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Karl Kusserow

INTRODUCTION

Lenticular*: Subject and Object in American Art

Although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing. . . . The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

—John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972

To say it another way, thinking, however abstract, originates in an embodied subjectivity, at once overdetermined and permeable to contingent events.

—Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, 2008

At the beginning of January 1761, a large box containing an elaborately framed, full-length portrait of England's King George II arrived at the fledgling College of New Jersey, already colloquially known as Princeton. The portrait, by the king's Principal Painter in Ordinary, John Shackleton, was immediately installed in the prayer room of Nassau Hall, the central space in the college's recently completed home, then perhaps the most impressive

*Of or pertaining to a lens; employing a lens or lenses.



building in the colonies. The painting's sudden appearance seems due to formal exercises in Princeton on January 14 to mark the death of George II, in whose name the school had been granted its charter.¹

King George was not alone in Nassau Hall. Another portrait, of college patron and former colonial governor Jonathan Belcher, adorned the prayer room, a donation from Belcher along with ten smaller "Heads of the Kings and Queens of England." None survived the Battle of Princeton sixteen years later, when American forces bombarded British troops occupying the building with artillery fire, which ricocheted around the prayer room, destroying, most appropriately, the king's portrait. Its frame, however, was spared and, in a famous act of Revolutionary recycling, repurposed to house an equally grand portrayal of the battle's American hero, General George Washington, painted by Charles Willson Peale, who had also fought in Princeton that day (fig. 1).²

These initial images set the tone for the institution's collection over the following half century and more, when portraits of its worthies, valued as much for their role in explicating the college's unfolding narrative as for their inherent aesthetic qualities, constituted the entirety of Princeton's enterprise in collecting art. The divergent sympathies accorded its first few portraits—of an English monarch, a royal governor, and a Revolutionary hero—by the different audiences encountering them, from British and American troops to students at the college of disparate political persuasions, underscore how the meaning of art is in essential ways in the eye of the beholder. Frames are both literal—made of wood and gilt—and metaphorical, referring to broader frames of reference. The portrait of King George surrounded by an ornate frame meant something very different to its various constituencies than the portrait of the other George that eventually replaced it in that same frame. The subject position, or social point of view, of an image's maker and perceivers crucially determines meaning. Perception is lenticular, and both "perceive" and "perspective" share the same Latin root (*perspicere*,

to examine, observe, or see through). *Object Lessons in American Art* explores this phenomenon within the context of a single collection of American art, as manifest by shifts in meaning in objects that move through time and are variably understood by various subjects, even at the same time, depending on the lens through which they are viewed.

Looking again at the two paintings that shared, one after the other, the same gilded frame, one might ask how different, really, were the two depicted Georges? We know how the destroyed portrait of the king looked, based on a replica completed in 1762 with an almost identical frame (fig. 2). Both images, of the monarch

FIGURE 2 John Shackleton (active 1742, London, United Kingdom; died 1767, London), *King George II*, 1762. Oil on canvas, 231.1 × 147.3 cm. British Museum, London (Painting.12)



FIGURE 1 Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827; born Chester, MD; died Philadelphia, PA), *George Washington at the Battle of Princeton*, 1783–84. Oil on canvas, 237 × 145 cm. Princeton University. Commissioned by the Trustees (PP222)

and the future president, represent white men of extraordinary privilege, portrayed by esteemed artists in remarkably similar poses with appropriate accoutrements of power. To some who encountered them successively in Nassau Hall's prayer room, George II and George Washington must have seemed much the same. When the switch took place—between the Battle of Princeton in 1777 and the unveiling of Peale's portrait in 1784—John Witherspoon was president of Princeton College. A Presbyterian minister, he used his platform to speak on behalf of slavery, arguing, and voting, against its abolition. Witherspoon enslaved two people, who lived mostly at Tusculum, his estate outside town. It is unclear how much time they spent in the college's President's House, located adjacent to Nassau Hall, but surely they would have visited the prayer room at some point, and seen the paintings, as would other people in servitude locally at the time. To them, what had seemed to many a world of difference must have looked like little difference at all, not least because Washington was himself an extensive slaveholder.³

Two hundred thirty-four years after the completion of Peale's portrait, the Black artist Titus Kaphar shifts the lens to reveal the social and political context of Witherspoon's predecessor, Samuel Finley, in *To Be Sold* (2018; see p. 56, fig. 15; also see p. 55, fig. 14). For Kaphar, the salient point in Finley's biography—literally occluding the rest—is the sale of six people Finley enslaved in a public auction held in the same President's House that Witherspoon later occupied. Instead of replicating Finley's portrait within a frame, Kaphar “reframes” him in his own actions and beliefs, reclothing Finley in strips of auction poster.

The Jamaican American artist Renee Cox stages a similarly compelling transformation using Howard Chandler Christy's *Scene at the Signing of the Constitution* (fig. 3), the vast historical tableau installed outside the Hall of the House of Representatives in the US Capitol Building. With *The Signing* (fig. 4), Cox reimagines Christy's painting as a scene of racial and gender redemption, replacing the roomful of bewigged white men with Black people, many of them women—the very individuals denied voice and agency in both the nation's foundational document and its early history. She thus “flips the script,” in her own memorable phrase, to

“give people who were considered three-fifths of a person when they wrote the Constitution a presence.” The photograph shows the artist herself standing in the same pose and location as Washington, powerfully claiming the place in Christy's composition of the country's “founding father.”⁴

Since the classic epigraph by John Berger that begins this essay was written, the scope of art history has steadily broadened to address questions of race and gender—each of crucial significance in America's past and present—and lately to encompass environmental considerations, reflecting current urgent concerns. At the same time, and now with renewed vigor, vital social campaigns regarding racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice have heightened the relevance of bringing such perspectives to bear on the art of the past. With recent attention to reconceptualizing museum practice, the same shift in perspective has similarly inflected the exhibition and display of historical objects—most of them, by the received conventions of collecting and patronage, Eurocentric and by male artists. This book and the exhibition it accompanies examine a gathering of Euro-American, Native American, and African American art from a range of contemporary interpretive positions, illustrating how multifaceted analysis of historical art can inform and enhance its meaning and afford new relevance to artifacts of the American past. The essays within *Object Lessons* excavate and interrogate history and power, collecting, and categories of knowledge and analysis from the various subject positions of their authors, which, although rooted in particular areas of expertise—gender, race, and the environment—are also inherently intersectional in their points of view, formed by the multitude of social, cultural, and political factors that collectively constitute them.⁵

The exhibition takes its title from the nineteenth-century didactic exercise of the object lesson—the study of a material thing to convey an embodied or underlying idea—here enhanced to embrace the added possibilities of groups of objects in juxtaposition. *Object Lessons* is grounded in the understanding that the meaning of art changes over time, in different contexts, and as a consequence of the ways in which it is considered, even as collections evolve to accommodate shifting priorities and perspectives. The works are drawn primarily from



FIGURE 3 Howard Chandler Christy (1873–1952; born Morgan County, OH; died New York, NY), *Scene at the Signing of the Constitution*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 6.1 × 9.1 m. Architect of the Capitol, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC



FIGURE 4 Renee Cox (born 1960, Colgate, Jamaica; active New York, NY), *The Signing*, 2018. Inkjet print, 121.9 × 213.4 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, Kathleen Compton Sherrerd Fund for Acquisitions in American Art (2021-38)



the historical collections of the Princeton University Art Museum, additionally inflected by examples from other campus collections and by contemporary art that imaginatively appropriates and reframes the subjects, style, and content of historical objects.⁶

Of course, Princeton's collections assumed their current size and scope across many decades, though even now their broadened parameters bespeak the enduring absences and imbalances of American history. In the beginning, its collection of portraits staunchly affirmed the overarching anthropocentric orientation of both the times and the institution, and more particularly the pervasive white, patriarchal character of collectors, subjects, and artists. The first American portrait by a woman artist did not enter the collection until 1958 (fig. 5). Princeton acquired its first portrait of a woman in 1909, and then

it was primarily for her role as the spouse of one of its leaders. Society portraitist John White Alexander painted Isabella Guthrie McCosh some two decades after his portrait of her husband, James McCosh, the school's eleventh president. The pair of portraits make an interesting comparison. Whereas *James McCosh* (fig. 6) exudes a sense of the sitter's deep thought and psychological presence, the same could hardly be said of Alexander's painting of Isabella (fig. 7). Despite the two portraits' similarity in pose and composition—and notwithstanding Isabella McCosh's evident accomplishments and keen intellect—she appears more pained than profound, her expression oddly pinched as she perches on a narrow settee with pillows to bolster her. The focus in *James McCosh* is on the sitter's head and hand, and by extension his intellect and instrumentality—suggested by the papers he



FIGURE 5 Sarah E. Perkins (1771–1831; born Plainfield, CT), *Colonial Dame*, ca. 1790. Oil on canvas, 73.7 × 63.5 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Edward Duff Balken, Class of 1897 (y1958-57)

authoritatively grasps—but in *Isabella Guthrie McCosh* attention is dispersed across the picture plane, with almost as much accorded the supporting pillow as the subject’s head, with which it visually rhymes, and her hands are half-hidden, diffidently, in her lap. The portrait of James McCosh was installed prominently in the Faculty Room at Nassau Hall, alongside images of other Princeton—and several American—presidents; *Isabella Guthrie McCosh*, by contrast, was placed unobtrusively in the infirmary named after her, for her selfless devotion to the health of students.

Both paintings are included in the first publication to appear on *Princeton Portraits*, as the catalogue by faculty art historian Donald Drew Egbert is titled. By 1947, when the book appeared, the collection featured 236

portraits—227 of them men. The nine women included occupy the end of the book, appended to its last pages much as they were deemed appendages to the institution, despite the noteworthy contributions of Isabella McCosh and others to its sustenance and growth. Princeton did not admit women until 1969, and it is perhaps unfair to remark on the paucity of images of them in an institution so long and so resolutely male (obviously, a problem in itself). In any case, James McCosh was more generous in avowing his wife’s agency, affirming “she advised and assisted me in all my work.”⁷⁷

Although Alexander’s portrait reveals neither Isabella McCosh’s “fine intellect” nor her “notable sense of humor,” as Egbert described it, she was at least granted a measure of recognition in the patriarchal world Princeton was constructing. Appropriately so, given the many accomplishments her husband, with her help, brought forth at the college, which effectively became a university during his tenure as president, with the gathering of a distinguished faculty, a revised and modernized plan of study, and the institution of graduate

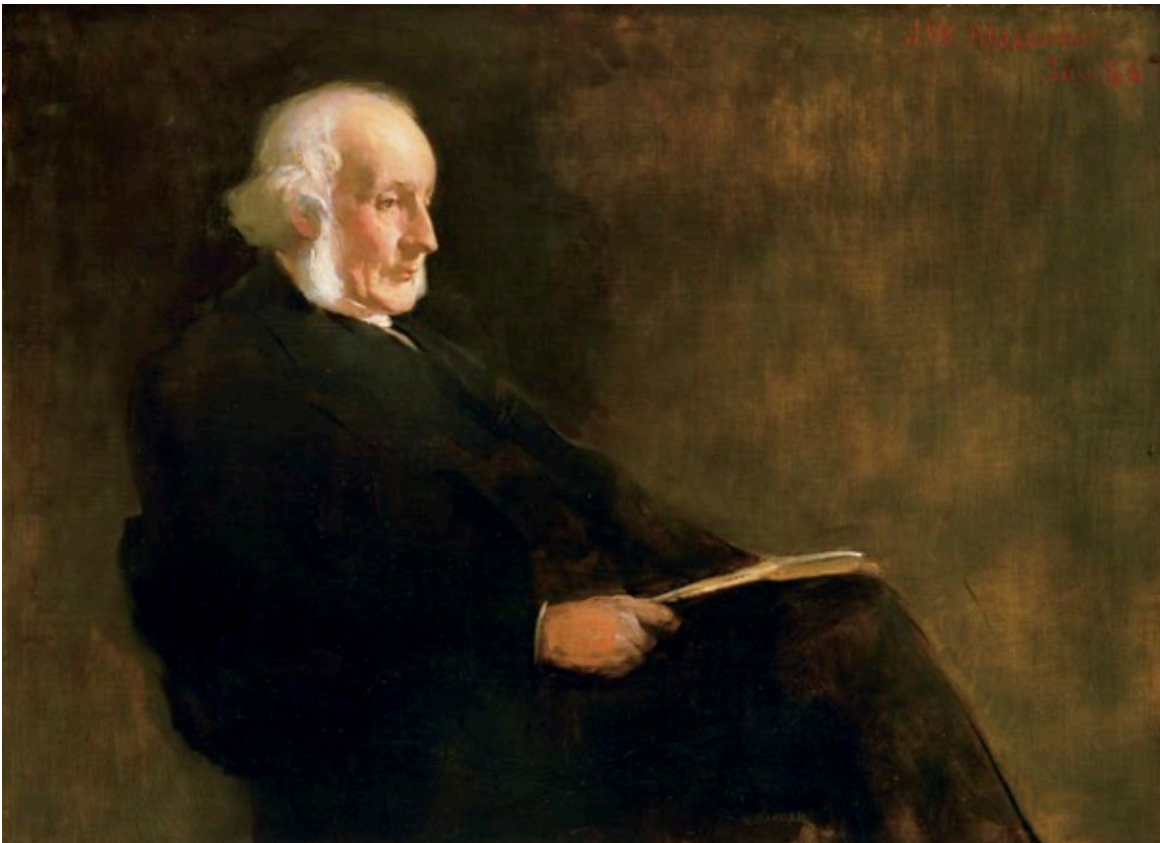


FIGURE 6 John White Alexander (1856–1915; born Allegheny, PA; died New York, NY), *James McCosh*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 89.2 × 123 cm. Princeton University. Gift of alumni (PP37)



FIGURE 7 John White Alexander, *Isabella Guthrie McCosh*, 1908–9. Oil on canvas, 125 × 100 cm. Princeton University. Gift of John White Alexander (PP232)

work. These efforts at modernizing Princeton—which had been founded primarily to train Presbyterian clergy and whose first twelve presidents were all ministers—notably included McCosh’s position on the science of evolution. When Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) threatened established belief in divine creation and dominion, recapitulating the era’s larger discussion about the proper relationship of science and religion, Princeton’s intellectuals staked out an unexpectedly wide range of positions. In 1865, the college apparently aimed to tackle the issue head-on with the appointment of Reverend Charles Woodruff Shields to a professorship in the “harmony of religion and revealed science.” McCosh himself

defended evolutionary doctrine, noting “We do not subject religion to science; but we are equally careful not to subject science to religion. . . . When a scientific theory is brought to us, our first inquiry is not whether it is consistent with religion, but whether it is true,” and insisting ultimately that the Darwinian hypothesis, far from denying the existence of God, was a manifestation of God’s unfolding plan, serving “to increase the wonder and mystery of the process of creation.”⁸

Princeton’s first real museum was constituted in the midst of this great debate. The completion in 1873 of the school’s new library, Chancellor Green, meant the removal of books from Nassau Hall, where they had occupied the old prayer room, and the refitting of the space as an ambitiously expanded Museum of Geology and Archaeology. The repurposing of the central place once dedicated to religion signaled the growing importance of science at the college. Renowned geographer Arnold Guyot was charged with the design of what by 1875 had officially become the E. M. Museum, named after an anonymous benefactor. Despite its jumbled appearance to contemporary eyes, the E. M. Museum was no haphazard Victorian cabinet of curiosities (see fig. 9). On the contrary, its scientific collections were considered second only to the Smithsonian’s, and were similarly intended both to instruct and to advance the frontiers of knowledge. Underscoring the Museum’s didactic function, Guyot referred to the gallery as his “Synoptic Room,” where “the leading idea in the arrangement . . . is that [the displays] should strike the eye as an open book in which the student can read, at a glance, the history of the creation from the dawn of life to the appearance of man.” The room’s diverse geological, paleontological, and archaeological contents were all arrayed to this end. So, too, was the remarkable series of paintings arranged around the room: seventeen canvases depicting prehistoric life commissioned by Guyot in 1875 from British scientist and natural history artist Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins. Set into panels on the exterior of the gallery balustrade, they presented a progressive pictorial account of life itself, from its imagined invertebrate beginnings through the development of mammals (figs. 8, 9). Joining the small and haphazard assemblage of plaster casts of ancient art the college had recently acquired, these were the first paintings commissioned

by the college other than portraits—the first, that is, to depict nonhuman life. However, their very purpose was to explain the emergence of mankind, and moreover to help reconcile it, per McCosh’s schema, with Christian orthodoxy, which placed humans explicitly above all other kinds of existence.⁹

These three vignettes of Princeton’s early art history—as it pertains, with the two Georges in the prayer room, to race; with Isabella McCosh in the infirmary, to gender; and with the Hawkins paintings in the nascent Museum, to anthropocentrism—underscore how the institution’s collecting habits reified entrenched ideologies. But we can change the lens. As the examples show, objects that once served to reinscribe racist, patriarchal, human self-centeredness can, when approached and understood differently, serve to dismantle such beliefs. Both the essays in this book and the arrangement of works in the accompanying exhibition shift the meaning of the objects by shifting the subjective lens through which they are viewed.

Princeton did not build a proper museum of art until the end of the nineteenth century, at which point the plaster casts were separated from the E. M. Museum’s natural history displays and, reflecting the era’s epistemological evolution toward increased specialization and classification of knowledge, reinstalled in its new Museum of Historic Art. There the collection grew in ways that might be expected: Western antiquities and later European art were the focus, as they were of the department of art history that developed in tandem with the Museum. Later, faculty members with interest and expertise in Asian art, and eventually what was known as pre-Columbian art, as well as photography, substantially diversified the Museum’s holdings in an era before the institution of a specialized curatorial staff. Native American materials came to Princeton from

FIGURE 8 Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins (1807–1894; born and died London, United Kingdom), *Cretaceous Life of New Jersey*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 81 × 221.6 cm. Princeton University. Department of Geosciences (PP336)

FIGURE 9 Pach Brothers (active 1867–1947, New York, NY), *E. M. Museum*, 1886. Albumen print, 17.8 × 22.9 cm. Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections. Princeton University Archives, Historical Photograph Collection





the 1880s through the missionary and exploratory activities of several individuals, often in ways now considered unethical, but these were dismissively deemed the purview of the ethnological sciences and until recently located in the Department of Geosciences. Missionary Sheldon Jackson's promiscuous acquisition of objects from the American Northwest Coast as well as the Southwest forms the basis of these collections, meant to demonstrate "the present condition and needs of Pagan Lands."¹⁰

Euro-American art had an early champion in the Museum's second director, Frank Jewett Mather, during whose tenure (1922–46) many of the collection's signature works were acquired, often as the gift of Mather himself. Following publication of his *The American Spirit in Art* (1927), one of the field's first surveys, Mather began building the collection in earnest. In the 1940s faculty member Donald Drew Egbert's teaching of American art and his scholarship on Princeton's portrait collection, as well as the University's establishment in 1942 of a Program of Study in American Civilization, created a conducive atmosphere for American art, culminating in 1943 with the Museum's first exhibition in the field.¹¹

Even so, it remained, like Princeton more generally, an overwhelmingly white and male affair. The Museum's first acquisition of art by an American woman did not occur until 1938, by which time male American artists represented in the collections already exceeded one hundred. Mather's donation that year of three drawings by artist and illustrator Wanda Gág resulted from her dual role as a writer for *The Nation*, where Mather had served as art critic. African American art was not represented at Princeton until 1972, when the American Academy of Arts and Letters gifted Romare Bearden's vivid collage *Moon and Two Suns* (fig. 10). Four years later, professor John Ralph Willis, a Black scholar of Islam in Africa, organized the first exhibition of African American art at the Museum, nearly a century after it opened.¹²

FIGURE 10 Romare Bearden (1911–1988; born Charlotte, NC; died New York, NY), *Moon and Two Suns*, 1971. Paper, cloth, and plastic on Masonite, 61 × 46 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Childe Hassam Fund (y1972-1)

Moving forward a half century from that same period, much has changed. Now there are hundreds of female and Black artists among the approximately 2,300 American artists in Princeton's collections, the result of both broad cultural developments and the institution's own belated reckonings with racial and gender bias. Native American materials have been relocated to the Museum, where they are studied and appreciated on their own terms, as more than ethnographic curiosity or "salvage" anthropology. Perhaps the most profound shift is how objects long in the collections are approached and understood, according to paradigms in which social politics, ethics, and justice factor alongside aesthetic, historical, and cultural concerns. Collections are by nature aggregative entities that grow slowly by accretion. They can be shaped over time, gradually evolving to more fully and fairly characterize the thing they purport to represent, but changes in approach to what is already there may occur more quickly, responding to the issues and attitudes of the era. Even as Princeton moves to bring the balance of representation in its collections more in line with historical realities, it must demonstrate a similar commitment to the reinterpretation and renewed understanding of the preponderance of objects it holds by dominant groups to reveal how hegemonies of gender, race, and species are inscribed in works that take such hierarchies for granted, and naturalize them politically to ensure their continuance.¹³

As definitions of American art become more inclusive, the geopolitical parameters that circumscribed it are also becoming more capacious, with the recognition that notions of the bounded nation-state bear little relation to Indigenous cultures, that adhering to them only reinforces discredited ideas about US exceptionalism, and that the European imperial project that produced the term "America" (after fifteenth-century explorer Amerigo Vespucci) is most productively applied to the hemispheric region originally intended by it. In so doing, the shared essential motivations of colonialism in America, North and South—instilling Christianity and extracting resources—can be holistically engaged and understood. A remarkable group of eighteenth-century casta paintings by Buenaventura José Guiol just acquired by the Museum would not until recently have been considered "American" art. Yet the racial calculus



FIGURE 11 Buenaventura José Guiol (active late 18th century, Mexico), 2. *From Spaniard and Mestiza, a Castiza Is Born*, 1777. Oil on canvas, 62.3 × 55.2 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2022-45)



FIGURE 12 Buenaventura José Guiol, 16. *From Black and China, a Genisara Is Born*, 1777. Oil on canvas, 62.3 × 55.2 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2022-49)

they embody and sought to affirm relates to similar racist hierarchies in the United States. A unique genre, Mexican *casta* paintings were one response to the same collision of Indigenous peoples with European colonizers and enslaved Africans experienced throughout the hemisphere. *Casta*, the Spanish word for “caste,” referred to New Spain’s mixed-race people and the hegemonic system whereby social, cultural, and economic status was tied to race. A typical series of *casta* paintings comprised a set of sixteen related works, with each scene illustrating different interracial couples and their offspring. As the scenes progress, they transition from the most “superior” families to the least, with Spanish heritage and purity of blood unsurprisingly elevated above other racial types. In them, art worked not only to reflect and

reify but also to actively create and define the complex social realities of the so-called New World. The examples by Guiol show how behavior, ranging from exemplary (fig. 11) to depraved (fig. 12), was explicitly linked to race, gender, and class, thereby justifying as if by natural order the malign social order they impose.¹⁴

When originally produced, these paintings were construed by their makers and target audiences less as overtly racist instruments of domination than salutary didactic aids, intended to clearly and persuasively explicate the arrangement and precedence of colonial subjects, in which racialized, gendered, and classed identities were mutually constructed to reciprocally affirm one another. Of course now, as what might be considered archetypes of intersectionality for the cumulative ways that multiple forms of discrimination are combined within them, *casta* paintings signify something entirely different, showing again how meaning is labile and dependent on circumstance, with images once meant to structure racist social relations now deployed to unmask them.

Something similar might be said about *Object Lessons*’s essays, which in their diversity of voice, focus, and approach perform the interpretive subjectivity that is their mutual concern and offer new ways of



FIGURE 13 Guerrilla Girls (active 1985–), *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*, 1998. Printed book, 25 × 20 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2012-143.86)

understanding their often shared subjects. They thus reflect not only the primary transformations of knowledge and perspective that have occurred over time, but also their authors' positionality, a sociological term referring, like intersectionality, to the social contingency of experience and meaning, here with particular regard to identity formation and hence outlook or worldview—the ways social forces produce discerning subjects just as, with intersectionality, they produce perceived ones. The varying perspectives on race, gender, and the environment that each contributor brings to the objects of *Object Lessons*—sometimes the same ones—demonstrate the subjective nature of attention and interpretation. While

the indistinct quality of Fitz Henry Lane's atmospheric *Ship in Fog, Gloucester Harbor* (see p. 149, fig. 29) prompts essayist Rebecca Zorach to speculate on the veiled imbrication of slavery with both Gloucester and the depicted vessel, my own consideration of the same attribute focuses on ecology. Even when the broad category of analysis is the same, perception and treatment differ: for Ellery E. Foutch, *From a New Jersey Weekend II* by Georgia O'Keeffe (see p. 92, fig. 23, and p. 108, fig. 1) is framed by the artist's determination to be known as more than Mrs. Alfred Stieglitz. Thus, perhaps the painting's two depicted headstones are “evoking the aged couple who might be buried beneath, the wife's name subsumed to that of her husband.” On the other hand, Horace D. Ballard's engagement with gender is “oblique,” as his essay is titled; he reads the work queerly as “a landscape that plays on the edges of its genre,” or “a still life depicting an interior landscape,” insisting that queerness is not inherently about sexual desire. This multiplicity of



lenses gives new life to the conventional “object lesson.” When objects were introduced in US schools during the nineteenth century as pedagogical tools, the assumption was that their lessons had a universality about them that ensured their efficacy and broad applicability. But if postmodernism has taught us anything, it is that disparate subjects learn different lessons from objects, and different objects mean different things at different times (fig. 13).¹⁵

To return again to the image of George Washington, in 1946 the Museum acquired a plaster bust of the first American president, painted to look like bronze, by Philadelphia sculptor William Rush, who had fought with Washington during the Revolution and knew him firsthand (fig. 14). The bust once belonged to Thomas Jefferson, who kept it at Poplar Forest, his country retreat near Lynchburg, Virginia. Jefferson’s enslaved carpenter John Hemings, half-brother of Jefferson’s enslaved servant and intimate Sally Hemings, worked extensively there, crafting the house’s interior woodwork and furniture, and the carriage that carried Jefferson between Poplar Forest and Monticello. Perhaps Hemings installed the bust of Washington when it arrived. We know Hemings had a close working relationship with Jefferson, but he was not freed until after the third American president’s death. Other versions of Rush’s bust are in Lexington, Virginia, at the university—Washington and Lee—named after the first presidents of the United States and the Confederate States of America, and in the US Capitol in Washington. In each context and to its various audiences, the bust of America’s founding father of freedom carries different associations. To contemplate the many meanings this object has and continues to hold—across time, place, and people—brings us back to the words with which this essay began: “Our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing. . . . The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.”

FIGURE 14 William Rush (1756–1833; born and died Philadelphia, PA), *George Washington*, ca. 1817. Painted plaster, 69.8 × 57.1 × 36.5 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Museum purchase, John Maclean Magie, Class of 1892, and Gertrude Magie Fund (y1946-78)

NOTES

1. The box was transported south from the town of Elizabeth by one Daniel Price, who was paid for his efforts with more than twice the amount received by George Prince, his presumed relative, for making it. The invoice for the transaction, addressed to Samuel Woodruff, mayor of Elizabeth and a trustee of the college, is preserved in the Pyne-Henry Collection of the Princeton University Library and is transcribed in V. Lansing Collins, “The Lost Portrait of George the Second,” *Bibla* 5, no. 1 (February 1934): 11.
2. For more on the portraits of King George, George Washington, the frame they share, and early collecting at Princeton, see Karl Kusserow, “Memory and Meaning in the Faculty Room,” in *Inner Sanctum: Memory and Meaning in Princeton’s Faculty Room at Nassau Hall*, ed. Karl Kusserow (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 47–114; also see Elizabeth Baughan and Karl Kusserow, “Framing History in Early Princeton,” *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* 70 (2011): 18–29.
3. On Witherspoon and slavery, see Lesa Redmond, “John Witherspoon,” *Princeton & Slavery*, 2022, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/john-witherspoon>; and Redmond, “Slavery in the Witherspoon Family,” *Princeton & Slavery*, 2022, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/slavery-in-the-witherspoon-family#:~:text=>.
4. Cox quoted in Karl Kusserow, “The Case for Reparations, in Pictures,” *CNN*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/03/opinions/slavery-reparations-in-us-in-two-images-hr-40-kusserow/index.html>.
5. Several “histories of art history” chart the evolution of the field toward an increased engagement with social politics, including Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006); and Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History’s History*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson, 2001); also see Michael W. Cothren and Anne D’Alleva, *Methods and Theories of Art History*, 3rd ed. (London: Laurence King, 2021); Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); and Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Art history’s reckoning with race transpired relatively recently; see Kymberly N. Pinder, ed., *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002). The discipline’s engagement with environmental and ecological themes occurred more recently still; see Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher, eds., *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009); Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, eds., *Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); and Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2018). Numerous texts on the democratization and decolonization

of museums have recently appeared; the most substantial and wide-ranging is Annie E. Coombes and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Museum Transformations: Decolonization and Democratization* (Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015). Among broader social justice movements, race is powerfully engaged by the Black Lives Matter movement, gender by #MeToo, economics by Occupy, and environment by Sunrise; for museum culture more specifically, see *Museums Are Not Neutral and Decolonize This Place*. The concept of intersectionality was initially articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–67, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>. In its original formulation, intersectionality referred to the ways in which multiple forms of oppression and discrimination combine to confer disadvantage; however, the concept is now more widely understood to explain how various socially constructed categories create unique sets of experience and identity. For the confluence of race, gender, and environment in determining experience and identity, see Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

6. On the object lesson as pedagogical tool, see Sarah Anne Carter, *Object Lessons: How Nineteenth-Century Americans Learned to Make Sense of the Material World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Anticipating and complementing intersectional approaches to social culture, several theoretical traditions have explored the mutability of meaning among cultural productions as determined by evolving historical periodization and changing individual subject position. The Marxian construct of “use value” supplies an initial critical frame for understanding the highly contextual nature of interpretation and meaning. Marx theorized two fundamental aspects of a commodity: its use value and its exchange value. Whereas exchange value denotes a purely objective and quantitative measure of the proportion in which commodities of one sort are exchanged for another based on the amount of labor power contained in them, use value refers, on the contrary, to the subjectively based desire for a commodity by a given person or group at a certain time. Following Marx, sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel posited that value and the meaning attached to it are not inherent properties of objects but rather are relationally determined by judgments made about them by subjects. More contemporarily, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has applied Simmel’s insights to his exploration of “regimes of value,” examining the conditions under which similar objects circulate differently over space and time. Another anthropologist, Igor Kopytoff, has pursued the concept of “cultural biography” to investigate the changing meaning and valuations of specific things as they move through different contexts, uses, and circumstances. And similarly, James Clifford, also from an anthropological perspective, has discussed

the crucial, determinative significance of context for the interpretation of cultural artifacts that remain themselves unchanged. In the realm of literary studies, three related bodies of critical work account for differences and developments in subject position and their effect on interpretation: reader-response, reception, and communications theory. Each posits that meaning is codetermined by both perceiving subject and meaningful object. Interpretation, then, is active, mutual, and shifting, decided by evolving and varied subjects as against set indefinitely and immutably by objects and their makers. Such socially situated criticism is attuned to both the diverse and changing nature of historically embedded subjects and the implications of that diversity for the role and meaning of the cultural products with which they interact. On Marx and use value, see Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: The Essential Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. Frederic L. Bender (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1972), 327–28; for the complete original text, see Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867), ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (1906; repr., Chicago: Kerr, 1932), 1:41–48. For Simmel, see Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1907), ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1978). Anthropologically based theses are discussed in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 3–63; and Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” 64–92; also see James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 215–51. Two anthologies of reader-response criticism—each with contextualizing introductory essays and featuring a range of reader-based approaches, including reception theory—are Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Susan Rubin Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); also see James L. Machor, “Introduction: Readers/Texts/Contexts,” in *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James L. Machor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), vii–xxix. For communications theory focusing on the social subject, see John Fiske, “Active Audiences,” in *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), 62–83. For a demonstration of art historical analysis embodying the tenets outlined here, see Karl Kusserow, “Portraiture’s Use, and Disuse, at the Chamber of Commerce and Beyond,” in *Picturing Power: Portraiture and Its Uses in the New York Chamber of Commerce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 9–133.

7. Donald Drew Egbert, *Princeton Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), McCosh quoted 340.

8. Egbert, *Princeton Portraits*, 339. James McCosh, *The Life of James McCosh: A Record Chiefly Autobiographical*, ed. William Milligan Sloane (New York: Scribner's, 1896), "We do not subject" at 322; also see J. David Hoeveler Jr., *James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition: From Glasgow to Princeton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); and, more generally, George S. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). McCosh, "increase the wonder and mystery," quoted in Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life after Death* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 82.
9. Guyot quoted in Kusserow, "Memory and Meaning," 85; for more on Princeton's E. M. Museum, see 73–85, from which this account draws; and Sara E. Turner, "The E. M. Museum: Building and Breaking an Interdisciplinary Collection," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 65, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 237–64. As was later revealed, the Museum received funding from William Libbey, who named it after his wife, Elizabeth Marsh, and whose son, William Libbey Jr., Class of 1877, eventually oversaw it, following Guyot's retirement. Confusingly, Hawkins's own views were actually anti-Darwinian, and accorded with those of Guyot in supporting the notion of limited evolution under God's plan without accepting the theory of natural selection. For McCosh, by contrast, natural selection was but a facet of an overarching intelligent design. Both points of view were accommodated in the Museum, whose displays, while clearly evolutionary in the sense of showing progression over time, did not specifically advocate "evolution" as Darwin theorized the term. For information on the Hawkins paintings, see Valerie Bramwell and Robert M. Peck, *All in the Bones: A Biography of Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins* (Philadelphia: Academy of Natural Sciences, 2008), 85–89.
10. On the early history of what is now called the Princeton University Art Museum, see "An Art Museum for Princeton: The Early Years," special issue, *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* 55, no. 1/2 (1996), especially Betsy Rosasco, "The Teaching of Art and the Museum Tradition: Joseph Henry to Allan Marquand," 7–52; J. Michael Padgett, "The Collections of Ancient Art: The Early Years," 107–24; and Cary Y. Liu, "Asian Art Collection: From Exotica to Art and History," 125–34; also see James Christen Steward, "Introduction: Making the Museum," in *Princeton University Art Museum: Handbook of the Collection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 2013); and, for the art history department in relation to the Museum, Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Eye of the Tiger: The Founding and Development of the Department of Art and Archaeology, 1883–1923, Princeton University* (Princeton, NJ: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1983). For Sheldon Jackson and Princeton, see Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (1985; repr., Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1995), quoted at 75.
11. *An Exhibition of Drawings by American Artists, 18th–20th Centuries* was jointly organized by the art history department and the new program in American civilization; also see Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "American Paintings at Princeton University," *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* 2, no. 2 (Autumn 1943): 2–15. On Mather at Princeton, see Barbara T. Ross, "The Mather Years, 1922–1946," in "An Art Museum for Princeton," 53–76. Previously in the Museum's history, collecting American art was not encouraged; a 1911 letter from an alumnus to Allan Marquand, the Museum's first director, notes, "I have for many years, or since the Art Museum was built, been anxious to see there a good representative exhibition of works by our early American painters, and I will never cease to regret, that through seeming indifference, I could not arouse sufficient interest. . . ." (James B. Townsend to Allan Marquand, November 24, 1911, Princeton University Art Museum, donor file, acc. no. y1943-120). For the history of the eventual American collection, see John Wilmerding, "American Art at Princeton," in *American Art in the Princeton University Art Museum, Volume I: Drawings and Watercolors*, ed. John Wilmerding (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 2004), 3–47.
12. See John Ralph Willis, *Fragments of American Life: An Exhibition of Paintings* (Princeton, NJ: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1976).
13. Currently, formal initiatives are underway to increase the Museum's representation of photography by Black Americans and contemporary art by Native Americans. In a related undertaking, the University has commissioned a more inclusive range of portraits of individuals affiliated with its history to broaden campus iconography.
14. The paintings illustrated are two of a group of five (from an original set of sixteen) acquired in 2022; see Ana Zabía de la Mata, *Five Casta Paintings by Buenaventura José Guiol: A New Discovery*, no. 4, *Jaime Eguiguren Studies* (Buenos Aires: Jaime Eguiguren, 2018). On casta paintings, generally, see Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); and Susan Deans-Smith, "Creating the Colonial Subject: Casta Paintings, Collectors, and Critics in Eighteenth-Century Mexico and Spain," *Colonial Latin American Review* 14, no. 2 (2005): 169–204.
15. The concept of positionality returns to some of the theoretical paradigms outlined in note 5 above; see Luis Sánchez, "Positionality," in *Encyclopedia of Geography*, ed. Barney Warf (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 2258, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412939591.n913>.



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