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Office of University
Communications

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Project Explores the Use of Body Language in Artwork



“Exhausted” by Hannah Smith

While exploring the works of artists like Käthe Kollwitz, Edgar Degas and Bo Bartlett, Gardner-Webb University art major Hannah Smith discovered her own artistic strengths. Smith was one of 11 GWU students who received a grant from the GWU Undergraduate Research Scholars Program for the summer term.

Students worked 40 hours a week for five weeks on their projects, which they are required to present in a professional forum. Each one had a faculty mentor or collaborator who worked with them. Smith worked with Susan Bell, professor of art, and she plans to present her full portfolio, artist statement and research paper in her senior show in spring of 2021.

“My research project centered around the use of body language in art and the psychology behind gestures, facial expressions, and hand movements,” described Smith, of Vienna, Va., “I studied styles such as Baroque and Expressionism. I used pen and ink, and acrylic paints to create my portfolio exploring body language, and more specifically, portraits that focus on the face and hands of the models.”

One of the challenges she faced was narrowing her focus from the vast amount of information she found on her subject. “Everyone from the beginning of time has drawn the human figure and evolved the way that the figure is shown, and the emotions displayed are truly astounding,” observed Smith. “For instance, the way we use our hands when we talk or the twitch of an eyebrow can tell you more about what a person is feeling than the words that come from their lips.”





“Frustration” by Hannah Smith

Bell helped Smith limit her scope and edit her research paper. “She has been nothing but supportive and insightful when helping me narrow my topic and choose the correct wording for my paper so that my true intentions would not be lost,” Smith reflected. “Her knowledge of both the elements of design and art history is truly a wonderful thing to have, and her understanding of all the topics, both old and contemporary, is great to have when my job is to combine understanding of both to create something unique to myself.”

While drawing her sketches, she discerned her future path. “It helped me as a person and an artist to narrow my subject matter and the art field I want to go into,” Smith related. “I would not make money being a big landscape artist, because I hate painting backgrounds. But I have found while doing sketches of the figures beforehand, that I enjoy designing characters, whether for a book or a TV show. After getting higher education in the field, I can see myself creating art for an animation company.”

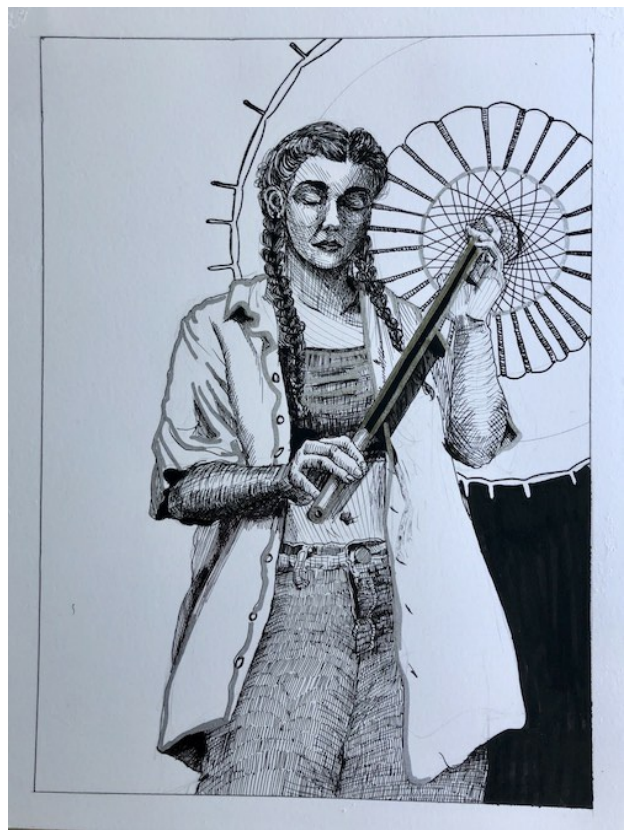
Her advice to others who are considering applying to do undergraduate research? “Your heart has to be all the way in it, doing something you love is so much easier than doing something for the satisfaction of others,” she affirmed. “Your topic can change as you do more research. The change means that you are discovering new information and broadening your perspective, which means you’ll also grow and discover yourself, too.”

Learn more about the Undergraduate Research Scholar Program.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.



Hannah Smith's preliminary sketches for "Exhausted" and "Frustration"



“Under the Weather” by Hannah Smith