When trying to decide where to travel this summer, I had a difficult time. It is a completely crazy thing to be presented with $4500.00 to travel anywhere in the world.

After months of researching online residencies, I realized that I kept returning to Japan. It dawned on me that this made sense; after all I had grown up in a home decorated by an artistic mother who loved all things Japanese. Though we lived in a Dutch style townhome with a form much like 5 year old's sketch when asked to draw a house, my mother took the liberty of outfitting it with exquisite pottery, bamboo baskets, and jade Buddhas from Japan. Traditional curtains were replaced with panels covered in lovely Japanese fabrics, our walls were painted in hues that appeared in the pottery we collected (bright yellows and oranges), and Japanese style screens divided the rooms. Now my mother has replaced the traditional Christmas fir with a lovely Japanese maple featuring delicate fairy lights and antique glass birds from... you guessed it... Japan.

I still remember attending a symposium on all things Japanese called Hyperculture! at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC and being blown away by the art (Yayoi Kusama’s enormous dotted blobs), Asimo, the Honda robot and a very lifelike female robot that comprehended and answered questions. I fell in love with Ghibli studio cartoons when I was first introduced to them and started a bamboo basket collection for my father when a friend was the first American admitted to a Japanese bamboo school.

Many of my favorite contemporary artists and designers are Japanese: Yoko Ono, Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, Isamu Noguchi, and especially Nagi Noda, whose video work is mind-blowing. I also loved their decidedly odd and uncanny ads and was excited to visit Tokyo, with its anime costumed teens saturated in the “cosplay” culture, and its hyper decked out girls who dressed in Lola (from Lolita) gear with hyperbolically puffed sleeves and skirts, 10” platform baby doll boots and enormous wigs.
I spoke with Professor Robert Platt about Japan and was able to procure a residency in Kyoto with the talented and highly regarded Kohei Nawa.

I planned a 5 week stay with two weeks in Tokyo to explore and the remainder at the residency working with a team of artists to realize Kohei’s projects.

When I landed in Tokyo, I hit the ground running, visiting a multitude of museums, including the Edo-Tokyo Museum, Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architecture Museum, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo Animation gallery, the Science Museum and the Watari Museum of Contemporary
Art, as well as traditional craft museums and a multitude of galleries. By far, my favorite visit was the Museum of Contemporary Art, which housed famed artists I knew of and some artists that were new to me, and outrageous sculptures and paintings in highly saturated colors. I also visited several shrines and gardens, all of them lovely and peaceful. I enjoyed wandering around Harajuku and even had coffee in a Anime themed café (of which there are many in Tokyo) where a woman with a blue wig served me.

After several days in Tokyo, I had to begin my residency, which was probably more appropriately termed a studio assistantship. Though I was disappointed by the lack of space and time to make my own work, it was an incredible experience to see how the intricate and highly priced sculptures of a renowned international artist were crafted. Kohei Nawa had very specific visions for each of his pieces and a team of nearly thirty artists that helped create them and run his studio. Though I would not want to oversee so many assistants, it was inspiring to see how a studio was run by a relatively young artist whose work I love. I worked on two projects- designing a video for POLYSICS, a pop group who had commissioned the studio to make a new music video for a newly released hit “Shooting Star”, and covering a small taxidermied deer with glass beads. I learned a lot about resins and how to apply them and was inspired to design one sculpture using Pokemon characters, which I hope to complete this year.
On days off, I visited temples, several galleries, a monkey park and Nara, where friends and I wandered around the stone paths that led to beautiful parks and impressive temples. We also fed the deer in Nara, which were many, and aggressive.

I spent the last few days of my trip in Tokyo, finishing up my list of galleries, districts and museums I had not had time to see when I first landed.

All in all this was an inspirational experience- the culture, the fashion, the shapes, the neon, the colors and the sense of electricity in Tokyo in particular, as well as the beautifully designed traditional houses and unbelievable gardens have seeped into my consciousness in a way that they could not have without first hand experience. These images are sure to affect my future sculptures.
It is with great appreciation that I write about this sojourn to a country that has always colored my interests and to which I would never have been able to travel without the generous support of the Art and Design School.