

[Emergence 2022: Reshaping the Future of the World Through Art](#)

CSEA and OAEA Conference for Art Educators - A Review

by Irene Faiz

The Canadian Society for Education Through Art (CSEA) and the Ontario Art Education Association (OAEA) combined forces in a national conference (***Emergence 2022: Reshaping the Future of the World Through Art***) at the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG) October 14th to 16th, 2022.

After at least two years of having virtual conferences, it was wonderful to share and learn and socialize once again.

The call for proposals invited art educators to “re-imagine how the world can be reshaped by visual art for the future and to address emergent art education sub-themes including decolonization, gender, social activism, accessibility, environmentalism, wellness, creative process, play, intersectionality and embodiment.”

The four keynote speakers were [Cara Tierney](#), [Mary Blatherwick](#), [Ekow Nimako](#) and [Don Kwan](#).

All of these artists/educators are thinking about issues of representation and activism. They are asking questions that are based on the [Eight Media Literacy Key Concepts](#) . Coupled with media literacy thinking, there are many fascinating interdisciplinary curriculum connections.

Keynote Speaker - Cara Tierney

Cara Tierney (they/them) is an Ottawa-area interdisciplinary artist, activist, curator, educator, consultant and community builder. They spoke about how Western forms of domination are ever-present and ever-persuasive.

Cara is a part-time professor at the University of Ottawa whose research in art history asks the question, “How does art act upon us?” They have been researching *The Guerrilla Girls*, *Romaine Brooks* and *The Lesbian Rangers*.

Gender identity and sexual identity have been themes in their art over the past 10 years. Their early performance works focused on questioning rituals we follow to represent ourselves. They also explored the language that has been used to represent us and how it has been hurting them. Cara uses their art practice to explore questions of representation. For one performance artwork, Cara hired a hairdresser to give them their father’s haircut. This creative activity helped them understand their father’s gender identity through a lived experience.

They are also interested in the power of clothing and jewellery and how it can affect people. During this keynote address, Cara was wearing a large necklace with the pronoun, “THEY” as the pendant. This pendant was at least 10 x 15 cm in dimension. The lettering style was something you would see at a Broadway theatre in New York City.

Cara is also interested in leading collaborative projects with youth. One of these projects asked the youth to “try to **degender** some of the bathrooms” that we used regularly. Cara led the youth to look at the traditional signs for men’s and women’s bathrooms and “**retire**” them. They also led the youth to demystify bathroom spaces that they had never been allowed to enter. With their brilliant sense of humour, Cara led these youth on bathroom expeditions that had traditionally only been accessible to the opposite sex. They led the youth on “**bathroom safaris**” to ask questions such as, “Have you ever seen a urinal? Let’s go see a urinal.” Like an enthusiastic educator, they made this field trip experience joyful. Cara Tierney’s art practice leads us into “gentle and creative” ways to look at our institutional policies about diversity and inclusivity.

Media literacy Key Concept #1

Media construct reality.

Student activities arising from Cara’s ideas:

What codes and conventions have traditionally been used to “label” men’s and women’s bathrooms?

Who do these codes and conventions include and exclude?

Creative Challenge: “Retire” the old bathroom signs. Create a plaque to “retire” the old bathroom signage that explains why it is being retired. “Create” new inclusive bathroom signage.

Keynote Speaker - Mary Blatherwick

Mary Blatherwick gave the Gaitskell Address. Mary teaches visual art and creative education at the University of New Brunswick. Her research interests include creativity, visual culture and community-based arts education. She is interested in how the creative thinking skills art educators offer students will help them to acquire the confidence to be creative thinkers. Her teaching practice offers her students to develop their creative thinking through imagination, open mindedness, playfulness, well-being, story telling, engagement, collaboration and curiosity. These educational experiences will help our students to be curious, challenge assumptions and stereotypes and find their passion.

Media literacy Key Concept #3

Audiences negotiate meaning.

Student activities arising from Mary’s ideas:

Analyze an artwork that has been created by the students and ask:

Which elements of design are used to engage/attract the audience (colour, visuals, sound, word choice, etc.)?

What is my interpretation of the meaning of this text?

Who might interpret it similarly/ differently? Why?

Keynote Speaker - Ekow Nimako

Ekow Nimako presented at the National Gallery of Canada on the evening of Saturday, October 15th. His presentation was titled, "Rebuild The World: LEGO Art and Education."

Ekow is a Toronto-based LEGO artist. He is a passionate artist and educator. His art is driven by the premise, "I don't want more kids like me growing with something they love, but not seeing themselves represented in that world."

Recently Ekow has started to offer youth workshops on the theme, "Building Brown Faced Descendents". He leads youth to create their own descendents with faces that resemble themselves. He wants these youth to see and know that "Black is beautiful" and "Black is sophisticated."

Nimako believes that "play" has a positive effect on children's intellectual, social, emotional and physical development.

Eko was born in Montreal, Quebec and grew up in London, Ontario. Since childhood, he has been passionate about playing with LEGOs. As a Black youth, he heard anti-Black racism such as the "N-Bomb" hurtled towards him. So he was inspired to "create safety" for himself by creating his own art. He needed to see himself represented in the LEGO universe that he was creating.

Ekow's expansive body of work is titled, "Building Black." Eko says, "I mainly build in black. I like black. It contains everything and nothing.... I use unconventional LEGO pieces. I find interesting ways to bend the parts that are available to everyone." His message is to empower the children of his culture. He says, "I want them represented."

Ekow's art empowers Black children and youth, creating a safe space for them. He continues to say, "I want to make art without getting arrested." In the words of Arturo Escobar, Eko's art reminds us in the words of Ekow Nimako, "another possible is possible." Art contains ideologies.

Media literacy Key Concept #5

Media communicates values messages

Student activities arising from Ekow's ideas:

Analyze an artwork by Ekow Nimako:

Whose values are represented in this media text?

Whose values are not represented?

Are my values/beliefs represented?

Keynote Speaker - Don Kwan

Don Kwan is a queer third-generation Chinese-Canadian multidisciplinary artist. His work explores place, identity, representation and family memory across time. His recent exhibit at the City of Ottawa's Fireside Collection in the Ottawa Art Gallery is titled, *This Land Is My Land, This Land Is Your Land*. Referencing the song by Woody Guthrie, Kwan is asking the question, "What does it look like to belong in the Canadian landscape?"

Don's family has been in Canada for 100 years as guests and settlers. In one of his artworks he reflects on the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1917. He comments on how this Canadian legislation stopped the flow of Chinese immigration to Canada. Don says, "I use my art to resolve and reconcile those histories."

Don also says, "My work is very autobiographical. It's very personal." He is inspired by the legacy that his parents have left behind. He says, "... my parents did community building after work hours." Don is also interested in using his art to create community. "I started curating art exhibits in restaurants in Chinatown, Toronto. Then I started using laundromats." These exhibits bridged language barriers and created community.

Don is always thinking about how to bridge gaps as a queer Chinese Canadian artist. Don's goal as an artist is to create change. He is inserting himself in the Canadian landscape in new and brilliant ways: Muskoka chairs in a locked circle; Chinese lanterns hanging in Canadian landscapes; Romanticized Chinese Landscapes; the Ottawa Art Gallery's Fireside Collection of Canadian Art has never seen such challenging "neighbours" exhibited amongst them.

Media literacy Key Concept #6

Media communicates political and social messages

Student activities arising from Don's ideas:

Analyze an artwork by Don Kwan:

What is this text's political point of view?

How might this text influence its audience's political point of view?

How does his art repurpose everyday found objects?

The workshop I presented was titled, ***Politics on Paper: Deconstructing the News - Ottawa Protests, Winter 2022 - Printmaking Projects.***

The analysis of this news story from different perspectives wove in the following media literacy concepts:

#5. Media communicate values messages

#6. Media communicate political and social messages

The printmaking project wove in the following media literacy key concept:

#7. Form and content are closely related in each medium

Links to this curriculum unit and curriculum units on looking at the art of Ekow Nimako is at the aml.ca website [here](#).

The lesson including Don Kwan and Kent Monkman is available [here](#).