

THE GREAT IMMENSITY

RESEARCH ASSISTANT POSITION FALL 2009 – SPRING 2010

The Princeton Environmental Institute, The Princeton Atelier and The Civilians (a New York-based theater company) are seeking to retain two (2) qualified research assistants to support visiting theater artists, Michael Freidman and Steven Cosson from The Civilians, during the 2009-2010 academic year as they collaborate to develop a new play with music entitled THE GREAT IMMENSITY. (See attached project description). To be eligible, applicants must be enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student at Princeton for the 2009-2010 academic year. Students from all disciplines are encouraged to apply though candidates must have interest in environmental issues.

Responsibilities will include broad research in a number of fields to inform an artistic response to environmental/climate change.

- Areas of research may include natural sciences, geography, history, arts and music or other directions depending on the development of the project.
- Roughly 10 hours per week
- Will involve some transcribing work. Excellent typing skills an asset.
- Compensation: tbd

To apply: Interested students should prepare a written statement (no more than two pages in length) that describes their interest and exposure to environmental issues and themes through coursework and practical experience and their ability to contribute to research supporting the development of a play. The written statement should be sent along with a current resume and University transcript to the attention of Marion Friedman marion@thecivilians.org. The deadline for receipt of applications: May 5th, 2009.

Applications will be reviewed by the artists and representatives of PEI and the Lewis Center. Interviews with finalists will be held on May 11th.

THE CIVILIANS: A New York based company; The Civilians is dedicated to creating original work from creative investigations into real life, combining documentary and artistic methods. All of the work is created from extensive, outward-looking research; it is highly collaborative; it seeks to connect the personal to larger social/political phenomena; and it is both formally experimental and broadly accessible. The Civilians is presently supporting the creation and development of THE GREAT IMMENSITY.

THE GREAT IMMENSITY, by Steve Cosson and Michael Friedman, is a theater project created from research and interviews about our attempts to understand climate and environmental change. The work will bridge scientific inquiry with artistic vision to create a performance that delves into the interconnections between natural and human systems. It will comprehend and respond to these changes. In encouraging audiences to think beyond their normal capabilities and grasp a larger picture, THE GREAT IMMENSITY will give them an opportunity to collectively grapple with the scope and complexity of climate change as well as to mourn what we have already lost. The play is conceived as a catalyst for further creative thought and action. In its form, content and ultimately in its production, the show facilitates dialogue between multiple perspectives on environmental issues: scientists, artists and the public.

The text, music and imagery of the show are based on documentary material gathered during trips by Cosson, Friedman and filmmaker David Ford to two geographically remote locations where environmental change is acutely present. Barro Colorado Island (BCI) is restricted for use by scientists conducting field research at the Smithsonian Tropical Institute, much of which relates to the accelerating deforestation of tropical zones. The artists conducted interviews with the international community of scientists there, including botanists, paleontologists, and primatologists, asking about their observations of

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change and their imaginings of the future and recording their daily tasks ranging from monkey observations to leaf litter collection. Churchill is a small town in arctic Canada where climate change is affecting the two prime aspects of the economy: shipping and polar bear tourism. Churchill is the Western hemisphere's only arctic port and significant capital is banking on the possibility of the arctic shipping season extending, while tourism will be greatly affected by the rapidly diminishing polar bear population. At this site, the artists interviewed a range of people including polar bear guides, port workers, the town's first indigenous mayor and scientists at the Northern Climate Research Center. The interviews and observations at both locations revealed empirical facts as well as deeply personal beliefs about our relationship to the world. The scientists discuss their work, but also talk about their visions of the future, the fate of the human world and the existence of God.

PRINCETON RESIDENCY: In order to fully develop THE GREAT IMMENSITY in an interdisciplinary environment, The Civilians is partnering with Princeton University's Environmental Institute and the Princeton Atelier. During the Fall of 2009, Friedman and Cosson will be in residence on campus conducting further research, interviewing faculty and building relationships with students. They will be completing a first draft of the full-length work. In spring 2010, Friedman and Cosson will co-teach an Atelier seminar involving students from a variety of disciplines and departments to help develop the work, culminating in a workshop at the Berlind Theatre. Details regarding the spring 2010 Atelier course will be available in the fall 2009. Enrollment will be by application.

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