

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

Created by Caleb Zouhary

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 outsidership, 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, Caleb Zouhary.

Caleb Zouhary

Belonging is the key point of social media and digital communities. You go into these cyber worlds where you can redefine yourself and make a new identity for people to evaluate. Most of these social networks are also based on common interests, so it is very easy to belong to a group with the simple click of a button. Most of the speakers at the session, “Social Media and Digital Communities: A Roundtable Discussion”, spoke of how these cyber communities are built on common interests and how like-minded groups can join together and hash out their beliefs on topics that may arise. I believe it is good to find support groups and the Internet is becoming a very viable way to join the ranks and start the revolution in a discrete way.

One thing that is good about building these networking organizations through the Internet is that it invites anyone who is interested. If, for instance, there was a LGBT rally or even a house that people could go to, it would deter certain individuals from entering in fear of the general public seeing what they are doing. However, with the support groups like The Dallas Way, people are able to view and visit discretely if they wanted to just see what it was all about.

Social networks create a new form of interaction where people can express their feelings without the fear of being ridiculed for their beliefs. Also, with the constant editing that occurs through the web, after a feeling is expressed it can be deleted and put to the wayside. The Internet is the next generation of belonging and anyone who wants to be part of a group can do so through this networking system.