

The apexart Fellowship: An Experiment in Vertical Cultural Integration

essays by:

Yona Backer

Joanna Ebenstein

Nicky Enright

Julia Knight

T. J. McLachlan

Anna Moschovakis

Stephanie Powell

Robert Punkenhofer

Casey Smith

Nancy Wender

edited and with an essay by:

Steven Rand

apexart publishing

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An Experiment in
Vertical Cultural Integration

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apexart

291 Church Street
New York, NY 10013
t: +1 212 431 5270
www.apexart.org
info@apexart.org

apexart is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit visual arts organization founded in 1994 by Steven Rand. Programs include local and international exhibitions, an international Fellowship program, book publishing, and free public programs.

Previous **apexart** books include:

Life Between Borders: The Nomadic Life of Curators and Artists (2013)

Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces (2010)

Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating (2007)

On Cultural Influence (2006)

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Steven Rand

Been there, haven't done that.

August 2016

Predictive content. You look at bikes online and then Amazon tries to sell you the same bike, similar bicycles, and every accessory that might adorn it for the next couple days. Don't look up diabetes because your mother's friend has it, you'll start getting ads for advice, medication, and related helpful stuff. It's what the internet does.

"Familiar and similar" is comfortable. The art world is a pretty regulated place. Museums, galleries, biennials, and art fairs rarely make people angry or challenged. People prefer familiarity and reinforced held beliefs and while there are more people visiting art museums than ever before, the art is less challenging and less interesting, and the number of people who call themselves artists is at an all-time high. Curators too. Creativity is valued in our society as long as it confirms or rejects within acceptable limits.

The Fellowship program, the focus of this publication, is the result of observation, contrarianism, frustration, and resolution. Observation and frustration about how art is taught and the role it plays in society, and contrarianism because questioning and challenging is the basis of creativity. apexart started in 1994 as the art world was getting more commercial. Expanding university art programs were a financial juggernaut for universities and collecting art became available to a much

larger group. Many new galleries were opening and as the art world grew, more people depended on it for a living and it was becoming very professional and very serious. Really serious. Really boring art became really serious art. I was confused and the result was apexart.

Our Fellowship provides a time out from the familiar. It reminds people of the time before they were “focused, professional, and serious.” Doing the kinds of things that aren’t validated by the media or the art world as hip, cool, or trendy. The kind of things you stopped doing because you got older, “focused,” scared, and serious.

Art referencing art is exclusive; new experiences, new activities, and meeting new people increases tolerance and allows new ideas to be considered and incorporated into ones work and/or life – especially in a place of anonymity. Feeling uncomfortable makes you feel less uncomfortable in the future. Conquering a situation gives you confidence. Reconsidering is invaluable. Maybe there are too many arts-related activities available for people who were networking or career building. Taking people out of their comfort zone, away from home, and having them participate in all kinds of new activities is creatively generative. And then sending them to three or four activities per day over a one-month period creates a behavioral change that often puts them at a higher level of productivity and creativity when they get home. We send our past Fellows one-month, six-months, and one-year questionnaires after their Fellowship is over to ask about this and other aspects of the program. Some responses are excerpted here, as well as portions of the Fellows’ online journal.

This program began about 18 years ago as a traditional studio program. The kind where an organization asked an art world 'notable' to recommend an up-and-coming aggressive young artist who was probably getting too many opportunities already. It quickly felt like a lost opportunity to bring someone to another place/culture, put them in a studio box for a month to produce an exhibition and then send them home. What was the point in having someone make the same work in a different place? Residency programs can be promotional opportunities or learning opportunities and those that consist mainly of inviting curators and others to meet the resident artist are for promotional opportunities and not the creative process. We didn't want to become their gallerist or their network hotel. There are many programs that do that and do it well. We wanted to have fun, challenge us, and the Fellow, and actually help creative people be more creative.

T.J. McLachlan - Vancouver, Canada, to New York City, 2014
Before coming to NY I had a few conversations about the gruff attitude of people who call NY home. So far I've been nothing but struck by the kindness of New Yorkers, and when they have been less than endearing they have at least felt sincere. For lunch I met with Eric and his colleague Raquiba; such kind and fun people. I later did an orientation for NYCares, a group who coordinates volunteer opportunities throughout the city. Their business model is smart, allowing people to really engage in their own city, but the people I was taking this class with were hilariously engaged. I was stifling my laughter at their excitement to participate. The instructor asked if anyone wanted to share his or her intentions in volunteering. I assumed that it would be an awkward silence for a while before the instructor would pry a response out of us, but people were talking over each other to share why they were there. It really was inspiring.

We're in an age of celebrity with the art world is as effected as ever. Name recognition is more important than the work we do and more valuable. Socially aware aggressive people seemed to have learned how to secure opportunities that might have gone to less socially adept, but more creative people in the past. Was this the case? Were the right people not getting opportunities? Was everything becoming "big" in a way that affected the "small," leaving little space for the unfamiliar?

On the internet, the more you look, the less you see. Let your browser get to know you and it becomes an overbearing friend reinforcing your "interests" and making you feel that everyone is interested in the same things you are - until you're sitting next to someone in a Starbucks and see that your home page is not the same as the person next to you. You've been informationally cut off. Slowly, insidiously, it has been narrowing what you see of the "other" while emphasizing the familiar. This is particularly unfortunate since exposure to the new and different creates acceptance and understanding and stimulates thought. Look around. Are you reinforcing this comfort for yourself or are you anxious about it? Or bored by it? If you are, you might really be an artist. Or at least someone who wants more.

apexart's Fellowship is counter-predictive. You will not be sent to openings, art museums, or art panels. Our Fellows are directed to activities they don't expect, never wanted to do, and sometimes make them nervous. We explain that they will be bored, lonely, depressed, exhilarated, challenged, and/or excited on a daily basis. The activities

are incredibly diverse, and while we don't know which meeting, activity, or situation will have what effect, we know that the accumulated effect is quite transformative. We give people raw material. Rather than going to a performance art event as an artist, we might send you to the Federal Court building to sit in on a criminal trial or an improvisation class. The art performance event is someone else's work whereas the trial has real performances and real actors. There's real tension and a real unknown. Its raw material. Paint it, social-practice it, digest it, or just watch it.

Shefalee Jain - Delhi, India, to New York City, 2015

Was your experience of apexart's Fellowship different than what you expected?

Somewhat different. The website had prepared me in some sense with the interviews of the former Fellows and the sample itinerary. But the actual experience of being there was both more exciting and challenging than I had expected.

Did you find your Fellowship engaging overall? Intellectually challenging?

Yes, very much. I was spending time by myself after a very long time. That was challenging but very rewarding. It helped me think and ruminate at ease. It also made me face my fears. The itinerary was very intellectually stimulating. With no hurry to return home or to a job, I spent a lot of time in each place and so could gather much through having the time to absorb things slowly.

Has the Fellowship caused you to reconsider how you relate and approach your creative process?

Yes, certainly, it has strengthened my resolve to work at my own pace and participate in life rather than merely produce.

First, we got rid of the studio and put the living space in the city center, with activity right outside the door. It's very important to make one feel part of the city and to encourage people to go out and investigate. The added expense of an apartment in the city center is more than offset by not having to support an additional studio.

People cannot have previously been to the location they are sent to for their Fellowship. We want the risk and excitement associated with a new experience in a new place. The first visit to a new place is unique in its unknown aspect. We can present a diversity and focus that they wouldn't have if they felt the place was familiar. It would be the wrong end of the funnel. If someone has been to the location and has friends and appointments, they go right to the comfortable and familiar. It's human nature.

Learning to navigate a new city in a different country is empowering. Being by yourself and making decisions based on new information every day is empowering. Many of our Fellows find a new sense of confidence and independence after participating in our program. In fact, it is a program about increasing self-confidence, reassessing priorities, and actualizing the self. New ideas and experiences that can be incorporated into one's life and work in a new way. Learning new things while learning about yourself. Doing things you've avoided or neglected because time and career redirected you. For one month their concerns shift, and it makes a difference.

To avoid the (sometimes innocent) nepotism that affects many selection processes and keeps opportunities within a small group in many countries, we changed from the typical outreach. For example, we might contact an adjunct professor at a university. Not the dean or department head, but someone who interacts with people every day and does not usually have the opportunity to give something so valuable away. Explaining the unusual program to them,

not always an easy task, we invite them to recommend the one person they know well who they feel would benefit from such an experience. They put a lot of thought into the selection of their recommendee who must be over 30 years old and never have been to the location we're sending them to. The Fellowship is a complete diversion from one's traditional work. An opportunity to have distance, to reassess.

Recommenders are only invited to nominate once in an effort to avoid the power politics of giving out opportunities. In almost every case the nominated individuals have been amazing people who bring the experience home to others and would otherwise never have received such an opportunity. The Fellow signs an agreement that indicates they understand the program is not promotional but experiential and experimental, that it will not conform to an expected residency structure with a studio and ersatz promotion and that they will not make any artwork. It is a difficult and perception-changing month.

Stephanie Powell - New York City to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2012

Did you find the restriction on producing work during the Fellowship useful or constraining?

Both: Useful in that the pressure of producing something was not a factor; constraining in that if my usual life is around 3-4 days in my studio so it was a challenge to break the routine of my studio practice. What happened, though, is that I ended up writing more about my work than I ever have, and the tension of the restriction allowed for new ideas to be developed.

We vertically integrate Fellows into a culture by doing what locals do rather than what a traveling artist/tourist would do.

The Fellows end up seeing and doing many things locals don't even know about. In one month they will have attended:

- 8 workshops
 - cooking, writing, improvisation class
- 4 meetings
 - with people in science, architecture, agriculture, financial, social welfare
- 4 volunteer sessions
 - help people in a direct way, disaster relief, learning to read, urban reclamation
- 4 religious/spiritual activities
 - Quaker meetings, singing in Baptist gospel church choir, LDS
- 8 physical activities
 - canoeing, yoga, boxing, hiking, biking, walking, tai chi
- 8 walking, train, and travel tours
 - neighborhood walking tours, factory tours, construction/gentrification site tours
- 2 days travel to a different location
 - Washington, D.C., or Lalibela, Ethiopia, for example
- 8 points of cultural interest
 - architecture, historical sites, landmark
- 8 performances
 - musical recitals, parades, dance, music, theater
- 8 lectures/classes
 - investing, social activism, environmental issues
- 4 films
 - experimental, historical, socially relevant, entertaining
- 4 psychotherapy sessions
- 3-4 free days (rest or elective activities)

It's a level of activity that people generally can't maintain for more than a month.

We provide airfare, an apartment in the city center, a daily schedule of around 75 scheduled meetings, activities, and workshops over the term, very few of which involve “art.” apexart is always concerned with and following the activities of the Fellow and their itinerary while largely leaving them on their own to think and do.

Outgoing locations have included the Australian outback, Ethiopia, Israel, Thailand, Korea, Cambodia, Venezuela, Brazil, Macedonia, Uruguay, among others. Frequently past NYC Fellows have assisted us in their home locations by administering an equally rigorous program there. All programming is directed and overseen by our Program Director here in NYC to maintain the structural intent, while activities are suggested and administered by them. Using their experience from having participated in the program allows alumni to help us determine content but also allows them to see the effect “second hand.”

Fellows don't get to choose their Fellowship location, and aren't sent to locations they've been to previously. Mates and significant others are not invited because being on your own is important and allows spontaneity. Ultimately the program is more about the process than any individual activities and every location offers so much. For our International Fellowships, we generally exclude art locations like Berlin, London, or Shanghai to eliminate art market locations and we attempt to keep Fellows from art in New York City until the final week, at which point many are unsettled by the market atmosphere, a lack of convincing work, and the number of galleries.

Darwin Molina - Mérida, Venezuela, to New York City, 2013
Did you find that you were more likely to attend activities, lectures, and/or events outside of your comfort zone when you returned?
I think that getting involved in activities that are unusual to me helped me to strengthen some aspects of my personality and also turned out interesting as a font of general knowledge. That is why, although at first the activities could be uncomfortable, I ended up valuing it and improving my predisposition to do, see, read, attend, participate, and experience different things that may be out of my comfort zone. So I try to keep doing it, maybe I still do not seek such activities intentionally but when an occasion arises, I remember the words of Steven: "Keep the spirit of the residence."

Do you think the experiential nature of the residency has affected the way you travel and approach new situations?

Yes, mainly I think I have less fear than before, so, that can help to approach with more confidence to different situations.

One of the first things a Fellow might do in a NYC Fellowship is a trip around Manhattan Island on a Circle Line Cruise. A touristic activity, the tour guide on board does a great job providing information on specific history and geography of NYC. Similar activities accomplish similar familiarity in unfamiliar areas. Financial information is often not comfortable for artists, so we arrange for them to meet experts in various sectors, such as real estate and finance, to learn about some areas that traditionally scare them, often finding its not scary or irrelevant. Learning enough about anything makes it interesting. They go to a seminar about investing so if they do start to sell work or get an inheritance they may know more about what to do or at least who or what to ask.

Incorporating therapy for Fellows in the program began in 2012, after a discussion with a colleague who is a therapist, to see what interest there was and what effect it might have.

Fellows participate in “talk therapy,” which is based on the core idea that talking about the things that are bothering people can help clarify them and put them in perspective. They see a psychotherapist four times during their Fellowship to talk about the program or to address other issues that are important to them. They are encouraged to use the time as they wish to address any issue, and many have taken the opportunity to address real and serious situations in a non-threatening professional environment, while others talk about general issues, program activities, and being in a new culture.

Many cultures discourage the therapy process and see the process as evidence of weakness, necessary only as a result of severe trauma. Other cultures discourage speaking about personal issues as being too self-involved. Being in a creative discipline can be especially confusing culturally as “new” values conflict with traditional ones. Sometimes it is an important opportunity for creative people to realize they are not crazy, just because they don’t “fit in.” Speaking with someone who is trained can be invaluable in finding out that you are more normal than you realized and the questions you have are valid and should be addressed. The sessions are private and non-disclosed and have expanded to all of our outbound locations in some capacity. The situation is even more interesting when noting that the therapists often work cross-culturally, dealing with different social values. We hear the experiences are as valuable for the therapists as for our Fellows.

Sarah Hollars - New York City to Bangkok, Thailand, 2016
What event did you find most challenging? Why? And what did it feel like once you overcame your fears about it?

I found the therapy sessions my biggest hurdle. I had never been to therapy and come from a culture (Oregon) that does

not hug let alone tell a stranger what is going on in one's head. It was terrifying to me to go to the first session and I went through a million excuses I could tell apexart about why I couldn't make the appointment but it was also the most challenging and where I learned the most about myself.

Has the Fellowship caused you to reconsider how you relate and approach your creative process?

Yes, I feel that is now okay to connect my process to life rather than the "Art World." Before the Fellowship I tried to keep up on all of the news, all of the art magazines, all of the shows. I was miserable and having a hard time making it to my studio and making any work. Now that I am back I have stopped trying to keep up with everything, instead I am living and my creative process is so much more productive because of it. I feel the way I felt about art before I came to New York, I feel connected to the world again.

It turns out that imposing structure on adult creative people is very successful when properly explained. Especially when most activities end up being much more fun and interesting than anticipated. We attempt to avoid or undermine the comfort zone of "making work" or of being the "artist."

Fellows participate in several volunteer opportunities where a real connection is often made with people from different economies or cultures. It's important for creative people to connect with their audience and artists often feel that is not happening. We attempt to provide a surrogate connection response that can maybe serve as a bridge or even a form of behavioral change and provide alternative ways of communicating to people. Maybe just playing chess in the park with a homeless person or working on a rooftop farm with new people can help redefine this. You learn about yourself. And in a new place, with people you don't know, you can take greater risks.

Fellows spend a lot of time alone and our program encourages it. The number of collectives and groups that submit to our open call programs has risen dramatically. People don't like to work alone much less be alone or out of communication. Someone recently told me that he arrived at his hotel, his phone dead and without a charger, and he was faced with the terrifying prospect of having to spend 45 minutes with himself. Being part of a group may make you feel good and avoid discomfort but it may not encourage the same depth of creativity or inquiry. Time alone is important.

Another Fellow, scheduled for a boxing class, resisted. Relating the thought process to us after the fact, he said he wasn't angry, didn't want to hit anyone, and didn't want to go. But, contractually stipulated, he went and found out that boxing was a sport, it was fun and was actually a form of self-expression. How do they integrate their experiences into their life and/or work? Good question. It's on our questionnaire.

Meeting with people you don't know without a specific reason or protracted script is difficult and challenging, but also really exhilarating; and you come away stronger. We intentionally do not schedule or allow artist talks or studio visits that compromise the potential of real discussion and interaction with people Fellows meet. They can always begin speaking about one of the activities they did or will do or, as we suggest, ask the other person what they do. New activities and meetings with people outside of your interests and socioeconomic group are important. We don't know what appointment will have the greatest effect and hedge our bets with volume.

Ashley Walters – Capetown, South Africa, to New York City, 2016
Did you find your Fellowship engaging overall? Intellectually challenging?

Yes, on so many levels. I was constantly kept on my toes, not knowing what to expect on each new day. I then later started to embrace the feeling of the unknown more and more. Intellectually it was very challenging as there were many occasions where I felt completely overwhelmed, but as a result I tried to engage even further in response, wanting to better understand each new situation/subject or conversation.

Has the Fellowship caused you to reconsider how you relate to and approach your creative process?

Before attending the Fellowship, I was not very keen with the idea of exploring the unknown, listening and incorporating others' feedback to the extent that I'm currently experiencing now. I often used the notion of collaboration when I spoke about my creative process, and thinking about it now I feel it was just a front for trying to make the next sale or whatever other reason. I was making art for art sake, or at least the way I was taught in art school. After my Fellowship experience my thinking and approach to making art is constantly shifting, taking inspiration from many facets of life. I have no idea how this will affect the outcome and that's okay.

With up to four events per day, Fellows might go to an improvisation class, an aerial yoga class, a roller derby, sing in a Baptist church, go kayaking, or learn how to cook Thai food. The places, people, and events that we select are intended to provide an in-depth cultural journey into the different sides of the host city, its environs, and population, as well as self-confrontation. The schedule aims to look beyond and around the art world, and tries to showcase aspects of the location that otherwise might be overlooked but that nevertheless hold a well of inspiration. It is a geographical, historical, and intellectual exploration that combines the high and the low, art and non-art, the mundane with the extraordinary.

Reid Nicholls - New York City to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2014
It has had a great effect on my work and my approach to my work. The people that I met when exploring some of Cambodia's social justice issues and the artists who were making work related to those issues really inspired me. It's amazing to me that I had to go all the way to Cambodia just to have someone remind me that it's alright to follow your conscience, and to even explain my work in that context. But I did. I came back to the United States with the desire to be fearless in my work, the way Kavy Samnang is with his. Do whatever is necessary to complete the work and let your conscience be your guide. Immediately I can say I stopped second-guessing myself and started to trust my choices, in topic and execution, leaning more on intuition and improvisation. Not completely, but as my projects progress.

Learning to navigate New York City, Addis Ababa, Montevideo, Phnom Penh, or Seoul is empowering. Being by yourself is empowering. Making decisions based on new information every day is personally empowering. Our Fellows universally express a new sense of confidence and independence after participating.

I've seen truly amazing residency locations around the world set up for people to go and work at, with great accommodations and the freedom to do work. We are traveling more but experiencing less, staying within the familiar. If artists do the same work in the residency as they were doing before they arrived and the same work when they return home, what is the benefit? Is networking and spending your time in an unfamiliar studio to make an often compromised show in an effort to secure another residency or an exhibition the best use of the time energy and money involved? Others organizations do this and think so. We respectfully don't.

Our program is intense, uncomfortable, assaultive, and challenging. We describe the program as being similar in some ways to moving to a new city, in that month or two period before you know people or get involved. It's not like visiting or being a tourist, because the Fellow has his own apartment and he's on his own. The stress to produce is not there. You're not yet involved in activities so you have the time to walk and you look. You go into a shop because it's interesting and not because it's new or trendy. It's a return to a kind of adolescent freedom. All possible because you've agreed to not make art, resist self-promoting, and to attend everything in the schedule. Some 75 activities in a 30-day period.

Programs that only provide a studio/living space are doing a disservice to their own efforts and support. The potential is so much greater. When you leave school there are few critical opportunities for you to re-evaluate what you're doing. And it's hard to change a direction you're committed to. You're concerned about everything from other's expectations to a fear of losing your identity by changing your work. While professionals in other fields attend classes and seminars to keep learning, this is generally not something that happens in our creative world. In a group we travel to exotic locations and cultures and see the same people and artwork while we move between the gallery, hotel, restaurant, and museum, infrequently exploring the sub-surface local except in organized groups going to prescribed locations.

Lior Pinsky – Jerusalem, Israel, to New York City, 2013

Do you think the Fellowship will have an effect on your work?

The truth is I came back overwhelmed, and I haven't really managed to do anything coherent since. The Fellowship made me think about things I do and why I do them. There was this guy I met just when I got back, he's into documentary films and news writing. A true working class defender. We connected and met a couple of times. The most interesting talks. Now we are talking about doing something together. The medium wasn't discussed yet. But NY certainly made me want to experience new fields of making. For the past few years I have also struggled with my self-trying to make art with a social effect. Not an easy thing. And I think the month of the Fellowship took me away from my familiar artistic making in a way I can really choose my next step now.

As artists we're often observers rather than participators. Hiding behind a camera or an artist persona, we become the commentator eager to record or comment but not to join in. When was the last time you put yourself in an uncomfortable situation electively? Doing something you don't know how to do and feeling comfortable or brave enough to do it in front of others is incredibly liberating. We care too much about what others think.

The meetings we schedule for Fellows with interesting people in the community involves sending them both to an activity neither has done. It might be a lecture or physical activity but it takes the other person out of their comfort area and gives them both something to talk about. We don't want "studio visits" or the "I have a show here" - "I have a show there" pong game where no one listens to an exchange that is quickly forgotten. If you go canoeing with a local architect who is as nervous as you are, you probably talk about more personal things.

A NYC arts admin who accompanied one of our Fellows, 2016
It was really nice to meet her and we had an amazing time in court. In fact, I went back the next day to see how the case was proceeding with my colleague who is from Uzbekistan. It was super interesting, and the judge (according to my on-line research) is considered one of the best in the State. It was pretty impressive.

We bring or send people to situations and places of great opportunity and then keep them from “capitalizing” on it by not arranging networking opportunities. Something people have criticized. We genuinely want people to succeed and believe if they get new and different experiences and challenges they will have a better chance at long-term challenge and success than if we arranged social meetings for them. The diversity of activities and references make our Fellows more interesting to people they meet, which often means more opportunity. When people tell us that we have to think about how artists can make money, we understand the problem, but this is not our mission.

Are we really affecting people the way we think we are? Or to the degree we say? This is the purpose of our sending periodic questionnaires to Fellows after their Fellowship; we ask them what worked, what didn't, and what their take away is. Some of the excerpts included above show this as well as the sections of Fellows' online journals, which are available in full on our site www.apexart.org, along with their exit interviews.

Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo - Havana, Cuba, to New York City, 2016

My last day of the Fellowship in New York has arrived. How do I feel? Desolated and sad, trying to understand to where the days went. You are thinking: What Susana? Yes, I know, I had written

about many of them but still, inside me, I would like to have more of those days, I will deeply miss getting up for an unknown challenge in the city of New York and going to bed with a new thing in my heart. I will miss everything apexart gifted me: the ridiculous loudness of the police cars in the street, the unknown Church's clock melody, the security guards, the performers in the subway, chess players in the park, merchants in Chinatown, the ladies from my nearby grocery store who started to know me, the sound of the heating, the light of the other houses, and countless other things.

What have we learned?

1. Be honest with yourself as often as possible.
2. Listen to others except when you shouldn't, which is often.
3. Change your mind often. It's like exercise.
4. Don't care about what others think, they're too busy thinking about themselves.
5. Talk to others about their idea of success and yours.
It's confusing.
6. Good luck. See line 1.

Steven Rand (steven.rand@apexart.org) is an artist living in NYC. Says he tries to make the art world a more equitable, challenging, and interesting place through direct action and intervention.

Julia Knight

apexart Fellowship Program

Ran apexart Fellowship Program from 2010-14
September 2015

When I started at apexart five years ago as Programs Manager in charge of the International Fellowship, a young female journalist was two weeks into her one-month program in New York. It was February and freezing, and she was Cambodian and miserable. The Fellowship is built around a 30-day schedule designed to introduce participants to people, places, and events outside of the art world, and the day I arrived, she had just finished a walk through Prospect Park after an ice storm, in a parka she bought for the occasion and later left in the Fellow apartment, knowing she would never need it back home. While apexart aims for a mix of excitement and discomfort in the Fellowship programming, it was clear that for her this snowy trek more resembled torture.

On my second day on the job I took her for a drink. She was shy at first, but I'm a talker and I put on a big smile and started asking her questions. Soon enough the words were pouring out of her. She vented all of her misery over the weather and difficulties with the program; she talked about how scared she was in her first few days in New York; about how in Cambodia women mostly travel in groups and tend to develop their opinions as part of a general consensus; and about the sudden shock of having to make her own assessments of everything from food to events to art to the city itself. After a few hours, the cloud had lifted. What started as a litany of complaints evolved

into an assessment of her growing confidence. She had needed an outlet, a response to her loneliness, and once she felt she had that, she didn't mind being alone anymore. In the remaining two weeks of her Fellowship, she took on New York with renewed vigor, participating in a rehearsal at the Dance Theater Workshop, a film class with The Bruce High Quality Foundation, and a tour of Grand Central. On her last day of the program she posted this on her journal: "I feel now more strong than before and it means that I can go far away from my country alone and do everything by myself."

We had the benefit of seeing her four years later when we were in Phnom Penh for an apexart Franchise Exhibition. She was transformed: married, full of energy, and head of arts-based advertising at a large ad firm in Cambodia. She had changed professions, moved out of her parents' house, and really seemed like a different person after all those years. Though apexart can't take credit for her skills and drive in making positive changes to her life, I know the program was a turning point for her.

Over the years at apexart, I saw, time and time again, how much people can learn in the course of one month. The opportunity to live outside your normal routine while spending so much time alone is rare, and the feedback we get from Fellows is that within these time capsules they think about family, motivations, plans, futures, relationships, and intentions. The apexart Fellowship has broken up relationships, changed career paths, and inspired relocations. There is no exhibition at the end to prepare for, no presentation to funders, no distractions that keep one inside and safe instead of outside and dodging taxis in New York.

My second year at apexart we started an exchange program with the city of Seoul, which has continued over the past four years. Each season we send a New-York based artist (or curator, or writer, or puppeteer for that matter) to Seoul where we worked with Seoul Arts Space_Geumcheon to develop a program, and they send someone to us in New York. Perhaps my favorite “success” story comes out of this exchange, when we sent a writer to Seoul. She has contributed an essay to this book which really beautifully shows a “before and after” take on her experiences. Though her professional success story is remarkable, I was struck more by the change in her personal life. She came back from her month abroad, broke up with her boyfriend, moved apartments, and started over. We insist that our Fellows travel without their partners, and we push for them to be alone during their program, but we never thought someone would take that to heart upon their return! The story behind it was one of deep personal reflection, and the changes she made when she got home took courage.

These kinds of stories help me to see that people don’t just lose five pounds or learn a few words of another language on these programs; they discover more about themselves and gain the fortitude to take action in their lives, and it comes from within. Without being alone, you can continue to operate on surface levels and you often don’t have time for the kind of self-evaluation and thinking that results from being on your own in a strange place, or you actively eschew it. Perhaps you can ignore it for a week, but after a month we hear time and time again that residents “go there”: re-evaluate, make big decisions, and have a better sense of who they are on their own, not in relation to other people.

Another great story from Seoul is from an African-American video and installation artist who wrote in her application, “While I have a number of close friends who were born and raised in Seoul... these relatively small doses of exposure ultimately reveal to me how little I know about the place and how vastly different it is from my home.” Funnily enough, her journal started out with all the things that did remind her of her home in New York and her cultural background, saying, “Damn if we don’t have a lot in common!” But the most interesting thing she reported upon her return, and that has stuck with me all these many years, is that she had not previously considered the Black/Asian racial dichotomy as it is so overshadowed by Black/White divide in the States. For me, hearing this was huge. In this instance it was not only about reconsidering oneself, but reconsidering the entire context in which one defines that self. Travel is one of the only ways to accomplish this. Sometimes you have to see how vastly varied this world is in order to understand your own corner of it. Sometimes you have to fly halfway across the world by yourself and spend a month alone trying to figure out how to successfully navigate a strange city in a foreign language.

Last year something really extraordinary happened. I was sitting at the front desk of apexart when I heard someone at the door. I looked through the door as I buzzed it open and my heart almost stopped. Standing in front of me was a South African Fellow who had joined us in New York the year before. He is a man you don’t forget, with a really warm heart, open face, huge smile. He is magnetic. But upon closer observation, it seemed that some of the light had gone out of him. He looked tired, his smile was thinner, he wasn’t standing in that tall proud way he had before.

He told me that his father died two months before, and that he had promised himself he would come back to New York to try his luck at being an artist. He had been in the city for two weeks already, sleeping on the subway and setting up his easel outside and painting all day long. He kept it up for another six months, successfully doing some art projects that got attention throughout the city. He landed some shows and made new relationships with people in the city. He tried to get an extended visa but ultimately he had to return to Johannesburg and try to make progress from there. What really struck me about his journey to New York was that he believed in the power of the city, and he attributed this belief to the apexart program. He was shown a side of New York that most locals don't even see, and it infused him with a drive and a belief in himself. I'm not sure I would ever have the conviction to get on a plane with very little money in my pocket, and arrive in a place where I knew few people and had few resources. The outcome of most importance for me is not that MoMA starts collecting his work, but that he did something daring. It's more than most of us do in a lifetime.

The apexart Fellowship takes the approach that exposure to new things coupled with self-discovery makes for interesting people. And interesting people make interesting art. We think. We don't think that people come to New York for their first time and leave painting the skyline. It's more that scenes, experiences, and people seep in over time and seep out later on. The theory is still being played out 15 years after the program first started, and we constantly look to our Fellows to try to understand if it is having the intended effect. Some of them will tell you for themselves about their experiences in the pages of this book.

As for myself, I've had the extraordinary pleasure of meeting people from vastly different parts of the world and hearing about their experiences. On occasion we've even had the chance to visit Fellows in their home countries and see what we couldn't know before. And it changes you. It gives you a bit more context when you read the news, and a bit more understanding of the differences and similarities between us. Five years into my tenure at apexart, I found myself waiting for a friend in the dusty parking lot of a rural port somewhere on the northern end of Phuket, Thailand. I stood there surrounded by hagglers trying to sell me tickets for rides on what ranged from run down motorboats to wooden longboats with holes mended with duct tape. As I tried to figure out which boat would take us to the tiny remote island of Ko Yao Yai, and the panic started to make its way from my throat to my face, I thought about our Fellows and how many awkward and uncomfortable things we throw them into, and places they get lost trying to find, and language barriers they come up against. 20 minutes later we were throwing our bags into a questionable craft and motoring off into the Andaman Sea. An hour later we were avoiding cobras on a rented moped. And nine months later it's one of my favorite stories to tell.

Julia Knight ran the apexart Fellowship from 2010-12 and helped evolve the program into a rigorous schedule for each Fellow. The following three years she served as apexart's Operations Director. She is now Director of the NYC Poster House.

Stephanie Powell

After all the smoke clears and the dust settles

International Fellow to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, July 2012
September 2015

When I arrived at my apartment in Phnom Penh, the first thing I unpacked was my laptop as I was eager to access Wi-Fi, check in with family, and fall asleep to a movie – in that order. My first hurdle was the password. However, the local point-of-contact assured me this would be resolved as soon as possible. So I was left to my own devices for sources of entertainment and sleep. This consisted of watching geckos circle the perimeter of the living room.

The apartment had three bedrooms and a wrap-around terrace. There were no glass windows, instead screens with shutters to keep the air flowing freely in and the bugs and rain out. The only technological devices were a transistor am-fm radio in the kitchen and a blender. The living/dining room was about the size of my two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn that I share with my husband and son. This room eventually became the bedroom. Located at the center of the apartment, the living/dining room felt safe. The other rooms flanked it, allowing me to hear directionally the source of any noises in the night.

apexart Fellows are given an itinerary with suggested activities and experiences to help engage with the local culture and

people. Waking up to a recording of Buddhist prayers on my first morning encouraged me to start my itinerary immediately and forget the Internet situation. From visiting markets to getting my hair washed to a list of nightclubs, it was a perfect range of experiences that only an insider could recommend – far beyond any visitor guide offerings.

It could be the New York City in me, but I made it through the bulk of the checklist for Phnom Penh in two days. However, they were 12-15 hour days spent at a range of markets, eating quite a few crickets and – perhaps the most awkward and powerless feeling ever – getting my hair washed and nails done at the same time. But this was only the beginning.

I went to the Bophana Audiovisual Center to watch historic films about the Khmer Rouge genocide and the rich culture that existed before the massacre, viewed incredible stone sculpture carvings, visited quite a few book stores, ate ginger fish twice at Psar Kap Ko, unsuccessfully meditated at a Buddhist temple, and made it to the FCC Hotel just in time for happy hour.

The FCC Hotel's restaurant and lounge is a popular place for foreign journalists, photographers, and "adventurers" to meet and share stories – a place where myths are born. The clientele was primarily Westerners with a Cambodian staff all housed in a colonial architectural shell. It felt like an earlier time in history. It was the perfect backdrop for a timely purchase during my day trip, *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene. Greene was a war correspondent in

the 1950s. I imagined he would hang out at places like this, and end the night at the Girls, Girls, Girls bar a block away.

After a few days the password was finally sorted out and I was back in the tech era – Skyped with my husband and son, wrote on the apexart blog, checked in on Facebook, and did a little research on the out-of-town excursions on my itinerary. The out-of-town trips still needed to be researched; and coupled with the requirement of artists to not make artwork in the apexart Fellowship program, I thought there would be ample time to prepare. But, unbeknownst to me, my unpreparedness turned out to be a fortunate misfortune so to speak.

The misfortune part is that my laptop died shortly after I got the correct Wi-Fi password. I was not able to research any locations for visits or day trips anymore. No Skype. No Facebook. Internet cafes were scarce, usually packed with locals and their own esoteric politics around who's next. Consequently, it became very difficult to communicate with my family – with my four-year-old son being the most difficult part. This was my first time away from him for any extended length of time, and the guilt weighed on me heavily.

To be honest, I felt like a bad mother and wondered if my decision to participate in apexart's program was selfish and irresponsible. All those comments about leaving my young son for a month began to resonate, especially with the Internet access challenge. He was too young to understand art,

Fellowship, and why he couldn't see mommy on the computer anymore. This made me worry about him worrying – and the effects an experience like this could have on his life.

The fortunate part, and what I believe is apexart's main goal for the Fellowship program: having no choice but to disconnect from the familiar and, adversely, connect with the unfamiliar.

This helped me realize that I was not disconnecting from being a mother, nor from being an artist or wife. I just wasn't mothering, actively practicing art, or hanging out with my husband for a month – which is really a short time in the grand scheme of things. All of the anxiety I had was not how I truly felt, but was put upon me by others questioning my month-long travels this far away from the familiar.

There is no HR department for artists. If there was, I would have filed a formal complaint. Being that in many industries maternity leave has changed to disability leave, if there were HR for artists it probably would have been a waste of time.

I had no choice but to let the anxiety go and trust my instincts. I learned to trust myself as well as my decision-making process. I am a great mother, artist, wife; and those who were judging me could go fuck themselves basically.

The apexart Fellowship is not a community-based residency like most: you are alone. That is a lot to process – feeling lost and truly alone in a foreign place with few people who speak your language, very little communication with your

family, contemplating opinions of me as a mother. It was overwhelming.

So I decided to go out – I went to the Heart of Darkness.

The Heart of Darkness is a nightclub that wasn't on my itinerary. It was pretty much how I imagined it to be – a dark, dungeon-like feel with the bass so heavy it feels like it is in your body. *The Heart of Darkness* is also a book written by Joseph Conrad. It's about an ivory tradesman's journey in Africa with overtones of European Imperialism, colonialism, and racism. It's a complex and dark novel, and this second literary connection fascinated me. I went with new friends I'd made and it seemed like the place to be that night. The guy who gave me the architectural tour of Vann Molyvann was there as well as a few others I met through my apexart itinerary. I didn't expect to cross paths with these people again – and of all the places to do so, it was at The Heart of Darkness.

Another fortunate part of my unpreparedness and losing access to the Internet was being forced to talk more and communicate differently. The skill set people had mastered for centuries before the internet phenomenon.

It was back to the basics.

Gestures, drawings, and hand drawn maps became my guides. I did end up in a few places I did not intend, like a few dark empty streets at night, but everything worked out eventually. I was reminded that life without GPS is possible

as it has been in the past, and roaming and getting lost is an incredibly liberating feeling.

There was one out-of-town trip that I failed to research properly prior to leaving Phnom Penh – the floating villages. Before my laptop died, I looked at images as no one I met was aware that floating villages were in the area. Everyone assumed there was an oversight as it related to my itinerary, but the group I eventually met in Kampong Chhnang assured me this was no error. I recalled seeing a picture of a floating luxury hotel in a Google image search, fully equipped with a restaurant that served cocktails. The image stuck with me, and created a fantasy of reclining in a lounge chair, drifting down a river on a floating bamboo platform drinking a pretty cocktail and waiting for my turn on the karaoke machine.

Like stories, images create myths and fantasies that meander from the truth. I later found out the floating hotel picture I saw was not even near Cambodia. When I told people I was going to the floating villages the response was either complete unawareness or “why?” People who knew about the floating villages said I was going to the wrong side of the Tonle Sap River. I was going to the southwest region when those who heard of the villages were only aware of them being located on the northeast. When I told people I was staying three days, there was confusion of where I could possibly stay. My romantic visions quickly shifted.

I have to preface this anecdotal reference to my journey with context: I cannot swim.

I never thought this would be an issue until the boat ride to the villages. The boat was a motorized canoe with no life jackets. People were seated by weight to balance the boat and the floor had a constant shallow pool of water. At one point we ran out of gas somewhere in the Tonle Sap River and had to wait for a floating gas station to come by to re-fuel. After about an hour or so moving through channels of deep tall grass, we arrived at the first village.

The villages are communities that live in homes constructed on bamboo platforms that float on water. They were tucked in open areas amongst tall grass almost like a cul-de-sac. Homes were in various conditions, many with holes or missing sections in the thatched roofs. The group I traveled with was doing research and interviews to find ways to help sustain a healthy community, this trip being specifically about maintaining floating gardens as access to vegetables and produce is a health concern. There were many other concerns with the villages, but this was the issue around our venture.

One of the team members was an activist and translator named Vannary who was very involved with the villages and started a program with the healers on sex education and access to contraception. She explained to me the floating villages are mostly ethnic Vietnamese families that survived the Khmer Rouge genocide. Most lost their Cambodian paperwork indicating they were Cambodian citizens during the exile, and are actually considered stateless. Without papers, work, and access to education, life is extremely difficult. The main source of income for families become primarily fishing- and shrimp-based – which is unreliable and with very little to no profit.

In total we visited three villages, and stayed three nights. We stayed in the floating schools, as they had the most space for us. Days were spent looking at homes and existing gardens and in community meetings at the home of the village's healer for the team to discuss strategies to support developing a floating garden system. Being an observer left me with lots of time to myself. And although my luxurious floating fantasy was a complete farce, I did find three luxuries anyway: a hammock to nap in and beer and cigarettes for sale.

The nights were a very different experience. We laid under mosquito nets strategically to keep the platform level. If not, one side would dip deeper into the water. Regardless, our weight did lower the platform at times and water would seep into our blankets. There was no electricity so when it was dark it was pitch black with only the sound of water moving around us for a sense of orientation, which was disorienting. The water rats gnawing on the platform was also a new experience.

Vannary woke me up each night as I apparently whimpered and cried in my sleep. One night she shook me hard and firmly said, "stop it, you are upsetting everyone." I had no recollection of crying or whimpering, but others told me the following mornings I kept them awake at night. I guess I couldn't keep my game face on in my sleep, and although I did not show fear outwardly during the day, it came out unconsciously at night.

The last day it rained all day. Our platform did not have doors or windows so the cool breeze and water would

come in. That part of the trip was awesome to say the least; but, by evening it was a major storm. There was one family that had a generator with lights and after their power ran out, we laid in the darkest dark under our nets. The rain didn't stop and although I couldn't see anything, I felt the platform moving. We were running into other floating homes and tall grass.

The spinning and bumping lasted for hours and for the first time in my life I felt truly lost. It was a new feeling. There was nothing I could do to change the situation and the only way to get through it was to ride it out. So I laid there and tried to enjoy the bumps and sounds of the night.

When the rain stopped, the sky cleared and I could start to see my surroundings again. I got out from under my net and went to look at the sky and it was completely clear and packed with stars. The stars illuminated us, the village, the water, everything. They seemed so close as if we could touch them. I still didn't know where I was and the neighboring homes were not our neighbors before. But it didn't matter.

The water was so calm, the sky overwhelmingly beautiful and for a few minutes the world seemed still. It was a moment of clarity that is still difficult to describe.

Pictures are powerful. They can create and shift perceptions. They can be truthful or tell a lie, and like stories, they can lead to myths. Part of me wishes I had a photograph of the starry sky that night, and part of me is very content with

only a memory. The process of myth-making has become a part of the conversation in which my artwork engages, and the story of the last night still lingers with me: the feeling of being lost, drifting on my back, and riding out a storm to a beautiful ending.

It took me a few years upon my return to fully reap the benefits of the apexart Fellowship. I needed some time to process all of the experiences and how they affected me as a woman, an artist – a person. I ended up doing so much more than what was on the initial itinerary, made life-long friends and acquired a new set of eyes with how I perceive myself. If I were to think about how the program affected my studio practice: I often stay the night in my studio, and I consciously chose to not have Internet access there.

Another powerful piece of the experience: Vannary, my colleague from the floating villages, is also a mother. I wasn't alone literally or metaphorically.

When I returned to New York City, I went straight from the airport to my son's preschool. His teachers right away told me how he talked about me everyday and couldn't wait for me to come home. He walked up to me and wouldn't look at me in my face. I took his hand as we left the school and he was silent. During our walk home, the silence continued until I asked if he was ok and reassured him I'd be home for a while. His reply was, "Well, can you make me a grilled cheese then? Daddy can't make them."

That was the first thing I did when we got home and everything was back to normal. Easy breezy.

Stephanie Powell was born in Yokosuka, Japan, on a U.S. navy base, but relocated to the U.S. in her formative years and raised in Portland, Oregon. Receiving an MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, her recent exhibitions include *Sgorbati Projects*, NYC; *Mallorca Landings*, Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and Mills Gallery at Boston Center for the Arts. Having been on faculty at both the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and CUNY Staten Island, Stephanie is currently a Professor at Pratt Institute, NYC. She has received awards from Sustainable Arts Foundation, Jerome Foundation, and Illinois Arts Council.

T.J. McLachlan

Journal in Retrospect

NYC Fellow from Vancouver, Canada, May 2014

November 2014

The cadence of apexart's programming constantly recontextualized the experiences I had last year during my Fellowship at apexart, leaving me with malleable memories rather than singular occurrences. New York was saturated in encounters that each demand more time to appreciate its nuance. I experienced tension and excitement and inspiration and frustration. While still in the wake of one event, I was aware of and preparing for the next. No one part the programming would be overwhelming unto its own, but the momentum of the day made a cumulative experience that I never expected.

The journal that apexart asks the Fellows to keep became a time for me to try to synthesize the day and understand what it was I had experienced. It took very little effort to find a thread that ran through the day. Now, revisiting the journal has made it clear that the way I related to place, people, and myself evolved during the month I was in New York. I've chosen three discreet posts to my journal to reflect on how these experiences unfolded. The Fellowship was cumulative and intermeshed. My ability to find meaning within the Fellowship has evolved with time away from New York. I remember each day as a point passed through in a process – the significance of a single day was most potent in how it fit into the Fellowship as a whole.

May 28, 2014

In my first few hours in New York I realize it's not what I thought it would be. This is not a judgment call of better or worse than expected, but I am simply realizing the elusiveness of place. On the subway ride from JFK airport it occurred to me that I am not experiencing what some part of me expected. I think what's most significant is that I had expectation at all; NYC, though I have never been to this side of the continent, already existed as a specific place in my expectation. Obviously and of course. I suppose the representation of New York on TV, in books, and through word of mouth has made something like a silhouette of the city; a distinct form with character and style, but lacking texture or depth. My first day in New York has begun to trace lines though this silhouette and I am coming to understand the city in a way that quickly makes the outlines I thought I knew inconsequential to the body of the city.

My relationship to the city developed throughout my Fellowship. It is not just about physical or geographic place but now the city holds more significance. Since participating in the apexart Fellowship, I have been inspired by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. The experiences I had with the city were different than I expected and his writing became a way for me to understand what I experienced, specifically in the distinction he makes between space and place. "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. [...] Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place."¹ Before I came to New York it was a place, but only a shadow of the place. The city was a specific

focus of value with an embedded narrative. After years of being told about this place, I had little sense of what was true and what was fiction, what was a past representation and what was current. The shadow is not the object but is caused by the object. Its proportions and form are recognizable but distorted. From this shadow I expected something of New York as a specific but mythological place.

When I landed I was jarred out of the shadow of a city and was instead confronted with the actual space of it. To me, the city was now a silhouette – the actual object – but the space was undifferentiated. New York was only a continuum of landmarks to which I had no real context. I arrived early in the morning and so I took the subway from JFK to Union Square during rush hour. The subway, with specific and concrete direction and destination ushered me through space. I knew New York to be a place with depth and I anticipated it would relate to the shadowy representation I had unintentionally developed, and yet I was experiencing only space. From this first day a process of transforming space to place began. I invested in space, finding value and, in that, a personal place-making process that would fill the silhouette out into a distinct place.

I walked through and around the silhouette while it began to take on depth and nuance. It was a process. Words and names that I associate with NYC meant so little. Central Park, the Empire State Building, Wall Street. These are only names that I associated with a place while it was a shadow. Place, a physical place, is inconsequential or at least is not much more than novelty. But place with investment becomes more. I remember my first time at Bryant Park; it was differentiated

only as a place to stop, catch my breath, and sort out how I fit into this city. On another day I returned for an event. The park was a destination as a place to facilitate something else. My third time there it was less a landmark and more a place to feel grounded. It took time and engagement, but slowly parts of this city took on depth and value beyond the fact of its physical existence. I started making felt distinctions, which I was able to discern through experience.

I began to understand the city as a body with character. I would walk the streets and feel familiar with it, not because of its landmarks but because I came to understand the flow of the city. My relationship to place was not about navigation, taking me from one distinct place to another with only space between. As New York City transformed from space to place I began to relate to it differently. I tended towards green spaces when I was stressed or overwhelmed. This created a place that was significant to me. My discourse with the city parks became more than physical green space, but rather a place of grounding. At night I would wander through the streets, appreciating the city for its momentum. Removed from day-to-day routines, the roads were less about transportation and more about a continuity of places. From shadow, to silhouette, to place. With time the space of New York City became the place of New York City.

June 10, 2014

The rain put an end to my first event for the day (intro to Japanese at Bryant Park) so I had plenty of time to walk down to my second stop. I was to attend a court case – any one, just pick. Normally, if I'm going to become anxious about one

of the days activities it would have begun, but on the walk downtown all I could think about was the hilarious parallels I would make between Judge Judy and the real judicial system. I was excited to see this. Once I actually arrived at the courts I became very uneasy. I wanted to be respectful and it was clear that a lot of the people were at a hard point in life. It seemed strange to be looking over a list names on trial and trying to find some reason to pick one over the other. I just picked a courtroom, rather than a person; #41. It was on the eleventh floor and it seemed like a good decision with a few people lingering waiting to be admitted into the room. It turned out it was a murder trial. Everyone's outfit communicated their role.

It was surreal to witness. Someone had died and two people were brought in wearing handcuffs. It felt weird to be there. Like I was looking in on someone's life and my presence was obtrusive. It was interesting, but what made it interesting was that it was how other people lived. I don't suppose it makes sense to ignore the reality of other's circumstances, but I don't want to take advantage of their situation so that I can rest easy as one who has informed himself. I think what I am trying to say is, how do I see this situation without simply Othering them?

I am probably betraying my ignorance. There are a lot of social issues that I don't know how to understand or place myself within.

Last week I participated in a conversational English class where I was just supposed to talk with someone as they

learn the language. My partner had just moved to New York City and spoke essentially no English. The problems of communication were really potent. It took so much energy to talk about the weather and even still I don't know that we were actually communicating. Once my hour of conversation was done I could return to the world where communication is easy, but, of course, that struggle for understanding will be his reality for a while. It's hard not to Other people. The haves and have-nots. When two people are not in discourse it is a problem on both sides. I was not communicating just as much as he was not. For that hour of discussion we were both Others.

I'm not sure that my experience in court today was very different. I don't know what the implications of that are, but my privilege didn't set me apart.

I understand myself as a product of the people I'm near. My family and friends, the relationships I'm in, are always impacting the way I see the world to such a degree that it would be disingenuous to say I am only a product of my own will. It's not only one or the other, individual or mutually autonomous; the way we frame the question will lead to the type of answers we get. I experience agency, moving through society and making decisions that will affect my own place in life. That's undeniable. On the other hand as I engage the people around me I see their responses. I am inspired by their passion, guarded from their aggression, or weakened by their pain. So little in the world is one or the other, and this is no exception. In this relentless feedback loop I act based on your actions, knowing my actions affect yours. There

are of course boundaries – I don't imagine the world as a codependent, homogeneous society, but I do think there is a tendency towards denying our inter-relation and feigning independence. I simply want to emphasize connections.

In New York City I experienced strangers differently and I think it had something to do with empathy and connection. At home, on my daily commutes and during my routines, strangers are just something that is there and usually in the way of my own progress. When surrounded by the familiar, embedded in relationships, my innate desire to give and receive empathy is satisfied. Strangers feel less significant. My need for empathy, and my intention to empathize satisfied in what is familiar.

Familiarity is not the only thing that changed my connection with strangers while in New York City. When I normally travel, again unfamiliar, my engagement is self-satisfying, and how I relate to strangers is detached. My interaction with people might look similar to my time in New York City – I would periodically talk with a stranger, or wonder at their story, but it would always be at a distance, knowing I belong elsewhere. The nature of apexart's Fellowship and the prolonged stay created a strange liminal space where I felt a certain amount of belonging to the city, while also feeling isolated. I'm attached to New York City and missing the intimacy of home.

Being in an unfamiliar context for a prolonged time seems like the ground for this experience. There was a shift away from seeing others as anonymous people and towards being curious or caring about them. The energy of the city came

from the sidewalks full of people. When I think back to my time I can still remember a few strangers on the street or in the parks and I think of them fondly. It's not that I want to or should become friends with them, but my experience of New York City is rooted in my encounters with people. I could still care and empathize without pretense or commitment.

I'm inspired by people. How others exist in the world as strangers reveals something of their character. There is an underlying current revealed through mutual anonymity that moves me. In both the courtroom and the English class I was confronted with people being vulnerable, and it's hard to maintain a strong face when confronted by people in that position. These examples are exaggerated compared to the day-to-day encounters, but being strangers together creates a certain amount of vulnerability that shifts individuals from being neutral Others to a part of the social tissue through which I make meaning.

I realize there is a way to care about and be affected by others that doesn't demand a relationship. Vulnerability and empathy go hand in hand. No words need to be exchanged to see and be inspired by what it means to be human together. Isolation from familiar relationships led me to a strange closeness with strangers.

June 18, 2014

Thick skin/Thin skin.

I feel with thin skin, I'm protected by thick, and I'm not sure if there's a middle ground. I'm not sure if I can choose to move between them. I miss Cora and routine and the familiar. The

more I miss the more I feel, and sometimes it hurts. As my skin begins to callous I don't feel the homesickness as much but I don't feel New York City either. The people and faces mean less.

I feel like these words make me out to be a wreck. I don't think that I am. But that's what sincerity gets you.

I actually think one of the most intellectually rigorous practices is fostering the ability to feel. Art/Culture/Philosophy are dealing with the world we have learned through practice and conventions. Being sensitive to our interface with the world is a primary insight. Recognizing a dissonance in one's feelings, and trusting that, is the raw material of insight. To foster this demands vulnerability and a willingness to feel pain (not a very ideologically-in-vogue idea).

But don't get me wrong; I do not think carving an emotional precipice is useful. That would be closer to self-induced sensationalism. The point isn't to instigate (or feign?) feelings but to be sensitive to them. I think people generally try to regulate feelings (rightly so) but I think there is a point where it becomes limiting in experience and limiting in insight.

I remember the walk that catalyzed this post. I cannot recall the events of the day, but in the wake of cumulative strain, and compounding stress, I was beginning to come undone. As I walked, the depth of the city and the potency of empathy was becoming too much. At some point I became numb. I did nothing and made no conscious decision, but I began to callous. Nearing Union Square it occurred to me that I was

not upset anymore, but simultaneously I was severed from the city and the people that are usually so inspiring. My thickened skin made me less sensitive to what had upset me but with a side effect of being less in tune with my surroundings.

Feeling is important. It is an understated type of rigor that informs how we know the world. But feeling is not necessarily easy, or comfortable. There are, I think, two ways to insulate ourselves. First is to allow skin to callous. The other is through context – the familiar and routine. To my mind, this is why apexart's programming is so valuable. It's a chance to feel, removing routine and exposing its participants. From there the onus is on the Fellow to engage. The Fellow is only left with their own skin between them and the world.

Sensitivity in a protected environment accomplishes nothing – sensitivity to what? Routine and the familiar become a type of insulation for thin skin. This became apparent in my month with apexart. The nature of the programming removed any buffer between myself and experience. Everyday I was confronted with opportunity to feel. I felt motionless in the rush of the city, and empathy amongst its people. I felt grateful for opportunity and a longing for home. Each day's experiences were more than what happened during the event attended. When I was confronted with relentless experience the only way to protect myself from discomfort is to insulate myself – calloused skin.

I think comfort, this insulation, is important too. This is not a call to always be strained in the name of some ideal. Comfort is a place to reflect on exposure and use that to create growth. It's

a balance. Oscillating between experience and the familiar as a way to know the world and to thrive in it. Thriving, with its connotations to growth and progress, happens through experience and the unfamiliar. My desire to foster sensitivity to my surroundings is in reaction towards a tendency to stifle feelings for the sake of protection. While I respect the need for safety, when a body is out of balance it must limp to compensate. To my eye there is a general bent towards comfort at the expense of this rigorous exercise of feeling. The limp will not leave until both legs are strengthened.

I don't know if there's a way to feel selectively, but I suspect, even if there was, it would be a loss. Being out of control (again, not a very ideologically-in-vogue idea) moves me outside of the insulated routines that keep me from feeling. I want to believe that if people were more willing to feel, their thinned skin would lead them to a type of intimacy with their context; but I know that's too grand. I know that it's just one ideology seeing the deficiencies of another. I can only speak to my own experience and that has shown me that I am most connected to my passions when I am willing to feel. It is not easy and certainly has drawbacks, but I have found a more generative base of meaning when my skin is thinned.

I want experience. It's the best way I know to make meaning of the world. I was struck by the fountains outside the Brooklyn museum and how a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge felt different from the Williamsburg Bridge. I was moved by the sincerity of people and the significance of our differences. While I was in New York City I was confronted with my own ability to feel.

What happens to participants in a program of this kind is original to it. These are nuanced experiences that happen through the situations the Fellowship coordinates. The understanding I gained was instigated through this program's balance between place, people, and solitude. I'm concerned that my descriptions might sound like idealistic or nostalgic reflections – I hold these as more than memory, but the kind of experience that fosters passion. The day-to-day of the Fellowship feels distant, but the significance of these experiences are still near.

1. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.

T.J. McLachlan is an artist living on the Canadian prairies. After receiving a BFA in Critical and Cultural Practices from Emily Carr University of Art and Design he is now a graduate student at the University of Alberta where he has received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Grant to study the role of systemic privilege in meaning-making processes. Embracing an interdisciplinary approach, he looks to find connections among disparate fields such as Linguistics, Critical Race, and Whiteness Studies to inform his artistic research.

Nancy Wender

Therapy and the Fellowship Program

Psychotherapist for NYC Fellows 2012-present
December 2016

As a psychotherapist in private practice, it is not often that I have the privilege to expand my horizons in such a profound and meaningful way. I have been able to do this by meeting with each of the past 35 Inbound Fellows for four sessions of psychotherapy, pro bono. Each Fellow spent one month in New York as part of apexart's cultural immersion program. This essay will discuss the Fellows' experiences, highlight some of my observations, and discuss, from my vantage point, the efficacy of the apexart program.

My Role as Therapist

The 35 Fellows, comprised of 13 women and 22 men, some with fluency in English and others with rudimentary English language skills, hailed from 30 different countries. They arrived to see me, in some cases, with preconceived ideas of what therapy is, questioning its value or wondering if the apexart staff thought they were "crazy" and felt they needed to see a therapist in order to participate in their Fellowship. 15 of the Fellows had seen a therapist at one point during their lives for emotional or life concerns (i.e., job anxiety, money worries, relationship issues). A few of the Fellows had a parent or other relative working in the field as either a psychologist or psychiatrist. In some of their cultures, speaking with anyone,

particularly a stranger, about his or her problems or important concerns was not sanctioned or encouraged. I explained that we were there to have a conversation and to provide a stable platform from which they could venture forth during their time in New York City. I also felt it was incumbent upon me, as with any psychotherapy patient I regularly see, to let them know that I would honor their confidentiality and would only alert apexart staff if there were a major safety concern.

In part, I saw my role as trying to help them ascertain the value of the experience within which they found themselves in New York City. Many of them felt alone, got lost often, and had to grapple with the loneliness of missing their families. 26 of the 35 Fellows either were married or were currently in a committed relationship, and 12 had children. They were able to Skype with their families as often as was feasible and call when desired. Families were encouraged to read the respective journals, as another window into their family member's experiences. This contact was very meaningful to them and provided some sense of grounding and familiarity while they were embarking on many new daily experiences. They have stepped out of their regular lives for one month, could not work while here, and were asked to focus solely on the activities they were scheduled to do. Rare an opportunity it was, to put one's life and concerns to the side for that length of time. Disorienting for some, invigorating and freeing to others, to be sure.

I also believe that part of my responsibility was to bridge the gap between their home and New York. In psychological terms, their sessions with me were their transitional object,

imbued with meaning on many levels. They spoke at length about their families, wives or husbands, girlfriends or boyfriends, their children, and friends. We viewed photos of their work, their families, and other images important to them. The one-on-one time with me, four one-hour sessions each, same day and time weekly, gave them my undivided attention, support, encouragement, and an opportunity for introspection and reflection. They were afforded the chance to speak in English without being rushed or pressured and could do so in a quiet, soothing environment that would support their effort.

I believe that it was important to ask about their lives previous to coming to New York, and in recounting the narrative of their lives, they came away with a deeper appreciation for their own struggles and the resilience and courage that they brought to the apexart experience. I was able to bear witness to these heroic efforts.

A few of the Fellows came into their sessions with important issues they wanted to discuss, be it a relationship issue, a career conundrum, or confusion about the desired focus of their lives, and remarked about the apexart opportunity happening at a pivotal moment in their lives. Others were willing to talk more generally about their lives and goals but without the desire to probe in a deeper manner. Whatever was helpful to them was what I chose to honor. Several Fellows spoke of their desire to find a therapist when they arrive home, as they noted that being in my office was an important touchstone going forward in life and trying to resolve conflicts with help from a psychotherapist.

I also learned that seeing me for the four sessions was an important note of continuity for them, as most of their meetings, activities and contacts were one-time events only. Therapy offered a comfortable, quiet and consistent moment of reflection and connection within the diversity of their scheduled events.

Cultural and Language Differences

Several of the Fellows struggled with English, a few only having learned English prior to traveling to New York. With a slower pace of speaking, they were able to communicate more effectively over the month they were here. As the Fellows were not permitted to work on their own art while here, one Fellow wisely commented, “I can’t hide behind my work, and I had to speak first.”

Culturally, I found some interesting differences: South Koreans do not make eye contact when speaking with others, and, over time, the Fellows felt more comfortable adapting and learning to do so. More than one Fellow came from a culture where women were expected to be in the home and tend to their families rather than work, this in stark contrast to our ever-changing roles for women in the States.

One Fellow had not traveled out of his country nor had been on an airplane before his Fellowship experience. Another had not been away from his wife and son before this time.

Others had family or spousal support, while others arrived with the skepticism and fear of their families looming large. Over time, this too was abated, and they were able to let those close

to them know that they were doing well, were safe, and were enjoying and/or being challenged by their experiences.

Fellow Journals

Each Fellow posted journal entries detailing the images, thoughts, and feelings about his/her activities, both in the New York area and in Washington, D.C. These were discussed and commented upon, and I was surprised that seldom did I see a similar photo or read descriptions that resembled another. Each was unique, personal, and wonderfully individualistic and idiosyncratic.

Volunteerism

Several of the Fellows found volunteering to be very meaningful and important to them. While not engaging currently in any volunteer efforts in their home cities, several now want to incorporate volunteerism into their lives when they return home. In one instance, a Fellow did some research from here and could not find any organization that met his goals. Therefore, he decided he might start a volunteer program with a specific organization to meet that need. The opportunity to give back was a profound one and changed their outlook on how to give their lives meaning and purpose.

apexart Fellowship as a Transformational Experience

More than one half of the Fellows found the Fellowship transformational in some way for them personally or in their everyday lives. Perhaps it was a new way of viewing oneself – someone shy who was able to engage more freely with others and enjoy those experiences. Another was considering a changed work/life balance upon arriving home.

They saw themselves capable of handling new situations and prided themselves on solving problems they encountered. One commented on his realization that after his apexart experience, he has confidence now that he could live and thrive somewhere other than where he is currently living.

Time took on a new meaning for them. Plucking them from their everyday lives, families, schedules, and goals, they were free to examine their lives in ways without pressure. One female Fellow mentioned that her life at home is finely calibrated to get many things done in the course of a day, and by being here, she could suspend those activities and enjoy the freedom that was afforded her. Also, she was able to reflect on the path her life was taking and perhaps make some changes upon arriving home.

One Fellow commented, “New York is heaven on earth... I can take photos here, wherein my country, I have to ask permission to do that.” Another reflected on the fact that within two weeks of being here, he was routinely being asked for directions. He felt gratified by feeling at ease here, and others noticed his confidence of movement through the streets and on the subway and felt comfortable approaching him.

Each Fellow prepared, or in some cases did not prepare, for his/her Fellowship before arriving here. One purposefully did not watch videos or movies or read any books about New York, just wanting to arrive with no expectations, absorb the experience, and take each day as it came. Others spoke with friends who lived in or traveled to New York, so as to understand their experiences as a potential guide. A few of

the Fellows had been to the United States previously, so they had a more realistic picture of what they might encounter upon their arrival in New York.

One Fellow recounted that New York offers more freedom than he finds in his country, and people smile here. Therefore, he noted there is less tension here, and it seems relaxed to him, vis-à-vis his home city.

I heard often their bewilderment about what the apexart Fellowship was all about. Was it a quid pro quo, for example? They found it hard to believe that this experience did not call for them to give something in return, other than their willingness to keep to their schedule, be open-minded, and attempt new things. Some embraced the improvisation class, the karaoke event, singing with a group by the water, observation of a trial in progress at the courthouse, a volunteer activity, for example, while others had trepidations about participating. In these cases, they felt it was okay to observe with the knowledge that they may have wished to be a part of the group, had their fear subsided. I was amazed and delighted by their newfound confidence and growth, though, over the month's Fellowship.

We discussed what value the apexart experience might hold for them, and I found it important to comment that it might only be with time and distance that this experience can be reflected upon and its value ascertained. Several of the Fellows have maintained contact with me since returning home. I have seen photos of their travels, news of their art activities and projects, updates about their thinking since we

last met. The Fellows were invited to Skype or e-mail should they want to pursue discussions about a particular topic once they were integrated back into their normal routine.

Observations

How fortunate I was to have had this extraordinary opportunity to meet with the Fellows in a therapy setting. I have been humbled by their honesty and willingness to face this complicated city while not communicating in their native languages in most cases. I often mentioned that I would have been terrified had I been in their situation.

Things that the Fellows found interesting during their travels through New York City and the boroughs were fascinating to me. The photos – the light, angles, objects, and perspective from which they chose to shoot for their journals – were things we New Yorkers take for granted everyday. A reminder to view the mundane in a new, invigorated light.

Several Fellows commented on feeling such gratitude for the good things in their lives, despite, in some cases, some challenging situations from which they came. This is the human condition but one that is valuable for us to keep in mind, as we strive to put life in perspective.

I learned many things during these sessions: different languages, cultures, different worldviews, resilience in the face of unspeakable losses, and grand triumphs. I learned about Raku, the Japanese cracked glazes on ceramics, via a video the Fellow sent to me. Another helped me understand

the printing methods he uses in his work. Another Fellow shared some of her wonderful writing with me, and the pieces gave me a wider lens with which to understand this Fellow's inner world.

Efficacy of the apexart Fellowship Program

I learned that the apexart program is unique in many ways, and those ways support growth, reflection, change, and reevaluation. The Fellows became emissaries for New York and dispelled any preconceived notions of New Yorkers, or Americans, being self-involved, rude, or unwilling to help. Many have registered interest in returning to New York, with family by their side, at some future point, and a few of them have done so by the time of this writing. Some have mentioned their desire, perhaps, to move to New York or send their children to college in the States. One Fellow did return for a year and fulfilled a long-held dream – to have gallery shows here. Others commented on setting a path for their children to emulate one day, that hard work can lead to growth, change, and a brighter future.

Several of the Fellows commented upon their desire to be hosts in their countries for the International Fellows from the New York City area. A tribute to the value of the apexart program.

Conclusion

I find it nearly impossible to overstate the positive impact on me from these experiences with the Fellows. I was given a privileged glimpse inside their lives, had the opportunity to share their successes, uncertainties, and insecurities

and share their delight at experiencing new, enriching opportunities.

For me, the desire to give back increased with each Fellow I saw, and I am grateful for this splendid opportunity and look forward to meeting with the future Fellows as they arrive for their upcoming month's Fellowships.

Nancy Wender, LCSW, a New York City-based psychotherapist practicing in Tribeca, works with adult individuals and couples. She brings an eclectic approach to her work and draws upon different theoretical models to inform her treatment hypotheses and style. Whether a patient has an immediate problem to be addressed or wants to examine one's past for greater understanding, Ms. Wender believes that psychotherapy can be a lifeline for many in these complicated, troubling, confusing times in which we live. The objectivity of a therapist can add a trained, impartial support as one tries to navigate life's complexities and make desired changes in one's life.

Casey Smith

Fields of Play

NYC Fellow from Washington, D.C., June 2010

Washington, D.C. Host to NYC Fellows, 2009-present

December 2014

I'm no authority on the subject of artist residency programs; I'll be the first to admit it. What I do know about them comes mostly from two sources: my friends who are artists and writers who have described their residencies to me, and from my experiences with International Fellows in the apexart program. For the past 18 years I've been on the faculty of the Corcoran School of Arts and Design at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where I teach writing, poetry, and print culture history. I met my first apexart Fellow in 2009; it was early March. She was a poet from Macedonia, Sofija Grandakovska, and she arrived on Amtrak. I met her at Union Station. At that time, I really didn't know anything about apexart or their Fellowship philosophy. A friend of mine, Jayme McClellan, at Civilian Art Projects, asked me if I could meet with Sofija. Jayme had worked with apexart in the past. She figured that since I was also a poet we would have something in common (and she was correct).

For whatever reason, I've found that people are afraid of poets, but that's a subject for a different essay, probably a comic essay. I also believe that art is a subset of poetry, but that too is another essay. But, staying with the idea for a moment... maybe the apexart Fellowship experience is a

kind of poetry unfurling in time and space. In one sense the time and space are limited to a month in New York, but in a more crucial sense the time extends into the unforeseen future and the place extends to all corners of the globe. Neither are static.

Don't think about poetry as lines of verse, or as emotional messaging. Think instead about poetry as a field of play, maybe as a playground. Poetry invites openness in its making and its interpretation; it's inherently inclusive. When it closes off interpretation, it's called propaganda. There's no teleological imperative in poetry, at least not the kind of poetry I'm interested in. But what does this have to do with experiential Fellowship programs such as apexart's? I think it has everything to do with it, and in the short space of this essay I'll try to illustrate the connections.

To say the Fellows come from all over the world is actually quite accurate. I'm sure that I'm neglecting to mention every country that has been home to an apexart Fellow I've met in D.C.: Argentina, Cambodia, France, Egypt, Lebanon, South Korea, Ireland, Chile, China, Australia, Greece, South Africa, The Philippines, England, Austria, Venezuela, Macedonia, Montenegro, Uganda, Latvia, and even Canada. The Fellows are all over 30 years old, and they've been nominated by members of their own communities. The other thing they have in common is that they haven't spent significant time in the U.S. Most of them identify as an artist of some stripe, but not all. I've learned over the years that there are no firm lines demarcating the arts from the humanities (or from the sciences if you want to get technical). apexart Fellows

are not only artists and designers; they're also journalists, theologians, community activists and organizers, physicists, and yes, even poets. There is simply no such thing as a typical apexart Fellow.

Not all of the Inbound Fellows make the trip to D.C. during their month-long residency, probably about half of them do. They follow the same type of itinerary familiar to them from their days in New York. After meeting at the station, we go to the hotel, register, and drop off their bags. They are either charmed or horrified by my ancient car. Many, or maybe most, of them never ride in a private car during their time in New York. Often we'll sit down for lunch or coffee and pore over a map of D.C. They show me their itinerary, and I'll help plot out their routes. The scheduled activities are usually counter-intuitive, and rarely obvious. In this way, it's very much a continuation of their routines in New York. We generally make plans to meet the following day. I'll invite them to lectures, poetry readings, and neighborhood parties. I try to introduce them to my friends. It's all very fluid.

But, of course, what they really want to talk about is New York City. They talk about their mistaken preconceptions, how they initially felt like they were on a movie set (this is virtually a universal response). They talk about the speed and density of New York, and how D.C. feels so slow, flat, and relatively empty. They make the inevitable comparisons that most New Yorkers make about D.C., and most of these comparisons are fair. D.C. feels like a retreat from New York; the air is a little easier to breathe, there's more green space, more horizon. The federal government

spends a lot of money on gardening. The noise is not as noisy. The streets and sidewalks aren't as littered. Everything seems more orderly in D.C. and consequently more sleepy. This gives the Fellows a space to consider their New York experience. I tell them the truth: New York is both a thing apart, like no other American city, and also a sort of macro-microcosm of America. It's hard to express this in words, but somehow after spending a couple of days in D.C. it's easier for them to get perspective on what makes New York unique.

The online journals created by the NYC Fellows during their stay combine photos with short texts of every genre – journalism, memoir, diary, poetry, surrealism, philosophy, etc. Reading these accounts as they progress day-by-day you can see the Fellows in action, registering details and perceptions that have become invisible and imperceptible through habituation. This is a long way of saying they have fresh eyes. Through reading these journals I've learned a lot about the things I take for granted, about the systems and institutions in which I'm embedded. One of my favorite journals simply lists the places the Fellow has been on each day of the residency. I think of it as one piece with many parts. In my reading, it's a list poem that doubles as a love poem to both the city and the apexart Fellowship program. It's radical in its diversity. Like the program itself.

And then there's Washington, D.C., a city that is entirely atypical and unrepresentative of America. The comments in the apexart journals about their days in D.C. reveal sharp opinions, usually about the hypocrisy of American mythology

and its representation in oversized, banal statues and monuments. The Fellows see the dome of the U.S. Capitol as we leave Union Station, and most of them comment that it seems bigger or smaller on television and movies. Scale is off-kilter here. The Federal part of D.C., the area around the Mall and the White House, is in many respects a theme park. At times it seems closer in spirit to Disneyland than it does to, say, Baltimore or Philadelphia. The Federal system makes it feel like a perpetual state fair. apexart Fellows notice this almost immediately.

Of course, this is just part of D.C. I always try to get them out of the tourist core and up to the neighborhood where I live, Mt. Pleasant. I feel strangely obliged to show them that not all of D.C. is a theme park. apexart Fellows are genuinely baffled that D.C. isn't a state or a city in a state, and that residents don't have basic voting rights. Once a Fellow asked me if it was like Vatican City. I had never thought about it in that way, but her question was perceptive. apexart Fellows can always sniff out how strange D.C. is. Every planned city is strange.

Sometimes we'll meet three or four times over the space of 48 hours. I usually spend part of an afternoon showing them around the college where I teach. Sometimes they'll visit a class I'm teaching or join me and my students on a field trip to the Smithsonian or the Library of Congress. Sometimes they'll hang out for a couple of hours with my students in their studios. Generally speaking, I find it more rewarding to introduce them to people instead of showing them museums or historical sites. They can do those touristy kinds of things if they have an open space in their itinerary. Sometimes at the end of their D.C. stay

I'll pick them up at the hotel where I dropped them off two days earlier and we'll have a little debriefing about their experience on the way back to Union Station.

I'm always curious to hear what they say. They are unusually astute and perceptive, which I think is a direct effect of the mental focus that their daily itinerary cultivates. It seems as if they are on a vast reading program: reading culture and society, seeing how other groups of people manage to arrange the affairs of living and working and making sense of their world.

Of course, we talk about geopolitical "big picture" issues. But in most cases they are more interested in talking about their daily lives, their families, their ways of living. It's part of the success of the apexart philosophy that they rarely talk about art in careerist terms. Sometimes we don't talk about art at all.

D.C. is Lilliputian compared to New York, as a pond is to an ocean, so they walk virtually everywhere. To be an apexart Fellow is to walk. Lots of walking. I wonder if apexart Fellows tend to lose weight during their month in New York? Of course, they are walking to get somewhere; it's purposive travel, a form of commuting. But the apexart "mentality" fosters a kind of active awareness even in seemingly mundane situations. Walking invites both observation and participation in direct and unmediated ways. Walking is like reading; it's a kind of radical freedom.

It was a good idea for apexart to change the name of the program from Residency to Fellowship, because they really

aren't "resident" in the conventional sense. They are always moving. Sometimes I describe it as kind of "anti-residency" because the popular conception is so entrenched that an artist residency is an exercise in radical isolation. The artist goes to a place to isolate and insulate. All focus is on "the work" and its development. This was essentially Henry David Thoreau's self-imposed residency program at Walden Pond. He went there to think and philosophize, but also to finish a manuscript.

When I meet with apexart Fellows I start by asking a lot of questions and listening closely to their responses. After a few minutes of this, they start to ask me questions. Then we're off. Even the Fellows who struggle with spoken English want to talk about what they've been doing during their days as they follow their itinerary. They want to process or activate their experiences. Essentially, they are telling their stories. Often they mention how the apexart Fellowship experience has re-oriented their conception of the possible. Practices that once seemed circumscribed now seem open for a re-imagination. These seeds are planted by the very structure of the program: looking outside of self in order to look inside and start the cycle over. It's powerful when groups of people are involved in this kind of inquiry and action. Humans, like most mammals, are inherently social. We need to band together for health and survival. The apexart philosophy makes other more conventional residency programs seem solipsistic.

Back in the summer of 2010 I was invited to come up to New York and experience the program for a week. Like the Fellows coming from around the world, I had a vigorous daily itinerary

that kept me busy through the days and most of the nights. I slept well that week, exhausted from walking in the summer heat. One thing I learned for certain: it isn't easy to be an apexart Fellow. For me it was a totalizing and initially dizzying experience, a vast mosaic of fragments that came into focus over time. I know from subsequent correspondence with Fellows when they return home that they can only make full sense of their apexart experience months, and sometimes years, afterward. And even then, they conceive of the experience holistically, as one big thing sewn together by a thousand little things.

I've learned to be wary of making generalizations about them and their experiences on the Fellowship. That's probably one of my favorite things about the apexart Fellowship program: it defies easy categorization. Since that first meeting with Sofija, I've served as an informal guide and host for over 30 apexart Fellows, about four or five a year. To be completely honest, it's an unalloyed joy. I get to make new friends that I wouldn't otherwise. I learn about how people live in places that I'll likely never get the chance to visit. This is the original meaning of "fellowship," it's a cousin to friendship. It seems increasingly rare in our daily lives to find circumstances that are mutually beneficial. It sounds like such a cliché: mutually beneficial. What we're really talking about when we use that phrase is the success of healthy society: Taking and giving in equal measure to the point where they become indistinguishable.

It's not right to think only about the experience of the resident in a residency program, or the Fellow in a Fellowship

program. Of course, this is a major component. But it's not the only one. We need to think also of the radiating effect that the Resident or Fellow has on the community that he or she enters, even over the brief space of a month, or a weekend for that matter. And we also need to consider the effect that the Fellow brings back. Sometimes the changes might seem imperceptible, but that makes them no less real or influential.

Over my 25-years-plus of teaching college students, I've learned that the so-called "content" of any given lesson is far less important than the memories and echoes it generates. The ideal teacher models learning. The student sees how a teacher learns (asks questions, investigates, tests evidence, speculates, hypothesizes, etc.). In most respects the apexart Fellowship philosophy mirrors this basic orientation. In short, we are all students in one form or another. And so it follows that we are all teachers in one form or another.

I should end this essay with an anecdote, something radical in its specificity. But somehow that would seem to deny the collective and accumulative force of the apexart Fellowship program and my interactions with it. I prefer not to think about isolable events or happenings, but rather a grand collective. Like the mosaic I mentioned earlier, it's in the process of perpetually coming into focus for me. Maybe it will stay a little blurry on the edges, and in doing so remain true to memory. Which brings this essay back, as promised, to the truth of poetry.

Casey Smith has taught poetry, writing, and print-culture history at the Corcoran School of Arts and Design at George Washington University College of Art + Design since 1997. His poetry and literary work has been published in various broadsides, chapbooks, journals, and artists' catalogs. He is the author of the uniquely unreadable conceptual poem *Opulent Stone Moccasins*, published by Ubu Editions in 2010. In addition to his scholarly and literary writing, he occasionally curates exhibitions and reading series in the Washington region.

Yona Backer

Gift Culture: Rethinking Results in Nonprofit Arts Funding

August 2015

Sometimes the most radical, creative ideas happen when we are able to step away from our daily lives. Having dedicated time and space, along with access to resources, can lead to important breakthroughs. This holds true for anyone looking to develop their research and practice, and particularly for artists working in any discipline.

Residency programs designed for artists serve as important incubators for new research and artistic experimentation. Artists may produce a body of work, test an unrealized project, or develop a new idea; and some programs offer an immersive learning experience based on cultural exchange or interactions within a community environment. Residencies that place artists in specific geographic or communal contexts, often with peers and mentors from all over the world, create an environment where artists can make substantial jumps in their work in a short time.

While most residencies provide space and time, artists may have to pay for the opportunity. Programs can be grouped in the following ways: Some are fully funded without fees; some are partially funded with fees; some offer stipends/awards; still others are project/work based. Some are invitation-only, while others use an open application

process. Residencies also vary in length, from one week to several months.

There are myriad residencies in the world, ranging from highly prestigious, internationally known programs such as the DAAD Berlin Artists-in-Residence program or the Banff Centre in Canada, to more informal or experimental retreats, such as BoxoProjects in Joshua Tree, California; Denniston Hill in the southern Catskills of New York; or apexart's experimental Fellowship program in New York City and international locations. Whereas residencies associated with presenting institutions, like those of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, or UCLA's Hammer Museum in California, mainly invite established artists to create fully funded projects, other residencies offer artists the freedom to focus on developing their process and practice without pressure to produce a final project or body of work, and to experiment with new ideas or techniques.

The range of residency programs is far and wide; programs are mostly defined by the caliber of artists who attend them and/or the support and services offered. For the purposes of this essay, I will use the term "residency program" loosely, focusing on those that provide artists with time and space to develop their practice and process.

This essay reflects on the fundraising challenges faced by nonprofit arts institutions in general, and those that run residency programs in particular. In doing so, I offer my take on our deeply flawed nonprofit arts system based on my experience both as a funder at the Andy Warhol

Foundation for the Visual Arts and, now, as a strategic consultant for foundations as well as for nonprofit arts organizations. I have also coached individual artists, giving advice and helping them think strategically about their careers. In addition to my experience in the philanthropic sector, I founded and ran Third Streaming, an experimental art and performance space based in SoHo (now closed). Thus, this essay is also informed by my understanding of the fundraising issues and challenges related to sustaining a noncommercial space.

In the course of more than 20 years in the field, as an arts funder, producer, curator, and founder of a space, I have gained valuable insights and experience, which, combined, inform my current practice as a strategic consultant. And of the insights I have gained, the most valuable have come from working, conversing, and spending time with artists. To this day, I continue to take my cue from artists and cultural producers working on the ground, whose viewpoints come from firsthand knowledge of what's going on in the field.

Disruption

We are living in an era of disruption. Given the enormity of the challenges facing our rapidly changing global society, it is hard to talk about our field without taking into consideration the broader socioeconomic systems currently in place. Society is increasingly polarizing along economic, political, racial, and ethnic lines, creating greater inequalities and gaps. This parallels the inequities present in our arts ecosystem, which uses a framework of economic thought that is stuck in the past,

divorced from the complex challenges and demands of our time. Fundamental sociopolitical and economic shifts along with technological innovations are setting the stage for a very different way of being and working, yet most nonprofits and the foundations that support them are slow to adapt to these profound changes. And in the midst of moderate economic growth, numerous nonprofit arts institutions, including many that run residency programs, are struggling to meet their annual budgets.

The radical changes in funding patterns for nonprofits are indicative of a system that is no longer working. As government support continues to decline (for the most part), and as foundations shift away from general operating support, contributions from individuals are being sought to make up the difference. This phenomenon has had a destabilizing effect on the arts sector, hindering the ability of nonprofits to work at the scale that is needed to effectively meet their mission.

Some nonprofits are able to attract corporate support, particularly when big names and large audiences are involved. This doesn't usually apply to residency programs, however, which are less "sexy," and lacking in entertainment appeal. Corporate monies spent on cultural programs tend to be earmarked for the larger institutions, and usually do not include direct support for artists. Like so many other nonprofits, organizations that run residency programs are increasingly forced to attract support from other sources and raise unrestricted monies through galas, smaller cultivation events, and ticket and art sales, among other tactics.

The fact that we are witnessing vibrant art centers across the country and beyond speaks to the resiliency of nonprofit arts institutions, and the entrepreneurialism and tireless dedication of the visionary leadership teams at the helm of these institutions. Yet many of the smaller and/or culturally specific groups are facing closure or have been forced to drastically cut their operating expenses in order to meet their annual budgets. And while many nonprofits have regained some measure of financial stability post-recession, their status remains precarious, particularly in some of the harder-hit areas of the country. It is not surprising that “the bigger, wealthier, whiter metropolitan organizations are doing better than the poorer, rural organizations and those serving culturally-specific constituents.”¹

Given the current realities, it is clear to me that our arts ecosystem requires radical, transformative change. To that end, I draw inspiration from the work of Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, who provide a creative and practical approach to shifting our economy to one that is more resilient, intentional, inclusive, and aware. In their book *Leading from the Emerging Future*, Scharmer and Kaufer state: “The blind spot of our time is that we take mainstream economic thought for granted, as if it were a natural law. But in reality, all so-called economic laws begin to melt and morph into something else the moment you begin to change the most important variable: the quality of awareness of the participants in a system.”²

Process versus Product

Too often, foundations do not provide support for salaries and other operational expenses tied to meeting a nonprofit’s

overall mission. Instead, funders generally prioritize specific programs that align with their own institutional goals, but not necessarily with the broad goals of the nonprofits they support. For example, a residency program may be able to get funding that will cover its direct expenses, but struggles to secure multi-year grants to pay for overhead, costs which are critical to running a robust program.

Compounding this issue is the fact that overhead costs in the nonprofit sector tend to be much greater than what's visible in financial reports and fundraising literature. Donors tend to reward organizations with the "leanest" profiles, while nonprofit leaders feel pressure to conform to funders' expectations by spending as little as possible on overhead, and by reporting lower-than-actual overhead rates. Thus funding is skewed toward programmatic activities. This presents a dilemma for residency programs, which prioritize process over product, and as such provide services that are much less visible to the general public than programs of presenting institutions.

Residency programs must therefore develop ways to communicate the impact of their services on the artistic community, such that funders recognize their infrastructure needs and the logic for overhead investment. Funders and grantees need to have honest conversations on the issue, and explore funding strategies that enable an organization to work at scale in order to advance its mission and vision.

In today's environment, nonprofits of all shapes and sizes are continuously vying for support from donors and funding

organizations with messages that affirm the worthiness of their missions. As James D. Woods and Chris W. Johnson write, in an article on economic impact, “It’s a competition rife with nuance and largely decided by how substantially nonprofits can prove the mission-focused impact of their work.”³

When it comes to defining outcomes and impact, a requirement of most foundations and donors, residency programs are further challenged. Those that promote artistic process and that encourage risk-taking and experimentation must find effective ways to demonstrate the benefits of their work.

Rethinking Results

An article in *Inside Philanthropy* had this to say about artist residency programs: “We tend to view artistic residencies through the lens of inspirational solitude and the classic ‘back-to-nature’ ethos. Upon further reflection, we realize we do this because we’re projecting. We imagine environments that would be conducive toward *our* ability to create and inevitably imagine some rugged, romantic landscape like the wind-swept Great Plains or the mountains of New England. There’s just one catch. Artists and writers can thrive in other, less isolating environments.”⁴

There are plenty of progressive foundations that do not solely abide by the traditional definition of an artist retreat. However, *Inside Philanthropy’s* view does illustrate the disconnect that often exists between the organizations that serve artists and the revenue providers that fund them.

Residencies that provide artists with time and space along with a wide range of services and support systems tend to fall in a nebulous category when it comes to funding. Securing support from aligned funding partners that value the experimental nature of residencies narrows the playing field substantially. Many nonprofits may find themselves in a compromised position, having to adjust their programs or infrastructure in order to meet foundation requirements. Consequently, many residency programs have “added value” to their programs, creating platforms for residents to interact with the public, engage with communities, develop cross-sector partnerships, and/or make public presentations to meet foundation requirements.

This is not unique to residency programs; many nonprofits tailor programming to meet foundations’ goals. This practice can be harmful, however, disrupting an organization’s natural life-cycle. Programs shaped to meet a donor’s needs may not be sustainable over time (donors often change their funding priorities), and have the potential to overextend an organization’s capacity, impose growth prematurely, and/or move the organization away from its mission.

It is reasonable, given the nature of the relationship and the power dynamics involved, that foundations want the assurance that their support is going to make an impact. However, for many funders this translates into producing something concrete, with measurable results. This approach is limiting and stands in contradiction to how the art world actually functions. When it comes to investing in artistic practice, which is not necessarily quantifiable, artists, or

the residency programs that serve them, are nonetheless challenged to make the case for support. We need to be more intentional in designing processes that are equitable as well as sustainable.

Most artist-endowed foundations understand the importance of supporting artistic practice and process, and the profound impact a residency can have on artists' development. Residencies are valued, because of what they might lead to, and for the innovations and new thinking that emerge when immersed in a "lab" environment. Thus, artist-endowed foundations are generally not as interested in metrics and data. This allows residency programs to make the case by defining impact from an artist-centric perspective, allowing for a more fluid and realistic understanding of the residency experience. This perspective is not the norm, however, as many foundations that fund contemporary arts and culture do not necessarily apply an artist-centered lens to their grantmaking.

Whatever the requirements of a given funder, demonstrating positive impact is absolutely critical to any organization's survival. In the absence of tangible products or metrics, situating the artist residency within the frame of the overall arts ecology becomes an essential strategy in making the case for relevancy.

Cooperation

It is possible to re-imagine the role of the institution as well as philanthropic practice by looking at the opportunities that exist when applying a model based on cooperation. To paraphrase Scharmer and Kaufer, this requires shifting our purview

from an “ego-system” focused entirely on the well-being of oneself to an “eco-system” awareness that emphasizes the well-being of the whole. To take it one step further, it means breaking out of our silos and looking at the arts and culture sector as a holistic body of connected institutions rather than solely focusing on the individual role arts organizations play within their specific locales.⁵

Cooperation is based on the ability to listen at many levels, and to let go of expectations of specific outcomes, which runs contrary to the way most funding bodies work. It requires a shift in relationship between nonprofits and the funding organizations that support them, moving from simple dialogue to a more co-creative process of understanding the system together from diverse perspectives. Collectively, these stakeholders from multiple sectors can move into a place of co-creative flow and deep relationship to create new structures that are mutually beneficial. This can only happen when there is openness, transparency, and shared ownership.

Most donors and foundations, as they evaluate residencies, tend to overlook field impact and instead apply a micro lens to their assessment process. In other words, foundations will look at how an individual organization is performing on its own without necessarily taking a broader view of how it behaves within the larger arts ecosystem. Traditionally, foundations have focused on impact that is direct, but they should also consider the catalytic impact and the innovations that residency programs can achieve by looking at the broader issues related to the mission statement, and how mission and vision connects with the larger ecosystem.

A few progressive arts foundations, such as the Lambert and Ford Foundations in New York, and the Doen Foundation in Amsterdam, have changed their grantmaking strategies to better leverage the collective resources of their grantee partners in addition to providing them with monies for long-term sustainability. Others, like the Joyce Foundation in Chicago, have made strong inroads in the area of sustainability, investing in the infrastructure of cultural organizations in the Midwest. Today, an increasing number of foundations are beginning to realize the disruption caused by imposing their institutional goals on nonprofits or by changing their priorities without fair notice. What if, instead of taking a top-down approach, funders were to work with their stakeholders as equal partners, and find ways to collectively leverage their influence, power, and monies?

Given our changing environment and challenged field, philanthropic organizations – and arts funders in particular – need to take a radically different approach if they want to remain relevant in our turbulent, fast-paced world. To be truly responsive to current realities, one must have the ability to forecast the effects of environmental changes on the arts and culture sector. Furthermore, foundations should take a more expansive view by focusing not just on a particular program or project, but also on the broader issues related to mission achievement and field-wide impact. Instead of providing piecemeal assistance to a multitude of nonprofits, funders should commit to supporting grantees over a multi-year period until they are able to meet a specific challenge or reach a certain scale of impact. Accordingly, nonprofits should shift their focus

from the scale of their organization to the impact their organization can help to achieve over time.⁶

Challenging as it may be for nonprofits to define impact at the individual artist and community level, finding ways to convey the short- and long-term effects their residency programs have on artists and their work, their peers, the field of arts and culture, and beyond, would provide potential funders with a broader understanding of the importance of investing in artistic process. Framing impact and relevancy within the larger arts ecology will help move the conversation forward.

Pushing the Boundaries

There is no doubt that most foundations supporting art and culture deeply value the important contributions artists make to the field, and to building healthy, vibrant communities. However, foundations and nonprofit arts organizations must work together more closely to design programs that meet the collective needs of our field, not just at the individual organizational level. It is therefore imperative that we move from an “ego-system” approach to view the arts as an interconnected ecosystem, wherein the interests of the whole take preference over the needs of a single organization.

The question then becomes: How to create institutional innovations that result in a collective lift for the entire field? Once we understand that the real limitations are not “out there” in the world – that they simply represent a mindset – we transform our way of thinking. This opens up limitless possibilities and opportunities. Taking this leap requires

letting go of our set ways, and being open to testing out new models, which may result in failure. This is exactly what artists do. We have much to gain by taking our cue from those artists who intentionally work outside their comfort zone by pushing boundaries, testing new ideas, and taking calculated risks without necessarily knowing the outcomes or benefits. If our sector were to apply a similar process at the institutional level, it could lead to more innovations and help us transform a system that has become obsolete.

Clearly, residencies fill an important niche in our arts ecosystem by offering time and space to focus on the creative process of making art; their presence in communities catalyzes learning and fosters greater awareness of the role of the artist and the arts in our society. Having time to dedicate to the artistic process is an essential part of an artist's practice, leading to new developments and often to important breakthroughs. In the process, our communities and social environment are enriched in ways not always measurable, but nonetheless critical in raising our collective consciousness, increasing our awareness, and challenging traditional perceptions about the world in which we live.

As one artist, who has participated in a variety of residencies over the course of her career, shared: "Residencies are about a gift culture. The good programs understand that. There should be no obligations except for artists' commitment to take full advantage of the opportunities to think about and produce new work."

1. Jeanne Bell, Jan Masaoka, and Steve Zimmerman, *Nonprofit Sustainability: Making Strategic Decisions for Financial Viability*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
2. Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013, 15.
3. James D. Woods and Chris W. Johnson, "Economic Impact: A New Approach for Proving Outcomes," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, accessed August 20, 2015, http://ssir.org/articles/entry/economic_impact_a_new_approach_for_proving_outcomes.
4. Mike Scutarie, "The Inside Scoop on the Studio of Key West's Artist Residency Program," *Inside Philanthropy*, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.insidephilanthropy.com/creative-writing/2014/11/17/the-inside-scoop-on-the-studio-of-key-wests-artist-residency.html>, accessed November 28, 2014.
5. Scharmer and Kaufer, 2.
6. Alice Gugelev and Andrew Stern, "What's Your Endgame?" *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2015, 43.

Yona Backer is a New York-based producer, curator, and strategic consultant with twenty years' experience in the field of contemporary art and philanthropy. Her background encompasses extensive involvement in grantmaking with a focus on experimental art and artistic practice. She is the Founder and President of Third Streaming Advisory Services and former Founding Artistic Director of the interdisciplinary art gallery Third Streaming. Backer's previous roles include Senior Program Officer at The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Director of Visual Arts at the Americas Society, and Gallery Director at Throckmorton Fine Art. She has an MA in art history and archaeology from Columbia University and a BA in art history and history from Hunter College.

Robert Punkenhofer

If I had an Island: My Ideal Curatorial Residency Program

April 2015

I have never been invited to a curatorial residency, nor have I applied for one. Still, I have managed to kick myself out of my comfy home in a tiny little village in the middle of the Austrian Alps and go on extended residencies on three continents. I have covered countries as diverse as Venezuela, Mexico, Germany, United States, Japan, Spain, and China by means of curatorial projects, diplomatic missions, and study grants. In a way, my life feels like an ongoing scholarship, inspiring, endless, and nomadic. In my essay, I will give anecdotal evidence of the sad, mad, and glad moments of 30 years on the road. As such I hope to give a possible blueprint of what a residency should be all about and define my dream scholarship to which I will apply and yes, will finally be invited.

For me personally, going abroad and immersing myself with a new culture crucially influenced my personality and lifestyle. Having grown up in a rural village of 900 souls, while experiencing a relatively conservative upbringing, I used every opportunity to go abroad from a very young age. Taking the night train from the Austrian province to Paris at the age of 16 was the first splendid opportunity to discover and redefine myself far away from familiar influence and daily routine. When after that I went to Venezuela and later

New York, I purposefully forced myself to integrate into the new surroundings by taking any opportunity available to me to mingle with locals: dance classes, studying at a local institution, and declining friends from home their requests to visit me.

Art has always been one of the most important aspects that helped me familiarize with a new culture. It serves as an anchor to connect to local stakeholders and communities and allows us humans to immerse into different social circles and transcend cultural barriers. Having hosted an informal residency program during my years with Art&Idea in Mexico City, I could witness the profound impact the stay had on the artists present – whether it was directly observable, as with Rudi Molacek and Maria Serebriakova, for whom we rented an old car to facilitate the making of a road movie depicting Mexican landscapes on the search of Peyote, or more vaguely, like Emiko Kasahara who got deeply inspired in Mexico and from there started an international series depicting offertory boxes in churches; or years later, Iwajla Klinke, who took my invitation to Vienna Art Week as a point of departure for her worldwide quest of portraying cultural rituals.

Of course, going abroad is always connected to sadness and fear – for me that has not changed even today. Setting off to new horizons means leaving behind old childhood friends – and with it the feeling of relaxed intimacy, sharing inside jokes based on similar upbringing, and a shared mother tongue. The lack of extensive social networks in a new environment also poses an obstacle to initial professional success in the new host culture. Old friends, who might otherwise facilitate

the start of a new career, don't exist in a new city. No matter how long a residency lasts – sometimes even a lifetime – cultural nomads will never become a full member of their new host culture. Every new beginning in another city takes time for social and job-related networks to grow, to learn about the culture, and identify important stakeholders.

My son Gabriel, who I have taken with me on so many stations in my life and who is still living a nomadic lifestyle himself, has learned to see the positive side of the exertion and loneliness that come with setting off to new places. He regards his global social circle of friends as enriching and constantly exposes himself to new experiences from Latin America to Asia. Recently he described to me how the solitude he feels is always accompanied by the rush of adventure. The bittersweet feeling of excitement, mixed with loneliness and a sudden need for self-reliance, leads to a state of heightened presence. Travelers tend to write endless pages witnessing their inner development and are open to intimate conversations with people they have just met; they start appreciating small details and experience themselves facing and overcoming new challenges. This state of increased awareness is what makes cultural residencies such a fulfilling endeavor.

Interestingly, the word residence – stemming from the Latin verb “residere” – means: to linger, rest, and remain behind. The choice of word for an art and curator program gives the impression of wanting to offer the artist and curator a space secluded from society, where they can draw on their own resources, block the outside noise, and re-develop in the silence of splendid isolation, a solitude, which can be used

as a source to shake up old habits and force out of an already restricting comfort.

A good residency program should invite fellows to engage in the host culture and fuel their creativity. It should offer them fascinating company, inspirational conversations, and engage them in activities they would not have done at home. In my ideal residency, I would like very much to find a range of unconventional free activities at my dispense, like philosophy lessons, mentorship sessions, meditation courses, psychotherapy, and even business consulting lessons with entrepreneurs. One might be inspired by learning how to plant carrots or by being assisted in envisioning one's future.

Unfortunately, it is the sad reality that scarce public funding and the loss of artist residency programs cause the creative industries to be evermore elitist and exclusive. With the exorbitant tuition fees at many colleges of art in the U.S. and elsewhere, art students increasingly belong to higher social classes. Therefore, artists going on a residency program shouldn't have to worry about financial matters – a generous monthly budget for living, traveling, and housing expenses should be offered. After all, most residents have running costs outside of the bubble back home – and it is well known that an unburdened mind works most creatively.

Most colleagues I asked for their residency experiences have named stimulating companionship as the critical factor of its success, whereas stories of ill-remembered residencies mostly boil down to the presence of either non-satisfactory attendants,

or complete isolation. Having no network or companions at all is as destructive to a residency program as bad ones. Coming to a new city without anyone to talk to can be overly demotivating and fails the purpose of ingesting and intermingling with another culture while on an international residence.

Moreover, the ideal residency needs a reputation, or legacy, if you will. I want to inhale the lively air in which a Mies van der Rohe, or an Alberto Giacometti, have already worked, loved, and lived. A secluded cottage in the village is unlikely to fill me with the same anticipation and aspiration as a culturally loaded heritage. At the same time, all the buzzing and mingling might interfere with the “residere” meaning of a residence: The remaining behind with one’s thought, contemplating, and finding time and sobriety to finally put plans into actions.

In order to fulfill this dual demand of offering solitude for contemplation and engaging in new surroundings, I have designed a metaphorical tool as my ideal residency that allows both for humans’ need of setting out for adventures and the urge to retreat into familiar spaces: Having my own personal free floating island would allow me to have a safe place where I’d keep my intimate possessions – books, music, and some art works – that give me a feeling of security and belonging. Backed up by this familiar surrounding I could freely set out to an unknown land and engage in the thrill of adventure. Free from social obligations and crowded public spaces, being captain of my island would allow me to dock on land wherever I pleased and switch freely between melancholic solitude and captivating buzz. I could stop in the

recluse Danube delta, the South Pole, or Patagonia, which, in their natural beauty, are perfect places for contemplation, but then also swiftly move on to buzzing cultural hubs, such as Rio de Janeiro or Hong Kong to engage in social happenings, such as a student protest or fascinating exhibitions.

While social encounters with inspiring minds, such as South African documentary film director Jyoti Mistry, Brazilian jeweler Roberto Stern, and brilliant brains from MIT and Harvard University would highlight my residency-experience, there also should be times of strict silence when inviting myself to my residency, being forced to face my innermost personality and to meditate on my own thoughts and fears, rather than constantly being distracted.

The last station of my extensive journey would be New York. There I'd hand over my long-traveled island, loaded with experiences, emotions, adventures, and ideas to Steven Rand from apexart, trusting that he knows how to use this gift wisely, so that many more curators in residence can enjoy a life where everything is in flux.

Robert Punkenhofer is founding director of ART&IDEA and currently Trade Commissioner of Austria in Barcelona, Spain. In his work he crosses the limits of art, creative ventures and international business. He is responsible for more than 100 exhibitions and special projects on 3 continents, amongst others the visionary Mur Island with Vito Acconci; the Vienna. He served as Director of the Austrian Design Foundation and the Creative Industry Office at Austria's Foreign Trade Organisation. He serves as creative director of Carl Suchy & Söhne, the leading watch manufacturer of the former Habsburg empire. He is a member of the International Advisory Council at Princeton University/ PLAS and visiting professor at New York University.

Anna Moschovakis

(One) Who Goes Back

International Fellow to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 2009
February 2015

1.

While I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, Ethiopia suffered a protracted series of famines culminating in the great famine of 1984-85, the worst the region had seen in a century. The drought that led up to it was catastrophic to be sure, but the high number of deaths (variously reported as between 400,000 and several million) and even higher number of people reduced to destitution could claim multiple causes, including but not limited to: fallout from an ongoing civil war after the 1974 coup and from the subsequent Red Terror (Qey Shibir) campaign; the effects of a land redistribution program on food production; and more generally corruption, government violence, peasant dissatisfaction, and revolt. I didn't know this, though. As it did for many (middle-class? upper-middle-class? sheltered? white?) children growing up in the U.S. at that time, Ethiopia became for me a stand-in for hunger, for suffering, for global inequity – “Eat your dinner because there are starving children in Ethiopia” – and, for reasons that are as complex and as obvious as racism and xenophobia themselves, a stand-in for the entire continent of Africa.

2.

In 1984 we had finally gotten cable, which meant MTV. That December I watched members of Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet along with Sting, Bono, and Boy George belt out “Feed

the world, let them know it's Christmastime," their tender faces intercut with glimpses of laughter on the recording set or of the musicians signing autographs and kissing babies (and, in the extended version, with a bizarre montage of glam head shots, *National Geographic*-style images of African children and adults in desiccated landscapes, and Bono *in situ* on a visit to – presumably – Africa, all underscored by the backbeat of Phil Collins' drums). The single, an instant hit, raised a record-breaking \$24 million for famine relief in Ethiopia and Eritrea; it also reified an image of Africa as "a" place "where nothing ever grows," where "the only water flowing is the bitter sting of tears," and where "they" (the "other ones") don't even know it's Christmas. (Could they have been referring to the fact that Ethiopians celebrate Christmas according to the Julian calendar, so it falls on January 7?) I'm certain I cried while watching the Live Aid video. Then I sat down to dinner and cleaned my plate.

Neither the fact that my father is an immigrant who nearly died during the 1941-42 Great Famine in Athens (a result of the Axis occupation and Allied blockade of Greece), nor the fact that I became politically active around the same time as Live Aid – in the international movement protesting Apartheid in South Africa and in support of the Nicaraguan people during the Iran-Contra affair – nor the fact that I lived in a cosmopolitan city and had friends with roots and ties (almost) all over the world, was enough to fully focus my attention on the inadequacy of the equation: Ethiopia = starving children = "Africa." ("South Africa" had become an exception, individualized for complex reasons both obvious and not.)

3.

I worked my way through college by waitressing at an Ethiopian restaurant run by women from Addis Ababa. This was in the late 80s and early 90s, just at the moment when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front revolted against and eventually toppled the Derg regime, 72 of whose officers would be found guilty of genocide 15 years later. Vegetarian at the time and learning to cook for myself, I lingered in the kitchen interviewing the (mostly Mexican) women cooks about the ingredients of *shiro wat* and the amount of *berbere* spice they would add when customers wanted their *misir* extra hot. I was taught a handful of words in Amharic by the owner and her sisters but otherwise don't remember learning much that was specific about Ethiopia and its diaspora – though I was surrounded by it four nights a week. When a critical mass of Ethiopians would gather on a given night, I could tell when they were talking politics, but I can't remember what, if anything, I asked them to explain.

4.

When I was offered the apexart International Fellowship in 2009 – before I was told where I might be sent – I noticed that Addis Ababa was one of the cities apexart had worked with in the past. Though I would have been happy to go anywhere I had never been to before, I secretly hoped to be sent there. I was.

As a writer, I was worried about the injunction not to work during the Fellowship. Taking notes would count as working; writing a blog, as I was supposed to do, would count as working. I took the notes; I didn't write the blog. Some time

after my return I edited the notes and arranged them into an *abécédaire*, which I hoped would serve as a transparently arbitrary way to organize the fragmented residue of an experience I didn't want to domesticate into a too-reductive narrative or a too-associative poem. The entries in the *abécédaire* varied in length, format, and intent. For example:

A is for AFRICA

When I tell people about my impending trip, I try to avoid the word "Africa," though I can't explain why. I am struck by the timidity, the lack of specificity of the euphemism I adopt: "I got a grant to spend a month in Ethiopia," I say. "Have you ever been to that part of the world?"

"Unprepossessing from a distance, up close it was dirty and falling apart, stinking horribly of unwashed people and sick animals, every wall reeking with urine, every alley blocked with garbage. Loud music, car horns, diesel fumes, and pestering urchins with hard-luck tales and insinuating fingers and dire warnings, such as 'There are bad people here.'"

This is the only mention of Addis Ababa in Paul Theroux's 2003 *New York Times* bestseller, *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town*. I had thought it might make good plane reading.

Paul Theroux is the internationally acclaimed author of such travel books as *The Great Railway Bazaar*, *The Old Patagonian Express*, *Sunrise with SeaMonsters*, and *The Kingdom by the Sea*. His many novels include *Hotel Honolulu* and *The Mosquito Coast*. Theroux lives

in Hawaii and on Cape Cod.

According to *The Boston Herald*, “The next best thing to going to Africa is to read (compulsively) this account.”

No, I’ve never been to that part of the world.

or:

C is for CARBON

A round-trip flight between New York City and Addis Ababa is 13,910 miles and produces 5,875 pounds of carbon, which is 13% of the total carbon output of the average North American and 24 times that of the average Ethiopian. To offset it by planting trees in nearby Kenya would cost \$43.76, less than an hour’s wage for the average New Yorker and one-and-a-half times the average monthly income in Ethiopia. The morning of my departure I go shoe-shopping. My boots are worn through, and I’m worried they won’t last the trip. The salesman, who tells me he is from Israel, says: “You’re going to a very poor county, you know. My sister went to South Africa once. She was on safari, she couldn’t believe her eyes. Me, I spent three years in India. The children they keep coming at you, you want to give them everything you have.” I buy a pair of \$110 boots that seem sturdy and versatile enough and wear them out of the store, leaving my old ones behind.

or:

H is for HAGIOGRAPHY

Mihret, an art student, takes me on a tour of the Ethiopian Studies museum on the university campus.

It's filled with icons and Medieval religious paintings, some anonymous and some by known artists, including one who quickly became my favorite: the Master of Sagging Cheeks. She tells me that if a person is painted in profile, that means he's a sinner. We spend half an hour looking for sinners in all of the paintings.

or:

T is for TEFF

The basic staple of Ethiopian food is injera, the bread that serves as a carbohydrate, a plate, and silverware. The grain used to make injera is teff. The traditional method of farming teff has been refined over generations. It is extremely labor intensive and at the mercy of the weather.

First, you plow with oxen.

Then, you let it rain.

Then, you spread the seed.

Then, you gather your neighbors and walk the field to tamp down the seed.

Then, you wait for rain.

Then, you send in the cows to trample the field again.

Then, you wait.

I may have the details wrong, but the procedure goes something like this. The teff grain is very fine and does not adapt well to mechanization. That the cows fertilize as they trample is not an explicit part of the equation, but when they are subtracted from the process, fertility is lost despite chemical amendments according to formula. International development interests are campaigning to promote a transition from teff to other grains that are

more easily grown using industrialized means, but a majority of Ethiopians resist this removal of their bread, plate, and fork in the name of progress.

Some of the entries – J (Jazz), S (Sex Work), U (University) – were given titles but, six years later, remain to be written.

5.

As a translator and an independent publisher of translations, I wanted to spend some of my time in Addis figuring out why there is so little Ethiopian literature, especially poetry (though the written tradition in Amharic is deep), available in translation in the English-speaking world. Maybe as a publisher I could “give back,” I thought (the apexart Fellowship being founded, in part, on a notion of exchange), but that thought had its own complications: Was I only looking for what they call in the corporate publishing world an “acquisition”? Was I just after another kind of takeaway, a souvenir?

6.

The year I went to Ethiopia was also the year I moved my primary residence from New York City to a rural area upstate. For the first time I encountered people who seemed to be made happy by the idea – and, much more surprising to me, by the reality – of staying put. Cabin fever hit me hard and often, and I began to wonder about how entwined my sense of self was with the privilege – or just the habit – of mobility.

7.

I could not have been more stimulated, better cared for, or happier than I was during my Fellowship. My “contacts” quickly

became friends. They didn't steer me; they left me alone much of the time. The context they provided didn't curate my experience; it created the conditions for my experience. It was also an effort on their part. What could I, what would I do for them in exchange? In the years after my return, I struggled with this question of reciprocity. I had my notes, my half-finished *abécédaire*. I had some photos about which I was ambivalent. I put off publishing what writing I'd done on the subject. I stayed in touch with a few of my Addis-based friends, occasionally proposing an idea for a future collaboration. I promised to return, in a few years – there were personal reasons that prevented me from traveling internationally for a while – and I meant it. But was it enough to go back for a social call? Could I justify, even if I could cover, the expense? And then: What would it mean not to return and deepen – in person – these relationships to people and to place? If I'd made connections over the course of a month and left it at that, would that make the connections any less real? And what do I mean by my use here of the term “real”?

Since then, my personal reasons for avoiding travel have persisted, and I have come to see them, though they are legitimate, also as an excuse – for not examining my desire to return, and even for not examining my suspicion of that desire. Going to Ethiopia as an apexart Fellow gave me a role, both mitigating and covering up the fact that I was also, unavoidably, a tourist. Tourism in developing countries is complicated ethical terrain. White Western tourism in African countries is complicated ethical terrain. For years I felt that to go back I'd need a new role: a project, concrete proof that on a second trip I would not be a mere consumer

(of novelty, of experience, of knowledge) or even a tentative friend visiting tentative friends, but that I'd come offering something – something besides my enthusiasm and affection – in exchange. (When I wrote “concrete” and “role” I almost wrote “mission.” See how quickly compromised this line of thinking can become.)

8.

Last summer I met with a geographer who studies tourism and mobility, and I asked him what he thought about my doubts. I both trusted my instinct – that what I'd embarked on in 2009 amounted to the beginning of a lifelong relationship (with Addis and with some of the people I'd met there) – and was baffled by my own anxiety about the conditions of an eventual return. What, I asked, would make a return trip more than the indulgence of a dabbler? (I'd returned from Addis full of enthusiasm and interest, convinced I'd learn Amharic, which I did not.) He paused. He'd just come home from his twentieth trip to rural China; his research project was coming to an end. “Well,” he said, perhaps bemused by my line of questioning, “if you go back, for one thing, you become the one who goes back.”

Was I overthinking? M is for Maybe. Y is for Yes.

9.

Scientists have identified a genetic factor for neophilia based on variations of a mitochondrial enzyme called monoamine oxidase A. Neophilia, one of the four basic temperaments (along with risk-aversion, reward dependence, and persistence) is linked both to addictive behavior and to long-term well-being.

10.

This spring I submitted a proposal for a “faculty development” grant to return to Addis next November. My twofold project is to facilitate a translation workshop and to document the activities of an artist-run collective founded in part by my friend Mihret, the one who introduced me to the Master of the Sagging Cheeks. The application was an excuse: my ambivalence seems to be more or less resolved – or if not resolved, then addressed to such an extent that I was able to make a move. In New York last month, I had a long overdue coffee with the Addis native I’d become closest to during my Fellowship, who was in the city for a week doing a residency of her own. Not surprisingly, as can happen in these situations, it felt to both of us as if almost no time had passed. Our date was insufficiently short; we drank weak diner coffee and got excited about each other’s current projects. When I updated her on a recent and major turn in my personal life, she smiled and thought for a moment, taking in the news. “You know what we say at home: What is meant to be yours will be yours.”

Poet, translator, and editor, **Anna Moschovakis** studied philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley. She then went on to receive her MFA in creative writing at the Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College, and her MA in comparative literature (French and American) at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is the author of three books of poetry, *They and We Will Get Into Trouble for This* (Coffee House Press, 2016), *You and Three Others Are Approaching a Lake*, winner of the James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets, and *I Have Not Been Able to Get Through to Everyone* (Turtle Point Press, 2006).

Nicky Enright

There is a Here There:

Global Citizenship and the apexart International Fellowship

International Fellow to Bangkok, Thailand, November 2010
September 2015

People must be judged not by how they treat themselves, but by how they treat the stranger, The Other. Thus, kindness in France should be judged by the fate of the Arab and African populations, and in Germany, by the plight of the Turks. The United States must be judged in relation to minorities and the handling of recent immigrants from around the world. Are refugees welcome? Ultimately the question has to be: can we recognize ourselves in The Other?

To be a stranger is to be strange. To be The Other can be disorienting, lonely, linguistically challenging, and conceivably infantilizing; you may find yourself defenseless and feel illiterate. Everything you have learned can seem useless and literally meaningless to your present needs. In certain areas of the world a stranger is in danger; you could lose your possessions and even your life. But then with any luck, someone intent on helping rather than exploiting your condition may show you kindness because they recognize themselves in you.

Global citizenship is valuable for inspiring such connections. I define it as an allegiance to the planet and its inhabitants

that transcends national borders and supports environmental concerns and antiwar measures. It is a sense of stewardship of the planet, and an allegiance that would make us all richer and safer. But how might we become global citizens? Here are ten feasible proposals to get started:

1. Trod off the trodden path, far beyond the bounds of tourist industries.
2. Experience foreign movies, embrace subtitles, books, music, and food.
3. Learn about the many people around you who come from afar.
4. Study a foreign language. ¡Es muy bueno!
5. Host a foreign student through a local school, or accommodate tourists.
6. During immigration debates, ask Americans how they became U.S. citizens.
7. Examine the extent to which borders define identity.
8. Challenge exploitation, nationalism, xenophobia, and racism.
9. Think globally and act locally; be glocal.
10. Pay with Globos! (my international currency, featured in the *Wall Street Journal*).

I long for global citizenship for the benefit of my son, for his generation, and that of his descendants. He has four nationalities and will surely grow to be a polyglot like his parents. But as much as looking ahead motivates me, I am equally driven by looking back. My late father was an American with wanderlust, drawn to explore “exotic” places, and learn foreign languages, a former Peace Corps Volunteer. My mother is an Ecuadorian whose love of the English language, its music and literature, started early. Consequently, I was born in Ecuador and grew up in a transnational and bilingual environment that predisposed me towards global citizenship, expanded my

consciousness, and prepared me to reach out and embrace The Other.

But the best way to become a global citizen is to travel widely, and to be a serious traveler, by which I mean a willingness to learn, to grasp the similarities and differences between home and abroad. Despite all the aggravations of travel (from expensive tickets, visa complications, and border security, to time zones, jet lag, and language barriers) most people would agree that travel offers the kind of priceless, eye-opening experience that can inform and broaden an individual's sense of self and sense of place, in a deep way. Sadly, serious travel is almost exclusively the domain of the wealthy. The opportunity for serious travel is a privilege denied the vast majority of the world's inhabitants; it is an added privilege for the richest few people from the richest few nations.

When ordinary people from less-wealthy countries travel to another country and stay for a long time, it is not considered serious travel, or finding yourself – it is simply called immigration. Immigrants are often people who, despite a stark lack of resources, have the bravery, tenacity, street smarts, and capacity for hard work to face the challenges and risks it takes to relocate successfully. There is much to be learned from multinational, polyglot immigrants, even if their voices are seldom considered.

Immigration is a common, front-page newscast in America. It often consists of longstanding, tired, or venomous disputes from people with little to no first-hand knowledge of the subject. Much of this discourse is hypocritical at best, or

xenophobic and racist at worst. I dread these aspects of the discussion but hope for progress on the issue of people's physical mobility, because the large migratory movement of people around the world lies at the heart of the matter of global citizenship.

What might happen if tomorrow every human on the planet were suddenly free to go wherever they wanted, to stay as long as they pleased, given documentation, and encouraged to find work? Europe already allows for any European citizen to live and work in whichever country they please within the European Union; imagine expanding that policy worldwide. Where might you go? As I write this there is a deadly refugee crisis raging in Europe while powerful nations deliberate.

Anyone who believes that the current American system for legal migration is functional and reasonable does not know much about it. Consider this: what facility replaced Ellis Island, which is now, significantly, a museum? Gone are the days of honoring the words engraved on the base of the statue of liberty, of welcoming "your tired, your poor... the homeless."

Yet when you hold an American passport you may take ease of international travel for granted, because you are officially welcomed in most countries, and you automatically receive a three-month visa stamp in your passport without the slightest hassle. In contrast, when a citizen from a poor nation wants to visit the U.S., she has to stand in long lines at American embassies around the world to request a visa, where she is treated with an offensively high level of suspicion, often just

to be denied it. This is the case even if she can afford the trip, which of course cannot be taken for granted no matter how hard she works.

One need not be an economics expert to know that this is emblematic of the gross inequalities that prompt people to migrate from poor to wealthy nations to begin with. I know this from personal experience. I have family in the unequal economies of Ecuador and the United States. Ironically, Ecuador is one of many “dollarized” nations that have adopted the U.S. dollar as their official currency, and this curious fact inspired my Globo currency project.

The way to stop people’s attempted movements from poor countries to wealthy ones, a chronic goal among certain politicians, is to address the huge gap between them in the first place, just as the way to end “illegal aliens” is to make it possible for people to migrate legally. To face immigration issues honestly is to be confronted with the rigged configurations of imaginary global capital and the exploited and disparaged global labor force. Solutions are simultaneously complex and simple. Many immigration issues could be resolved by literally furnishing the “undocumented” with documents.

Nobody knows what would happen if humans could go live and work anywhere, legally, but I wonder about it. Our current system allows “first world” people to visit, live in, and even exploit “third-world” people; while “third world” people – assuming they could afford it, are rarely allowed to travel legally to “first world” nations. The system functions very well for a tiny minority of the world’s inhabitants.

In the system of global capital that informs these differences, rich and poor nations are the outcome of imposed judgments about how much the time and life energy of a citizen of a given nation is worth; the same is true of the worth of that nation's currency. It's not surprising then, that most nations' currencies are worth next to nothing; it's arranged that way. None of the world's currencies are backed by anything other than the social contract about who is powerful, militarily or market-wise. Who can afford to travel the world, and who cannot, is not entirely a matter of desire, employment, savings, diligence, or coincidence. As noted however, even having the resources to travel from the third world does not guarantee successful navigation of guarded border bureaucracies. It should also be noted that having the resources to travel from the first world does not necessarily move one any closer to global citizenship; there are certain affluent globetrotters who view the world simply as their rightful playground while learning little about the world.

Therefore, in speaking about global citizenship I am not taking solely about economics or about a global tax bureaucracy, but of a state of mind. I am talking about globalization in the deepest sense. The word has been given a negative connotation, but globalization should not simply be about markets. Nor should it be simply about granting "multinational" corporations the ability to disregard a nation's rules, employ cheap labor in weak economies, and avoid paying taxes to their home country. Globalization should and could actually benefit people. Why shouldn't ordinary people around the world become "multinationals"?

It's sad that corporations, legally considered people under American law, have reached a widespread multinational stage before actual people have. But we can be sure that the corporation-people are not at all interested in beneficial ways to use their status. Their mandate is to be motivated solely by corporate profit. Actual people have a broad range of interests; they may see, for instance, that the health and sustainability of the planet's resources are a vital element of the true bottom line. Actual people may discover all sorts of benefits to becoming multinational.

Theoretically speaking, what might the world look like if there was no limit to being a citizen of as many countries as one desired? One might still pay taxes to one's place of birth or primary residence while enjoying multinational status and mobility. I would choose to be a citizen of the U.S.A., Ecuador, Switzerland, Brazil, France, Bolivia, Thailand, Germany, Egypt, and Jamaica, because I am already connected to those places in some way. Then I'd be interested in joining South Africa, Indonesia, Peru, China, Mali, Mexico, and Japan, because I'd like to be more connected to those places on my path to global citizenship.

What if serious travel was not only widely available, but required, as part of a "well-rounded education"? I have little doubt that it would change the world for the better. For example, because I have a Syrian friend, I pay attention to the news about Syria, and I know for a fact that Syrians are more than what the media focuses exclusively on: terrorists and refugees. I know that news reports about the other side of the world involve actual human people (as opposed to corporate

people or caricatured people), because I have been exposed to them. I know they are just like me: possessing challenges, hopes, fears, dreams, and the exact same human rights. Exposure beyond one's circumscribed world is critical. From immigration debates to bombing campaigns, we should know at least a tiny bit about the humans being dehumanized and the nations being demonized and destroyed.

Another example: ever since I traveled to Egypt as a college student working on an independent art-historical study, I have felt very connected to it. I was embraced by the Egyptian people and amazed by their hospitality. I traveled from Alexandria to Aswan, visiting the pyramids of Giza and the ruins of Luxor. I learned some Arabic, listened to Umm Kulthum, read Nawal El Saadawi, and ate koshari, ful, and hummus.

I also had the opportunity to study the dawn of written history, hieroglyphics, and to consider the cultural movement that informed the birth of western civilization, from Egypt to Greece and Rome. Because of my exposure, I now take interest in the fate of the Egyptian people. I view their shifting saga from ancient times to the present as relevant to my life and my society, not as foreign or insignificant. A part of me remained there, as a part of there remained in me. There is a here there; there is a there here.

Egyptians mistook me for Arab all the time, and for all I know, they were right - I may indeed have Arab ancestry. There certainly are Arabs in Ecuador. But like the vast majority of the world's population, I only know about the latest few generations of my family. The concept and reality of shared

ancestry supports global citizenship as much as it questions notions of imaginary borders that circumscribe our lives.

So let us pause to contemplate what it means for human beings to share a common ancestry. We have many more ancestors than we know about, and as we travel back in time we must envision a journey back to Africa, no matter where we may think “our people” are from. This time travel contains a biological certainty: we are the cutting edge of an extended line of *Homo sapiens* who we know next to nothing about. All we know about our distant relatives is that every single one of them survived at least long enough to reproduce, and that they lead to humanity’s original homeland, Africa. Now imagine a time when none of the countries we are connected to even existed as political entities, and when our ethnicities or “race,” as we understand them today, did not exist or were in flux. The way our direct ancestors viewed themselves long ago has little to do with our own current self-image.

Visualizing our actual ancestors long before this time of 195 nations is a mental exercise with the potential to alter your perspective. Since the vast majority of our ancestors lived in prehistory, there is no way to know how they identified themselves. Of what dominion did they feel themselves to be citizens? In what category of human did they feel they belonged? It is absurd that the latest U.S. census in 2010 listed a total of 21 “races” for people to choose from. If we are to move on from the cruel fallacy that is race and the imaginary borderlines that nation-states fight over to achieve a saner world and feel akin to our fellow citizens, then we must begin

by enlarging our perspective, both through conceptual means, as with the ten suggestions above, and through travel.

Globalization should denote the opposite of provincialism, defined as a narrow-minded insularity. The world's biggest troubles – from blind adherence to fictitious borders that divide and often conquer, to closed-mindedness, and the us-and-them mentality – stem from a lack of proper perspective. To tackle one's own provincialism by seeking to enlarge one's own perspective is to play a small but meaningful role in our evolving world. Which brings us to apexart.

The apexart Fellowship program is centered on broadening perspectives through sweeping cultural exchange. International Fellows are NY-based art professionals encouraged to explore and exchange ideas in a foreign country they have never been to. Their website states that the goal is to provide participants an opportunity to experience a new culture rather than create new work. The intention therefore is serious travel that will result in the expansion of the Fellow's perspective. A flip side bonus of the program is the expanded perspective of local people who encounter the International Fellow in their midst.

This Fellowship structure is different from that of any other I am familiar with, and it makes sense to me. Although I understand the artist's need to occasionally get away to focus on creation, it does seem strange to travel to a residency in an interesting, maybe even foreign place, only to hole up in the studio and produce work. Such an approach would tacitly reduce the host-terrain to a simple "backdrop" of no intrinsic value or interest.

I was fortunate enough to be nominated for an apexart International Fellowship by Melissa Rachleff-Burt that sent me to Bangkok, Thailand, for one month in December 2010. I was provided a plane ticket, an apartment, an unpredictable itinerary, selected local contacts, and a blog on which to post my impressions, photos, and videos. I cordially invite you to visit my journal: <https://apexart-journal.tumblr.com/tagged/Nicky-Enright/chrono>.

Thailand was an eye-opener in terms of my understanding of the diversity of the world. Nothing could have prepared me for the sights, sounds, smells, and feverishly spicy tastes of Bangkok. I studied Thai history, language, music, and art, all of which I found fascinating. I experienced what it must feel like to be illiterate, since I could hardly recognize their alphabet, and I marveled at the diverse splendor of the world's scripts (which brought Egyptian hieroglyphics back to mind). I was daily astonished by the food. And I grew to love Bangkok, a thrilling but somehow serene city, lit up at night by dim fluorescent lights.

I pondered the way their magnificent ruins still remain relevant to their lives, since their dominant religion continues to be Buddhism. In this they differed greatly from Egypt, Greece, or Rome, where the ruins are remnants of bygone eras and religions. I felt the sturdy spirit of a self-determined people who, unlike those of most countries including the U.S., were never colonized by any European nation. I learned about their longstanding struggles with neighboring countries, recent domestic disruptions concerning their monarchy, and even their ethnic tensions, which seemed familiar.

I had been uprooted and dropped in a “foreign” place where I was arguably the foreign feature, and I learned as much about Thailand as I did about my own home as a result. To be uprooted in a reflective way is how one may begin to see one’s own world clearly, because the nation we are raised in, the language(s) we speak, and our life’s geography, all inform our worldview while masking it. Serious travel will deepen our understanding of our own, local world. In fact, the phenomenon known as “culture shock” often prevails upon return, as one’s own culture may suddenly seem foreign. Culture shock is a magical growing pain, a swelling of the perspective.

The esteemed author Junot Diaz says, “The strength of your art is from your engagement with the world.” The apexart Fellowships are bestowed on artists and arts professionals probably for this reason; artists are directly involved in the construction of culture. Nonetheless, everyone should have the opportunity to travel internationally. Everyone.

If global citizenship is a goal, then travel should not be solely an individual’s responsibility; it should be a publicly funded endeavor. Travel should be acknowledged as a crucial part of a well-rounded education. High school students should be sent abroad to experience apexart-like experiences. The democratization of serious travel could pave the way for an unprecedented cosmopolitanism that would potentially have an enormous impact on our collective future.

Past educational practices encouraged students to have pen pals with counterparts halfway around the world; we

could step it up. Transportation technology allows us to take this far-reaching step, and it should not seem radical to believe that young people ought to go on journeys around the world and make friends, fall in love, learn languages, engage their senses, explore vastly different cultures, and develop a genuinely international outlook and understanding. This should be the norm in worldwide education.

In the meantime, I would love to see the apexart model emulated in the art world. I'm not the first person to say the art world is overly occupied with itself, at the expense of broader experience and expertise. The image of an artist shuttered in a studio space at a faraway residency program, ignoring the region, is an apt metaphor of this reality. Too much art comes from a sparse engagement with the world. It is highly worthwhile to step outside our world, to acquaint ourselves with faraway strangeness and see the familiar from afar.

Paradoxically, the apexart Fellowship uses distance to create closeness, and not just with faraway people and cultures. For example, familiarity with the beautiful Thai script makes me appreciate how I encrypt my thoughts into this Latin alphabet I'm typing right now, and, amazingly, how you can de-encrypt them. You and I share the understanding of this code. How would these encoded thoughts look and sound in Thai? They would be, as Thai people famously say, "same-same but different."

Eventually, I found parallels in Thailand to almost everything that at first seemed strange. This ancient culture on the other

side of the world even had its own Tea Party to contend with. By that I mean there were what appeared to be spontaneous political demonstrations that were in fact manufactured by manipulative billionaires with less populist intentions. Same-same but different.

My apexart Fellowship also affected my behavior as a traveler. Now when I travel I try to find local contacts long before I leave, and I won't linger long on the trodden path of tourist attractions and historical sites. I resist the urge to see everything and go everywhere, as epitomized by a Euro-rail pass. I aim for quality over quantity, and I strive to learn as much of the local language as possible, always a rewarding effort.

I am grateful for every residency program I have participated in that has furnished time and space to create; they have all had an impact on my work, my thinking, and on my ability to produce. But the apexart international Fellowship provided an opportunity for serious travel, the value of which is incalculable and lasting. My Thai Fellowship changed who I am and how I view my home. It enlarged my circle of friends and colleagues and forever linked me to Thailand and its people.

I have great respect for the alternative residency program that apexart has developed. They represent an ambitious and noble effort that I am grateful to be a part of. What is being explored by apexart is the potential for art to create community on an international level. The quest to understand, appreciate, and learn from other societies is

the motivating dynamic of an apexart Fellowship. And the pursuit represents a significant step on the path towards global citizenship, one individual at a time.

Nicky Enright is an artist, educator, writer, and DJ based in New York City.

Joanna Ebenstein

A Month Without Words

International Fellow to Seoul, South Korea, August 2011
December 2014

Do you think the Fellowship will have an effect on your work? If yes, please let us know how.

Yes! I cannot even say at this moment. It was more vague. I thought a lot about truth and integrity vs success when I was there. This has lingered. I feel very different than I did before I left. More interested in taking chances with new things out of my comfort zone. The desire to get away from the computer and make things with my hands.

—from post-apexart Outbound Fellowship Survey, October 27, 2011

Am I an artist? Or am I, rather, a curator, maker, designer, producer, galvanizer, and photographer? Or maybe a thinker, writer, editor, lecturer, scholar? Or a collector, taxonomist, dilettante, enthusiast, librarian, and museologist? Maybe I am more of a proselytizer, promoter, publicist, engagement officer, popularizer, and educator?

I have never been sure how to describe what I “am” or “do.” Since earliest childhood, I have been described as “artistic,” but also scientific and nerdy. I have drawn, and painted, photographed, directed, sung, written, and acted; I started clubs where the members had to write essays. My sister and I used to write back cover copy for books of our own invention. I spent most of my time either drawing, reading, or catching tadpoles and baby catfish at my local pond.

When I was in college, I met a self-proclaimed fortune teller in a hotel lobby. She asked my birthday and then told me: “you are interested in too many things and you won’t know how to decide between them.” Was this a canny prediction or a curse? Trying to find a way to balance – and make a unity of – my interests has been one of my great challenges.

In college, when forced to pick a major in the aftermath of realizing I could not get into the over-enrolled art program at University of California at Santa Cruz in 1989, I floated from literature to marine biology to art history to, ultimately, intellectual history, the closest I could find to what we would now call “multi disciplinary studies.” In 1999, after a series of mostly meaningless jobs and brief flirtations with graduate school, I moved from San Francisco to New York City to take a job as a nanny for a family friend. I moved into a townhouse on East 91st Street, and, as it happened, into the home of an art critic and a pretty epic collection of fine art. I had come to New York City with idealistic notions about “art” (old fashioned words like “truth” and “beauty” come to mind), and my intent was to spend my spare time and money on art classes in order to build a portfolio for art school admission. I dutifully studied life drawing, oil painting, and photography at The New School, School of Visual Arts, and the 92nd Street Y.

This same year, I got mixed up with a group of recent art school graduates who, motivated solely – so far I as I could see – by their desire for fame, created an art-spectacle-music hybrid which they framed as fine art; they staged their shows at hip downtown galleries like Gavin Brown and intentionally

created an air of exclusivity and glamour via the artful use of red ropes and magazine cover stories. To their delight, their little group became “the next big thing;” I ended up disillusioned with the sordid commercial realities of the art world, and the fame-seekers I encountered who had moved to New York to try to “make it big.” At this point, I withdrew from the art scene proper, but kept making work, while supporting myself with a freelance career in graphic design.

A few years later, in 2007, I met a medical museum curator who commissioned me to produce a photography exhibition based on my ongoing work documenting artifacts in anatomical museums around the world; this only mildly successful project led to a very successful blog, followed by the founding of a gallery/event space; a popular international event series; and, finally, the opening of a private library/museum in a tiny, overstuffed 300 square foot space. I was still supporting myself with my graphic design work, and trying to figure out some way to get to the next level and, I hoped, find a way to make my passion-based projects my sole occupation.

This is where I was in 2011, when I was nominated by my friend Josh Foer for an apexart International Fellowship. At that time, I was in a kind of art career conundrum; what next? What did I want to do? How could I ever stop doing my freelance work and spend all my time working on the things I was passionate about? I looked forward to using my time in Seoul to focus on these questions. But once in Seoul I found, to my surprise, that I had absolutely no interest in thinking about career. I wound up instead wanting unstructured time

in which to explore, and to let my mind wander in a seemingly aimless fashion. Being alone in a deeply foreign locale with an impenetrable visual and spoken language for an entire unstructured month left me alone with my thoughts in a way I had never experienced in my adult life. I ended up meditating, without any conscious intention, on truth and integrity versus success. My time in Korea – and the realizations I came to there – made lasting changes on me, my work, and my life.

Over the course of my month in Seoul, I visited many museums and took in a great deal of art. South Korea is a wealthy country with a strong infrastructure in the arts and museums. To be an artist – as my translator, a young artist explained to me – was the kind of job which would make middle class parents proud. This was reflected in the very many slick, professional galleries and gleaming, moneyed museums filled with passionless and professional art, most of which left me completely cold.

But South Korea did have wonderful art, albeit not taken nearly as seriously, which possessed a very real earthy, homely, warm, imperfect charm; this was its folk art. This had to be sought out, but it could be found in the few non-madeover back alleys, and in the many Buddhist and Shamanistic temples still in daily use. It could also be found in a few museums such The National Folk Museum and the wonderful Kokdu Museum, a small museum celebrating Kokdu Dolls, or painted wooden figures representing spirits that help the deceased on their treacherous journey through the afterlife and used in the 18th and 19th centuries to decorate the traditional funeral biers which carried the deceased.

Seoul also had a variety of small, idiosyncratic, non-institutional deeply charming museums which influenced me greatly. One of my favorites was The Owl Art and Craft Museum, which was essentially a tiny room filled to the rafters with a private collection of all things owl, from art to artifact to naturalia; your \$5 admission gets you a gander, a cup of tea or grape juice, and a chat with the proprietor. Also of interest was The Comfort Women Museum (aka “The House of Sharing”) which was a hybrid museum/halfway house dedicated to “Comfort women,” the term for the women forced into sexual slavery by and for the Japanese military during World War II, most of whom were Korean. It describes itself as “the world’s first human rights museum centered on the theme of sexual slavery” and is run by a group of elderly former comfort women who live together on the grounds.

But by far the most fascinating museum I visited in Seoul – and the most personally influential – was The Musée Shuim, a museum created by a woman named Park Ki-ok in the wake of her husband’s death in their former hillside home, and dedicated to traditional Korean funeral art and culture. It describes itself as having been “founded to highlight the wise methods used by our ancestors for dealing with death,” but it is much stranger and broader than that, more a kind of monument to a grieving woman and her dead husband. There are, indeed, plenty of funerary artifacts, such as hearses, funerary ephemera, photographs of funeral processions, Kokdu dolls, etc.; but there is also a room devoted to the founder’s collection of dolls and lots of contemporary art. The museum was touching and imperfect and overwhelming human; my tour guide, who painstaking translated every

caption into English for me, introduced me to the proprietress, who, it seemed, still resides in the home.

I returned from Seoul a changed person. The lessons of truth and integrity – and my acknowledged appreciation for imperfect, homey productions over slick, professional art – led to some major life and work changes. I went through the heartbreaking process of breaking up with long-term, live-in boyfriend, which set off a chain of events which led to me getting kicked out of my eleven-year home and forced to move all my possessions in storage. I ended up feeling like a ghost, an exile, with no connection to New York City. This painful progression of events ultimately left me free in a way I never had been in my adult life, and able to accept an opportunity to move to London for six months.

In London, I visited more museums and saw more art, and paid attention to what I truly liked and, perhaps even more instructive, what I hated. I noted that I was much more moved by imperfect, amateur productions such as The Pitt Rivers Museum, John Soane's House, and The Witchcraft Museum than by grand enterprises like The British Museum. And I noted my ire when I saw an exhibition ostensibly devoted to curiosity but so besotted by statement-driven contemporary art that it was ruined. I worked for one of my favorite museums – The Wellcome Collection, a kind of hybrid art/science/history museum – which was at once like the graduate school I never had, and a very real sabbatical from a life which no longer fit in New York City. Reporting daily to the people I most respected in the museum world gave me a new confidence in my own idiosyncratic vision, which I had found so hard to describe

to others, in Korea and elsewhere. Was I an artist, a maker, a producer, a curator, a collector, and writer, a scholar? All of the above? My attempts to fit my work into preconceived models of the art world never felt quite right. They were also, it seemed now, beside the point.

I now am comfortable with the fact that there is no one-word answer for what I “am” or what I do. I tend to use the word “artist” because it is a word people understand and it has become a kind of catch-all for a certain kind of *créativité*, but I think it would be more accurate to say that I am a maker interested in scholarship-based projects which use words and images within the framework of design. Something akin to the utopian artists, designers, journalists, and makers of the early 20th century, with their ideas of *gestalt*-theory (i.e. “unified whole”) in which all elements were equally important and designers must be masters of them all. I am interested in the ineffable interaction of these things, in the telling and the framing of a story. I am interested in the whole rather than the part. I am interested in the tricky places where our categories overlap or contradict, where they flicker on the edges of contemporary categorical divides, challenging not only these categories but, by implication, all categories. But what is that called? Is it art? Is it something else entirely? And if so, then what?

These realizations, and the clarity in my interests, ultimately led to my role in co-founding the Morbid Anatomy Museum, and my current role there of Creative Director. Here, I am able to be all at once an institution builder, maker, producer, designer, curator, scholar, networker and in a way which

makes perfect sense. In this position – largely self imagined – I have found a place which makes sense of my interests in too many things, my tendency towards lateral thinking and the connections between things; my interest in the combined effects of images, words, and design in communicating stories about that which interests, as a way of drawing people in and making them question their assumptions.

In a very real way, it was the apexart International Fellowship in Korea which made all this possible. This experience gave me the necessary quiet space to hear my own thoughts and acknowledge my own uncomfortable truths; the strength to act courageously; and the courage of my own convictions. It also put into motion the events which left me truly if painfully free, a prerequisite, in this case, for real change and fulfillment.

Joanna Ebenstein is a Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist, curator, writer, lecturer, and graphic designer. She founded the Morbid Anatomy blog and website, and is cofounder and creative director of the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, New York. She is author of *The Anatomical Venus*, which is the product of nearly 10 years of research, image collection, and photography. She is also coauthor (with Dr. Pat Morris) and featured photographer of *Walter Potter's Curious World of Taxidermy*; and coeditor (with Colin Dickey) and art director of *The Morbid Anatomy Anthology*.

Select Fellowship Journal Entries

Olivia Ciummo

International Fellow to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

December 23, 2014 - January 23, 2015

January 14, 2015

Three Days + More / Far away from the internet

I arrived in Lalibela in the morning; I could not believe how the plane had to land on this tiny plateau. Mountains and canyons all around. There were two men with my name on a paper – one from the hotel the other from the trekking group. I was confused of course, but then found my trekking guide Happy. We loaded up the mini bus with most of the folks from the flight, I could already tell everyone in Lalibela was just amazing with the few conversations that I had (days later this was still true). Happy then took me to his sister's house. A block structure with a tarp overhead and hay on the floor. There was a mud pool that we all had to jump over to get to the stools. Stew cooked, and there was a calf and a tiny sheep tied up next to us. We waited for the priest to bless the dabo (bread). He was a sweet man, with a soft voice. The women covered their heads, the men their shoulders. I felt comfortable wearing a head covering – it was out of respect, no law. I waited through the blessing; Happy was actually checking his phone and took a phone call during the prayer. This I found hilarious, but only laughed to myself. I ate and drank as much as I could to be polite – but to be honest I was kind of scared, I had just gotten over a stomach thing and now I was eating different meats and drinking homebrew. I had no idea if my stomach could deal. I only have observations and impressions. The mixture of symbols and the ambiguity of where I was made me very excited, a total confusion for the western semiotics. Travelers.

Reid Nicholls

International Fellow to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, June 1 - 30, 2014

June 17, 2014 - *Kicking and Screaming*

I went to my boxing class yesterday, at my scheduled time, the time they set for me, and the entire place was missing a wall - as in I could see outside of the building. The pieces of the wall were piled up in the middle of the floor where I guess I would have been boxing. It was perfect because I didn't want to box anyway. Unfortunately they said I should come back in 1 hour and it will be ready. I asked if they were sure, because it looked like a big project and I could come back another day, or never. They were sure they would be done putting the wall back up after an hour. Sigh... So back I go. I was confident I was going to hate boxing, I get winded going up a flight of stairs. But, I thought it was worth it if only to see if there really would be a wall. Sure enough when I walked in there was a brand new brick wall with a still wet smooth top coat of concrete. I couldn't believe it. Now I had to box. The lesson started the way I had pictured it would. I learned the proper stance and form for jabbing and punching. I felt ridiculous. Jab, punch, jab, punch, jab, punch, now ELBOW. What? Elbow? Sweet. From the elbow we moved on to kneeing and then kicking. I realized this was kick boxing like I had seen the day before at another scheduled event, Bokator fighting. The schedule just said boxing. Suddenly it became bad ass and I started to really get into it. I was so jazzed up when I got back to the apartment that I could not stop practicing. Even in the shower I continued to throw elbows and hooks and combinations. What has happened to me?

It's the next day now, I can barely move, and I am having a hard time typing this post because my hands and fingers are twitching and sore. I think it was worth it though.

Marta Simoes Sarkozy

NYC Fellow from São Paulo, Brazil, June 22 - July 22, 2011

July 10, 2011 - *Loosing Subject*

After 2 weeks in this city I felt a conflict between belonging or not, being part of the city or just being a passenger. I enjoy staying in the flat doing things to myself as I was in my own house. I read, I go to gym and sleep as much as I want. I feel very comfortable, good and calm alone having so much time to myself but I also feel lonely. Getting out of the flat is like jumping into another world starting up from the corridor until elevator; there is always someone who obviously was not born here. Inside the elevator some people smile, some say a discrete hi but some just keep the eyes to the buttons or the door. Get in such a small room like an elevator is an instant intimacy which some of us just can't manage. Last week I met twice a lady who was getting repair in her party dress for the marriage of her daughter. Yesterday she told me the wedding was just fine! It seems that every time I go to the streets something new is going on. The more I pace to watch my surrounding the more I notice unseen details. I'm not sure but I think I may be reacting with some kind of camouflage instinct. I catch myself trying to wear in the same way people do, paint my nails with the same colors suiting the colorful summer clothes. I even tried to speak faster but the result was a mess. I was told this residency was intended to work as a break in the artist work but it's so hard to leave home the huge luggage one carries in his head. But I think something is happening; I already see things from outside myself and maybe, who knows I could stop fighting myself and be easy going. Just like a walking on the streets... relaxed but with attention and all my senses on.

Javier Mazza

NYC Fellow from Montevideo, Uruguay, January 10 - February 9, 2015

January 15, 2015 - *Happiness*

The other day I attended meditation, followed by a lesson on Buddhist teachings. The meditation was fine. I managed to follow it patiently and calmly, it helped me calm down a little. Strange thing happened with the lesson that followed, all throughout the lesson I fluctuated between agreement and disagreement with the teacher. We were instructed to concentrate on a happy thought during our meditation. I thought about my daughter and the way she starts to laugh like crazy at certain games we play. After having focused on the happy situation for a while we were told to forget about the source of happiness and concentrate on the feeling in our minds. Amidst meditation I found it hard to do this, I could not get the happy feeling without the object my happiness came from.

During the lesson the teacher explained that happiness could not be found in the world but had to be found in the mind. Happiness that's dependent on worldly objects (which include other human beings) is bound not to be lasting, because sooner or later you may lose the object of your affection.

My personal opinion is that this results rather selfish and bound to seclusion. First I'll explain why the selfishness. If happiness is solely dependent on your mind's perception, then the object that provides you with such happiness is not desired as an end in itself but as a means to an end which is your own happiness: you are knowingly and consciously using this other thing (or other one) to delight in your own happy state of mind. If this line of action is denied then your only option is seclusion. The only way in which you may live in

a happy state of mind without using another thing or person, would be isolating yourself and depriving yourself of other objects, you don't need them anymore, happiness lies within your mind.

What I think is that happiness cannot be achieved without the other. We need the other, not for him or her to makes us happy, but for the both of us to be happy together. Not by the savoring of a state of mind but by the honest sharing of a common experience; in which both get to experience our shared humanity not just an individual state of mind. For me happiness has to be achieved in action not in reflection, even when that action is as simple as spontaneous laughter.

Ahmad Zatari

NYC Fellow from Amman, Jordan, May 30 - June 29, 2012

June 4 , 2012 - *'Salam' in Union Square*

I regret wearing the T-shirt with the Arabic writing on it. Wearing it attracted every single Arab I endlessly bumped into on the streets. At the beginning a sparkling smile would embark looking at the written words. Then asking me where I come from. This is strange-I thought that it would drag a whole conversation. Actually the only curious person who was interested to know what is behind the written words is an Anti-war movement protester in Union Square. Discrimination. He quickly agreed. I told him: basically it is a campaign against the military regime in Egypt, but yes of course, it has social layers. Then he began talking about the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, saying that his movement is calling for a Palestinian state. We call for peace, 'Salam.' He yelled at me when I was walking away.

Marta Simoes Sarkozy

NYC Fellow from São Paulo, Brazil, Jun 22 - Jul 22, 2011

July 14, 2011

I can hear different languages spoken in the streets and still the spoken English with many kinds of accents. I hear fast or slow tongues, open vowels or not, small tune variation or huge, low and sibilant whispers or an unexpected throaty excuse-me. Maybe I listen a southern accent in a subway speech and definitely incomprehensible syllables coming from the mouth of some kid. I'm sitting in a bench in front of a deli and I hear old lady's long chatting beside me. One lady's talking is full of exclamations and I catch lost phrases about relationship. In the corner of the other street I hear a familiar vocabulary. As I walk slowly in the streets capturing as much as I can with my eyes and ears, I listen monologues with or without earplugs; people walking and complaining to themselves or mad at someone who I can see. I do talk to myself in loud voice once in a while but I keep walking and suddenly I'm lost... I have to stop and ask some of those citizens for direction to the Brooklyn subway or Washington Avenue. Then I'm surprised for hearing my own voice an accent among all those sounds. I think to myself: this is New York and I am here... I'm just one more beat in this club.

apexart Fellows

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Line Halvorsen	from Oslo, Norway - nyc	November 2009

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Andeath	from Seoul, South Korea - nyc	October 2013
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Forrest Gillespie	to Seoul, South Korea - int'l	October 2016
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Tatjana		
Kovačević-Vidović	from Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina - nyc	April 2017
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Maytal Rotenberg	from Jerusalem, Isreal	June 2017
Nathan Catlin	to Jerusalem, Isreal	June 2017
Raymond Nsereko	from Kampala, Uganda	July 2017

The **apexart** Fellowship is an intensive cultural immersion and personal challenge with more than 75 different and diverse activities over 30 days operating in more than a dozen countries.

"I think [the Fellowship] made me more aware of the diversity of things places have to offer, and that could be each city. So that is a gift that stays."

Lonnie van Brummelen, The Netherlands

"I feel enriched, and as I say to people, I feel I had a life-experience."

John Beattie, Ireland

"It truly was an amazing experience. Being a month out, I feel almost like I dreamed the experience."

Alex Branch, New York

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