



MHEAC SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

Connecting alums across Europe

Mount Holyoke European Alum Council hosts the 17th Symposium in Munich

The arts and socio-political change:

A powerful interplay at
the heart of democracy

Munich, Germany

October 31 – November 3, 2024

From October 31 to November 3, the Mount Holyoke European Alum Council brought together 170 alums, students, College representatives and guests in Munich, Germany for its 17th symposium. Organized by a team of alums in Germany led by Catherine Jourdan '95, the Symposium explored how the arts can raise awareness, foster dialogue and change how we see the world.

Mount Holyoke alums and students from the classes of 1957 to 2026 traveled from 23 European countries and the U.S. to hear keynote addresses and panel discussions, exchange ideas in discussion groups and connect with fellow alums.

The Symposium was held at the Catholic Academy in Bavaria (*Katholische Akademie in Bayern*), an independent ecclesiastical foundation and think tank. Boasting modern conference facilities, lovely grounds and a Baroque palace, the Academy is in Munich's vibrant Schwabing district, just a stone's throw from the city's English Garden.



Optional tours and activities were offered starting on October 31. Excursions showcasing Munich's "laptop and lederhosen" vibe included the European Patent Office and BMW Museum, a castles and royalty tour, a Wagner opera, an evening at a historic jazz club, a bus and museum tour, a walking tour in the footsteps of women of the Bohème, and a walking tour of Munich in the Third Reich.



Catherine Jourdan '95, Chair of the organizing team

The core program kicked off on Friday evening with a warm welcome from **Catherine Jourdan '95**, Chair of the Symposium organizing team. Aperitifs and a buffet dinner provided the perfect backdrop for mingling. In a nod to a most beloved MHC tradition, M&Cs were served in the Academy's historic palace, where attendees socialized over cookies baked by local alums.



Core organizing team: **Ramona Marks '02, Catherine Jourdan '95, Patricia Simon '68, and Clara Faerber '17.**

On Saturday morning, **Mount Holyoke College President Danielle R. Holley** headed the roster of speakers. She presented the MHC Forward strategic plan, describing it as “an audacious vision.” In her overview, President Holley touched on priorities such as making a Mount Holyoke education “bold, rigorous and responsive to the needs of today’s world,” executing a best-in-class career readiness program and reimagining the campus for greater accessibility and sustainability. An engaging Q&A session with **Alum Association President W. Rochelle Calhoun '83** followed, in which she spelled out the “three T’s” that alums can contribute to the College: **time, talent and treasure.**



During the first keynote, scientist and visual artist **Professor Jürgen Partenheimer** discussed attitude and belief as timeless parameters of art. In a thought-provoking address spanning centuries, Partenheimer cited an array of exceptional artists and thinkers, including Giambattista Vico, who defined art as portraying “the impossible as something credible.” The complete text of his address is available [here](#), with the password Munich2024.

Next up was **Anton Biebl**, head of the Department of Arts and Culture for the City of Munich. Noting that the Department’s foremost field of action is “strengthening democracy through the arts,” Biebl highlighted municipal support not only for institutions such as libraries, museums, orchestras and theaters but also for the city’s Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism. Eyes widened when Biebl disclosed Munich’s overall arts budget — a sum that would be the envy of any U.S. city, as President Holley later remarked to attendees.

MHC Professor of Art History **Ajay Sinha** then moderated a panel with **Nata Togliatti**, an independent artist in Brandenburg, Germany; **Sofia Contino**, a consultancy portfolio manager at Tate Britain; and **Claudia Volpe '17**, director and curator at the Petrucci Family Foundation for African American Art. The panelists outlined recent projects of their own (later presented in greater detail in discussion groups; see below) as they considered how the arts can prosper in tomorrow’s world.



The afternoon started with a keynote by Professor **Caron Gentry '99**, Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences at Northumbria University. Addressing the fundamental necessity of the arts to our society, Gentry noted that “creating helps people observe, giving them a better understanding of themselves and others” and drew a connection between budget cuts in the arts and growing levels of anxiety in society.



Attendees then moved to discussion groups on topics illustrating the socio-political impact of the arts:

- Curating an exhibit in a supermarket during the pandemic – Independent artist Nata Togliatti and Ingrid Harding, head of product development, Royal Nymphenburg Porcelain Manufactory
- Censorship within a UK-Chinese partnership to promote art education – Sofia Contino, consultancy portfolio manager, Tate Britain
- Investing in African American art to inspire storytelling and cultural literacy – Claudia Volpe '17, director and curator, Petrucci Family Foundation for African American Art
- Science Woman: Art Actions for positive change – Independent visual artist Leslie van Stavern Millar '72, Montana
- AI as a creative catalyst in visual communication – Erin McGee Ferrell '94, visual artist at the University of New England

Saturday culminated with a festive dinner at Munich's Ratskeller, a historic Bavarian restaurant in the heart of the Old Town. The evening began with mingling over drinks and a silent auction of products and services donated to support scholarship and awards programs. Victorious bidders won everything from MHC sweatshirts and scarves to fine Swarovski jewelry, German beer steins, and vouchers for home stays with alums. After the auction, guests enjoyed a multi-course dinner featuring a mouthwatering selection of Bavarian specialties. The evening ended with the traditional celebration of recent award winners and several important announcements (see below).



Sunday's agenda began with a dialogue on the arts and democracy, moderated by **Marcia Schenck '09**, Professor of Global History at Potsdam University with three distinguished panelists. **Leslie van Stavern Millar '72**, an independent visual artist from Montana, described an exhibit she recently

organized in response to concerns about democracy and freedom of expression, saying it was “time to come forward... to activate not only the artist population but also the viewers.” **Jennifer Lawson '91**, Public Affairs Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Pristina, Kosovo, spoke about several cultural exchange projects, including a dance project in Ecuador, illustrating how the State Department partners on arts initiatives to support democracy overseas. **Hartmut Keil**, Professor of American History and American Studies in Munich and Leipzig, expressed unease about the possibility of the arts being instrumentalized and called on artists to engage the broadest possible audience.



Topics for informal group discussions were then chosen using an interactive format called BarCamp. People with topic ideas gave one-minute pitches and participants voted on which to include. The proposed topics were so intriguing that none were voted out. Questions explored in the groups ranged from how we can nurture humanity and connection in an age of automation and instant gratification to what role performative arts such as the circus can play in peace-building and how alums can best engage with MHC.

During the final wrap-up, incoming **European Alum Council Chair Catherine Jourdan '95** invited alums to “feel empowered to make the alum experience what you want it to be.” Reflecting on the Symposium, **Ellie Shulman Bartolozzi '75** described it as “an energizing experience that... recharges me intellectually, socially and emotionally!” For panelist **Leslie Van Stavern Millar '72**, similar sentiments translated into concrete inspiration: “I came away energized, stimulated and empowered to expand my work in the visual arts: both in creating art and voicing artists’ concerns through ‘art actions.’” Renee Scialom Cary award winner **Elsa Kulatunga '26** noted that attending the Symposium “made me realize how vibrant and connected the global Mount Holyoke community is,” while fellow winner **Madeline Greenberg '26** saw the event as “a fabulous opportunity to connect with alums while deepening our shared sense of purpose and commitment to global engagement.”

What better affirmation of Mount Holyoke’s values than to know that Symposium attendees went home with not only a renewed connection to the College community but also a strengthened resolve to advocate for the greater good?

by Donna Schlimm '80

Munich Symposium Impressions

The **full gallery** of pictures from the recent European Alum Symposium is now available on our [website](#)! What a great way to re-live the excitement and fun of the weekend or to **discover** what happened in Munich if you were not able to attend!

Full Gallery



Enjoy!

Festive Celebrations and Announcements

The dinner at the Ratskeller restaurant was a joyful mix of animated conversations, cheerful celebrations and important announcements. **Catherine Jourdan '95** welcomed the guests and thanked the MHC Development Office for its generous support for the dinner before inviting **Heather McDonald**, Associate Vice President of the Development Office, to say a few words. **W. Rochelle Calhoun '83**, Alum Association President, presented Alum Association awards to **Corinne Morgan '13** and **Elizabeth Birch Ta'eed '09** and bestowed the Association's Medal of Honor on **Silvia Maulini '80**. Rochelle also expressed the Association's appreciation to the alums in Germany who organized the Symposium.



Silvia Maulini '80 then recognized the winners of this year's MHEAC awards: **Katherine (Kit) Corcoran '24**, the recipient of the Graduate Study in Europe Award; and five winners of the Renee Scialom Cary Award for students studying abroad: **Siyu Lan '25** (Switzerland), **Madeline Greenberg '26** (France), **Elsa Kulatunga '26** (Ireland), **Kate Vavra '26** (France) and **Hahn Minh Pham '26** (Scotland; not present). Silvia also paid tribute to the highly esteemed late Chair of the European Alum Council and country delegate for France, **Marcia Mead Lèbre '71**.



After expressing her thanks for all the support she received during her long tenure as **Chair of the European Alum Council**, **Silvia Maulini '80** announced that **Catherine Jourdan '95** would now succeed her in this capacity. Silvia will remain a Council member and country delegate for the Netherlands. Catherine said she was honored to chair the European Alum Council while continuing to serve as country delegate for Germany and head of the Munich alum group. In an eagerly awaited announcement, she then disclosed the next Symposium's location: Edinburgh, Scotland. **Corinne Morgan '13**, representing the Mount Holyoke Club of Britain, expressed her excitement at planning this event in a city rich in history and innovation.

See you in Edinburgh in 2026!



Symposium Trivia!



Number of countries that participants have called "home" since graduation: 52

Highest number of attendees per class: 7 (class of 1994)

Oldest graduating classes represented at the Symposium: 1957 and 1958

Most represented MHC major among attendees: Politics

Most frequent names among attendees: Barbara, Kim and Susan (3!)

Number of alums contributing as speakers/panelists/discussion leaders: 6

Number of (former) presidents of the Alum Association in attendance: 4

Number of current students attending the Symposium: 5

Number of cookies baked by alums for the M&C party: over 400 – baked by 6 alums!

Number of pretzels consumed during the symposium: exaggerated!

Mount Holyoke European Alum Council

Can you spot the difference?

Our name is now **Mount Holyoke European Alum Council!**

Mount Holyoke College is proud to be a gender-diverse women's college. Its community reflects the 21st-century expression of its founding mission – to provide an intellectually adventurous education for individuals who have been marginalized on the basis of their gender or gender identity. Because MHC graduates and former students include individuals with a wide array of gender identities, we are aligning with the College language in order to be as inclusive as possible. **We are all alums!**



If you did not receive this newsletter as an email directly to your email box, and you want to keep up with the latest from the Mount Holyoke Alum Community of Europe...

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For more information, please contact the
Mount Holyoke European Alum Council at:
mhceuropean@gmail.com.

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