Office Hour

The start of the academic year brought a new role and a brand new office for Assistant Professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures Erin Schoneveld. As one of three newly appointed Visual, Cultural, Arts, and Media faculty fellows, she moved into a glass-walled office in the recently completed VCAM facility, where part of her job as a fellow, she says, will be to call attention to the many opportunities VCAM has to offer.

“I’ll be highlighting to faculty that there are a lot of ways to engage in the space and take advantage of the classrooms, the Maker Arts space, the Screening Room, the Create Spaces,” says Schoneveld, who teaches courses in modern and contemporary Japanese art, cinema, and visual culture. “There are resources available for people working across all departments and disciplines on campus.

To help spotlight the interdisciplinary possibilities the center was designed to promote, she’s teaching a new VCAM-supported course this semester called “Art and the Environment in East Asia,” and bringing a local artist to do the outdoor art installation with the class. “He’s a sound engineer, and we’re going to be using the Maker Arts space to build bio-data sonification devices,” says Schoneveld. “Basically, they’re machines that measure conductivity and create musical sounds to represent changes in the bioactivity of plants. So we’ll connect them to plants, and the sounds that are emitted will allow us to hear the effects we humans have on our immediate environment.”

1. Prints: There are two prints from the famous series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji by Hokusai. I got these in Japan when I was conducting research as a graduate student. My interest in Japan really began with exposure to Japanese prints, particularly by Hokusai, and his most famous one in this series, The Great Wave. I think most students—even if they don’t know anything about Japan—know that image.

2. Wall: To have a whole wall that is an enormous bulletin board is amazing. I’ve got materials from a research project up there. Previously it was spread out all over a desk. I’m a visual person, so it’s nice to be able to look at everything. I also have posters from various Haverford classes and events, and postcards and thank-you notes from students. The red cloth is called a furisode and was a gift from a friend in Japan. Cranes are a symbol of longevity and good luck in Japanese culture.

3. Magazine: These are original copies of a Japanese art journal called White Book, or Shinbun in Japanese. They’re part of my current research project, but I also use them when I teach my seminar “Japanese Modernism Across Media.” I bought these when I was studying in Japan. I went to this area in Tokyo called Jinbocho, which is the bookseller district, hoping I would find something relevant to my work, and I actually found five or six of these originals. The library has very generously bought a complete set of back numbers for me, but to be able to hold these [magazines] and see the water stains and folded corners of pages, to know that someone else touched and read them is so cool.

4. Theater masks: That’s a mask of a monkey [from the Japanese comic theater tradition called Kyogen] and the other is a NM mask of a young warrior. I made them when I was in Japan during junior year abroad. I was taking a class on traditional Japanese performing arts, and my teacher said, “I know a traditional mask carver.” I can get you into his class.” I was the only woman in a room full of retired Japanese businessees, and we would sit on trays mats on the floor to work. I started with big blocks of wood, and over the course of a year I carved and painted these two masks.

5. Family photos: [Left] That’s my older sister, Soen, in the middle. He’s four. My twins are two. That’s my son River [on the left] and my daughter, Min. [On the right.] The picture was taken last summer in front of our campus house, and the kids are in these Japanese summer outfits a friend sent from Japan. And this is my husband Mark playing the guitar and Soen when he was a baby. Mark is a writer and he runs a music blog called pvmx (‘why vinyl?’) that showcases Philadelphia’s independent music scene.

6. Figures: This is a Japanese tree spirit called a kodama. The first time I taught my course “Modern and Contemporary East Asian Art,” we studied different aspects of art and media, from film to photography, to painting, to architecture and performance art, and one of my students for her final project researched the anime film director Hayao Miyazaki. He made a film called Princess Mononoke, about the destruction of the environment told through the story of a young girl, and throughout the film these little tree spirits appear. My student [Caroline Fleet ’16] did this incredible final presentation, and at the end she sang the entire class and one of these little kodama figures she had made.

7. Rowing team photos from her undergrad days at Brown University: I had never rowed before, but I was recruited to the dining hall as a freshman and I ended up rowing all four years. I rowed Division One and traveled all year, so it was a big commitment. We were two-time NCAA champions. Rowing was a formative experience, and it was something I learned with me into teaching here at Haverford, I’m the faculty liaison to the women’s field hockey team, and there are a number of our student-athletes in my classes. I understand the idea of balance—that athletes can really enrich the college experience—and I have a lot of respect for what they are doing. —E.L.