

Name: **Anita Allyn**

Email address: **allyn@tcnj.edu**

Department or Program: **Art & Art History**

Title of Proposal: **Wissahickon Valley Park Public Art Project**

Date: **October 8, 2017**

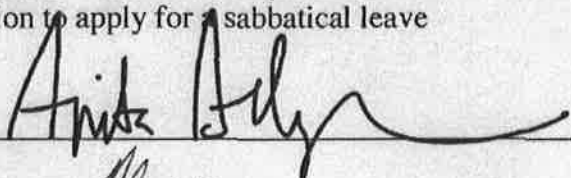
Month and year of your first appointment at The College of New Jersey: **August, 1999**

Dates of your previous sabbatical leaves: **Fall 2006**

Current Application is for:

- Fall  
 Spring  
 Either Fall or Spring  
 X\_Full Academic Year

I have notified my dean and department chair (or program coordinator, as applicable) of my intention to apply for a sabbatical leave



Applicant (signature)



Chairperson/Coordinator (signature)



Dean (signature)

Please note that the Cover Sheet must be printed, signed by all appropriate parties, and then scanned. The resultant image may be incorporated as the first page of the materials making up the rest of the application, or it may be transmitted as a separate file, provided that both files are attached to the same email message.

## *Wissahickon Valley Park Public Art Project*

**Project Summary :** I am requesting a one-year sabbatical of support in order to create a temporary public art project in collaboration with the Wissahickon Valley Park, an affiliate of the Philadelphia Fairmount Park System. I am the primary artist and designer of the project collaboration with the Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW) (see letter of invitation, Appendix A). The project will require research materials on the history of the park with close attention to environmental degradation. Based on these findings, I will create a series of photographic objects throughout the park's trails. The prototype of the works will be in consultation with the FOW approvals of materials, safety, and structural design. This project will bring photographic public art to a park in Philadelphia that has never hosted temporary public art before (see proposal, Appendix B).

**Description Overview and Objectives:** Public Art is a diverse art form. It is often site-specific, created in response to the place and community in which it resides. It interprets the history of the place, its people, and can address a social or environmental issue. Being public, the art is free and accessible to everyone. Public art creates a heightened awareness in the viewer of the site and the broader context of what's around them. Public Art can be temporary or permanent, large-scale or small and can reside indoors and outdoors. Public art includes murals, sculpture, memorials, integrated architectural or landscape architectural work, and community art (see Appendix C). My interest in this specific project stems from dual investigations – one of which is my ongoing research and creative practice combining photography and 3-dimensional form and two, my creative research focusing on invasive plants (see Appendix D). My proposed project combines these research interests while also challenging the further development of my creative and technical skills.

Friends of the Wissahickon, (FOW) a 501(c)3 organization, will be the primary point of collaboration with this project. Friends of the Wissahickon is the partner organization with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation for overall stewardship and public engagement, as well as for targeted projects. Friends of the Wissahickon will assist me with site planning, recommending ecologically sound materials for fabrication, guiding me with the installation of the work and connecting me to additional collaborators: the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's library of historic photos as well as the Fairmount Park Conservancy.

My proposed series of self-standing photographic objects will be placed within the park, near frequented walking trails. The objects will be welded aluminum support structures (4'x6') onto which photographic images will be mounted (see Appendix E). In-depth research during the sabbatical will include emerging techniques of eco-friendly ink and materials onto which the images will be printed: mesh banners, plexiglass panels or vinyl wraps. The supports will be secured into ground trenches in consultation with FOW. The photographic objects will remain in the park for an agreed-upon length (at least one year) and then removed by me, for future exhibitions in public galleries. Each photographic image will represent a tree or plant specific to the Wissahickon Park, that has disappeared or is in a crisis state of disappearance that is exacerbated by climate change conditions.

The overarching focus of my project, then, addresses the health of the park's forest. Most of our natural landscapes have become degraded by the influx of non-native invasive plant and animal species and the effects of climate change. In fact, this is a world-wide problem. One of the first invasive species that completely transformed Northeastern forests was the Chestnut blight, caused by the pathogenic fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica*. Prior to its accidental arrival to these shores in the early 1900's, our forests were dominated by the majestic American Chestnut. Wissahickon Valley Park was no exception where virtually 100% of American Chestnut trees were wiped out. More recently, the Wissahickon Valley Park, like all northeastern forests, is being degraded by the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and will soon be devastated with the arrival of the Emerald Ash Borer. An estimated 22,000 Ash trees are expected to be killed over the next 5 years from this invasive pest.

In this project, each photographic-based image will be represented by bright, florescent and otherwise unusual color inks for the type of tree or plant depicted. I intend to take this artistic license to create a striking counter balance within the natural setting of the parks paths. Bright florescent colors will ensure that the image will be seen by park visitors and will also serve the purpose to highlight the uniqueness of the plant which is missing from the surrounding area.

As a former resident of the East Falls neighborhood in Philadelphia from 2008-2014, I frequently walked to the Wissahickon Valley Park to enjoy the beauty of the changing seasons, to brainstorm, to walk dogs, and to breathe deeply. Here, I became inspired. I bring that desire for renewed inspiration and to spark reflection with my proposal for a public art project in the 1800-acre watershed park within Philadelphia's Fairmount Park system. As a National Natural Landmark, the valley encompasses, in miniature, the landscape of the entire continent –from gorges and waterfalls to forests and meadows.

**Work Plan:** The next academic year course release provided by a sabbatical will be devoted to site specific research, site planning, testing printing and fabrication methods on different materials and finally, installing a series of public artworks. In the summer, 2018, I'll learn aluminum tig welding in order to properly conceptualize the shape and configuration of the support structures and build a prototype to test in the park. I will begin research in collaboration with FOW to examine extinct species specific to the Wissahickon and identify final site locations for the works, in the park during the summer and fall, 2018. For the winter, 2019, the focus will be on the fabrication of the photographic images onto various materials until identifying the most successful substrate and ensuring its stability when integrated into the park environment. I aim to have the finalized prototype completed in the early spring 2019, and then their completed production realized by early summer. I'll complete the aluminum supports myself but outsource the printing. With assistance of students and a FOW crew, installation of the final works will be completed by the end of the summer, 2019. Thereafter I will regularly photograph the series in its changing seasonal and weather conditions. I will give at least one public lecture about the working process and the final series in the fall, 2019. After a year, I'll return with a crew to de-install the works in 2020.

**Schedule:** Because of my dedication to teaching and service, I have not applied for or taken a sabbatical leave since 2006. For this proposal, I seek one year's sabbatical. Due to the amount of research, prototyping, material testing, and collaboration with different organizations connected to the park that will be required, it is inconceivable that a project of this scope could be researched and realized in less than one year.

TIMELINE		
Summer 2018		Preliminary Research: Extinct species and the history of the Wissahickon, Photograph the seasonal changes around prospective site locations; learn welding and create aluminum support prototype
Fall 2018		Continue research on the extinct species and the history of the Wissahickon, Weekly Site-location Trips: Meet with FOW-proposal finalization; 3-dimensional mock-ups
Winter 2019		Research fabrication methods for environmental printing including eco-friendly inks and materials; final approval of sites, images, materials and support
Spring 2019		Final prototype with approval from FOW; complete fabrication; outsource printing and complete support structures
Summer 2019		Install final artworks with crew; Artist talk public lecture
2019 - 2020		Document artworks in seasonal weather conditions.
Summer 2020		Removal of artwork from the park

**Outcomes:** At the completion of the public installation, I will have a new body of artwork. The original physical photo objects, along with seasonal documentation of the work, will be submitted to significant regional, national and international exhibition venues. Completing this project will help me create a working model for future projects in other national parks as I intend to apply to the National Parks Arts Foundation Artist-in-Residence programs (see Appendix F) when the project has been completed. There are over 40 national parks that offer this opportunity through a competitive application process. Additionally, I will create proposals for at least one public artwork for Percent For Art in New Jersey.

**Value and significance to my discipline:** In the history of Public Art there is a dominant use of sculptural materials (stone, metal, bronze, wood, etc) but rare is the use of the photographic imagery in conjunction with sculptural materials, especially in public spaces. This project will directly address the photographic object as a 3-dimensional form. Over the past five years my research has focused on the fusion of photographic and sculptural media. The exhibition I curated in 2015, *An Unfixed Image: The Photographic Across Media*, at the TCNJ Art Gallery, explicitly investigated the relationship of the photographic image and its embodiment as an object. The creation of this project will intensify my professional and creative rigor due to the

project's scale, scope, materials and its public installation. Completing this project will provide in-roads for working on future public art projects to bring my work out of the confines of the gallery and into the public arena. Through this experience, I will be able to apply for larger scale, fully funded opportunities.

Equally significant is that this work bridges my future goals to address environmental justice on the one hand (justice among humans on environment issues) and ecological justice on the other (justice toward the natural world).

The fruition of this project will directly benefit my teaching in several ways. It will continue to shape all the courses I teach with a new perspective and more specifically, I hope to incorporate my experiences with producing this project into a new course on public art. In recent courses, I've combined photography and issues of environmental and social justice. In 2014, I taught a special photography topics course, *Envisioning Water*, in which we were fortunate to work with the Stonybrook Millstone Watershed. Students researched and photographed the green environmental process that went into the planning and execution of the Center for Environmental Advocacy, Science and Education. Students produced a semester long research project about its development that culminated in a visual book. In the 2015 course *Documentary Photography*, photo students collaborated with Liz Borland's Advanced Sociology students to research the history of Trenton through interviewing septuagenarians. The audio responses and photographic images were then curated by students into a public exhibition in Trenton.

As I have done in the past, I will generously share experiences and connections with TCNJ, the Art Department and students in the classroom.

With a very active service load at TCNJ as Department Chair for over seven years, it has been extremely challenging to almost impossible to explore in-depth creative research projects. This sabbatical grant will support and invigorate my artistic practice, career goals, and my teaching.