



Mentorship, research, and professional growth at the Robarts Centre

BY ERIN YUNES

Dr. Erin Yunes is a professor and departmental coordinator of art history at the American College of the Mediterranean (ACM-IAU) in Aix-en-Provence, France. Dr. Yunes recently completed a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) post-doctoral fellowship in community data for the *Rematriation Project: Restoring and Sharing Inuit Knowledges* in the University Libraries at Virginia Tech. She holds a PhD in visual culture and art history from York University.

As the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies celebrates its 40th anniversary, I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on my experiences. The Robarts Centre has played an important role in my professional and academic development, encouraging rigorous and equitable research practices and cultivating meaningful collaborations. My journey with the Centre, from working with Inuit artists through the Mobilizing Inuit Cultural Heritage (MICH) project, to collaborating on the Robarts Executive Committee and Borealis Council, has significantly shaped my career.

During my six years at York University pursuing a PhD in visual culture and art history, my dissertation, “Decolonizing Nunavut’s Art Market,” centred on empowering Inuit autonomy in the arts economy through Indigenous-led, community-owned information and communication technologies. The Robarts Centre’s involvement with MICH was instrumental in preparing me for community-engaged work. The opportunity to travel to Nunavut was essential for understanding community values, as I collaborated closely with Inuit artists, leaders, and organizations. The guidance from the Robarts leadership was invaluable, reinforcing a community-first approach and providing the foundation for me to build lasting relationships.

A pivotal experience was attending the All Arts Summit in Kinngait, Nunavut, where I engaged in discussions with members of the government of Nunavut about strategies and policies for the cultural industries. This deepened my understanding of the challenges and opportunities in preserving and promoting cultural heritage within the Inuit arts community. Speaking with artists and organizations in Kinngait enriched my appreciation for the intersection of cultural business and entrepreneurship in the Arctic.

Participating in an intensive program at the University of Graz in Austria expanded my perspective on international debates surrounding governance, tradition, and migration. Collaborating with participants from 31 countries highlighted the interconnectedness of societal challenges, emphasizing the importance of a global perspective in addressing complex issues. These experiences, supported by the Robarts Centre, informed discussions at the spring graduate conference, attracting significant interest from scholars across Canada.

Involvement in the Borealis Council allowed me to contribute to research initiatives at York, highlighting the intricacies of interdisciplinary collaboration and organizational decision making. This role sharpened my skills in teamwork, critical thinking, and strategic planning. After defending my dissertation, I transitioned into a professional role at the Centre for Maritime Research and Experi-

mentation at NATO in La Spezia, Italy. As a scientific editor and public relations specialist, I applied the skills I developed at Robarts, including editing and compiling scholarly publications, event planning, and cross-cultural coordination. These skills were vital in my work at NATO, where effective communication and collaboration were crucial to success.

The most memorable aspect of my time at the Robarts Centre has been the mentorship I received. The guidance and support from mentors at the Centre not only nurtured my academic growth but also encouraged a proactive approach to engaging in global initiatives. Their insights enabled me to participate in international research experiences, broadening my horizons and shaping my professional trajectory. As I transition to my new role as faculty and department coordinator in art history at the American College of the Mediterranean (ACM-IAU) in Aix-en-Provence, France, I aim to bring these ideals into my own mentorship of students.

My connection with the Robarts Centre has been a multifaceted experience, blending academic, research, and professional opportunities that have profoundly shaped my perspectives on Canada and the global landscape. The skills and insights gained from my time at the Centre have equipped me to navigate the complexities of cultural, technological, and societal challenges, emphasizing the importance of community engagement, global awareness, and interdisciplinary collaboration for our shared futures. ■