living standards, the agitation of the working and middle classes, or quirks of national character, but rather due to the

factional strength of the countries' old-regime elites.

Democracy menaced the socioeconomic power and basic moral ideas of these notables. But

the elites themselves were hardly monolithic, navigating different options with different implications for democracy in different countries. Where conservative factions developed parties that could win at the ballot box, old-regime elites tolerated the extension of voting rights and the expansion of political competition. Where this proved difficult or impossible, they thwarted political change, causing democratic transitions to collapse into far-right or fascist regimes.

Ziblatt focuses the bulk of his analysis on two test cases, democratic evolution in Britain and Germany, though he applies his conclusions to the whole of Western Europe.

In the first case, he argues, the United King-

dom's Tories built a robust party organization that attracted the votes of middle- and working-class people drawn by nationalist and religious appeals. British conservatives spent critical decades in the mid-nineteenth century cultivating social clubs, interest groups, and grassroots activists that drove success at the polls.

Theirs was a difficult road, and some worried they might be the country's last conservatives. Both elites and their opponents suspected mass voting would upend class relations and lead to land reform—or, even worse, revolution. And political competition contained a paradox for conservatives who believed influence and money were theirs by right. As Ziblatt writes, electoral appeals, in grounding old social relations in a new language of consent, “would alter the very inegalitarian and hierarchical world that mid-century conservatives sought to preserve.”

But the party's central leaders achieved mastery of mass politics sufficient to risk the extension of the franchise and the edging out of undemocratic institutions like the House of Lords. And their bet paid off: Conservatives crushed their Liberal and Labour opponents in the two decades that followed the 1884 adoption of near-universal manhood suffrage.



A Conservative Party poster, circa 1900, the year the precursor of the Labour Party first participated in a general election

Germany, Ziblatt asserts, presented a reverse image. After the country's 1870 unification, all males had the franchise, but that mattered little. The German Conservative Party, the voice of the semi-authoritarian kaiser, managed to hold onto power through an elaborate scheme of electoral manipulation

Conservative Political Parties and the Birth of Modern Democracy in Europe, by Daniel Ziblatt (Cambridge University Press, \$99; \$34.99, paper)