

THREE QUESTIONS

An Artist's Homecoming

Sculptor Judith Modrak '85 explores the nature of memory.

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

Sculptor **Judith Modrak** '85 lives in Manhattan and keeps a studio on Union Square. But she remains pretty rooted in Rochester. Her mother, Deborah Modrak, a professor of philosophy, has been teaching Rochester students the ancient Greeks since 1982. Her brother, physician Joseph Modrak, treats patients at the Strong Sleep Disorders Center, and her husband, Mark Lobene, is a native. She visits often.

Still, her solo exhibition, opening in the River Campus's Hartnett Gallery during Meliora Weekend, is a special kind of homecoming.

"Your time at a university is a milestone in your life. A solo exhibition is a milestone in an artist's life. The two converge in a really wonderful way," she says.

Titled *Fundamental Filaments*, Modrak's exhibit will consist of about a dozen pieces that reflect her full range. Her aim, she says, is "to shed light in sculptural form on the complex neural and psychological circuitry involved in bringing life to our memories and experiences."

The Hartnett Gallery, on the second floor of Wilson Commons, is a student-run professional gallery. Part of Wilson Commons from the student center's inception, the gallery is celebrating its 40th year. For more information about the gallery, the exhibition, and the complete 2016-17 exhibition schedule, visit blogs.rochester.edu/hartnett/.

Judith Modrak '85

Judithmodrak.com

Home: New York City

Exhibition: *Fundamental Filaments*
Hartnett Gallery, Wilson Commons
Opens October 7, Meliora Weekend, and runs through October 30.

Modrak has exhibited in solo and group shows in galleries and museums across the country in cities such as Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Trenton, and New York. Her work is also held in many private collections.

What got you thinking about memory?

I was always drawn to art and expressive media as a child, and as an adult, to psychology and biology as well. What intrigues me so much about memories are questions like, Why are some so poignant, joyful, or unnerving, and others ephemeral? Where are they? What regions of our minds do they inhabit? They're elusive and incredible.


What are dendrites, and why depict them?

Dendrites are the branches, similar to arms and legs, of a nerve cell. Scientists once thought they were passive transmitters of information, and then they recently discovered that dendrites aid in etching and storing memories.

The essence of sculpture is that it occupies physical space. And in a way, the physicality of sculpture mirrors the physicality of actual memories as they're imprinted in our brains. As I investigated and sculpted neurons and dendrites more, they came alive to me in a very anthropomorphic way.

What can an artist's rendering offer that scientific investigation can't?

For me, art has always been a tangible expression of one's experience. In one series of figures, I explore feelings of vulnerability, uncertainty, and anxiety to provide a lens for other people to explore their own feelings, which can be unsettling, though equally cathartic.

My sculptures provides a three-dimensional emotional interpretation of phenomena and experience. From earliest times, humans have sought ways to record their experience in material form and leave testimony that their lives mattered. I really do view the artist as a visual anthropologist of sorts. In my case, I'm rendering a very small sliver in the overarching timeline of human evolution. And at this particular time, I'm struck by the amazing advances in neuroscience. Collectively we understand what's happening in our brains in a way that we never have before. It's really quite astounding. 





NEW ANGLE ON NEUROLOGY: Modrak's works explore "the hidden physiological topographies" of memory and emotion.

In the News



DUO: Fleming (left) and Puts premiere his song cycle this fall.

A Musical Dream Team

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Kevin Puts** '94E, '99E (DMA), Grammy Award-winning soprano **Renée Fleming** '83E (MM), and the Eastman Philharmonia are teaming up for a performance of Puts's song cycle *Letters from Georgia*.

Fleming and the Philharmonia will premiere the song cycle on Saturday, November 12, at Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre as part of the Eastman Presents series of performances. They will perform the piece again the following Monday at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Letters from Georgia, which Puts composed specifically for the Philharmonia and for Fleming, is inspired by letters written by artist Georgia O'Keeffe to her eventual husband, photographer Alfred Stieglitz, as well as to suffragist Anita Pollitzer.

The commissioning of Puts was cosponsored by Joseph and **Bette Hirsch** '64 and the Eastman-affiliated Howard Hanson Institute for American Music. Hanson, director of the Eastman School from 1924 to 1964, founded the Eastman Philharmonia in 1958.

A Partner in Health

Kesha Calicutt '01 was a panelist at the 2016 Partnership for a Healthier America summit held last May in Washington, D.C. As part of a panel titled "Living with Obesity," she spoke about maintaining health and fitness following her 2010 bariatric surgery. A teacher in the Dallas, Texas, school district, Calicutt maintains a separate career as coleader of a patient support group and as a blogger on weight loss, health, and fitness at Waningwoman.com.

Calicutt was also an invited guest at a White House briefing and reception held in conjunction with the summit.

Partnership for a Healthier America is an independent nonprofit organization formed in 2010 as a counterpart to First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign, and designed to bring leaders in the public, private, and nonprofit sector together to help reduce childhood obesity.

Moving On Up

John Palattella '92 (PhD), long-time literary editor of the *Nation* magazine, will begin a new role as editor-at-large of the magazine this September. Palattella has previously been an editor at *Lingua Franca* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*, and written

for a variety of publications, including the *London Review of Books*, *Book Forum*, the *Boston Review*, and the *Guardian*. In 2010, Palattella delivered a talk on literary culture in the digital age at Rochester as part of the Neilly Series Lectures.

From ‘Terra Incognita’ to Terra Firma

Attorney Brett Stark '07 helps immigrant children seeking asylum to get both legal and medical help.

By Sofia Tokar

A teenager from Guatemala experiences a schizophrenic break upon arriving in the United States. He finds his way to a shelter for homeless youth, hoping to get help identifying and replenishing his medication. The medical professional available that day is physician Alan Shapiro, who recognizes that this young person—like many unaccompanied immigrant youths—needs both medical and legal help.

When it comes to the latter, he turns to **Brett Stark** '07, who (along with Shapiro and Cristina Muñiz de la Peña) cofounded

Now, as the program's legal director, Stark represents unaccompanied immigrant children in federal and state litigation, specializing in asylum and special immigrant juvenile cases.

Over the past few years, there has been a surge of unaccompanied minors crossing the border into the U.S. from Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which have some of the world's highest homicide and child-homicide rates. Recent analysis from the Pew Research Center, based on data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, puts the number of apprehensions at nearly 28,000

English—are often removed without ever having had a lawyer represent them in court. Meanwhile, immigrant children must begin the resettlement process, and those still fighting their case are eventually placed with relatives or acquaintances, or in shelters in the U.S.

The Terra Firma team connects with unaccompanied immigrant children who require medical, mental health, or legal aid via a programmatic partnership primarily between Catholic Charities New York, the Children's Health Fund, and the Children's Hospital at Montefiore.

But word of mouth has also proved useful. For example, a case manager at Catholic Charities who runs a soccer program in the South Bronx puts Stark in touch with clients who need his team's expertise.


Meanwhile, Terra Firma continues to talk with other people and organizations—in Long Island, Brooklyn, and Texas—to help create a broader network of holistic services for unaccompanied immigrant children.

As a founder of one of the nation's first medical-legal partnerships dedicated to serving unaccompanied immigrant children in the community, Stark hopes others will look to Terra Firma as a model.

In some ways, Stark himself is a model for others, especially for those interested in social justice entrepreneurship. That's why Gretchen Helmke, a professor of political science and Stark's undergraduate thesis supervisor, invited the political science major to speak at the department's undergraduate diploma ceremony this year.

"It was important to invite someone in the beginning or middle of their career," says Helmke. "For students majoring in political science or international relations, we wanted to present diverse career paths or ways for them to become social entrepreneurs." Stark's "heroic legal work and dedication to education and advocacy," she says, made him the ideal choice.

For his part, Stark gratefully accepted the invitation.

"I reflect on what I've done with the skills and tools that Professor Helmke, the department, and the University gave me," he says. "These are skills and tools I still use today in my work and that enable me to give back." 



COORDINATED CARING: It's not just for medical specialists. Attorney Stark is a leader in helping undocumented children get both legal and medical aid.

Terra Firma, a nationally recognized medical-legal partnership, in fall 2013. Based in New York City, the program's guiding principle is that all children deserve health care and justice.

Stark's interest in social justice entrepreneurship began taking shape during his time at Harvard Law School. He spent a summer working with refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, and also worked with families and children as part of Harvard's Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative and the Immigration and Refugee Clinic. After graduation, his Equal Justice Works fellowship provided the initial funding for Terra Firma.

unaccompanied children in just the first six months of the 2016 fiscal year.

Fleeing unstable and unsafe homelands, many unaccompanied minors have experienced physical, emotional, or psychological trauma as part of their journey. But there are many barriers to getting help.

"They have no government status," Stark says. "They are alone, without documents, and not entitled to a government-funded lawyer."

Unaccompanied immigrant children are usually apprehended at the border. If not, their first impulse might be to seek out border control or immigration authorities in order to apply for asylum or refuge.

At that point, they are detained and placed in deportation (also known as "removal") proceedings. Children and families—many of whom do not speak