My summer internship at the Guarisco Gallery was a lot like the two heat waves that occurred around the beginning and end of my time in Washington, D.C.: surprisingly intense. My first day in the gallery, my fellow interns and I were asked to unpack a crate. Once we moved past removing the hard outer shells, we were urged to proceed with utmost caution and tender handling of the object inside. What we found when the final wrapping was removed was a definite shock to our collegiate senses: a small still life of peonies painted by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. This small task—that was rewarded with a tremendous outcome—set the tone for my internship at Guarisco Gallery.

Guarisco Gallery specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings, along with smaller scale bronze sculptures. The works owned by the gallery are European and American and include pieces from the schools of Romanticism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, etc. Most of the works tend to be landscapes, portraits, still-lifes, and genre scenes. What makes Guarisco Gallery unique among other galleries is that the owner, Laura Guarisco, owns the majority of the inventory. By owning the works, the gallery is able to give a certain confidence of the importance of the work to potential buyers. While the gallery often brings in high profile works by artists such as Renoir and Winslow Homer, many of the works in the gallery are by lesser-known artists that were contemporaries to well-known artists. However, this does not mean their works are of less importance. Many of these artists, like other artists, are becoming better known and more appreciated as time passes. Guarisco Gallery serves to promote these artists and their works.

I had a varying range of responsibilities at Guarisco Gallery. Much of my time at the beginning of the internship was delegated to the filing cabinets. The gallery, when trying to garner interest in/sell a work, gives a potential buyer a photo packet. This package includes a full
Shot of the work, a detail shot, a perspective shot of the work, and an artist biography. Packets like these, along with research on the artist and his works, are kept in huge filing cabinets throughout the gallery. By refiling these packets, I became familiar with much of the inventory in the gallery. As the summer progressed, I was asked to update the photo packets. To make the packets look more professional, the gallery combined the three photo shots onto one page, thus giving the package slick look. To do this, I had to learn more about Adobe Photoshop. With the help of the gallery Preparator, Mark, I learned how to use the basic elements of Photoshop. Mark also taught me how to shoot the pictures for the packages and how to edit these pictures in Photoshop to look aesthetically pleasing to the potential buyer. Along with teaching me Photoshop, Mark taught me how to hang the gallery. There is a certain technique to hanging the works at eyesight, but also on a general line to each other around the gallery. I now have the confidence to say I can successfully hang a gallery. Later in the summer, I was asked to head the yearly task of organizing the filing cabinets. This included taking an inventory of the works, creating new packets, figuring out which artists did not have biographies, and creating a cleaner cabinet.

Along with learning technical skills, I gained a greater knowledge of different art movements and the artists are associated with those movements. This is due in part to the gallery managers and curator, Nurit, Caitlin, and Randall, respectively. Through their combined experience at different galleries and museums, I gained valuable knowledge not only of art history but of the gallery career world. Along with the day-to-day tasks at the gallery, an invaluable part of the experience was learning to write artist biographies. This involved extensive research not only online and in the gallery’s library, but also at the Library of Congress. In my last week at the gallery, my fellow interns and I, led by Randall and former Sewanee student
Mary Stuart Baker, made a day trip to the Library of Congress. Beforehand, Randall had done research to figure out which books we needed to request. The Library of Congress differs from a regular library in that one has to request a book and wait for it to be brought out to you by a librarian. The book cannot be taken out of the reading room, but can be photocopied. We had the amazing opportunity to do our research in the main reading room, the Jeffersonian Room. Along with taking us to the Library of Congress, Randall exposed us to many other great cultural opportunities in D.C. We explored the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian where we were able to view James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s famous “Peacock Room.” We explored the architecture of different neighborhoods in D.C. and were able to witness a plant that only flowers every twenty years. It was an incredibly informative summer.

My summer internship experience at Guarisco Gallery definitely solidified my desire to work in the art world after graduation. Being able to put my art history knowledge to use in a work space was the ultimate reward for all those hours of studying the past three years at Sewanee. It also helped me realize there is so much to learn outside of my studies at Sewanee. Only more experience in the art world, either more internships or an actual job, can help me advance in my career. I believe that my experience at Guarisco Gallery was a great jumpstart for future jobs. It also helped me realize that one cannot fully be prepared for a job in the art world. Only more experience and constant learning can prepare me for a career in the art world.