

Monique Rodriguez Statement

I would like to participate in the LARC community “South Africa: Connecting Art & Science in Cacadu” with Professors Andries Fourie and David Craig. I am interested in the exploration of social relationships among wild animals and the relationships between animals and people. In particular, I am interested in studying how elephants in the Greater Addo National Park in South Africa interact with each other and with the people in and around the park (tourists, conservations staff, poachers, and the surrounding farmers). This interactive relationship between humans and animals is important for any ecosystem as the outside change that occurs, such as the introduction of elephants to a park or people creating an ecosystem for a specific species, effects the population of other plant and animal species.

For the LARC, I would observe and research elephant habitat and behavior by going with Professors Fourie and Craig to South Africa. In South Africa I would collect visual material for sculptures that I hope to create upon my return to Willamette University. By going to South Africa I would have direct access to the environment and people the elephants interact with as well as scientists and conservationists who study that dynamic. I would also have the opportunity to collaborate with other science and art students at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

A large part of this LARC project is creating international intellectual and artistic connections. Access to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University would also provide better research for the history of the elephant’s interactions with people at the Greater Addo National Park. After observing and researching the social behaviors of elephants, I plan to create a series of mixed-media sculptures inspired by the relationships between elephants, as well as the relationship between people and elephants. These sculptures would be made from welded steel and other materials, and would illustrate these social relationships in either abstract or representational structures. Both Professors Fourie and Craig are essential in assisting my own research and creation of works of art. AS a biologist and ecologist Professor Craig is an important resource in explaining the social behavior of elephants and their reactions to humans and their environment so that I may create more informed and thought-provoking art, and Professor Fourie provides guidance in the development and creation of my artwork.

In previous artworks that I have created in photography and ceramics I have explored relationships between people, nature, and nature and people. The effects that people have on each other and nature has always been interesting to me, and with the help of the LARC program, I can continue this exploration. Elephants are especially fascinating to me as they behave like people in the way they interact with each other. For example, elephants are one of the only animals that mourns the death of members of their own species, similar to the way people gather and mourn at a funeral.

Participation in the LARC program would provide me with the opportunity to further my experience as an artist. Many contemporary artists are inspired to create work based on collaborative research projects, as communication between disciplines is important in gaining a well-rounded perspective of a subject. As I am considering art making as my

future vocation, the LARC will help me assemble a unified body of artwork for applications to an art graduate school. This LARC program with Professors Fourie and Craig is also a great opportunity for me to gain experience as I will go through the entire process of researching, creating, and presenting my artwork. I am also particularly excited by the opportunity to participate in a culminating group exhibition with the other members of the research community in the late summer of 2013.