

# The Independent Scholar Quarterly

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Woman Weaving Ikat, Stung Treng Women's Development Center, Cambodia.

## A Scholar by Design: An Interview with NCIS President Mona Berman

by Klara Seddon

NCIS President Mona Berman is keenly aware of the balance between creative vision, implementation, and communication needed to successfully manage an organization. Since 1979 she has owned and operated Mona Berman Fine Arts of New Haven, CT, a gallery specializing in contemporary fine arts, crafts, and ethnographic arts. In this role, she combines her practical experience of art and design with a diverse business strategy. An authority on South and Southeast Asian textiles, Mona collaborates with museums, universities, and community support groups to connect connoisseurship and criticism with studio and business practices.



You may have noticed our new header and title. The Executive Committee has decided to change the name of this publication to The Independent Scholar Quarterly, starting with this issue. Don't worry, though--all of our standard sections are still included!

# Interview

*You've curated over 100 exhibitions at your gallery. What were some of your favorites?*

The early years when the gallery was breaking new ground were the most exciting for me. The energy and enthusiasm was contagious. Until we opened, New Haven had one gallery that had been exhibiting traditional landscapes for decades. Following our initial success, New Haven's gallery scene grew almost overnight.



Sampot Hol (Cambodian Women's Skirt Cloths), weft-faced twill ikat (chong kief)- prob. early 20th cent.

Those very early exhibitions were, of course, the ones I remember most fondly. Paolo Icaro's sculpture installations coupled with Tom Hricko's In Vitro series of photographs was a gem. Pierre Dardignac's painting exhibition was amazing, and his work so great I fell in love with him! Tom became and has remained my closest friend and I still show his work. Most recently some of his photos of Angkor Wat are included among my gallery's current exhibition, Indonesian and Cambodian Ikats.

In the early days we regularly incorporated lectures, film screenings, and performance pieces into the programming. A couple of years later two sculpture exhibitions come to mind—Gil Scullion's work—I still have the sculpture St. Sebastian of Scampi in my personal collection, and I'll never forget when two women were about to enter John Morariu's exhibition of altar-like assemblages only to

whisper to each other "they're religious" and turn on their heels and walk out. Well, I guess hot chili peppers and olive oil can labels could be considered

iconic! I handled many of the Yale art faculty's work and many of those exhibitions received fabulous press- Robert Reed, Denzil Hurley, and others, and some of the then recent Yale grad students like Julie Shapiro. I still work with Denzil and Julie.

Of course one of the proudest events was when three of the gallery's artists were simultaneously nominated for membership in the National Society of Arts and Letters.

*Both your BFA and MFA degrees focused on metalsmithing. How did you become involved in South Asian textiles?*

My interest in textiles developed as a result of a trip to post-earthquake, pre-political turmoil Guate-

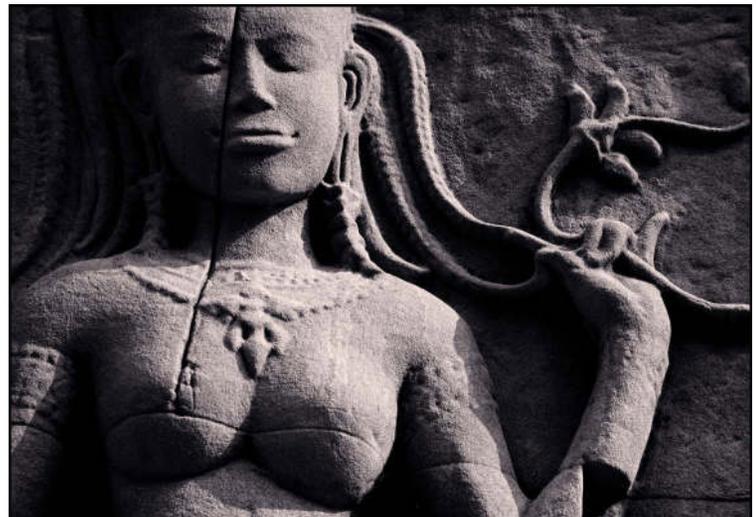
## Interview

mala, where I was a witness to history unfolding. Towns were turned to rubble; gashes in the earth ripped the main streets. Wandering around Antigua one night, long before it was a tourist and weaving mecca, an indigenous woman approached me with her textiles. I knew how desperate she was to sell these treasures to survive and I bought them, almost sight unseen. After spending some time looking at them I was hooked. This woman's life was in these pieces, the motifs represented very specific birds, flowers, etc. and the pattern layout identified the cultural group to which she belonged. Her hands literally wove the story of her people. Her clothing exhibited her identity. I know it sounds naïve, but I was very young and I had never experienced history before.

From then on I was hooked on ethnographic art, especially textiles. One of my clients became a close friend and asked me to accompany her to India. That was a life-changer. The colors, sounds, smells—the way the light played on the moving women's light-reflecting saris! I noticed a one-line listing for a dance performance in the local paper and suggested we go. I knew little of the culture, but was familiar with Bharatanatyam dance, so we headed off to see the "show." And what a show it was. We arrived in typical Western dress to find lines of women (in the women's line of course) dressed in their finest. The color combinations were none like in the West, especially then. When we got in line I realized everyone was holding a card. I asked where the box office was and the giggles began. This was a special performance of the most famous dancers in the country. The President of India would be attending. It was by invitation only! Indians are generous people and before we knew it we were handed invitations and after checking our cameras, etc. at the front door, the "American women" were personally escorted to some of the finest seats in the house! The performance went on for hours— the spectacular color of the costumes— textiles in motion— the way they were meant to be seen, was mesmerizing. As I traveled the standard tourist trail—Jaipur, Agra, Khajuraho, Varanasi—I started buying textiles. I have never stopped.

*You spent five years on the Board of Directors of the Stung Treng Women's Development Center in Cambodia, a weaving center providing health and literacy education, vocational training, and employment for women. How would you compare/contrast that experience to your NCIS service?*

There is no comparison. SWDC is a Khmer NGO and Cambodia remains one of the poorest places on the planet. The mission was to develop the life skills you mentioned as a means to provide these women at risk with a safe and secure livelihood. The center provides childcare and meals to help maintain an integral family structure where the kids have constant access to their mothers.



*Angkor Wat Series II: "Apsara" © Tom Hricko, silver print, 1998. Used with permission.*

# Interview

One positive outcome I discovered while interviewing some of the women was that, for the first time in their lives, they were able to develop camaraderie with other women who shared their concerns and problems.

In a country like Cambodia where indigenous crafts were jeopardized during the genocide, it is important to continue to support those crafts. I began studying other NGO's and have been working on ideas about what kind of real help we could bring to small villages to keep women out of the sweatshops while helping them establish cottage industries and maintain their family structure.

I can't think of any organization more different from SWDC than NCIS. NCIS is a membership organization composed of highly educated people with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise. Perhaps what the two organizations have most in common is the individual's search for camaraderie and support. The challenge is how best to serve such a diverse population.

*Design can be defined as an organization of ideas and intention, thereby articulating the solution to a problem. What can scholars in other fields learn from design methodologies and processes?*

That's an age-old question to a complex problem. It may be an unsolvable question especially when considering the "high arts" and their study.

While the artist begins with a vision and slowly arrives at a tangible physical reality through manipulation of a concrete medium (sounds, colors, words), the scholar encounters this reality first, and through analysis and observation, works backwards to uncover the roots, causes, desires, connections, and motivations of the original maker(s).

Having been on both sides of the fence, I find material culture and vernacular design can provide the bridge between the makers and the interpreters. The various approaches to the problem—discrimination, analysis, etc.—are similar in any field regardless of the apparent or superficial differences between them. For example, both the creator and the analyst can agree on the virtues of clarity, density, expressiveness, etc.

The study of material culture, for me, provides one of the most direct means of access to the study of art and design as well as to other disciplines perhaps because the viewer/student/scholar can quickly and easily establish a more direct relationship to a purposeful object than to a painting or sculpture, for example. There is less assumed, less unknown. The object is often more relevant to daily life and the study of its performative context provides insight into the society in which it was created. The creation of an object involves problem solving and planning. It helps us identify cognitive and manual behaviors and the relationship between the mind and the hand. The study of an object provokes questions- who made it? How was it made? Why was it created? The dimensional and surface organization of the object can provide a contextual understanding of society and offer a glimpse into meaning, memory, and identity.

## Interview

*Many artists and scholars experience difficulty when it comes to financing their independent projects. How have you met this challenge?*

I guess I meet challenges head-on. When I moved to New Haven my work had already been published. I had a good exhibition record, favorable reviews, and was selling my work nationally. But since New Haven offered no higher education institutions where I could continue teaching jewelry and metalsmithing, in addition to commuting to my teaching position in Boston, I began teaching in smaller community-based organizations. Rather than looking at that as a limitation, I used those teaching jobs to develop a solid local reputation and clientele.

While teaching at one of the community-based art schools, I approached the administration with a plan to organize a national metalsmithing juried exhibition. Through a grant we were able to bring two of my esteemed colleagues from major universities to New Haven to jury the exhibition. We received hundreds of submissions from renowned metalsmiths and art-jewelers in the country. The grant also allowed us to create a beautiful catalog. The exhibition was well reviewed and highly attended. Two doctoral candidates working on the Silver in American Life Exhibition for Yale University (one of whom became Director of American Decorative Arts for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston) approached me to curate the contemporary acquisitions for Yale's Garvan Collection. Silver in American Life opened at the Carnegie in Pittsburgh and traveled from there. It was an exciting opportunity for me as my work was also featured in the newsletter accompanying the show.

My suggestion to any artist and scholar: believe in yourself, promote yourself, seize the moment.

*What role do you envision the NCIS playing for artists and others involved in the arts, such as curators and critics?*

I don't see artists, curators, and critics as being different from other specialists so whatever benefits NCIS has to offer is and should be available to members in any discipline.

My personal goal for NCIS is to create opportunities and empower indy scholars through high quality programming, including networking opportunities. Maintaining and expanding upon NCIS's quality reputation will help us achieve that goal.

*You've acted as a mentor to emerging artists and underprivileged youth and adults throughout your career, and have expressed an interest in bringing a mentor program to NCIS that would link established and junior scholars together.*

It is important for each of us to give back and I'm certain we have all had mentors who have helped direct us with our work. I would like to see NCIS develop a junior scholar membership or other mechanism for those without graduate teaching positions and advisors. There are many people taking courses online or part-time who would benefit from such a mentoring program.

# Executive Committee's Letter

Dear members,

For this issue, as Treasurer, I am happy to bring you the Letter From the Executive Committee (EC). Last issue, President Mona Berman introduced you to the four members of the EC. After an energetic start, Margaret Clements had to withdraw from the position of Secretary due to the demands of personal life. I am pleased to introduce you to our new Secretary, Janet Wasserman. Janet is a Past President and long-time member of NCIS, and she brings with her considerable experience and wisdom. Her activism for and in NCIS has never faded and many members will celebrate her reappearance. More about Janet will appear in a later issue when members of the EC are featured in focused interviews.

The Executive Committee continues the crucial tasks of stabilizing the organization, redeveloping its benefits, and expanding the membership base. The assignment of specific tasks within a flexible committee structure has helped firm up NCIS's administrative structure. Members of the Board of Directors (<http://www.ncis.org/board-directors>) have been working hard to define their positions in ways that are more meaningful to NCIS. They continue to seek volunteers in this necessary and cooperative work (more on this below).

The EC has also been exploring the substance and expansion of the benefits NCIS offers to members. Access to grant support is available to members through a variety of sources, including the excellent "Foundation grant search" option in the Members Only page. Ordinarily, this grant search subscription service would cost a non-NCIS member about \$100 a year; it is offered here as a part of NCIS membership. The Benefits Committee is working hard to restructure itself so that members may receive more immediate and comprehensive information on what is available. Check out as well the resources listed on the right hand side of the screen in the Members Only section for more benefits and our in-process committees.

As Membership Chair, I can report more directly on our growing membership base. As has been the case for several years, the economic situation and the changing nature of higher education staffing have all affected the size and continuity of our membership. I can't give an exact number of NCIS members because it literally changes daily, and because I'm in the midst of cleaning up our several databases. We have been receiving about four to six new applicants a month, but as we extend our outreach, I expect that to rise. One slow area has been member renewals, and this has been in part a result of some programming failures we had with the website's membership modules several months ago. This function has been repaired and sweeps for renewals are in preparation. If you have questions about your membership status, send me an email to [membership@ncis.org](mailto:membership@ncis.org). The website is now taking renewals in an appropriate fashion (see the "Renew membership" link on the Members Only page).

Finally, I'd like to repeat the call for members to add service to the organization. Such organizational work has always been a part of the commitment to a professional life, and the relationship between NCIS and its members is no different. Perhaps more so than many academic groups, NCIS has

## Executive Committee's Letter

always had a diverse pool of members experienced in several important skills. From advisory functions to hands-on work, we have need of member support and assistance. Take a look at the committees in the Members Only page and join us.

David Sonenschein, Treasurer, for  
Mona Berman, President  
Nicole Salomone, Vice President  
Janet Wasserman, Secretary

## Regional Meet-and-Greet

Contributed by Piri Halasz

As part of the new initiative by our incoming board, NCIS held what it hopes to be its first regional “meet & greet” reception in Manhattan on the afternoon of July 13 (we would like to see it repeated in other regions). This event was held in my apartment, and drew a near-capacity crowd of 21, headed up by Mona Berman, our president, and Janet Wasserman, our secretary, as well as three other board members: Jackie Modeste, Klara Seddon, and myself. Members who attended were Barbara Curren Bell, Deborah Browning-Schimek, Margaret DeLacy, William Eaton, Christine Keating, and Boria Sax. Among non-member guests, most of whom had expressed a desire to know more about NCIS, were Ann-Marie Adams, Jared Barkan, Ginnine Cocuzza, Peter Johnson, Michael Keating, Mirna M. Lascano, Claudia Lewis, Jeffrey Perry, Gary Shapiro, and a colleague of Ann-Marie’s visiting the U.S. from Sierra Leone.

Most of the afternoon was informal socializing, with everybody eating, drinking, and exchanging notes on our latest activities. Both Christine and Deborah turned out to be interested in art, which is also my area of interest. Christine is an artist, and Deborah is compiling a catalogue raisonné of the works of Hans Reichel, a 20th century artist who was born in Germany but died in France (Mona is also an artist & Klara has an absolutely beautiful website picturing foods). In addition, Boria brought a copy of his newest book, *City of Ravens: The Extraordinary History of London, the Tower and its Famous Ravens* (his specialty is books about animals, real & imaginary). Jeff Perry brought a book that relates to his website & interests, two anti-white supremacist authors, Theodore William Allen and Hubert Harrison.

Towards the end of the gathering, Mona held the briefest of general meetings, at which she explained what NCIS was up to, and had each of us give a capsule presentation of our interests to the gathering. After that, Margaret and Barbara told us a lot about H-Scholar, the very useful listserv for which they are two of the three editors, and that does such an admirable job of getting academic news out to the world.

# Remembering Herb Posner

Long-time NCIS member Dr. Herbert S. Posner was born on August 30, 1931, and died March 30, 2011. Posner joined NCIS near its beginning and was an active member and supporter of the organization until the end of his life.

Born in New York City, Posner received his PhD in Biochemistry from George Washington University in Washington, DC. In 1967, he moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to work with the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) as a researcher. He retired in 1986 after a 30-year career with the Federal Government, after which he promptly began a Master's degree in Urban Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Apart from his work, Posner enjoyed music, the arts, and gardening. He served as a volunteer at Judea Reform Congregation, and was honored for his volunteerism by the Jewish Family Services of Durham and Chapel Hill. He especially loved to share the joy of learning, and was a member of Sigma Xi (The Scientific Research Society) and Mensa (The International High IQ Society) in addition to NCIS.

Posner was preceded in death by his wife Lorraine, to whom he was married for 40 years. He is survived by his children Barbara (David) Zimmer, Richard (Stephanie) Posner, and Trudy Posner (Mark Bresler). He is also survived by his wife of 15 years, Isabel Samfield, and her children Frieda Werden (Suzette Cullen), Max (Judy) Samfield, Emily, and Dina Samfield (Ed Maloney), and eleven grandchildren.

## Submitting to *The Independent Scholar Quarterly*

*TIS Quarterly* welcomes scholarly articles from members on any topic not to exceed 5000 words. Articles should be submitted as a Word doc or compatible file and should be formatted in Chicago (in-text author-date) style. Permissions for quotations, photos, etc., are the responsibility of the author. Articles should not have been previously published; authors retain all rights to their work. Send article proposals and complete articles to the *TIS Quarterly* Editor at [tis@ncis.org](mailto:tis@ncis.org) for consideration.

For book review suggestions, or to become a reviewer, contact Book Review editor David Sonenschein at [dsncis@gmail.com](mailto:dsncis@gmail.com). Please include information on your area of expertise for reviewing books. Member authors are encouraged to contact David about their new and upcoming publications for the purposes of review.

*TIS Quarterly* also welcomes member news, including recent publications, presentations, honors, and other information. Deadlines for inclusion are February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1 of each year.

# Affiliate News

Bea Rose, a long-time member of San Diego Independent Scholars, invites all NCIS members to join in her new reading group and oral history project, titled The Science Legacy of World War II. This project is a series of six meetings during which one book will be reviewed that focuses on a scientist or scientific contribution that ensured the Allies victory in WW II.

Attendees are invited not only to discuss the books, but also to share any involvement, direct or indirect, they may have had with a scientific project in WWII. If you know of someone who had such involvement or knows of this from family lore, please invite him or her to come and share his or her history. All of the proceedings of the meetings will be recorded, transcribed, and published by SDIS.

The meetings will be held at Vi at La Jolla Village Drive on the first Tuesday of each month starting September 3, 2013 from 2-4 PM. Complimentary valet parking is available. For further details, including the possibility of attending via phone or Skype, or to assist with the project, contact Bea Rose, at (858) 458-9263, or <beabe@me.com>.

# Member News

**Tisa Anders** published two chapters in edited collections: “Betabeleros and the Western Nebraska Sugar Industry: An Early 20th Century History,” in *Latin Migrations to the U.S. Heartland: Reshaping Communities, Redrawing Boundaries*, Linda Allegro and Andrew Grant Wood, eds. “American Working Class” series, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013; and, with Rosa Cobos, “Empowerment of the Fields: Betabeleras and the Western Nebraska Sugar Industry,” in *Gender and Rural Migration: Realities, Conflict and Change*, Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, ed. New York: Routledge, 2013. In November she will present “The Civic Nature of Murals: Carlos Hernandez Chavez’s Work as Example,” at the Peace History Society meeting in Carbondale, Illinois.

**Olga Bertelsen** conducted research in Ukraine this summer, and will become a postdoctoral fellow at the Harriman Institute at Columbia University in September. Her work there will focus on on the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation.

**Susan Breitzer** presented a paper, entitled “Should Teachers be Allowed to Strike? The Unlikely Role of the Cook County College Teachers Union in Remaking Illinois Public Employee Relations,” at the Labor and Working Class History Association conference in New York in June. She was also a discussant in a roundtable session on “The Challenges of Engaged Scholarship.”

**William Eaton** published “Wild Life, Wild Mind” in the July 29, 2013 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He is the editor of *Zeteo: The Journal of Interdisciplinary Writing*.

**Martha Elliott** will be attending the International Congress of Voice Teachers conference in Brisbane, Australia, hosted by the Queensland Conservatorium of Griffith University, where she will present a talk called “Ornamenting Italian Arias: Decorations and Flourishes from Monteverdi to Rossini.” She will also be contributing a chapter on ornamenting Italian arias to a new publication sponsored by

## Member News

ANATS (Australia National Association of Teachers of Singing) and edited by the faculty at Griffith University and published by Springer.

**Glenn McGovern** published two nonfiction short narratives using Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing: *Murdered Justice: The Grudge*, which details the events spanning thirty years that ended with the assassination of a retired district attorney; and *Murdered Justice: Consumed by Power*, which chronicles the events in the assassination of a sheriff-elect at the hands of deputy sheriff's acting on the orders of the out going sheriff. He also presented at the California District Attorney's Association summer conference in Lake Tahoe, CA, on the topic of targeted violence against prosecutors, and at the Imagine No Violence conference in Fort Worth, Texas, on the topic of targeted violence against the justice community.

**Klara Seddon** published "From Bento to Blog: the Digital Culture of an Everyday Japanese Meal," in *Food and Everyday Life*, ed. Thomas Conroy, Lexington Books, 2013.

## Library Access in New York City

Contributed by Janet Wasserman

Independent scholars living in the New York City area and those visiting the city may be eligible to use the Manhattan Research Library Initiative (MaRLI). This consortium permits borrowing privileges at three major research libraries: New York Public Library, Columbia University and New York University. Visit <http://www.nypl.org/help/research-services/MaRLI> for eligibility requirements and for registration and use at the three institutions.

## Scholarly Calendar & Announcements

### NCIS Matters

For more CFPs, conferences, and other opportunities, login to the NCIS website and visit the Opportunities page, located in the members only menu. You can also post your own!

Participate in the NCIS membership survey via email this September—please share your opinions and suggestions!

### Calls for Papers

**Zeteo: The Journal of Interdisciplinary Writing** is seeking articles and essays for its next, Fall

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2013 issue. Our interests lie where worlds collide or intertwine—in post-impressionist art’s fictional roots; in community housing learning from queer theory; in the perpetrator’s perspective and pro football’s institutionalized racism; in the epistemological challenges of vegetarian crab soup.

Where does your piece fit? If you have an intellectual essay or scholarly article that you wish to have read by curious generalists and intrepid Internet explorers, please submit it to [zeteojournal@gmail.com](mailto:zeteojournal@gmail.com) by September 15.

Not every piece has to be 5,000 words with full citations. There is room at Zeteo for shorter pieces, book reviews, letters to the editor, and reflections written on impulse and with emotion. Personal essays are not accepted, but we have a particular interest in work that combines the personal, political and intellectual.

Zeteo, which was founded by alumni and graduate students of the City University of New York Liberal Studies Program, is under the editorial direction of NCIS member William Eaton. Zeteo manuscripts and queries should be submitted in Word and include a brief bio and a short paragraph summarizing or introducing the piece. Maximum length is approximately 20 pages double-spaced.

**The Southwest Popular/American Culture Association**, to be held February 19-22, 2014, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, seeks paper submissions on the Digital Humanities. The theme for 2014 is “Popular and American Culture: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.” Provide a 200-word abstract to the SWPACA submission database: <http://conference2014.southwestpca.org/>. Proposals are due by November 1, 2013. All proposals must be submitted through the database.

**Academic Exchange Quarterly** is seeking submissions on Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy. This issue aims to explore helpful cutting-edge knowledge on second language acquisition and pedagogy. The target language may be any second/foreign language, including English as a second language (ESL). Both quantitative and qualitative studies are welcome. Submission deadline: November 30, 2013 through <http://rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/rufen1.htm>.

**Basic Writing and Community Engagement** (BWe) seeks articles that investigate the uses and effects of community engagement in basic writing coursework. Our concept of “community engagement” is conceived very broadly, and includes concepts covered by umbrella terms such as service-learning, community based learning, and community literacy. In addition, we’re interested in interdisciplinary collaborations from any perspective. How has your basic writing course worked with the library, the writing center, or other disciplines? We welcome submissions not only from basic writing faculty, but also faculty from other disciplines or from community partners who have collaborated with basic writing classes.

Article submissions will be accepted through December 28, 2013. BWe submissions will be responded to no later than March 1, 2014. If revision is requested, a final revision from a BWe author

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must be submitted to Guest Editor Tom Peele May 1, 2014.

BWe is a peer-reviewed online journal that welcomes both traditional and multi-modal texts. Submission guidelines for formatting print essays and webtexts appear on the BWe Web site: <http://bwe.cuny.cuny.edu/>. Please direct submissions and further questions to Tom Peele (thomas.-peelee@liu.edu).

## Jobs

We are now accepting applications for Editor of Diesis: Footnotes on Literary Identities.

Diesis is an online journal of literary criticism for graduate students. It is nationally syndicated through EBSCO, MLA International Bibliography, and is in the planning stages with ProQuest. Learn more about Diesis at [www.diesisjournal.org](http://www.diesisjournal.org).

### MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:

M.A. English

### PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS:

Ph.D. English / Ph.D. Student - English  
Some experience with publishing

### DUTIES:

The Editor is responsible for all aspects of the journal, with the exception of online domain management, legal issues, and publishing of the journal.

After a period of supervision, the Editor will be responsible for choosing issue themes, soliciting papers, curating journal content, managing the review board and working with our technical editors, writing the editorial introduction, managing web content, hiring assistants if necessary, and sending completed issues to the editor in chief.

Interested candidates should submit a CV and letter of interest to [editors@diesisjournal.org](mailto:editors@diesisjournal.org).

Position is open until filled.