

Alfred University professor to bring home new knowledge of Japanese papermaking

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Rie Hachiyanagi, assistant professor of fine arts at AU, has been awarded a Summer Research Grant to travel to Japan in order to bring back information on Japanese papermaking. In the mid 1970s Timothy Barrett received a Fulbright scholarship to become the first westerner to study Japanese papermaking in Japan. He went on to publish the first English-written book on the subject and was a mentor to Hachiyanagi while she studied at the University of Iowa in the mid-1990s. Inspired during her time spent with Barrett, Hachiyanagi decided to specialize in Japanese papermaking. She also had an advantage that most papermakers in the West lack: she is fluent in Japanese as well as English. Until now the bulk of what the western world knows about Japanese papermaking has been based on oral knowledge as most western artists do not know Japanese, Hachiyanagi explained. As the process of Japanese papermaking was passed down, something was missing. Hachiyanagi believes that with her research she will be able to broaden the knowledge of those in her field by giving a history to the practice of papermaking. Because of the lopsided approach to the topic, Hachiyanagi maintains there is a great deficit in the knowledge of the history of papermaking. Those who were asked for information were helpful in providing the processes used in the current day but did not pass on much of the history of papermaking. Hachiyanagi's research this summer will provide the basis for her larger overall project in which she will be "editing and translating the Japanese-written information as the first English-written book of the kind." Hachiyanagi began her research last summer with the aid of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, and while she made a solid beginning for her work, she did not have enough time in Japan to realize her goals. This summer Hachiyanagi will travel to Japan once again to continue her research at several libraries in Tokyo and Kyoto. Armed with her knowledge of Japanese, Hachiyanagi hopes to knock down the language barrier that has prevented so many in her field from understanding the history of their art.