

2021 Report on the IAH Faculty Fellowship Project:

Developing the Outsider Art Project Curriculum with Digital Media Self-Portraiture

Professors Gregory Scheckler and Tony Gengareilly

Snapshot of the project

Following up on the many successes of the 2020 Outsider Art Project, the 2021 Outsider Art Project was focused through two main activities: a) large-scale curriculum development that can be share with many teachers and the community, and b) a more localized suite of art projects in the ART 204 Digital media class. To quote our initial application:

“... Ultimately, all individuals are part of varying spectrums of personal and social inclusion and exclusion.

This project aims to help students (and teachers) understand how their ideas of these spectra alter, open, and sometimes confound their expectations about what the arts can be, and how they create meaning. ...

Part of this work is hands-on art-making. Through Prof. Scheckler’s ART 204 Digital Media class, students will explore and integrate their understandings and expressions of what it means to be an Outsider and it’s reverse, an Insider, through a set of self-portrait digital art projects. Digital methods allow for dynamic layering that can create expressions of inner thoughts and feelings along with outer expressions and/or expectations. Self-portraiture also allows for significant discussion of appearances and stereotypes along with realities of individuality versus group membership or group definitions. The use of the preliminary curriculum from the initial (2020) Outsider Art Project informs these activities, and will also template and refine the curriculum that we’re developing, with student feedback, to make it more approachable for a variety of uses. Professor Gengareilly’s input for the course will encompass support activities based on the resources of the Jessica Park Project, including *Art on the Spectrum* (PDF version included here) which provides inspirational personal accounts of artists with ASD and offers as well a number of paths to inclusion.”

Documentation of who participated / audiences served

Please refer to attached documentation of student art examples from the ART 204 Digital Media course. Students were: Kayla Behymer, Amanda Bortman, David Jamina, Paula Kingsbury-Evans, Brian Rhodes, Hailey Rolon, Benjamin Ross, Raphael Rothman, Kennedy Sobon, Jonny Tobey, Jamie Vachula, Paige Wandrei, and Skylah Zayas.

Of these students, five or six were graduating seniors from several majors, taking the course for personal interest, and others were Art Majors and Art Minors at the beginning of the college experiences. They were lively and delightful.

Evidence of achieving the learning outcomes

In our initial application, we developed the 2020 Outsider Art project into a broader scope of building a large, and shareable curriculum about Outsider Art as a window into diversity, equity, and inclusion goals, while also piloting aspects of these curricula through the ART 204 Digital Media course.

In relationship to that proposal, as of mid-May 2021, we have outlined the large-scale curriculum, and are continuing to work on drafting it to create the final curriculum package to share with others. We expect that this complex work may take several more months. So far, however, Prof. Gengarely also completed several activities, including new articles and an extraordinary new book, *Art on the Spectrum: a Guide for Marketing Artists with ASD*. The book was produced in conjunction with the MCLA Jessica Park Project, as well as the College Internship Program in Pittsfield. This work will support a great deal of the broader curricular work for the 2021 Outsider Art Project goals, which we are continuing to refine.

The second goal is completed, having succeeded at piloting curricula through the ART 204 Digital Media course, as evidenced by the examples of student works and their comments on their learning experiences and artistic intentions (see documentation sent earlier). Professor Scheckler tested and taught many of the ideas through his media course, including drawing on significant readings and ideas from the 2020 project. For more reflection on this aspect of our project, read on...

Reflection on what worked, what you would do differently, and what is/was the overall impact of your project

A lot of the teaching and learning goals worked very well through the Digital Media course. In conversation with one of our project partners, curator Jamie Franklin gave us several ideas about integrating photo-based applications into the course. Specifically, a wonderful show of Outsider Artists was recently shown at the American Folk Art Museum, titled *Photo Brut: Collection of Bruno Decharme and Compagnie*. Prof. Scheckler drew on many of these artists as examples related to the course content. These vivid artworks immediately enlivened our class discussions, and moved us far beyond the painting and drawing-based artworks that

we'd relied on through earlier iterations of the Outsider Art Project. Students then translated the questions and issues dramatized by these example artworks into their own new, original creations.

Due to the pressures of the pandemic, it did feel to Prof. Scheckler that there was never quite enough time for students to read more and see more examples of art. In contrast, in 2020 we were able to do a field trip to the Bennington Museum to see artworks in person (we got lucky, the field trip happened a few days before pandemic lockdowns were announced). Field trips were not possible in Spring 2021. It will be wonderful to do them again in the future.

It might also be that the Outsider Art topic would be better served as a full-semester (three-month long) college course, rather than a one-month module within a broader range of topics. Perhaps the introduction in one course could lead to a more in-depth course in the future? Ultimately, however, students gained significant introductions to considering how the arts, and visual communications in general, are far broader and more open-ended and available to far more individuals (everyone in their own way, really) than they knew prior to the course. *This was eye-opening to many students, and helped them discover much more experimental, unusual and heartfelt ways to develop their own imagery too.* Again, for examples, see the documentation of student artworks and student's comments that were submitted earlier.

Of these artworks, a couple of students misunderstood 'Outsider' in a literal sense of outdoors, in nature. That may have stemmed from an earlier project that we did in the course that did involved indoor/outdoor differences in digital photography. We cleared that up, mostly, through discussion with individual students. After the middle of the semester's Outsider/Insider self-portrait project, the final project in the Digital Media courses expanded on the themes, into a project called 'Extrinsic/Intrinsic' challenging students to figure out what is necessary for their imagery, and what is extra — while including some of both. This created even broader forums for their artistic explorations, building on the Outsider/Insider digital self-portraits, to more ideas about concepts of what the artist includes and/or excludes throughout their own creative processes, enthusiasms, and arts conversations. Students experimented and innovated broadly, gaining a much richer sense of the breadth and diversity of the contemporary arts.

(Visuals and Media: see next page)

Visuals and media

Again, please see the Outsider/Insider art project documentation of student's artworks and commentaries from the digital media course, that was submitted earlier this semester and shared with the other faculty fellows.

For the ART 204 Digital Media course, it might also be interesting for you too see some examples of student's final "Extrinsic/Intrinsic" projects, which built on their many ideas immediately after the Outsider/Insider self-portraiture project. Each student created a total of ten images on their interpretations and choices of imagery related to the themes and ideas of the course. I think if you compare these images with the Outsider Art Project artworks that they did earlier in the semester, that you can see how one project fed into the next project. Many of these are excellent artworks suitable for professional art, design, and illustration portfolios.

From Paula Kingsbury-Evans, comparing/contrasting stereotypes of fashion portraiture and race via complex overlays:



Two artworks from Hailey Rolon, developing concepts and images of gender roles and a dose of surrealist collage across time periods:



Benjamin Ross considering the nature of signs, symbols, and technology-graphics related to depictions of nature and mind:



Kennedy Sobon expanding on ideas of identity from her Outsider Art project, to include more considerations of how technology and networked media can have a fracturing effect for self-portraiture:



And, whimsical, surrealistic animal portraits in hyperactive colors, by Isaiah (Jonny) Tobey:

