



A Tale of Two Cities:  
*Representations of  
Havana, Cuba*

George G. Booth Traveling Fellowship

Megan Peters

Image Credit: Chelsey Boatwright

## A Tale of Two Cities:

*Representations of Havana, Cuba*

Abstract

*There exists in the minds of many Americans a crumbling city full of delightful patina and meticulously restored Chevrolets and Cadillacs, where the glamour of the Kennedys and the macabre fascination with the cold war and nuclear fallout build in imaginations a world of exoticism and intrigue.*

### **This is City #1.**

*There exists 90 miles south of Key West, Florida a place two million people call home, a place where life continues as it always has. It is a city struggling to make do under economic and political pressures, where hope and tenacity prevail. A city on the brink of profound change.*

### **This is City #2.**

I am proposing to research the various representations of Havana, Cuba and the role aesthetics plays within them. To begin, I will analyze how these representations are constructed, whether through techniques of photography, collage, film, or drawing. I will then look at how the constructed images are disseminated (perhaps as advertisements, travel blogs, or exhibitions) to ultimately unravel how the uses of representation and image are instrumentalized for patriotism, propaganda, self-expression, or cultural identity.

What facilitates the phenomenon of one Havana with two distinct identities is the difference between the external gaze and the internal gaze of the city. The external gaze embodies aesthetics with distance and this is what leads to representations laden with misplaced nostalgia, the romanticization of decay and poverty, and the overall objectification of the city and of the country. The internal gaze embodies aesthetics with an agenda as questions of Cuban modernity, politics, authenticity, and identity all begin to arise. Before traveling to Cuba I will study representations with an external gaze and while in Havana I will seek out and analyze those created from an internal gaze.

What do I mean, "aesthetics"?

The distinction between the two uses of aesthetics in this research is important to understand. The first uses the philosophical study of art where the aesthetic experience demands distance, sometimes sacrificing ethics in order to achieve this distance. When people say, "Go to Cuba before it's ruined!" they are embodying an objective, external, aesthetic view that entirely ignores the humanitarian consequences of keeping Cuba "ruined". This is City #1. The second definition of aesthetics is based on the assertion that aesthetics carry messages and meanings through appearances, which can then be interpreted

by the individual or society. When Cuban architect Orlando Inclán says, "The biennial gives the image of the city that we want to have." he is referring to the perceptions one makes when associating a city with a culturally significant event such as a art biennial. This is City #2.

Why is this research relevant?

Architecture and our understanding of it are deeply rooted in the visual and the information we attain from the aesthetic experience. Using the eye of an architect, this work begins to understand how representations are complicit in not only passively representing a city but also actively creating one. Havana is a pertinent site for this research as for the first time Cubans have to decide how they present themselves to the world and actually have the agency to do so. How are the different representations of Havana constructing an image of the government, of the society, and of the people? What are the differences between how a governmental body constructs and disseminates an image of identity versus how an individual does? How does Havana represent its aspirations for its approaching modernity? In what ways, through the use of image, does the city attempt to reconcile its historical identity with its burgeoning one? How should the city and its citizen instrumentalize its image authentically?

When to go?

My travel to Havana would be planned in conjunction with one of the most important holidays in Cuba, "26 Julio", which celebrates the anniversary of Fidel Castro's 1953 assault on Santiago de Cuba's Moncada Barracks, and thus marking the beginnings of the Cuban Revolution. The fervor and patriotism is said to be celebrated with communist banners, posters, graffiti, rallies, and speeches. This event would commence 3 weeks of in-country research.

#### Projected Expenses

Airfare: \$600.00  
Research Materials + Museum Admission Costs: \$350.00  
Lodging + Living Expenses: \$150.00/day totaling \$3,150.00  
Exhibition Displays + Printing: \$2,000.00  
Total: \$6,100.00

Thank you for considering my research proposal. I am very excited by this opportunity and it would be an honor to be selected as the 2016 George G. Booth traveling fellow.



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## A Tale of Two Cities:

### *Representations of Havana, Cuba*

#### Proposal

#### Itinerary

##### 00 Week - Upon Arrival

##### *Seeking Assistance*

Habana Re-Generación (<http://www.habanaregeneracion.com/>) is an architectural think tank run by young Cuban architects. I would like to arrange a meeting with them, as I believe they would be helpful for providing context and knowledge about the contemporary architectural culture within Havana. As well, they would be able to provide me with "insider knowledge" of where to look for evocative representations of the city, more than I would be able to discover on my own.

##### 01 Week - 25 JULY to 29 JULY

*Seeking Historical Representations - Observing how government sponsorship and historical accounts represent the city.*

Celebration for the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution

Habana Vieja

El Capitolio

Palacio de los Capitanes Generales

Plaza de la Revolución

Cuartel de Moncada

Museo de la Revolucion

##### 02 Week - 1 AUGUST to 5 AUGUST

*Seeking Cultural Representations - Starting at the heart of the biennale, examine how artists and other cultural agents use representation.*

Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam (Main Office of the Biennale)

Escuelas Nacionales de Arte

Teatro Bertold Brecht

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes

Fábrica de Arte Cubano

Kcho (multi-media art gallery)

##### 03 Week - 8 AUGUST to 12 AUGUST

*Seeking Representations in Daily Life - How the people of Havana endeavor to represent themselves and their city.*

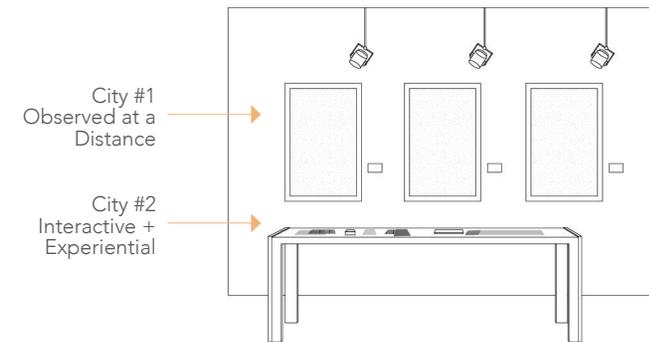
This would entail visits to places such as schools, churches, shops, restaurants, markets, movie theaters, public parks, soccer fields - the public places that make up everyday life in Havana. Conversations with willing participants (local citizens) would also be beneficial at this stage.

#### Project Delivery, 3 Ways

1 : Blog - Content describing my daily experiences, interactions, and overall thoughts and reactions while in Havana.

Post-travel, my research findings will be collected and presented as an exhibition and a printed publication. Both will illustrate and explain the various facets of modern Cuban identity through the use of representation and aesthetics.

2 : Exhibition - At this time I imagine the exhibition using photographic and objet trouvé techniques to visually present the external and internal gazes of Havana. Various exhibition techniques will be engaged to further emphasize the complicit relationship between representations, aesthetics and image.



3 : Publication - A more in depth analysis of how representations are constructed, disseminated, and instrumentalized within and outside of Havana.

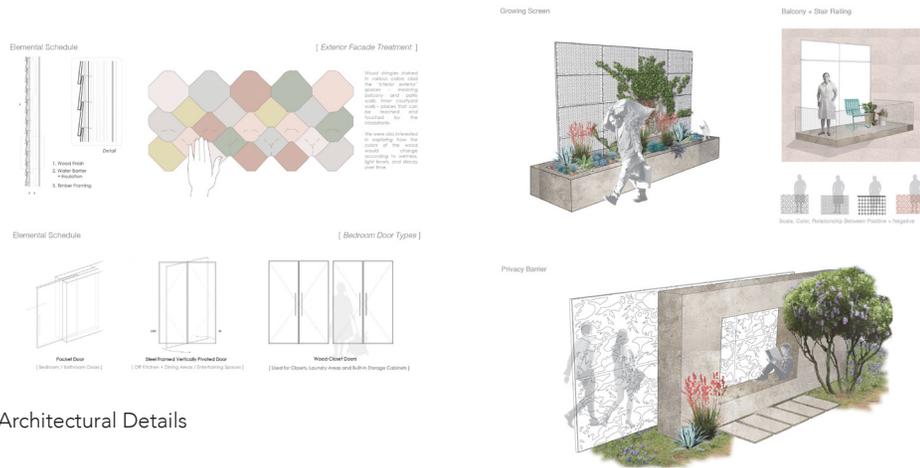


Image Credit: Michael Eastman

# Systems Studio: Served + Serving

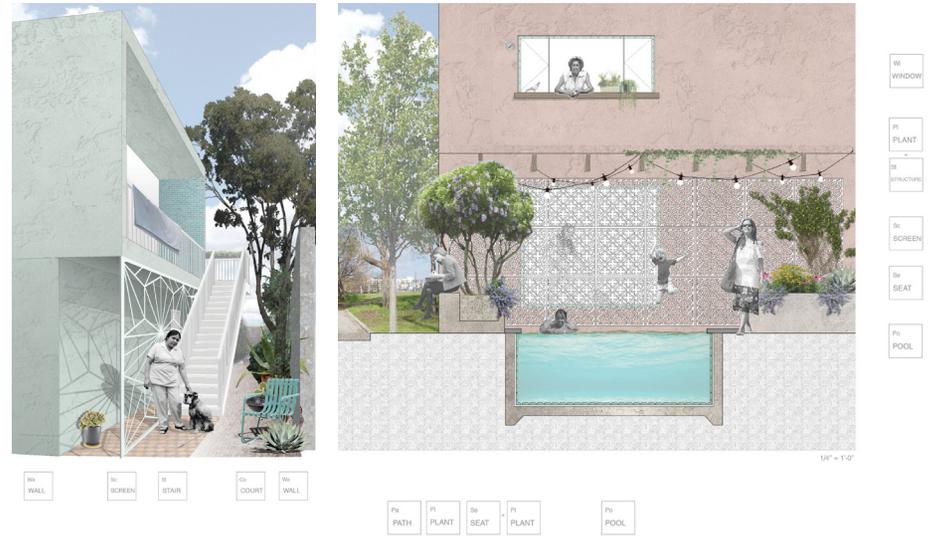
Portfolio

This project, done in collaboration with Troy Hillman, worked to reframe the idea of "assisted living" and think in more depth about the typical organizations of domestic life. Our medium-density courtyard housing in Austin, Texas was located in an east Austin neighborhood traditionally inhabited by minorities. The city of Austin is rapidly growing and many areas are feeling the effects of gentrification, this neighborhood feeling those effects particularly strongly. How can housing attempt to assuage the tensions between



Architectural Details

"Habitable" Section



"A Day in the Life" Vignettes

new residents and old in a changing city? Instead of making the reality of hired help or live-in nannies "hush hush" we embraced these circumstances and worked to elevate the unique and very personal relationships through domestic architecture. As well, we focused on the experience of the architectural detail at a variety of different scales.

## Exquisite Corb: Full Bloom

Portfolio

The Menuserie Sylva is complete. Almost. The basement is raw. The generous attic spaces are exposed and drafty.

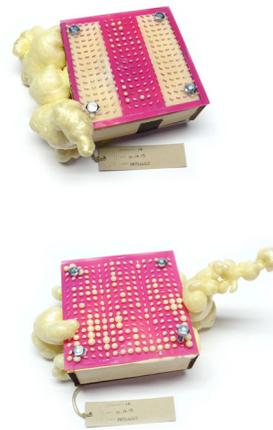
In response to this partial unfinishedness, the project reconsiders the potential aesthetic of an otherwise hidden and under-considered architectural element: foam insulation. Evoking the historical lineage of insulation, beginning in the form of tapestry and later evolving to include less refined but more available materials like horsehair, sheep's wool, newspaper, and other inexpensive, the project works to combine both functionalism and ornament in an otherwise banal, industrial, and under-considered building element. Today, through ubiquitous industrial streamlining, insulation has been simplified, standardized, rendered austere, and virtually invisible. As a result, rolling, blowing, spraying and so on, are assessed by measures of speed rather than finish.

Full Bloom considers architecture's tectonic potentials made possible by rendering commonplace, industrial matter – in this case spray foam – visually explicit. Combining spray foam, precise application of paint, and a replicable mold, the project produces a series of insulating blocks deployed to weatherize and ornament interior surfaces. In this scenario, the architect, by reclaiming the prosaic, suggests speculates about the breadth of possible impact by engaging what might otherwise be dismissed as meritless.

Work done in collaboration with Jaxine Chang and Sydney Brown.

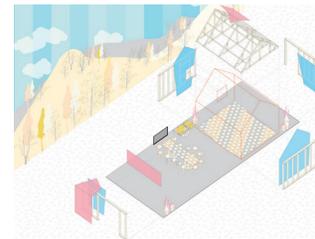


The Attic Space at Menuserie Sylva



Bloom Test Units

Blooming Foam Unit



Cabanon Mock Up For Final Review Presentation



Detail of "Blooms"

# Launching Design Practices: Meg Peters Architecture & Interiors

Portfolio

**The Objective:** Design from the ground up a small-scale professional architectural practice ready to launch one to five years after graduation.

**The Process:** Through hands-on workshops and seminars this course aimed to "simulate the startup process from concept to launch." The startup developed over time using market research, positioning, strategic branding and identity design, business information and planning, consulting prospective customers, startup expense budgeting and profit planning, operational design and business formation, brochure design, website design, and pitching.

**The Pitch:** To test my readiness to launch, I pitched my startup to a number of architectural and business professionals. As they stepped into their "client shoes" and began to question my business from their personal perspectives and experiences, my confidence grew each time I rebounded a tricky question successfully, professionally, and convincingly. In the end I presented a persuasive pitch and felt ready to launch! Additionally, I assembled a cumulative "Startup Portfolio" to refer back to when I one day launch my actual future business venture.

Key  
In C  
In A



**Philosophy:**  
We take seriously the influence home has on the others areas of your life and therefore see the work we do as vitally important. We strive to design unique solutions to each client's specific needs and desires.



- We Promise:**
1. Creative and Customized Designs
  2. Perfection in Craftsmanship
  3. Perfection in Professionalism
  4. Innovative Solutions
  5. An Enjoyable Experience

Excerpt From Startup-Pitch Presentation



Fixed Costs: Rent, Employee Salaries, Utilities  
Branding Design  
Variable Costs: Labor and Wholesale Product Costs

## Positioning



- Personalized property search
- Potential property is within your budget and other desires
- Structure so that it is fit for the location
- Create and design customized and cohesive home interiors

Time frame, budget, pieces of each specific element

Identify: Fixer houses that need potential with the right homeowners  
Homeowners visualize the homes the agent is selling them

Assist agents in deciding which "fixer uppers" are worth listing and selling and which to pass up



*Meg Peters - Architecture and Interiors*

Meg Peters Architecture and Interiors is a full-service architectural design firm led by founder and principal architect Megan Peters. The firm specializes in residential real estate consulting, renovation, and interior design. The aim is to help residents turn ugly homes into their dream homes.

## Customer Relationships



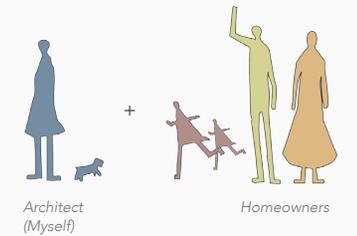
I am a **Dedicated Personal Assistance** in service of my clients.

Relationships with clients develop over a long period of time and is dependent on understanding the customer's specific needs and pain points. Good communication is necessary.

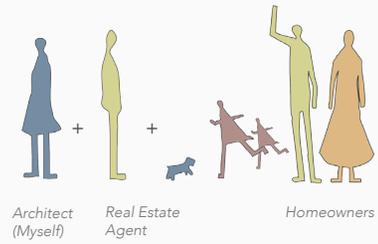
## Customer Segments



**Primary: Homeowners**  
Looking for a customized home design in both the exterior and interior.



**Secondary: Real Estate Agents**  
Collaborating with them to sell houses in need of renovation.



## Channels



Primary - In Person, Face-to-Face Communication and Networking, Word of Mouth

Secondary - Email, Phone, Website, Social Media

\* Must make sure portfolio of completed projects is visible and easily accessible \*

## Revenue Streams

- Reoccurring Transactional Revenue
- For Consulting Services: Hourly Fee
- For Architectural Services: Percentage of Construction Costs
- For Interior Design Services: Hourly Fee



# BASE: Mumbai Colors of Bombay

Portfolio

As part of a Taubman College travel studio I spent five weeks in Mumbai studying the architecture and architectural features that make up this fascinating and exhilarating city. While as a group we measured and documented ancient water tanks in the outlying city of Alibag, each student was able to pick a smaller more personal study to undertake and I chose to look at the Colors of Bombay. Using a combination of David Hockney's ubiquitous joiners, pantone color matching, collaging of found objects, and the creation of physical color swatches I attempted to inventory some of the colors and more interesting, the color combinations found within the city.

Studio led by Mary- Ann Ray + Robert Mangurian



### Process

1. Prepare Materials
2. Mix Pigment, Plaster, and Water
3. Apply
4. Sand Smooth
5. Finished!



Finished Color Palettes

(Right) Spreads From Final Publication



80



## BASE मुंबई

### FIELD WORK

Site: Alley Neighborhood Near the 5 Bridge

Date: 25MAY2015

Sheet 1 of 1

Team: Megan Peters

We were walking to a Persian restaurant for dinner and the streets were crowded (as usual), people were unloading trucks and women were selling produce and grains on the sidewalks. I looked to my left down an alley that a man standing nearby said had the local radio station office in it. I'm not sure that part was understood correctly but a row of painted shutter doors caught my eye. We kept walking but I had to tell the group to stop, I had to explore this little colorful alley!

The way that it was organized was interesting to me, in a daily life can be charming too way. On one side were small individual attached homes, each exterior was painted its own hue, the entry was covered and "sprawled" with hanging plants, a bare hanging bulb, and the top blue plastic water tanks. There is a step up from the street to the entry, wide enough for two people to stand on. While I was there a handful of women were sitting together outside their homes. The alley was narrow enough, maybe 4' across but no more than 10', that another woman who was sitting opposite the homes could still be a part of the conversation.

On the opposite side of the alley it was service oriented. There were more painted plants, clothes lines strung, shelf storage for crates, parking for motorcycles and even a broken down ambulance.

The entire neighborhood butts directly up to the railroad tracks and the train station itself, reinforcing the home and in-service of home areas.



58



Things Bought

"Tiffin" - Eating or drinking out of mealtime. The word itself is thought to be derived from 'tiffin,' an 18th century English slang term for sipping."

Excerpt from the book "Tiffin"  
Written by Rukmini Srinivas

6MAY2015

"We had lunch which was brought to us in these tins called 'tiffin.' They are stacked metal tins that rice and curry come in. It has been arranged for them to come every day for our lunch and each lunch costs about a dollar. I actually bought in each one at the grocery store this evening for about \$3.50 each or about \$200 apiece. I plan to pack our lunches in these!"

81

### Architectural Objects

The thing that strikes me most about this small neighborhood is how peaceful and calm it is despite being sandwiched between a busy street and the railroad tracks. From observation along you can tell that there is pride and care taken with these dwellings. There must also be joy in the home and community making.



Alley Neighborhood South of the "S" Bridge



59



## Experimental Surface Treatments in Ceramics: Textures & Terracotta Screens

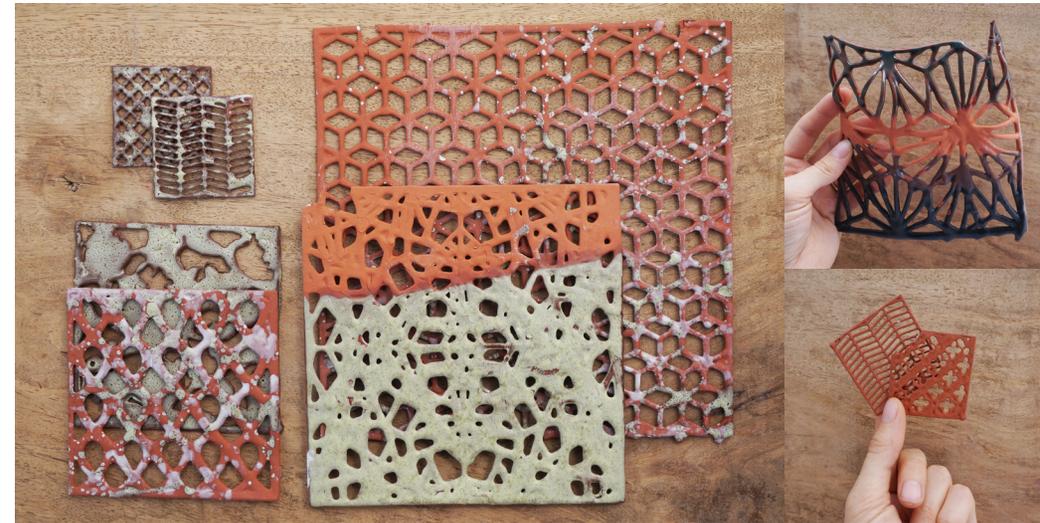
Portfolio

For a studio art course taught by painter Jim Cogswell, I explored hand-built surface treatments and textures in a new medium, clay. My interest in the course was to gain experience with the making of ceramics tiles as they are a material I worked daily with in my job as an Interior Designer.

Despite no prior experience with ceramics I took to it quickly and fell in love with creating small tightly designed overall patterns with subtleties in the colors and textural variety.



Hand-Built Details  
Exploring Carved Texture  
Exploring Applied Glaze  
Unexpected Effects of Under Glazes



Terracotta Screens

For my final project in the course I explored the making of architectural ceramic screens. The technique of slip coating that I employed had never been used before so it was a new experience for both myself, Professor Cogswell, our TA, and even the seasoned ceramics studio coordinator!

Using a process of laser cutting chipboard, then dipping the cut pieces into terracotta slip, and then finally firing and glazing the pieces I was able to create lattice-like ceramic screens. The final pieces are extremely delicate. I am excited to continue to explore the technique and see how it may be developed into a larger-scale architectural element in the future.



Process 1. Laser cut chipboard 2. Dip in terracotta slip 3. Dry 4. Bisque fire 5. Glaze fire

## EDUCATION

University of Michigan - Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning  
Master of Architecture Candidate - Expected Graduation May 2016  
3.94 GPA

University of Virginia - School of Architecture  
Bachelor of Science in Architecture - Graduated May 2008

## EXPERIENCE

**Interior Design Assistant - Pinney Designs**

Cambridge, Massachusetts - 2012 to 2014

Pinney Designs is a full scale residential interior design firm that specializes in new construction and renovations. I created technical specification drawings and books, schedules for tile, appliances, lighting, and furnishings, ordered and tracked custom furniture, window treatments, case goods, lighting, and accessories. I assisted in the design of wall and floor tile layouts, custom cabinetry + built-ins, and furniture plans. I managed the scheduling of clients, contractors, and other vendors.

**Interior Decorator - Haven at Home Interiors**

Killeen, Texas - 2011 to 2012

Haven at Home Interiors offers interior design and renovation services, resale staging, and custom event decorating. I created composition story boards and renders for client presentations and coordinated fabrics, paint colors, furniture, lighting, and other decor accessories in order to create custom interior design plans.

**Interior Decorator - Buy the Hour Interiors**

Harker Heights, Texas - 2009 to 2011

An interior decorating firm that specializes in residential design for military families, who face the challenge of making a house a home despite frequent moves. Responsibilities included the creation and presentation of custom design plans and interior renders both by hand and digitally. I designed the company's printed media, such as business cards, newsletters, and advertisements.

**Teaching Assistant - "Lessons in Making"**

University of Virginia - Charlottesville, Virginia - January 2008 - May 2008

I worked as a Teaching Assistant for Professor Sanda Illiescu's "Lessons in Making" course. I was responsible for teaching a weekly discussion section, creating the assignments, and was responsible for assigning grades. The course was designed to be an introduction to the technical drawing skills necessary in architecture school.

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

**Ceramics Volunteer - Ann Arbor Art Center**

Ann Arbor, Michigan - Summer 2015

Volunteering at the Ann Arbor Art Center in the ceramics department filled out my knowledge of the more technical aspects of ceramics as I learned more about kiln firing and loading, mixing clay, "pugging" clay, as well as creating and testing glazes.

## SKILLS

**Using a Mouse:**

Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign), AutoCAD, Sketch-Up, Basic skills in Revit and Rhino, Some Experience Using Design Manager

**Using my Hands:**

Power Tools, Refinishing Furniture, Laser Cutting, Lighting Installation, Interior House Painting, Sewing, Basic Re-Upholstery Skills, and Welding

**Artistic:**

Freehand Sketching and Drawing, Collage, Watercolor, Traditional Printmaking Techniques, Hand-Built Ceramics, Glaze Making, Basic Bookbinding

**Languages:**

English, Basic Conversational Spanish, Three Years of French and One of Italian

## ABROAD

Italy: May 2007 and July 2008 - January 2009

My first trip to Italy was as part of a studio abroad to study and document the architecture of Andrea Palladio. I returned after graduating and spent the next six months traveling Europe.

México: March 2010 and June - July 2014

My first trip to México was experienced from the sidecar of a motorcycle as my husband and I rode around the country for four weeks. Then, in the summer before enrolling in graduate school I spent two months studying Spanish in San Miguel de Allende, México.

Mumbai, India: May 2015

I spent five weeks this past summer primarily in Mumbai as part of a summer travel studio, I documented the ancient water tanks of Alibag, and using the Pantone color system documented the colors found in Bombay's urban architecture.

## EXHIBITION

Student Show - Ann Arbor, Michigan - March 2016

Exquisite Corb Studio's work was presented as part of the Student Show which highlights the best work of the semester.

Atelier Slyva Presentation - Saint Dié des Vosges, France - October 2016

Presented the work of a seven day charrette to a group of French students and professors from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Art et de Design de Nancy.