
The Renaissance Academy @ the Center for Ethics (T.R.A.C.E.)

presents:

Conversations at the Carlos: Health and Humanities

March 31, 2017

About the Event

The Renaissance Academy at the Center for Ethics (T.R.A.C.E.), an Emory University collaborative, hosted "Conversations in Italy: Health and Humanities" at the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Art on March 31, 2017. Sponsored by the Michael C. Carlos Museum, the Department Italian Studies, the School of Medicine, the School of Physical Therapy, the Department of Medicine, and the Center for Ethics at Emory, the evening provided the opportunity for health professional students "seeking to engage the arts...to become better listeners, inspire compassion, and improve health."



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Background

On March 31st, 2017, a group of health professional and bio-ethics students gathered at Emory University's Michael C. Carlos Museum for the inaugural Renaissance Academy at the Center for Ethics (TRACE) event, "Conversations @ the Carlos: Health and Humanities."

The event series was started by Judy Raggi-Moore (Professor of Italian Studies in the Emory College of Arts and Sciences), Sarah Blanton (Associate Professor, Department of

Rehabilitation Medicine), Leigh Partington (Writer for the Department of Medicine and Geriatrics), Elizabeth Hornor (Marguerite Colville Ingram Director of Education at the Michael C. Carlos Museum), Gerard Vong (Director, Masters of Arts in Bioethics), and John David Ike (Fourth-year medical student at Emory University School of Medicine).

This innovative approach to interprofessional education was designed to utilize the arts as an interdisciplinary medium to discuss the link between the humanities and health at both an individual

and a population level. The topic of the first event was Shamanism in the Ancient Americas.



Welcome and Refreshments

For this evening event, Elizabeth Hornor led a group of medical, physical therapy, bio-ethics, and physician assistant students through the Carlos Museum's collection of Ancient North and South American art. First, however, Hornor asked the students to gaze into the Greek and Roman galleries. The classical works of art with long arms and legs, aquiline noses, and robes draped around nude bodies are in sharp contrast to the forms they will explore in the Americas Gallery.





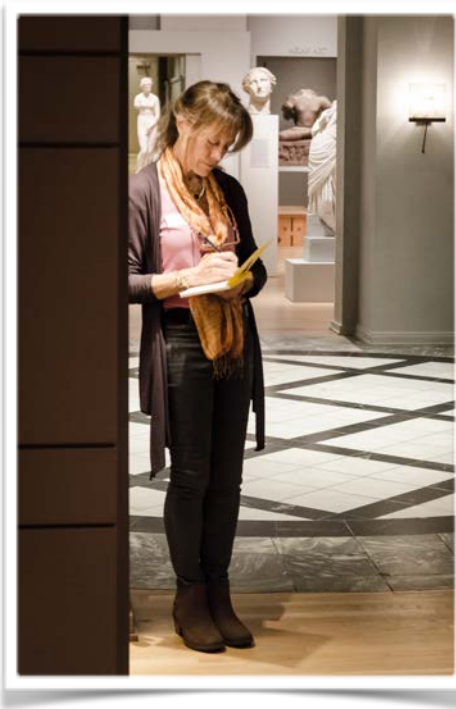
Using various sculptures depicting Shamans (cultural “healers”), the students applied visual literacy skills - looking closely, describing, and interpreting – to gain insight into current rehabilitation practices and cultural perceptions of health. The students reflected on various depictions of Shamans with a range of deformities (blindness, Leishmaniosis, kyphosis, etc.) and how these “disabilities” to the Ancient Americans were viewed as positive attributes; if you were able to survive a life-threatening illness or live with a disfigurement, you were viewed as god-like.

The conversation then shifted to four female figures in different stages of womanhood: a pregnant figure, a figure with child, and two decorated elder figures. The intricate detailing and adornment of the figures exemplified the value that the Incas placed on the elderly women of their communities. These observations sparked conversation on the role of gender in society and in health.



Following the guided discussion and to allow time for self-reflection, the students were released into the gallery with sketch pads to explore, draw, or write in an attempt to gain greater insight into the experience. Small groups of students from different health professional programs fluidly moved through the collection discussing the pieces and their relevance to their roles as health professionals or bioethicists.

Concluding Comments



The group concluded the evening with a debriefing session to share their perspectives and collectively reflect on the ways art fosters awareness, and on the various cultural interpretations of disability and healing.

Phillip Kellogg, a physical therapy student, commented that our “Western gaze” often limits our ability to interpret a work of art; we are biased towards false conclusions about an artist’s ability or a culture’s development due to our own preconceived beliefs. He went on to state that “very often we make similar, very quick conclusions about our patients if we do not grant ourselves a moment to slow down and assess the environment that impacts their clinical picture.”

Leslie Blackshear, a first-year medical student, commented on the perception of disability in the Ancient Americas. She was “struck by the idea that something our society would consider a physical disability was, in ancient America, an indicator of ability in another area,” and how such a contrast, “made [her] think about the ways in which our society frames disability and what that says about our own cultural values.” In the end, students agreed that art may serve as a medium to make us more observant and instill compassion towards humanity.

The next event is currently in the planning phase and will focus on art’s role in grief and death. For more information, please contact Judy Raggi-Moore. More information on TRACE can be found on its website: www.conversationsinitaly.com

