

**TEACHING INSTITUTE GRANT REPORT**  
**SABBATICAL PROJECT**

***Another Woman's Life***  
***Documenting the Bani Weavers***

Bani, Dominican Republic  
Winter 2016



MELANIE REIM  
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## FACULTY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AND AWARDS REPORT

MELANIE REIM

Sabbatical Project

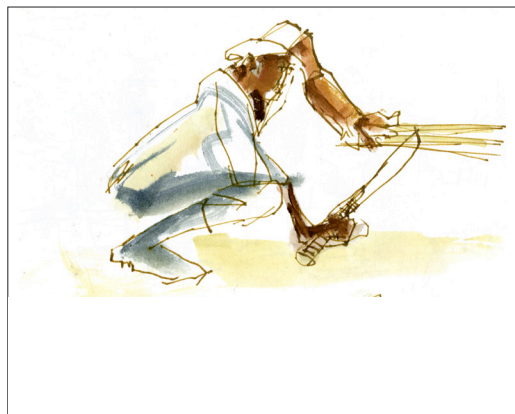
*Another Woman's Life: Documenting the Bani Weavers*

Bani, Dominican Republic

Winter, 2016

After twenty years of teaching at FIT, in the Spring 2016 semester, I embarked upon my first-ever sabbatical. It was a mixture of sheer joy, excitement, trepidation, and great anticipation. The idea of having this expanse of time in front of me to return to making art, essentially full-time, was very unfamiliar, but most appreciated.

The reportage component of my project is based in the Dominican Republic. There, I was introduced to and granted access to an incredible family of traditional weavers, with a impressive matriarch at the helm, her husband of many years by her side. It is hard to know or extract exactly how old she is; word has it, somewhere between 88- 100 years old. She is a strong, independent, pipe-smoking, extraordinarily loving woman, whose weathered face and glazed eyes tell the story of toiling under the Caribbean sun, surrounded by her family-nine children, their children and the children's children, all who weave as well. It seems that each member of the family has his/her role, not only with regard to the work, but as I spent more time with them, his/ her personality. There is the bookkeeper, the hostess, the joker,



the gardener. The love of weaving is clearly admired and respected by the community, as visitors often pass by. This family could not have been more welcoming to me, and as I sat drawing them in my sketchbook, I also tried to “draw” them out in conversation. They could not imagine how anyone could be so interested in them and what they were doing. However, they are beginning to recognize the beauty and importance of what their craft, as word spreads and commissions unlike any they have had before, come to them. As I visited, they were fulfilling an order of 300 handbags, of their own design, often accented with a gingham fabric that lined the inside and sometimes, feathers and/or beads on the outside, evolving into the community artisans and entrepreneurs. They weave under the tree at the side of their typical Dominican house, a collection of hammered tin, weathered over time, with the expanse of the country's mountains in the background. Through a contact that I have cultivated at *Diario Libre*, one of the country's leading newspapers, my profile, including my FIT affiliation, and work has been highlighted, and a short film made, with plans to expand it should we be able to make additional visits.

As I worked on location, watching the deft hands of the weavers at work, I needed to try it myself- not very successfully! My admiration grew. I felt the need to expand my drawings beyond my page, and created small three dimensional portraits, derivative of my own sketches, not photographs. These, along with oversized digital prints were exhibited in Casa Quien, in Santo Domingo. Through that process, I was approached by a Dominican animator who wants to collaborate with me, bringing them to life through motion graphics.

As I promoted my work and project, I was contacted by Nassau Community College, to exhibit in the Firehouse Gallery this summer. The work will be up through October 2016. I am very honored and feel privileged to bring awareness to the opportunity that I have been given by FIT and the support from the FDGA. The opportunities keep multiplying and I am deeply grateful. Though this second exhibit was unexpected, it is thrilling, and actually provides a unique opportunity to highlight another project that was generously funded by the then, “Teaching Institute”, the Hong Kong Factory Reportage project. An entire showcase at NCC will explain the collaboration and highlight prints from the experience. They are most interested, as they, too, are part of our SUNY family. To date, I have completed three of the four sketchbooks that I intended, with several more in process- it seems that I cannot stop drawing!

The support I was granted from the CET was used to travel to and from the DR, car rental and fuel, and expenses related to two exhibitions. I intend to return to continue to document, as well as to visit other weavers that have been brought to my attention, through my presence in the country. As the weavers and their families and workers get more familiar with having me in their environment, drawing, they are becoming more comfortable and more forthcoming. I look forward to continuing creating this story and exploring their craft.

I will apply again to the FDGA in the Fall 2016 semester.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melanie Reim".

Melanie Reim