

9 Sessions at CAA (Chicago, 18–21 Feb 26)

Chicago, Feb 18–21, 2026

Deadline: Aug 29, 2025

ArtHist.net Redaktion

- [1] Beyond Paranoid and Reparative: New Methods in Photo-History
- [2] Blackbirding: Tracing the Visual and Material Histories of Indentured Labor in the Pacific
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- [5] Who's Afraid of Decorative Art?
- [6] Word-image Encounters: Ethical Dimensions of Words For/About/Through Images
- [7] Methodological Approaches to Researching Modern Art by African Women Artists
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[1] Beyond Paranoid and Reparative: New Methods in Photo-History

From: James Michael Levinsohn

Date: 17 Jul 25

Photo-history's origin as a distinct field of study within art history in the 1970's and 1980's cannot be extricated from its privileged status within the postmodern critique of representation. Participants in what Eve Sedgwick, in 2003's essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," called the broader paranoid tendency (an injunction in the critical humanities towards demystification rooted in Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche's "hermeneutics of suspicion"), photo-historians such as Allan Sekula, John Tagg, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau were unified, whatever their topic, by a determination to unmask the codes through which photography's seeming transparency naturalized and perpetuated systems of social oppression. By the early 2000's, however, the paranoid paradigm in photo-history began to be supplanted by a method approximating Sedgwick's notion of the "reparative": an "accretive" method seeking to restore wholeness to its objects so that "selves and communities can extract sustenance from them," permitting "surprise" and "joy" rather than disillusionment. Exemplified in the 2014 edited volume *Feeling Photography*, its title a riposte to Victor Burgin's 1982 anthology *Thinking Photography*, the reparative method emphasizes photography's affective and tactile dimensions, privileging the phenomenological, open-ended encounter between photographer and viewer as the primary site for producing internal, ineffable meanings. As technological developments (and challenges to photography's definition) such as generative AI render renewed reflection on photo-historical methods urgent, this panel seeks to move beyond the dichotomy of paranoid and reparative, soliciting proposals that model new methods outside this binary or provide novel historical and theoretical perspectives on the transformation of photo-historical methods since the 1970's.

Please submit a 250 word abstract and 2-page CV via the CAA submissions portal:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>. You must be a current CAA member to submit. Submissions are due August 29, 2025.

Submitters will be notified of the decision regarding their proposal on September 16, 2025. Registration for CAA opens in early October 2025 and the CAA 114th Annual Conference will be held at the Hilton Chicago from February 18 to 21, 2026. Contact the Chair, James Michael Levinsohn, at james.levinsohn@mail.utoronto.ca with any questions.

[2] [Blackbirding: Tracing the Visual and Material Histories of Indentured Labor in the Pacific](#)

From: Sandrine Canac

Date: 17 Jul 25

As Britain, France, and the United States moved to abolish slavery, unscrupulous ship captains and labor traders from these very nations removed over a hundred thousand Pacific Islanders from their homelands. This practice, known as blackbirding, peaked during the second half of the 19th century and involved trading Islanders to places such as Australia, New Caledonia, Fiji, and even Peru, where they were forced to work under conditions that closely resembled slavery.

While the history of blackbirding is relatively well known, little attention has been given to the visual and material culture that bears witness to the journeys and lived experiences of these indentured workers. Yet, as the growing scholarship on the material culture of transatlantic slavery has shown, such artifacts can deepen our understanding of the lives of those who left little written records and open new ways of connecting people, objects, and places across time and space.

This panel invites papers that contribute to the writing of this history, whether through the study of archival records, historical objects, photographs, and built environments, or through the lens of contemporary artists whose work engages with the history of blackbirding. In doing so, this panel aims to expand the historical record and bring renewed attention to the cultural, visual, and material legacies of those whose lives were shaped by these coercive practices.

Please submit your proposal for an in-person or virtual presentation before August 29, 2025 by following the corresponding link:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>

[3] [Recentring Crafts](#)

From: Shen Qu

Date: 17 Jul 25

This session highlights the integral role of craft and material culture in global art history, urging a reevaluation of craft as a fundamental component of artistic practice. Historically, craft has been central to art production across cultures, yet its significance has often been overlooked within mainstream art historical narratives. From the rich traditions of Chinese art, where calligraphy, ceramics, and silk weaving have long been revered as high art, to the vibrant artistic practices within LatinX communities, where craft and everyday objects have served as expressions of cultural identity and resistance, craft has always been deeply embedded in the fabric of art history.

By centering craft, this session provides an opportunity to recover and reframe these overlooked narratives, recognizing the contributions of marginalized communities—particularly women, Indigenous groups, and diasporic artists—whose work has shaped both historical and contemporary art. As Professor Julia Bryan-Wilson emphasized in her keynote at Rice University, "there are no self-taught artists; they are mother-taught artists." This poignant observation underscores the importance of craft as a generational, community-based knowledge that has shaped art outside formal academic structures.

As such, I invite papers that engage with crafts from a wide range of perspectives and methodologies.

Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Feminist histories of craft and "self-taught" art
- Contemporary craft practices and their social or political dimensions
- Digital humanities approaches to craft and cultural heritage
- Intersections between new media and traditional craft techniques
- Museum practices around the conservation, preservation, and display of craft
- Craft's role in challenging art-historical hierarchies between fine and decorative arts
- Craft as an alternative and decolonial method of writing and imagining history

Application:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>.

[4] Beyond the Page: Histories, Methods, and Futures of the Artists' Magazine

From: Camilla Salvaneschi

Date: 16 Jul 25

Chairs: Gwen Allen, San Francisco State University and Camilla Salvaneschi, Università luav di Venezia

Artists' magazines today are more than printed objects—they are dynamic platforms, social networks, exhibition spaces, and sites of artistic production. While much scholarship has focused on the radical print cultures of the 1960s and 70s—when artists' magazines emerged as alternatives to institutional gatekeeping—today's publications exist in a radically different media landscape shaped by social media, algorithmic circulation, and fluid editorial models. These hybrid publications operate at the intersection of print and digital, commercial and alternative, physical and virtual, and blur boundaries between media, institutions, and communities. Some explore novel formats, while others seek refuge in more traditional publication forms, even as they forge new economic and editorial structures, and exist within a nexus of other kinds of spaces, activities, and events. This panel explores the evolving nature of artists' magazines and the methodological challenges they pose. How can we describe and theorize this new mediascape? What tools, models, case studies, and methodologies might past scholarship offer for understanding the contemporary world of art publishing? What new, interdisciplinary approaches, such as media studies, sociology, digital humanities, or network theory are available for navigating today's blurred media ecosystems? Is the term "artists' magazine" still useful in this context? We welcome papers that address these questions or others that reflect on the history of artists' magazines and how they have evolved in today, and that attend to the material, social, and/or technological dimensions of artists' magazines and their publics.

Please submit a 250-word abstract and a 2-page CV by August 29, 2025, through the CAA submission portal: <https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/Session16689.html>

Chairs will notify applicants directly of their decision by September 16, 2025.

Conference participation rules and key dates can be found at the following link:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>

For questions about the panel please contact either Gwen Allen (gwen@sfsu.edu), or Camilla Salvaneschi (csalvaneschi@iuav.it)

[5] Who's Afraid of Decorative Art?

From: Ivana Dizdar

Date: 16 Jul 25

Chaired by Adrienne L. Childs and Ivana Dizdar

In the history of global nineteenth-century art, decorative is often treated like a pejorative term. Even as scholars increasingly resist boundaries between 'fine art' and visual culture, the decorative arts are largely neglected or expressly avoided. Why maintain the exclusion of decorative objects, whose production, circulation, and reception are inextricable from the history of art? The exclusion of decorative art stems from its supposed inferiority within the hierarchy of visual media; its frequent elusiveness with respect to attribution; and its entanglements with industry, consumerism, and domesticity. Perhaps most importantly, the exclusion appears rooted in assumptions that decorative art is apolitical. Yet decorative objects—from porcelain to wallpaper to clocks—were a function of the artistic, social, and political developments of the nineteenth century. We invite submissions that explore how decorative arts offer a critical lens into the period's complex sociopolitical currents, including (but not limited to) imperialism, slavery, technology, extraction, commerce, and collecting. As markers of status, wealth, luxury, taste, and style, how did objects and images considered decorative contribute to the formation of personal and collective identities? What kinds of intersectional issues were embedded in decorative objects? How did these objects shape conceptions of what constituted modernity in—and beyond—the Euro-American context? How did the decorative not only reflect but also influence global geopolitics?

Abstracts will be accepted via the CAA portal until August 29, 2025:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>.

[6] Word-image Encounters: Ethical Dimensions of Words For/About/Through Images

From: Tilo Reifenstein

Date: 16 Jul 25

The relation between images and words has been a focal point for scholars from many different disciplines. WJT Mitchell's semiotic approaches (1994; 2012) conceptualised this link via the 'imagetext' as synthesis, rather than 'image/text' as rupture. Clive Scott (1999) and Susan Sontag (2004) engaged with it through the written contexts of/next to images, and the impact of writing on one's ability to comprehend a photograph of violence, respectively. In literary studies, recent scholarship counters the oft-antagonistic understanding of word-image relations. David Kennedy and Richard Meek (2018) proposed a more reciprocal model of ekphrasis that highlights exchanges and encounters. Liliane Louvel (2018) similarly moved away from assessments of dominance and emphasised the collaborative conjunction that produces a 'pictorial third' between reading and seeing. This panel will explore such debates through analyses of the ethics of images vis-à-vis writing.

Whether as seemingly innocuous captions, suggestive titles or full-blown art-historical/theoretical discourses, words next to/around/about/in the work frequently mediate, intensify or otherwise (co-)determine our encounter with images. This power, responsibility and opportunity to 'shape' images carries a significant ethical dimension.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- How do ethical understandings of the re-presentational nature of an artwork rely on written (con)texts?
- How do viewers' ethical perceptions shift when they become readers of written (con)texts?
- How do we problematise the power dynamics of word-image ethics if the words are not the maker's?
- How do understandings of word-image relations as symbiotic, antagonistic or neither affect an analysis of ethics?

KEY DATES:

29 August: Deadline to submit your presentation title, 250-word proposal, 2-page CV (max) to the session using the "Submit an Abstract to this Session" button at <https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>

Note that you're required to have a CAA account, though membership is not necessary at this step. Please see the useful submission information offered at the above link.

16 September: Deadline for session chairs to finalize session and inform submitters of decisions via email. Accepted submitters will receive an email to access their own SC after 25 September.

Please don't hesitate to direct any queries to Tilo at: t.reifenstein@yorksj.ac.uk, or Kyveli at: k.lignoutsamantani@yorksj.ac.uk

[7] Methodological Approaches to Researching Modern Art by African Women Artists

From: Claudia Marion Stemberger

Date: 15 Jul 25

- Session will convene remotely -

The rise of the contemporary in both research and exhibitions of African visual art and material culture has gained significant traction, placing the historically marginalized study of women artists in twentieth-century Africa at a crossroads. The recent growth in online resources pertaining to global modern art, such as biographical notes by AWARE and contextual essays from the MoMA, has helped to reevaluate the narratives surrounding African women artists of the twentieth century. Surveys on African women artists have proposed that gendered practices are multifaceted (Blackmun Visonà 2021), while also underlining the challenges posed by "incongruent methodological approaches to how that gendered history is constructed" (Makhubu 2020). This has opened opportunities to transform research methodologies and fieldwork strategies.

In moving forward, however, despite ongoing reflections on the current state of the field (African Arts 2017 & 2024) and revised trajectories of African modernisms (Critical Interventions 2019), there remains a paucity of directions in the analysis of modern art by individual African women artists. The panel discusses methodological innovations and case studies that underpin novel scholarship on women's artistic production among twentieth-century African art historiography. The scope encompasses accounts of recent shifts and envisioning future inquiry, especially in respect of Africa-centered perspectives. By engaging in debates about the de/canonization of art historical knowledges, this panel illuminates the previously under-

represented histories of African women artists.

Please submit your abstract (250 words) and shortened CV (~ 2 pages) before August 29, 2025, using this link:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>

The chairs will notify submitters directly of their decision by September 16, 2025.

[8] Road Trip. The art and material culture of communal travel routes

From: Stephanie Miller

Date: 15 Jul 25

2026 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Route 66 in Chicago, Illinois. The celebrated, historic 2,400-mile "Mother Road" connected Chicago to Santa Monica, California with countless stops along the way, from small roadside towns to large cities, through the Midwest and to the West Coast. With this 100-year milestone as its inspiration, this session explores the art and material culture of travel and tourism by considering the visual culture of and along the travel routes which bind and connect us. In the Route 66 instance, examples for reflection and discussion might include billboards, postcards, souvenirs, National Park photo-ops, and the distinctive travel oases whose architecture highlights local styles or tourist expectations of such styles. This is, of course, but one example.

This session intends to reflect the chronological and geographical expansiveness of various kinds of travel (commerce, tourism, pilgrimage, migratory, refuge-seeking) and the visual culture it generated. Medieval pilgrimage routes, the caravan routes of the Silk Roads, or the Grand Tour, hint at the breadth of longstanding, communal travel routes. Related scholarship on art creation prompted by travel born of necessity, such as with the Great Migration, the Dust Bowl migration, or the current refugee crises, is also sought. This session aspires to interrogate the art, artifacts, and associated visual culture that developed alongside this diverse travel or responded to it and its travelers.

Proposals are not restricted to MAHS members and are welcome from all scholars.

To submit a proposal, visit the CAA confex system:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/meeting.html>

[9] Lighting the Artwork: Sensory Perception and Shifting Contexts of Display

From: Marlen Schneider

Date: 17 Jul 25

Session chairs: Marlen Schneider (Université Grenoble Alpes), Romain Thomas (Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art)

From Peter Paul Ruben's Ecstasy of St Gregory (1608), a masterpiece that has been rejected once placed in the Roman church Santa Maria in Vallicella due to its unsettling lighting effects in situ, up to Olafur Eliasson's The Weather Project (2003) that unfolded its full sensual potential and artifice only when leaving the studio and being installed in its public setting – artworks often undergo dramatic perceptual shifts when presented outside their space of creation. Lighting effects add to the materiality of the artwork in a somewhat unstable and ephemeral way, either by being deliberately integrated in its creation and exhibition, or

by unintentional modification of the surrounding light.

This panel explores how lighting conditions affect the sensory and aesthetic reception of artworks. It invites contributions that examine light not as a motif, but as an external, contextual and performative agent – one that may dialogue with, enhance, or disrupt the artwork's visual and material presence. We encourage proposals engaging with aesthetic reception theory (e.g., Kemp 1998; Wilder 2020), historical lighting technologies (Underhill 2017, 2018), or approaches from sensory studies. How did the evolution of lighting techniques impact artistic practice and display? In what ways did they interact with historical theories on the physical, artistic or even spiritual dimension of light, which also could determine the viewer's expectations and appreciation of the object? Can knowledge of historical lighting conditions be reintegrated into today's curatorial strategies?

Papers will be presented in English and should be no longer than 15-20 minutes. Please submit your proposal directly on the CAA website, before August 29, 2025:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/Session16560.html>

Reference:

CFP: 9 Sessions at CAA (Chicago, 18-21 Feb 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 17, 2025 (accessed May 11, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50408>>.