

Experiencing Art Abroad
SE04EP10
Cindy Evans

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

Z: For this episode, we talk with Cindy Evans, a PhD Art History student who is teaching abroad in Florence, Italy this summer. Cindy talks about her international and study abroad background, her experience seeing Florence's art for the first time alongside her students, and how study abroad is truly a life changing experience. Let's go to our conversation with Cindy now.

Z: Hi Cindy, how are you doing today?

Cindy (C): Hi! I'm doing well. How are you guys doing?

Z: Doing really well, we're excited to talk to you. First off can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

C: Yes, happy to. So, I am Cindy Evans, I am currently teaching an art history course at the Florence study center in Italy. I'm a PhD student so I'm a little unique in that, that I'm actually a student myself as well as teaching and yeah I'm here and loving it.

H: Awesome can you give us an overview of your international background?

C: Yeah, I would be happy to. So I'm actually technically a dual citizen. I was born in Germany, my mom is fully German grew up her whole life there, and my dad's American they met he was stationed in Germany and they met and got married and had some kids over there. Yeah so I have a lot of experience traveling to see my family and so I went almost every year growing up to visit them. So I traveled a lot but not really outside of Germany just like visiting my grandma you know and my family over there so yeah I feel like I've traveled a lot but I didn't really travel much outside of Germany until I got a little older but then I made that a priority for sure.

H: Yeah can you tell us a little bit about that travel? What did you do later on?

C: Yeah so as I got older I realized how incredible Europe is, the fact that everything is so close. And so I begged my mom to have us go somewhere other than just kind of the typical places we had been visiting around where my family was. So I took my first like more major trip, we went to Paris, when I was 15 I think and yeah and I just loved traveling after that. And so I eventually when I got a little bit older, when I was like 16 and 17, I traveled Germany by myself for months at a time so I feel like I had kind of extensive traveling, independent traveling experience, pretty young. And then when I went into my undergrad I eventually realized I had this love of art and art history specifically and I decided that I wanted to do an internship because I was developing my German skills and I wanted to develop more of my art history and my curatorial kind of museum experience because I hadn't worked in museum before. So I end up doing an internship in Germany through the study abroad office at the place I did my undergraduate degree which was at BYU in Utah, so I spent three months working at a museum in Schwäbisch Hall, Germany

and it was like one of the coolest experiences in my life. I loved it and ended up working at the study abroad office after that which was really amazing.

Z: Awesome that's so cool. So you mentioned studying abroad and then working at the study abroad office as a student, can you talk about the importance of international education and what that means to you?

C: Yeah for sure. I really feel, I mean I know it sounds a little cliché, but I feel like that was a life changing experience for me. Even though I had been to Germany a million times, I think it's very different when you're by yourself and not only by yourself but you're also working in an international context, that's just very different than visiting somewhere. I feel kind of similar now. I feel like my internship and living here in Italy are very similar in the sense that I'm not I'm not a tourist. I mean I feel like a tourist sometimes, but I do feel a little bit more ingratiated in the actual happenings of the city which is the greatest way to experience the city in my opinion. I really feel like it's kind of perspective changing. You realize that there's just so many different people and perspectives in the world. You see kindness every day, just from like a like a human level, it's really cool to see like how kind people can be even if I don't, you know 'cause I don't speak Italian - I speak fluent German, I have literally no Italian to speak of - I learned how to say 'thank you' while I was here here and I say it constantly, 'grazie' all the time, and people are very kind which is actually really cool to see. As well as just seeing kind of the different culture that is here. You know like especially when you're comparing an American kind of perspective on the world versus maybe an Italian perspective, you know I'm in this city that is just thousands of years old basically which is just something that you don't have in the US and that makes a difference. I feel like I think about that a lot when I'm walking down the road I'm like wow this has been here for so long and I'm just so grateful that I'm able to see those things just like on a daily basis. Even when I'm not seeking it out, right it's just it's around me all the time.

H: That was one of the coolest things for me the first time I went to Europe was just thinking about how I felt like I could even comprehend how old the things around me were because I had never experienced that before like nothing in my context was as old as the things I was just walking by on the street so it's really cool, really cool point.

C: Right.

H: So you mentioned that you are also a PhD student. Can you tell us about your research and what got you interested in studying what you're researching now?

C: Yeah definitely. So I kind of talked before, I have this love of Germany because of my background and I for a long time kind of struggled with exactly, I knew I wanted to study something within the realm of German history but I wasn't really sure what I wanted to study. And then really in the last two years I became deeply invested in kind of the post war era on an international scale because I feel like a lot of the things that you study, especially when you're talking about like the late 60s have a lot of resonances with what's going on today, a lot of activism, a lot of political unrest, that kind of thing and I actually went about doing this research paper that turn into it is my dissertation now. So my concentration, to back up, my concentration is on post war Germany specifically and then my dissertation topic is based around this art group there known as "The Effekt Group," it was four artists that were collaborating together in effort to create these artworks that were really supposed to be democratic in nature, they were supposed to be anti capitalist, anti, they kind of wanted to remove individual identity, they wanted to work as a cloud collaborative group and they wanted to kind of echo these democratic models within their own artistic

practice as well as on a political scale. They were very politically involved specifically with the German student revolutions that were going on internationally. And they had a lot of connections with the Non-Aligned movement that was coming out of Yugoslavia which is in Eastern Europe. And I try to focus a lot in my research and in the way that I go about teaching on marginalized histories. Basically I try to focus on certain narratives that are normally ignored for, normally political reasons or what have you. So basically the Non-Aligned movement came out of Yugoslavia which is in this context of the Cold War which basically you have the US and Europe they're you know kind of capitalist powerhouse and then you have the Soviet Union which is this communist powerhouse, but most people don't know that there was a lot of people that opposed this binary and wanted to find their own path and so the Non-Aligned movement was kind of one of the biggest ones that were posing this. So I talked about how that manifests in artistic practice. Because even when you're talking from an art historical perspective, most people will tell you there's this binary after the war of abstract expressionism or art informel on like the western side and socialist realism on the communist side, but that's just not true. There was lots of other things going on and yeah so my research kind of focuses on those marginalized histories. My group specifically has never had anybody write about them. There's like little blurbs about them here and there, but there's no book, there's no paper, nobody talks about them. And largely, I would argue, it's because they were very anti-capitalistic because they destroyed everything after they made it, and so you can't make money on it so you can't make money on it, you're not going to write about it. So yeah so that's what my project is and they had, like I was saying they had lots of connections in Yugoslavia but they also had connections in Italy and France, all over the all over Europe, as well as South America and Japan actually. So that's something that's really cool about being in Italy is because they have a lot of works that were in the same movement here in Italy that I'm actually planning a trip to go to Milan to to do some more research with that and to visits some of the works that had an impact on their on their artistic practices.

Z: That's awesome it's so cool that your research is taking you abroad and it's based internationally as well. So shifting a little bit, we want to ask you what do you expect to gain from this experience teaching abroad?

C: Yeah that's a good question. I feel like it's, I think it's such a cool experience and it is almost a little strange to say that this is the first time I'm doing this, but this is really the first experience I've had being with students in a room with the artworks, looking at them you know up close. Which is really the way it should be done. You know, I mean for example like today I was teaching and today's the first time that I had to teach in the classroom and I couldn't actually take the students into the space to like see the works because just of timing stuff, the museum wasn't open when class time is going on. And I just remember saying over and over again when you guys see it on your own time, because they have to go see on their own time, when you see it like pay attention to this, pay attention that, look for this, look for that, you know. And I think that's just such a cool thing to be able to really enjoy and teach about art the way it's meant to be experienced. I mean there's just so many artists and artistic practices that have emphasized like the physicality of the work so it in all reality the way that we teach with PowerPoints and everything like that, don't get me wrong I love PowerPoints I think there would helpful, but in all reality that's not the way that art is supposed to be enjoyed, it's not the way that it's meant to be experienced. So while I feel like you know we're so lucky to have the internet and be able to share art on the vast scale that we do, it is a very different experience being in front of it, talking with students about it, letting them really experience in real time, in real space.

H: That's awesome. It's such a good way to really experience the city too because I'm sure you being in the city where most of this or some of this art was likely created also kind of adds to that context and like the feeling of really understanding what the art is, like who the artist was, what their life was like, I think

that just adds so much. Like you said, it's not in a PowerPoint you can see it in real life which definitely makes a difference, I'm sure. What has been your favorite thing about being in Italy so far?

C: The food. I feel like that's a lame answer.

H: Not at all.

C: But the food really. Well the food and really you know the typical things. Just really being here where the art is. One thing, I don't think I've mentioned it so far is that this is actually my first time being in Italy myself so a lot of these artworks you know I have seen a million times in the classroom or I have read about them a million times or I've heard about them or whatever and this is the first time I'm experiencing a lot of them. You know like we talk about Michelangelo's David which is just you know the most quintessential renaissance sculpture, this is the most important thing ever, but I've never seen it in real life! You know, so it's just interesting, I feel like I'm adding a little bit of authority to what I'm saying when I'm teaching something I could say you know, 'it really is this way, it really is!' You know, so I feel like is something that's really neat is to you know feel like, like I said just have that experience face to face with these works and be able to have that kind of in my arsenal to help teach in the future as well.

Z: Yeah it's always awesome when you study something in the classroom and then you're able to go abroad and see it really come to life whether it's art, or language, or food, or whatever it's just cool to have that immersive experience.

C: Yeah, most definitely.

Z: So our last two questions we want to ask you for some advice. So the first one we want to ask what advice do you have for other faculty who are considering teaching abroad?

C: I think that's an interesting question because maybe I shouldn't think this way but I feel so much the junior when I'm here. You know, all the instructors here either live here full time, they've done this several semesters, or they're instructors who've been doing this for over 30 years so I feel completely out of my authority, out of you know, I feel like, they're all like, I have no advice for anybody because I'm just so new at coming to this. But I will say that the one thing that I feel like is unique and kind of like the strength that I have is that because I'm experiencing these things for myself the first time, I really can relate to the student's joy and just like kind of the like that experience that they're having of seeing these things and being you know, learning these things for the first time and how unique that is and how special it is considering that you know they are so young, I mean I know that you know there are mostly over 18 everything like that but that's still very young, and these are really going to be life changing experiences. And like I said I mean I still think about my study abroad experience all the time you know and I don't feel like I want to take that for granted, I want to really kind of soak that in when I see the students, and have them soak it in. So to really just emphasize like this is really about the students and letting them have this really magical moment for them to learn and to grow you know academically which is like obviously important but also just as people. I feel like that's something that is important too and I feel like is my goal, like as much as I want to teach my art, I feel like it's you know I would like to think that it's having an impact on students as people too, not just like from an educational perspective you know.

H: So it's reflecting a little bit more on your own study abroad experience and then also the students that you're teaching and impacting now, do you have any other advice for students who are considering studying abroad?

C: Yeah I feel like I have like my practical answer that and then I have my more like romantic or like spiritual response to that. I feel like my advice would be to do it, I mean just absolutely do it, it's an investment and I know that one of the biggest things, because when I was working at the study abroad office, I was you know for a time basically in charge of helping facilitate the experiences for people going to German study abroads and you know I came across a lot of students who'd say I don't know the money you know what I relate to that, I understand that. You know, that's not a completely that's it's not like that's an invalid concern, but I will say it's an investment in your future. And kind of some advice that I or like kind of standard that I've gone on or followed in my life is I try to always travel when it seems the most convenient or if it's like the cheapest is ever going to be if that makes any sense. This will be the most convenient and cheapest it will ever be for you to travel abroad. When you're at this age you know you're in a position where you can be in a country for six weeks and you don't have to take time off of work, you don't have to, I mean maybe you have to take time off of work, but in terms of like if one day you get a career you know you're not taking six weeks off of work, people can't really do that most of the time, you're getting credit for school which is huge I mean that's in and of itself, you're being productive while you're here, and most of these museums will get you in either free or for a reduced price at the age that you're at. So for me like the advice would just be to go, from just a purely kind of productive perspective. I know that for me like, I eventually got another internship at another museum and I know for a fact, I mean the people that hired me told me, I got it because I had had this other internship experience, you know. And when I eventually got into grad school I know that, I'm sure part of it is the fact I did this study abroad so you know it helps even just from like a perspective of like your career. And then yeah that more romantic or spiritual element of it would be you know this is a life changing experience so don't underestimate kind of the impact it's going to have on you as a person. And you know kind of let, you know if you end up doing it, let the experience dictate the experience. That sounds so cliché, I don't know how else to say it, but you know when you're here you kind of let yourself... because sometimes you have these ideas of how it's going to go but really you just you show up and you let yourself experience it. You know, you learn the best places to go eat, or you meet people are here you would expect meet, or you go places that you wouldn't expect to go, and really it's those things that you don't expect are the things that have the greatest impact on you, I think. At least that's been the case for me, so just do it. That's my advice, do it you won't regret it.

Z: Absolutely that's great advice I love that you touched on you know that this is the time to go and that also it can help your career and it will change you as a person. I think all of us who have studied abroad have experience that change and that shift in our mindset as well, so love that advice. Well Cindy, thank you so much for talking with us today, it's been a real pleasure.

C: Definitely, thank you guys so much this was really fun. I like to reflect on the experience, it kind of reminds me how lucky I am and how grateful I am to be given this opportunity to begin with.

Z: Before we disembark, let's talk about the next season of the Noles Abroad podcast!

This is the last episode of season four and we are looking forward to the next season of the podcast coming in the Fall! As we wrap up this season, we would like to invite you to rate and review the show on Apple Podcasts! We also want your input for season five!

H: If there is a topic you want to hear about on the podcast or if you have a story you would be interested in sharing, let us know! You can reach out by sending us a message on social media or by emailing IP-Media@fsu.edu.

Z: Thanks to Cindy for talking with us today, and as always thanks for listening!

H: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Hannah Meister and Zoë Crook.