Fostering collaboration and Interdisciplinarity

The Mapping Paradise project partnered students in ART 2ER3 (Environmentally Responsible Studio) with Distinguished Hooker Visiting Scholar, Gregg Schlanger to produce works of art in response to Cootes Paradise Nature Reserve and the Niagara Escarpment. Local experts and researchers from the Royal Botanical Gardens, Department of History, Engineering and OPRIG made presentations to the class on social, historical and environmental issues related to the natural areas of the campus and city. These presentation introduced students to a broad research base that informed their creative work on the project. Students in ART 3J03 (Collaborative Community Projects) who were working with community groups such as L’ARCHE (disabled adults), CORE (Community Outreach Reaching Everyone) and MICHA House (Refugees) brought their community partners to campus and engaged them in aspects of the project. These groups worked with art students to print components for the exhibition, make buttons and contribute to the community wall map. Local high school groups from Hamilton and Brantford visited to participate in workshop sessions associated with the project and environmental groups such as Environmental Defence, contributed with displays and information. Students participated in outreach to environmental groups in the area such as Hamilton Naturalist Club, Cootes to Escarpment Park System advocates, Dundas EcoPark and the Hamilton Conservation Authority building a resource list and connecting sustainability efforts on campus with the local community.

The success of this project and the connections established through it has generated plans for another collaborative project. ART 2ER3 will work this September with artist Jim Reid in the natural corridor owned by McMaster University that is being developed as a teaching resource. This project will be funded by the York Wilson Foundation as part of the School of the Arts Spotlight on the Arts Festival in 2013/14. We have already met with faculty from Biology, Peace Studies and Engineering to explore collaborative opportunities between our respective student groups. The database of environmental contacts compiled with Mapping Paradise and the experience of the initial project will be valuable resources for this subsequent project and will build on the momentum established with the Mapping Paradise project.

Exposing Students to New and Emerging Research

The Mapping Paradise project was initiated within ART 2ER3 (Environmentally Responsible Studio) under the direction of Judy Major-Girardin. This is a new course in the BFA program, taught for the first time this year. It is part of a larger program commitment to rethink the processes, materials and approaches of art practice to pursue more environmentally sound and safer methodologies for artists. This initiative is a unique feature of our program and represents a significant paradigm shift from traditional art education. The timing is appropriate for this shift and we have found students to be receptive and excited by this new direction. Environmental responsibility is a concern that is shared by many disciplines on campus and has the potential to connect widely with resources on campus and in the community.

The Mapping Paradise project utilized a blog site for communication throughout the term and held regular SKYPE sessions with our visiting artist prior to the collaborative week of the project. These tools were introduced to studio art as a result of this project and have provided additional learning tools for students. Due to the success of these electronic tools, the instructor is piloting electronic learning portfolios in courses next year.

The interdisciplinary research, exposure to students and faculty from other areas of campus and the site visits to natural areas have offered students an experience beyond traditional borders. In a participant survey, 64.7% of students reported that the interdisciplinary approach of the project had a significant impact on their learning and 70.5% reported that community engagement was of significant importance to them in the project.
Sustaining and Expanding the Initiative

As a result of this work, the instructor for the course has been invited to join a campus group pursuing the restoration of wetlands under Parking Lot M and has been asked to serve on a committee exploring an interdisciplinary Minor in Sustainability at McMaster. If successful, this minor would complement the direction of the art program at McMaster providing students with an educational program that is unique in the country. In addition, plans are underway to mount an environmentally responsible printmaking exhibition at McMaster Museum of Art in fall 2014. Art 2ER3 and studio art will continue to expand this initiative through regular curricular programming and through the annual visiting artist series.

Barriers and Challenges

Connecting with Biology and Environmental Studies was a logical link for the Mapping Paradise project. Due to busy and conflicting schedules, this was not realized in our first attempt. Our subsequent project planned with Jim Reid in September 2013 has already achieved this connection. Despite the great work of our Project Assistants, connecting with campus and local groups and individuals proved to be a time-intensive venture. A considerable amount of legwork is necessary to identify the right individuals and to follow up to maintain links. Advertising and Public Relations work could be much better organized if centralized with committed funds and staff to ensure the widest possible exposure for the work going on at McMaster. This project involved workshops, a public lecture, and an exhibition open to the community. Our events were well attended but parking on campus is an obstacle to creating a welcoming environment to local collaborators and the public.

Dissemination of Results

The Mapping Paradise Project was advertised through electronic and printed posters with special invitations extended to key individuals on campus and in the community. Local media covered the exhibition via CBC Hamilton [http://www.cbc.ca/hamilton/news/story/2013/03/01/hamilton-mapping-paradise.html](http://www.cbc.ca/hamilton/news/story/2013/03/01/hamilton-mapping-paradise.html), It was advertised on the Daily News [http://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/worth-mentioning/mapping-paradise-collaborative-art-project/](http://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/worth-mentioning/mapping-paradise-collaborative-art-project/) and was covered by an article in the Humanities newsletter Humanities Now [http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/news/2013/Paradise.html](http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/news/2013/Paradise.html). Project Assistant Natalie Jachyra produced a u-tube promotional video and Project Assistant Joanna Chan facilitated our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/mappingparadise](http://www.facebook.com/mappingparadise). Artist Gregg Schlanger maintained a Wordpress blog for the project at [http://mappingparadise.wordpress.com](http://mappingparadise.wordpress.com) and Randy Kay from OPRIG included links, articles and a video on the project on the Restore Cootes blog [http://restorecootes.blogspot.ca/2013/03/rising-tide-art-examines-cootes-to.html](http://restorecootes.blogspot.ca/2013/03/rising-tide-art-examines-cootes-to.html). The project was featured on the School of the Arts Website at [http://sota.humanities.mcmaster.ca](http://sota.humanities.mcmaster.ca). A display was set up at the campus event for the Cootes to Escarpment Park System initiative held in March and a lecture on the project by Judy Major-Girardin was provided to members of OPRIG at the Annual General Meeting in April. Project Assistants visited classes to provide information on the project resulting in participation from students in all levels of our program. Lastly, limited copies of iBook were produced documenting the project in visual form (available from girardin@mcmaster.ca) and the project has been submitted to a sustainability project poster competition in Toronto (results pending).

"The Mapping Paradise project was a huge success because it integrated opportunities for students to collaborate with professionals and because it gave students the means to apply their knowledge to a tangible project. Learning opportunities such as this one are in short supply across campus and I hope more students can also benefit from this approach to collaborative, community learning. "

Project Assistant Joanna Chan

"The spirit and knowledge of the community on environmental issues, taught me, and others, the importance of the environment, and personally, the impact artistic practices have on it."

Project Assistant Natalie Jachyra