In June 2018, I was the recipient of a faculty grant that supported my travels to Finland for one month for two reasons. The first was to investigate the feasibility of a travel study program for Otis students in Helsinki and the second to continue an ongoing body of studio work related to my Finnish ancestry.

Research for an Otis College Helsinki, Finland travel study program
I spent two and a half weeks living in the Rhuoholahti district of Helsinki and exploring the city and meeting with different artists, teachers and organizations to experience daily life and what the students would encounter. This grant afforded me the opportunity to have an adequate amount of time to become familiar with Helsinki life. I visited local galleries, museums, libraries, college, and cultural sites across Helsinki and Tallin, Estonia. Many options stood out as having excellent potential for an Otis travel study program. A few are listed below.

Collaboration with Helsinki University of the Arts students
I met with Annu Vertanen, Printmaking/Design Professor at UniArts, the major art college of Helsinki in their expansive printmaking studio. We discussed Otis/UniArts collaborative possibilities and she welcomed the idea of a collaboration. She showed me two beautiful artist books that the UniArts students had collaborated on with University of Virginia and one with Berinika Boverska, an architect from Los Angeles. Planning ahead would be essential to incorporate the visit and we could stay one to several days depending on the project. Research and working via email in advance is a possibility, leaving printing and production to our time there. The UniArts students do not choose a major, work would be interdisciplinary. The environment and sustainability are critical to their students as with Otis students so that topic is a possibility.

Marimekko Factory
I visited with Marketing Director Asta Halme, and Senior Design Director Petri Juslin at the Marimekko factory for a behind the scenes factory tour involving the production of the famous Marimekko textiles and products. Asta and Petri confirmed we would be able to do a student tour. Petri who has been the Design Director of Marimekko for 30 years and has overseen the transition to large scale sustainable design also teaches design at the University of Finland.

Arabia Glass and Ceramic factory and the Design Museum of Helsinki
The Arabia glass and ceramic museum and factory tour, and the Design Museum of Helsinki focus on the long relationship and history of design and nature in Finland.

Edel Mobile Upcycle
I was able to participate in a popular upcycling workshop at Vertas 247 Art Center with Isabella Hass who runs the mobile upcycle company Edel Design. Isabella runs mobile workshops for individual artists and group who want to make products from recyclable goods.
Study with artist Mikko Keski-Valhala
Mikko is a printmaker and letterpress artist who runs a small newspaper in the Helsinki area as well as the Espoon Kuvataiteilijat, Art Center in Helsinki. He is excited by the possibility of collaborating with Otis students on a project of mutual interest.

Day ferry trip to Tallin, Estonia
One of the highlights of my trip was a ferry ride to Tallin, Estonia. I stayed overnight and visited Old Town Tallin, a beautiful old medieval city that is also very technologically advanced. Tallinn’s neighborhood Telliskivi Creative City is thriving artist area. The ferry ride is 2 hours and Tallin is small enough with easy tram transportation to be explored in a day trip from Helsinki.
Studio practice
The second part of my grant was dedicated to my ongoing studio project about the land of my mother’s ancestors in Finland. I started this project several years ago on a trip to Central Finland and I continue to deepen and expand it, this time sourcing local specimens for textile patterns and typeface designs. On this trip, I stayed at a country farm and small island alone rowing myself out to live off the grid for a few days and document the environment. I sketched, photographed and printed the flora of the area daily, experimenting with ways of working with the collected plants and natural items. A daily paper scroll became the basis for much of my imagery, overlapping drawings and tracings of the material.
I anticipate using these images either in a singular way as drawings, photographs or prints or as a basis for a series of textile prints I am developing. I am very grateful for the support of the Otis faculty grant to offset travel expenses for both investigation into a new travels study program at Otis and to continue working on my studio project.