

American Art Archives in Britain
Friday 6th May and Saturday 7th May
3pm BST – 6pm BST

Abstracts and Biographies

MICHAEL LEJA

Problems of Primariness

In the process of selecting primary texts for the volume *Art of the United States: Primary Sources* (co-authored with John Davis) a number of challenges emerged. A principal one was bias in the collecting and preservation of documentary materials. Another concerned distortions in prior forms of publication or preservation. In some cases multiple forms of primariness complicated the choice of which of them to publish. My presentation will narrate some case studies illustrating these and other problems of primariness.

Bio: Michael Leja is James and Nan Wagner Farquhar Professor of History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, which was awarded the Charles Eldredge Prize for distinguished scholarship in American art in 1996; *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*, which won the Modernist Studies Association book prize in 2005; and coauthor of *Art of the United States 1750-2000: Primary Sources* (2020). A book titled *A Flood of Pictures*, which explores changes in pictorial forms and in social relations associated with the industrialization of picture production and the development of a mass market for images in the mid-nineteenth century US, is forthcoming.

MARK RAWLINSON and ASHLEY GALLANT

Orphaned images: Photographs without their Photobooks

We started this project by identifying and analysing American landscape photographic prints in British public and private collections that were originally published in the form of the photobook.

There are many examples of such de-coupling: from Ed Ruscha' photobook, *Thirty-four Parking Lots* (1967), which entered Tate's collection as individual prints in 2008 to images from Jon Rafman's own take on Ruscha, *Sixteen*

Google Street Views (2009) which were later printed and displayed at Saatchi as large-scale photographs, and then collected by the Usher Gallery (Lincoln). There are other examples, too, in private collections (such as the Kirkland Collection, Derbyshire).

In this paper we will discuss the questions these objects raised, asking what happens to the status of the photobook, an aesthetic form with its own particular histories, when individual prints, rather than the photobook itself, become the focus of collecting? Does this de-coupling of the image from its intended book context side-line the important role of the artists' book in American landscape photography? What role does outsourced authorship, curatorial sequencing, display methods, interpretation and copyright play in understanding these images, and what is the difference between the photobook and artists book in the museum structure, and is this key to decoupling?

Bio: Dr Rawlinson's current research explores the 'minor histories' of post war American photography and relates to the renaissance of the medium in the USA during the 1970s, a renaissance whose origins can be traced back the GI Bill and the Photography teaching programmes of the 1950s onwards. He argues that minor histories more usefully account for the divergent, experimental and often incoherent forms of practice that are the predominant focus of this project. By 'minor histories' he does not mean qualitatively less important or overlooked, many of the photographers and curators of interest are not obscure or unknown. However, the dominant interpretative discourse of photography, it's 'major history,' has reduced many to the realm of 'historical context.'

Bio: Gallant is a curator and PhD candidate. As a curator he cares for the Ruskin Collection, a teaching collection including 19th century books of prints, drawings and early photography. His PhD research focuses on the intersection of copyright law and the museum. Arguing that museum collections should be copyright free to encourage use, and that a form of object and property based 'copyright thinking' has become the dominant curatorial thought method. He argues that by challenging this we can publicly own, and use, more diverse and experimental forms of artistic practice.

JOHN FAGG

Pop Goes to Wolverhampton!

This paper explores the early development of the Pop Art collection at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, including the acquisition of paintings by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein during the 1970s. It traces the circulation of work by these artists in London commercial galleries and the positioning of Lichtenstein and Warhol as major artists in Tate exhibitions in 1968 and 1971. These events, in one of the cosmopolitan centres of Pop Art, set the stage for the acquisition and display of American Pop Art works by UK regional galleries. The paper explores Wolverhampton's early interest in American Pop Art under the leadership of David Rodgers. Rodgers began his time at Wolverhampton with innovative exhibitions of popular material culture that establish a discursive frame for Pop Art; found innovative ways to fund acquisitions; and built the core of a collection that has come to define the Gallery's identity. The paper draws on Gallery Artist's Files, press reception and correspondence with funders and other galleries. It also reflects on archival research among relatively scarce archival materials.

Bio: John Fagg is Senior Lecturer in American Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellows and Modernism* (2009) and several articles and book chapters focusing on early-twentieth-century American literature and visual art, including "Chamber Pots and Gibson Girls: Clutter and Matter in John Sloan's Graphic Art" (2015). He has also contributed catalogue essays for exhibitions including *Simple Pleasures: The Art of Doris Lee* (2021) and the National Portrait Gallery's *The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying American Workers*. He has recently completed a second book, *Re-envisioning the Everyday: American Genre Scenes, 1905-1945*.

KAREN DI FRANCO

Carolee Schneemann's Minor Histories

"and all we left or lost no longer need
here having all together"

— Reproducing Carolee Schneemann

This presentation explores the period the American artist Carolee Schneemann spent with the Fluxus affiliated Beau Geste Press; a print

community that operated from a farmhouse in Cullompton, Devon, when she stayed in the UK between 1970–73. Contributing to a range of publications as well as producing her first artist book, Schneemann and her partner, Anthony McCall, formed a connection with press and in particular, the founder Felipe Ehrenberg, a political emigre from Mexico, who left for the UK with his family to escape the regime. Intertwined in life and work, the working conditions reproduced by the press are revealed through the materials that are preserved in the Beau Geste Press archive at Tate Britain; collected together by member, David Mayor. A small collage made by Schneemann in July 1972 for a collective publication forms the basis for discussion about the major and minor — materials and histories — that complicate our understanding of what is considered and described by institutions as art.

Bio: Dr Karen Di Franco is a curator and writer, working in the fields of exhibition making and art historical research. She specialises in post-1960s feminist art practice and artists' publishing, alongside the contexts of iteration, fiction writing and performance as points of enquiry in her work. She is Programme Leader of M Litt Curatorial Practice (Contemporary Art) at Glasgow School of Art and Programme Curator at Chelsea Space, Chelsea College of Arts, UAL. Her PhD research titled Embodied Iteration: Materialising the Language of Writing and Performance in Women Artists' Publishing, 1968–1979 was funded by the AHRC collaborative Doctoral Partnership and based between the University of Reading and Tate Britain (2015-2020).

EMMA MERKLING

Science, Séance, Stereoscopy: The Extraordinary Archives of 'Margery' Crandon

This paper focuses on archival material surrounding the strange séance performances of Boston-based spiritualist medium Mina Crandon, alias 'Margery', c. 1925. Crandon was renowned for her apparent ability to generate spirit phenomena while in a trance state, from disembodied voices to fleshy 'ectoplasmic' excretions. In the 1920s, she was subjected to intensive investigation by a transatlantic and interdisciplinary team of scientific researchers, whose documentary photographs, careful observational records, communications, and séance notes are today scattered across archives in at least three countries (Canada, US, and UK). My focus is on the 'straight' stereoscopic photos of Crandon and documentary records housed at Senate House in the archives of Harry Price, a psychical

researcher — founder of the National Laboratory of Psychological Research — deeply invested in the case. These objects, like my occultic-scientific area of focus, sit uneasily in most categorisations we may try to ascribe to them. This paper explores what we gain from approaching this archive and these materials — not quite art objects, not purely American, not attributable to a single maker, not exclusively in UK collections — from an art-historical perspective, as American art archives in Britain.

LUCY BRADNOCK and KATHERINE DONIAK

Abstract Impressionism in the East Midlands

Between February and March 1958, the art gallery at the University of Nottingham staged the exhibition *Abstract Impressionism*, curated by fine art fellow Harold Cohen in collaboration with Lawrence Alloway, then Assistant Director of the ICA in London. It comprised twenty-six paintings by British, American, and European painters, united by a common deployment of abstract forms. Though the term would not be widely adopted, the exhibition, which travelled to Cambridge, Newcastle, and London, represents an important milestone in the regional exhibition of American modern art. In this paper, we outline how the exhibition came to be and what it reveals about how American art was staged beyond London's museums and galleries. We explore the complex network of professional and personal relationships upon which Cohen and Alloway drew in selecting and securing works for the exhibition, negotiations that are reflected in correspondence unearthed as part of this project. Drawing on this and other archival materials related to the exhibition's critical reception locally and nationally, we examine the role of the "American pictures" in framing British abstraction and the part they and *Abstract Impressionism* played in the University's cultural and institutional agenda, to ask what was at stake in staging American art in the post-war East Midlands.