

August 26, 2009

To: Dr. Michael Green
VPAA / Dean of the Faculty

Fr: Michael Pittari
Associate Professor of Art

Re: Sabbatical Report

Objectives and Goals

In my sabbatical request (October 11, 2007) I stated my objectives as such:

I intend to spend six months, from January through June 2009, immersed in my creative work. This will entail working in my studio full-time, five days per week, while taking regular trips to Philadelphia and New York to solicit my work to galleries and art centers.

The goal of this six-month period was to create “a sustained body of work” that I would have the opportunity to exhibit “in a nationally recognized gallery or art center.”

Assessment of Outcomes

My sabbatical was an incredibly productive period for me. I created an entirely new body of work that I have begun to promote and exhibit on the national level.

Although in my request I stated that I would be working on “...a continuation of a current series of paintings (acrylic on wood) that I began earlier this year [2007]...,” my artistic interests evolved from the time of the sabbatical report to the sabbatical itself. The work I created instead was a continuation of an ongoing side-project (for which I received a faculty research award in 2004) in which I create large-scale digital prints based on imagery sampled from reproductions of art historical paintings that hold particular conceptual and visual interest for me.

The new work I created consists of manipulated and reconfigured images of 19th-century American landscape paintings as a commentary on the iconography of landscape itself as a cultural signifier (see accompanying artistic statement, as well as images of the work on my website: www.michaelpittari.com).

For the making of the Landscape Series (as I call it) I read two books of art historical analysis (Albert Boime's *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c. 1830-1865*; and Angela Miller's *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875*) as well as numerous essays and excerpts from additional books. I also traveled to New York City

and Washington D.C. to view as many of the original American landscape paintings as I could – visiting institutions including the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Historical Society, and the National Gallery of Art. In June I traveled to upstate New York to visit the estate of Thomas Cole (the so-called “father of American landscape painting”) and other historic spots along the Hudson River.

In terms of promotion of the work, I had the aforementioned website built, designed and printed a postcard for the work (attached) that was mailed to a number of galleries and museum curators, and I sent exhibition proposals/applications to a number of institutions. Thus far my promotional efforts have been productive: several curators whom I contacted have expressed interest, and one gallery (Kenise Barnes Fine Art, www.kbfa.com) has invited me to participate in a three-person exhibition called “Celebrating the Hudson River Quadacentennial” that opens in late September. Given the location of this gallery to New York City (just north, in Westchester County), I consider this a major step in my career – one that I am confident will lead to additional exhibition opportunities.

In conclusion, my sabbatical was productive and reinvigorating. It has given me a necessary career boost that I intend to continue through the making of more work in the series, further exhibition of the work, additional travel and research on the Hudson River School, and participation in relevant academic conferences.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT: THE LANDSCAPE SERIES

The historic grandeur of 19th-century American landscape painting was founded on strategies of surveying, mapping, and ordering the wilderness. Paintings by artists including Thomas Cole and Frederic Church displayed an idealized, determinist vision of civilization in the making – an aesthetically pleasing visual iteration of the political doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

In my work the act of appropriating and re-presenting manipulated reproductions of 19th-century American landscape paintings is intended as a commentary on the iconography of landscape as a cultural signifier. By exploiting the formal majesty of the original paintings, I hope to offer a re-visioning of the powerful optical gaze inherent in American landscape painting of the 19th-century. The construction of my work is based on repetition and mirroring, leading to the creation of strange new forms that reinforce the underlying messages of the source paintings. I have chosen the work of well-known artists from the Hudson River school because the ubiquity of their paintings as reproductions lends my work a visual familiarity that I hope gives viewers an opportunity to contemplate the implications of landscape imagery.