

AHAA Sessions at CAA, New York 2003

The Association of Historians of American Art, an affiliated society of the College Art Association, will be sponsoring 2 sessions at the 2003 CAA Conference in NYC (Feb. 2003).

Please submit papers directly to the session co-chairs by May 10, 2002.

1) 'Strangers in the Night?': Case Studies in Visual Culture and American Art History

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This session will explore the emergent field of visual culture in relation to the canons, disciplinary approaches, and value hierarchies of Art History. The visual cultures of the U.S. (including animation and graphic arts, film, advertising, medical and ! magazine illustration, neon and billboards), are especially susceptible to such study, given their richness, and their pronounced role in visual modernity. The newness of visual culture studies is both a strength and a weakness, offering a critical vantage from which to reconsider the too-often invisible manner in which Art History is constructed as a discipline, but presenting as well a sometimes vast and undifferentiated field of artifacts so inclusive as to overwhelm theoretical and historical categories.

Our purpose is not to rehash efforts to give a definitinal fixity to visual culture, since this ends up reinventing the taxonomies of the older Art History. Rather, we propose a series of "case studies" in how to incorporate a broader field of visual artifacts into our classes and exhibitions. We would also like to explore ways to historicize these artifacts and their roles in shaping ideologies, as well as their forms of circulation. Using such case studies, what can we learn about how the realm of the visual reinforces, qualifies, or rethinks cultural value systems. We are particularly interested in the ways in which visual artifactsj consigned to "non-art" status reinforce the category of "high art" through difference. Are there common questions that we can use to frame visual culture as a unified fieldj, according to such poststructuralist considerations as the mutually constitutive role of high and low art? We welcome proposals from museum professionals, curators, museum educators, as well as academicians.

2) Reframing American Art for the Public: Current Ideas on Permanent

Collection Reinstallations

Terry Carbone, Department of American Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238 terry.carbone@brooklynmuseum.org

Museum curators, museum educators, and professors of American art are invited to submit papers on the subject of current theory and practice of permanent installations in the field.

Who are permanent installations of American art for? If they are for the broadest possible audience (encompassing children and adults of a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and experience as museum visitors), how can the varied needs of discrete segments of that audience be addressed effectively? How does a collection limited by the history of its collecting parameters achieve broad appeal and embrace the interests of a wide array of racial and ethnic communities? And to what degree should the character and content of a traditional American collection be reframed to enhance its reach? Is there a dissenting voice amid this trend toward broad appeal? Can any permanent collection afford to retain a tight focus that might limit its relevance to a wide audience?

These are questions with which Americanists today must come to terms as the challenge of intellectual and cultural accessibility, as it is currently conceived, is placed before them. As museums increasingly undertake reinstallations of their permanent collections with similar goals, methods such as mixing media (fine arts, decorative arts, material culture, and film and video), thematic frameworks, and community involvement have become familiar tools for reshaping the presentation of objects.

Participants in this session are asked to provide their perspectives on the goals, methodologies, and success of recent permanent reinstallations in which they have played a major role in organizing or have utilized in teaching. They are asked to address such questions as: How can disparate collection elements (i.e., Native American objects), which effectively redefine the traditionally conceived notion of "American Art," be successfully integrated? How should the level and position of a didactic program be determined? What is the most effective way to compensate for collection weaknesses? How do you measure the success of a permanent reinstallation, which can offer the opportunity for ongoing dialogue in a way that temporary exhibitions cannot?

This session ideally will address recent installations at a broad spectrum of art museums. Collaborative papers are welcome.

For further information about the Association of Historians of American Art, please contact:
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ArtHist.net

Reference:

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