

It was a sunny August day when I entered into the second floor studio of Hilton Head Prep. Paint-splattered tables, posters of vaguely familiar works of art, and mason jars of supplies filled the room. Despite Kathryn Ramseur and her warm reception and inclusiveness, I was intimidated. It was not only my first day at Prep but my first art class.

At my previous school, art was an elective for the elite who had participated in art classes since childhood. I feared that without any hands-on experience or training, art was outside of my element and, at sixteen, I had missed my window. The Prep administration disagreed and maintained that art was a graduation requirement. I tried to talk my way out of it. I even asked if I could substitute another English course instead of art. My request was quickly denied and so I entered into the art studio that first day of school, changing my academic (and life) trajectory forever.

I still remember my first assignment: a pointillism work. Ms. Ramseur charged us with choosing an image as our inspiration, drawing it, and then adding color through tiny dots of application. I pored over the dogeared books and old Art News magazines that were kept in neat piles throughout the studio, searching for just the right work to recreate. My classmates quickly found their inspirations, selected their works, and began drawing. Days passed and my search continued. It wasn't that the imagery didn't inspire me, it was that it all inspired me. I adored the colors of Henri Matisse, the compositions of Andrew Wyeth, and the decisions of the contemporary artists. I finally chose a painting, ending on Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. My pointillism left much to be desired, but I was hooked.

By the end of my junior year, I had successfully completed *Starry Night* and a few other projects, and had also completed the graduation requirement. I wasn't finished learning about art, though, so I rearranged my class schedule to accommodate a second class my senior year. Things had certainly changed as I went from trying to get out of one to making sure I got another!

I also took AP European History during my senior year. This class surprisingly underscored my newfound interest in art. The curriculum and the text we used for the class included art history and once again, I was hooked. My teacher encouraged this interest and my final term paper explored the ways European masters captured the Postwar era on canvas. Four years after that term paper, I graduated from Duke University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history.

While I am not a professional artist (and my pointillism still needs work), I draw on my Prep art classes every day in my career. They instilled an appreciation of the arts that I now try to pass on to others. They laid the groundwork for a visual literacy that allows me to converse knowledgeably with the artists whose work I curate. And ultimately, they led me to the world of museums, galleries, and collections in which I work – a world that, at age sixteen, I thought I had missed. Thank you to Prep, and especially to Kathryn Ramseur, for this priceless exposure to the arts. May it always stay a graduation requirement.