Following are statements by WSU Painting ISA Alumni on their experience in Italy. The statements were included in exhibitions of their work created at ISA or influenced by the experience. The exhibitions are held in the School of Art and Design Clayton Staples Gallery each year that WSU Painting students, alumni or friends attend sessions at ISA.

*Indicates recipients of a Koch Cultural Trust Enabling Grant to support travel to Italy and study at ISA.

**Jodi Lightner**  Residency Program, Summer 2009  A compulsive traveler, I was excited to make the most of an opportunity to work in Montecastello di Vibo, Italy, and I went with the expectation of gathering ideas, research, and sketches for developing my MFA thesis body of work. I intended to focus myself on what was essential to my thesis work on the experience of place and as a scavenging foray for resource material. I went to experience a place. I was certain that the Residency Program would be useful and it was, though not as I expected. The quintessential hilltop village has all the nostalgic charm of the medieval and sits quietly on its perch. Anyone who has been there will tell of its beauty, with the rolling fields and castles on neighboring hills, and I attest that the color of the light is different there than anywhere else I have been. The compact architecture is like a life-size maze where you could never get lost. It captivated me in its winding walkways, towers, steps and tunnels. I chose to make sketches of anything that intrigued me. They were usually simple objects, fairly mundane and common. It didn’t make them more romantic because they were Italian; they were simply there and part of the place. They were my experience. After searching and sketching and laying the work out, it was apparent that there wasn’t one right image that captured place. Each work was a fragment, a piece of the place that made it significant. In the experience itself, I realized it was the relationships that I made between people and objects that made the place, and thereby fragments, meaningful. The sketched fragments were considered and made separately but were actually fit together in the end. They were not meant to stand alone, just as my experience of place is not in isolated moments but built on encounters with others and the environments that those encounters occur within.

**Chiyoko Myose**  Residency Program, Summer 2009  It has been one of my dreams to have an opportunity to concentrate on my painting for an extended time. I am so glad that it happened this past summer, in Montecastello di Vibo. I fell in love with this medieval hill town in central Italy at first sight. The experience that I had there is unforgettable and cannot be exchanged with anything else. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to the Koch Cultural Trust for funding this trip, to Ron Christ and Levente Sulyok for assisting me in many ways during the application process, and to the alumni of ISA from WSU who introduced me to this program and gave me a strong desire to go there. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family for supporting me and encouraging me while pursuing art. Without all these people’s help, this experience would never have happened. ~ I formed two bodies of work from this experience. **The Portrait of the Landscape** In Montecastello di Vibo, I was specifically drawn to relationships with the landscape just like meeting a person. In each slice of landscape, I found their personality and history. I thought they were formed by the interaction with the unchanging everyday routine and changing environment surrounding the landscape. I saw things which have not changed for many years such as medieval stone walls, individually characteristic passageways, and the unique shape of the sky created by these buildings. These landscapes have seen everyday routines such as the sweet smell of pancakes from somewhere, conversations in Italian language sounding like music, and a mother and her daughter walking together hand in hand every evening. On the other hand, I saw things changing such as the shape of light and shadow, the trees revealed and hidden by fog, and the distant hill town gradually shifting to a pink color by the setting sun. These landscapes have seen the changes of growing trees and grass, the changes of people who grow up there from their childhood to elderly age, and coming and going of countless artists from different parts of the world. The personality and history of these landscapes have been formed by both the changes and the constants in life. I was struck with awe when I met these landscapes just like meeting someone who has a long life full of experiences. Every plein air painting that I did there was a portrait of these landscapes. For each painting, I spent only a couple of hours and did not go back later for further details. It was just like the way I treasure the moment of meeting someone knowing that I would keep longing to see them again in the many years to come. **Italian Landscapes in the Air**
While visiting many museums and churches in Italy, I was very much fascinated with the background landscapes in fresco paintings or altar pieces by artists such as Giotto and Duccio which are abundant in the regions of Umbria and Tuscany. It seemed that today's landscape of these regions has not changed from these artists' time. Their rendering is abstracted and stylized; there was a good reason for me to be drawn to their work since I am basically an abstract artist. After returning to Wichita, I did some drawings inspired by their images together with the photos that I took as a reference, as well as my imagination. These landscapes are more the impression of the places rather than realistic in detail. In spite of my efforts to remember each stone step and each angle of the street, these scenes in my mind are getting vague. Now, I wonder if it was real or not real, just like landscapes floating in the air.

Jacob Seymore* Residency Program, Summer 2008 My experience at the International School of Painting, Drawing and Sculpture was invaluable. It was my first time being overseas. When we first got to the town we were taken on a tour. The town itself is very quaint. It was peaceful, not a lot going on there. The best part about the town, for me at least, was the scenery surrounding it. It took a little getting used to as it was a lot, almost too much, to take in. Painting the landscape in Italy was definitely a challenge. A day for me, aside from art trip days, was getting up at 6:00 a.m., painting until 8:00, breakfast, painting again until noon, eating lunch and afterwards either taking a nap or looking at art books until 2:00-2:30, going out and painting until 7:00-7:30, and dinner at 8:00. In all, 9-10 hours were devoted to painting each day. I loved it. I had discussions with people from Maine, California, Beirut, Turkey, Hong Kong, Canada, Massachusetts, London and Scotland that included their passions and visions on life, religion and philosophy, past experiences, hardships and failings. I was challenged both intellectually and empathetically. All in all, my trip to Italy, made the world bigger, and at the same time, made the world smaller. Again, it was invaluable. Words don’t do it justice.

Martha Wherry* Residency Program, Fall 2007 I found myself in the land of fabulous shoes, and with very little money. I did cautiously manage to purchase a pair, but as we made our way down the Via della Paste in Rome to Mickey’s Miscellanea, an economical pub catering to the food budget of students, here came trouble. I turned around to see a lunatic running down the alley full speed at me and my first thought was, “Oh no – he wants my purse or my shoes.” I dashed into Mickey’s, the looney ran off, and the locals told me “he is crazy, but harmless. They just let him run up and down here.” Not good for business, I thought, how would a visitor tell a harmless crazy from a dangerous one? My month in Italy was full of escapades, many not so adrenaline-producing as the above but all worthy. The gift of time and money to be able to paint 8-10 hours a day, to travel and see some of the best art in the world, and to grow among a supportive community of other artists was a generous one. I am so thankful to the Koch Cultural Trust for funding my trip to the ISA program in Montecastello di Vibio, and to Ron Christ and Kathleen Shanahan, former faculty members of my MFA study at WSU and recommenders who were instrumental in helping me gain the Trust award for this experience. Some of my favorite discoveries in my residency were Montecastello’s intriguing architecture, the Italian people, terrific local food, and my ISA companions: dreamers, artists, and new friends. I was happier than anticipated in my spacious, wonderful and cobwebby studio with not one bug, the gift of time and money to be able to paint 8-10 hours a day, to travel and see some of the best art in the world, and to grow among a supportive community of other artists was a generous one. I am so thankful to the Koch Cultural Trust for funding my trip to the ISA program in Montecastello di Vibio, and to Ron Christ and Kathleen Shanahan, former faculty members of my MFA study at WSU and recommenders who were instrumental in helping me gain the Trust award for this experience. Some of my favorite discoveries in my residency were Montecastello’s intriguing architecture, the Italian people, terrific local food, and my ISA companions: dreamers, artists, and new friends. I was happier than anticipated in my spacious, wonderful and cobwebby studio with not one bug. I think I learned to open my heart and my eyes to a different land, and to flourish in my time there. Again, many thanks to those who helped me find my way to Italy. I can’t wait until the next adventure!

Joanna Mix Residency Program, Fall 2006 The Residency Program at ISA in Montecastello di Vibio offered one of the most valuable and influential art experiences imaginable. This was my first visit to Italy and I was immediately captivated by the country’s beautiful landscapes, rustic medieval architecture and the warmth and generosity of its people. It was instantly apparent why artists have been flocking to Italy for centuries. In September 2006 there were artists from several countries including the United States, Canada, New Zealand and a large group from Ireland. It was such an incredible experience getting to know all of these people from around the globe who all shared the same passion for creating art. It truly made the world seem like a much smaller place. Everyone had unique styles and brought richness to the group. Some of the many wonderful surprises included all of us sitting around the dining tables by candlelight learning Irish folk songs in the heart of Umbria, attending a Bach piano concert in the Teatro della Concordia and visiting with Giovanni and the locals in the Bar Centrale while looking at a large atlas because they wanted to know all about Kansas. Before arriving in Italy I had assumed I would be painting mainly street scenes and architectural views, since European architecture has always been one of my favorite subjects. Having this in mind, I was very surprised when I began painting still-lifes. There are elements of richness and bounty that are found everywhere in Italy. These are seen in the trees and vines that are dripping with beautiful figs and
grapes in Montecastello, as well as the historical palaces and museums we visited in Rome and Florence with their opulent interiors and fabrics. Having daily exposure to these elements, I could not help but be inspired by them and have tried to bring these influences to my work. I am so grateful to have had this experience in Montecastello. It has had a profound influence on me personally as well as artistically. I highly recommend this program to all artists who wish to find their inspiration, not only from Italy itself, but from the extraordinary Italian people and fellow artists who make this experience so special.

E. Vincent Wood III*  Residency Program, Fall 2006  Attending the Residency Program at ISA was a life-changing experience. The trip was my first overseas experience and it offered a completely different and beautiful life perspective. In the lovely medieval hill town of Montecastello di Vibio, a typical day included three square meals made by the sweetest Umbrian cook Illia, a walk about the town whose walls hold some of the most amazing vistas, open sessions of figure drawing, and all the free time one could desire to create in private studios. The visiting artists were helpful and enthusiastic about painting and the people of Montecastello were extremely pleasant. I was invited to sing in two Catholic masses, taught local card games called briscola and scopo, instructed in the Italian language by the cooks, and everyone greeted everyone. Additionally, there were weekend trips to Perugia, Florence, Assisi, and Rome, where I had goose bumps standing in front of a number of works by Caravaggio and Bernini. Of course, painting in Italy was great, but what I enjoyed most about Montecastello was the absence of hurry and lack of advertisements. Nobody was rushed and the environment was marked by quiet simplicity, which made for very calm, peaceful living. I recommend the residency to anyone with the prospect of going. You never know who you are going to meet at the Residency Program as I found myself in Ireland a few days after the program. I would like to thank Ron Christ for introducing me to this opportunity and assisting me in the application process. I would also like to thank the Koch Cultural Trust for providing the means for this trip. Without such I never would have experienced Italy.

Karrie Maxwell*  Residency Program, Spring 2006  As I left for the Residency Program in Montecastello di Vibio, I had no idea what to expect. I am not a landscape painter. Traveling in itself, especially internationally, is an invaluable experience for the development of an artist. And to a painter, Italy is a feast for the senses. My experience of the residency at ISA was something I will cherish. I will never be able to articulate in words what I felt, experienced and learned while being there. This is something that was talked about at the residency. Photographs cannot convey it, and words fail to do it justice. The paintings will speak of what happened there. The work that was done in Montecastello marks a transition. I had conversations with resident faculty artists that are influential to my work: Cezanne, Frank Auerbach and, in particular, the work of Alberto Giacometti. The introduction of the concept of space into my dialogue has alerted the way I experience the space I inhabit and how I construct the painting. With this new information, I could not paint as I had done before. True to my nature, I literally had to tear the painting apart and analyze each fragment. The concept of space, which seems rudimentary, has literally opened up my notions of what the body is and more precisely what it is that I am depicting. The friendships I made with other artists in Montecastello di Vibio and the lessons they taught me continue to grow. I have been forever changed by this experience.

Matthew Hilyard*  Residency Program, Spring 2004  I spent several days just inhaling the fact that I was in another country and that I would be able to spend all my days painting and visiting cities that hold art that I have only seen in history books. Not being a traditional landscape painter, I was a bit concerned in how I was going to proceed in my investigations. Not expecting to have a model, I was quite please to know that I would be able to draw from the figure. This experience was very fulfilling. The works that you use are from those sessions. The abstractions came about after visiting Citta di Castello, which hold the most compete collections of works by Alberto Burri. I have read a small amount about this great, and in my opinion very underrated artist, but to actually see his works up close was one of many highlights of my trip. I had the wonderful opportunity to have a car available to me. This allowed me to travel with two other students to surrounding cities and see art that I would not have been able to see. When I left Montecastello di Vibio, I spend two days in Rome. My hotel was just two block from the Vatican, so it was convenient for me to walk to all of the historic sites. Those two days alone in Rome was a life changing experience. I would like to thanks Ronald Christ for his support and dedication in keeping the ISA Residency Program alive here at Wichita State University. I encourage all students to take this opportunity.

Carole Branda  Residency Program, Fall 2003  It has been one of my life long dreams to have an opportunity to concentrate solely on my painting for an extended period of time. I had that opportunity when I went to Umbria, Italy for three weeks to take part in the Residency Program at ISA in Montecastello di Vibio. Essentially there were three things that made
Judy Dove  Residency Program, Fall 2003  What a wonderful surprise! While contemplating a boring day, I decided to call WSU to get some information about the ISA Artist Residency Program. Even though it was Christmas break, Ronald Christ answered the telephone. I was able to get information from him and also learn that there was another Wichitan who wanted to attend ISA. After talking to Ann Martin, who had already experienced the Residency Program, it was still an unexpected delight when we arrived at ISA. It far exceeded my expectations. The town was great, the food was marvelous, the studio was fabulous, and the people friendly and helpful. ISA provided everything I needed without any outside distractions. I was able to concentrate, exploring and experimenting on images and techniques that I felt reflected the mood of the time, place, and space. On some level, I work intuitively and let my surroundings influence the work. The colors, textures, weather, and the landscape (to some extent) was the atmosphere I used. I explored some techniques I discovered accidentally, made do with what I had, used dirt from the street. I was totally immersed. One of the top five experiences in my life! ... no order given.

Rosemary Dugan  Residency Program, Fall 2003  Montecastello is a landscape artist's dream. The town provided an invaluable opportunity for plein air painting with the Tiber Valley vineyards, olive groves, rows of cypresses and pines, as well as the medieval architecture of the town. I especially appreciated the Umbrian light and its effect on the valley. The view of the countryside from my studio window was incredible, as were the sunsets beyond my window. It seemed that around every corner of the town was an intimate scene waiting for me to paint. The people were friendly and welcomed us daily. The intimate atmosphere and slow pace provided a relaxed environment for producing art. I loved it.

Ann Gethen  Residency Program, Fall 2003  I developed my knife painting technique during 17 years in Wichita. I started to see during three weeks of concentrated painting in Italy. I am a landscape painter, usually of wide open spaces in the mountains and plains. The intimacy of the scene in Montecastello was daunting. After trying to put in all the fields and all the windows, I did some thinking and decided that "up close and personal" should be the theme. I have often avoided buildings, but in Italy there was not that option. I had to start to see proportions, shadows, angles, and extreme contrasts cause by the narrow streets – nothing was level or straight! The landscape, too, gradually pared down to one olive tree or a couple of grape vines. The light in Umbria catches you off guard. As I am originally from England, I should have been ready to cope with the foggy mornings and the prevalent haze ... (wonderful for aerial perspective). However, after painting the South West mountains in the U.S., with harsh, bright light and sharp edges. I was a little taken aback and took a week to get into the spirit of the area. Perhaps it was a good thing that our luggage with art supplies took two days extra to reach Montecastello. It gave me (us) time to acclimate and think what we could make of the town and countryside. My aim in going to the Residency Program was to simplify, find a different palette from my usual, and to painting more loosely and with more gusto. Plein air painting demands speed. Could I do that and still get the right feeling of the place? Will it rub off on my work back in the U.S? It was a bit unsettling to be pulled out of my comfortable rut. It's hard to get back into it now! I intend to find closer subjects, more colors and less detail. A wonderful experience. Thank you ISA and Marc Servin for making it possible.

Carole Ranney  Residency Program, Fall 2003  I fell in love with Montecastello at first sight, as a painter and as a lover of history. For the first few days, I was torn between trying to paint or discovering the history of this tiny fortified hill town in the middle of Italy. How does an artist sum up a three week emersion in the Italian experience of Montecastello di Vibio? How do I describe the rolling hills of Umbria or the light when the word gold is inadequate? How do I paint the glow of sunlight bouncing off miles and miles of farm fields in the Tiber River Valley? What words do I use to describe the colors on centuries old stone buildings? What colors do I mix to capture the look of sunlight and shadow? I am still asking myself these questions, still searching for answers. Each sketch painting brings me a little closer. While Italy captured my heart, she also challenged me to reach beyond myself to paint my feelings about the experience. I really think I need to go back and try again to get it right. Hopefully .... Just as soon as I can.
Maureen Walter * Residency Program, Fall 2003 Italy 2003 was the experience of a lifetime. I greatly appreciated and enjoyed the weeks I spent in Montecastello di Vibio. The villagers were warm and friendly, and very willing to visit and help you with their language. Although I expected to paint landscapes when I arrived, I found myself more attracted to scenes within the village itself. The panoramic views of the cultivated fields, vineyards, and olive groves in the surrounding countryside were ever-challenging to paint. The town itself is a treasure. The architecture of the medieval hill towns in Umbria and Tuscany is a treat for someone who lives in a town where the oldest buildings might be 100 years old, rather than 1,000. The all-day trips to Rome, Florence, Perugia, and Assisi gave us an opportunity to see sculptures, paintings and drawings by some of the world’s greatest artists. Especially memorable was an exhibit “M”, which I happened to run across in Rome. It turned out to be original figure and architectural drawings by Michelangelo, and had to be seen to be believed. They were stunning. Others were the treasures and art collections belonging to the Vatican, and the sculptures and paintings in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

Jennifer Lawhead* Residency Program, Spring 2003 The opportunity to study and work in Italy was a very important experience prior to going to graduate school. It gave me the opportunity to meet and work with various individuals in a community environment of artists. The cultural experience and diversity that varies from a small village like Montecastello di Vibio to an intense city like Rome is a significant contrast and an important part in gaining a well-formed understanding of the art and culture in Italy. The time spent traveling to various cities and museums was the most illuminating part of the month during the Residency Program. It has informed my sense of space and scale in my current work, as well as the possibilities of site-specific art. The trip to The Alberto Burri Museum in Citta di Castello was a significant part of my visit. I am most interested in Burri’s work, and the experience gave me insight on his work, as well as the Arte Povera movement. It was a chance to see in person the works’ tactile intensity and grand scale and to experience the effect of the work in the environment in which it was exhibited. The massive black painted tobacco-drying factory and the adjoining house create a structural and visual effect that relates directly to the work. The experience of traveling to Italy is one that I often refer to and draw from as a significant part of my educational and cultural experience.

Jennifer Locke* and Jonathan Lee Stevens* Residency Program, Spring 2003 The body of work Azzuro (blue sky) was created during the Spring 2003 Residency Program at ISA. Jennifer Locke and Jonathan Stevens have been making works together for four years. This is the first true collaboration in both process and idea. We were visiting the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi to see the Giotto cycle. After hours of unfolding the narrative, discussing the figures, the application of the fresco, and how powerful it all is, we realized how much we believed in this extremely surreal illusion. How Giotto expects us to fill in the blanks, and we do. How there is just the right amount of information in just the right areas. Somehow this discussion of the azure sky kept coming to the forefront. The tension is created in all of the panels. Sometimes creating an out, other times holding our gaze to the dialogue between figures. We have always known about how effective a negative shape can, and needs, to be, but Giotto reminded us.

Rebecca Franz* School Program First Session, Summer 2002 My stay in Italy was an exercise in emotional incongruity. I experienced exhilaration, focus, confusion, insecurity, confidence, and self-loathing … often all within thirty minutes time. Six weeks of isolation from that which I am familiar, both culturally and physically, compelled me to paint with an unprecedented sense of urgency. My studio became a haven, and each painting a desperate attempt to record what I couldn’t be sure I would ever see again. A session at ISA requires hard work and devotion to one’s craft. It should not be mistaken for a holiday, but recognized for what it is: a sacrifice. However, a sacrifice like this can sometimes be the best thing a fledgling painter could hope for.

Jennifer Locke* Residency Program, Spring 2001 The month long residency at ISA in Montecastello di Vibio, Italy was a humbling experience. The complex Umbrian landscape, the organicness of the medieval stone building hill town, the lack of verbal communication, visits to Italian towns with more beautiful artwork than imaginable, and silence every day for four weeks created a slower perspective of things. With all of this new information, it seemed the best approach would be to record as much of it as I could with straightforward observational painting. Being that my work previous to Italy was created mostly from memory, this was a daunting task. Though the goal of recording what was in front of me sounds easy enough, the landscape moved, literally. I would look away for a moment and the complex fields would have new light creating a constantly shifting scape. I looked for what did not move. I found the horizon line, which at first, to my dismay, also moved, disappearing, reappearing, sinking, and rising, depending on the temperament of the sky. Yet it did grab my attention as the most constant visual element. I became fascinated by the
subtle shifts that so drastically would change my perception. While in Italy, I created several straightforward observational paintings, concentrating on the light, atmosphere, color, and shape of relating elements. All the while, wondering if once home, I would be able to discern this new information, and how it was going to affect the paintings. Now, removed from the romance of the place, I have been able to see my familiar scape in a new way. The paintings are now investigating new relationships between illusion of place and contrasting elements of shape, color, light, mark, and texture that negate the sense of space. Differing temperaments within the invented landscapes become a metaphor for the constant change within our understanding of reality. While in Italy, not only was I viewing the place itself, but also the art produced there. Trips to Rome, Florence, Cortona, Arezzo, Assisi, and Perugia allowed me to view the most amazing things. The museums, churches, architecture, and cultural attributes of Italy made me aware of how much there is left to see and learn.

Christopher Bertholf*  School Program First Session, Summer 2000 & 1998  Both summers of study at ISA were really great experiences for me. The school’s intensely creative working environment was complemented by the beautiful countryside and the Italian culture. It is hard not to be inspired in such a dynamic environment. The staff at the school, the impressive faculty, and the visiting artists were great. I really developed as an artist under the advice of the faculty, who acted more like colleagues and friends than professors. I probably learned more about art in discussions over a glass of wine than standing in from of my easel. The best part of the school was just the fact that I was in Italy and that Umbria is absolutely beautiful. In all, I really saw myself grow artistically by leaps and bounds at ISA.

Kyle Bowen  School Program Second Session, Summer 2000  I found my stay in Italy to be frightening, frustrating, confusing, and unknowable. I usually felt like I was feeling around in the dark, and it was that level of discomfort that made it all worthwhile. I spent much of my time in the landscape and grew more miserable as time went on. I was absolutely overwhelmed by a sort of option paralysis that came from the infinite amount of space and stuff that I felt was constantly digesting me, rather than my manipulating it. I can look back on many moments now and laugh at the image of myself in a sunflower field on the brink of tears and shaking paint brushes at for foreign insects. However, the misery paid off in a big way. Working in conjunction with two instructors who considered painting in utterly opposing ways, I learned a great deal. Through this and the awful feelings that so often accompanied working in the landscape, I found myself lost in a fog. As I continued to work in this sort of darkness, I felt as though I were bumping into someone in a dark room, trying to make out their features just by feeling around their face. I lost control and, in doing so, lost some sense of myself. Through the work, travel, and the people I encountered while I was in Italy, I feel I have emerged from the experience with a greater sense of freedom and am enjoying this terrible, blinding burden a great deal ... (usually).

Maureen Tunnell  School Program Second Session, Summer 2000  Feast of the Assumption. I sit here, far from the sounds of the town, in this church of La Madonna delle Carceri. Beside me, in a huge dry granite holy water font, is an old framed photo. It is the church, from up the hill, with its’ roof blown off by a bomb after World War II. No sign of the past violence, except the photo, remains. This place is full of orange air; the color from the stained glass over the door gets sucked up - held - by the atmosphere in here. The sound of the birds and the breeze outside only emphasizes the quietness that the scratching of my pencil breaks. This church is old - too old. Not even the old women come down the hill to pay their respects in this sad, ancient place. On this extravagant day, Padre Pio watches over only the candle, one prayer, and it is mine. This place can be a treasure to me because my encounter with it is fleeting. I do not have the luxury of taking these old walls for granted; it is only when one possesses that one has the work to acquire. How can you acquire what you already have? You let go of the foreign thing to which you cling, and find what rises to the surface from within. That’s freedom.

Joann Ray  Residency Program, Spring 2000  When I applied to go to the Residency Program at ISA I had to evaluate what I expected of the experience. I wanted it to be a time to do whatever I wanted: time to take stock, to explore - perhaps try new things, or rediscover old things. Time to think about where I was, where I was going, and where I might want to go. A chance to focus and refocus. A time of action, or a time to just contemplate and enjoy Italy. I wanted a good experience for myself, as it had been for my friends who had attended earlier sessions at ISA. It turned out to be a great experience, and the school provided good food, friendly support, and stimulation - visiting artists, trips to Rome, Florence, and other places to see Medieval Art, and ISA Gallery openings. The other artists in the Residency Program were friendly and creative people, and we all had a lot of fun along the way. The time was mine to spend whatever way I wanted, and I would like to return for another session in the future.
In May 2000, I enjoyed the abundant gifts offered by ISA as a participant in the Residency Program. The Program provides a feeling of privacy which is partnered with a community of other artists. I was able to work independently in my studio by myself whenever I wanted. At the same time, I was encircled by a professional nurturing group of other artists. This is always a blessing. The Umbrian area is one of the most beautiful in Italy, which is a great help. The dear souls of Montecastello di Vibio are most kind and gracious to the visitor. I was drawn to ISA because of the formidable international reputation it enjoys. The other resident artists were devoted, very talented, and dedicated to their art. I was constantly encouraged and profoundly affected by the environment and my experience.

The ISA Residency Program was an amazing experience, amazing on many levels; the setting was so picturesque, the culture so rich, the colors so alluring, the people so interesting (too many superlatives), and the opportunities to learn so immediate; to learn about Italy, about Italian art, about the other artist residents, and about myself (that's the big one). My personal goal in terms of my work was to do what I never do at home: paint the landscape en plein air, paint with new methods and materials, paint faster, and draw non-stop without intellectualizing. It was a lot to do in a month, and I could have stayed another month (or six months) to do more and to do it better. I realized that I had really just begun when it was time to pack up and go. A residency is a great gift to oneself because the daily personal responsibilities of home and family and friends and afflictions can be suspended for a while, giving one the time and the energy and the freedom to do nothing but think art, talk art, see art, and make art; if that is what one wants to do. Many thanks to Ron Christ and Mary Morgan for talking me into it. It was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have ever had.

On May 1, 1999, I was transported to a land of enchantment in the mountainous region of Umbria, Italy. The small village of Montecastello di Vibio dates back to Medieval times, and to become a resident was to experience time warp. The people spoke only in Italian and were happy, gentle, kind hearted, and helpful. A sense of humor was evident also, as I tried to meld my way into their culture. Each day began with a “buon giorno” greeting as we made our way up and down hills to the studio or dining room from the apartment. Flowers were everywhere in pots, niches in the wall, or overhanging the passageways and stone steps. The four hour session of life drawing four days a week was a choice bonus. Beyond the walls of the town, the countryside was a patchwork of undulating fields with small clusters of people using rakes, hoes, or bent over long furrows as they planted seeds in the rich soil. Whole fields of poppies bloomed and could be seen from the studio windows or from the ribbons of roads that took us to neighboring towns build on tops of nearby hills. We were deep in Etruscan antiquity territory...another time warp that had a great impact on my sense of place in the present. The friendship of fellow resident artists added another important dimension to the shared experiences of viewing incredible artwork in Rome, Florence, Assisi, etc. All agendas included stops for gelato or cappuccino. The entire month was packed with savoring relationships. The new environment pushed the energy envelope to the max, as well as the all consuming desire to make the most of every minute of the residency. I believe I did that. How did this affect my artwork? I don’t know at this time. I do know that there is a lot of stuff percolating that is bound to emerge one of these days. In the meantime, my journal that I kept during the month of May and the e-mails that keep coming from the new found friends are good reminders of time well spent.

The Residency Program at ISA provided a wonderfully exhilarating and nourishing atmosphere in which to work. In the company of 20 other professionals from Europe, Canada, and the United
States, we experienced life from the simple dwellings of a medieval mountain-top village, Montecastello di Vibio. The studios offered comfortable space, professional models, and natural light pouring in from windows which held aerial-like views of the geometric countryside of Umbria. My responsibilities were to draw and paint 10-14 hours daily and emerge at the hours of 8 a.m., 1 p.m., and 8 p.m. in the dining area to indulge in delectable and healthy Umbrian cuisine. Often times evening meals would extend into the night when slides and foreign films might be shown and art-related topics discussed. There could always be a reason found to stop off at the nearby Giovanni’s Bar (on the piazza with a spectacular view of the landscape, the nearby hill town of Todi, and the Umbrian mountains in the distance) for a nightcap before calling it a day. Traveling with the group took place primarily on the weekends to such destinations as Naples, Pompeii, Monterchi, and Arezzo. While in Montecastello di Vibio, I was especially grateful for the solitude. It reminded me of my earlier graduate school days at WSU, where the intensity and focus of my discipline was similar, and the vision was clear. I would strongly recommend the ISA Residency Program to serious and self-directed artists who are capable of working independently and are committed to growth through hard work, honesty, and perseverance. This was, for me, a highly personal and invigorating time.

Mika Holtzinger  School Program First Session, Summer 1997  I remember the first two weeks being a sensory overload. Nothing, absolutely nothing was familiar. It wasn’t only the magnificent landscapes, rich culture, or the isolation that caused my excitement, but the fact that I was to live and breathe art. For the first time ever, I was removed from my own limitations, my environment, my home, and I literally forgot how to paint. For two months I woke up thinking about art, discussing art, creating art, dreaming art, loving and hating art. I let my senses swim, I explored, for the first time, nature as my model, filling my painting surfaces with color and light. The paintings in this exhibition are some of my studies from afternoons spent painting in the hills of Umbria. Soon my summer was over. My summer work was rolled up and sent 5,000 miles back to Kansas, back to my reality. The experience made me remember why art is a tool to constantly feed ourselves. Painting is a way to rediscover nature, emotions, and myself. The summer I spent in Montecastello di Vibio was nothing less than magic. It will always be part of me and my paintings.