

My internship in Kansas City this past summer was one of the most unique and affirming experiences I have yet to experience as a student and an artist. Working under Phil “Sike” Shafer, I began my internship at the beginning of July. Phil had just returned from his annual “SikeQuest”; he had spent a month in Los Angeles on a mini-sabbatical with an aim to study the East Coast graff scene and work along side graffiti greats Shepard Fairey, Retna, Tristan Eaton, and Cyrcle. Understandably, Sike was filled with artistic inspiration,, dubbed me “Intern X”—which would become my nickname in the KC art scene for the next six weeks—and I started work, extremely excited to learn a new craft, network, and develop my artistic sphere.

There was no standard for how our days went. My first day on the job, Phil showed me around the Crossroads and West 39th Districts of Kansas City where I spent most of my working time. In addition to being a freelance artist, Phil works at Kansas University Medical School where he is a graphic designer. While he creates all of the graphics, presentations, posters, and any 3D imaging needed for medical evaluations or lab experimentation, Sike instantly showed how it is possible to make one’s “stable income job” flow with and support, on a level other than money, your artistic endeavors. He expressed that I was essentially there to represent him and complete double the projects he might without a helper. So, in an effort to immerse me in SikeLife, one of my first projects was to meet with a client, Chris, who was starting a lifestyle company and wanted Sike to create a logo, a marketing portfolio, and brand merchandise. During the meeting we brainstormed what Chris wanted for a logo, drawing inspiration from skate brand logos, choosing a color concept, and so on. Not only did I get the chance at

interaction with a client, Sike then had me create an inspiration board, illustrate vectors of possible designs and, just a few weeks later, meet again with Chris to table the possible design ideas. Over the six-week internship I had several more projects similar to this one. Going into the internship, Phil had asked what I was most interested in learning during my time in Kansas City. As I have always dabbled in graffiti but never found a mentor to train me on technique, Phil facilitated daily painting sessions for me. He would require an Illustrator vector, which stood as a project proposal, and would guide me through the mural process. By the time my internship was finished, I had helped plan and complete over 10 large murals across the city, three of which were unassisted solo endeavors, and the biggest being a 150ft. KCOG collaboration mural with Lucid, a friend of Sikes and fellow graff artist. These murals all were incredibly time consuming, many requiring detailed projection or vinyl stencils that had to be cut by hand, over 100 cans of spray paint, countless caps and painting supplies, as well as permission from property owners. Weekends were spent painting or prepping for upcoming projects and meeting with collaborating artists. Representing an artist whose business is pushed forward by nobody but himself was not only exhilarating but such great exposure; in a world of 9 to 5 work hours, it is very rare to find someone who can enjoyably make after-hours benefit their career. Though Phil did on occasion do art in the evenings, a lot of the social events we attended were examples of how crucial (and exhausting) networking is to a freelance artist. Constantly, Phil would be introducing me to fellow artists from the KC area and always encourage me to ask for contacts or "office visits" so I could see how other artists market themselves and their work. As one of the only women in the KC graffiti scene, I really wanted to meet with all of the other females in the scene. Phil made sure that I met with female

sculptors, curators, tattoo artists, Hallmark greeting card illustrators, screen printers, graphic designers, DJs, clothing designers...the list goes on. For the last two weeks of my internship, when I wasn't painting I was hanging out in the studios of some of the most inspirational women artists KC had to offer. This also widened my scope of possible mediums. I learned how to use a printing press, messed around with a DC router, practiced tattooing, threw porcelain clay, and gleaned so much motivation from some very radical women, all with incredible stories of how they got to where they are today as artists.

Wrapping up my internship and preparing to return to Sewanee was a challenge. Working with so much freedom and in such an art-centric environment was more beneficial than I can put into words. I feel like my style as an artist developed incredibly simply because I was surrounded by art almost 24/7. Not once did I not feel challenged while working for Sike; jumping into the "boys club" graffiti scene of Kansas City was intimidating. That environment put a lot of pressure on me to prove myself, and that pressure ultimately created an artistic revolution inside of me. Now, back at Sewanee, I feel like the intention behind my work is extremely powerful and my mind has been opened to a career path that I've always wanted but never quite knew how to go about pursuing. My investment and courage in my art is renewed; though, yes, I still doubt my ability to make "meaningful art" at times, my foundations are a lot stronger than they were at the beginning of this summer and I will continue to draw inspiration from my weeks as "Intern X."