

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

Chicago, Feb 18–21, 2026

Deadline: Aug 29, 2025

ArtHist.net Redaktion

- [1] The Margins and Backgrounds of Portraits
- [2] From the Lab to the Studio: Abstraction and Scientific Inquiry
- [3] Seeing Citizenship in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture
- [4] Numbers in the Dark? Quantitative Aesthetics and the Future(s) of Art / History
- [5] Speculating on Value: Art and Financialization in Contemporary Art Practice
- [6] Design Activism as Repetition, Reconstruction and Reinvention
- [7] Currents: Video's Aqueous Aesthetics
- [8] Landscape, Materiality, and Representation in the Long Nineteenth Century
- [9] Critical Femininities? Navigating Subversion and Conformity in Contemporary Visual Culture

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[1] The Margins and Backgrounds of Portraits

From: Joseph Litts

Date: 17 Jul 25

Convened by Joseph Litts (Princeton University) and Michael Hartman (Dartmouth College, Hood Museum)

Portraiture studies have traditionally focused on faces, clothing, and accessories as sites of creating and stabilizing identity within art. Layers of oil paint, pastel dust, and engraved ink articulate race, gender, class, and kinship networks on a scale ranging from jewelry miniatures to life-size replicas. Scholars have demonstrated how these representations surrogated for distant power, how collections and exhibitions were political statements, and how portrait iconoclasm could be broadly ideological rather than personal.

However, what happens behind and around the body? This facet of portraiture remains an open field. Our panel thus invites papers that examine the margins and backgrounds of portraits. These spaces vary from roundels or planes of color, to classicizing scenes or imaginary gardens, to draperies or architectural structures. As much as standardized formulas and techniques have developed for the face itself, the (back)-ground has been curiously resistant to such strategies. This panel asks what do these diverse environments—a visualized “habitus,” to borrow from Bourdieu—contribute to the portrait? How might painterly surroundings trouble notions of identity and modernity? For group portraits and conversation pieces, how does setting provoke or dismiss relationality? Do specific display or exhibition contexts become extended backgrounds for portraits, especially with sculptures? Ultimately, how do the edges, however they might be defined, (re)frame our understanding of the key genre of portraiture? In addition to paying close attention to the borders and liminal spaces of portraiture as traditionally understood, we also welcome papers that

trouble the definitions of portraiture itself through close attention to context.

We welcome submissions from scholars at all stages. Papers should be approximately 20 minutes in length, and the working language is English. This panel will convene in person in Chicago, Illinois. The deadline for submissions is 29 August 2025.

Please send proposals through the "Submit an Abstract to This Session" link on this webpage:

<https://caa.confex.com/caa/2026/webprogrampreliminary/Session16119.html>

Please feel free to email us with any questions. [jlitts @ Princeton.edu](mailto:jlitts@Princeton.edu) and [Michael.W.Hartman @ dartmouth.edu](mailto:Michael.W.Hartman@dartmouth.edu).

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[\[2\]](#) From the Lab to the Studio: Abstraction and Scientific Inquiry

From: Molly Superfine

Date: 17 Jul 25

Panel chair: Dr. Molly Superfine, msuperfine@gmail.com, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

This session seeks panelists who will illuminate through specific case studies or broader theoretical arguments the practices of modern and contemporary artists who trained in the sciences before turning to or while artmaking. Of particular interest are artists working with conceptualist strategies and languages of abstraction. Twentieth-century examples in the U.S. include Nancy Holt (1938-2014) and Kenneth Young (1933-2017) who, respectively, studied biology and physics as undergraduates and Beverly Buchanan (1940-2015) who completed graduate studies in public health and parasitology. How and why do the artists of interest turn to abstraction and conceptualist methods? How do their trainings in sciences affect their practices? What do these artists teach us about attending to biological and medical humanities in art's histories? Panelists may examine the conditions under which artists move away from studies or careers in the sciences and towards the arts. Do artists turn to artistic strategies because they exceed the realm of science and its commitment to fact-finding in some way? Does abstraction become a path of (extra-)scientific inquiry? Or, are there artists whose scientific careers occur in tandem with their artmaking with palpable and revealing crossovers? During a period of governance where abundant creativity, historical fact, and scientific processes are under attack, panelists may also consider what possibilities exist in bringing these disciplines' methods together, and how they might illuminate a way through intellectual and ethical challenges facing us today.

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 panel chair, Molly Superfine, at msuperfine@gmail.com with any questions.

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[\[3\]](#) Seeing Citizenship in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture

From: Karen Stock

Date: 17 Jul 25

Session will present: On location

Ariella Azoulay, in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, writes: "When and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that allows a reading of the injury inflicted on others becomes a civil skill. This skill is activated the moment one grasps that citizenship is not merely a status, a good, or a piece of private property but rather a tool of a struggle or an obligation to others to struggle against injuries inflicted on those others, citizen and noncitizen alike." Citizenship, far from being a "natural privilege," is contingent on the performative bond between the citizen and the nation-state. This civil and cultural contract is fragile. The ruling power uses ideological mechanisms to maintain divisions between citizen and noncitizen which assists in maintaining the hierarchy between the nation-state and the governed. Another civil contract exists amongst those who are governed whether they are recognized by the state as a citizen or not. This alternate conception of citizenship is based on a shared duty to others that defies the borders enforced by the nation-state.

This panel seeks to explore the role contemporary art and visual culture play in problematizing/establishing citizenship. What is the future of socially engaged art that anchors spectatorship in civic duty? How do emerging technologies play into these questions? Papers are welcome that explore these and other questions related to global, cultural and legal citizenship across a variety of media.

Contact Karen Stock with questions: stockk@winthrop.edu

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/Session16919.html>

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

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[4] Numbers in the Dark? Quantitative Aesthetics and the Future(s) of Art / History

From: Diana Angoso de Guzmán

Date: 18 Jul 25

On location

Surveying the cultural landscape in early 2023, art critic Ben Davis pondered the "increasing popularity of...Quantitative Aesthetics—the way numbers function more and more as a proxy for artistic value" (Davis 2023). While that relationship has long held in the art market as both common sense and critical complaint, comparative metrics like box office returns and music platform streams increasingly inform the way we talk and think about culture, transforming understandings of aesthetic taste and cultural value. To explore this phenomenon in more depth, this panel gathers perspectives on how quantification and computation are shaping the production, reception, and study of art in our "ordinal society, a society oriented toward, justified by, and governed through measurement" (Fourcade and Healy 2024). How, for example, do measurement and quantification condition art-making, artists' identities and careers, arts organizations' operations, and audiences' behavior? What epistemological commitments and risks (cf., Clayton 2021, Lindsay 2021) are shared by digital and data-driven art history (e.g., Brown 2020, Greenwald 2021),

as well as computational aesthetics (Lakhal, et al. 2020) and neuroaesthetics (e.g., Magsamen and Ross 2023)? What does the rise of quantitative aesthetics and ordinal society mean for the future of art and art history?

Chairs:

Paul D Melton, Fashion Institute of Technology State University of New York and Diana Angoso de Guzmán, Universidad de Salamanca

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<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. Please contact the chairs Paul D Melton at paul_melton@fitnyc.edu or Diana Angoso de Guzmán at dangoso@usal.es with any questions.

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[5] Speculating on Value: Art and Financialization in Contemporary Art Practice

From: Diana Angoso de Guzmán

Date: 18 Jul 25

Session will present: On location

Over the past few decades, the financialization of the economy has transformed not only global markets but the very way we produce, perceive, and assign value in culture. In the art world, this shift is visible in the increasing prominence of metrics—auction prices, algorithmic valuations, social media reach—as proxies for artistic merit. But financialization is not merely an external force; it permeates aesthetic practices, institutions, and even artistic subjectivities.

This panel gathers critical perspectives on how the art world, contemporary art, and visual culture engage with systems of valuation under late capitalism. How do artists respond to the collapse of distinctions between aesthetic and economic value? What can we learn from historical and emerging forms of the artist-economist (Cras, 2019), entrepreneurial artist, or speculative practice? What happens to cultural institutions when assetization, datafication, and performance metrics shape funding, curating, and programming?

Grounded in historical research and contemporary critique, this session seeks to map how quantification and financial abstraction reshape both art and its histories

We invite papers that explore topics such as:

- The role of financial instruments and data in aesthetic production
- Artists who critically engage with money, speculation, or valuation
- Theoretical intersections of neoliberalism, aesthetics, and trust
- Metrics as curatorial or institutional strategy
- Transatlantic or global perspectives on art and economic imaginaries

Chairs:

Diana Angoso de Guzmán, Universidad de Salamanca and Paul D Melton, Fashion Institute of Technology State University of New York

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 Chairs Paul D Melton at paul_melton@fitnyc.edu or Diana Angoso at dangoso@usal.es with any questions.

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[6] Design Activism as Repetition, Reconstruction and Reinvention

From: Harriet Atkinson

Date: 18 Jul 25

This panel examines the ways in which forms, methods and narratives recur in design activism. Design activism, defined here as the practice of using images, objects and type as tools in support of political action, is a distinctly referential process, through which historical citation can situate one struggle's alignment, or misalignment, with another (Sholette, 2021; Huyssen, 2003). In this mediating role, design activism's forms and methods move across temporal, spatial, and political boundaries and thus provide ideas, models, and symbols that energise new or existing political movements and activists (Atkinson, 2024; Maasri, 2015; Demos, 2013).

This panel addresses the adaptations, continuities, and slippages that occur in design activism across times, spaces, and cultures. How is the act of history-making politicised in these contexts, and how are its narratives represented? How are histories repeated, reconstructed, and reinvented to serve different political objectives? What methods can historians, archivists, and activists develop to facilitate the activation and reactivation of historical ideas for contemporary struggles, as well as those of the future? Papers may address, but are not limited to the following subject areas:

Histories of design activism as providing patterning for the present and inspiring hope for the future.

Craftivism as historically-informed political practice.

Archiving visual, craft, graphic and material cultures as radical practice.

Pedagogical tools and methods for teaching histories of design activism.

Case studies of design activism as tools for decolonising and queering histories.

Curatorial strategies for staging design activism.

Limitations and tensions in methodologies of histories of design activism.

Keywords:

Topics: Design History, Theory, Or Criticism

Topics: Activism

Geographic Area: Global

Time Period: Twentieth Century

Time Period: Twenty-First Century

Chairs:

Harriet Atkinson, University of Brighton and Alex Todd, Pratt Institute

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[7] Currents: Video's Aqueous Aesthetics

From: Helena Shaskevich

Date: 19 Jul 25

We invite proposals for a panel addressing video's aqueous aesthetics to be held at the CAA conference in Chicago, Feb 18-21, 2026.

Currents: Video's Aqueous Aesthetics

Session will convene: On location

Helena Shaskevich, Kennesaw State University and Gillian Young, Wofford College

In 1975, video artist Shigeko Kubota linked the nascent technology of video to the primordial role of water in human society. "In preindustrial times," mused Kubota, "rivers connected communities and spread information. Now electronic signals perform this function: charged electrons flow across our receiver screens like drops of water." Beyond metaphor, Kubota's poetic description is indicative of how, since the 1970s, video has been perceived as an aqueous media, storing and transmitting information akin to water and its global flows. Video is frequently imagined in liquid terms: "waves" of electronic signals, broadcast "channels", "immersive" environments, "streaming" content, and "snow"-filled TV sets.

This panel seeks to explore the generative, yet overlooked role of water in video art history, as well as the continued confluence of water and video. We invite papers that examine how water was not only the subject of the work of early video artists like Kubota, Steina, Joan Jonas, Bill Viola, and others, but also a formal and conceptual framework for video's fluid, mutable, and connective characteristics. Papers may also consider how, as screens have become more expansive, contemporary artists like John Akomfrah, Isaac Julien, and Wu Tsang use immersive video to plumb historic traumas and more-than-human encounters within oceanic depths. We are especially interested in papers that take water as a lens through which to rethink both video art's history (where video may be understood as a form of land-or water-art, for instance), and its future as a media art form with ecological significance and decolonial potential.

Proposals must be submitted by August 29 through the collegeart.org website. They must include the presentation title, 250-word abstract, and a shortened CV. There is also an option to add up to 5 images.

The CFP on CAA's website can be found here:

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

[8] Landscape, Materiality, and Representation in the Long Nineteenth Century

From: Noam Gonen

Date: 20 Jul 25

This session invites contributions that investigate the entangled relationships between landscape, materiality, and representation in the long nineteenth century. While landscape has often been examined through symbolic, nationalistic, or pictorial frameworks, this panel foregrounds its material dimensions—both as subject and substance—and asks how they shaped artistic and cultural production during this transformative period: How did the physical qualities of land, earth, and environment inflect visual representation? What tensions emerged between landscape as material presence and landscape as mediated image?

Bridging art history, material and visual culture, human geography, and environmental humanities, this session seeks to integrate phenomenological approaches (Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Casey), material and object-oriented ontology (Bennett, Harman), and geographical theory (Ingold) with close visual and historical analysis. We are particularly interested in how the materiality of land—its textures, substances, and

transformations—was registered, abstracted, or resisted in the practices of representation across diverse geographies, media, and artistic traditions during this period.

Contributors might consider:

- The material construction of landscape images: grounds, supports, pigments, and surfaces
- Representing geological time, land use, or extraction industries
- Earth as medium: pigment, sediment, and organic matter in artistic practice
- Artistic responses to ecological degradation
- Indigenous and non-Western modes of representing land and territory
- The role of materiality in 19th-century cartography or land surveys
- The visual rhetorics of land ownership, enclosure, and displacement
- Intersections of land, labor, and class in visual culture

We welcome proposals engaging with both canonical and understudied works that rethink landscape through its material and representational operations.

Keywords:

Time Period: Nineteenth Century

Geographic Area: Global

Topics: Materiality

Medium: Landscape

Topics: Environment

Chair:

Dr. Noam Gonen, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Session will present: On location

[9] Critical Femininities? Navigating Subversion and Conformity in Contemporary Visual Culture

From: Dr Elisabetta Garletti

Date: 20 Jul 25

This session critically examines visual manifestations of femininities, exploring their capacity to both challenge and reinforce societal norms. Historically cast as a patriarchal construct or a surface to be disavowed, femininity has been rearticulated through queer feminist frameworks as a performative stance rather than an ontological state (Dahl, 2012; Hoskin & Hirschfeld, 2018), with scholars emphasizing femme as a potential site for feminist and queer solidarity that challenges naturalized gender models (Hoskin, 2017; McCann, 2018).

We invite papers that analyze how artists use feminine aesthetics to 'exist' and 'resist' simultaneously (Duggan & McHugh, 1996). How, for instance, does the plastic excess in the work of artists like Juno Calypso challenge normative visual codes of femininity? In what ways do the hyperfeminine aesthetics of bimbo-core navigate the space between subversion and commodification? As feminine aesthetics experience a revival in mainstream visual culture, it becomes crucial to interrogate the boundaries between deconstruction and the recirculation of normative archetypes, especially when they align with whiteness, hypersexualisation and neoliberal self-improvement (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004).

This panel seeks to address a series of questions: What forms of resistance and visual reimagination do

feminine and femme aesthetics make possible? Where do we locate the line between feminine performativity and its commodification? How do race, ability and class shape feminine and femme legibility?

Potential paper topics include:

- Femme drag and the subversion of gender norms
- Disidentification and queer-of-color critique
- Bimbocore, hyperfemininity and neoliberal agency
- Femme failure as resistance
- The politics of affect in feminine aesthetics

Thank you for helping spread the word! I look forward to reviewing many interesting proposals.

Reference:

CFP: 9 Sessions at CAA (Chicago, 18-21 Feb 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 20, 2025 (accessed May 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50444>>.