
GW Students Abroad



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Spring of 2016, I had the incredible pleasure of studying abroad in Shanghai, China through the [George Washington's Office for Study Abroad](#). However, the abroad program I selected began in March of 2016, so I decided to start my abroad experience two months early and work for the local contemporary art gallery, [Leo Xu Projects](#). Of course, I was nervous to travel to China knowing no one and start work full time. However, as an international business major, art history minor and Mandarin student, I could not pass up the opportunity to participate in a market place where these three studies converged. So, I packed my bags and crossed my fingers that my Mandarin was good enough to get me home from the Shanghai Airport.

At Leo Xu Projects, I was initially hired to help the executive gallery assistant translate and edit literature that the gallery produced for upcoming exhibitions. At first, this responsibility was rather humbling, but there was a major exhibition coming up for the artist Michael Lin that kept me motivated. The exhibition was set up all under my nose, the artist was often in the gallery and his team was working around the clock to install his latest pieces. The team was incredibly friendly and despite a small language barrier, we had a great time chatting during breaks. The show's opening night brought a vibrant Shanghaies art scene to the gallery. Passing out the artist's biographies and answering questions was a great chance to get to know more about the contemporary art culture within the city. I met one of my closest friends from abroad that night, a local photographer whom I still stay in touch with.

After this event went without a hitch, I was invited to work in the gallery's booth at [Hong Kong Art Basel](#). During this week long art fair, I was responsible for assisting the gallery owner with booth set up and sales. During public hours, thousands of people passed through the booth, speaking dozens of different languages and from all over the world. Remembering what I had learned in freshmen Mandarin class was the least of my worries. Of course everyone in Hong Kong speaks perfect English, so I met tons of new friends and got to enjoy the city with them during the evenings. The Hong Kong city culture was much more international than Shanghai's, the art scene was no different. Working in the gallery I gained an understanding of the difference between the Shanghai and Hong Kong art markets. Upon returning to Shanghai, it was difficult to believe I had experienced so much before my first class even started.

My interest in the Chinese language and culture began after a high school trip to Beijing, where I studied introduction to Mandarin for six week. After high school graduation, I was drawn to the George Washington University for their intensive Chinese language and abroad programs. Both were great additions to my collegiate career, and along with my previous work experience, prepared me for working in Shanghai. After six months living in the cosmopolitan Chinese hub, I realized that I could go back and do it all over again.

