

https://dailytitan.com/news/campus/new-art-professor-grew-up-living-in-ucla-student-housing/article_596461d5-bd1c-5e35-bb4d-bf294205d8e6.html

New art professor grew up living in UCLA student housing

By Alec Calvillo

Dec 5, 2018



Cal State Fullerton's new tenure-track professor Mateo Tannatt's has worked on art for the Hammer Museum like an art display of a baby grand piano being dropped from eight stories. (Alec Calvillo/ Daily Titan)

Correction: *This story was changed at 1:53 a.m. on Saturday, Dec. 15 to correct the pronoun “he” when it should have said “she” when referring to Ryan Farley. It has also been corrected to reflect that Mateo Tannatt received his master’s in sculpture at UCLA not his bachelor’s.*

Mateo Tannatt grew up in Los Angeles as a “by-product of UCLA,” where he was raised in student housing by his parents, who attended the university.

“My dad studied literature and I believe some linguistics, and my mom (studied) psychology and child development. She got her Ph.D. while I was in elementary school at UCLA,” Tannatt said.

He went to Seeds University Elementary School, an experimental school with an unconventional approach to teaching that was located on the campus grounds. The teachers were not referred to by titles like Mr. or Mrs., and students weren’t given grades, he said.

Tannatt is now Cal State Fullerton’s newest faculty member in the art department where he teaches sculpting.

He said he found his passion for art at a very young age, even though art classes were limited at his school. Students had to be nominated to take the class, and he was chosen. It helped him become more aware of his talent, he said.

“It was kind of like a natural thing that I liked. I was good at it and could spend hours doing. I took on other activities beyond just drawing or painting,” Tannatt said.

Ryan Farley, a senior art history major, is one of Tannatt’s students and said she enjoys the professor’s teaching style.

“I think Mateo’s a really great teacher, and he’s always open to help you. He doesn’t impose a lesson on you. He’s not going to sit and make everyone learn something that they may already know how to do, but if you need to learn a certain technique you can go to him and ask,” Farley said.

Some of his inspirations came from literature, films and music.

“The house was filled with jazz as well as classical and some sort of psychedelic rock. But it was kind of a combination of hearing a lot of that as well as kind of absorption, and seeing that culture didn’t necessarily have to be specifically visual,” Tannatt said.

Tannatt attended a public high school, but the school didn’t have the art courses he was looking for.

He found out there was a free arts school called Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He applied to the school and was accepted.

“I think it sealed my fate in a sense that that [education](#) advanced me exponentially because it was centered around being able to take art classes as well as being around people who are creative and found their way there,” Tannatt said.

After high school, Tannatt attended UCLA like his parents and received a master's in sculpture.

One of Tannatt's works of art for the Hammer Museum involved a baby grand piano being dropped from eight stories high to capture the sounds of the piano smashing on the ground.

"I had to talk to some people at MIT. It had to go eight stories high to really impact the complete crushing of it and its weight," Tannatt said. "(The idea) came from growing up probably watching cartoons and thinking about experimental music as a performance as well as a piece of cinema."

Before arriving to CSUF, Tannatt taught at UC San Diego for a number of years as an adjunct professor and was a fellow at the University of Houston in the sculpture department.

Tannatt said he wanted to go back to Los Angeles when he found an opening at CSUF where he could utilize his experiences as an artist.

"I bring my experiences teaching to the studio and I bring my personal experiences as an artist or working artist into the classroom," Tannatt said. "They're symbiotic."