

Andrew Wallace

## Marguerite M. Friedberg Travel Fellowship Report

In August 2017, I spent a week living in Avignon, in the south of France. My original aim was to conduct research on the Avignon School of Painting, and though my experience was not exactly what I had anticipated, living in Provence for a week proved extremely valuable both within the context of the material I had set out to study and beyond it.

The Musée du Petit Palais, where I was originally to do the majority of my research, is a fascinating and atypical museum. It houses an extremely extensive collection of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century art from Avignon, Florence and Rome, among other major artistic capitals. The collection is very large, and while I gleaned some general trends, if not a cohesive narrative, from the painting of the Avignon School at the museum, it was at the Papal Palace itself that I sensed the city's grand history, originating with the Avignon papacy, unfolding first hand.

The vast walls of the monumental palace are largely bare now due to episodes of violence and repurposing over the centuries, but one can see the massive dining halls, chapels and bedrooms in which the Pope and his retinue once dined, prayed and slept. The few striking frescoes that still remain boast incredibly vibrant blues and golds in their depictions of biblical scenes and scenes of the lives of the chapels' eponymous saints. Today, the Papal Palace serves as an exhibition space for contemporary art, which can be found throughout its courtyards and halls. The model of an historical site, visited for its own architectural and artistic merits, also

serving as a vehicle for showing contemporary work is one that I went on to see a number of times during my stay in France, for which the Papal Palace always served as a reference point.

I learned so much about the painters from the period surrounding the Avignon School by studying the works at the Petit Palais, and about the greater historical period by visiting the Papal Palace in Avignon. But part of the joy and benefit of getting the opportunity to be there in person was the ability to learn about things I had not known to attempt to research beforehand, and to experience a part of French culture I otherwise would have missed. In exploring the tiny hill villages in the Luberon region, like Roussillon, Ménerbes, and Les Beaux, I sensed a regional lifestyle and beauty totally apart from anything I had seen before. This wider experience of a different, more local kind of French lifestyle helped to contextualize, and thus greatly enhance, my time during the following year I have spent in Paris, whose populace lives so differently.

My experience in Provence, though leading me somewhat away from my original research topic, proved extremely fruitful and has had a great impact on the months I have spent in France since. The art I studied in Avignon provided for me an excellent point of reference from which to think about the art that came before it and that which followed it, which I had studied at Williams and went on to study in Paris. Beyond just the art history that I studied in Avignon, I think that my time in Provence proved invaluable for being able to see a more complete picture of French culture, beyond the very specific, and sui generis one that exists in Paris. I know that I would not have had the resources to spend this week in Provence without the help of the travel fellowship. As I have mentioned, the trip was incredibly meaningful to me, and I would like again to express my gratitude for the opportunity.