

Project Overview Narrative: Learning Limits
R. Susan Xie, Rising Third Year

I. Project Overview

In the next year, I propose to learn the tradition of photography, from its historical inception to its modern day value. My primary goal is to document my learning process. I will gather information through formally practicing the art and experimentally researching its uses. I plan to study pinhole photography in Italy this summer, take an additional course on film photography in the fall, and conduct independent research on digital photography next spring. However, learning a new art form is a sweeping statement and requires limits such as in time, space, and content. Although I trade-off perspective by limiting my scope, I view these limits as necessary secondary goals that filter and make sense of information. Without these filters, I may learn nothing meaningful at all from the abundant pool of information I foresee accumulating. In a sense, my learning process mimics the camera. I will deliberately set specific limits, like exposure time and aperture, and choose the focus through certain lenses to record information.

II. May-term in Italy

It seems fitting to take my inquiries about the historical inception of photography to Italy this summer. I have been accepted to study abroad through the International Studies Office. From May 23rd to June 16th, I will take two 3-credit courses, ARTS 2511 Pinhole Photography in Italy and ARTH 2472 Modern Art in Italy, to study the first cameras alongside modern art. The aspect of travel adds to my project because it offers even more of the newness that is so essential to my goal of learning. In addition to learning a new art form, I must learn to live in a new culture and environment, which adds perspective and dynamism to my project. I also look forward to working directly with my hands, which will allow me to gain unique how-to knowledge, not just knowledge about photography. In addition, May-term in Italy provides me the prized opportunity of devoting four weeks entirely to the arts. This portion of my project comes with the highest expenses, and I would greatly appreciate help in funding my upcoming month of full arts immersion.

III. Details and Concerns

“Learning photography” is a broad proposal, so I must carefully define my limitations and goals. On the onset, I see two major concerns. First, how feasible it is to learn a whole tradition in just one year? And second, how do I measure learning? I do not expect to thoroughly understand photography after just half a year’s course work and a few more months of intentional study, but I do hope to learn photography as best I can under my set of limitations on time, space, and content. In the summer, I will have the most freedom in time and space. Mid-May to mid-June will be almost entirely devoted to learning photography. I will live in two primary locations: Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy and Acton, Massachusetts. Crossing the Atlantic provides me a slightly broadened geographic perspective, but still, I will be wavering about two points on the forty-second degree latitude. Come fall, I will live in one city, Charlottesville, and my schoolwork and commitments as a full time student will put severe restrictions on my time. Though I am willing to compromise and reallocate my time, I cannot give up previous commitments. My content goal is to explore the twofold development of photography as a tool and an art form. Addressing my second concern, I will begin the project with zero prints and end with a portfolio of prints produced in class, which proves learning to a certain extent. More

specifically, I will take steps to measure my progress in learning, I will draft four definitions of photography in the next year: one before leaving for Italy, one at the end of summer, one at the end of the fall semester, and one next April, always writing the next definition without consulting the previous. I will also be using a digital camera and a sketchbook to document the process and the development of ideas. As I collect information, I will further develop ideas on how to best combine my products from the dark room, digital images, sketching, and writing into a comprehensive presentation of my learning.

IV. Budget Overview

My budget consists primarily of the monetary costs of May term study abroad. The estimates are displayed below. (I am an Out-of State student)

Summer Budget Sheet for UVA in Italy: Photography and Contemporary Art History		
Budget Item	In-State	Out-of-State
Tuition *	\$1,938.00	\$2,472.00
Program Fees *	\$3,812.00	\$3,812.00
Non-Refundable Deposit *	\$500.00	\$500.00
Billable subtotal:	\$6,250.00	\$6,784.00
Airfare	\$1,980.00	\$1,980.00
Course materials	\$200.00	\$200.00
Meals	\$300.00	\$300.00
Personal expenses	\$125.00	\$125.00
Other	\$254.00	\$254.00
Local Transportation	\$100.00	\$100.00
Non-billable subtotal:	\$2,959.00	\$2,959.00
Total:	\$9,209.00	\$9,743.00