I would like to begin this report by thanking and acknowledging UW-Platteville for the opportunity to take a sabbatical leave for one semester during the 2010-2011 academic year. The time was used as productively as possible for the purpose of observation, making drawings, and for further visual exploration of life in the pristine southern Yucatan coast. This region is a sparsely populated, very diverse and unique environment that is rapidly changing due to development, modernization and tourism. The purpose of the sabbatical period encompassed making artworks on paper, specifically with pastel media, of what I observed in this area.

**Artistic Traditions**

I had two historic models to examine: Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent. Both artists worked on paper with watercolor media, traveled to exotic locations, and both spent some time in the tropics. Homer completed watercolors from subject matter he found in the Bahamas, Cuba, and Florida. Sargent traveled to Florida and completed a few watercolor landscapes there. Having found some minimal written material on their precise working methods, I presumed that most of their works were started and finished on location. All of their working locations are not far from the Tropic of Cancer and the seashore; therefore, in theory both artists would face the same relative conditions I would. The materials they had to work with included a small range of fairly stable pigments for their watercolors and manufactured paper bound into tablets that would have used natural materials for sizing. I would think they faced the same problems that I would encounter during my time in a similar environment. Also, these gentlemen would have had more primitive working environments than would be available to me. According to monograph information about both artists, each stayed only several weeks at a time in a tropical location. If this were true, they would most likely not have faced similar weather conditions. However, if they spent more time in the tropics, they might have experienced strong storms and done so without the aid of modern weather forecasting. If both artists were able to accomplish so many works on paper I should be able to as well. So, with this in mind, I set forth with a steel flat file full of watercolor paper, drawing paper, a custom-made aluminum easel that stands upright and folds into a tabletop, plenty of watercolors, pastels and in case I needed to renew my stock of paints or pastels, an array of tools and pigments to make new working supplies.
The Location

The pueblo or town I resided is a small fishing village called Xcalak at the very southern end of the Yucatan coast. I was told the Mayan name refers to the ‘two cuts’ in the ocean waves in front of town, which is actually the two 50-meter breaks in the Mesoamerican Reef that spans the entire Yucatan Caribbean coast and Belize. These reef breaks allow access to the open ocean while the remainder of the reef in this part of the Yucatan rises to sea level. Boats can pass into open ocean only through these two openings. Between the reef and beach, the maximum water depth is nine feet and the average distance from shore to the reef is a little less than a half-mile. Thousands of coral heads of various sizes dot the length of the inshore environment between the reef and the beach. The coral attracts many different species of fish and marine invertebrates. Therefore, in 2003 the Mexican government established the area as a national marine park. This is a remote peninsula surrounded by the Caribbean to the east and The Bay of Chetumal, known as a manatee refuge, to the west. The small town of Xcalak consists of some 150 Mexican residents and about 60 American and Canadian expats. Most of the “Gringos” are either retirees who built winter homes on the Caribbean coast or live a simpler year-round life with a hotel or restaurant business that caters to the handful of tourists that wander further south from the luxury of the Cancun hotel strip and the Riviera Maya south of Cancun. Most of the Mexican residents make a meager living from the sea as lobster fishermen. Some work in the few hotels and restaurants, while others are local fishing or diving guides or captain boats for hire. Another handful of citizens find work as belladors or night watchmen for homeowners with vacant houses along the coast. This is what I did to be able to have a house to live in during my stay.

To add more perspective on this location, Xcalak is a seven-hour drive south of Cancun by car or bus. Off of the main highway, which spans the Caribbean coast, one paved road and one pothole-filled beach road reaches south to this little village. Chetumal, the capital of the state of Quintana Roo borders Belize to the south on the Rio Hondo River and is relatively close as the crow flies. However, driving to Chetumal requires a 125mi trip up the Costa Maya peninsula and around Chetumal Bay. The city of Chetumal has large grocery stores, a shopping mall, hospitals and many other modern services. It is possible to fly in to Chetumal but the extra cost from Cancun is prohibitive and often requires a layover of one night in Mexico City. One bus leaves Chetumal each day that services Xcalak and Mahahual, another small town forty-five miles north on the Costa Maya coastline. Mahahual has a cruise ship pier but very limited services due to devastation from Hurricane Dean in 2007. The Costa Maya peninsula, east of Chetumal Bay consists of 2100 square miles of very sparsely inhabited mangrove swamp and chit palm jungle. The area is bound by the Sian K’an Biosphere and Bahia Espiritu Santo to the north and Ambergris Caye, Belize to the south. Ambergris Caye is the actual southern fingertip of the Costa Maya peninsula. The peninsula border between Mexico and Ambergris Caye is a small outflow of saltwater called Boca Bacalar Chico, literally “Little mouth of Bacalar” connecting the Bay of Chetumal to the Caribbean Sea. If you are in a small boat on Boca Bacalar Chico, at some point you can touch the mangrove
branches of Mexico on the north side and the mangrove branches of Belize on the south of the river.

Wildlife in the Costa Maya peninsula abounds. Manatees are sometimes seen at Boca Bacalar Chico and on rare occasions, near the reef just off the coast. Peccary and deer thrive on the peninsula so jaguars and other smaller jungle cats such as ocelots and margays are occasionally seen. Outside the barrier reef of the Caribbean, whale sharks seasonally migrate along the coast. On the paved road or beach road, you might encounter toucans or boa constrictors. During the day in the bay and at night along the coast, American crocodiles of various sizes are numerous since they remain a protected species throughout Mexico. I had my fair share of crocodile encounters during my stay in Costa Maya. Thankfully, each ended well with crocodiles going in one direction and me in another.

Most of the residents along the coast partake in the seasonal harvesting of spiny lobsters and queen conch. All of the fishing is done by hand. The fishermen collect conch during a limited season by diving down inside the reef with a mask, snorkel and simply picking them up by hand. For the spiny lobster, the fishermen use a meter-long stick with a large hook on one end. This tool allows them to reach into the many holes in the coral heads and ‘hook’ into any lobsters they find. Nets are illegal to use within the marine park but locals can subsistence fish with rod/reel but most prefer spear guns. One might think this is a sizable threat to the ecosystem; however, most of the inhabitants understand the fragility of the resource and take only what they require. On the other hand, I did witness some limited poaching and mentioned it to friends. They replied that it does occur from time to time and there is very little that can be done in such a small community.

Unfortunately, an invasive species has made its way south from the US and is a larger problem for the reef ecosystem. In 1993, Hurricane Andrew destroyed an aquarium in Homestead FL and six Indo-Pacific lionfish were released into the sea. Since then, accidental and intentional releases from home aquariums in the US have added to the lionfish breeding population, which has spread throughout the Caribbean. The lionfish is threatening the natural species in all Caribbean ecosystems, not just in the Yucatan. Lionfish have no natural predators in this part of the world, they will eat anything that moves by expanding its stomach thirty times its body size and is one species capable of spawning at a very young age. One of the newer activities to take part in is lionfish hunting with a pole spear or spear gun while snorkeling or diving. But lionfish must be handled with extreme care. Their dorsal spines contain a toxic venom that can cause severe chronic pain or in some cases, necrosis if a spine pierces the skin. During my stay in Xcalak, I served on a park committee to codify rules for a lionfish-spearing tournament. Almost nine hundred lionfish were brought to the park office in the week the event took place. This event had a rather small impact on the lionfish population; however, the Mexican government has begun demonstrating to the public that lionfish, if handled properly, can be a readily available food source that should be exploited as much as possible.

Another threat to the area is the drug transport trade. The Mexican government’s priority in the region is to stop drugs and guns from passing through the state. An active
military presence is in place on the paved roads. Any vehicle trip into or out of Costa Maya requires a military checkpoint stop for a five-minute vehicle search. Also, the Mexican navy maintains a small base at the border of the Costa Maya peninsula and actively searches for drug-running fast boats that are transporting contraband from Central America to the Bahamas and the US. Often a drug-running boat that passes by offshore may throw small, sealed packets of drugs overboard. The drugs are usually packed in Styrofoam containers that eventually float onto the beach so that the military will have to make a thorough search along the entire shore to find each one. Gringos call this the “Mexican Lottery” as some locals do find a *paquete* or small container of drugs, which usually contains cocaine. They may be able to sell the drugs to buyers in Chetumal or other known areas and in turn, get a sizable profit for minimal amount of work. At times, townspeople hear of drugs washing up on the beach. When this happens, some residents are so intent on finding a *paquete* that they will be out early and late scouring the shore instead of working and they may even have their small children searching with them instead of having them attend school. Also, since the military is for the most part its own unregulated force that the government directs or controls only to a point, many locals speculate that the military is supporting itself through the collection and sale of illegal substances across the state. Most locals see the influence of the drug trade as an unfortunate downturn in society overall. In the villages, drug use is rare. On the other hand, alcohol abuse is a very visible problem.

Since the standard of living is much lower and incomes more tenuous in these remote areas than in the cities, petty theft is an issue that all residents and visitors in the region, whether Mexican or not, must face and prepare for. Some Mexican locals view the problem this way: the ‘wealthy’ gringo who can afford to build a vacation home here must have enough money to overcome any losses that he or she may incur. Fortunately, the largest majority of locals would never lower their ethical standards to steal from anyone else. This is often because of the influence of religion. Mayan Catholicism, once the only modern religious movement in the Costa Maya has for all purposes been replaced with Pentecostalism, Mormonism and other independent Protestant groups. The Seventh Day Advent Church currently has had a major influence on smaller communities like Xcalak in the region. I found many locals who never drank alcoholic beverages, had an excellent work ethic, and maintained tight family bonds due to their adherence of religious principles.

**Living Arrangements**

The Costa Maya peninsula is actually a low and very wide barrier dune that separates the lagoons and mangrove swamps and Chetumal Bay from the ocean. Located about a mile north of town, the concrete house I maintained faced the edge of the property that was bound by the dusty beach road to the east and the Caribbean shoreline 60 feet beyond. At this latitude offshore breezes cool the tropical heat some and are usually a barrier against biting insects that come from brackish water to the west. If the wind drops during the night or low light hours, the *chiquistas*, or microscopic biting flies
swarm. Window screens are useless and the only recourse is to shut up the house and plug in a walnut-sized device called a Raidolito into a wall socket (requiring electricity of course). The plastic and metal unit heats an inch-long paper biscuit that is inserted inside, which releases a toxic-smelling chemical (note the emphasis on “Raid” in the name) into the air. Also, I would have to take a match to several mosquito coils throughout the house. Mosquito coils are ubiquitously sold in stores throughout the Yucatan and are coiled rings of dried paste that produce the same basic results for mosquitoes. Mosquitoes there are smaller, numerous and not as fragile as what we are accustomed to in the US. Window screens and lit mosquito coils that produce smoke must be kept in good condition to keep them out of the house. Mosquito times usually begin one hour before sundown and end one hour after sunrise but that varies on location and the strength of the sea breeze. This means that daily outside activities are usually restricted to take place within that timeframe unless an emergency arises. Mosquitoes do present a problem in this region due to the numerous areas of standing fresh water or Las Aguadas in the mangrove swamps several hundred yards west of the seashore. Malaria has never been a problem in Costa Maya since the mosquito genus Anopheles is not common. However, the mosquito genus Aedes is ubiquitous in the region and can transmit Flaviviruses such as Dengue Fever, Yellow Fever, or West Nile to humans and heartworm viruses to dogs.

It is rather difficult to live in the region without at least one good, faithful watchdog on the property. I ended up with two primary watchdogs and other times I had three. Because petty burglary can be a problem along the beach road, beyond keeping doors locked at night, habituating dogs to the property is the best deterrent. A friend put it very precisely when he said, “Yucatan watchdogs- you can’t live without ‘em but you can’t sleep with ‘em.” After a couple of months at a house on the beach road you begin to understand the specific meaning of barking heard in the night and sleep eventually comes more easily. Since there are a few other gringo residences, hotels and a few local families living up and down the beach road and each property has its own watchdogs, recognizing the dog and its location by its bark, the temperament or ferocity of the barking and whether the barking is heard to move are clues you accustom yourself to in order to determine whether you should get out of bed, put on shorts and sandals, grab a flashlight and go see what the fuss is about or roll over and go back to sleep. All that is needed to maintain dogs at a house is giving them regular vet care, adequate tick protection, good quality food, plenty of fresh water and a breezy sleeping place to deter mosquitoes. As a matter of fact, I began leaving food out for one extremely malnourished feral dog that lived on anything it could scrounge from the jungle and passed by the house everyday. After two months, “Itchy-Scratchy” had the run of the property and became a healthy alpha watchdog of the group.

**Remote Utilities**

In a remote location such as this, there is no public service for water and electricity. Any homeowner must invest in digging some sort of well and/or creating a water collection and holding cistern system. The house I took care of had a typical cistern
system without a well that kept non-potable water for household use. The system consisted of a deep pit underneath the house containing two 7ft wide by 8ft tall plastic tanks, called *tanacos* for water collection and storage. The flat concrete roof of the house sloped towards two downspouts that emptied rainwater into the tanks. From there, the water would be brought up into a smaller *tanaco* on an elevated concrete platform above the roof by an electrical pump. This *tanaco* would become the gravity-fed water tank as long as the plumbing and electricity worked properly and the cistern underneath the house had water.

Propane gas for cook stoves, ovens and water heaters came by delivery truck. The two propane companies in the region sent out small tank trucks on set schedules, once every three weeks. They would fill each small 20-kilo tank or large 500-kilo tanks for about one US dollar per kilo along the beach road until they ran out of propane to sell. If you did not make yourself aware of when they were due or you were not on the road with your tank waiting to wave them down, the gas truck drivers flew by in a cloud of dust. At one point I ran out of propane and had to heat pots and pans with a butane soldering torch, which lasted two weeks until I could flag down the next gas truck and fill the propane tanks.

Away from town, no electrical lines exist along the beach road so electricity must be made on the property. At other homes on the road this is usually accomplished with a large array of solar panels or a large wind generator or even both. The problem is that these units are quite expensive and must be on the outside of the house. If the house is left vacant for any length of time, the homeowner risks having the solar panels or wind turbine stolen. During my stay, I heard of an ex-pat that had a solar panel installation business near Mahahual who was accused of stealing solar panels from older homes and selling the same panels to unsuspecting customers having new homes built.

Making household electricity requires some sort of generating source, a group of deep cycle golf cart batteries linked together to store the generated electrical charge, and an inverter unit to convert the stored electricity from the direct current (DC) batteries to alternating current (AC) for the house. To have any electricity at all, the system must function well and be maintained properly. If the generating system breaks down or does not produce enough electricity for the house, a back-up source such as a gasoline-powered generator that looks like a small lawnmower motor connected to an electric motor on a small-wheeled cart needs to be on stand-by. To supplement electricity with a generator, you simply make sure the generator fill tank has gas, pull the cord on the gas motor, wait a minute or two, and plug the running generator cord and socket into the inverter, which immediately begins charging the batteries. While most ex-pat homeowners there choose passive solar panel arrays for electricity, the owner of the house I lived in chose to use a wind generator normally intended for a sailboat, which was inadequate for a house as the single generating source. That meant that even with a stiff wind of at least 28mph, the generator would only produce enough electricity to keep the batteries from going stone dead. That also meant that an additional generating source was required each day: the back up gasoline generator. Therefore, if I wanted to have electricity and light at all (and very dim 25 watt LED bulbs at that) after dark, I would need to operate the generator at least 4 hours each day. This required quite a bit of
gasoline. To keep the generator powered I had to have several extra portable gas tanks on hand. When gas ran low I would make a 120-mile roundtrip drive to purchase gas. I spent approximately $140.00USD worth of gasoline every three weeks. Keeping electricity going in the house was very time consuming and labor-intensive. When a generator had mechanical problems, I would have to borrow another generator from someone else along the coast, get it into the vehicle and back to the house. Then I would have to use a whole day to drive the problem generator to the repair shop in Chetumal, 2 ½ hours away. Just maintaining the electrical situation for the house became a sizable job on its own. That also meant that I had to stay at the house monitoring the charging system for a third of each working day available to me. Due to this unforeseen necessity, I did not have as many opportunities to take longer trips away from the house to the northern Yucatan coastline, as I would have liked. However, when it was not raining, the water-collecting flat roof became my open-air work studio. I was able to set up my portable easel there, mount my work to a homasote board, set all my art materials on a folding wooden table and start working. I had plenty of light and plenty of ventilation when I did not have any other time-consuming inconvenience, such as making long trips to buy gasoline, groceries or dealing with vehicle and generator mechanical issues.

**Storm Season**

In tropical latitudes of the Atlantic basin, the trade winds flow east to west. From June to December, disturbances in this wind current come from Africa and can develop into spinning storm systems that threaten the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic seaboard. Some have the time and conditions to strengthen into very powerful hurricanes that produce destructive winds and intense rains. In the early 1900’s, the city of Xcalak had some 100,000 residents and was a major coastal fishing port and exporting center for coconut products. Chetumal to the west across the bay was about the same size. In 1955, Hurricane Janet devastated both cities, causing terrible loss of life and devastation. Chetumal rebuilt as a metropolitan city, Xcalak did not.

Tropical storms have wind speeds of 39 to 74mph, while hurricane wind speeds begin at 75mph and are categorized as 1 through 5 depending on the force of the wind. The strongest winds are typically northeast of the center of the storm rotation, known as the storm’s ‘eye’. If the storm’s eye is north of you, the wind and rain will be from the north, then west, then south as the storm passes overhead and will have the least potential force within the storm. If the eye is to the south, it is more likely that your location will experience the strongest winds and rain. Also, a coastline storm surge can cause more damage than the wind or rain alone. Since I arrived at the house in June, my experiences with tropical storm systems began early with Tropical Storm Alex, which made landfall about 50 miles to the south. Winds were almost at Category 1 Hurricane force when it hit the coast. The location of the house on the coastline meant I might see some storm surge since the winds were pushing up the water near the coast to the north of the eye and doing the opposite to the south. Luckily, the seawater never made it to the beach road directly in front of the house. With each storm system nearby, I would have to board up
windows and doors. I only had enough plywood for three sides of the house, which meant that I would have to pay very close attention to where and how far away people said the eye would make landfall then I could start boarding up the sides of the house that would be most effected by wind and rain. Installing the plywood boards alone would take and entire day to accomplish and a whole other day to remove and store. In addition, the twelve to twenty-four hours I would spend barricaded inside while the storm churned overhead and the resulting necessary cleanup afterward required one to two days more. With each storm that arrived, I lost several days of working time. The house had poorly framed windows with wooden louvers that could be opened and closed. Framed screens covered each window. When the first storm hit, I had all my art supplies in a separate bedroom on the southern side of the house. I only had enough plywood to cover one end of the house and friends said that most of the rain and wind would come from the north so that’s the side I boarded up since I thought the north side would face most of the storms force. Once the strong wind and rain arrived, I saw that water was gushing in through any tiny space in windows in the south bedroom. It was as if a large water hose spraying saltwater was turned on outside and aimed right at the windows. That night, I did my best to cover everything with plastic bags but some necessary items did get wet. My vehicle was parked outside the house and still had the flat file full of paper sealed up in the back so as long as a tree did not fall on the vehicle or flying coconuts break windows, it could ride out the storm. Fifteen hours later I was able to assess the damage. Some pastels were rendered useless and some boxes of gums and glues for making more pastels and paints were destroyed by water that had come into the storeroom. I used a squeegee to remove a good two inches of standing water from the floor and as soon as possible I made the 125-mile drive to Chetumal to purchase silicone caulk and a caulking gun. Once I removed all the screens from the front and sides of the house I used four containers of caulk to seal up everything I could to keep water out. That helped tremendously for storms to come.

Since I spent the entire 2009 summer in relatively the same area without experiencing any tropical systems, I thought that tropical storms and hurricanes were always very rare events. I was wrong. In the summer and fall of 2010, I made it through TS Alex in June with 70mph winds, TS Karl in September both with 65mph winds, and TS Matthew in September with 70mph winds, Hurricane Paula in October with 105mph winds and Hurricane Richard in October with 100mph winds. I seriously doubt that Winslow Homer or John Singer Sargent ever dealt with weather like that while they worked in the tropics.

**Working Methods**

My expectations were that I would be able to drive the 4000 miles to the Costa Maya loaded down with my new portable easel, several boxes of pastels and watercolors, my steel flat file full of paper and simply draw away. That was something that had come fairly easy for me in the past.
One of the most important aspects I really did not thoroughly consider enough and prepare for was the effect of humidity and salt air on my art materials. As soon as I arrived, I noticed that some of the paper in the flat file began to yellow. For the first month, I kept the flat file in my vehicle with the windows sealed and ran the air conditioner frequently. This would remove most of the water vapor entering the vehicle when doors were opened. I purchased as many containers of moisture-soaking desiccant as I could find in Chetumal. Each week, I used up a quart-sized container of desiccant that I placed in the vehicle with the flat file. A friend who owns a home on the beach road was driving down from the states so I had him carry down a large box of giant zip-lock bags and a box of sealed silica moisture remover. I placed all of my paper into several of the zip-lock bags and added a container of silica desiccant in each bag. I sealed the bags and put them back into the flat file. I had high hopes of this working well. However over time, much of my watercolor paper still took on too much moisture and showed large rust-colored stains and spots, making the paper unusable. Exactly why this occurred still eludes me but I suspect the damage was caused by salt air eating away at the steel flat file. Even with the paper sealed inside the bags, the gum sizing on each sheet was most likely affected by rust from inside the cabinet.

This issue brings to light some interesting questions about the materials I had compared to what was available to Homer and Sargent. In their time papers were most likely machine-made and then coated by hand with a natural glue or gum sizing to inhibit the absorption of colors into the paper. They most likely purchased individual ‘quarter sheets’ measuring ten by fifteen inches and watercolor ‘blocks’ that consisted of several sheets of paper bound together with glued edges. Watercolor blocks are still available and widely used by watercolorists today. The watercolor paper I had on hand was, for the most part manufactured with the same methods aside from the sizing process that was done by hand. The most important difference is that the sizing used on modern watercolor papers has a synthetic base made from replicating the elasticity and durability of natural gums and glues but employing different chemical compounds that are manufactured in a lab. Could it be that this difference in materials led to my watercolor paper staining to this extent? I doubt it. From the notes of both Homer and Sargent, they did not stay long in any one place for an extended length of time. I doubt the paper they had with them was in the tropical environment long enough to result in any adverse effects from humidity and salt air.

Homer and Sargent also had to travel with a minimum of materials if they were moving from place to place. If they were making the works on location, they would face a multitude of complex problems. The most important is this: Light, shadow and color change very rapidly- so rapidly that working in a comparative similar size requires laying down almost vague abstractions to capture an ‘impression’ of the particulars mentioned above before the sun changes angles in the sky. Therefore, I strongly suspect that the work they did at each site was performed in small, quick notational washes that they would be able to refer to later once they were back in the studio at home. Another possible solution to the problem is that each artist might set up equipment at a particular location, work for thirty minutes to an hour, then stop and break down equipment to go to the next location to work on a different image. In effect, the artists may work on one
image at a specific location only for a short period during the day. Each artist might possibly require many days to produce one completed work from one location.

The most daunting problem I faced is how my own working methods have changed over time. I found great difficulty in setting up at a specific location and making any drawing work, even with a simplistic technique, that satisfied my own standards. No matter how long I worked, where I worked, or how I worked I was not happy with the results. It was not a matter of practice or skill. It came down to the fact that my work did not interest me or drive me to feel that I was successful enough to continue with those methods and be able to walk away with well-defined, well-composed drawings. In time, I began to use the unsuccessful drawings I made at specific locations as simple notations on general color and composition and see them as just that, simplistic notations for more complex development in later, larger and more specific formats. I could take my equipment up to the roof of the house, setup there and develop larger, more complex and better-developed works that I saw as relative successes. The watercolor notations became larger, more expanded drawings in pastel media. Watercolor requires more time and patience to be able to control areas that need to be dry before new areas of color are added next to or on top of the original washes. I also needed to spend time stretching and mounting watercolor paper. Therefore, I eventually found that by continuing to use soft pastels as the ultimate media for the larger works, I eliminated much of the downtime that watercolor media required. I could work the pastels right onto dry paper without any of the waiting that watercolor necessitates. This became my primary working method.

In past years, I experienced some success with smaller oil paintings on location. Prior to my time in the Costa Maya while I planned for the sabbatical project, I negated using oil media for working in this area since I assumed I would have more control and consequently, more success with drawing media. Oil painting also requires solvents that do not travel well and the works take much time to dry. What I discovered is that the heat and humidity of the Caribbean would have been a perfect environment for oil painting mediums. If I had produced works in oil media, I would not have had to worry about keeping paper dry and out of the elements. I also discovered that the solvents I would require were readily available at hardware stores in Chetumal. I only would have needed to bring a large number of pre-made painting supports with me to Mexico and if I could haul a heavy steel flat file full of paper 4000 miles, I very well could have brought enough painting supports instead.

I also had digital photographs that I took at many locations at specific times of the day. To be able to use the photos as working reference in addition to the drawing studies I had on hand, I purchased a Mexican color printer and paper card stock and frequently relied on the photo prints to help me accomplish the artwork. However, working with these new methods was more time-consuming than I preferred, although I was seeing much better results than with other methods more familiar to me. Consequently, due to the technical challenges and the working methods I chose, I did not complete as many ‘finished’ works as I planned to have before my sabbatical period was over.

After my sabbatical period ended and I returned to the United States, I have been refining the works I began in Mexico and have added to the visual group as time allows by continuing to work from the many photographs I took in the Costa Maya. Upon my
return, I booked the first available opening for a show in the Harry and Laura Nohr Gallery. I will present the completed, framed works in a formal exhibition to my colleagues on campus. The exhibition opens in February 2012 and will be available for the entire campus and community to view at that time.