This summer, I explored the themes of perception and sensation in order to inspire and inform my own creative writing. My intention was to simply pay attention—to my natural surroundings, to the nuances of human interaction, to texts and art of all kinds—and from all this write short stories and reflections that would evoke the notion of that permeable barrier between visual art and literature and call into question the complexity of the creative process in itself.

Living at Bowdoin, I sought to explore new aspects of the Midcoast landscape that I hadn’t yet discovered in my previous two years of living in Maine, or had simply overlooked. I traveled to nearby towns and scenic landmarks in order broaden my conception of what it is about place that inspires artistic endeavors. A trip to Monhegan Island, famous for its history of plein air painting, offered me the thrilling experience of seeing natural beauty twice over: once through my own eyes as I walked the trails, and a second time within the island’s galleries as I found this beauty mediated through the eyes of artists.

Apart from such location-based research, I divided my time between visiting museums, conducting interviews, reading relevant literature, and working on my own writing. Observation of art and conversations with artists was an essential component of my research. I frequently visited various independent galleries in Portland, the Portland Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Art in Boston, and Bowdoin’s own Museum of Art, paying special attention to artists’ engagement with their own environment—either literally as reflected through landscape painting, or subliminally in more abstract pieces. I interviewed local artists in order to understand how they regard Maine as a site for artistic observation and creation. As I suspected when formulating my research topic, I found the Maine landscape to be much more than an established Vacationland or place of exile where artists seek a needed solace. It is, rather, a place that offers inspiration selectively under an artist’s (or a writer’s) own terms—inspiration that might come in the form of concern over a polluted river, wonder at the luminosity of clouds on a summer’s night, or an overheard conversation between two strangers at the grocery store.

The texts I read contributed greatly to my thinking about perception, sensation, communication, and the overlap between visual and literary arts. I read both scholarly books and articles as well as short stories and novels (the most compelling being Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye*). All this literature enriched my understanding of both the correlation between text and textile in analytical terms, and the power that this connection translates when communicated through story-form.

My own stories were, in a way, both a conglomeration and reflection of the words I read, the people I spoke with, and the sights, sounds and smells I experienced for myself over the summer. Among my countless discarded efforts, I completed three rough drafts of stories that are inevitably linked by their shared source of inspiration. The revised versions of these stories, along with others I will continue to write this coming year, will serve as the beginning of an honors project that I will complete my senior year for which I will put together a full compilation of short stories.

In true modernist fashion, I found much of my research to be self-reflective. I learned how to deal with the challenges of relying on self-motivation in a field that is frustratingly subjective. In short, I discovered what it means to be a writer. I am deeply grateful to Professor Brock Clarke and the Patterson Fellowship for giving me the advice and support that allowed me to spearhead not only this particular project but indeed all my future endeavors in fiction writing.
Faculty Mentor: Brock Clarke

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