

1. Michelle Rhee (English) & Caitlin Allen (2012)

2. **Title**

Visual Rhymes

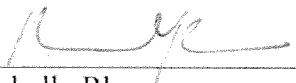
3. **Abstract**

Our project is to create and curate a Winter Gallery exhibit called *Visual Rhymes* in the Tang for the fall 2010 Scribner Seminar, *Ways of Seeing: Image, Text, Illumination*. The purpose of the exhibit is to introduce viewers to the intersections of text and image. We will procure artwork that combines language and visual arts, underscoring Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, "The Medium is the Massage." The exhibit will examine the relationship between visual studies and knowledge formation—how a message is formulated by the way our senses are massaged or manipulated. The selected works of art are meant to challenge the viewer to question whether there is a power balance as a text or image struggles to come to the fore. How does one illuminate the other?

4. **Faculty Statement**

I had Caitlin last semester in my EN 229C course, *Introduction to Asian American Literature*. I couldn't ask for a better student collaborator, as Caitlin is not only diligent, enthusiastic, responsible, and caring, but she is also genuinely interested in the intersections of text and image as an art major who has serious ties to literature. This semester, she even dropped Italian in order to take a course in English because she missed working with literature. The exposure Caitlin will have to the Tang collection as well as other collections in New York City at the MOMA, the Met, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Whitney, and Harvard's Widener Library, will encourage her to combine her disciplinary interests and, I hope, help her understand the ways in which she can pursue longer projects that address this fascinating nexus.

Caitlin's background in the arts will be indispensable as we make aesthetic choices about how to use and arrange the space in the Winter Gallery. I look forward to our collaboration as we make difficult decisions about how to create a kind of narrative arc with the selected works of art. The pieces she'll be working with will force her to reconcile this seemingly new language that melds together language and the visual into a new idiom fraught with meaning.



Michelle Rhee

5. **Student's Statement**

This fall semester I submitted work to the student show in the Schick Gallery. While dropping off my drawings, I was greeted by the curator for the show, Mary Jablonski. She explained the process of the judge, Dawn Clements, and the history of previous student shows in the gallery. As I examined the space, it occurred to me how difficult it must be not only to select several works from hundreds but also to make such

a large variety of styles seem cohesive. It seems that the biggest curatorial question they faced was: what do you want to communicate to your viewers?

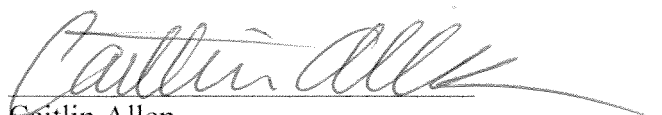
Last semester around the same time, Michelle Rhee, my English professor in *Introduction to Asian American Literature*, asked me to be the peer mentor for her seminar *Ways of Seeing*. She described her plans to evaluate artists' integrations of both image and text. How do artists further the meaning of a work or contradict it through use of these elements? Which sense is the viewer supposed to trust: what they see or what they read? These are the types of questions that will be posed in the seminar. When Professor Rhee explained this distinction, she described the most important learning tool for her seminar: an exhibit in the Winter Gallery at the Tang Museum. This is where students will analyze and research the combinations of text and image directly in front of them. This great exploration of "ways of seeing," however, is not intended to cater solely to the students but is meant for the Saratoga community as a whole.

Professor Rhee and I went to the Tang for a closer look at the collection. We examined one work after another for elements of text, image, and aesthetic appeal. There is an incredible variety of scale, media, and aesthetics. It occurred to me, too, that I was viewing these without any knowledge of their time of creation or of the artists themselves. With these considerations in mind, I truly understand the burden of a curator. How do you communicate meaning and choices? Answering this question is where my research lies. Examining works in the Tang collection as well as other collections in New York City at the MOMA, the Met, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, The Whitney, and Harvard's Widener Library, I will explore the full potential of the content of the show *Visual Rhymes*. How have other curators contributed to the same text and image aesthetics? What were the intentions of the artists themselves?

As a studio major and English minor, I feel as though this project were made for me; I am excited to tackle the integration of my two major interests. This experience of studying the choices of curators will be invaluable in my understanding of the art world. I will further my consciousness of artistic choices through communication with artists and interaction with their work. Specifically, one of the artists I will be researching is Tom Phillips, artist/creator of *A Humument*. In his work, Phillips alters a Victorian novel by painting and drawing images to create a kind of poetry. His designs on each page conceal certain words and highlight others that illuminate new meaning. Amidst my research, I will also be creating a *humument* of my own to be displayed in the gallery, which will help guide the students in the seminar this fall as they create one themselves. This endeavor entails exploring a work to alter and finding my own solutions as an artist, using what I learn from other artists and integrating the very elements explored in *Visual Rhymes*.

As Professor Rhee and I pursue the possibilities for the show, we will be formulating our own "visual rhymes." After all, in a show each piece does not just stand on its own but must be integrated as a bigger part of the whole. Thus, the Winter Gallery will be a work of art on its own. The research I do will inform our choices as curators so that they align with the choices of artists. Furthermore, this research is an extremely exciting opportunity to boost my abilities as a mentor and artist. Just as the prospect of exhibiting my work in the Tang to an entire community is thrilling, so is the opportunity to lead students in an exploration of the concepts I have come across in my exploration of

the art world thus far. This research will help me grow as a student, an artist, a curator, and a teacher.


Caitlin Allen

6. Goals

Creating a gallery exhibit requires an enormous amount of time and energy. Our contacts at the Tang have warned us that even a small exhibit with only 10-14 pieces demands so much of its curators. Because our exhibit will include even more selections, we are prepared to use the entire ten-week period to ensure that the exhibit is ready to go for the beginning of the school year. The final outcome will be a stimulating gallery filled with works of art that will force the viewer to grapple with how to “read” these multiple and various confluences of image and text.

7. Budget

We would like to request \$750 to engage in further research at Widener Library at Harvard as well as a variety of museums in New York City. The money requested would cover the cost of transportation to and from New York City and Boston. Both Caitlin and I have friends and family in New York and Cambridge/Boston, and therefore will not use the money for accommodations but for museum entry fees and for the cost of reproducing facsimiles of certain artists and authors. The remaining money will be used to offset the cost of permissions requests of reproducing the works of certain artists who are not in the public domain.

List of Costs	<i>Rhee</i>	<i>Allen</i>	Total
Museum Entry Fees			
Whitney	\$18	\$12	\$30
Met	\$10	\$5	\$15
MOMA	\$20	\$12	\$32
Guggenheim	\$18	\$15	\$33
PS1 Contemporary Arts Center	\$5	\$2	\$7
New Museum of contemporary Art	\$12	\$8	\$20
Brooklyn Museum	\$10	\$6	\$16
Access to Widener Library system	\$0	\$0	\$0
Museum Entry Fees Total			\$153
Accommodations	NA	NA	\$0
Transportation			
To and from Penn Station, NY	\$104	\$104	\$208
To and from Cambridge, MA (400 mi. roundtrip)	\$160 (by car)	\$50 (by bus)	\$210

Transportation between museums 7-day unlimited Metro Card	\$27	\$27	\$54
Transportation Total			\$472
Remaining Costs to defray the cost of Photocopies and Facsimiles of works the Tang does not own or have loan access to Permissions Requests for Fair Use if necessary			\$125
Grand Total			\$750

8. Complete Description



Ceci n'est pas une pipe.

René Magritte's famous "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" painting illustrates powerfully and swiftly what we aim to do with our show in the Tang, *Visual Rhymes*. In this work, Magritte catalyzes a full equalization of the text and image. He entitles this work, *La Trahison des Images* (The Betrayal of Images), but Magritte does not specify who or what is being betrayed. Perhaps the image of the pipe is betrayed by the objecting words, "[t]his is not a pipe." At the same time, the title ambiguously includes the viewer who is betrayed by the image or the text to think that it is or is not a

pipe. Amazingly, Magritte is able to reduce and infinitely desaturate the text and the image by the indeterminate word, *trahison*. Word and object continuously betray each other, never allowing the other to rest in the viewer's mind as superior or subordinate.

This tension is exactly what we hope to capture in the works we ultimately display in the Winter Gallery. Each of the works will contain both pictorial and linguistic elements, forcing the viewer to consider what kind of power dynamic exists on the canvas. Is there such a thing as what Ernest Fenollosa calls a "thought-picture" that "speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds"? Does the combination of language and image meld into a new language or a visual rhyme? Is simultaneity possible, or is the reader or viewer always prioritizing language over the visual or the image over the linguistic? This project will investigate whether images, as John Berger asserts, really do come "before words."

Our show will debut in the fall and be a part of the Tang's 10th anniversary celebration. We have been fortunate enough to have been allotted the Winter Gallery space to create both an exhibit as well as a classroom designed specifically for the fall 2010 Scribner Seminar, *Ways of Seeing: Image Text, Illumination*. Our summer's work will interestingly shape-shift over the course of the fall semester, as the students help transform the gallery with their research and extended labels in the gallery. Ultimately, the students, too, will be responsible for helping the community learn more about these talented, mixed media artists.

In order to prepare adequately for this show, Caitlin and I will spend most of the ten-week period in the Tang, relying upon shorter visits to New York City and Cambridge to further our research. While at Skidmore, we will focus on narrowing the gallery selections and editing and arranging the space for visual impact. The short visits interspersed throughout the period will expose us to other artists who are not part of the Tang's private collection but could possibly be incorporated into our gallery—whether by facsimile or photocopy. These brief trips will also facilitate the expansion a literature-based section of the show that will display excerpts from texts such as William Blake's illuminations, select graphic novels, and Tom Phillips's *A Humument*.

This summer period will be vital as we attempt to contact various local and current artists. Because the fall students will be researching the artists in the gallery, we need to ascertain whether there are enough resources available for the students to write about them. For those

artists who are newer and less established, we would like to see if these artists might be willing to talk to the students via email or phone, as they work on their three-part installation project for the class, which entails a close reading of a work of art, research about the artist, and the creation of both a tombstone (a pithy summary of all relevant information) about the artwork as well as an extended label for the gallery.

The discussions Caitlin and I will have over the summer will not only help prepare her to lead the students both inside and outside of the classroom but will also give her the theoretical background to create a piece that will become a part of the show. We will read and analyze Tom Phillips's work, *A Humument* (a text in which the artist "retreats" and paints over a Victorian novel called *A Human Document* in order to create a new hu(man doc)ument, or what he calls a *humument*). The text is visually stunning with its use of color and isolation of certain words and phrases on the page to create an entirely different text. Caitlin will use her skills in art and design to create her own humument, which will be displayed in the Gallery and also serve as an example for the students when they approach their final project of the course: to create their own humument.

Ultimately, we hope that this gallery will open the students' eyes and help them understand in a very concrete way that writing is not intended only for the professor who reads it, but that through the craft of revision, their work can be a part of something that has a very real impact on others in the community. Their future work, which will ideally become a part of the gallery (if it is up to Museum standards), will encourage them to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment about their own writing skills.

We feel especially proud to be included as part of the 10th anniversary of the Tang Museum, and therefore feel even more compelled to put forth a show that not only serves as the classroom space for our Scribner Seminar but also can serve other classes in the arts and humanities. I use the Tang quite regularly in my courses in the English department and have a special interest in blurring disciplinary lines with this show, so that other classes can benefit from the displayed works of art. We doubt that members of the Skidmore community and the surrounding community of Saratoga Springs are aware of the richness of the Tang's private collection, as many of these works have never been shown to the public. We hope this gallery will inspire others to take advantage of the incredible collection as well as figure out ways in which to integrate the Tang into the classroom.