

2017

LITERARY ARTS + STUDIES



*Graduating Concentrator
Reflections*

As someone who loves to read, I am glad I got the opportunity to concentrate in Literary Arts and Studies as an Illustration major during my time at RISD. Through my classes in the department, I was able to learn more about poetry, confessional nonfiction, feminist literature, and how the written word has such a close and strong connection with visual art. As I progressed through my Illustration studies, I became more and more interested in women's studies in the twenty-first century. The LAS Concentration allowed me to explore that field through modern literature and expand my knowledge of feminist theory.

Some highlights during my time in the LAS Department were my Poetry Workshop and Modern Poetry class, as well as a course titled “Thingamajigirl,” a course that examines the long-standing connection between femininity and things. These classes introduced me to literature that inspired my art and steered me in the direction of making work about women's lives in 2017 and how they differ, or have not changed, from the past. Reading and literature is extremely important to me, and the LAS Concentration helped me maintain that practice, and better my artistic practice, during the last four years.



CATHERINE CAWLEY
Major: Illustration

I am extremely grateful to complete an LAS concentration here at this unique art school environment. This whole experience has aided me in fostering a more informed interdisciplinary art practice, where writing and critical theory merge or compliment visual material. I am grateful that I heard about this concentration when I was a freshman, and for the opportunity to work on an independent study focusing on the history and poetry of theatre culture and the role of women in Greek tragedies. To this day, these interests and influences are alive in my budding performance art practice.

My last RISD literature class was, “Literature of the Middle East and North Africa.” The debates that took place in class were intellectually and socially stimulating. There was a camaraderie amongst students and faculty that was so essential for my emotional growth and school spirit. The socio and political content of the course ended up seeping into my Painting Degree Project which was about the hyper visibility and invisibility of South Asian women in public space, post colonization.



ZOYA CURRIMBHOY
Major: Painting

Being the rather curious and overly determined person that I am, I was eager to concentrate in LAS so that I could shape what I wanted to learn and when. My LAS Concentration gave me the opportunity to find a common thread through all my budding interests. I built up my poetic voice in “Advanced Poetry” and got to study social phenomena and movements in “From Literary to Cultural Studies” (one of my favorite classes at RISD hands down!)

Through fiction, I got to explore post-colonialism in “Post-Colonial Literatures.” I enjoyed answering questions about whether post-colonialism can exist as its own independent identity and how it can’t be ignored in various other contexts of created work: from art to literature. This became a factor in my Senior Thesis Project in which I considered the decolonization or re-contextualization of my own Industrial Design education.

The most interesting part of going through this Concentration was seeing how the many diverse insights I got from each class influenced or inspired my design work in one way or another, whether big or small.



ZOE ENE

Major: Industrial Design

Of course, illustration and the written word go hand-in-hand, but figuring out my personal working dynamic in that relationship has been a growing, fruitful focus of the last few years. As I leaned more and more into a fine arts practice, the courses offered by the LAS department were often the invaluable sounding board and idea source for pushing my thoughts and works into bigger and better and more exciting versions. LAS gave me the space and the words to express and think through the odd experience that is life. I am forever grateful for the novels, articles, assignments, discussions, critiques, workshops, classmates and professors that the LAS concentration has provided.



RACHEL HAHN
Major: Illustration

Kristin made the most of the variety of classes offered by the LAS Department, taking a selection of courses that ranged from Fiction writing to magical realism to feminist theory and activism. She served as our concentration representative in the student advisory council for one year.



KRISTIN HUTTON

Major: Printmaking

My LAS Concentration here at RISD has been integral to helping me fulfill my want and need to study literature. The amazing teachers have been a joy to work with. I am particularly grateful for the incredible support and the invaluable resource for reflection and critique that I found in my fiction writing classes.



SAVANNAH KENNELLY

Major: Illustration

The LAS concentration, combined with working at the Writing Center, gave me many opportunities to think about language more broadly. The exposure to so many different kinds of literature gave me the confidence to put my own thoughts into words and released me from the pressure to find a singular medium or format. Writing – academic, fictional, and professional – helped me clarify my personal voice, which then came through more strongly in my studio work. Thinking about words and how they work to communicate ideas really strengthened my ability to do the same with visuals.



YI BIN LIANG
Major: Illustration

Ahjin focused on developing her poetry writing and took a range of creative writing courses for her concentration program.



AHJIN LIM

Major: Industrial Design

Becoming a Literary Arts Concentrator was a conscious decision to maintain a study outside of my studio practice. It was crucial that I be able to contextualize my work in another way, and the variety of classes meant I could tailor my curriculum build my strengths as a writer. Having started out as a timid writer and public speaker, my confidence in my literary voice has grown tremendously.

My first forays into poetry and performative writing were awkward and frightening, but pursuing a Literary Arts and Studies concentration meant I was slowly overcoming obstacles and improving my writing, however incrementally. My studio and writing practices contextualize each other, and switching between different modes of working helped me resolved issues I had with either field. LAS provided a welcoming home among encouraging peers and professors, a refuge for my thoughts and ability to express them.

A rolled-up scroll of paper is positioned on the left side of the image. A white, torn-edge paper overlay covers the bottom right portion of the image, creating a layered effect. The background is a dark, textured blue-green color.

RENA RONG

Major: Furniture

A Film, Animation, Video major, Natasha took advantage of the range of courses offered in LAS, and enjoyed writing both critically and creatively.



NATASHA SHARPE

Major: FAV

In my Spatial Dynamics class fall semester of freshman year, I struggled with working in 3-D. My first project, where we were limited to creating three paper sculptures under a theme, was a complete and total disaster, enough to warrant finding a pink slip in my mailbox. I felt extremely discouraged going into the second project. However, between the first and second projects, the Professor gave us a short week-long assignment where he read us a parable and we had to respond to it with our opinions and feelings. The next week, after he'd read through our responses, he singled me out as having the most successful one, as I had written it as a continuation of the parable rather than an objective analysis. It was then I learned the most important lesson I would in that class: combining my writing with my artwork strengthens it and makes it more compelling. For my second project, which was open-ended, I wrote a fairy tale-esque story and created a book form for it, the first of many books I would end up making at RISD. At my final critique, I was commended for really picking myself up from the failure of my first project to create this successful final project. As I look back at the projects I consciously added my writing to, I realize how important that lesson was to my time at RISD, and how lucky I was to work with the teachers in the LAS department to make that component of my artistic practice even stronger.



ANNALISA SHELDAHL
Major: Illustration

As a soon to be graduate in Illustration, being a concentrator in the Literary Arts and Studies Department was an invaluable experience to me. In the field and department of Illustration, there is an important emphasis on communication. Regardless of whether the artist is there to defend their work or not, there is a constant communication being told between the image and the audience. It only made sense for me to want to further work on aspects of storytelling, metaphors, symbolism and characters in my liberal arts classes to then better my visual projects. I am also a person who has always been passionate about literature, movies and poetry, and someone who wanted to explore the relationship between these interests and illustration, so I sought out to be a concentrator in LAS.

Being in LAS allowed me to nurture and spend my school time tailored to studying my other interests outside art. The department really pushed and fueled my curiosity, which made great projects emerge not only in those classes, but also overflow inspiration into my projects in my illustration classes as well. My studies in literature, film and writing my own short stories really helped with my sequential art projects, where I could apply and create the story structure of my comics and storyboards just like I would approach and outline a written short story for one of my liberal arts classes. I was able to find new interests that greatly influenced my art style too, such as how I found out about how much I love expressionism and avant-garde Russian theatre in one of my classes.

LAS courses gave me the opportunity to explore my own questions about the world and be able to respond to them in a visual or written way, not necessarily either or but in collaboration with one another. They helped me navigate my own process of personal voice, in storytelling and illustration. I had many ideas, but LAS helped me gain a better process for turning those ideas into something more. LAS felt so necessary to compliment, enhance, and collaborate with my Illustration studies and I am grateful to the wonderful experience I had as a result.



HEATHER STARADUMSKY
Major: Illustration

Ajani's concentration program included an interest in eco-criticism and environmental literature.



AJANI TAKAHASHI-LOFTON
Major: Illustration

Doing this LAS Concentration has meant a lot to me, and my growth as an artist and writer would not have been possible without it. I am grateful for the opportunity to grow and spread my wings as a poet with confidence and passion, and for the courses that really allowed me to push myself with my writing and also expand my mind with awesome readings and stimulating and interesting in-class discussions.

The fiction writing classes provided a nurturing platform for my writing to blossom and for opportunities to perform my writings in class, which led to one of the best experiences I have had at RISD. Doing this concentration has allowed me to grow so much as an artist. Some of my strongest works was when I combined my literary skills with my artistic and performative ones. I am extremely happy and grateful for this fruitful experience as an LAS Concentrator. I am now looking for interdisciplinary graduate programs with writing as my next step.



ELAINE TSAI
Major: Painting

I began my concentration Sophomore year in LAS simply because English has always been my favorite subject in school. Through my time as an LAS concentrator though, Literary Arts have taken on more of a personal significance. The relationship between my studio classes and literary arts classes was more rewarding than I expected. The process of critique in my studio practice sharpened my critical thinking as a writer, while my time in LAS classes fed my brain with new subjects to explore visually. I did not follow one particular path in LAS (or even in Illustration) but enjoyed jumping around to the class descriptions piqued my interest at the time. I am grateful that this approach allowed me to study things that I never expected I would get to study: from postcolonial literature, to creative writing, to critical theory, to journalistic writing. Now I am going into the field of children's books where I have found the perfect marriage between my interest in both writing and illustrating. As I leave RISD, I carry with me my love for image and word. Thank you LAS for giving me a space to explore and expand this relationship.



JULIA TYLER
Major: Illustration

Being in the LAS concentration has allowed me to truly develop my writing to a level I am satisfied with. I have been pressed to develop my critical thinking in both writing and social dynamics, and I gained both confidence and stamina in long-term projects. Thank you to everyone at the LAS department.



MICHELLE ZHUANG

Major: Illustration