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## Student research highlighted in art exhibit

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

A television monitor sitting on the floor in the corner greets visitors upon entering the darkened room. A slide projector against the wall alongside the monitor flashes images of a young couple in conversation, which depicts surreal video images of the couple. Sounds from the conversation draw you to the adjacent room, where a video projector fills the far wall with staccato images of the couple. A side profile of the couple is visible – sometimes the camera rotates in the outdoor wintry scene to change the viewpoint. Though the images are placed in space, the conversation is more difficult to put in context. Only snippets of apparently random conversation mixed with subtle electronic music are audible. The remainder is a blank left unfilled.

“What’s audibly absent is more important than what’s present,” said Oakland University senior Louis Rawlins of his **Meadow Brook Art Gallery** exhibit, titled **“Conversation Piece 003.”**

“The exhibit is more about exploring what people notice in conversation, and what people take from it,” said Rawlins, who is a mathematics major and art history minor. “There are a lot of subtleties people miss during conversation.”

Rawlins’ exhibit is the fruition of his provost-sponsored University Research Scholarship. The scholarship program invites students to become exposed to the challenges and excitement gained by pursuing independent research projects.

To date, 30 OU students each have received up to \$1,000 to support their research. Students work with faculty mentors on their projects for a minimum of one semester and submit a final research report within one year. The student researchers also have the opportunity to apply for up to \$500 in travel support to present their research at a professional conference. Students from any academic discipline are eligible.

Andrea Eis, special lecturer in Oakland University’s **Department of Art and Art History**, served as Rawlins’ mentor through the process of constructing his exhibit, which was on display July 18-22.

“I met with Louis about the project frequently over the past year,” Eis said. “He began with the academic side of the piece, which was researching installation art. He had a general idea of the process of how he’d assemble different parts of the exhibit and how its form would relate to the ideas he wanted to convey. I helped him follow through that process and helped ensure he did the things he needed to do to bring it to an exhibit level. Sometimes my aesthetic input was important in adding to what he wanted to do. On the technical side, Louis’ computer programming input was astounding.”

Rawlins’ inspiration for the exhibit was a piece of electronic music titled “Aquarius” by a Scottish duo called Boards of Canada.

“There’s a part of the song where they use bits of speech, and I wanted to do something similar to that in rearranging words,” said Rawlins, who is also an **Honors College** student. “I make music and do a lot of video and audio work and digital photography, so this project seemed like a natural extension of all those things. It really helped to see professor Eis on a weekly basis. I went over my progress with her and spoke to her about my ideas as a kind of colleague.”

Rawlins’ plans to pursue a graduate degree in information design after graduation.

“The reason I became a math major was to gain a background in logic and see structure in things that are not as apparent to others,” Rawlins said. “The perception of patterns that others aren’t always aware of pervades a lot of the art that I create.”

To complete the project, Rawlins will write an academic paper documenting the process of putting the exhibit together. The paper will be tied to his Honors College thesis.

“Louis has the ambition to try a really complex project,” Eis said. “I think this is just what the university research scholarship is about – creating an opportunity for students to expand their possibilities.”

Applications for the scholarship program are accepted three times per year. The next series of proposals are due Monday, Oct. 3, with the award announcement on Monday, Nov. 3.

The Research Advisory Committee, comprised of faculty from a broad range of disciplines, reviews and evaluates each

submitted proposal. Students are selected based on their academic strengths as well as the quality, significance and potential impact of their proposed research projects.

The guidelines and application material may be accessed from the **Provost's Program for University Research Scholars** Web page. For more information, contact Assistant Vice Provost Pat Beaver at (248) 370-3222 or [beaver@oakland.edu](mailto:beaver@oakland.edu).

**SUMMARY**

The recent Meadow Brook Art Gallery exhibit by OU senior Louis Rawlins explored what people notice in conversation, and what people take from it. The exhibit was the culmination of a yearlong, provost-sponsored University Research Scholarship.

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