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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
DAILY BRUIN

Student receives Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship at LACMA

November 26, 2014 3:13 am More stories in [A&E](#), [Lifestyle](#)



Third-year world arts and cultures student Lilia Taboada is the recipient of the inaugural Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Aubrey Yeo/Daily Bruin senior staff)

By [Aubrey Yeo](#)

Lilia Taboada grew up surrounded by art.

The third-year world arts and cultures student said being raised in a bi-racial family paved the way for many childhood memories spent within art museums, learning about the identity and culture of her mixed heritage.

At the same time, her father, Arturo Taboada, brought some of his architectural background into his daughter's life – whether it was through sharing building designs, photography or his time serving on the board of a museum.

“Those things sort of follow you home and you get your family exposed to them in many ways,” Arturo Taboada said. “Talking about them over dinner ended up sparking her curiosity and perhaps helped her carve her own path into some of these topics.”

Now, as a participant in the inaugural Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship Program with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Lilia Taboada has embarked on a path to continue living surrounded by art – this time as a curator.

“I always knew I wanted to do something in museums, but this fellowship really brings out curating,” Lilia Taboada said. “There are so many jobs within a museum, but so far curating is what attracts me most.”

The two-year fellowship offers opportunities for two undergraduate students at each of the five partner museums around the country – The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, LACMA, Art Institute of Chicago, High Museum of Art and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston – to develop their interest in the curatorial arts.

It’s a new initiative that Leslie Jones, curator of prints and drawings at LACMA and Taboada’s program mentor, said she believes offers a new generation something that wasn’t available before.

“I know when I was an undergraduate interested in becoming a curator, the only opportunities were basically volunteering in the university art museum bookshop. That was kind of it,” Jones said. “Most internships were for most people who completed their undergraduate degree in art history.”

Although Taboada made her first foray into museum work by volunteering with family programs on weekends at the de Young Museum in San Francisco during her junior year in high school. It wasn’t until winter quarter of Taboada’s first year when she began considering curating as a career path after taking a curating cultures class with Polly Nooter Roberts, a professor in UCLA’s Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance who also serves as a consulting curator for African art at LACMA.

For the course, Taboada produced a virtual exhibition that blended her minors of Chicana/o studies and art history – an exhibition about Chicano/a and Latino/a alternative artistic identities with a focus on five contemporary artists.

“She did something that is very near and dear to her heart,” Roberts said

When Taboada chose to apply for LACMA’s Andrew W. Mellon Summer Academy for a chance at the Mellon fellowship last spring, Roberts wrote a letter of recommendation for Taboada, who’d received the highest grades in her two classes.

The weeklong summer academy at LACMA culminated in a virtual exhibition, where the students combined their artworks they presented in a joint exhibition, after which only two of 15 students received the fellowship.

Now in her first quarter as an undergraduate Mellon fellow, Taboada said she devotes the first three days of her week to classes, while her Thursdays are spent volunteering as a student educator at the Hammer Museum. Every other Friday, Taboada transitions to her duties at LACMA with the fellowship.

“I think there’s a popular assumption that what a curator does is organize exhibitions all the time, hang out in art galleries, telling people where to hang pictures, traveling the world looking for art objects for their exhibitions,” Jones said. “But that’s only 10 percent of what we do.”

A large part of Taboada’s shadowing process at LACMA includes accompanying Jones on administrative tasks, meetings about designs or publications and evaluating museum gifts. At the end of each activity, Taboada and Jones engage in a discussion to review the practical lesson.

In addition to creating access to a hands-on experience with curatorial work, Taboada said her two-year fellowship also aims to help her continue her pursuit of academia. The undergraduate Mellon fellow will also receive guidance in applying to a graduate program and working on her portfolio.

Taboada said she plans to apply to several schools in New York and Los Angeles with traditionally well-regarded graduate art programs, among others.

Taboada’s said her plan to continue pursuing education at the graduate level en route to becoming a full-on curator mirrors what drew her to this prospective vocation in the first place – new opportunities to learn about art.

“You open the cabinet and you can take out a Picasso and you get to spend time with it. But with curating ... you have new projects every two to 10 years,” Taboada said. “So you get to spend time with art, but you’re also constantly learning about new art and new topics which is really enticing to me because I really enjoy art. But I think it’s hard to focus on one thing for the rest of your life.”

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FYI! This fellowship program is overseen by UCLA professor Chon A. Noriega with LACMA deputy director Nancy Thomas. Noriega, as director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, has had a partnership with LACMA since 2004.