

## Relationality in American Art (online, 24–25 Jun 21)

online / Courtauld Institute of Art, Centre for American Art, London, Jun 24–25, 2021

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Whether in current critical discourse or recognized retrospectively, relationality has been central to the study of twentieth-century art. Art history is, after all, predicated on the study of relations between bodies, artworks and forms, and their contexts or communities. Moving beyond the simple situatedness of an artwork faced by a viewer, this conference foregrounds the concept of relationality as a means through which we might learn to encounter difference. Relationality is a key tenet of phenomenology, or the study of the structures of consciousness, and in this context it has returned every thirty years or so since its emergence in the first half of the twentieth century in the theorization of feminism, race, film, body art and most recently queer and trans studies to help scholars conceptualize the contours of subjectivity as non-oppositional and fluid. Addressing art of the Americas in the long twentieth century, this conference asks how relationality as an analytic might undo binaries and critique the persistence of a universalized maker and viewer within art history. Presentations examining formal relations and/or artwork-viewer relations are welcome so long as they open onto larger considerations about subjectivity. Speakers are encouraged to address the following and related questions in the context of American art of the long twentieth century:

- What strategies of reading does relationality open up that focus on the relationships artworks and artists produce with audiences?
- How does art allow for creative acts of co-emergence in making or viewing? How do we think with artworks?
- How might relational readings of American art reconfigure notions of kinship?
- What is art's potential to engender community or make space for difference? How does the notion of relationality acknowledge a wider range of viewers, and broader spectrum of experiences, than those usually recognized within art history?
- To what extent might the conditions of viewership or participation—from the use of opera glasses in beholding Frederic Church's *The Heart of the Andes* to Vito Acconci's *Seedbed*—stage relational models of community or the self?
- From a variety of disciplinary positions, how might encounters with artworks contribute to our ever-expanding notions of the self, as in Caroline Jones's concept of 'symbiontics,' which calls for phenomenology to move outside the limiting philosophy of the individual?
- How do bodies exist prior to, during, and after perceptual encounters with artworks? Is art constitutive of the body?
- How do artworks demonstrate relational models of knowing, such as, for instance, Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr's proposal for a new 'relational ethics' in museums' practices of collecting

and display?

- How might formal relations allegorize relations of other kinds?
- How do theoretical stances outside continental philosophy, especially before the mid-twentieth century, invite us to reconsider American art in terms of bodily knowledge?
- Beyond the context of American minimalism in the 1960s, how have phenomenology and its legacies affected artistic practice and discourse?
- Looking forward, what does critical phenomenology have to offer histories of American art?

Due to the pandemic, 'Relationality in American Art' will be held online. This conference is funded by support from the Courtauld's Centre for American Art and from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

We encourage submissions from advanced graduate students and established professionals in fields including, but not limited to, artistic practice, English, philosophy, comparative literature, art history, performance studies, and American or African American studies. To apply, please send a proposal consisting of a CV and a 250 word abstract (including paper title and up to two images if relevant) to Elizabeth Buhe at [ebuhe@nyu.edu](mailto:ebuhe@nyu.edu) by 5 April 2021.

Reference:

CFP: Relationality in American Art (online, 24-25 Jun 21). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 7, 2021 (accessed Jan 23, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/33550>>.