A Message from the Board of the Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art

It’s hard to fathom the horrific violence of George Floyd’s murder, or the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others. Today, we are all confronted with the legacy of some of the oldest problems the United States has never resolved – problems around race, inequality, and police brutality – and we affirm our commitment to a society that respects the dignity of all people. We are deeply saddened by recent events, which challenge some of our most basic values, and we feel compassion for those who suffer at the hands of racist and unequal treatment.

Black Lives Matter, and the Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art stands in solidarity with those calling for justice for George Floyd and an end to police brutality. AHNCA’s social media team is participating in #BlackOutTuesday and will stay on top of other initiatives yet to come.

In times of political and social unrest, art helps us process a seemingly senseless world. Whether it’s Edmonia Lewis’s sculpture, Forever Free, Henry Ossawa Tanner's moving and spiritual paintings, or Aaron Douglas's powerful murals for the Works Progress Administration, art has found ways throughout history to turn horror and pain into positive action. As a community, AHNCA encourages all persons to look deeply within themselves to bring forth creative expression that counteracts injustice, violence, and oppression wherever they see it. This is our call to action.

We plan to use this crisis as an occasion to renew our commitment to diversify the field of nineteenth-century art history. As our colleagues at the Association of Historians of American Art have noted, this is more than a question of scholarship. It’s about the structural realities of our field. How do we bring new voices into the discipline, and support those who continue to be marginalized?

AHAA has helpfully called attention to several resources that are useful in this effort:

- Association for Critical Race Art History (ACRAH)
- LaTanya Autry’s Social Justice and Museums Resource List
- ArtMuseumTeaching’s Museums Are Not Neutral
- National Museum of African American History & Culture’s Talking About Race

As we pursue this important work, we will continue to take solace in the extraordinary people who make up our field. It is all of you who give us hope that as a society we can and will do better.

The Board of the Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art