

 Academics

# Brush named to top professor honour



PAUL MAYNE // WESTERN NEWS

Visual Arts professor Kathryn Brush has received Western's Distinguished University Professorship award, which acknowledges sustained excellence in scholarship over a substantial career at Western. Brush's research focuses on medieval art and architecture – as well as the histories, theories, and practices of art history and visual culture in the 19th and 20th centuries.

BY PAUL MAYNE

Visual Arts professor Kathryn Brush smiles as she remembers getting a photo from one of her students doing a cartwheel in front of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Denis, just north of Paris, France.

She may be an internationally recognized art historian and an influential scholar of medieval art, but it's moments like these that fuel Brush's passion for art and cultural history. Seeing her students interact with lessons and pictures in textbooks is rewarding, she said.

"The Middle Ages live on in Canada today, in so many ways," said Brush, noting the architecture here on campus. "You look around, and see the living middle ages in any town in Ontario because of their churches. When you look around, you will see the middle ages transplanted here to Ontario, and I try to wake up the students to their daily environment. I want to turn on that enthusiasm in the students," she continued.

"Things like the CN tower, or Ground Zero, or any of the skyscrapers or cathedrals, they go back to medieval principles of building. I make a lot of parallels (in teaching) to today because while perhaps technology has changed, human mentality hasn't

changed."

Focusing on medieval art and architecture – as well as the histories, theories, and practices of art history and visual culture in the 19th and 20th centuries – Brush was recently awarded the Distinguished University Professorship (DUP) award from Western.

The DUP acknowledges sustained excellence in scholarship over a substantial career at the university. The award includes a citation, the right to use the title, an opportunity for a public lecture and a \$10,000 prize to be used for scholarly activity at any time.

While her primary research interests include Romanesque and Gothic art, medieval sculpture and the historiography of cultural-historical thought, Brush said she enjoys opening herself up to many other possibilities in learning.

"As an art historian, I have my own area of the Middle Ages, but I'm also interested in museum and curatorial work, and that is not always the case with an art historian," said Brush, who has been at Western for 30 years. "I'm interested in being a multi-dimensional art historian, not just an arm chair scholar."

One of Brush's more notable projects included working with her graduate students to publish a collection of essays developed from a graduate course and exhibition, *Mapping Medievalism at the Canadian Fron-*

*tier*. By cutting across historical eras, geographies, cultures and canonical categories, the teaching and research project examined the rich and multidimensional impact of 'medievalism' on conceptions and representations of the Canadian frontier in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

"(Her) mission as a teacher is to inspire and educate global citizens of the future who appreciate mentalities other than their own, and respect the power of critical thought in many different domains," said Arts and Humanities Dean Michael Milde. "At Western, and beyond, Kathryn is known to be an extremely generous and dynamic team-player who has a passion for excellence in all areas of academic endeavour."

As a first-year student at McMaster University – majoring in modern languages and literatures, especially French, German, and Spanish – Brush quickly realized her language skills could greatly enhance a career in the realm of art and visual culture. After spending her third year abroad at the Université de Poitiers (France) and the University of Gottingen (Germany), she changed her major to Art History and German, graduating *summa cum laude* in 1978, earning her MA and PhD in Art History at Brown University afterward.

So much pop culture we see these days, from modern movies to video

games, draws inspiration from the Middle Ages, Brush said, and for her, it's about connecting these parallels with her students.

"I'm trying to make the students aware of the importance of studying the pre-modern past because not only is our visual environment affected, but also many of them go travelling and I want to make them realize there is a culture and history way past Canada, so when they travel, they will know something about that culture. And I will get photos of them doing cartwheels."

With more research and writing on the go, including a book that will map and contextualize the scholarly imagination of Arthur Kingsley Porter (1883-1933), professor of art history at Harvard University and North America's pioneering scholar of medieval visual culture, it's full steam ahead for Brush.

"I'm very enthusiastic about what I do. It's fun and exciting," she said. "There are so many major topics for me to cover. I'm in the fast lane and still forging on." [WU](#)

## WESTERN NAMES FACULTY SCHOLARS

Western has selected 11 Faculty Scholars, recognizing their significant achievements in teaching and research. The recipients are considered all-around scholars and will hold the title of Faculty Scholar for two years and receive \$7,000 each year for scholarly activities. This year's Faculty Scholars are:

- **Thy Phu**, English and Writing Studies, Arts and Humanities;
- **Stuart Webb**, Faculty of Education;
- **Laura Misener**, School of Kinesiology, Health Sciences;
- **Dave Walton**, School of Physical Therapy, Health Sciences;
- **Valerie Oosterveld**, Faculty of Law;
- **Brian Corneil**, Physiology and Pharmacology, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry;
- **Rogemar Mamon**, Department of Applied Mathematics, Science;
- **Els Peeters**, Department of Physics & Astronomy, Science;
- **Laura Huey**, Department of Sociology, Social Science;
- **Mark Cleveland**, DAN Management and Organization Studies, Social Science; and
- **Robert MacDougall**, Department of History, Social Science.