TITLE OF THE PROJECT:

“Mobilizing Interdisciplinarity and Collaboration in/for Museum and Curatorial Studies”

RESEARCHERS:

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STUDENT RESEARCHERS:

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Undergraduates: Giorelle Diokno, Level IV Combined Honours, Theatre & Film Studies and Department of English and Cultural Studies; Ben Robinson, Level IV Honours, Department of English and Cultural Studies.

THE CONTEXT: THE EXHIBITION PROJECT:

With funding from FWI for two key activities related to our exhibition at the McMaster Museum of Art, we fostered collaboration with undergraduate students, a graduate student, Museum staff, and faculty members at other universities. Working across visual culture studies, art history, curatorial studies, feminist studies, disability studies, Indigenous studies, critical race studies, and digital media studies, we generated a rich interdisciplinarity with this FWI project.

With FWI support, we were able to develop two innovative activities, a scholarly panel and a student workshop, to increase the impact and circulation of our co-curated exhibition, This is Me, This is Also Me. The exhibition ran from November 7, 2014 to March 22, 2015, and enjoyed close to 17,000 visitors. In addition to this exceptionally high total of guests to a show at the Museum, the exhibition also received considerable publicity (not only local coverage in the Spectator, Daily News, and Silhouette, but also national coverage in Toronto Life, Canadian Art Online, The National Gallery of Canada Magazine, and Akimblog), and the two FWI activities were well attended. Both activities entailed ongoing collaboration with one graduate research assistant (paid through FWI funds) and two undergraduate students (who received academic credit for English 4Y06: Research Practicum). We met regularly with the students to discuss, develop, and facilitate the activities. Students prepared plans and reports throughout the process, and they each published three blog entries on the Museum’s website (see, for example: http://museum.mcmaster.ca/about/news/so-where-are-you-from-nation-place-and-belonging/). The reports they submitted at the end of the project indicate that their participation advanced their own learning about representational practices; media culture; selfie culture; autobiographical art; moving image culture; art history; memory work; spectatorship; affect; relations of gender, race, sexuality, disability, and Indigeneity; subjectivity and intersubjectivity; and self-other relations.

The FWI activities were planned and situated as an interconnected suite of events, and they led into another event funded by the Museum, an artist’s talk with Deanna Bowen on March 19, 2015.
THE FWI ACTIVITIES:

1) Scholarly Panel: “Representing the Self, Connecting to Others”

The panel was held on November 27, 2014, in the space of the exhibition. We invited panelists whose research contributes to visual culture studies as well as critical race studies, disability studies, Indigenous studies, and feminist studies. FWI funding supported speaker honoraria and travel costs. We made a point of inviting a graduate of McMaster. The panelists included:

Eva C. Karpinski, Associate Professor, School of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies, York University

Shoshana Magnet, Associate Professor, Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies and le département de Criminologie, University of Ottawa

Carrie McMullin, recent graduate of McMaster in Indigenous Studies and Cultural Studies and Critical Theory

Thy Phu, Associate Professor, Vice Chair, Department of English, Western University

In collaboration with our research assistants, the two undergraduate students and the graduate student, and with an emphasis on new and emerging research, we prepared “prompts” or research questions to address a range of key themes in relation to the exhibition project, including self-representational art, affect, interdisciplinarity, and social differences. The panelists addressed the following questions:

1. What does visual self-portraiture have to teach us about the differences between ourselves and others? Is it possible to “overcome” differences through self-representational art? Are there any artworks in the room that register and complicate how we think about “difference”?

2. What role does feeling play in how viewers might respond to self-portraiture? Are there any works in the room that are interesting to discuss in terms of “feeling” practices and politics?

3. How might students’ senses of history be challenged by works in the exhibition? Are there any works or artists in the exhibition that you think are particular important for students to engage with? History could open up, for example, on to questions of Indigeneity, settler-colonialism, citizenship, and belonging.

4. How can we make connections between works in the show and today’s selfie culture, in its complicated relationship to social media and especially to surveillance? Are there any works in the show that can help us think critically about digital self-portraiture today?

5. We’d like to invite you to reflect on some of the methods that are important right now for visual culture studies. What is the importance of collaborative approaches in this field? And what are some of the ways we might think about the field as interdisciplinary or comparative?
6. How are issues of self-representation important to your own intellectual, pedagogical, and/or activist projects? Throughout the discussion we are very keen to hear about your own past, present, or future projects and commitments, but here we thought we might conclude by inviting you to touch again on any key visual archives, works, or projects that you think our audience might be interested to learn about!

A total of 75 guests attended the panel, a particularly high attendance for a panel at the Museum, and a recording of the event was prepared by Colin Czerneda, a Digital Media Specialist in Humanities Media and Computing. The panel is available on YouTube:
http://youtu.be/G0i4HB6zqrE

2) Student Workshop: “Our Selfies, Ourselves?”

The workshop, which was discussion-based, hands-on, and exclusively student-oriented, was held in the exhibition space on February 5, 2015. It addressed the practice of making and circulating selfies, which is a particularly prevalent form of self-representation in contemporary culture. A dynamic group of twelve students from across the Faculties and from both McMaster and Mohawk College participated in activities that asked them to think critically about selfie culture: a focus on developing analytical skills to apply to self-representational practices.

In planning the workshop, we focused on collaborating with our student research assistants, who were especially engaged in thinking about selfie culture and how a critical approach might be encouraged, given this historical moment with its emphasis on social media and web-based forms of self-representation. The student researchers focused on themes of motivation, discourses of narcissism, community building, implications of social media, approaches to self-representation, subversive potential, dangers and challenges, and self-other relations. In preparation for the workshop planning, the students investigated theories of pedagogy, representation and self-representation, visuality, and social difference. They developed annotated bibliographies that traced foundational work in visual culture alongside emerging critical literature about selfie culture.

Students registered for the workshop, which entailed two key activities and a refreshment break. With the students, we collaborated with the Educational Coordinators at the Museum to develop one activity, which was facilitated by one of the Coordinators. However, our student team served as key facilitators for the entire event. Student participants collaborated with each other through group activities. These students engaged with self-representational practices in the artworks of our research project, the exhibition, to develop knowledge about imaging making of the self, and they analyzed examples of contemporary selfie culture.

The workshop generated public excitement, including an interview with Dr. Hladki on AM900 CHML (The Scott Thompson show) and an interview article in the Hamilton Spectator (http://www.thespec.com/news-story/5322492-what-does-a-selfie-say-about-you-take-one-and-tell-us/)
EXPANSION OF THE OUTCOMES:

Beyond what we outlined in our initial proposal, our research team also generated an interview for the McMaster Alumni Association (http://museum.mcmaster.ca/about/news/also-curators-interviewed/); two Museum Studies candidates from the University of Toronto documented our student workshop as a model/case study; Dr. Brophy shared results of this collaborative, student-oriented research process at the International Autobiography and Biography Association conference at the University of Michigan at the beginning of June (http://iabasns.dudaone.com/americas); and we are planning a peer-reviewed article the journal a/b: Auto/Biography Studies, for its series on research methods entitled “The Process.”