Palimpsest: An Artist-in-Residency on Kent Island
Elsbeth Paige-Jeffers, Class of 2010

“Crammed into that coffin of an island, you must find wider horizons to express these secret selves.”

Kent Island provided me with a unique artistic challenge. Rather than being a peaceful haven in which I could make work without distractions or overstimulation, Kent Island was the primary obstacle in my art-making this summer. Though lacking the bleak undertones of the above Rushdie quote, Kent Island was, for me, in many ways a small coffin of an island.

I typically work in various media, including painting, printmaking, photography, video, installation, and performance. My two-dimensional work tends to be abstract and very large-scale, while my photography and performance treat issues such as identity, self-portraiture, queer theory, pain, intimacy, sex, and sexuality. Needless to say, a small, isolated island does not present itself as the ideal environment in which to create this kind of work.

But overcoming obstacles often does reveal wider horizons, new methods for expressing the artistic self. I found ways to engage the island: I used the natural landscape, the physical objects, and the community found on Kent Island to fuel my work. Through my own particular brand of abstract landscape photography, small-scale painting on paper and found objects, outdoor installation, and a series of photographic studies, I stretched my artistic tendrils and sent roots down into Kent Island.

The work I accomplished on Kent Island will not be an isolated instance of departure from my typical art-making. Rather, new questions about identity and how we perform our identities in specific communities and isolated spaces have taken form in my mind. Do we have innate, stripped-down selves that would exist even in a vacuum? Are we entirely performative creatures? Do archetypes emerge in small communities? These are questions I plan to explore as I continue making work, using my time on Kent Island to inform and nourish my thinking.

Faculty Mentor: Damon Gannon
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