U-M acquires archive of maverick filmmaker John Sayles

By Debrah Holdship
News Service

Perhaps more than any modern filmmaker, John Sayles personifies American individualism.

From his 1979 directorial debut “Return of the Secaucus 7” to his November 2013 release “Go for Sisters,” he has thrived outside the Hollywood mainstream, using his films to explore such complex, nuanced themes as race, class and gender identity. Sayles is an iconoclast who sees film as a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Now, thanks to a gift to the U-M Library, documents, images and props illuminating Sayles’ vast body of work will be made available to researchers in the John Sayles Archive at the Special Collections Library.

President Mary Sue Coleman announced the gift Oct. 8 at her annual Leadership Breakfast. “The John Sayles Archive is a scholarly treasure trove for students, faculty and anyone interested in exploring the inner workings of this artist,” Coleman said.

The Sayles acquisition complements U-M collections documenting the careers of American filmmakers Orson Welles and Robert Altman. With the Sayles collection, U-M is a major destination for research on the American maverick filmmaker.

“These are three independent thinkers and artists, not traditional filmmakers consistently supported by the studios,” said Philip Hallman, film studies librarian at the U-M Library. “They are all American mavericks with much to teach us not only about film but about our shared heritage, culture and society.”

Sayles and his longtime producing partner, Maggie Renzi, donated the John Sayles Archive to U-M in September. The collection includes approximately 310 boxes of archival materials spanning Sayles’ career, up through the soon-to-be-released “Go for Sisters.”

“The fact that John Sayles is a contemporary filmmaker producing new work as we speak is significant,” said Hallman. “His is what we call a ‘living collection,’ providing researchers with unparalleled opportunities for discovery and insight. Sayles’ films are housed at the UCLA Film & Television Archive. The U-M collection includes scripts, production documents, legal documents, photographs, storyboards and correspondence regarding such films as ‘Matewan,’ ‘Brother from Another Planet,’ ‘The Secret of Roan Inish’ and more.

There are personal journals and notebooks, business records and props. Also included are manuscripts of some of Sayles’ novels, short stories and plays. The archive even showcases his uncredited work as a writer on such films as ‘Apollo 13.’”

These items will be available to the university community as well as the general public. Perhaps among the first to use them will be students in U-M’s winter 2014 Department of Screen Arts & Cultures class Major Directors.

Students will research and develop an exhibit about Sayles and his work for display in April 2014. A Sayles symposium in June will coincide with Cinémoi, an annual Ann Arbor-based film festival. Lectures and screenings will complement the symposium and student-driven exhibit.

“Students enjoy a much deeper learning experience when they engage in the active exploration of the archive,” said U-M Library archivist Kathleen Dow. “The thrill of discovery is a wonderful supplement to the student’s introduction to research and critical thinking. We acquire archival material in the hope that it will be used in exactly this way.”

Sayles’ partner Renzi points to this kind of hands-on activity and practical scholarship as the primary reason she and Sayles chose U-M to house the archive. The university’s ability to integrate academic disciplines across colleges and schools mirrors Sayles’ artistic and intellectual breadth. His archive offers a unique point of entry into myriad topics, from the art and business of the creative process to the provocative themes of political unrest, class warfare, racial discrimination and more.

By Diane Brown
U-M Police

Police Beat

Homicides reported by patient

Four Hospitals and Health Center Security officers sustained minor injuries Sept. 15 when they were subduing a patient. The 35-year-old subject was wielding a broken-off IV pole as a weapon before he was restrained. The investigation has been submitted to the Washtenaw County prosecutor’s office for review of possible assault charges.

Football tickets stolen in burglary

Season football tickets reportedly were taken from a Markley Hall room when it was left unattended. There were no signs of forced entry, but the door reportedly had been propped open three times during the suspected timeframe of 5 p.m. Sept 5 to noon Sept 6. There are no suspects.

No property missing in two burglaries

Two additional burglary reports were filled with university police in September; no property was taken in either incident and there are no suspects.

At the Coliseum, a TiVo device was found unplugged on an open window ledge at 10:30 a.m. Sept 1. The device had been accessible by reaching through an open exterior window. An interior door was found forced open at the Grounds Building on Greene Street at 8 a.m. Sept 16. The area had been used Sept. 14 for the student general admission queueing area.

Move-in golf cart stolen

A rented golf cart used by University Housing staff during fall move-in reportedly was stolen from outside the Student Activities Building. The incident occurred between 2 a.m. Aug 31 and 5 a.m. Sept 1. There are no suspects.

By Debora Halsted
News Service

President Mary Sue Coleman announced the gift Oct. 8 at her annual Leadership Breakfast. “The John Sayles Archive is a valuable resource for students, faculty and anyone interested in exploring the inner workings of this artist,” Coleman said.

The Sayles acquisition complements U-M collections documenting the careers of American filmmakers Orson Welles and Robert Altman. With the Sayles collection, U-M is a major destination for research on the American maverick filmmaker.

“These are three independent thinkers and artists, not traditional filmmakers consistently supported by the studios,” said Philip Hallman, film studies librarian at the U-M Library. “They are all American mavericks with much to teach us not only about film but about our shared heritage, culture and society.”

Sayles and his longtime producing partner, Maggie Renzi, donated the John Sayles Archive to U-M in September. The collection includes approximately 310 boxes of archival materials spanning Sayles’ career, up through the soon-to-be-released “Go for Sisters.”

“The fact that John Sayles is a contemporary filmmaker producing new work as we speak is significant,” said Hallman. “His is what we call a ‘living collection,’ providing researchers with unparalleled opportunities for discovery and insight. Sayles’ films are housed at the UCLA Film & Television Archive. The U-M collection includes scripts, production documents, legal documents, photographs, storyboards and correspondence regarding such films as ‘Matewan,’ ‘Brother from Another Planet,’ ‘The Secret of Roan Inish’ and more.

There are personal journals and notebooks, business records and props. Also included are manuscripts of some of Sayles’ novels, short stories and plays. The archive even showcases his uncredited work as a writer on such films as ‘Apollo 13.’”

These items will be available to the university community as well as the general public. Perhaps among the first to use them will be students in U-M’s winter 2014 Department of Screen Arts & Cultures class Major Directors.

Students will research and develop an exhibit about Sayles and his work for display in April 2014. A Sayles symposium in June will coincide with Cinémoi, an annual Ann Arbor-based film festival. Lectures and screenings will complement the symposium and student-driven exhibit.

“Students enjoy a much deeper learning experience when they engage in the active exploration of the archive,” said U-M Library archivist Kathleen Dow. “The thrill of discovery is a wonderful supplement to the student’s introduction to research and critical thinking. We acquire archival material in the hope that it will be used in exactly this way.”

Sayles’ partner Renzi points to this kind of hands-on activity and practical scholarship as the primary reason she and Sayles chose U-M to house the archive. The university’s ability to integrate academic disciplines across colleges and schools mirrors Sayles’ artistic and intellectual breadth. His archive offers a unique point of entry into myriad topics, from the art and business of the creative process to the provocative themes of political unrest, class warfare, racial discrimination and more.

Police Beat

Homicides reported by patient

Four Hospitals and Health Center Security officers sustained minor injuries Sept. 15 when they were subduing a patient. The 35-year-old subject was wielding a broken-off IV pole as a weapon before he was restrained. The investigation has been submitted to the Washtenaw County prosecutor’s office for review of possible assault charges.

Football tickets stolen in burglary

Season football tickets reportedly were taken from a Markley Hall room when it was left unattended. There were no signs of forced entry, but the door reportedly had been propped open three times during the suspected timeframe of 5 p.m. Sept 5 to noon Sept 6. There are no suspects.

No property missing in two burglaries

Two additional burglary reports were filled with university police in September; no property was taken in either incident and there are no suspects.

At the Coliseum, a TiVo device was found unplugged on an open window ledge at 10:30 a.m. Sept 1. The device had been accessible by reaching through an open exterior window. An interior door was found forced open at the Grounds Building on Greene Street at 8 a.m. Sept 16. The area had been used Sept. 14 for the student general admission queueing area.

Move-in golf cart stolen

A rented golf cart used by University Housing staff during fall move-in reportedly was stolen from outside the Student Activities Building. The incident occurred between 2 a.m. Aug 31 and 5 a.m. Sept 1. There are no suspects.