2021 Eleanor Greenhill Symposium

[Keynote Address]

Dr. Vanessa Davidson, Curator of Latin American Art, The Blanton Museum of Art

“I Never Met A Straight Line I Didn’t Like:” An introduction to Carmen Herrera

Vanessa Davidson received a BA in Hispano-American Literature from Harvard University, and studied Latin American art and Argentine poetry at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as Portuguese at the Universidade de São Paulo. She has worked at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She was awarded a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship to conduct dissertation research in Argentina and Brazil in 2009, and received her PhD in 20th Century Latin American Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, in 2011. She worked at Phoenix Art Museum as Shawn and Joe Lampe Curator of Latin American Art for eight years, during which time she organized twelve major exhibitions, two of which traveled internationally. She assumed her role as Curator of Latin American Art at the Blanton Museum of Art in October 2019.

[Speakers]

Lucy Quezada Yáñez

Clarival do Prado Valladares and the discourses around Afro-Brazilian art in the Revista Brasileira de Cultura

Between 1969 and 1974, in the middle of the Brazilian military dictatorship, was published the magazine Revista Brasileira de Cultura. Intended to disseminate the work of Brazilian academics, the magazine covered a range of areas such as Human Sciences, Literature, Historic and Artistic Heritage and Arts. In the latter section, the figure of Clarival do Prado Valladares, art historian, art critic, professor, and editor of Historic and Artistic Heritage and Arts rose to prominence. This paper will analyze two articles written by Prado Valladares in the Revista Brasileira de Cultura regarding Afro-Brazilian art practices, proposing questions around the complex relationship between this topic and the fact that this magazine was part of a government institution.

» Quezada Yáñez is a doctoral candidate within The University of Texas at Austin’s Department of Art and Art History and researcher with its Center for Latin American Visual Studies, sponsored by the Chilean Fulbright Commission and the National Research and Development Agency (ANID-Chile). Her research interests are mainly focused on artistic practices and institutions during the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone. Her most recent publication is the book Mario Pedrosa y el CISAC: Configuraciones afectivas, artísticas y políticas edited by
Chasitie Gabrielle Brown

*Without the Whips: Curating the Caribbean at the Guyana CARIFESTA (1972)*

Nearly 1,200 cultural practitioners from 28 countries across the Caribbean, Latin America, and its diaspora participated in this three-week event held in the 1972 Guyanese Caribbean Festival of Arts country’s capital, Georgetown. The festival took part in a larger celebration of the country’s recently gained independence from Britain in 1966 and its announcement of it becoming a Co-Operative Republic, a Guyanese attempted version of socialism, in 1970.

As part of this event, a self-contained town was constructed to accommodate the CARIFESTA participants. Known as “Festival City”, this town included infrastructural amenities such as banks, shopping centers, canteen halls, and three-bedroom houses. The city was designed not only to serve this practical function of providing lodging for the festival’s visitors, but also to create a space that would foster collaboration and fruitful discourse among its diverse residents. Thus, in many aspects, this temporary city may be viewed as a simulacrum or material manifestation of the pan-Caribbean ethos that the festival sought to stage.

Taking Festival City as a point of analysis, this paper examines more broadly how the decolonial strategies deployed in CARIFESTA promoted a pan-Caribbean ethos or an expressed solidarity among the region. By analyzing this city through the theoretical framework of Tony Bennett’s exhibitionary complex, the paper argues that the festival’s organizational logic subverted European epistemologies of display and representation as characterized in imperial World Fairs. Analyzing the Guyana CARIFESTA through this perspective not only reveals the curation of a pan-Caribbean regionalism, but also the cultivation of a larger cultural ecosystem that promoted artistic exchange.

» Brown is a first-year doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History studying contemporary Caribbean and Latin American art with a focus on Cuba. Her research broadly centers on constructions of Afro-Diasporic identities, exhibition histories, artistic networks, and cultural policy during the second half of the twentieth century. She received her MA in Art History from Tulane University where she was awarded a Tinker Foundation Grant to conduct field research in Havana.

Mara McNiff

*Conspicuous Consumption and Portable Culture: Reframing the Teotihuacan Cylinder Tripods within the Context of a “Globalizing” Mesoamerica*
During the first millennium BCE, the presence of shallow metal bowls—usually silver with gold ornamentation—found across the Mediterranean from the Levantine coast to the Strait of Gibraltar, has long been discussed as a marker of a globalized and integrated Mediterranean. These bowls, identified under the umbrella distinction “Cypro-Phoenician”, are some of the more conspicuous traces left by the “Phoenicians”, a loosely cohesive cultural group of Levantine merchants, sometimes credited as “Map-makers of the Mediterranean” following their earliest expansion and trade in the region. Halfway across the world, and one millennium later, the mysterious settlement of Teotihuacan left its trace across Mesoamerica in the form of stucco-painted ceramic cylinder vessels stabilized on a tripod base. The clear parallels between the cylinder tripods and “Phoenician” metal bowls as beacons of influencing cultures are notably underlined in their use as title page images for seminal works of interaction in each discipline.

There are a number of similarities between these two classes of vessels as markers of intercultural exchange and influence, not least of which is the fragmentary nature of the corpus and deposition context. This paper supposes to reframe the cylinder tripods vessels within a framework that has gained traction as a useful means to discuss interaction and influence between cultures in the Mediterranean. By looking at the consumption, proliferation, and manufacture of the cylinder tripods within the framework of “globalization” and entanglement, this study introduces a new avenue from which to study cultural communication in Mesoamerica. The cylinder tripods found across Mesoamerican sites, like the Cypro-Phoenician bowls in the Mediterranean, are a prime example of conspicuous consumption, whether as an index of travel, or as a marker of social capital via participation in Teotihuacan’s trade market, and allowed sites across Mesoamerica to participate in the social and economic expansion of “the place of the gods”.

» McNiff is a second-year doctoral student in Ancient Mediterranean Art and Archaeology at the University of Texas at Austin, working with Dr. Nassos Papalexandrou. She is primarily interested in questions of cultural interaction and identity negotiation in ancient Sicily and the larger Mediterranean as a whole. She has excavated and participated in archaeological surveys across Sicily and in the Peloponnese in Greece. At the University of Arizona, McNiff’s MA thesis focused on the stylistic analysis of cultural influence between Greek, Phoenicians, and the indigenous populations during conflict periods in Archaic Sicily. At the UT, McNiff’s research interests merge around a broad study of identity negotiation, especially in religious contexts, of diasporic Greeks and Phoenicians in the central Mediterranean.

Aja Mujinga Sherrard

Gray Area: Adrian Piper’s “Retirement from Blackness” and the unraveling of racial coherence
In 2012, Adrian Piper produced a piece of conceptual art critically summarized as her “retirement from being Black,” entitled *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment*. Although the piece was “released” simply as an image and short blurb on the artist’s website, it made a significant impact. In a 2018 interview, Piper herself described this piece as her, “most political piece of art.” Considering this piece in the alongside Piper’s 1992 essay, “Passing for White, Passing for Black” and earlier works in which her racial identity is at the forefront, this paper reflects on why this piece should be considered so politically significant. Positioning Piper in the context of other racially ambiguous women, including fictional “tragic mullatas” like Clare Kendry, Iola Leroy and Amantha Starr; “race passing” authors like Danzy Senna, Toi Dericotte, Bliss Broyard; and the more controversial race-passing figures of Rachel Dolezol and Jessica Krug, this paper explores Piper’s philosophical experimentations with racial identity and her performative indication of a separate “gray’ space between Blackness and Whiteness in which the coherence of both categories unravel. Written in response to questions of authorship and the utility of being visible within our academic text, the paper also reveals my own identity as “white-passing” and the way in which I have personally been challenged—and moved—by Piper’s treatment of race as a medium for artistic inquiry.

» Mujinga Sherrard is a first year PhD student at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on visualizations of selfhood across the Black Atlantic, with a special focus on how the experiences of diaspora manifest in imagery of belonging, hybridization, nostalgia, queering, and innovation. She is also interested in the ways black and Indigenous American contemporary art practices echo and complicate one another. Sherrard joined the PhD program in Austin after three years teaching undergraduate studio art and art history at the University of Montana Western. She holds an MA in Art History and an MFA in conceptual art from the University of Montana, and completed her undergraduate studies at Sarah Lawrence College. She is also a practicing artist, whose work can be found at: aja_mujinga_sherrard.com.