

for your information...

Philadelphia, April 5, 2007

To whom it may concern,

This letter is in support of Antawan Byrd's application to the Library prize for undergraduate research entitled: "Poles of Mimesis: An Analysis of Photographic media." I have followed every step of the writing of this paper, since its original idea at the beginning of the term to its completion this week, and I can certify that Antawan's use of the library resources has been an integral part of his writing process.

To start with, Antawan has made a very thorough bibliographic research, using both databases he was used to and others he discovered. As a student in the fine arts and art history departments, he did not specifically know about philosophical databases. His search was enriched by them and he has ended up collecting references from a great number of sources, including JSTOR, the Philosopher's Index, and the Art Index. I remember seeing him in early February with an 8-page list of references and abstract, including several readings notes that he had already started to take on some of them.

It is absolutely obvious to me that the reading of these references, and the search for photographic materials to discuss (Antawan also borrowed a number of exhibition catalogs from the library), has proved decisive in the evolution of his paper. From a very broad, and too ambitious, topic, originally oscillating between something like "Photography vs. the other arts" and "Mimesis in contemporary art," Antawan's readings have helped him focus his attention on a circumscribed topic that is of real relevance for the research in aesthetics today. It is through his reading of a number of articles and books, both on Mimesis (representation) and the nature of photography, that he has identified the most important names to discuss, and that he has come to read them directly – such as Bazin, Scruton and Walton, but also Greenberg and Carroll. Antawan's will to devote all his energies to this paper is clear from the fact that he registered to do a tutorial with me on this project over the whole term. But I would like to insist on the complete autonomy that he has shown in this process of defining his topic and selecting his references, as well as on my sincere admiration for the outcome of it.

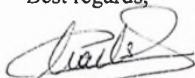
Antawan has barely any background in philosophy, and he confessed to me that he was frustrated by the fact that his courses in art did not include any aesthetics or philosophical reflection on the practice. I have the strong feeling that the writing of this paper proved decisive for Antawan's own positioning within his field, and particularly toward the medium he has chosen for his artistic practice, namely, photography. Through his struggling with the definition of photography as a mimetic art, and his elaboration of the more personal view that photography does include more "world-creation" than is usually acknowledged, he has come to make clear for

himself what he respects in photography, why, and how to achieve it. In other terms, he has defined what value criteria he will use in his own practice. And he has gained confidence in his understanding of the significance of this practice, both to him, and with respect to the other arts.

I can hardly imagine how anyone could have better benefited from the research made for such a project. Not only has Antawan learnt about new research databases, but he has also learnt about a new field, i.e., philosophical aesthetics, and he has transformed and ascertained his vision of his own field and practice.

I very sincerely, and warmly, recommend him for the prize.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Syliane', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Syliane Malinowski-Charles
Assistant Professor, Philosophy.