

**2007-2008 UIS Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant Proposal**  
**April 4, 2008**

**TITLE:** "The Great Chase: Sisyphus and the Human Genome" A contribution to the exhibition "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" at the Illinois State Museum, 2008-2009.

**TEAM MEMBERS:** Mike Miller, Assistant Professor of Art  
Brian Gillis, Assistant Professor of Art  
James Bonacum, Assistant Professor of Biology

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### A. Project Description

Members of the UIS Visual Arts Department and Biology Department seek funds from the Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant Program to support a collaboration addressing the concept of the human genome and its power to provide insight to the public regarding issues of race and identity. Specifically, project team members are requesting \$6160 to create a work of art entitled "The Great Chase: Sisyphus and the Human Genome" that will be part of the group exhibition "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" at two Illinois State Museum venues during 2008-2009. The exhibition will be on display at the museum's Springfield location from August 14, 2008 through January 25, 2009 and then travel to the museum's Chicago venue from February 6, 2009 through May 8, 2009. The Illinois State Museum exhibition is part of a larger citywide effort to commemorate the centennial of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot.

With the proposed work of art, the project team seeks to engage the theme of difference, particularly the perceived racial differences that prompted the tragedy of the Springfield Race Riot, through the prism of science and the new understanding of the human body made possible by DNA sequencing. It is a scientific fact that human beings exhibit very little genetic variance attributable to race. The premise for our portion of the exhibit is that racial divisions are social and class originated- not a product of quantifiable physical differences.

For this exhibit, the team will create the tableau of a research station in the museum gallery space, complete with DNA sequencing equipment, banks of computers, and lab technicians. The student workers and community volunteers that will staff the station will be engaged in active research during gallery hours. They will be searching relentlessly for racial differences in the genetic material of two subjects- one black descendant and one white descendant of participants in the Springfield riot. The work will also include two life-sized photographs of the subjects, and a large-scale digital print displaying differences in the subjects' specific genetic sequences. Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant funds will be used to pay for materials needed to produce the final installation in the gallery space.

The project team consists of Assistant Professor of Visual Arts Brian Gillis, Assistant Professor of Visual Arts Mike Miller, and Assistant Professor of Biology Dr. James Bonacum. Professor Gillis is an installation artist interested in memorial ceremonies and other practices employed by societies to mark the passage of time. Professor Miller is a painter and digital media artist exploring the impact of technology on human understanding of both real and simulated environments. Professor Bonacum is a genetic researcher investigating the evolutionary history of marine life, including the Chambered Nautilus. The team assembled for this project is uniquely qualified to deliver a thoughtful and challenging presentation on the chosen subject matter. Gillis and Miller bring exhibition experience in gallery and museum settings throughout the country, and technical expertise in the areas of painting, sculpture, and digital media. Bonacum's experience as a genetic researcher is invaluable to the project. He will replicate DNA and generate data for the exhibit, advise on installation of lab equipment, and generally ensure that the science involved in the project is accurate.

### B. Suitability of the Project to UIS Strategic Plan Initiatives

Project team members believe that the "The Great Chase: Sisyphus and the Human Genome" project clearly embodies the concepts laid out in the UIS 2005/2006 Strategic Plan. In particular, the proposed project would support *Goal One: Academic Excellence* in the strategic plan. Under Strategic Thrust #2: Excellence in Scholarship, Action Step 7 indicates the need to "create opportunities for collaborations in research and creative activities". The proposed project represents a meaningful collaboration between the science and creative arts faculty on campus. The project seeks to make the science of genetic sequencing better understood to the general public, while suggesting the limited ability of science to resolve the deeply troubling social problems of race and class. The project also supports Action Step 8, "(to) establish more high-visibility collaborative projects, some of which will be 'Stretch Ideas' for UIS". Perhaps the strongest

aspect of the proposal is the large audience that will experience the exhibition. Based on museum attendance figures from last year, the exhibition could be viewed by as many as 60,000 individuals during its run in Springfield and Chicago. Plans also exist for an exhibition catalog that would make permanent record of all works in the show, with essays and commentary by prominent cultural critics. Finally in the area of scholarly excellence, the other artists represented in the "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" exhibit are truly remarkable. Members of the assembled group have been recipients of the MacArthur Genius Fellowship, Prix d'Rome, and NEA Fellowship and exhibited work in such prestigious venues as the Venice Biennale, the Museum of Modern Art, Documenta, and the Studio Museum of Harlem. For a full description of participating artists, please see the curator's synopsis on page 4.

The proposal also supports UIS Strategic Plan *Goal Three: Making a Difference in the World*. Specifically, in Strategic Thrust 1: Reflection, the plan states "Reflection is a learning process of fostering awareness and understanding of issues, mastering skills, and acquiring the experiences that facilitate effective engagement. We will foster the awareness and understanding necessary for action on public policy and civic culture." The very process of re-creating a genetics lab in a gallery setting calls for reflection on the definitions of art and the uses of scientific knowledge. Historically, scientific research has been used to support public policy, and cultural and societal bias has informed the research motives of scientists. With the creation of this installation in a museum gallery space, the project team will stimulate reflection on these issues for students, faculty, and community members alike. In Strategic Thrust 2: Dialogue, Action Step #5 seeks to "promote and facilitate faculty presentations and service activities to community, business, professional, and advocacy groups." This project will place UIS faculty in direct dialogue with a diverse mix of viewers. In addition to local and regional community members, the project team will also interact with fellow artists, cultural critics, and museum professionals, thus enacting dialogue about race and class at multiple levels of sophistication and among diverse audiences.

### C. Project Timeline

The timeline for the project consists of three separate phases- research and development, construction and installation, and exhibitions. Tentative dates for each of the three phases are outlined below.

#### 1. Research and Development

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|-----------------|---|
| Fall 2007-      | Informal discussions occur with Robert Sill, the Illinois State Museum Curator responsible for developing the exhibit. Art and science agree to collaborate on a proposal to the museum.                      |
| Feb 13, 2008    | Outline for the work "The Great Chase: Sisyphus and the Human Genome" formally proposed and accepted for inclusion in the exhibition "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" by officials of the museum. |
| Feb-April, 2008 | Bi-weekly meetings with all team members held to refine concept, material, budget, and installation plans.  |
| April 4, 2008   | Submission of UIS Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant proposal to seek support for material costs of the project.  |

#### 2. Construction and Installation

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|----------------|---|
| May-June, 2008 | Gather bids for large digital print and portrait processing, secure agreements for loaned equipment, enlist student and community volunteers for genetic material donation, installation assistance. Purchase prints and laboratory supplies. |
|----------------|---|

July 2008                      Create mock installation in the UIS Visual and Performing Arts building enlisting student volunteers and in cooperation with museum curatorial staff. Prepare museum exhibition space to receive the installation.

August 1-13                      Install work at Illinois state Museum.

3. Exhibitions

August 14, 2008                      Exhibition opens at the Illinois State Museum, Springfield.

October (TBA)                      Exhibition reception at the Illinois State Museum, Springfield.

January 25, 2009                      Exhibition closes at the Illinois State Museum, Springfield.

Jan 25- Feb 5, 2009                      Works for "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" are transported to the Illinois State Museum, Chicago.

February 6, 2009                      Exhibition opens at the Illinois State Museum, Chicago.

February (TBA)                      Exhibition reception at the Illinois State Museum, Chicago.

May 8, 2009                      Exhibition closes at the Illinois State Museum, Chicago.

After May 9, 2009                      Works for "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other" are returned to participating artists.

(TBA)                      Publication of exhibition catalog.

**D. Expected Results of the Proposed Activities**

The project team envisions many positive outcomes arising from the successful implementation of this proposal. In addition to producing an increased collaborative atmosphere between science and art faculty at UIS, the project will provide an opportunity for student involvement with local institutions, promote the UIS art and biology departments to local and regional community members, and result in significant scholarly achievement for faculty members involved. An expanded discussion of outcomes follows.

1. Student Involvement

UIS students will participate in the development, installation, and exhibition phases of the project in a variety of capacities. Students will work closely with faculty members to help fabricate and format material components of the project. Students will have an opportunity to work with museum staff and participating artists to install the exhibition at the museum. Students will also participate in lectures, symposia, and receptions associated with the exhibit.

2. Community Benefits

The UIS campus community and the greater local and regional community stand to benefit greatly from this collaboration. As previously mentioned, the interaction undertaken between art and science faculty on this project has the potential to open new lines of communication and build alliances for the future. Similarly, this project will also create a stronger bond between the campus and a major regional institution, the Illinois State Museum.

3. Intellectual Products

The core premise of this proposal is that the funds granted will allow UIS faculty to participate in a highly visible intellectual product; an art exhibition at a major cultural institution. The exhibition will have an extended run in Springfield and Chicago, with a conservative attendance total attendance estimate of 60,000 viewers. In addition, plans exist and external grants are being sought by museum officials to produce a full color catalog for the exhibit, with commentary by prominent scholars in the field.

A final thought on “results”-

Perhaps most importantly, UIS faculty participation in this particular exhibition, “Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other”, publicly involves the campus with an issue of great importance to our community. The proposed work of art emphasizes that human division issues are of our own social and cultural construction, not the inevitable outgrowth of genetic patterns. The work is also designed to raise the question of the motives of “pure” science- to suggest that bias may exist in the most objective arenas of human thought, and that we must all be skeptical of our subjective interpretation of “facts”. Thus, this work has the potential to stimulate interesting conversations, complement the work of other artists in the exhibit, and leave the viewer with compelling food for thought regarding their own attitude toward issues of race and class, truth and fact, objectivity and subjectivity.

**E. Exhibition Synopsis**

Prepared by Robert Sill, Assistant Director for Art and Exhibition Curator, Illinois State Museum.

The ISM is organizing the contemporary art exhibition: “Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other”, a component of collaborative efforts to raise consciousness at the 100 year-mark of the Springfield Race Riot. Curator: Robert Sill

**Project Description:** In partnership with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) and the University of Illinois, Springfield (UIS) three separate exhibitions will be presented concurrently to help publicly commemorate the race riot.

- In “Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other” a diverse group of talented contemporary artists will engage ISM visitors through their works that spur dialog on issues relating to race, ethnicity, class and religion. \*Sill is still negotiating with the artists on what their contributions will ultimately be.
- The ALPLM will produce a documentary exhibition detailing the events of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot.
- The UIS Art Gallery will produce a solo exhibition by contemporary artist James Luna, He deals with American Indian contemporary history, social/economic dilemmas and representation in media, institutions and American mind set of the romantic west.

The ISM will premiere “Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other” from August 15, 2008 – January 25, 2009 in Springfield and then travel the exhibition to the ISM Chicago Gallery February 6, 2009 – May 8, 2009.

**“Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other” will present installation works by:**

- **David Hammons**, winner of the Macarthur Foundation Award and the Prix d’ Rome, has an established international reputation with exhibitions that include Documenta X, Venice Biennale, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Studio Museum, Harlem. Known as a master of improvisation, his installations are often formed from found and de-valued materials always responsive to site and situation. He combines intellect, humor and profound wisdom to address the

African American experience, politics, and race. (Final proposal for his installation still pending, he is committed but does not yet know what he'll do.)

- **Fred Wilson** is internationally recognized for his installations that re-install museum collections in new juxtapositions. His rearrangements of cultural objects and artifacts create fresh interpretation, engaging social commentary and powerful cultural critique. (Final proposal for his contribution is still pending, waiting for gallery response Pace/Wildenstien.)
- **James Luna**, a renowned installation/performance artist, has exhibited nationally and internationally including the Venice Biennale. Luna will contribute an exhibit display case directly adjacent to the "Peoples of the Past" permanent displays. He will fill the case with objects he considers "artifacts of the present," with a physical design echoing those of the permanent displays.
- **Jin Soo Kim**, a Korean-born Chicago artist, has exhibited throughout the United States and abroad. Kim has proposed an outside memorial and a gallery installation. Her memorial addresses the fact that the ISM, sits on the grounds where in 1908 William Donnegan was lynched. Kim has proposed draping the Museum's limestone south facing façade, which measures 40 by 45 feet high, with fabric. On the cloth will be a monumental image of an eye, based on concepts of memorial, witness and monument. University students and members of the general public will be invited to work with Kim in the fabrication process. (The memorial is still pending feasibility and safety clearance.) The gallery work will consist of tall canvas panels wrapped in gauze bandaging leaning against the gallery walls. The panels present texts of firsthand impressions of South Central Los Angeles community members recorded shortly after the Rodney King Riot of 1992, which took the lives of 53 people over a six-day period.
- **Michele Feder-Nadoff** and **Kanaan Kanaan** will collaborate on a performance installation. Chicago artist Feder-Nadoff of Jewish heritage and Kanaan Kanaan who has a Palestinian background have done many collaborative installation and performance works since 2001. They propose dividing a gallery space diagonally in two with a large sheet of muslin. Working together on opposite sides of the muslin they will produce embroidery. By passing the needle to each other through the muslin, they will stitch designs and text with the blue and red thread of Israeli and Palestinian colors. They will perform periodically, and in their absence, a video of their performance will be shown in the space.
- **Brian Gillis** and **Mike Miller** are talented emerging regional artists and UIS Professors of Art who will co-create a research laboratory tableau complete with DNA sequencing equipment, banks of computers, and lab technicians. On the walls will be life size photos of one black descendant and one white descendant of participants in the 1908 riot who will serve as study subjects, and an 8' x 12' digital print displaying differences in their specific genetic sequences. The artists are working with Professor of Biology, James Bonacum, PhD. a genetic researcher at UIS who will replicate the subjects' DNA and generate the data and generally ensure the science involved in the project is accurate.
- **Luz Maria Sanchez** is known for her sound environments that deal with direct relationships between the body and its surrounding space, the alienation of the senses and the idea of sound (specifically) as an immersive directional medium. These physical and atmospheric spaces are realized as structures that are built to human scale; in order to experience them one must move through or become enclosed within the piece itself. Her work will deal with the geographic divide between the U.S. and Mexico and the cost of human life in failed border crossing attempts.

**There will also be individual two- dimensional works by several other artists including Rashid Johnson, Carrie Mae Weems and Barkley Hendricks.**

ISM staff will promote audience understanding of the aesthetic, conceptual and social content of the art through interpretive text panels, gallery tours, exhibition guides, and an exhibition catalog developed by the curator and UIS faculty.

2007-2008 Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant Proposal  
 Miller, Gillis, Bonacum

Budget

Project Title: "The Great Chase: Sisyphus and the Human Genome"

**Budget Description:**

The budget below outlines all material and staffing costs to outfit a working laboratory in the museum space, pay a technician to replicate DNA, and produce three high quality digital prints. The team recognizes that this budget exceeds the \$5000 limit established in the SAIG guidelines, and is prepared to supplement SAIG funds with additional funds from individual or outside sources. This budget reflects expenses associated with producing the proposed work of art only. The Illinois State Museum will provide any additional installation, transport, and promotion costs associated with exhibiting the work as part of "Across the Divide: Reconsidering the Other".

	SAIG	Total
Equipment		
Micro pipette w/ stand	\$ 1000	\$ 1000
Mini Centrifuge	\$ 400	\$ 400
Commodities		
Miscellaneous Office Supplies (Paper, ink, clipboards, etc.)	\$ 100	\$ 100
Miscellaneous Lab Supplies (Pipette tips, PCR tubes, tube racks, reagents, etc.)	\$ 560	\$ 560
Miscellaneous Building Supplies (Paint, wood, hardware, etc.)	\$ 300	\$ 300
Contractual		
Lab Tech Labor 40 hours @ \$10/hr	\$ 400	\$ 400
Large Format Photographs 2 @ 500 ea.	\$ 1000	\$ 1000
Large Format Digital Print	\$ 2000	\$ 2000
Book Binding 2 @ \$200 ea.	\$ 400	\$ 400
TOTALS	\$ 6160	\$ 6160