

# VISUAL IMPETUS

THE ART HISTORY AND VISUAL STUDIES GRADUATE CONFERENCE



**For Your Viewing Pleasure?  
Ethics, Activism, and Visual Media**

JANUARY 26 + 27, 2018

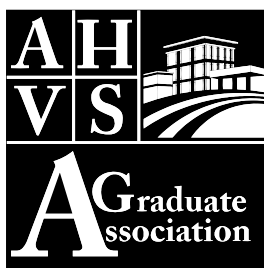
# Welcome to Visual Impetus

The Art History and Visual Studies Graduate Association (AHVSGA) is pleased to welcome you to the 21st anniversary of our graduate student conference Visual Impetus (VI). This signature event is a multiday conference that aims to promote inclusiveness among a range of departments across the university as well as internationally. VI provides a unique opportunity for the unification of graduate candidates at both the MA and PhD level to present their research.

This year we are pleased to present Visual Impetus' 2018 theme:  
"For Your Viewing Pleasure? Ethics, Activism, and Visual Media"

On behalf of AHVSGA's executive board, we would like to thank the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Department of Art History and Visual Studies for their continued support. We would also like to recognize all those who contributed to Visual Impetus including: the VI committee, volunteers, and our community partners. Lastly, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all of the participants and attendees—for the last 21 years, you have made this conference possible!

AHVSGA comprises graduate students in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies. The association provides a voice and an enhanced academic experience for all graduate students enrolled in the department. For more information, please visit: [finearts.uvic.ca/historyinart/graduateassociation](http://finearts.uvic.ca/historyinart/graduateassociation).



# Visual Impetus 2018

## For Your Viewing Pleasure? Ethics, Activism, and Visual Media

Founded in 1996, Visual Impetus (VI) is a graduate student conference hosted by the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Victoria. The theme of the 21st VI conference is “For Your Viewing Pleasure? Ethics, Activism, and Visual Media.”

The Art History and Visual Studies Graduate Association (AHVSGA) and the Visual Impetus Committee are excited to showcase the work of emerging scholars with an interest in the field of Visual Culture. We would like to welcome you to Visual Impetus 2018, and hope that through this symposium we can further encourage diverse research across the discipline.

The Committee would like to extend our gratitude to the following individuals and organizations, without whom this event would not be possible:

- Dr. Susan Lewis, Dean of Fine Arts
- Dr. Erin Campbell, Chair, Art History and Visual Studies
- Dr. Allan Antliff, Graduate Advisor, Art History and Visual Studies
- The Department of Art History and Visual Studies
- The Graduate Student Society
- Lindsay Kaisla, Graphic Designer
- Sandra Curran, Graduate Secretary
- Barb Biggs, Administrative Assistant
- Peter Dunsmore-Papagiannis, Alumni Annual Giving Officer
- The Faculty of Graduate Studies

# Schedule

**Friday, 26 January, 2018**

4:00- Opening Remarks by Dr. Susan Lewis, Dean of Fine Arts, introduced by Abbey Hall and Nellie Lamb, VI Co-Chairs

## **Panel 1: Alternative Modes of Distribution and Criticism**

4:10- Panel introduced by Emma Richan

4:15- Alexa Heenan, *Nineteenth-Century Carte-de-Visite: The Democratization of the Photographic Portrait*

4:35- Abbey Hall, *Ely Raman: Beyond the Fulcrum of Fluxus*

4:55- Claire Scherzinger, *Caring Through Hating: A Look At The Canadian Art World Through Meme Culture*

5:15- Question Period

5:25- Break

## **Keynote**

5:30- Keynote introduced by Su Yen Chong

5:35- Keynote Speaker: Haema Sivanesan, *Acts of Care: Three Exhibitions on Art and Buddhism*

5:55- Jenelle M. Pasiechnik, *Beyond the Classroom: Putting Art History to Work in the Gallery Today*

6:05- Question Period

6:15- Closing Remarks by Nellie Lamb and Abbey Hall, VI Co-Chairs

**6:20 - 7:30- Poster Fair and Pizza Dinner in Room 104**

\*Gluten free and vegetarian options provided

## **Saturday, 27 January, 2018**

9:30- Coffee Social

\*Gluten free and vegetarian options provided

### **Panel 2: Canadian Art and Culture: Analyses and Critiques**

10:00- Panel introduced by Nellie Lamb

10:05- Bradley Clements, *Telling Truths in Museums: Decentred Museum Studies and Practice*

10:25- Marina DiMaio & Evelyn Soroohan-Ruland, *Pavilion, Rock, and Shell: Victoria's Verdict*

10:45- David Christopher, *Apocalypse and Anarchist Politics in the Works of David Cronenberg*

11:05- Question Period

11:15- Break

### **Panel 3: Cosmopolitan and Cultural Identities**

11:20- Panel introduced by Lindsay Kaisla

11:40- Su Yen Chong, *Imported Pekalongan Batik: Emblems of Cosmopolitanism in Imagined Communities of Straits Peranakan Women*

12:00- Jaiya Anka, *Interwoven Identities: Portraiture and the Spaces of Cultural Encounter in Renaissance Venice*

12:20- Ambreen Shehzad Hussiani, *"Nun! By the pen what they inscribe": A brief survey of Islamic Ornamentation, its features, and its artistic values*

12:40- Question Period

12:50- Zahra Kazani, *ARTiculate: Call for Expressions of Interest*

**1:00- Lunch**

**\*Light refreshments, including gluten free and vegetarian options**

**1:15- Button-making workshop, led by Nellie Lamb**

## **Panel 4: The Studio, Homes, and Furnishings**

2:00- Panel introduced by Beth Bartholemew

2:05- Lindsay Kaisla, *The Tiny House and 'Miniature Living': Functional Minimalism or Romantic Reverie?*

2:25- Brian Pollick, *Bedazzled and Bedevilled: Beds in Late-Medieval European Illuminated Manuscripts*

2:45- Shanice Wolters, *Magnifying Primitive Perceptions: Material and Methods in Faith Ringgold's 'Picasso's Studio'*

3:05- Questions

3:15- Break

## **Panel 5: Animals Represented**

3:20- Panel introduced by Alexa Heenan

3:40- Beth McMonagle, *I Belong To The King: Cultural Frameworks of Fabergé Miniature Animals in the Royal Sandringham Collection*

4:00- Holly Cecil, *The "Blackfish Effect": Documentaries Motivating Interspecies Empathy and Legislation Change*

4:20- Question Period

4:30 – AHVS Grad Association

4:40- Closing Remarks by Dr. Erin Campbell

4:50 Closing Remarks by Nellie Lamb and Abbey Hall, VI Co-Chairs

# Abstracts

## Haema Sivanesan, Keynote Speaker

**Title:** *Acts of Care: Three Exhibitions on Art and Buddhism*

**Key Words:** Buddhism, curatorial practice, notions of care

**Abstract:** This presentation reflects on three exhibitions that look at the relationship between Buddhism and art, to consider the idea of curating as an “act of care”. What does it mean to care for objects – for what purpose, and to what ends? Is the notion of care culturally neutral? Or how do we recognize and facilitate the multiple historical and contemporary meanings of objects and their relationships to communities?

In recent years, curatorial practice has become increasingly focused on exhibition histories, exhibition-making and exhibition theory, such that the notion of “care” has become almost redundant to curatorial work. But can the idea of care continue to have relevance? Can a more expanded view of collections and communities restore notions of care to the practice of curating?

# Jaiya Anka, AHVS PhD Candidate

**Title:** *Interwoven Identities: Portraiture and the Spaces of Cultural Encounter in Renaissance Venice*

**Key Words:** Renaissance Venice; portraits of women; textiles; dress; cross-cultural encounters

**Abstract:** In the sixteenth century, Venetian artists created influential images of figures from the Islamic world. During the Council of Trent (ca. 1545-63), a period coincident with the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, a series of portraits of elite women who embodied Venice's complex relationship with the Ottoman Empire proliferated in Venice and beyond. This study has identified and examines a corpus of images that has escaped critical scholarly attention. Notably, the portraits, or their prototypes, were created by Titian, one of the pre-eminent artists of the Italian Renaissance. I suggest that portraits of Caterina Cornaro, the "Daughter of the Republic" and the former queen of Cyprus, Jerusalem and Armenia, and elite women of the Ottoman harem, offered patrons and viewers ways of imagining civic and religious identity and individual and collective security as a feminine presence. Situated at the middle of the sixteenth century in Venice, this study provides us with insights into a particular cultural moment wherein the painted portrait of the noblewoman represented entangled identities to function as an emblem of empire.



# Holly Cecil, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *The “Blackfish Effect”: Documentaries Motivating Interspecies Empathy and Legislation Change*

**Keywords:** documentary; orca; cetacean; legislation; influence

**Abstract:** The 2013 documentary *Blackfish* examines the life of Tilikum, a bull orca owned by SeaWorld who killed three people in separate incidents, and critiques industry methods of cetacean capture and confinement as the direct cause of the violence. *Blackfish* is significant among a growing corpus of documentaries addressing human exploitation of non-human animals, both for presenting orcas as complex individuals deserving of autonomy, and for galvanizing public opinion leading to significant legislation change.

Interweaving testimonials by cetacean researchers and former orca trainers, *Blackfish* calls for a new ethics in how we perceive and treat intelligent and socially complex species. My critical analysis engages the film’s message within ecofeminist theory, which disrupts binary conceptions dividing humans from animals and instead proposes an “ethics of care” model. I also argue that because the film medium has conditioned viewers to identify with the camera’s point of view, it is particularly suited to show us life as experienced from an animal’s perspective. *Blackfish* excels in this endeavour, allowing us to witness the physical and psychological effects of exploitation through cetacean eyes. For those advocating animal-centred ethics, documentary’s dynamic tools of moving footage and audio fuse both message and means.

Widespread public response to *Blackfish*, termed the “Blackfish Effect,” is credited with catalyzing debate on captive orcas and the 2016 passage of California’s Orca Protection Act which outlaws their capture, breeding and performance regimes. That this legislation is popularly titled “The Blackfish Bill” testifies to the galvanizing influence of an artistic genre on social action.

## Su Yen Chong, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *Imported Pekalongan Batik: Emblems of Cosmopolitanism in Imagined Communities of Straits Peranakan Women*

**Key Words:** batik; Southeast Asia; diaspora; cosmopolitanism; imagined communities

**Abstract:** Batik cloth made in Pekalongan, North Coast Java was popular amongst nyonyas (women who identify themselves as Peranakan) in the Straits Settlements. Batik cloth was often worn in the style of a sarong, a tubular fabric wrapped around the waist. The design and dissemination of these imported and signed batiks made by either Indo-European or Peranakan batikers in Java provide scholars with a unique opportunity to explore one very visible aspect of the multiple layers of identity of the nyonyas. The preference for fashionable and luxurious batik cloth points to a desire to be represented as cosmopolitans. By recognizing the way in which the Peranakans express their cosmopolitan viewpoint, perhaps we can learn how all human beings, regardless of their political or religious affiliation, have obligations to others beyond their immediate context. In the day and age where nationalism is a deeply rooted social construct that is highly influential in the formation of policies affecting the lives of refugees, immigrants, and citizens, it is all the more necessary to comprehend and embody cosmopolitanism's principle of hospitality. Visual culture and objects have the ability to carry and further issues of identity contributing to different levels of community development. Remarkably beautiful batik sarongs adorned by the nyonyas is emblematic of an exceedingly sophisticated method to literally and metaphorically weave the layered identities of the Peranakans in continuous conversations with communities beyond their own.

# David Christopher, AHVS PhD Candidate

**Title:** *Apocalypse and Anarchist Politics in the Works of David Cronenberg*

**Key Words:** Anarchist cultural theory; apocalypse; Cronenberg; Toronto New Wave

**Abstract:** Most critics consider David Cronenberg in the context of his concern with abject sexuality and bodily transmutation, often accusing him of the same misogyny that characterizes contemporary reactionary slasher-horror films. Otherwise his works are endlessly debated as to their 'Canadianness.' In an uncharacteristic turn, however, horror film critic Charles Derry notes the particularly apocalyptic nature of Cronenberg's films. Perhaps the most comprehensive analyses have been completed by William Beard and Lianne McLarty, both of whom also at least intimate the apocalyptic aspects of Cronenberg's works. In fact, all of the critics who have examined Cronenberg's work intimate the apocalyptic and even anarchist underpinnings of his thematics, but very few take up this trajectory and follow it through to any specific conclusion. I daresay what is not necessary is another lengthy analysis of Cronenberg's films. This task has been accomplished well over by myriad theorists. Instead, this presentation looks at the particularly apocalyptic and anarchist aspects of Cronenberg's work and the visual techniques he deployed through which he subversively criticized bourgeois society, patriarchy, and the status quo, and through which he specifically influenced the filmmakers of the cycle of films that has come to be referred to as the Toronto New Wave.

# Bradley Clements, ANTH MA Candidate

**Title:** *Telling Truths in Museums: Decentred Museum Studies and Practice*

**Key Words:** institutional ethnography; anti-colonialism; museum anthropology; Indian Residential Schools; curation

**Abstract:** Last October, a group of Nuuchah-nulth, Tsimshian, Gitksan, and Nisga'a Survivors of the Alberni Indian Residential School gathered before an audience in the Canadian Museum of History. There, they chose not only to share testimony of their experiences of residential school, but also to claim the space to enact a naming ceremony. Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples have been claiming space in colonial exhibition settings across the world for over a century. What can contemporary museums and galleries learn from the conditions that Indigenous peoples seize to conduct their own cultural work and representation, and from the tensions which arise in these circumstances, to become better partners to Indigenous peoples and nations?

I have been made aware of benefits of a decentred approach to fostering and understanding anti-colonial conditions during my study of the Canadian Museum of History, specifically the section of the new Canadian History Hall about the history and aftermath of Indian Residential Schools. What I refer to as a "decentred approach" manifests an interest in the perspectives of diverse agents as they converge to create a representational exhibit or programme. It is inspired by Ruth Phillips' 2011 recommendation "to reimagine the museum as a networked system," and by my interlocutors' directives. A decentred approach has helped me to understand the functioning of a museum as it affords the claiming of space and the telling of sensitive stories by and for Indigenous peoples, and it has shown ways that museums may make themselves more accessible to these enactments.

## Collaborative Presentation:

# Marina DiMaio & Evelyn Sorochan-Ruland, VISUAL ARTS MFA Candidates

**Title:** *Pavilion, Rock, and Shell: Victoria's Verdict*

**Key Words:** public sculpture; media; letters; Victoria; contemporary

**Abstract:** In 2003 Mowry Baden's sculpture titled, *Pavilion, Rock, and Shell* was selected in accordance with the City of Victoria's Public Art Policy, to be installed in front of the new Save-on-foods Memorial Arena which would open in 2005. Shortly after Baden's piece was selected and approved for the site, an angry public outcry began against the sculpture and continued for many years. The City of Victoria, Baden himself, and local press received hundreds of letters suggesting that the piece was a "disaster," "tragedy," "tasteless," and "meaningless."<sup>1</sup>

Our presentation brings the city of Victoria into a critique, in a consideration of a contemporary moment which seems to be imbued with an inherent misunderstanding of the role and value of contemporary art. Through an examination of the public discourse surrounding this sculpture by Baden – an emeritus faculty member of the Visual Arts Department at the University of Victoria – we will highlight a larger discussion around public art, question commemorative structures and monuments in dialogue with public sculpture, consider the purpose of a civic public art policy, and reflect on the role of the media, and other power structures in this contemporary moment. *Pavilion, Rock, and Shell* has given this piece an aura of controversy, affirming that art which intermingles with the contemporary moment, has an inherent power to change place, minds, culture.

<sup>1</sup>Robert, "A Mutt decision," The Painters Keys, March 08, 2016, Accessed November 02, 2017, <http://painterskeys.com/mutt/>.

# Abbey Hall, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *Ely Raman: Beyond the Fulcrum of Fluxus*

**Key Words:** Fluxus; mail art; commodification; alternative distribution; imaginary economics

**Abstract:** I analyze Mexican born, German-Canadian artist Ely Raman's artistic production in the 1970's in order to illuminate the ways in which he used Fluxian principles of a de-commoditized, living, "anti-art" to create art objects that worked outside of the regular economic system. Examining Raman's series of unbound assemblies of multimedia art, titled *8x10 art portfolio*, this presentation will focus specifically on the ways in which the breakdown of barriers between artist and viewer work in tandem with the disruption of what we consider the value of art to be.

I posit that Raman's participation in Fluxus led to the development and dissemination of his *8x10 art portfolio* series, which worked as an alternative form of economic exchange. In addition to creating a participatory art object, in which the viewer can rearrange the items contained within an *8x10* folder in order to "create" a new work of art, the sliding scale of the *8x10 art portfolio* redefined the valuation and commodification of art. In Raman's words, the art object's value was "...like love, in the mind of the beholder."

# Alexa Heenan, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *Nineteenth-Century Carte-de-Visite: The Democratization of the Photographic Portrait*

**Key Words:** Photography; Carte-de-visite; portraiture; standardization; democratization

**Abstract:** Since the birth of photography in 1839, numerous formats have come and gone with the advancement of the photographic process. The carte-de-visite was a format that quickly gained popularity across the globe for a short period between 1854-1870. It was small, cheap and infinitely reproduceable. For the first time, portraiture was made affordable and accessible to the growing middle-class who used the carte-de-visite to fashion their public identity. By looking at the standardization of its format and composition, we can see how it challenged dominant power structures and democratized the portrait genre.

The carte-de-visite is often overlooked, but it was crucial in solidifying photography's role as a mass medium. Its standardization scaled everyone to the same size and the full-length pose was adopted by all. This was a major shift in the representation of the body and challenged historical visual codes that were reserved for class distinction. By looking at various photographs of sitters that range from civil war soldiers to celebrities, we can begin to see the similarities and understand the formation of a collective identity that was unlike anything that came before.

# Ambreen Shehzad Hussiani, AHVS PhD

## Candidate

**Title:** *“Nun! By the pen what they inscribe”: A brief survey of Islamic Ornamentation, its features, and its artistic values*

**Key Words:** Islamic art; geometrical designs; vegetal ornamentation; calligraphy

**Abstract:** Islamic ornamentation played a significant role in architecture and visual arts of the Islamic world. It is nearly impossible to find any scholarly work on Islamic art without mentioning Islamic ornamentation as one of its most distinctive features. It is indeed an extensive field of study that demands comprehensive knowledge and research. It is one of the central features of the history of the Islamic art that connected the vast range of architectures and objects for over thirteen-hundred years, from all over the Islamic world across geographical borders. It gives an impression that Islamic ornamentation is a highly profound subject, yet the question arises: How do we define Islamic ornamentation? What are its distinctive features that made it ‘Islamic’? What are the basic principles that needs to be considered thoughtfully? This paper intends to respond to these questions briefly. I have used the literature review methodology to present an overview of Islamic ornamentation and its uses in the Islamic world. In this paper, I will discuss a few distinctive features of Islamic ornamentation that includes calligraphy, geometry, and vegetal designs. I suggest that: multiplicity and eternity, unity and interrelatedness, symmetry and rhythm, abstraction and beauty, are few of the artistic values that are pragmatic in Islamic ornamentation.



# Lindsay Kaisla, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *The Tiny House and 'Miniature Living': Functional Minimalism or Romantic Reverie?*

**Key Words:** tiny house; miniature; popular media; romanticism; phenomenology

**Abstract:** The tiny house movement that has gained momentum in North America over the past decade reflects, in general, the need or desire of individuals or families to scale down aspects of their lives—from the number of material possessions they own, to the impact of their ecological footprint, and beyond. While there are a number of motivating forces that have led people toward this form of 'miniature living'—from economic necessity, to the refute of superfluous residential architecture, to the personal desire to live a simpler life within the scaled-down walls of a tiny house—it is also clear that popular media has contributed to a romanticized perception of tiny house living. Despite the widespread attention, however, statistics show that only a small segment of the general population would actually consider living in a tiny house. As such, it seems apparent that there is a gap between the idealistic perceptions and the practical realities of tiny house living. Considering this disparity, this paper explores the aesthetic appeal and fascination with the tiny house in North American culture, examining historical influences, as well as the notion of the 'miniature' in relation to the charm of the tiny house. Drawing upon historical examples of tiny houses and theoretical concepts of the miniature, I ask: to what extent does the element of fantasy and captivation of the miniature fuel the widespread fascination with the tiny house?

# Beth McMonagle, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *I Belong To The King: Cultural Frameworks of Fabergé Miniature Animals in the Royal Sandringham Collection*

**Key Words:** miniature animals; Fabergé; collection

**Abstract:** The collection of Fabergé miniature farm animals that I am presenting are from the Royal Sandringham Collection, owned by King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. In 1907, the King commissioned Russian jeweller Carl Fabergé to create miniature sculpted portraits of the couple's animals from their Sandringham Dairy. The miniature animals are exquisitely carved and polished from quartz and obsidian and the eyes are inset with diamonds, rubies or sapphires. This magnificent collection was housed in a glass cabinet in the drawing room of Sandringham House, in Norfolk, England, where the Queen spent time admiring them.

John Berger asks a succinct question, “Why look at animals?” Shifting views of animals from chattel to sentient beings has fueled our fascination. This paper examines how Fabergé miniature animals act as ersatz counterparts to the Sandringham Dairy animals. The miniatures’ agency reflects the cultural shifts in how animals were viewed in 20th century England. Recognition of animal sentience and autonomy perversely resulted in the development of an animal hierarchy that resembled the social stratification within English society. Counterintuitively, animals were genetically manipulated, valorized for their pedigree, and displayed as spectacle, that ultimately negated their autonomy and sentience. Further, the miniaturization of the Sandringham dairy animals, to the scale of handheld miniature objects, bolstered the King and Queen’s ownership of them.

# Brian Pollick, AHVS PhD Candidate

**Title:** *Bedazzled and Bedevilled: Beds in Late-Medieval European Illuminated Manuscripts*

**Key Words:** medieval beds; visual morality; visual metaphor

**Abstract:** In her recent publication *Medieval & Renaissance Interiors in Illuminated Manuscripts*, Eva Oledzka observed that “Illuminated manuscripts often give us a unique glimpse into medieval and later life in castles, palaces and houses in urban and rural settings, but they are an underused resource.” (p.7) Such interior illuminations often feature beds, which serve as fundamental objects in visually explaining the primary meanings of the illumination, irrespective of the type of the manuscript. I believe that art historians have generally overlooked the importance of such representations of beds, tending to seeing them as decorative props rather than as encoded images that broadcast fundamental Judeo-Christian biblical, historical and moral truths.

In this presentation I will examine a number of types of manuscript images of beds to demonstrate their use across the range of manuscript genres in late-medieval Christian Europe. These genres include: Bibles; Books of Hours and other types of Devotional works; Hagiographies; Legends and Literature; Theology; and Medicine. I will show how the many different images of beds in these types of manuscripts conveyed well-understood, and often gendered, messages of piety, sinfulness, Christian stages of life, morality, charity, prophecy, or rank/status. I argue that the bed exerts agency that links interior spaces and people in a visual network that emphasizes natural and unnatural, moral and immoral behaviours within a medieval Christian framework.

# Claire Scherzinger, Visual Arts MFA Candidate

**Title:** *Caring Through Hating: A Look At The Canadian Art World Through Meme Culture*

**Keywords:** meme culture; sharing; moral licensing; Instagram; critique

**Abstract:** Currently, there is a lack of challenging discourse in artistic practices across Canada. This is partially due to galleries continually supporting the work of white, male, artists who perpetuate the status quo of Canadian art to be small and conservative. Persons of colour, indigenous peoples and women of these intersectional ties are occasionally let into this exclusive space, but, subsequently, many of their respective communities are still excluded from the potential of gallery representation in public or private institutions.

In response, how does one, or many, set out to change a national art scene so hung up on these outdated qualities? How do we continually change the minds of powerful bodies in museum roles and directorships without antagonizing and alienating these bodies?

One effective answer thus far is to critique these everyday power structures through satire and parody. Accordingly, meme culture has spread as a visual aid showing the everyday ironies we experience on a moment-to-moment basis. The process of sharing images and text through the Internet, which capture a sentiment felt by some, is an act of unity and solidarity amongst many. When applied to the Canadian art world, the results have been electrifying. Under the alter ego Canadian Art World Haterz (CAWH), I administered a virally successful Instagram meme account critiquing Canadian artists and institutions. Reflecting on this fleeting success and other viral Instagram accounts, I will show that critiquing power structures through image sharing, in this way, will make a more vibrant and socially responsible Canadian art scene.

# Shanice Wolters, AHVS MA Candidate

**Title:** *Magnifying Primitive Perceptions: Material and Methods in Faith Ringgold's Picasso's Studio*

**Key Words:** quilting; primitive; African art; Faith Ringgold; linguistics

**Abstract:** The term “primitive” is commonly associated with non-Western cultures that are often assumed to be uncivilized and underdeveloped. However, despite this term’s derogatory understanding, in 1995, Faith Ringgold, a black artist from Harlem, wrote in her memoir, *We Flew Over the Bridge*, that “*primitive* is a word I use in a positive way to explain the completeness of a concept in art.” Four years prior to this statement, Ringgold created *Picasso's Studio*, 1991, an African-style painted quilt that places Ringgold’s alter ego, a black model and artist named Willia Marie Simone, in front of Pablo Picasso’s primitive-inspired painting, *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, 1907.

Through an interdisciplinary framework of gender and racial theory, this study argues that an object-centered inquiry on the materials and imagery used within *Picasso's Studio*, such as the quilt, depiction of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and Willia Marie Simone, and the use of African masks, enlarges details about the historical and contemporary understandings of the term “primitive.” Additionally, this study adopts linguistic theories to interrogate how the methods used by Ringgold in *Picasso's Studio* shows this work’s capability to reclaim “primitive” into a positive term. To this end I ask: why is a discourse on current perceptions of “primitive” necessary? How does focusing on a single object provide historical insights on the connotations of “primitive?” And can the term “primitive” be reclaimed into a positive label?

*ARTiculate*  
**The Graduate  
Student Journal of  
Art History and Visual  
Studies**



*ARTiculate* is a peer-reviewed graduate student journal of art history and visual studies published by the University of Victoria. The publication aims to further the establishment of a graduate art historical community by offering graduate students the ability to disseminate their knowledge and engage in an editorial process that is shaped by the insights of peers well-versed in their chosen area of study. In keeping with the inclusive conception of art that is embraced within a global art history, *ARTiculate* does not privilege a singular culture or medium in its selection of manuscripts. Rather, the publication serves to circulate highly original submissions that are valued for their contributions to the preexisting scholarly conversation.

Currently, a team made up of AHVS graduate students, a faculty advisor, and peer reviewers are working to prepare the next edition of *ARTiculate*. The journal can be read online at <https://finearts.uvic.ca/articulate/>.

*ARTiculate* is a valuable opportunity for graduate students and alumni to engage in the provision of academic publication. The Journal is currently accepting Expressions of Interest so do consider applying and supporting this initiative. Further information and questions can be directed to: [articulate@uvic.ca](mailto:articulate@uvic.ca).

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