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Jennifer Jane Marshall

Artists have a skill set. They're good at stretching canvas, building armatures, and PhotoShop. But for this discussion let's emphasize two more: the ability to show us our individual and social lives as they most poignantly are or could be; and the ability to imagine novelty amidst the status quo and, not only that, but also to make it manifest. The artist's skill set encompasses nothing less, in other words, than the capacity to perceive and produce—but to do so *otherwise*, that is, at a creative angle to the reproductions of the workaday world.

Art history is tasked with preserving the memory of these skills as they've been realized across time and culture. Sometimes we relay cautionary tales of art's too-frequent assistance to social inequity, repression, and violence. But sometimes we offer inspirational reminders of art's capacity to affect the right kind of change. But either way, the discipline is charged with the responsibility of stewardship. To living artists, we owe parables of potential. To our broader audience—undergraduates, museum-goers, colleagues across the university, and one another—we owe reminders that it is possible to see and imagine our social lives differently.

I acknowledge that this is not what my deans or provosts have in mind when it comes time (and time again) to justify the role of art history in the university. Or to improve enrollments in art history courses. Or to market an art history degree as something other than career suicide to prospective students and their parents. And it's thinking like mine that encourages Barack Obama to conjure our field as the obvious opposite of a vocational degree. But my sense of art history's central optimism—its vocational call to creativity—is nonetheless where I think we might now stake our claim. Not just because it feels good. (Although defending our right to the pursuit of happiness is heroic enough as post-secondary education grows less and less liberal.) Defending an exceptionalist claim for art's potency amounts ironically to a denial of the usual attitudes that would view it as cliquish, irrelevant, or inessential. Art history would be well-served by emphasizing *imagination* as the shared, vital terrain of both art and democratic citizenship.

I think this means I'm on Lester Longman's side. Ironically given their relationship, however, Grant Wood has long been my role model for this position. Wood's best works were his history paintings, through which he modeled a way simultaneously to honor memory, leaven it with myth, question it with wit, and skewer it with irony. Look no further than *Parson Weems' Fable* (Amon Carter Museum, 1939). How might our own historiographic efforts emulate Wood's complex layering of fact, fiction, caution, and critique? If we seek to teach artists their history of powerful creativity, we would be well-served by taking lessons from them on the same. In this way, Americanists might venture a model of democratic politics premised on the boldness of thinking otherwise.