

# Digital Frontiers' Social Media and Digital Communities Roundtable and Questions of Belonging

Created by Rachel Christensen

20th-21st Century Graduate Art History Seminar  
AEAH 5813.001, Fall 2012

Dr. Jennifer Way, Professor

On Friday, September 21, 2012, Dr. Jennifer Way's graduate art history seminar on 20th-21st c art attended "Social Media and Digital Communities: A Roundtable Discussion," a session featured at the Digital Frontiers 2012 conference sponsored by the UNT Libraries. The roundtable speakers and titles of their presentations included Jennie Fleming, "Examining Flickr's The Commons: What does creative interaction with digital image archives mean for users and institutions?," Robert Emery, "Telling Stories of The Dallas Way: Finding LGBT History and Creating Community Using Social Media," Heidi J. Wachter , "RevolutionaryAct.com and ExperienceLife.com," and Mariette Papić, "Digital Rights, Media and Practice: The Right to Bear Arms in The Information Age." Spencer Keralis, UNT Libraries' Director for Digital Scholarship, moderated the roundtable.

Students in Way's seminar are studying how recent scholarship on belonging illuminates contemporary and historical art and art history. They are considering how art and culture foster belonging to a place as well as a nation, and the ways that places index belonging, inclusion and exclusion. A primary concern is the way the creation and use of works of art participate in facilitating someone or something belonging or not. There are also questions of what counts as a belonging and how this relates to someone belonging to someone, thing or a place. Ways of facilitating belonging include civilize, salvage, domesticate, diplomacy, accommodate, remember. Examples of forms of belonging include autochthony, citizenship, memory and heritage. Ways of not belonging encompass but are not limited to outsidersness, alienation, dislocation, refugee, and homelessness.

Way charged her students with writing a short paper to explore connections between the roundtable and their seminar studies. What follows is a short paper by graduate student, Rachel Christensen.

Rachel Christensen

Current media has revealed that one is not able to be both a citizen and a public protester. While protest is an act that is enabling for a citizen, it is disabling in the notion that the protestor (regardless of being peaceful or violent) is now only regarded by the media as a “protestor.” There is no “American citizen protestor,” just protestor. The University of North Texas Digital Frontiers conference featured guest speaker Mariette Papić, who brought forward the issue of the citizen vs. the protestor. This issue is directly relevant with the seminar topic of belonging and how some of our notions of “belonging” are questionable. For some, is belonging a place where someone belongs (a safe place) or it is heritage or even their citizenship? Unfortunately, while many individuals clutch their status as American citizens as a means of entitlement, it is an effort that is simply futile. During the 1940s, after the Pearl Harbor bombings it did not matter if you were a third, fourth, etc. generation Japanese-American citizen, because to everyone else in America, you were Japanese and you did not belong outside of an internment camp. Today, if you are a law-abiding, tax-paying citizen who chooses to participate in peaceful protest, you become a protestor. In a seminar where there is a focus on belonging, this conference brought up issues that threaten one’s sense of belonging. Where you are absolutely determined you belong, there is a high probability that you are in fact an outsider.

Papić, Mariette. “Digital Rights, Media and Practice: The Right to Bear Arms in The Information Age.” Presentation at the Digital Frontiers Conference at the University of North Texas, September 21, 2012.