

CAA News Today

Annual Conference Committee Chair Charlene Villaseñor Black on Why You Can't Miss CAA 2019

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Charlene Villaseñor Black is Professor of Art History and Chicana/o Studies at UCLA and chair of the Annual Conference Committee for the **2019 Annual Conference** in New York, February 13-16, 2019.

As a crucial player in the conference process, we asked Charlene to share her thoughts on the field, being a part of CAA, and what goes into making the conference a reality every year. Listen in or read her thoughts below.

CAA 107th Annual Conference, 2019



So, chairing the Conference Committee is a huge job. We had a record number of submissions—there was a lot of reading—but it was also very exciting to see where our members are, and what kinds of things people are doing in terms of their artistic practice, what things art historians are thinking of. It was actually very exhilarating to read these submissions.

When I came on, agreed to do this, I had a couple of goals in mind, and the first one for me was diversifying CAA. Really broadening out what kinds of topics we were looking at. I was also interested in pulling in more people who are working on historic time periods. I'm someone who works on colonial, on early modern but I also work in contemporary Chicana art. So I'm very much interested in seeing how differing fields can speak to each other, and I was also very much interested in studio art, and a little nervous about that because I actually think that dialogue with artists is extremely important for those of us who are historians.

The submissions that we read were very exciting. There are many different themes, a very diverse representation of subject areas. What was interesting to me was that several themes that transcend chronology or geography came out to me. There were a lot of panels on the politics of artistic production. There were a lot of panels looking at migration, immigration, globalism. There were a lot of panels looking at the environment, artistic practice in the environment. Materiality was another very important topic that I saw that's still very popular.

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So I was very attentive to the representation of historical panels for the annual conference. This is actually very important to me, and there were a lot of early modern panels. As someone who works on early modern colonial and contemporary, I really think about why history matters. And in this current political moment, I think we understand why history matters, and why facts matter. And thinking about the current migration crises in the world right now, the roots of those crises are really in the early modern period, during this period of European imperialism. So I actually think this is a moment when we can really speak to each other across time periods, across fields. It's a really important moment for us to do that.

I hope that the biggest surprise about the conference is its incredible breadth, and the incredible range of interests that our members have, and people are working on in their studio practices, in their scholarship.

My very first CAA was in 1992. I was a graduate student. It was in Chicago, and I very clearly remember going to that first conference. I felt intimidated. I also remember very well, I think it was 1995, San Antonio. I was on the job market, but what I remember is that there were two Latin American panels. There were two colonial panels. They were scheduled at the same time unfortunately, but I remember presenting at that conference.

CAA is the major professional organization that I belong to. I'm also active in Latinx studies, but CAA for me feels like home. I was very fortunate to win one of the CAA **Millard Meiss** subventions early on for my first book. CAA to me is just fundamental in terms of you go to the conference, you see what everyone's working on, what does the field look like at this moment? You see lots of old friends. You hopefully meet some new people.

The job market is a challenge right now for young scholars who are just finishing. Because of the fields I work in, I am very fortunate that my students have done really well. They tend to have multiple job offers. I had two people on the market this year, so I'm very grateful for that. I think it's actually really important to broaden what it is we can teach and what we can talk about. Not just be highly specialized in twenty years of the 16th century, for example. It's extremely important to have range,

to be able to even move out of art history. A number of my students are also working in ethnic studies right now, and they've all done beautifully on the job market.

I think it's also up to us to argue for the importance of what we do. Visual literacy could not be more important than it is at this particular moment. This is the most visual world that has ever existed, so that visual literacy argument is important for us to make, I feel.

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So we had a record number of submissions this year, and I read a lot of them. I read hundreds of the submissions, and really allotted a lot of time to doing it, because you want to make sure you give every submission a fair read and a good read. You don't want to be grouchy or tired when you're reading someone's submission. It's their work. It's very important. So I read I'm guessing 400 or 500 of the submissions. Yeah. I really wanted to get a sense of where everybody was.

The final decisions are made by a committee, by the Annual Conference Committee, and there were so many submissions this year that we pulled in extra readers. You want to have a very diverse group of readers because our knowledge tends to be very particular. For example, you want to make sure you have people who are in studio art reading studio art proposals. Somebody who understands maybe contemporary may not understand ancient pre-Columbian. So you want to have readers who are literate in a variety of areas able to read and fairly assess the submissions.

I think it's really important, and I'm speaking as an advisor, as a mentor, as someone who's also an editor, that I like it when we put our main idea out first or upfront. When we're talking in a proposal submission, I think it's important to not kind of unroll your way to the main point. So I think being direct can really help clarify what you're talking about.

I think to be successful presenting, it is really important that you're not just reading, looking down, reading your script. That even if you have to rehearse moments of engagement with the audience, that will really enliven the presentation. Take time to look at the images you're talking about, to point out things in the images. Take time to engage directly with your audience, make eye contact with them. I know when I'm working with students, it's very important to tell people that you need to do those things, and to rehearse the paper so that you're not stumbling—you know what you're going to say before you say it.

I love the opportunity to connect with people that I haven't seen since the last conference. I love seeing the latest work that's happening in art history, and I love hearing artists talk about what they're doing.

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caavvisual Ever wonder how the CAA Annual Conference schedule comes together? The answer is lots of time, table space, and coffee ☕ Here is (L-R) Mira Friedlaender, manager of the annual conference, Tiffany Dugan, director of programs and publications, and Charlene Villaseñor Black, annual conference program chair, finishing up day one. They'll pick it back up tomorrow on day two, scheduling over 300 sessions for #CAA2019. 📌 Want to join a panel? Tap the link in our profile to see which sessions are looking for contributors.

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Charlene Villaseñor Black, whose research focuses on the art of the Ibero-American world, is Professor of Art History and Chicana/o Studies at UCLA. Winner of the 2016 Gold Shield Faculty Prize and author of the prize-winning and widely-reviewed 2006 book, Creating the Cult of St. Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire, she is finishing her second monograph, Transforming Saints: Women, Art, and Conversion in Mexico and Spain, 1521-1800. Her edited book, Chicana/o Art: Tradition and Transformation, was released in February 2015. She is co-editor of a special edition of The Journal of Interdisciplinary History entitled Trade Networks and Materiality: Art in the Age of Global Encounters, 1492-1800, with Dr. Maite Álvarez of the J. Paul Getty Museum; and editor of a forthcoming issue of Aztlán focused on teaching Chicana/o and Latina/o art history. She has held grants from the Getty, ACLS, Fulbright, Mellon, Woodrow Wilson Foundations and the NEH. While much of her research investigates the politics of religious art and global exchange, Villaseñor Black is also actively engaged in the Chicana/o art scene. Her upbringing as a working class, Catholic Chicana/o from Arizona forged her identity as a border-crossing early modernist and inspirational teacher.

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