

# Travels and Fantasy



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## Travels and Fantasy

*Real landscapes of the South Pacific instigating nostalgic fantasies  
in a young American traveler*

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Traveling in the South Pacific has led me to self-discoveries about my love for landscapes, my love for fantasy elements, and the enjoyment I find in combining them. These travels took place during my semester studying abroad in Australia. I visited sites of every climate in Australia and highlights in the surrounding countries of Thailand, Fiji, and New Zealand. I felt the strong sense of being out of context of my ordinary environment with feelings including wonder, awe, fear, and comfort. From amazement at sublime landscapes to a sense of home in the untamed wilderness, each place felt unique.

I have always had a great interest in the fantasy-genre films that have been exposed to me through America's powerful entertainment industry. Although I was far away from home, witnessing landscapes from the South Pacific brought me back to these images of characters and places from the movies that I love. My series of paintings and dioramas are representations of personal experiences I had in each place I have traveled to, as they were instigated by both reality and fantasy.

As described, one inspiration for my Integrative Project sprung from my fascination with the "unreal"; magic presented to the world through mass-media entertainment. These ideas of imaginary characters include witches, mermaids, goblins, giant gorillas, present-day dinosaurs, wizards, vampires, fairies, dragons, and all other

seducers of reality enjoyed by a vast audience. These kinds of magical creatures create the fictional stories from old myths to present-day Hollywood movies. An initial drive towards my research was the new and popular fantasy movies that I fell in love with, including Stardust, Star Wars and Batman, as well as my enjoyment for books such as J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and Ann Rice's Vampire Chronicles.

When I read or watch these films I feel completely involved in the stories. I enter an enjoyable realm where I believe without reason in the existence of the characters and their dramatic tales in these imaginary settings. I found that films of our time were based on classic novels, myths and poetry, such as 'the Little Mermaid' and 'Beauty and the Beast'. I found that the reality of war and the idea of religion in our own lives were commonly incorporated into the stories. In Harry Potter, he is the "chosen one", with friends such as Sirius named after the Greek G-d with a meaning related to "Dog". There is always the traditional theme of good verses evil, which seems to be stretched to two extremes in most stories. In summary and most importantly, I found that a sense of reality is the base for these stories, whether it is religion, war, animals, the nature of good verse evil, love, landscapes, or drama.



Within the movie realm, the film director Tim Burton was a great inspiration for the concept behind my Integrative Project. In most of his stories he has placed an irrational individual in a world where he or she is misunderstood. In other words, they are out of context of their ordinary environments, whatever that may be, and the reaction and relationship between them and the environment is intriguing. In Burton's The Corpse Bride, Victor has mistakenly entered the land of the dead and immediately wishes to escape back to the land of the living. However, as the movie progresses Victor begins to see the colorful, fun, and ironically lively personality of the underworld. Similar to Tim Burton's stories, my works are about my relationships and reactions to the places I have visited where I stepped into environments of the unknown and discovered worlds of creativity.

The magic of the films heavily lies in the artwork behind the scenes. For me, the most interesting artwork in the films is the set designs. The characters are commonly placed in settings that are fit for adventure-filled narratives, such as the dark woods included in the Grimm brothers' tales, the dense jungles in King Kong and the old gothic-styled school known as Hogwarts in Harry Potter, located in what seems to be the hills of a countryside setting. The connection between movies and the landscapes I visited became clear when I witnessed places that were actually used in the sets of some popular films that I enjoyed. Being in a setting where I felt excitement and adventure of the unknown was a very similar feeling to watching fiction, fantasy films of drama and the same sense of adventure.



*Acrylic, 3' x 4', 2007, Hornstein*

### New Zealand, “A Middle World”

This painting was inspired by my travels to New Zealand. When I visited the South Island of New Zealand I witnessed the most striking and beautiful landscapes I had ever imagined. In this actual setting was where the movie *The Lord of the Rings* was filmed. On a boat ride to the fjords I was overwhelmed with the intensity of the cliffs, the waterfalls, and the icy mist from the waters that surrounded us. There was a sense of excitement and danger in the knowledge that I would die in these intensely cold waters if I were to leave the boat. Like a feeling from a movie, my experience seemed unreal.

In this painting I took the striking features that I visualize from New Zealand and created my own world. I added imaginary characters to this world that create a narrative

for the audience to follow. In truth there are no large predators in New Zealand. There are no reptiles or dangerous mammals, only sheep, a number of species of plants and birds, and other animals that will not do harm to humans. Regardless of this reality, I have added dangerous pterodactyls to my transformation of New Zealand. Legalus, the warrior, waits, anticipates, and shoots these vicious birds before they snatch the elf princess. She sits on the rock as her past white jaguar remains her guardian. She watches the living polar bears play, and the spirits of their deceased ancestors are forever embedded in the nature of the land.

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Phi Phi Island, Thailand, “The Beach”



*Mixed Media, 34" x 36" x 32", 2007, Hornstein*

In this piece, I embraced the paradise realm of the southern islands of Thailand. One of the islands I visited, called Phi Phi island, was where the movie “The Beach” was filmed, with Leonardo Dicaprio and Daniel York. Dicaprio plays an American boy in his twenties who travels to Thailand and finds himself in possession of a mystery map to a secret island: Phi Phi island. He thinks the island is man’s ultimate treasure, everything he wants, but finds that the solitary beach paradise is deceiving; filled with legends and dangers that he encounters. I was able to see how the beauty of the place will inevitably spark curiosity, therefore providing the perfect environment (or set for films) for mystery, uncertainty and action.

Unlike Dicaprio’s visit, my visit was short and my experience on the island was a tropical bliss. I was completely drawn to the island’s features: the turquoise water, cliffs hovering the sand, monkeys and exotic rocks. I wanted to recreate this experience for my viewers. I made the work into a diorama to give my audience a stronger sense of entering the atmosphere. I built a wooden suitcase that holds the piece, resembling how I carry these memories. A small portion of the sand is from the actual tropical island. I added a personal luggage tag and a quote by Jack Kerouac, “My fault, my failure, is not in the passions I have, but in my lack of control of them.”

The island is lustful for the traveler, as it was for Dicaprio’s character and for myself. I added the two people kissing in my piece to display a number of things. It is a self-portrait and a real memory from my visit. Through them I am showing how this real, foreign, exotic landscape instigates fantasies, such as sexual fantasies. The kissers also act as characters in a set design with the painting as the backdrop. Lastly, the man that I am kissing is from South Africa and is someone I will most likely never see again. My

relationship with him is similar to my relationship to the landscape; exotic and provisional, both acting as an impermanent “paradise realm.”



*(images from “The Beach” and of Phi Phi Island.)*

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Ayre’s Rock, Australia, “Memory Globe”





*Acrylic, 36" x 30", 2008, Hornstein*

Ayre's Rock is one of nature's wonders that lies in the middle of one of the world's most intense environments. The Outback of Australia has the most greenery of any desert in the world, thriving with different plant species and animals. The desert extends throughout the entire middle of the country. Australia's coasts are populated with people in the cities and only 10% live in the Outback. In terms of area, the Outback is the mass of Australia and is home to many animals such as the feral camel, dingoes, kangaroos, and lizards. The Aboriginals are Australia's native people. Their artwork, cultural and religious practices, and all around life-styles revolve around the outback and the spiritual qualities of Australia's land.

For this piece I present my appreciation for Australia's Outback. I attempt to capture the intense features that make the environment extremely unique. The desert sand is a rich red; a striking feature that was surrounding me. It makes the environment

look unlike anything else in the world. I added animals in my painting because they are an integral part of the land and are represented in many Aboriginal works. Furthermore, I wanted to present my experience visiting a land so opposite of my home. I was faced with the real idea that I was in an environment so superior to me that I would not be able to survive in if I were on my own. I hiked through King's Canyon near Ayre's Rock in February (the middle of Australia's summer.) It was 104 degree F heat and there was a swarming of flies. It felt unbearable. This is a prime example of the powers of nature over the natural limited abilities and patience of mankind. I also love the idea of how most of the Outback is untouched by man. When I look back on my experience I can recognize the wonders of nature in the untamed wilderness of the Outback.

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#### Northern Territory of Australia, "Never Never Land"

My piece titled "Never Never Land" represents the place of travel that most strongly sparked my imagination: an area of waterfalls in Litchfield National Park, located in the Northern Territory of Australia. I saw the waterfalls, the streams, the forest, the cliffs, and the rocks as wondrous features of the landscape. I created a world of adventures and inhabitants in my mind based on this land. I added gorillas, peter pan, fairies, and starry skies and created a scene based on this area that I witnessed. The starry skies especially show how this is a distorted realm of fantasy. I created this work into a diorama so that the audience can feel more welcoming into the environment. The waterfalls are extended out to give the feeling of movement between them. The foam acting as rocks frames the work as if it is a story to be read. The three-dimensional

aspect of the piece gives it the sense of mystery, and the notion that there is much going on in this setting.



*Mixed Media, 7' x 4', 2008, Hornstein*

Like my painting titled “Never Never Land”, my series of works present imaginary worlds where my characters can mingle together and co-exist. They were created based on the connections I made between landscapes and fantastical elements. I enjoy believing in the fictional characters, settings, and plots of fantasy-genre films. I felt the same fascination with the landscapes of the South Pacific. One reason was because being half way around the globe made me feel as though I was already in a

different world, one in which I can push my imagination past reality and believe.

Another connection is that I found the landscapes to be so beautiful and striking. The wonders of nature felt like magic themselves. I intend for my audience to enjoy the connections that I have made and feel the freedom in the realm of fantasy. I want my viewer to not be timid, but to enter; to travel through my works and embrace my world of adventure.

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