

My dear **Returning IB Artists:**

First of all, I know you're extremely busy, so I am not piling a lot of extra work on you. But I also know that you're creative and driven to succeed, so I want you to continue an artistic routine this summer that will prepare you for the year ahead—at the end of which you will meet the IB Art examiner with a solid portfolio and an air of almost unbearable confidence.

You spent your first year in IB art becoming familiar with a wide variety of media and completing specific class assignments that may or may not have reflected your own interests. This second year will be very different. You will have much more independence, and I will be assisting you as a consultant and critic, helping you to realize the ideas, projects, and directions that YOU bring to class. This summer project is designed to help you generate ideas about what means the most to you.

Your summer project has two parts:

1. Read and think about artists with whom you identify.
2. Study yourself from several new points of view.

Your work on these summer assignments is due at the end of the first week of school. The assignments will be graded, and they will be a significant portion of your grade for the first marking period.

1. Research artists

Find two artists (painters, sculptors, cartoonists, designers...) whose work really interests you. At least one of these artists should be alive and working now. An excellent way to find contemporary artists is to loiter in your local bookstore reading the art magazines. Research their work in books, on the Internet, or in person. Describe the issues they explore in their work in your sketchbook and document with drawings and pasted-in photos. Find an interview or an artist's statement, if possible, to learn not just what they did and when, but **how and why.**)

2. Create a personal ethnography

One artist (among many) who inspires me is Keri Smith (<http://www.kerismith.com/>). In her book *How To Be an Explorer of the World*, she talks about how art and science are connected in the collection and organization of things that may at first glance seem meaningless.

An ethnographer applies this approach to the study of human cultures to create an **ethnography**:

“the documentation and analysis of a particular culture through field research.”

What do we mean by culture? Here are two definitions from the Merriam Webster Collegiate:

“The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time.”

So you are now an ethnographer, and your subject is you. Begin to study yourself as if you were part of a newly discovered tribe (which, believe me, you are). Collect evidence and documentation of the following:

your rituals	the stories you tell
your superstitions	your (multiple) social communities
the things you consume	the daily paths you take
the things you create	your rules of conduct

These are just a few categories to get you started. The main thing is (in the words of Keri Smith again) to **“document and observe the world around you as if you’ve never seen it before.** Take notes. Collect things you find... Notice patterns. Record what you are drawn to.”

Do you need a minimum number of pages? Fine, if it will help:

Fill at least 20 pages with notes, lists, diagrams, maps you make, observational sketches, and overheard conversations. Fill a box or an envelope with things you find that might prove useful or provide new clues.

You already have a good start on this. In the past year I’ve asked you to draw maps of your influences and also what’s going on inside your head. You’ve identified objects that were essential to you, and practiced looking at some of them in unfamiliar ways.

Look at the work already in your sketchbook as if it was done by someone else. What are the most successful works? Think about the formal properties (value, contrast, unity, etc. etc.). What looks the best, and WHY? **Write down these thoughts in the margins, on post-it notes, or directly on the pages themselves.** If you are writing about a studio piece, take a picture of it, glue it in the middle of a page in your book, and write your thoughts around it. **Combine images and words on the same page.** Aside from the formal properties, what do these works tell you about the strange being who made them? What ideas, concerns, or emotions are they communicating?

This process of *becoming aware* of what you are thinking/doing/choosing is what IB (and art? And life?) is all about. Do good work, have fun, and I’ll see you in August!

This assignment and other observations will be posted at <http://angryelvis.com>.

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