The Canon as Provocation: Partnering with Museums for the Future of Art History

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By every measure, the notion that the art-historical canon is socially embedded and historically negotiated should be considered a threshold concept for art history.[1] It is both difficult and transformative to realize that masterpieces become masterpieces due to complex negotiations between artists, patrons, donors, academics, critics, curators, and dealers. The results shape the parameters of our disciplinary inquiry.[2] Even if not explicitly articulated as such to students, the power and politics entrenched in the processes of canonization underlie art history's long-standing efforts to diversify its canons. The challenge remains that a more global and inclusive curriculum does not in and of itself enable students to recognize and assess canon formation as a process or to trace and analyze its legacies in disciplinary discourse. Despite a half-century of feminist scholarship, we continue to render those female artists that we have elevated to the canon with

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[1] Jan Meyer and Ray Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines," in *Improving Student Learning - Theory and Practice Ten Years On*, ed. C. Rust (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, (2003), 412-424; Ray Land, Jan H. F. Meyer, and Michael T. Flanagan, *Threshold Concepts in Practice* (2016); Julie A. Timmermans, and Jan H.F. Meyer, "A Framework for Working with University Teachers to Create and Embed 'Integrated Threshold Concept Knowledge' (ITCK) in Their Practice," *International Journal for Academic Development* (17 October 2017), https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1080/1360144X.2017.1388241.

[2] For this reason the College Art Association recognizes a particular responsibility that the field has to living artists to disseminate information about their work. Alongside obligations stemming from the illegal trafficking of artworks, it is the only standard articulated which does not directly focus on matters of academic honesty. College Art Association, "Standards for the Practice of Art History," revised October 26, 2014, https://www.collegeart.org/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines/art-history-ethics.

the tired traits of male genius.[3] And the enactment of multiculturalism in higher education has failed to address structural racism in the academy.[4]

We have both an intellectual and a moral duty to explore alternative pedagogical models and empower students to engage with the cultural canon and its ethical questions in more intentional ways. Despite the general paucity of educational research on how to position students to examine and navigate disciplinary formation, academic art history has an advantage.[5] It enjoys a close relationship with museums, which are more public facing than academic departments and also make the discipline and its history both present and tangible for students. What professional art historians or donor culture has deemed worthy has a direct impact on what gets collected. What gets collected, in turn, influences what is studied, the narratives that emerge, and whether and how new works are brought into the canonical group that the art-historical community accepts as essential.[6] Neglected

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[3] Linda Nochlin, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTNews* May 30, 2015 at http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/; Ashton Cooper, "The Problem of the Overlooked Female Artist: An Argument for Enlivening a Stale Model of Discussion," in *Lucid Gestures: An Exhibition of Barnard Alumnae*, ed. Vanessa Thill (2014), 16-20. Reprinted in *Hyperallergic* January 10, 2015, https://hyperallergic.com/173963/the-problem-of-the-overlooked-female-artist-an-argument-for-enlivening-a-stale-model-of-discussion/

[4] Henry A. Giroux, *Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies* (New York, Routledge, 2000); Henry A. Giroux, *Public Spaces, Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism*, Culture and Politics Series (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). This failure manifests in our interpretive approaches. See for instance Darby English's "Beyond Black Representational Space," in his *How to See a Work in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 27-70; Beth Loffreda and Claudia Rankine "Introduction: On Whiteness and the Racial Imaginary: Where Writers Go Wrong in Imagining the Lives of Others" in *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*, ed. Claudia Rankine, Beth Loffreda, and Max King Cap (Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2015), 12-22, as well as the Racial Imaginary Project, https://theracialimaginary.org.

[5] Two recent studies in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning literature aim to open up this space and argue the approach has applicability across the disciplines – while needing to be specific to the contents and discourses of each discipline. Jeanne Dyches, "Particularizing the Tensions Between Canonical and Bodily Discourses," *Journal of Literacy Research* 50.2 (2018): 239-61 and Jeanne Dyches, "Critical Canon Pedagogy: Applying Disciplinary Inquiry to Cultivate Canonical Critical Consciousness," *Harvard Educational Review* 88.4 (2018): 538-564.

[6] Gabriel Kaltermackt's sixteenth century letter advising Elector Christian I of Saxony on how to form an art collection is an early example of this at work. In Susan Pearce and Alexandria Bounia,

by university scholars in the twentieth century, museums have now returned to academic attention.[7] This tracks with the growing sense in many fields that the academic disciplines as they are practiced are artificially isolated from the many contexts that produce them.[8] Indeed, museum narratives, displays, and collections encode historical data about the working of the canon and the canon at work. Museums are in this way particularly suitable partners in the task of using the canon as provocation for art-historical learning.

How might the academic classroom engage with museums in ways that teach students to engage with art-historical canons thoughtfully and ethically? Critical pedagogy and models of teaching for social justice offer generative frameworks for developing new approaches to teaching both art history and museum studies.[9] Museums for their part have long been subject to institutional critique – now in its

The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting vol. 2. Early Voices (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), *#3*. For a recent critical discussion of the canon as concept see Gregor Langfeld, "The Canon in Art History: Concepts and Approaches, " *Journal of Art Historiography* 19 (December 2018).
https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/langfeld.pdf.

[7] Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life 1876-1926* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Mansfield, *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2002); Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Charles W. Haxthausen, ed., *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francis Clark Art Institute, 2002), and Haxthausen, "Beyond 'the Two Art Histories'" *Journal of Art Historiography* 11 (December 2014) online at: https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/haxthausen.pdf.

[8] A position Robert Nelson was already advocating for twenty years ago in "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 79.1 (1997): 28-40.

[9] The most frequently cited foundational model is Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M. Berman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970); Paulo Freire and D. Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1987). See also: Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, translated and with an introduction by Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994). A session at the annual conference of the UK-based Association for Art History in April 2018 explored how art and art history pedagogy might afford critical readings of society and our place within it. It was intended that this result in a publication which it is hoped will be forthcoming. As will become clear my own perspective is informed by both art history and museology. Laura-Edythe Coleman offers an extremely helpful historical perspective and conceptually engaged advice for inclusion in museums, in *Understanding and Implementing Inclusion in Museums* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018). She has called for museology to develop pedagogies and curricula that center social justice. Many features of her analysis resonate with the theoretical foundations and curricular frameworks in Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

third artistic generation. At their best, each of these approaches underscores the political nature of disciplinary cultures and their institutions. At their worst, these methods operate so much at the level of theory that students struggle to see the relevance for their own work or start to replace one institutionalized discourse with another.[10] Working with, rather than in opposition to, museums invites alternative models that draw on Community Based Learning (CBL), a high-impact pedagogical practice that offers students a sense of immediacy, accountability, and relevance.[11] Yet CBL has not always fostered equal relationships between the interests of academic and community participants; it thus benefits from the insights of critical-inflected and social justice teaching practices.[12] In short, CBL, critical pedagogy, teaching for social justice, and institutional critique might fruitfully be treated as interdependent when positioning students to negotiate the canon's performance in academic and public spaces.[13]

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[10] Willem L. Wardekker and Siebren Miedema, "Critical Pedagogy: An Evaluation and a Direction for Reformulation," *Curriculum Inquiry* 27.1 (1997): 45-61. Similar concerns have been expressed about institutional critique. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44.1 (2005): 100-106; Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray, *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2016).

[11] Thomas H. Batchelder and Susan Root, "Effects of An Undergraduate Program to Integrate Academic Learning and Service: Cognitive, Prosocial Cognitive, and Identity Outcomes," *Journal of Adolescence* 17.4 (1994): 341-355; Lori Simons and Beverly Clearly, "The Influence of Service Learning on Students' Personal and Social Development," *College Teaching* 54.4 (2006): 307-319; George D. Kuh, "High-Impact Practices: Retrospective and Prospective," In *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion and Quality*, ed. Jayne E. Brownell and Lynne E. Swaner (Washington D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010), v-xiii; Christine I. Celio, Joseph Durlak, and Allison Dymnicki, "A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Service-Learning on Students," *Journal of Experiential Education* 34.2 (2011): 164-181; Shauna K. Carlisle, Karen Gourd, Safaa Rajkhan, and Keith Nitta, "Assessing the Impact of Community-Based Learning on Students: The Community Based Learning Impact Scale (CBLIS)," *Journal of Service Learning in Higher Education* 6 (2017), http://journals.sfu.ca/jslhe/index.php/jslhe/article/view/104/48.

[12] David J. Maurrasse, "Higher Education-Community Partnerships: Assessing Progress in the Field," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31.1 (2002): 131–139; Barbara Jacoby, ed. (2003). *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth A. Tryon, *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press., 2009); Dan W. Butin, *Service-Learning in Theory and Practice: The Future of Community Engagement in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Susan Benigni Cipolle, *Service-Learning and Social Justice* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2010).

[13] Many museums and academics are also engaged in public facing social media work, websites or convenings aimed at rethinking canonization processes in art history. In this vein is the National Museum of Women in the Arts #5WomenArtists twitter campaign; Kimberly Drew's Tumblr blog

This article presents case studies of two CBL courses developed in partnership with a local public art museum that aimed to promote canonical critical consciousness (to borrow a term recently used by Jeanne Dyches in another disciplinary context). Both were upper level seminars capped at twelve students – although a particularity of where I teach is that the course could have no prerequisites and had to accommodate a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds.[14] One course focused on the representation of black arts in US art museums between the 1930s and 1980s. The second course drew on a European masterpiece collection and a larger collection of African art. Each course foregrounded active learning scenarios. Students created original, research-based interpretations of art for the museum partner.[15] We adopted museum practices and goals in the classroom. Pedagogical assessment strategies included setting and evaluating cognitive and affective learning goals, identifying the presence or

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Black Contemporary Art (https://blackcontemporaryart.tumblr.com); Allyson Healey's Art History for All (https://arthistoryforall.com), which uses a random geographic coordinate generator to broaden the geographic and cultural scope of the catalogue of works presented. Most recently Sarah Lewis convened *Vision & Justice* in April 2019 to consider the role of the arts in understanding the nexus of art, race, and justice. There is also a burgeoning interest in socially engaged art history pedagogy and in art history as social practice – modeled in many ways on socially engaged art and social practice art. An example is Jennifer Borland and Louise Siddons, "Yay or Neigh? Frederic Remington's Bronco Buster, Public Art and Socially-Engaged Art History Pedagogy" *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 3.1 (2018). https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol3/iss1/5. The authors include significant documentation of current initiatives, including Art History That (AHT), a promising collaborative project to imagine art history as collective social practice. https://sites.google.com/site/arthistorythat/home. I am at present hesitant about using either "socially engaged art history" or "social practice art history" to describe my own approach here because I aim less here to consider how the disciplinary practice of art history might engage social problems outside disciplinary contexts, and more to propose models of CBL pedagogy that apply a social justice and critical lens to art history's institutions and disciplinary discourses.

[14] I teach in and direct an undergraduate program in the history, theory, and practice of museums at a research university. The program offers a minor intended to complement any major and my students come from all over the university, with the majority pursuing degrees in History, Archeology, History of Art, and Writing Seminars (a creative writing program that is the largest humanities major at my university). Anthropology and language studies are also well represented.

[15] For active learning in art history see: Peter Scott Brown and Jace Hargis "Undergraduate Research in Art History Using Project Based Learning," *Journal of Faculty Development* 22.2 (2008): 152-158; Marie Gasper-Hulvat, "Active Learning in Art History: A Review of Formal Literature," *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 2.1 (2017), http://AcademicWorks.cuny.edu/happy/vol2/iss1/2. For a practical guide to reflective learning see Mary Elizabeth Ryan, ed. *Teaching Reflective Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Approach Using Pedagogic Patterns* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015).

absence of critical canonical consciousness in students' written work, measuring that work's public impact where appropriate, and tracking expressions of the community partner's levels of satisfaction with the collaboration. The courses followed recommended best practices for CBL by incorporating both formal and informal opportunities for critical reflection, including in direct interactions with museum staff.[16]

In both courses students demonstrated an extremely high level of engagement. They took responsibility for driving their own inquiry into the material, discovering for themselves the presence of disciplining discourses and their impact on gender and race. Students started to recognize canonical tropes. They iterated frameworks for counter-storying and struggled with the relative applicability of these to different artworks. Students further demonstrated increased awareness of the canon as a social construct and the ability to evaluate its value propositions in nuanced ways. While students in both courses further demonstrated awareness of the ethical implications of negotiating disciplinary canons, students from the course that focused on African-American artists demonstrated greater reflection upon and intentional navigation of emergent ethical dilemmas. Key factors to both courses' success were developing a sense of shared authority in the classroom, and feeling that, as a group, we were accountable to audiences beyond the classroom. Investigating both the origin stories and the afterlives of artworks also proved to be essential. Students found the second course, which worked with a more heterogeneous group of artworks, more challenging than the first course, which focused on early twentieth century exhibitions of art by African-American artists. Other differences in course outcomes suggest a correlation between the quality and level of ethical sensitivity and the degree to which 1) students anticipated their work to be publicly visible, and 2) students perceived the subject of their research to be relevant in the present political context.

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[16] Robert A. Rhoads and Jeffrey P. F. Howard, *Academic Service Learning: A Pedagogy of Action and Reflection* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998); Sarena D. Steifer and Kara Connors, *Faculty Toolkit for Service-Learning in Higher Education* (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2007), http://www.servlicelearning.org/filemanager/download/HE_toolkiit_with_worksheets.pdf; and Janet Eyler, "Creating Your Reflection Map," *New Directions for Higher Education* 114, Special Issue: Developing and Implementing Service-Learning Programs (2001): 35-43.

Case Study 1:
Black Artists in the American Art Museum: Using Museum Collections Data and Project-Based Learning to Surface the Relationship of Racial Politics and the Canon

In Winter 2016 I collaborated with the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) to launch the collaborative venture *Black Artists in the Museum*. The Museum was in the planning stages of an exhibition (to open in Spring 2018) that would revisit an historic showing of contemporary black arts that took place at the BMA in 1939 – one of the first ever displays of the work of black artists in a public art museum – and felt the museological bent of the show would be of interest to us. We planned a course related to the exhibition for Fall 2017 – the soonest we could manage given the challenges of coordinating between the academic calendar and the museum's exhibition calendar. Conceived initially as a pendant to a major retrospective of Jack Whitten's work that would explicitly engage questions of canon-formation in contemporary arts, the exhibition, later titled *1939: Exhibiting Black Art at the BMA*, offered an opportunity to conceptualize a course around the twinned issues of canon formation and exhibition history. It would take the form of a practicum, giving students the responsibility to create work for public audiences, with the attendant accountability.[17] Because the course was anchored in a historic exhibition staged at a local museum in collaboration with Alain Locke and the Harmon Foundation, and because it featured American artists (with one exception) who were active in the 1930s we had rich regional resources on which to draw.[18] The curator and I did significant archival research both independently and collectively to lay the groundwork for the exhibition and course. The materials we mined informed the exhibition – some even made an appearance within it – and are robust enough to sustain further iterations of the class.[19]

<u>Objectives</u>

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[17] Jennifer P. Kingsley, "The Practicum Course Model: Embracing the Museum University Culture Clash," *Journal of Museum Education* 41.4 (2016): 250-261.

[18] In addition to the BMA itself, these included the National Archives, Archives for American Art, and Howard University's Archives and local press archives, especially the Baltimore headquartered and nationally circulating newspaper the *Afro American*.

[19] The full project has its academic home at https://black-artists-in-the-museum.com. A companion website containing the students research on and interpretations of BMA artworks lives at the museum https://artbma.org/1939/.

The main objective of the course was for students to analyze the inclusion and exclusion of African-American artists in the canon from a historical perspective; hypothesize and test their conclusions about contributing social factors; and create interpretive materials based on their findings for the BMA's visitors.[20] As the project and exhibition evolved, the museum and I negotiated through various iterations of the role students and their work would play.[21] We ultimately developed a website to accompany the exhibition and house the students' interpretations. Based on the course learning objectives I focused the course content on twentieth-century exhibitions of black arts in the United States and structured it as a series of case studies.[22] For each example we discussed who was included in the exhibition; which artworks and what types of artworks were featured (in terms of medium, style and content); and analyzed the public and academic conversations about them. We dug into the people and organizations involved in the shows and speculated about the possible connections between the players coming from outside the museum, curatorial choices, and visitor reactions. Informed by the existing scholarship we sought to identify historical patterns in the exhibition and interpretation of black arts in the twentieth century. The class operated very much as a research team, working together to develop our

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[20] Ten students enrolled in the class. Two dropped after the first session – telling me that they felt the class was not for them because they did not know enough about art. I had invited a museum leader to speak with the students in hopes that this would bring home the relevance and significance of the work they would be doing but unfortunately, pursuant to some miscommunication between us, the conversation pitched too high in terms of, for lack of a better word, "artspeak." That two students left the class, possibly in part because of this first day experience, is an important reminder of how exclusionary the art world feels for many of our students.

[21] The exhibition changed radically in scope and approach during the project: the curator changed, it changed sites and opening dates, and went from a loan show to one focused entirely on the BMA collections. Based on my several years of experience partnering with museums, I would say the extent and rapidity of these changes is unusual. I note them here to underscore that CBL requires significant flexibility on the part of the instructor, as well as more time for planning and implementation than is typical for designing and teaching an undergraduate course. Nonetheless, I hope the model is useful for colleagues interested in similar endeavors. I would add that many of the modules for in-class learning I present in this article can be adapted for a non-CBL class and indeed I have taught them outside the CBL context.

[22] I included some of the exhibitions discussed in Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011) and in Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016). We also considered the discourse around black arts at World's Fairs, and local exhibitions that had less national impact but reflected the national discourse and shaped a local context for black arts. Also important was to attend to the role of historically black colleges in collecting African American art.

questions, identify potential methods, and select which types of evidence to consider. Our museum partner served, in part, as the experimental space to which we could pivot to test the ideas that emerged out of this inquiry-driven process.

<u>Student Work: Testimonials and Challenges</u>

One of the most revealing moments came when we compared our qualitative analysis of exhibition history to quantitative data about our museum partner's history of acquiring and displaying black arts. Using BMA accession numbers I created a simple chart to show how many artworks by black artists entered the collection in each decade, starting with the first acquisition in 1945 (fig. 1). I also used a list prepared by the museum's archivist of every BMA exhibition of African and African-American arts to diagram when the museum had presented shows featuring African-American artists (fig. 2). The patterns closely tracked American racial politics with spikes in the 70s and 90s for instance. Upon seeing these charts two of my students let slip startled exclamations "that's so bad!" and "have you shown the museum this?!"[23] Our next step was to dig back into the qualitative data contained in the museum's archives. We spent one class session investigating the language with which the museum presented its acquisitions and exhibitions and consulted curatorial files to find out more about the people involved. Every student took on their own 5-10 year span (depending on the quantity of files involved) and reported their findings out to the group. We made new discoveries, for instance the key role played by the Women's Cooperative Civic League (an African American sister organization to the then all white Women's Civic League) in bringing black arts to the museum in the 1940s. Returning to our broader examination of US exhibitions we started to see more clearly the contribution of black women in advancing the public visibility of black (most often black male) artists. Working through the raw qualitative and quantitative data points brought home to students how important social and historical factors were in whether or not individual artists garnered the attention and resources of art institutions, as well as the qualitative and intersectional complexity of these factors. The museum's data surfaced the negotiations between academics, artists, advocates, collectors, dealers, curators, and visitors that so profoundly shaped what has become the canon of black arts, and made visible – and local – the story of black arts' place in white institutions and their art-historical canons. Attending to these histories established for my students a foundation for reading the structure of the canon that did not require significant

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[23] Personal class notes from October 3, 2017 – week 5.

historiographic background in art history, as the public-facing work they would produce made clear.

Outcomes

The course project tasked students with applying their insights to interpreting the biographies of artists and artworks connected to the original 1939 exhibit for interpretive materials that would be shared with BMA audiences – that is, the work had to serve our museum partner's needs and goals. I gave students starting packets for each biography that included a preliminary bibliography, primary sources (including prior biographies of the artists), and some data in order to reduce the burden of discovering and identifying appropriate sources, so as to free them up to devote more time to reflection and analysis. Standard fare for contemporary art interpretation, biographies of modern and living artists typically proffer stories of innovation and originality, recognition of genius (late recognition in the case of women and/or African Americans), and celebration of difference.[24] If, as I hypothesized, the course design and content fostered a canonical critical consciousness, then I should observe additional themes in the student-authored narratives that attended to social and historical aspects of canon formation. I did have some concerns about how the resulting interpretations might negotiate our responsibility and relationship to the exhibition and to our museum partner. Course content was, by design, weighted towards a critical stance, but, prior to the start of the semester, museum leadership had made an off-hand comment that the planned exhibition should neither adopt a tone of uncritical celebration, nor of institutional critique, but simply "be history." This statement raised the specter of potential conflict between academic and community goals about which I needed to be mindful. The students and I did meet frequently with curatorial and education staff to discuss their evolving thinking about the exhibition, share our own views on the histories we were encountering, and to discuss our and the museum's respective needs and goals for the class project. Students also had direct interactions with museum staff in my absence – at moments, for instance, when they were working independently with curatorial files or museum archival material.

Asking students to apply a biographical method to the study of objects was a more novel choice. It made sense pedagogically, in that students would be using the

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[24] Christopher Whitehead, *Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2012), 147-173.

same approach across all aspects of the project. And it was an assessment I had used before – giving me a baseline for evaluating whether, in conjunction with the other aspects of the course design, the object biography might heighten students' critical attention to canon formation. Using locally accessible artworks to foster skills in close looking, visual analysis, and historical contextualization is already recommended best practice for teaching and learning in art history – and is essential for disciplinary training.[25] But whereas art history traditionally centers the artwork's origin story – its production and reception at the time it was made – the object biography pays equal attention to the afterlives of artworks. The idea that objects have cultural biographies goes back to Igor Kopytoff, who posited that things could not be fully understood without considering all the stages of their existence and processes and cycles of production, exchange, and consumption.[26] The meanings of artworks change according to the historical moment and persons they encounter. Such changes may leave physical marks for conservators to analyze, be documented in an artwork's provenance, or be visible in the circulation and exhibition of analogous pieces in private collections, World Fairs, or public museums.[27] Students can treat these indices together with past scholarly and public interpretations of artworks as primary sources. Where I posited that object biography would intersect with the processes of canon formation is that the method has the capacity to foreground the varied fortunes of artworks and the different meanings they accumulate over time. Put another way, the afterlives of artworks are closely entangled with the socio-historic and material conditions that shape and have been shaped by historiographic tendencies in the discipline. The question was, would students recognize this fact? If so, how would that affect their sense of the canon? Would they fall into unproductive moralizing? Would they apply canonical narratives to their assigned artworks, or would they tell a different type of story?

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[25] Joshua Adam Yavelberg, "Discovering the Pedagogical Paradigm Inherent in Art History Survey Courses: A Delphi Study," Unpublished PhD diss. (George Mason University, 2016); Virginia Spivey, Andy Schulz, and James Hopfensperger, *Measuring College Learning in Art History*, Learning in Higher Ed, Unpublished report (2018), http://highered.ssrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018.02-MCL-in-Art-History-Report-for-CAA.pdf.
[26] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91. For an overview of different ways of thinking biographically with objects see: Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31.2 (1999): 169–78.
[27] For instance: Laura Morowitz, "Medievalism, Classicism and Nationalism: The Appropriation of the French Primitifs in Turn of the Century France," *Studies in the History of Art* 68 (2005): 224-241.

Students in the course "Black Artists in the American Art Museum" (BAAAM) each selected two objects to research – an artwork from the original exhibition and one artwork presently in the BMA collections. They shared their findings with each other, wrote six page academic essays for instructor feedback, and then developed these materials into 200-300 word texts aimed at public audiences online. From a purely structural point of view, the sequence of research > discussion > academic paper > blog post/museum label had several effects. For one, it meant students had to revise multiple times with the expectation that the final product would look substantially different and more refined. It is simply not possible to go from 1800 to 300 words without evaluating the argument and ideas of a paper and refining them to develop greater focus. Sharing the challenge of doing so with peers engaged in a shared intellectual endeavor helped. Beyond the emotional support, it gave the students opportunities to learn from each other's research and identify common themes across all the investigations. And knowing that their work would be made public moved the students' focus from writing for an audience of one (their instructor) to an audience of many, who would be bringing their own perspectives and background to the subject.[28] Almost every student shared with me during office hours that they felt some trepidation and a burden to "get it right."[29] They also struggled with staying within the length requirements and complained – frequently – about not being able to explain all the complications and nuance to their satisfaction. Listening closely in class discussions it became clear to me that the students were grappling with the difficulty of wanting to celebrate artists and artworks they felt to have been historically marginalized while not ignoring the systems that marginalized them. In my notes from this period, I jotted down many comments in this vein. Representative are the following: "don't want to instrumentalize black arts"; "how to show agency of black artists?"; "not all black artists had same path – how to explain?"[30]

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[28] The classic study of how motivation, prior knowledge and personal and social context affects visitors' meaning making is John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning From Museums*, 2nd edition (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018). Another influential model in the field is the Smithsonian's well-tested IPOP, online at https://www.si.edu/Content/opanda/docs/IPOP/IPOP%20short%20description%20150806.pdf.

[29] This phrase came up in virtually every individual meeting with students, which I started holding regularly after the first public facing assignment came due in Week 8 of the semester.

[30] Excerpts from personal class notes dated November 28 and December 5, 2017. In lieu of giving a final, I used the exam slot to facilitate a discussion reflecting on the semester's work and discussing the ways it, and the museum partner's exhibition project, "revisited" the 1939 exhibition. Students had additional time to revise their web texts after this session.

An added complication was the fact that the BMA had not collected out of the 1939 exhibition and that its exhibition would showcase pieces from the BMA collection that for the most part differed considerably in content and style.[31] A case in point was Robert Blackburn's 1984 woodcut *Woodscape*. Blackburn had submitted four figurative lithographs to the 1939 exhibit, but he abandoned figuration by the mid-1950s. And the work the student was researching (because it would be in the exhibit) was a woodcut, a technique with which Blackburn only started experimenting in the 1970s. In 2014 the museum acquired three Blackburn prints for its centenary. All were abstract. Two dated to the 1950s and 60s, and the third from the 1980s. These parameters framed the student's research problem. Over the course of researching Blackburn and the print *Woodscape*, the student became struck by the artist's underrecognized contributions to abstraction, the early critical pressure Blackburn faced to produce representational work that signaled "blackness," by Blackburn's modesty in interviews, and by his foundation of a print workshop to support artists and experimental print-making. These were the building blocks for the student's interpretation of his findings (figs. 3 and 4). In the aggregate, what the students excavated of the experiences of Blackburn and his cohort, and of the lives of their artworks, offered up an emergent theme that would also answer some of their interpretive anxieties: black artists born at the end of the Progressive Era repeatedly developed structural solutions to their systemic exclusion from art's predominantly white institutions. My brief introduction to the artist section of our project website aims to orient readers to the students' shared realization – felt more deeply by the students for the sense that it made a real scholarly contribution and that it originated out of their own research and collaborative efforts to grapple with its results. The key paragraph reads:

> These artists share the struggle to be seen by a racist system as well as the benefits they leveraged from select opportunities that were open to them. Philanthropic organizations such as the Harmon Foundation and the Rosenwald Fund offered chances to exhibit, and to travel to Europe. For those who could access it, the federal government's Depression era work relief program for artists offered support at a critical time. Sensitive to the impact of unequally distributed resources, many black artists created their

[31] Morgan Dowty, Gamynne Guillotte, and Jennifer P. Kingsley, "Revisiting *Contemporary Negro Art* at the Baltimore Museum of Art," *Reconstructing Exhibitions*, Research in Art Museums and Exhibitions (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

own structures to support colleagues and to advance the careers of their students.

Learning Outcomes

The process of creating the biographies made evident to students the structural forces at work in art history. Presenting their findings to public audiences outside academia established the conditions for an authentic ethical dilemma that we were only able to resolve when we found an approach that highlighted artists' active navigation of the unequal power dynamics at play in art institutions. This illustrated that students could identify the conditions and factors that impact canon formation and apply that understanding to researching and offering new interpretations of artworks. They were not, however, using the terms canon or canon formation. Instead students emphasized concepts like racial and gender bias, systemic and institutional racism. Even though we had devoted one class session to university-based perspectives on the canon, the majority of the course focused on exhibition history and art criticism and students could accomplish their interpretive goals without applying a critical lens to academic art history. Nonetheless, I was satisfied that students demonstrated a rich understanding of the racialized discourse around collecting and exhibiting black arts and did not resort to existing canonical narratives to interpret the lives and works of African American artists.

Most compelling to me was the evidence of the students' ethical struggles in arriving at an interpretation. Many fields beyond art history have debated how ethics should be taught and whether higher education learning can encourage ethical behavior.[32] A recent quantitative study of business ethics education found that teaching ethics had limited impact on student responses to ethical scenarios.[33] But here my students were showing a critical awareness of the social and political factors that exclude black artists. And in their concerns about instrumentalizing

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[32] How to teach ethical behavior has been of particular interest to the scholarship of business education. Minette Drumwright and Robert Prentice, "Conceptual Research: Behavioral Ethics and Teaching Ethical Decision Making," *Decision Sciences: Journal of Innovative Education* 13.3 (2015): 431-458. Mark S. Schwartz, "Teaching Behavioral Ethics: Overcoming the Key Impediments to Ethical Behavior," *Journal of Management Education* 41.4 (2017): 497-513; Kathleen A. Tomlin, Matthew L. Metzger, Jill Bradley-Geist, and Tracy Gonzalez-Padron, "Are Students Blind to their Ethical Blind Spots? An Exploration of Why Ethics Education Should Focus on Self-Perception Biases," *Journal of Management Education* 41.4 (2017): 539-574.

[33] Elizabeth Prior Jonson, Linda Mary McGuire, and Brian Cooper "Does Teaching Ethics Do Any Good?" *Education and Training* 58.4 (2016): 439-454.

the artworks and artists they had researched, they manifested a sensitivity to the potential of reproducing oppression in their own practice.[34] They were analyzing mainstream narratives that upheld the status quo, and "counter-storytelling" in nuanced ways.[35] And they were attentive to matters of form. By way of example, in narrating the lives of artworks, they were careful to present the object and its artist as the agents of the story: intentionally devoting space to descriptions of the artworks' form or subject matter and making the artist or work the grammatical subject of the majority of their sentences. One especially challenging case focused on a watercolor that artist Lois Jones submitted to the 1939 exhibition. We were unable to find any records or images of this work, despite consulting Jones' extensive archives at Howard University. The student still found ways to foreground the artwork in the interpretation (fig. 5).

Students also expressed feelings of responsibility to the museum's exhibition project – asking museum staff whether their interpretive ideas – then still in draft form – served the needs of the exhibition, which they assumed would need to take a positive perspective about the museum's history as a site for exhibiting black arts. From a CBL perspective such a sentiment is a key indicator of the sincerity and authenticity of the collaboration. Indeed both museum staff and students felt themselves to be engaged in a shared intellectual endeavor and, I would learn later, the curator had similarly been pondering how to balance the presentation of racism and its effects with acknowledgment of the significance of the 1939 exhibit, and how to focus on artworks and artists in a show that was about an exhibition. The curator expressed her appreciation of the process directly in a letter sent to me after the course's end stating "Your students came to the table with probing questions. Their work will help to present a broader narrative than I would have been able to present alone." We have since co-authored, with the museum's Chief Education Officer, an article on the 1939 exhibition and on the role it has played in the museum's memory and identity since, including its most recent revisiting. Through this project I also developed a closer working relationship with the museum's Chief Education Officer, and I worked with her to

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[34] Lee Anne Bell, "Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education," *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed., ed. Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, with Diane J. Goodman and Khyati Y. Joshi (London: Routledge, 2016), 3-26.

[35] Critical Race Theory (CRT) uses counter-storytelling to destabilize stock stories that validate the domination of some groups over others. Adrien Katherine Wing, *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Lee Anne Bell, *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Anti-Racist Teaching* (London: Routledge, 2010).

develop the concept for a second course that ran in Fall 2018 "Object Encounters at the Baltimore Museum of Art."

Case Study 2: "Object Encounters": Engaging the Canon for Social Justice

If BAAAM focused on interpreting black arts, the seminar "Object Encounters at the Baltimore Museum of Art" developed from a desire to apply a similarly critical approach to a broader chronological and geographic span.[36] I aspired also at this time to integrate the perspectives of our museum partner's visitors, i.e., for the course to include in the community partnership not only the museum, but also the needs and wants of its public audiences. And I sought more deliberately to measure attitude shifts in the students. Finally, the course adopted a social justice agenda consistent with the BMA's newly revised mission to center social equity across all its activities, from hiring practices and acquisitions to art interpretation. Using Fraser's two pronged model for social justice, the syllabus stated explicitly that students in the course would tackle the "recognition" condition of justice, meaning concerns pertaining to cultural domination, non-recognition, cultural imperialism, and status hierarchy.[37] The first class meeting focused on identifying

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[36] I have described the class more narratively elsewhere, in: "Collections-based Teaching and Social Justice," *Material Collective Blog*, January 9, 2019, http://thematerialcollective.org/3101-2/. This article emphasizes the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning that informed the course design and shares the results of formative and summative assessments.

[37] Nancy Fraser initially conceptualized justice along two dimensions recognition (cultural dimensions) and redistribution (economic directions), "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 212 (1995): 68-93 and "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 107-120 and with Axel Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Verso, 2003). More recent work adds a third dimension responsive to globalization and that is representation, which she links to the political sphere. Applying these ideas to museums are: Richard Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17.4 (1998): 401-418; Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23.3 (2008): 261-279; and more recently Coleman, *Understanding Inclusion*, the campaign Museums Are Not Neutral, co-founded by La Tanya Autry, Teresssa Raiford, and Mike Murawski, the toolkit published by MASS Action (Museum as a Site of Social Action), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58fa685dff7c50f78be5f2b2/t/59dcdd27e5dd5b5a1b51d9d8/1507646780650/TOOLKIT_10_2017.pdf. See also, resources and essays on the sites Museums and Race: Transformation and Justice https://museumsandrace.org; the Incluseum https://incluseum.com; and Visitors of Color https://visitorsofcolor.tumblr.com. All share as a premise that political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions contribute to exclusion and thus impact "participatory parity" (to use Fraser's term). While the course tackled canonical critical

features of oppression as they intersected with arts institutions – bringing in the voices of people of color, such as by playing video clips of Michelle Obama's famous comments on the re-opening of the Whitney. We aimed to unpack the stories art museums tell and rethink existing interpretative choices using tools of academic and applied research.

I structured the course content as a series of deep dives into three of my partner museum's installations, selecting for collections that 1) were presented as a grouping in the museum in the present moment, 2) shared a history– such as a relationship to a specific donor or curator, 3) intersected with each other either because of their historiography or reception history, and 4) connected to different moments in western canon formation. For the first case study I selected late antique mosaics from Antioch (presently Antkaya in Turkey) which hang together in a courtyard designed especially for them and entered the museum's collection in the 1930s as part of the fruits of an excavation in which an important local family participated. The second case study focused on the museum's small medieval gallery, which displays works that had been donated together in the 1950s to create a Jacobean period room at the museum. The third case study revolved around an unusually large collection of Sande society masks in the African art galleries; these were acquired through the efforts of the first curator of the department and help the museum show visitors the important conceptual and creative role African artists played in the traditional arts of Africa. The three case studies connected to each other in ways intended to problematize the canon. African art and medieval art intersect in the primitivizing interests of early twentieth century art and art history, while long into the 1970s scholars described the search for Antioch as the search for the stylistic origins of medieval art.

Class meetings modeled the blended art-historical/object biography method I expected the students to follow in their project work. To offer one example, the BMA's Antioch mosaics offered opportunities to discuss colonialism in relation to archaeology, museum collecting, and the interpretive frames that we apply to the Middle East (or Near East depending on the chronological boundaries within which one works). In the 1930s, a consortium led by Princeton University had conducted seven seasons of excavations in what was then the French mandate of Syria and Lebanon. Archaeologists had set out to find the "lost city of Antioch,"

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consciousness from a recognition standpoint, it was equally key to understand that misrecognition reflects and instantiates political, economic, and social exclusion as to understand that social justice requires intervention across all four dimensions of exclusion and consideration of all three aspects of social justice.

important to them as a cradle of Christianity. Their discovery there of mosaic pavements was hailed by scholars and newspapers for the contribution it would make to the study of Roman wall painting and western art's transition from classical to flatter, less naturalistic, medieval artistic styles. While perhaps easy to dismiss as outdated scholarship, the history of the public and scholarly reception of the Antioch mosaics demonstrated to students how persistently art history has framed anti-classical impulses in art (and its anti-art cousin iconoclasm) as other, attributing them to Middle/Near Eastern influences. These narratives operate at the object level. The BMA's famous *Striding Lion* (a favorite of visitors and docents) prompted great debates about how to explain the stylistic difference between the naturalistic modeling of the lion and the mosaic's flatter carpet patterned background. These debates resonate with larger canonical stories about western art's engagement with classical styles.

The mosaics had overt relevance for present international relations. Ancient Antioch is present day Antakya, a city located in Hatay province, which Turkey annexed in 1939 and which Syria still claims as its own. Since about 2010, Turkey has increasingly pursued the repatriation of important cultural properties it believes are best understood and belong within its borders. While to my knowledge Turkey has not made any claims on the Antioch mosaics as part of that campaign, it has been attentive to the ways that Western museums locate Antioch on their labels.[38] Given the geopolitics of both past and present, and a current public discourse that presents Syria as a site of Muslim extremism, I asked students in our first session on these mosaics to consider how we might rethink the ways that we engage with and narrate the material culture of ancient Antioch. Later sessions explored how current art-historical and archaeological interest in the more holistic analysis of Antioch and its suburbs on the one hand, and materiality and ancient color on the other, might be allied to that effort. A colleague specializing in ancient color and one of the collections' curators made a joint guest appearance and we discussed our ideas with them. We also spent time analyzing the different ways the mosaics had been displayed and interpreted over time at the BMA and in other museums of the West and Turkey. We discussed what these choices revealed about the attitudes and intentions of the interpreters and debated their impact. Historiographic and political trends tracked with historical changes in how western museums have presented mosaic pavements from Antioch, while the locations of the museums – their cultural positionality –

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[38] The curatorial files for the mosaics include a letter from the Turkish Embassy in Washington D.C. requesting the museum correct its labels to reflect the location of the find as Antkaya, Hatay province, Turkey (prior to that the label read Syria for the location).

resulted in subtly different interpretive language that students could unpack. We applied the same processes to our study of the medieval gallery and Sande society masks, giving us, among other opportunities, the chance to consider gender concepts in art from an African feminist perspective and to discuss the role of the Middle Ages in historical and contemporary constructions of whiteness.

Student Work: Testimonials and Challenges

 The semester-long project tasked students with investigating select artworks from the European and African collections. The process included academic research milestones (an object timeline and an "all but the paper" – essentially the equivalent of the introduction to a traditional paper combined with an annotated bibliography) and museum-based assignments for which students would engage with museum visitors in the galleries. Students would create a kind of inclusion audit for their artwork and, based on their findings, pitch ideas to inform how the museum might reconsider the presentation of their permanent collection. BMA curators selected the works they felt merited study from this perspective. With the help of the museum's education department I arranged for students – as a first step – to observe and track visitors in the gallery where their object was on display.[39] Students recorded visitor path and stopping behaviors: specifically how people moved through the space, where they stopped and for how long. They took notes on visitor demographics and they analyzed the gallery's presentation.[40] Students recorded their observations in the form of a map intended to visualize the art and stories presented in the museum space in conjunction with behavioral responses to the installation (fig. 6).

Phase two asked students to work with an evaluation instrument. I developed draft questions from Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri's 2001 study of visitor interpretive strategies in art museums, adapting them to assess the meanings visitors made in their encounters with a single object and its label text.[41] After

[39] For an analysis of the history and best practices of systematic observational work in museums see: Steven S. Yalowitz and Kerry Bronnenkant, "Timing and Tracking: Unlocking Visitor Behavior," *Visitor Studies* 12.1 (2009): 47-64. A valuable compilation of visitor tracking data is Beverly Serrell, *Paying Attention* (2009). It is important to note however that Serrell's book raised some significant points for debate in the museum field including her metrics for measuring an exhibition's success.

[40] The most useful analysis of art interpretation for university-based art history is Whitehead, *Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries*.

[41] This was a large-scale study by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester, the West Midlands Regional Museums Council and Wolverhampton Art

integrating feedback from museum leadership, I shared the survey with students, who tested it out with each other. We reflected on the results of their experience, and students made suggestions to refine the questions – revising for usability, length, and assumptions that had surfaced in the original. Over the following week students spent a few hours in front of their chosen artwork, using our finalized interview script (Appendix 1) to engage with visitors about their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the work of art, asking what questions visitors had, probing their response to the curatorial interpretation, and recording the comments and questions that came up after reading the object label. Students shared their raw data with me to aggregate and disseminate to the class, and wrote reflective observations about visitor assumptions and visitor friction points – non-obvious or hidden factors that troubled visitor understanding and/or resulted in negative or exclusionary feelings among visitors. Both can point to cultural assumptions and biases. A classic example would be the tendency of US-based intellectual cultures to assume a normative and shared Christian background as we do when we refer to Christian concepts or characters without context or explanation. Another is the tendency to approach African art with the expectation that its significance is largely functional versus approaching European art with a focus on aesthetics.[42]

In the final phase students were to propose new approaches to interpreting their artworks that 1) identified assumptions, biases, and friction points at work in the current presentation and 2) told a story that countered hegemonic narratives of the canon. Academic research into their artwork's biography alongside more traditional investigation into its making and historiography were to inform the new interpretations. I assigned readings that drew on feminist and critical race texts and shared excerpts of debates about diversifying the canon.[43] I also shared web-based resources such as the Association for Critical Race Art History (https://acrah.org).

Gallery and Museum that combined professional and academic objectives. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Theano Moussouri, "Making Meaning in Art Museums 1: Visitors' Interpretive Strategies at Wolverhampton Art Gallery," http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/52845/1/Making_meaning_1.pdf.

[42] I shared the results with the Chief Innovation Officer, a leading voice in the BMA's evaluation work, who also visited the class to discuss the students' findings with them and share results from studies of the museum's existing visitors and non-visiting potential audiences.

[43] Classic readings like Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" alongside excerpts in edited collections eg: John C. McEnroe and Deborah Frances Pokinski, eds., "Pt 5. Ch. 21: Culture Wars and the Canon" *Critical Perspectives on Art History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).

Students were to articulate the social justice argument for their choice, weighing both matters of visitor accessibility and the particular issues raised by their artwork's relationship to the canon's hegemonic narratives. They could argue in favor of the current curatorial presentation, or suggest changes. They could advocate for any interpretive solution ranging from in-gallery brochures to web-based content. The tricky part was that "writing a more inclusive interpretation" would invite a different strategy for each artwork. Tackling the canonical narrative at work in the presentation of a portrait by Rembrandt differs in obvious ways from tackling one painted by Vigée le Brun, or navigating primitivist attitudes towards African art. For students, identifying an interpretive approach to pitch proved an extremely difficult task.[44] One probable contributing factor was the heterogeneity of the artworks with which the students were working.[45] Students did not experience the same feeling of shared insights and ideas that students expressed in BAAAM and which might have compensated for their lack of prior exposure to the history of art. Potential thematic connections felt elusive. Nonetheless, both their reflections on their struggles and their analysis of their artworks revealed a sophisticated understanding of canon formation and its entangled public and scholarly aspects.

Representative is a sophomore who worked on Rembrandt's portrait *Titus, the Artist's Son* from 1660. At the mid-term, a salon-style oral presentation of the object biographies, the student astutely observed that Rembrandt's status as a master of the old canon had stimulated both the original acquisition of the painting and what, for this object (as for many related works), had been a dominant preoccupation with its position in the Rembrandt canon. The entirety of the history of its interpretation had focused on claiming the work as a Rembrandt, emphasizing somewhat conservative presentations that telegraphed the painting's belongingness to the Rembrandt corpus. He would later write: "How can this artwork fit with the museum's commitment to become more socially engaged? How does a portrait of the son of a white Dutch male artist relate to inclusion, diversity, or social justice? In short, it doesn't directly." Based on my own read of

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[44] Comments on the university-administered course evaluations show they found it very rewarding as well.

[45] One of their assignments was to find other artworks in the BMA collections that could open up their artwork to new ways of looking. The idea was to help the students step back from the familiar into the strange. All the students enjoyed hunting around the museum's galleries for connections. However, from a learning perspective I would say the students made relatively weak connections and in the future I plan to rethink this assignment.

the problem, I would add that efforts to build a broader picture of Dutch arts in the 1970s and 1980s deliberately neglected Rembrandt. Rembrandt posed many kinds of political problems – first because of nationalistic discourses around Rembrandt in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and second because of the focus of the multicultural politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, although the BMA's painting is today considered among the finest of Rembrandt's portraits of Titus, the late twentieth century creation of a more inclusive Dutch art tended towards an anti-Rembrandt stance. And present scholarship on Rembrandt emphasizes aesthetic over social questions.[46] None of these trends lend themselves readily to helping an undergraduate rethink Rembrandt from a social inclusion standpoint.

The student further observed that visitors had an interest in Rembrandt's technique and the social conditions that enabled him to be so productive, but that they also expressed feelings of inadequacy about interpreting his art.[47] The student elected to dig into the literature of informal education and proposed that the museum consider some form of F.A.Q. style interpretation that addressed visitor anxieties about "not getting art" and also owned up to art history's obsessive-tepid relationship with Rembrandt. He proposed four main questions: "1) Whatever happened to Titus? 2) Why does the museum have a Rembrandt? 3) Is this painting important? and 4) What stories can this object tell us?" In each case the answers included basic factual information such as: "there is very little scholarship on this specific work" - and led into culminating questions: "What do you think makes a painting important? Is a painting important solely because the artist is famous?" "What makes an artist famous?" or "How and why were other artworks acquired by the museum?" The student explained their reasoning as follows:

> Question 2 sets the stage for conversations about object
> provenance, a topic mostly discussed publicly in regard to
> non-western art...in an attempt to equalize the approach to
> European and non-western art. I want viewers to ask the same

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[46] Mariët Westermann, "Back to Basics: Rembrandt and the Emergence of Modern Painting," *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art* 2 Le Pays Bas (2011): 723-747.

[47] Visitors often share this sentiment – and students have said similar things to me. In a comprehensive study of US people who visit cultural organizations and those who don't, 4 out of 10 people stated that they don't feel that art of history museums/sites are for "people like me." https://www.colleendilen.com/2019/02/06/theyre-just-not-that-into-you-what-cultural-organizations-need-to-know-about-non-visitors-data/

> questions about European art such as "How did this object arrive at
> the museum" and "Should the museum have this?"...Question 3 is
> bold but I feel it is important for the viewers to question what it
> means for an artwork to be important...Some visitors stated that the
> painting felt important but they were not sure how to explain why
> the painting gave them that impression.

Essentially, albeit not articulated in these terms, the student proposed that art
history subject its judgments to greater scrutiny and find ways of helping visitors
problematize the West as a norm. A student working on an African work had
similarly – but earlier in the semester – questioned in class whether the museum's
treatment of African objects as art (placing a greater emphasis on artists and
originality) might not on some level play into hegemonic narratives.

Navigating the three poles of the assignment: social equity in interpretation,
visitors' needs and wants, and utility for the museum as our community partner,
and doing so all in the concrete space of a single object, proved hardest for the
three students working on artworks by male European artists. Each came to my
office hours for guidance. They understood the role their work played in
canonical narratives and they had a clear sense of how visitors received the
present curatorial interpretation, but they did not feel equipped to counter-story
the canon using its stated masters. From my perspective, this struggle was
precisely the point: to understand the scope and parameters of the problem while
remaining committed to the struggle. I realize in retrospect, however, that some
aspects of the course design had added an unintended challenge for students. Two
students made comments on a customized survey administered on the final day of
class that suggested that both had strained to apply class discussions and readings
to their own work because their artwork did not fall within the same chronological
and geographic boundaries as the works we analyzed in class.[48]

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[48] One student stated this explicitly "I have a hard time applying concepts to things outside the
context they were speaking in." The other described the deep dives into individual collections as
fascinating but disorienting at times. In the future I plan to orient students better to the
historiography at play in their particular galleries – in this case students working with European
paintings essentially were grappling with a highlights Old Master collection. Drawing on lessons
from BAAAM, I will provide them with more engineered starting bibliographies rather than
relying on the curatorial files, which, because of their purpose as records of the stewardship of the
artwork, tend to track the object only at a micro-level, assuming curatorial expertise to fill in the
broader picture.

Assessment and Learning Outcomes:

Beyond evaluating the assignments, assessing the impact of the course on student learning included a customized survey administered on the last day of class that tested for changes in how students described art museums and the role of institutions in shaping how we understand art, based on comparing its results to ice-breaker exercises from the first day of class. Most notable among the results from the custom survey were responses to the first question, which directly repeated a prompt I had given the students on their very first day of class as part of a getting to know you questionnaire: "what comes to mind when you think of an art museum?" What students wrote then included many descriptions of the white cube and expectations for contemplative experiences. At the end of the semester students described the art museum as "a space where we should learn how to interact with others we don't see in our everyday lives" or "a site for discussing hard to confront topics" and "a place that has the potential to be at the forefront of social inclusion." One student shared "I think this class has made the term 'art museum' a lot more vague for me." Directly relevant to the threshold concept were the key take-aways they listed. Statements like "museums are political" to "institutional voice can and should be challenged" or "there are rarely simple solutions [in reinterpreting art]" demonstrated the understanding that art's meanings have been and continue to be shaped by institutional forces. One student stated it most explicitly in terms of disciplinary discourse: "To look at and think about art exhibitions and displays more critically, as well as discourse around art and history and how the perspectives we're given [influence] our perception of the world."

The standard university-wide course evaluation was administered in the usual way after students turned in their final projects. Results from these revealed a high level of engagement and enthusiasm (4.75 out of 5 for overall quality of course; comments like "eye opening" and "challenge students to think beyond their comfort zones"). Beyond that, of the nine students who completed the class, three added the minor. Two of these enrolled in a follow-up Spring course. A fourth student proposed an independent study focused on how to make the experiences of art in museums more inclusive for adults with cognitive and sensory disabilities. Assessing the satisfaction of the museum partner, to cite just one metric of success, after engaging with students in "Object Encounters" the curator of African art at the BMA approached me with the idea of co-teaching a curatorial

seminar in which students would conceptualize an exhibition about power and gender in African art.

Conclusion

These case studies have suggested ways of moving the histories of the discipline to the forefront of students' art historical investigations, without sacrificing the close and direct engagement with visual artworks that is the cornerstone of the discipline. They show that by engaging at the same time in processes that blend institutional critique with art interpretation, students start to take ownership of conversations around matters of disciplinary judgment, taxonomies, and narrative tropes. Students learn to recognize the intersecting roles of institutions, their ideologies, and the historical and commercial processes at work in art history, and apply those insights to research-based interpretations of individual artworks. Students in these courses traversed epistemic and ethical conflicts that were authentic, emergent, and productive, with important intellectual and social stakes.

Despite the ways in which these CBL experiences helped students gain an ability to recognize and respond to disciplinary inequities, two areas invite further investigation. For one, how might these courses – or do these courses – build skills in engaging in "race talk" – crucial for speaking back to the canon as well as for living in the world? BAAAM considered the entangled histories of artists, critics, and museums in constructing black art as a concept in relation to blackness. Object Encounters included a unit on the construction of whiteness related to our study of the medieval gallery.[49] The same unit also pointed to the normalization of Christianity in art interpretation, comparing the presentation of Christian saints in the gallery with that of Buddhist saints in other parts of the museum. Yet I have mixed impressions about how we did on addressing racial thinking. Upon reflection, I would say that in Object Encounters we often fell back on terms like "the West" (versus Africa) in ways that presumed and normalized modern conceptions of whiteness. We did slightly better at disrupting

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[49] I assigned the students Madeline Caviness, "From the Self-Invention of the Whiteman in the Thirteenth Century to *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*," *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1 (September 2008): 1-33 and relevant blog posts from the public medievalist website at https://www.publicmedievalist.com/race-racism-middle-ages-toc/ and shared my documentation of the exhibition curated by Kristen Collins and Bryan C. Keene, "Outcasts: Prejudice and Persecution in the Medieval World," Getty Center, January 30-April 8, 2018.

whiteness as the norm in BAAAM – thinking through, for instance, whether we were racially characterizing both black AND white institutions.[50]
Ethical competence is another area I aim to study further.[51] Compared to students in BAAAM, students in Object Encounters framed their challenge in more cognitive than ethical terms. Perhaps this stemmed from the different nature of the stakes in each class. Students in BAAAM knew their interpretations would be made public and they worked on underrepresented artists whose stories felt directly relevant to the students' present. Students in Object Encounters shared different pieces of their work with staff from the departments most implicated by individual assignments – but knew their assessment would stay internal to the museum. And the museum already presented their works as masterpieces. At the same time all the students showed rich levels of ethical judgment. They came to an understanding of and reflected upon a range of perspectives about their research as a tool for social action. They weighed different forms of evidence,

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[50] Down to the level of language – we identified and discussed the tendency we found in scholarship and in our own writing to set "mainstream" criticism and institutions as the norm while describing black criticism and institutions as "black" and chose to qualify white criticism and institutions with the term white or predominantly white.

[51] Including studying how we might define ethical competence for art-history teaching and practice. Studies of ethical competence in other fields emphasize sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and the ability to act ethically. CAA's Ethical Standards for the Practice of Art History (online at: https://www.collegeart.org/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines/art-history-ethics) focus on issues related to recruitment and hiring faculty, authorship/intellectual property, access to research resources, disseminating content, and citation. Unique to art-historians are 1) the duty to living artists, whose careers and livelihoods may depend on disseminating knowledge of their work, and 2) obligations stemming from the illegal traffic in artworks. These latter two responsibilities point to art history's impact on the public sphere but only where there exists a potential direct link between academic art history and present commercial interests. Another model to consider is museological. The American Alliance of Museums states that the distinctive character of museum ethics derives from the ownership, care, and use of collections (https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/). The organization emphasizes rightful (legal) ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal of collections under strictly defined conditions. There is also a growing literature on museum ethics that aims to regard ethics as a dynamic social practice. I highlight here the research project launched in 2012 at the University of Leicester because it included moving beyond canonicity as one of its five themes. Janet Marstine, Jocelyn Dodd, Ceri Jones, "Reconceptualizing Museum Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Vol. 2 Museum Practice*, ed. Conal McCarthy (West Sussex: Wiley, 2015), 69-96.

identified different views on that evidence, and considered the context and stakeholders before arriving at their own judgments.[52]

Undergraduates often see CBL courses like those described above as an opportunity for professionalizing experiences.[53] My own university's administrators value the program for building real-world skills as well as an example of community engagement. I am grateful for those perceptions and acknowledge they have a basis in fact. But at the heart of the program's learning goals are empowering students to be critical interpreters of museums as both disciplinary and community institutions; to encourage students to reflect on their major field of study in new ways; and to enable students to be active, informed members of the broader cultural community throughout their lives. Museums shape the public understanding of art, including that of our students. Learning to read museums and their collections visually, archivally, and through data-driven methods empowers students to investigate the formation of academic art history and attend to the legacies of those historical processes in the canon. Taking responsive action builds students' ethical judgment and sense of agency. Art museums and academic art and art history departments are so much each other's mirrors, including in our respective and shared forms of elitism, whiteness, and power – that engaging with each other, in the end, helps us see ourselves.

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[52] Amelie Rorty "The Use and Abuse of Morality," *Journal of Ethics* 16 (2012): 1-13; Andrea Milligan, Lindsay Gibson, and Carla L. Peck, "Enriching Ethical Judgments in History Education," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 46.3 (2018): 449-479.
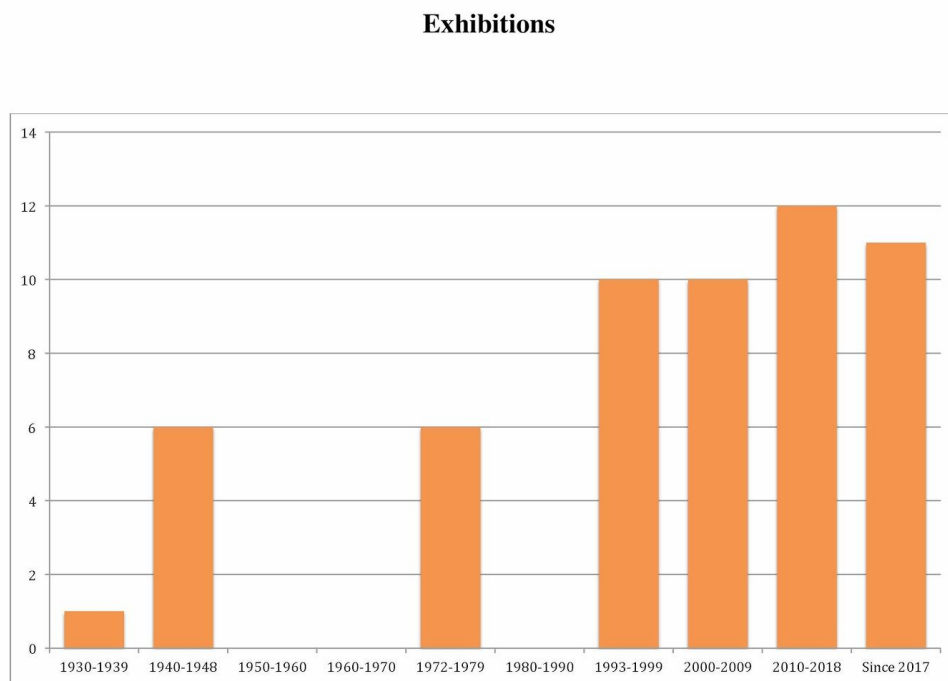
[53] Based on the results of a recent survey of alumni who graduated with a minor in the museum program. One caveat is that the survey had a 30% response rate strongly biased towards alumni employed in the cultural / museum sector.

Figure 1
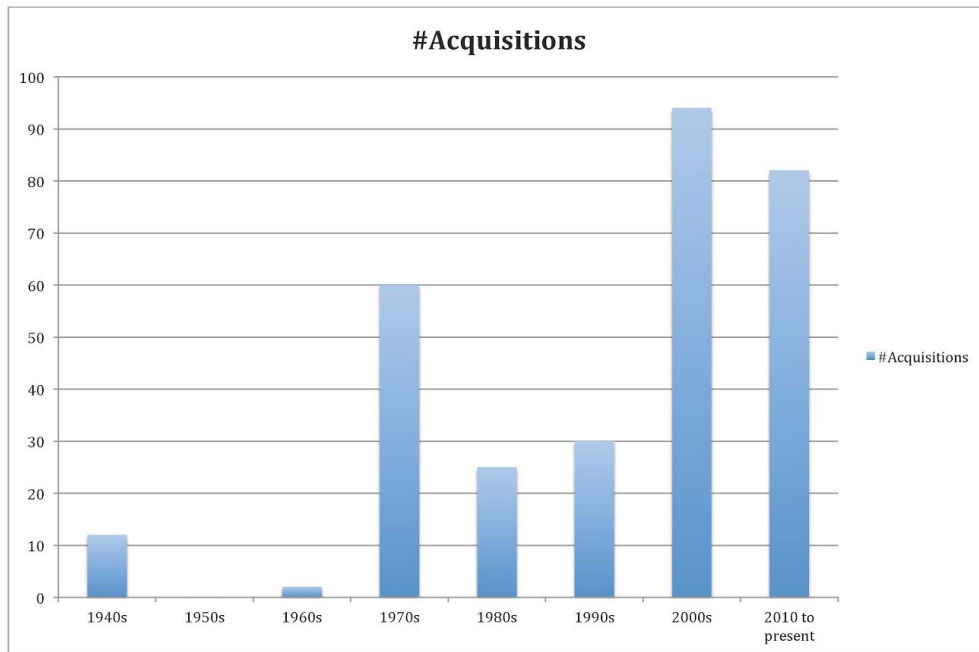
Acquisitions of Artworks by African-American Artists at the Baltimore Museum of Art From 1939 to 2018

Figure 2

Exhibitions Featuring African-American Artists at the Baltimore Museum of Art From 1930 to 2018

Figure 3

Robert Hamilton Blackburn (1920-2003) was the leading lithographer of his generation. His artistic soul and evolutionary process is most apparent in this medium. Despite his innovative and virtuosic prints, however, art-history tends to neglect Blackburn's oeuvre [1].

Blackburn grew up in Harlem's artistic community, which at the time afforded Black artists significantly more opportunities than many places in the United States. There Blackburn participated in the Harlem Arts Workshop (HAW), the artistic salon "306", the Arts and Crafts program at the Harlem YMCA, the federally funded Harlem Community Art Center (HCAC) and the Uptown Art Laboratory. He benefitted from the mentorship of Charles Alston, Augusta Savage, and James Lesesne Wells and built an extensive professional network that included such well-known figures as Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, Roy DeCarava, and Jacob Lawrence. A prolific artist even as a student, Blackburn won acclaim early in his career, receiving three top prizes at HCAC, as well as the John Wanamaker Medal in 1936 and the prestigious Spingarn Award in 1937. He earned praise from the mainstream (read: white) newspaper the *New York Times* as well as from the Black cultural critics Alain Locke and James Porter.

His most recognized legacy, however, is the Printmaking Workshop he opened with Will Barnet in the late 40s. Run as a cooperative, the workshop gave artists access to training, the space and technical support to experiment with printmaking processes, and it encouraged innovative approaches to a medium that was slowly gaining recognition and acceptance as a major art form. The Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop had a liberal structure that served as a welcoming hub to people of all backgrounds. It was always full of notable artists and students and had a major impact on American art. The Workshop's contributions extend to the preservation of Black arts. Many works on paper by Black artists currently in American art museums (including the Baltimore Museum of Art) are later prints that Blackburn prepared of his colleagues' earlier work.

Blackburn often focused on the Workshop and its artists during interviews. He seemed almost reluctant at times to put forward his own art. This may explain, in part, why his art has not yet received the historical recognition it deserves. But Blackburn is a pivotal figure in the history of art on many grounds: for his community work, his advocacy for and support of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and his creativity.

[1] For instance, Blackburn is not even mentioned in Riva Castleman's *Standard Print of the 20th Century*.

Figure 4

Robert Blackburn. Woodscape. 1984. Purchased as the gift of the Joshua Johnson Council in Honor of the 100th Anniversary of The Baltimore Museum of Art; and Print, Drawing, and Photograph Society Fund, with proceeds derived from the 2012 Contemporary Print Fair, BMA 2014.90. Photo courtesy of the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Robert Blackburn started making woodcuts in the late 1960s. It is one of the many printmaking media he explored in innovative ways throughout his career. Blackburn particularly enjoyed iterative experimentation and pushing the creative possibilities of both form and material. *Woodscape*, from 1984, is a mature example of his approach. Blackburn probably used three woodblocks to create this piece. On one of them, he raised the wood grain in select areas. The effect is of textured crimson zones set over clean grays and framed by deep black accents. The title "Woodscape" draws attention to that and plays off the idea of landscape. It suggests that a representational intention grounds the picture's abstraction.

"Woodscape" is one of three Blackburn prints owned by the Baltimore Museum of Art. All entered the collection on the occasion of the museum's centennial in 2014, purchased as gifts, respectively, of Mark and Lorraine Schapiro and the Joshua Johnson Council, an African American museum support group. The pieces' abstract style differs considerably from the four figurative lithographs a young Blackburn exhibited in *Contemporary Negro Art*. Blackburn abandoned figuration entirely by the mid-1950s, and that choice, along with his commitment to the Universal Limited Art Editions (1957-1963) and the fame of his printmaking workshop, has contributed to this master printer being less publicly known than some of his contemporaries.

Figure 5

"Quarry on the Hudson" is an enigma. No images or record of the work have surfaced beyond its listing in the catalog for the Baltimore Museum's 1939 exhibition.

Jones created an etching with the same title around the same time, but there is no way to know if the two works are connected.[1] Etching would be a more unusual choice for Lois Jones than watercolor, which she taught at Howard University for her entire tenure there. Although Jones struggled with the fact that many critics dismissed watercolor as a feminine art form,[2] she remained passionate about the medium. Part of watercolor's appeal for Jones and other masters of the medium is its suitability for plein air painting and ability to render light.[3]

Jones' landscapes span from renderings of sites near her family's Martha's Vineyard vacation home to depictions of the French countryside.[4] They tend not to receive nearly the same level of attention as works featuring African motifs such as "Les Fétiches" (1938) or one of her portraits of Alain Locke.[5] Those paintings pop up in many publications on Lois Mailou Jones, whereas a watercolor landscape like "Quarry on the Hudson" has no face.

The disappearance of "Quarry on the Hudson" is symptomatic of the sociocultural pressures put upon Jones. She was rejected from the American fine art institutions in Boston early in her career, instead told to go south to work for "her people" in black institutions.[6] At Howard University, Jones received much creative support from her contemporaries and yet in that environment, she was restricted to being an African American artist, and not simply an American Artist.[7] By the cultural standards of the time, a black female painter made no sense in the realm of American landscape painting.

"Quarry on the Hudson" comes from an early moment in Jones' career. She would later turn more to black subjects in America and Haiti, only coming back to painting to landscapes after the death of her husband.[8]

Figure 6
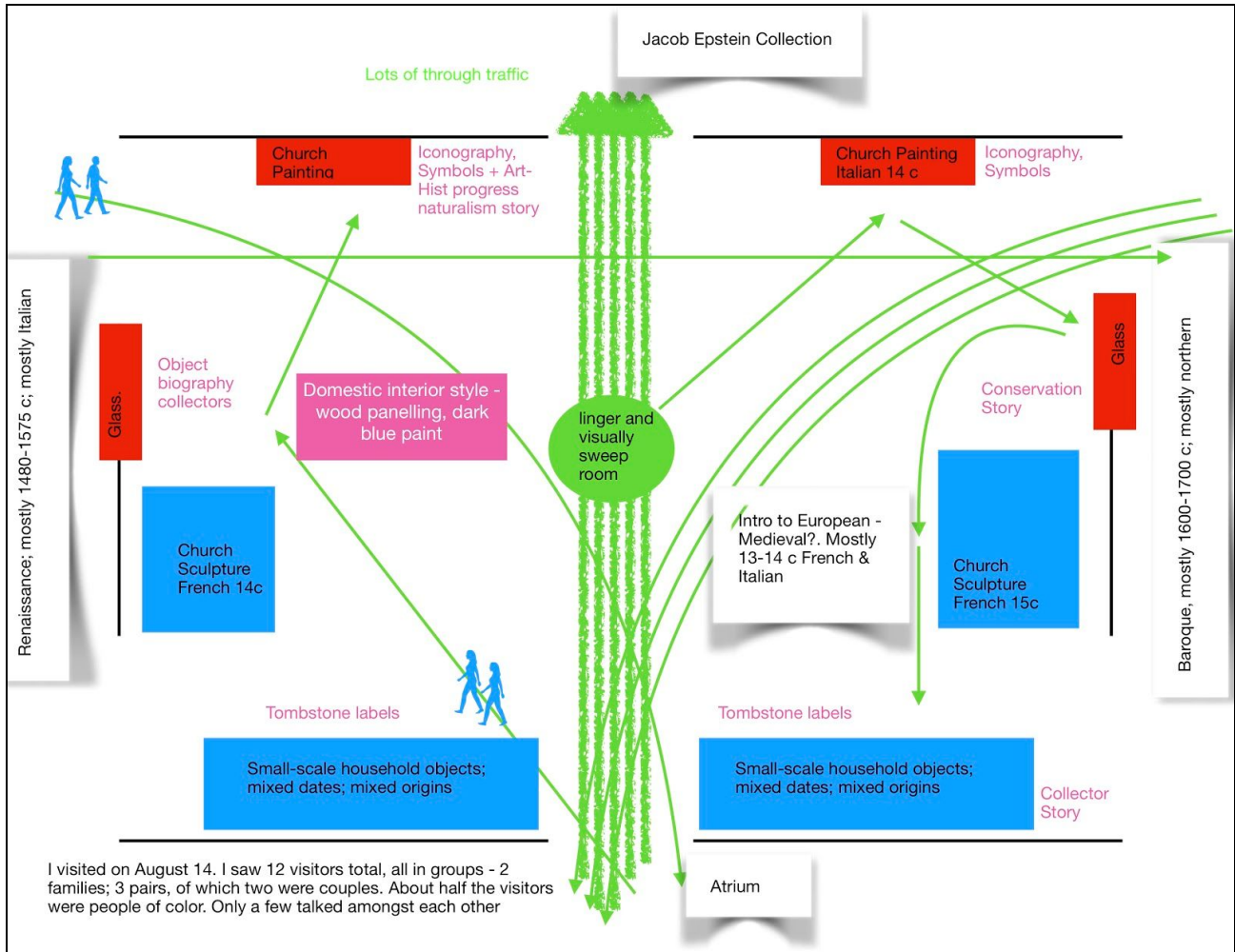
Appendix 1

Visitor Survey

References:
Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Theano Moussouri, "Making Meaning in Art Museums 1: Visitors' Interpretive Strategies at Wolverhampton Art Gallery," http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/52845/1/Making_meaning_1.pdf

Some questions visitors have been asking the Brooklyn Museum:
https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/ask

Desai, P. and Thomas, A. *Cultural Diversity: Attitudes of Ethnic Minority Populations Towards Museums and Galleries*, **Museums and Galleries Commission, London; and Harris Qualitative, (1998)**

Instructions

Your goal is to record 10 responses to your survey. It may take multiple tries at different times. The weekends are probably the days with the most traffic. You will need to record the responses with an audio recorder. You can check out an audio recorder from the Digital Media Center, or, with advance notice, I can reserve a recorder for you at the Center for Educational Resources. Make sure to turn in all survey recordings to the instructor.

Position yourself in the gallery near the object you are researching. Approach every third person / group to enter the gallery.

Survey (please follow this script consistently)

Hello, my name is .... and I'm a student at ……. I'm doing research for a class and I'm interested in what your experience is like in this gallery of the museum. Would you mind if I ask you some questions? (Yes/No)

(If they don't mind)
I would like us to spend some time with this artwork and record your reactions to it. You can say anything you want about what you see and what you think about this artwork and this museum. There are no right or wrong answers. Anything you say will be useful for this research.

      1.   What comes to mind when you look at this artwork?

      2.   Can you explain what you mean? (and / or Can you tell me more about that?)

      3.   What else comes to mind when you look at this work?

      4.   Not everyone sees the same things in this artwork. What questions come to mind when you look at it?

      5.   What other things are you curious about when it comes to this artwork (or artworks more generally, or the museum)?

If they haven't read the label yet, please ask them to read it

      1.   What impressions of the artwork does the label give you?

      2.   What in the label creates that impression?

      3.   What questions, if any, does the label answer for you?

      4.   What questions, if any, does the label raise in your mind?

"Thank you so much – to wrap up - I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself which will help me analyze my study."
Please record the responses to these in writing as well as with your audio recorder. It will make it easier to quantify your data.

1. **Can I ask what year you were born?**

2. **Do you live in Baltimore? If yes, what neighborhood do you call home? If no, where do you live?**

3. **What brought you to the museum today?**

4. **Have you come to the Baltimore Museum of Art before? How many times? Do you have a favorite spot / gallery / artwork?**

5. **Did you ever study art? If yes, which art subject? How long?**

6. **Do you follow any publications, websites, social media or programs on either art or museums (e.g. magazine, blog, Instagram etc…)? ….If yes, which ones? how often (e.g. regularly, occasionally)?**