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Elizabeth Cowgill
Guarisco Gallery
Washington, D.C.
September 1, 2014

Before this summer, I saw art mostly as it was taught to me at Sewanee. It was purely a product of the era in which it was created, representative of cultural movements, historical events, and artist innovation. I mostly thought of art as untouchable as history itself, and belonging in museums- only to be viewed from a safe, respectable distance. However, as I learned during my ACE internship at Guarisco Gallery in Washington, D.C. this summer, the commercial art world is dynamic, and susceptible to trends and the ups and downs of the economy. Guarisco Gallery boasts one of the largest collections of nineteenth and twentieth century European and American art in the world, and includes Academic, Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Contemporary paintings and sculpture. This summer, with the help of the talented staff at Guarisco Gallery, I began to see the exchange of art as a business, and was able to visualize my place within this dynamic field.

At the gallery, it is the job of the directors to literally and figuratively frame works for clients and to interpret the stories of the artists, as well as the history and inspiration for the works. I quickly came to realize that there is so much more to purchasing art than simply liking its appearance, or because it will look good in your living room. Guarisco Gallery promotes the purchasing of art as an investment that can be enjoyed throughout the years. Therefore, potential buyers need thorough information about each piece of art in order to make the best possible strategic decision. A lot goes into this “framing” process on the gallery’s part. The work

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physically needs to be put in the best light: involving restoration, repair, and (in the case of paintings) framing. Then, the buyer needs information about the work and the artist. The subject, the artist, and the painting's history need to be thoroughly researched, cited, and put into a concise article to be distributed to clients.

This area of research is how I spent much of my time at the gallery. Guarisco Gallery is a commercial private gallery, and highly unique in that it owns most of the art it collects. Because of this, the gallery has the singular responsibility of framing, restoring, and fully researching works before making the investment to pass along to clients. It is committed to purchasing only the highest quality works. Specifically, only the top 10% of an artist's body of work is considered for purchase. I did quite a bit of research on both potential purchases for the gallery, as well as more extensive research on newly acquired pieces. The gallery is strategically located next to the Ritz Carlton hotel, which allows for window shoppers to stop by, as well as for hotel events to be hosted in the gallery's expansive space.

I was honored with unique opportunities such as a trip to Gold Leaf Studios, a massive, old-world complex dedicated to the production of gilt frames. Through this trip and after taking frames apart for the purposes of measuring, I discovered that frames, although designed to both protect and accentuate paintings, are often historical works of art within themselves. One of the more exciting events during my internship was the unpacking of a small Renoir of the artist's redheaded muse. I had the opportunity to hold and examine the painting under a black light, a method used to verify a painting's authenticity.

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One of my major responsibilities was managing the gallery's vast filing system, which was based on artistic genre: American, Loose, Sculpture, Genre, and Still Life. The purpose of this system is to have easy access to artist biographies and printed photographs of works when clients come in. Therefore, it was crucial that I filed photographs and other information into the correct files, as well as kept them updated, which required the printing of photographs through Photoshop as well as researching and updating biographies. Additionally, I occasionally had the responsibility of mailing photographs and biographies of the pieces to potential and repeat clients around the world.

One of my last responsibilities at the gallery was to hang a wall that was covered in what seemed like a random assortment of paintings, many by the American Impressionistic painter Charles Mundy. What would seem like a relatively simple task quickly became an exercise in creativity, geometry, and craftsmanship as we attempted to arrange the paintings to their best advantage. Earlier on in the internship, one of my favorite duties was to compare the selling prices from sales at auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's to the appraised values of the art. This gave me a great understanding into which pieces of art were more lucrative at the time, and what was not selling for its anticipated value.

During my time at Guarisco Gallery, I began to envision my future in the art world, as well as life after Sewanee. I found that my strengths and main interest lie in the academic and educational section of art, whether it be in a commercial or museum setting. I really enjoy the

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process of starting with no information about an artist and building up a biography. Although, I found that there is simply not much information on some artists I encountered. However, digging through foreign books at the Library of Congress and finding information on an artist who was seemingly invisible during our Internet research was certainly one of the highlights of this experience! I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work at all levels of a relatively small gallery that allowed for more hands-on interaction with both the gallery's staff and its incredible collection.