

Sabbatical Leave Report
Linda Nagel, SFRES
Fall 2008

My one-semester sabbatical was designed to focus on the human-forest relationship through visual arts and narratives that depict our historic relationship with forests and changing land use, and to explore the aesthetic and ethical implications this holds for natural resource management today. The overall objective of this sabbatical was to lay a foundation upon which to fuse science, art and ethics, yielding a more holistic approach to problem-solving in the natural resource sciences. My goals were to become versed in the depiction of human-forest relationships in the visual arts through human history by learning the lexicon of art critics, including Europe and the US; to become versed in the relationship between aesthetics and environmental ethics; and to produce a scholarly paper that advances these topics in natural resource management while also incorporating this information into curriculum at MTU.

Although I was on sabbatical for the entire fall 2008 semester, I remained on campus at MTU through September. A master's student of mine defended in September, later than she had originally planned. I was also a committee member for a PhD student who defended in September, and for another PhD student who defended in December. During September, I completed work on a number of manuscripts that were re/submitted to journals for publication. I also participated in a workshop in Milwaukee as part of a funded project titled: *Silvicultural Strategies for an Uncertain Climate Future*. I will be presenting a paper at the National Silviculture Workshop in June 2009 based on this project. Also during this month, I made all arrangements for the travel that served as the central focus of my sabbatical leave.

I spent the month of October engaged in traveling through Germany, The Netherlands, and Austria. It was an intense time of visiting major art museums throughout these countries, while also taking in the natural landscape by traveling by train from city to city. The major cities and museums visited, in order, were:

Hamburg, Germany:

Hamburger Kunsthalle (13th Century to Contemporary)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands:

Rijksmuseum (under restoration, limited selection of Dutch Masterpieces)

van Gogh Museum (large collection spanning van Gogh's life, many landscapes)

Hermitage, Amsterdam (special exhibit of Caspar David Friedrich, German Romantic)

The Hague, The Netherlands:

Mauritshuis (masterpieces from the Dutch Golden Age)

Gelderland, The Netherlands:

Kröller-Müller Museum (located within a National Park, featuring Impressionism)

Frankfurt, Germany:

Städelsches Kunstinstitut (14th Century to Contemporary)

Munich, Germany:

Alte Pinakothek (14th to 18th Century European)

Neue Pinakothek (18th to 19th Century European)

Pinakothek der Moderne (Modern, European)

Lenbachhaus (Private Collection)

Vienna, Austria:

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery (extensive collection of European paintings from the 16th to 18th Century)

Belvedere Palace (Austrian art from the Middle Ages to the present)

Liechtenstein Museum (special exhibit on landscape gardens of Central Europe)

Leopold Museum (collection of masterpieces from the Viennese Secessionist Movement, including landscapes by Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt)

Dresden, Germany:

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (masterpieces from the Italian Renaissance, large collection of Dutch and Flemish landscapes)

Berlin, Germany:

Gemäldegalerie (13th to 18th Century European)

Alte Nationalgalerie (19th Century European)

The insights gained through this exploration are immense. I learned about the beginnings of landscape depictions in paintings, largely related to religious scenes, and could trace exactly when landscapes became a genre in and of themselves. The connections of people to the land from the 14th century to the present have evolved in similar yet different ways throughout Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria. I was able to compare some of these trends to France from a prior visit made several years ago to Paris where I learned a great deal about French painting. This sabbatical experience was unique in several ways: the intensity in which I traveled from museum to museum, making comparisons and contrasts between artists, time periods, and countries allowed for intense focus and a deeper exploration than if these travels had been spread across more time; and, the focus was entirely on European art – I saw no American art while making site visits except the occasional piece as part of a modern exhibit. I also gained an appreciation for more artistic medium than I anticipated: several museums featured exhibits that included film and photography focused on nature, which broadened my perspective on the issues they presented as well as the medium used.

Upon my return to the US, I traveled to Reno, Nevada to attend the annual Silviculture Instructor's Tour as part of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) National Convention. I was a co-author on a poster that was presented at the National Convention. I also serve as the faculty advisor for the student chapter of SAF, and helped represent the MTU students that were in attendance at the National Convention. During the field tour, I spent a significant amount of time interacting with the author (Dr. Klaus Puettmann) of a book that just came out that month titled: *A Critique of Silviculture: Managing for Complexity*. Based on this discussion, I decided to teach a new one-credit seminar course by the same title this spring (2009) focused on the book, which traces the roots of the discipline of silviculture to Germany (a nice parallel to the work I was doing in Germany on landscapes and art), and encapsulates aesthetic relationships of humans and natural resource management to nature. To my surprise, there was a large demand for this course, and it filled to capacity with 20 students enrolled.

In addition, based on the interaction with Dr. Puettmann, I have been invited to guest teach at The University of Applied Science in Eberswalde, Germany in June 2009.

In December, I began to explore the second phase of this project by visiting the Art Institute in Chicago, which houses an extensive collection of European and American art. This visit allowed me to

understand how nature has been depicted through time as exploration and settlement advanced from East to West across North America. This also opened up the door for comparing human-nature relationships and artistic styles between Europe and North America. As a continuation of this exploration, I made a trip in January 2009 to Boston to visit the Museum of Fine Arts, which features an extensive collection of Hudson River School painters. Further exploration of American landscapes through paintings represents the next step of this project.

It has become very clear to me how I will incorporate what I've learned thus far into my current classes, particularly the ones I teach at our Integrated Field Practicum each fall (6 credits). I have found that the human dimension is often underemphasized because it can get messy in the classroom. More so than ever, I realize the importance of making and keeping this connection with the students as they advance through our curriculum. Consideration of aesthetics as part of decision-making processes in natural resource management, as well as nurturing individual connections to nature, is as important as the technical skills our students walk away with.

Another major product from this sabbatical is a new UN1001 Perspectives on Inquiry course that I will teach in Fall 2009 titled: *Looking at Nature through Pictures*. This class will lay a foundation upon which students will learn how to bridge the chasm between science and the humanities, and will facilitate development of a more holistic approach to problem-solving. This will be accomplished by exploring the human-nature relationship through readings, and by actively looking at and critiquing art, photographs, and film. Changes in human-nature relationships over time as well as the influence of western European artistic traditions will be explored as they heavily influence American ideals and approaches to land management. This course is possible only because of the knowledge and experience gained during this sabbatical leave.

This sabbatical work is ongoing as I am currently working on a manuscript that synthesizes the work I undertook during the fall. I have also begun outlining a grant proposal that will extend the work that I have begun. Over the past year, continuing through the present, I have done extensive reading about the history of land-use in Europe and the US, along with absorbing historical and present-day environmental philosophy literature. I have also continued exploring landscape art by making a trip to London, UK over spring break 2009 where I visited several museums, including the National Gallery, and the Tate Britain, both housing extensive collections of landscape paintings. My enthusiasm for this work is growing, and will undoubtedly become infused in the future research and teaching I do at MTU.

I sincerely thank MTU for the opportunity to take this sabbatical leave. It has been tremendously enriching, and I have grown professionally in many directions.