



ELAINE CHAN sits down with Jennifer Yee, the curator of EFUT's Art Gala, to talk about "Political Identities in the Francophonie."

PHOTOS BY ANDREW RUSK



Jennifer Yee at the exhibit's opening reception.

The Varsity: What inspired you to choose "Political Identities in the Francophonie" as the theme for the EFUT Art Gala?

Jennifer Yee: Because of all the events that are happening Francophonie [global community of Francophones] right now, [this theme] is really making headlines, not just in French media but internationally. So many things are happening, from the ban of the burqa and the expulsion of the Roma people in France, the G20 in Toronto, the Black Bloc, and the earthquake in Haiti. Now, with some of the former dictators returning as well as with the Tunisia uprising, I think there's been a real outcry from different populations of the Francophonie, and I wanted all those voices to be heard. Especially in Canada, where French is a second language, everyone experiences living in a dichotomy of having two official languages in some way.

TV: In the curatorial statement, you mentioned that the chosen theme reflected the current political climate and that as French-speakers, bilinguals, or Anglophones, we are integrated in a community which embraces two official languages. What drew you to this subject?

JY: I think being involved in EFUT [influenced me]. They're such an inclusive club! I noticed it's not just French speakers who go, but also English speakers and people who identify themselves as being bilingual. There's a sense of inclusivity and I wanted have the same feeling [at the gala]. You don't have to be a French speaker in order to be in this show. As an Anglophone, you experience French culture in some way and it does have a direct effect on your narrative of your own life story.

TV: Tell us about some of the artists featured in this exhibition.

JY: We have six artists, seven including myself, involved. We have a good range of students, from PhD to undergraduates from here at U of T, to OISE, York, and OCAD.

Brooke, one of our artists, took a trip through the French speaking region of Western Africa and

photographed her experience. She went by herself with a backpack and a camera to take these photos, whereas before, that was what you saw done only with *National Geographic*. There's definitely something to be said about globalization, the western gaze and also a focus on what most of us here ignore, such as the ongoing effects of war, especially in the Congo.

Jay's set of photographic collages talks about the expulsion of Roma people and the political implications that reside in locking people out from a place they've called home. Marc's piece was about the Black Bloc at the G20 and how French speakers were targeted while a police state was created here in Toronto.

Overall, everyone did a good job in responding to the call. I didn't have to rework anything — they were just the ideas they had themselves.

TV: When people leave the exhibit, what would you like them to take away from it?

JY: I would like them to take away that everyone is welcome in the French community, at EFUT, at U of T, and welcome to participate. I find when we have a call-out people usually need convincing to submit. If you make art, you're an artist. I feel that people are very reluctant to take that term and should feel empowered. When people see this show, I hope they feel that they don't have to be just on the viewing end but at the participating end as well.

TV: Given the successful turn out of such a great project, how do you feel about the overall experience?

JY: It's definitely overwhelming. It's a lot of work, but when you're backed by a club, it makes it a whole lot easier. I think U of T has done a great job in creating a space where students can be heard. At the end of the day, I know I worked blood, sweat and tears into this show and I didn't do it alone.

EFUT's 3rd Annual Art Gala runs through February 19 at University of Toronto Art Centre, 15 King's College Circle.