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Project Proposal: “Yūgen” Artist’s Book

Project Overview

Yūgen is a term lifted by Japanese writers from medieval Chinese philosophy meaning “dim,” “deep,” or “mysterious.” It refers to a traditional Japanese aesthetic in which images and ideas are conveyed indirectly by means of suggestion, nuance, and intimation. A comparable concept in Western criticism might be synecdoche – a literary device in which a part stands in for the whole.

When this term is applied to art, particularly in the criticism of *waka* poetry and *Noh* theater, *yūgen* suggests that mere words or marks on a page are fundamentally incapable of capturing certain broader truths in nature. These truths can only be hinted at by proxy or suggested by the feeling of certain images. This perspective suggests a certain approach to constructing images and ideas, evoking them by means of “resonances” rather than simply stating them or rendering them directly. Despite this ethereal quality, *yūgen* is an aesthetic dedicated to capturing reality, not some fantasy world.

Superficially, even the literal English translations – “dim,” “deep,” “mysterious” – are intriguing. It makes you think of nooks, caves and hidden spaces: natural places filled with unseen life. It conjures images with rich, varied blacks and grays, deep layers and transparencies. Just writing this description I thought of the term *yūgen*-space – places like deep forests, far from human eyes, that might be prime locations for this sort of resonance.

All of the above sounds to me like the beginnings of some really good art.

What I propose as my project for the College Arts Scholars Arts Award is essentially a research project into the concept of *yūgen* executed in the media of printmaking and bookmaking. The ultimate product of this process would be a high quality artist’s book, which might theoretically be composed of twenty copper etchings and dozens of polyester “pronto” plate lithographs (two types of prints that I feel I have an affinity for) bound into a book printed on extremely fine paper. Some text may be printed either from “pronto” plates or using hand-set lead or wooden type. I am hesitant to pin down a precise number of images because I would like to let the ebb and flow of the piece itself decide the precise contents of the book, but it would be a substantial amount. Additionally, the book itself would be printed in a large edition of around 50 copies, each one identical and immaculate.

There are several essential objectives both in terms of tangible products and personal goals. First, there is the final book itself, which is probably the single greatest artistic undertaking I have considered so far. Then, there are the composite prints – around 20 etchings – which could be reprinted and recombined separately. This would essentially constitute an entire portfolio of work in and of itself. Beyond those there is also the large quantity of drawings, photographs, poems, and ink paintings I would like to execute in preparation for the project itself. While these might be rougher and more sketch-like, they could be substantial fodder for future projects or perhaps be presented as work on their own.

As far as personal development goes, this project would be monumental. First, as I develop more technical skill I want to start working on pieces that I can really consider “my art” – something I could show to someone and tell them that this is what I do. This seems like a golden opportunity for that. Second, I genuinely want to investigate this *yūgen* concept, which I believe will have legitimate value for developing my own personal aesthetic. Third, I really want to practice my technical skills in the fields of drawing and ink painting. I have been taking studio art classes for a long time now, but there is no such thing as too much practice. Ink painting, particular splashed ink painting in the style of Zen ink painters like Sesshu Toyo has always appealed to me and this project presents an excellent and thematically relevant opportunity to practice.

In terms of spaces and materials, this project is fairly resource intensive. Most of the work will be conducted either out in nature, in Ruffin Hall’s printmaking studio (with my mentor/advisor, Dean Dass), or in the Virginia Arts of the Book Center. The VABC, while not part of the university, provides a variety of presses more suitable to printing larger editions. All of these spaces are free to use. Instead, most of the budget is dedicated to purchasing materials and tools – copper plates, ink, paper or papermaking materials, etc. At least a portion of the budget would be dedicated to hiring on an assistant when it comes time to actually print, collate, and assemble the final copies of the book. At certain stages of the process having two extra hands which do not have ink on them can be absolutely invaluable to a clean, professional product.

Project Timeline

- Summer 2014
 - Collect drawing materials, most of which I already own. Acquire inkstone and a nice sketchpad of watercolor (or similar weight) paper from The Art Box to avoid shipping delay.
 - Create preparatory drawings, photography, and ink paintings of isolated natural and urban spaces.
 - Curate resulting materials, selecting the most interesting images and gestures to be incorporated or reproduced on plates. This should be completed by the first day of school.
 - Order supplies online from *www.utrechtart.com* so that they arrive at the beginning of the school year.
- Fall 2014
 - Create approximately 20 copper etchings plus additional supporting pronto plate layers in Ruffin studio. This task should be complete approximately three quarters of the way through the semester, so that the remainder of the semester can be spent fine tuning and fixing inevitable printing issues.
 - Print all of the etchings individually on high quality paper as stand-alone pieces. This paper will come from a stock I already have. These pieces will be critiqued by students and professors as part of my *Intermediate Printmaking I* class.
 - Design structure of final book. This should be completed in tandem with the etchings themselves for maximum cohesiveness. This design should be finalized by the end of the semester.
 - Reserve space at the VABC for the coming semester to access presses better suited to higher volume printing.
- Spring 2015
 - Recruit a research assistant to assist in final printing stage – printing and assembly. The assistant should be confirmed within the first week of the semester.
 - Print an edition of 50 of each print on Magnani Revere paper at the VABC.
 - Collate printed pages into signatures, then books. Sew the signatures together and assemble the book.
 - Present completed books at Center for Undergraduate Excellence in the first week of April.
 - Mentor/Advisor writes a one page evaluation, submitted to Michael Rasbury.

Project BudgetRequested amount: **\$1200.00**

Item	Quantity	List Price*	Cost
18" x 24" Copper Plate	3	\$ 99.00	\$ 297.00
24" x 40" Magnani Revere Printmaking Sheet	100	\$ 5.35	\$ 535.00
Assistant at \$10/hr	15	\$ 10.00	\$ 150.00
Yasutomo Sumi-e Set	1	\$ 41.32	\$ 41.32
18" x 24" Utrecht Watercolor Paper (Educator's Series)	20	\$ 2.47	\$ 49.40
Gamblin PVA Glue Sizing	1	\$ 11.95	\$ 11.95
Shipping**	1	\$ 40.00	\$ 40.00
Tax***			\$ 51.66
		Total	\$ 1,176.33
		Extra****	\$ 23.67

* The vast majority of this budget is dedicated to art supplies which can frequently be purchased at a discount thanks to coupons, educational prices or bulk prices. As these prices are fluctuating, the maximum potential price has been listed. Any savings made here would go towards either more hours of help from the assistant or additional/redundant materials.

** Shipping cost based on UPS estimate for weight of all supplies combined. This may vary slightly. If fluctuation causes the cost to exceed the award amount, I will pay the difference out of pocket.

*** Tax estimated based on Virginia sales tax (5.3%). This may vary depending on the origin of shipped items. If fluctuation causes the cost to exceed the award amount, I will pay the difference out of pocket.

**** Extra funds will be spent either covering fluctuating cost of shipping and tax or go to more hours of help from the assistant or additional/redundant materials.

Evidence of Participation in the Arts

Participation in the Arts at UVA

I am extremely active in the arts at UVA. I have taken numerous classes in UVA's studio art department – namely *Introduction to Drawing I*, *Introduction to Drawing II*, *Introduction Printmaking I*, *Introduction to Printmaking II*, and *Special Topics in Printmaking* (on bookmaking). Additionally, I am heavily involved with UVA's creative writing program, having taken poetry workshops up to the Advanced level. I am currently a declared Arts Administration major, an interdisciplinary distinguished major program that has exposed me to a variety of art events across grounds and helped me to obtain leadership positions across the arts at UVA. For example, I am currently a student representative for the College of Arts and Sciences on the McIntire Art Committee and co-chair of the Visual Art Arts Board responsible for bringing a resident artist to UVA in the spring of 2015. I have assisted in the installation of numerous gallery shows across grounds, specifically in Campbell, Ruffin, and Robertson Hall. Finally, I am soon to declare a second major in Studio Art with a concentration in printmaking and further plan to pursue the distinguished major program there as well.

Participation in the Arts Scholar Program

I am exceedingly proud of my involvement in UVA's College Arts Scholars and seek actively to contribute to its development whenever I am able. I have attended seminar three of my four semesters at UVA, only recently missing seminar due to an unavoidable scheduling conflict. I like to think I am a vocal participant in seminar and contribute positively to our discussions. During my first year, I helped organize a video feedback system to allow students to voice their opinions on how Arts Scholars ought to develop. This feedback went on to form the underpinnings of the program's current form. In the fall of my second year, I volunteered to assist our president in directing the Arts Scholars first annual showcase, a precedent setting event that met with great success. Initially intending to serve primarily as an artistic director, helping to coordinate the disparate parts of the show into a unified whole, I rapidly found myself producing the show technically, even operating the lights during the final show. I also submitted a pair of prints which were displayed as part of the showcase. I hope in the future to take more of a leadership role in the program, having been nominated for the student offices of President, Vice-President, and Studio Art Department Representative.