

# Pedagogical Reckoning

Decolonizing and Degendering  
the Art Historical Canon in the  
Classroom and Museum

Edited by

**Sooran Choi**

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Series on the History of Art



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Gillian would like to thank Sooran for inviting her to co-edit this very timely volume. She appreciated the collaborative spirit of the contributors to this anthology and their willingness to offer constructive criticism to one another as part of the internal peer review process. She would also like to thank her husband, Randall Hannum, for assistance with technical matters in the preparation of the manuscript. Finally, she thanks Vernon Press for its interest in this important topic.



# Contributors

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is now known as Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Laura worked in museums, galleries, libraries, and archives (GLAM) internationally for 20 years (England, Qatar, USA, Eeyou Istchee, Canada). Her research interests and teaching activities focus on decolonizing the pedagogy of museum studies, co-teaching decolonizing and Indigenizing courses for GLAM professionals, and educating her fellow settlers on the implications of our ongoing presence on lands stolen from Indigenous Nations. She is grateful to live in what is now the state of Oklahoma (Okla Huma), on the homelands of the Hasinai Caddo Nation and Kiriikir?i:s Wichita & Affiliated Tribes. She acknowledges this territory serves as a hunting ground, trade exchange point, and migration route for the Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, and Osage nations, and that the 39 Indigenous nations present in Oklahoma are here because of violent settler colonial policies designed to assimilate and eradicate Indigenous peoples. Among her publications is "Teaching Decolonizing Curatorial & Museum Practices," *Museum Worlds* 10, pp. 112-131. doi: 10.3167/armw.2022.100109.

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special issue of *Media-N: Journal of the New Media Caucus*. In September 2022, Lehner presented their research on trans selfies at the MeCCSA conference in Aberdeen, Scotland, and was the keynote plenary speaker at the International Visual Sociology Conference. In March of 2023, Lehner will present their research on trans photography at the Society for Photographic Education conference in Denver, CO. Lehner's artwork has appeared at the International Center of Photography, New York, NY; Geary Contemporary, Millerton, NY; el Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; Gallery La Central, Montreal, Canada; SOMArts, San Francisco, CA; and The Wassaic Project in Wassaic NY. In June 2023, Lehner will have a solo exhibition of their project *Barbershop: The Art of Queer Failure* at Practice Gallery in Philadelphia, PA. Lehner's current book project is *Trans Representations: Decolonizing Visual Theory in Contemporary Media (Working Title)*. Lehner holds a Ph.D. in Visual Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an MFA in Fine Art / MA in Visual Studies from California College of the Arts. Lehner is an Assistant Professor in Art and Art History at the University of Vermont.

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## Editors

**Sooran Choi**, Assistant Professor of Art and Art History at the University of Vermont, Burlington, VT, specializes in decolonization within avant-garde discourse, global feminism, and ecocriticism, with a focus on contemporary East Asian art. Her current book manuscript, titled *Zombie Avant-Gardes: Subterfuge as Radical Agency in Postwar South Korean Art*, explores post-WWII global interdisciplinary artistic exchanges among East Asia, the United States, and Europe by highlighting South Korean renditions of avant-garde art viewed through postcolonial lenses, moving beyond the center-periphery binaries. Her research and teaching seek to decenter the very structure of avant-garde conceptual frameworks and global art history by contextualizing South Korean postwar art within its socio-political and cultural terrains. Her efforts are reflected in recent publications, including "Manifestations of a Zombie Avant-garde: South Korean Performance and Conceptual Art in the 1970s" (2020); "Camouflaged Dissent—A Plastic Umbrella and Transparent Balloons:

‘Happenings’ in South Korea, 1967–1968” (2021); “Korean Shamanism in Action/Art: The Counter-cultural Spirituality of Women and Gender Fluidity” (2023); and “‘Total Art’ in Disguise—the Aesthetic of Anarcho-Daoist Intervention: the Fourth Group in Cold War South Korea, 1970,” among others. She received the 2018 College Art Association (CAA) Professional Development Fellowship for the early version of her current book project. Additional awards include the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics Dissertation Fellowship, grants from the Academy of Korean Studies, and the Black, Race, and Ethnic Studies Initiative grant from the Mellon Foundation, which launched the Cross-Ethno-Gender Korean/Asian Studies Initiative (CEGKASI) that hosted its first seminar the Afro-Latinx-Queer-Korea-Asia in the Arts Symposium at the City University of New York in April 2023 to promote cross-disciplinary Korean studies.

**Gillian Greenhill Hannum** is Professor Emerita of Art History at Manhattanville University in Purchase, New York, where she served on the faculty from 1987 to 2021. A photo historian with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from The Pennsylvania State University, she has published on photographic topics in the *Journal of the Royal Photographic Society* (of Great Britain), *History of Photography* and *Nineteenth Century*, has presented widely at national and international conferences, and has contributed to several books and exhibition catalogs. Most recently, she co-edited, with Kyunghee Pyun, *Expanding the Parameters of Feminist Artivism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023) and a special issue of the journal *Religion and the Arts* titled “Keeping the Faith: Religion, Gender, and the Arts in the Twenty-first Century” (Brill, March 2023). She continues to teach at Manhattanville on a part-time basis.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Sooran Choi  
*University of Vermont*

### How It All Began

At a recent art history conference, a poignant moment occurred when a young graduate student, passionate about social justice, shared her frustration with the traditional Eurocentric syllabus of her art history courses. She described how she felt disconnected from the material, which focused predominantly on European art and often excluded contributions from other cultures. Her comments sparked a lively discussion among attendees about the need for a more inclusive curriculum.<sup>1</sup> This anecdote reflects a broader pattern—students from diverse backgrounds frequently express similar concerns, feeling alienated by a curriculum that fails to acknowledge the global dimensions of artistic production. In an era of rapid globalization, social media connectivity, and unprecedented ease of travel, maintaining a narrow, provincial perspective is not just a disadvantage in career development but also a significant barrier to understanding humanity in its full complexity for everyone, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, or gendered backgrounds. Many educators are now re-evaluating their syllabi and teaching methods to incorporate diverse perspectives and decolonize the curriculum. This shift is not merely academic but reflects a broader commitment to equity and inclusion, aiming to provide a more representative and comprehensive understanding of global art history.

In 2020, Yale University retired its legendary art history survey course, *Introduction to Art History: Renaissance to the Present*.<sup>2</sup> Despite the press coverage and controversy that ensued, it was hardly the first institution of higher education to take this step; in fact, it was a rather delayed change. In an era when diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to academic discourse and increasingly a focus of colleges and universities, a course that almost exclusively

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<sup>1</sup> “Teaching Introductory Classes with DEI in Mind, i.e., Decolonizing the Survey” (Panel presentation, College Art Association Annual Conference, New York, February 16–19, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Hedeman and Matt Kristoffersen, “Art History Department to Scrap Survey Course,” *Yale News*, January 24, 2020, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2020/01/24/art-history-department-to-scrap-survey-course/> (accessed September 12, 2022).

focused on the work of white men had become anachronistic. This shift was part of a broader reassessment of curricula across various disciplines. Yale's English Department took a similar step in 2017 to 'decolonize' its major requirements, reflecting a growing institutional effort to question and diversify traditional academic canons.<sup>3</sup> The reassessment of content in college courses that led to such decisions had its roots in the 1960s and '70s when the Civil Rights and Feminist movements questioned the omission of women and people of color from the 'canons' that dominated so many intellectual disciplines.<sup>4</sup> In explaining Yale's decision, the campus newspaper emphasized "the impossibility of adequately covering the entire field [of art history]—and its varied cultural backgrounds—in one course."<sup>5</sup> This acknowledgment reflects a broader shift in art history pedagogy, moving away from a single, overarching narrative toward a more pluralistic and inclusive approach that better represents the complexity and diversity of artistic traditions worldwide.

This anthology emerges at a crucial juncture in art history, responding to the imperative to decolonize and diversify the traditional curriculum. The genesis of this volume lies in a series of conferences and discussions among art historians, driven by a shared commitment to deconstructing and reimagining art historical pedagogy.<sup>6</sup> Our objective is to move beyond the historically entrenched Western, white, cisgender, male-dominated canon and to embrace perspectives grounded in decolonization and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

A pivotal moment in the development of this anthology was my participation in the WOMEN'S HERstory Month Colloquium, "Making Women Visible in the Art History Classroom and Beyond," held at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York on March 25, 2022.<sup>7</sup> This colloquium provided a platform for strategizing how to diversify art historical survey courses, even when conventional canons still needed to be covered within limited class time. This experience catalyzed my deeper engagement in

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<sup>3</sup> Hedeman and Kristoffersen, "Art History Department."

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," *Art News* (January 1971): 22–39, 67–71; and Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (1983): 118–131.

<sup>5</sup> Hedeman and Kristoffersen, "Art History Department."

<sup>6</sup> "Making Women Visible in the Art History Classroom and Beyond" (Panel presentation, WOMEN'S HERstory Month Colloquium, The City University of New York, March 25, 2022); "Pedagogical Reckoning" (Panel presentation, Cultural Studies Association [CSA] 20th Anniversary Conference, Columbia College Chicago, Chicago, IL, June 2–4, 2022); and "Teaching Introductory Classes with DEI in Mind, i.e., Decolonizing the Survey."

<sup>7</sup> "Making Women Visible in the Art History Classroom and Beyond."

discussions and collaborations with colleagues across various disciplines, exploring the integration of teaching and scholarship in addressing this pressing pedagogical challenge.

Building on these interdisciplinary efforts, I organized a panel at the Cultural Studies Association (CSA) conference at Columbia College, Chicago, in June 2022 and participated in a similarly themed panel at the College Art Association in February 2023.<sup>8</sup> These initiatives laid the foundation for this anthology. During the CSA conference, I was approached by an editor from Vernon Press with the opportunity to compile an edited volume that would encapsulate these critical discussions and insights. I am especially grateful to Dr. Gillian Hannum, Professor Emerita of Art History at Manhattanville University, Purchase, NY, for her invaluable collaboration as co-editor of this volume. Her expertise and dedication have been instrumental in shaping and enriching this project.

The contributions within this volume underscore the importance of integrating the narratives and achievements of artists from diverse ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural backgrounds into the broader tapestry of art history. They offer various educational strategies for implementing these changes, such as updating course materials, utilizing diverse sources art history classrooms, exhibitions, and research. Collectively, these essays highlight the broader cultural implications of these pedagogical reforms,, and fostering inclusive environments in suggesting that transforming how art history is studied and taught can reshape societal perceptions and valuations of contributions from historically marginalized groups. This anthology represents a collective effort to rethink and reshape the art historical canon. It introduces recent major museum exhibitions and publications that contribute to diversifying the conventional narratives in Euro-American academia. The volume proposes a strategy of organizing art historical discourses around a multidirectional web of connections, acknowledging existing canonical works while shifting focus to the broader mosaic of global connectivity, inclusive of women, non-binary genders, Indigenous peoples, and the 'non-Western.'<sup>9</sup> Through these diverse pedagogical approaches, this anthology seeks to decolonize, degender, and deconstruct the Western art historical canon, fostering a more inclusive and representative understanding of art history.

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<sup>8</sup> "Pedagogical Reckoning"; "Teaching Introductory Classes with DEI in Mind, i.e., Decolonizing the Survey."

<sup>9</sup> I will use problematic binary terms such as 'Western/non-Western' or 'East/West' because these terms are still actively used in defining fields of study. However, they also serve as a starting point to problematize these categories and move toward a non-binary understanding of the world.

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