

American Grantee Report

(Fulbright Hays Act)

July 30, 1988

Part I. Administrative

Name.....Ronald DeWitt Mills
Category of Grant..... Lecturing
U.S. Home Address..... c/o Art Dept., Linfield College, McMinnville, OR 97128
Host Institution..... University of Costa Rica
Host Country.....Costa Rica
Field of Specialization..... Fine Art Manual Lithography
Period of Grant.....February-July, 1988.

1. Preparation for the exchange experience:

A. Selection and Notification: The selection and notification process was well handled in my case. Communication was clear and questions were answered fully, often by telephone. The only improvement that I would recommend is some acceleration of the notification process so that professors such as myself have adequate information to take sabbaticals of an appropriate length of time.

In my case, verbal telephone notification was not made until late May and written notification not until July 9, which was well beyond the date my home institution needed to make arrangements for my replacement. Forced to make a choice as to taking a half-year sabbatical (with full-salary) or a full-year sabbatical (with half-salary, and after having been nominated by CIES for what seemed ostensibly to be the full 10 month project duration originally requested, I chose the full year sabbatical only to learn later that the grant support would be reduced to 6 months. It should be appreciated that this represented a significant financial difference, and could have been avoided by earlier notification.

In general, communication via telephone was informative, responsive and friendly. Possibly due to personal changes in Washington and Costa Rica, the post in Costa Rica had little information about my project when I arrived (admittedly early) and required a reconstruction of communiques between Washington, the University of Costa Rica and myself.

B. Washington Briefing: I did not receive such a briefing.

C. Transportation Arrangements: I had no problems in this regard including the transportation of a computer.

D. Financial: The stipend was clearly adequate and appreciated, however, as I explained above, I got caught short not knowing how to handle the sabbatical length due to late notification and may well have chosen to spend the fall semester another way had I known earlier that the grant support was to be shortened.

E. Logistical Arrangements Abroad: My housing arrangements were simplified because my wife is Costa Rican. We were able to rent a small studio apartment with the help of her family. Medical and dental services are quite good in Costa Rica.

F. Suggestions: Betsy Adair, Cultural Affairs Officer and the rest of the staff in USIS were very helpful and friendly. I have appreciated their support very much. My only lament is that there were not more opportunities to meet and exchange information with other Fulbrighters.

Part II. Professional Activities

A. Description of study, research, teaching or lecturing assignment:

The nominal description of my responsibility at the University was originally to teach fine art manual lithography, for which there has never before been adequate facilities nor regularly offered curriculum. My actual assignment was a bit ambiguous at the beginning with no clear plan within the School as to how to integrate the curriculum of my offering within existing academic disciplines nor the level of prerequisite experience to be required of students. Lithography had never been taught other than through limited individual investigations and guest foreign professors giving short workshops.

Decisions concerning prerequisites, scheduling and lab-security were made by the Director or deferred to me in an agreeable and satisfactory manner. Class size was dictated by the capacity of the new studio and the amount of available work stations, with 12 regular students as well as 6 professors and a substantial number of additional visiting artists. It is important to note that while the number of *registered* students was low, it is not an adequate indication of the actual value or impact of the project. I trained several professors, two of whom are prospective instructors of lithography for the School, as well as invited artists, unregistered students and other professors. I taught a minimum of 12 hours per week in three sessions. In addition, I spent a minimum of 6-10 hours a week preparing instructional papers, building the studio or testing native materials.

A more realistic list of the responsibilities that I assumed by obvious necessity or by the direct request of Lic. Carlos Guillermo Montero, Director of the School, are as follows: Physically create a new lithography facility, including build and design furniture, purchase basic lab equipment and find local sources of chemicals and supplies. Intensively teach a group of advanced students and professors as well as other non-matriculated artists. Train professors to teach the introductory course in the future. Research native and readily available materials for the economical continuation of the program. Involve a number of important national artists, including Francisco Amighetti and Rafa Fernández and Alfonzo Merino in the creation of lithographs in order to proliferate its usage and interest. Organize and curate two exhibitions of lithographs produced during the semester for the School of Fine Art and the School of Education. Participate in normal faculty activities including exhibitions and faculty meetings. Give a special public lecture on the history of the medium and the research progress of the project to the School. [June 6, 1988] Write *Un Nuevo Impulso: La Litografía en la Escuela de Artes Plásticas* for publication in *Kañina*, the research journal of the University of Costa Rica. [for publication during August, 1988, text enclosed] Write *Litografía Manual; procesos básicos, tablas químicas, investigaciones de materiales*.for the School of Fine Art. [enclosed]

My status within the School of Art has been basically as a regular faculty member. I was expected to prepare all regular curriculum and syllabi material as well as participate in faculty meetings, exhibits and consultations. I conducted standard examination sessions and graded student work. My hourly load seemed to be roughly the same as those for full-time professors, though I was conducting basic material research and giving presentations in lieu of quite so much classroom teaching.

My students were of mixed levels, including regular University students from fine and applied arts, as well as other professors, non-matriculated students and mature national artists. Class size was limited by the facility.

B. Research:

Though I was not technically on a research grant, I have had to do a great deal of basic investigation in order to accomplish the assignment. I have been investigating indigenous lithographic materials in order that the lithography facility of the School of Art might finally become self-sufficient and continuous. This has led me into basic chemical investigations into the use of native marble, artificial stone surfaces and the re-cycling of off-set printing plates. The successful creation of artificial stone surfaces is a technical innovation with wide potential usage, which I will publish in the appropriate U.S. journal when the investigations are completed. Please refer to the enclosed article and technical guide for more detailed information about my research activity.

2. Completion of project objectives:

The original objectives of the assignment involved nothing beyond teaching, which was completed with clear success. My personal objectives were more broad, with the ultimate goal being a permanent facility and continuing new subject area. As of this writing, these goals seem to be gradually materializing. [see article] , however, I will be interested in seeing how all is going after the initial euphoria is over and the hard work of independently supporting the ambition is tested.

I am confident that (a) the appropriate teaching staff has been identified and is reasonably prepared and knowledgeable (b) that the necessary information is now available in Spanish (c) that the technical research is substantially completed and that (d) the start of an adequate facility is in place. The students and professors are enthusiastic and artists not usually interested in the School of Art's activities are involved. The School's administration seems to be gradually realizing the value of the program, and that the now existing talent and knowledge will be enough to carry it in the future without foreign guest professors.

3. Professional relationships:

My contacts were only at the Division and Department levels with no contact with University officials per se. I have continuing professional collaborations with the Dean of the Division of Fine Arts, and enjoy a very supportive and friendly personal and professional relationship with him. The Director of the Department, who is new in the post, has been a bit slow on organizational matters but generally helpful and supportive. He has assisted in attracting interested mature artists, students and professors to be involved in the project. My relationship with him is professionally efficient and cordial. I have developed a number of interesting relationships with other faculty members and have had occasion to speak with them about a number of academic, creative and professional matters. In addition, I have had pleasant opportunity to cultivate other professional contacts within the art community due to my Fulbright work.

4. Problems & Solutions:

- The extreme variety of levels of student competence in the same class provided some difficulties, though with a little flexibility the problem was solved, primarily through a lot of personal attention and conferences.
- The lack of adequate supply funds drained the Fulbright book budget and forced the expenditure of personal funds to keep the studio running through the term. Now with local supplies having been found for nearly all basic supplies, this should no longer be a problem, though the laboratory remains incompletely equipped by U.S. standards. The lack of an adequate art and slide library facilities made lecture preparations difficult. I would advise future grantees to bring their own slides and technical material. Lack of confidence by the administration of the School that it could become independent of foreign grant funds and foreign professors in this subject area. This has been largely overcome by demonstrating newly developed local competence, however the administration is taking a go-slow attitude, reflected in slow response to new staffing, equipment and budget needs. While this seems prudent, it is my opinion that more energetic and organized administration at this point would bear fruit.

5. Additional Professional Activity by Grantee During Term of Grant: Individual exhibition of 26 new paintings and lithographs in Espacio Jorge de Bravo of the Museo de Arte Costarricense during the month of June. Assist in the preparation of a catalogue and additional publicity. [see enclosures] Collaboration with senior Nicaraguan poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra in the publication of *Siete Arboles Contra El Atardecer*, published by Libro Libre of San José, Costa Rica. I created a suite of 16 new wood engravings for this project. Collaboration with Lic. Jorge Luis Acevedo, Dean of the Fine Arts Division of the University, on an album cover for *Música Indígena Costarricense: Borruga, Chirripo*, and the book cover of *La Música en las Reservas Indígenas de Costa Rica*. A current project concerns black calipso musical derivations on the Caribbean coast for which I will be making a cover image derived from field excursions with Sr. Acevedo. Consultations with three of my students concerning the creation of a private professional lithography studio in San José to serve the needs of national artists in dispersing their works on the international market. Write article for *Pensamiento Centroamericano* about new lithography studio and investigations. [currently in the editing process]

6. Evaluation:

(a) Professional value: The grant period was a time of intense personal creative work as well as a welcome chance to do basic investigations into the mechanics and chemistry of lithography. The relative lack of traditional materials forced a good deal of resourcefulness, which has ultimately been of professional and technical significance. As an artist, the hours spent "talking shop" and looking at art with artists from Colombia, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica has enriched my perspective immeasurably. It is sure that the professional contacts made during the grant period will continue to benefit me in numerous ways, as both artist and professor.

(b) Personal and social value: My work in Costa Rica has been such that a good many personal friendships developed naturally. My ability to communicate and relate to the many artists, professors and students greatly improved during the grant period. I feel that I have had a positive social impact through the extensive public outreach of the lithography project as well as through my articles and exhibitions.

(c) Contribution to international understanding: The nature of visual art is such that national boundaries are crossed easily, though the precise visual language and customs of analysis differ greatly. I have had the pleasure of speaking at length with a large number of artists, curators and museum officials in order to share my points of view and discover others. I believe that international relations require continuous dialog. The process is the goal.

Part III. Educational Resources and Academic Program

A. Educational Resources:

1. Books: I was unable to find adequate written technical material in Spanish, and so wrote a lengthy and detailed technical guide to use during the class and beyond. Subsequent professors in this subject area may wish to augment the material. The lack of adequate published material in Spanish was not a serious problem, but required a substantial amount of computer time to produce the necessary technical guide.

2. Collateral Resources: Audio-visual aids, i.e. art historical slides are generally not available or are extremely limited. I produced, at my own expense, many slides for teaching prior to, and during, the grant period.

B. The Academic Program:

1-2. Administrative organization: In the Bellas Artes division [music, theatre and visual art] there is a dean. The Escuela de Artes Plásticas has a director and various sub-division coordinators, including for printmaking. The requirements for various "career" foci are well documented by the Escuela, though lithography, as a new offering, is not yet integrated very fully into the program. I expect this will change soon. Degree requirements and the academic calendar are best obtained directly from the University or School of Fine Art.

3. The Escuela offers "careers" in fine and applied art. There are specializations in graphic arts, photography, typography, painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, weaving, art history and various additional mediums, such as paper-making and jewelry. In printmaking, intaglio, xilography and serigraphy are taught, and now lithography as well.

I wish to thank all of those individuals of CIES and USIS who supported my work.
Respectfully submitted,

Prof. Ronald DeWitt Mills July 30, 1988