Call for Papers:
The Seventeenth Annual Yale University American Art Graduate Symposium

Theme: Inheritance
Date: April 2, 2022
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Patricia Marroquin Norby, Associate Curator of Native American Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Inheritance can be both a gift and a burden. Current conversations in and outside the field of American art history speak to inheritance’s double temporality: What pasts have we inherited? What futures do we wish to pass on? Inheritance is a site and an object of struggle: when Tamara Lanier sued Harvard University for possession of the daguerreotypes depicting her enslaved ancestors, she affirmed the right to ownership of her past. To inherit involves questions of kinship, both genealogical and fictive: whom do we claim as our forebears and descendants, and who claims us? To inherit is thus both an intimate and a political act. To inherit is to stand in relation, to be indebted, and to claim power.

The Seventeenth Annual Yale University American Art Graduate Symposium invites submissions that present new ways of thinking about art’s relationship to inheritance. Canons and received narratives of what constitutes “American” art history are our field’s collective inheritances, yet cultural production has also bequeathed us counter-histories and alternative genealogies. We invite submissions that address art and material culture across North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean, that engage a range of critical perspectives, and that speak to a variety of time periods and artistic practices.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Intergenerational transmission of skills, customs, stories, and knowledge
- Indigenous survivance
- The ethics of reception and (mis)appropriation
- Property, possession, and the transmission of capital
- The inheritance of objects, the history of collecting, and the decolonization of museums
- Queer legacies
- Gendered dimensions of inheritance
- Climate crisis and other forms of toxic inheritance
- Environmental stewardship and land “ownership” in a settler-colonial state
- Genetic legacies and constructions of race
- Unwanted inheritance and “bad kin”
- The weaponization of “heritage” in service of white supremacy

Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract of no more than 350 words, along with a CV, to americanist.symposium@gmail.com by January 31, 2022. Accepted participants will be notified in mid-February. We are planning for a day-long, in-person symposium but will adapt to a virtual format if Covid-19 conditions and University policies change. If the symposium is in-person, accommodation will be provided for all participants.