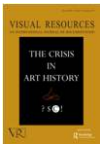

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Just What Is It That Makes Contemporary Art So Different, So Appealing?

Pepe Karmel
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The Crisis in Art History

"The Crisis in Art History" comprises a revised set of papers delivered at the 2011 College Art Association of America (CAA) meeting in New York City as part of the "Critical Issues in Art History" series sponsored by its Board of Directors. Representing a broad spectrum of the art history profession, authors Patricia Mainardi, Patricia Rubin, Stephen Murray, Pepe Karmel, Elizabeth Easton, and Maxwell Anderson discuss how the current situation looks to each of them. Many of the same issues emerge in several different essays, such as the dislocations caused by government policies that privilege technological training over the humanities, and the skewing of academic art history and museum exhibitions toward contemporary and away from historical art. The papers also reveal economic issues, changing museum audiences, issues of gender and race, graduate school curricula, shifts in trends in scholarship, and redefinitions of the public domain.

Keywords: Architectural History; Contemporary Art; Museums; Art Education; Funding; Intellectual Property Rights; Collecting; Humanities; Art Market

Introduction

Patricia Mainardi

When I was invited to organize and chair a session at the ninety-ninth annual conference of the College Art Association of America (CAA), meeting in New York City, February 9–12, 2011, as part of the "Critical Issues in Art History" series sponsored by its Board of Directors, I chose as topic "The Crisis in Art History" because I have become increasingly aware that major changes—not all to the good—are happening throughout our field. Since, like the blind men who are asked to describe an elephant, we are each most knowledgeable about our own area, I invited representatives of a broad spectrum of the art history profession—academics and curators, critics and museum administrators—to discuss how the current situation looks to each of them. "Is there a crisis in art history, and, if so, how does it affect what you do?" was the question I posed to participants. The session drew a standing-room-only audience (Figure 1), and it provoked animated discussion throughout the conference and long afterward.

I expected that many of the issues discussed would be economic, but the responses ranged much farther afield, bringing up issues of changing museum audiences, graduate school curricula, shifts in trends in scholarship, the loss of interest by both students and the general public in historical art, and redefinitions of the public domain, to cite just a few. In subsequent discussions, other topics emerged, not treated in the session

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Figure 1 Crowd gathered for "The Crisis in Art History" session on February 9, 2011, at the annual conference of the College Art Association in New York City. Camera phone photo. Image courtesy of Christine L. Sundt.

but worthy of future attention: the virtual collapse of art history publishing, the closing of visual resource and library facilities.

The papers from the session, published here, should be considered a "rough draft" of our comprehension of the situation confronting art history professionals today. My opening paper was written from the point of view of someone with many years of experience teaching in and directing the graduate program in art history at the City University of New York (CUNY); for me, the loss of the historical aspects of art history is the major problem within the field. Patricia Rubin, the Judy and Michael Steinhardt Director of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, as well as an historian of Italian Renaissance art, taught previously at the Courtauld Institute in London, and so has an international view of the current situation in graduate art education; she discusses the relationship between price, subsidy, and quality in education and offers a statistical overview of major graduate programs in art history. Stephen Murray, a specialist on the Gothic and Romanesque periods, teaches architectural history at Columbia University, and is active in the implementation of digital media within the field; for him, the rapidly changing intellectual fads and fashions constitute art history's most serious current problem. Pepe Karmel, of the art history faculty at New York University, was not part of the original CAA session, but has been invited to contribute an essay because he has the unusual qualifications of being a contemporary art critic and academic art historian who has also worked as a curator. He criticizes the inclusion of contemporary art within the graduate school curriculum, finding it an inappropriate subject for a doctoral degree. Elizabeth Easton has an extensive background as a curator; as the current director of the Center for Curatorial Leadership,

she addresses problems of museum administration: gender inequality, the lack of adequate training for museum administration within art history programs, and the looming shortage of experienced museum directors. Particularly valuable is her survey of art museum curators who recount what each sees as current issues. Maxwell Anderson, the Melvin & Bren Simon Director of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, has worked in museums throughout his professional life, as curator and as director, and, in addition, publishes widely on museum policies; in a ten-point essay, he identifies major problems affecting museums, their curators, and their audiences and offers some solutions to these problems.

Many of the same issues emerged in several different essays, such as the dislocations caused by government policies that privilege technological training over humanities, and the skewing of academic art history and museum exhibitions toward contemporary and away from historical art. Many of the essays are polemical and provocative. It is the hope of the editors and contributors that this special issue of *Visual Resources* will inaugurate a lively and productive discussion about the future of art history in the twenty-first century.

Art History: "Research that 'matters'"?

Patricia Mainardi

Although I have been aware for some time that there is a crisis brewing in art history, two events brought the situation home to me. In January 2011, I received an e-mail from my university asking for nominations of "15 impressive Ph.D. students" who would go to Albany, New York, to meet with state legislators and participate in an event called "Research that Matters: An Exposition of Graduate Research in SUNY and CUNY." Among the bullet points defining the criteria for choosing these students were that their work "should be relevant to state jobs and job creation, as well as the state economy in general—it should be research that 'matters.'"[1]

This brings up the issue of research that doesn't matter, that cannot be linked directly to jobs and job creation. Our colleagues in England are already facing this situation, of universities being redefined as places of technical training linked to the economy, so art history in the United States is certainly not alone among the humanities. But an added development affecting art history was brought into focus by an article published in the *New York Times* at almost the same time. Headlined "In India, a Busy Fair and a Spirited Art Scene," the article described the third international contemporary art fair in New Delhi, featuring 500 artists, over 1,000 visitors, dealers from twenty countries, an international contingent of collectors, and "panel discussions led by curators and college professors."[2] This was clearly an event that, were our graduate students involved, would certainly impress legislators with its economic benefits.

The problem, as I see it, is that art history has become part of the global economy, but not all art history can participate in this economy: only contemporary art offers the kinds of economic benefits that can be reaped by these international emporia. If we think of money as the sun, then art history is a heliotropic flower. To be sure, in my youth the "Young Turks" railed against the connoisseurship studies that ruled art

history of the day and that, we charged, deformed art historical studies into gauges of market value. But that phenomenon was insignificant compared to today's shifting sands caused by the vast amounts of wealth now moving through the world of contemporary art, in museums and auction houses, galleries, and international art fairs with their side shows of academics and curators. It is no wonder that the glamour of this global economy has attracted youth, much more so than the libraries and archives of previous generations. Nor is it any wonder that graduate programs are swamped with students wanting to work in the field of contemporary art—and this is an international phenomenon, not limited to the United States. A Swiss colleague told me that bright students there can, immediately upon receiving a bachelor's degree, begin earning more money in the contemporary art trade than their professors, can hobnob with the rich and famous, go to all the best parties, etc. "What can we offer them to compete with that?" he lamented. A French colleague told me that, in France, universities outside Paris can't even fill courses on earlier art—and France is a country with major regional museum collections. The tail of contemporary art is now wagging the dog of art history.

But is this just a question of changing trends in subject matter? I can remember when American art first entered the art history curriculum, when photography began to be included in our course offerings, followed by critical theory and visual culture. I think this situation is different, however; this is a sea change, not just a change of currents. Wherever contemporary art studies have become dominant, the same results are apparent: one is that, whereas in the past, art history students, either voluntarily or through program requirements, studied the art of different periods and cultures, today's contemporary art specialists are reluctant to venture before . . . when? It used to be "post-war," approximately 1945, then it was 1980; now students beginning graduate study in art history routinely state their focus as "twenty-first century art."

To accommodate this increasing interest in contemporary rather than historical art, universities that are unable to increase faculty numbers have, instead, reconfigured art historical areas of specialization. Ancient and medieval art are often combined into one position. Architectural history has all but vanished, increasingly relegated to schools of architecture where the emphasis is always on the contemporary built environment. The traditional division of the modern period between two faculty members, one specializing in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art and the second a twentieth-century specialist, has largely been replaced by one art historian responsible for the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, a second in contemporary art since 1980, and, sometimes, a third in photography, critical theory, or visual culture. Even in areas fairly new to the art historical curriculum, such as African or Islamic art, the preference is for specialists in contemporary, not historical, aspects.

As part of this "presentism," universities have gradually abandoned traditional requirements for art historical education, so that it has become increasingly common for students to approach graduate study with little or no familiarity with any art before the contemporary and with no language skills other than English. Even worse, it has become increasingly common for them to complete their graduate coursework in much the same condition. Statistics tracking doctoral dissertations,

though valuable in themselves, do not tell the whole story. Because it takes years to arrive at the level of a dissertation proposal listed by the College Art Association, such statistics in reality track the preferences of students who began graduate study three to five years earlier.[3] In addition, such statistics omit the much higher percentages of students focusing on contemporary art in masters programs. Since student demand is a major factor in determining course offerings, whether such students are at the undergraduate, MA, or PhD level, the result is that more and more areas are being combined or eliminated in order to allow additional courses in contemporary subjects.

Most disheartening, from my point of view, has been the loss of a sense of history. The most basic methodology underlying art history has always been the realization that art will have different meanings at different times and places—how it looks to me today is rarely how it looked to viewers in previous centuries or in other cultures. Discovering and understanding those other meanings and functions of art has always been a principal endeavor of art history, regardless of where and when the art was produced, and regardless of whether those insights can be translated into the global marketplace of economic value. But for contemporary art, the only moment is now, with each new generation of artists rapidly replaced by the next. Insofar as academia participates in this process, we are at risk of producing one-dimensional and shallow intellectuals whose area of expertise is already irrelevant by the time they complete their degrees, whether MA or PhD.

Every discipline has its own sun whose magnetic attraction pulls its galaxy out of alignment: in history it is politics, where many historians end up working for government; in economics it is the big investment money that seduced Larry Summers even while he was president of Harvard.[4] And for us that sun is the global economy in contemporary art. For now, this is where the money and jobs are, but we should remember that the global economy in contemporary art is investor-driven and deeply speculative, much like derivatives in the financial markets; it is not a happy model for long-term prosperity.

The contemporary art wing of the global economy, of academia, of museums, will remain presentist and ahistorical simply because, at the moment that the art of today becomes the art of yesterday, it is, by definition, no longer contemporary. So should we drop the word "history" in art history? Or should we begin, once again, to reclaim all of art history as our proper field of study?

1 Memo to Art History Faculty from Graduate Center Provost [City University of New York], January 24, 2011, subject: "Students for Albany poster session—March 8, 2011."

2 Somini Sengupta, "In India, a Busy Fair and a Spirited Art Scene," *New York Times*, January 31, 2011.

3 Dissertation titles in art history and visual studies from US and Canadian institutions, completed and in progress, are published annually in *caa.reviews* (http://www.caareviews.org/dissertations).

4 Charles Ferguson, "Larry Summers and the Subversion of Economics," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 3, 2010.

Defining the Crisis in Art History

Patricia Rubin

"I would begin by saying that art history is in crisis, but that would have too strident a ring." So T. J. Clark opened his landmark essay, "The Conditions of Artistic Creation," published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in May 1974.[1] Clark continued: "Out of breath, in a state of genteel dissolution—those might be more appropriate verdicts." He then asked, "why should art history's problems matter? Or on what grounds could I ask anyone else to take them seriously?" He answered by reminding the reader and reminding himself of "what art history once was," eventually coming to "the roll-call of names—Warburg, Wölfflin, Panofsky, Saxl, Schlosser"—art historians whose research in different ways led "back time and again towards the whole terrain of disagreement about the nature of artistic production." Clark's purpose was not to "sanctify" the names, but to "rediscover the kind of thinking that sustained art history at that time." He dismissed a "cheerful diversification of the subject," with his "speciality," the social history of art "taking its place alongside the other varieties—formalist, 'modernist', sub-Freudian, filmic, feminist, 'radical', all of them hot-foot in pursuit of the New." Against this "disintegration," he set a "concentration" on the "relation between the work of art and ideology." The point here is not to sanctify nor, absolutely not, to vilify T. J. Clark or his essay, but to put "crisis" and "art history" into a disciplinary context: to recall a moment when the "New" was mounting the barricades against a stale tradition or, worse, disciplinary constructions that obscured entire realms of artistic production and neglected the conditions of that production.

To situate Clark's polemic in its time, the year 1974: March saw the end of a five-month oil crisis caused by OPEC's embargo; on May 17, a week before the publication of Clark's article, bombs set by the Ulster Volunteer Force in Ireland killed thirty-three people and wounded 300, the highest day of casualties in the Troubles; that year neo-Fascists were setting off bombs in Italy; a TWA flight exploded over the Mediterranean; members of the Japanese Red Army occupied the French Embassy in The Hague; Turkey invaded Cyprus, and the Rubik's cube was invented. Could one say that there was there more or less crisis in 1974 than today? Or was "crisis" applied to different types of events? Is there a reason it should recur now in discussions of the paradigms of art history?

The College Art Association has addressed questions about the health of the field more than once, most explicitly in 1982 with an issue of the *Art Journal* dedicated to "The Crisis in the Discipline."[2] Edited by Henri Zerner, there was an article by his colleague at Harvard, Oleg Grabar (but, conspicuous by its absence, none by T. J. Clark, at that time also at Harvard, where a faculty crisis was developing), and contributions by Joan Hart, Rosalind Krauss, David Summers, Donald Preziosi, and Otto Werckmeister. Zerner adopted the pluralistic approach rejected by Clark, demurring from taking one direction in response to what he defined as the need for art history to be "re-examined, rethought [and] restructured" in order to recuperate it from its "deteriorated" state as an "uninspired professional routine feeding a busy academic machine . . . in the service of a dominant ideology [and] deeply involved with the market, which determines the

object of its studies to a considerable extent."[3] The expanded visual field provides the uniting theme of the issue, and with it, the incorporation of new objects of study in a decisive move (or moves)—materially, geographically, chronologically, and conceptually—from the definition of art inherited from the Renaissance and the writing of art history descended from Giorgio Vasari's biographical celebrations. Like Clark, Zerner expressed a decided disciplinary nostalgia for a past art history "at the forefront of intellectual life," with its founders (for Zerner) "Morelli, Riegl, Wölfflin, and others."

Werckmeister's article in this collection sheds an interesting light on the radicalization of art history in the 1970s, which informed the crisis model of the time. Writing about "The New Marxist Art History of 1970," Werckmeister notes that it emerged from younger art historians in West Germany, France, Holland, and the United States, who gathered together:

> in regular associations, proposing Marxist answers to a growing range of art historical questions ... That movement ... was part of the political unrest which in those years swept Western European and American universities ... which, in turn, was prompted by political events, most notably the Vietnam War in the United States and the Grand Coalition between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in West Germany.[4]

Those younger art historians have long since passed their own mid-life crises and many have retired as distinguished emeriti.

To return to the dilemmas of our day: where and how was the crisis model applied in 2010–2011? To environmental events? The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico? The earthquakes in Haiti and Japan or the floods in Australia? Those cataclysms were generally qualified as "disasters" by the news media and to speak of disasters in art history sounds overcharged. "Crisis" found some resonance in political events, such as the revolution in Egypt in February 2011; but even then the dominant vocabulary was that of "protest," "upheaval," and "unrest." In recent times, the most consistent references to a crisis are found in descriptions of the dramatic economic downturn of 2008. While it is not useful to characterize art history as suffering from the effects of sub-prime slime, it is entirely appropriate to talk about the discipline and its discontents in economic terms.

The phrase "knowledge-based economy" was coined in the late 1960s to distinguish between those who work with their hands and those who work with their heads, as characterized most influentially by Peter F. Drucker in *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to our Changing Society*.[5] Drucker identified a shift from an industrial to a technological economy where knowledge—as created, stored, transmitted, analyzed, and applied—is product as well as process. That product has economic value. The consequences of this shift for higher education have been fundamental and far-reaching. In the United States and in the United Kingdom it is fair to talk about knowledge as a component of the GDP, the Gross Domestic Product, or perhaps the Gross Domestic Prestige, and as being viewed as essential to maintaining a position in the global economy. In making the case for investment in higher education, the *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance* commissioned by the British government and published in October 2010 states that:

> Higher education matters because it drives innovation and economic transformation. Higher education helps to produce economic growth, which in turn contributes to national prosperity . . . Employing graduates creates innovation, enabling firms to identify and make more effective use of knowledge, ideas and technologies. Internationally successful businesses employ high levels of graduates.[6]

The concern is that Britain retain a competitive edge. The report argues that "Sustaining future economic growth and social mobility in an increasingly competitive global knowledge economy will require increased investment in higher education."[7] The implementation of that investment has taken the form of a policy of increasing tuition fees, creating a system of student loans, and making severe cuts in direct government funding to universities. Crucial here is the fact that the commoditization of learning that underlies this model and the investments being made to support it are not to the advantage of the humanities, and therefore are likely to have a debilitating effect on art history as a university discipline. The president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Don Randel, has cautioned that "The U.S. is disinvesting in higher education at an accelerating rate, and in the humanities even faster."[8]

Culture is not absent from the rhetoric of the British government's funding review: "a strong higher education system is an important element in the economy and culture of a leading nation . . . Higher education . . . helps to create the knowledge, skills and values that underpin a civilised society."[9] But it plays a secondary role to the economy, serving as part of what Randel described as the "instrumental argument" of social advancement. Of course, the case can be made for the economic benefits of the arts to any society and with it the place for art historians as their expert interpreters and guardians. However compelling they might be, such arguments have limited force against the programmatic swing to supporting the STEM disciplines – science, technology, engineering, and math—in schools and universities in both America and Britain. The Higher Education Funding Council in England has designated special funding for these subjects, which are defined as strategically important. And all of the winning states in the United States government's Race to the Top competition to improve K–12 education announced plans to bolster STEM subjects—the ultimate winners in the race.

This is not to be paranoid about those subjects or to doubt their value, but to observe that the language of productivity, of marketplace skills, and of measurable results dominates educational discourse, and that art history is hardly a priority. Holding out for the humanities is a bold position. A great debt is owed to major charitable organizations like the Andrew W. Mellon and Samuel H. Kress foundations for maintaining a commitment to them, and to the private donors and sponsors who support cultural institutions, but they could be said to be the exceptions that prove the rule.

The truth is that education is costly. The authors of a book published in 2011, *Why Does College Cost So Much?* define the three basic features, or the "holy trinity," of the American higher education system—"price, the size of the public subsidy, and the quality of the programming"—that policymakers (and University presidents) "would like to control."[10] They conclude that:

> If you force universities to hold the line on price (while underlying costs are rising), then you cannot maintain quality unless the subsidy rises. If you cut the subsidy, you cannot hold the line on price unless you are willing to see quality fall. Realistic policy proposals will have to be aware of these basic tradeoffs. The only way to avoid these difficult choices is to find a way to increase productivity in higher education without decreasing quality. We may ultimately succeed in doing to the artisan industry of higher education what the Internet did for brokerage services.[11]

Apparently, like some cheeses and wines by small producers, higher education is an artisan industry and it is to be asked whether art historians will be setting up stalls in the academic equivalents of farmers' markets or, more likely, whether major changes will be required for the field to meet new production targets. The discourse of cost, price, and market, so favored by university administrators, which is partly about the application of metaphors and partly about the literal adoption or adaptation of business models, sadly neglects the structural flaws in those models that have repeatedly led to critical failures and crises in industry and in finance. However, to venture such considerations is like holding the "Conversation with a Tax Collector about Poetry," to appropriate the title of a 1926 poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. It is a conversation held in conflicting idioms.

The Internet, cited as the agent of academic production is, of course, also a means of consumption. Commonplace as it might be, it is necessary to note the radical transformation of the methods of research and means of communication resulting from Web technology, and the even more radical generational transformation of students from the species of "Homo Sapiens" to that of "Homo Zappiens," the generation born in the 1990s and now reaching college age.[12] From an art historical point of view, the good news is that students of the Internet generation are at ease with images and symbols —news that is offset by their illustrative and functional apprehension of images. These students are swift and fluent in the languages of connectivity provided by the Web. Growing up in a networked society, they demand immediate access to information and think and work in novel and rapidly evolving configurations. Taking "crisis" to mean a testing time, it is essential to acknowledge these dynamics and anticipate the ways that technology will become methodology and will modify the objects of art historical study.

Yet the brave, new networked world is not necessarily one of unlimited freedom or uninhibited access. It is a realm of surrogates: some of them may be works of art, but most are mere representations. The fact remains that advanced research is expensive. Art historical research has particular costs, both in the close physical examination of its widely dispersed objects and in their publication. Image licensing and copyright fees are often prohibitive and the commercial priorities of many publishers can be restrictive. These are crucial factors in the presence of the discipline, the quality of its voice, and the nature of its topics, and they are addressed in other contributions to this issue. Equally important to consider here is how the specialist areas of academic art history are faring as departments cope with the fluctuations of supply and demand in the marketplace of higher education. A detailed analysis of the situation would

require a systematic statistical study, which is not offered here. What follows is a sample based on faculties in three private East Coast universities (New York University, Columbia, and Yale) and two public universities in other regions (University of Michigan and University of California, Berkeley).[13]

There are two principal art history faculties at New York University: the Department of Art History and the Institute of Fine Arts. The Department of Art History is mainly dedicated to undergraduate teaching. There are fifteen professors in art history, archaeology, urban design, architectural history, and museum studies, whose fields include Egyptian art and archaeology, Islamic art, Western art and architecture from the Middle Ages to the present. As with many other departments in America, there is a component of Latin American art. Art history is presently the sixth largest major in NYU's College of Arts and Sciences and the largest undergraduate program in the country. In the 2010–2011 academic year, there were 364 majors and 150 minors.

The Institute of Fine Arts is a graduate school, with twenty-three professors in art history and archaeology—three are joint appointments with the Department of Art History. There are four professors in conservation, and a number of adjuncts, affiliates, and visiting professors. The fields of research encompass Bronze Age, Egyptian, Roman, and Greek art and archaeology, early Christian, Byzantine, and Islamic art, and Western art and architectures from the medieval to the modern and contemporary periods as well as museum and curatorial studies. There are 114 MA students, twenty-eight conservation students (who also receive an MA in art history), and 184 doctoral students. In the last two years, forty-five PhDs have been awarded, with just about half in modern and contemporary art. The proportion is the same for the dissertations in progress.

NYU's portfolio of teaching, training, and research in art history and archaeology extends well beyond the Institute of Fine Arts and the Department of Art History. Over fifty faculty members teach courses in art history and related fields: museum studies, visual studies, and material culture. Faculty teaching those courses and supervising research are located in departments across the university, most often in "studies" departments, such as Italian or Russian and Slavic Studies.

According to its website, the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia has twenty-eight full-time members of faculty, a number that combines Columbia and Barnard faculty. There are 150 doctoral students, sixteen of whom entered the program this year. There are sixty students in the MA program in "Modern Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies," with fifteen in the 2010 entering class. The fields taught at Columbia include the art and archaeology of the ancient world (ancient Near East, Greece, Rome), and African, Asian (Japanese and Chinese), Southeast Asian, pre-Columbian, and Native American art, architectural history, history of photography, theory, criticism and historiography, early Christian art, and Western art from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. Twenty-three dissertations have been completed in the past two years, and there are 133 in progress, with just over a quarter of them on twentieth- and twenty-first-century topics. There were no figures available on the website about the number of undergraduates taking courses or majoring in art history.

Yale's Department of the History of Art has approximately 1,500 undergraduates registered in courses and fifty junior and senior majors. There are twenty-three

people listed as teaching, with sixteen permanent faculty in the department. The areas covered include African, pre-Columbian art, Japanese, Greek, Islamic, Near Eastern, and Western art from medieval to modern and contemporary Western art, including Latin American art. There are between eighty and ninety doctoral students with forty-nine dissertations in progress. Among them, there is a distinctive concentration on subjects in nineteenth-century American art, including the decorative arts. Otherwise, very roughly stated, there are twelve dissertations on topics in modern and contemporary art, eight on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art, and twelve on subjects from the medieval to Baroque periods.

Berkeley's History of Art department has eight members of faculty, whose fields cover Greek and Roman art, Japanese and Chinese art, and Western art from early Christian to contemporary. About ten PhD students start each year. There is no separate MA course. There are currently twenty-five dissertations in progress, with a fairly even chronological range: five on topics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art; six on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art; four on ancient art; three on topics in Indian, East Asian, and Chinese art; seven in twentieth-century art.

The History of Art Department of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor has twenty-five faculty members, with four cross-listed with other departments and two curators with faculty positions. The fields covered by the faculty include Africa, the ancient world, and Western art from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century, with two professors of medieval art, four professors teaching Renaissance and Baroque art, and seven teaching modern and contemporary art. There are thirty-five PhD dissertations in progress with ten of them in modern and contemporary art. Of the dissertations completed between 2008 and 2010, one-third were on subjects in modern and contemporary art.

These figures, synoptic and unsystematic as they are, give a broad indication of the range but no insight into the intellectual flavor of any of these faculties or the approaches of individual professors. It comes as no surprise that they show that student research interests are concentrated in modern and contemporary art. But they also record a substantial amount of doctoral work being done in other fields, in earlier periods, and well outside of the Western canon. Surveying these departments reveals a commitment to chronological and geographical breadth. It cannot be said, however, whether this results from an articulated ideal of coverage, a belief in global art history, or whether it is simply based on traditionally occupied slots and departmental identities. Nor can such an impressionistic overview tell which subjects might be under threat in a given institution or which might be protected by their popularity or by university or departmental politics.

The student numbers suggest, however, that there is a steady call for art history at these big schools. There does not seem to be a consumer-based crisis. The difficulties are most likely to be found in maintaining the supply. The finances available to support this range of activities are conditioned by the economic crisis and the funding policies of higher education, with the attendant devaluation of cultural currency. Is there a sustainable future for art history in this climate? How is the balance of fields to be weighed against student demand? How agile or active are departments in addressing trends and debates? Does the deployment of resources in some way recall a cold war arms race that could lead a department or the field to its own standoffs, its own "Cuban Missile Crisis"? Are energies

being put towards keeping competitive advantages—in prestige, in faculty and student recruiting—to the detriment of perceived rivals, or is there a model of working towards mutual benefit through cooperation, through a distribution of resources, and a discussion of shared priorities? Is competition a healthy and necessary driver of the knowledge economy of art history or is it a destructive force? Invoking crisis in the 1970s was a call to dissent and to take action against institutionalized elitism and intellectual complacency. Invoking crisis in 2011 is a call to attend to the precarious situation of art history as a commodity in a market of wildly fluctuating values.

1 T. J. Clark, "The Conditions of Artistic Creation," *Times Literary Supplement*, May 24, 1974, 561–62.
2 *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982).
3 Henri Zerner, "Editor's Statement: the Crisis in the Discipline," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982): 279.
4 O[tto] K[arl] Werckmeister, "Radical Art History," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982): 284.
5 Peter F. Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to our Changing Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).
6 *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in England*: *An Independent Review of Higher Education and Student Finance in England*, October 12, 2010. The quotation is from the opening of chapter 1, "The Investment Case for Higher Education," 14. The review is available at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/report/.
7 *Securing a Sustainable Future*, 14.
8 Don Randel, "Studying (if possible) the Renaissance (if any)," a talk given at Villa I Tatti, the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, June 9, 2011. See also the President's Report, *Report of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation 2010*, 7–16.
9 *Securing a Sustainable Future*, 14.
10 Robert B. Archibald and David H. Feldman, *Why Does College Cost So Much?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91.
11 Archibald and Feldman, *Why does College Cost So Much?*, 91.
12 Wim Veen and Jan-Paul van Staaldduinen, "The Homo Zappiens and its Consequences for Learning in Universities," in *Changing Cultures in Higher Education: Moving Ahead to Future Learning*, ed. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers and Dirk Schneckenberg (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010), 323–37.
13 I am grateful to Yaelle Amir, the Research Activities Coordinator at the Institute of Fine Arts, for her assistance in gathering this information from the relevant websites and other available sources for Columbia, Yale, the University of Michigan, and the University of California, Berkeley. Any mistakes or misunderstandings in reporting this information are my own.

The Crisis in Art History?

Stephen Murray

I should begin by acknowledging my partial view of the world of art history—which I see through the eyes of a historian of medieval architecture—as well as my underlying

assumptions about the central mission of the scholarly enterprise invested in the university, of which art history is a part. First, the intellectual mechanism that has, from the very start, empowered the enterprise is a syllogistic one: the production of knowledge through inquiry. The system is geared to the exposition of opposite positions. At the dawn of the age of the university, or so Peter Abelard (1079–1142) claimed, the force of dialectic changed the game, chasing older notions of "realism" from the field.[1] The mechanism for the production of knowledge in this context should match Jean Bony's famous dictum for the creation of Gothic architecture: the pioneers of Gothic were, Bony tells us, driven by "critical dissatisfaction with the immediate past."[2]

I have a second working assumption. Right from the earliest age of the university, the production of knowledge, far from taking place in some kind of insulated ivory tower, has been associated with bustling city life and the production of wealth and worldly status.[3] As I have worked, over a period of four decades, with generations of young scholars, attempting to help them position themselves in the increasingly competitive business of finding a job, I have often reflected on the notion of an *intellectual stock market* that pumps up the value of certain kinds of intellectual property, while devaluing others.[4] As we learned in the recent economic meltdown, the assessment of those values may be prone to rapid shifts.

Building upon these two premises, it seems to me that the academic discipline of art history, institutionalized in our great universities now for a century and a half or more, remained relatively stable—perhaps too much so—for an extended period of time with its pursuit of issues of style, iconography, and authorship.[5] Particularly in the teaching of the discipline, the darkened room with juxtaposed images and Hegelian/Wölfflinian exploration of this-and-thatness provided a remarkably viable teaching device that has only been challenged in the very recent past.

Entering the discipline as I did in the context of London's Courtauld Institute in the late 1960s (the age of Sir Anthony Blunt), I and many of my fellow students felt that some kind of radical shake up or crisis was entirely desirable. Yet when it came in the 1968 events in Paris, I have to confess that we were not paying attention, being preoccupied with pressures of academic deadlines. Our "critical dissatisfaction with the immediate past" was expressed in enormous skepticism about the ideas propagated by the giant figures of art history: in my field this would include Erwin Panofsky, Jean Bony, Robert Branner, Paul Frankl, and Willibald Sauerländer, and a desire to return to the monuments with a higher level of critical self-consciousness, new questions, and more rigorous investigative methods, eschewing the larger questions of "style" or cultural contexts as we found them laid out, for example, in the work of Paul Frankl.[6]

And then, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the practice of art history was profoundly shaken by two dramatic changes—should we call them "revolutions"? The first was the so-called literary turn—that is, the infusion of assumptions (some people would say "methodologies") derived from literary criticisms, Marxist thought, gender studies, postcolonial theory, etc.— impacted upon different disciplines and different areas of art history at different times. I will recount the story from my own viewpoint. The two publications that most affected me at the time were Hans Belting's

The End of the History of Art? (1983) and Willibald Sauerländer's stinging review of Jean Bony's *French Gothic Architecture of the 12th and 13th Centuries* (1984).[7] Belting's book, announcing the collapse of the Vasarian metanarrative, encouraged us to experiment with a range of alternative means of representation. It certainly resonated with those of us who were impatient with the limits of the Hegelian underpinnings of the most recent books on Gothic by Focillon, Bony, and Frankl. Sauerländer rebuked Bony for imposing his own modernistic vision upon great Gothic churches: of neglecting fittings and furniture that infused these great spaces with liturgical and devotional meaning.

With increasing urgency as the Millennium approached, scholars indulged in a strategy that I shall call "endism"—the delivery of ringing manifestos announcing the death of the "old" while attempting to anticipate, guide, and control the "new."[8] Some of these manifestos were conceived in a generous spirit intended to recognize multiple possible approaches—I think not only of Belting's book, but also Michael Davis's clever "Sic et Non," and Paul Crossley's big-spirited introduction to the new edition of Frankl.[9] Others, it seems to me, were unnecessarily proscriptive, attempting to pump up a certain kind of intellectual stock by ridiculing and devaluing the other. *Caveat lector!*

The second profound change was, of course, the digital revolution of the 1990s, facilitated by the new availability of high-resolution digital cameras and projectors, software to facilitate the production of simulations and animations, and above all, the Internet.[10] The critical date for me was 1994, the year we established the Media Center for Art History at Columbia University. The paradox in the enterprise of the professor of art history is that we spend most of our time as teachers in the classroom talking about what is not there—the absent work of art, represented by a surrogate image projected onto a screen. I believed from the start that the way that we bring the image of the work of art into the classroom is not a passive factor in the representation of the work of art and the history of art, but rather that it has the potential to change the way the student sees and comprehends. However, in some ways we have simply traded in our slide carousel for our PowerPoint and our slide room for ARTstor. The computer has the potential to be so much more than an intelligent slide carousel, and the interactive medium of the Internet should, I think, provide a stimulus for new explorations and collaborations.

After the exciting events of the last decades of the twentieth century—events to which the epithet "crisis" was sometimes applied, has our discipline now reached a point of stasis? I certainly hope not, since, given the assumptions that I presented earlier, stasis would be the real crisis.[11] However, in conclusion, I cannot resist looking briefly at the other side of the coin. I sometimes feel concern that the atmosphere of uncertainty associated with the continuing rhetoric of crisis may prevent students from preparing themselves for that "dry-as-dust" work in the archives. Moreover, the rhetorical mode that I have called "endism" has sometimes been associated with the kind of proscriptiveness that may prevent students from engaging in the extended and careful study of the work of art. In some conversations, a "formalistic" approach is a bad one. The "positivistic" study of "facts" contained in the primary sources may be considered suspect. In my field of medieval architecture, the admonitions of "Mod

Gothic" ring on: the study of liturgical and devotional practices is considered "good" while the study of the architectural framework is "bad." Meanwhile, our European colleagues have continued to produce what I consider wonderful studies of the material qualities of the work of art—often conceived in a Marxian spirit.[12]

If there is, indeed, a "crisis" in art history, it results from the extended deployment of the proscriptive rhetoric of crisis over a period that now extends for more than three decades. The "Old Art History" needed to be shaken: it was, and our discipline was enlivened through discourse with the range of contiguous areas of thought noted above. Finally, though we may certainly want to discuss the negative impact of the full exposure of professor and student to the buffeting winds of Internet exchanges, I remain convinced that the second of my two revolutions—the digital one—has the potential to continue to animate and energize our intellectual and pedagogical missions.

1 Eleonore Stump, *Dialectic and Its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), esp. 89–110.

2 Jean Bony, *French Gothic Architecture of the 12th and 13th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 1.

3 Olaf Pedersen, *First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe*, trans. Richard North (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 131, "no medieval university ever grew up in the country."

4 The assessment of value in such an "intellectual stock market" is, of course, closely linked to the agency of professional organizations like the College Art Association.

5 Eric Fernie, *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon, 1995), esp. 10–18.

6 Skepticism is directed particularly at Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey Press, 1957); Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St-Denis and Its Art Treasure* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946); Henri Focillon, *Art of the West in the Middle Ages*, ed. and intro. Jean Bony (London: Phaidon, 1963); Jean Bony, "The Resistance to Chartres in Early Thirteenth-Century Architecture," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, series 3: 20–21 (1957–1958): 35–52; Robert Branner, *Saint Louis and the Court Style in Gothic Architecture* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1965); Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); Willibald Sauerländer, *Von Sens bis Strassburg. Ein Beitrag zur kunstgeschichtlichen Stellung der Strassburger Querhausskulpturen* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1966).

7 Hans Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1983; trans. Christopher S. Wood, *The End of the History of Art?* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]). Willibald Sauerländer, "Mod Gothic," *New York Review of Books* 31, no. 7 (November 8, 1984): 43–44.

8 Michael Camille, "Art History in the Past and Future of Medieval Studies," in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 362–82.

9 Michael Davis, "Sic et Non: Recent Trends in the Study of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58 (1999): 34–66; Paul Crossley, Introduction to *Gothic Architecture*, by Paul Frankl (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 7–34.

10 Stephen Murray, "Art History and the New Media: Representation and the Production of Humanistic Knowledge," in *Working Together or Apart: Promoting the Next Generation of Digital Scholarship*, Report of a Workshop Cosponsored by the Council on Library and Information Resources and the National Endowment for the Humanities (Washington: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2009), 57–61; http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub145/pub145.pdf.

11 For a sense of current excitement in art historical research, see *What is Research in the Visual Arts: Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, ed. Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

12 *L'homme et la matière: l'emploi du plomb et du fer dans l'architecture gothique*, Actes du colloque, Noyon, November 16–17, 2006, ed. Arnaud Timbert (Paris: Picard, 2009).

Just What Is It That Makes Contemporary Art So Different, So Appealing?

Pepe Karmel

I have been teaching an undergraduate course on contemporary art on and off for around a decade. Contemporary art has changed, and so has the course. Topics that seemed urgent when I started—institutional critique, appropriation, neo-expressionism—now seem "academic," interesting as historical phenomena but not particularly relevant to the making of art in 2011. Feminist art —with its three major currents of decoration, body art, and the analysis of the gaze—still seems of crucial importance to me, but not, I think, to my students. The artistic exploration of racial and ethnic identity leaves them cold. On the other hand, queer art, body art, and the imagery of sexual transgression evoke gasps and titters, and they are mostly disgusted by abject art—which means, I think, that these kinds of art still function as intended. Around 2003, imagery related to teenagers began to play a big role in contemporary art: on one hand, the evocation of adolescent alienation and sexual angst; on the other, the use of graphic styles inspired by comic books and manga. By now, the angst is getting old, but comics are going strong. Sculpture survives mostly as a subset of installation, which is being supplanted in turn by video and interactive performance. Still photographs have to be very big or very ironic, arranged in grids or embedded in sculptural installations. Abstract painting, pronounced dead in 1970, has experienced a surprising revival, albeit by abandoning formalism in favor of allegory. So we have abstractions that evoke maps, houses, diagrams, printing, handwriting, sex, bodily effluvia, psychedelic trips, baroque ornament, and comic books (again).

Despite my students' lack of interest in ethnic identity as a theme in American art, they are fascinated by the cultural kaleidoscope of the global art scene. What began in 1989 with the Parisian circus of *Magiciens de la Terre* has now become a non-stop art festival in East Asia, South Asia, Australia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Most of this art addresses local audiences and sells to local collectors, but it is (or should be) of interest internationally. To be familiar only with art made and shown in New York, London, and Berlin is to be a provincial. It says something

significant about art in the twenty-first century that the Communist government of China chose a leading contemporary artist, Ai Weiwei (b. 1957), to design the stadium for the 2008 Olympics. His international reputation made him an effective spokesperson for social change—more so, it turned out, than the Chinese government could tolerate. His April 2011 arrest made the front page of the *New York Times*, as did his release two months later.[1] Not since the Habsburgs appointed Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) as their ambassador have artists played such an important part in international politics.

Contemporary art is enthralling because it is about our world, our lives, our desires, our fears. It has the immediacy of movies, television, YouTube videos, rock-and-roll, hip-hop, and fashion shows. And it increasingly assumes the forms of these media, as well as traditional forms such as painting and sculpture. We live in an era of amazing art. A few examples, chosen more or less at random:

- The paintings of Julie Mehretu (b. 1970) and the animated drawings of William Kentridge (b. 1955) offer vivid images of social change in a global context.
- The performances of Marina Abramović (b. 1946) and the sculptural installations of Robert Gober (b. 1954) expose the intimate link between social and bodily experience.
- The videos of Pipilotti Rist (b. 1962) and Christian Marclay (b. 1955) demonstrate how we can seize the tools of mass media and use them as vehicles for personal expression.
- The installations of Xu Bing (b. 1955) and the paintings of Glenn Ligon (b. 1960) find new symbolic power in the materiality of the printed word.
- The paintings of Beatriz Milhazes (b. 1960) and the textiles of El Anatsui (b. 1944) make decoration into a vehicle of cultural affirmation and critique.

Such work is avant-garde without being esoteric. But the sheer quantity and diversity of contemporary art make it hard to get a grip on. Eleanor Heartney's superb survey, *Art & Today*, divides the different currents of contemporary art less by medium or style than by subject matter.[2] Tellingly, the cover does not feature a work of art (what single work could possibly represent the range of work being made today?) but a list of topics: "art & popular culture, art & the quotidian object, art & abstraction, art & representation, art & narrative, art & time, art & nature and technology, art & deformation, art & the body, art & identity, art & spirituality, art & globalism, art & architecture, art & its institutions, art & politics, art & audience." Terry Smith, in a book-length analysis, *What is Contemporary Art?*, and a more-compressed summary for the *Art Bulletin*, rejects Heartney's pluralistic approach, looking instead for a common factor that sets contemporary art, as a whole, apart from earlier modernism. He finds it in the shared condition of being made after the "end of art," circa 1970.[3] In response to this situation, Smith argues, contemporary artists have adopted three different strategies: to revive modernism despite its historical exhaustion, to engage with the global experience of defining post-colonial culture, or to "meditate on the changing nature of time, place, media, and mood" in the world around us. Smith suggests that traditional art historical approaches are useless for

the study of contemporary art, because the art itself is fundamentally different from the art studied by traditional art history.

I do not share Smith's belief that contemporary art is fundamentally different from earlier art. The difference is a question of perspective and of time. As today's art settles into the museum, it will lose the sense of immediacy and engagement that makes it feel "contemporary." Think of Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*. In 1819, when it was first shown to the public, it was perceived as a powerful political statement, a denunciation of the recently restored monarchy whose corruption and incompetence had (supposedly) permitted the appointment of a flagrantly unqualified captain, leading to the shipwreck and its ensuing horrors. Two hundred years later, the political context of the painting is invisible to most viewers. We see Géricault's desperate survivors in an art historical context, as heirs to the tumbling bodies of the damned in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1536–1541) and as precursors to the dead and suffering figures in Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty on the Barricades* (1831) and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). As it recedes into the past, the political statement is transformed into an estheticized, timeless image of suffering.

The installations of Thomas Hirschhorn (b. 1957), with their combination of citations from high modernism (or high fashion) and brutal photographs of Third-World suffering, might be seen as contemporary counterparts to the *Raft of the Medusa*. Right now, their political immediacy is overwhelming. In fifty or a hundred years, however, they may look as stylized and "esthetic" as Géricault's painting.

What has changed in recent decades is not the ontological character of art; it is the interests and enthusiasms of the viewers, critics, historians, curators, dealers, and above all collectors who make up the "art world." Quietly but rapidly, there has been a broad loss of interest in older art—meaning art made before 1980. This is evident in the programming of museums. In Paris, where the responsibilities of major museums are parceled out by government policy, different eras are in theory assigned to different museums: ancient, medieval, and Old Master to the Louvre; nineteenth-century to the Musée d'Orsay; modern and contemporary to the Centre Pompidou; and ultra-contemporary to the Palais de Tokyo. Nonetheless, in recent years, the Louvre has begun an ongoing program of exhibitions of contemporary art. Similarly, in New York, the Morgan Library, founded primarily for the preservation and study of manuscripts, printed books, and drawings, has begun to exhibit modern and contemporary art.[4] As Jimmy Durante used to say, "Everybody wants ta get into da act!"

It might be argued that this shift has been driven primarily by changes in the art market. Michael Moses, a professor at the Stern School of Business at New York University who has meticulously analyzed the art market of the last hundred years, notes that its center of gravity has moved in recent decades from Old Master to contemporary art.[5] I discussed this recently with Amy Cappellazzo, Chair of Postwar & Contemporary art at Christie's. For most of Christie's existence, she observed, the biggest, most lucrative department was Old Masters. Around 1980, Impressionist & Modern painting and sculpture began to bring in more revenue than Old Masters. Between 2004 and 2007, Postwar & Contemporary overtook Impressionist & Modern, although in years when a major Vincent Van Gogh or a Picasso sells for $100 million or more, Impressionist & Modern regains its primacy. Christie's 2010–2011 sales offer a snapshot of the current

situation. Their January 2011 sale of Old Masters yielded $28.13 million.[6] Their Impressionist & Modern sale in May 2011 yielded revenues of $155.9 million, while the Postwar & Contemporary sale in the same month yielded $301.6 million.[7]

Why has the focus of collecting shifted so dramatically from Old Masters to modern to contemporary?

One reason, as Cappellazzo pointed out in our discussion, is that there is only a limited amount of first-rate Old Master or even modern art still left in private hands, and therefore potentially available for purchase. I can back up this point from personal experience. In 1998, when I co-curated the Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, I gave a private tour of the exhibition to a major collector who had made an important loan to the exhibition. He was tremendously enthusiastic, but about two-thirds of the way through the show he paused, sighed deeply, and said, "It's so sad, it's all gone." What did he mean, I wondered? The art was right there, all around us. Then I realized that, while I talked about the evolution of Pollock's work, he had been carefully reading the wall labels, and had noted that pretty much all of the major pictures were in public collections. He was sad because there was hardly anything there he could buy. Ten plus years later, what I hear through the grapevine is that he has moved on to collecting contemporary art.

From a narrowly economic point of view, contemporary art attracts collectors because there is a large stock available for sale, and because there is still the chance of making a killing, buying low (although "low" in this context may mean a couple of million dollars) and selling high a few years later. However, I think that this is too narrow a view of the psychology of collecting. Collectors' turn toward contemporary art reflects a fundamental change in worldview. When the robber barons of a century ago wanted to legitimize their fortunes, they stamped them with the imprimatur of the past, whether that meant buying Old Master art or endowing universities built in a neo-Gothic style. The investment bankers, real estate developers, and digital entrepreneurs who have accumulated comparably vast fortunes today no longer look to the past for legitimation. As Cappellazzo said to me, "If you have big money today, you buy a big house on the ocean, and you walk around it in shorts and a t-shirt. There's not this enchantment with the past. The future holds more promise." Indeed, today's collectors have typically made their fortunes by looking ahead, figuring out what the world will want in five minutes or five years, and providing it. They have, as Cappellazzo put it, "a religion of the future." Insofar as contemporary art remains avant-garde—insofar as it attempts to imagine and represent what lies ahead of us—it is in fact ideally suited to this new class of collectors.

My impression is that this shift of interest—from past to future—is also occurring in the larger art audience. The desire to experience art that transcends everyday life is giving way to a craving for art that unabashedly addresses our world, our lives, our desires, our fears. This shift may not be immediately apparent. Museum attendance continues to rise. Crowds line up for blockbuster exhibitions of modern artists like Édouard Manet (1832–1883), Picasso, and Pollock. Leonardo, Raphael, and Rembrandt would probably attract similar crowds, if the loans were available. It is an encouraging sign that the High Museum in Atlanta did extremely well with a recent loan show of masterworks from the Louvre.

What concerns me is that, when I fight my way into these blockbuster shows, many of the visitors seem strangely detached from the art they have come to see. They slowly and carefully read wall texts and wall labels, and then spend just a few seconds looking at the actual paintings, sculptures, or photographs. They do spend long blocks of time in front of the paintings or sculptures discussed on the audio guides. One can hope that they are in fact looking at the art works while listening to the experts (or, as often happens, movie stars) discuss them. On the other hand, the users of audio guides generally seem to ignore the works not included on the programmed tour. It seems as though the intellectual crutch of a guided tour has deprived them of the initiative to look at the art without assistance.

The marmoreal museum experience, with its obligatory air of reverence, is notably absent from commercial galleries, *kunsthallen*, biennials, and art fairs where contemporary art is shown. And the behavior of visitors is strikingly different. People look hard at what is on the walls, talking and arguing about it. They decide for themselves what is worth spending time looking at, and what is not. Contemporary art matters to them in a way that most older art does not. On average, the quality of the work may be lower than in a typical exhibition of modern or Old Master art, but it engages the public with more intensity.

Not surprisingly, contemporary art attracts a significant percentage of the students who want to do graduate work in art history. It has been suggested that as many as eight out of ten graduate students in art history are now studying contemporary art. It is true that many students choose to write doctoral theses on contemporary topics, something that would have been considered unacceptable thirty or forty years ago. However, a review of the dissertation data available on the College Art Association website (http://www.caareviews.org/dissertations) suggests a less dramatic change. Between 2002 and 2010, the percentage of dissertations on contemporary topics increased from around 18% to around 22%. During the same years, the percentage of theses on modern (1700–1980) topics also went up, from 32% to 37%. Together, this means that modern and contemporary theses increased from 50% to almost 60% of PhD dissertations in art history. It should be noted that the number of degrees granted has grown overall, from 261 in 2002 to 344 in 2010. Some areas, such as non-Western art, have diminished as percentages while increasing in absolute numbers. Others, such as late antique and medieval, and architecture and decorative arts, have declined in terms of absolute numbers. (See Appendix for more detailed data.)

It may therefore be premature to describe the current situation as a "crisis." However, it is not too soon to begin worrying about the future of art history, particularly in view of the increasing focus on contemporary art among wealthy collectors. In the long run, the patronage of these collectors determines the institutional structure of our field. It is their purchases that allow an unprecedented number of artists to live by making art. It is their purchases that support the art dealers who take out ads in newspapers and magazines, providing employment for art critics. It is their money that decides ultimately what museums do or do not buy. It is their money that pays the salaries of curators, and the honoraria for scholars who write catalog essays and give

lectures. It is their money that underwrites tenured chairs in art history at leading universities. Where the collectors go today is where art history is going tomorrow.

It seems likely that, in years to come, there will be more and more money available for the study of contemporary art, and less and less for the study of everything else. The question, therefore, is not whether we should accept contemporary as part of the art history curriculum. If we do not, another department will: Studio Art or Visual Culture or Curatorial Studies.[8] If we do not embrace contemporary, the money and the students will drain out of art history. As tenured professors in areas other than modern and contemporary retire, their lines will not be renewed. In twenty years what will be left of a typical art history department will be a handful of very overworked people, trying to cover a vast curriculum —from Mesopotamia to Minimalism, from Xi'an to Sao Paolo—most of which they were not trained to teach.

We therefore confront two crucial questions. How can we insure that "traditional" art history—everything before contemporary—continues to receive the support it needs? And how should contemporary art in fact be taught?

Finding adequate funding will require a delicate balancing act. We need to acknowledge vigorously the importance of contemporary art, so that we can persuade its patrons to support art history programs. However, we also need to convince these patrons that they should support art history in general, and not just the particular area that interests them. Back in the 1990s, when the Museum of Modern Art planned the fundraising campaign for its expansion, it decided in advance that for every dollar raised for construction, another dollar had to be raised for the museum's endowment. (MoMA had learned from the bitter experience of other museums that erected fabulous new buildings and then went bankrupt because they could not cover their fabulous operating expenses.) We need to do something similar. A request for a million dollars to fund the teaching of contemporary art should automatically be coupled with a request for another million for other types of art history.

The second question—how should contemporary art be taught in an art history department?—is even more difficult to answer. It is not clear whether contemporary art can, in fact, be studied or taught as art history. *Pace* Terry Smith, I do not mean that there is anything inherent in today's art that makes it impossible to study. Once again, it is a question of timing.

When we look at the 1960s, it seems clear that the two important movements of the decade were Pop Art and Minimalism, and these are what we encourage our students to study. If you go back and read the art magazines and exhibition catalogs of the time, however, you will find that Pop and Minimal art were regarded as merely two among many tendencies in contemporary art, and not the most important. We privilege them because they have played a generative role for the art of our own time.[9] Similarly, when the art historians of fifty years from now look at the decade 2000–2010, it will be clear to them that certain artists and movements were of historic importance, while the great mass of art made in these years was not. Their narrative of art history will be shaped by the art of their time. Since there is no way for us to know what their art or their art history will look like, there is in fact no way for us to know who are the truly important artists of our own era, or what are the important questions to ask about art today.

The discussion of contemporary art is inherently provisional and improvisatory. It is the job of art critics, not of art historians. The same person may do both jobs, but they remain different tasks. I say this based on personal experience, having worked both as an art critic and as an academic historian. The art historian begins with a repertory of analytical frameworks that have been developed, tested, and validated by other art historians, and then situates the work of art within one or more of those frameworks. The critic begins with a subjective, intuitive response to the work, and then attempts to put that response into words, reaching out for relevant ideas and information drawn, not from a fixed academic repertory, but from his or her whole range of experience. Criticism is inherently a branch of literature. It may well be more valuable than art history. What would you rather read, Charles Baudelaire's (1821–1867) highly subjective art criticism or the scholarly tomes of his contemporary Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807–1869)? Still, criticism is not art history.

Furthermore, the kind of training necessary to become an expert on contemporary art is radically different from the training required by art history. Art historical research begins, one hopes, with the examination of actual works of art. However, it is then followed by months or years spent in libraries and archives, mastering the scholarly literature and exploring as-yet-unexploited bodies of information related, somehow, to the art. As the Germans say, historical research requires *sitzfleisch*. Research into contemporary art requires comfortable shoes, physical stamina, and a large travel budget. At last report there were over 300 galleries in Chelsea, dozens more on the Upper East Side and the Lower East Side, in Brooklyn, etc. Given that galleries are closed at least two days a week, you would need to go to something like twenty galleries a day, five days a week, to see all the art on view in New York in a typical month. Now add London, Berlin, and Shanghai. Now add the over fifty biennials held in different cities around the world. Even the most assiduous critics—such as Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter, Jerry Saltz, Eleanor Heartney, and Terry Smith—can see only a fraction of the contemporary art on view each year. Curators of contemporary art are constantly in motion, touching down at their home museums briefly between flights.

Art historical knowledge is more inherently durable than knowledge about contemporary art. Once you have put in your four to six years studying Fan Kuan (fl. 990–1020) or Rembrandt (1606–1669) or Matisse (1869–1954), keeping up with new research should not be excessively onerous. You can teach or curate and still find time to read new books and articles on "your" subject, and to see relevant exhibitions. In contrast, contemporary art changes with terrifying rapidity. Interesting new artists and movements appear every year; after five or six years, the art scene as a whole looks radically different. Keeping up with contemporary art is a full-time job. If a contemporary critic or curator settles into a full-time teaching job, his or her store of knowledge grows rapidly out of date.[10] For a full-time academic to teach a course on contemporary art is a quixotic enterprise. I still do it, but I feel queasy about it. Before teaching a new iteration of my contemporary course, I spend months looking at catalogs of recent shows, most of which I missed because I was teaching or doing historical research. Then I begin the class by apologizing for not being well enough informed.

How, then, should a program in contemporary art be organized? Who should teach it? What kinds of courses should be offered? What kinds of readings and research should be assigned? What kind of work should be required? What kind of degree should students earn? Let me offer some tentative answers to these questions.

If programs in contemporary art are to be part of art history departments, art historians who are members of the regular faculty should direct and, in part, teach them. This does not necessarily mean specialists in modern art. There are many historians of earlier periods who have a lively interest in contemporary art and become experts in one or another aspect of it. Scholars of non-Western art often take advantage of their language skills to acquire a secondary expertise in the contemporary art of their chosen culture. That said, contemporary art should be taught mostly by visiting artists, art critics, and curators. These instructors should remain adjunct faculty, and their roster should be rotated frequently to bring in new instructors more familiar with recent art.

Courses in contemporary art should be organized around a wide variety of themes and issues and not just around conventional media or familiar movements. The curriculum should draw on courses offered in other areas such as anthropology, literature, media studies, sociology, and studio art. Students should be required to take some conventional art history courses, with their emphasis on memorizing large numbers of images, mastering a body of scholarly literature, and writing a long research paper. Such courses provide an essential background to contemporary art, and teach research skills that can be transferred to new areas. However, courses directly addressing contemporary art should focus primarily on firsthand encounters with works of art on view in galleries and exhibitions.

What readings to assign for such courses is a thorny question. Much contemporary art emerges from a thick cocoon of bad writing: the pretentious, impenetrable prose that fills the pages of exhibition catalogs and avant-garde journals. Typically, these texts offer a mish-mash of ideas borrowed from philosophy, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, physics, and, yes, even art history, applied helter-skelter to the art at hand. As a rule, these texts do not meet the standards of academic scholarship. But they do reflect the concerns and intentions of artists, and they genuinely influence the making of art. They are essential reading, just as the turgid writings of Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935) and Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) are essential reading for the scholar of early twentieth-century art. To understand the genesis of abstract art, you need to be familiar with theosophy; to understand contemporary art, you need to know Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992).

Under these circumstances, it is probably unrealistic to ask students to write conventional "research papers" on contemporary art. Archival information is often unavailable. More important, we do not yet have an appropriate art historical framework. What we can do is try to teach students to write clear, well-researched, well-argued art criticism.

The bigger, more contentious question is whether graduate students should write dissertations on contemporary art, and whether the terminal degree in this area should be a conventional PhD or some other kind of degree. My own feeling is that it is in fact impossible to write an academic dissertation on contemporary art. Obviously,

contemporary theses are written and approved and PhD degrees granted to their authors. However, I believe that even if we call the results "doctoral dissertations," what these students are writing is something other than art history.

The CAA statistics on "Dissertations Completed" and "Dissertations in Progress" yield data relevant to this issue. If you take the number of dissertations in progress and divide it by the number of dissertations granted in any given year, the result should approximate the average number of years that it takes for a dissertation to go from start to finish. The average for art history as a whole is around 4.2 years. For instance, in ancient art (Egyptian and Ancient Near East, plus Greek and Roman), nineteen dissertations were completed in 2010 and there are currently another eighty dissertations in the pipeline. Similarly, in non-Western art as a whole, forty-one dissertations were completed in 2010, and there are another 176 underway. Late antique and medieval dissertations, and also Renaissance and Baroque, take significantly longer to complete: an average of 5.5 years for the former categories and an average of 6.3 years for the latter. Presumably, this reflects the facts that the primary research for these dissertations is done in archives that are often distant and difficult to access, and that the documents in these archives are mostly written in Latin, which slows most people down. Even without this linguistic barrier, theses in modern art take an average of 3.9 years to complete, suggesting that their authors engage in significant archival research.

In contrast, dissertations on contemporary art take an average of 2.6 years. The simplest explanation is that less work goes into them. You interview the artist a few times, you persuade the artist's gallery to let you see their files and their photo archive (the real-world equivalent of a catalogue raisonné), you read the published criticism, you follow up on the artist's remarks about texts and ideas that influenced him or her. Then you sit down and write. The resulting text may be very good. It may become a terrific book or exhibition catalog. But it simply is not the same thing as a PhD dissertation in other fields of art history. And the degree it earns should not be a PhD.

An ideal program in contemporary art would be attached to a graduate program in art history, so that students in contemporary could take art history courses and students in art history could take contemporary courses. It would include six or seven semesters of study, with at least one semester spent abroad, so that students would have direct exposure to an art scene outside of North America. At home, it would include courses in a wide variety of subjects relevant to contemporary art. There would be a capstone project requiring research and writing on a particular artist or movement. However, this would not be a doctoral dissertation, and the resulting degree would be a certificate in contemporary art, not a PhD. Such a degree would not qualify graduates to teach at a university level. However, it would qualify them for jobs in the art world, whether as critics, gallerists, publicists, auction house personnel, art consultants, instructors in art schools, museum educators, or curators of contemporary art. It should be noted that there are many more jobs available in these areas than there are tenure-track openings in academic art history.

Graduate education in contemporary art should prepare students for jobs they can reasonably hope to find. It should be tailored to the nature of the subject, with its constant intellectual provocation, its stretches of boredom and flashes of pleasure, its overwhelming variety and nonstop transformations. Education in contemporary art should

teach students how to respond to a phenomenon that, like contemporary life, has not yet frozen into history.

1 On Ai Weiwei's arrest, politics, and subsequent release, see: Andrew Jacobs, "China Takes Dissident Artist Into Custody, *New York Times*, Asia Pacific, April 3, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/04/world/asia/04china.html; Holland Cotter, "An Artist Takes Role of China's Conscience," *New York Times*, April 5, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/06/arts/design/ai-weiwei-takes-role-of-chinas-conscience.html); and Edward Wong, "Dissident Chinese Artist is Released," *New York Times*, Art & Design, June 22, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23artist.html.
2 Eleanor Heartney, *Art & Today* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2008).
3 Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) and Terry Smith, "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art," *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 366–83.
4 Holland Cotter, "Opportunity on Madison," *New York Times*, Art & Design, July 29, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/arts/design/what-the-met-should-do-when-it-moves-into-the-whitney.html?_r=1&ref=design.
5 Michael Moses, "Art as an Asset Class," September 28, 2007 lecture to the Visual Arts Forum, New York University.
6 Souren Melikian, "No Starry-Eyed Buyers at Christie's and Sotheby's Art Sales," *New York Times*, Arts, January 27, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/28/arts/28iht-melik28.html?pagewanted=all.
7 Totals for Christie's May 2011 sales of Impressionist & Modern and Post-War & Contemporary Art were provided by Christie's senior public relations manager Sophie Chabbott in an e-mail of July 8, 2011. See also Souren Melikian, "Buyers Lose Their Taste for 18th-Century Art and Furniture," New *York Times, Arts*, July 22, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/23/arts/23iht-melikian23.html?pagewanted=all.
8 It should be noted that the term "curatorial" no longer refers to nuts-and-bolts skills like writing loan letters; rather, it signifies a reflection on the critical issues raised by the making, exhibition, and marketing of art.
9 In recent years, artists and curators have begun to revive Op Art, alongside Pop and Minimalism, but as far as I know this has not yet made an impression on academic art history.
10 I owe this observation to a discussion with Eleanor Heartney, several years ago.

APPENDIX: ART HISTORY DISSERTATIONS—DISTRIBUTION BY FIELD

This table is based on the lists of "Dissertations Completed" and "Dissertations in Progress" posted online by the College Art Association at http://www.caareviews.org/dissertations/. I printed out the lists of dissertations in different subject categories, totaled them up, and aggregated them into broader areas. It should be noted that a number of inaccuracies have been introduced as a result of this process of aggregation. For instance, I have included "Drawings / Prints / Photography / Works on Paper under "Modern," although some of the dissertations listed in this category are premodern and some are contemporary. In other cases, dissertations may appear twice—for instance, once under "Latin American / Caribbean" and a second time

Table 1 Art History Dissertations, Distribution by Field, Completed and In Progress, 2002–2010. From College Art Association, http://www.caareviews.org/dissertations/.

FIELD	*2002*		*2010*		*In Progress*	*Average Years to Completion*
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%		
NON-WESTERN						
Chinese	10		14		59	
Japanese/Korean	4		8		29	
South/Southeast Asian	5		8		21	
Middle East/North Africa	5		1		25	
Sub-Saharan Africa	6		0		24	
Pre-Columbian	4		9		18	
Oceanic/Australian	0		1		0	
Prehistoric	2		0		0	
subtotal	36	13.8%	41	11.9%	176	4.3
ANCIENT						
Egyptian/Ancient Near East	0		3		18	
Greek/Roman	13		16		62	
subtotal	13	5.0%	19	5.5%	80	4.2
LATE ANTIQUE/MEDIEVAL						
Early Christian/Byzantine	9		3		23	
Medieval	14		17		87	
subtotal	23	8.8%	20	5.8%	110	5.5
RENAISSANCE/ BAROQUE						
Renaissance/Baroque	32		34		215	
subtotal	32	12.3%	34	9.9%	215	6.3
ARCHITECTURE & DECORATIVE ARTS						
Architecture & Preservation	19		22		117	
Decorative Arts	8		3		37	
subtotal	27	10.3%	25	7.3%	154	6.2
MODERN (1700–1980)						
Eighteenth Century	6		3		34	
Nineteenth Century	30		34		116	
Twentieth Century	25		67		234	
Latin American/ Caribbean	6		7		57	
Drawings/Prints/ Photography	16		17		55	
subtotal	83	31.8%	128	37.2%	496	3.9

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*).

FIELD	*2002*		*2010*		*In Progress*	*Average Years to Completion*
CONTEMPORARY/RELATED						
Contemporary	16		28		96	
Critical Theory etc.	21		36		67	
Digital Media/Animation	1		0		1	
Film/Video	4		7		27	
Performance	5		6		8	
subtotal	47	18.0%	77	22.4%	199	2.6
TOTAL	261		344		1,430	4.2

under "Modern." I have tried to eliminate such duplications, but have no doubt missed some. Furthermore, the calculations of the "Average Years to Completion" in each subfield remain approximate. The basic idea here is that the average number of dissertations begun in a given year times the average time to completion should equal the number of dissertations in progress. However, since the CAA website does not break out the number of dissertations begun each year, I have used the number of dissertations completed in 2010 as a crude substitute. In growing fields, the average number of dissertations begun in each of the last five or so years would be lower than the 2010 value, so that the time to completion would in fact be somewhat longer than stated below; in shrinking fields the opposite is true. Furthermore, a certain number of dissertations are abandoned, introducing another distortion into the averages given below. Notwithstanding, I think these numbers can be used as a guide to the relative time to completion for dissertations in different subfields.

Museums in Crisis?

Elizabeth W. Easton

There are several crises in the museum profession particularly related to the education of art historians and the role of the academy. Those of us in the museum sphere of art history face a genuine crisis with the public's understanding and appreciation of art—a concept that is at the core of the museum's mission, but not necessarily covered in our academic education. The diverging priorities of an obligation to public engagement and the traditional art history curriculum render the curatorial profession inadequately equipped to deal with this crisis. In addition, the typical art history curriculum leaves those wanting to engage in museum careers ill-prepared to face the managerial and leadership challenges of complex institutions with large operating budgets. And, finally, with a universal appetite for contemporary art, the training of those wishing to pursue careers focused on the art of our time has found outlets outside the academy, but this training leaves the pursuers unequipped as art historians.

Educational Shifts and Consequences

A methodological shift in the discipline, with the advent and later dominance of theory, distanced art history from the object, furthering the divide between the academy and the museum. In an *Art Bulletin* issue of 1996 devoted to "Art History and its Theories," Irving Lavin wrote an article, "The Crisis of 'Art History,'" that addressed how theory had begun to so dominate the profession that two of the original mainstays of the discipline, the analysis and history of style, and connoisseurship, had all but disappeared.[1] He called this the devisualization and hypercontextualization of art.

Whatever we think of that, the dominance of theory in the field seems to have inhibited the number of art historians pursuing museum careers. Thirty years after theory was introduced and then took hold in the study of art history, and fifteen years after Lavin's article, a new crisis has arisen out of the old one: there is now a crisis in the leadership of art museums. With fewer scholars pursuing museum careers, there are now fewer candidates to take on leadership positions in institutions across the country.

Missing: Leaders and Skill Sets

Since the 1960s, there has been a staggering growth of nonprofit arts institutions, including museums. In the last fifteen years alone, twenty-five museums of modern art have been built, the number of performing arts theaters has doubled, and museum expansions have proliferated across the country.[2] At the same time, museum directors are now older when they begin their careers: in a study conducted by Janet Meredith for the Association of Art Museum Directors, she found that the average age of directors has increased by almost a decade, from forty-seven to fifty-six, over the last twenty years (Table 2). In part, this is because older directors are perceived as better trained for the increasingly complex challenges of running a museum.

Table 2 Demographics within the AAMD. Statistics from studies conducted by Janet Meredith Consulting in 2009 and 2010 on the Future Leadership Development in Art Museums.

DEMOGRAPHICS WITHIN THE AAMD

BY AGE:		**AVERAGE AGE OF DIRECTOR BY YEAR:**	
Under 40	1%	1980	47
40–49	18%	1998	52
50–59	46%	2009	**56**
60+	**35%**		

OTHER FACTS:

60% come from curatorial backgrounds
95% hold an art history, studio art, or museum studies degree
47% are within 8 years of age 65
Up to 34% planned attrition within 5 years
Up to 66% planned attrition within 10 years
Many plan to work beyond 65, either by choice or by necessity

At the same time, more than 30% of museum directors say they will retire in five years, and, all told, in just under ten years, over 60% of current museum directors say that they will be no longer be in their jobs.[3] This will have a huge effect on the profession. This is a problem, not a crisis. The crisis comes if suitably prepared candidates are not available to fill these challenging jobs.

The majority of art museum directors today had the same training as academic art historians: a post-graduate education in art history. Most directors acknowledge that they learned on the job, yet in a universe where they handle budgets in the tens of millions of dollars per year, and often greater, more training beyond that of an art history degree is required to meet and overcome these financial challenges.

How is this accomplished? One way is to reach out to other university departments and programs in order to fill in missing skills that address professional responsibilities in a variety of art practices. In the Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL), a program created for museum curators to clarify and address the wider concerns of museums beyond their particular area of expertise, Columbia Business School professors teach an intensive two-week course, which CCL fellows consistently rate as transformative.[4] This sort of training could benefit more than just curators who look forward to becoming directors. What if this model were a standard educational facet or option in the art history curriculum?

Gender vs. Balance

The educational challenge lies not simply in how graduate schools prepare their students, but also in whom they are preparing for museum positions. A curator at a major encyclopedic art museum who manages a curatorial studies program warns that our graduate programs are so disproportionately female that they resemble finishing schools. We have to make an effort to bring men into museum work. However, the figures about museum leadership and women in the field reflect a skewed leadership pie with men dominating top positions.

In a 2009 MA thesis for New York University's Visual Arts Administration program, Katie DePew demonstrated that women clearly lead as a percentage of all nonprofit workers.[5] But the distribution of women shows that a large percentage occupies lower salaried positions, while men far outnumber women in every increment above a $75,000 annual salary. The largest percentage of men earn between $90,000 and $100,000, while the largest percentage of women occupy the $45–60,000 range.

If we move beyond compensation to the leadership position of women in the field, we find that women at present occupy 35 percent of directorships of museums belonging to the AAMD. Yet when the pie is divided differently, by annual operating budget size, women manage only 15 percent of the total dollars spent annually in AAMD museums (Table 3).

The difference is even more pronounced when we review the actual numbers of total operating budgets from 116 AAMD museums directed by men and then by women (Table 4).

Table 3 Museum Leadership Today. (L): AAMD Membership by Gender based on statistics provided by the Association of Art Museum Directors; (R): AAMD Membership by Operating Budget based on data compiled with annual reports of over 100 museums, collected using GuideStar.com.

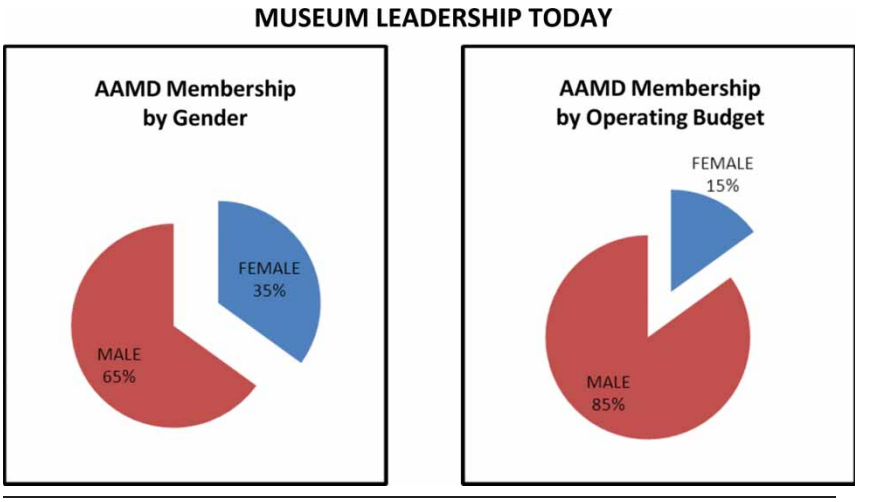
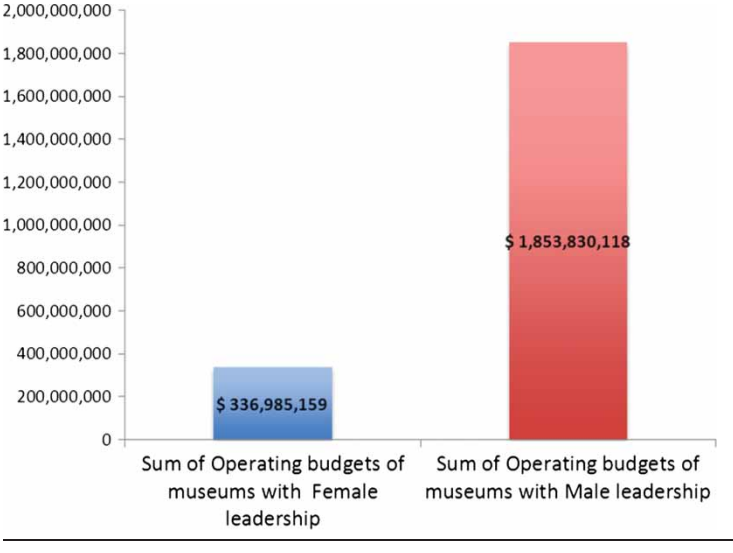


Table 4 Operating Budgets and Gender based on data compiled with annual reports of over 100 museums, collected using GuideStar.com.



Career Choices

The academy has traditionally been antagonistic toward the prospect of students becoming professional curators. Gloria Groom, Curator of Nineteenth-Century Painting at the Art Institute of Chicago, commented that the drive to attain one's PhD actually inhibits an ability to get experience along the way. She wrote:

> While I applaud the fact that the university wants to limit the amount of time towards a PhD so that the student is launched sooner, the result is that many

> of these PhDs have to go on to Post-Docs since there are not enough jobs available. Ironically professors will no longer recommend a student to work as an unpaid or even paid research assistant at our museum because they do not want them to be "distracted" from their degree program. So none of these art historians, who may or may not find an academic career (at least with the PhD only), has the opportunity to try out another route for their so-called "terminal" degree.

Unlike any other post-graduate academic field, art history offers two main career choices—that of the professor and the curator. Widespread de facto practices in universities—like the discouraging of museum internships, the lack of connection between academic departments and campus museums, the absence of curators from the roster of department faculty—seek to assert the primacy of the academic over the professional option. It should be clear that this contributes to the crisis we see in museum leadership today. Abstract thinking at the academic level and public art consumption through museums need not be worlds apart. Curators—and their museums—form the bridge between these groups, and academics have the power to control the strength of this connection.

Addressing the preparation of art historians to pursue museum careers and, should they choose, to become museum directors, a group of CCL Fellows from 2010 embarked on a research project to determine factors that lead to choosing a museum career. They conducted a survey that elicited almost 700 responses, with over 1,500 additional written comments to enlighten their findings. Their work was presented at the 2011 College Art Association conference in New York, in a paper titled "Inspiration and Opportunity: Art History Reflects on its Past to Determine its Future." (Results can be found on the CCL website: www.curatorialleadership.org) Among the findings, there was a strong indication that in addition to solid training in art history, a key factor in choosing a career in academia or museums was mentoring. The early experiences that budding art historians had, either in museums or in academic departments, seemed to determine future career directions, overriding at times their initial career aspirations. Professors and curators should keep this in mind.

Contemporary Art as a Driving Force

In order to ascertain a selection of crisis issues in the museum field, I canvassed past CCL Fellows in January 2011. Of the many answers, the majority fell into two categories: lack of training, and the dominance of contemporary art:

Mary-Kay Lombino, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, wrote:

> One thing that comes to mind is a debate that often takes place among curators of contemporary art about the various "curatorial studies" programs popping up all around the country. Often the programs focus more on the theory behind curating and put it into practice only by working directly with artists to organize exhibitions of contemporary art. However, there is often not enough art history taught in the programs to give a sense of

> where we came from and how we got here in the first place. Some programs resist this by offering a comprehensive course on the history of exhibitions, which is clearly important. But there is sometimes still a lack of knowledge of earlier periods of art that inform modern and contemporary.

In addition to traditional art history programs, a number of curatorial studies programs have emerged to train people to become curators without standard art history courses. Because these programs teach little art history, their graduates do not always have a sufficient art history background to inform their work in museums. And yet, because of the large majority of students studying contemporary art today, these programs provide a draw. This is something that traditional programs should examine: is the road to a PhD too long and arduous for the quicker pace of the contemporary art world? Yet more dire: does the separation between graduate schools and pre-professional programs create a system in which academic understanding and professional skill are mutually exclusive? The result is that art history programs are exclusively academic, and curatorial studies are devoid of art history, thus neither produces the sort of curator fully prepared for the actual needs of the profession.

The popularity of contemporary art has proved to be a challenge for the encyclopedic museum, as Paola Morsiani, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art, identified: "What are the strategies that museums have found that avoid treating contemporary art like Parmesan cheese that you sprinkle all over the museum?" Of course, with such a huge interest in modern and contemporary art, curators at encyclopedic museums feel compelled to address and include newer work without regard to the composition of their collections.

At the same time, there are fields where positions cannot be filled and huge areas of collections in encyclopedic museums that will have no expert on staff to do research, cataloging, exhibitions, etc. One CCL Fellow wrote: "We are in danger of narrowing our offerings to exclusively European or American art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Scholars interested in decorative arts, Oceanic or Native American art, Southeast Asian art, etc, might not have found professors in these fields in graduate school, and thus would have had to learn on the job in museums. But as museum resources increasingly serve the interests of the public in contemporary art, there is an growing shortage of experts to care for these other collection areas.

A contemporary curator at a university art museum writes: "Increasingly, it seems, we are told that younger museum goers 'crave their own reflections in everything they do,' including seeing a contemporary exhibition rather than something that doesn't feel relevant to them (like the Renaissance!). If museums buy into this belief, they risk dumbing down their programming. The challenge for museum curators is to make the inaccessible relevant to that constituency because they are the future."

Keeping Up, Staying on Track, and Succeeding

Kathleen Forde, a curator at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center in Troy, New York, wrote:

> I'm currently thinking a lot about how the digital revolution has changed our audiences in ways that institutions need to react to in profound and diverse ways. Some see this as an opportunity and others as a crisis (I'm in the former camp). In short the digital world/social networking has led to our audiences expecting an increasing amount of participation, context, and opportunities for relationship building in the way art institutions present their information, market it and even plan public programming around it. Gone are the days of just getting your subscription for the orchestra or museum and waiting for the arbiters of good taste to tell you what you should like. New audiences expect input and have much more of an inclination to, in a sense, "curate" their own cultural experiences.

The response to this problem amid today's economic climate need not be what museums themselves consider as pandering. A senior curator at a major institution on the West coast comments:

> As for crises in the museum field, for us I believe the number one crisis is the pressure on the exhibition program to generate revenue. This isn't a new issue—shows that appeal to a broad audience have always been encouraged—but for us it has recently hardened into a demand, leading to our dropping several worthy projects because the audience projections weren't high enough. It is especially challenging for a general institution whose mission is to show global art from the past and present.

In the current economic climate, as the price tag of loan shows grows more daunting, curators can look into their permanent collections for low-cost exhibitions that present a high degree of intellectual muscle. The sacrifice, then, is not in integrity or ambition but simply in scope. This should be palatable to serious curators and wallet-conscious board members alike.

Characteristically, however, museums have chosen to redirect themselves more and more to the gate, marshalling their energies to increase visitor numbers. At the same time, universities have shown little desire to support the curatorial field, and curators themselves have had few opportunities to hone their craft and skills with leadership experts in structured, tested environment. As such, the ultimate crisis in art history today is that we do not make a good enough case for the role of art in society. Museums are the widest avenue to the point at which we are moved by art, something outside ourselves, to think in a non-quantitative way about the objects and sensibilities of the world around us. This is what is at stake right now. What museums offer that is unique among academic disciplines is an engagement with the public. It is our humanistic imperative to engage the public in what we do. That is what makes museums a worthy enterprise. By bolstering the power of the curator in the art world, from museum organizational structures to university classes, we can reinvigorate this potential source of energy that ultimately benefits art for all.

1 Irving Lavin, "The Crisis of 'Art History,'" *Art Bulletin* 78, no. 1 (March 1996): 13–15.

2 James Abruzzo, "The Leadership Crisis in Art Management," http://www.abruzzoassociates.com/LeadershipCrisis.pdf. His publication dates from 2009, so the exact number may be larger today.
3 Janet Meredith, Janet Meredith Consulting, "Preparing for the Future: Developing the Next Generation of Art Museum Leaders," presented at the midwinter meeting of the Association of Art Museum Directors, Ponce, Puerto Rico, January 18, 2009.
4 In 2007, Agnes Gund and I founded the Center for Curatorial Leadership as a response to what was seen as stagnation in curatorial careers, and to a desire to champion curators who would keep art front and center as a museum mission. Curators lacked the necessary leadership tools to fully realize the potential of their own jobs and advance within the museum hierarchy. The program as we have organized it comprises instruction by Columbia Business School, interaction with the most important civic and cultural leaders in New York and various cities across the country, and a mentorship and a residency with leading directors throughout the United States and Europe. In addition, every year as a part of our program, the fellows—curators of all disciplines from museums across the country—work on a six-month team-based project that they've identified as an important issue facing the museum profession. The CCL has already enjoyed great success in its initial goal of helping curators advance professionally: of the forty Fellows who have completed the program in the past four years, twenty-four have received promotions or moved into more senior positions at other institutions.
5 Katie DePew, "Persisting Feminization: The Status of Women Art Museum Professionals" (MA thesis, Visual Arts Administration, New York University, 2009).

The Crisis in Art History: Ten Problems, Ten Solutions

Maxwell L. Anderson

Given the great interest among those attending "The Crisis in Art History" session during the annual conference of the College Art Association, it seems apparent that the field of art history is in crisis. Yet, the real question is what a fragmented pool of experts can do to elevate the importance of their discipline in the hearts and minds of academics and non-academics alike; build stronger connections among the life of mind, surviving works of art, and the public; and encourage more members of a new generation to devote their lives to the study and care of cultural heritage.

Among the key factors in what most would agree is a crisis, I would single out ten, many specific to this museum leader's perspective. The first and second factors are a function of social and economic forces; the third is related to the self-regarding culture of the moment, the fourth through eighth are attributable to the emergence of digital communication, and the ninth and tenth are due to the commercialization of the art world. They are, of course, interrelated, and the decline in our humanities-based discipline is not unique in a world consumed by religious and territorial conflict, the profit motive, and the planet's survival. But, for the purpose of tackling the issue at hand, I will address them one at a time.

1. Perhaps the biggest problem facing our discipline is that art history is a white field in an ethnically diverse world. First-generation people of color in college, fast becoming the majority, are less likely to enter museums and art history programs as parents pressure children to achieve financial independence. The discipline's mounting irrelevance is not confined to issues of ethnicity—history in general is losing relevance in the eyes of youth culture absorbed in the latest tweet, and *art* history is perceived as an unaffordable vanity by an increasing sector of the public, including parents—and university administrators have taken note. While we might hope that more people would connect their burgeoning awareness of the decline in natural resources with the threat to material evidence of cultural heritage and to its narrative, there is little evidence so far that such a connection will prevail. It is also a boy's club. Art museum directors are about one-third female. We need to do better in representing the workforce.
2. America's educational decline puts the arts and humanities on notice that it is not going to help the United States or Europe compete—and China and India focus their educational systems on competing with the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) orientation of the US curriculum. The American educational system is in the grip of its own crisis, linked to the myopia of lawmakers and opinion leaders who aspire to reverse the exodus of research and manufacturing jobs from the United States. Seemingly oblivious to the inevitability of America's marginalization as a center of production, the shapers of public educational policy look at the arts and humanities as a distraction from the life-and-death race to retain and attract talent. They have swept away the practice and study of art from K–12 schools with inevitable damage to our belief that creativity need not be confined to blueprints and formulae to have value in society.
3. The fields of nineteenth-century art and modern and contemporary art now dominate departments of art history in the United States to the point that undergraduate and graduate interest and instruction in the first 5,000 years of art history is in precipitous decline. Art history departments are consolidating "pre-modern" courses obliging fewer faculty members to cover ever-larger tracts of history, while redirecting funds for new appointments necessary to keep up with a growing demand for art history of the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. Consequently, students are finding increasing difficulty in pursuing art history specializations in the art of antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or African art, while the juggernaut of modern and contemporary studies accelerates with no end in sight.
4. Accurate information about artworks is not keeping pace with the information explosion as training in the attribution and interpretation of objects is viewed by some as an antiquated pastime by the academy. The French intellectual revolution of the late 1960s, which imported structuralism and deconstruction to the American academy, yielded a bounty of interest in the theoretical understanding of literature and art, but it had the effect of rendering unfashionable the close study of objects, their materiality, and even their interconnections in tracing the evolution of artists and movements. As artworks turned into useful illustrations of theoretical explanations for the psychological underpinnings of the creative act, the objects themselves took on a merely expository utility. The

study of objects as artifacts embedded in their authorship or time and place, rather than as transcendental ciphers, has come to be seen by many as quaint hackery, confined to self-appointed connoisseurs blemished by their connections to the art market—whether dealers or curators. The indictment of what has been simplistically reduced to the pursuit of connoisseurship for its own sake is orthodoxy without merit, since without informed judgment about the authenticity and authorship of works of art, the theoretical assumptions built from presumed attributions is on very shaky ground.

5. Younger scholars resist consulting pre-1980s printed primary sources and default to online resources. In the past, it was an article of faith that scholarly training demanded a deep knowledge of primary and secondary sources leading up to contemporary judgments. In a pre-digital age, this required a demanding yet imperfect form of research, marked by countless hours in library stacks, scouring journal articles, monographs, and primary sources that had no linkage apart from footnotes tugging scholars from one shelved source to another. The explosion of digital records, and subsequently of networked data, has obliterated what was admittedly a hit-and-miss research methodology. But in its place we have a breathless sprint to capture, scan, and copy sources which appear relevant by virtue of search terms—and the contemplative character of research has yielded to a largely mechanical ledger system of briskly noting observations once long in the making. More gravely, there is an irresistible tendency to ignore carbon-based research materials, and to limit inquiry to what exists online or in databases germane to specific fields of inquiry, perceived to be the only available sources. While the resulting efficiency is indisputable, so is the implicit denigration of critical thinking as practiced in the pre-digital age. The effect on the field of art history is that younger scholars have startling gaps in knowledge about the most fundamental historical events, unsung academic protagonists of the past, and the vast number of undigitized sources and images of artworks in collections far afield.
6. Scholarly authority is contested through crowd sourcing, as with the salutary project Steve (http://www.steve.museum/), which invites the public to upload terms of their choosing in response of works of art. Curators are no longer in control of how artworks in their care are described. Claims by amateurs or would-be experts can gain currency overnight by virtue of crowd sourcing, which can abet the repetitive churn of baseless or plausible interpretations. The opposite is also true: Wikimedians are quick to pounce on poor or inaccurate descriptions of movements, monuments, and artworks. But among the millions of such squabbles playing out on the Internet, examples abound of half-formed opinions tapping into popular myths that wash over sound and well-grounded explanations and postulations. Museum curators, once guardians of the unassailable fortress of institutional authority, were never infallible, but they are now, often as not, simply one voice of many. Their saturation in the physical properties of an object may not entitle them to insulation from criticism or rejoinders, but they are being increasingly sidelined as debates of an interpretive sort enjoy as much currency as the lifetime study of objects in close proximity. One solution is for art historians and curators to devote more pages and column inches to explaining why art matters and

why it should move us, and to be less patronizing about the relevance of our discipline just because the public does not see the point.

7. The reward system for professional achievement in art history is pre-digital and fails to account for new models of collaborative versus autonomous inquiry. The emergence of scholars from book-stacked carrels in libraries to communal tables at Starbucks has had an interesting effect: it has made the model of the scholar toiling in isolation, like Saint Jerome in his study, a relic of the pre-digital age. When I learned, in 1979, that an Austrian graduate student was writing a doctoral thesis about a subject related to mine at Harvard, the advice of my adviser was to "write like hell." The vainglorious pursuit of a doctorate led me to follow his advice, and I wrapped up the research and writing at an accelerated pace, with no evident benefit to the dissertation. But the absurdity of this kind of solipsistic research—so anathema to the research culture of the sciences—is a vestige of a time when people communicated by post, instructors read from yellowed notes, students crammed by means of slide carousels, and compendia of ideas could live separate lives on separate shelves. Each of these modes of communication, instruction, study, research, and publication has been reduced to an anecdote to astonish today's youth at the world their elders endured. But the reward system for scholarship remains unchanged from medieval universities in Western Europe. The proving ground for capacity as an academic has yet to acknowledge the central reality of our time: that autonomous opinions are not always better than collective ones. It is long overdue that the academic establishment should open its eyes to new avenues of digital scholarly publishing and to the inevitability that smart people working together may yield a more rigorous process and a better result than smart people emulating Saint Jerome in isolation.
8. The decline in authoritative venues for art criticism due to cost cutting by paper-based outlets under assault by the Internet is a canary in the mine, diminishing the value of art historical inquiry in the public eye. There are now, according to National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesman, a grand total of four newspapers in the United States with full-time art critics.[1] While art criticism is not synonymous with academic inquiry, it has, for two centuries, helped fuel an exchange of ideas with the public to the undeniable benefit of art historians and followers of the discipline. The disappearance of salaried perches for art critics at the nation's leading newspapers, journals, and magazines has without question compromised the public's understanding of art, which in turn further isolates all practitioners of art historical inquiry. In addition, critics have been the watchdogs of ethical misdeeds by those in power in the art world. In the absence of third party critics, art historians will need to take up this responsibility. Our students need to be taught the importance of a clear moral compass in being stewards of information and of institutions.
9. Market domination is skewing interest in artworks by powerful "brands," for example, artists with name recognition; the result is pressure on scholars to research, publish, and display marquee names. Young scholars, less equipped than before to tackle the complicated business of attributing, classifying, and interpreting works by lesser-known artists, often default to thematic inquiries

into the work of better-known artists and movements validated by the art market. A decline in the number of dissertations on recondite topics reflects the celebrity worship of our consumer culture. The thrill of uncovering something about a well-known subject is far greater than the discovery or rehabilitation of an artist or subject of lesser popular awareness. And, at the very moment when digital access to newly digitized or translated sources, newly recorded contexts, and freshly illustrated examples of cultural heritage are on the rise, the professoriate, too, is more captivated by marquee names who have a better chance of eliciting the interest of skittish editors at university presses.

10. The professional leadership of museums is rewarded for exhibitions and publications of popular fare, as opposed to original art historical inquiry. As a result, museums are becoming entertainment or commercial ventures rather than centers of research. Some of the key repositories of art history, namely museums, are becoming fixated, like so many in the academy, on "big ticket" names that will spin the turnstile, to the detriment of more adventurous scholarship. Only a handful of well-endowed museums continue to pursue major thematic and monographic exhibitions of topics that are not sure-fire winners in commercial terms. Like the decline in art criticism, the commercialization of art museums leads to an impoverishment of public awareness about the breadth and depth of the visual arts across time.

I will stop with ten. I believe that there are steps we can take to remedy some of the travails listed above. Even in this brief essay, I can offer up ten rejoinders to the ten problems listed above:

1. At the January 2011 meeting of the Association of Art Museum Directors, I announced the launch of a new program with Dr. Michael Lomax, president of the United Negro College Fund, to attract undergraduates of color into the art museum profession with grants supporting tuition reduction in exchange for professional experience.
2. All of us should use every possible avenue to advocate curricular standards privileging STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) over STEM.
3. I believe that ethical challenges in collecting may stimulate better art history as provenance becomes a necessary accompaniment to previously clandestine acquisitions.
4. In a culture fascinated by crime-busting science on television series, conservation science is an expanding discipline offering opportunities for art historians seeking credible evidence in lieu of purely stylistic observations. We must connect advanced scientific research on material evidence of artworks with their historical study—a stealthy way of getting the "A" in STEAM. We should use technical discoveries to shed light on the sequence of artistic practice. Examples might include the social and economic history of materials like the addition of tin to copper to create bronze in the second millennium BCE, the origins of cobalt blue in Europe, the history of oak forests harvested for Renaissance panel painting, and the recent history of manmade plastics.

5. We should reduce the isolation of intellectual centers by welcoming a distributed conversation over multiple networks about art history, and judging the merits of research with less regard to whence it emanates. Leading university presses and peer-reviewed journals are too narrow a pipeline to develop a new generation's interest in studying art.
6. We should promote research in pattern recognition software in developing stylistic taxonomies and rendering artistic attribution exciting and relevant to modern computer science, thereby combating visual illiteracy among our students.
7. Given the success of popular literature like Dan Brown's 2003 *The Da Vinci Code*, we should insure that undergraduates are routinely exposed not just to a determinist narrative of art history or theoretical training, but also to the vast litany of exciting, unexplained phenomena in the history of art. They should be familiar with the underlying value, intent, and impact of an individual artwork, not just the explication of its likely function or its use in buttressing an overarching theoretical interpretation.
8. We should not demonize, but legitimize a curatorial career as a viable alternative to serving in the professoriate. Curators should be less fearful of academic reprisal if they talk to visitors like human beings rather than writing labels for their peers.
9. We should entice undergraduates into a career in art history by means of unorthodox inducements: acknowledge that the market can reward true art experts in galleries and auction houses with high salaries, and siphon off a few who might otherwise assume that business school is their only bet to a life of luxury.
10. Lastly, we should develop new standards for professional advancement as a result of collaborative research methods, and prepare for a redefinition of academic tenure in the wake of team-based problem solving.

While there may be a crisis in art history, it seems to me that our discipline is beset by many of the challenges affecting the arts and humanities in general. Rather than seeking solutions to our fate in particular, I think art historians would be well served to seek alignment with others invested in the history of creativity and the life of mind, and pursue a collective agenda to build the next generation's curiosity about our shared cultural heritage of the past and present.

1 Rocco Landesman made this point in his keynote address to the midwinter meeting of the Association of Art Museum Directors, Ponce, Puerto Rico, on January 17, 2011.

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Easton earned her PhD at Yale University, writing her dissertation on Edouard Vuillard's interiors of the 1890s. She joined the Brooklyn Museum in 1988 as assistant curator, and was chair of the Department of European Painting and Sculpture from 1999 until 2006. During her tenure, she was responsible for numerous exhibitions, including *The Intimate Eye of Edouard Vuillard*; *Frederic Bazille: Prophet of Impressionism*; *Monet and the Mediterranean; Brooklyn Collects*, among others. In recognition of her contributions to French culture, Easton was appointed Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 2008.

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Third Republic (1993); and *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* (2003). She is completing a book manuscript "Another World: The Invention of Illustrated Print Culture."

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