

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

The Gallery of Writing in Social Networks: An Interview with Curator Cornelia Pokrzywa

By Lori Ostergaard

On October 20, 2009, writers around the country celebrated the first National Day on Writing. As a part of the celebrations, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) sponsored a National Gallery of Writing where writers could contribute everything from business letters to poems, emails to research papers. MBWP's own Cornelia Pokrzywa proposed and curated her own gallery on social networking sites: "Add to Friends: Writing in Social Networks."



Cornelia Pokrzywa

I asked Cornelia to tell us a little about her writing gallery, which is available to visit and to contribute to until June 2010 at <http://galleryofwriting.org/galleries/166662>

Tell us about your gallery

My gallery highlights the range of writing in social networks. I got the idea after reflecting on the popular notion that social network writing is somehow "less worthy" than the writing that is published in other media. Writing in social networks is generally considered "throw-away writing" and criticized for its immediacy and lack of formality. I find a certain sense of beauty in the immediacy. A collection of status updates, or a status update followed by a series of comments, reveals an exigency that is both subtle and complex. The National Council of Teachers of English has an initiative called "Everybody is a Writer," and I believe that social networks have turned this slogan into a truism. Social networks create a valuable, low-risk opportunity to write. The practice of reflecting on one's "status" and then putting it in words goes back to the ancient practice of "self-care." It's not trivial; it's not banal. It IS writing.

What was the process of setting up the gallery and publicizing it like?

The process is very simple. The NCTE gallery is completely automated. I submitted my idea and when it was accepted, I was given a URL to a gallery management page where I had tools to review submissions and manage acceptance notifications. There were plenty of opportunities for networking and idea-sharing with other curators, from Facebook pages to NING groups, a Twitter feed and, of course, the live webcast on Oct. 20. I used my own social networks to curate submissions, and anybody searching for "social networks" in the national gallery website would find a link to my local gallery.



"Add to Friends: Writing in Social Networks"

Did your students contribute? If so, what kinds of texts did they submit?

Yes, I did have some students who submitted artifacts to my gallery. In the weeks leading up to the National Day on Writing, my students were contributing to a class Wiki, framing arguments about the value, purpose, and implications of writing in social networks. The Wiki gave them some time to reflect on their own writing practices, and then later they were invited to submit artifacts to the gallery. I was surprised by the range of submissions. Some submitted status updates, but I also got poetry, letters, and even a video.

What kinds of other submissions did you get?

I got contributions from people I didn't know! I don't know how they found my gallery or what made them decide to share. It makes it even more interesting. I was also honored to receive submissions from Meadow Brook Writing Project colleagues and fellow Oakland University faculty. The featured piece in the gallery is an open letter from Professor Annie Gilson to students that circulated on Facebook during the Fall 2009 when Oakland University faculty were engaged in an unfair labor practice protest.

How long will your gallery be up? Can people still contribute to it?

Yes, people can still contribute, and I hope they will! I will continue to review submissions through June 1, 2010. The National Gallery on Writing was unveiled to the public on the National Day on Writing (October 20, 2009) and will remain open for submissions/viewing/reading through June 30, 2010.

Is this going to be an ongoing project for NCTE, and do you plan to stay involved?

I don't know what kinds of plans NCTE has for the project beyond June 2010. I hope to curate a new gallery for the next National Day on Writing and plan to archive the submissions in this year's gallery.

SUMMARY

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