
Dialogues

Addressing Diversity and Inclusion in Latin American and Latinx Art History

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ABSTRACT The inauguration of *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, the first art history journal of its kind, stands as a testament to the great strides made by the indefatigable work of both long-standing and emerging members of this scholarly community to promote the field and fight for its inclusion within mainstream art historical discourse. With unprecedented growth and expansion, however, comes the need for reflection. This Dialogue addresses the issue of diversity and inclusion within the profession. While most of us are well-versed in identifying systemic inequities in the field in the face of a Eurocentric art historical canon and the institutions that support it, we have found a corresponding reluctance to address issues of exclusion and inequity in the profession. This Dialogue consists of three components: an introductory essay by Ananda Cohen-Aponte and Elena FitzPatrick Sifford addressing issues around diversity and inclusion in the profession; the results and analysis of findings from a demographic survey conducted by Cohen-Aponte and FitzPatrick Sifford of all tenured and tenure-track professors of Latin American and Latinx art history as well as graduate students at the ABD level in the United States; essays by invited scholars Beatriz E. Balanta, Kency Cornejo, Arlene Dávila, Emmanuel Ortega, Rose Salseda, and Lawrence Waldron that reflect on systemic inequities in the field and areas for growth.

KEYWORDS Diversity, inclusion, Latin American art history, Latinx art history, people of color

RESUMEN La inauguración de *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, la primera revista de historia del arte de estas características, es uno de los resultados de los grandes avances que se han dado gracias al trabajo incansable de miembros antiguos y nuevos de esta comunidad académica para promover este campo y luchar por su inclusión en los debates centrales de la comunidad académica que se dedica al estudio de la historia del arte. Sin embargo, con un crecimiento y expansión sin precedentes, surge la necesidad de la reflexión. Este Diálogo trata el tema de la diversidad y la inclusión dentro de la profesión. Si bien la mayoría de nosotros tenemos mucha experiencia a la hora de identificar desigualdades sistémicas en el campo, frente a un canon eurocéntrico de la historia del arte y de las instituciones que lo apoyan, hemos observado renuencia a hablar de los problemas de exclusión e inequidad en la profesión. Este Diálogo consta de tres componentes: un ensayo introductorio de Ananda Cohen-Aponte y Elena FitzPatrick Sifford, que aborda temas relacionados con la diversidad y la inclusión en la profesión; los resultados y el análisis de los hallazgos de una encuesta demográfica realizada por Cohen-Aponte y FitzPatrick Sifford a profesores de planta en el campo de la historia del arte latinoamericano y latinx y a estudiantes de posgrado en los Estados Unidos de nivel ABD, es decir, que están en la última fase de la redacción de sus tesis; ensayos de los académicos invitados Beatriz Balanta, Kency Cornejo, Arlene Dávila, Emmanuel Ortega, Rose Salseda y Lawrence Waldron que reflexionan sobre las desigualdades sistémicas en el campo y oportunidades de crecimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE Diversidad, historia del arte latinoamericano, inclusión, personas de color

RESUMO A inauguração da Revista de Cultura Visual Latino-americana e Latina, a primeira revista de história da arte do seu gênero, é um testemunho dos grandes avanços feitos pelo incansável trabalho de membros antigos e emergentes dessa comunidade acadêmica para promover o campo e lutar por sua inclusão no discurso mainstream da história da arte. Com esse crescimento e expansão sem precedentes, no entanto, surge a necessidade de reflexão. Este Diálogo aborda a questão da diversidade e inclusão dentro da profissão. Enquanto a maioria de nós é bem versada em identificar desigualdades sistêmicas no campo em face de um cânone histórico-artístico eurocêntrico e das instituições que o apoiam, encontramos uma relutância correspondente em abordar questões de exclusão e desigualdade na profissão. Este Diálogo consiste em

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três componentes: um ensaio introdutório de Ananda Cohen-Aponte e Elena FitzPatrick Sifford endereçando questões sobre diversidade e inclusão na profissão; os resultados e análise dos resultados de uma pesquisa demográfica conduzida por Cohen-Aponte e FitzPatrick Sifford de todos os professores titulares e com titularização condicional de história da arte latino-americana ou latina, bem como alunos de pós-graduação no nível ABD nos Estados Unidos; ensaios por acadêmicos convidados Beatriz Balanta, Kency Cornejo, Arlene Dávila, Emmanuel Ortega, Rose Salseda e Lawrence Waldron, que refletem sobre desigualdades sistêmicas no campo e áreas para crescimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Diversidade, história da arte latino-americana, história da arte latina, inclusão, pessoas de cor

The fields of Latin American and Latinx art history have grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade, as attested by a wealth of exhibitions, scholarly monographs, and dissertations in progress that cover a range of topics, from Teotihuacán material culture of seventh-century Mexico to Afro-Dominican artists of twenty-first-century New York City. The energetic participation among professors, curators, graduate students, independent scholars, and artists to promote the field and fight for its inclusion within mainstream art historical discourse has yielded rich results. Latin American and Latinx art has become an enduring and growing presence within college curricula; conferences such as the College Art Association (CAA), the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), and the Latina/o Studies Association (LSA) feature panels dedicated to these topics; and scholarly associations such as the Association for Latin American Art (ALAA), the Latino Art Now! biennial conferences, and the US Latinx Art Forum (USLAF) help to establish networking opportunities and enhance the visibility of our fields to broader audiences. Indeed, the inauguration of *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, one of the first journals of its kind, testifies to the great strides made by the indefatigable work of both long-standing and emerging members of this scholarly community. One could say that the final phase of infrastructure has been laid to ensure the vibrant growth and longevity of art historical fields that have occupied the margins of US academe for decades. With unprecedented growth and expansion, however, comes the need for reflection. This Dialogue addresses the issue of diversity and inclusion within the profession.

We have noticed the ease with which colleagues can speak to the marginalization of Latin American and Latinx art within the canon of art history. There exist ample platforms through which scholars have voiced concern over the delegitimization or near exclusion of our fields of study within institutions of higher learning, museums, and galleries, and proposed strategies for asserting its inclusion. These critiques have been waged in public fora such as

conferences and museums and have drawn significant attention to the importance of Latin American and Latinx art's seat at the proverbial art historical table. At the classroom level, many have probably given preambles in their introductory courses on Latin American and Latinx art about its historic exclusion from the canon. Yet we have found a corresponding silence on issues of exclusion and inequity in the profession itself.

This Dialogue was inspired by our own realization of this disconnect at a recent CAA panel on pre-Columbian art; the presentations were superb contributions that brought new findings and methodological perspectives to the study of visual cultures of the ancient Americas. Yet as the session ended and we stood up to gather our belongings, we glimpsed the panorama of the large conference room, turned to each other, and asked, almost in unison, "But where are the people of color?" As the only women of color in the room, something felt deeply uncomfortable about the normalization of a virtually all-white conference panel and audience discussing the visual culture of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, especially in the city of Los Angeles, given its significant population of Indigenous Mexicans and Central Americans.¹ We started to list the number of Black and Brown folks working in the discipline of pre-Columbian art history and could only come up with a handful. We began speculating on why the demographics of the discipline skew overwhelmingly white for the earlier periods (pre-Columbian and colonial), whereas modern, contemporary, and Latinx art history have much higher proportions of people of color (albeit fewer in number) both in the pathway and the

1. I (Elena FitzPatrick Sifford) identify as a Black woman with multiethnic ancestry. My mother is Afro-Panamanian with roots in the West Indies, and my father is Irish American. I (Ananda Cohen-Aponte) identify as a Brown Cuban Jew; my mother's family is Afro-Cuban and my father's family is Jewish American. We mention our personal background both in solidarity with our contributors and respondents, and to further highlight the incredible diversity of *latinidad*.

professoriate.² In the midst of ongoing calls for museums and educational spaces to not just diversify, but decolonize, we felt that the time was ripe to take stock of the state of the field with regard to racial representation. But before we could begin to investigate pathway issues, micro- and macroaggressions faced by students and faculty of color, and gatekeeping mechanisms that enable the maintenance of a white-dominated status quo, we needed a more concrete sense of the actual demographics of our field. We had no data on the demographics of art history within academia other than the frequently cited 2015 Andrew W. Mellon Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey, which reveals significant structural barriers for racial equity within the art museum sector.³ It is our hope that more systematic studies are conducted for the discipline of art history at large, especially in light of CAA's establishment in 2018 of a Committee on Diversity Practices and appointment of Roberto Tejada as its first vice president for diversity and inclusion.⁴

We decided to design and implement an anonymous survey that would give us concrete data on which to ground a conversation on inequities within Latin American and Latinx art history. While we are both specialists in pre-Columbian and colonial Latin American art with additional interests in contemporary Latinx art history, we recognize that even the framing of this study can be perceived as problematic, since many specialists in Chicana and Latinx art do not view their work within a Latin Americanist/diasporic paradigm. As Rose Salseda notes in her essay in this section, we have seen increasing calls to

understand Latinx art as American art; Arlene Dávila's piece likewise discusses the neoliberal impulse that undergirds elisions of Latin American and Latinx art. While we affirm these important interventions, we chose to bring together these fields in both the demographic survey as well as in our solicitations for essay contributions in the same spirit in which this journal was founded; as editor in chief Charlene Villaseñor Black states, "It's not that Latin American and Latinx art are the same—it's that putting them into conversation can be a powerful way to break down nationalist categories in favor of hemispheric conversations."⁵

In September 2018, our survey, entitled "Demographic Survey of Scholars of Latin American and Latinx Art in the United States," was sent to tenured and tenure-track faculty specializing in Latin American and/or Latinx/Chicana art at US colleges and universities, as well as ABD graduate students in the United States.⁶ We recognize that a survey focused on US institutions does not capture the obvious foundational role of Latin American institutions and universities in art historical discourse. This study does not

5. From her text introducing *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/35806/introducing-latin-american-and-latinx-visual-culture/>.

6. This survey was granted exemption from IRB review according to Cornell IRB policy and under paragraph(s) 2 of the Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations 45CFR 46.101(b). As a point of clarification, while we made use of the ALAA and USLAF directories in creating the database of individuals to whom we would send the survey, the survey was not sponsored or represented by either of those organizations. Moreover, the survey is by no means to be understood as a comprehensive assessment of the entire field of Latin American and Latinx art scholarship. We note the unfortunate exclusion of adjunct and contingent faculty from this equation, as well as early-stage graduate students, due to the difficulty of tracking names and contact information. Moreover, this survey did not include curators or museum educators. These omissions are due to the difficulty of obtaining systematic data and thus potentially skewing our sample, as these individuals do not consistently appear on department pages or museum websites. Questions of marginalization and exploitation of contingent faculty within our discipline deserve critical examination, and we hope that our fellow colleagues will take on this charge in a separate study. We also recognize that a survey focused on US institutions does not capture the obvious foundational role of Latin American institutions and universities in art historical discourse. This study does not intend to exclude voices, but to specifically identify trends within the US university system where the majority of PhDs in the field are being produced. It is our hope that this Dialogue serves as a starting point for much-needed future conversations that address these lacunae. We are especially grateful to Gilda Posada, Corey Stout, and Rose Salseda for their help in building and finessing our database of scholars and graduate students. We also extend special thanks to Crystal Adams and Shannon Marie Gleeson for their assistance in survey design and data analysis. We are also grateful to Charlene Villaseñor Black and Emily Engel for their enthusiasm and support for this project. This Dialogue is dedicated in loving memory of Linda Marie Rodriguez.

2. We use the term "pathway" instead of "pipeline" in alignment with Indigenous protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

3. For a discussion of the findings see "Case Studies in Museum Diversity," Mellon.org, January 22, 2018, <https://mellon.org/resources/news/articles/case-studies-museum-diversity/>; this essay also benefited from the insights discussed in Jordana Moore Saggese, Camara Dia Holloway, T'ai Smith, Tina Takemoto, and Tobias Wolford, "Beyond the Numbers Game: Diversity in Theory and Practice," *Art Journal* 75, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 98–109.

4. To date, the only study of racial representation within the realm of art history is an informal one conducted in 2015 by Steven Nelson, professor of African and African American art at UCLA, which revealed that there were only six Black full professors of art history in the United States (and of these six, five are men). See Seph Rodney, "Why Are There So Few Black Full Professors of Art History in the US?" *Hyperallergic*, November 30, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/256013/why-are-there-so-few-black-full-time-art-historians-in-the-us/>. As of 2018 the number has risen to around nine or ten, a small but encouraging step (personal correspondence with Steven Nelson, March 21, 2018). As a point of comparison, there are four full professors of Latinx art in the discipline of art history, all of whom are Latinx or Chicana/o, and the number increases to about ten if one considers departments beyond art history. We thank Rose Salseda for providing us with this information.

intend to exclude voices, but to specifically identify trends within the US university system where a significant number of PhDs in the field are being produced. It is our hope that this Dialogue serves as a starting point for much-needed future conversations that address these lacunae. We sent the survey to scholars in the fields of art history as well as American studies, Chicana/o studies, anthropology, Latina/o studies, and other related disciplines because we recognize that not all scholars of Latin American and particularly Latinx and Chicana art are based in art history departments.⁷ In compiling our database of faculty and ABD graduate students to whom we would send the survey, we made use of our contacts and networks within ALAA, USLAF, and other groups to put together the most comprehensive pool possible.

The survey asked participants to identify their primary and secondary art historical specialties; their gender; their racial identity; and whether they are a US-born and/or US-raised Latinx or a foreign national.⁸ The survey allowed participants to elaborate on their identity or write in their own if the given categories did not correspond to their self-identification.⁹ The survey also included the following open-ended questions: “Did your identity shape or direct your art historical trajectory? If so, describe below”; “Has your identity informed your scholarly research? If so, explain”; and “If you have any further comments regarding issues of diversity and inclusion in the field of Latin American/Latinx art history, or in the discipline of art history as a whole, please elaborate here.” We included a checkbox option for people to opt in to have their survey responses anonymized and included (possibly in lightly edited, condensed form) in this Dialogue piece. While we had some initial projections about

7. Our survey draws inspiration from the quantitative and qualitative work reflected in Rita González’s critical 2003 article tracing index citations for Latinx artists and Adriana Zavala’s 2015 article “Latin@ Art at the Intersection,” which explored the invisibility of Latinx art history in academia through quantitative analysis of CAA’s dissertation index and course offerings in US art history departments. Rita González, “An Undocumented History: A Survey of Index Citations for Latino and Latina Artists,” *CSRC Research Report*, no. 2 (August 2003): 1–10; Adriana Zavala, “Latin@ Art at the Intersection,” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 125–40.

8. Since “Latinx” has been adopted transnationally, we wanted to further distinguish between Latin American nationals and US born/raised Latinxs due to significant class and racial differences between these two groups.

9. We used the following racial categories in our survey: Asian, Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern/Arab, Multiracial/Multiethnic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White, Other. We departed from US Census categories in order to better understand our sample, particularly with the use of the category multiracial/multiethnic.

trends in the ethnic and racial composition of Latin American and Latinx art history and its various subdisciplines, a formal survey would provide both quantitative and qualitative data on the current state of field as well as participants’ perspectives on racial inequities within Latin American and Latinx art history and academia at large.

SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey was sent to 238 US-based scholars. Of those, 111 responded, giving us a response rate of approximately 47 percent.¹⁰ We will first provide some basic demographic statistics, followed by our analysis of the most relevant data points within our sample.¹¹ It came as no surprise that 72 percent of our sample was US born. The majority of the remaining group (23 percent) were Latin American foreign nationals, with South America in particular having a strong showing, with scholars from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru. Mexico and Cuba had three each, but the rest of the Caribbean and Central America were lacking representation, with only one Central American country represented. Keeping in mind that almost two-thirds of the sample was US born, we were pleasantly surprised to find that 50 percent of our sample identified as Hispanic or Latinx.

Of those 50 percent, almost a quarter identified racially as white, revealing that only 38 percent of our Latinx respondents identify as people of color.¹² A consideration of whiteness within the paradigm of Latinx identity may strike some as paradoxical, but we acknowledge the colonial and national legacies of whitening campaigns that have stripped Latin Americans and Latinxs of their Black and Indigenous ancestry, as well as the historical racialization of Latinxs in the United States as “other” or “nonwhite” regardless of phenotype.¹³ Indeed, scholars such as Arlene

10. Of the 238 scholars sent the survey, the subdiscipline breakdown is as follows:

pre-Columbian: 54; colonial: 40; modern/contemporary: 117; and Latinx/Chicana: 27, which include faculty of all ranks and ABD graduate students. While we recognize that many scholars study more than one period, for simplicity’s sake we went with the earliest temporal period listed.

11. Percentages have been rounded as necessary to the nearest whole percent.

12. We define “person of color” here as any respondent who selected one or more of the nonwhite racial categories provided in the survey, in any combination.

13. The literature on this topic is vast. For a broad overview see José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe R. Feagin, eds., *How the United States Racializes Latinas: White Hegemony and Its Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2009);

Dávila have used the term “ethnorace” to account for the nuances of *Latinidad*, in which factors beyond skin color such as language and culture contribute to this racialization.¹⁴ Keeping in mind these nuances, we feel that it is important to consider difference within the category of Hispanic/Latinx, since ignoring race within Latinx populations flattens out the experiences of Black and Brown Latinxs and perpetuates the myth that we are all the same. A survey respondent who self-identified as Latinx, Black, and multiethnic aptly described this issue: “Part of my commitment [to the field] has come from a frustration at the misrepresentation of my cultures [and] refusal to address race in Latinx contexts.” This Dialogue addresses that refusal head-on using the micro data of our contributor essays alongside the macro data from our survey.

We asked a number of demographic questions in the survey, but we also had open-cell responses for participants to reflect on their own positionality in the field and offer general thoughts on diversity and inclusion in art history. We will begin by analyzing how the participants responded to the following prompt: “If you have any further comments regarding issues of diversity and inclusion in the field of Latin American/Latinx art history, or in the discipline of art history as a whole, please elaborate here.” Although this was the third open prompt, we feel it is necessary to discuss first because it points to an important issue of selection bias.

Of the 111 responses, we received only forty-two comments in this cell, meaning, only 38 percent of the survey participants answered this question. Of those forty-two comments, twenty-five (approximately 60 percent) were from people of color. Considering that people of color made up only 32 percent of respondents as a whole, this indicates that white people were far less likely to answer the

Wendy D. Roth, *Race Migrations: Latinos and the Cultural Transformation of Race* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). For a discussion of the impact of mass mobilization on identity formation and perceptions of racialization among Latinxs see Chris Zepeda-Millán and Sophia J. Wallace, “Racialization in Times of Contention: How Social Movements Influence Latino Racial Identity,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 1, no. 4 (2013): 510–27. We also thank the participants in this Dialogue for a lively and informative discussion of these issues.

14. As Dávila asserts, “The concept of ethnorace allows us to acknowledge that, while some members of a particular ethnic group may be visibly white, by mere membership in a racialized grouping, their whiteness remains suspect and conditional, rather than a de facto guarantor of unmarked mainstream status—especially when considerations of class, language competence, and cultural capital are considered.” Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 18.

open-cell questions, even when they were asked not for identity-based reflections but for general thoughts on diversity/inclusion in the field. Extrapolating from there, while it is impossible to know the demographics of the remaining 127 Latin American/Latinx art historians who were sent the survey and did not respond, we believe that group to be largely white. This phenomenon corresponds with broader empirical studies that demonstrate that white people are in general less likely to respond to and engage with issues of diversity and inclusion than POC.¹⁵ Our white participants corroborated this by being less likely to respond to the open-cell questions compared to POC. We believe that there may be selection bias at play whereby Latinx and/or POC were more likely to fill out the survey, thus creating the impression that the field is more diverse than it really is. The percentages discussed below thus do not represent the field in its entirety and provide a rosier picture than the reality on the ground; nonetheless, the data still offers crucial insights into major demographic trends in the discipline.

Many of the responses from Latinx and/or POC, as well as a handful of white allies, echoed the sentiment of the overwhelming whiteness of the field of Latin American art history. Numerous participants did, however, note that the fields of Latinx and Chicax art history are far more diverse than Latin American art history. Our numbers corroborate this impression: 90 percent of the scholars who listed Latinx and/or Chicax art history as their primary specialty themselves identified as either Latinx or Chicax. The large majority (82 percent) of those Latinx/Chicax specialists identified as POC, which indicates that of the subdisciplines we surveyed, the Latinx and Chicax fields are by far the most diverse. In comparison, the percentage of people who identified as Latinx from the remaining three subdisciplines are as follows: pre-Columbian (14 percent), colonial (50 percent), modern/contemporary (53 percent). The percentage of POC are

15. A study conducted by social psychologists E. Ashby Plant and David A. Butz used the term “avoidance focus” to describe the ways that their white participants avoided interracial interactions. E. Ashby Plant and David A. Butz, “The Causes and Consequences of an Avoidance-Focus for Interracial Interactions,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32, no. 6 (2006): 833–46. Similarly, Knowles, Lowery, Chow, and Unzueta argue that whites deny their privilege and distance themselves from the category of whiteness, which “promote[s] insensitivity and inaction with respect to racial inequality.” Knowles, Lowery, Chow, and Unzueta, “Deny, Distance, or Dismantle? How White Americans Manage a Privileged Identity,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 9, no. 6 (2014): 594–609.

as follows: pre-Columbian (21 percent), colonial (42 percent), modern/contemporary (42 percent).¹⁶ You will notice that pre-Columbian is by far the least diverse specialty; this squares with a document that Cecilia F. Klein, professor emerita of pre-Columbian art at the University of California at Los Angeles, graciously shared with us that lists US pre-Columbianists with PhDs who work with art and visual culture, updated as of July 2018; as she noted in the *LALVC* Dialogue published in January 2019, the majority of doctorates in pre-Columbian art history have gone to white people.¹⁷ Colonial and modern/contemporary straddle the middle, and Chicana/Latinx is far and away the most racially diverse field.

With these trends in mind, it is also worthwhile to consider diversity numbers in light of rank. We expected to find significant divergence of diversity based on rank, assuming that upper-level graduate students and early-level academics (such as nontenured assistant professors) were likely to be a more diverse group than tenured associate and full or named professors. Instead, the numbers are relatively flat across the board, though notable that the ABD graduate students were the most heavily Latinx group at 59 percent.¹⁸ The next “most Latinx” group was not surprisingly assistant professors, at 50 percent, and the least was full or named professors at 44 percent. We were particularly disheartened though not surprised to see the near absence of Black scholars: just two participants out of the entire 111 identified as Black.

Having surveyed the key demographic findings regarding the ethnic and racial breakdown of the field and our subspecialties, we will now analyze the ways in which the participants responded to our two prompts that asked them to reflect on how their identity informs their research and professional trajectory. The first question in this category was “Has your identity informed your scholarly research? If so, explain.” We found that identity was far

more connected to research for POC and/or Latinx scholars than for whites.¹⁹ In fact, of the forty participants who either left this cell blank or answered no, 81 percent of them were white. This indicates that of the seventy-five white scholars who answered the survey, thirty-five (47 percent) of them felt that their identity had nothing to do with their work. One of the most illuminating aspects of the data analysis was, in fact, the blank spaces.

Contrast this with statements made by a Chicana participant: “Everyone’s identity informs their scholarly research. No one is neutral or objective. My identity informs my research because as a woman of color who is racialized as nonwhite, I find an interest in telling stories that are hidden or erased by white racial primacy and heteropatriarchy. This question is a disappointment because it presumes that someone out there is *not* operating from a place of identity formation and positionality.”²⁰ Indeed, for numerous Latinx and POC participants, the question was a preposterous one. Many of these scholars expressed a desire to reclaim a lost or ignored history, and others referenced their specialized knowledge and experience as POC and/or Latinxs that aided in their approach to art historical research.

While many white participants declined or disagreed with this premise, some white participants did connect their identity—at times as women, or LGBTQ, or having a particular place of origin—to their research.²¹ One participant who identified as a “Caucasian (queer) male” wrote that his identity “made me wish to resist the canons that dictate, from an art historical perspective, that the hierarchy of aesthetic values culminated in the Euro-American, classically-based western tradition.” Clearly for many participants, identity is a major factor in the topics and modes of inquiry employed in their research.

Moving beyond the topic of research, the next question asked: “Did your racial or ethnic identity have any impact

16. These numbers of course reflect only the demographics of those scholars within our survey criteria who chose to participate. We remind readers of the selection bias mentioned above whereby the percentages of Latinx and/or POC reflected here are likely higher than those of the field as a whole.

17. Personal correspondence with Cecilia Klein, November 3, 2018.

18. The breakdown was as follows: of sixteen full professor participants, seven (44 percent) were Latinx and seven (44 percent) were POC. Of thirty-three associate professors, sixteen (48 percent) were Latinx and ten (30 percent) were POC. Of the twenty-four assistant professors, twelve (50 percent) were Latinx and eleven (45 percent) were POC. Of the twenty-seven ABD graduate students, sixteen (59 percent) were Latinx and eleven (41 percent) were POC.

19. Of the thirty-six scholars of color who took the survey, twenty-nine (81 percent) felt moderately to strongly that their identity impacted their research. Of the fifty-five Latinx participants, forty (73 percent) felt their identity impacted their research. Of the seventy-five white survey participants who answered the survey, forty (53 percent) felt that their identity impacted their research.

20. This question, while admittedly problematic, was a provocation for the types of responses that ensued.

21. A handful of white scholars from California and the US Southwest cited their proximity to Mexico as offering a sense of affinity and cultural familiarity. Others mentioned their Mediterranean background and its similarity to aspects of Latin American culture, particularly vis-à-vis the Catholic Church.

on your art historical and professional trajectory? If so, how?” This question aimed to prompt discussion of inclusion and equity in the profession. We were hoping that participants would reflect specifically on how their racial or ethnic identity played a role in their education, training, and professional lives as art historians.

As we expected, there were many painful stories shared in this portion of the survey. Numerous participants spoke of art history as white supremacist and exclusionary to POC artists and scholars. Others spoke of racism they have encountered. One Indigenous, multiracial Latinx respondent shared the following: “There have been negative impacts due to my ethnicity—discriminatory incidents going back to when I was a grad student, that continued on the job market, and at my jobs, including my current position. These experiences, and the fact that art history is overwhelmingly white, led me to focus energy on mentoring students of color at my various jobs.” Indeed, numerous POC participants spoke of putting in extra work to mentor students of color. In contrast, very few white participants spoke of mentoring POC students, though many did mention their efforts at diversifying the curriculum, a phenomenon explicitly addressed in Lawrence Waldron’s contribution to this Dialogue. We have observed both anecdotally as well as through this survey data that discussions centered exclusively on curricular inclusion conveniently sidestep more difficult conversations around who stands behind the podium.

One POC participant spoke of the invisible labor of mentoring: “The diversity fatigue is real. The added emotional labor of existing as a queer person of color in art history with a political identity makes you fluent in white oppression.” Some white participants revealed themselves to be allies, reflecting on their white privilege, one pointing out that she had likely been “handed opportunities, given the benefit of the doubt, and been helped and advised better because I am white.” But the number of participants who openly acknowledged their white privilege was quite small: only seven out of the seventy-five white participants made mention of it in the identity-based questions. Of those seven, four were graduate students. Following the lead of this small number of allies, we need more white scholars (and especially those in senior ranks) to have the hard conversations and work to address these systemic inequities. In light of these trends, we found it imperative to reflect on the factors that contribute to the field’s lack of

racial diversity, and the important gains that can be made from promoting a more inclusive community of scholars.

THE K-12 LANDSCAPE

Any consideration of inequality within the discipline of art history must look beyond the parameters of undergraduate and graduate education to understand barriers of access long before undergraduates enter the college classroom. Given art history’s absence from most K–12 curricula, many undergraduates do not even know that the discipline exists when they arrive on college campuses. But even if they cannot define art history if asked, most have absorbed the dominant narratives of fine art as elite, housed in a museum, and made by (white, male) artist geniuses. That is, they have a keen sense of artworks and art spaces as opaque, exclusionary, and inaccessible even if they don’t have the language to identify this as “art history.”

Undergraduates will likely instantly recognize the *Mona Lisa* but feel hard pressed to name a Latin American or Latinx artist besides Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Certainly, these trends differ based on geography; West Coast students, even non-Latinx and non-Chicanx ones, may have a more inclusive visual vocabulary and knowledge of Latin American, Latinx, or Chicanx art because of proximity to those communities and the cultural institutions that support them. Nevertheless, we would argue that the framework through which the uninitiated perceive art history remains largely intact due to ongoing disparities of access to arts institutions, the persistence of Eurocentric approaches to art history within museums and college curricula, and the predominant whiteness and elitism of the art world, all of which coalesce into the cultural representations of art history that youth absorb through mainstream and social media.

But at the same time that disparities of access and representation persist, we are also witnessing unprecedented degrees of access to information and digital reproductions of artworks that would have been unimaginable just two decades ago. Museum collections across the world have digitized their collections; websites like Smarthistory have eliminated the need for expensive art history textbooks; Google image searches pull up artworks from any period or place in the world with lightning-fast (if sometimes unreliable) results; Instagram and Twitter have entire accounts and hashtags dedicated to the visual arts and their histories. In fact, even meme culture can serve as another

trajectory of access; to take one example, the trippinthroughtime subreddit provides an impressive overview of Western (and some Latin American) art history through the lens of a young, savvy internet subculture, with user-captioned images of paintings and manuscript illuminations to provoke laughter and entertainment.

Youths today may miss out on critical context or background information about a given work of art, yet their visual vocabulary is far more expansive than the average undergraduate who grew up in the 1990s or earlier. But perhaps more importantly, Twitter hashtags, Instagram feeds, and art historical memes circulated on Reddit enable youth to become participants in a discourse around art history rather than as passive recipients. It is perhaps with the rise of digital vernacular culture that youth from all walks of life, whether within or outside of the university system, break out from digital into public space to take down Confederate monuments, protest exclusionary museum practices,²² or conduct “uncomfortable art tours” that explore the colonial legacies of Western museum collections.²³

One of our jobs as graduate students, college professors, educators, researchers, and museum professionals is to suture the imaginary gap between institutionalized and vernacular art spaces, both physical and digital. There are already grassroots, Latinx-run platforms that do this important work of bringing art history to youth of color who may otherwise lack access to formal knowledge of the discipline, from Emmanuel Ortega’s co-hosted podcast “Latinos Who Lunch,” to Bronx-based Dominican journalist and curator Kiara Ventura’s “Artsy Window,” a platform through which she live-streams art history classes on emerging artists of color via Instagram Live.²⁴ These platforms speak to the

22. At the recent 2018 Columbus Day protests that occurred at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, according to reporters at *Hyperallergic*, “One student named Hayley who attended the event mentioned that she had followed Decolonize This Place’s Instagram account for years before joining the anti-Columbus Day demonstration, which she could do because she had the day off from school.” Zachary Small, “Around 1,000 People Attend Anti-Columbus Day Tour at American Museum of Natural History,” *Hyperallergic*, October 8, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/464475/american-museum-of-natural-history-third-annual-anti-columbus-day-tour/>.

23. Aditya Iyer, “Alternative Museum Tours Explore Colonial Loot, Biased Narratives,” *Al Jazeera*, September 16, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/alternative-museum-tours-explore-colonial-loot-biased-narratives-180915213140176.html>.

24. See <http://www.latinoswholunch.com/>; and <http://www.artsywindow.com/>.

ingenuity of a new generation of scholars and creatives who are bridging vernacular and institutional registers of artistic knowledge to open up new ways of “doing” art history in the world. Quite frankly, we find that it is folks of color in contingent or freelance positions who are making the most direct impact in bringing Black and Brown youth and students into the conversation.

FIXING A WAYWARD PATHWAY

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Latinxs make up just 4 percent of the professoriate. The numbers are equally abysmal for African Americans, who make up 6 percent, and Native Americans at less than 1 percent.²⁵ These statistics contrast significantly with national figures: US population estimates for 2017 are 13 percent African American, 18 percent Latino, and 1.3 percent American Indian. Asians are overrepresented in the professoriate, coming in at 10 percent while the national population of Asian Americans is 5.8 percent, although disparities persist for low-income Asian Americans as well as for Southeast and South Asians.²⁶

These numbers stand in stark contrast to the unprecedented rise in enrollments of students of color, particularly Latinx and African American students, to US colleges and universities. Latinx students make up around 17 percent of college enrollments, an increase of 114 percent in the past decade (and these numbers rise in areas with large Latinx communities; for example, Latinx students make up around 25 percent of the student population at most University of California campuses).²⁷ African Americans comprise around 16 percent of college enrollments, a steadily growing number over the past decade. Despite these promising undergraduate numbers, few find their way into art history classrooms and even fewer become art history majors. The only subdiscipline poised to bridge this gulf between undergraduate and

25. See <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61>.

26. US Census Bureau QuickFacts, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>. For a more nuanced take on these figures see Leslie Bow, “Difference without Grievance: Asian Americas as the Almost Minority,” in *Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure*, ed. Patricia A. Matthew (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 67–79.

27. Felicia Mello, “At California’s Top Public Universities, Here’s Why a Dearth of Latino Professors Matters,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.dailynews.com/2018/03/14/at-californias-top-public-universities-heres-why-a-dearth-of-latino-professors-matters/>.

faculty demographics is Latinx art. As Rose Salseda points out in her essay here, these gains were hard-won through continued advocacy and infrastructure building. Adriana Zavala, in her 2015 *Aztlán* essay “Latin@ Art at the Intersection,” mentioned the importance of cross-listing her courses in Latinx art history with American studies and Latino studies programs to bring more Latinx and POC students into the classroom; small gestures like these can have a great impact in building the pathway.²⁸ Latin Americanists of all time periods, and particularly those who specialize in the pre-Columbian and colonial eras, have a much longer way to go in terms of achieving equity in the field and can learn from the gains that have been made in the field of Latinx art.²⁹ Ironically, at the same time that the field has surpassed the others by leaps and bounds in terms of diversity and inclusion, Latinx art, as Arlene Dávila contends in the pages that follow, remains the most vulnerable to disinvestment and erasure.

One important place to start is through mentorship, both informally as well as through support and participation in programs specifically designed to increase the number of underrepresented minorities pursuing PhDs, such as the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. Studies have shown the disproportionate labor that faculty of color take on in mentoring students of color; many of us do this work because we know through personal experience that those students will fall through the cracks otherwise, whether because of (at best) failure to recognize talent or (at worst) overt hostility.³⁰ Moreover, the narrow ways through which a predominantly white professoriate identify (or fail to identify) talent also perpetuates a homogenous academic community. For example, recent studies have found that Black students are far more likely to be identified as gifted by Black teachers.³¹

28. Zavala, “Latin@ Art at the Intersection,” 127–28.

29. We think it is important to point out that three of the contributors to this Dialogue (Cohen-Aponte, FitzPatrick Sifford, and Waldron) all trained under Eloise Quiñones Keber, one of the first Mexican Americans to receive a PhD in pre-Columbian art history in the United States.

30. The term “cultural taxation” was developed by Amado Padilla to describe the extra burden placed on faculty of color. This often plays out in unwritten expectations for mentoring students of color. Amado Padilla, “Ethnic Minority Scholars, Research, and Mentoring: Current and Future Issues,” *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 4 (May 1994): 24–27. See also Lila Jacobs, José Cintrón, and Cecil E. Canton, eds., *The Politics of Survival in Academia: Narratives of Inequality, Resilience, and Success* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

31. Anya Kamenetz, “To Be Young, ‘Gifted’ and Black, It Helps to Have a Black Teacher,” NPR.org, January 20, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/>

While myriad socioeconomic factors contribute to low numbers of students of color entering the art history classroom, we would like to focus on the impact of gatekeeping and exclusion, whether intentional or not, as a disincentivizing factor. Art history classrooms remain overwhelmingly white and elite, on both sides of the podium. Despite recent overtures to democratize and decolonize the field, students internalize these associations, which are transmitted both via popular culture as well as through their own personal experiences in the museum and the classroom.³² One need only recall the iconic scene in the blockbuster film *Black Panther* (2018), in which Killmonger, a Black man, enters into a cinematic equivalent of the British Museum and is immediately followed around by guards. He meets with a white curator in the African wing, who rattles off the names and cultures of various masks and ritual items on display, performing her authority as gatekeeper of non-Western objects and privileged holder of specialized knowledge. While hyperbolic, the movie brilliantly taps into tropes with which many people of color are familiar: being eyed with suspicion at a museum; being condescended to by a white expert in non-Western art; being the only person of color in the room.

These boundaries and roadblocks may remain completely invisible to white scholars who view the classroom and museum as spaces for all, yet the convenience of invisibility for one party shifts the burden onto faculty, students, and practitioners of color to perpetuate the very fictions that damage us. We must take seriously the real barriers that prevent students of color from stepping into the art history classroom in the first place. Beatriz E. Balanta, Kency Cornejo, Emmanuel Ortega, and Rose Salseda speak to the myriad obstacles—veritable “battle zones,” as Cornejo describes them—that they faced in their

[cd/2016/01/20/463190789](https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-463190789)/to-be-young-gifted-and-black-it-helps-to-have-a-black-teacher.

32. Art history is seen as an elitist major, a perception reflected in popular culture. For example, the 2003 film *Mona Lisa Smile* portrayed an art history classroom at prestigious, wealthy, all-white Wellesley College. And it was no coincidence that the popular 1990s *Cosby Show* spin-off *A Different World* featured Whitley Gilbert, the most privileged and lightest-skinned character, as an art history major at the (fictional) historically Black Hillman College. More recently, in the TV show *Jane the Virgin* about a mixed-status Venezuelan family in Miami, the mother decides to go back to school and immediately feels alienated and uncomfortable in her art history class. While race is not specifically mentioned, it lingers in the subtext, as she is the only visibly brown person in the room. In short, our popular culture both reflects and reinforces perceptions surrounding the elitism of the discipline of art history and its study.

path to the professoriate. These testimonies underscore that the predominantly white spaces of academia and of art history in particular are that way not by happenstance, but by design.

In our experiences as adjuncts within the City University of New York (CUNY) system during our graduate training, followed by contingent and tenure-track positions at other universities in our postgraduate years, which include a large state school in the US South (Louisiana State University), small liberal arts colleges (Smith College and Muhlenberg College), an Ivy League institution (Cornell University), and one art school (Pratt Institute), one commonality emerged from our varied experiences: the CUNY classrooms were the only spaces in which we taught art history to predominantly working-class students of color.

The CUNY system has one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation; in fall 2017, undergraduate enrollment was 76.3 percent students of color (American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Hispanic), which means that nearly every classroom, regardless of discipline, will consist of predominantly students of color.³³ Moreover, a large percentage of the white students come from low-income and/or immigrant backgrounds. As of 2016, the number of full-time underrepresented CUNY faculty is 34.5 percent, which the university system has sought to increase through a number of strategic initiatives.³⁴ The promising trends within the CUNY system, however, do not hold up in the majority of college classrooms. While we do not actively collect demographic data on our current college classrooms, we have anecdotally noted that Black and Latinx students comprise a minority, and even fewer of these go on to pursue art history majors or graduate work.

In my (Cohen-Aponte) past six years at Cornell, I issue a student survey to every class I have taught that includes questions about prior experience in art history. The most commonly cited response is family trips to the Met or the Louvre, as well as AP art history in high school. These responses closely map onto the majority white, middle- and upper-class demographics of my

33. For CUNY enrollment numbers by race and ethnicity see http://www.cuny.edu/irdata/book/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0015_RACE_TOT_PCT.rpt.pdf.

34. See the City University of New York Office of Recruitment and Diversity 2016–17 Annual Report, <http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/hr/diversity-and-recruitment/ORDAnnualReport2017.pdf>.

classes, and speak to family wealth and privilege that enabled international trips to see art and enrollment in a specialized AP course found most commonly in elite high schools. This stands in stark contrast to the most commonly cited reason for enrollment in my pre-Columbian course at City College- CUNY: a desire to learn about the art of one's ancestors, or to learn about art outside of a Western framework. These divergent patterns bring to the fore two major trends that deserve further consideration: the inequities of access to art historical knowledge prior to matriculation, and the differing motivations for art historical study among undergraduates who do enroll in these courses.

EDUCATION AS SELF-EXPLORATION

For students of color, their motivations for pursuing Latin American/Latinx topics are often linked to their desire to explore facets of their identity that have not been recognized in their secondary schooling. For example, elementary school students in the US educational system are still taught the myth that celebrates Christopher Columbus as a great hero, calling no attention to the atrocities committed by Europeans during their exploration of the Americas. Ongoing efforts to eliminate the few ethnic studies curricula that exist at the K–12 level, such as the attempted ban on Mexican American courses in Arizona public schools in 2017, only further alienates students of color from their own histories and reinforces the notion that history, art, and culture lie exclusively within the domain of Europe and Anglo America. And as Ortega discusses in his essay here, these phenomena are not limited to the United States; in Mexico, the K–12 curriculum is nearly devoid of references to the colonial period because right-wing political sectors seek to reinforce a fictionalized timeline of Mexican history that zooms straight from the Aztec empire to the Mexican Revolution. Too often the responsibility of teaching a more inclusive and decolonized history falls on parents rather than educators.

Emerging from white supremacist secondary education, students of color often flock to ethnic studies courses in college in search of a more nuanced understanding of both world history and the histories of their ancestral heritages. The pursuit of this knowledge is a critical form of self-exploration, which can be edifying for students who have not previously seen themselves reflected in their educational experiences. Many of the contributors to this Dialogue cite

that critical “aha!” moment at which they knew that they wanted to pursue a degree in art history, from Balanta’s readings of counter-narratives scribbled in the margins of a book on Pablo Picasso to Cornejo’s first exposure to the art of Emory Douglas. These visceral experiences of self-recognition through the visual archive—the realization that we can contest master narratives that circumscribe our existence and create new ones in their wake—go far beyond mere intellectual curiosity.

Furthermore, following the lead of Eugenia Zuroski, we contend that people of color hold specialized knowledge that is not a “natural byproduct of identity,” but the result of the hard work of “living through, and thinking through, unjust conditions of being.”³⁵ A recent racist incident at the Society for Classical Studies Conference in San Diego prompted much discussion.³⁶ During the Q&A session, independent scholar Mary Frances Williams claimed that Afro-Dominican classicist Dan-el Padilla Peralta only obtained his professorship at Princeton University because he is Black. In an online response, Padilla asserted, “I should have been hired because I was black: because my Afro-Latinity is the rock-solid foundation upon which the edifice of what I have accomplished and everything I hope to accomplish rests; because my black body’s vulnerability challenges and chastizes the universalizing pretensions of color-blind classics; because my black being-in-the-world makes it possible for me to ask new and different questions within the field, to inhabit new and different approaches to answering them, and to forge alliances with other scholars past and present whose black being-in-the-world has cleared the way for my leap into the breach.”³⁷ Padilla’s words get to the heart of what we and the contributors to this Dialogue wish to communicate to our scholarly community. There is not one of us who has not heard some iteration of Williams’s comments, whether directed at us or in reference to another person of color, whispered in hushed

tones by a white colleague who wrongly equates collegiality with license to show their racism.

We have shied away from these discussions out of fear of accusations of essentialism; academia, and art history in particular, trivialize as illegitimate embodied, intergenerational knowledge. This hierarchization of knowledge, in fact, acts as a gatekeeping mechanism to further alienate those of us who inherit, who live, who are viscerally connected to these histories to view our lived experiences as invalid or inconsequential to our research. As Salseda points out in her essay, it took a close mentor and ally to remind her that “my lived experiences have more authority than the blanket of abstracted knowledge I thought I had to hide them under.” These conversations are crucial because for many of us, there is much at stake in the work that we do, whether it is speaking back to ancestors who emerge from the margins of archives and artworks, or writing for and with our communities. Indeed, as many of our contributors bring to light in their essays, their positionality as scholars of color deeply informed their scholarly trajectory and serves as the locus from which they write art history—what Cornejo describes as “writing art histories from below.” In other words, these issues cut far beyond the tepid neoliberal language of “diversity.” This is not about equality, but about equity; it is not about “leveling the playing field,” but recognizing the structural barriers that prevent or actively discourage scholars of color from entering into academia. And finally, this is not about diversity for diversity’s sake, but a recognition that marginalized scholars bring new insights and approaches to the field precisely *because of* rather than in spite of our embodied experiences and ability to think through dynamics of power.

The essays that comprise this Dialogue are all written by scholars of color who specialize in Latin American and Latinx art from the pre-Columbian to the contemporary periods. While our survey enabled us to capture a broad snapshot of the field and reflect on the systemic forces that reproduce inequities, the quantification of disparities can only take us so far. You will find that many of the same numbers that we cite in this introduction from the National Center for Educational Statistics reappear in the essays. Why did we all feel the need to cite these numbers when they should be immediately obvious to anyone who has set foot on a college campus? Balanta’s words have stayed with us: “I don’t need to cite these numbers to remind you that we are the minority.” The numbers tell us important things; they can become the basis of official reports; they can prove that we have a wayward pathway that is hemorrhaging talented students of color

35. Eugenia Zuroski, “Holding Patterns: On Academic Knowledge and Labor,” Medium.com blog post, April 5, 2018, <https://medium.com/@zugenia/holding-patterns-on-academic-knowledge-and-labor-3e5a6000ecbf>. We thank our esteemed late colleague Linda Marie Rodriguez for calling our attention to Zuroski’s work.

36. For more on what transpired at the January 2019 meeting see Colleen Flaherty, “Q&A Goes Horribly Wrong,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 7, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/07/racist-comments-directed-classics-scholar-disciplinary-meeting-floor-classicists>.

37. Dan-el Padilla Peralta, “Some Thoughts on AIA-SCS 2019,” Medium.com blog post, January 7, 2019, <https://medium.com/@danelpadillaperalta/some-thoughts-on-aia-scs-2019-d6a480a1812a>.

before their foot is even in the door; they can justify more money, funds, and resources. But the numbers only speak to those who have not been looking or listening.

The essays in this Dialogue offer personal journeys, stories, and reflections on the authors' paths to academia. They testify to experiences in the classroom, the seminar room, and the museum space, many of which were deeply personal and painful. The essays are a provocation to entirely rethink normative models of academic inquiry and to consider the gains that can be made when we radically decentralize not only the artistic canon, but the spaces of enunciation from which we write about images and the people who make and consume them. Whether that be *desde abajo*, from the margins, from the border, at the intersection of identities, within predominantly Black and Brown classrooms, or from a space of invisibilization, each author offers new ways of looking at and thinking through Latin American and Latinx visual culture.

When we first dreamed up this Dialogue in February 2018, one of the first people we asked to participate was Linda Marie Rodriguez, a scholar of colonial Cuba, who offered both logistical and moral support throughout the process. Linda did not live to finish her essay, but the title

she proposed cuts straight to the heart of this Dialogue, and is something we one day hope to achieve: an “Art History for All.”

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