

SABBATICAL REPORT:

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August 2017 – August 2018

TIMELINE:

August-September 2017: Shiro Oni Residency, Onishi, Gunma Prefecture, Japan.

October 2017: Foundation Obras Residency, Renkum, The Netherlands.

March 2018: Argentum Residency, Seville, Spain.

April-May 2018: Mas Els Icols Residency and Estudio Nomada Art School, Barcelona, Spain.

INTENT AND PLAN:

My sabbatical proposal included researching drawing techniques across several countries including an Asian country and a European country. My goals were to strengthen my abilities as a professor and to find fresh ways to teach ink, charcoal, and graphite.

I also intended to meet with many international artists, professors, and local community members to engage in many best practice dialogues.

TRAVEL AND RESEARCH:

Japan

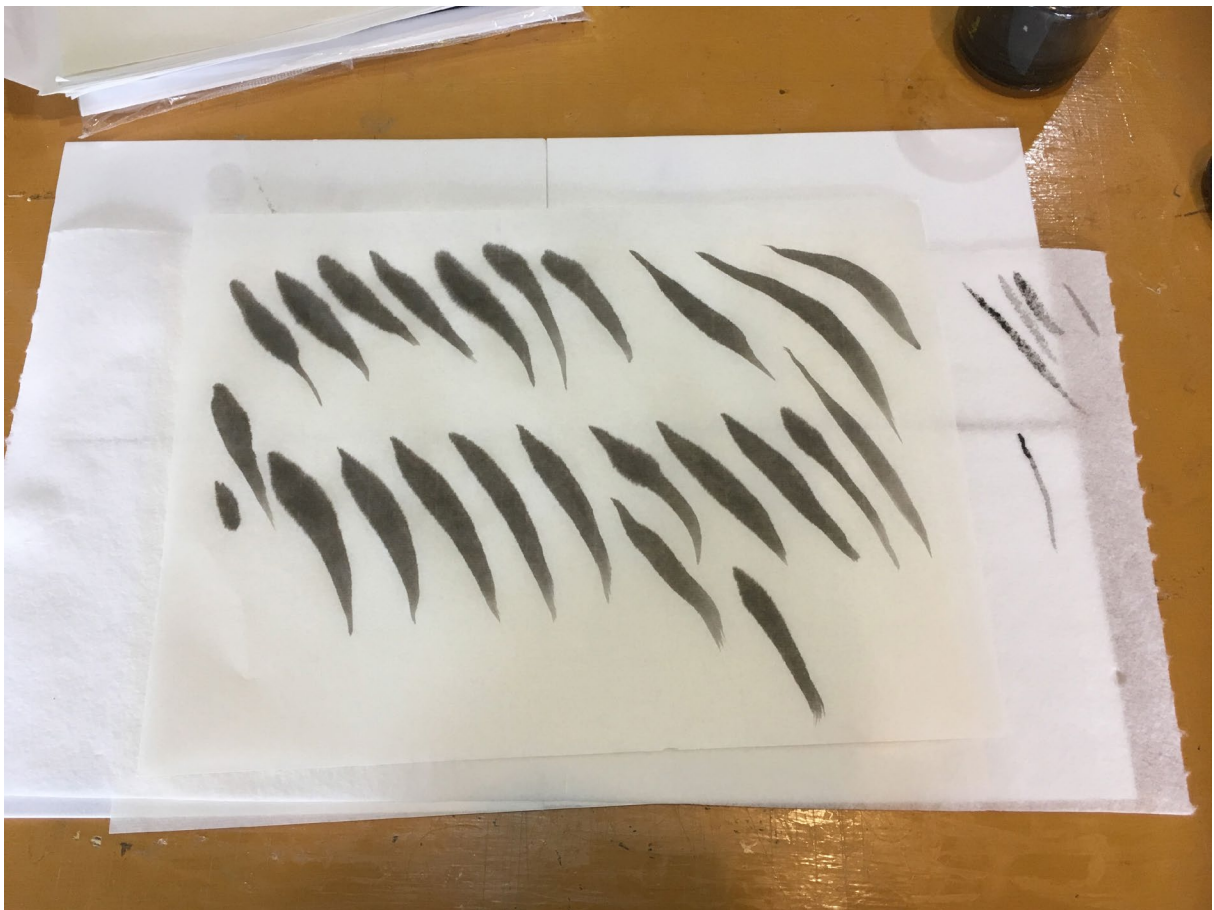
The first stop was Japan where I found myself in a small town with a vibrant community of artists. I quickly found an instructor, Sanae Aiba, who was able to offer several sumi-e lessons. Sumi-e ink drawing utilizes very specific techniques that set it apart from other ink drawing styles in that it focuses on efficient and minimal strokes with the bamboo brush. I quickly developed and appreciation for ink drawing as I struggled to learn a new way of working with a familiar medium.

I had no idea that so many small things could make such a big difference in the outcome of an ink drawing. I bought several brushes that all looked the same to me. The brush that I thought I needed turned out to be specifically for color rather than the black ink I was planning to use. For my first lesson I used this brush plus another brush that Sanae provided. She talked me into ordering a better brush and I choked when I saw the prices but I wound up with a \$60 brush that looked like all of the others. For my next lessons I used this brush but my hand is not trained enough to know the difference from a \$5 brush and a \$60 one. I asked her to draw with it and tell me if it was any good. She said it was. I will take her word for it.

There were just as many choices in ink. There are both wet and dry inks and they come in many different varieties of tone – from warm brownish blacks to cool blue-ish blacks. I was shown how to grind my own ink on a stone and how to load two different strengths of ink onto a single brush to create a gradation in

one brush stroke. This works well for painting bamboo stalks.

Paper? It all makes a difference. Another local Japanese woman, Yasuko Takada, offered to take me to a paper or “washi” factory. Not only did I learn about many different kinds of paper and fibers but I got to make my own paper as well! I bought several papers on which to practice. The factory employees could even tell me which papers would allow the ink to bleed and which papers would prevent bleeding from happening. I got some of both but I have been too timid to work on these nice imported papers because ink is not erasable. I also bought hundreds of sheets of practice paper to learn to make some very basic strokes. I have gone through all of them simply trying to coax my hand into painting a simple and elegant bamboo leaf. I like to call my attempts “slugs and turds.” Do not worry. I am getting better. I have found a local source of practice paper and have continued to work in this medium.



My residence here culminated in an art show where I displayed Japanese fans that I made from scratch. I was so inspired and influenced by the process of making these fans that I am actually going back to Japan to make more this Summer. I will be in Japan of two months. That place understands me.

Later in the Japanese phase of my sabbatical I was able to visit several museums and galleries. Through new eyes I was able to truly appreciate sumi-e works like never before. At the Suntory Museum of Art I was able to see a historic show of sumi-e work by Kano Motonobu. Where I used to find these works boring and repetitive I now see the true beauty and skill it takes to create this kind of drawing with masterful and graceful movements of the wrist.

Holland

Directly after Japan I made my way to an isolated place in Holland where I worked in a large house by myself. I chose this time to learn a more traditional and academic way of making drawings. Literally called the “academic style” of art, this kind of drawing follows a painstaking process to copy both from 2D and from life to create a very realistic and exacting result. I followed the instructions of Stan Prokopenko and the Da Vinci Initiative to learn the “Bargue Method.”

I learned a new way to sharpen a pencil (either graphite or charcoal) to a super fine point and how to approach the paper obliquely with a very light touch. It is this slow buildup of material that creates smooth transitions in value and it is this property that creates a believable three-dimensional illusion. In learning the Bargue Method I understood a lot more about an assignment that I have been giving for many years now that I call the “Master Drawing.” The goal is to copy a drawing done by an old master as accurately as possible. The Bargue Method shows step by excruciating step how to make this happen. I can’t see torturing my students quite so much but it was good to have the history of the method filed away in my memory banks.

I had several amazing opportunities present themselves in The Netherlands due to having some connections in the area. First, I got to meet with a local sculptor, Jan Van Ijzendoorn. Jan had a great artistic influence in Holland and connected me with a fellow instructor of art at Utrecht University. Professor Marcel Alberts and I had a fantastic discussion about best practices and he changed my mind on a few of my basic teaching tenets in my drawing class. While I argued for technique he countered that creativity and materials were equally important. I was also able to meet with a local artist named Laura Casas Valle on an open studio day though I didn’t get the one on one time that I had hoped for.

On two separate occasions I was able to tour Amsterdam museums and galleries with two different Dutch artists. While I saw many famous works, the



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biggest impact on me was a New York based artist who does drawings on vellum (among other things). Anthony Goicolea's self-portraits were so breathtaking to view that I felt them physically. My heart raced!

Lastly, I happened to be in the Netherlands during Dutch Design Week. I booked a room and took a train down for two solid days. I got over 600 images of inspiring and mind-blowing fashion, design, music, and art. The Dutch are known for their innovation and the textures and materials of the art I saw on those two days still inspire my artwork and design choices today.

Spain

I had two residencies in Spain and chose to travel around a little bit before and in between the residencies to learn more about the art and country. I began my three-month trip in Madrid where I was able to visit the Prado Museum and

the Reina Sofia. These were two completely different experiences as the Prado contains much older works and the Reina Sofia is much more contemporary. At the Prado I was able to see *Las Meninas* by Velazquez, *The Black Paintings* and *The Nude and Clothed Mayas* by Goya, and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch. These are works that I've only seen in art history books for years. Nothing beats seeing the details and scale of the pieces in person. They are breathtaking. At the Reina Sofia I saw *Guernica* by Picasso, work by Salvador Dali, Man Ray, Joan Miro, and William Kentridge. I blogged about all of these experiences on my website, www.sueannerische.com. At one of the smaller galleries I visited I came across a couple of drawings that inspired me to share with my students. They were simple charcoal drawings of tools that were smeared through as the last creative act. It serves as a way to keep students loose in their mark making.

In Seville I focused on my own work that involved drawing, sewing, and sculpture. I had an art show at the end of this short residency. I worked with colored pencils for the first time in several decades (outside of brief color mixing demos) and sharpened my skills.

In the residency outside of Barcelona many wonderful and unexpected things happened. I had already finished the work I had proposed for both residencies so I came to Mas Els Igols without a solid plan. After surveying the studio and equipment available I decided to make some linoleum cut prints. This is like drawing with an engraving tool. Since printmaking allows for mass production I was able to make nearly 200 prints off of five separate plates.

As a part of my residency package in Barcelona I was invited to teach at the art school that was run by the same people. This created one of the best opportunities for growth as I took one of my assignments and experimented with it. When meeting with Arnout Krediet, the innovative director of Estudio Nomada, I mentioned an assignment that I give to all of my classes: The 20 favorite things list. In this introductory assignment students are asked to list the first 20 things that come to mind that they love. For each thing on the list they also write a couple of sentences as to why the thing is a favorite. I then ask them to look for common themes and encourage them to explore that in their assignments and integrate these things into their lives and careers. Arnout loved this assignment and wanted me to stretch it out over seven weeks of class meetings. This was a challenge as my assignment usually ends when I reveal that they can refer to this list to help turn a task that they don't enjoy into something worth doing. Arnout wanted me to work with the students on developing conceptual ideas and it began with this assignment. We drew from the student's favorite things to actually make artwork.

But first let me tell you a little about Estudio Nomada. This is a school that Arnout and his wife Iris developed to collect students who didn't quite fit into a traditional university system but that still needed some instruction in techniques or in developing meaning and reasoning in their work. Students are interviewed to see if they have the motivation and the ability to work without being poked and prodded forward and they are expected to behave like professional artists. Successful students are energetic self-starters. They are not graded but have

frequent one-on-one meetings with an instructor in addition to being offered classes and workshops included in the school's tuition. One of the school's most successful artists is a student named Noa Jansma from Amsterdam. Her project is to take selfies with the men on the streets who catcall her. Her project is called #dearcatcallers. She is internet famous because of this work.

The role that my assignment played was one to get the students to think more deeply and conceptually about their own work. I was thrilled to work with students who are in an art school who know that art is what they want to pursue as a lifelong goal. I've dreamed of working with a class of dedicated art students like this and here was my chance. The second part of my assignment was for them to make two propaganda styled posters based on one of their favorite things. One poster would be in support a favorite thing and the other poster would be against that thing. I met with students three times in an attempt to help them grow by thoroughly exploring one of their favorite subjects deeply. Only a handful of them rose to the challenge and the results were not as strong as I expected. For the last part of the assignment I told them that their subject would now be considered illegal. The piece that I had them make would be a work that showed subtle support for their favorite thing without the theoretical authorities raising a red flag and arresting them or worse. Again, the results were marginal. This school does not provide grades as a motivating factor and I wonder if this might have been part of the problem. On the bright side, there were some students who really warmed up to the assignment and they plan to use it to help them do a deep dive into their future subject matter. The best takeaway I got from this is that students are the same everywhere.

Another unexpected benefit that arose while in Barcelona was that Arnout had Robert Philip, a Trainer, Lecturer & Designer in Higher Education, come to evaluate Estudio Nomada. Robert followed me around as I met with the students and he gave me exceptional feedback. I talked about how I teach at Collin and mentioned that when I have really talented students together in class with novice artists and that I give the novice students more of my time. He asked me if the talented students were not just as deserving of my time and it was a question that has resonated with me ever since. I was glad that Arnout and Robert were happy with my assignments and instruction.

Overall, I am pleased with my growth during my sabbatical.

OUTCOMES:

My travel, experiences, and research have benefitted myself, my current and future students, and the college as well. Here's how:

- I have already incorporated the sumi-e bamboo project in my class and the students were wild about it. It's good to have this playful and intuitive kind of drawing in class to make up for my usual rigidity.
- Conversations with Marcel Alberts have inspired me to shift focus on what is important in class. I am giving a little more room to my students to be creative.

- I have applied new techniques in my own drawing after researching the Bague method and have new insights on how drawing material should be applied to the paper without destroying the fibers.
- I have new inspiration in my own work and have plans to continue my training in Japan this Summer.
- I learned about the value of having an art studio and have acquired one in downtown McKinney.
- I am continuing to build on my momentum in making the drawing classes innovative, creative, and of top quality to reinforce Collin's core values and reputation.
- The grass is no longer greener on the other side regarding student quality. I appreciate my students more.
- I pushed an assignment to a conceptual level and can use the same parameters in my current classes.
- A class restructure is in the works. The time away has allowed me to come back and observe my students progress differently. I can easily separate what is working and what isn't by examining the overall results of each drawing.