Writing Art History: A Conference (Williamstown, 25–28 Jun 25)

Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA, Jun 25–28, 2025

Caroline Fowler

RAP 25.
CLARK ART INSTITUTE.
JUNE 25–28, 2025.

In June 2025, the Research and Academic Program (RAP) is gathering to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the program. Past fellows, former conference conveners and participants, previous RAP and Clark staff, and a host of other invited scholars, curators, and practitioners, will convene for lectures, roundtable conversations, seminars, film screenings, special tours, and object sessions.

RAP is coming together under a theme,Writing Art History, to think together over four days about the ways in which writing art history is changing rapidly.

PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25

PUBLIC CONVERSATION
Manton Auditorium
5:00 PM Reception, Manton Reading Room
5:30 PM A CONVERSATION ON THE RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC PROGRAM AT THE CLARK ART INSTITUTE AND ITS LEGACY IN ART HISTORY
Michael Ann Holly, Starr Director Emeritus of the Research and Academic Program, in conversation with David Breslin, Leonard A. Lauder Curator in Charge of the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Darby English, Carl Darling Buck Professor of Art History, University of Chicago, Christopher Heuer, professor of Art History, University of Rochester, Mark Ledbury, Power Professor of Art History and Visual Culture and Director of the Power Institute, University of Sydney, Australia, and Mariët Westermann, director and CEO of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation
7:00 PM Dinner, Clark Center, Glass Box

THURSDAY, JUNE 26

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM THE “WORK” OF THEORY FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Resisting nativist cultural politics on the one hand and art history's Eurocentrism in the matters of theory on the other, the panel takes off from an article titled "The Work of Theory: Thinking Across Traditions" by Prathama Banerjee, Aditya Nigam and Rakesh Pandey in 2016 published in the Economic and Political Weekly, to propose that "we move from the position of being a critic of Western theory to that being a composer and assembler of a new theory from different sources and histories." Theorists from the global south and the global north will gather to explore writing an art history that leaves open the possibility of abstract thinking and self-reflexivity in the non-European knowledge systems and aesthetic theories.

- Parul Dave Mukherji, convener, professor at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
- Iftikhar Dadi, professor of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University, on "Abstraction and Modernism"
- James Elkins, chair of Art History, Theory, and Criticism, School of the Art Institute, Chicago, on "Reconceptualizing Global Art History"
- Prita Meier, associate professor of Art History, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, on "The Indian Ocean as Method: Beyond the 'Cross-Cultural' Paradigm in Art History"
- Keith Moxey, professor emeritus of Art History, Barnard College, New York, on "Decolonization Now"
- Sugata Ray, associate professor, History of Art and South & Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, on "Eco Art History from the Global South: Genealogies, Methodologies, Practices"

SEMINAR
Scholars' Seminar Room
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM DRAWING ART HISTORY
Register in advance; spots are limited
Drawing is not only a subject, but also a tool for art history. Its use was common among 19th-century art historians, many of whom had an artistic training, but the professionalization of the discipline led to its neglect or occultation. Major art historians, such as Meyer Schapiro, continued to use drawing as a way to observe, analyze, record, and interpret their objects of study, but most of them kept their drawings, deemed "subjective," to themselves. Changing definitions of scientific "objectivity" and the study of epistemic tools by historians of science are bringing drawing back to the attention of our discipline, however, as demonstrated by recent publications, conferences, and exhibitions. This seminar deals with the past, the present, and the future of drawing as an instrument of art history, by focusing on case studies and leaving ample room for discussion. Part of the seminar will be devoted to a sketching session in the galleries of the Clark Art Institute.

- Dario Gamboni, co-convener, professor emeritus of Art History, University of Geneva, on "Testing Ways of Visualizing Aniconism"
- Jérémie Koering, co-convener, professor of Art History, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, on "Drawing by Proxy: Edgar Wind through Karl Schneider"
- Isabel Bird, PhD candidate in History of Art, Harvard University, on "First Person, Twice Removed: On Drawing After Sturtevant"
- Dominic-Alain Boariu, Swiss Science Foundation Senior Researcher, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, on "Wölfflin's Hatchings"

- Kerstin Thomas, professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, University of Stuttgart, Germany, on "'Secrets de la matière et de l'outil': The Role of Artworks and Art Practices in Henri Focillon's Concept of Form"
- Barbara Wittmann, professor of Art History and Theory, Berlin University of the Arts, Germany, on "Reconceptualizing Vision: Drawing and the Experimentalization of Perception in Art History"

TOUR
Manton Research Center
10:00 – 11:30 AM HIKE & TOUR OF GROUND/WORK OUTDOOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITION AT THE CLARK
Meet by water feature on Fernandez Terrace outside Manton Research Center

OBJECT POP-UP
Library
Manton Research Center
12:30 – 2:00 PM ARTISTS' BOOKS HIGHLIGHTS
Andrea Puccio, Director of the Clark Library, delves into highlights from the Clark's rich and varied collection of artists' books.

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium
1:30 – 4:30 PM AGAINST WHITENESS AND ITS ARCHIVES
Art history awaits its anti-melancholic turn. From Aby Warburg's belief in the universal lost "primitive" origins of human expression to George Kubler's concept of the "extinction" of Indigenous cultural forms and even to the present day, art historical reflections on the discipline's relationship to archives have tended to focus on how archival lack corresponds to colonized cultures' losses. This colloquium brings together art historians who write with different attitudes, affects, and methodologies in approaching colonial and postcolonial archives. These approaches will be anti-melancholic, oriented toward not past destruction but present construction. If art history always already acknowledges the deferment of full, replete meaning in its object of study, and has traditionally honored the unusual powers of the artwork, our colloquium hopes to push the discipline's latent potential for writing beyond grief.

- Jennifer Nelson, convener, associate professor of Art History, University of Delaware
- Mia Bagneris, associate professor of Art History and Africana Studies and director of the Africana Studies Program, Tulane University
- Allison Caplan, assistant professor of History of Art, Yale University, on "Feathers in the Archive"
- Ximena A. Gómez, assistant professor of History of Art and Architecture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, on "Generative Possibilities of Erasure"
- David Young Kim, professor of History of Art, University of Pennsylvania, and visiting faculty at the University of Zürich, on "Found in Translation: Vasari, Life-Writing, and Art History"
- Shawon Kinew, assistant professor of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University, on "St. Paul & Me"

TOUR
Manton Research Center
2:00 – 3:00 PM HIGHLIGHTS TOUR: RECENT ACQUSITIONS AT THE CLARK

Meet in Manton Reading Room.

EVENING CONVERSATION
Manton Auditorium
5:00 PM Reception, Manton Reading Room
5:30 – 7:00 PM CURATING & WRITING AMERICAN ART IN THE MUSEUM
Horace Ballard, Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Curator of American Art, Harvard University Art Museums, in conversation with Layla Bermeo, Kristin and Roger Servison Curator of Painting, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

FRIDAY, JUNE 27

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM CASE HISTORIES
In 1980, Carlo Ginzburg analyzed a modern medical-semiotic paradigm predicated upon clues that emerged simultaneously among the detective, the psychoanalyst, the forensic scientist, and the art connoisseur. Expanding from this line, this panel aims to think broadly about the largely unacknowledged medical models underpinning the writing of art history and perpetuating harm within it. Not least we will explore the diagnostic basis and disciplinary power of the interpretive act. By incorporating perspectives of disability studies, the history or sociology of medicine, and critical medical humanities, among others, we hope to propose new ways of writing that either account for these origins or seek how, in practice, to repudiate them.

- Suzanne Hudson, co-convener, professor of Art History and Fine Arts, University of Southern California
- Victoria Papa, co-convener, associate professor of English and Visual Culture, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Amanda Cachia, assistant professor, Arts Leadership, Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts, University of Houston, Texas, on “Hospital Aesthetics: Disability, Medicine, Activism”
- Fiona Johnstone, assistant professor in Visual Medical Humanities, Institute for Medical Humanities, Durham University, UK, on “Art History and Critical Medical Humanities”
- Raphael Koenig, assistant professor of French and Comparative Literature, University of Connecticut on “Hans Prinzhorn: Between Medical Case Studies and Art Historical Style”
- Hannah Zeavin, assistant professor of History, University of California, Berkeley, on “Composite Cases”

SEMINAR
Scholars’ Seminar Room
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM A CALL TO TRANSFORM: ART HISTORY & BLACK STUDIES
Register in advance; spots are limited
This colloquium gathers a group of female scholars who are invested in the productive challenges that black studies, and its engagement with gender studies and performance theory, bring to bear on the discipline of art history. We will be devoted to sharing both the broad methodological approaches and the specific tools with which we bring black studies and art history into conversation, both in our scholarship and in the classroom. What lecture topics, readings and assignments help our students build an understanding of these two disciplines, and how do we assess that

understanding? What readings do we bring into conversation in our seminars, and how mobile are these texts for the different contexts in which we each “do” black studies?

- Ellen Tani, convener, assistant professor of Art History, Rochester Institute of Technology
- Sampada Aranke, associate professor of History of Art and Comparative Studies, Ohio State University
- Tiffany E. Barber, assistant professor of African American Art, University of California, Los Angeles
- Emilie Boone, assistant professor of Art history, New York University
- Megan Driscoll, assistant professor of Art History, University of Richmond
- Donette Francis, associate professor of English and director of the Center for Global Black Studies, University of Miami
- Faye Gleisser, associate professor of Art History and Critical Theory, Indiana University
- Christina Knight, assistant professor of Art History, Rutgers University
- Keisha Oliver, assistant professor of Art and Design, University of The Bahamas, and PhD candidate in Art Education and African American and Diaspora Studies, The Pennsylvania State University
- Abbe Schriber, assistant professor of Art History and African American Studies, University of South Carolina

TOUR
Manton Research Center
10:00 – 11:30 AM HIKE & TOUR OF GROUND/WORK OUTDOOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITION AT THE CLARK
Meet by water feature on Fernandez Terrace outside Manton Research Center

OBJECT POP-UP
Study Center for Print and Drawings
Manton Research Center
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM PRINT ROOM POP UP: RECENT ACQUISITIONS AT THE CLARK
Drop in to the Manton Study Center for Prints and Drawings to peruse a display of recent acquisitions.

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium
1:30 – 4:30 PM WRITING THE I: THE SELF IN ART HISTORY
How has art historical writing shifted in recent years to account for the author’s lived, embodied experience? How have scholars borrowed from autobiography, creative nonfiction, life-writing, and auto-theory to open the discipline to new ways of writing art history that emphasize an author’s positionality––their groundedness in history, class, sexuality, gender, race, time, space, and place? This session seeks to uncover the wide-ranging possibilities, risks, and potential shifts to our thinking about the art object when art historical writing asserts a self.

- Sarah Hamill, convener, professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, Sarah Lawrence College
- J. Vanessa Lyon, professor of Art History, Bennington College, on “Blackness Thirteen Ways: On Finding Myself in Art History”

- Iris Moon, associate curator in the European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Department, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on “The Bluest I: Writing Melancholy Wedgwood”
- Ren Ellis Neyra, associate professor of English, Wesleyan University, on “A Disturbance that Does Not Yield”
- Jordan Reznick, assistant professor of American Studies, Grinnell College, on “Looking with the Ancestors”
- Jennifer Stager, assistant professor of Art History, Johns Hopkins University, on “Casting Knucklebones, Conducting Clouds”

SEMINAR
Carswell Room
Lower Clark Center
1:30 – 4:30 PM FORM: SELF AND EXPERIENCE
This seminar asks: What would it mean for form to “tell us enough, or even, at times, what we most need to know” (as Eve Meltzer has written)? In other words, what ways have questions of form (be they visual, narrative, conceptual, etc.) modeled ways of being and living? “Form”—as both a noun and a verb—is our provocation to the representational politics through which art history tracks identity. Form is neither separable from content nor signification, but it is also surplus to them. We contend that only through an account of experiences—not identities—can the terms of enduring and surviving be characterized. Thus, we attempt to supplant the mapping of intersectionality with narratives of the behaviors through which intersectionality is experienced.

- David Getsy, co-convener, professor of Art History, University of Virginia, Charlottesville
- Rachel Haidu, co-convener, professor of Art History, University of Rochester
- Jennifer Doyle, professor of English, University of California, Riverside
- Joan Kee, Judy and Michael Steinhardt Director, Institute of Fine Arts (IFA), New York University

TOUR
Manton Research Center
2:00 – 3:00 PM HIGHLIGHTS TOUR: RECENT ACQUSITIONS AT THE CLARK
Meet in Manton Reading Room.

FILM SCREENING
6:00 – 7:30 PM ART HISTORY x CINEMA
A screening of short films at Images Cinema
50 Spring Street
Williamstown, MA
The Desert and the Lagoon: A Film Essay on Giovanni Bellini (2020), dirs. David Young Kim and Amelia Saul, 21 minutes
You Hide Me (1970), dir. Nii-Kwate Owoo, 16 minutes
Art Isn’t Fair (2012), dir. Allen Sekula, 5:16 minutes
Hubert Damisch: Thinking Aloud (2011), dir. Mieke Bal, 20 minutes

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium

9:30 – 12:30 PM POETICS
This series of papers takes seriously the contemporary turn towards poetics to address aesthetics and the history of art from eco-poetics to Kevin Quashie's aliveness. Poetics has emerged to challenge the limits of works created in relationship to an art market, the accumulation of capital, property, and the role of visual art and museums within histories of colonialism. In the words of Audre Lorde, poetry "forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival." In this series of papers, scholars and poets will reconsider the encounter that is possible between historical bodies of work and the resonant resounding bodies of poetics as a discourse in sound, rhythm, and language that allows a reimagining of history and art.

- Caroline Fowler, convener, Starr Director, Research and Academic Program
- Sora Han, professor of Criminology, Law & Society, School of Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine
- Jeremy Melius, lecturer of History of Art, University of York
- Roberto Tejada, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Professor of English, University of Houston, Texas

SEMINAR
Scholars' Seminar Room
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM PRESIZU YA-KUNTAI AE YANE-NHEENGA RUPI / WE NEED TO SPEAK IT IN OUR OWN LANGUAGE: WRITING INDIGENOUS ART HISTORIES
This seminar brings together some of the most prominent Indigenous scholars, curators, and artists working in the region to debate and share strategies that can serve to address these impasses in the relationship among Indigenous peoples, art history, and museums. The colloquium delves into the writing of art history from Indigenous perspectives and interrogates possible orientations that help address the multivocality of artistic creations that circulate on the art market and are held in private collections and public museums. The discussion encompasses Indigenous epistemologies, the writing of art history, in dialogue with anthropology, curatorship, and museology.

- Fernanda Pitta, convener, assistant professor in the Art Research, Theory, and Criticism Division, Museum of Contemporary Art, University of São Paulo, Brazil
- Denilson Baniwa, convener, artist, curator, and activist, São Paulo, Brazil
- Elvira Espejo Ayca, artist and former director of the National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore, La Paz, Bolivia
- Candice Hopkins, director and chief curator of Taghkanic, New York's Forge Project
- Maria Luísa Lucas, associate professor, Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, University of São Paulo, Brazil
- Rember Yahuarcani, artist, Peru

PUBLIC PANEL
Manton Auditorium
2:30 – 5:30 PM SONIC INTERVENTIONS
Over the last two decades, art history has experienced something of a "sonic turn." This session gathers scholars from a variety of disciplines to think together about sonic practices, methods, and theories. We will consider what these interventions might offer to art history, particularly as it

relates to the writing of visual art and time-based media as well as museum practices.

- Caitlin Woolsey, convener, Assistant Director, Research and Academic Program
- Maria Hupfield, artist, Brooklyn, New York, on “An Incredible Sound”
- Erica Moiah James, associate professor of Art History, University of Miami, on “Sonic Visualities and Gestures of Caribbean Modern Form”
- Cash (Melissa) Ragona, associate professor, Art History and Theory, Carnegie Mellon University, on “AFTERSOUND: Frequency, Attack, Return”
- Dylan Robinson, associate professor in the School of Music, The University of British Columbia, on “qwà:l ye thqát / Hailed by Trees: Public Art’s Interpellation of Settler Subjectivity”

Reference:
CONF: Writing Art History: A Conference (Williamstown, 25-28 Jun 25). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 24, 2024 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43200>.