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NZFGW Fellow 2008, at the Victoria and Albert, London,

I have just finished the first year of my two year MA course in the History of Design, run by the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum. Over this year, I have completed a critical review of a piece of academic writing; a 10,000 word object study on an eighteenth-century Chamber Horse from the Museum's collections; a 10,000 word paper on American motel design during the postwar period; and a half hour presentation on the writing of Jacques Derrida. In preparing each of my written pieces of work I delivered work-in-progress papers to my class and tutors. I also ran a twenty minute discussion about Derrida after my third term presentation.

The first year's work is planned to give grounding in three different areas. My first paper, an essay on the eighteenth-century Chamber Horse, involved large amounts of primary research and focused study around a particular object. Preparing this paper provided an excellent introduction to the course as it engaged me closely with the details of design history. Encouraging me to think carefully about the construction, production and consumption of eighteenth-century furniture, the assignment established useful frameworks for my future research.

Working on this initial essay also gave me close contact with curators in the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department. As a result, I am now familiar with the ways in which the Museum works and have made valuable contacts in one of its major departments. I am much more informed about the nature of the Museum's collections and have had experience with different ways of accessing information about the collections. My work on the first term paper opened the V&A up to me as an invaluable resource for my future academic work.

The focus of the second major piece of written work for the MA is historiography. In this paper I reviewed the literature on motel history and design. I then used this review to offer a critical analysis of writing about the motel, considering it in relation to Cold War nationalism and to a long-standing American history of nationalist writing around the frontier and the road. The essay required me to use a body of writing that was not directly design related, and to link this writing to a detailed study of the motel as designed object.

The focus of the year's third major assignment was engagement with theory. For this paper I chose to look at two of Jacques Derrida's late texts, *Specters of Marx* (1994) and *Archive Fever* (1995). I used a close reading of Derrida's arguments in these books to offer an analysis of the design of the King's Library, in the British Library. The paper required a close engagement with difficult theoretical texts. The use of theoretical writing will be crucial in my dissertation, making the paper particularly useful to support my work in the second year of my MA. For this assignment I also had to run a discussion with the class and course tutors about my presentation. This requirement gave me excellent practice in managing a group discussion.

In addition to these formal pieces of assessment, the first year of the course has also involved regular presentations in group seminars; two study trips (to Amsterdam in the first term and to Prague in the second); study days with other practising Royal College students; and a study day with the curators of the current major exhibition showing at the V&A, *China Design Now*. As a programme, the course constantly encourages me to think broadly about issues of design practice, exhibition and consumption. I have been introduced to a large

range of people working in my field. These connections have already opened up wide areas for possible future employment, helping to establish me in a growing field of practice and academic study.

My dissertation in the second year will be a 30,000 word thesis, which will be based around detailed research from archival material and the use of contemporary theoretical writing and will be submitted in May 2009. My class will then spend two months preparing an exhibition of our work to be included in the Royal College graduation show. We will also run a symposium in which we present our research to curators and academics working in the field.

I am planning to use most of my NZFGW Fellowship to pay for a research trip in 2009. Being able to visit archives outside London will be extremely important in writing a well researched thesis. I would not be able to do this kind of primary research without the financial support of the NZFGW.

Since writing this report, Elizabeth has won one of two Clive Wainwright Memorial prizes for excellent work done in the first year of her course. She also won the Design History Society MA essay writing prize, for an essay about American motel design, done as part of her MA coursework. Congratulations from NZFGW!

