



Senior Joanna Patterson let students borrow her apparel as part of her senior art thesis. The thesis explored what consumerism means. Patterson's parents are artists, who encouraged her to explore her creative side. JULIA SAYERS | Staff Photographer

Art major wants to change the world through creativity

Kate Riley
Copy Intern

She has been making crafts since she was four years old. When she was in fifth grade, she was granted an independent study by her art teacher and made place settings modeled after van Gogh's 'Starry Night.' With a potter for a mother and a painter for a father, her passion for art was recognized and appreciated from such a young age, helping to mold the person she has become today.

Senior Joanna Patterson is an artist.

"I finally realized that art was the thing that I loved," she said. "I decided to take a risk and do something deemed 'impractical.' My life would be less full if I didn't."

The graduating senior's love for art was what drove her to be a part of Elon's first class of four students graduating with Bachelors in the Fine Arts. Patterson described the program as having a higher rigor in art academics, but she was prepared.

"I had already taken many classes in art because I was really thirsty for it," she said.

But studying in the classroom was not enough for Patterson. One of the main reasons she decided to come to Elon, she said, was because of how accessible the university makes study abroad opportunities.

In her years at Elon, Patterson studied abroad three times - her freshman year she spent Winter Term in London, her sophomore year she spent Winter Term in India and the spring of her junior year, she spent a semester in Ghana.

"Most of the things that I've chosen to do at Elon have influenced my education in art in some way," Patterson said. "Ghana affected how I view human rights issues, and my final project in art was inspired by what I saw in Ghana. I knew about human rights issues before going, but it became much more real on a visceral level. I knew if I walked away from it, I would be walking away from so many other injustices that I have witnessed before."

In her senior thesis capstone project, Common Goods, Patterson loaned out items she owned. In return, she asked people to respond in some way, usually sitting down with the borrower to

discuss his or her experience with the item.

"The point of the project was to question conventional notions surrounding the idea of ownership," Patterson said. "It was a smaller gateway into bigger problems, like the ones that I saw in Ghana. And it's not as simple as a return - it's more of a redirect. Some people may have enjoyed an item more than I ever did and in this way, maybe I really didn't own it in the first place."

Patterson is graduating this year. Even before walking across the graduation stage, Patterson walked down the aisle May 15, beginning her new life after college with a husband by her side.

She said that she is grateful that she has found someone that she can enter into the post-collegiate world with. They both "artsy people" as she described and love adventure, one adventure being applying to work in Thailand directly out of college.

The entire trip was planned for the both of them, until it fell through at the last minute.

"It was unfortunate that it didn't work out, but we aren't letting it stop us," Patterson said. "We applied to teach in Korea and are also looking for potential non-profit jobs."

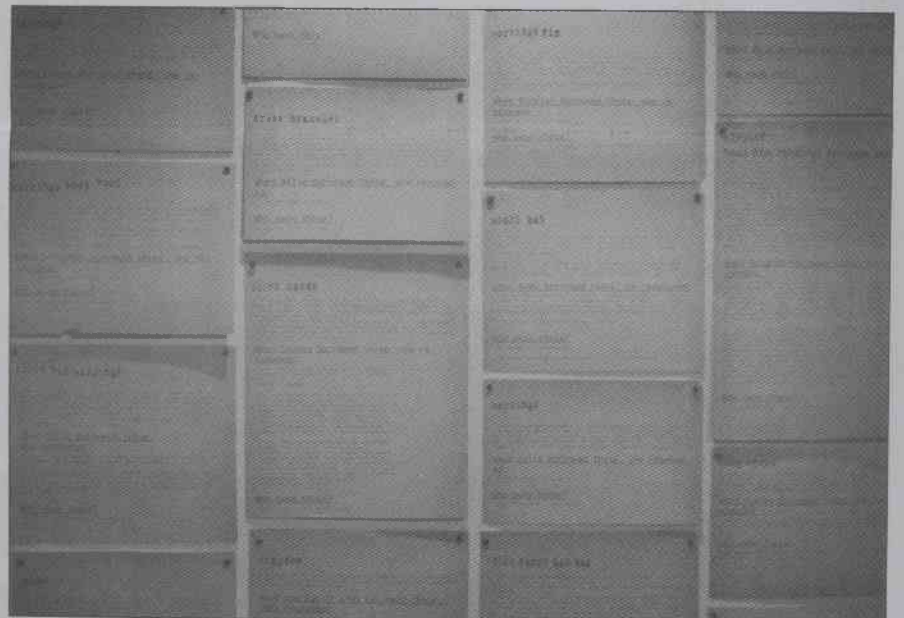
Some non-profit jobs that Patterson is interested in are, of course, in the area of the arts. She said her time at Elon has helped her realize she would like to serve as an advocate for the arts.

"I realized how much more useful and important it was in the world as I grew older," Patterson said. "I think that art and practitioners of art can do amazing things."

Patterson said she believes that art has the power to do much more than just "look pretty." This belief was demonstrated through her senior project, as she took something different from it than many other art enthusiasts might have.

"It's not important that people relate to it as art," she said. "It's important that people can relate to it at all."

This is her goal - to advocate for art in many realms, whether through teaching or through social justice, so it can relate to the masses. It was this type of thinking, and the help of religion professor Rebecca Todd Peters, that pushed her to develop a



The installation of Patterson's thesis featured notecards with the stories of those who borrowed her items. PHOTO SUBMITTED



Patterson displayed the items that were borrowed along with the stories that accompanied them. PHOTO SUBMITTED

senior project that was different, but relatable.

"I would love to give back and teach art at almost any level that I can imagine, in any setting," she said.

Patterson's passion for the advocating of the arts is something she strongly believes in and has been working toward, and wants to continue wherever the future takes her.

As a senior, Patterson has found her stake in the Elon community and in the art community alike. She has pushed through years of essays, tests, quizzes and final projects that have allowed her to define who she is as a person, and as an artist.

Because Patterson has, in a way, done it all, she wishes a few words of advice to the younger classes at Elon.

"You have a lot more time than you think you do," she said confidently, "because suddenly, I was planning a wedding, potentially moving out of the country and graduating all within a three-week period. But at the same time, I got all the sleep that I needed, and still maintained my grades. If someone had told me that, I would have never believed it. You have time. And if there is something that you want to do, even if it scares you, do it. Do it, and everything else will fall into place."