

Research Proposal

MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Regina

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I am writing to express my sincere interest in the Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MFA) at the University of Regina and propose a Thesis Project.

“Synaesthe” would combine my joint interests in Music, Visual Art and Psychology, finding a place of connection at the topic of sensory experience, in particular synaesthesia—the phenomenon of having one sensory stimulus involuntarily elicit another, unrelated sensation. I wish to create a large body of work—paintings, drawings, and installation—representing and reflecting on my own experience with colour-grapheme and colour-audio synaesthesia, and to explore synaesthesia as a neurological phenomenon of art making. If possible, I would like to collaborate with music students in the program, using performance as a component in the show. The question is not to validate my own experiences through empirical data, but focus on the intermarrying of three disciplines and the historical dialogues made by artists/scientists in each discipline regarding joint sensation experience.

My choice to pursue a B.A. allowed me to study music, visual art, and psychology, and to identify connections between these fields. I have explored synaesthesia and other psychological models of art making by representing sensory experience through wet and dry media (*Heartlock*, 2013). I have read the most current, comprehensive works on synaesthesia including *Wednesday Is Indigo Blue* by Richard Cytowic and David Eagleman (2009), as well as written reviews on recent experimental articles for my psychology classes. I am influenced by Wassily Kandinsky, who is credited as the first visual artist for exploring synaesthesia. Unlike Kandinsky, however, I am not searching for a universal “sublime,” but rather, recognizing the ultimate isolation of subjective experience, and an individual perception's inability to represent a group. In the end, everyone having unique subjective experiences is what we share in common.

My investigation not only seeks to bridge music and visual art, but bridge the language and approaches to understanding in each separate field; namely the artistic (subjective and experiential) and scientific (objective and speculative). An MFA would provide me the environment, resources, and faculty and peers interested and knowledgeable in specific artistic and scientific domains, to supervise and collaborate with, and to thoroughly examine this topic. Because of my formal music studies in the earlier time of my degree, I would like to add a technical theory element to the investigation, such as mapping out the visual and audio patterns by describing them in music theory and notation. I also am interested in composition, which I'd like to be under supervision for from the music department. My research into the Modernist efforts in the 20th century to find a universal “essence” or “sublime” and the theory of Primitivism, will aid in my own efforts not to become too generalized in my final conclusions. A strong basis in colour theory and visual design, and extensive painting and drawing studio experience have also prepared me for this project.

I would like to be supervised by the Fine Art and Music departments. Because my search for “pure” art in sensation is historically rooted in Primitivism and the Modernist tradition, which I view as negatively impacting society in terms of ostracizing so-called peripheral cultures, I would be appreciative if some of the supervision was in art history. Additionally, I would like to contact researchers specializing research on synaesthesia to ground the research in scientific studies, however this would be only by correspondence. I would welcome the opportunity to work with David Garneau, who in my view, demonstrates a way contemporary artists dynamically integrate their cultural heritage into their art practice while remaining relevant to the present art world. A sensibility for interesting visual relationships and technical expertise in painting would improve my ability to create work for the project.

In my portfolio, there is an image of *Heartlock*, a large painting that I represented my visual experience of a particular song by Imogen Heap, *Headlock*. I am also including a paper I wrote on the impacts of Emily Carr's search for the “essence” of a sensory-emotional-spiritual experience which had negative social and political implications.

I expect to be thoroughly rerouted in my thoughts and art production during my time at U of R, through interactions with my peers, instructors, and my experiences living in Regina. The final exhibition will expose me to the level of critical discourse existent in professional shows. A teaching opportunity during the MFA would expose me to instructing at the post-secondary level, which I plan to pursue professionally. I also am attracted to the prospect of studying in the Prairies, which is the geographic, demographic and cultural region I identify with. I believe this MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies at University of Regina would propel me to become a practicing artist with social relevancy, conceptual and technical flexibility, and meaningful and engaging work.