

This interview was recorded on September 30, 2025. It has been lightly edited for readability.

Rebecca Tucker (RT): Hello, this is Art History on Fire, an interview series exploring the current state of the field of art history through conversations with a variety of U.S.-based art historians. Your hosts are myself, Rebecca Tucker, professor at Colorado College, and...

Deborah Hutton (DH): Deborah Hutton, professor at the College of New Jersey. We're here to talk about what the future holds for our field. Higher education and the arts are facing a variety of threats, well known to all of us, and the discipline of art history is certainly not exempt.

RT: At the same time, it's also true that art history is in a dynamic and an innovative phase. Attendance at museums is up, and general interest in the arts is surging.

DH: In this series, we will talk to art historians on the ground to learn from them about what is happening and why, and to gather ideas for moving forward.

RT: For this second installment in the series, we speak with Dr. Laura Holzman. Dr. Holzman is Professor of Art History and Museum Studies at Indiana University, Indianapolis, where she also serves as Public Scholar of Curatorial Practices and Visual Arts, as well as Chair of the Department of Art History, Art Education, and Art Therapy. Additionally, Dr. Holzman is one of the founders of the Engaged Art History Project, which you could find online.

DH: And as always, you will be able to find a transcript of this interview, as well as more information on Dr. Holzman, on us, and this interview series on our Substack, Art History on Fire, and on the project's website hosted by Colorado College.

RT: Welcome to Art History on Fire. We are delighted to welcome Dr. Laura Holzman. Laura, thank you for agreeing to be part of this interview series. Deborah and I are excited to hear more about your work and your thoughts on the current state and future of art history.

Laura Holzman (LH): Thank you, I'm really glad to be here.

DH: We are so grateful for your generosity in sharing your time and expertise with us, Laura. In our intro that precedes this interview, we gave a very brief summary of your current position as art historian, public scholar, curator, department chair and co-founder of Engaged Art History (I'm not sure I got all of your titles, but that is a very impressive list of hats that you wear, I will

say); however, we didn't go into detail, because we wanted to give you the opportunity to define yourself and your work. So, to that end, here's our first question for you. How would you describe yourself and the type of art history that you practice?

LH: Well, you're right, it's certainly a lot of hats, isn't it? And it's often actually challenging to introduce myself to people because I don't always know where to begin. So, sometimes I start by saying that I am an interdisciplinary scholar, and I study visual culture and sense of place, usually in the United States, usually beginning in the 19th century and continuing into the present. But sometimes I say that I'm especially interested in the role of art in public and community contexts, and I often end up describing myself as a specialist in Engaged Art History. So, that means that I use a lot of collaborative methods in both my research and my teaching, and I often find myself working together with people who don't have professional expertise in art and art history so that we can tell stories together that blend my methodological expertise and their expertise in whatever it is that they know best about that they're bringing to the collaboration. I guess I should also maybe say that I'm not always convinced that I'm an art historian.

DH and RT (laughing): I was about to ask you that.

LH: If I look at the work that I do, I think it's really easy to kind of point out, well, that's not art, that's not history, so what do you have? What do you have left? But I will say I feel a strong allegiance to the field, and I think that even though I'm often working in public history spaces, and I've been doing a bunch of projects lately that some folks would describe as anthropology, I keep coming back to art history as an anchor point in part because I think that we have a lot that we can learn from the way that other fields do things, and also because I think there's something about the way that art historians study visual culture that I just find really clicks with the way that I like to think about the world and the way that I like to teach my students.

DH: Yeah, that makes sense. You know, my specialization is South Asian art, which for so long was left out of art history, so it's natural, I think, in our field that we use anthropological methods or religious studies. I guess this gets to the question of what is art history, right? How narrowly are we defining that, or how broadly are we defining that? Personally I take a very broad definition of what art history is, so I am more than happy to claim you and your work as belonging to the field. But I'm curious, just as a follow-up question, when did you go and get your PhD in traditional art history? When did you make this move to thinking about yourself as a public scholar and as a specialist in Engaged Art History?

LH: I think that in retrospect, I can tell a somewhat tidy story, but the truth is that it kind of built over time. I was kind of in a unique situation where I went to college knowing that I wanted to

major in art history. Okay, I also wanted to major in biology and I didn't end up doing that, but I knew I wanted to study art history, and I found that I was in an educational setting where a lot of people at the institution were really focused on social justice, and I cared about that too. But I didn't see a lot of examples for how I could connect my work in art history to all of these other really important initiatives that I was being encouraged to connect with through other programs on campus, and so I kind of set a little aim for myself to figure out: how can I bring these two things together? I had, you know, friends who were studying linguistics who were also working to help preserve dying languages, and I had friends in sociology who were doing really important projects, for example, somebody was working with communities of people who were unhoused, doing research, but also, kind of really being involved on the ground, to support those communities. And I wanted to do that in art history, so I started seeking out ways to piece together a path to doing that. I ended up, after college, working in marketing and public relations at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and at the time, I wasn't sure that that was necessarily connected, but what I realized was that part of my role at the museum was thinking about how the museum can tell the stories of what it does to the audiences that it has, and maybe to the audiences that it would like to have, but doesn't have yet, or didn't have then. And I found myself asking a lot of questions about why we were telling the stories that we were telling, and how we were understanding the audience that we thought we were speaking to, and in some cases, I thought that, wow, there's some really cool stuff happening that we're not sharing because we assume that people don't care about it. And that kind of just stuck with me. I decided to go to graduate school sort of unrelated to that. I found myself in my spare time reading a lot of academic journal articles, and so that was kind of an indicator, maybe I should go back to school.

RT (laughing): That's usually a bad sign.

LH: And I initially went to school to study something totally different. I wanted to study words on screen in early cinema. But I coincidentally fell into a class on museums and cultural history and memory, and I realized that there was a lot of stuff from my time at the museum that I still wanted to work through. And then that really shifted the focus of my research. What I found was a really strong commitment to using the tools and the methods and the resources of academic study in order to address questions and problems of broader public concern. So, while the sort of specific conversations that scholars were having with each other were very interesting to me, I felt a real drive to focus my work outward instead of inward. And so I ended up doing research to try to understand what was going on with some really big public debates that were happening about visual culture in Philadelphia. And by the time I came out of grad school, I had a more clearly articulated commitment. I had specialized in public art. I wasn't sure if I wanted to work as a professor or as somebody in an arts and culture organization outside of academia. Maybe I

made the official commitment to being a public scholar when I accepted the position that I currently have with the title of public scholar, and then I got to learn what that really looks like.

RT: I love this story, it's like a back-and-forth weaving through all these different disciplines and access points, right? College, and then museums, and then grad school, but in a different space, and then this academic approach to the questions, that's really fascinating. Can I follow up on that? I want to talk specifically about the founding of Engaged Art History in 2021. You describe it as building a lasting community of practice for art historians. Can you talk a bit about that project—why you decided to start it, some of the things you learned or are learning about art history, and where you're at with it now.

LH: Yeah, so as I was building my own practice in what I would now call engaged art history, I felt like I was the only person doing that. And I was really fortunate, because of my position at IU Indianapolis, I was in conversation with a lot of scholars from other fields who had really, you know, phenomenal public scholar practices, and I learned so much from working with them. But when I would come back to conversations in art history, I would have these moments of, like, does anybody else care about this? Is anybody else doing this... surely I can't be the only person? And over the years, through a variety of conferences and other professional interactions, I found other people who also thought they were the only ones, and we started to build more of a sustained community of thought, perhaps. And we would periodically have these conversations, like, oh, it would be really great to get all of us together and invite some other people to join us, and have a symposium or something where we can spend more time working together to learn about what each other is doing. But also, I really wanted to connect my art history colleagues with some of the great work that my colleagues on my campus in other disciplines were doing. Because I felt like I'd learned so much from them, I wanted other people to learn from them as well, and I thought that that interdisciplinary conversation could really advance the practice. I knew I couldn't do it on my own, so I wanted to bring everybody together.

RT: I was going to say, as a good collaborator, a good community outreach person would do, right? Bring everyone together, yes.

LH: Yeah, so for a variety of reasons, that didn't manifest until 2021. And I think a big catalyst for this was that Erin Benay, a colleague at Case Western, reached out to me. She sent me a cold email, and basically said, I found your website, I'm interested in public humanities work, can we talk? And so we had a series of conversations over Zoom. This was peak COVID days, and we decided that we should have a symposium. We didn't have to worry about how to bring people together in person, because people weren't getting together in person, and we could just organize something on Zoom, because that had become a platform that people were much more comfortable participating in and willing to engage in really rigorous ways on. So, we sent

out a call for who wants to join us to participate in this symposium. We thought we'd be lucky if, like, 15 people responded, and we got something like 200 responses, from people in many different countries, many different time zones, and we had this moment of, oh man, this is bigger than we thought it was going to be.

RT: That's incredible.

LH: So, it was really exciting, but it was also a little bit scary, because it meant that we kind of had to rethink some of our approaches. It was really important to both of us that this symposium would be a time for conversation and collaboration, and have a really different vibe from the typical art history conference where people read papers, and somehow during the session, everybody forgets that the audience is there because they actually have knowledge and expertise that they could bring to a conversation. So we decided to keep it relatively small so that we could facilitate those conversations. And it ended up being a group of about 40 people, many people who were professors, some people working in museum spaces, some people working in cultural spaces that weren't museums or universities, some students as well. And we had a really exciting - I think it was two days of discussions and workshops over Zoom - and out of that, a group of us decided to establish something that would be more lasting, and it became the Engaged Art History community of practice.

RT: So it really was a ground-up, grassroots kind of thing that you and Erin put together.

LH: Yeah, it's not a professional association, it doesn't have a board, it doesn't have bylaws, we don't collect dues, and from my point of view—and I think others shared this perspective as well—it's really important for it to be that way because we wanted the group, exactly as you said, to reflect that, to really be a manifestation of a collaborative process and to be a space where it's okay for people to be coming at this from different perspectives, needing different things. We didn't want to exclude somebody because they didn't want to pay dues. I think some of it is also, I guess, I've come to recognize that I'm a decent leader. As a department chair, I think you have to figure that out. But I certainly didn't want to jump in and say, well, I'm in charge of this whole thing, and here's how we're gonna do it. That felt really wrong to me. But there has been a group of people that's kind of been consistently involved in the leadership, and so now we have a website with resources that people can access if they're trying to learn about what Engaged Art History is, if they're trying to do it, if they're trying to evaluate it. We have a directory so that people can find other people who are doing Engaged Art History so they can know that they're not the only ones. We have a listserv that is a place where people can share ideas, conference information, publications, questions, things like that. And we've had an occasional event series too, inviting folks from the Engaged Art History community to come together to either listen to

talks about research that's going on, or discuss questions and challenges related to teaching, and kind of take things in the direction that the collective wants it to go in.

DH: I think I attended an online lecture talking about empathy in teaching. And I found it fascinating, and I found it to be a really welcoming and supportive community. It had a nice feel. It was on Zoom during COVID. So yes, I think you are meeting your objectives.

LH: I'm really glad to hear that, because it was very important to me, at least, and I think to others as well, for it to be a welcoming environment, because I know sometimes art history spaces can be intimidating.

DH: Yes, yes.

RT: I think it's fascinating how something that comes out of that set of experiences and desires and that grassroots origin is also now creating a space in art history, right, as a mode of practice, as a pedagogical approach, as you say, something that would in practice, be evaluated for tenure... that's pretty institutionalized, right? And that, I think, is a really fascinating example of the permeability in our field that is generative and exciting.

LH: Yeah, it's really cool. And I've learned a lot from being involved with this group and with this practice. I mean, I've learned that there are more people than we might think who are doing this kind of work or interested in this kind of work. They're working in different countries, they're working in different kinds of institutions. They are also approaching this work in a bunch of different ways. So, some people take it kind of primarily as a research method. Other people are interested in Engaged Art History because they use it in their teaching, and they're coming from a service learning methodology or something like that. There are other people who are really interested in, like, the political dimensions of an engaged practice, whether that's with a capital P or a lowercase p. And then there are other people who are interested in that aspect of public address, so the kind of conventional public intellectual, maybe, approach as well. And I think that it's great that there's so much variety. We could spend a lot of time differentiating, well, this is what counts, and this is what doesn't count, but I really think that, especially at this stage, it's really helpful to bring all of that stuff together under an umbrella, because people doing any of those dimensions of the work have a lot to learn from each other.

DH: Yeah, absolutely. I'm teaching the capstone class for art history (our last four art history majors...), and, and we've been talking a lot about methods, and I love all of the approaches, but I love the idea of Engaged Art History as a method. I think that it's really exciting to think about that.

LH: I'm really glad to hear that. When... well, several years ago...I kind of said my vision is that in art history methods classes in the future, engaged practices will be taught alongside iconography and all the other good stuff.

DH: Yes!

RT: I'll do it. I'm in! Now, I don't want to go dark, but we should probably talk about some of the harder things that are happening right now.

DH: Yes, so, Laura, I think we told you this, we named the interview series Art History on Fire in large part because the title can be read both in a positive way and a negative way. Your Engaged Art History project definitely captures the positive, exciting developments in the field. Sadly, recent developments in Indiana have impacted art history programs there at public institutions, including yours, and embody some of the challenges facing art history. Would you share as much as you feel comfortable with what has happened and what the state of art history at your institution is?

LH: Yeah, it's sad and it's frustrating. I'll just start there. So, this spring, when the state legislature was preparing its final budget bill, there was a last minute--like, 24 hours before the vote--addition of new language that had some implications for how public universities operate. And there were actually a handful of things that were part of this new language, but one of those things was the new requirement that degree programs, undergraduate degree programs, graduate an average of 15 students per year. And if they don't meet that number, they are required to either seek permission for an exemption from the state, or suspend their operations, so essentially close the degree.

RT: Wow.

LH: Yeah, and it was really unfortunate that there wasn't time for public discourse, public response, to this. It was kind of just slipped in at the last minute, and it has some really big implications that I'm not sure people really thought through before they put those in place. One of the implications is that our art history bachelor's degree, Bachelor of Arts in Art History, does not graduate the required minimum of 15 students per year. And so we were put in this situation of having to figure out, over the summer, after a lot of people were no longer on their 10-month contracts...we had to figure out how to move forward and how to respond. So, I was actually really proud of my colleagues in the department and my colleagues in leadership at the Herron School of Art and Design. We put together an awesome proposal explaining why art history should be worthy of an exception. We talked about how there had been a recent article citing, you know, really great employment...

DH: Yes, we know that article.

LH: ...relative to other majors, and we talked about things like how we serve almost every single student at the art school. We serve many students in schools across campus. We're not actually spending a bunch of extra resources on a small number of majors, which was what some of the justification around these new rules was about. And, yeah, I think we made a really strong case. When we advanced our case to the university level, they declined to seek an exemption for our program.

DH: Okay, so it didn't even make it out of the university.

LH: It didn't make it out of the university. I have no idea if it would have been compelling at the state level. I don't know about the university leadership's vision for what they wanted to request, what they didn't want to request, and why they wanted to make the requests that they made and not make the request that they didn't make. But, the outcome is that it feels like we've basically been told by our university that what they hired us to do doesn't matter. And, we have had to support our current art history students in helping them figure out how to process this message as well. So, we are suspending our art history bachelor's degree. We are required (I read this as we get to) teach out all the students who have declared a major, so we've basically got four more years of students, of art history majors, coming through our program. We will still have a minor. We still have an art history program. We're figuring out ways to help students focus on art history, if that's where they really feel drawn to focus. But it's been a tricky situation to navigate, to say the least.

DH: Sure. Yeah, that's absolutely an understatement. May I ask, how big was your program, just out of curiosity? And was enrollment steady? Was it going up? Was it going down?

LH: So, we had, on average, maybe about 10 graduates a year, so it was... I would think of it as, like, a healthy program, but it didn't meet the somewhat arbitrary minimum numbers that were imposed on us. And again, you know, it's funny, because we teach so many students. Even though we didn't have an enormous number of majors, we have a major impact on the education...

DH: Absolutely. And also, I really don't understand the financial argument, because it doesn't cost very much to have that major, because the bulk of our teaching are these larger classes for art education and fine arts students across campus. You don't need big, expensive labs. I mean, it's really actually quite an inexpensive program to run, and while having majors is something to be proud of...

RT: I mean, it seems like the takeaway has to be that they didn't value that contribution. As robust and comprehensive as that contribution was to all these different students and their different learning moments, like, that wasn't of value. That's the scary part for me.

LH: Yeah. I mean, it's tricky, and I think this might be something we'll get into later in the conversation, but I can't help but wonder if some of it is that the university leadership that was responsible for making that decision to not advance our proposal, I wonder if they really have a good understanding of what art history is, and what we do, and what we teach our students to do.

DH: Yes. Absolutely. I think that the public perception of art history that is held even by people in academia itself is a big question, I think. It's something that Rebecca and I talk about as well.

LH: Yeah.

RT: Should we talk about that, then?

DH: Yeah.

RT: Outside of academia, how does art history operate, or what's its reputation? That should be entertaining, yeah? So let's circle back then to your work on art history in the public realm. What role do you see this discipline, whatever name you want to give it, playing in American culture, and maybe in a culture that our administrators would participate in, both, you know, on the edges of academia or out in the public realm?

LH: Yeah. So we've kind of hinted at this already, but like Deborah, I take a wide, expansive approach to art history. I really think of it as this interdisciplinary powerhouse that has the potential to teach students how to look carefully, how to read carefully, how to think about business and the economy, how to think about science and engineering, how to think about politics, like, all different kinds of stuff. And students take what they learn in an art history class, and they bring it out into the world, and they apply it in so many different places. And I know, at least in my state, there's a lot of concern about how universities prepare students for jobs. And so, you know, in that sense, I really genuinely believe that art history can prepare you to do any job. But beyond that, I also don't believe that the sole purpose of a university education should be preparing somebody for a job. And I think that art history teaches skills that are things that will enrich your life. And I think that has to be important, because what are we doing if, you know, we're not trying to have meaningful lives? So, I really see art history playing a role in that much, much broader context. Some of that comes from...what do some people do for

recreation? They go to the museum! And art history is really active in art museums. People go to art galleries. Art history, you know, has a role to play there. But people also go to the park, and they go out for walks, and they pass by, if they're lucky, some public art, you know, whether it's a mural, or a sculpture, or, like, a weird thing that's making strange noises and you crane your neck, and you're like, what the heck is going on with that? Those are all places where the kind of skills that are embedded in art history and the knowledge that's embedded in art history is doing its work out in the public sphere. I think beyond that, even for people who maybe say, like, they don't care about art, they don't care about, you know, art history, maybe they care about tourism in their town. And so much of tourism is wrapped up in public visual culture, whether it's advertising, or cultural activities that people come to do, or that big sculpture that people recognize as, like, a landmark or an identifier of something that makes that place the special place that it is. And so I see art history intertwined with all of those different things.

RT: Obviously, we would agree with you, right? And we would point to, you know, on Airbnb, you could take a tour of the murals in Denver and Five Points, right, and see all of them. You know, obviously there's this ground-level (even swelling, I would argue) popular interest in this kind of public visual culture, and in museums. And yet, somehow, art history is separated from that. It's not as if you have to, I don't know, study biology to enjoy the Museum of Nature and Science, right? Somehow we have found ourselves in a spot where we're being denigrated, and yet the results of the inquiry are celebrated. And I find that very challenging to kind of parse in my head. What does one do about that? Do we need to change our name? Would that solve the problem if we come up with a hipper name for art history?

LH (laughing): I don't know. I mean, my degree is in visual studies, and I don't think that helps, so...

RT: I would agree that none of the alternatives so far have really gone anywhere, but I do think in this moment where people don't really want to hear from "experts" (and I'm using air quotes there), that somehow art historians are the sort of the ultimate in the pedantic expert that no one wants to talk about, or to.

LH: Yeah, I mean, I think part of that is that a big enough chunk of what we study is, admittedly, stuff that was produced according to very precise and sometimes esoteric principles and methods, so we gotta deal with that. Sometimes it was stuff that was made for rich people, and so we have to deal with that. But I also think this is maybe part of where art history can do a better job, or art historians can do a better job, of helping people see what our discipline really is, and what it really does. For one example, I mean, with the collaborative practices that I use, it is all about this belief that art historians are not the only ones who get to tell the story of the history of art. There are really important perspectives that people can bring because of their

lived experience, because of their family history, because of the expert knowledge that they have from some other field, and those are all part of how we can be doing the work and how we are doing the work, in some cases, of art history. So, I think there's a really important piece of that there. But that's also kind of like a one-to-one kind of thing, you know? The people I'm working with on a project can come to see, "oh, she's not really like what I thought an art historian would be," or "this stuff that we're doing is like, oh, it's about me and my family, and that's really interesting, and that's not snobby," all of that stuff, but I think you only get so far if you're trying to change the discourse about a field, or the reputation of a field. You only get so far when you're kind of connecting with one person at a time.

RT: Right, and you have such success with grassroots efforts, right? But that doesn't seem like it's trickling up. You and all your colleagues who are doing this kind of important publicly engaged kind of work, even the work that museums are doing to change their narratives, incorporate and collaborate and all those things, it doesn't seem like it's trickling up into the discipline at least.

LH: Hmm.

DH: Although I will say, I think that museums—the efforts that museums have done to be more inclusive, have different types of activities, different types of shows—it's clearly paying off. People are attending in droves, they're changing how they think of museums. But there's also been a sort of backlash to that, as well.

RT: Are you saying I should just be more patient and wait for art history to get a positive, I don't know, wave?

DH: I think the problem is: what's the public-facing side of art history? I think of Engaged Art History and collaborative projects, but like you said, Laura, that's small groups of people, right? You can have a one-on-one conversation and show that there's not just this very narrow way to talk about art, that art history is more, back to that really big definition of what art history is. So there's all sorts of ways to talk about an object that includes lots of people, but what are the ways that we get that out there? And that actually leads me to another question for you, Laura, which is that, based on your work – because you've been doing this work as much as anyone – are there fruitful intersections with the public that you think more art historians should pursue? Or things that they could do to maybe help change that perception?

LH: Maybe (laughing). I'm not sure. So, on the one hand, we have examples of people who share their expertise in presentations at a museum, or in exhibits, or by creating resources that are available to broad publics, and I'm thinking of Smarthistory, for example. And, those are all

really great because it's important for people to be able to access reliable resources and resources that they can read without getting their tongue or their brain in a tangle. That's super helpful and important. I think there's more to it, though, because I still think if we only do that stuff, we're only getting so far along the way. So, sure, I would love to see more scholars working collaboratively with people outside of academia to do the work of art history, and maybe that looks like doing some more local art history. We all live in places. There's art history all around us. It doesn't just exist in New York and LA and Chicago and, you know, places in other countries, right? So, we can be working with our students, we can be working with our neighbors to tell the histories that are really rooted in the visual culture of wherever we are based. And at the same time, it's really hard. This collaborative stuff is not easy. While some of my projects have been successful, and some of my colleagues have done really amazing things in the engaged art history space, there's a lot of failure there. There's a lot of trial and error there. I would not suggest that every art historian drop your archival papers today and go out into the streets! That's not gonna be a good situation, in part because different people work better using different methods, and so the benefit of a field that has access to a broad array of methodologies, that's a good thing. So there needs to be space for people to choose the methods that work well for the questions that they're trying to answer, and also their own individual personalities, abilities, resources, things like that. But also, our institutions, sometimes they say they want engaged scholarship, but when it comes time to award funding or for tenure and promotion, they don't always recognize the engaged scholarship the way that one might want them to. So there are challenges associated with those practices as well. So, these are possibilities, but again, I don't think any one is like: here's the answer, and here's what we can do to connect more with a wider array of audiences or stakeholders. I mean, it's not just audiences, and I think that's a thing.

DH: Right, that's a great distinction there.

RT: Okay, so given all that, the possibilities for action, and then the kind of boundaries that we work within, how are you feeling about art history? On that spectrum, are you leaning positive, or trending negative? What are you really hopeful about, and what would you identify as something you're really concerned about for the future of our field?

LH: I think where I fall on that spectrum probably varies from day to day, and sometimes from hour to hour, depending on what it is that I've been working on, or what it is that I've been reading. So, yeah, full disclosure, like, I'm all over the place in terms of how I'm feeling. But I am usually a very optimistic person, and so I think it's easier for me to get my mind in a space where I'm feeling excited about helping more people connect with a field that I think is important, feeling excited about taking steps to try to make art history more democratic, envisioning future

possibilities. I could brainstorm all kinds of exciting, exciting stuff. But at the same time there are moments when I think, if even our universities don't value what we do, that's pretty depressing. So, yeah, I go back and forth, but I think if I can't land on the optimistic side, then, what are we doing? I don't know.

RT: Well, I appreciate that, and I think we all feel similarly in terms of the waffling between those sides of the spectrum. But maybe I'm just in that space right here at this moment, right? There do seem to be some concerning signs: Closures of PhD programs, such as that UChicago announcement. It does feel like there's something at play. These are potentially necessary correctives, maybe, to the size of some PhD programs, or that sort of thing. But you worry, if we're not producing art historians, then what is the future of art history at all levels? At the BA level? Deb, you're doing your last class of majors, right? Laura, you have 4 more years of majors to go, and then...

DH: I would say that I think that there is a future to art history beyond just how many colleges and universities offer majors. It's incredibly rewarding to teach art history to other majors as well, and they can incorporate that in their lives, but I do worry about the slow disappearance [of the field...]

RT: I hear you, and I obviously agree, but this is the tip of that iceberg, right? If we don't have majors, we still have programs, but at what point do we not have programs?

DH: Right, at what point when people retire or leave, do those lines not get replaced? And then it becomes this slow disappearance. Rebecca and I probably are a bit more pessimistic at the moment, but I love your optimism, Laura. What do you think the future of art history is, if you have a crystal ball? Or is that an impossible question to answer? Do you think that there are actions we can take now to ensure the best outcomes for the future?

LH: Yeah, so a question like that really wants me to claim the historian part of art history and say, like, I don't want to predict the future, I just want to focus on what has already happened. But, I do like to imagine, and I think that some of that imagining, even if it doesn't predict an actuality, it gives us a path to follow, or something to stay on or to guide us as we get to whatever the actual future is going to be. So... When I imagine a future for art history, again putting on that optimism hat - and maybe it's because I'm, like, in denial and I can't accept that all of these bad things that are happening are going to have a real tangible impact on the field and our society - but I imagine things like... art history is a core component of an interdisciplinary curriculum that is taught from kindergarten through college, where maybe you don't have to major in it, but you get a taste of it at every stage of your education, because it is so important for understanding the world and for helping a student find their place in that world. I

really do believe that what we study and teach in art history has value beyond what professionals in our discipline do with it. And so that's the direction that I go in. I was on a little brainstorm thing the other day, and I thought, well, we could have a whole university where the only major is art history. They don't want us to major in art history anywhere else, we'll just take it, we'll make our own institution (laughing). What would that look like? So...

RT: You can be president. I'll nominate you.

DH: Yes, I would vote for you, absolutely.

RT: I don't want to go on the dark side, but, you know, New Zealand just eliminated art history from its K-12 school systems, right, earlier this month, so it doesn't seem like that's the trend to create a comprehensive program, unfortunately.

LH: Yeah.

RT: I mean, I love that vision. But I think... what could we do to make that vision more viable, right? You're such an interdisciplinary scholar. Does it behoove art history to really embrace interdisciplinarity, and stop thinking about ourselves as a humanities, and more as an ID program.

LH: Yeah, it might, and I think some of that comes from going into other spaces, other educational spaces, other research spaces. So, what, as an art historian, can I bring to my kid's math class, you know? That sounds like a joke, but I'm actually serious. We can count years just as well as we can count pennies...there's ways to create those connections, and I just gave a really bad example, but there are good ones that we can come up with, if we think carefully about it. There have been movements to embed historians in all kinds of public and professional settings. There have been movements to embed artists in similar places. I do think that an art historian brings value, brings a degree of advanced media literacy that can be really meaningful in a lot of different settings. Maybe this is less scary to me because I do have that interdisciplinary background, and I do see myself as a connector and a translator and all that stuff. Working with people in other disciplinary spaces is going to help them learn that we do a lot more than sit in a dark room and look at slides. Right?

DH: I was just reading - I think it is Stanford's medical school, that has an art program, and they bring in artists and art historians, and part of that is just to get the medical students and the staff there to look more closely. That close looking, and paying attention, and thinking critically and creative problem solving, is really important for doctors to actually look at the patient and see

what's in front of them and not what they expect to see. So, there are spaces that are doing that, but again, they're these very elite spaces.

LH: Um hmm.

RT: I love the notion of the embedding. In my city here, Colorado Springs, we have a city archaeologist. Maybe we should have a city art historian. We have good people who work on our public art program and other kinds of cultural amenities—museums and other things—that exist in our park system, but wouldn't it be fascinating to advocate for something like a city art historian to provide those many perspectives that you're talking about? So I appreciate your positivity. I'll try not to be quite so dark.

LH: I think, even in the case of a city art historian, there are probably people filling those roles that just don't call it that. So, some of this, I don't know, maybe this is my one year in PR coming through, but I think some of it might be a branding and a storytelling issue. How can we tell the story better about the interesting work that we do? How can we help people see that actually what they're doing is art history, or is building on art history scholarship? And also, how can we help people see that, like, art historians can be friendly, kind, accessible, silly, like, all the different things that we are!

RT: Fun!

DH: You know what we need? We need a reality show where an art historian goes around and finds all the people who are doing art history work, but they're not called art historians. And Laura, I nominate you to be the host of this show.

RT: Like, one of those travel cooking shows!

DH: Exactly, yeah. The Traveling Art Historian, exactly.

RT: Well, this has been great. Laura, thank you so much for your time, and for sharing all of your experiences and all of the things that you've been thinking about. You definitely have given me a more positive tilt to my day, so thank you personally for that.

DH: Yes, thank you so much. We are beyond grateful that you joined us and shared all this knowledge with us and your perspective on the world. You were a perfect first interview for us, so thank you.

LH: Oh, thank you so much. Thank you for having me. It was really fun and interesting to talk with you, so this was a treat for my day. I think that as we're navigating all the very real challenges that we are navigating (because I know I get very optimistic, but it's not that I don't realize that there's some really serious stuff going on), I think it's stuff like this, these bright spots, opportunities to connect with colleagues, to think through some of the thorny things in our discipline, in our professions, these are really valuable and meaningful opportunities. So I'm really grateful that you are organizing this.

RT: We're so grateful and happy that you joined us - that was really fun. So, yay! for art history as fun.

DH: And collaboration too! Thank you.

LH: Thank you.