

The interview with Dr. Kerry Lucinda Brown was conducted on 6/18/2026. This transcript has been condensed and edited for clarity and readability.

Rebecca Tucker (RT): This is Art History on Fire. Here you'll find interviews exploring the current state of the field of art history. Our conversations with U.S.-based art historians aim to illuminate a variety of perspectives on undergraduate teaching in the field of art history. Your hosts are myself, RT, I'm professor at Colorado College, and...

Deborah Hutton (DH), professor at the College of New Jersey. In order to deeply consider both the present and future of our field, we speak with art historians on the ground to learn from them about what is happening, good and bad, to ask why it's happening, and to gather ideas for moving forward.

RT: Okay, Deborah, I imagine everyone listening knows that there are major transitions happening across higher education in the U.S. And that's due to a number of important factors, including demographics, institutional funding, social change, and politics. Art history is certainly implicated in those changes. We've made the case in this series that today's art history is dynamic, innovative, experimental, and exciting. And I hope you'll agree that our next interviewee is a great example of all those wonderful elements.

DH: Absolutely, for sure. And so, it is my pleasure to introduce our interviewee for the seventh installment of our series.

We speak with Dr. Kerry Lucinda Brown, who currently serves as an Associate Chair of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design, where she guides strategic planning, curriculum development, and faculty membership across the department. Her scholarly work focuses on South Asian and Himalayan art, specifically Niwar, Buddhist art, and ritual in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. Dr. Brown also contributes to major museum initiatives and educational platforms, including the Ribbon Museum's Project Himalayan Art, and the Penn Cultural Heritage Center's Cultural Property Experts On-Call program.

RT: I love the idea of experts on call. As always, you can find a transcript of this interview, as well as more information on Dr. Brown and the series on our substack, Art History on Fire, and on the project's website, hosted by Colorado College. So let's get started!

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DH: So today we have the distinct pleasure of speaking with Dr. Kerry Brown. Kerry, thank you so much for taking the time to be part of our interview series. Full disclosure, you and I know each other. Among other things, you spoke on a College Art Association panel that I chaired this past February on pedagogical strategies for student engagement, and so I am familiar with some of

the amazing things you do in the classroom. I'm excited for our conversation today, and Rebecca and I are excited to hear more about your work in general, as well as your thoughts on the current state and future of art history.

Kerry Lucinda Brown (KLB): Thank you so much for inviting me, Deborah, and it's wonderful to be able to speak with you and Rebecca about these topics.

RT: We're really excited to talk with you. Thank you for making the time to be here. In our intro that precedes this interview, we gave a very brief summary of your work as a scholar and teacher. But besides that, we didn't really 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. How would you describe yourself and the type of art history that you practice?

KLB: I think when thinking about my kind of trajectory, whether I want to describe myself as a professor or a scholar of South Asian art and Himalayan art, I can talk about my area of specialization generally as somebody interested in Himalayan Buddhist art, ritual theory, ritual practice, and performance. But at my core, I really identify as a teacher first. Thinking about education and teaching is tied back to both some of my earliest foundational experiences with art history in elementary school, but also the time in college when I was part of a rowing team. I was a D1/ D9 baby at Ohio State. I was part of the rowing team. We balanced out the football team, and I was the first recruited class at Ohio State. And then I went on, after that time, continuing my graduate program at Ohio State, I coached for the club program, and so a lot of my teaching is informed by some of the foundational experiences from elementary school, then coaching and being coached in college. And then also having this experiential side of field work in South Asia, living and working in India and Nepal, being around objects that I didn't know, but absorbing, really set the stage for how I'd like to approach the classroom. I like to share that with my students at the start of every term, both giving them my background as an art historian, what I did in terms of my degree and how I got there, but also talking about museum partnerships I have and the kind of work I do with them (whether that's object research or education and interpretation) so that when I'm explaining what art history is, I'm giving really tangible experiences that I've had, but also, why I do what I do. And I think the "why" becomes really important for the generation of students I have in my classroom. I'm learning that if they think it's busy work, or they think that art history is one thing and not another, they're going to really, really come in with a lot of preconceptions about what the class is. It can really set the stage, you know, rough for the first few weeks, so I like to just confront it as soon as possible, and then change the tone of the classroom so that they understand my goal is for them to learn, and learn a process. I'm not always trying to transform them into art historians, but I want them to understand the utility that

art history, art historical research, art historical analysis, and images in general can have for their creative projects and development, whatever those may be.

DH: That's fascinating. The word utility, I think, is something that is really striking me that I want to come back to at some point, because I think that's interesting. I didn't know that you did rowing and that you coached. I think that's really interesting.

KLB: It [rowing] was why I went to Ohio State. I was recruited. I wasn't sure about what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be a history major. My father was a history professor, my mom was a teacher, my mom taught special education. I guess my family origin story was teaching, and then thinking about how to engage and interact, but for the first year or so at Ohio State, I was a history major. And then I had 3 bad history teachers in a row. I'll call them teachers, they were professors, but I had 3 kind of poor experiences back-to-back-to-back, and then I had 3 really great experiences back-to-back-to-back with religious studies and art history, and I was like, "okay, we'll go this way, not that way." It's really the power of what a relationship with a student can do. And I think now that I'm thinking about this at SCAD, we have so many students who come in with the horizons upon them, whether that's animation, illustration, game design, game development, those are some of our top majors here. I rarely get students incoming with an interest in art history, or majoring in art history. They usually convert. But increasingly, we're starting to see students come into SCAD with an interest in art history. Certainly when we have our SCAD days, which are our recruiting days that SCAD's open, and students can come and explore campus (they can explore the majors with leadership, members of the department, and chairs and associate chairs around and available to answer their questions), so many students are coming to visit our little area, really excited about art history, wanting to do curatorial things, or interested in studying art history further, or partnering that with another degree. So there's a very keen awareness, and I think some of this is because of AP Art History. Some of this is because of just the availability of art history resources, like Khan Academy. Most of them know Khan Academy, or have been engaging with Khan Academy in different ways, and so they can go down that rabbit hole. But generally, there's a tremendous amount of excitement related to understanding that utility part of art history.

RT: That's fascinating to me that you're finding that in your student population. And I'm wondering if there's a correlation between the kinds of students who are coming for a "SCAD day." What I hear on the other side, and certainly across the humanities and the other spaces, is that you have to catch them at the first-year seminar, or in the humanities intro courses or something, so that they know about the discipline, because they won't come in with any training in it.

KLB: Right, and I do make the assumption that they're not going to come in with any training. At SCAD, we have a 10-week quarter, and we meet for 20 class sessions, so each course meets

twice a week for two and a half hour blocks, and that's the same for every class at SCAD. So, we have only 10 weeks with them, but we have an intensive period of time with them. One of the curriculum things that we do, and one of the unique features of SCAD is we have a pre-quarter assignment. The Blackboard shells open up about a week before the class starts, and we actually have faculty post some kind of engagement assignment to get students thinking, so when they arrive in Class 1, it's not just syllabus review, it's "we get started with what we need to do." And then that [expectation] is enculturated across the university. So, all students know that there's a pre-quarter assignment. They know to open up things before the first day of class, that they are actually looking. Some of those activities are simple, some of them are complicated, it really depends on what the class is, but it's meant to get them thinking so that they're really excited on that first day. It's not just like, "oh, day one is a syllabus day, and then I go home." Especially since we're with them for two and a half hours each session.

DH: So, there's a couple things in there that you said were really interesting. I have a quick question for you, which is, are art history classes the same length as studio classes?

KLB: Yes.

DH: Right now, you're serving as Associate Chair of Art History at SCAD, and SCAD's undergraduate degree in art history is a BFA rather than a BA. You're the first person we're interviewing who is at a program where there's a BFA in art history, and so we're eager to hear more about what that means. I think, just what you said, the longer classes that are the same as the studio [classes] would certainly be different than, say, at my institution. And Rebecca, would you say that's the same?

RT: I would agree. And I would love to hear a little bit of the logistics, like, how big is SCAD, how big is the program, all those number-y things, if you have those at the top of your head, by chance.

KLB: So SCAD's roughly - I think our latest enrollment was around 18,000 students.

DH: Wow.

KLB: And technically, we have 4 campuses. So we have a campus in Savannah, which is our main campus. We have a campus in Atlanta, which opened up in the early 2000s. We have a location in Lacoste, France that's growing and expanding. And then we also have online, virtual classes, and we have fully online degrees available. Not every single degree is available online, but students can take online classes, they're able to go from campus to campus as needed, and the number 18,000 represents those totals. Savannah is the largest concentration. This is where we have all of the majors, and this is where most of the faculty core is located. Atlanta's growing.

Lacoste is growing. And the online campus is growing, that's called "SCADnow." It's basically on-demand. And then there was another part of your question.

DH: Oh, yeah, so about the art history BFA. I think you're familiar with both structures. What makes it a BFA? How many majors do you have? Things like that. We'd be curious.

KLB: SCAD has defined the difference between a BA and a BFA – the main difference is in the number of required general education courses. So, for the BA, generally you'll have more Gen Ed hours than you will for your major curriculum, and you might have a few more elective hours. And for the BFA, what that means is you might have then less of those general education hours, and then you'll have more major curriculum courses. So there's more opportunity to take more courses in your area of expertise. Both options here at SCAD will come with some kind of capstone project. So, for art history, there's a senior thesis that they develop over their three quarters, and they complete their senior year. All of our classes meet for 5 credit hours. They're 5 credit hour quarter classes. So for art history, we have foundation studies of 25 hours, so they're doing things like sketching and drawing, color theory, maybe design thinking. We'll have gen ed classes, so they do have a language requirement – three quarters of a language. With general education electives, they can pick and choose and tailor what they want to do within that general education requirement. But they'll also take English, they'll take digital communications classes, there's a speaking class. There's business fundamentals that was added within the last few years. Every person, every student who comes through SCAD has to take a business course. One of SCAD's founders and current president, Paula Wallace, didn't want students struggling as artists. So, one of our mottos here is "no starving artist." Learning those fundamentals, learning how to market yourself, learning those basics, that's all part of the general education. And then the available electives do allow students to tailor that. I would say the addition of a minor allows you to tailor even further. But that means for the major curriculum, for art history, there's 65 art history credit hours. Those can be at various levels, covering a range of areas and time periods, so that they meet that diversity requirement. But then there's another set of electives. So there's a lot of flexibility that art history provides at SCAD. In trying to understand this question about what distinguishes the BFA from the BA, I think it's that intensive time spent in these art history courses. Some of our art history courses are thematic, some of them are traditional time period-based classes, some of them are broad surveys. But our faculty population here - just this past year, we had 38 faculty in our department in Savannah with only one part-time faculty member.

DH: Wow.

KLB: SCAD as a general approach tries to limit part-time faculty. Part of that is because we're meeting twice a week for two and a half hours, for 10-week quarters. But it's also that level of

relationship-building you have with your students when you're in a smaller classroom. So studio classes are capped at 20.

We have faculty who are accomplished in so many different areas. Some are coming out of the museum world, some have long museum careers. But at their core, our central faculty are educators. And we really put education first, and so the focus on teaching and learning is our core mandate. We are not a publish-or-perish institution. There is no requirement for me to publish at all. It's great, it's beneficial, it's a boon if I do. I can write that down in my annual report. It helps SCAD. But at our core, our mandate is to mentor and to educate, so you can spend time thinking about assignments, you can spend time collaborating with peers. I think the most fruitful relationships I've had in my department are [due to] the fact that when I was faculty, I didn't have an individual office. We were all in rooms together with little cubbies. And if somebody had a problem, they're like, "hey, this thing's happening. Yeah, this is happening in my class, too. What are you doing? Oh, here's my assignment, here's my stuff." There's this constant sharing of information that I didn't feel was typical before I got here. And some of that could be because we don't have a tenure system at SCAD. We're all on annual contracts - but we are all on annual contracts, and so it's not like a class system of some tenured and some non-tenured faculty. It's not a hierarchy of status and levels. Everyone is a professor, everyone is given the rank of full professor. Most faculty, I'm going to say the number is in the 70% or 80%, have terminal degrees in their field. For art history, that is indeed the case. It's about 98% of our faculty. And so the change in that attitude is really striking. I was at 6 different places before I got to SCAD. I was an adjunct at so many different places and teaching at museums, teaching at different kinds of institutions, and when I came to SCAD, the tone was just different. Everyone was supportive, everyone is happy you are here. We are all in this 10-week cycle together, so "what do you need? what can I help you with? Oh, do you need an assignment? This is what I do. This is what I find." And I think that's one of the challenges of being in traditional departments where, especially if it's an R1 or research-focused institution, you're not given the same toolkit to learn how to teach, and you're not given the same time and attention, nor is it given the same weight in, like, a tenure review. And I have lots of opinions on tenure, but I find that, at least here, because everyone is in the same system, it does feel equitable, and it does feel like people are given contracts every year. We don't give contracts just to take them away. But that [annual review] is an opportunity to assess the year, it's an opportunity to figure out what are opportunities for developing further, what's really consistent, what's strong, what can you share with the team. Then, having that contract offered for the next year is a real investment in that person. And so the challenges of not having tenure, I think, here are kind of moot, because there isn't this scaled hierarchy of some people having tenure and other people being considered teaching faculty or professors of practice, right?

DH: Right. I think on my campus, we're moving more and more towards those ... we call them clinical hires, or clinical faculty, that is creating that system. It's so fascinating to me, the words that you use, because you're talking about building skills, and having the students practice, and doing activities, and I think one of the things I've noticed is that art history, certainly when we all went to school, was about the professor conveying information. You did readings, you came to class, you listened to lectures, and then you had an exam or a paper where you just kind of regurgitated it, or did your research on your own, did more reading. It was about information, it was about content. I do think that perhaps art history hasn't made the shift from content to skills. I see when you're talking, you're definitely centering the skills rather than the content and I wonder if that's a change that art history needs to make more generally.

RT: I'm going to piggyback on that. I think a lot of folks we talk to are going that direction. I think the field itself is perhaps undecided about how far we go, how operationalized we make art history, how much we buy into it as a skills-oriented, almost training for employment. In some ways, I'm wondering if we aren't doing the same thing across higher ed - turning the education (the learning, the understanding, the larger context, all those things) into skills training for a job. So I guess I see this spectrum, Deborah. Some folks have really leaned into that, and other folks are worried about it, or clinging to something, which maybe they shouldn't cling to. I don't really have an answer here, but I think we are all on a spectrum on this.

KLB: I think you can have both, and I think we need to think about both as a discipline. And the reason why I think we need to think about both, both in terms of skills related to the profession, is we will always have people criticizing us as a discipline, why we should exist. And so, if you're unable to talk to those people and give them tangible reasons, in a numbers kind of way, you will lose them. You know, in the same way that you still need to build your core skills as a human and understand how to engage with people, and how to engage with the world around you as a human, and developing character. I think the liberal arts in general provides that opportunity to cultivate who you are as a person. And so there is a discourse around what do we think about in terms of education – [it is] “education has to have this outcome for a job, rather than developing and cultivating the person.” I think we lost the narrative. Because the narrative surrounding jobs, jobs performance, job activity, even “Will this have some outcome?” is problematic, because as we know, I know so many people that got law degrees that are not lawyers, right? But they have a law degree. I want to think that the larger outcome for us. In terms of skills, could be that analytical knowledge, developing a toolkit so you can see the practical application of art history - only so that we can challenge these very antiquated, preconceived notions about art history just being rote memorization of information, and regurgitating facts. Now, I'm part of a generation of students that did have to go back to the department building and look at the printed boards on the wall beside the print for studying. I did have to grab a slide carrousel and review the little slides. I

thought it was so technologically advanced! I got to work in the slide library as a graduate student. I got to work at the Huntington Archive of Buddhist and Related Art to scan the images which went into ArtStor for Southeast Asia and Japan. I had to use Photoshop to clean the dust off the slides. [laughs]

RT: You were at the foundation of the digitization of our field!

KLB: Anytime I open up JSTOR and I see one of those Huntington Archive slides, I thought, "did I scan that one?" I tell my students: I probably cleaned the dust off that. If you're looking at Kyoto, Japan, and it's a Huntington Archive image, I probably took the dust off of that for you.

RT: Thank you for doing that. [laughs]

KLB: Going through that whole evolution of [technology], and being able to share that with my students, they think it's a novelty. I brought in a DVD, and I have Indiana Jones on VHS. I brought that in, too, one day, and they're like, "what is that?" I do think there are these moments where we have to think about education as cultivating the whole person. And that's what the liberal arts do, that's what art history does. We're in such a visual world right now. It can be instantaneous. People make decisions in less than 2 seconds about you, whether you're talking about Tinder and talking about apps, there's a relatability when you talk about images in the world with students, because they are surrounded and inundated by it. So, I think we do have to think about art history as a practical mode of pausing our brain and saying, "what are we looking at? Why are we being shown this? What does it mean? What can you see?" But also, in terms of skills, I slow my students down intentionally, and I say, "I want you to learn how to describe, and I want you to challenge your descriptions. Are you being objective? Are you making assumptions? Are you using words that work, or are you using words that are actually interpretations, and you don't even realize you're doing it?" I think there's a fundamental opportunity where the skills of the student who will become the scholar and the skills for the workplace overlap a lot. We just have to not be so worried about which package they're going to receive it. It's like: I want you to eat your vegetables, and maybe they're hidden in some macaroni and cheese, covered in cheese, or maybe you're just eating them steamed ... you're still getting your vegetables. I do think it's a way of understanding the utility of art history, and why we need to question what we're looking at, so that they learn how to question, and they learn how to be curious. Because so much of K-12 education is not fostering curiosity in the same way that we almost need to use that foundational time in a general education class to do that.

I would also add one thing about SCAD. Every student, almost every single major that comes in, takes our two survey courses for art history (*Visual Culture and Context: Pre-modern Global*

Perspectives, and then *Visual Culture and Context: Making Modernities*, that's our 1 and 2). Nearly every student that comes to SCAD, that serves as their core general education classes. So we're getting everyone, this isn't an elective.

RT: All 18,000 of them?

KLB: Yep. Maybe there's one or two that don't have to take the survey of art history. But because so many students take this class, our core mandate is really teaching the survey for all faculty. We teach a global survey. That was a change that took place in 2020. Because of that [requirement], I see every student. Every time we teach a survey class [it] is an opportunity to basically explain the utility of art history. It's an opportunity to look at objects in depth. It's an opportunity to look at world cultures and create this introductory sampler of things that they can focus on later, should they be interested. Because we have experts in Asian art, experts in ancient Americas, experts in medieval, contemporary, contemporary photography, cinema, and museum studies are also part of our department. We can't do everything in a survey, as Deborah knows. You can't cover everything in a survey. Even if the book is wonderful and giant, you're still cutting things down further, and cutting things down further, and cutting things down further. I think if you focus on content you will never feel satisfied, and students will just feel an overwhelm of information. But if you focus on process, a process can be learned, and a process can be applied later. When they're ready to learn more, they can, because you've taught them the process of how to do it. I've taught them the process of looking so that they can learn more themselves, and I think that's the larger takeaway, and I think that approach that we've been taking has resulted in growing majors and growing numbers of minors. Over the last 5 years, those numbers have grown each year. I do think it's because of our teaching.

RT: I want to pivot into the pedagogical question we had on our list for you, but it does sound like you have, in some ways, the ideal setup. Your students are coming in already intrigued and curious about the visual world, because you're an art school, perhaps. But it sounds like also you're getting all of them in the survey class.

KLB: Yeah.

RT: That's is a very frequent piece of advice given to art historians: teach in the gen eds, teach in the first year seminar, get the students right away so that they know about your discipline. You get both! That's a pretty happy convergence there.

KLB: My favorite class to teach is basically our art history first course, ancient to 1400s, medieval. And in that class, especially with freshmen, they're eager, they're curious, they're excited to be here. They have the most energy, because they're not burning the candle at both ends, trying to

get major projects done. It's not just the classroom academic experience that we focus on at SCAD, but it's also soft skills, because of our relationships that we have with industry. Industry will give us information about what they are seeing trends with for new hires or during interviewing. Companies like Deloitte or Google or BMW will say "students aren't really making eye contact, they're really not good with small talk, or they're coming in and they're dealing with older generations, they don't know how to interact." SCAD opened up a center, which we call "SCADamp," which was basically teaching them how to talk. How do you learn how to do your elevator pitch? We have an elevator! And they go stand in it. And they learn, right? There are some things that are really amazing here in terms of that experiential learning. I do think that grows out of being a creative place. You have creative designers and thinkers who are like: "Don't just practice the elevator pitch. I'm going to put you in an elevator in this room, and you're going to practice [in it]." We have a whole studio for them to practice spoken presentations, where they can do scripted things, they can do visual things, and there's a whole team to assist, both with the visuals and with the delivery. So the professionalism is embedded into everything that we do. I don't think that diminishes from that cultivation of who the person is.

RT: Right, [your point is] that balancing. So our question about your pedagogy, which you've been talking about throughout [our conversation] so far, is about a traditional approach, which we've been talking about, versus this more accessible, more process and professionalized approach that you've been describing. Do you have any advice for folks who maybe don't work in the same kind of creative places - that don't have elevators set up.

DH: [laughs]

RT: I teach in a very intensive setup as well, so I'm fully aware of both the possibilities and the pitfalls of intensity, but most folks don't have that, right? They have a semester plan like Deborah does. So, do you have any thoughts for folks about what they could do to achieve the results that you're seeing?

KLB: Figuring out what your goal is as an instructor – whether as an adjunct, or professor, or whatever level you're at, doesn't really matter – I think it's what do you want that outcome to be, and what do you want that knowledge to be? It took me several years to figure out that I could be getting all this content and all this information to my students during lecture, and I thought it was really engaging, and then my tests asked "what is this? What date is it?" It was this traditional, multiple-choice, large lecture hall kind of class, and the course evaluations were really insightful. So I think critically examining course evaluations is the first step, and actually reading them.

RT: In your coaching model, you're suggesting that the feedback will help you improve your stroke, right?

KLB: Right! I don't mind that conversation, and I don't mind reading the negative feedback now, because often, I know it's not necessarily always about me. However, I can use my abilities as professor to change the dynamics of a classroom, to rethink. Maybe I need to do less group work, but I'll do some group activities so it's low stakes, and it won't be tied to a grade, because I don't want to stress them out the way I did. There was no great outcome to this, so why don't we shift it over here? I think if you're willing to think critically about what you're doing and re-examine that, reviewing course evaluations [is key]. But also, because this is an art and design school, critique is embedded into what students do in every single class, so they're used to giving feedback. There's a culture of hearing feedback, both in the moment and after the fact. And there's a culture here at SCAD of asking and soliciting feedback, and then acting on that. Half of what I do in my class now – the toy activities and other assignments and sketching and drawing that I do in class – come directly out of student feedback from course evaluations. And when they sit down to take their course evaluations before I jump out of the room to let them do it in privacy, I remind them that I actually read them, and I actually have responded: “This study guide that you have for this thing is because of student comments. So please share.”

DH: I would love for you to describe either the drawing that you have them do in class or the toy assignment for people. I do wonder if it's because you have longer class periods that you're able to do some of these assignments in class, but I find them to be really exciting, so I would love for you to describe them a little bit in depth. But I just wanted to say, back to that discussion about peer evaluation, at my institution, we have a problem with it, because the only time you get observed, it goes directly into your tenure and reappointment file. And so there's a culture where everyone gets a glowing peer observation. And so then, if you say anything, even helpful critique, people kind of freak out, because it's, “oh no, this is going in my tenure file, it has to be positive.” And so we're actually trying right now to change that culture, to say “no, all constructive feedback is helpful.” No one's the perfect teacher. Again, it's built into that cultural system that has to do with tenure and re-employment and all of those things.

RT: But also how you value teaching as a skill, as a practice, as a calling, even. Not all institutions are able to do the kind of thing that you're describing, Kerry.

KLB: Yeah. We do have teaching best practices, as we call them, so there are workshops faculty can take, best practice workshops on how to write rubrics, thinking about ramping classes up or winding them down (especially after two and a half hours), how do you break apart that time so it's meaningful? How do you get them up and moving? How do you prepare students, demonstrate how to do something, and then actually activate it? And so the two and a half hours, I think, is a real, real bonus that we have, because it gives you a lot of flexibility. But with that, there are some challenges, such as keeping them going for that time period as well.

So I'll talk about those assignments, especially what I call "sketch and annotate," or, "close looking," or even "image mapping." It has a lot of different terms, but essentially it's sketching and annotating. That activity can be unpacked in different ways, and I've also employed it online. It can be also a discussion board post. I do love it because it's really not something that students can use AI with at all. So the challenge I had was, in our classrooms, because of a large population of students with accommodations for various reasons, we can't actually disallow or prohibit laptops. I developed this assignment – I was having them sketch things in their notebooks as we were talking about it, and I said, "okay, add some notes about what you see." Then I formalized the assignment into a worksheet I bring to class. That is blank, with a set of instructions on the side, and the instructions read simply: "do a rough sketch of what you see, observe." In that time (it can be stick figures) begin to annotate the object, so literally draw a dot and a line, and then make some notes. In a survey class, what I'm trying to get them to do first is just describe and see where they're at with that, so I can check to see what kind of words that they're using. I tell them that at the start of a term, I don't care which words you're using, I want you to use the language you have to describe what you see. But your challenge is to NOT analyze. It's to just observe. What I can see in that activity, which is really easy to review after class, and when we're watching videos like Smart History video, or any of those, like, UNESCO Asia videos that are, like, two and a half minutes, is they use interesting words, sometimes, problematic words. I want them to be able to latch onto that. I want them really thinking about short writing that's more impactful and accurate. I'm not asking them for an essay, because the first thing they want to do is run it through Grammarly, so it's perfect. I cut that out. I just want to see what they're writing. I'm not doing a lot of in-class essay writing, but I'm doing a lot of in-class writing with these annotation assignments. And what that's allowed me to see is that they're actually learning how to apply the work, or they're getting more comfortable because they're writing more than they did [in] week one.

KLB: You know, once I did the *Woman from Willendorf* in class, and I made everybody tell me one thing, and this was a class of 32 students. So clearly, when we get to the end, everything that you probably identified is going to be gone from your list. So, what do you do in those cases? I basically have a tips guide: you just get more specific. When you run out of things to do [in visual description], you get more specific. You get more specific about her lack of feet. Or, a student pointed out that the *Woman from Willendorf* is knock knee-d, right? There's one knee that's kind of turned into the other. They're need to **look**. I always promise we'll go the other way next time, but making them go through this and getting more specific really demonstrates the nuances of art history. When I was dealing with BFA thesis students who were working on their thesis this term, I made them map out and annotate one of the images they were analyzing in their paper, because they were only telling me about the culture, and they were only telling me about cultural meaning.

They weren't doing any visual analysis, and I said, "okay, no more writing. I need you to annotate this." And so, we had to go back to that process. I was like, okay, all those things you need to embed as evidence when you're writing. The larger impact of that is: "what's your visual evidence?" I do share that I do model this when I get unknown images in the mail, and I do get [those]. I'm one of the consultants for the University of Pennsylvania's Cultural Heritage Experts On Call, like, for random things that come through customs. And when I get stuck and I don't know, this is exactly the process that I use. When I get stuck when I'm writing an essay – when I had to work on Project Himalayan Art, and I wasn't sure what to narrow topics down to, I do the same process.

I think oftentimes what makes this successful for me is it's a practice I use. And so, I think a tip for faculty, and a tip that I share with my direct reports (I have 13 faculty that directly report to me in our department) is really leaning into "what did you do as a scholar? What did your toolkit [contain] as an art historian? What is that thing you can lean into that's "your thing?" Because I can't make my thing somebody else's thing, right? And when faculty are struggling, or if they're trying to learn how to teach new content, or teach a global art history, they're [often thinking], "well, I'm just not the content expert." It's irrelevant - it really, really is. You're an art historian. You're an expert at art history. Please remember that, and teach them a process. And even if that process is, "how do you deal with an unknown object? How do you deal with an unknown culture?" Be a little transparent that this isn't your area of expertise, but you're still an art historian, you have a PhD, you earned that! You do field work, you've written books. Teaching a new subject shouldn't be so overwhelming that you can't lean into your process. I think it works both for the faculty to lean into process, and it works for the students to lean into process.

RT: This theme of being a generalist is something we've heard over and over again. I start to wonder if our grad schools are actually doing us a disservice by making us feel like specialists. Deborah, it looks like you have something you want to say.

DH: I do think that what Kerry's saying I 100% agree with, but I do think it's a shift from how we're taught in grad school, and how I see many art historians operating, which is that they see themselves as a content expert, and that their main job is to convey that content. They feel super insecure when they have to teach anything outside that area because we don't think about the skills, the toolkit that we bring. Maybe that is vocabulary that's used in the turning higher ed into professional training, job training, which is happening. But this is something slightly different, it's just using different words or thinking about what we do in a different way.

RT: Why do we have this hang-up? Historians don't have this problem. They don't have existential crises about the fact that they have to talk about Europe if they're an Americanist, or vice versa. Why is this an art history burden that we carry?

DH: Hmm.

RT: [laughs] And that was a rhetorical question, I don't actually expect you to answer that.

KLB: You know, the concept of public history was embraced by history and historians a lot earlier. There's some elitism with art history. The museum as this institution, the ivory towers... I do think because of the value and this idea of art sales and the consumerism around exhibitions and markets, there is this other level of elitism related to art history. Art museums as an institution, compared to a history museum or a Civil War museum, and thinking about various scaling of things - I do think that [elitism] is tied up with it. And then, I think it comes full circle with the preconceived notions of what art historians do. I have a more anthropological lens when I'm looking at things because of the work that I study - I study objects in motion, and I study image displays of the Buddhist communities of the Kathmandu Valley. But I'm able to tell my students in class, "it's just like a fashion show." It is telling the same story. It's an iconographic program. There is, I think, an individual awareness through social media and public/pop culture that I try to stay abreast of, because I'm always seeing patterns. That pattern recognition, that makes me a good art historian, is why, when I look at contemporary media, I just see the same patterns and same pattern recognition. So for me, the toolkit is, "what's the pattern recognition? What [are] the stories?" Iconography and iconographic programs are always so fascinating, because I'm realizing that's like a puzzle. And I'm trying to solve a puzzle, and I'm trying to solve those visuals, but I was never really a formalist, and I wasn't looking at style, so I wasn't necessarily looking at formal visual characteristics. I've had to add that to my toolkit so that I can more appropriately teach my class and have them look at things. So I'm constantly growing and constantly learning. And I think that oftentimes, as educators, we don't give ourselves time to learn new material. The NEH Summer Institutes, when they existed, used to be fantastic.

RT: They were.

KLB: But you also had to apply, and you also had to make sure you had that concentrated time, and not everything was being offered. Art history needs something that's consistent and steady. I don't know if that's a job for CAA, I don't know if that's a job for CCAC, I don't know if that's a job for an entirely new Institute or individual field-specific organizations to lean into teaching and being really, really aggressive with making art history available to the public. Because if the public doesn't understand the utility of art history, that's a problem. If my students come to my class, and they don't leave understanding why art history is useful for them, and why they should just always

continue to study, I don't feel like I've done my job. It's not about making them an art historian. If they end up being on city council, and if they end up being in charge of a budget, and if they end up being in charge of urban planning and design, I want them to think about the art historical components. I want them to be thinking about public art. I want them to be thinking about community building. I want them to be thinking "what are we doing if we're not thinking about the community?" Whether that's art history or liberal arts, we're at a point in society where we're building things all the time, we're developing things all the time. AI is a question and an issue that everyone's dealing with and contending with. The liberal arts and art history are going to give you that understanding of WHY. Should we build that bridge there? Should we put that park there? Should we give that company a ton of money to put a chemical plant next to that river? That critical part is really another contribution that art history gives to the world, but what gets publicized the most is when things go for \$45 million at Sotheby's.

DH: Yeah.

RT: For sure.

DH: So, you mentioned in passing your work with Project Himalayan Art, and I wanted you just to kind of talk a bit about that, because this gets back to what you're talking about, about public art history, making in this case Asian art accessible to a variety of audiences. So would you talk a little bit about that project and your involvement?

KLB: Sure. Project Himalayan Art was an initiative, still is an initiative, with the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art in New York City. We actually had our first meeting scheduled for March of 2020, which, if we can all remember, that's when the world changed with COVID.

So the goal of Project Himalayan Art was threefold. It was to organize materials, to create a timeline of art of the Himalayas that would be accessible for undergraduate populations in higher ed, so that we could create materials (visuals and text, and some video) that would give faculty who don't have any experience with Himalayan art and culture and the dynamics of it, resources so they can begin incorporating this into their teaching materials. The essays were around 1500-1700 words. The objects that were selected, there was a humanities advisory group, which I served on as the Nepal expert, and there were around 10 or so [experts] representing different disciplines and different regions. We wanted to have a comprehensive ancient-to-contemporary selection of 108 objects that would then get essays, related to a larger map, and have this digital humanities component where you can see these cross-currents across the Himalayas. The actual website is really dynamic, in terms of the resources, and really leans into accessibility. So the language and editing that was selected wasn't about reducing the academic rigor of the material,

but ensuring that the language was transparent for anybody to read and understand. There was also a pronunciation guide...

RT: I love pronunciation guides, they're so helpful.

KLB: With native speakers, and I know the Thames & Hudson Global Survey does this as well in the digital version, so you can click on it, and you can hear someone say "stupa" or other terms. It really allows the learner to feel a part of the conversation, which I really appreciated. There was also an interactive map to show that the Himalayas is both a geographic region, but also has these cross-cultural connections. We're dealing with parts of North India, we're dealing with Bhutan, Nepal, the greater Tibetan Plateau, but also Mongolia, objects from Beijing, and so thinking about the broad application of the term "Himalayan." The website was meant to be user-friendly, the resources were meant to be short so that students could read them and learn from them. I think what's going on now is a continuous, moving exhibition of objects from the Rubin Museum's permanent collection targeting university museums. So, universities that have museums can host this exhibition, and then the goal would then be to target faculty at that particular institution to introduce students to objects firsthand, and also then utilizing those teaching materials. They have grown in to include videos, there's videos of practitioners, videos of religious terms and concepts, so more like Himalayan studies materials, broadly conceived, but really rooted in art history and rooted in visual culture. That was an amazing project to work on to see from start to finish.

DH: Very cool.

RT: Yeah, it's super exciting. And such an interesting microcosm of all the things you've been talking about.

KLB: It's really nice to use both Project Himalayan Arts essays [and] Smart Histories essays as examples to students when we think about short-form writing. I often say that my responsibility to them is to teach them how to talk about art in a way that allows ideas to be shared. Wanting them to understand that they shouldn't make things overly complicated. They can be informative, they can be instructive with the language that they choose, but they should always consider who their audience is. Their audience is going to be really diverse. So, if you're really trying to share something and make it available, why are you going to choose obtuse language? Why are you going to choose words that are overly complicated and overly wordy? when we can make things direct, we can make it clear, and you can broaden the pool of people who are able to have a conversation with you. I do think that's the benefit of my position at SCAD, and being at SCAD and teaching so many survey classes every single year. You do get used to speaking to a broader audience. I would argue, I'll go toe-to-toe with anyone on this: being a better teacher has made

me a better scholar, because it makes my writing better. [I ask] “well, what's the point of this? Why am I saying this? Do I even need to say this? Is this useful?” The same conversations you have in class are the same ones that come up in an article. But luckily, I'm not trying to churn out articles every year. I choose my projects, because I have a lot of academic freedom to spend time where I want to spend it. Right now, that's on curriculum, and that's doing my sketching and annotating. Even if that means bringing toys into the classroom for them to sketch and annotate, so that they have something to touch and feel. I don't have access to a museum, or objects of Asian Art. But I can bring in a bunch of figurines, and they can touch it, and they can hold it in the same way, and they can be critical in the same way. And we can apply that toolkit to that thing. They're already super judgmental and they're already really good at tearing apart toys and video games and pop culture, and so what I want them to understand is they can apply that in an art historical way, too, and ask questions in the same way. They just need to give the terminology a different context.

RT: Right – the street goes both ways, of course, in terms of critical thinking. We've talked a lot about this already, but just to wrap up, our final question, the one that we ask everyone, is, “what do you think the future of art history is?”

KLB: For this one, I think it's really, really positive. My take on things is...the arc of history is long. I do think this is a really, really strong moment and an opportunity for art history to think about what our role is as art historians and as a discipline. The liberal arts in general is going to be needed if we continue these same conversations that we're having with AI. We need to know why we're doing what we're doing. We need to know how to think critically. We need to do the things that the robot and the machine can't do, with that critical, thoughtful awareness. AI can generate anything generic in general. But there's not going to be a genius AI - there will be a genius person. I think the role of art history, if we are able to position ourselves as critical in terms of this very visual-heavy time, and we're able to position what art historians do [well] - being content experts is important. Having those content experts is vital. But you also need to think broadly, and you need to understand that narrow sliver in the larger conversation. And so I'm really excited about art history, but I do think we need to lean into our role as educators. We are our best representatives of the field in the classroom. So if you're going to come to class, and disregard your students and feedback, because you must teach something a certain way, and you're unwilling to change, the discipline's not going to change. But if you're willing to understand the changing dynamics and the needs of students and you're able to then translate what you do to a broader public, [then] I think there's tremendous success awaiting art history. My goal is for every museum to have art historians on staff that are specialists, but that's not going to happen. My other goal is to have industry, the film industry, TV industry, advertising, illustration, animation, all of those disciplines understand that you should have an art historian on staff, not [only] the

historian. There's been a long history of having historians on TV sets and film sets. It's like, "well, they're good with text, right?" The art historian is going to be good with the visual. So understanding that history and art history aren't interchangeable, they're complementary, but understanding that awareness of the historical thing in the visual components of that, as vital, and as informed, and as important. I see all of that being really, really, impactful in the next few years. I think art history as a discipline is going to continue to grow, if we're able to successfully position what we're doing and share that with the public and not cloister it.

RT: That's our challenge, right? Because there are places where we're not growing, where we're shrinking. That is, in fact, a concerning narrative across the country, and so what you're suggesting is an interesting antidote to that.

KLB: My concern is the shift away from full-time faculty to filling gaps with adjunct faculty. I know I didn't have the bandwidth as an adjunct faculty member to even give students that amount of time. Anytime they asked for a letter of recommendation I had a policy of saying "no," so that the department understood their role. The detriment [was] that I was an adjunct [asked] to do this heavy lifting that was really required of them. Now, that's a whole issue with higher ed, and funding, and class sizes, that is institution to institution, but I think it does come down to the relationship a student has with a professor. And so, if you have great professors, ensure that they have an opportunity to teach those survey classes. It loathes me when I hear faculty say, "well, and I'm so excited I don't have to teach survey anymore." I'm like, "But why?" That's the best class. It's your opportunity to change the field. It's not going to get changed in a 400-level senior seminar. That person is already bought in.

DH: Right, right.

RT: The future of art history is good... it starts with good teaching.

KLB: Good teaching, and it starts with hopefully incorporating art history into the standards of learning for through K-12, in the same way that Europe has had, or Europe or the UK has this, embedded. Visual literacy is starting to appear in the schools for K-12, but I think we need more art history outreach, and we need faculty willing to take their PowerPoint presentations into a classroom. We need to figure out how to do that. We need faculty, PhD faculty, going to a third-grade class to talk about ancient Egypt, and then showing them ancient Shang Dynasty China. Because when they start seeing zoomorphic animals and all that fascination as an 8-, 9-, 10-year-old, that's how you get kids hooked. We need to be doing that in middle school. We need to be doing that in high school so that they have that exposure before they get to college. And if colleges are going to start cutting back on these things, what's the utility [of those cuts]? We're just going to have a vicious downward spiral, but we need to have an upward spiral as well.

RT: Yeah, that's the challenge. Because I can see the downward spirals happening. As you say, the UK has a strong program, but New Zealand just eliminated art history in their K-12. So, we're at that tipping point, feels like, where there's going to be more weight one way or the other.

KLB: Right, and the conversation about "can you get a job out of this or not" is so destructive.

RT: But we have to find the answers, right? We can't just say that's not an important question.

KLB: Well, I would say, a lot of these tech and AI companies, they're hiring art history majors. They're hiring the majors that have the flexibility and the critical visual skills.

RT: Somehow, even though that's true, and even though the data is out there, and you can see it reported even in major outlets, etc, it's not resonating as a narrative that anybody believes.

DH: Anyone at the levels at higher ed to make those decisions.

RT: Or even parents. I can say, "art historians have the highest rate of Fortune 500 CEOs." And they'll say, oh, that's an interesting tidbit, but I want my kid to major in business.

KLB: Yes, it's a challenge. I think there's a lot of fear involved and a lot of challenges related to what's next, especially given the world climate. I've had students come into these recruiting days, SCAD days, where they're usually in high school. [We ask] "why are you interested in this? Why are you interested in that?" Asking them these questions. They're like, "well, the world's kind of burning, so I want to be an artist." I do think that there is this pendulum, again, there's going to be a swing back. The challenge for the art historian is [to assert]: "no, we matter." We need to show you what we do. And we need some more voices, we need to have broader voices coming to the stage, we need people who are the experts, and we need people who are generalists. And I do think programs producing graduate students really need those graduate students teaching broader courses and being able to teach a global art history survey. You're doing them a disservice if they're not. They should be a specialist in what they're doing, but if we look at the statistics and look at the numbers of who's going to get this job versus that job, and then the jobs that are actually available, I want to say that the challenge is really having those students shift gears and get out of their hyper-focus on their very narrow specialization to realize the larger conversation. And that's going to take a teaching shift. That's going to take a shift from department administrators, that's going to take a shift from the people who are the PhD advisors to recognize the utility of that [approach]. But also, you can't have just graduate students teaching survey classes. It's good practice, but you also need the PhD professors teaching a survey class.

DH: Back to the part of the conversation earlier when we were talking about why is history, why do history professors feel more comfortable? History shifted to world history much earlier than art history shifted. I mean, art history is just now shifting to a global survey, and I do think - this is perhaps my own bias talking - but I do think some of it was the Eurocentrism embedded in art history and the Western canon, and this kind of elitism of the masterpieces. Kerry, obviously, I agree with you. I think we do need grad students to be able to teach a global survey, and I think that history did that. They went through that. They've had world history since the 90s, maybe?

KLB: Yeah.

DH: I think that that is partly why they can do that, they feel more comfortable that way. That's my take.

RT: So we're just a little slow. Maybe, you might be right.

DH: I mean, I do think it's what Kerry also said earlier, that the auction house, the connoisseurship, the money, the elitism involved in it, [has an impact]. That's what scares me: I've said this before, that right at the moment when it feels like the field of art history is finally becoming less elitist, in terms of what we teach and how we teach, where it's being offered is becoming more and more elitist, because it is these regional state schools that were late to get art history as a major that are the first places where it's being cut.

KLB: That's where I see Project Himalayan Art, Smart History, even Google Arts and Culture, where you have informed essays written by scholars, but for the general public as a repository of information that's accessible. So even if somebody isn't privileged enough to even go to college, they can still learn, and they can still be informed. And this is where that content over process conversation comes up, because the content's accessible. The students can look stuff up on their watch. So, I think process, and utility of process, and understanding that people see differently [is crucial]. I share with my students that the FBI and police officers train, they have workshops and training, and they have to look at art, because they can read a scene differently. Just because they're a detective doesn't mean they're all going to read the same. But understanding the situation, who's involved in what. Large cities are able to do this. I think if you're able to increase understanding of what art history is, and erase some of those preconceived notions about what we do, but shift it back towards actual things that we look at and we do. I'm not an appraiser and I don't paint. I think oftentimes when I'm talking to somebody I'm meeting for the first time, and they don't know what I do, and I mention I'm an art historian, sometimes, [they'll say] "oh, I have this thing, can you tell me what it's worth?" And I say: "well, you know, art history is not that." But I think there's always an opportunity to think critically about the world in a way that's really, really tangible and possible. If I had all the time in the world, I probably would spend all of my time

writing more essays for Smarthistory, more essays for Project Himalayan Art, and also recording videos - TikToks. How do you do art history in a minute? And really thinking about what are people [saying], and what are the media informing people? There's a lot of...for lack of a better term, "history bros" that have their pages that talk about history, but I ask, "okay, what's their degree? What do they do?" [I'm] critically questioning these narratives that get put together. Art history doesn't have that same thing, but people are constantly using art history to illustrate those conversations, and no art historian is going in there being like, "no, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, misrepresentation!" because it takes a tremendous amount of time and it takes a tremendous amount of effort to do that. There will be a shift when that happens. The people who are able to tap into those social media markets to bring art history to the world in a way that's accessible in a minute, they're going to find that success, and they're going to have that niche that breaks things open, where you get that exposure that's informed. The issue is the informed part. There's a lot of people doing this, but it's misinformed, or ill-informed, or a little misrepresentative, because they just are trying to generate content.

RT: You're being kind. There's plenty of that [type] that also has agendas. Well, this has been fascinating. I've got a whole page of notes here, I've learned so much. Thank you, Kerry. Thank you so much for sharing everything that you do with us.

KLB: Thank you so much for the opportunity to spend some time with you all and have these conversations. I think it's really helpful. I don't have great answers...

RT: I think your answers were pretty great!

KLB: But what you're doing here, I think, will further that conversation and hopefully bring some time for the thought and process about, "what are we going to do in the next step? What are the next steps?" And that's exciting.

DH: Thank you. I really appreciate your optimism and energy.

KLB: I appreciate the opportunity. it's a pleasure to talk to you both, and I look forward to all the things that come down the line, too.

RT: Thank you. Us too!