2013 Chairs’ Award Recipient Application

Name: Holden Brown

Major: Film & Video Arts

Where you wish to travel: Stockholm and Älmhult, Sweden

Proposed dates of travel: 9/1/13 - 9/30/13

Budget amount: $3,567.43 - $4,689.43

Have you received any other traveling fellowships/scholarships from MICA? If yes, please specify: No

Application Video Link: https://vimeo.com/65398213
Travel Grant Proposal:

Itinerary

September:

1st
Depart Baltimore, MD

2nd
Arrive in Stockholm, Sweden

3rd-14th
Explore sites in Stockholm

15th
Take train to Älmhult

16th-20th
Visit the 14 companies owned by Ikea, including the world's first Ikea. Explore sites in and around Älmhult

21st
Take train to Stockholm

22nd-26th
Take day trips to explore Rinkeby

27th-29th
Edit notes and documentation
Revisit sites

30th
Depart Stockholm, Sweden

October:

1st
Arrive in Baltimore, MD
Travel Grant Proposal:

Budget

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Expenditure Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airfare</td>
<td>United Airlines</td>
<td>$896.20</td>
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<td>(as of April 30, 2013 for Sept. 1 - Sept. 30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>Guesthouse Rental in Stockholm</td>
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<td>Ikea Hotel in Almhut</td>
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<td>Tourist Sites</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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<td>Subway card</td>
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<td>Food/Water</td>
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<td>Everyday Expenses</td>
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<td><strong>Total Estimate:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,567.43 -</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$4,689.43</strong></td>
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Travel Grant Proposal:
Stockholm and Älmhult, Sweden

Over the past year I have begun developing a body of work, which explores the American suburban ideal: a way of life characterized by economic and social stability within our cultural collective unconscious. However, this illusion of idyllic life has begun to falter following the financial crisis of 2007-2008. Not only did the Great Recession draw attention to the cracks in our capitalist system, but it also exposed the disintegration of the middle class through the broadening divide between the upper and lower classes. Through my videos, installations, and sculptures I have begun questioning the utopian image of suburbia – exposing the myth of the American Dream as an insidious nightmare, fueled by the soulless and destructive nature of materialism. For my thesis project at MICA, I am constructing a recreation of an Ikea showroom, a space that has come to define “domestic perfection”. While seemingly sterile and new, closer inspection reveals this environment and the objects contained to be quietly menacing, horrific and repulsive, uneasily suggesting both store display and crime scene.

If granted the Chair’s Award, I hope to continue my artistic journey by traveling to the source of this modern suburban aesthetic: Sweden – the birthplace of Ikea. The cultural perception of Sweden is almost shaped by the idyllic images found in the company’s iconic catalog: beautiful people who inhabit well-designed, modern homes. From the outside looking in, it is a peaceful country that has avoided war and has one of the highest per capita income rates in the world. However, no country is perfect, and there are extremely unpleasant undercurrents beneath Sweden’s tranquil social order; rates of violence against women and child abuse are surprisingly high and racism is rife. Rinkeby, a suburb of Stockholm, is a virtually segregated community, in which immigrants make up more than 80% of its residents. These residents are socially, economically, and geographically isolated from the rest of the city (a homogeny of white Swedes essentially) and have little economic and social opportunity to gain the necessary social, political and cultural capital to work in Stockholm. In a nation that holds an unemployment rate of 5.8%, only 30% of Rinkeby residents hold jobs and more than 50% live off of full government benefits. Compared to the American notion of suburbia as cookie-cutter perfection, the suburbs of Sweden are comprised of utilitarian, concrete high-rises and hold largely negative social stigmas. In contrast, Älmhult, Sweden, the hometown and headquarters of Ikea, is a picturesque community, no less than what you would expect from the company’s “Mecca”. Ikea’s corporate presence could not be stronger here. In this small town of 8,000 people (half of which are Ikea employees) here are 14 Ikea companies, which include: the first ever Ikea store, a test lab, Europe’s largest studio where all of the catalogues are photographed, an Ikea bank, an Ikea hotel, a design unit, an Ikea spa, and an Ikea museum. I will be traveling between the city of Stockholm, the suburban sprawl of Rinkeby, and the small town of Älmhult in order to compare and contrast these three very different locations and gain a thorough understanding of Swedish culture as a whole. I will be documenting my experiences with recorded video, photographs, and writings, which will be used to create a series of video installations, based on this journey, when I return to my studio in the states.

Placing myself directly within the Ikea company headquarters and the middle-class communities (both domestic and foreign) that Ikea depicts and markets to, would provide me
with the first-hand experience and knowledge necessary to complete the work I’m interested in making. The Chair’s Award would give me an incredible opportunity, which I otherwise would not have: to broaden the scope of my work into a larger, worldlier, context. The social, racial, and economic inequity occurring at a small scale in Sweden is happening at a much larger scale in America, making it the perfect location to study the issues I am interested in and want to bring awareness to.

Thank you for your time and consideration.