

## The Power of Nature

by Martin Thureau

The logic of exploitation, risk-taking, and optimism in the face of disaster: Professor Christof Mauch and his colleagues at the Rachel Carson Center study how the environment continues to impact culture and society. Scholars from six continents examine how people alter the environment, the cultural consequences of such change, and how societies perceive and dramatize nature.



▲ Hurricane "Katrina" and the subsequent flood that ravaged 80% of New Orleans made shockingly clear to Americans that, as Mauch remarks, "natural disasters have a social dimension and, so to speak, they are colored."



For the complete article, see

[www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03\\_01.pdf](http://www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03_01.pdf)

## Followers of Humboldt

by Kathrin Bilgeri

LMU Munich is the most popular destination in Germany for Alexander von Humboldt Fellows. Here, they conduct their own research in a large variety of disciplines – from Tibetology and Theology to Anatomy and the Nanosciences.

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## Global postgrads converge on ProArt

by Elizabeth Willoughby

ProArt, LMU's Department of Arts PhD program, welcomed doctoral students from Europe, the US, China and India to its first summer school in August. It was an interdisciplinary, intercontinental and intercultural exchange about the arts.

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## A dala dala bus ride through Africa

by Elizabeth Willoughby

Kwaito-house, kuduro, hiplife, mbalax – are familiar sounds if you're on a dala dala minibus in Africa. Alternatively, you could tune into Georg Milz's DJ gigs, music label or even his thesis: World Music is not Dala Dala Soundz.

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## Followers of Humboldt

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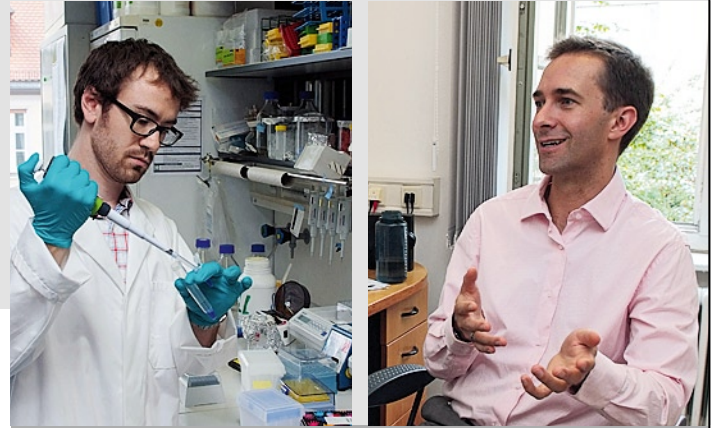
**LMU Munich is the most popular German destination among Alexander von Humboldt (AvH) postdoctoral fellows and award winners. Here, they can pursue their own research projects in a large variety of disciplines – from Tibetology and Theology to Anatomy and the Nanosciences. insightLMU spoke to two of the recent award winners.**

*“Seven Years in Tibet and Kundun* – that was sort of the trajectory when I was getting into Buddhism as a teenager,” says Brandon Dotson. When one talks to the American Tibetologist, who spent almost ten years in Oxford, it becomes abundantly clear that he has preserved his enthusiasm for Tibetan culture, literature, history and society. Obviously, he also managed to communicate this passion to the AvH jury who selected him for the Sofja Kovalevskaja Award, one of the most valuable academic prizes in Germany totaling up to 1.65 million euros. “It’s a unique opportunity at this early stage in one’s career to develop a research plan, draw up a project that you’d really like to do and handpick experts from all over the world to form your own group,” says Dr Dotson, who joined LMU in September 2010.

### From “Kundun” to Old Tibetan manuscripts

During the five-year project, the 33-year-old philologist and his team plan to chart the relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers that Tibetan kings exercised for hundreds of years, beginning in the 7th century. Analyzing and dating historical and architectural evidence and translating Early Tibetan manuscripts form the methodological basis for the project, and the core of the classes that Dotson teaches. Two Chinese students are sitting in his office, bent over old textbooks and laptops – and immediately dispelling any notion of Tibetology as a rather stuffy science.

Constant willingness to learn and international networking are the bedrock of a researcher’s career. Michael Nash, who took up his two-year-long AvH Postdoctoral Fellowship in March 2011, is pleased that he can combine both aspects at LMU Munich. “I am still in the learning phase, improving my skills in physical techniques, mixing them with my prior background and coming up with something new,” says Nash, who recently graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle with a dual PhD in Bioengineering and Nanotechnology.



▲ At LMU, Michael Nash (left) and Brandon Dotson (right) pursue their own research projects funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

### Coming up with something new

At LMU, Dr Nash will focus on the self-assembly of plasmonic nanostructures and the dynamics of fluorescent compounds within such structures, as well as investigate synthetic polymer-protein assemblies, and study their biochemical and biophysical properties. “I greatly benefit from the know-how of my host professor Hermann Gaub, who holds the Chair of Applied Physics,” the 28-year old scientist underlines, “and from the various conferences hosted by the Center for NanoScience and AvH Foundation.”

Michael Nash also had personal reasons for moving to Munich: his wife grew up here. Munich might seem a less likely destination for Brandon Dotson, since London and Paris are still the major centers of Tibetology – due to their colonial heritage. But Dotson has settled down well at LMU’s renowned Institute of Tibetology and Indology. And so has his wife. Having left her job as a university researcher in Oxford to come here, she is taking advantage of Kovalevskaja funds to retrain.

Michael Nash, too, has already adjusted well to his new life in Munich. He has already found a way to balance the daily challenge of scaling the scientific heights: he regularly enjoys rock-climbing sessions at Kochel Lake nearby.

### About the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) is a research foundation supported by the German government. The AvH offers various support schemes allowing post-docs and established professors to work on a research project in Germany together with a host and collaborative partner. The number of AvH fellows and award winners hosted by a University is a useful indicator of its international reputation and the size of its network of contacts. [www.humboldt-foundation.de](http://www.humboldt-foundation.de)



## Global postgrads converge on ProArt

by Elizabeth Willoughby

Doctoral students from as far away as China and India converged in Munich last month to attend the first summer school of ProArt, LMU's Department of Arts PhD program. It was an interdisciplinary, intercultural and intercontinental exchange about the arts.

Art history is no longer only about architecture, sculpture, painting and art objects, but also about how one perceives the visual world. Advertising, television, theater, opera, music at a concert are all visual experiences. LMU's art faculty recognized that the foundations of a new comparative art discipline would require interdisciplinary work between theater, music, art and art pedagogy.

But Avinoam Shalem, an LMU professor in art history, points also to the need to address the idea of global art: "The moment you start to speak of global art, you realize that you have to undermine the Eurocentric way that visual arts has been a narrative taking place mainly in Europe and North America. You have to put the whole world into the narrative. Global art means bridging different methods of different art history being taught on every continent. You need the internationalization of the department with its professors, but also with its students." So ProArt did, for a week. Only four of the 18 students were from Munich.

### A grand exchange

This year's theme was art, politics and economics, to shed light into art's dissolving boundaries, how politics and economics are affecting it, and what art's role is in the process. "The topic was very close to the work that I am pursuing in my dissertation," said Rajdeep Konar, an Indian student who is looking at how 1960s West Bengal theater and politics influenced each other leading up to the turbulent period that followed. "That there would be international participants and professors was important to check what others are thinking. I have gained a lot of ideas and perspectives."

So did attendees of Ranjit Hoskote's lecture that described how, as curator of the India Pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year, he changed the dialogue from nationality to cultural citizenship. The lively question and answer period that followed held discussions of language, geography, nationality, rights, values and politics, as well as the established international system and the paradox of using it to break the confines of tradition.



▲ *Insight into India's first official pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale.*

Traversing boundaries and presenting ideas came not only from the expert guest speakers invited from abroad and the LMU professors facilitating the discussions, but also from the students themselves. As part of the application process, each chose one of five proposed subjects – such as a comparison of the German and US national theater funding systems or the examination of American music after 1945 – and wrote a paper on it. The respective professors selected the best papers, which were presented by the authors and debated during the summer school week by the postgrads that came from various disciplines including art history, architecture, theater, media studies, visual arts and even musicology – a discipline not always found under the arts umbrella.

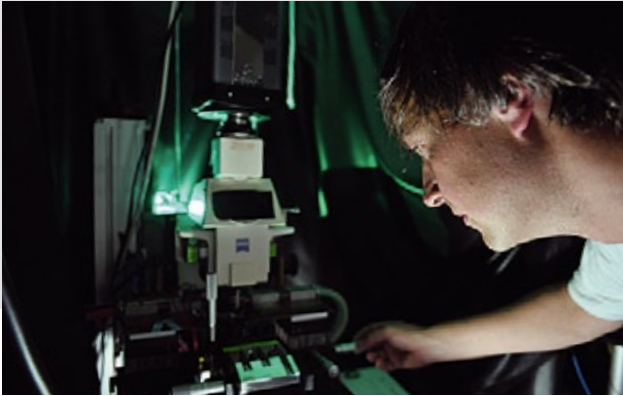
### Deemed a success

Students unanimously felt the summer school was a worthwhile experience, and professors were equally pleased, so there are plans for future programs. "By the very last day, you could feel something had been created," said Dr Shalem. "There was a kind of a discussion space that had developed. Outside of their universities, away from a supervisor, not checking every word he or she is going to say, there was a kind of freedom for these people, creating a better discussion. These PhDs were giving in a generous academic way that is how it should be."

### About ProArt

ProArt is the six-semester PhD program offered by LMU's Department of Arts. Each doctoral student is assigned a mentor to supervise the development of the paper, and has courses to prepare to give the dissertation. ProArt aims to have 1/3 of its students from abroad. For further information see: [www.en.proart.marc.uni-muenchen.de](http://www.en.proart.marc.uni-muenchen.de)

## RESEARCH




## BIOPHYSICS

**Molecular cooking**

by Alexander Stirn

Looking for the right recipe: Life most probably evolved from a “primordial soup”. Biophysicist Professor Dieter Braun wants to reconstruct in the laboratory the conditions that made biological evolution possible. And, as in kitchen, getting the cooking temperatures right is crucial for success.

For the complete article, see


[www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03\\_02.pdf](http://www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03_02.pdf)



## PSYCHOLOGY

**“Beauty is not always an advantage.”**

A conversation with Maria Agthe

The job goes to the best candidate? Undoubtedly, qualifications should determine the choice. Should. Often, however, irrelevant criteria also play a role, according to social psychologist Dr Maria Agthe. And sometimes in quite unexpected ways.

For the complete article, see


[www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03\\_03.pdf](http://www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2011/03_03.pdf)


## NEUROSCIENCES

**When background noise moves to center stage**

by Monika Gödde

Elderly people often experience difficulties when following conversations in complex acoustic situations – in noisy restaurants, for example. One likely cause is a defect in the temporal processing of auditory information in the brain, which is associated with an impaired ability to tune out background noise.

For the complete news release, see


[www.en.lmu.de/news/newsarchiv/2011/2011-grothe.html](http://www.en.lmu.de/news/newsarchiv/2011/2011-grothe.html)


## EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY

**German identities**

by Susanne Wedlich

Summer 2006 with the football world cup hosted in Germany brought a new sense of German national identity to the fore. In her new book “Deutsche Identitäten” LMU ethnologist Professor Irene Götz investigates the place it has come to occupy since the epochal year of 1989.

For the complete news release, see


[www.en.lmu.de/news/newsarchiv/2011/2011-goetz.html](http://www.en.lmu.de/news/newsarchiv/2011/2011-goetz.html)

## A dala dala bus ride through Africa

by Elizabeth Willoughby

It can be difficult to define “authentic” music, particularly in reference to an entire continent, but Georg Milz has found one solution for Africa. Dissatisfied with “ethno pop” or “world music”, Georg has just finished writing his theses about the pop music you’ll hear riding around Africa on dala dalas (minibuses). He prefers the term “urban African music” to describe the musical styles unique to each city you’re passing through.

With a passion for disc jockeying, Georg (aka Dala Dala, previously Dala Dala Soundz), is able to relive such excursions through his DJ gigs in Germany: “I’ll start in Dar es Salaam with a Bongo Flava song, mix in kwaito-house from Durban and Jo’burg. Next stop could be Luanda in Angola with some up-tempo kuduro, then some laid back hiplife guitar track from Accra in Ghana, or some heavy mbalax club banger from Dakar, Senegal.”

It’s mercurial and resonant of the various cultures, but is also influenced by music from other parts of the world says Georg. “Some genres are kick-started from the diaspora bringing something new and cutting edge back home. Ghanaian hiplife originated from the diaspora in London. The music that I deejay as Dala Dala is this brew of local and global influences that make it unique and authentic and, in a way, more real than the ‘traditional’ African drummers you can hear in Munich’s English Garden.”

### Authentic Africa – from Paris

Georg Milz’s fixation with African music and culture began in high school with reggae and hip-hop. But when he returned from a first trip to Tanzania with a bunch of cassettes, the desire to learn more about the music, the artists and lyrics was sparked. This set him on a course into the business side of the music world and eventually to “out here”, the record label he co-founded in Munich.

That first trip to Africa also helped him to decide on anthropology as his study program, which he started at LMU Munich. “My studies benefited a lot from this experience. I got to know how anthropologists are investigating and representing culture today and what methods they are using, so I found the program quite supportive.”

Finding music an effective way to understanding other cultures, Georg decided that this should be the focus of his



▲ Georg Milz together with Smallz, DJ Bobo & DJ Menace at a radio station in Jo’burg.

thesis. He narrowed it down to coupé-décalé due to its popularity all across Africa, but with little published on it, he decided, naturally, to head to France to research – the Ivory Coast being too dangerous and its diaspora, which founded the genre, being in Paris. Also traveling to Paris were many of the pioneering artists from the Ivory Coast that he had connected with on previous trips to Africa.

### out here

While Georg’s label aims to present a new urban image of Africa by bringing African talent to the international market, the wild and wonderful journey has been fraught with challenges that reach even the most basic levels. For an illiterate artist, an international contract can be daunting, a signature of “xxx” problematic and a tour through Europe an impossibility – without a passport there can be no visa, without a birth certificate there can be no passport, without cash there can be no paperwork, and without a bank account there can be no funds.

Georg has worked hard to establish relationships and trust in order to work through such obstacles and to address cultural complexities. How does one explain to a Zambian artist performing a televised benefit concert before 80,000 people in Europe gratis that no one is making any profit? How does the artist explain to his wife that the proceeds will benefit poor people in Africa, but not her?

Nevertheless, Georg has managed to establish contacts to most countries in Africa. “When we meet them we listen to their music, do interviews, take photos and sometimes end up in the studio recording together. I think it’s great when a record works both in Africa and here in Europe.”



[www.outhere.de](http://www.outhere.de)

[www.myspace.com/daladalasoundz](http://www.myspace.com/daladalasoundz)



## LMU celebrates 539th anniversary of its foundation

On July 1, LMU Munich celebrated the 539th anniversary of its foundation by Ludwig the Rich in 1492. The principal speaker was Marie-Janine Calic, Professor of East and South-east European History at LMU, who gave a lecture entitled "After the wars: What Europe can learn from the Balkans." As part of the ceremonies, the 2011 Georg Heberer Award, sponsored by the Chiles Foundation (Portland, Oregon), was presented to Dr Christian Kunte (Department of Dermatology and Allergology) and Dr Christian Schneider (Department of Surgery), who share this year's prize totaling 25,000 euros. Kunte received the award for a study of the relevance of certain surgical interventions in the treatment of malignant melanoma. Schneider was honored for a study of the long-term survival of critically ill patients who had undergone a prolonged period in intensive care before being discharged.

## University Council: New external members confirmed

LMU's Board of University Representatives has unanimously confirmed the proposed list of eight new external members of the University Council. Prof Roland Berger, Honorary Chairman of Roland Berger Strategy Consultants in Munich, and Stephan Götzl, Chairman of the Board of the Association of Bavarian Cooperatives, are now entering on their second term of office. The new Council members are Bianca Marzocca, Secretary General of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, Prof Helga Nowotny, President of the European Research Council, Prof Helmut Schwarz, President of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Prof Viola Vogel-Scheidemann, ETH Zürich, Prof Hans Weder, formerly Rector of Zürich University, and Lesley Wilson, Secretary General of the European University Association. Their term of office begins with their formal nomination by the Bavarian Minister for Science on 1 October 2011.

## First national scholarships awarded at LMU

In a ceremony held on 22 July, the Bavarian Minister for Science, Dr Wolfgang Heubisch, presented their certificates to 71 students selected to receive stipends from the new national scholarship program (*Deutschlandstipendium*) set up by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The awards are intended to motivate particularly gifted and productive students and to honor outstanding academic achievements. The scholarships, which are not means-tested, come with a stipend of 300 euros per month, financed in equal part by the Federal Government and private sponsors. The program is open to all students enrolled in Bachelor's and Master's degree programs at LMU. The recipients are selected by the respective Faculties at LMU. The next call for nominations will be issued in the summer term of 2012.



[www.lmu.de/deutschlandstipendium](http://www.lmu.de/deutschlandstipendium)

## LMU geoscientist named Secretary General of the ERC

Professor Donald Bruce Dingwell, Director of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at LMU Munich, has been named Secretary General of the European Research Council (ERC). The Secretary General is the Permanent Representative of the ERC's Scientific Council in Brussels. The Council currently comprises 22 researchers from institutions all over Europe. Professor Dingwell, a renowned volcanologist, took up his new post on 1 September 2011. His term of office will expire with the end of the EU's Seventh Research Framework Program on 31 December 2013. Dingwell becomes the third ERC Secretary General since its foundation in 2007. The first was LMU biochemist Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, former President of the German Research Foundation and founding director of the Gene Center at LMU. He was succeeded by the Spanish economist Andreu Mas-Colell. Since September 2010 the position has been vacant.



[www.erc.europa.eu](http://www.erc.europa.eu)

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