

***IN THE FOREGROUND:***  
***CONVERSATIONS ON ART & WRITING***  
A podcast from the Research and Academic Program (RAP)

**“WHAT ARE OUR IMPORTANT QUESTIONS?”: COLLABORATION  
AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN A DIGITAL AGE WITH  
JACQUELINE FRANCIS AND SUSAN ELIZABETH GAGLIARDI**

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**Transcript**

**Caro Fowler**

Welcome to *In The Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. I am Caro Fowler, your host and director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In this series of conversations, I talk with art historians and artists about what it means to write history and make art, and the ways in which making informs how we create not only our world, but also ourselves.

**Anne Helmreich**

Hello, and welcome to this podcast series on Grand Challenges of Art History: Digital Methods and Social Art History. My name is Anne Helmreich, associate director of the Getty Foundation.

**Paul Jaskot**

And I am Paul Jaskot, Professor of Art History at Duke University.

**Anne Helmreich**

The contributors to these podcasts all responded to our invitation to address what we self-consciously described as a “grand challenge.” This was organized under the auspices of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark, which generously sponsored our scholarly colloquia and ensuing public conversation in April 2019. The phrase “grand challenge” is one frequently adopted in the sciences to refer to the great unanswered questions that represent promising frontiers. For art history, we saw the conjoining of digital and computational methods and the social history of art as one of those grand challenges.

**Paul Jaskot**

Given that investigating society, in all its complexity, also seemingly calls for the big data so central to computational methods, we asked the podcast participants how digital art history might help us explore the grand challenges of the social history of art's future. How are digital methods effective, or not, at analyzing large-scale structural issues important to art history, and modes of visual expression? Our intent is to discuss the concerns central to contemporary practitioners of the social history of art, as well as those of digital humanists who claim an allegiance to these same questions. In doing so, we aimed to consider practical, rigorous, archival, and theoretical

ways of addressing such a task with both computational and analog means. We hope that you enjoy the series.

**Jacqueline Francis**

*I think if we think about interdisciplinarity, in terms of different people, which is within the communities of the humanities, in and outside of the academy, working together, thinking together, producing together, that's the way it has to look. That's the other thing that I keep thinking about: who is all of this work for? I don't think it's a singular audience.*

**Paul Jaskot**

Welcome, Jackie, and Susan.

**Jacqueline Francis**

Thank you, Paul. Great to be here with you and Susan.

**Susan Gagliardi**

Thank you so much. It's really a delight to be here.

**Paul Jaskot**

Perhaps each of you could start us out by describing how you see your scholarly development in relation to--or not, as the case may be--the terms at the heart of our conversation: "social art history," and especially, "collaboration" and "digital humanities." How are these terms important to your current work, if at all?

**Jacqueline Francis**

Well, this is a really generative question for me, Paul, because I think my current work, and certainly some work of the last few decades has been grounded in collaboration. You mentioned that I'm a co-founder of the Association for Critical Race Art History, which I co-founded with Camara Dia Holloway. Working together, Camara and I have been thinking about these questions of racial formation and construction--building on other scholars' work; scholars who are both our contemporaries, as well as scholars who precede us not only in the fields of US art history, but broadly speaking, people coming out of critical theory, critical legal studies, and of course, critical race theory. So for us, we've tried to create a platform in which people can not only share resources, but think of this idea of critical race art history as something interdisciplinary at its formation. And similarly, I should have

said also as part of my current identity, I'm one of the executive editors of *Panorama*, the journal of AHAA--the Association of Historians of American Art. There are three of us, me, Keri Watson and Naomi Slipp. We are the co-executive editors of this peer-reviewed, born online journal, and our work together as executive editors--as collaborative team members--has been so critical and so rewarding to me over the last couple of years.

**Paul Jaskot**

Do you see the digital as formative here, or is digital a kind of context? Or is it background?

**Jacqueline Francis**

Certainly with *Panorama* the digital is formative--being born online, as opposed to moving from the traditional print medium to present something online as part of *Panorama's* trajectory from the outset--you know, we are only five years old. And certainly in terms of digital art, humanities and digital art history, generously funded by the Terra Foundation, we will be publishing our first digital article this fall. And we're super excited about that, because we are absolutely committed to what we can be learning from digital humanities research, as well as the access question.

**Paul Jaskot**

Susan, maybe you could talk a little bit about your coming to terms with social art history and digital humanities and the concept of collaboration.

**Susan Gagliardi**

Thank you so much for this question. Because for me, it brings me back to how I ended up deciding to first study art history. And I am, I'm fairly certain that without social art history, I'm not sure I would have chosen the history of art as a major. So for me as an undergraduate, probably the most memorable examples of social art history are TJ Clark and Michael Baxandall. But what I really appreciated, and what I think I was looking for at that time, was something to study that had to do with politics and real-world experiences. I wasn't really interested in the elite. I really was much more interested in how people live, and what kinds of power dynamics are at play in people's lives. And so actually, history of art was always my second major--that was very important and clear to me. And geography was my first major. And as a geographer, someone who is thinking about human geography, especially, much of my coursework was about politics of place, experiences of

individuals, and interconnections. And those are really core ideas that I brought into my study of art history. And I would say I was doing research on objects. And I had questions about those objects informed by geography. But that's how I ended up in art history because they had the models from geography, the possibility from social art history, and that led me to, "Okay, I can, I can pursue questions in, in art history." As for the digital, when I think about social art history, and my decisions to major in geography and art history, I remember those as very conscious decisions. Entering the realm of digital humanities, that was not a conscious decision. I had questions, and I wanted to create a multi-layered digital map to answer those questions; I knew I needed to work with other people; there was a call to participate in the Kress Summer Institute on Digital Mapping and Art History. So I went there. And it was there that I started to realize--and in fact, Paul, I think what I remember, [at the Kress Institute] is that you said very explicitly that we had entered this realm [of the digital humanities and digital art history] whether or not we knew that. So that wasn't something I was conscious of. But for me, it has actually been very generative since that moment in 2014. And I see all kinds of things coming together in terms of my interests, my commitments, what I would like to see. So it's very exciting that you're bringing these two things--social art history and digital humanities--together in this conversation.

**Paul Jaskot**

I love that you talk about falling into it, because I also fell into it. I was working on a Holocaust topic, and I was invited to a workshop. And suddenly I realized the mapping was something that I didn't know that I needed to do in order to really think through my questions. And it's interesting, because Jackie, you also are kind of falling into it--in the sense of, this is the moment in which the journal is going in a more digital direction. So could you all expand on that a bit in terms of a very specific example of falling into a collaboration that you've had? Or, also, do we see collaboration as central to the field as a whole? So is there a personal story you can tell us about collaboration? Or maybe expand on how central do you think collaboration might be, more broadly speaking?

**Jacqueline Francis**

You know, collaboration has always been part of perhaps all of our fields in the academy, it's just that it's not often acknowledged as such. That is to say, there is often a single author's name on an article, or on a book cover. But of

course, we all talk amongst each other. We learn from our instructors, our advisors, and so forth. And certainly, we learn from the other living interlocutors, whether we conceptualize them as subjects of our research--or archivists, or librarians, and so forth--all the people that make it happen. And so if I go back to the Association for Critical Race Art History example, and I can also speak of the *Panorama* example as we go through the conversation today, I think about bouncing ideas off of each other and not necessarily toward a very neat consensus--that is to say, that we agree entirely about what this idea of critical race art history does--more, or even what the core term "race" is. But that we can live with that tension as we work out a problem together. And I'm speaking of Camara and I, as we thought about what the field--or the approach, more accurately--of critical race art history could do as an intervention. So I am strongly in favor that I think of critical race art history as a comparative method, something that doesn't necessarily speak of race as non-white difference, but instead, is about the construction of race, as we can chart it through visual representation and reception to it. I think oftentimes, I've heard other people say, "Well, critical race art history might even be just a supplanting term for African American art history." And for me, it is not, it is a different way of thinking about certain subjects, certain people who are producing work and their identifications, and certainly the reception to it.

### **Susan Gagliardi**

For me, I really think of collaboration as a way of being and it is not something that I immediately recognized as distinctive. But I know that there's a lot of talk around collaboration right now. And I say that only because my parents were community organizers who are very collaborative in their work. I was on a swim team where while swimming is very individual as a sport; my coaches always emphasized the team. And I was the slowest member of my swim team, but was recognized for the contributions to the team. Actually, I liked being the slowest member on the swim team, because then nobody felt like I was competing with them. And then also, I participated in City Year, which is an AmeriCorps funded community service initiative. And that was very much team-based in to bring together socioeconomically diverse individuals between the ages of 18 and 23 to devote a year to national service. So all of those things, I think, are core to understand how I understand working with other people. And so I find that I bring those things into my work as an art historian, but I didn't realize at the time that I was doing something that was collaborative and maybe

distinctive. So working in western Burkina Faso, and doing research with other people meant being collaborative. I had to have conversations with people, I had to build trust with people, I had to have a concern for community if I was going to succeed in the work that I was doing.

And since then, since I've earned my PhD, I've have sought out opportunities to work with conservators, to work with curators, and then with "Mapping Senufo" ["Mapping Senufo: Reframing Questions, Reevaluating Sources, and Reimagining a Digital Monograph"]--this huge digital project. And I say huge just because I'm working with so many different people on that project. We need a database, I don't know how to build it, and so, I'm collaborating with people who know how to build databases. Joanna Mundy, and Sarah Palmer spent a year working with us to build a relational database, for example. And there are many, many examples. And I also want to say that what I've really enjoyed in the past year-and-a-half, working with an undergraduate student and a graduate student, on an initiative that they started called Art Circles, that's very much about trying to figure out ways to create a democratic and collaborative mode of communication to deal with difficult issues. So it's just I want to highlight that for me, collaboration isn't always about working with other people who in their own fields are necessarily in a professional position, but also working very closely with students. And sometimes really seeing that students can be the engine, and I learn and benefit a lot from what students are bringing to that conversation and what students are doing. So I think that's also really important: that I think collaboration can trouble hierarchies.

### **Paul Jaskot**

What I liked that you've both highlighted is the way that collaboration is very distinct in your worlds from interdisciplinarity. Not that interdisciplinarity isn't a wonderful thing--where we have to learn the knowledge and the language of other disciplines. But it's really about working with others. And realizing, Susan, as you were saying that there are limits to your knowledge, and so we have to embrace other people in the room. And, Susan, if I could follow up a bit--you contextualize that within a history of activism. Is collaborative art history necessarily a kind of activist art history? Is that what makes it compatible with social art history? Do you think?

### **Susan Gagliardi**

Well, if I think of a model of art history that has favored the authority, then collaboration, I think challenges the idea of an authority. I think it's hard for collaboration to succeed if one person in the room thinks that they are the authority, the all-knowing person--because that, at the outset, dismisses the idea that anybody else has anything to bring to that conversation. So I guess in that sense, I do see it as activist, right? To see that I can actually learn from my students-- that I'm not just the person to profess to them is a very different way to approach being, I think.

**Paul Jaskot**

This this leads me back to Jackie's mention of the solo-authored work, that is the kind of individual way that we do art history. So I wonder if we might talk a little bit about that. Obviously, most art historians and colleges in university produce solo-authored works, even museum catalogs emphasize this approach, we're even awarded of course through jobs, grants, tenure and promotion as individuals. In other words, individual scholarship forms the condition for our field, even though both of you have signaled that the collaborative is very essential to your own thinking, both intellectually as well as in practice. How might we open up this world to collaboration? And either institutionally-oriented actually, and I'm specifically interested if you might talk a little bit about our institutional context as art historians, how might we take that activist spirit or even the questions of social and history that opens us up to collaborative in in a new way in our institutions?

**Susan Gagliardi**

I think that the support is really key in terms of having funding in place that can foster collaboration. So the ACLS had a collaborative research fellowship. And I think that the last year that they accepted applications was during the 2017-2018 application cycle. The National Endowment for the Humanities has a collaborative grant. So there are a few opportunities. But I would agree with you, Paul, that so many of the things that we do, as art historians, and as humanists favors the single author, the single person working on something so. So that's one element. I think another key thing is how we review work, and what our expectations are-- that also has to do with tenure and promotion, and how we hire as well. At this point, my first book is done. My second book is in press. I have a lot of solo [publications]-- I mean, no, I have luck! I have solo authored articles--that's done. And I think at this point, it's a time for me to really say, "I'm going to co-author, co-organize, co-curate." I'm going to do that with colleagues. I'm going to do that with students. And I'm



going to look for other people, people who don't necessarily have PhDs, but who have things to say, and ideas we can bring together. And I have to say, Paul, you really pushed me to do that when you made a very similar statement at the end of a lecture. So I feel that as a sense of responsibility. I do think that really means realizing that what my effort is--what I want to do by collaborating--is to help another person achieve something important, or help other people achieve something important, while realizing that I stand to gain from that exchange--I don't want to say that I don't. I guess what I'm saying is not centering me as the person who needs to achieve something, but centering the question of how we can work together to get something done? And maybe one other thing I'll say, in terms of thinking about, about art history in the humanities, is we might often want to look to the sciences and say, "The sciences have a lot of collaboration, they have multi-authored, publications, labs, etc." But we could actually look to Yale, which just produced a report on PhDs in the humanities, in February of 2021. And in this report, Yale is advocating for--or at least the authors of the report are--advocating for a switch from the "mini-me" model of advising to a collaborative approach to mentorship. And collaboration is in the very first sentence of their conclusion: how do we approach graduate education? Collaboratively. And that's collaboratively among faculty and collaboratively faculty to students as well. And I would say, where do staff also fit into that equation--other people on campus, and beyond campus? I think it's really important that we think about how to do that. And maybe sometimes, we need to insist on doing these things in our practice, even before there's the institutional structure and support in place to do that.

### **Jacqueline Francis**

We can talk about this moment that crisis has brought to us--that is to say that, as some have said, and I mean it in the most sincere way, that crisis is an opportunity to discover something. And I don't just mean the crisis of the pandemic. I mean the crisis of recognition about social inequity in cultures across the globe. And I think that we can think about this moment, as we have in previous decades--and arguably, centuries--that this is about insertion. This is about bringing more people into something that is institutional and systemic, maybe even an idea of addition. All of that is certainly useful. But I think what we realize is that we have to really fling the doors open in order to discover something, and allow something that we don't even know about--we don't even know what the shape of it is. This has come to fruition in certain kinds of lexicons of decolonization, and the

rejection of hierarchies, etc. We have to really think about, what is it that we, "want to learn"? We have to open ourselves up to the risk of maybe learning some things that are parts of difficult acknowledgments and difficult conversations. I think about something like *Panorama*, which is a peer-reviewed journal. People publish in it who are within the academic structure. However, we are not only people in the academy; we are people who are curators, albeit some with PhDs, not all PhDs; and people are arts administrators. And so we want to think broadly about, "What does the study of art history--in terms of what is produced in the United States--look like in all of those contexts?" The Academy? Us, as educators? What does it mean in terms of museums--and perhaps not only art museums, but all kinds of cultural museums? What does it mean in terms of arts administration? In terms of people supporting contemporary and living artists? We have to use that platform as a place to think about those ideas, broadly speaking. And we try our best to.

**Paul Jaskot**

What you've both spoken about is very much about a kind of generosity of spirit here, which I really appreciate, and opening yourself up to collaboration--not only with "traditional peers," but with a whole variety of different communities. But I want to put that word ["collaboration"] actually also next to the word you've just mentioned, Jackie, "crisis," because there seems to be a tension there about how generous we can be in this moment of problems with the PhD system, the number of PhDs, the number of hirings, and the institutional attacks on the humanities, let alone the status of art history in today's world.

So there is a way in which this actually does bring me back to the digital. There's a way within my environment at Duke I can honor the truly collaborative work of this staff; of faculty of all different ranks; of students, and we can work on this together. And I can acknowledge that and be part of that, right? It doesn't have to be me acknowledging--it has to be "we" acknowledge it. That work, though also helps us think about a reimagining of the humanities at a moment in which many of our institutions are really wondering about the funding model, to be blunt, but also the intellectual model. And so for me, I think it's the big questions of social art history: the questions of race, class, and gender, that helped us to take that on, and force us to do it collaboratively. They kind of forced us to be generous, but they also forced us to rethink in a moment of crisis. So I guess I wanted to add that

to the conversation--because it seems to me that there's a kind of tension between this concept of being generous, and this moment of being in crisis that is worth exploring institutionally.

**Susan Gagliardi**

I think that maybe trying to be generous, and trying to cultivate generosity in ourselves, may be one of our best hopes to getting through crisis. So I'm not sure if I see them as in tension, or that, in fact, crisis necessitates generosity. I can see that they're hard to bring together. But if I if I wanted to maintain some sense of hope and optimism for the world, I think I have to see generosity as something that crisis can lead to.

**Jacqueline Francis 26:50**

I would add, when you think, "What is social history of art?" If you look at the *Oxford Art Online* definition, the first thing is about people coming to the study of art; assuming that art is not autonomous--art doesn't make itself; art doesn't come out of a vacuum; art is linked to social factors. And I think that's where we are, in terms of thinking: what are the conditions in which art is made? What are the conditions under which artists study? What are the conditions under which art is collected and otherwise consumed and used? And so I think that this is the moment in which we have to really speak to that--even in terms of our production. How is research produced? Under what context? And so forth....

**Paul Jaskot**

Let's take that intellectual question a little bit further. Because one reason the three of us are together on this topic is that we have a shared belief in critical art history, and the way that critical art history can engage collaborative modes, some of which are digital, and some of which are not. This, at least for me, requires a focus on certain art historical topics, and as you rightly point out, Jackie, takes us to those kinds of foundational concepts of social art history. But it also seems to me, I think, to demand a focus on new methods, new methods within our institutions. And we have to think about different modes of acknowledging credit, and also different modes of intellectual production that are valued. But it's also above all, I think, different methods that perhaps might be drawn from the digital humanities. What do you think are the productive questions and methods for your subfields--that we might collaborate around, that might be best for a critical art history of collaboration?

**Jacqueline Francis**

I think the model in which we have been working, in terms of interdisciplinarity, can be more intentional. I've always felt with interdisciplinarity, a sort of challenge: that is to say that, those of us who say, "We're interdisciplinary," and that we understand disciplines in terms of Religious Studies, or political science or philosophy. And I would never say that--I would always say that I'm still trying to learn my first discipline, which is the history of art. And so I think if we consider interdisciplinarity in terms of different people, which is within the communities of the humanities, both in and outside of the academy, working together, thinking together, producing together, that's the way it has to look. And in terms of access too. I mean, that's the other thing that I keep thinking about: who is all of this work for? I don't think it's a singular audience. I think that all of us have many audiences who can be talked to about the work that we do, in terms of the research, and what are the different ways in which we talk to them. I think so much about the different ways that we've learned about pedagogy--at least the way we've talked about our audiences more openly in, say, the last 20 years--in terms of learning styles; people who are visual learners; and the different ways that we talk with, for instance, students. We know that people can have different ways of accessing information. And I only say that to challenge the way that so much of what we do...whether it's the 20 minute talk at College Art Association's annual conference--we have to figure out different distribution methods, especially for those of us who are interested in historical art and questions of history. Because it's not so much that the people outside of the academy don't care about history. I always say there wouldn't be a History Channel if people don't. They are issues with the delivery system. So we've got to figure out different ways of delivering what we are discovering, as historians of art.

**Paul Jaskot**

May I follow that up a bit and ask you whether there are particular kinds of collaborative questions that you think, as an Americanist, are in your subfield? Are there topics now that warrant and even demand this kind of approach? Or this kind of thinking?

**Jacqueline Francis**

I think in terms of Americanists...this is, you know, the beginning of American Studies, at least in the United States. And certainly American Studies has a

different history. I always talk about the Germans in the 19th century, perhaps being the first Americanists, because they were really interested in American Studies—as in, what were people who were indigenous to the United States making? And certainly, what were people who were of African descent making? I am not adding any kind of luster to it. I'm just saying this is my understanding of a foundation of American Studies...the merit of American Studies in the US is it often started with American Studies in terms of material culture. And I think that is a collaborative field in terms of archaeology, anthropology, even to some extent, ethnography. So we look back to those fields, and what do we learn from subjects? Both those who are contemporary as well as those who historical? How did they talk about themselves? What have we discovered in terms of relics and artifacts about the lives they lived? I also think in terms of cultural studies. Sometimes I think cultural studies in the US is very deeply politicized. But not to be elitist about it: it does engage in terms of popular culture. And what do people who can see and consume culture take away from it? I wish, more often than not, that we would think about more about the issues of labor and politics, that cultural studies, as generated in Europe, and certainly the UK, in the '50s and '60s brings to questions of cultural studies--in terms of labor and distribution, and accessibility.

### **Susan Gagliardi**

I want to pick up on one thing that Jackie said having to do with audience, because I also think that is a really key and important issue. And this is one that Kathleen Fitzpatrick brings up in *Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University*--thinking about the ways in which humanists are alienating broad audiences because of our mode of discourse and the ways in which we often try to outdo each other, as opposed to really listening and processing together and working together. So [Fitzpatrick's work is] another kind of call for collaboration. It's no surprise that she is a digital humanist herself, thinking about this as a possibility for a future for the humanities in our institutions. I think my sense is that digital art history--digital humanities--requires really focused attention on our methods or processes or evidence. And I think that actually is one thing that could bring together different fields within art history: to think about, how it is that we work? What are our processes? What evidence do we use, and when we when we compare and contrast how different people in different fields are operating or dealing with different kinds of objects and different histories? I think we might see or get a better sense for some of the assumptions that that we

bring to our research through that comparison. I guess I would also say that while I see a lot of potential in digital art history...and I'm sure Paul, I've learned this a lot from you: that the critical part of digital art history is indeed central. Because not all digital art history endeavors at least appear critical. There may be a critical dimension, but that's not always brought out by the people who are engaged in those activities. So I do think that that's a really important endeavor. And for that, I partly thank a former dean at Emory, who once asked me why digital humanities and digital art history wasn't just the next glitzy thing. And I really thank him for that question, because that question, very early on--when I was starting to work on *Mapping Senfo*--that question helped me realize that we needed to be doing something--that there had to be a reason. And for me, I think where I find the potential in digital art history has to do with the possibility of revealing assumptions and inequities. So I have in mind here, the article "Diversity of Artists in Major US Museums," from 2019, by [Chad] Topaz, and a group of scholars working together. And I guess I would also say, when I think about digital art history and the potential of working digitally, I also go to Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein's *Data Feminism*, and their seven calls for action, which I think are relevant, and for me are important as an African history historian. And I think also, they relate to how we might think of social art history. Their seven action items are to examine power to challenge power; to elevate emotion and embodiment; to rethink binaries and hierarchies; to embrace pluralism; to consider context; and to make labor visible--which is something that we have talked about, because, Jackie, when you were talking about the single-authored book, I was also thinking about all of the people in the acknowledgments. We know that no single-authored thing is actually single authored. How do we make more of that visible?

For African art history, specifically, we're in a moment right now. October 2021. There's a lot of tension and discussion around restitution of the so-called historical or classical arts of Africa, that requires collaboration that requires difficult conversations from people in many different positions across the ocean. And there are moments in those conversations, when I hear people posit that perhaps the digital will be the solution: that we can make a bunch of databases, and that's going to reveal where all of the objects under consideration came from, and facilitate return, or at least, discussion. I'm not quite sure it's so straightforward. I'm not sure digital is the solution. But I do think it's very much an important part of the process, because it will, I think, force us to ask questions, and to pay attention to our methods and to think

about our evidence. So that's really where I see a lot of potential in digital art history.

**Paul Jaskot**

In my own my own world of Nazi studies, this is a really crucial question. Provenance research, which is the most state-of-art historical categories is actually one of the most radical, because it is indeed about the massive tens of thousands of looted objects that are flowing through a system that are completely invisible. And the construction of these databases by various teams throughout the globe are really helping us see that history. And as you say, Susan, it's not that that's the answer, but it's at least allowing us to see the question more clearly, and to put looting in the center of an art historical equation. I mean, how many surveys really address looting, for example?

**Jacqueline Francis**

And I think it'll also open up other questions about ownership and also identity and identification. Not to step out of my lane here, but we all know that migration is a part of the history of the continent of Africa. So, even to identify something as belonging to the Yoruba or belonging to the Akan people doesn't end the discussion. And certainly in the Americas, we will find that as well. You know, we will have discussions among Sioux. Which Sioux are going to get that thing back from the university museum? So at the end of the day, it's never going to be arithmetic, nor mathematic. We're still going to have to speak with each other, hear each other, and to some extent negotiate with each other.

**Paul Jaskot**

On a related note, and I think that's a really good segue point: collaborative questions and methods also function in many ways, as we've just talked about, as a critique of the canon. That is a critique of art history as we know it, and at least of opening it up in a completely different way. Perhaps also as a critique of authority. How does that work intellectually? And practically? How do we think about a critical social art history? And again, I want to think about this social art historical tradition here, that isn't just adding another historical brick to the wall. And I guess it's a related question: do you think digital questions may help with that? We seem to have touched a little bit on that topic, but perhaps you could expand on that too.

**Susan Gagliardi**

What immediately came to my mind was Alison Langmead's article, where she shows that for over one hundred years, art historians have been responding to technological advances, and very much thinking about embodied experiences. So using the example of Wölfflin's slide lecture in the comparison, and his lecture as a performance and as an experience. And so in that sense, I don't see digital art history as something that's like a new brick that we're adding, but as an extension of some of the things that art historians have been doing for a very long time. And I think maybe in terms of the critical social art history, and also the question of authority, Emily Pugh's writing about the growing availability of information in the digital realm comes to my mind, because, as I understand it, she's arguing that we really need new ways of working. And we need critical approaches, because the amount of information that is coming at us is more than we can keep up with. And so I think that also means that this abundant information, this ever-flowing information demonstrates to us the impossibility of being the all-knowing authority, because we just can't possibly be all-knowing, right? Google and the internet can contain a lot more than my one brain can. And so we need to think about things in different ways, and try to wrangle our head around that information. But we still need the critical eye in terms of what gets translated into the digital realm and what doesn't. So as an Africanist, I'm very well-aware that there are still often huge glaring silences about what gets produced in the African continent because there are inequities in the digital realm; there are inequities in terms of access to the internet and to technology. So I think we need to remain attentive to that, as we think about working digitally.

**Paul Jaskot**

I love you say about what gets translated and what doesn't, because it does remind me of the foundational critique of social history--I'm thinking even of Gombrich's critique of Hauser, which is it's just more information and just adding more information doesn't mean that it is better art history, or that it's more critical, or even more analytical. In fact, of course, Gombrich thought quite the opposite. But in that regard, it is about how the expansiveness of the digital, which is also the expansiveness of social art history. We really do try to think much more systemically as social art historians...that it can be seen as something which is just one more thing, just an expansion of what we already have, or what we already know, perhaps even a distraction from our main focus, which might be a work of art. But at that regard, then it's not really a critique of the canon at all. It's just an expansion of the canon.



**Jacqueline Francis**

That's the part that I've always struggled with. For instance, in the fields in which I work, has my investment been to build another canon, one that would displace or somehow sit astride a dominant Eurocentric canon? It has not been my intention--I'm not interested in it. I'm interested in the questions around production and reception. And I'm interested in, especially with students and with other audiences, trying to be part of an ability to think about how these things come to be. That is to say, canons are, as one of my graduate instructors said once, they are just heuristic devices, perhaps, through which you can think through why people do what they do. So in terms of the digital, I want to show how canons are formed, maybe through amplification, through multiplication and to some extent to saturation. For example, who says, "This is good?" Who will put their money where their mouth is and purchase something from an artist, from a gallerist, from an auction house? And what kind of strategies of logic do they erect to say why something is good? And similarly, what do other competing assessment makers say is good about what they like, and what they don't like? To me, the ideas of certain kinds of formalism can certainly be diversified. And I use that word deliberately, to show why and how people make sense of what they like and why they like it.

**Paul Jaskot**

I think what's really interesting here is--for me, how I understand what you're both saying--that it's not merely adding to the canon, but it's going to the canon with an interest in mind. And interest might be exploring labor, it might be exploring production and reception, it might be exploring the invisible--and it's the interest which makes it critical; the interest which also makes it not merely another brick in the wall. Do you think that's fair?

**Susan Gagliardi**

I'm not invested in the canon at all so, in fact, I think that's one of our huge challenges. And I take Jackie's point: I'm also not interested in creating multiple parallel canons. I think once we accept the idea that there's so much happening in different directions, we have to realize that we're not all going to come to the conversation with the same questions, with the same background visual information, with the same sets of readings. I am completely okay with that. Because I don't think we get around this bind if we all still need to know Michelangelo but people don't need to know Yinka

Shonibare and Ellen Oxby, we just keep repeating the same problem. Allowing for pluralism, embracing pluralism, having multiple voices thinking about collaboration means understanding that there are going to be different priorities--different ways of grouping, different ways of asking questions, and that there isn't one fixed set of artists or authors that that I need to know or somebody else needs to know. I think we need to learn how to talk with each other when we don't have the same shared set of ideas.

**Paul Jaskot**

Collaboration really requires a kind of generous thinking. And in your opinion, does that generous thinking, does it belong to methods like social art history? Does it belong to digital humanities in a way that's different? We've touched a little bit upon that. But I wonder if you might give us an example? Or could you think about what would the goal of really a new kind of critical art history be?

**Jacqueline Francis**

I was doing some stirring in my mind, thinking about simply putting name to the labor. Susan spoke earlier in the conversation about looking at the sciences, where you might see a published article that's undergone peer review have several names on it. I would love to see that certainly in our fields, in the humanities, and certainly in terms of the history of art. I certainly would like to see it even in terms of artists, in terms of tombstones. In museums and galleries. I'm thinking about when artists have assistants that are part of the production, in terms of the object that becomes something made by the hand of...fill in the blank. I do that at great peril, because I know that in terms of artists who are underrepresented in our institutions--and I think of artists who are women, artists who are black artists, who are indigenous artists, who are Latinx--what that might do to the idea of the artists as auteur, the artists as genius, and so forth. But it seems to me a risk worth taking. And again, it answers a lot of basic questions that I know that people I know who are not in academia have about museums, which is, how did that thing get there? That's such a basic question that I think--even with all of the platforms that our hard-working colleagues in education departments in museums [are establishing], even with all of the introductory text to introduce this movement and that movement, even with platforms like Art21.org--there is still so much mystery and opacity around how objects get to be in these buildings.

**Paul Jaskot**

I'm struck by both what you're saying is the question of naming the question-making visible who makes the decisions, making visible who's at the table, making visible what is not in our museums, putting names to labor that that is otherwise not there. The digital humanist in me says, that's exactly what critical digital humanities can do: make that visible; make the invisible visible; think about actors that have been written out of history in new ways. I'm actually struck by how that gets to fundamentals of social art history, even an older notion of ideology critique, after all--what is that early moment of social history in which the idea was to show class and gender in order to denaturalize the narrative? To say, well, it's not actually just about a bunch of white European men who live in a certain moment, or if it is that, it's about them in a much more complex way in relationship to a lot of other people and a lot of other systems. And in some senses, we have to do that both inside our own minds, inside our methods, but also inside our institutions. And that's about making things visible--at least that's in some ways how I'm thinking about it here.

**Susan Gagliardi**

I'm inspired by how Paul, you've talked about designing projects for your courses, I asked students in the graduate methods seminar to create a database. And to put in that database information from a single course syllabus, and then to create a separate one, where they focused on a single course textbook. And to me, it was exciting to see how excited they seemed to be when they looked at their spreadsheets and started to think about what even filling in the fields showed them that they already had intuited. That's why they had selected a particular syllabus or a particular textbook; but there was something about actually starting to realize that later in the semester, they'll visualize it. There is where I see there's a real potential in trying to think differently.

**Jacqueline Francis**

It's also a question of authority, thinking differently about who can--I'm not sure if I want the phrase "share authority," but I want to think about perhaps share responsibility toward accountability for something getting done. Or the ways in which we come to producing-- including, producing knowledge-- whether it's in the classroom or in other contexts in terms of publication, even in terms of curation, etc.

**Susan Gagliardi**

Jackie, what came to my mind was another moment during the Kress [Foundation] Summer Institute on Digital Mapping and Art History, where it was near the end, and we were having a conversation about what we had learned and maybe what we might carry forward with us. And Kelly Knowles, the geographer, who was working with Paul to run the Kress Summer Institute, described how she works with her students. And she said that she presents them with a problem--she's working on a big research project--and she presents the students with the problem. And she doesn't necessarily tell the student how exactly to solve the problem. She lets the student try to come up with a solution. And the student might come up with a different solution and see the problem differently than she did. And that description of how she worked freed me to realize this potential and this possibility of presenting to someone, "This is my question...how would you approach it? What do you think about this question?" And so I went back to Emory and started to try to practice that, and for me, that has been incredibly rewarding. And so when you're talking about authority and thinking differently about authority...I still feel that I have some responsibility for students when they're working with me, and I don't mean to give up that responsibility in guiding them, but I do think that's an example of rethinking authority. I don't need to have all of the answers and the ways to arrive at the answers. I can allow students to explore a question that might be of interest or use to me, but also helpful for them in some way. And I've really enjoyed trying to see the possibilities in that.

**Paul Jaskot**

Well, on that note, I think that's a wonderful grand challenge indeed, and it indicates the generosity of both of you in being here, part of our collaboration today. And so my thanks to Jacqueline Francis and Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi for having this conversation.

**Caitlin Woolsey**

Thank you for listening to *In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. For more information about this episode and links to resources referenced in the conversation, please visit [Clarkart.edu/rap/podcast](http://Clarkart.edu/rap/podcast). This program was produced by Caroline Fowler and me, Caitlin Woolsey, with editing by John Buteyn, music by lightchaser, and additional support provided by Annie Jun, Jessie Sentivan, and Sara Houghteling. The Clark Art Institute sits on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people. We acknowledge the

tremendous hardship of their forcible removal from these homelands by colonial settlers. A federally-recognized nation, they now reside in Wisconsin and are known as the Stockbridge-Munsee community. As we learn, speak, and gather here at the Clark, we pay honor to their ancestors past and present, and to future generations, by committing to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.