On his creative process, artist Pablo Picasso once said: “Inspiration exists, but it has to find us working.” This work may take the form of painting and drawing – as it did for Picasso, or researching provenance and examining brushstrokes as it did for me while undertaking my internship at Christie’s earlier this year. To be inspired in such a profound way on a daily basis is rare, and an experience not easily forgotten.

As the recipient of the 2015 University of Sydney Christie’s London Scholarship, I was given the opportunity to travel to London and complete an internship in the Impressionist and Modern Art department at Christie’s. As one of the world’s leading auction houses, this was a privilege and indeed an honour.

The prestigious Impressionist and Modern Art department, located on King Street offers paintings, sculptures and works on paper by the leading artists of the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. To my delight I was assigned to the Works on Paper sales team within the department. Often drafts, sketches, experiments or works in progress, Works on Paper have an intrinsically charming quality about them. Offering a rare glimpse into the inner workings of an artist, how they approach and plan their work, Works on Paper are – to me – akin to looking into the soul of an artist.

A considerable aspect of my role as graduate intern was assisting the specialists in researching property for bibliography, provenance and exhibition history. This research led me to some of London’s most exclusive art libraries and archives, including the breathtakingly beautiful National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Completing this comprehensive research involved sourcing rare documents from exhibition catalogues to photographs, to confirm authenticity. Tracing the history and lineage of works of art in such a manner was as pleasurable as it was enlightening.
Throughout my internship I accompanied the specialists to ‘hilling’ sessions, which are when the works are catalogued and condition reports are written. Observing the specialists catalogue works for auction was an extraordinary experience and due to the generous consideration of my mentors, I was educated through each step of the process. In these sessions I was able to observe and examine works of art first-hand. To take in the brightly-hued blossoms emanating from a Marc Chagall watercolour, to follow the lines and curvatures of a Pablo Picasso drawing – to feel their presence, their aura. These are the kind of experiences that students of art history can only dream about.

What the Christie’s Scholarship offers is more than a work placement, it offers the rare opportunity to enter an otherwise unattainable world, exposure to the world’s leading art specialists and the chance to view masterpieces first-hand. I would like to extend my extreme gratitude to both the Power Institute and the University of Sydney, without which I would not have had the opportunity to further my professional development and experience the profoundly inspiring world that is Christie’s.