

## **Chapter 2**

### **College Life (January – July 2004)**

*"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see."*

– Edgar Degas

Soon after returning to Emerson College from Singapore in early January, I became happily immersed in the final two terms of the Visual Arts Course. New learning experiences awaited. In the following seven months, I made three trips to Europe – France in February, Spain in April and Italy in July. Never would I have envisaged that travelling to Europe would be a regular feature during my stay in Emerson. And there were more trips to come in my second and third year on the sculpture course.

#### **Second Term of Visual Arts**

Claudia, a guest tutor from Germany, conducted lessons in Relief Sculpture in the first five weeks. Emerson was a familiar place to her as she had graduated from the Sculpture Course several years earlier. In the last five weeks Margaret Shillan continued with us the painting lessons she started in the first term. 'History of Art' lessons conducted by Rudolf and Ken were scheduled after lunch four times a week. Weekly afternoon lessons with a pottery teacher, who lived in Forest Row, gave us a respite from the grey cold clay and paints. We all looked forward to the course trip during the February break to see in Paris, some of the masterpieces introduced in the History of Art lectures.

#### **Relief Sculpture**

It was a good experience to work continuously on a single piece the whole morning from Monday to Friday. In the first term we created many small forms in

clay with Rudolf. However, with Claudia we had to produce just one relief sculpture. In the first week, she got us to make a relief collectively on a large flat surface of clay. This communal exercise caused a few tensions among the classmates as some people were more dominant and wanting to have their way. Certainly, this experience was an insight into our personalities. I am not exaggerating but all the characteristics of the animals of the Chinese Zodiac, from the rat to the pig, were displayed.



Weren't we glad to return to our individual work? Each of us was to make a flat rectangular surface about 90 cm by 60 cm, with small pieces of clay, sticking them together bit by bit. And then to create concave and convex forms on it, by piling more clay on top of it or digging out clay from the surface. We had no notion what the ultimate form would look like, we just simply shaped the clay. Initially, the sculpture looked like a mess of ridges and craters.

Both Claudia and Rudolf reviewed our works weekly and gave us feedback. The comments I received at the first review were (a) too much flat surface. i.e. not utilising the clay enough to create concave and convex forms, (b) my edges were too sharp and (c) unclear directions of the forms. I was told to consider how to distribute the concave and convex forms on the surface; where the convex parts and the concave parts meet; and the transition from concave to convex and vice versa.

I realised that when one part of the surface was changed, other parts would also need to be changed so that the whole form looked balanced. It was not an easy task.

In the third week, we were still making changes, moving the clay upwards, spreading it sideways, filling up the craters or digging more cavities. How would we know when to stop? Another review session was held whereby all the students gave comments on one another's work. The feedback I received was that the



Relief Sculpture, 90cm by 60cm

upper part of my form was astral-like and the physical elements in the lower part were very strong, thus making the entire work appeared to have two distinct forms. I need to shape it into a more harmonious entity so that different parts related to one another. I was also given a tip to stand away and look at the form from a distance, to visualise the improvements required. Well, more work to do then.

We had only one more week to complete the sculpture. Guided by Rudolf's words - 'Use our eyes and hands' and 'listen to what the form needs', I persevered. Finally, regardless of whether we were happy with our relief, we had to conclude our fiddling with the clay. I felt that the experience in doing relief sculpture shifted something inside me. During the process, there was one lump on the surface that I felt uncomfortable with. After getting rid of it, I felt as if something heavy in my heart had been removed too. Very strange. Perhaps I had experienced first-hand the effect of sculpture therapy.

## **Painting Lessons**

Painting with Margaret was more enjoyable than in the first term. Gouache, a water-based material that produces thicker paint than water colour on paper, was introduced. By diluting the paint, however, a gouache painting does resemble a water colour painting. The first few sessions were on classification of colours and using them to create mood. We learned that the minor colours that produce a sombre mysterious effect in paintings, are blue and black. The so-called suspension colours that create a dreamy picture, are violet, green, grey, and brown, and the major colours like red, yellow, orange, pink and white generate a lighter mood, bringing light and joy to a painting. To achieve a balance in a picture, give a bit of a spark by adding white, while painting in dreamy colours, and add some sombre colours when using the majors. We examined the different shades of grey by mixing two complementary colours – green and red, blue and orange, violet and yellow. And we created black using indigo and cadmium red. We also discussed the qualities of transparent and opaque paints. The advice was to start a painting with a light wash and to avoid strong, bold colours at the beginning as it would be harder to make a colour transition as we progressed.

There was a tendency for me to overwork a painting and making the colours bolder too soon.

## Exercises in Painting

I still have a vivid memory of one exercise and Margaret's reaction to my painting. The exercise was to use two complementary colours to create squares and rectangles. My creation was a set of concentric squares, centred and symmetrical, using violet and yellow.

"The brilliant yellow between two dark violet squares looks unhappy, yellow should be allowed to expand.", Margaret commented. Didn't I notice that it was asking for more space? And the outlines of the squares needed to be softened.



My purple painting on the wall on the right.

She vigorously cleared the rigid boundaries with a damp sponge and asked me to re-paint. I tried to soften the painting by using a cooler lemon yellow instead of brilliant yellow, increasing the space occupied by light violet, and reducing the area of the dark violet square. However, the yellow paint still shone brightly, sandwiched between the violets. Finally, Margaret suggested that I replaced the central square with a circle, which would ease the harshness of the painting.

On reflection, I realise now that this painting portrayed the layers of rigid walls enclosing me, and Margaret was helping me to break free.

Margaret gave us another exercise to change the way we looked at objects and scenes. We were asked to paint a scene in the college grounds in its natural colours, then create another of the same scene, but change the colours used in the original painting to their complementary. Thus, the green field became red field, the blue sky became orange. This exercise was a precursor to her explanation of two painting styles - 'Impressionism' and 'Expressionism'. Impressionistic artists do not create a realistic picture but portray their impression

of what they see. The French artist Monet is an example of an impressionist artist. Expressionism is a style in which the artist expresses his/her emotions in response to the subject, be it an object, an event, or a person. I found the abstract expressionism works of Jackson Pollock rather revolting, and Edvard Munch's works rather dark. Expressionism apparently was not my cup of tea.

## **Egg Tempera**

The last week with Margaret was spent learning to make egg tempera and creating a painting on wood using this medium. Egg tempera, an ancient medium used before the advent of oil paints, is created by mixing coloured pigments with egg yolk. I still have Margaret's recipe for making tempura.

1. Separate the egg white and yoke.
2. Hold the membrane of the yoke between the thumb and the second finger and extract the yoke into a bottle. Discard the membrane.
3. Mix the yoke with an equal amount of linseed oil, adding the oil a little at a time and beating the mixture with a spoon. (this mixture could be stored up to a month in the fridge)
4. To create the paint, pour out a small portion of the mixture and add 2 parts of water to 1 part of the mixture and then pour the combined mixture onto the colour pigment powder
5. Grind the powder until the mixture is smooth (this becomes the paint)
6. Apply the paint using a brush on the pre-gessoed wood panel.

Medieval and early renaissance painters used this medium. As tempera paint dried rapidly, we had to be quick in executing our painting and being a 'slow cooker' myself, I felt rather stressed using this medium.

## **History of Art**

My knowledge of the history of European art was rather limited before Rudolf's lecture series. My first encounter with European art was during my Western European holiday tour in the early 1980s. The huge portraits and landscapes in

The Louvre in Paris, the sculptures in the British Museum in London and the Dutch paintings in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, had left a deep impression on me.

Rudolf traced the development of art from the Egyptian period to modern times. We looked at the Egyptian sculptures. How stiff, strong and still they are. All the statues have a serious look on their face. I could easily relate to the characteristics of Egyptian artwork, having seen the gigantic statues and the pyramids when I was holidaying in Egypt in 2000. Then, with Greek marble sculptures, came movement. The facial features, the human body and the Greek women in their flowing dresses – I love them all. The bent arms, curvy bodies and drapery showed movement – expansion and contraction, unlike the stiff upright Egyptian statues.

Rudolf then went on to Roman sculptures which closely imitated the Greek style. He contrasted the divine beauty of the Greek and the ego-centred Roman sculptures, from the time of the ancient Roman emperors to Romanesque Art in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The early Christian art portrayed figures with gestures of worship with palms facing upwards. Gothic was a style of medieval art developed out of Romanesque. Gothic architecture in the form of churches and cathedrals emerged between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, mostly in France.

The Italian Renaissance era was divided into three periods – Pre-renaissance (1300), Renaissance (1400) and High Renaissance (1500). Cimabue, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, and Raphael were some well-known Italian Renaissance painters. It was Cimabue who first broke away from the style of flat and highly stylised painting. His works had a more 3-D effect with shading and life-like proportions. Of the Renaissance painters, Raphael is my favourite. His portraits of both men and women were exquisite and so rich in colours. It was a pity that Raphael died at a young age of thirty-seven.

The famous works of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael were created in the High Renaissance time. The sculptures of Michelangelo, who was actively creative from his early twenties to his late eighties, showed strongly the thinking, feeling and willing elements, according to Steiner. His best works were towards the end of his life, although his most famous creations were his early works, including 'David'.

Rudolf talked more about sculpture when he introduced Modern Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He showed us examples of works by Lipschitz, Giacometti, Rodin, Brancusi, Arp, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, highlighting the style and the creativity development of each sculptor. All these sculptors pioneered new styles. For example, Brancusi's KISS differed from Rodin's KISS. I do like Brancusi's KISS – minimalistic and neat. He then went on to relate space art with Steiner's threefold human being. A line represents thinking, a plane is to do with feeling and volume indicates willing. Well, some references for us to observe when looking at sculptures. I prefer the works of Barbara Hepworth amongst the British sculptors. Coincidentally, some friends in London who were going to Cornwall for a weekend break during Easter, offered to include me in their party. As they were art lovers, we had the opportunity to appreciate first-hand Hepworth's works in Saint Ives.

"Modern artists sometimes got into a fixed style and they developed works to meet others' demands and to please their clients and patrons." This comment made me wonder what style I would be pursuing when I became an artist after graduation. He prompted us to think about an artist's responsibility to society, not just to create ego-based works.

'Land art' or Earthworks, a movement which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s whereby materials of the earth and objects from nature such as rocks, soil, twigs, leaves and snow were used in sculpturing. Rudolf showed us examples of works by British land artists – Andy Goldsworthy, David Nash and Richard Long. Such artworks are site specific and the artist's aim is to bring sculptures into the environment to harmonise with the surrounding landscape.

Buildings are basically huge sculptures sitting on land. Human beings are unconsciously affected by the environments they create. Rudolf, who changed his course of study from architecture to sculpture in his younger days, had much to say on this. Sensitivity to the environment is essential when designing a huge structure on a piece of land. This made me ponder the effects of living in a concrete jungle like Singapore, where buildings stretch further and further upwards as the years go by. Architects nowadays seem to soften the harsh urban environment by replacing tall rectangular blocks by more curvy structures.

I enjoyed these lectures which were delivered in a fascinating way, peppered with humour, Rudolf style. It was an enlightening experience to listen to his words and to view images of the artworks on his many slides.

## Pottery

We learned how to make pottery using the coiling technique. Our first project was to create small objects such as a cup. After rolling the terra-cotta clay into thin cylindrical strips about the thickness of a pencil, we built the walls of the cup by placing one coil on top of another, taking care all the time to maintain its shape and not letting the structure collapse. Then we smoothed the surface of the clay and added a handle. As there was no kiln in the college, the pottery instructress had to take our works home to fire them in her kiln. We got to see our creations only in the next lesson, a week later.

We were set free to make anything we liked after learning the basic techniques of coiling and glazing. Some of my classmates went on to make some quirky clay sculptures. My choices – teapot and vase. The products of my handiwork turned out to be quirky too, not by design though. It was more to do with my inability to build the walls of the vessels upright as the soft coils kept on sagging as I piled them higher. As a result, I was told that my teapot, which I later gave to my brother Chek Tow, had a distinctive character.



Quirky teapot

## Course Trip

We, the visual arts students, were full of excitement as we prepared for our first course trip to Paris and Chartres in February. Bernie, one of the college chefs, accompanied us. She organised the food for our five days in Paris, and we loaded boxes of vegetables and cooking ingredients into the college van which took us to Dover and across the English Channel by ferry, to Calais on the French coast. Our tutor, Ken, was the leader of the trip as well as the driver. There were less than

fifteen in our party as a few students had left the course at the end of the first term, and the part-timers did not join in.

Accommodation in Paris was in a dance school. As it was also the term break for its students, the school was vacant, and we could stay there for a small fee, sleeping on the floor of two studio rooms, on mattresses provided. There was a kitchenette and a minute shower cubicle created by a shower curtain around one corner of a room. After our arrival, Ken gave us a briefing of what to expect in the coming week. We were to set out at eight in the morning each day, straight away after breakfast, to take the Metro train to the city centre to visit museums and galleries. When we returned to the accommodation in the evening, in teams of two or three we would take turns to prepare dinner under Bernie's supervision.

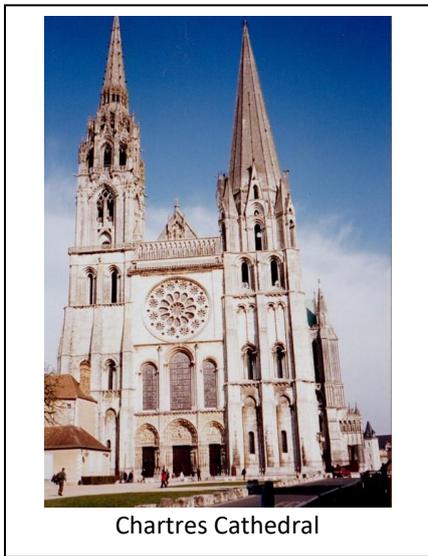
## **Museums and Cathedral**

It was exhausting to visit two or three museums a day, listen to Ken's explanation at each place and make sketches of sculptures. Ken was a fast walker. After leaving a Metro station he would speed off to our destination. I had to almost run with my short legs to keep up with him. The trip was brilliant, giving us the opportunity to see the actual sculptures we learned from the 'History of Art' lectures or from books.

Ken showed us selected works in The Louvre as it has such a huge collection. "Come, I show you 'Rudolf's girlfriend'". And we spent a long time studying her, from all angles, wondering why Rudolf loved this nearly 2000-year-old armless Greek woman, Venus. After spending half a day in the museum, Ken asked us to go back to explore more on our own on Wednesday evening, when it was opened till ten at night.

The Atelier Brancusi was another fascinating place to visit. There we could view the studio in which the sculptor had worked, the tools he used and the display of some of his works. We also spent a long time in Musee Picasso looking at the large collection of the artist's art. I am not a fan of Cubism but most of my classmates adored Picasso's paintings. My own favourite museums were the Musee d'Orsay, Musee Bourdelle and Musee Rodin, and amongst all the sculptures we saw, my favourite was Rodin's Thinker.

On the fifth day, we piled into the van again for our next destination – Chartres, about two hours’ drive from Paris. We stayed in a hostel, a short distance from Chartres Cathedral which was built over the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It started out with a Romanesque style architecture but ended up as a Gothic on completion. Before this current cathedral, there had been a few churches previously built on the same site, each replacing an earlier one damaged by either fire or war. We studied the intricate stone sculptures on the exterior of the building, and the stained-glass windows from inside. Ken asked us to experience the space inside the cathedral by walking in a straight line slowly from the entrance towards the altar. We spent hours doing sketches of the stone sculptures as well as the whole cathedral outdoors. It was not very comfortable, as being mid-February, the weather was still cold.



After two days, we made our way back to England. The return ferry crossing was very choppy, and a few of us, including me, puked in the toilet. For the major part of the voyage, we either stood on the open deck trying to maintain our balance and braving the spray from the sea or lying down on the floor inside the ship. Weren't we glad to be in our own bed in Emerson College?

A few weeks later, we presented our impressions from the trip at the Monday morning's college meeting, in the form of a mime with Susanna posing as Ken. It drew a few laughs from the audience.

### **Visiting Yin Yoke**

About two months after returning from France, I found myself back in Europe again. This time on my own to visit Yin Yoke in Manlleu, about an hour and a half train ride from Barcelona. My friendship with Yin Yoke started when we were in Secondary One. She has been living in Spain since the end of 1986 when she decided to share her life with a Spanish guy whom she met in London where they were studying. They have one son who was eleven years old at the time of my

visit. We did not go out much while I was there except on a trip to Barcelona and the nearby town called Vic. We simply stayed at home, chatting away and enjoying the fruits of our creativity in her kitchen. Our first attempt in making croissants was surprisingly a success.



Yin Yoke and her son Mateu trying out the home-made croissants

## **Vipassana Meditation**

On returning from Manlleu, I went for a 10-day Vipassana meditation course somewhere between Gatwick Airport and Emerson College. I had been encouraged to attend by fellow students in Emerson who sang praises of this meditation technique. It was a residential retreat. The late SN Goenka, who had learnt Vipassana from monks in Myanmar, started such retreats all over the world. Participants had to remain silent throughout the first nine days, and then shared their meditation experience on the final day. Instructions on this ancient meditation technique, aimed to purify and quiet the chattering mind, were given from Goenka's video and audio recordings. There was also someone at the retreat whom you could ask questions, but only at specific times.

On the first day, most of us had to drag ourselves from our beds at the sound of a bell at 4 am and be in the hall at 4.30 am for the first meditation session of the day. After a few days, I got used to waking up that early. The instruction for the first three days was simple – just pay attention to your breathing. When your mind wandered away, just bring it back to the fact that you were breathing. Yet this simple instruction was extremely difficult to execute. Attempts in the first three days to bring the mind's attention solely to the flow of air through the nostrils was to me futile. It was not boring because my mind, as usual, was racing all over the place. The remaining days of the retreat aimed to help us to achieve equanimity by keeping our body still, enduring the numbness of our crossed legs caused by long hours of sitting, and ignoring our surroundings or any aching parts of our body. Meditation was the main activity, apart from getting up, breakfast, lunch and sleep. We were fed with amazing vegan food, but only two meals a day

with a fruit in the evening. Going to bed early was good as it helped to alleviate the hunger pain in me.

Surprisingly, no one quit the course despite having to go through nine days of no talking, no eye contact, no gesturing, no phone, no books, and no contact with the outside world. We were all very happy when the noble silence was lifted, and what a noisy bunch of people we were, as we could hear our voices again. No, I don't think I want to repeat the experience, although I know friends who have been to Vipassana retreats again and again.

It was wonderful to be back to the tranquillity of Emerson after being away for three weeks. Nice to be away and equally nice to be back. I felt at home in Emerson although I had been there for less than nine months.

### Stone Carving in Spring



By the third term, we had settled into the routine of college life. More clay modelling with Rudolf, painting with Margaret and drawing with Ken. A new activity was stone carving with Bernie. I chose two small stones to create a pair of sculptures. Every afternoon, from 2 to 4pm for nine weeks, was spent hacking on the stones under a

temporary open tent built for the activity. We were well spaced out in the open area. Imagine the noise we would have made if all of us were to chisel the stones indoors.



Lovely daffodils in spring

As it was spring, working outdoors surrounded by trees and bushes was very

pleasant. Colours had returned to the campus after the grey winter. Yellow daffodils, crocuses, and



My pair of stone sculptures

many tiny colourful flowers whose names I did not know, sprouted in the college grounds. Fresh green leaves started to populate the bare branches. The two huge magnolia trees, near Pixton House were blooming magnificently, one with pink blossoms and the other white. The wood near Westwood House was carpeted with bluebells for about three weeks from late April to mid-May. I love spring.



Springtime – bluebells in the wood and magnolia tree in front of Pixton House

### **Goethean Science Week**

The Goethean Science Week was timetabled in the first week of the third term. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was renowned as a German literary figure, but his contribution in natural philosophy was not widely publicised in his lifetime. He was deeply involved in botanical studies and recorded his observations in the 'Metamorphosis of Plants'. Many of Goethe's writings on his observations of clouds, plants, minerals, animals, and colours laid in the archives of his home until, when years later, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was asked to edit his materials.

The two Margarets, Margaret Colquhoun and Margaret Shillan, opened our eyes to plant life during the one week of study. Colquhoun had compiled her life science courses into a book 'New Eyes for Plants', showing how science could be practised as an art using Goethe's approach. Each student had to choose a tree or a plant as the subject of study, starting from drawing the whole tree to drawing the parts of the flower – the petals, calyx, stigma, stamen.

My choice was the pink magnolia tree. The method used was first to draw the subject of our study in detail, exactly as we saw it, making use of ESP –Exact Sense Perception, a term used by Goethe. Then, we had to imagine going through the journey with the tree or plant in its growth process, from bud to flower, from seed to leaves. We accomplished



this phase of imagination using Exact Sense Fantasy (ESF). It was a leap for me from painting an exact copy of a tree to making an abstract drawing of its growth process from my imagination. At the end of the week, when we were asked to use some words to summarise the learning experience, mine were: 'potential', 'impermanence', 'continuous growth', 'transforming'. What the plants experience also applies to the development of human beings as we are all part of nature. As we breathe, we are also continuously growing and changing.

### **Day Trips**

Living and working on the college campus for weeks could be claustrophobic, no matter how beautiful the environment was. It was refreshing when Ken took us on day trips in the college van during the spring term.

The Seven Sisters, a series of chalk cliffs on the English Channel coast, near Seaford, are about an hour's drive from Forest Row. On the way, we stopped to view the Long Man in Wilmington, a seventy-metre tall male figure which appears to have been carved on chalk on a steep hill slope. Who had done it? And when? No one is clear about its origin.

A panoramic view of the majestic Seven Sisters greeted us at Seaford Head. We took care not to step too close to the edge of the cliffs as we walked on the Sisters, starting from the Seven Sisters Country Park to Birling Gap. There are distinctively seven mounts, so our walk involved climbing up and down seven times. It took us three to four hours to complete the whole trek, reaching Birling Gap where we had a glimpse of Beachy Head and its lighthouse.

The next day, Ken created a massive 'drawing board' using large sheets of paper taped on one entire wall of the Red Studio and asked us to create, from memory, a picture of The Seven Sisters on it. The outcome was a composition based on our combined memory. Then we examined the qualities of each sister, not only in terms of its shape and size, but also the feelings we experienced looking at them. The next activity was to create seven clay forms, each displaying the qualities of a sister. This was also a group work. I don't know how we managed it. Two of us were to work on a form, and then move on to one created by another pair and make changes to it. Moving from one form to another, we had to be constantly and consciously aware of the changes made to the rest of the sisters while working on one. Everyone had a hand on each of the sculptures. It was a very dynamic exercise. By hook or by crook, we managed to miraculously create the forms without disagreement. Great teamwork! A far cry from the time we did our collaborative work in relief sculpturing at the beginning of the second term.



As we were doing stone carving this term, Ken thought it would be appropriate for us to see some Neolithic stone sculptures. So, a trip was made to Avebury in Wiltshire, more than a hundred miles away from the college, to see supposedly the largest megalithic stone circle in the world. There is a spread of monuments around the village of Avebury. Besides the stone circles, we also saw Silbury Hill, a prehistoric man-made mound. How skilful the ancient 'sculptors' must have been to create the symmetrical 39-metres high artificial hill. Another place we visited on the way was a tomb at West Kennet Long Barrow.

Ken was full of energy and enthusiasm in organising these trips for us. Another memorable outing was to Glastonbury and Stonehenge. We climbed up the Glastonbury Tor to get a good view of the plains, and then to Chalice Wells, a natural spring garden. A special access pass for one hour at Stonehenge, allowed

us to walk among the stones, touch them and sit on them. We had the whole place to ourselves watching the sun setting. A magical evening wrapped in the tranquillity of the mysterious prehistoric stone circle on Salisbury Plain.

### **'Navigating the Next Steps'**

I took a couple of weekend courses in Emerson College in the first half of 2004.

The workshop with the title 'Navigating the Next Steps' by Belinda Heys, a Career Counsellor, attracted me. I had returned from Singapore less than a month ago, having decided to stay on in Emerson College for three years instead of just one. My future after that was unclear. Perhaps this course would prepare me to navigate my next step.

The agenda for the workshop was:

- (1) What are my questions? Where am I now? What relationship do I have with the future?
- (2) What inspired me? What are my dreams? (this involved looking at the past)
- (3) Future – options, dreams, obstacles.

The two days with her ended with me realising that:

- (a) My future life will only make sense if
  - (i) I am clear on my goals
  - (ii) I do what I love
  - (iii) No worries and fears about financial uncertainties
  - (iv) I can relate to others – people and environment
  - (v) I feel appreciated for what I am doing as this motivates me to go on;
  
- (b) No one except ourselves could answer our questions. We are always in between the past and the future, between chaos (many options) and creativity (new possibilities);

(c) I have to find my own ways of managing transitions (change from one situation to another), being aware of the transience of my time in Emerson College.

### **'Living Artfully'**

Another weekend course I signed up for in spring was with Warren Cohen entitled 'Living Artfully'. It was on bread-baking with sourdough and using the outdoor oven he had built from straw and mud in the college grounds. Before this course, Warren had taught me how to make sourdough bread, and I had been baking it for myself regularly in the student house.



Bread making with housemate, Leilani

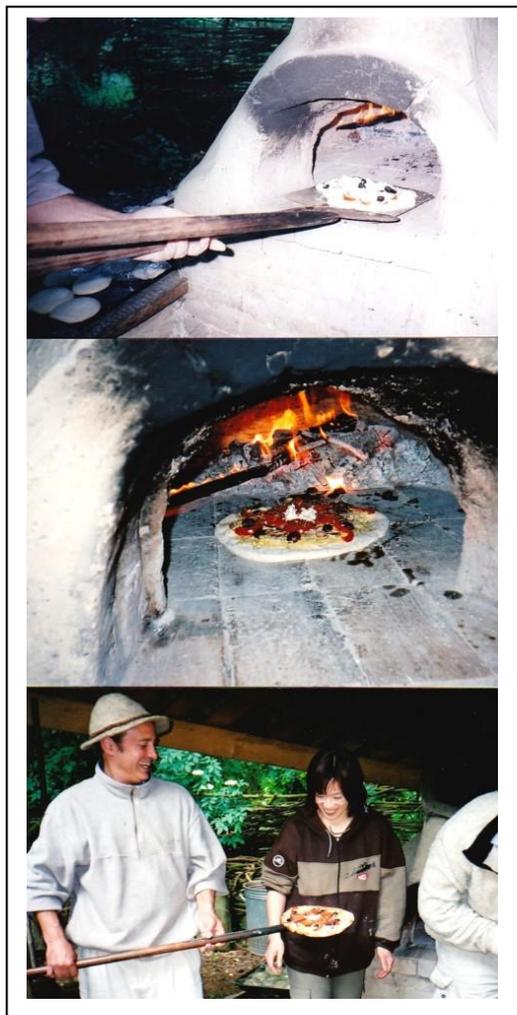
What a surprise when Warren offered me to attend free of charge if I would assist him during his weekend course. In addition, he would pay me a small allowance through the college for working as his assistant. I truly felt honoured to be asked.

Quite a bit of preparation work needed to be done before the start of the course. I was asked to collect wood on Friday for the outdoor oven and get the flour ready for use. Lots of flour needed for about twenty participants. It was an intensive course. On Friday evening when the participants met for the first time, we had to get them to prepare the sourdough from a starter which was a fermented mixture of flour and water that Warren had made.

On the Saturday morning, Warren and I lit the outdoor oven at 8am as it was necessary to heat it for four hours to reach a temperature of 230 degrees Celsius to be ready for the baking. The morning session was spent shaping the dough for rustic country loaves, pita and rye breads. We also prepared the yeast dough for the afternoon session. The pita breads were baked to serve with the lunch in the college dining rooms. After lunch, we made bagels. I stayed in the college kitchen to boil a large pot of water for them, and when the participants brought in their bagel dough, I put them into the boiling water, a few at a time, until they rose to the surface. Then I removed them and placed them on the baking sheets before

baking them in the huge kitchen oven. Whilst I was doing this, I missed the croissant making and the 'design your own bread' session that Warren had with the participants.

Early on Sunday morning, we fired up the oven again for baking the croissants and breads that had been prepared the previous day. The croissants were happily consumed during the morning coffee break. While I was preparing the pizza toppings in the kitchen Warren was with the class making the dough for the pizza bases. We planned to end the course with a pizza party around the outdoor oven. What fun we had, choosing the toppings for our own pizza and heartily devouring the wood-fired pizza we all had a hand in baking. All of us were amazed at the variety of breads we produced in just two days.



## **Festivals**

A few activities took place in the Spring term spicing up our life in the college. If I remember correctly, the responsibility for organising the 2004 Easter Festival, a few days before the courses broke up for the Easter break, fell to the Foundation Studies and Visual Arts students. My contribution was a big drawing of the Last Supper, created in chalk on several pieces of black paper taped together. Warren, the course leader of the Foundation Studies, opened the festival with a beautiful talk about resurrection, about spring bringing a fresh start to plants in nature and to our lives.

The May Day Festival which was open to the public was another delightful event in spring. Staff and students were set in motion weeks before the actual day to

prepare for this annual event. In the run up to the day, just after lunch and before the start of the afternoon study session, students from different courses were given a crash course on Maypole Dancing. I do not know how I was roped in to be one of the dancers. About twenty of us circling around a tall pole had to practise the step movements with each holding the end of a long ribbon tied to the top of the pole. After 'plaiting' the colourful ribbons round the pole, the dancers had to unwind the pattern by reversing the path of the dance. Complicated manoeuvres were involved but the practice sessions were quite enjoyable. We made many mistakes during the rehearsals and wondered how the actual day performance would turn out.

May Day was a beautiful sunny day. Hundreds of adults and children from Forest Row and neighbouring villages came and snapped up the variety of foodstuffs that were rolled out from the college's kitchen and ice cream from a vendor. Staff and students set up a variety of stalls - games, face painting, craft works, and storytelling performances for the visitors. Michitaka, the Japanese student who met me at the car park when I first arrived at the College, led a group of us to prepare sushi in the college kitchen the evening before the event. He taught us how to make the thin omelette and cook the sushi rice with vinegar. I lost count of the number of sushi rolls we made and packed in plastic boxes. They sold like hot cakes to the visitors though. It was an exhausting but fun day. Fortunately, we managed to display our Maypole dancing skills without any hiccups to a delighted audience on the day itself. Yet another novel experience for me.

### **Sculpture Course Graduation**

The next great event was the Sculpture Course Graduation that took place around mid-June every year. First and second year sculpture students were mobilised to clear the space in the sculpture huts and red studio and to help the graduating students to prepare for the exhibition of their final year projects. Some of the projects were displayed indoors, with quite a few outdoors as the works were land arts. It was a great opportunity for us to experience what to expect when it was our turn to exhibit our final year projects.

It was a week-long event. On the first day, the exhibition was opened to the whole college with a presentation by each third year to an audience made up of the college staff and students, relatives, and friends of the graduates. The exhibition was opened to the public for the next two days. The finale was a BBQ dinner, a skit (a kind of comedy sketch) and the diploma award ceremony. It was a tradition that the first years were responsible for preparing the BBQ and the second years to provide the entertainment. It was hilarious to watch the skit portrayed by the sculpture students, each one taking the persona of a graduate and imitating his or her mannerisms.

The award ceremony was very touching with Rudolf giving an account of each student's artistic journey in Emerson College. What a memory he had. He could clearly describe their progress from the first year, sprinkling some witty comments here and there. Instead of an exchange of handshakes, the tutor gave each graduate a warm hug after handing out the diploma. It was the most amusing and moving graduation ceremony I had attended in my whole life. Such a contrast with the graduation ceremonies of the tertiary institutions in Singapore. The small number of graduates (less than ten) made it possible for the ceremony to be held in such an intimate manner.

During the last few days of the term before we dispersed for the summer holiday, Rudolf and Ken led us round the exhibits for a closer examination of each artwork created by the final year students. These last lessons were deeply educational, as one viewed not only the works, but also came to appreciate the process involved in conceiving them and the struggles of graduates to create them.

## **The Italy Trip**

The first Sunday of the summer holiday which began in the last week of June, found me in the city centre of Rome. This was my third trip to Europe in 2004. Andrew Wolpert, the tutor in charge of the Spirit of English Course in Emerson, organised the three-week 'History of Art' trip once a year for a group of not more than fifteen students. I booked a place on this trip as early as December 2003 before I went back to Singapore, as Andrew took bookings on a first-come first-serve basis.

He had given a series of lectures on Renaissance Art every Monday evening from 7.30 to 9pm throughout the spring term, to prepare the participants for the trip. I was quite embarrassed when very often I dozed off under his very eyes during these talks. Not that the presentation was uninteresting, but I was so tired after a whole day of lessons and sculpturing starting from 8.30am.

The trip, my first visit to Italy, was an eye-opener. Very intense with plenty of walking but also plenty of opportunities to relax. We were all equipped with notes provided by Andrew to study the architecture, sculpture, paintings in numerous museums and churches starting in Rome and ending in Milan. Between these two major cities, we visited Florence, Assisi, Arezzo, Caprese and Urbino. We did have plenty of time to relax, as promised, as every afternoon with the closure of many places of interests, we were forced to have a siesta. Moreover, walking in the afternoon in the hot and humid Mediterranean summer would not have been a comfortable experience.

## **Rome**

The three days in Rome began with an orientation walking tour of the city with the remaining two days viewing Michelangelo's sculptures – '1st Pieta', 'Risen Christ' and 'Moses', the Sistine Chapel and Raphael's paintings in the Vatican Museum. I was overwhelmed by the splendour of the interior of St. Peter Basilica, whose dome was designed by Michelangelo. And his accomplishment of the ceiling paintings in Sistine Chapel was a wonder. It must have been a neck and back aching experience for him. Raphael's 'School of Athens' and 'Transfiguration' in the Vatican Palace were amazing in terms of their composition and the number of figures, all in different postures in each of these two paintings.

## **Florence**

On the fourth day, a train ride took us to Florence where we stayed for a week as there was so much to see in this famous city of art. Andrew pre-booked all our tickets so that we need not join the crowds to queue for them. The first day was

solely dedicated to viewing Michelangelo's artworks. Casa Buonarroti, a museum that used to be Michelangelo's house, was our first stop where we saw several of his early works. Then we moved on to Galleria dell' Accademia where the original David sculpture was housed. It was taller than I had imagined.



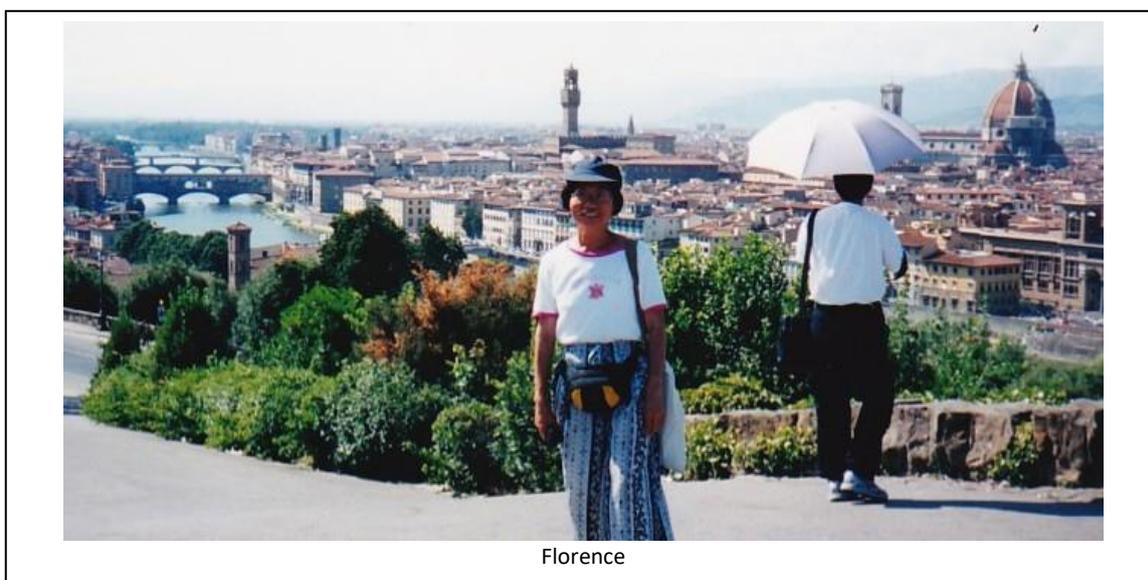
Michelangelo's David

We spent the second day in Florence's Uffizi Gallery looking at the amazing paintings. Day three saw us at the Medici Chapel and Palazzo Pitti, the former for Michelangelo's sculptures of his patrons and the four sculptures of dawn, day, dusk and night, and the latter mainly for Raphael's paintings. Crossing the busy

Ponte Vecchio with its numerous jewellery and goldsmith shops to get to the galleries and museums from our hostel, was almost our daily morning routine.

Andrew took us in the remaining couple of days to various churches and chapels - San Marco, San Lorenzo, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Croce. At the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, we saw Donatello's 'David' which was very different from Michelangelo's. We paid a visit to Palazzo Strozzi to a special exhibition of Botticelli's works. Of course, we could not miss visiting the Baptistery and the Duomo of Florence's cathedral, the main attraction for millions of the tourists visiting the city each year.

Nothing was scheduled on the last day in Florence. Thanks to Andrew for giving us



Florence

the break as we needed it after such an exhaustive programme. I went with Zhou,

a Taiwanese to visit Siena. Previously a student at Emerson College, she had flown especially to Florence from Taiwan to join us for part of the trip. Both of us did have a relaxing time, sitting at a cafe in the popular square Piazza del Campo and walking around the city, window shopping for a change.

The group departed from Florence with a different transport mode, travelling on four wheels in two cars hired in the city. We moved on to Verna, the place where St. Francis received the stigmata; Caprese (now a quiet hill resort) where Michelangelo was born; Urbino to visit the birthplace of Raphael; Assisi to see the frescoes by Giotto; and Basilica of St Francis at Arezzo. Finally, we reached Milan where the cars were returned.

## Milan

The reason to visit Milan was to see the painting, 'The Last Supper' by Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo's unfinished sculpture 'Rondanini Pieta'. It was depressing to see this final work of the great sculptor, after having viewed his strong and wilful sculptures in Rome and Florence. He was still carving it days before he died.

After three weeks in Italy, we flew back to England bringing with us memories of, not only the Renaissance art but also Italian food – gelato, fresh pasta, mozzarella, thin crust pizza and tiramisu. Andrew also gave us a flavour of Italian opera when we watched Tosca at an open-air performance one night.



Sketches of Michelangelo's works

The trip gave me the impulse to sketch the sculptures and paintings by Michelangelo and Raphael. I spent numerous summer nights in my room,

sketching the paintings and sculptures seen in Italy with the help of books available from the Sculpture Department library.

I was also eagerly looking forward to the start of a summer course on oil painting which I had registered.