

Session at CAA (online, 16–19 Feb 22)

online / Chicago, Feb 16–19, 2022

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What's the "matter" with American Sculpture?

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Chairs: Christine Garnier, Harvard University, Kelvin Parnell Jr., The University of Virginia and Kate Sunderlin, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Sculptures can be made of anything and placed anywhere. When Kara Walker exhibited the monumental *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2004) in the historic Domino Sugar Refining Plant in Brooklyn, she unpredictably brought formal and material histories into alignment through the base material of sugar. *A Subtlety* prompts questions about how the very material of sculpture can open onto narratives often absent in art-historical discourse. From Olmec jadeite masks, to Spanish colonial corn-paste crucifixes, to Elizabeth Catlett's powerful *Black Unity* carved of cedar, this panel seeks research that looks to material histories across all historical periods and geographies of the Americas (North, Central, and South).

We welcome papers that foreground how material itself can reframe American sculptural histories within discourses of race, gender, colonialism, and empire. What embodied relationships exist between form and its underlying material? What are the ways that race, gender, and sexual constructions are implicated in sculptural materials? How does the study of sculpture from a material perspective open onto longer histories of regional and global networks? Can histories of material and invisible labor undercut the formal meaning of a work? How does materiality become a framework for understanding the relationship between the viewer and final sculpture? Do investigations of material histories allow us to rethink the relationships between sculpture and its intended site throughout the Americas? We look to material histories across the Americas as a means to expand our understanding of sculpture as a medium.

To submit, gather the following materials and send via email to the chairs at garnier@g.harvard.edu:

(1) Completed proposal form CAA website:
<https://www.collegeart.org/programs/conference/proposals>

(2) a shortened CV (close to 2 pages).

Reference:

CFP: Session at CAA (online, 16-19 Feb 22). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 13, 2021 (accessed Jul 13, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/34783>>.