

Call for Papers: The Twenty-first Annual Yale University American Art Graduate Symposium

Theme: Local

Date: April 11, 2026

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Caitlin Beach, Associate Professor of Art History, CUNY Graduate Center

What is at stake in identifying artists, subjects, materials, and economies as *local*? The term commonly circumscribes a particular space while evoking feelings of inclusion. To be “a local” is to belong to a place or a people, to have insider knowledge, to see oneself as part of a community, to be and feel at home. From quilts made by generations of Black women in Gee’s Bend to the centuries-long production of lienzos by Ñuu Dzaui, Nahua, and other Indigenous artists, objects play outsized roles in shaping and defining the local. Embracing the local may also function as a subversive move. Establishing a local artistic identity can oppose hegemonic national narratives, a gesture in line with what Arjun Appadurai has termed “the production of locality.” Maroon communities in the Caribbean, for instance, blended West African traditions with Taino knowledge and indigenous materials to assert their own definitions of place within imperial landscapes.

Across time, place, and media, artists and viewers alike have imagined and reimagined the local, stretching and compressing its contours to define who falls within its bounds. The term’s elasticity continues to provide fertile ground for new interpretations within art history and beyond. How does the local open onto discourses of repatriation and conservation, or histories of migration, diaspora, and Indigeneity? How do we navigate the term alongside related concepts like intimacy, insularity, and domesticity? How might locality interface with decoloniality?

Featuring Dr. Caitlin Beach as our keynote speaker, the Twenty-first Annual Yale University American Art Graduate Symposium asks what centering the local affords art historical inquiry. We welcome submissions exploring art, architecture, performance, and visual and material culture across the Americas, including the Caribbean, North, Central, and South America. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Community-based artistic practices, collectivized artistic labor, and local artistic identity
- Local materialities and histories of industry
- Indigenous understandings of space, the local, and (home)lands
- Site specificity and placemaking
- Local audiences and reception
- The local in relation to provincialism, urbanism, and cosmopolitanism
- Local ecologies and economies; agrarianism and rural uplift
- Tourism and the commodified local
- The local and the nation state, narratives of locality and universality

You are invited to submit an abstract of no more than 350 words and a CV to americanist.symposium@gmail.com by **January 31, 2026**. Accepted participants will be notified in mid-February. “Local” will take the form of a day-long, in-person symposium, with food and hotel accommodations provided for all speakers.