



2016 LAS

Graduating Concentrator

Reflections

ANNIKA BERRY

Major: FAV

Concentration Focus: Creative writing both Poetry and Prose

I didn't realize how much LAS had benefitted me until I stumbled across an old academic paper while packing this weekend. It was terrible--from Freshman year. LAS has allowed me to continuously grow as a writer, which has simultaneously spurred other growth--as a thinker, as a visual artist, as a tutor, etc. At art school there's a culture around studio work that is difficult to penetrate with other academic interests. LAS has been a sanctuary for playing with language, which (at least for me) is not at all separate from my artwork, but rarely receives critical attention in studio... Thank you LAS!!

GATES CALLAHAN

Major: FAV

Concentration Focus: Race and Empire

The reason I chose to pursue a concentration in Literary Arts and Studies was so that I would be able to continue developing my writing, and analytical skills with texts that I may not otherwise encounter. I love to read and write, and a concentration seemed like a great way to push me to take more classes and help me get into classes I would want. I also enjoy having to make time in my life for topics other than my art making or the discussion of art. I hope to continue to write short stories and works of fiction as well as to be able to articulate topics that I research better in conversation. As far as being employed I hope that if an opportunity ever arose for me to take a writing position, my concentration would help me. The concentration put me in contact with Mairead Byrne, whose classes made me stretch out of my comfort zone, and whose advice caused me to take the class “Cooking, Eating, Thinking” with Yuriko Saito. This class opened my eyes like no other class here at RISD and made realize how important some issues that I was already interested in, were to the world while showcasing other world views beyond American philosophy. I also met Patricia Barbeito who made it possible for me to take a magical realism course that let me explore my creative writing for the first time in a long while. Working with the concentrator coordinators has lead me to meet such interesting and wonderful faculty. It has undoubtedly enhanced my experience at RISD.

JAE HEE HAN

Major: Painting

Concentration Focus: Empire and Colony

I came to RISD thinking that I would become an artist; if I wasn't already one by then, I had arrogantly thought, this will make me one. There were other smaller motives but that really was the why behind my choice of majoring in Painting, and the LAS concentration too no doubt has something to with that. Yes, I gave up on that path. Before I go any further, for I don't want my statement to be misunderstood in any way, I make it clear that the Painting department is more than capable and considers it a duty that their students gain all the tools needed to debut as a self-sufficient young artist before graduating (they don't hesitate to fail students if that is necessary).

But back then facing serious and threatening creative blocks for the first time I blamed the institution and the teachers. Yet, despite not quite having the motivation to make art, just by attending the classes regularly I witnessed myself growing at a dazzling pace: both as an artist and an analyst of visual data. Not only had I to admit how hardworking my teachers were, but I started to feel profoundly grateful. Progress had never happened at such a pace anywhere else in my life.

No longer able to blame others I naturally turned it upon myself. I must lack talent. Honestly I'm still struggling when it comes to this line of thought, but eventually I came to accept that I was talented in the visual arts alright. Extremely talented.

Then maybe it was the matter of choosing the right field. Around this time I had made the commitment to LAS concentration, but not out of any wanting to become a writer. By that point I just couldn't bring myself to 'create' anything (I still find this very difficult). But I had written some witty papers during my years at RISD, some good enough to convince my professors to write recommendations for PhD literature programs, so I thought maybe I could do that. If I couldn't become an artist, maybe I could become a scholar. But like becoming an artist, just because I was talented enough to stay competitive did not mean that I could do it. Somewhere along the path I hit a wall, and I could not 'will' or 'force' through it like I had done before.

But none of this actually has much to do with art or language or talent. All of the above has to do with understanding myself and cannot be solved without it. But no one teaches you, nor is it possible for someone to teach you, who you are. Unlike knowledge it is not transmittable in any way, nor can true earnest introspection be achieved through forcing.

But reading books, discussing – more like arguing sometimes – about them, along with critiques of visual media, help. It was *The Sun Also Rises* that first showed me how seemingly innocent love will always contain something purely sinister and utterly destructive within it, albeit in hindsight; I had torn apart a few hearts under the justification 'pursuit of love' and it ruined myself as much as it did to others. It was Conrad's *Lord Jim* that helped me understand that what I was running away from was not punishment in both the legal and the social sense of the word, but from my own sense of guilt. It is hard to pinpoint exactly where and when and how, but in the larger view of things it was that book that helped me understand that the exit from such strangling emotion can never be found outside of oneself. And running to no place on this earth, be it the midst of tropical jungles (that's where our Jim

ran away to), nor years floating on oceans chasing after the White Whale (that's Captain Ahab), relieve one from that heavy grief one burdens upon oneself. Keeping yourself busy with stimuli does help you forget – the harsh environment, having power over others, the challenges that press you every day – but in the end, unless you deal with it, your own emotions will resume the chase without exception or failure. That introspection is what painting and literature taught me, each in slightly different ways. The Painting program requires me to make something, and like or not that thing made tells more about me than I would ever have liked to reveal, not just to others but even to myself. But while verbal clarity is certainly a valued skill in critiques of painting, putting those strands of thought, untangling each thread from other, telling what end connects to where, seems to have something to do with literature. Perhaps because verbalization is the body and not a peripheral. Viewing the exact same body of text and discussing it with others you realize that whatever book you have read at any point of time, really isn't a book but a reflection of yourself; only after seeing the difference of your reading to another person's reading you realize that reading is always subjective, a relationship you form with a book; and even with a same book, a reading from past often differ significantly to another made at a later time.

Whether all this is worth more than some nearly three hundred grands I'm not so confident, and surely my parents will feel different about that. And for all that time and money and effort, it didn't really give me any answers either. But I worry less about 'living the destined life of an artist' or 'attaining the honorable title of PhD in Literature, tenured professor'. It helped me gain not only the habit of doubt but the skill to gather and refine those doubts into a question. And to a matter like understanding oneself, where no clear answer possible, perhaps asking the right questions is all you can do. Or thinking about what a right question is.

FRANCES LOGAN

Major: Textiles

Concentration Focus: Contemporary Narratives

I think more than anything the LAS concentration has allowed me to make lasting relationships with professors I never would have had the chance to meet. Having the ability to pre-register for classes allowed me to continue taking classes with professors who were interested in the same topics I wanted to be learning about. Many of these teachers that I got to know better because of the concentration have become mentors and life long friends. I've done a few Wintersession ISP projects that led me directly to a topic for my degree project, and without the intimacy and immediacy that the concentration allows I don't think I would have taken the path I did.

MARISHA LOZADA

Major: Painting

Concentration Focus: Politics of Identity

I wrote some pretty bad poems. I wrote some better poems. I wrote about anime boys; the time I got too emotional over Phil of the Future; Adult Love Quizzes; tips for making an essay appear longer. Through the help of my LAS professors, I pressed against whatever boundaries my pre-RISD writing manuals taught--and gained enough confidence and stamina to embark on long-term projects. To all my teachers: I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

JOSEPH (ROB) POLIDORO

Major: Painting

Concentration Focus: Critical Theory, Historu of Literacy Cultures

Painting as a discipline is rooted in dialogues that exist outside of the work of art itself. For this reason, I chose to commit myself to an LAS concentration, in order to better my ability to discuss art. I took many classes at Brown, which broadened my literary vocabulary and my circle of friends. The LAS concentration at RISD has lead me to eye opening concepts that have greatly influenced my work as a painter, and I feel that I am a better person because of it.

CAMILLE SHEA

Major: Illustration

Concentration Focus: Literature and Politics

Before I came to RISD, I flitted to and from visual art and the literary. After I got here I instinctively knew that if I didn't make reading and literary studies a priority, I would go insane. Even today if I phone home and sound at all down, the first things my dad will ask me are "are you getting enough sleep?" and "do you have a book, Camille?"

At first the chief appeal of the concentration was the ability to pre-register for LAS classes, but it quickly morphed into the warm home in my schedule where I can most easily become myself. It's the place where I found and honed my own voice, but it's also where I learned how to listen. In discussions, seminars, lectures and workshops I discovered how to speak my mind, but also how to shut up and truly hear someone else's ideas and heart. Privileges naturally amplify my voice, but my LAS concentration taught me how to pass the mic. I would not be half the person that I am today without the experiences I've had and the people I have met through the LAS department. I am grateful beyond words to be a concentrator, I could not have asked for better.