



## Sophie Smidth:

A First-Year Renaissance Woman Muses about Engineering, Fine Art, and the Path Between.

*Bovine, 2012*

**At** a demanding research university, artistic passions can take a back seat to academic pursuits. This spring, ten University Honors Program students showcased their work in a student-organized exhibit on campus. Sophie Smidth, a freshman in the Davis Honors Challenge, had three pieces on display: *Bovine*, an expressionist portrait-of-a-lady-with-cow-on-forehead; *Moonshine*, an ink-and-watercolor of the moon and stars reflected in a cup of coffee; and *Dink*, an exquisitely detailed paper diorama of a study scene. Despite their range of media and subject matter, the pieces shared an intriguing combination of whimsy and attention to detail. An equally intriguing artist's statement claimed that her ideas come from the doodled margins of her papers.

I had to meet this amazing student and find out about her creative process.

Smidth painted *Bovine* the summer before she arrived at UC Davis. One of her first ventures in oil painting, *Bovine* boasts thick strokes, bold colors, and a sense of play almost suggesting an Aggie parody of Kahlo's solemnly symbolic *Diego on my Mind*. For this original, winsome painting, Sophie was awarded the Monday Club of San Luis Obispo's Fine Arts Scholarship.

The style is a departure from her typical, finely-detailed works such as *Moonshine*. When Sophie Smidth draws the moon, it is painstakingly cratered and shadowed – even when it's reflected in a cup of coffee. With its detailed books, furniture and study scene, *Dink* does indeed look like a page of inspired doodles, rendered in 3-D. She has long enjoyed constructive media, particularly building tiny clay models.

While her love of math and science and her curiosity about how things work poise Smidth for a successful engineering career, she is discovering that her artistic passion is not just a hobby. It's a powerful vocation.



*Moonshine, 2011*

Sophie's attention to detail and love of building models reflects her engineering side. The daughter of an electrical engineer who, she says, "knows how everything works," Sophie enrolled at UC Davis as a biomedical engineering major. On campus, she has enjoyed creative activities offered through the Craft Center, as well as a DHC poetry class with D. R. Wagner – particularly the "visual poetry" assignment, which she built with in the redwood grove with materials she found there. Her current schedule doesn't allow time, however, and the engineering curriculum does not leave room for a minor in Art. She is considering changing her major to

mechanical engineering, which has a design component to engage her artistic side and prepare her for a career in industrial design.

**Defining** a career which combines her passions for both fine arts and engineering is a challenging and potentially rewarding path. While a college education should develop a professional skill set, discovering who you are—and becoming that person—is also an important part of learning. We look forward to watching Sophie's path unfold, and hope that participation in Undergraduate Education's programs will offer opportunities for discovery to light her way.



*Sophie in the Arboretum, one of her favorite places on campus*

Questions about this article: [scknox@ucdavis.edu](mailto:scknox@ucdavis.edu)  
About Undergraduate Education programs: <http://ue.ucdavis.edu>

Think again.

**UCDAVIS**

**UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

**U** are more than u know.