Embracing the threshold
Nicola BARSALEAU

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EMBRACING THE THRESHOLD

Artist-in-Residence Programme
Department of Visual Studies
Lingnan University
Spring 2012

A Residency Project by
Nicola Barsaleau

Closing Ceremony
May 14, 2012, 3:00 to 5:00 pm

Exhibition Date
April 27 to May 14, 2012
The Department of Visual Studies at Lingnan University offers students an interdisciplinary course of study encompassing art history, cognitive film studies, analytic aesthetics (including environmental aesthetics and everyday aesthetics), and “research expression.” The programme’s Artist-in-Residence scheme, which is generously supported by the Lingnan Foundation at Yale University, reflects the Department’s commitment, among other things, to “research expression”, understood as the rigorous exploration of concepts and ideas through art practice.

Designed to sharpen students’ understanding of artistic practices and their results through studio courses and interaction with artists, the Artist-in-Residence programme brings one local, one non-local, one established, and one emerging artist to the Lingnan campus every year. These artists are in residence for a full semester, and during this time they are actively engaged in producing art in the Visual Studies studio.

We are particularly interested in recruiting artists who explore creativity collaboratively, and who are thus inclined to look for ways of engaging students, colleagues, and the wider Tuen Mun community in their art practice. We are also eager to recruit artists from parts of the world with which Hong Kongers have not traditionally had a great deal of contact. Artists whose work deepens our understanding of Environmental Aesthetics, Chinese Art, and Art and Well-being are also of special interest to us. “Embracing the Threshold” features work by visiting artist Nicola Barsaleau alongside that of students from her printmaking studio course. With its emphasis on mindfulness and sharing, on respect and caring for nature, and on the contributions that creativity makes to health and well-being, “Embracing the Threshold” helps to articulate many of the values that we seek to foster through our Artist-in-Residence programme.

It has been a great pleasure and privilege to have Nicola Barsaleau with us. We are deeply grateful to the Lingnan Foundation at Yale University for having made her residency possible.

Mette Hjort
Chair Professor and Head
Department of Visual Studies
Lingnan University
BIRD, TREE AND EGG (2010)
8 x 10 inches
Linocut
EMBRACING THE THRESHOLD

Our Lingnan residency, now in its fourth month, is a comprehensive exploration of creativity in day-to-day living. Creativity satisfies a portion of vital human needs: the need for autonomy, adventure, celebration, community, play, and spiritual harmony. Contemplating our artistic self is healthy. In some cases, artistic activity can be immensely healing, leading towards wholeness, balance, and integration. This project was enacted at both a communal and personal level for many of the participants, including myself.

Our own individual life force flows through us in intriguingly personal ways. We all have unique gifts to offer and uncover that no other person exactly has. Yet I have discovered here at Lingnan some dimensions in which we are beautifully similar. For example, observing the students and their individual artistic processes taught me that we all seem to go through a similar creative progression; embracing the threshold of creativity head-on moves us forward, even if sometimes it’s a bumpy ride. Faced with an unknown outcome, we may feel a dissonance, even anxiety, as we try to gain momentum. Yet through the very process of embracing mystery and challenge, and by being attentive to higher principles, we journey into surprising places. Transformation surrounds us, and as we listen and respond to our deeper creative self, significant movement and internal shifting occurs.

During my residency at Lingnan, I’ve been touched by the prevailing mood of service and concern, the depth and determination of the individual students, and the natural graciousness in everyone I’ve met. I hope you will enjoy the celebration showcased in this presentation.

Nicola Barsaleau
The paintings done during this residency period are a continuation of a series of portraits I have been working on over the last four years. Ever since my teenage years, when I would spend many hours perusing art books in libraries and book stores, I’ve been fascinated by primitive portraits and their quiet faces, often against dark backgrounds, gazing out at the viewer. More recently, my own paintings have included birds, sometimes in pairs, cupped by the central figure. This image can suggest empathy and a need to truly listen to one another from a place of deep caring. And while painting here at Lingnan, my own backgrounds gradually became more mountainous, perhaps reflecting the richly enveloping quality of the Hong Kong countryside.
WOMAN WITH WOODPECKERS (2011)
24 x 36 inches
Oil on Canvas
EMBRACING THE THRESHOLD (2012)
24 x 36 inches
Oil on Canvas
The nature of carving and hand printing is imperfect, and this quality has assisted me in my own attempts to embrace balance and spiritual harmony. Once a cut has been made on the block, I can’t erase it. Rather, I am invited to relax into the present moment. And if the carving tool slips, the so-called defective cut is somehow woven into the piece. This give and take serves as a metaphor for personal healing and growth; the better we manage our human imperfections, the more space we have for inner contemplation, development, and empathy for others.

Another draw to carving relief prints is the ease in which the blocks and materials can be transported. I am able to set up a table at outdoor markets, pull out my carving tools and block, and get to work right away. And being in public space provides an additional dimension to the art making. The process can become a bridge or a threshold; it can precede genuine exchanges and shared experience.
FIVE IN THE MORNING (2010)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
INCUBATION (2012)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
UNTITLED (2012)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
GRACEFUL ANCIENTS OF THE OCEAN (2011)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
EYE OF THE OCEAN (2012)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
BUTTERFLY CIRCLE (2012)
12 x 12 inches
Linocut
When I arrived at Lingnan, my first carved block was a large butterfly with open wings. Somehow this image served as a greeting or an invocation. As time went on, I moved onto other narratives. But at some point I came back to the butterfly. Then winter turned to spring, and I had the opportunity to visit a local nature-based primary school in the hillside of Tai Lam Countryside Park in Tuen Mun. Here the children and teachers adopt nature names, like Cricket, Tortoise, Butterfly, etc., and every day they celebrate the natural nourishment nature provides. My Butterfly Wall is my humble tribute to this spirit.
Monoprints (and monotypes) by nature are playful; making one involves painting or rolling various colors on a sheet of plexiglass and then running it through the press. Often three or more prints can be made from the same plate, each one unique. Monoprints also work well in combination with relief printing, which was the main focus of our studio practice course.

As time went on, we decided to extend our studio class experimenting with the community, and our trusted etching press, a beautiful yet efficient antique, became the center of lots of shared experience and laughter!
STUDENTS’ WORK
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Professor Mette Hjort, whose graciousness and vision have touched me deeply, and to Dr. Sophia Law for sharing her knowledge of healing and Chinese art. A special thank you to Joyce Tong for her friendship while I was here at Lingnan. Among a multitude of arrangements, she was also able to co-create a printmaking studio from scratch. I thank all the scholars and teachers I met, especially Dr. Yu Ping Luk and Zoie So. Thank you to Kaye Wong, for technical support, and to Hung Sheng and Stacie Wong for their help and sharing. Also, thank you to Kasey Wong and Bowie Yeung for joining me on field trips to the intaglio studio at the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre. And, of course, I thank my husband and family for all their support. Finally, I am grateful for the beautiful Lingnan campus environment, with its contemplative pathways, sitting places, and unending songs from Nature.
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Nicola Barsaleau grew up in South Africa, and she lived near Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. Within these landscapes, she was introduced to authentic artistic expression, traditional handicrafts, and diverse spirituality. She trained as a printmaker in London and holds a degree from the University of Florida. She has illustrated a variety of publications, and, most recently, was commissioned as the poster artist for the 19th Biennial Conference of Marine Mammals. Her relief prints are in collections around the globe.

www.nicolasartroom.blogspot.com
SPECIAL THANKS TO THE STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDIO CLASS AND THE EXHIBITION

Chau Wan Yu, Joyce
Choi Ka Man, Eunice
Chu Shuk Yee, Conroy
Ho Lai Na, Nana
Kai Yuen, Verna
Kwok Wing Ki, Winky
Law Sin Yee, Niki
Lee Kin Wai, Kenry
Tabitha, Li Cheuk Wing
Li Hoi Ching, Ching
Li Kam Fung, Jimmy
Lo Joanne Wai Nam
Luk Shao Shin, Frieda
Ng Man Sze, Connie
Jacqueline A. Venzon
Wong Ka Wai, Penny
Wong Man Man, Kasey
Wong Sin Yi, Stacie
Yam Choi Tung, Rainbow
Yeung Po Yi, Bowie