

Jake Waldner Statement

I would like to take part in the LARC program, South Africa: Connecting Art & Science in Cacadu, with Professors Andries Fourie and David Craig. I am particularly interested in exploring specific threads that connect each species within Greater Addo National Park in South Africa. One of the most specific examples is the patterns of interaction between different animal species, such as the relationship between trees and elephants. There are 30 species of African trees that rely upon the elephant's intestines, and then on the dung beetles to spread their seeds across the landscape. An interaction such as this between species is essential for the flow of energy through an ecosystem. These connections are all around us, we just have to look closely in order to see the web.

For this Grant, I would need to travel with Professors Fourie and Craig to South Africa in order to study these relationships between species closely in a specific environment. In South Africa I would collect visual reference material, photographs, and other resources such as biological data and information in order to come back to Willamette University and create mixed-media sculptures (a combination of a welded steel structure with other materials) that are a representation of this specific web of species interaction in the Addo National Park. Traveling to South Africa would also give me the opportunity to collaborate with not only professors Fourie and Craig, but also with Willamette Biology major Erynn Rebol and science and art faculty and students at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. We would also have access to the library and research facilities at the university. This would give me a greater opportunity to work with students who have firsthand experience in this environment. Each of the professors working on this project, Fourie and Craig, are essential because they provide not only a background in art and South Africa, but also a background in environmental sciences which is relevant to the connections that I am trying represent. All of these resources and materials are essential in order for me to be able to return to Willamette University and recreate the connections and webs that I have found.

I have always been intrigued by the relationships that connect all living things. In high school, I participated in three years' worth of college level biology at the local community college in order to study the biological relationships between the local plant and animal life. Through the LARC program I would have the opportunity to continue this fascination and continue to explore the patterns and strings that connect every living thing. I am excited to see these specific relationships in South Africa that are quite distinct from the relationships between species here in Oregon.

Participation in this program would give me the opportunity to grow as an artist and as a person, expanding my personal horizons as well as my portfolio and experiences as an artist. This program would provide me with the opportunity to work with artists who have found their path, and would hopefully provide me with insight into my plan for the future. I would also have the opportunity to present my work in a gallery in order to expand my portfolio by making a unified body of work for application into graduate programs in art.