

JIM MOTT ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROPOSAL

Time Frame: Spring 2015

I favor next spring term, partly because it would give me the chance to incorporate the ESS mountaintop removal field trip into my artist project, and partly because of other work I have tentatively scheduled for fall. However, I could arrange to be in residence for Fall 2014 or the full academic year if either better suits the interests of Drew University or the ESS Department.

Desired Disciplinary Affiliation: Environmental Studies and Sustainability (ESS)

I gravitated toward ESS partly because it is already interdisciplinary in nature and seems well suited to absorb a visual artist's influence. The connections to landscape painting are endless. Also I have a strong background in environmental science and am intrigued by many of the faculty projects. Some faculty and student study sites could provide subject matter for my proposed painting series, and student and faculty work could readily complement mine. I seem to be emphasizing science here, but the humanities and social science dimensions of ESS interest me just as much.

Overall theme: Arts and Environmental Consciousness, and Arts and Civic Engagement

These would be two of the most apparent themes pertaining to "arts and the common good." As noted in my artist statement, I am interested in using art as a witness to environmental change and degradation, as one piece in the puzzle of raising consciousness. Although most of my artwork to date has been more about sense of place than overt environmentalism, it is informed by a high degree of environmental awareness, and I am interested in making that more explicit. Promoting civic engagement is a more general interest – one that goes hand in hand with raising consciousness. Civic engagement has also been at the heart of my Itinerant Artist Project (IAP) since I started doing it almost 15 years ago. I would be using outreach strategies developed for the IAP as part of my residency project.

(My artist statement has a link to an interview I gave on the topic on civic engagement).

Course Proposal: (working title): Knowing Nature: Modes of Perceiving, Understanding, and Relating to the Natural Environment

When the British Painter John Constable observed that "we exist but in a landscape" the concept of landscape in Western culture was still fairly new. Did it enhance our appreciation of nature or accentuate our sense of separation from it?

What do you see when you look at a forest or a field? What do the hunter, the poet, and the ecologist observe in the flight of a bird across an opening? Why does one person stop to sketch a rock outcrop for an hour where someone else would snap a photo to be viewed later on a computer monitor?

Human consciousness separates us from nature in ways that help us to survive and sometimes prosper. But it also leads us back, desiring the reassurance of connection to the source. Many of us want to feel a sustaining relationship to nature. Does it help to know the names of the plants? To take gps readings? To know which watershed you're in? To draw? To meditate?

This course explores the various ways in which we frame, measure, study, look at, look into, record and otherwise try to relate to our natural surroundings. It would consider the often conflicting ways in which people construct a sense of value, a sense of place when regarding the natural world, and the continual interplay of separation and connection in our interactions with nature.

Class lectures would draw from a wide range of historical, cross-cultural, gender, and class perspectives, to illuminate contrasts and commonalities. But my intended focus would be on leading students to an understanding of the varying, potentially complementary ways in which practitioners from various major disciplines – including (potentially) Biology/Ecology, Literature, Fine Art, Economics, Anthropology, Religion, and Engineering seek to gather information from, evaluate, interpret and relate to the same plot of land.

The class would include practical exercises, from various disciplines. If practical I would like each student to locate and define a personal study plot (Drew Forest, abandoned lots around town, further afield if practical) where he or she can practice several types of observation and study, from transect sampling and species inventories to memory mapping, sketching and journaling.

The working title for my proposed course is provisional. And I am happy to let the concept evolve in discussions with ESS faculty.

Public Programs: I would be prepared to give at least three public presentations, organize at least one symposium, and prepare my project exhibition. If resources allow, I would be happy to curate an exhibition of 4 or 5 other visual artists whose work addresses either environmental concern, ways of looking at nature, or sense of place. I would also include an Itinerant Artist Project element in my residency project – occasionally staying and painting with volunteer hosts in the community.

My proposed public presentations could be on the following topics: the Itinerant Artist Project; Art and Environmental Consciousness; and my Mellon Residency Project (coinciding with exhibit). Other topics could emerge during the residency.

For the symposium I would like to bring in other visual artists – or visual artists and writers – representing a diversity of approaches to addressing environmental issues or sense of place. I believe Marc Boglioli is starting to do radio interviews on the topic of "sense of place," and a symposium that builds on that would be interesting. Such a symposium would pair well with the proposed exhibit.

I would also be happy to present guest lectures in various Drew University classes outside ESS. With any luck I would get to talk to some painting classes. In the past I have also spoken on creativity to philosophy and communications classes, but I think my strongest suit – the Itinerant Artist Project – plays best to Anthropology, Religion, Literature, and Art History, since those are the areas from which I drew my main influences. For more on that topic: www.thedorseypost.com/?p=848

Artist Project: The primary focus of my project would be the creation of a series of 60 small-panel oil paintings done on site in 10-12 locations mainly from the Passaic River watershed and North Jersey Shore industrial zones and coastal habitats (where I will be doing some work this summer). The paintings will explore a diversity of landscapes and habitats that reflect the interplay of human activity and the environment – with special attention to evidence of major environmental changes due to such factors as groundwater contamination or other degradation, and climate change (including storm damage). Landscapes showing restored habitat or more harmonious interplay of human and ecological interests would also be included.

Choosing sites would be a dynamic process and part of the creative process, which I will document through notes, sketches and maps that would be included in the project exhibit. Painting sites will be located primarily in northern New Jersey but may include ESS faculty study sites out of state. Locations would be chosen in collaboration with ESS faculty and students, based on recommendations, conversations, site visits, and suitability for the series. I would be particularly interested in ESS study sites that allow faculty or students to participate in the exhibit – through the contribution of creative work (drawings, poems, photo essays) or commentary reflecting varied areas of expertise. This would allow the exhibit to reflect more of the spirit of my proposed course: different modes of understanding and connecting with nature.

Because Drew has important programs in place to study energy-related environmental degradation, such as mountaintop removal in Kentucky and hydro-fracking in Wyoming, the residency project could possibly include work from such sites, as part of the main series or as separate series.

The residency project would include an Itinerant Artist Project component, as I would make efforts to locate volunteer hosts near most of the painting sites. This process includes networking and talking with the media, which tends to create a sense of community involvement in the process, as well as interest in the painting series and the ideas behind it. Hosts provide room and board for 1-3 days and receive a painting done on site.

The final exhibit would include the small-panel painting series, related faculty and student work, notes, sketches, maps and diagrams documenting the process, and from 4 to 10 larger canvases distilled from the field experiences, as time permits.

Space needs: A small studio or large office suitable for occasional painting, of about 120 sq. ft. or larger would be ideal.

Budget:	Painting supplies	\$850
	Travel/gas	\$400
	Exhibition costs	\$350
	Minimal total	\$1600
	Optional Kentucky trip	\$500
	Optional Wyoming trip	\$650
	Larger Scope total	\$2750