

SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

FALL '25
ARTS IN REVIEW

Mc Art Beat

Visual, Performing, and Media Arts News at Montgomery College



MONTGOMERY
COLLEGE



Message from the Dean

DEAR FRIENDS OF MONTGOMERY COLLEGE ARTS,

Fall 2025 was an exciting time in the Visual, Performing, and Media Arts at Montgomery College. In addition to our extensive class offerings, an outstanding array of performances, exhibitions, and workshops showcased the immense talent and dedication of our students, faculty, and staff.

Among the highlights was *1400 Weeks*, a major retrospective exhibition of photography by John Hoover in the newly revitalized Media Arts Gallery. Emphasizing process, persistence, and long-term creative practice, the exhibition invited students and community members alike to engage with the realities of artistic work over time. Our commitment to student advising, transfer preparation, and career exploration was also on full display during MC Day, when Visual and Media Arts faculty hosted demonstrations, panels, studio visits, and advising sessions that helped students imagine future pathways in the arts. Montgomery College students made history on a global stage as the only two-year college invited to produce and host a live, one-hour segment of *On Air*, a 24-hour international broadcast connecting more than 500 students from 17 institutions across six continents.

This semester marked an important moment of growth in the Visual, Performing, and Media Arts. We welcomed new full-time faculty members Siqiao Ao, Marjuan Canady, Katja Toporski, and Victor Provost, who are already enriching our programs in media arts, theatre and film, visual arts, digital fabrication, and world music. In addition, Jason Bruffy stepped into his new role as the Collegewide Venues and Programming Director, where he is unifying Montgomery College's arts venues and public programming under the new MC Live Arts initiative.

Spring 2026 promises to be just as eventful as the fall. Be sure to check our Spring 2025 Arts Calendar for theatre productions, dance performances, concerts, lectures, workshops, gallery exhibitions, and other arts programming at montgomerycollege.edu/artsinstitute.

We wish you a wonderful semester and hope to see you at an arts event very soon.

Frank Trezza, PhD

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Contents *Fall '25 Arts In Review*

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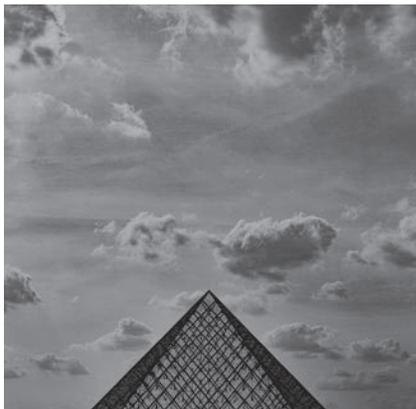
Advising in Action: MC Day Brings Creative Futures to Life at Rockville *p. 6*



Jason Bruffy, Brings Radical Inclusion to the Arts at MC *p. 12*



MC Goes "On Air": Students Lead a Global Live Broadcast from MCTV *p. 18*



1400 Weeks: A photography exhibit by Professor John Hoover *p.24*



New Faculty Spotlight: Siqiao Ao, Marjuan Canady, *p. 30*



New Faculty Spotlight: Katja Toporski & Victor Provost *p. 36*

ADVISING IN ACTION:

MC DAY BRINGS CREATIVE FUTURES TO LIFE AT ROCKVILLE



Above: Students engaging with a panel on MC Day.

“ MC Day turned the Rockville campus into a hands-on tour of creative majors and careers. ”

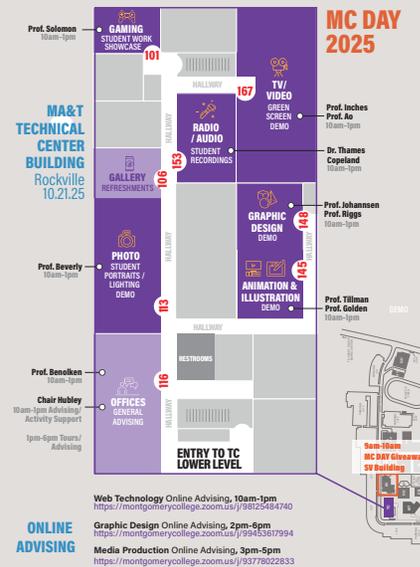
On October 21, MC Day turned the Rockville campus into a hands-on tour of creative majors and careers. An annual College-wide tradition, MC Day is an interactive, one-day event designed to help students explore their futures at Montgomery College and beyond. While the college’s primary focus for the day was advising, the Media Arts & Technologies (MA&T) Department and the Rockville and Germantown Art Departments used the occasion to open their studios, highlight student work, and connect students with transfer institutions and working arts professionals. Students visited TV studios, galleries, and panel discussions, often with a slice of pizza in hand.

Throughout the day, the Technical Center building operated as a comprehensive showcase of MA&T programs, with each room representing a different facet of the curriculum so that even casual visitors could imagine themselves as majors. In the TV studio, students participated in a green screen demonstration. With the help of the department’s control room

and chroma-key equipment, they saw themselves composited into a roller coaster scene, mirroring the processes used in weather broadcasting and special effects. In the photography studio under the guidance of Professor Ronald Beverly, students sat for professional portraits that could be used for LinkedIn profiles



Students sit for portraits in the photography studio



A map of MC Day Activities in the Media Arts and Technologies Department

and portfolios. Elsewhere in the Technical Center, Graphic Design, Animation and Illustration faculty led demonstrations and Gaming students showed their latest work.

Media Arts & Technologies Chair Katherine Hubley and other faculty members also maintained a visible advising presence throughout the morning, greeting students, answering questions, and helping them navigate the building. Meanwhile, MA&T representatives were on hand in the Student Services building, distributing candy and printed maps that guided interested students to the Technical Center.

Because MC Day is fundamentally an advising-focused event, the department

devoted the afternoon to structured advising opportunities. From 1 to 6 p.m., faculty advisors met with students in person to discuss every major in the department, including Graphic Design, Illustration, Animation, Photography, Web, Gaming, and Media Production for television and radio. Parallel online advising sessions expanded access for students who could not attend in person.

Across campus, the Art Department structured its MC Day programming around transfer preparation and career opportunities. The morning began with a Transfer Institutions Information Session, with representatives from four of the department’s key transfer schools. Presenters from the University of Maryland, College Park; the University of

Maryland, Baltimore County; Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA); and Salisbury University explained degree options in art, graphic design, art education, and digital media.

The session underscored how intentionally the department has developed its transfer relationships, particularly through formal articulation agreements, and structured its curricula to support smooth transitions from Montgomery College to a wide range of four-year institutions. For example, the AFA programs in Studio Art and Graphic Design now articulate directly with MICA, allowing students who complete the AFA with a qualifying grade point average to transfer up to sixty credits toward the 120-credit MICA BFA. Students who meet the higher GPA threshold are guaranteed a substantial merit scholarship and receive an application fee waiver. Since the agreement was finalized in 2024, MICA has become an especially engaged partner. Earlier in the semester, the college sent a bus to pick up a group of MC art majors for a campus tour and lunch, and plans are already in place to repeat the visit next semester. On MC Day, the MICA representative stayed well beyond the scheduled session to meet individually with students and address questions about applications, financial aid, and life at a specialized art institution. The Transfer Session

also highlighted additional pathways, including options at Pennsylvania College of Art and Design and the opportunity to complete a BFA in Graphic Design through Salisbury University at the Universities at Shady Grove.

After a pizza lunch on the Art Building's fourth floor, students attended a "Careers in the Arts" panel moderated by Professor Amelia Hankin. The panel featured an accomplished group of arts professionals whose experiences represent the breadth of contemporary art careers. In attendance were: Towson University professor and 2025 winner of the prestigious Sondheim Art Prize, Amanda Burnham; Katherine Blood, curator of fine prints at the Library of Congress; artist, educator, and Pyramid Atlantic founder Helen Frederick; Lily Siegel, executive director of Hamiltonian Artists; and Camila Savlatierra-Sinn, a practicing art educator at Seneca Valley High School who spoke about teaching and arts education in the K-12 system.

During the discussion, panelists described career paths that included studio practice, curatorial work, administration, nonprofit leadership, and teaching. Their stories emphasized that a foundation in art or media arts at Montgomery College can lead to a variety of careers, from exhibiting artists and museum professionals to community organizers,

arts administrators, and educators. Students heard candid reflections on balancing creative work with financial realities, pursuing graduate education, and building networks of colleagues and collaborators.

The day concluded with a virtual Art Programs Information Session, which provided an overview of the AFA in Studio Art, the AFA in Graphic Design, and the AA in Art. Chair of the Art Department, Tendai Johnson explained the structure of each degree and described how they align with transfer expectations at four-year schools. Throughout the day, the Art Department also offered scheduled windows for advising in the morning, afternoon, and early evening, both in person and via Zoom. This flexible approach allowed students with work,

family responsibilities, or classes on other campuses to participate in advising and receive support with spring registration and long-term planning.

Ultimately, MC Day in the Media Arts & Technologies and Art Departments illustrated how advising can become an integrated, experiential process rather than a simple checklist of required courses. For students from both departments, MC Day delivered a clear message: Montgomery College is the beginning of a longer creative journey. With the support of faculty advisors, studio resources, and strong institutional partnerships, students can chart a path from MC classrooms and studios to four-year degrees, professional practice, and meaningful roles in the region's cultural landscape.



Careers in the Arts Panel. From left to right: Lily Siegel, Amanda Burnham, MC Professor Amelia Hankin, Helen Frederick, Katherine Blood, Camila Savlatierra-Sinn



New Collegewide Venues and Programming Director, Jason Bruffy, Brings Radical Inclusion to the Arts at MC



Performing Arts Center

Producer, director, teacher, and arts leader Jason Bruffy has spent much of his professional life drawn to work that breaks rules. Along the way, he's become known for interdisciplinary projects that cross genres, take risks, and create more equitable and inclusive spaces in the arts. Now Bruffy is bringing that bold, experimental, and deeply people-centered spirit to his role as Montgomery College's first Venues and Programming Director.

The new position was created as part of a reorganization designed to strengthen collaboration across the College's arts centers and expand access to arts experiences for students and the community. Bruffy, who has served as the Cultural Arts Center Manager since 2019, will now oversee all of the College's major venues, including the Parilla Performing Arts Center, the Cultural Arts Center, Rockville's Theatre Arts Arena, and Globe Hall on the Germantown Campus. He will help align how the venues operate, how programs are planned, and how the College presents its arts offerings to audiences across Montgomery County. It's both high-level vision and practical, behind-the-scenes work, with the stated goal of "cultivating a vibrant and inclusive arts community that promotes creativity and innovation, and will ensure a diverse range of cultural, artistic, and community-focused collaborations."

Introducing: MC Live Arts!

One of the biggest changes under Bruffy's leadership is the creation of the MC Live Arts brand, a collegewide umbrella that will bring together all of the College's programming from guest artists to lecture series, with a clearer, more cohesive identity across all three campuses. A centralized online hub is currently in development to pull together performances, academic productions, and lecture events in one place, so information isn't scattered, calendars aren't competing, and the arts are easier to discover from campus to campus.

In addition to streamlining access to arts programming, MC Live Arts was created with the overarching goal of highlighting underrepresented voices and emerging artists from diverse backgrounds. This reflects Bruffy's careerlong commitment to radical inclusion, an approach he describes as more than just who appears on stage. For him, it's about access at every level, he says, what stories are told, who gets to create them, who manages the process, and who feels welcome in the room.

That philosophy has been shaped by a wide-ranging career spent building ambitious work and the structures that support it. Over more than two decades, Bruffy has worked coast to coast as a director, producer, and teacher, founding and producing the

Cincinnati Fringe Festival for 7 years before serving as the chief operating officer for programming and production at the Freeman Arts Pavilion. He was a producing director/senior arts consultant at Greenway Arts Alliance in Los Angeles, a freelance producer and director for stage and screen in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and a producer and resident director at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York. In 2011 he received an Obie Award for his work on *Born Bad* at the Soho Repertory Theatre and in 2009 was named Person of the Year by Cincinnati City Beat magazine.

Bruffy studied theatre, dance, and music at Radford University before earning a Bachelor of Arts in organizational

management with a focus on nonprofit management from the University of Arizona, and a Master of Fine Arts in theatre directing and management from the University of Idaho.

Bruffy's first love is fringe arts, which he describes as the "wild, weird, and innovative stuff that is interdisciplinary...breaking down boundaries and crossing genres," and "helping us rediscover why we love the

performing arts in the first place." That creative appetite for experimentation and new work is also what makes him so energized about what's taking shape at Montgomery College now.

The Cultural Arts Incubator and Curatorial Fellowship Programs

Bruffy is especially excited about initiatives that make new work possible and invite students into the process. To that end, he's already launched two new initiatives designed to give artists and emerging presenters real resources, space, and platforms to develop and

share bold ideas.

Now in its first year with three resident artists, the Cultural Arts Incubator is a four-week residency

that provides artists working in dance, music, theater, and other performance-based art forms a stipend, free rehearsal space, and a fully-produced culminating performance at the Cultural Arts Center. The program prioritizes "creatives who are exploring multidisciplinary and innovative approaches to their craft," and who are "ready to take risks, push boundaries, and experiment across disciplines." Also in its first year with a cohort of two fellows, the

Cultural Arts Curatorial Fellowship is a yearlong residency that provides emerging performing arts presenters with a stipend, mentorship, professional development, and real-world experience. Each fellow is required to produce at least two events per semester during their year at the College.

Both programs were designed with student engagement at the center, and Bruffy looked to an existing model at Montgomery College for guidance. For years, the Artist-in-Residence program in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Takoma Park has connected professional artists with students through lectures, collaborative projects and exhibitions, and workshops. As Bruffy shaped the new performing arts programs, he sought advice from the department chair, Norberto Gomez, on how to structure them in ways that would work for students. The result is a design that intentionally links artists and fellows to the classroom through workshops, visits, and other learning opportunities.

What's Next: Student Opportunities and a Bigger Arts Vision

Another initiative Bruffy wants to grow is a more intentional student employment program that provides internship-like paid positions in the College's performing arts venues. The vision is hands-on, practical, and career-

relevant with students learning front of house, box office operations, and technical skills like audio and lighting from seasoned professionals. "Some of the best technicians in the DMV work for Montgomery College," Bruffy says, "they are the best in the business and great mentors for our students."

Even with the enormous amount of work he's doing to plan for the future of the performing arts at MC, Bruffy has found time to get involved in broader campus leadership. He is currently serving as the Chair of the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus Council and has already received a Special Recognition Award from the College for extraordinary performance this fall.

With MC Live Arts taking shape, new pathways opening through the Cultural Arts Incubator and Curatorial Fellowship, and expanded opportunities for students to learn alongside working professionals, Bruffy's new role feels less like a title change and more like a launch. By his own account, this is only the beginning. He is laying the groundwork now for a more connected, visible, and welcoming arts experience that reflects the diversity of the MC community and makes room for new work, new voices, and new ways of experiencing the performing arts. In other words, a collegewide arts future shaped by the same values that have guided his career all along.

MC GOES "ON AIR": STUDENTS LEAD A GLOBAL LIVE BROADCAST FROM MCTV



The MC On Air Panel

“MC was the only two-year college asked to participate in the project which featured the work of more than 500 students from 17 colleges across six continents.”

Montgomery College students stepped onto the world stage this fall, producing and hosting a live one-hour segment for On Air, a 24-hour international broadcast led by Ravensbourne University London that hopped time zones from Australia to the Americas. MC was the only two-year college asked to participate in the project which featured the work of more than 500 students from 17 colleges across six continents. In their hour, the MC team showcased student storytelling, live panel conversation, and pre-recorded features about life in and around Rockville.

Broadcast live from the MCTV studio in Macklin Tower on October 16 from 4:30–5:30 p.m., the show blended a student panel with video roll-ins produced in TVRA courses. The

on-camera team included host and panelist Nora Canellakis, a current Media Production student and MCTV intern; student panelists Kyle Leacock and Anthony Pineda; and Brandon Rodriguez, a recent graduate now at the Universities at Shady Grove. The conversation was moderated by MCTV Producer/Director Carolina Galeano.

From the Classroom to the World Stage

The opportunity for MC to participate in On Air arose through the involvement of Media Arts and Technology faculty and staff, including Professor Emerita Joanne Carl and Television Engineer Pat Thrope, in the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE). When Chair of the Media Arts and

Technologies Department, Professor Katie Hubley, heard about the project, she contacted its London-based organizer, the Media Talent Manifesto. “I got more information and was sold!” she says. With only a few weeks before the October 16 air date, Hubley secured campus support, enlisted the involvement of MCTV and Professor Inches, and got to work helping with everything from scripts to run of show. “It was kind of crazy. There were a lot of meetings,” Hubley says, but the effort was well worth it. “When John (Watson) announced that we were off-air, everyone was cheering and high-fiving. It was really cool.”

Students from Professor Andrew Inches’s Video Production II and Directing classes were responsible for the prerecorded segments that

highlighted Rockville’s diversity and painted a lively portrait of the community MC serves. Topics included the city’s greenspaces and local parks, the Glenview Mansion, several restaurants, and, of course, MC’s three campuses. With only three weeks to produce a polished product, student-directors led teams through the field-production cycle of storyboarding, location shooting, audio, and editing. “It was a tremendous experience... students had to step out of a controlled studio and make decisions in the field. What shots they needed, how they’d edit each sequence, what soundbites to get from interviews,” Inches says.

Behind the scenes, MCTV’s John Watson directed the hour while engineering colleagues established real-time links with London to



The control room during the broadcast



Back row, standing left to right: Professor Katherine Hubely, Ildar Nigmatzyanov, Dr. Frank Trezza, Professor Andrew Inches, Carolina Galeano, Kyle Leacock, Nora Canellakis, Scott Youngblood, Brandon Rodriguez, Anthony Pineda, Genevive Banaticla, Neil Lee Front Row, kneeling left to right: John Watson

coordinate cues and transmission. “It was a technical challenge... My talented engineering colleagues Ildar Nigmatzyanov and Neil Lee were key in getting our live signal connected to London (and) my managing producer Scott Youngblood submitted several videos... that were used throughout the day as “filler” between the live hours,”

Watson explained, describing a collaboration that spanned studio crew, graphics, lighting, and control room operations.

For the on-camera team and crew, adrenaline turned to pride after London’s host studio sent their congratulations for “a great hour of television”. “It’s stressful leading up to the moment, but after it’s over and they saw it all come together, they were riding a bit of a high,” Inches recalled. The full impact of the experience became clear to Hubley later, as she watched student participants being interviewed by several local outlets, including [The MoCo Show](#) and [Montgomery](#)

[Community Media](#). “They were so excited, and their answers were incredible.”

Watson, who has worked as a Producer and Director for MCTV for almost 25 years, called the experience “a highlight of my career,” adding that the best part was showcasing MC students and the hands-on learning that prepares them for real-world work. Dr. Frank Trezza, Dean of the Visual, Performing, and Media Arts, who was on hand for the live broadcast, called it

“one of the best things I’ve seen in my time at MC.”

Plans are already in place for MC to join On Air again next year, this time with more lead time to develop pre-recorded stories from campus and the community. “If we can start earlier in the spring and really think about the stories we want to tell, we will come up with some really amazing work,” said Inches.

For video of MC’s hour On Air, [click here](#).

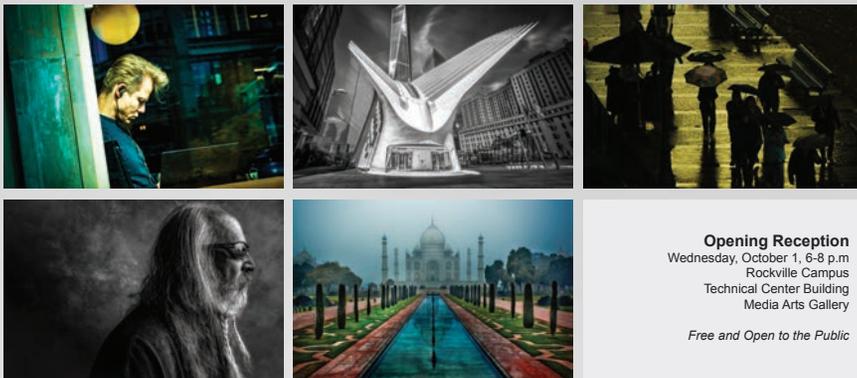
1400 WEEKS: A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT TIME, PROCESS, AND PERSISTENCE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

A retrospective photography exhibit by Professor John Hoover

1400 Weeks

A Retrospective Photography Exhibition by John Hoover

September 15 – October 23, 2025



Opening Reception
 Wednesday, October 1, 6-8 p.m.
 Rockville Campus
 Technical Center Building
 Media Arts Gallery
Free and Open to the Public



During the Fall 2025 semester, Montgomery College’s Media Arts Gallery presented 1400 Weeks, a retrospective photography exhibition by John Hoover that invited viewers to slow down, look closely, and reconsider what a creative life looks like over time. Spanning roughly twenty years of work, the exhibition brought together photography across three core disciplines architecture, portraiture, and travel offering a rare opportunity to see how artistic vision develops through sustained practice rather than isolated moments of inspiration.

The title 1400 Weeks referred to the approximate number of weeks

represented across those two decades. Rather than emphasizing milestones or individual achievements, the title quietly underscored the cumulative nature of creative work. It reminded viewers that photography, like many artistic practices, is built through repetition, observation, and long-term commitment.

What distinguished 1400 Weeks from a traditional photography exhibition was its emphasis on process. Large-scale contact-sheet-style prints were displayed alongside select finished photographs, allowing viewers to move beyond the polished final image and engage with the decisions,

experiments, and revisions that led there.

By presenting sequences of images rather than single standout works, the exhibition revealed how photographs were shaped through trial, error, and refinement. Viewers were able to see how framing shifted, how light was tested, and how moments were revisited over time. This approach demystified the idea of the “decisive moment” and replaced it with a more realistic and accessible understanding of photographic practice.

For Hoover, the retrospective was not about celebrating highlights or creating a visual greatest-hits collection. Instead, it offered a chance to step back and examine the long arc of his work. After decades of photographing and teaching photography, he became increasingly interested in what persistence looked like across time. The exhibition connected threads across genres and decades, revealing how both the work and the photographer evolved.

Although the subjects in 1400 Weeks varied widely from built environments to intimate portraits to images made while traveling, the underlying narrative remained consistent. The exhibition traced a way of seeing that was shaped by attention, presence, and

the discipline of returning to the work week after week.

Viewers often described the exhibition as immersive, noting that they spent far more time in the gallery than they initially expected. Many followed visual patterns across decades, noticing recurring compositional choices, shifting perspectives, and subtle changes in approach. The experience rewarded patience and close looking, encouraging audiences to engage deeply rather than quickly.

Bringing 1400 Weeks to Montgomery College required extensive collaboration across multiple departments. Gallery staff, facilities, communications, and the Photography area worked together to coordinate print production, gallery layout, scheduling, and installation. Just as important were the conceptual discussions around how to present a retrospective in a way that felt accessible and meaningful to students.

Hoover credited the flexibility and support of the Montgomery College community for allowing the exhibition to remain ambitious while staying grounded in an educational mission. He expressed particular gratitude to the Media Arts Gallery, the Photography faculty, Professor Ronald Beverly, facilities and production staff, and



colleagues in communications who helped amplify the project. Additional artists, designers, and educators also contributed feedback, technical assistance, and encouragement throughout the process.

1400 Weeks opened on September 15 and remained on view through October 23, 2025, at the Media Arts Gallery in the Technical Center Building on the Rockville Campus. A public opening reception was held on Wednesday, October 1, from 6 to 8 p.m. The exhibition was free and open to the public, welcoming students, faculty, and community members alike.

Beyond the gallery walls, the exhibition created opportunities for deeper engagement. Students participated

through class visits, informal conversations, and discussions focused on photographic process, career sustainability, and long-term creative practice. These interactions helped connect the exhibition to coursework and reinforced its role as a teaching tool.

Student response to 1400 Weeks was marked by curiosity, engagement, and relief. Many students expressed surprise at the amount of experimentation and imperfection visible behind strong images. Seeing contact sheets displayed at such a large scale made the realities of photographic practice tangible and human.

Several students remarked that the exhibition made the idea of a long-term

creative career feel more attainable. Rather than presenting success as immediate or effortless, 1400 Weeks reframed it as cumulative and evolving. For emerging artists, this perspective proved both encouraging and empowering.

In a cultural moment dominated by speed, algorithms, and instant visibility, 1400 Weeks offered a counterpoint. The exhibition emphasized patience, craft, and lived time, inviting reflection on how productivity and success are measured in creative fields. It suggested that depth, consistency, and sustained attention still matter, even as technology continues to reshape how images are made and shared.

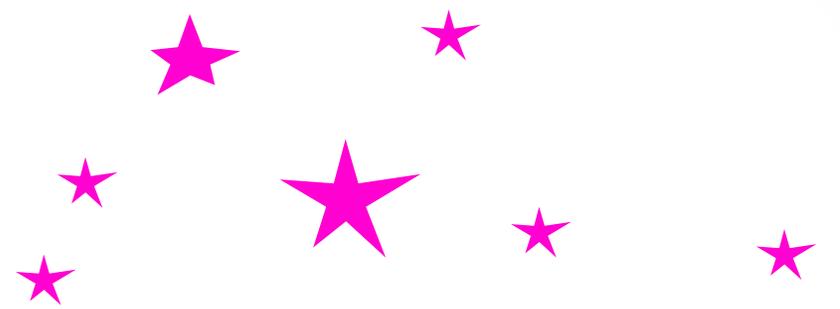
At its core, 1400 Weeks functioned as a teaching exhibition. The contact-sheet format mirrored how photographers actually work by testing, refining, and learning through repetition. The exhibition reflected the same values Hoover brought into the classroom curiosity, rigor, and respect for process.

Hoover hoped visitors left with a healthier understanding of creative life, one that acknowledged uncertainty as part of the process and recognized that meaningful work is built incrementally over time. The retrospective was not intended as a conclusion, but as a midpoint in an ongoing practice.

“The retrospective isn’t a conclusion,” Hoover notes. “It’s a midpoint. The work continues.”



NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

A cluster of ten pink stars of varying sizes arranged in a loose arc above the text.

*Sigiao Ao, Marjuan Canady,
Katja Toporski & Victor Provost*

A thick, horizontal pink brushstroke with a gradient from light to dark pink, with several smaller pink stars scattered below it.

This fall, Montgomery College proudly welcomes *Siqiao "Austin" Ao* to the Media Arts faculty. Ao brings a rare blend of creative expertise, academic rigor, and heartfelt dedication to student growth—qualities shaped by a career that has spanned continents and storytelling forms.

Born and raised in northeastern China, Ao discovered his passion for media production while completing his undergraduate degree at Beijing Normal University. That passion carried him across the globe to the United States, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts in Film from Syracuse University and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Maryland.

After Syracuse, Ao spent nearly a decade in Washington, D.C., as a video producer for a federally funded media agency, creating content that showcased the diversity of American life—from farmers in Iowa and small business owners in California to marginalized communities in Minnesota.

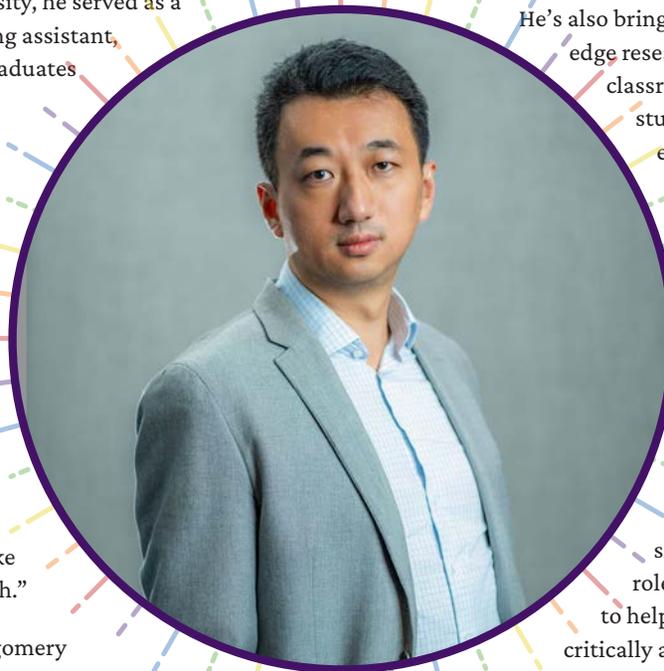
“Through those experiences, I realized that media production is not just about filming or editing,” Ao reflects. “It’s about leadership, collaboration, and empathy—understanding people and telling stories that resonate beyond boundaries.”

Teaching, Ao says, has always been

central to his identity. Before beginning his professional media career, he earned a teaching certificate in China. Later, at Syracuse University, he served as a graduate teaching assistant, helping undergraduates master cinematography and editing techniques.

“When I learned about Montgomery College’s emphasis on accessibility, diversity, and hands-on learning,” he recalls, “it felt like the perfect match.”

Ao joined Montgomery College in Fall 2025, drawn by its creative energy and collaborative spirit. “Here at MC, I see the same values that have guided me throughout my life—curiosity, openness, and the belief that learning is a shared journey.”



Ao’s teaching philosophy merges technical skill with critical reflection. “I want students to understand not only how to create, but why their work matters,” he explains. His classes emphasize teamwork, ethics, and real-world problem-solving, encouraging students to see media as a way to engage with—and serve—the community.

He’s also bringing cutting-edge research into the classroom. His recent study on audience engagement with AI-generated versus human-created content earned a Top Paper Award at a national conference in August 2025. “AI is reshaping media,” Ao says, “but our role as educators is to help students think critically and use new tools responsibly.”

“In my opinion, my role as an educator in media production is not to take sides in the ongoing AI debate,” Ao adds, “but to help students think critically, adapt

creatively, and use new tools responsibly.”

Ao’s approach to teaching begins with connection. By the third week of each semester, he knows every student’s name. “That small detail matters—it shows them I see them as individuals,” he says.

He also shares hard-won lessons from his time in production. “Creativity is only half the job,” he tells his students. “Discipline, teamwork, and responsibility are just as important.”

Whether his students are shooting a short film or producing a PSA, Ao challenges them to ask: How does this work serve the community? Who might it reach beyond our college walls?

Ao believes the future of media education will require blending technical fluency with a global perspective. “AI will change our workflows,” he says, “but creativity, empathy, and cultural understanding can’t be automated.”

He hopes to help students see themselves as creators of meaning, not just content. “Growing up in China, I saw how access to education can transform lives,” he says. “Montgomery College represents opportunity and possibility. I tell my students: wherever you’re from, whatever path brought you here, make the most of it.”



Montgomery College welcomes Professor *Marjuan Canady* a Caribbean-American writer, director, producer, and educator whose work sits at the powerful intersection of Black history, culture, and storytelling.



A Washington, D.C. native, Canady brings more than two decades of professional experience in theatre, film, and arts education to the Visual and Performing Arts department—along with a deep commitment to equity, access, and creative empowerment.

Canady is the founder of Sepia Works, her production company, and the Canady Foundation for the Arts, a nonprofit she established to create culturally responsive arts programming for young people of color in her hometown. Across theatre, film, children’s media, and education, her work consistently uplifts underrepresented voices while building community through the arts. “No matter the medium, my focus is always to share meaningful stories and build community through the arts.”

Long before stepping into higher education, Canady built a full and expansive career in theatre and film. Her professional journey includes producing on Broadway, developing stage productions, writing and directing narrative and documentary films,

and presenting work at film festivals, museums, universities, and performance spaces around the world.

These real-world experiences shape her approach to teaching. In the classroom, she emphasizes not only craft and technique, but also the discipline, collaboration, and professionalism required to thrive in creative industries. “I want students to understand how storytelling works in the real world,” she explains, “from the art to the business, and everything in between.”

Canady joined Montgomery College in Fall 2025, drawn by the institution’s mission to provide accessible, high-quality education to a diverse student population. Teaching at MC felt like a

natural extension of her lifelong work as an artist and educator committed to opening pathways for emerging storytellers.

From her first semester, Canady says she knew she made the right decision. “The students’ curiosity, creativity, and resilience continually motivate me,” she shares. “It’s a privilege to invest in the next generation of artists in a community I care deeply about.”

What excites Canady most about teaching at MC is helping students discover their creative voice—and the confidence to use it. Montgomery College’s diverse student body brings a wide range of lived experiences into the classroom, enriching discussions and creative work alike.

In her first semester, Canady has already diversified her curriculum to include films, plays, and media created by artists of color, women, LGBTQ+ creators, and global voices. This intentional approach challenges

traditional narratives and expands students’ understanding of who gets to be a storyteller.

She also brings industry professionals into the classroom; directors, actors, playwrights, cinematographers, and producers offering students mentorship, exposure, and insight into multiple career paths. Her teaching prioritizes process over perfection, encouraging experimentation, revision, and creative risk-taking.

Canady views today’s theatre and film landscape as one of transformation. While technological shifts, streaming platforms, AI tools, and virtual production are reshaping how stories are made and shared, she sees opportunity in the industry’s growing demand for inclusive and authentic storytelling.

“The future belongs to artists who are adaptable, collaborative, and rooted in their truth,” she says. Her advice to students emphasizes persistence, professionalism, and authenticity, reminding them that rejection is part of the process and that relationships, curiosity, and kindness matter just as much as talent.

For Canady, the future of theatre and film education is inclusive, interdisciplinary, and socially engaged. She believes students should graduate not only with technical skills, but with an understanding of how their work can challenge assumptions, reflect



Katja Toporski joins MC as full-time faculty in 2D and 3D Design and Coordinator of Digital Fabrication.

This fall, Montgomery College's Rockville Art Department welcomed Katja Toporski as our new full-time faculty member in 2D and 3D Design and Coordinator of Digital Fabrication. While Toporski is new to the full-time faculty, she is already a familiar presence at MC. She has taught in the Jewelry & Metalsmithing area since 2017 and most recently served as a full-time sabbatical replacement for Professor Lucy Derickson. In her new position, she will expand access to digital fabrication while supporting how those tools can be used across studio areas.

Toporski's professional path reflects the kind of curiosity and adaptability she cultivates in students. Before earning an MFA in Metals and Jewelry from Towson University, she was a practicing anesthesiologist for almost a decade and received training in fine jewelry. In addition to teaching, Toporski exhibits widely, both nationally and internationally, and has held prestigious artist residencies. Her current studio work includes larger-scale 3D work that combines materials such as prints, fabric, and silicone, reflecting an ongoing interest in pushing beyond a single medium or process. In her recent Bombenwetter series, for example, Toporski creates three-dimensional

portraits using materials including silk and acrylic, and she links the work to family history and memory. In the Tomorrow's Tyrants series, the forms shift into sculptural bodies that read as both human and uncanny. She describes the sculptures as "a second skin that exists without its body like a screen for projection," constructed from silicone and lit internally so they appear like "AI robot ghosts." The series incorporates embroidered maps of Germany showing election successes of extreme nationalist parties "both from 1933 and present day," pairing material craft with direct political reference.

Toporski's work and teaching sit at the intersection of digital design and hands-on fabrication, and she believes that students gain confidence by building

strong fundamentals before applying them across materials, tools, and formats. As she develops the College's new digital fabrication space on the Rockville campus, she has emphasized that it should be centered on creative practice, experimentation, and critique, where tools support the work without taking over. She thinks of the space as a digital studio rather than a "fab lab."

"I don't like the atmosphere of computer labs," she explains. The point is not technology for its own sake, but technology in service of creative thinking. To make that possible, she is working with faculty to integrate processes such as laser cutting into coursework and to build a space that can serve multiple disciplines, including areas like printmaking, ceramics, and sculpture.

That studio-first approach also shapes what she wants students to do once a tool has produced an object. "Now the machine has spat out this thing, now what?" she says. The next step, what

students do with a prototype, how they refine it, and how they develop it into something intentional, is her focus. In her words, "what else is there that we might want to consider? How does this exist in the real world, or how can we build on it from what the machine gave us to make it something, to give it a soul, essentially."

Whether in her role as an artist or a teacher, exploration is key for Toporski and she believes teaching is strongest when it stays active. "I kind of get bored with it," she says, describing the danger of settling into a routine. "And then I lose my enthusiasm, and it shows." Instead, she pushes herself to keep expanding what she can do, so her students are learning in an environment where curiosity and growth are visible parts of the process. That mindset is serving her well as she helps shape what digital fabrication can become at MC. "It's a good challenge for me," she explains of working around constraints to create a studio resource that supports multiple disciplines and encourages students to test ideas, revise, and build on what they discover. "And I really embrace it."

This semester, Toporski is teaching foundations while building momentum for expanded digital fabrication offerings. Her arrival strengthens the department's commitment to interdisciplinary learning, experimental practice, and the belief that students learn best when they are invited to explore. "I'm really excited about what is possible here," she says.



B

uilding a Global Sound: *Victor Provost* Joins MC Full Time to Lead World Music, World Ensemble, and Steelpan.

This fall, Montgomery College welcomed Victor Provost to a new full-time role teaching World Music and directing the World Ensemble. Widely regarded as one of the world's leading voices on the steelpan (or steel drum), Provost brings a career that includes major collaborations, recordings, prestigious academic residencies and awards, international performances, and extensive teaching experience.

Born and raised on St. John in the Virgin Islands, Provost discovered steelpan through an after-school program. Having toured Europe twice by the age of 15, he developed a reputation as a dazzling soloist with a style that draws on Caribbean vernacular traditions, straight-ahead jazz, and contemporary improvisation. He has performed and recorded with an impressive roster of artists, appeared on over 30 recordings, and played major stages all over the world. His most recent release, *Island to Island*, a collaboration with GRAMMY-winning pianist Alex Brown, follows his 2016 album *Bright Eyes*, which debuted at #5 on the iTunes Jazz Charts.

Provost earned his Bachelor's and Master's of Music in Jazz Studies

from George Mason University and has taught at multiple institutions throughout the region. He is also frequently invited to lead residencies and masterclasses and his work has been recognized with honors including the Montgomery College Smithsonian Faculty Fellowship Award (2023) and the George Mason University Adjunct Teaching Excellence Award (2023).

Provost's World Music courses are designed to meet students where they are. "It's a super-diverse group of people with various experience levels," he says, "from music majors to people whose religious backgrounds didn't allow for music-making, and a whole gradient of everyone in between." He begins by asking students to reflect



on their own musical identities, then broadens the lens to consider how music functions inside communities and cultures. "It's kind of music sociology at first and then becomes essentially musical anthropology." To engage everyone, his classes are active and hands on, leaning into demonstration, discussion, listening, and participation.

The World Ensemble is also open to all experience levels and instruments. Last semester's ensemble included an oud, multiple basses and guitars, strings, piano, banjo, and an accordion, several played by students who were brand new to their instruments. "There's a lot of arranging involved in this class," Provost says. "And a pretty heavy curatorial process, because I have to choose music that will be engaging, but also accessible to everybody. I want to make sure nobody is left out," he says. "I try to operate more as a facilitator than a director. I don't hand out sheet music and say, this is what we're doing."

Instead, "it's an organism that kind of grows and changes as the semester goes on... (This semester), we're going to play some music from the Middle Eastern tradition, from Egypt. We're going to play some klezmer. We're going to play some reggae, we're going to do some afrobeat music... we're just going to kind of do it all."

For Provost, the ensemble is a powerful expression of what makes Montgomery College special. "We benefit from the diversity of our student environment," he says. And as a college experience, he sees it as rare. "I've never seen anything like it, to be honest."

In addition to teaching, Provost now directs the annual World Arts Festival, including last fall's residency with Nigerian guitarist Dòkun, who led workshops and joined the World Ensemble for a performance. This spring, the residency spotlight shifts to Imam Hamdani, one of MC's own part-time instructors and a guitarist Provost describes as "incredible," with "a real kind of mystical mind" and a deep gift for teaching.

As he settles into his new full-time role, Provost is focused on expanding the College's steelpan and world music programs. He is especially happy to be doing this at Montgomery College. "I think the community college model is the future," he said, "it is something I've always believed in."

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