

Diversity in Academia in a Post-Truth World

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I never imagined during my period of infatuation with postmodern theory that I would one day be an advocate for objective truth. But if we've learned anything since the 2016 US presidential election, it's that facts and truth matter. While sensitive to the ways in which data can be manipulated, or "alternative facts" mobilized, to recollect Kellyanne Conway's infamous phrase, hard data on diversity can be a powerful reality check.¹ To that end, this third issue of *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* features a unique Dialogue section on diversity in the fields that make up our readership. It was initiated by guest editors Ananda Cohen-Aponte and Elena FitzPatrick Sifford, who recently undertook a yearlong period of data gathering, analysis, and reflection. To our knowledge, their study is the first to collect demographic data for the Latin American and Latinx subfields of art history. The results suggest that these subfields are diverse. Similar data for African, African American, Native American/Indigenous, Asian, and Asian American art history would help expose the larger context. Indeed, as my colleague Steven Nelson recently noted in his paper at the 2019 College Art Association, "Diversity Matters: On Access, Knowledge, and Histories of Art," a demographic study of the entire field of art history would be extremely useful.² In this editorial comment, I articulate the value of diversity in the

academy and the museum world and suggest some best practices.

But allow me to begin with this simple question: Why does diversity matter?

Diversifying academic and arts institutions will bring them into alignment with the reality of our world, with facts and truth, and with widely held understandings of fairness. As Latin American and Latinx art specialists we understand firsthand that we should not acquiesce to a vision of art history that reflects only one artistic tradition, that of Europe, enshrined as the single or most important visual history.³ The practitioners and contributors to our discussion of the arts should reflect a similar diversity. Only when we have a multiplicity of peoples and viewpoints represented will we have true intellectual diversity and an actual meritocracy. Consider this editorial comment a call to bring in people who have historically and systematically been excluded, and whose gifts and talents would benefit our students, research, and institutions, all in the name of fairness, truth, and facts, which are under serious attack in the post-truth world. Diversity makes a difference in the academy and in the art world.

By quantifying the number of people of color among the faculty teaching Latin American and Latinx art history, the data presented in this issue's Dialogue builds on previous reports focused on the museum world, in particular the recent Mellon and Smithsonian studies. The Mellon survey, published in 2015 and 2018, tracked museum employees in

1. On January 22, 2017, Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Trump, used this phrase to characterize a falsehood presented by Sean Spicer during his first appearance as press secretary. The clip appears on the NBC website: <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/conway-press-secretary-gave-alternative-facts-860142147643>.

2. Steven Nelson, "Diversity Matters: On Access, Knowledge, and Histories of Art," presented in the session "The Mellon Foundation at Fifty: Reflecting on Five Decades of Philanthropy in the Academy," College Art Association conference, February 15, 2019, New York. Nelson is one of the coauthors of Chad M. Topaz et al., "Diversity of Artists in Major U.S. Museums," *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 3 (March 20, 2019): <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0212852>, which surveys the diversity of artists whose works are held by US museums. Their survey finds that 85 percent of the artists are white and 87 percent are men.

3. Most US art history departments no longer solely teach European art, but that change is fairly recent. On the development of the study of Latin American art at US colleges see Elizabeth Wilder, "Call for Pioneers," *College Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (1941): 6–9; Elizabeth Hill Boone, "U.S. Universities and Latin American Art History," *Research Center for the Arts Review* 2, nos. 1/2 (1979): 2–3; Cecelia F. Klein, "Not Like Us and All the Same: Pre-Columbian Art History and the Construction of the Nonwest," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 42, no. 1 (2002): 131–38; Robin Cembalest, "The Colonial Revolution," *ARTnews* 109, no. 4 (2010): 78–85; Olga U. Herrera and María C. Gaztambide, "En Diálogo: Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art," *Diálogo* 20, no. 1 (2017): 3–8.

“intellectual leadership positions,” defined as “curators, conservators, educators and leadership,” from 2014 to 2018.⁴ Between those two years of data collection, people of color increased from 15 percent to 20 percent. Gains were reported in curatorial and education departments; no statistically significant changes were evident in museum leadership or conservation. African American curators and educators increased from 4 percent to 11 percent; “Hispanic” (Latina/o/x) increased from 3 to 5 percent; “Asian” (a category also including Asian American) increased from 6 to 7 percent. Still, the number of Native or Indigenous curators and educators remains low, at less than 1 percent for both “American Indian or Alaskan Native” and “Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.”⁵ There is still much work to do.

“Invisible No More: An Evaluation of the Smithsonian Institution and Latino Representation,” published in September 2018, also presented a mixed picture, with some notable progress in increasing Latina/o/x representation at the Smithsonian, but also some disappointing news.⁶ This report, which was authored by colleagues at my own institution, the University of California, Los Angeles, revisited the recommendations in the earlier 1994 report “Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos,” a scathing assessment of how Latina/o/x voices were being left out of US cultural history.⁷ While their 2018 assessment recognized notable gains for Latina/o/x representation at the Smithsonian in the hiring of curators and archivists, with a dramatic increase from 2.7 to 8.1 percent, their criticism of the lack of Latina/o/xs in leadership positions suggests that little has changed in the twenty-four years since 1994.

4. Roger Schonfeld and Mariët Westermann with Liam Sweeney, “The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey,” July 28, 2015, <https://mellon.org/programs/arts-and-cultural-heritage/art-history-conservation-museums/demographic-survey>; Mariët Westermann, Roger Schonfeld, and Liam Sweeney, “Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018,” January 28, 2019, <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/art-museum-staff-demographic-survey-2018/>.

5. On why this matters see Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

6. Daisy Vera, Chon A. Noriega, Sonja Diaz, and Matt Barreto, “Invisible No More: An Evaluation of the Smithsonian Institution and Latino Representation” (Los Angeles: Latino Policy and Politics Initiative and Chicano Studies Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 2018).

7. Raul Yzaguirre and Mari Carmen Aponte, “Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos: Report of the Smithsonian Task Force on Latino Issues” (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1994), https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/forum-pdfs/Willful_Neglect_The_Smithsonian_Institution%20and_US_Latinos.pdf.

Building on these important evaluations of diversity in the museum world, the data collected by the guest editors of this issue’s Dialogue adds specific knowledge and assessment of the fields that make up Latin American and Latinx art. On a positive note, this new data indicates that these fields are more diverse than other, more traditional fields in art history. Why is this the case, and how can we build upon this progress going forward?

ARRIVING AT THIS POINT

A few ready explanations for the diversity in our fields come to mind. The first is changing demographics in the United States, where the number of Latina/o/xs has increased. From 1980 to 2015, the percentage of Latina/o/xs in the US population almost tripled, from 6.5 to 17.6 percent.⁸ I think it is safe to suggest that Latina/o/x scholars are interested in the fields of Latin American and Latinx art because of their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. That was certainly the case for me.⁹

The 1990s occasioned another significant boost to Latin American art history when we witnessed an increase in scholarship related to Spain and Latin America during the years around the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus’s 1492 arrival in the Americas.¹⁰ The event encouraged significant new research on Spain and the Americas, encouraged by the availability of new grant funding. According to David Block of the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas Libraries, by 1994 more than one thousand new publications related to the quincentenary had appeared.¹¹

8. Antonio Flores, Gustavo López, and Jynnah Radford, “Facts on US Latinos, 2015: Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States,” Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends, September 18, 2017, <https://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/09/18/facts-on-u-s-latinos-current-data/>.

9. The data gathered by Cohen-Aponte and FitzPatrick Sifford focus on Latina/o/x diversity and other equally important racial and ethnic groups.

10. My discussion of this event is not intended to support or replicate any sense of celebration associated with 1992. For thinking through the legacy of Columbus’s arrival I recommend Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On Metaphysical Catastrophe, Post-Continental Thoughts, and the Decolonial Turn,” in *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago*, ed. Tatiana Flores and Michelle A. Stephens (Long Beach, CA: Museum of Latin American Art, 2017), 247–59.

11. David Block, “Quincentennial Publishing: A Ocean of Print,” *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 3 (1994): 101–28. Similarly, Daniel J. Slive of the John Carter Brown Library noted, “The five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s landfall has produced a remarkable number of conferences, exhibitions, and publications—not to mention television series, movies, and an assortment of commercial products—concerned with Columbus, the expansion of European empire, and the encounter of the Old and New Worlds.”

Then there is the supposition that the Latin Americanist field has historically been home to many allies who support people of color. Overall, the various fields that constitute Latin American and Latinx art emerged relatively later within the discipline, in comparison, for example, to studies of Renaissance European art. In some cases, their emergence coincided with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. A number of early pioneering Latin Americanists and Chicana/o art specialists came of age during this era of activism.

What was happening methodologically and theoretically within the discipline is also important to consider. The fields that constitute Latin American art developed during the heyday of social art history, not during earlier years when scholarship was focused on connoisseurship, attribution, and dating. Given the timing of heightened interest in Latin American art, I suspect that the politics of many early and important Latin Americanists had an influence on the development of the field. It is likely that their personal political beliefs led these pioneers to consciously encourage and support people of color and other underrepresented minorities, such as people with disabilities or from the working class, or members of the LGBTQ community. Early on women were also underrepresented, another interesting topic to think about and analyze. In other words, it is thanks to the generosity and support of older mentors and past scholars that the field is as diverse as it is today. That said, we still have work to do, which I sketch out below.

THOUGHTS ON BEST PRACTICES

The data in the Dialogue section, and that published by the Mellon Foundation and others, inspire us to ask ourselves the following questions:

- How many faculty of color are in your department?
- How many students of color have been admitted to your graduate program this year?
- How many of your undergraduate majors or honors students are students of color?
- Does your conference or your panel include underrepresented voices?
- Is it a “man-el”?¹²

Daniel J. Slive, “Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Commemoration by Herman J. Viola; Carolyn Margos,” *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 310.

12. Many people have weighed in on the all-male conference panel. See “Congrats, You Have an All Male Panel!” a hilarious Tumblr: [http://](http://allmalepanels.tumblr.com/)

Are there underrepresented candidates on the list of job finalists, admitted students, or the table of contents of your edited book?

How many all-white art history faculties are there in the United States?

Be mindful of the numbers in your department and take concrete steps to change them. If your faculty is all white, insist on diversifying it. Facts tell a story. On UCLA’s faculty of fourteen art historians, there are 1.5 faculty from US-born, underrepresented, minoritized communities.¹³ The data on graduate admissions into UCLA’s Art History department reflects this lack of diversity on our faculty. Since my hire in 2000, not a single Chicana/o/x student was admitted into our PhD program, despite my best efforts, until fall 2015. And let me be clear—there was no lack of qualified candidates. Some of those refused entry into our graduate program are now prominent professors at leading universities across the United States.

Refute the myth that there are no qualified candidates out there for faculty positions, postdocs, graduate school, or college admissions. What used to be called the “pipeline” problem, which I term here “pathway” on the advice of Indigenous colleagues, simply does not exist. There are plenty of qualified candidates of color at every step of the way. So why aren’t they admitted or hired? What can we do? What has worked in our fields in previous years? How can we as faculty encourage more students of color to consider the humanities? In the section that follows, I make concrete suggestions that can begin to challenge institutionalized racism—the policies normalized in our institutions that effectively restrict diversity, inclusion, and equity.¹⁴

allmalepanels.tumblr.com/; Leila Fadel, “Survey Suggests ‘Manels’—All-Male Panels—Are Still the Norm,” National Public Radio, November 1, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/01/663012390/survey-suggests-manels-all-male-panels-are-still-the-norm>; Owen Barder, “The Pledge: I Will Not Be Part of Male-Only Panels,” <https://www.owen.org/pledge>.

13. I refer to my African American colleague, Steven Nelson, and me; I count as 0.5 because in July 2016 I moved half of my tenured line into Chicana/o Studies. I intentionally employ “minoritize” here to underscore the process of marginalizing certain communities, regardless of their actual size. For an interesting discussion of this usage see Amanda Anastasia Paniague, “Opinion: Minoritized, Not a Minority,” KentWired.com, September 20, 2015, http://www.kentwired.com/latest_updates/article_dc83f7e0-5fe9-11e5-b6c0-2b8c8a9b5266.html.

14. Bedelia Nicolas Richards, “Is Your University Racist?,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/05/25/questions-institutions-should-ask-themselves-determine-if-they-are-operating>.

*Challenge implicit bias, unconscious thoughts, and assumptions we hold about others, usually based on stereotypes.*¹⁵ Anyone who has grown up in the United States has internalized some measure of implicit bias. In 2017, I was a speaker and guest of honor at a donor event held at a private home in a fancy Los Angeles neighborhood. I arrived in a suit, toting my laptop, and was promptly mistaken for a wealthy donor's home health-care aide. I've heard similar stories from other colleagues of color.¹⁶ By checking our own assumptions about others we can create a more just, interesting, and intellectually challenging world. Expand beyond your own stereotypes of who is qualified. As we all know, some very prestigious universities have historically been reluctant to expand the study of art outside the Western canon or to offer ethnic studies courses. Not surprisingly, many leading specialists in Latin American and Latinx art were not trained at the Ivies or on the East Coast. Recognize that there are multiple paths to excellence.

*Consider how you and your institution define diversity.*¹⁷ Definitions vary by institution. In the University of California system, diversity efforts are intended to prioritize Native Americans, African Americans, and Latina/o/xs, in particular US-born Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans; others can be included in the "Latina/o" category, too, such as people with family histories in South America or the Caribbean. Asian American students at UCLA do not normally fulfill the diversity category, since they are the majority of the undergraduate student population.¹⁸ Admittedly, UCLA is an unusual

15. Jerry Kang and Kristin Lane, "Seeing through Colorblindness: Implicit Bias and the Law," *UCLA Law Review* 58 (2010): 465–520. Kang, UCLA vice chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion, has collected a number of other resources on the topic of implicit bias at <https://equity.ucla.edu/know/implicit-bias/>. On the danger of over-relying on the notion of unconscious bias, which can effectively shift focus away from institutional or systemic bias to individual acts, see Jenny Bourne, "Unraveling the Concept of Unconscious Bias," *Race and Class* 60, no. 4 (2019): 70–75.

16. For a published account of a dramatic and heartbreaking similar experience see Megan K. Guliford, "Even Progressive Academics Can Be Racist. I've Experienced It First Hand," *Washington Post*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/09/11/even-progressive-academics-can-be-racist-ive-experienced-it-firsthand/>.

17. This is a large topic of great complexity; definitions of diversity vary geographically and are constituted relationally. My thinking is inspired by work in relational ethnic studies such as Luis Alvarez, "From Zoot Suits to Hip Hop: Towards a Relational Chicana/o Studies," *Latino Studies* 5, no. 1 (April 2007): 53–75; and Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez, eds., *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

18. The subject of Asian and Asian Americans and diversity efforts is a complex one and outside of my own expertise. Some of these complexities are

case, a top-notch university with significant diversity. It is, in fact, on the verge of achieving the federal designation of Hispanic-Serving Institution or HSI, with 21.2 percent of the student body identifying as Latina/o/x in the fall of 2018. Unfortunately, the percentage of faculty who identify this way remains low, at 6.6 percent according to the latest available numbers.¹⁹

Challenge faux or fake diversity, such as claims for "intellectual diversity." The point of diversity guidelines is to bring in people who have historically and systematically been excluded, and for that reason diversity policies favor US-born minoritized populations. International colleagues and/or students don't normally fulfill the original intent of diversity efforts. If a person was born and raised as a member of the elite class in their country of origin, they will have a tough time understanding discrimination against minoritized folks in the United States. That said, many of our international colleagues or students begin to experience discrimination once they move to the United States and become identified as people of color, and they can, and often do, learn to become supportive mentors to students of color. Finally, challenge calls for intellectual diversity that camouflage the hiring of more people of the same elite social class and mindset. True intellectual diversity, in which we hold different, even challenging opinions informed by our different life experiences, sharpens our minds, drives new thinking, and fosters understanding.

Valorize facts. Only with facts can we combat the effects of implicit bias and challenge institutionalized structures that uphold discrimination against people of color (and others such as women, members of the LGBTQ community, and people with disabilities). Facts can sensitize us to fairness and objectivity as well as the existence of double standards. A recent article assessing gender bias in letters of recommendation makes clear how we unconsciously replicate internalized stereotypes about students and job

addressed by Iris Kuo, "The 'Whitening' of Asian Americans," *The Atlantic*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/08/the-whitening-of-asian-americans/563336/>; Pew Research Center, "Asian Americans: A Diverse and Growing Population," <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/asian-americans/>. UCLA's fall 2018 enrollment statistics can be accessed at <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/fall-enrollment-glance>.

19. The latest data is from 2016: <https://equity.ucla.edu/data-hub/bruinx-dashboards/faculty-demos-2/>. Fall enrollment statistics: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/fall-enrollment-glance>.

applicants.²⁰ Are there similar things happening in graduate admissions in your department, in job searches, in faculty promotions? What adjectives do you use to describe students and colleagues in letters of recommendation or promotion evaluations? Are your standards truly fair and objective? Frequently we fail to apply standards equally and evenly. I can think of several instances at my own institution where faculty of color were required to produce markedly more publications than white colleagues for the same promotion: eight articles instead of six for a tenure promotion; twelve articles instead of six for a tenure promotion; or more books for promotion to full professor. In the end, these differing requirements for faculty of color, usually cloaked as arguments about “quality,” function as forms of gatekeeping intended to preserve the status quo of decades past. I couldn’t help but think about these calls for “quality” and “meritocracy” when the recent college admissions scandal broke, revealing how wealthy families had paid off admissions officials and test takers to gain admission to prestigious schools.²¹

Be mindful of inequities in service at your university. The amount of extra, usually invisible, labor that faculty of color do is considerable.²² At my own institution, UCLA, with 21.2 percent of its undergraduate students but only 6.6 percent of its faculty identifying as “Latina/o/x,” Latinx professors are overburdened to the breaking point. Students of color seek us out because they feel more comfortable with us; and we feel a moral imperative and responsibility to our communities to respond. In addition to weekly meetings with my advisees and students in my classes, last quarter at UCLA I also met with students who didn’t have enough food to eat; a student unable to pay rent; and others facing immigration challenges within their families. I’ve been reprimanded by an administrator for advising too many students—while in the same conversation being asked to serve on yet another committee that will value my “diverse” perspective! This is, of course, not only a burden for university faculty of color. It extends to others, frequently women, but anyone who seems generous and understanding. A recent *Harvard Business Review* study demonstrated that while

frequently called on to do “diversity work,” people of color who do strive for diversity are penalized in the workplace. Conversely, white employees who do the same work are praised.²³ I am not aware of a similar study on the academy, but based on anecdotal evidence, I’m guessing the results would likely be the same.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Demographics in the United States are changing. Since 1980 we’ve witnessed a dramatic increase in the percentage of Latina/o/xs, as noted above. Current statistics suggest that we are on the brink of a similar increase in Asian immigrants. Between 2000 and 2015 the US Asian American population grew 72 percent, and they are now the fastest growing ethnic or racial subgroup in the country.²⁴ As a result of these demographic changes, our universities, the art world, and our society are changing. Diversifying the academy and art world to create real intellectual diversity, rooted in the facts of our differences, is the proper response to these changes. Consider this editorial comment a call for inclusion.

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude and support to the editors of and contributors to this issue’s Dialogue section. I appreciate their personal and intellectual courage in carrying out such an important study. Thank you for opening this discussion, and thank you to allies of the past, present, and future who have used their own privilege to support diversity work in academe. May we all be inspired to be courageous and stand up for what is just and right.

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20. Colleen Flaherty, “Help That Hurts Women,” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 19, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/19/study-finds-recommendation-letters-inadvertently-signal-doubt-about-female>.

21. Rebecca Hallek, “Who’s Been Charged in the College Admissions Cheating Scandal? Here’s the Full List,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/us/felicity-huffman-lori-loughlin-massimo-giannulli.html>.

22. Zak Vescera, “The Unseen Labour of Racialized Faculty,” *The Ubyyssey*, 2019, <https://www.ubyssey.ca/magazine/unseen-labour/>.

23. Stefanie K. Johnson and David R. Hekman, “Women and Minorities Are Penalized for Promoting Diversity,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 23, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/03/women-and-minorities-are-penalized-for-promoting-diversity>.

24. Gustavo López, Neil G. Ruiz, and Eileen Patten, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population,” Pew Research Center, September 8, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.