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What Is the Role of Patriotism in the Study of American Art?



William Rush, *Eagle*, 1809-11 (detail). Carved wood (probably Eastern white pine), gessoed and gilded, and cast iron, painted, 36 x 68 x 61 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Sansbury-Mills Fund, and Anthony W. and Lulu C. Wang, Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Goelet, Annette de la Renta, and Vira Hladun-Goldmann Gifts, 2002

During a meeting of the *Panorama* editorial board last winter, we talked about our need to set up some kind of forum for intellectual exchange during this season of national restiveness. Our question, early on, was what impact the current political situation might have on the teaching and curating of American art, our intention being to invite colleagues to share their classroom or museum experiences in the fraught environment of today. We subsequently decided to broaden our inquiry by asking whether we professionals in the field of American art history have a role to play in this new, national conversation. To begin a

larger discussion, we invited a group of academic and museum scholars to contribute their thoughts on the concept of patriotism and its meaning for the study and teaching of American art. Sally Webster, professor emerita from the City University of New York, has served as guest editor of this new edition of *The Bully Pulpit*, and we greatly appreciate her work on this topic.

To begin the exchange, we asked our respondents whether patriotism is a term that helps us see the country as a whole, a term that knits us together—the East and the West, the Midwest and the Mountain States. We posed the following questions: Do we have a responsibility to the nation in our teaching and writing on American art? How would this responsibility be enacted and can it be done without seeming to be jingoistic? Does a new understanding of our nation impact our teaching and study of American art? How do you feel about the idea of a national narrative? Have you been challenged to rethink the relationship between American art, the nation, and its citizenry at any time in the last year?

We were pleased to find so many who felt compelled to weigh in on this issue, either in terms blunt and polemical (we love this), or nuanced and subtle (also crucial). We also welcome your thoughts and look forward to receiving them at journalpanorama@gmail.com. Your voice and perspective would add immeasurably to this important conversation.

—*M. Elizabeth (Betsy) Boone and Lauren Lessing, Executive Editors*