Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

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Department: Art & Design

College: Arts & Humanities

Leave taken: ◉ Sabbatical ○ Difference in Pay ○ Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period: ◉ Fall 2022

○ Spring

○ Academic Year

○ Other

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Neil Chowdhury

Final Sabbatical Report:

A Photographic Journey to Kolkata and Studio Goppo, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India

Sabbatical Leave taken Fall semester, 2022

April 1, 2023

Final Sabbatical Report

Accomplishments of the leave in relation to the proposed goals:

My Sabbatical leave of fall 2022 resulted in the accomplishment of the main objectives set out in my original proposal, with some creative deviations resulting from unexpected conditions and facilities situations found at the site of my artist residency, Studio Goppo, in Santiniketan, India.

I completed an artist residency at Studio Goppo in the months of September and October 2022, as planned. During this time, I practiced and improved my craft in the 19th century photographic printing techniques of gum bichromate printing, salted paper printing, and the very early photographic technique of calotype paper negatives. These latter two photographic processes represent the earliest commonly practiced photographic techniques invented by Englishman Henry Fox Talbot, announced in 1839, and the foundation of all modern analog negative-positive photographic print technologies practiced since.

While I did not engage in the process of albumen printing myself, I also had the opportunity to closely observe the entire production process of this method, which was the favored black and white printing process practiced in the late 19th and early 20th century photography. At the time of my residency, the studio proprietor, Arpan Mukherjee was executing a printing commission for the Indian Museum in Mumbai in collaboration with the British Museum to produce albumen prints for an exhibition of 19th century historical photographs of Indian monuments and landscapes. Not only was this a fascinating introduction to the process, which, as a result, I should be able to replicate in the future on my own with some practice, it was also a great opportunity to see first-hand, the beautiful prints made from digital copies of the original 19th century paper negatives produced by British historical survey photographers. These photographs of important architectural sites and ancient Indian monuments helped to stylistically inspire my own explorations of India's humbler vernacular mud and thatch Kutcha houses found in the rural villages of West Bengal surrounding the town of Bolpur/Santiniketan where I was staying. I photographed these places using the same technology and the same paper negative techniques as the 19th century photographers had used in the works that I saw Arpan Mukherjee printing.
I adapted a similar dispassionate documentary style of architectural photography employed by these early photographic pioneers. Rather than employ the later invention of albumen printing, however, I opted to print my calotype negatives using the much older salted paper process due to its rich velvety tonal range that I found a more aesthetically pleasing and appropriate rendering of my chosen subject matter than the crisper gloss of the albumen print. I printed and exhibited a selection of my original 10x12" Calotype waxed paper negatives as salt prints at Studio Goppo on the conclusion of my residency there at the end of October 2022.

Bengali villagers have built traditional Kutcha houses out of sustainable local materials, with walls made from mud and cow dung, and bamboo and rice straw thatch roofs, since time immemorial. Living in these self-made dwellings, raising livestock, and growing crops in subsistence farming communities makes up much of the texture and culture of life in rural West Bengal. However, in a bid to modernize the villages in the West Bengal hinterlands, in recent years, the state government of West Bengal has offered rural families grants to replace their Kutcha houses with brick bungalows. As a result, the traditional architecture (and to some

degree, the lifestyle it supports) is rapidly disappearing from the West Bengal countryside. Realizing that the traditional Bengali mud house will soon fade into the memory of the past, I decided that my brief time photographing in this region would be best applied to documenting this endangered architecture and the Bengali village lifestyle it exemplifies. The Calotype and Salt Print Processes are significant to this project for metaphorical and historical reasons, as well as aesthetic ones: While these early photographic processes were soon superseded by faster and simpler technologies in the West, due to the unique climactic and logistical conditions in 19th century India, they were used in the Subcontinent for decades after they had died out in the rest of the world. British photographers would often use these technologies to photograph and survey their colonial territories. My identity as a mixed-race Anglo (Bengali) Indian, using those 19th Century techniques to preserve vestiges of the cultures and lifestyles that would have been visible during colonial times, and now endangered by the policies of the regional Indian state government, adds a layer of poignant irony to the project's material production and meaning.

During my residency, I was able to visit many of the rural villages surrounding the town of Bolpur, Santiniketan, where I was staying, and take a range of photographs using a 19th century style 10x12" folding wooden field camera loaded with my home-made calotype "film" to represent the unique vernacular village architecture. The 10x12" field camera that I used deserves special mention. While likely manufactured in the 1940's or 50's when large format photography was still commercially practiced, the camera I used was a type that would have been typically used by 19th Century colonial British and local Indian photographers alike. This specimen was the property of Arpan Mukherjee for the use of the artists in residence at Studio Goppo. It appeared to be a locally produced variant of the Indian Vageeswari field camera, invented by K Karunakaran in 1942. Using this type of camera requires a good deal of patience and technical knowledge. I'm familiar with the wooden field camera through years of my own creative practice, but I'd never had the opportunity to work with a 10x12" Indian version. Due to its weight, size, and complexity, this instrument is best set up with one person holding the camera, and another fixing the tripod into position. The camera is so unwieldy and slow to operate, it limits the number of images that can be made in any given day. I therefore had to be extremely selective in my choices of subject matter. Furthermore, I only had access to three plate holders, which could each carry two prepared pieces of sensitized calotype paper. Each day I photographed, I was therefore limited to expose only six negatives. This was a practical limitation also imposed by the hour-long developing time required for each negative. For every day spent in the field, I needed at least the same number of hours developing my calotypes in the darkroom.

One cannot photograph quickly or unnoticed with such a large and unwieldy, camera. This limitation shapes the way the photographer must approach the subject and defines the character of the final image and overall parameters of the project. To do this type of photography within these rural villages, where everyone knows everyone, and everything that happens is everybody's business, I had to obtain not only the permission of the property owner who's dwelling was being photographed, but I also needed the active collaboration and the goodwill of the entire extended community. In addition to its aesthetic and metaphoric qualities, this process therefore enforced a much deeper encounter with my subjects than an easier, more convenient method of photography. To facilitate easier communication with the village residents, I traveled with local artists Manoj Biswas and Himadri Datta, who served as guides, translators, and photographic assistants. Their help was necessary not only to assist with the bulky camera, but

also because few of the villagers spoke English and are they not accustomed to visits by foreigners. As soon as we arrived in a village, we were usually surrounded by a group of curious residents who wanted to know why we were there. Manoj and Himadri helped me to obtain permission to photograph the houses, and patiently explained my project to everyone we encountered. The residents showed great curiosity about the process and were amazingly accommodating to my strange requests. More than once we were offered tea and sweets as we worked in the hot Bengali sun. I talked via their translation to many of the villagers, who shared with me the aesthetic pride in their traditional houses, as well as their frustrations maintaining these structures as the material culture and craft necessary for their upkeep gradually faded from common practice. These conversations were a wonderful way to learn more about the lives of the owners of these beautiful structures.

Each day after photographing, I returned to the lab at Studio Goppo, working late into the night to develop my new calotype negatives. I worked diligently to produce enough hand-made silver salt emulsion contact prints from these negatives for exhibition at the end of my residency, but there wasn't time to complete the whole series. The summer of 2023 should provide the necessary time, and access to the photographic lab in CA226 when students are not using this facility for their classwork, to finish and expand upon this project. An RSCA Grant or other funding source will be needed to provide the funding to complete this project.

Approvals of modifications, if any, to the original proposal:
No modifications to my planned sabbatical activities were sought or approved. Out of necessity, I did, however, modify my photographic processes and subject matter for logistical reasons to fit the situation on the ground once I reached India. The changes to my proposed activities were twofold. First, once I understood the facilities, equipment, social, and cultural options available to me, I quickly realized that my intended subject matter of the historical sites and creative community surrounding Rabindranath Tagore's legacy would be difficult to access with my camera, and not particularly original as a photographic subject. While the campus of Visva-Bharati University and the surrounding areas of Santiniketan are indeed full of such historically significant sites, I was not allowed photographic access to these places. Unlike American college campuses, outsiders were not welcome on the Vivsva-Bharathi grounds, and a strict no photography rule was enforced to preserve the peace, privacy, and serenity of the faculty and students of this institution. Unbeknownst to me, driven by the mythology surrounding Tagore's legacy, this region has become a popular tourist destination for weary Kolkatan urbanites, many of whom visit to escape the dense and stressful environs of their megalopolis 161 km away. As a result, a thriving tourist industry has sprung up, threatening the town's formerly rural idyllic nature, and forcing these restrictions to protect what is left of the serenity valued by the campus community. Realizing that my time on site was very limited, I did not attempt to negotiate the voluminous red tape that would have been necessary to afford me photographic access to the campus. Furthermore, I realized that these sites have already been thoroughly documented, so by treading this worn path, I would not be contributing anything new to the field in terms of subject matter. Secondarily, I had originally proposed to study and practice the mid 19th century process of wet plate collodion photography, as invented by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851. This method requires the photographer to travel with a portable darkroom, prepare chemicals on site, coat glass plates with a wet collodion silver emulsion, make the photograph while the plate is still wet, and then develop it immediately. The collodion process therefore demands a good deal of

bulky specialized equipment, and some means of transporting it. Furthermore, the chemicals required, such as ether, and the traditional Potassium Cyanide fixer, are volatile, toxic, and ill-behaved in the hot and humid weather that I encountered in the field during the tail end of West Bengal's late monsoon season (which *should have been* but *wasn't* over by the time I arrived in India, as global warming has disrupted India's once predictable monsoon cycles). While wet plate collodion was the preferred method of photography in Europe and North America during the 1850's to ca. 1900, due to its speed (relative to previous methods) and ability to render fantastically sharp, tonally rich images, as evidenced by the bulk of the photographic documentation of the American Civil War, it was usually practiced by at least a duo of camera operator and processing assistant, accompanied by a horse drawn wagon to haul the gear and provide a processing tent. Studio Goppo does have the basic equipment required to practice this form of photography, but not in a portable form. I would have therefore been restricted to photographing around the studio property, limiting my subject matter to the studio staff, set up studio still life images, and performative-directorial modes of photography antithetical to my usual documentary approach. Given these logistical challenges, I was left searching for a suitable subject, and for a method of photography in keeping with my desires to document my newfound surroundings utilizing some type of more easily portable 19th century photographic process. These challenges conspired to delay the start of my research, or maybe seen more holistically, redirected my creative path in a more fertile direction.

Outside of the (off limits to my camera) Vivsva-Bharathi Campus and the Santiniketan area where I was lodged, was the typical West Bengali town of Bolpur- an unremarkable mid-sized settlement that serves as a regional transportation hub, and supply center for the surrounding farming villages. Other than its status as the nearest train station to the storied university campus, Bolpur is generally lacking in aesthetic and historical significance. During the first few days of my residency, I explored the town and its surroundings on foot and via tuk-tuk. While I was able to successfully engage in some digital street photography documenting this place, I didn't find much of special interest here to practice the kind of photography I had hoped to accomplish. After all, I had already spent several weeks in the teeming urban environs of Kolkata, where I'd been able to pursue a great deal of urban street photography. Here in the provinces, I was looking for something different. One potential subject that at first appealed to me, the looming industrial rice mills on the edge of town, also proved off limits to photography. These installations drew my attention due to their brooding, dark industrial revolution era appearance, as well as their importance as a lynchpin for the region's economic activity. On proposing this idea to my hosts at Studio Goppo, I was told that the proprietors of the mills had recently been indicted in organized crime activities, were awaiting trial in jail, and that they'd employed local "goondas" (gangsters) to keep an eye on the properties in their absence. Clearly, these were people who would meet a visiting photographer with extreme suspicion, and my guides wanted nothing to do with any project in proximity to this area, out of fear for my (and their own) safety.

The other subject in my sabbatical proposal that I had planned to photograph was the nearby Ballabhpur Wildlife Sanctuary. I had *imagined* this place as a wild Indian jungle, complete with elephants, tigers, and towering virgin rain forests. What I discovered a short bicycle ride from my lodgings, however, was more like a desultory petting zoo, featuring insipid interpretive signage, cartoony fiberglass figures of animals that no longer lived in the area, and a couple of dubious looking young men who attempted to shake me down for money to watch over my

bicycle. The surrounding reserve turned out to be a swath of land that had been overgrazed and stripped of its vegetation by local farmers many decades ago, then replanted sometime in the 1960's by the state government. This "forest" was unimpressive by any measure, and the only wildlife in evidence was a herd of semi tame deer who gathered to be fed by their keepers, forming a mildly interesting spectacle for the occasional Bengali tourist. This was not what I had traveled halfway around the world to photograph!

Another idea I discussed with my residency hosts was to photograph the many abandoned homes around Santiniketan and Bolpur. This concept seemed a logical extension of my photographic documentation of my grandfather's abandoned home in Howrah. The Bolpur region's relatively recent status as a tourist destination often inspired wealthy Kolkatans to purchase second homes in the area, which they used only infrequently, and sometimes left abandoned when they lost interest or couldn't sustain the finances necessary to maintain their investments. Some of these homes were left to rot, while others were eventually occupied by Adivasi (indigenous tribal) squatters. I spent a couple of days scouting these locations and making digital images of the abandoned homes, but my curiosity was more piqued by the Adivasi "interlopers" than the decrepit structures themselves. Himadri and Manoj told me that these "squatters" in a sense weren't trespassing. Instead, we were trespassing on their ancestral lands. These were the descendants of the original inhabitants of this region, and the town had grown around their ancient settlements. I soon noticed the presence of small enclaves of Adivasi settlements that existed within the confines of the otherwise "modern" Bengali townscape of Bolpur. The people in these areas wore different clothes, hairstyles, and lived in mud and thatch houses, rather than the elaborate brick and plaster bungalows favored by the town's status conscious middle-class residents. On repeated inquiries, my guides from Studio Goppo discouraged me from wandering and photographing in these communities, alluding to the locals' occasional hostility to camera toting "tourists"- understandable, given the area's popularity as a regional tourist destination. On further investigation, I learned that the Bolpur region was surrounded by tiny rural villages, some of them Adivasi, and others simply rural Bengali farm communities, where people lived in traditional mud and thatch houses, and practiced a collective, subsistence agrarian lifestyle. These outlying communities were not often visited by outsiders, and therefore, might not be quite so jaded by a visiting photographer. Finally, this was something I could work with.

Meanwhile, while I explored my new surroundings, and tried to identify a process and subject upon which to focus my attention, I also got started in the Studio Goppo photo lab with another project. My journey to India did not begin in Santiniketan. My flight landed at the nearest international airport of Kolkata. This megalopolis of 15 million people is familiar to me from several previous trips, as well as being my ancestral homeland, the place of my father's birth, and site of my paternal grandparents' semi abandoned house in the neighboring municipality of Howrah. I have previously completed an extensive body of work on this semi abandoned house and my family's history there, entitled *46 Lahiri Lane.* To acclimatize myself to India's culture and climate, revisit my ancestral home, and continue to pursue my customary artistic practice of urban street photography, I allowed myself a three weeks stay in Kolkata before my scheduled artist residency at Studio Goppo. This buffer proved prescient, because seated on the Mumbai to Kolkata leg of my flight next to a woman with no mask and a nasty cough, I contracted Covid 19, falling ill before I even had a chance to recover from jet lag. I found myself confined to my room in a historic old Kolkata haveli turned Airbnb for ten days before I was well enough to

explore the city once again. Fortunately, my hosts had already been through this all before, and kindly provided me with medicine and nourishing, delicious traditional Bengali food as I slowly recovered.

Once I was finally able to venture out, the weather proved extremely uncooperative for street photography. I had planned my trip to coincide with the cool, fresh weather that comes after the steamy summer monsoon season. Unfortunately, this year, the monsoon arrived and left months behind schedule, leaving me to negotiate torrential rains as I attempted to engage in my photography practice. Weakened by covid and hampered by bad weather, I was nevertheless able to amass an interesting new body of street photography images. Perhaps the most compelling of these was a series of photographs I made during a particularly heavy storm. Wandering far from my lodgings, I soon found myself, along with hundreds of Kolkatans, wading nearly hip deep in the filthy flood water that had suddenly inundated the streets. I was utterly transfixed by the spectacle of a city carrying on, as water rose above the elevated doorways on the street, entering homes and businesses, and washing over the formerly bustling stalls of the street vendors. Warily protecting my camera with plastic bags and an umbrella, I was able to capture the mood of the city's resilient residents as they weathered this catastrophe with smiles and good humor, attempting to go about their daily business through their newly aquatic environment as if nothing unusual was happening. It was a small selection of photographs from that day that I chose to print in the recalcitrant process of tricolor gum bichromate.

I have tried printing gum bichromates before, even having some success teaching the process in my alternative photography classes but have never truly mastered the technique. Once I realized that Arpan Mukherjee was an expert in this process, I hoped to take advantage of his knowledge to improve my own level of success with the method. Even with Arpan's guidance, however, I ran into obstacles. Once I decided to pursue this project, it turned out that the promised large format digital printer necessary to create the RGB channel color separation negatives needed to make tri color gum bichromate prints was no longer available for my use. The nearest suitable facility was back in Kolkata, 161 kilometers away. I therefore had to email my digital files to Arpan, who had them printed in Kolkata and couriered back to Santiniketan. Once I had my negatives three days later, I realized that Arpan's work in the medium was of abstract imagery that did not depend on accurate color reproduction, while my photorealistic narrative images demanded a more objective rendering. I realized that I'd be essentially alone in creating the quality of prints that I had envisioned. Gum bichromate printing is by nature an extremely slow and laborious process, exponentially more so when attempting to produce accurate tricolor separation prints. Each image needs to be printed in three color layers, perfectly balanced and aligned to reproduce an accurately color balanced print. The slightest variation in the color/chemical mix, coating technique, exposure time, development technique, and even the ambient humidity creates huge variations in the outcome of the print. The process needs to be meticulously controlled in every aspect of the procedure. I won't describe herein all the endless trial and error experimentation I went through to create this small series of 8 images, but after an entire month of effort, I only have a handful of moderately successful prints to show. Although I'm not fully satisfied with my progress in this medium, I did vastly improve my skills, and feel that when I once again attempt this process, I'll be able to achieve my goal of creating beautiful, rich, and properly color balanced prints using nothing more than watercolor paper and pigments, gum Arabic, and potassium dichromate solution as my raw materials. For future trials of gum

printing, I'll definitely take the advice published in *Gum Printing: A Step-by-Step Manual, Highlighting Artists and Their Creative Practice (Contemporary Practices in Alternative Process Photography) 1st Edition,* by Christina Anderson, which suggests creating a measured mixture of pigment, gum and dichromate in bulk, using an entire tube of watercolor paint, rather than the traditional method of portioning out the mix in minute quantities as needed for each print. Anderson's method, while using far more materials initially, has the advantage of consistency and repeatability, which is the factor that continued to elude me in my efforts to make successful gum prints.

Meanwhile, the pages of the calendar were slowly turning, and I realized that I was running out of time to accomplish my main goal of learning an entirely new (to me) photographic process. For a suitable subject matter, I finally settled upon documenting the rural farming villages that I'd been hearing about. For my photographic method, I settled on the previously mentioned method of Calotype photography and salted paper printing. While the Calotype was one of the very oldest methods of photography, its use in global practice was quickly superseded by more efficient methods. At the time, most people preferred the commercially more viable contemporaneous method the Daguerreotype, invented in 1839 by Frenchman Louis Daguerre. The Daguerreotype had several advantages that secured its early supremacy in the new world of photography. While the Calotype could be "grainy" or hazy in appearance due to the use of a semitransparent paper negative substrate, the Daguerreotype, printed on polished metal in microscopic vaporous silver mercury amalgamate, appeared almost magically sharp and clear, as if one were looking at the very spiritual essence of its subject. Daguerre himself was a bit of a showman, and a shrewd businessman. As a result, he effectively marketed and promoted his invention as a commercially viable method of photography for a burgeoning middle-class population who wanted to show off their new status and wealth by having portraits taken. The calotype's inventor, Henry Talbot Fox, by contrast was a landed aristocrat, motivated more by intellectual and artistic achievement and historical renown, rather than profit. He was much slower to bring his invention to market, and subsequently imposed such restrictive patents on his method of photography that it was prohibitively expensive for would be calotypists to follow in his footsteps. By the time all the legal problems had been untangled, the much quicker, sharper, and maybe more importantly, freely available wet plate collodion method had already superseded the use of both daguerreotype and the calotype in most of the developed world. Notably, however, because of its remote location and tropical weather, both of which made sourcing and handling the materials needed to produce wet plate collodion photography too difficult, the use of the calotype method persisted in India well into the late 19th century, decades after photographers in the rest of the world had consigned it to the pages of history. I chose this process for my project specifically for the significance of its historical use in India, as well as the fact that it's eminently portable, and more practical for my purposes than its successor, the wet plate collodion process. Now, as in the mid 1800's, calotypes suit the Indian environment, and perhaps more importantly for my own purposes, fit my preferred personal working methods of wandering, discovery, and photography. It's possible to prepare the calotype paper "film" days or weeks before use. The resulting sensitized paper "film" is used dry- and does not need to be processed on site with volatile chemistry, as would be necessary with the more popular wet plate collodion process. This task is left until the day is done, or days later once the photographer can return to the sanctuary of the darkroom.

Once I had begun my work with the Calotype/Salted Paper printing process, I again experienced another deviation from my original plan. The important Hindu holiday of Durga Puja was on the horizon. Despite my desire to focus on my new project idea, my Studio Goppo hosts, Arpan and Shreya, encouraged me to travel back to Kolkata so I could experience this holiday for myself in the buzzing metropolis of Kolkata, where the festivities would be the most spectacular. Since this holiday occurs in early October, when I'm normally in the thick of teaching fall semester, I realized that this would be my only opportunity to witness this spectacle for many years. Arpan booked me a train ticket, and I soon found myself back in the big city, amidst one of the most amazing spectacles I've ever witnessed. Crowds thronged every street, everyone dressed in their festival best. Every neighborhood and civic organization had pooled every rupee they could gather ,to creat extravagant displays and effigies honoring the Goddess Durga. During this time, I wandered the city in wonder with my camera, documenting the amazing displays of Durga Puja pandals, as well as the raucous ceremonies where the elaborate likenesses of the Goddess Durga are immersed in the Hooghly River. The thousands of digital images I made of this event should provide the material for a separate exhibition of images once I can make the time to edit and print them. On my return a few days later to Studio Goppo, I continued exploring the nearby villages, making calotype images of the Kutchi houses, and printing them as salted paper prints, as described in the previous section of this report.

Objectives of the original proposal (if any) that were not accomplished:
While my sabbatical work in India presented unique opportunities to access fascinating subject matter, and my residency at Studio Goppo allowed me access to unique technical expertise, it also presented unforeseen technical and logistical challenges that affected my ability to carry out my planned creative research. As previously described, I was unable to access the campus of Vivsva-Bharathi University to photograph its historical structures, and its associated creative community. This ultimately turned out to be a fortuitous situation, because it led me to discover the more interesting subject matter of the Kutchi houses in the surrounding farming villages.

I did not have time to learn all the techniques mentioned in my sabbatical proposal, including wet plate collodion, and kalitypes, during my two-month residency at Studio Goppo. On retrospect, the expectation to meaningfully engage in more than two or three antiquarian photographic processes, with their long learning curves and slow process times, were overly ambitious goals for a two-month artist's residency. Furthermore, and perhaps more disappointing, the prints that I did manage to produce are not up to the standards I would expect of my work, or those expected by commercial photographic galleries where I hope to exhibit them. While better than my previous efforts in the medium, my tricolor gum bichromate prints vary too much in color balance and image density. I would consider these works valid research in process and methodology, and as such a valuable experience, yet they still fall short of my own aesthetic and technical standards.

The salted paper prints made from my calotype negatives taken of the Kutchi houses in the rural villages are more successful, but I was unable to print the entire series of images before my time was over at the residency. I was, however, happy to show a selection of these prints at Studio Goppo in a public exhibition. Unfortunately, after my return to the United States, I have recently observed changes in the appearance of the salted paper prints I made from my calotype negatives. During the 19th century, the bane of salted paper prints, and a big reason that

photographers moved on to other methods of printing, was their tendency to fade and to develop unsightly chemical stains. Many of my own salted paper prints are also suffering from the latter ailment. Contemporaneous research during the late 19th century suggested that the main culprits of these defects were in the inadequate fixation of the prints in a fresh solution of sodium thiosulfate, and the inadequate washing of the prints afterwards, where residual Sulphur compounds from the sodium thiosulfate fixing agent react with the environment to form stains (as discussed on p. 101-103 in *The Albumen & Salted Paper Book* by James M. Reilly, Light Impressions Corporation, 1980). Discussions with Arpan Mukherjee suggest that these stains may also emerge due to the alkaline Ph. of the paper that I used (Fabriano Artistico watercolor paper) and possibly residual silver chloride byproducts of the developing process. To prevent this undesirable effect, the salted paper printing process requires several intermediate washes during the processing steps to remove unwanted chemical byproducts of the developing process, and a through final wash after a complete fixing step in two baths of freshly mixed Sodium Thiosulfate. These intermediate washing steps require the use of distilled water to avoid unwanted chemical reactions with impurities in the water and the photographic chemicals used in the print emulsion. The time that I was working at Studio Goppo coincided with an important Hindu holiday season, encompassing Durga Puja and several festivals soon afterwards. During these festivities most of the retailers in the area were closed for many days, rendering the simple commodity of distilled water unobtainable. As a result, I was forced to conserve this now precious resource during the most crucial phase of my work in the photo lab. While the residency had promised access to adequate chemistry for my experimentation, previous artists in residence had been content to produce a limited number of works as a proof of concept. Perhaps the residency program wasn't expecting me to embark on such an ambitions scope of work in my creative project. A lack of basic chemical supplies such as Silver Nitrate, Gold Chloride (used for toner) as well as the shortage of distilled water interrupted my work several times and negatively affected the quality and quantity of my creative output. While the prints that I did create are aesthetically beautiful, their lack of archival stability renders them useless for exhibition and sale in a commercial gallery, whose collectors would demand technically perfect and archivally stable prints. To realize my goals of exhibiting this work more widely, I will most likely have to reprint the entire series and process the prints with meticulous adherence to correct processing standards.

Anticipated outcomes for the near term:

During the summer 2023 I plan to produce a final portfolio of salted paper prints from the original Calotype paper negatives of the Bengali Kutcha houses that I made during my residency at Studio Goppo. Producing these images as salted paper prints would adhere to the historical photographic practices used in the late 19th century. Most of the images I originally printed at Studio Goppo will need to be reprinted due to the unfortunate staining effect previously described. I have also made high-resolution digital scans of the original calotype negatives. I plan to use these scans to make larger digital internegatives and produce enlarged versions of this series for gallery exhibitions. Since the original negatives are 10x12", it will be possible to make 2x enlargements of these images to produce 20x24" salt prints from the digital internegatives. This is the largest size analog print I can make with the current setup of the darkroom in Conley Arts Building, but I will also explore alternative methods of production (using the UV plate burner in CA260) that may allow the output of 30x40" prints. While these larger prints would

not have been possible in the 19th century, they are often de rigueur in contemporary gallery spaces due to their increased visual impact on large gallery walls. RSCA funding would allow me to work at this larger size and help with the associated costs for mounting, framing, and transporting larger works. Once the production phase of this project progresses to the point where I have a portfolio of finished works to represent its potential, I'll research and solicit current contemporary photography galleries, academic galleries, and other exhibition spaces for opportunities to exhibit this work. There should be, at minimum, the opportunity to exhibit at Fresno State's Conley Art Gallery for a local and student audience, but I believe that this unique subject matter and use of the Calotype process will also attract the attention of additional exhibition venues.

This work is significant, not only for its unique historic subject matter documenting a disappearing vernacular architectural style in rural India, but also for its use of the Calotype and salted paper print processes. While the Calotype process is one of the very earliest photographic processes, it was also a very short-lived technique in historical practice, due to its incredibly slow and laborious workflow. As a result, while it's often revisited by contemporary photographic artists for occasional experimentation, very few individuals practice this method of photography as a primary means of producing new creative work. Many workers in alternative process photography gravitate to the much faster and currently trendy wet plate collodion technique, bypassing the earlier method of paper negative photography. Artists who have completed a significant body of contemporary Calotypes are much less common. As a result, *Kutcha Houses of Rural West Bengal* should attract significant traction in the alternative process photo world and its associated gallery scene. I believe there is also potential here for exhibitions and a presentation at the Society of Photographic Education National Conference next March 2024.

I photographed several smaller photo "stories" with my digital camera, as well as the *Kutcha Houses* calotype series. In addition to the street photographs in Kolkata, photos of the abandoned vacation homes in Bolpur, and the documentation of Durga Puja in Kolkata, near the end of my stay in Santiniketan, despite my host's misgivings, I explored a nearby Adivasi enclave on my own. Maybe because I was obviously a foreigner, and not a tourist from Kolkata, my presence there was tolerated, and in many instances obviously welcomed. This settlement was an easy walk from my lodgings at Studio Goppo. In the evening, after a long day working in the darkroom, I would often take a stroll with my digital camera, capturing the beautiful golden evening light, and making photographs of the traditional mud and thatch houses, the children playing in the dirt streets, and the livestock wandering freely. Since my guides felt uncomfortable accompanying me in this nearby Adivasi settlement, and lacking a common language, I couldn't speak with the residents. Nevertheless, nobody objected to my photography, and I was often greeted with smiles and waves. I achieved consent to make pictures with the universal sign language, pointing to my camera, then my subject, smiling and gesturing. This method has served me well in years of travels in India and elsewhere. A smile and a joyful attitude communicate good will regardless of the local language. The children seemed glad to see me, and sometimes kicked a ball my way, inviting me to join in their games, while parents smiled and looked on curiously from the shade of their neatly swept courtyards. Some of these idyllic scenes are amongst my most beautiful photographs from the trip, and those evenings amongst my fondest memories. I plan to include some of these photographs in exhibitions of my Kutcha house series, or perhaps to develop a separate body of work with these images.

In addition to the exhibition and presentation potential of the *Kutcha Houses of Rural West Bengal*, the further development of this body of work will provide considerable additional knowledge and practice in alternative process photographic methods that I can transmit to my students. I have enjoyed teaching a couple of iterations of the special topics class I designed, "Art109T Alternative Process Photography." I am scheduled to teach this class again in fall 2023. This course is a survey of 19th century photographic printing techniques hybridized with 21st century digital negative production methods. I'm hoping to progress this into a regular course offering, possibly with a two-part series of intro and advanced, as well as adding a graduate component for students in our MA and the MFA program currently under development. My recent experience in calotype photography, salted paper printing, and gum bichromate printing will allow me to add these components in greater depth to the course.