Candidate: Catherine Kyle
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: English

Title: Subjective Selves: Visual Metaphor and the Figure of the Artist in Contemporary Comics

Committee:
Dr. Gwen Tarbox, Chair
Dr. Jil Larson
Dr. Jeanne LaHaie
Dr. Katharine Capshaw

Time/Place: Thursday, February 18, 2016
2:30 to 4:30 p.m.
3025 Brown Hall

Sarah Oleksyk’s Ivy, I. Merey’s a+e 4ever, David Small’s Stitches, Craig Thompson’s Blankets, and Ellen Forney’s Marbles are five contemporary U.S. long-form comics that demonstrate what I call branched metaphoric monstration—the presence of illustrations that represent at least two narrative positions that contain visual metaphor. Given that all five of these texts are also semiautobiographical stories and memoirs that focus on the maturation of emerging visual artists, branched metaphoric monstration serves, in each of them, to comment on the developing cognition of young creators. The insights these texts provide individually and collectively shed light on some of the pressures young artists face, the way artists navigate these obstacles, and the relationships between thought, perception, emotion, memory, and visual art. Drawing from cognitive metaphor theory, comics studies, film studies, critical theory, queer theory, and other discourses, I supply literary analyses of these texts with attention to the themes of emptiness and denial in Ivy, gender and sexuality in a+e 4ever, physical illness in Stitches, religious anxiety in Blankets, and mental illness in Marbles. I argue that comics displaying branched metaphoric monstration are helping to usher in a new generation of Künstlerroman narratives, one heavily influenced by postmodern thought that still reveals traces of the genre’s Romantic heritage.