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PAGES: A TACTILE ART INSTALLATION
by Khanh-Van Isabel Ngo

Abstract

My creative project is a multi-step process of researching and creating a tactile art installation that is based on Renaissance art history, textiles, and journaling. The project will also explore themes of opera, identity, memory, and travel. The creative processes of writers and artists vary for each individual and may range from periods of quarantined focus and solitude to inspirational excursions that involve travel, workshops, and organized critique. An active awareness of this “roller coaster” of methods and processes leads me to suggest an organized, but flexible, plan of action — scheduled around a 4-week trip to Florence, Italy — that will aid me in creating and completing the tactile art installation.

I plan to conduct textual and fine arts-based in-depth analyses into both Renaissance and contemporary art, which will inform the creation of my art installation. This research will begin prior to and will continue during my time Italy, as the ARHS 4752 Italian Renaissance course is built into the abroad program. Following my return to Los Angeles, I will begin the art-making and physical construction process of the tactile art installation, which will ultimately be displayed in the B217 hallway and classroom gallery space on campus.

Introduction

There is a dearth of creative projects usually presented as research in academic settings, especially those that represent the University Honors Program and the LMU Studio Arts department. Past Honors summer fellowship grant recipients have directed film documentaries abroad, but my original vision of a tactile fine arts installation on campus will break away from the somewhat limited preconceptions about student research. In addition, the exhibit of my art will be in a gallery space open to all of the LMU community, serving to bridge the intimidating, but misinformed gap between elitism and accessibility sometimes present in academia.

Whether I am accepted to receive a summer fellowship grant or not, I hope to make the most out of my abroad trip to Florence, Italy — not only in participating in all the class expectations and excursions, but also taking advantage of the one-on-one time and guidance I will be able to have under my mentor Jane Brucker, who teaches the upper division Visual Thinking course during the summer program. I have previously taken drawing classes with Professor Jane Brucker, who is a practicing artist and educator experienced in performance art; art installations with found objects and textiles; themes of memory, ritual, and spiritual reflection. Many of the subjects she explores in her art overlaps with my creative interests in theatre arts, personal and cultural identity, collage and mixed media art.

One of the risks associated with my project proposal, and with most creative art endeavors, is that I have a constantly evolving vision of my end project. This is partially because the study abroad program itinerary in Italy has not yet been released to students, and I am unable to precisely plan my research timeline without knowing which museums and excursions will be included in the planned trip. In addition my personal experiences and reactions to the cultural crux that is Florence and the artwork I will be able to witness in person there are unpredictable

and the main source of reference and inspiration for my proposed art installation. The creative process for all artists, writers, and performers—three identities with which I identify—is overall turbulent; risks and changes in direction that lead to the end project are common. However, I plan to focus in and stabilize as many factors as I am able, including the use of regular, detailed journals and sketchbooks throughout the summer and the constraints of strict deadlines after the Florence trip to construct and complete the actual art installation. In addition, as induced from past artworks, papers, and projects I have completed in the past, I expect my work to be highly influenced by memoir, personal experience, and cultural reflection.

Related Research and Motivation

My previous semesters and classes at LMU have motivated me to take on this large scale creative project. Visualizing Literature, an interdisciplinary course which I took in fall 2016 with studio arts professor Marina Moevs, taught me that creative inspiration and ideas can come from many sources, and not just from traditional art forms and techniques. By the end of the semester, I had completed three pieces (both 2D and 3D), created an artist statement, and compiled an annotated bibliography included novels, academic sources, and contemporary artists. I related each source to one another—despite their varied forms and genres—as well as to themes of family, personal experience and spiritual reflection. The process of planning and reworking these artworks also solidified my recurring interests in such themes, which is what I expect my art installation to express, but on a much larger scale.

Because I have a wide background as a theatre arts major with minors in English and Studio Arts, I am experienced with engaging in interdisciplinary work and often observant of the interlocking connections and influences between these fields. In particular, my passions for performance, writing (critically, creatively, as well as journalistically), and making art have led

me to the pattern of studying and creating memoir work. This is embodied in solo theatre performances I have starred in, creative nonfiction and cultural essays I find myself drawn towards, and art that reflects on personal histories—rather than political, post modern theoretical, conventionally/aesthetically beautiful or technique-based art. In fact, I am currently taking the upper division English course *Autobiography and the Novel with Honors and Humanities* Professor Alexandra Neel, and I plan to use the varied readings and analyses from this class in the annotated bibliography for my proposed tactile art installation. One such reading is the graphic novel *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, which I have previously read and combines visual and written storytelling to produce a work of relateable, emotional complexity.

The syllabus from this course asks, “How do fictional elements within autobiography allow difficult stories to be told? What do both forms tell us about the making and unmaking of personhood?” (Neel). Similarly, I expect the process of creating my tactile art installation will probe the “difficult stories” of my own personhood and identity. The motivation behind the journals and sketchbooks I plan to fill throughout the summer directly stems from these personal inquiries. My journals will follow in the artistic tradition of recording emotional intimacies, life events, and raw ideas—a somewhat amateur dedication and product of admiration, inspired by the diaries of masters such as Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso and Frida Kahlo. Pablo Picasso’s creation of the famous political and emotionally rife painting *Guernica*, in fact started out with sketches. He sketched both composition and character studies in what seems to be “false starts and wild experimentation” in the painting’s preliminary stages (Weisberg, 27). However, further reflection of the bombings of the Northern Spanish town and developments of his final vision resulted in the display of the piece at the 1937 Paris World Fair.

In a special 2016 exhibit, the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Museum displayed “a kaleidoscopic array” of source materials, which included newspaper clippings, photographs, small objects and other ephemera that artists used as inspiration for their larger works. I hope to gather artifacts from my home as well as during the summer trip in Italy, along this same creative vein. “Artists rely on source materials to form more cohesive ideas [...] and even use as raw material. They can also evoke fleeting moments and moods, some of which are never fully realized in artworks,” the exhibit introduction explains (“Finding”).

Methods

Before I depart in May, I will undergo a process of prior research, studying artists featured in Florence museums as well as special exhibits. I will also visit local museums and galleries in Los Angeles including the Broad, LACMA, and MOCA to gain insight from contemporary installation artwork. As the study abroad itinerary becomes available for students, I will schedule a more specific timeline of my events and research in Italy and continue meetings and discussions with Jane about my initial installation ideas and the logistics of displaying it on campus. I will gather some art materials during this pre-trip period and plan how to acquire others after my return from Italy in June. By the time I travel to Florence, I will have several drafted options and initial plans of the final creative project in my journal and sketchbook, which are subject to change and evolution.

The actual study abroad trip will start May 15 and continue until June 9, 2017. During this time I will take a studio arts course as well as a Renaissance art history course as part of the program. Led by Jane Brucker and theatre arts professor and costume designer Leon Wiebers, the program focuses on fine art, especially as it relates to textiles and opera. I will visit primary museums with the group and plan individual visits to galleries not included as part of the class

itinerary. I will also be writing and sketching the city life, personal experiences, and reflections in my sketchbook and journal. Because these journals are integral to my research, they will be crafted and filled with detail and honesty. If funds permit, I will also purchase and gather fabric samples, photos, brochures, tickets, found objects, and other evocative materials that I can use as source material for my installation. Outside of class studio times, I will be meeting and discussing my ideas and progress with my mentor Jane Brucker as well; her close presence and availability during the trip is a valuable resource in itself.

Upon my return to the States, I will start the more structured creative process of reviewing my sketchbook and gathered artifacts, continuing journal entries, and making the installation artwork itself. As I complete key steps in drafting and modeling, my communication with Jane is crucial, especially in utilizing and preserving experimental materials such as fabric and textiles in an 3D space. After discussing my progress with Jane and gaining feedback, I must continue to rework the visual or logistical parts of the installation until the start of fall 2017, when the project should be nearing its completion and preparation for display.

I do not recall previous Honors Summer Fellowships being put toward program costs of established study abroad programs with the University; therefore, I have attached an estimated budget list that includes other needed funding and materials necessary for the research and construction of my art installation. However, the maximum \$5000 of the grant would aid immensely in the separate program tuition of \$7,626. The final tactile art installation is an ambitious, cohesive project that otherwise I could only accomplish in small, individual works of art because of lack of resources and funds.

Expected Results

I will complete the actual construction of the creative project art installation by the end of summer in August so that I will be able to present my research process at the Honors Symposium and display it on campus that fall semester. I have already discussed the gallery space with my mentor Jane Brucker, who suggested that I display the journals and main installation in the B217 classroom. The entry hallway of B217 serves as a regular intimate space to display drawings as well as mixed media experimental 2D artwork created by students and faculty as well as practicing artists outside LMU, and this is most likely where key journal pages will be shown. The main installation will be hung on the main wall of the classroom and is open and visible immediately after viewers enter through the hallway. With helpful feedback, I will adjust and add to the installation after its initial showing in B217 and most likely submit it for display later that year with other completed artworks in the Thomas P. Kelly Student Art Gallery in the Burns Fine Arts building, which is a more traditional gallery space.

Conclusion

All my previous courses, experiences, and relationships will inform my proposed creative project — a debut of artistic initiative and my first individual exhibit. What tangentially inspired me to create a tactile art installation project that would engage viewers and audiences in a large space is the digital phenomena of art as boasts of social performance and activity, shared on social media by young people and for many of them, main reasons to visit art museums. I will publicize the display of my project, and encourage others to touch and photograph themselves with it and share the images on platforms such as Instagram. I will gather and reflect on feedback from my mentor and other participants of the exhibit, as I expect the organization of the entire creative project to be turbulent, eventful, and revealing in a personal way. My creative project

will be an original and intriguing student-organized event on the LMU campus that will challenge the community's perceptions of art as research, personal reflection, and touch.

Works Cited

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