

Citation for Johnny El-Alam, 2012 Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship Winner

By Mark Langer, OCUFA President 2009 – 2011

Before I talk about Johnny El-Alam's accomplishments, I'd like to acquaint him with some of the qualities of the man for whom this Fellowship is named.

Henry Mandelbaum is, and has been, a tireless advocate for the rights and well-being of those involved in post-secondary education. Most people in this room are well aware of Henry's work lobbying, forging alliances with unions, student organizations and other groups in the public advocacy sector. His efforts were always directed toward the welfare of the larger community to which we all belong. Henry came to OCUFA when it was going through a crisis period. He left it stronger and more effective than it had ever been. Henry is the very model of commitment to the broader social good.

Charles Schultz once observed "I love humankind, it's just people I can't stand." That would not apply to Henry, even when faced with some pretty appalling human material. Those of us who have worked in the public sector know that one can encounter some fairly odious types. Henry would always be able to find the good in anyone, and appeal to the angels of their better natures to get his points across.

And Henry is a truly caring person. Having been on several management bargaining teams with him, negotiating new contracts with the OCUFA employees, I can recall countless times in which Henry would bring up his concerns that the contract be fair to OCUFA's staff. We had long conversations in which he would speak about his desire to run what he calls "a happy office." Henry has been reluctant to accept credit for his own accomplishments, and quick to credit OCUFA's outstanding employees and elected representatives for the work done. Throughout the time Henry has spent with OCUFA, he has been the very heart and soul of this organization.

Henry's other fine qualities – his ability to forge lasting friendships, his appreciation of nature (particularly being out on the water in his boat), his love of animals, family and most particularly his wife Thea, are too many to list here. Perhaps these few words indicate to the first recipient of the Mandelbaum Fellowship the kind of characteristics we are trying to foster through this award, and convey our hopes for the winners of the Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship, now and in the future.

It is my great pleasure to be part of this ceremony which will award the first in what I hope will be many Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowships for excellence in social sciences, humanities, or arts.

One of Henry's legacies, on his retirement, was to convince us that he wanted to be remembered for his service to OCUFA, in part, with the establishment of this award.

The office received literally hundreds of inquiries and almost forty complete applications since information was sent out in the Fall of 2011.

As immediate past president of OCUFA, I was asked to chair the selection jury and had the invaluable help of Kate Lawson and Glenna Knutson.

Your selection jury was confronted with devising a process and sifting through an incredibly accomplished candidate field. We all remarked on the difficulty of selecting just one of these scholars for recognition.

In the end, however, we made a choice. The choice, I, Kate and Glenna believe, will set a very high bar for future candidates and will do justice to Henry and the Fellowship created in his name.

Johnny El-Alam is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture at Carleton University. He previously was awarded a Masters in Art History from Carleton and a BA and MA equivalent from the Lebanese University in History and Fine Arts, respectively.

I'd like to quote from his referees and professors:

Already an accomplished visual artist and teacher...Johnny quickly helped to elevate the level of discourse in...class. His insights into issues of cultural retention, hybrid identities, and intercultural global connections were invaluable. In the six years I have known the applicant I have been deeply impressed with his perseverance and unwavering commitment to scholarship.

Another referee stated: His MA work was really quite brilliant and he returns to it now, moving it into a more difficult register with the really quite new framework of transnationalism, trauma, and translation....Johnny's scholarly excellence (promising his future in the academy, as a researcher and teacher) is demonstrable in his MA distinction, his awards to date, his exceptional teaching and working resume, and his grades.

Your selection jury agreed and noted an all-around strength, a passionate articulation of his research and dissertation, incredible community service, and a compelling topic that will truly build knowledge in an area with scant literature at this time.

Johnny's research will establish a relation between Canada's official policies on multiculturalism and the escalating interest among national museums and galleries in issues of diversity and defining Canadian identity. It will build on his previous work by inquiring into whether or not artists feel less Canadian by representing another nation's trauma. His study will bring together, for the first time, a number of renowned Canadian artists with hybrid identities based on their shared experience of war during childhood and their diasporic experiences during adulthood.

The Board will have the pleasure of a presentation from Johnny next June and can look forward to a high level of insight and creativity.