New Horizons in American Art History (Philadelphia, 15-16 Apr 27)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, Apr 15–16, 2027
Deadline: Dec 15, 2026

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The field of American art history was only just emerging in 1976. The Bicentennial generated a series of ambitious and influential exhibitions, including Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art (Philadelphia Museum of Art), Two Centuries of Black American Art (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), Selections of Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), American Art 1750-1800: Towards Independence (Yale University Art Gallery), and America as Art (National Collection of Fine Arts, now the Smithsonian American Art Museum). These shows and others asserted the vitality of American art, which, as one contemporary New York Times critic remarked, had previously been "widely condescended to in high places and often relegated to the storeroom."

Fifty years on, American art's position in the canon is secure but the shape and terrain of the field as defined by those exhibitions has shifted. Questions about the meaning of "America" have only become more complex and urgent despite promises, at the Bicentennial, of a freer, more open, and more just future. What, then, is the state of American art history at the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding, and what might the next fifty years bring? How have the exhibitions and publications inspired by the Semiquincentennial—including A Nation of Artists at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts—shaped our understanding of creativity in the United States? More broadly, how have methodologies or critical frameworks that have gained strength in recent decades—among them, materiality, ecocriticism, critical race theory, dialogues about "self-taught" and "folk" artists, the field's hemispheric turn, post- and decolonial discourses, and Indigenous Studies—changed what it means to be an Americanist? What conversations are we having now, and which are still needed?

Toward that future, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, will convene a symposium for emerging scholars working on art—defined as all visual and material culture—of the Americas across every period and medium. Proposed papers should reflect on the current moment in scholarship, highlight new modes of inquiry, and/or propose creative approaches to teaching, interpreting, or exhibiting American art of all types. Interventions that are interdisciplinary in nature and/or that push the traditional boundaries of "American art" are encouraged.

Submission guidelines:

• Current graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and scholars in the early stages of their

careers (within 5-7 years of their receiving their terminal degree) should submit abstracts of ca. 300 words as well as a brief curriculum vitae by December 15, 2026 to academicengagement@philamuseum.org.

• Proposals will be evaluated by a committee made up of staff from the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Papers that are selected for the symposium will be grouped into panels to be moderated by mid-career and senior scholars in American art history. Presentations will have a maximum duration of 20 minutes.

• Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process by mid-January 2027. Participants should plan to attend both days of the symposium and will have their travel and lodging expenses reimbursed.

Reference:

CFP: New Horizons in American Art History (Philadelphia, 15-16 Apr 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 21, 2026 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54318>.