Report Otis Faculty Development Grant 2015
Tree Houses: Research Journey to Pacific Northwest
Rush White, Professor of Drawing in Foundation

TRANSCRIPT OF POWER-POINT. Note: Red numbers in the narrative indicate the cued-image from photographs of journey and artwork by Rush White

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Before I begin I want to say that I have recently become aware and a little bit involved with the first annual LA Climate Action Arts Festival, currently in need of art and in need of assistance. Some Otis faculty and some Otis students have already submitted some of their studio work for a Festival art exhibition whose Open Call is still…. open…. Anyone interested in getting involved may contact Organizer Cheryl Slean.

I wish to thank the Faculty Development Committee for the rich opportunity afforded by this grant. Receiving the grant made me appreciative of all my colleagues here at Otis. A shout out to my home team, leader Katie Phillips and the hard-working gang in the Foundation Year Department.

I especially thank Kathleen Forrest in the Otis Library without whom the power point you are about to see would lack the experienced professionalism Kathleen offered in the development of this presentation.

In the outline of my faculty development grant I proposed to explore the environment of contemporary tree houses in the Pacific Northwest on a 10-day trip.

Today, my presentation will include some of the documentary photographs I took of the forested environment alongside the man-made structures. Also I will have images of my drawings and paintings. And a few drawings done on-site. All the structures
you will see are utilized as lodgings for guests, priced up there with high-end hotels. The phrase: glam-camping.

**During the trip** this past July, I took numerous documentary photographs, made some on-site observational drawings, and interviewed two of the three creators of the tree house parks that I explored. HERE is the FIRST location I visited, where I did spent two nights in one of the **Free Spirit Spheres** — Vancouver Island, British Columbia — **Creator: Tom Chudleigh**

**WEBSITE:** freespiritspheres.com

**Chudleigh’s original conception** was to make a spherical houseboat. In building the smaller prototype for the houseboat he realized that the sphere could be used as a tree house. In bio-mimicry fashion, the nut like shape attaches to a web of rope. The web connects to whichever strong points are available. This replaces the foundation of a conventional building. A tree house sphere uses the forest for its foundation.

Here is **the workshop —of Sphere production.** The "Spherical Tree House" concept borrows heavily from sailboat construction and rigging practice. It's a marriage of tree house and sailboat technology. Wooden spheres are built much like a cedar strip canoe or kayak. Chudleigh’s future dreams include a washroom/shower/sauna sphere complete with its own effluent treatment system. It will produce only clean water and compost, something that could serve a whole colony of spheres on a remote setting.
My next destination was to the Trillium tree house — Fall City, Washington State (a short drive east of Seattle). The artist/craftsman/astute businessman Pete Nelson is known as the central character in the History Channel’s reality show, Treehouse Masters. It is there where you watch him build custom tree houses around the country. There was no vacancy for us to stay here but we got a tour of the on-site tree houses. Trillium is characterized by its simple shape, a rectangular solid with large surfaces of windows giving rise to thoughts and visions of stained glass in a back-to-nature forested cathedral.

Cedar Creek Treehouse — within view of Mt. Rainier. Thanks to the Grant I was able to spend two nights here also. Creator: Bill Comphers a colorful character who evolved from being a musician to a sort of Pacific Northwest folk-art hero making one gravity defying structure after another. You climb up the Stairway to Heaven, cross Rainbow Bridge to the Observatory.

The tree house where I stayed was 150’ above ground, built around a cedar tree. There’s a saying: “It’s more thrilling to defy gravity than let it control you.” Comphers assures his jittery guests that the structures are much stronger than they need to be. On site, he is building a second tree house based on the structural principles of a hammock.
These extremely elevated structures created by one person and a handful of assistants with no nets below is awe-inspiring. The work of these three Pacific Northwest artist/craftsmen are testaments to the inspiration, the physical daring and the craft of fierce, yet personally genial individuals.

**This research/explore/document opportunity** has enlivened my ongoing investigation and analysis of the relationship of these invented structures to their primordial forest backdrop. About three years ago, I came across a Taschen book found at Hennesey and Ingalls in Santa Monica. I was instantly mesmerized by the the sight of any and all tree houses. I have more thinking to do about where my studio work is evolving. I am exclusively engaged in depicting all things tree house. I am poised to delve deeper into my own learning and understanding of the contemporary tree house.

**Work from intuition, analyze with intellect**
In all of this I am working from intuition toward intellect in pursuit of a more rigorous studio painting development. With this grant I feel challenged to understand where does my inclination towards drawing-based painting put me in relation to the equal urge to investigate the structures I paint and to make paintings that consciously present, re-present and represent

Thanks to **Barry Fahr** for that book he gave me recently the one published by MIT and written by a Pratt artist/professor, called **101 Things to Learn in Art School**. From that book, I found a dozen statements that resonated to me.
Time is an essential element in all media

Art is the means of culture describing itself to itself

Meaning does not exist in the singular.

Porosity, not solidity, now defines our view of the world.

Art is the product of process

Complexity derives from the presence of contradiction

The studio as a place to work, as well as a state of mind. Style is the consequence of something being described in the way most appropriate to its content.

Scale is a critical component of any work

Hybridity defines the art process

Color is Light

Thank you. Five of my recent paintings are on view in the VisionLA “Art Makes Change” exhibition at the Vision Home Gallery which is housed at Bergamot Station in the former Santa Monica Museum of Art.
THE VISION

Tom Chudleigh’s personal goal is to produce 10 - 15 spheres and hang them all in a large area of old growth forest; a spiritual retreat for him and whoever else is interested.

I personally recently experienced a vision. Perhaps in the future Otis College would receive a large grant or grants. The grant would allow Otis to commission, say Tom Chudleigh of Free Spirit Spheres. I envision Chudleigh expanding his work crew and creating a dozen of his spheres to be used on some magically acquired land in the Angeles Crest Forest. The dozen spheres would host Otis faculty and students for brief stays throughout the year. Outdoor Otis classes would be the focal point for sustainability, climate, and other environmental issues. Images of a dozen spheres meandering through the forest would become a trademark icon for Otis in the 21st century.... That’s the vision.
An LA-wide Festival
ART • FILM • PERFORMANCE & MORE

NOV 30th VISION LA’15 - DEC 11th
Climate Action Arts Festival

For a full calendar of events: www.visionLAfest.org
Thank you again!