After Short Detour, Student Returns to Grad Studies

The road to graduate school seldom is a straight line, as Jenny Filipetti discovered in 2010. She was planning to apply to the emergent digital practices (EDP) program at the University of Denver when a call to work as an intern for a web publication in Milan, Italy, diverted her plans. After two years in Milan, Filipetti returned to Denver to pursue her graduate studies where she is doing research to find a space where the fragility of life and ceramics can combine with automation and robotics.

“I've been interested in the notion of ‘fragile robots’ for some time,” Filipetti said. “So much of the infrastructure of contemporary life is regulated by systems that are at their core extremely fragile. Biological bodies are fragile, fundamentally capable of functioning in only a very narrow range of physical conditions. The idea of ‘fragile robots’ is to upend the context in which robots are normally conceived as very stable if not indestructible, such as in military and commercial applications.”

As an undergrad, Filipetti studied computer programming and genetics in addition to studio art and semiotic theory. It was this combination of study that led to her interest in digital media. She was drawn to the EDP program at DU for its equal focus on studio practice and theory, as well as the intimate class size and hands-on, individualized approach of the department.

In October 2010, just before a flight to Denver to attend a University of Denver graduate open house, Filipetti came across a posting for an internship at the web publication Designboom, an online magazine specializing in the fields of industrial design, art and architecture.

“The description of the position sounded like a dream come true, and I had all of the required and desired skill sets,” said Filipetti. After arriving in Denver, she submitted an application to Designboom that day, and attended the DU graduate fair that evening.

“That single day literally determined my trajectory for the next five years!” she said.

During the graduate open house, Filipetti had conversations with two professors who were instrumental in her decision to attend DU. “They gave me a tour of EDP’s brand new facilities and immersive black-box space in the Shwayder Art Building, which are some of the most cutting-edge and versatile of any program I know. That evening sealed my decision.”

Within a few days of returning home, Filipetti was offered the internship as editor of arts and technology for Designboom. A month later she was on a plane to Milan.

“Although I still submitted my application to DU that winter, it was clear that I had so much to learn and experience at Designboom and in Milan,” said Filipetti, who was informed the following summer that she had been accepted into the EDP program. “When the internship became a job offer, I decided to defer a year.”
Filipetti worked for the magazine for two years in Milan, and returned to Denver in 2012 to attend DU where she will graduate in 2015. Following graduation, she is considering teaching at a university where she would continue pursuing her art and research, and work with future generations of students who will grow up with different media and technology experiences. But she also has a fervent belief that coding and computer programming should be part of literacy education of children today.

“I was lucky to attend a public school that offered computer science classes as an elective in high school, but I've worked and volunteered in many schools for which that would be a difficult task because of the financial burden and lack of standardization of such a program, said Filipetti, a native New Yorker. “There are activists, nonprofit organizations and companies pursuing these issues, and I could easily see myself working in this capacity as well.”