Art History Pedagogy & Practice

Volume 6
Issue 1 *Special Issue: Teaching the Art History of the United States*

2021

# Guest Editor Introduction: Cultivating our Field through SoTL Practice: Teaching and Learning the Art History of the United States

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This special issue of *AHPP* was first inspired by the "SoTL Bootcamp" held in conjunction with the CAA Annual Conference in February 2018. Reflecting on the impact that the young *AHPP* journal had already made in terms of raising disciplinary awareness of SoTL, a speaker at the bootcamp commented that, nonetheless, most essays concerning teaching and learning in art history continued to focus on either art appreciation or the introductory survey course. An explicit call was made for scholars to initiate field-specific topics of SoTL and pedagogy research. As a scholar long engaged with SoTL, this critique rang true to me. How we teach our introductory survey courses may not reflect best practices for other field-specific classes and is quite distinct from the techniques used in upper level seminars, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. Consequently, for SoTL to successfully cultivate teaching and learning in the discipline of art history, we must attend in a focused manner to the pedagogical practices of each individual field within the discipline. Furthermore, for those dedicated teachers who are also active research scholars, a robust body of field-specific work in SoTL has the potential to allow for a greater understanding of how research and teaching work together as a professional practice. Having reflected on this call to action, I proposed the panel "Teaching the Art of the United States" for SECAC 2018, seeking to identify a core group of other scholars in my field who might be interested in collaborating on this SoTL project with me.[1] Four of the essays in this current issue were originally presented in an

[1] A note on terminology seems appropriate here. In my call for papers, and in the current title of this issue, I have chosen to refer to the umbrella field as the "art history of the United States." In their individual titles and essays, some contributors have chosen to use the term "American Art." I made the editorial decision to allow both variants, at the preference of these scholars in the field, though in this introductory essay I avoid the phrase "American Art," unless quoted from other essays. Similarly, the call for contributions was explicitly inclusive, inviting discussion of race, ethnicity and the "hyphenated" fields (including African-American Art, Asian-American Art, Native American Art, and/or Latina/o Art). Not each of these areas was represented in papers proposed or accepted, but the breadth of topics in this special issue provides an opportunity to consider the importance of these sub- or hyphenated fields in teaching practice aligned with the art history of the United States. Finally, the title of this issue uses "art history" for simplicity. The essays within the

earlier form within that panel and the additional two were generously written for this special journal issue after the *AHPP* editorial team approved the topic.

While we have been at work on preparing the essays for this special issue, several related publications have affirmed the significance of these conversations. An "In the Round" feature "Teaching with Primary Sources" in the journal *Panorama*, guest edited by Liza Kirwin, included four scholar's contributions in response to Kirwin's "radical idea—that the Archives of American Art be included, in some way, in every single undergraduate course and graduate seminar in the history of American art."[2] Organized specifically around the concept of how primary sources can be introduced into the classroom, the four authors focused on related assignments and activities. An intersecting "Bully Pulpit" in the same *Panorama* issue brought five scholars in the field together to speak about their public-facing practices. In her essay "Isn't It Time for Art History to Go Public?", guest editor Laura M. Holzman called for explicit attention to "the value and role of public scholarship" in terms that could equally be applied to SoTL research and art history: "We must strengthen the growing network of publicly engaged art historians who can share strategies for success, contribute to evaluating each other's work, and advocate for the value and rigor of what we do."[3] Though not focused exclusively, or even primarily, on teaching and learning within the classroom, the contributions to the "Bully Pulpit" offer a window into some potential voices and themes for a body of SoTL literature concerning teaching the art history of the United States.[4]

This special issue does not attempt to be encyclopedic, nor to put forward one specific agenda with respect to teaching and learning in the field. Rather, the goal of this project is to begin a conversation about the significant role that the scholarship of teaching and learning could play for teachers and scholars concerned with the history of art in the United States. More broadly, I hope it also begins to make a clear case for a greater investment in SoTL literature for each field of art historical inquiry. This issue contains six thoughtful essays, each of

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issue engage with a great diversity of media and methodology encompassing material culture, visual culture, design thinking, architectural history, museum education, and historic preservation.

[2] Liza Kirwin, "Teaching with Primary Sources," introduction to In the Round, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2019), https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.2298.

[3] Laura M. Holzman, "Isn't It Time for Art History to Go Public?," introduction to Bully Pulpit, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2019), https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.2271.

[4] Another related project, in press at the time of writing, is the volume: *Socially Engaged Art History and Beyond: Alternative Approaches to the Theory and Practice of Art History*, Edited by Cindy Persinger and Azar Rejaie (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2020).

which discusses the structure of courses, powerful techniques and moments of teaching and learning, and the philosophies of teaching and scholarship that undergird these pedagogical practices. In working with these six scholars, I have felt privileged to gain a deeper view into their teaching and to learn from and with them about the strengths that our field offers to teaching and learning within the larger discipline of art history. Each of these contributors, like myself, has developed a practice for teaching the art of the United States without access to a body of literature concerned with critical and research-based pedagogy in our field. In rising to the challenge of contributing to this special issue, each of them has stepped out of the comfort zone of object-centered art historical research and has turned, instead, toward the reflective analysis of teaching and learning. Their contributions reflect openness to innovative teaching practices and engagement with the existing literature of teaching and learning in higher education. These essays show the impact that conference presentations, teaching collaborations, conversations with colleagues, SoTL publications, and internet fora (such as Art History Teaching Resources) routinely have in making positive changes in classroom teaching practices. To me, their essays also show the potential that a body of SoTL literature could have in cultivating our field of art history—helping instructors to further refine their high-impact teaching practices, identifying core pedagogical strengths and issues within the field, and clarifying ideas about the how, what, and why of our teaching practices.

Across these essays, certain themes emerged to me as representative of the particular contributions that the art history of the United States can add to larger curricula within the discipline. These highlighted themes emerged organically as intersections among these contributions and may help us to begin establishing the framework for key SoTL themes in the field.

As this issue comes to completion in the summer of 2020, a historical moment in which racial unrest overflows amid a global pandemic and other national crises, these essays make clear that courses in our field can play a key role in teaching and modeling equity, inclusivity, and antiracism.[5] An important facet of this is the specific importance of conversations about race when introducing learners to the history of the art of the United States. In her essay, Nancy Palm Puchner reflects that in her course on Native North American Art, "A great deal of the artwork we study is meant, like Luna's *Artifact Piece*, to illustrate how deeply racism is embedded in American culture, to the point that everyone, even those who would never consider themselves racist, are implicit in its perpetuation." Most instructors

[5] Though having been rapidly adopted in the public sphere, the term antiracism should be credited to the significant scholarly work of Ibram X. Kendi, especially *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World Press, 2019).

are surely aware that the shape of our syllabi, the topics we include, and the objects that we select to teach communicate cultural values. Palm Puchner offers a powerful reflection on how such decisions matter within the social dynamics of our classrooms and the lessons with which students leave our courses. Her essay celebrates the contributions of Native American students, while also cautioning that the burden of such learning experiences should not be on the shoulders of these students.

Among the fields of art history, the art history of the United States may have a special role to play in higher education classrooms within the nation. Many students emerge from their K-12 educational experiences without a deep understanding of the roles that race and power have played in the nation's history, let alone the role that art, architecture, and material culture have variously played in bolstering and contesting these dynamics. A single core curriculum course in college may be the only opportunity that any given student may have for exposure to new ways of understanding this history, or a student might encounter a course on the art of the United States within a larger curriculum of art history, history, or American studies. In any of these scenarios, educators in this field have a special opportunity to transform students' understanding of their positions with respect to United States history. Courses that integrate themes related to race, equity, or social justice may transform learners' understanding of their roles as citizens, thinkers, and future professionals. Importantly, Nenette Luarca-Shoaf's essay explores how educators can shape such potentially-transformative experiences in museum galleries as well as in classroom spaces. Of course, scholarship in the field has its own history with respect to race and equity.[6] Due to differences in graduate education and individual research fields, scholars may feel more or less prepared to integrate inclusive materials into their pedagogy. Some faculty may benefit from large programs, able to support individual faculty lines and staff multiple survey and/or specialized topical courses, while others may be the only art historian on a campus or one of few attempting to build a representative curriculum. Whatever the circumstances in which we teach, these six essays make clear that a historiography of SoTL scholarship for our field must attend to high impact practices for engaging with race and supporting antiracism.

It is also notable that across these six essays, the pedagogical significance of the field with respect to equity, inclusion, and social justice is not confined to issues

[6] Influential narratives that have discussed this historiography include: John Davis, "The End of the American Century: Current Scholarship on the Art of the United States." *The Art Bulletin* 85:3 2003: 544-580;and Jacqueline Francis, "Commentary: Writing African American Art History." *American Art* 17:1 (2003): 2–10.

of race and antiracism. Issues raised across and among these essays include the attention to diverse student populations (including, but not limited to, first-generation students, students who are underprepared academically for college, and African American, Latina/o, and Indigenous students), including a range of objects of study in the course in order to be more representative of makers, patrons, and consumers of art/architecture from a diversity of backgrounds, and engaging with local communities. Clearly, these factors are not limited solely to this art historical field, but these three areas may present particular intersections of potential (and perhaps challenges as well) for teaching in the art history of the United States. Anne Verplanck chronicles the adaptations that she has made to her survey course in American art in order to maximize learning for students who are underprepared for college and at an institution where there are a high proportion of first-generation students. Importantly, she emphasizes the need to meet students where they are, building in pedagogical techniques for helping them grow into the role of college student. Unlike some other areas of the art history curriculum, students may enter a course on the art history of the United States believing that their prior secondary school study of U. S. history will give them a baseline of valuable knowledge. Thoughtful pedagogical strategies may help faculty to raise up students with outdated or insufficient prior academic training, while still offering a rigorous and representative survey course in the field. Similarly, Palm Puchner notes the contributions that her majority-minority student population makes to the success of her course on Native North American art, while also attending to the pedagogical adaptations she has made in order to create an appropriate learning environment in her classroom.

Across this collection of essays, the contributors align in awareness of the significant pedagogical gains to be had through teaching a diverse range of objects. Kate Kocyba introduces the role that teaching vernacular architecture and historic preservation can play in bringing issues of social justice, diverse communities, and gender dynamics into play within an architectural history course. Judy Bullington and Evie Terrono both discuss how teaching material culture has helped their students to have significant learning experiences about race and racism, while Palm Puchner introduces the cautionary challenges of labels such as “traditional” and “folk” within teaching and learning about Native North American Art.

Engaging with local communities and collections emerged as a commonality across these essays. Here the potential within the field is great, while the obligations to consider equity and representation are also significant. Bullington, Kocyba, Terrono, and Verplanck each discuss the role of field trips and other experiential learning opportunities as vital to the successes of their courses. Such

experiential learning opportunities shape active, rather than passive, constructions of learning, and are also foundational building blocks toward increasing students' capacities for critical perception—a goal that seems to resonate with multiple of these authors. Through bodily or kinesthetic learning, students can develop deeper understanding of the objects in front of them. Importantly, Luarca-Shoaf highlights how communities of learners engaging with works of art within a museum space can deepen understanding of nuance and complexity in ways that may otherwise be rare in the public sphere. She remarks, "art catalyzes opportunities for listening to others' perspectives, underscoring the benefits of holding nuanced, unresolved interpretations, and the ways a community might recognize that complexity together." These essays also reveal that including local and experiential learning opportunities within courses also allows regionally-based students to make extra contributions to the classroom space. As students share their knowledge of neighborhoods, landscapes, and local objects, they may feel a greater sense of empowerment, while also taking their classroom learning out into their lives beyond higher education. Palm Puchner describes her integration of Lumbee students' knowledge into her classroom as an opportunity to build the "collective creation of knowledge," a concept that reflects a flipped classroom or active classroom environment. This collective creation of knowledge offers an important model of how the student and professor roles within the classroom can help to build knowledge beyond the standard textbook or academic information about a work. The intimacy of viewing works of art together in class can create rich opportunities for discourse and shared construction of knowledge. Such experiences are surely compounded when students have the opportunity to build such locally-based learning into coursework that is a capstone element of a class—as discussed by Kocyba and Terrono. As Kocyba observes, such opportunities enable students to become agents—defining what local subject(s) are deserving of scholarly attention and why.

All of these pedagogical examples speak to the field about its opportunity and obligation to serve the communities that we teach. Perhaps more than most other specialists in art history, those who teach the art of the United States have the most opportunities and, therefore perhaps the most duty, to adapt their syllabi and curricula to the local populations of students and the wider communities of their institutions. The intersection of these issues with the growing interest in community-engaged art history is clear.[7] These essays emphasize how important such experiences can be in terms of deepening student learning, but also how

[7] For a deeper consideration of the field's intersection with community engagement, see my forthcoming contribution to Persinger and Azar's volume, *Socially Engaged Art History and Beyond*: Julia A. Sienkewicz, "Art History and its Publics: Weighing the Pedagogical and Research Benefits of Community Engagement" (forthcoming).

significant the balance is in terms of scaffolding these assignments appropriately, organizing the logistics of these experiences, and even, possibly, embarking on offering feedback or critique to local collections based on in-class learning, as exemplified by Bullington and her students' collective work. Challenges and pitfalls abound with fostering deep and inclusive learning opportunities that engage with our local communities, especially in a polarized socio-political climate and with many professionals being vulnerable as they struggle to build stable careers in higher education, museums, and the arts. While such immersive learning experiences can yield high dividends in terms of student learning, tenure track and other contingent faculty may well shy away from the risks of student frustration, logistical complexities, and deep time investment of such teaching techniques. These essays make clear that there is a window for SoTL to help instructors understand which immersive learning strategies work best to bolster student learning (and under what conditions they are most likely to succeed). With such a body of literature, each individual professional would not need to proceed through trial and error, but can initiate high impact teaching practices with the benefit of collective expertise, such as that presented by these six experienced faculty members.

A final SoTL lesson for the field that is clarified by these essays is the potential for an exceptionally close affinity between scholarship and teaching. As in all fields of art history, a scholar's research topics and methodology may influence the selection of objects and interpretations that are included within a course. Yet, with the field of the art of the United States, the close proximity of a range of collections, communities, and stakeholders in this history opens up the possibility for cross-fertilization of research and teaching practices. The contributions to Kirwin's "Teaching with Primary Sources" began a conversation about how the archival materials available for research practices might also provide deep learning opportunities for students within the classroom. Here, these essays explore other aspects of this phenomenon. Terrono introduces how a developing field of research interest led to an innovative and community-focused undergraduate course. While such a close dynamic between research and teaching is often understood to be a foundation of graduate teaching methodology, her essay makes clear that such teaching practices are also vital in undergraduate education. A body of SoTL literature making such high impact teaching and learning more visible could offer significant evidence to institutions of the value in hiring and supporting full-time faculty as teacher-scholars, willing to commit to such intensive models of education. Palm Puchner's experience of identifying a new research area in Lumbee art also speaks to the generative potential of the classroom space. By opening her mind and her classroom to the influence of the local community—and remaining 'teachable' as she terms it—Palm Puchner not

only has succeeded in offering high-impact classroom experiences, but she has also defined a new and highly-productive area of research expertise. Such analyses make clear that the long-held stratification of research scholar versus dedicated teacher should be rethought and urgently so within the shifting ecosystems of higher education. The essays collected here make a strong case for the reality that high quality teaching and research go hand in hand and, further, that, at least within this art historical field, they can cross-pollinate one another.

Beyond a focus on the field of the art history of the United States, these essays present two significant themes for the larger body of SoTL literature in art history. First, these essays attend to the significance and impact of active learning techniques in the classroom and give strong evidence for the discipline's productive shift away from an 'art in the dark' pedagogical model. Verplanck presents this shift not merely as a response to existing SoTL literature, but also an urgent need from the realities of the classroom. She writes, "each year the students are more and more receptive to interactive components, and less responsive to traditional learning practices. My solution is in each class, including American art, to find more ways to engage students with hands-on or interactive activities." Active learning is a common thread across each of these essays—whether through a flipped classroom, discussion, experiential learning, fieldwork, or otherwise. Acknowledged as high-impact practices, these essays suggest that active learning experiences may also, and increasingly, be a path forward for increasing the relevance and interest in the discipline across our diverse institutions of higher learning.

Second, these essays collectively emphasize the great value that teaching core art history skills seems to deliver for learners. These essays demonstrate some of the professional skills gained by students—including, but not limited to, learning how to evaluate primary and secondary sources, how to fill out bureaucratic paperwork, how to speak professionally, and, of course, how to conduct research and writing in art history. Alongside teaching awareness to issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion, these courses present a clear professional toolkit for future citizens. Further, these essays reflect on certain types of teaching and learning that can only emerge from an art historical context. Discussing the Education Department program "Intersections" that she helped to build at the Art Institute of Chicago, Luarca-Shoaf concluded, that the program "shows the value of art historical methodologies such as formal analysis, artwork comparison, understanding materials and artistic process, and gaining insight into historical context, as tools for reframing vexing contemporary issues." Within the space of a single 60-minute program, instructors could use finely-tuned art history pedagogical skills to guide members of the public to think in new ways about

challenging current issues in the public sphere. Further, Bullington with careful attention to teaching the skill of critical perception, the art history classroom can provide students with a unique set of lifelong skills with which to engage with difference or controversy. She writes, "Critical perception is the formative foundation upon which life-long learners develop, adopt, and adapt insights and attitudes toward unfamiliar, and sometimes controversial, issues while increasing their ability to identify gaps and limitations in the information at hand." From these essays, we can understand more about how a sustained body of SoTL scholarship in art history will enable us to define and promote the unique benefits of teaching and learning within the discipline.

Within the many successes discussed across these essays, some challenges also emerged concerning what scholars continue to face when launching into SoTL research. Though I benefited from receiving training in both SoTL and pedagogy during my graduate career, such opportunities remain inconsistently available and were certainly not the standard when most experienced faculty completed their training.[8] As we discussed moving forward with this journal issue, the contributors expressed eagerness at the opportunity, but for some this excitement was tempered by anxiety about limited familiarity with SoTL literature, and lack of prior publication in pedagogy. Opening our classrooms to one another—particularly to other specialists in the field—can remain a vulnerable and humbling act, especially while the production of SoTL research remains a relatively small area of inquiry within the discipline. At the same time, these scholars' essays reflect the significant role that professional conferences can and do play in reinforcing SoTL's potential for our professional practices. As sessions at SECAC, CAA, and beyond are increasingly inclusive of pedagogical sessions, more scholars become aware of this line of inquiry as a valid and productive direction of scholarship, which can be aligned with the discipline of art history. In addition to the lack of comfort with SoTL, these essays reflect the challenges of assessing the success or failures of teaching techniques and the real or perceived barrier that Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes at our institutions can play in limiting scholarly directions. Luarca-Shoaf's thoughtful discussion of assessment in her museum programming presents a set of challenges to and formats for assessment of relevance to both museums and classrooms. Meanwhile, Verplanck's discussion of IRB reflects concerns expressed by many faculty as they launch into or consider initiating SoTL scholarship. Providing

[8] While completing my PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign I eagerly enrolled in the interdisciplinary and team taught graduate course "Teaching in the College Classroom". So much of what I learned in that class remains formative to my successes as a teacher today and I wish all PhD students could benefit from a similar class. I also completed the "Graduate Teaching Certificate" through the university's robust Center for Teaching Excellence.

professionals in the discipline with knowledge about IRB standards could open the doors to future and ongoing lines of inquiry—and her experience also emphasizes how important it is to offer this knowledge early within a scholar's teaching career so that projects can be initiated with confidence and with the most robust available datasets over repeating semesters. As professional organizations in the arts increasingly provide opportunities to share SoTL-based research, they might also consider creating teaching certificates, IRB training, and other avenues to formalized professional development as these are inconsistently available to faculty at different institutions and depending on employment status. Such initiatives could increase art historians' knowledge about and commitment to building a body of SoTL literature for the discipline and its fields.

For scholars of the art history of the United States, I join the contributors to this journal issue in hoping that these essays inspire deep thought about how, what, and why we teach within the field. We are in the first stages of an important conversation about the scholarship of teaching and learning in our discipline—and within its respective fields of specialization. This journal issue has clarified some important directions of what SoTL might look like in our field and how it might contribute to increasing the real impact of our teaching practices. We look forward to seeing the seeds of this work germinate as more and varied voices join this conversation.