

THE ISC'S SWISS RESIDENCY

With the generous support of sculptor Heinz Aeschlimann and arts advocate, collector, and patron, Gertrud Aeschlimann, winners of the ISC's Outstanding Student Achievement Award in Contemporary Sculpture are offered the chance to apply for a six- to eight-week residency in Switzerland. This year, Samuel Ekwurtzel of the University of Hartford and Crystal Schenk of Portland State University were selected to live and work in Zofingen. Both emerging artists were encouraged to take advantage of the Aeschlimanns' vast network of resources, including the sculpture facilities at Art-St-Urban, an art center in the former Abbey of St. Urban. Crystal finished her residency this past summer. She completed several new artworks and represented the ISC in her interactions with the Swiss artistic and cultural communities. An exhibition of her work and the work of other ISC residency winners was recently held at Art-St-Urban.



Clockwise from left: Crystal Schenk forms a panel of laser-cut steel; Schenk at the Aeschlimanns' property in Ticino, Switzerland; an exhibition of Schenk's residency work at Art-St-Urban.



CRYSTAL SCHENK ON HER EXPERIENCE IN SWITZERLAND

This summer I spent six unforgettable weeks immersed in the life, culture, and extraordinary landscape of Switzerland. As a recipient of the ISC Switzerland residency, I was welcomed into the home and lives of Heinz and Gertrud Aeschlimann, two exceptionally creative and abundantly supportive individuals.

The program was the perfect combination of an artist residency and a teaching internship. It not only focused on developing new artwork, but also introduced me to Swiss history, galleries, museums, artists, and collectors. I was provided with two fully equipped studios: one in Zofingen, which is home to Aeschlimann AG, and one at Art-St-Urban.

Guided by Heinz's experienced hand, I learned many non-traditional and industrial techniques to apply to my sculpture. These included carving glass foam, forming bitumen sheets, laser-cutting steel, and casting gussasphalt, a type of asphalt that can be built up vertically. Through a combination of demonstrations and my own experimentation, I was able to discover the endless possibilities of these new materials—I felt like a kid in a candy shop with all of these great resources at my fingertips.

Like all of the people I met during my stay, company employees were remarkably friendly and always willing to lend a hand. In the machine shop, the language barrier was not an obstacle, as we developed a working relationship that didn't require words and became a choreographed dance. I couldn't have accomplished all I did without their help, and sharing coffee breaks made me feel like part of the crew.

It was a wonderful experience to create sculpture in the industrial setting of a road-surfacing plant—where nondescript substances can be transformed into alluring sculptures that seduce the gaze and touch. The inspiring surroundings and eerie history of the second studio in Art-St-Urban (a former psychiatric clinic) contributed to my interest in investigating mental health and familial history.

During my residency, I completed nine rather ambitious sculptures. There were moments when I questioned whether I would get everything done in such a short amount of time. But with many long hours in the studio, and with the Aeschlimanns' encouragement, I am quite pleased with the resulting body of work, which focuses on human fears and perceptions about the body and the mind—themes that I plan to pursue further. It was a great honor to be chosen to participate in the Switzerland residency, and I would like to thank the ISC and the Aeschlimanns for an incredible experience.