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Branson, O'Brien Receive Phi Beta Kappa Awards

May 1, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Rachel Branson '14 (Overland Park, Kan.) and Joseph O'Brien '14 (Naperville, Ill.) have received this year's Phi Beta Kappa Liberal Arts Scholar Awards at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Phi Beta Kappa, the undergraduate honors organization recognizing excellence in the liberal arts and sciences, is the nation's oldest academic society. The Liberal Arts Scholars Awards foster and celebrate student research that engages, translates and bridges academic disciplines and/or crosses traditional academic boundaries. Applicants submit a research paper or a work of art, music composition, film, collection of poetry or research that stemmed from experiential learning.

A senior double majoring in English literature and international studies, Branson follows the narrative transformation of the plot of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi from text to film as well as its cross-cultural modifications in order to understand why this transformation occurs.

"My project focuses on how the *Pinocchio* narrative maintains its basic structure and story in each version of the tale, while still including significant changes that make the tale relevant and important for the culture in which that version was produced," said Branson. For example, each incarnation includes an ideological message, whether it's to be a moral and good little boy in the Italian text or in the 1940 Walt Disney movie produced in the United States, or to be an ideal Soviet citizen, as in the Russian text and film.

In tracing the *Pinocchio* narrative, Branson said the familiar framework of a fairy tale and its inherent didactic nature make it particularly suitable to become a vehicle for ideological content.

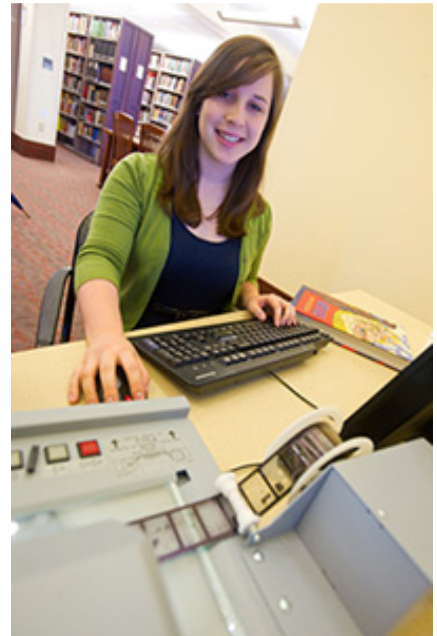
This fall Branson will enter the comparative literature Ph.D. program at the University of Oregon.

O'Brien is a senior majoring in art with concentrations in photography and graphic design. For his project, "Experiencing the Ineffable," O'Brien wanted to look at how humans experience aspects of a recalled episodic memory that's missing.

For example, if you remember you had coffee and a bagel for breakfast yesterday, but you can't remember what type of bagel, that's a partially recalled episodic memory. O'Brien was interested in the sensation we feel when we can't recall an aspect of this type of memory. Philosophers call this sensation a *quale* — something that can't be known without having been experienced.

"The interesting issue about this quale in particular is that not only is knowledge of it based entirely on experience, but we also have no word or phrase in the English language to devote to this sensation," said O'Brien, whose project included a written essay and artwork. The most similar phrase is when we say 'it's on the tip of my tongue,' O'Brien said.

To learn more about the ability of art to evoke sensations, O'Brien created seven pairs of photographs as a body of artwork. In each pair, one photo was untouched



Rachel Branson



Joseph O'Brien

and the other was distressed. Within the exhibition space, the pairs of photographs were arranged so that spatial disconnect between each pair forced the viewer to attempt to recall the untouched image when viewing the distressed image. This hopefully evoked the quale in question, O'Brien said.

This fall O'Brien will begin a master's program in studio art at Emily Carr University of Art & Design in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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