“During my time at Brown and especially as the inaugural NAISI fellow in Public Humanities, I was given the space to think critically about the role and representation of Native peoples in the Public Humanities. It was an honor to curate and organize programs for the exhibition Sacred is Sacred: the Art of Protecting Bears Ears in collaboration with the Haffen-reffer Museum, JNBC and people from my community. I will carry the skills and perspectives that I gained through Public Humanities coursework and this exhibition throughout my career.”

Isabella Robbins, MA ’19, Native American and Indigenous Studies Fellow
DEAR FRIENDS OF THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HUMANITIES,

I invite you to look through the many and amazingly varied projects, events, classes, and people who contributed to the life of the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage in the past year. We aim for activities that bring together all our constituencies – faculty, students, and our local, national and international communities – in critical conversations about the role of the arts and humanities in enriching our lives and advancing social justice.

I particularly loved the great classes we offered; the student work in practicums and courses; our unconferences, Hacking Heritage and Curatescape; our trip to Hong Kong; and the terrific lunch speakers. The quality and quantity of different things you can read about in this report are the result of the hard work of the staff of the Center: Assistant Directors, Ron Potvin and Marisa Brown; Post-doctoral Fellows, Majida Kargbo and Jim McGrath; and Center Manager, Sabina Griffin.

Glad for any suggestions for new collaborations or inquiries about our MA program. Be in touch!

And thanks for your interest in our work.

Susan Smulyan
Professor, American Studies
Director, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage

Susan Smulyan with JNBC students and colleagues in Hong Kong, March 2019. L to R: Louis Cheung, Jasmine Chu, Susan Smulyan, Robert Lee, Alyson Myers, Molly Pailet, Julia Renaud and Johanna Obenda.
Year at a Glance

19 MA Degrees Awarded in 2019
17 Courses Taught
16 Lunch Talks
6 Jobs/Skills Workshops for Students
6 Exhibitions and 14 Tiny Exhibits
9 Faculty, Student, and Staff Publications*
3 Conferences

160 Total Alumni

* 1 manuscript in progress titled Doing Public Humanities, edited by Susan Smulyan.
Degrees Granted in Spring 2019

“Being a part of the public humanities allowed me to think both critically and practically about issues surrounding museums and other cultural institutions. Not only was I able to learn from JNBC faculty, but I was also exposed to new ideas from my talented, thoughtful classmates. I am excited to see the waves we will make as cultural practitioners.”

Johanna Obenda, MA ’19, Public History of Slavery Fellow

MASTER OF ARTS

Sandra Arnold
New York, NY
Public History of Slavery Fellowship, Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Center for Reconciliation (Providence, RI) and the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University.

Emma Boast
Brooklyn, NY
Public Humanities Curatorial Fellowship, Brown Arts Initiative
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the National Public Housing Museum (Chicago, IL) and the Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism.

Jasmine Chu
Claremont, CA
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes (Los Angeles, CA) and New Urban Arts (Providence, RI).

Taylor Jackson
Memphis, TN
Communications and Outreach Fellow, Brown Arts Initiative
Public Humanities Curatorial Fellow, Swearengin Center
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History (Washington, DC) and StaySilentPvd (Providence, RI).

Zhuohan (Bella) Jiang
Shanghai, China
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at Chambers Fine Art and China Institute (New York, NY) and with Nicole Wholean, University Curator and Registrar, Brown Arts Initiative.

Kenna Libes
Cabin John, MD
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Historic Park, Great Falls National Park (Potomac, MD) and Museum Textile Services (Andover, MA).

Hannah Mooney
Mount Pleasant, SC
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at Redux Contemporary Art Center (Charleston, SC) and RISD Museum.

Alison Myers
Stephens City, VA
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at George Washington’s Mount Vernon (Mount Vernon, VA) and the Cambridge Historical Society (Cambridge, MA).

Johanna Obenda
Brooklyn, NY
Public History of Slavery Fellowship, Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, NY) and the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice.

Molly Pailit
Denver, CO
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at RiNo Arts District and the Western States Arts Federation (Denver, CO).

Julia Renaud
Brooklyn, NY
Marketing and Communications Fellow, Brown Arts Initiative
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Dirt Palace and the Center for Reconciliation (Providence RI) and “Dialogues on the Experience of War,” NEH-Sponsored Project, Brown University.

Isabella Robbins
Tuba City, CA
Native American and Indigenous Studies Fellow
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Cantor Arts Center (Stanford, CA) and the Haffenreffer Museum, Brown University.

Ryan Saglio
North Kingstown, RI
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at Mystic Seaport (Mystic, CT).

Ruby Thiagarajan
Maastricht, Netherlands
Practicum in Public Humanities completed with Maria Blyzinsky, Independent Curator (London, UK).

MASTER OF ARTS EN ROUTE TO THE PHD IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Erin Aoyama
Cambridge, MA
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at The No-No Boy Project (Honolulu, HI and Chicago, IL) and Heart Mountain Interpretive Center (Powell, WY).

Sam Coren
Cranston, RI
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at Congress for the New Urbanism, New England Chapter (Providence, RI).

Kristen Iemma
Brooklyn, NY
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities, American Studies Department, and the Providence Community Library.

Jacquelyn Jones
Williamsville, NY
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA).

Claritza Maldonado
Chicago, IL
Practicum in Public Humanities completed at the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance (Chicago, IL).
Courses Offered in the 2018–2019 Academic Year

“The seminar I taught on Philanthropy and Civil Society happened at a moment when the ethics and politics of philanthropy were at the center of controversy nationally at museums and on the Brown campus. They still are. Being able to place issues like de-colonization and philanthropy’s connection to the opioid crisis in historical and policy context deepened our perspectives. The role of philanthropy in public humanities is an important inquiry.”

Elizabeth Francis, Faculty and Community Fellow, and Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities

FALL

2630 Public Amnesias and Their Discontents: Theories and Practices of Remembering and Forgetting
Diane O’Donoghue

2631 Public Humanities on Lockdown: Considerations on the Role and Design of Public Humanities Programs in Prisons and Jails
Christina Dawkins

2650 Introduction to Public Humanities
Steven Lubar

2660 Projects in the Public Humanities
Marisa Angell Brown and Majida Kargbo

2680 Semester Practicum in Public Humanities
Ron Potvin

2686 Creating a 21st-Century Art and Design Museum: A Seminar and Laboratory
Roger Mandle

2687 History and Heritage Organizations: Collaboration and Critique
Richard Ring

2689 Show Me the Money: Philanthropy and Civil Society
Elizabeth Francis

2697 Museum Interpretation Practices
Sarah Ganz Blythe

2699 Digital Storytelling
Jim McGrath

SPRING

1950 Pursuit of Happiness: Environmental Justice and Indigenous Rights
Ron Potvin and Lorèn Spears

1970 Independent Study
Majida Kargbo

2500A History Curatorship
Steven Lubar

2540 Methods in Public Humanities
Susan Smulyan

2655 Against Invisibility
Robert Lee

2660 Projects in the Public Humanities
Marisa Angell Brown, Majida Kargbo, and Robert Lee

2680 Semester Practicum
Ron Potvin

2689 Show Me the Money: Philanthropy and Civil Society
Elizabeth Francis

2697 Museum Interpretation Practices
Sarah Ganz Blythe

2699 Digital Storytelling
Jim McGrath
A Selection of Course Projects

“Public humanities work in the twenty-first century inevitably brings us to digital spaces, tools, and conversations, and my work at the JNBC prepares our students for these new and changing realities.”

Jim McGrath, Postdoctoral Research Associate in Digital Public Humanities

Thirteen students in Pursuit of Happiness: Environmental Justice and Indigenous Rights contributed exhibition panels on the Narragansett Nation’s “struggles for decolonization, environmental justice, and indigenous rights” to Climates of Inequality: Stories of Environmental Justice, a national traveling exhibition and digital platform organized by the Humanities Action Lab (HAL). HAL is a coalition of universities and issue organizations in 40 cities, led from Rutgers University-Newark, that collaborate to produce public humanities projects on urgent social issues. The exhibition will come to Providence in the fall of 2021.

In History Curatorship, three students wrote pamphlets and produced smartphone-activated audio tours from the perspective of six different “animal tour guides” for the exhibition Little Compton: A Changing Landscape, at the Little Compton Historical Society. Tours were written and recorded from the point of view of a horse, a fish, a dog, a mouse, an owl and a cow.

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**The Providence Album, Vol I: Harry Callahan & Carmel Vitullo** was co-curated by four students in *Methods in Public Humanities*, working with Marisa Brown. The exhibition revisited Providence in the 1960s through the photographs of Vitullo and Callahan, who captured the city during a time of tremendous change, presenting contrasting narratives about modern urban life and postwar female identity. The exhibition was open from May 4 through July 22, 2019 at the JNBC’s Carriage House Gallery.

**Enslaved Labor and the Making of the Nightingale-Brown House** is an illustrated pamphlet written by three students in *Methods in Public Humanities*, working with Ron Potvin, that traces Joseph Nightingale’s ownership of enslaved people and his profit from slave voyages in 1784 and 1790. The pamphlet states, “It is likely that five enslaved and four free black people who resided with the family on Water Street moved with them to Benefit Street” when they moved into the newly constructed Nightingale-Brown House, now home to the JNBC. The content was derived from “Black Labor in the Making of the Nightingale-Brown House,” by Joanne Pope Melish, and the design was derived from the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice’s pamphlet, “Hidden in Plain Sight: American Slavery and the University.”

Supported by a grant from the **Learning by Giving Foundation**, nine students in *Show Me the Money: Philanthropy and Civil Society* formed a foundation, designed and circulated a request for proposals to arts, culture, and heritage organizations in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, evaluated 16 submitted applications, undertook five site visits, and awarded two $5,000 grants to Everett, an organization that mentors new generations of young artists, and Women’s Refugee Care, which helps refugee families from the Great Lakes Region of Africa to become self-sufficient while maintaining their cultural and ethnic identities.
Initiatives, Conferences, Exhibitions, Lectures and Tours

“It’s the range of projects at the John Nicholas Brown Center that never ceases to astonish me. My students last year considered a proposed H.P. Lovecraft memorial, produced exhibitions on African diasporic cooking in Providence and websites on Little Compton landscapes, outlined young adult fiction on the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and an audio tour of Snowtown, and produced a set of audio tours of the Little Compton Historical Society’s collections barn narrated by a fish, a cow, a dog, an owl, a horse, and a mouse!”

Steven Lubar, Faculty

INITIATIVES

Rhode Tour is a statewide mobile smartphone application containing thematic “tours” of Rhode Island’s history using text, sound and images. Launched in 2014, it is a joint initiative of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, the Rhode Island Historical Society, and the JNBC.

Year of the City: The Providence Project comprises exhibitions, performances, walks, lectures and conferences about the life, culture and history of Providence produced by more than 50 different curators all over the city. The initiative took place throughout 2019 and was organized by Providence Public Library, ¡City Arts! for Providence Youth, and the JNBC.

EXHIBITIONS

Unfinished Business: The Long Civil Rights Movement, curated by the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice
September 21 – December 14, 2018

4th Annual Hacking Heritage Unconference
March 16, 2019

Architectural History and Place-based Storytelling, organized with faculty in the History of Art and Architecture during the Society of Architectural Historians’ annual conference
April 24, 2019

EXHIBITIONS

Tiny Exhibits: A Rotating Installation Series, curated by JNBC students
October 5, 2018 – June 1, 2019

The Providence Album, Vol I: Harry Callahan & Carmel Vitullo
May 4 – July 22, 2019

Where the Heart Is: International Southeast Asian Migration Stories
May 23 – August 30, 2019

In Between: Public Humans in Hong Kong
May 23 – August 30, 2019

CONFERENCES AND PANELS

Curatescape Unconference: Digital Storytelling and Place-based Tours
October 18, 2018

4th Annual Hacking Heritage Unconference
March 16, 2019

Architectural History and Place-based Storytelling, organized with faculty in the History of Art and Architecture during the Society of Architectural Historians’ annual conference
April 24, 2019
LECTURES
The JNBC’s lunch talk series, New Voices, New Directions, brought sixteen public humanities innovators to campus in 2018-19, including the following speakers.

**Erik DeLuca**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Music and Multimedia, Brown University

**Aaron Forrest, AIA**, Principal of Ultramoderne and Assistant Professor of Architecture, RISD

**Briann Greenfield**, MA ’96 PhD ’02, Executive Director of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center

**Therese Kelly**, Artist and Founder of the Los Angeles Urban Rangers

**Lisa Lee**, Director of the National Public Housing Museum

**Sage Xaxua Morgan-Hubbard**, Public Programs Manager, National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution

**Tim Raphael, Director of the Center for Migration and the Global City at Rutgers University-Newark**

**Roopika Risam**, Assistant Professor of English, Salem State University

**Reina Shibata, MA ‘10, Director of the Percent for Art program in New York City**

**Fiona Vernal**, Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies at the University of Connecticut

**Kamau Ware**, Founder of the Black Gotham Experience

**Christina Yang**, Director of Education and Youth Programs at the Guggenheim Museum

TOURS AND WALKS

**Providence Chinatown Tour**
September 1, 2018

**Untitled: Walking, a 2-day 20-mile urban hike across the city of Providence**
May 4-5, 2019
The JNBC Community

STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION
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Professor of American Studies
Marisa Angell Brown
Assistant Director
Adjunct Lecturer
Sabina Griffin
Center Manager
Majida Kargbo
Director of Graduate Studies
Postdoctoral Research Associate in Public Humanities
Jim McGrath
Postdoctoral Research Associate in Digital Public Humanities
Ron Potvin
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Director, Tomaquag Museum
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FACULTY FELLOWS
Jim Egan
Professor of English
Kevin Escudero
Assistant Professor of American Studies
Robert Lee
Professor of American Studies
Patrick Malone
Assistant Professor of American Studies
Deitrich Neumann
Director, Urban Studies
Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Urban Studies and Italian Studies
Amy Remensnyder
Professor of History
Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence
Sydney Skybetter
Lecturer, Theater and Performance Studies
Esther Whitfield
Associate Professor, Comparative Literature

COMMUNITY FELLOWS
Christina Bevilacqua
Director of Programs and Exhibitions, Providence Public Library
Bert Crenca
Founder/Plenipotentiary, AS220
Holly Ewald
Founder and Artistic Director, UPP Arts
Elizabeth Francis
Executive Director, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities
Marta Martinez
Executive Director, RI Latino Arts
Marjory O’Toole
Executive Director, Little Compton Historical Society
Shey Rivera
Artistic Director, AS220

PRE-DISSERTATION FELLOW
Virginia Thomas
Department of American Studies
“In the Public Humanities program, I found what felt like a true intellectual home—a place where I could freely explore and integrate seemingly disparate interests in urban history, food studies, museums, and the politics of public culture. My professors and mentors at Brown really made that possible by encouraging and nurturing a sense of critical curiosity. Their support provided the foundation for me to pursue an incredible array of interdisciplinary learning opportunities: an exhibition design class at RISD, a year-long community-centered project in Providence’s Smith Hill neighborhood, and practicums at Chicago’s National Public Housing Museum and the Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism. Most importantly, it was an absolute privilege to study among such thoughtful, creative, and passionate colleagues. Public humans are a special sort, and I am grateful for the community that we shaped over our two years together and that we’ll belong to going forward.”

Emma Boast, Public Humanities Curatorial Fellow, Brown Arts Initiative