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Explorer: Muheb Esmat sees Museum open Doors to History

Pat Sims

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Muheb Esmat ’17 made a significant discovery when he came to Colby. Actually, he made more than one.

Esmat arrived on Mayflower Hill from Kabul, Afghanistan, by way of Massachusetts (four years at Deerfield Academy) and Jordan (a postgraduate year at King’s Academy) and decided to explore. He took geology, psychology, English, and, in the same spirit of exploration, his first foray into art history, a class on East Asian art with Professor of Art Ankeney Weitz. He had loved the architecture classes he took in high school, and now it occurred to him that architecture and art could go together. “This,” he said, “is something I would be able to do for the rest of my life.”

Esmat was off and running, to the Colby College Museum of Art, a resource he describes as a treasure. “I have classes where I have written papers about pieces that are in the museum,” Esmat said. “That is a different feeling than writing about something that you only see on a website or you only get to see in a book.”

In his sophomore year Esmat declared art history his major. As part of a Jan Plan with Weitz, he curated an art exhibition, visiting the studios of artists who had immigrated to Maine from Taiwan and China and selecting works to show at Waterville’s Common Street Arts gallery. Last summer Esmat became a Mellon Research Assistant, working with the art museum’s Curator of Academic Programs Shalini Le Gall. One of his tasks was to help set up the Davis Curricular Gallery, which features art chosen by faculty members and museum staff that will be used for class work.

Esmat also assisted Le Gall in discovering not only the provenance of a piece of art that had been donated to the museum decades before, but the historical context in which it had been created, an absorbing and compelling project that required considerable art detective work.

—Pat Sims

For the solution to Esmat’s art mystery and more, go to colby.edu/mag