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## ***Be a Generalist!***

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Generalist is a loaded term, part of an assumed binary, set against the idea of the specialist. Wrongly associated, perhaps, with the term "generic," as the root word *gen-* in Latin has twinned meanings: "born, produced." We might say that one is born a generalist, but produced as a specialist.

The art history doctorate has increasingly trended toward obtaining expertise in a narrow span of fields. Field-specific seminars and reading groups, oral and written exam bibliographies, and subject-based seminars have all contributed to the way PhD students' trajectories are shaped throughout the early years of graduate school. The track becomes even more focused as the years pile on in art history PhD programs. The winnowing process, digging deeply until one hits the substrate of a dissertation topic, gets ever murkier and harder to see during the writing phase. Sometimes graduate school can feel as though one is actually set up to become a ground-dwelling mammal (in that proverbial rabbit hole), capable of digging a very deep, but modest space—snug, but in the end, suitable for only one. This is the plight of the specialist—and when we each emerge out of the wintry depths of our burrow, squinting in the bright light of spring, it is easy to feel lost when presented with a maze of potential, but unknown, pathways.

Dissertation research does not always translate to direct classroom content. In fact, it often comes out badly when it tries; we all have stories about the single-artist graduate seminar, or the survey course that never got past one century. It turns out that a lot of scholarly projects are too specialized for the non-specialized students we all teach; at my large public university, this includes non-majors, STEM students, and community college transfers, nearly all of whom are new to the discipline. Art history is still an elite discipline offered at the secondary school level only in the best-funded public and private high schools nationwide, but not beyond that. So it is imperative that we "hook" majors as first-year college students, or junior-year transfers, if we want to expand our reach pedagogically and actually create rich departmental cultures with bright, inquisitive undergraduates and a graduate population equally excited to learn the ropes of classroom mentorship. Students can study art history to recognize and respond to artistic production that occurs right where they have grown up, and certainly where they go to school.

When I arrived in California, I noticed a worrisome trend: my undergraduate majors, intending to study abroad, wanted to go to London, Paris, Rome, New York—but not just to experience the cultural and historical breadth of these cities. As kids native to California, they wanted to get out of the state, which they thought of as a cultural wasteland with "no art." This led me to develop a course titled Art in California, which was simultaneously a

didactic rejoinder to them and a challenge to myself. Obviously, California has had loads of art throughout the wide span of its history. At the beginning, I even thought, hubristically, that I knew a great deal of it. How wrong I was!

Turns out, I had that particular breed of speciality arrogance propelling me forward. As any good modernist, I knew a lot about *portions* of the 1960s and the 1970s, if I leaned heavily on my own specializations of craft and feminist histories. But this was not actually a constructive approach. It ignored wide swaths of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) cultural production. It overlooked the clear class biases embedded into the institutional histories of California's museums, collections, and art schools. When I went to search for a survey text, I quickly realized there was not one. In developing a syllabus that first year, I pulled together readings from journals and myriad museum catalogues. Three years later, I have now written a survey text, having taught myself a much wider, intersectional breadth than I ever thought possible. *Art in California* demonstrates to readers, including my current and future students who wanted to travel to locales of "art" and "art history" that there is contemporary and historical practice here in the state where they live, work, and learn.

I aimed for the broadest possible audience and pitched *Art in California* to Thames & Hudson's World of Art series, which produces highly illustrated, paperback volumes that are simultaneously affordable and aesthetically pleasing to my diverse, first-generation college students. This series has texts that often span thousands or hundreds of years. They had never done a single-state volume. Why California? Why not New York? The answer to this became increasingly clear: American art history emanates from the East Coast, and still today retains that bias. Most Americanists are still produced, as specialists, from East Coast programs. I know I was. But in general, our discipline has long advanced a cultural hegemony that is based on urbanism, and, like real estate, is steeped in *location, location, location* (i.e., the New York School, School of Paris, the Grand Tour).

But art history can do so much more. In fact, I'd like to see us aim differently, as a field, and start training generalists—a requirement for a museum job, but not yet one for an academic job—who, structurally, will work differently from the get-go, to try to absorb the *overview* rather than the narrow view of American art. This means embedding radical disciplinary change from the origins of social and intellectual induction into the discipline itself, rather than working piecemeal, narrowly, and individually, as I did in my forthcoming book, only to amend the gaps and biases later. We fail as a discipline if the next generation teaches exactly as they were trained.