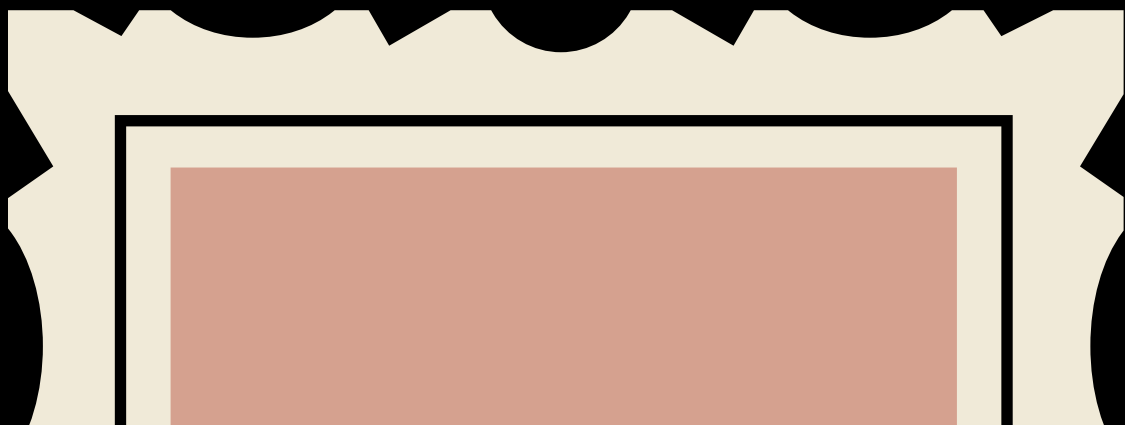


ART AS ANCHOR

A litigator, a diplomat, a book designer, and a budding opera singer—four individuals with distinctly different callings and one shared love: the arts. Although these alumnae currently indulge their passions to varying degrees, all agree that the qualities they cultivated in pursuit of art—dedication, determination, courage, and passion—serve them equally well in their chosen careers. They also affirm that their years at Emma Willard provided vital encouragement for following their passion, whatever form it might take.

BY LORI FERGUSON / PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUBJECTS



Madeline Chan '10

SELF-CONFIDENCE SOLIDIFIED

At less than 30 years of age, **Madeline Chan '10** has lived on three continents, earned two degrees, and is now working as an associate with the London office of the global law firm Linklaters. Circumstances change frequently, she acknowledges with a smile in her voice. “But no matter what is happening in my life, art is the constant.”

A singer, dancer, and classically trained pianist, Madeline credits the arts, and Emma Willard, for giving her the skills and discipline to succeed. Although she didn't ultimately pursue a career in this sector—she currently serves as a litigator and engages in pro bono work as time permits—the arts remain an integral part of who she is. “The arts taught me to feel life's uncertainties and be OK with them, and Emma gave me a well-rounded sense of what it means to use my voice and find my own way,” she asserts.

The Hong Kong native concedes she wasn't always so comfortable with carving her own path. She arrived at Emma Willard as a conflicted 15-year-old. “I was grateful to be attending high school in the United States,” she clarifies. “The educational system in Hong Kong is ‘one size fits all,’ and if that doesn't work for you, it can be tough. But I was also mindful of family expectations.” Madeline's parents both worked in professional services, and although neither had ever pushed her to do so, she felt substantial pressure to pursue a career in banking or law. “As a Chinese girl, filial piety was heavily engrained in me. I felt like I needed to be a good daughter and repay my parents' various sacrifices in sending me abroad by following the path I thought they wanted me to take.” The message Madeline received at Emma Willard, however, was to follow her own passion.

Struggling to reconcile these directives, Madeline spoke frequently with her advisor, Debra Spiro-Allen, Emma's director of choral music and a close friend and mentor to this day. During one such conversation, Spiro-Allen remarked that her work didn't feel like a job because she loved it so much. “That really hit me,” Madeline recalls.

The statement became a touchstone for Madeline, a litmus test she continues to rely on as she travels her own career path. To wit, after earning a degree in political science from Amherst College, she returned to London and took an analyst's position at Barclays where she had interned during her junior year of study abroad. “I took the job because it was easy and familiar, but it quickly became clear banking wasn't for me,” she says. Madeline turned to art for comfort—attending tango dancing events called “milongas” to lift her spirits and “meet non-bankers”—and ultimately changed course and enrolled in law school at the University of Cambridge. She insists such a drastic shift would not have been possible without the self-confidence imbued by artistic pursuits and her Emma education. “Those experiences gave me the ability to admit that banking wasn't a good fit and change directions.”

Happily, Madeline says she is finding satisfaction as a lawyer, particularly with the relationships formed, a fascination she traces back to the arts. “As an artist, you're forced to embrace your humanity and dig deep to connect with an audience or partner, and law is like that as well—you need to be a good listener and engage with clients to find solutions to their problems.”

A litigator preparing for trial is not unlike an artist preparing for a performance, she continues. “As an artist, I rehearsed with the mandate in mind to ‘expect the unexpected,’ a sentiment that can just as easily apply to a legal case. Having the discipline to prep, for a trial or a performance, is critical. By the time you get before the audience or the judge, the work's been done.”



Kotoha Takashima '12

A CAREER PATH CLARIFIED

More than a decade has passed, but Fukui native **Kotoha Takashima '12** still vividly recalls arriving at Emma Willard as a shy teenager with a tenuous grasp of English. “I cried a lot,” she admits, “but then I had my first piano concert, and suddenly everything changed. People began to see me as I really am.” In fact, Kotoha credits the instrument for giving her the courage to leave Japan. “My passion for the piano motivated me to go out into the world and see what’s possible,” she asserts.

The structure of Japanese education demands specialization rather than exploration, explains Kotoha, and although she loved playing piano, she wasn’t certain she wanted to make music her career. “I didn’t think I should choose a specialization at age 14, so when I learned that boarding schools in the United States allowed students to try many things, I jumped at the chance to go.”

The decision proved fortuitous. “Everything I’m doing right now is built on my experience at Emma,” says Kotoha. “Had I not studied in the United States, I would have lacked perspective on all the possibilities for my life.” After graduating from Emma, Kotoha returned home to complete her undergraduate degree at Tokyo’s Sophia University, then travelled back to the States to pursue a graduate degree at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Today, she works for Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is currently stationed at her country’s embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine.

For Kotoha, the progression from arts to a career in international relations feels natural. “My experiences in the performing arts gave me the

confidence to relate to others regardless of background, race, or culture, an important skill in diplomatic work. Through the arts, I gained the ability to see people for who they really are, just as people see the real me when I play the piano.”

Unfortunately, concedes Kotoha, she hasn’t enjoyed much keyboard time of late. “I don’t have much free time or access to a piano in my current posting, which is tough. Playing the piano offers me an escape from the real world, and at the same time allows me to organize my thoughts; it’s both relaxing and productive, my form of meditation.”

Regrets aside, Kotoha has plenty to occupy her mind right now; she has set high goals for her work with the ministry. “I want to help empower young girls—make the world better for them—and diplomacy is one of the best ways for me to achieve these big dreams.”

Kotoha is confident her artistic endeavors have prepared her for success. “A performer must rehearse long hours to reach the level she envisions. That process can be tough and lonely, but you persist because you know how lovely a piece can be and how inspiring it is to perform with and for others.”

Diplomats aren’t that different, she continues. “Sometimes people focus solely on the bright side of a diplomat’s life, like socializing, but it’s hard work. We negotiate for just one word in a text and often work night and day, sacrificing our private lives. But we do this work because we believe it will change the world for the better.”

Such commitment to the goal is a common thread in Kotoha’s life. “I learned from the arts and from my experience at Emma that there’s always a bright goal if you have a passion, endurance, and confidence in your beliefs, and amazing people around to share it.”



“Through the arts, I gained the ability to see people for who they really are, just as people see the real me when I play the piano.”

Zian Taylor '19

A PASSION PURSUED

Zian Taylor '19 was just a preschooler when she announced her life's calling. "My teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I said an opera singer," she recalls with a chuckle. "To this day, I have no idea where that idea came from." As it turns out, Zian was remarkably prescient. Today she is a double major in voice performance and music business at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam.

Zian isn't the least bit surprised that her youthful yearnings have come to pass. "My parents exposed my sister and me to the arts from a very young age," she explains. "I started dance lessons at age two and violin lessons at age three. I've never viewed the arts as an extra-curricular activity; they've always seemed like an essential part of my life."

Zian admits that she did stray from opera for a time. "Initially, I was more focused on a Broadway career; it seemed like the natural choice given my dance experience." When she began taking voice lessons at age nine, however, the idea of opera resurfaced. "My voice teacher was a professional opera singer and when she heard me sing, she told me she wanted me to try opera." Zian obliged and has never looked back. "I fell in love with the music and from age 12 on, all I wanted to do was go to music school and study voice," she enthuses.

In the intervening years, Zian has pursued her chosen field with a vengeance, honing her instrument with years of voice lessons, summer music camps at Interlochen and Tanglewood, and participation in all three of Emma Willard's choirs as well as the cappella group 12 Tones. And when not in the practice room, she was on the playing field as a member of Emma's field hockey team. "Looking back, I honestly don't know how I fit everything in," she muses.

In the fall of her sophomore year at Emma, however, Zian was thrown a curve ball. She fell ill during her final field hockey game of the season and after a year of uncer-

tainty, was ultimately diagnosed with a rare blood disorder known as Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) the following summer. Doctors recommended an aggressive treatment regimen of chemotherapy and steroids and told Zian that she must stop singing her senior year to avoid potential permanent damage to her vocal folds. Zian rejected the plan outright. "I was very against the treatment because I didn't want to stop singing and playing sports," she explains, "but a hospital social worker said, 'It's one year of your life in exchange for a lifetime of performance and happiness,' so I agreed."

Completing her final year of high school without singing was tough, Zian confesses, but she drew strength from Emma and the arts. "My classmates and continued contact with the arts sustained me," she asserts. Happily, the course of treatment was successful and Zian is singing once more. She entered the Crane School of Music in the fall of 2020 after taking a gap year to get her voice back in shape and ready for admission auditions.

Entering music school during a pandemic has been challenging, she concedes. "All of my performance classes and voice lessons take place over Zoom because the virus makes it unsafe to sing in person but seeing the resilience and sense of purpose demonstrated by other performers has given me a fresh sense of appreciation for the arts. It's what's keeping me going right now."

Zian is also bolstered by the lessons she learned at Emma. "Faculty and classmates taught me the importance of cultivating relationships and seeking to maintain a work-life balance.

And the respect shown for each person's passion—whether that was singing or science—made a lasting impression. I always felt that my teachers at Emma were invested in my future, whatever path I chose."



Christine Moog '87

CONNECTIONS CREATED

Mention an esteemed art museum or design school in the Northeast and chances are good you'll find it on the résumé of **Christine Moog '87**. The book designer has worked at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Museum for African Art and has taught courses in design and design history at Yale University, The Ontario University for Art and Design, and The School of Visual Arts New York City. She currently serves as an assistant professor at Parsons School of Design. "My love of art is a seed that has sprouted in many different areas and disciplines," Christine observes. "You know the saying, 'if you find what you love, it's never work.' It's a cliché, but for me it's true."

And those seeds were sown at Emma Willard, Christine notes. "My studio and art history courses with Ed McCarten and my British Literature course with Jack Easterling planted seeds that continue to bear fruit." As a youth, Christine envisioned a career in art or architecture, but as she aged, she realized the challenges inherent to making a living in the arts. "To be candid, as a visual artist, it's hard to find good paying jobs."



Art is a great noncommunicative way to communicate. It can be powerful therapy for those who are suffering but unable to find the words to describe their physical or emotional pain."

At one point, Christine pursued a career in art therapy, but missed art history—she earned a master's in art history at the University of Toronto and an MFA in graphic design from Yale University—and returned to the museum world. It was there she landed the chance assignment that set her on her current path. "While at the Guggenheim, I was asked to design a pitch book for Hugo Boss and found that I loved the work." Now, Christine designs the art history books she used to study. "I consider myself a more informed designer because I have an art history background. Different disciplines can inform one another so nicely."

This connectivity extends to Christine's interests in women's studies; she has published articles on women

who ran printing presses in Europe and North America from the 15th century onwards. "These widows ran presses after their husbands died, just three decades after Johannes Gutenberg's invention. It's fascinating to learn about these fabulous, yet unknown, individuals and it relates directly to my interest in women's studies, another takeaway from Emma."

Art's influence on Christine is not confined to the professional sphere; it also touches her on a personal level. Witnessing her father's decade-long struggle with cancer, she realized that treatment programs often overlooked the psychological impact of an illness. "My father believed deeply in the mind-body connection, although it wasn't something that was fully appreciated when he received his diagnosis in the late '80s," she explains.

When Christine became a parent herself, she decided to change that calculus. An advisory board member for the Yale Medicine Cancer Center, she donated to create an art therapy program at the Yale School of Medicine. "Art is a great non-communicative way to communicate. It can be powerful therapy for those who are suffering but unable to find the words to describe their physical or emotional pain. Although I didn't use art as therapy for myself when my dad was sick, I want to help other patients and their families in these difficult situations."

Lately, family is on Christine's mind for another reason as well. Daughter Charlotte is considering enrollment at Emma Willard and she couldn't be more pleased. "To this day, my closest friends are from Emma. It's a wonderful school—the oldest girls' school in North America—with such a sense of history and tradition. I think so highly of single-sex education, particularly at Emma. As a student, you can be yourself!"

Christine remains grateful for her time at Emma and the exposure to the arts she was afforded. It's a gift that endures. "How does art anchor my life today?" she muses. "It's my identity and my career." 📧

