In the last decade, particularly on university campuses, there has been a very clear and conscious effort to bring *tolerance* and *diversity* to the front of academic conversation and rightfully make them a more meaningful part of a curricular agenda. It is, after all, the duty of those in academia to hold up a mirror to the world for examination, discussion and, ultimately, criticism.

We live in incredible times—no doubt. As cultures become blurred, fused and less homogenous, new ways of thinking about a course for societal progress are necessary. It could be said that we live closer to each other than ever before, nearly side by side and on top of one another, physically and figuratively. Suburban, rural and dense urban spaces all have by and large access to the same amounts of culture. It is rare for people in developed nations to experience provincial life.

We can be anywhere, virtually plugged in to one another, entertained, informed and challenged to see the world creatively. The revolution in technology is the definition of the age. It has the power to lead us, effortlessly, not only to a wealth of information but also to enable us to make intimate contact with history. We receive this information in lightning fast, stimulating bursts: blogs, community forums, etc. Participation in the political process has become an empowering individual experience.

This would seem to suggest the possibility of a new era of enlightenment. Greater freedoms and broader access to information are ideally thought of as tools for the betterment of humankind. Tolerance is on the mind of everyone, it seems. Respect is being talked about, and the message is urgent. However, divisive groups and individuals are using the same methods to deliver their messages of separation and exclusion. Ironically, the same social media revolution that can empower is causing withdrawal and detachment in many. Why be engaged, when the alternative is so entertaining, visually stimulating and non-confrontational? We can either choose a version of history or create our own with little or no questions asked.

It is on this premise that this exhibition was formed. Our intolerances shape us as directly as our tolerances. So then surely, isn’t it critical—even necessary—to identify that which separates us or establishes hierarchies, that pushes us to grapple with the core elements that foster uniqueness? And then we might ask why, after all we claim to understand, do we still have this distilled darkness in our being? Why do we still struggle to embrace the difference in others, simply accept our tenacious existence and steer toward living in a meaningful way?

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For more information about *The Narcissism of Minor Differences*, contact MICA’s Office of Communications at 410.225.2300.

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