

This is America: Re-viewing the Art of the United States

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ABSTRACT

Rooted in art history's founding are hierarchical narratives that traditionally reflect White, able-bodied heteronormative perspectives and privilege the concepts of "fine art" over "craft." Here in the United States, these omissions have resulted in a history that reinforces discriminatory practices and limits the inclusion of diverse practitioners. ***This is America: Re-viewing the Art of the United States***, which has been accepted for publication by Oxford University Press, serves as a responsive survey of American art and identity. The textbook, cowritten with Dr. Keri Watson, associate professor of art history in UCF's School of Visual Arts and Design, includes works from across media and by a diverse group of artists, many of whom have been historically overlooked due to their gender, race, or sexuality. **By combining close visual and historical analysis with discussion of how works of art operated within specific cultural contexts and for us today, this publication prioritizes art's critical role in social discourse.**



CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS: RESPONDING TO THE CANON

Inspired by Indigenous archivists who encourage us to "emphasize relationships not records," distinctive breakout sections called "**Contemporary Connections**" interweave art made in the last thirty years into each chapter and encourage conversations between art and artists past and present. Study of these relationships offers readers examples of the ways in which issues of the past animate the present; assists readers in cultivating visual literacy; demonstrates historical contingency; and illustrates the ways the past has shaped (and continues to shape) global, national, and local relationships between societies and peoples. The work of global contemporary artists is vital to expanding the historical narrative and challenging the aggrandized role of the so-called founding fathers and Anglo-American settler colonists in the construction of national identity. By creating art that directly addresses the legacy and missteps of the past, these artists give viewers a critical platform for the discussion and understanding of America's complex history.

THE CHALLENGES

Art history as an academic discipline finds its philosophical roots in the ancient world; its canonization in the Italian Renaissance; and its establishment as an academic discipline at the turn of the twentieth century. As such, it is imbued with a penchant for idealism that has privileged certain media over others. Still, the study of American art has grown rapidly in recent years and become increasingly interdisciplinary in nature. Drawing upon a variety of interpretive methodologies, scholars endeavor to reckon with the discipline's own troubling history. Inspired by this shift, we ask: **Which works are emphasized and whose stories are told? What are we to do with images and artists now considered racist or sexist? What is the role of galleries and museums in assigning value and legitimacy to objects? Finally, we ask: who is America?**



RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

In addition to preparing the book's 10-chapter manuscript for print, current research is focused on the development of the publication's digital compendium. **This online resource will provide a framework for academic lesson planning.** Web content, developed by the authors, is being produced by Oxford University Press and will include interactive image walkthroughs, author-narrated video introductions, and application activities that allow students to apply lessons learned to larger themes in art history. Through these methods, the digital compendium will serve as a valuable resource for educators and students, offering a one-of-a-kind art survey experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Drawing upon a variety of interpretive methodologies — including **social history, feminist theory, critical race theory, postmodernism, postcolonial theory, and Indigenous studies** — *This is America* reimagines the traditional survey of American art. The book prioritizes underrepresented stories through the inclusion of marginalized makers, diverse media, and vast geographic regions, across ten accessibly written chapters. The theoretical frameworks employed are used to underscore the diversity of material culture and challenge the problematic constructions of cultures too often thought of as existing in an inaccessible and forgotten past.



SELECT REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Mithlo, Nancy Marie. 2020. *Knowing Native Arts*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Watson, Keri and Keidra Daniels Navaroli. Forthcoming 2022. *This is America: Re-viewing the Art of the United States*. Oxford University Press.

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Images (from top, left to right): Omari Booker, *This is America*, 2018. Vanderbilt University Black Cultural Center. Image courtesy of the artist ; Scipio Moorhead, *Phillis Wheatley*, 1773. Drawing engraved by Archibald Bell. Metropolitan Museum of Art Open Access Archive; Taíno Culture, Zemi Cohoba Stand, Dominican Republic, 974 – 1020 CE. Metropolitan Museum of Art Open Access Archive; Unidentified Hopi artist, *Mickey Mouse Kachina*, after 1930. Smithsonian Open Access; Gordon Parks, *American Gothic, Washington D.C.*, (Ella Watson), 1942. Image by Mike Licht, licensed under Creative Commons, downloaded from Flickr, March 10, 2022.