

# SIGHTS and SOUNDS

MARCH 2026



COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS & COMMUNICATION  
**LAMAR UNIVERSITY**

# *in this issue...*

PAGE  
2

**A Message from the Dean**

PAGE  
3

**The College of Fine Arts & Communication**

Reviving a Legacy: The Dean's Corner

PAGES  
4

**Le Grand Bal 2026**

50: A Sparkling Celebration

PAGES  
5-6

**Department of Art & Design**

Global Visions, Local Voice

PAGE  
7

**Department of Communication & Media**

Innovation and Industry

PAGE  
8

**Mary Morgan Moore Department of Music**

A Resounding Honor

PAGE  
9

**Department of Theatre & Dance**

From Page... To Stage!

PAGE  
10

**Dishman Art Museum**

Call for Entries!

PAGE  
11

**KVLU**

Critical Hits

PAGE  
12

**Can't Miss This!**

**Hello!**

I am Golden Wright, privileged to serve as the Dean of the College of Fine Arts & Communication at Lamar University. Our college is a dynamic hub housing an array of talented individuals, including students, staff, and faculty. Through this monthly newsletter, we aim to shine a spotlight on the exceptional achievements of these individuals across various disciplines within the fine arts and communication fields.

Our college boasts an exceptional student body, each pursuing their passions in fields ranging from artistry to performance. Student success will always be our core mission here in the College of Fine Arts & Communication.

At the heart of our college is the profound connectivity we foster among students, faculty, and staff through the common thread of communication. Each distinct area within our college relies on communication in its own unique way. Communication serves as the cornerstone of each departments' success within the college.

From the multifaceted realm of communication and media, utilizing mediums such as television, radio, social media, and newspapers to disseminate information, to the evocative storytelling of music majors who convey emotions and narratives through voice or instruments, the immersive experiences offered by theatre and dance provide an escape from reality through the interplay of movement and text. And lastly, the visual eloquence of art captures moments and places, transporting us to new dimensions and inspiring our imagination.

We hope this newsletter illuminates all of the possibilities that our College provides. We are immensely grateful for the unwavering support of our surrounding community, which generously provides funding for scholarships, new equipment, and invaluable learning opportunities.

Thank you!

“THE BEST KEPT SECRET...”



**Golden Wright**

College of Fine Arts & Communication, Dean



## REVIVING A LEGACY: THE DEAN'S CORNER

**T**he College of Fine Arts & Communication is proud to announce the return of the beloved LUTV News segment, The Dean's Corner.

The show, previously hosted by Dr. Jimmy Simmons, Dr. Robert Moulton, and Dr. Russ Schultz, has now been passed to Dr. Golden Wright. The Dean's Corner covers all things from this corner of campus, including upcoming performances, lectures, student projects, innovative teaching styles, events and more.

*"The first episode of The Dean's Corner I saw was hosted by Dr. Russ Schultz. Through his interviews, I learned things about people in our College I would have never known otherwise,"* says Dean Wright, *"Then I found out that others had hosted the show before him, and that this was truly a legacy that I was happy to continue."*

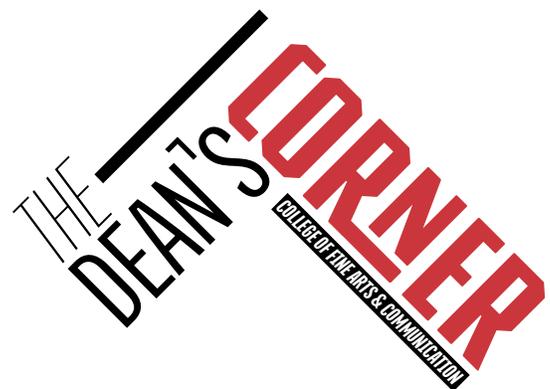
One of Dean Wright's main missions in his role as the Dean of the College of Fine Arts & Communication is to increase the College's visibility and help tell our story.

*"There's lots of wonderful things that are happening!"* shares Dean Wright, *"We've done a lot of projects recently to help define who we are, and I think that reviving The Dean's Corner was a natural next step in our mission."*

Gordon Williams, the Lamar University Television Studio Operations Manager, is excited to help this new project come to life.

*"I think our college is a window to the rest of the University,"* Williams explains, *"This College is where the community connects through art, theatre, music, film, print publications, and more. It's an opportunity to get to meet the people behind the art. The more we can connect to the community, the more successful we all are."*

We hope you tune into The Dean's Corner on LUTV News. Follow us on our Instagram and Facebook to be notified every time a new episode drops!



**ONLINE ART AUCTION PRESALES: MARCH 16TH - 20TH!**

Visit [lamar.edu/lgbartsale](http://lamar.edu/lgbartsale) to find the next piece of your collection



**LE GRAND BAL 2026**  
LAMAR UNIVERSITY®

**3.21.26**

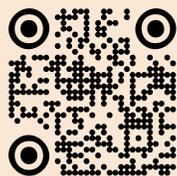
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with Live Entertainment*

BY SPECIAL GUEST HUNTER COURTS  
& THE CARDINAL JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Black Tie Optional • Black, White & Gold

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Tables and tickets are still available! Visit [lamar.edu/legrandbal](http://lamar.edu/legrandbal) today to reserve





COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS & COMMUNICATION

**LAMAR UNIVERSITY**

Department of Art & Design



# *GLOBAL VISIONS, LOCAL VOICE*

In 2026, photography is exploding across Houston, and Art & Design Professor Prince Varughese Thomas' artwork is well represented. His work is featured in two exhibitions: *A House Divided* at Hooks-Epstein Galleries and *Global Visions* at Sawyer Yards Galleries during FotoFest 2026: The International Biennial of Photography.

Founded in 1983, FotoFest is one of the longest-running international photography biennials in the United States and has become a defining force in contemporary photography and visual culture. Every two years, it transforms Houston into a global stage for curated exhibitions, artist talks, film programs, and citywide installations. The 2026 Biennial, themed *Global Visions*, marks its fourth decade of photographic arts programming and is curated by FotoFest co-founder Wendy Watriss and executive director Steven Evans, with co-curators Annick Dekioug and Madi Murphy. This edition of the biennial brings together more than 450 artists from 59 countries.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Within this sweeping international dialogue, Thomas' exhibition, *A House Divided*, offers a meditation on the fractured pulse of our contemporary moment. Borrowing its title from a biblical warning later invoked by Abraham Lincoln, *A House Divided* becomes both mirror and metaphor. Thomas does not simply look back at history; he situates viewers squarely in the present, at a time when the seams of community strain and fault lines run through shared civic spaces and private lives alike.

Within this fractured landscape, national symbols are transformed into sites of inquiry that reflect a complex and difficult past and present. Camouflage patterns are meticulously layered over civic icons, interrupting their legibility and calling attention to what is hidden, protected, or deliberately obscured in the stories a nation tells about itself. Here, camouflage becomes more than a surface; it is a metaphor for how identity, history, and power are concealed and manipulated, and how what appears unified may be fractured beneath.

Through the act of seeing, viewers become both witness and participant. The works frame quiet ruptures and loud fractures, subtle gestures of division alongside fragile, flickering signs of unity. Thomas asks: ***What is the architecture of belonging? And what happens when the walls between us grow taller than the bridges we build?*** Within each work carries the ache of separation alongside the persistence of hope and his belief that what has been split might, in time, be made whole.

Professor Thomas joined the faculty at Lamar University in 1998 and has built an expansive interdisciplinary practice that bridges Drawing, Photography, Video, and Installation. With academic degrees in Art and Psychology, his work examines contemporary life through observation, research, and visual inquiry, probing the cultural frameworks and prevailing ideas that shape society.

Working in the interstices between history, media, and lived experience, Thomas reveals unexpected relationships between subjects. His projects demand careful looking and sustained reflection, inviting viewers into difficult but necessary conversations. Guided by the belief



that art must reflect the times in which we live, he consistently challenges societal norms and sparks dialogue around identity, power, and belonging.

Recognized for his artistic impact, Professor Thomas has received numerous accolades, awards, and grants including support from the City of Houston, the Andy Warhol Foundation, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation. His work has been exhibited in over 250 solo and group exhibitions at museums and galleries worldwide including the Atlanta Contemporary, the Queens Museum, the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, the Amarillo Museum of Art, the Brownsville Museum of Art, the Museum of New Art, the Hammond Museum, and the Station Museum of Contemporary Art. His art is permanently displayed in the United Airlines Terminal at George Bush International Airport and on a billboard near Daikin Park, home to the Houston Astros. In addition, his work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Art Museum of Southeast Texas in Beaumont.

*A House Divided* will be exhibited from February 28th through April 4th at Hooks-Epstein Galleries in Houston, TX (2631 Colquitt St, Houston, TX 77098). In addition, Professor Thomas' artwork will also be on view March 7th through May 10th at FotoFest Headquarters (Sawyer Yards Galleries, 2000 Edwards Street, Houston, TX 77007) in conjunction with the main biennial exhibitions for The International Biennial of Photography in Houston, Texas.



# INNOVATION AND INDUSTRY

The Department of Communication & Media made sure to stand out at the 2026 Boomtown Film and Music Festival this February!

Run by the Boomtown Film Society, this annual event hosts filmmaking competitions including the 48 Hour Film Race and the Spindletop Storytellers, film showings, social gatherings, live performances and more.

This year, Lamar University's own, Red Beak Productions judged the entries and hosted a screening at the Dishman Art Museum for the Spindletop Storytellers, a free competition for grade school filmmakers of Southeast Texas. First place winners in each category received \$500 scholarships, provided by the College of Fine Arts & Communication, towards a degree in the Department of Communication & Media at Lamar University.

Winners included Javier Garcia, Diego Carrillo, Mitxel Chavez, and Giovani Mungia for their documentary, "Eagles Online," Adreanna Huerta for her public service announcement, "Don't Text and Drive," and Diana Lopez, Johana Figeroa, Jade McGuire, and Edna Garcia Salazar for their Narrative Film, "Play Date."

The 48 hour Film Race had strong student participation. Participants had 48 hours to write, shoot, edit, and submit a complete short film based on a genre and specific requirements given at kickoff. Red Beak Productions won the second place and audience choice awards with their short film, "Deadbeat."

Also awarded at the festival was Professor O'Brien Stanley.

Stanley was awarded the "Lifetime Achievement Award" for his contributions to filmmaking in Southeast Texas.

In 1998, O'Brien started the film program in the Department of Communication at Lamar University. From 1997 – 2015, Stanley taught courses in film and video production. In 2000, working together with Gordon S. Williams, Chris Castillo, and Robert Fong, Stanley helped start the Spindletop/Lamar University Film Festival.

Stanley recently completed a book with Lamar University faculty members Nicki Michalski, Lane Roth, and Steven Zani. The book, "Martian Pictures: Analyzing the Cinema of the Red Planet" (2018, McFarland), examines the role that Mars-themed science fiction films play in popular culture.



Stanley, Michalski, and Zani are working on an upcoming book about time travel and film. Although O'Brien retired from full-time teaching in 2025, he continues to teach part-time. He currently contributes to weekly podcasts--on subjects ranging from (but not limited to) coffee, Criterion Collection films, and science fiction movies.

Lamar University Television Studio Operations Manager and Board Member of the Boomtown Film & Music Festival, Gordon Williams is proud of the strong Lamar University turnout, and hopes that this is a continuing trend for years to come.

*"Film is a collaborative art," says Williams, "We have a lot of talented and dedicated people that want to pursue this craft in Southeast Texas. We hope that events like the festival will allow the community to see that there's beauty in what's being created here and that it can be a viable business venture for anyone pursuing a degree in Communication."*

We look forward to seeing the future accomplishments of our Cardinals at the Boomtown Film & Music Festival in 2027!



# A Resounding HONOR

**T**his February, Lamar University's Wind Ensemble earned an invitation to perform at the annual Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) Convention.

The process is as rigorous as it is prestigious. Each year, universities from all over the great state of Texas submit live recordings from the previous year's concerts. The panel then reviews these performances and extends three invitations to perform. This year, The Lamar University Wind Ensemble was able to secure one of those elusive invitations, something that hasn't been done since 2015.

This year, Lamar shared the stage with The University of Texas at Austin and Texas Lutheran University; an extraordinary accomplishment for a smaller institution competing alongside much larger programs.

After months of rehearsing, a full technical rehearsal day at the Julie Rogers Theatre, and critiques from local band directors, the performance was perfected, and the Wind Ensemble was ready for TMEA.

On the day of the performance, the audience was filled with over 1000 music professionals from all over the state, but the students remained cool, calm and collected.

*"It seemed like the students were very relaxed. I didn't feel like people were anxious,"* explains Dr. Andy McMahan, Associate Professor and Director of the Wind Ensemble, *"They were very confident. All of the soloists played perfectly."*

The result of all their hard work and dedication was a phenomenal performance that garnered praise from several institutions, alumni, students, and faculty.

*"Those performances made me reflect on concerts from decades past—but even more, they made me incredibly proud of my alma mater and its current ensembles. What I heard mirrored the greatness of earlier generations. The sound was familiar. The standard was unmistakable."* – Tom Harvey (Dept. of Education, Alumnus of Music).

*"It was amazing getting to see some of my inspirations come up to me to congratulate me and the band on our performance. My high school directors, my lesson teachers, my friends that I have made both in high school and my college career. These people have shaped and made me into the person I am today and I cannot express how thankful I am for each and every one of you,"* – Emmanuel Rodriguez (current graduate student and Alumnus).

After a well-earned short break, the ensemble is already preparing for its final spring concert. The program will feature Wine-Dark Sea, along with selections from Wicked, including "Popular," "Defying Gravity," and "For Good," performed with guest vocalists.

While next year returns to a more typical schedule, the impact of this TMEA performance will resonate for years to come.



## From Page... TO STAGE!

The Department of Theatre & Dance is excited to unveil a new project, Next Draft: LU New Student Works Series.

Be among the first to witness the bold, fresh voices shaping the future of theater. Next Draft showcases original works written, directed, and performed by student artists pushing the boundaries of storytelling. From raw and personal to daring and experimental, this dynamic collection of short plays and staged readings offers a glimpse into the next generation of creators—unfiltered, unapologetic, and unforgettable.

Come celebrate the art of the rewrite—and the power of a story still in progress.

Next Draft is led by guest artist, Elizabeth Keel. Keel, is a Houston playwright, director, actress, dramaturg, producer, screenwriter and novelist. Under her direction, our students are hard at work preparing their stories for

the mainstage. which, for most, can be exhilarating but intimidating.

*"It can be easy to get spooked or psyched out when writing in isolation. But I take great comfort in putting multiple brains on the case when it comes to new plays. My approach is to bring together a kind, friendly writers' room, with a variety of tools for the playwrights to experiment with, to unlock what might work best for their projects. We can find the resources we need to complete the play through dramaturgical research, by examining history, in learning from past writers, through reflecting with fellow students, drawing on my industry experience, or taking inspiration from design and other art forms,"* says Keel.

Keel is encouraging our students to dig deep and think about what it means to be intrinsically human.

*"It's hard work being a human! Plays offer a chance to practice our personhood. New plays let us say something deeply true in a way that is distinctive to the author. They're an incredible opportunity for those nearby to listen and hear something profound. In the earliest days, a new play is well-served by being asked, "What exactly are we trying to say?" and "Why?"* says Keel.

Keel praises the Department of Theatre & Dance for being a tight-knit community that fosters collaboration and discovery.

*"The university setting is ideal for this kind of work. An active theatre department fosters teamwork and innovation; the playwrights are generating their scripts within an atmosphere of creativity, support, and discovery. This work teaches patience! Compassion! Humor! And a keen awareness that problems can be solved with nearly infinite contrivance,"* says Keel.

We look forward to seeing what comes from Next Draft: LU New Student Works Series and hope you can join us for these one-of-a-kind performances.

Next Draft will take the stage on April 9th – 11th at 7:30 p.m. and a matinee performance on April 12th at 2:00 p.m. All performances will be held in the Studio Theatre between the Dishman Art Museum and the Susan and Jimmy Simmons Music building on the campus of Lamar University.

Tickets are available through [lamar.edu/lutdtix](http://lamar.edu/lutdtix).



LAMAR UNIVERSITY  
**AFTER  
SCHOOL  
SPECIAL**  
7TH JURIED ALUMNI ART EXHIBITION

# CALL FOR *ENTRIES!*

The Dishman Art Museum is excited to announce the return of "The Lamar University After School Special: Juried Alumni Art Exhibition."

In this annual exhibition series, the Dishman Art Museum partners with the office of Alumni Affairs to collect entries from alumni of all disciplines.

Previous exhibited artists include Andy Coughlan, Greg Busceme, Ken Mazzu, Sunni Forcier, Cathy Spence, Mark Nesmith, Gonzalo Alvarez, Audra LaCour, André Ramos-Woodard and so many other talented and esteemed graduates of Lamar University.

***"The great thing about the juried alumni exhibition is that it is open to anyone who attended Lamar, not just those who graduated with art degrees,"*** explains Museum Director, Alex Irvine, ***"That way, we are exposed to the breadth of talent in our community."***

This year, Caitlin Clay, Curator of Exhibitions at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, will serve as juror.

***"I am incredibly grateful to the Dishman Art Museum's***

***team for inviting me to judge this year's Juried Alumni Art Show. The legacy of Lamar University's Art & Design Department is rich in the diversity of its alumni and their art-making practices. For decades, the Art Department's faculty has mentored highly talented artists, who are successful at local, state, national and international levels,"*** Caitlin explains, ***"I look forward to seeing a wide range of artworks, whether it is in choice of medium, subject matter, or formal composition. I also encourage the department's most recent graduates and graduates who have never entered before to apply to this exhibition."***

"The Lamar University After School Special: Juried Alumni Art Exhibition" will run from June 12 through August 14. The Dishman Art Museum will be hosting an opening reception on June 12th from 6:00 – 8:00 PM.

The call for entries for this exhibition has begun and the deadline is April 30th. "After School Special" is open to any graduate or former student of Lamar University with any major, and all media will be considered. To submit a body of work for consideration and view the guidelines, please visit [www.lamar.edu/alumnishow](http://www.lamar.edu/alumnishow).

# CRITICAL HITS



Step into a world of fantasy, combat, and friendship with Vocals and Valor on 91.3 FM, KVLU.

College of Fine Arts & Communication students, Travis Reed (Communication), Willie Sandals (Graphic Design), Vivian Siau (Music Education), and John Brimm (Broadcasting) decided to combine their love of storytelling and the classic game of Dungeons and Dragons, with live radio, creating the show Vocals and Valor.

What began as a shared interest for some and a new venture for others quickly turned into a full-fledged production, with 18 episodes recorded throughout the year and more to come.

The campaign centers on an undead apocalypse, with six powerful bosses threatening the world. The party has already defeated one major villain and is working their way through battling the second. They plan to defeat all six bosses and finish the story before the end of the semester.

But the real magic isn't just in the monster battles. It's in the characters.

John serves as the Dungeon Master. The Dungeon Master serves as the organizer, narrator, and referee for each session.

Hos, played by Willie, is a towering half-giant barbarian with something to prove. Although originally driven by a need to impress his father, Hos has gradually softened over the campaign. What started as a stoic warrior arc has evolved into what the group affectionately calls "team dad energy." His character growth moving from proving himself to discovering who he actually is has become one of the emotional cores of the show.

Phobos, played by Travis, is a conflicted warlock trying not to follow in the darker footsteps of his lineage. His player describes the character as a reflection of his younger self, navigating identity, resisting expectations, and deciding who he wants to become.

And finally, Bongo, played by Vivian, is a two-foot-tall goblin. Created specifically for comedic relief, Bongo has no parents, no filter, and no impulse control. In early episodes, the party literally kept her on a leash to prevent her from robbing shopkeepers along their journey.

For the cast, the show is more than just gameplay. It's collaboration, performance, improvisation, and friendship.

**Be sure to tune in to KVLU on Sundays at 10:00 P.M. and follow along as this student adventuring party rolls the dice on monsters, mayhem, and meaningful character growth.**

# CAN'T MISS THIS!

**JAN – APR  
23 – 2**

*“the tether that binds us”*  
Dishman Art Museum

**MAR  
18**

***Creative Conversations***  
Communication Building, Room 103  
*5:30 P.M. - 7:30 P.M.*

**MAR  
21**

***Le Grand Bal 2026***  
*50: A Sparkling Celebration*  
*Visit [lamar.edu/legrandbal](http://lamar.edu/legrandbal) today!*

**MAR  
28**

***Percussion Festival***  
Susan and Jimmy Simmons Music Building  
*Beginning at 9:00 A.M., Concert at 7:30 P.M.*

**APR  
9-12**

***Next Draft: Student Work Series***  
Studio Theatre  
*Tickets available at [lamar.edu/lutdtix](http://lamar.edu/lutdtix)*

## **GIVE NOW, EMPOWER THE FUTURE!**

Your generous support for the College of Fine Arts & Communication at Lamar University ensures that the arts and communication fields continue to grow and thrive. Your contribution, no matter the size, makes a lasting impact.

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