

***IN THE FOREGROUND:
CONVERSATIONS ON ART & WRITING***

A podcast from the Research and Academic Program (RAP)

**“WHAT A PICTURE CAN’T OFFER”:
MICHAEL GAUDIO ON THE IMAGINATIVE WORK OF
SOUND IN ART HISTORY**

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Transcript

Caro Fowler

Welcome to *In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. I am Caro Fowler, your host and Director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In this series of conversations, I talk with art historians and artists about what it means to write history and make art, and the ways in which making informs how we create not only our world, but also ourselves.

Caitlin Woolsey

I am Caitlin Woolsey, the Assistant Director of the Research and Academic Program and in this episode, I continue our mini-series from last season focused on sound, media, and visual art. Today, I'm speaking with Michael Gaudio, Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota, who specializes in visual arts in the early modern Atlantic world. We discuss his trans-historical and trans-regional approach, how seeing and hearing come into relationship and tension with one another, and what Michael calls "the melancholy work of being an art historian," or, the descriptive challenge of thinking, writing, and teaching visual art, particularly around questions of sound.

Michael Gaudio

Hearing is absolutely an important sense for us, but of course, that's what a picture can't offer. So, as someone interested in unsettling the meaning of pictures, I suppose it only makes sense that I started to think more about this gap between pictures and sound: how do we negotiate it? How did audiences negotiate that difference? When do we see seeing and hearing coming into relationship and coming into tension with each other?

Caitlin Woolsey

Thank you so much for joining me today. We usually start these conversations by asking a little bit about kind of where you would trace your interest in art history, if there's some through lines or formative experiences that drew you to not just the arts, but also art history in particular?

Michael Gaudio

There was no special formative experience for me as a child. The visual arts have always appealed to me. I had a mother who was a pretty talented artist. I have always enjoyed drawing. I spent time in museums. I even worked as an intern in a museum in high school. That may have all helped orient me towards the visual

arts, but it was really the discovery in college--and maybe after college--of the kind of thinking that the best art historians do that really led me into the discipline and opened up the possibilities of the objects themselves and their interest. In college, I actually was not an art history major. I was an English major and it took me a while after college--a couple years--to figure out my calling, that I was to go to graduate school and become an academic. But I was an English major in college, and I had taken some art history [classes] as well and eventually [I] realized that art history was where I wanted to be and I suppose this has had something to do with the kind of exposure that I had to art historians, which is different than what I had to literary historians as an English major in my English classes. I read Shakespeare and Milton and Dickens and Joyce, I read all these great writers, but we didn't read the scholarship on them. That was actually a fabulous education, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I think I've learned to read closely. But I never learned much about how literary scholars wrote about these figures. We didn't read literary scholars. In my art history classes though...You can't teach art history the same way. You can't just say to a student to go home and look at Rembrandt's self-portraits and come back and be ready for a test on them tomorrow. You can do something like that--maybe I tried to do something like that on occasion--but really at the undergraduate level, the discipline is just organized differently, and we need to supplement those artworks with scholarship. So, when I took medieval art I remember in college, I studied Saint Denis, I read Panofsky on abate Suger. When I studied early medieval migratory art, I read Kitlinger. When we studied Manet, I remember reading TJ Clark. These were amazing models of nuanced, scholarly thinking about places and objects that really appealed to me. I mean, Panofsky made Saint Denis incredibly interesting, as TJ Clark did for Manet. So, I suppose one way to say it is that it was the discipline of art history and the kind of thinking and writing that it prompted, as much as the objects themselves that drew me to art history. Or rather, there would just be no easy way for me to separate out the objects and the thinkers and say it was one thing or the other that brought me into art history.

Caitlin Woolsey

Do you feel like the kind of close textual reading that you were trained in at the undergraduate level had a connection or rapport to the close looking that you were also beginning to engage in in your undergraduate art history courses? Or do you see those as being kind of two [inaudible]?

Michael Gaudio

I think, absolutely, that was true. Especially when I made my way to graduate school. The people I worked with in graduate school were very close lookers, and so, that sort of close reading of paintings absolutely owes a lot to the sort of close literary reading I did as an undergraduate. But, at the same time, there was something else in those introductory art history classes that you get. Even in a survey of British literature, you don't get that kind of majestic sweep of world history and that story of stylistic development that was really powerful. Those kinds of grand stories were also part of what drew me. So, in a way, these kinds of stories--I don't tell those kinds of stories when I write about art history. I do more of a micro art history--but nevertheless, that sort of majestic story behind the development of art is something that I also didn't really encounter in literary studies and I really liked [it]. It really, really drew me to the discipline.

Caitlin Woolsey

It's interesting that you say that about your writing because one thing that I find engaging about some of your work--like the *Sound, Image, Silence* book--is the way that even though you have these sort of in-depth, very specific, particular case studies, you offer this narrative arc that feels at once cohesive, and yet, you have these different stories that are connected within that book. One thing that's appealing to me personally about your writing--as an art historian who also has a background in literature--is that I see some of the strengths of that kind of attention to storytelling or narrative.

Michael Gaudio

And that's always the challenge. So, it's good to hear you say that. To be able to look closely at that micro level, but to say something big when you're doing it--that's always the constant challenge.

Caitlin Woolsey

So, you mentioned that it took a few years--maybe after college--to locate yourself within the trajectory that you've since been on of graduate school and academia. I would just be curious [to know]: why academia? Why art history?

Michael Gaudio

As for 'why academia,' it took me, as I say, a little bit of time to figure it out, including some aborted efforts in law school and working in title insurance, but [I] eventually found my way. Partly, it was continuing to take classes in art

history. And again, art history and not literature for the reasons I suggested before. There was something about these art historical writers that spoke to me and I was captivated by the scholarship. That led me, naturally, to graduate school and into this idea that I belong in the academy. I mean, where else could I spend my time thinking and talking and writing about art and ideas and exploring the kinds of questions they raise and what art does and what we're doing here? The academy creates that space, and it continues to create that space. It seems like now more than ever--[or] since I've been in the academy--we are really surrounded by these calls to make what we do more relevant and make what we do address the world's problems more effectively and make our students prepared for a career--I certainly hear a lot of that teaching at a big public university. But it does seem to me that the fundamental value of the academy is not maybe as much its irrelevance, as its relevance. That is to say that this is a space that doesn't immediately answer to the external pressures of the moment. It aspires to a larger frame or creates a space where you can do that. It questions truth and [the] nature of human existence and I have the freedom to explore those questions with my students and my colleagues as I see fit, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Caitlin Woolsey

Were there other thinkers and writers beyond TJ Clark, who you saw as being--at least at that early stage in graduate school--models or touchstones?

Michael Gaudio

There's a host of art historical writers. Panofsky and Clark were two amazing writers [that] I encountered before I started graduate school and they helped me decide that this is where I wanted to go. But in graduate school, we read Clark, but [also] Joseph Koerner, Michael Fried, Leo Steinberg, Svetlana Alpers. I encountered these art historians that graduate students still read because they were--and are--brilliant and complicated thinkers about art history. So, I encountered them...and then for a lot of others, I think also--in recent years--the rediscovery of those foundational writers in the discipline has been really important for me--Riegl and Warburg--and coming to see them through the eyes of the scholars who have written most insightfully about them-- people like Georges Didi-Huberman and Chris Wood, for example--and reopening those sort of foundational questions of the discipline. That was really important for me. And writers outside of the discipline too. In graduate school--I was at Stanford for graduate school--I had my advisor, Alex Nemerov, [who] was a young scholar

who had recently come from Yale--this was in the 90s. Alex had studied at Yale, which in the 80s, was the heady center of deconstruction. He brought some of that to Stanford and I would say that that was a really important moment for me as a graduate student, being introduced to deconstruction. Alex taught this Deconstruction in the Visual Arts seminar that a bunch of us took--'96 [or] '97, around there--and this, again, was a really key moment in my graduate education. We read Paul de Man, Derrida...and this is the mid to late 90s. You're beginning to see a kind of backlash against all this kind of thinking--not least of all because of the wartime writings of Paul de Man that had surfaced in the late 80s--so, deconstruction was controversial, but still very much present and, in fact, Derrida came to Stanford when I was there and that was a big event. [It was an] exciting and really electrifying event for me. I wouldn't say I became a deconstructionist--whatever that might mean, and, to be honest, I've not read a whole lot of Derrida since that period of time--but, at this early moment in my own intellectual shaping, his work opened up to me a new kind of thinking and that was a kind of thinking that was resistant to arriving at definitive meaning about works, that sought to inhabit the contingencies and ambiguities of a text or an artwork. I saw liberation in that as a graduate student. This wasn't irresponsible or apolitical as its critics have insisted it was. It was a way of opening up the texts, [of] possibilities, to show that the text is always this unfinished thing and that's something that I've always tried to pursue since then in my own work. Starting with a seemingly finished work, but my own habit of thinking and writing is to work in a way towards the undoing of that sense of completeness. Again, there's no nihilism in that. It's an effort to bring the work to life and to unsettle and de-familiarize our relationship to it and that's the kind of thinking that I encountered in graduate school, especially through thinking about deconstruction.

Caitlin Woolsey

It seems like it's also an effort to honor the complexity of the work, whatever it may be. When you started graduate school did you go in knowing that you wanted to focus on the Americas and a certain period? Or did you figure that out through the process?

Michael Gaudio

Yeah, I kind of figured it out through the process. I got my master's degree at the University of Kansas, and I started there thinking I was going to go into American art. And I went to Stanford for my PhD [and] continued...I mean, I went to study

with Alex, who's an Americanist at Stanford, which is, in some ways, still my field, but I also sort of backed into the early modern period at Stanford as well. [I] did a lot of my coursework with people who worked on the early modern world and wrote a dissertation on early depictions of the Americas from the 16th and 17th centuries. So, what am I? I'm kind of an early modernist, but also an Americanist. It's always kind of hard when people ask me what my field is because it doesn't fit into the categories that tend to be national categories that we use for the study of art history. So, I started as an Americanist and backed my way into this earlier material. The early modern period continues to be...I mean, a lot of my teaching is in this period [and] my writing continues to be in it because it's the early modern, it's the moment of the formation of the modern world, and the big questions it raises are ones that continue to appeal to me.

Caitlin Woolsey

How does that play out in your teaching or in your work with students?

Michael Gaudio

I teach a big undergraduate course called The Age of Curiosity, for example, which is about art and science and [the] mutual interactions of them over a long course, from about 1400 to about 1800. [It] starts with Europe in the 15th century and ends with looking at what's happening in North America in the 18th century. Or I teach a course on the visual culture of the Atlantic world. These are not traditional art historical categories. So, I've had to invent these courses. It's been a struggle, in some ways, coming up with syllabi for them. What does the Atlantic world mean in relation to art history? They seem that they're often at odds. There's no Atlantic visual art. It's not a stylistic category. It's not a national category. It seems to defy the kind of categories that have developed and that we continue to organize the discipline around, but again, that's part of the fun of it, to let this kind of thinking outside of traditional art historical categories stir up the art historical material that I teach.

Caitlin Woolsey

Do you feel like the discipline--not necessarily your particular institution, but writ large--is more receptive to that kind of trans-historical, trans-geographical, different models for approaching [inaudible]?

Michael Gaudio

Yeah, absolutely. It is now--and much more so than when I began my teaching. In fact, when I got the job--my first tenure track job that I got that and I still have at University of Minnesota--it was advertised as an Atlantic world position, like an early modern person who studies transatlantic art worldwide. I had never seen anything like that before. [I was like,] "Wow, actually, that's kind of what I do." But since then, early modern has become a common term that you see in job searches and so that suggests that things have indeed changed a lot and I talk to a lot of friends that teach courses now similar to the ones I teach. So, absolutely things have changed in the discipline, though, at the same time--and I don't say this as a bad thing, actually I think it's a really good thing--these categories like the Renaissance, for example, still carry a lot of weight in our discipline, as they should. I enjoy teaching courses on the Renaissance and introducing my students to what that might mean that might be different than this category of early modern.

Caitlin Woolsey

I'd love to hear you speak a little bit about how you encountered or began to focus more on sound as an aspect of thinking art historically and writing about objects.

Michael Gaudio

Maybe a good place to begin answering that question is with my interest in the history of the printed image, which is one of the enduring concerns, one of the through lines of my work. In fact, the first two books that I wrote focused specifically on print and print history. I think there are various reasons for that. One, is just a fascination I have with the process of printmaking and the beauty of prints and the bare bones language of line that's the foundation of print, especially engraving and etching and woodcut. John Ruskin called the making of wood cuts and engravings 'the art of scratch.' He likened it to scratching lines on the wall of a cave. I wouldn't use Ruskin's criminalizing language but I'm in sympathy with that focus on the making of print. The preparing of the matrix, and the fundamentals of process that are involved in that, really appeals to me. But another aspect of the print that interests me is surely the phenomenon that another writer on print history, William Ivins called the 'exactly repeatable pictorial statement.' In other words, I'm interested in the multiplicability of prints, which has given them the special role in disseminating knowledge. They've played this huge role in laying out the world in front of us, making the

world available to us. We wouldn't have modern disciplines--including art history by the way--if it weren't for printed images. So, for centuries, until photography, the world was known through prints. What this also meant was that there was an expectation that prints would report faithfully on what was seen, that they would tell the truth and not deceive us. It's, of course, an anxiety we're all still very familiar with--all the ways that we can be manipulated visually. But this is really interesting to me. I think about Europe's knowledge of the Americas, which has been one of the focuses of my work. My first book looked at engravings of the New World by the Flemish printmaker, Theodore de Bry and the images that he made. There was a great deal of pressure on them that they report back on and faithfully transmit the practices and customs that Europeans had never encountered before. And that led to new kinds of claims being made about these images, that they were made *ad vivum*, or from the life, that they counterfeited the actual appearance of things, that they were witnessed by individual observers and faithfully represented by those witnesses. So, the appearance of an Algonquin medicine man in a print or how the canoes are made in Virginia or what a dance in Virginia looks like--these are all images that de Bry made--they claimed that they were reporting faithfully on what was seen. I say this because it ultimately gets to my interest in sound because what's the most basic test of having been somewhere and having witnessed it? It's not just having witnessed it with your eyes, but also having heard it with your ears--'Voice is presence' to come back to that deconstructive realization--that you were there at that dance, witnessed it, and heard the sounds of it. The travel literature on the New World is full of those kinds of moments. So, one of the key figures in my most recent book is Jean de Léry, who was a French missionary in Brazil and wrote this amazing book on the history of his voyage to Brazil, but he wrote it 20 years after he was there. There are these amazing moments in his book like his witnessing of a Tupinambá dance and writing 20 years after that he talks about those voices and those chants still ringing in his ears. So, that kind of echoing of that original aural experience is really important. Hearing is this absolutely important sense for us, but of course, that's what a picture can't offer. As someone interested in unsettling the meaning of pictures, I suppose it only makes sense that I started to think more about this gap between pictures and sound: how do we negotiate it? How did audiences negotiate that difference? When do we see seeing and hearing coming into relationship and coming into tension with each other?

Caitlin Woolsey

Because of that, the power of the aural--but also it's often characterized as it's kind of ineffability, or the kind of the temporal dimension, that means, at a distance, (I think you use this language in some of your writing about retrieving the past and or bringing it into the present in a way)--I would just be curious to hear you reflect a little bit on what that process is like for you, in your own sort of research and writing in terms of methodologically, using archives, literary sources, or analyzing evidence, whether it's pictures or whether it's other kinds of evidence. I think that what interests me is that you're often--not always but often--writing about the sonic dimension of still images. You're bringing together this presumed sort of static visual representation with the fuller life of that work and its context.

Michael Gaudio

Maybe a place to start is with that question of the difference between that temporal process of translating sound which the verbal arts can do, in a way that a picture might not be able to do. This actually goes back to Lessing in the 18th century and those distinctions between poetry and painting. Poetry as a verbal art is time-based, painting, on the other hand, is static and silent, and so, it belongs to a fundamentally different realm than poetry and the verbal arts. In short, for Lessing, they can't be compared with each other for that reason. They're not just sister arts that are easily relatable. They're really different and this is exactly the problem that interests me, actually, the gap between a silent picture and the sound that might in some sense, be conjured by it, but which is also not there. I guess I'm enough in sympathy with Lessing to see that this is a real difficulty because painting and the verbal arts are different than each other. But, at the same time, I embrace the challenge of comparing the two and there is a long tradition of encountering pictures so powerful that they speak to us. Think of St. Francis encountering the crucifix and it's speaking to him. Or there's this great figure in 17th century Italy, Athanasius Kircher, who had all these talking statues in his museum in Rome, that people would go and be spoken to by the speaking portrait bust. I don't write about such literally speaking images, but I'm interested in that question of how they might speak to us. How does the picture sound? It's not going to be a matter of locating that sound somewhere in the painting and making easy links between an action that's depicted say and the sound that that action produces. It's not as if we...One of one of the works of art that I write about in my recent book is the painting of a waterfall by the artist Thomas Cole. It's not as if you can hear the sound of that waterfall in his

painting. We may want to hear it. Teaching that painting to my students, I might try with my own words to evoke it sounds as Thomas Cole tried to do in his own writings, but the descriptive challenge is to come to terms with the absence of sound in the work of art. We want the sound to be there, we can almost hear it, but it's not there. And so, where is it? And so, you're asking about how this all might play out then in my mind, how I actually go about researching and the archival work of writing about sound and the visual arts. There's no question that the recovery of sound presents special problems. The phonograph is not very old. It's a late 19th century invention. How do we hear the world before the era of recorded sounds? And then there's also the question of how much a recording captures? But of course, there's this whole burgeoning field of sound studies. In part that field is dedicated to this task of retrieving the audibility of the past: what did it sound like to walk the streets in Shakespeare's London or what did 14th century Florence sound like when you walk down the streets? There's a real effort to create what one sort of foundational historian of sound called 'soundscapes' of the past and that's an interesting project. It's an interesting word too, this idea of laying out sound before you, the sound of the past, like a landscape, that we might see it from this elevated perspective that we have in the present and somehow be invited to travel through it and re-experience those sounds. I've relied on that kind of scholarship in the work that I do. One of the things I do with Thomas Cole is try to situate his art amidst all the sounds of the Second Great Awakening and all the shouts of preachers and the hollers of the camp meeting and I've relied a lot on the work [of] historians who have tried to create these soundscapes of 19th century America. But that's not what I would say my work is about. In that sense, I don't face the challenges that a creator of soundscapes faces because I'm interested in the sounds, but I'm more interested in the impossibility of recovering the fact that they're not in the picture. Remember, my recent book is called *Sound, Image, Silence* and that silence part is a really important part of it. So, I read the scholarship, but I'm not scouring the archives, in the effort to retrieve the actual sounds of a 16th century Tupinambá dance or the Second Great Awakening. I'm more interested in reflecting on the unavailability of those sounds to us. That's not least of all because I think that it tells us something about...it comes back to the discipline of art history itself. I think it tells us something about the melancholy work of doing art history, which is a discipline in which we try to bring works of art to life through our words. So, the sound of the art historian is also really important to me. We try to give these paintings--works of art that we talk about--a voice. At the same time, we're in the business in art history, of consigning these works of art to the past, right? Art

history is founded on this. 'Art has to be for us a thing of the past,' Hegel famously said. So, we're always thinking 'what's the past, but this place that we can't hear anymore?' It's no longer present for us. We're always losing the sounds of the past. Jean de Léry, whom I mentioned before, right saying that 20 years ago, 'those voices still ring in my ears, they're still here, but they're lost at the same time.' There's a melancholy quality to his distance from the Tupinambá dance 20 years later, trying to remember it, trying to recover it, but knowing that he can't fully. The sounds ring in his head, but it's also lost to him. So, to come back to that question. That's about the challenge of writing about sound. For me, I think it's really to keep in play both our desire for sound and soundscapes, but also their unequivocal loss at the same time. I think there's an imaginative space in between, space for--what in my book, and others have used this term--the aural imagination. It's a space that is in this gap between pictures and sound or sound and its absence. It's a space that I think our history can inhabit and do a lot with.

Caitlin Woolsey

I mean, it also strikes me hearing you speak that sometimes the acknowledgement of the impossibility, of that kind of knowing or retrieval, can be seen as limiting or as a defeat, but it has always seemed to me that it just is more honest about the nature of human experience in the construction of knowledge.

Michael Gaudio

I absolutely I agree with you, and I think that the problem you're articulating deserves more attention. I think there is--and I don't want to group all sound historians together--but I think one of the big impulses behind [sound studies] is this, maybe not fully examined, desire to recover the past audibly. And I see the interest. There's no question that we have a desire to recover sounds. Right now, in the Twin Cities where I live, somewhere in Minneapolis, there's this exhibition called *The Immersive Van Gogh* going on. I don't know if you've heard of this, I haven't been to it, but apparently, it's this space where all these images of Van Gogh's works are projected on walls and there's all the sound being projected at the same time, surely, people reading Van Gogh's letters, speaking in his voice and all that kind of thing meant to bring these paintings to life through the sound of Van Gogh, and that kind of effort towards this--I don't know--synesthetic presence, in which sound is this sort of crucial factor for making that presence, that's part of what we do as art historians, right? Again, when I stand in front of

my class and try to bring these paintings to life--I'm a great believer in the lecture and using that forum to find the right words and make these works of art compelling--we try to enliven them in that way. But the other side of art history that can't be forgotten, as you're suggesting, is the loss that accompanies that. At the same time, we try to bring these paintings to life, but we're also pushing them into the past. We're creating this temporal distance, but we're also abolishing it, it's a totally irrational enterprise that we do. There's this paradox at the center of it, that the irrationality of it doesn't make it worthless and, in fact, I think we need to spend more time thinking about that paradox because it's precisely...to come back to that idea of the moral imagination, I use that term to describe that space between that inaccessible past and that sense of the presence of the object, so present that it speaks to us in the here and now.

Caitlin Woolsey

Are your current or upcoming projects drawing on or building on your recent book?

Michael Gaudio

Yeah, in some ways, but one direction that my work has taken, or is continuing to take is landscape, which is a genre that really fascinates me and that I write about a fair amount in my recent book. I look at Thomas Cole's work. I look at the work of the Dutch landscape painter Frans Post. The questions that I pursue in my recent book are around sound and the landscape or silence--Frans Post's landscapes are particularly silent ones, Thomas Cole's are particularly loud ones. But I'm also intrigued--and this kind of comes back to the discussion that we've been having here too--by the question of the art historian's position in the landscape, as it were. Where do we speak from as scholars? It's actually something that I wrote about a little bit in this book. One of the chapters--a chapter on Thomas Cole--begins by looking at this essay by Alois Riegl from the late 19th century in which he declares that landscape is the kind of art above all that captures the mood of the modern world--*stimmung* is the German term that he uses and that's because, for Riegl, being a historian of art is like standing on a mountain and seeing the world or the past stretched out before you at a distance. It's this calm and contemplative position to inhabit. It's the position of the scholar. So, it's a really interesting question. Where do we speak from as scholars? It's become an urgent question too. Look at my own university, the University of Minnesota is a land grant institution. It's an institution that we know--now more clearly than we have in a long time--was built on indigenous

land cessions to the state of Minnesota in the 19th century. So, there's a fraught politics around the land that we perform on as scholars. So, what does it mean today to speak with the disinterested voice, to speak with that mood of landscape from the grounds of the land grant university? Is that even possible? It's actually the landscapes of a particular artists that I'm thinking about in this term, the 19th century painter Seth Eastman. His work really sparked this question for me. He was a military officer at Fort Snelling, in now St. Paul, and a topographic painter. In fact, he taught topographical drawing at West Point. He did these remarkable watercolor landscapes of the Mississippi River in the 1840s, including the area on which the University of Minnesota was founded in 1851. I don't know precisely where this project leads, but it feels important to me. I'm very interested in thinking about Eastman's work in relation to this question of where I stand in the early 2000s when I profess from the University of Minnesota. I just have this habit of thinking in terms of constant contradictions and tensions. The other side of that coin is--to come back to that question of irrelevance or relevance of the Academy--I'm always kind of reluctant to declare what is the most urgent or topical or important thing to be working on. I suppose my discomfort with that comes back to that question of relevance, just because I'm a bit uncomfortable with the idea of having to justify what I studied by demonstrating its relevance. I guess my concern is that the demand for relevance risks limiting our scholarly horizons, potentially homogenizing scholarship. To give an example from my own work, my second book was about these handmade Bibles created at this small Anglican community of Little Gidding in the 17th century. If you've heard of Little Gidding it's because of T.S. Eliot's poem, it's not because of what was being done with cutting up and collaging of prints at the same place. When I've discussed this material with people in the past, I've left them confused, because they've often had difficulty understanding why someone who wrote about the printed image in the early colonial context of the American encounter would turn to this isolated Protestant community in the 17th century English countryside and write a book about that. Why write about that? The fact is it's hard to point to today's headlines and show how a book like that is necessary, urgent. It's not, I suppose, but it was an occasion for me to reflect on problems of meaning and interpretation that I think are interesting, that are worth reflecting on, that are by no means narrow in scope, but are not at the same time ripped out of the headlines either. So, I think it's this question of urgency, what's urgent scholarship, is a really interesting one right now.

Caitlin Woolsey

Well, thank you so much for your time, Michael. It's been a real pleasure to speak with you. Thank you.

Michael Gaudio

Likewise, Caitlin, thanks very much. I appreciate it.

Caro Fowler

Thank you for listening to *In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing*. For more information about this episode and links to the books, articles, and artworks discussed, please consult clarkart.edu/rap/podcast.

The Clark Art Institute sits on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people. We acknowledge the tremendous hardship of their forcible removal from these homelands by colonial settlers. A federally recognized nation, they now reside in Wisconsin and are known as the Stockbridge-Munsee community. As we learn, speak, and gather here at the Clark, we pay honor to their ancestors (past and present) and to future generations by committing to build a more inclusive and equitable space for all. This program was produced by Caitlin Woolsey and myself, with music by lightchaser, editing by John Buteyn and additional support provided by Jessie Sentivan.