

Jennifer Shaw
Report Sabbatical Spring 2018

February 5-18 Paris: Expert on French Art for “Entangled Modernisms: Chinese Artists Trained in Europe”, Getty Foundation “Connecting Art Histories” initiative

I was invited by Professor Sarah Fraser of the Heidelberg University Centre for East Asian Studies. The project aim was to investigate the experiences of Chinese artists in France in the nineteenth century. As an expert on nineteenth-century French art, I taught Chinese faculty and graduate students both in the classroom and on location in Paris. I gave lectures on site in the Musée D’Orsay and the Louvre Museum as well as slide lectures in a classroom setting to Professors and Ph.D. students of Chinese art. I participated in a workshop session of viewing paintings produced by Chinese artists working in Paris in the nineteenth and early 20th Centuries at the Musée Cernuschi (Museum of Asian arts in Paris). While in Paris I also visited other museums and galleries as part of my own research.

February 21-23, Los Angeles: College Art Association Conference.

Presented “Performance, Poetry, Resistance: Claude Cahun’s Anti-Fascism” on the panel “Avant-Gardes and Fascism”. Attended panels and lectures. Visited Los Angeles museums.

For the duration of my sabbatical I worked on my proposed project, then titled *Parallel Lives*. The title has now changed to *Migrations*. My novel follows the story of Helga, a free thinking woman living in remote northern Iceland at the end of the 19th C. Unlike her beloved but compliant twin sister, Helga wants to be a poet, loves the heroic women of Norse literature, and questions Lutheran doctrine. When Helga’s mother dies, she is torn away from her twin and sent to live as a pauper on another farm. Thus begins a physical, emotional, and intellectual journey in which Helga falls in love and is forced to abandon her infant daughter to travel to a pioneer community in North Dakota. There she faces hardship and near death. Discovering the ideas of American intellectuals Whitman and Paine, she becomes embroiled in a battle over the position of women and the ideas of the Church that will change her life forever. This is a novel about love and loss and choosing one’s own values. *Migrations* explores how leaving everything that is familiar can sometimes lead to new discoveries about oneself.

I used my training as an art historian to pursue historical research for the book, all the while working on the manuscript. This included:

March 2018: Participation in the on-line writing course, Write Fiction Like a Pro, through Sonoma State University’s Extended Education.

April 2018: Continued work on my book

May 2018: Participation in on-line writing course NLV02 Write a Novel in a Month through Stanford Continuing Studies.

May 2018: Arts Iceland Writers Residency, Isafjordur, Iceland

The time spent in Iceland was invaluable and I achieved more than I had planned. I located, visited and documented the sites of all the places where Helga and Sumarlidi lived including Aedey, one of the main settings of my novel. This island is privately owned and visitors are not usually allowed. However, I was able to locate the owners who ferried me from the mainland to the island for a day and allowed me to explore. They also discussed the history of the locale with me, and gave me first

hand knowledge of its unusually fauna (puffins and eider ducks) and age old economy (eider down harvesting).

While in Iceland, I conducted historical research in museums and archives in Reykjavik and the Westfjords and I made valuable connections with historians and museum directors. What is more, I exceeded my plan to write descriptions of the landscape. Instead, while there I was so inspired by the place that I managed to finish a full draft of the novel.

Since finishing the first draft of my book during the sabbatical, I have revised the manuscript several times and have secured representation for the book with the Levine, Greenberg, Rostan Literary Agency, New York, NY.