

Amy B. Werbel, PhD

History of Art Department
State University of New York -
Fashion Institute of Technology
amy_werbel@fitnyc.edu

Office address:
27th Street at 7th Avenue,
B634
New York, New York 10001

Education

Yale University
Ph.D. in the History of Art, 1996
M.A. in the History of Art, 1988

Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges
B.A. *magna cum laude* in Fine Arts, 1986

Current and Recent
Positions

State University of New York - Fashion Institute of Technology
Professor of the History of Art, 2020-present
Associate Professor of the History of Art, 2013-2020

Co-Chair, Public Art Dialogue

State University of New York Civic Education and Engagement
and Civil Discourse Fellow, 2024-2025

University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic
Engagement Fellow, 2021-2022

Research Project: Study of Freedom of Artistic Expression in
Academic Art Museums and Galleries

Fulbright Scholar to the United Kingdom

University of York, 2019-2020

Research Project: "Comparative Study of Art Censorship in the
United Kingdom and United States Before World War I"

Publications: Books

Art and Censorship: A New History of Power and Pleasure (in
development)

*Lust on Trial: Censorship and the Rise of American Obscenity in
the Age of Anthony Comstock*, New York: Columbia University
Press, 2018.

Winner of the Peter C. Rollins Book Prize, Northeast Popular and
American Culture Association

Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.

Selected by *Choice Magazine* as an Outstanding Academic Title

Lessons from China: America in the Hearts and Minds of the World's Most Important Rising Generation, Self-published.

Printed by CreateSpace: Charleston, 2013.

Public Scholarship “Seizure of Sally Mann’s photographs in Texas revives old debates about obscenity and freedom of expression” *The Conversation* (January 24, 2025).

“Disregard for Women’s Lives Explains the Comstock Act’s Origins. It Also Explains Its Revival Today” *Scientific American* (May 15, 2024).

“The Fragile Future of Artistic Expression on Campus” *Inside Higher Ed* (March 30, 2023)

co-author, with Jonathan Friedman, “The Comstock Law at 150: A Highly Relevant Cautionary Tale for Today” *The Hill* (March 3, 2023)

Fellows in the Field: Art and Porn on Campus, webinar with Lynn Comella, UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement (October 13, 2022).

Art Law Colloquium: Censorship and Artistic Expression on College Campuses, Center for Art Law (October 1, 2022).

Panelist, Restricted Access: An American History of Book Banning, New York Public Library / PEN America (September 21, 2022).

“Proposed federal abortion ban evokes 19th-century Comstock Act” *The Conversation* (September 19, 2022).

Study of Freedom of Artistic Expression in Academic Art Museums and Galleries, University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement (June, 2022).

“The Puritan Gladiator: 115 Years of Life Drawing and Censorship at The Art Students League of New York” (August 3, 2021).

“The Confederate Flag in the Capitol and the Future of Artistic Expression” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 7.1 (Spring, 2021).

“The Confederate Flag in the Capitol and the Future of American Expression,” remote presentation for panel discussion: Reframing the Legacy of the Capitol, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts - Art at Noon (January 26, 2021).

Teacher Guide: Does the First Amendment Allow Government to Censor Art? First Amendment Watch at New York University. A Project of the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute (published June 1, 2021).

“Off Limits: Art, Social Media and Censorship,” presentation and panel discussion with Michael White and Kyveli Lignou-Tsamantani, York Festival of Ideas (June 9, 2020).

“How the Postal Service helped stamp identity on America – and continues to deliver a common bond today” *theconversation.com* (June 2, 2020).

“What Would Benjamin Franklin Think About Facebook?” Fulbright Annual Lecture, Benjamin Franklin House, London, (May 28, 2020). Transcript available on Medium.

“Reaching Broader Audiences through Book Projects” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5.2 (Fall, 2019).

“Tenth Annual Authors After Hours Book Talk: *Lust on Trial*,” Amagansett Free Library (August 25, 2018).

“Should She Stay or Should She Go? The uplifting, but ultimately cynical saga of *Fearless Girl*” *3rd Dimension* (January 08, 2018).

“Removing Monuments Won’t Fix our Problems” *History News Network* (October 8, 2017).

“For Our Free Speech, We Have Censors to Thank” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* LXII, no. 3 (September 18, 2015), A56.

Publications: Essays, “Anthony Comstock’s 1906 Raid on the Art Students League of New York” *150 Stories: The Art Students League 150th Anniversary* (forthcoming, 2025).
Academic

“Anthony Comstock and the Rise (and Fall) of Obscenity Prosecutions,” in: Jen Manion and Nick Syrett, eds., *The Cambridge History of Sexuality in the United States*, vol. II, (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2025).

“The Influence of Art Censorship on New York Collectors in the Gilded Age,” *Journal of the History of Collections* (February, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhaa056>

“John Haberle’s *A Bachelor’s Drawer*: Censorship, Geologic Time, and Truth,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 55 (Fall, 2020), 43-59.

“*State v. Charles Conroy*: New York City Photographers’ Battle for Free Speech in the Late-Nineteenth Century,” *New York History Journal* vol. 99, 3-4 (Summer/Fall, 2018), 356-369.

“Imagining the Future of Monuments to the Confederacy” *Sculpture Review* 357 (Winter, 2017), 32-37.

“Lifting the Lid on Cigar Boxes at Winterthur,” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 2.2 (Fall, 2016).

“‘The Crime of the Nude:’ Anthony Comstock’s Raid on the Art Students League of New York and the Origins of Modern American Obscenity,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 48, no. 4 (Winter, 2014), 249-282.

“Tales from the Vault: Searching for Smut,” *Common-Place Journal* 11, no. 1 (October, 2010).

“Thomas Eakins: Last of the Art Crusaders,” in Kathleen A. Foster, ed., *Thomas Eakins’ Drawing Book* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 27-44.

“Thomas Eakins’s Early Years,” in *Thomas Eakins: American Realist* (exh. cat., Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 1-12.

“The Foley Food Mill,” in Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman, eds., *American Artifacts: Material Culture Theory and Method* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 229-242.

“Art and Science in the Work of Thomas Eakins: The Case of Spinning and Knitting,” *American Art* 12, no. 3 (Fall, 1998), 31-45.

Publications: Book Reviews *The People’s Porn: A History of Handmade Pornography in America*, Lisa Z. Sigel. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), in: *Winterthur Portfolio* 56: 2/3 (Summer/Autumn, 2022), 169-171.

Book Review. *Ben Shahn’s New Deal Murals: Jewish Identity in the American Scene*, Diana L. Linden. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), in: *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 3.1 (Summer, 2017).

Book Review. *An Eakins Masterpiece Restored: Seeing “The Gross Clinic” Anew*, edited by Kathleen A. Foster and Mark S. Tucker (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012), in; *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 138 (April, 2014), 224-226.

Book Review. Bonnie Tocher Clause. *Edward Hopper in Vermont*, Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2012, in; *Vermont History Journal* 81, no. 1 (Winter/Spring, 2013), 126-128.

Lectures:
Academic
And Professional

“From Sir Frederic Leighton to Banksy: Censorship’s Perverse Consequences,” Sorbonne Université (June 5, 2024)

“Anthony Comstock in Historical Perspective,” ComstockCon, Initiative for a Representative First Amendment at the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University (May 14, 2024)

“Drawing Histories: Contemporary Perspectives on Practice” National Academy of Design (panel participant, September 19, 2023)

“Censorship, Social Control, and the Nude in 19th C. Britain vs. the United States,” University of York, Department of the History of Art Research Seminar (February 27, 2020).

“Art in the Age of Social Media” with Mikaela Gross and Irina Tarsis, Center for Art Law Lunch Talk (July 29, 2020).

“Is Art Censorship on Social Media Leading Us to Tyranny?” blog post, Institute of Art and Law (June 25, 2020).

“Censorship and Obscenity in Law and Culture,” Institute of Art and Law, York, UK (February 22, 2020).

“Obscenity in Law and Culture in the Age of Anthony Comstock,” University of New Hampshire School of Law, The Franklin Pierce Center for Intellectual Property (March 27, 2019).

“From Charles Willson Peale to Robert Mapplethorpe: Philadelphia on the Front Lines of the Fight for Artistic Freedom,” Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (March 6, 2019).

“Lust on Trial in Conversation with Nadine Strossen,” First Amendment Salon, Ballard Spar LLP, New York City (December 4, 2018).

“Met Perspectives: Art and Truth in the American Wing,” Metropolitan Museum of Art (November 16, 2018).

"Lunchbag Book Talk: *Lust on Trial*," Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. (November 14, 2018).

"The Quagmire of Government Censorship Efforts in the Age of Anthony Comstock" Archer Center, The University of Texas System in Washington, D.C. (November 14, 2018).

"The Past, Present, and Future of American Free Speech: A Conversation with Nadine Strossen, Amy Werbel, and Daniel Levinson-Wilk," Fashion Institute of Technology (October 23, 2018).

"John Haberle's *Bachelor's Drawer*: Public and Private (Still) Life in 1894," Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art (October 19, 2018).

"Book Talk: *Lust on Trial*," History Book Festival, Lewes, Delaware (Sept. 29, 2018).

"Book Talk: *Lust on Trial*," New York City Bar Association, New York (September 26, 2018).

"Book Talk: *Lust on Trial*," Saint Francis College, Brooklyn, New York (September 25, 2018).

“Lessons from 1915: Why We Cannot Retreat from the Fight for Academic Freedom” AAUP Annual Conference on the State of Higher Education (June 15, 2018).

“Fool’s Errand: Art Censorship and the #Resistance,” 2018 Joint Annual Meeting on Law and Society (June 7, 2018).

“Researching the Influence of Art Censorship on New York City Collectors in the Gilded Age,” Frick Center for the History of Collecting Fellows’ Forum (May 11, 2018).

“*State v. Charles Conroy*: New York Photographers’ Battle for Free Speech in the Tangled Web of Late-Nineteenth Century English and American Law,” Winterthur Conference on Images and Copyright in the Nineteenth Century (March 30, 2018).

“Miss Bentham’s Body in Art and Law,” Symposium, Bellows and the Body: The Real, the Ideal, and the Nude,” The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, UK (November 4, 2016).

“Nymphs, Satyrs, and Censors: The Trials of *Muller* and *Knoedler*, and the Origins of Modern American Obscenity,” Association of Historians of American Art (October, 2014).

“Art, Sex, and Censorship on Trial: The Case of *Anthony Comstock vs. the Art Students League of New York* (1906),” Art Students League of New York (September, 2014).

“Men will be Men: The Visual Culture of Saloons and Brothels in 19th-Century New York,” New York Metro American Studies Association (November, 2013).

“Thomas Eakins and the Analysis of Gender and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century American Paintings,” College of the Holy Cross (April, 2013)

“Censorship of Visual Culture in the United States,” “African Cultural Traditions in American Art and Architecture,” and “Modern American Painting,” Xinjiang Normal University, Urumqi, Uyghur Autonomous Region, China (June, 2012).

“Censorship of Visual Culture in the United States,” and “Images of George Washington and the Formation of American Political Power,” Peking University Graduate School, Shenzhen, China (March, 2012).

“Art and National Identity in the Early Republic and Antebellum Era,” United International College, Zhuhai, China (February, 2012).

“Censorship of Visual Culture in the United States,” School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Hong Kong University (February, 2012).

“Censorship of Visual Culture in the United States,” and “Architecture and Culture of New York City before World War I,” Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China (November, 2011).

“Censorship of Visual Culture in the United States,” and “The Rise and Role of Women Artists in the United States,” Shantou University, Shantou, China (October, 2011).

“Thomas Eakins and the Politics of Beefcake,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art (October, 2010).

“Art and Vice ‘Confounded:’ Anthony Comstock's 1906 Prosecution of the Art Students League of New York,” New England American Studies Association Annual Conference (October, 2010).

“What Every American Art Historian Should Know about Anthony Comstock,” Smithsonian American Art Museum (August, 2010).

“Anthony Comstock and the Censorship of Radical Women: Prosecutions of Victoria Woodhull, Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, and Mary Ware Dennett,” Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study (January, 2009).

“The Life and Legacy of Anthony Comstock,” Connecticut Historical Society (July, 2008).

“The Epistemology of Thomas Eakins' *Gross Clinic*,” College Art Association Annual Conference (February, 2008)

“Subversive Body Politics: Artistic and Medical Anatomy Education in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” Dartmouth College Humanities Institute (May, 2006).

“Thomas Eakins' Drawings: An Introduction to his Life and Art,” Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (October, 2001).

“Discovering Nineteenth-Century American Art,” (six-lecture series), Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont (April-May, 2001).

Professional
Leadership

Session Co-Chair, *The Elephant in the Statuary Garden: Celebrating the 250th Birthday of the United States*, College Art Association Conference (forthcoming, February, 2026).

Session Co-Chair, *Temporality in Public Art*, Southeastern College Art Conference (forthcoming, October, 2025).

Project Co-Investigator, *Creative Spaces/Contested Spaces: Reinterpreting Italian American Public Art in New York City Landmarks of American History and Culture* Grant, National Endowment for the Humanities, with Rebecca Bauman and Daniel Levinson-Wilk (June 2024)

Co-Organizer, *Art Censorships on Campus*, College Art Association (February 15, 2023)

Scholarly Advisor, *Flashpoints: Free Speech in American History, Culture & Society*, 2022-2023 event series organized by PEN America and the American Historical Association

Book Review Editor, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, 2020-2023

Peer Reviewer, Institute for International Exchange, U.S.-U.K. Fulbright Commission, and China-U.S. Scholars Program, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2020, 2021

Peer Reviewer, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*

Peer Reviewer, *American Art Journal*

Peer Reviewer, *Routledge*

Peer Reviewer, *New York University Press*

Co-organizer, with Sylvia Yount, New York City Area American Art History Reading Group, 2015-

Member of the Advisory Board, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 2017-2021

Session Chair, "Go Public, Young Scholar," College Art Association Annual Conference, 2019

Fulbright Scholar Alumni Ambassador, 2016-2018

Moderator for panel discussion: "Mobility and Cultural Identity through Fashion," Symposium "Native/American Fashion: Inspiration, Appropriation, and Cultural Identity," National Museum of the American Indian, NYC, 2017

Fulbright China Scholar Program Orientation Leader, 2013, 2014

Presenter, *Lessons from China*, Board of the Institute for International Education, 2013

Co-Chair, "*Jurisprudishness: Law and Visual Culture in the United States, 1842-1973.*" College Art Association Annual Conference Session, 2011

Positions, Past

State University of New York - Fashion Institute of Technology:
Faculty Senate President, 2023-2024

History of Art Department Acting Chair, 2022-2023

Chair of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences General
Education Committee, 2022-2023

2018-2019 State University of New York Chancellor's Award for
Excellence in Scholarship

Associate Professor, 2013-2019

Fulbright Scholar to China

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, 2011-2012

Saint Michael's College

Assistant, Associate, and Professor of Art History and
American Studies, 1994-2013

Fellowships and
Grants, Past

Center for the History of Collecting, Frick Art Reference Library
Leon Levy Senior Fellow, 2018

Center for Excellence in Teaching, FIT, Faculty Development
Grants Received, 2014, 2015, 2017 (2), 2018 (2), 2021

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute
American Material Culture: 19th Century New York

Participant, 2013

Smithsonian American Art Museum
Senior Fellow, 2010

New England Regional Fellowship Consortium
Bostonian Society / New England Women's Club Grant, 2008

Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
Fellowship at the Library of the New-York Historical Society,
2008

New York State Library
Anna K. and Mary E. Cunningham Research Residency, 2008

University of Minnesota
Kautz Family YMCA Archives, Chambers Travel Grant, 2008

Center for Research on Vermont, University of Vermont
Bryan Award for Excellence in a Vermont Research Project, 1999

Metropolitan Museum of Art
Chester Dale Fellow
Department of American Paintings and Sculpture, 1992-1993

Exhibitions
Curated

“Process on Paper: Drawings from Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,” Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, February, 2001–May, 2001; Museum of American Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, September, 2001-December, 2001

Film / Audio

Commentator, “Empire City: The Moral Crusade” Crooked Media Podcast (2024)

Commentator, “Empires of Excess: The Booze, Bets, and Sex that Built America,” The History Channel (released 2024).

Commentator, “Seen and Obscene” Borrowed and Banned Podcast Brooklyn Public Library (2023).

Commentator, Long Shots Podcast “Victoria Woodhull” (May, 2020)

Advisor and Commentator, *Exposing Muybridge*, produced by Marc Shaffer (filmed June 10, 2019)

Commentator, *Ipsa Dixit Podcast*, [Amy Werbel on Anthony Comstock and Obscenity Law](#) (April 24, 2019)

Commentator American Bar Association Journal, Modern Law Library Podcast, [“How Anthony Comstock’s Anti-Obsecenity Crusade Changed American Law”](#) (June 6, 2018)

Commentator, “So to Speak: The Free Speech Podcast. [“Anthony Comstock and the Role of Artists in the Emergence of American Free Speech Rights”](#) (May 3, 2018)

Commentator, *Before Hollywood: Philadelphia and the Birth of Movies*, documentary by filmmaker Andrew Ferrett. Provided on-air discussion of photographic innovations in nineteenth-century Philadelphia (released October, 2017)

[“Amy Werbel and John Fagg in Conversation: Ashcan artists’ approach to study of the nude,”](#) The Barber Institute (November, 2016)

Script advisor and Commentator, “Thomas Eakins: Scenes from American Life,” WHYY documentary, produced by Glenn Holsten. Broadcast nationally (June, 2002)

Pre-Doctoral
Fellowships
and Awards

Yale University:
Alumni Dissertation Fellowship
Mellon Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship
Robert Lehman Research Fellowship
Henry R. Luce Fellowship
University Fellowship

Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges:
Joseph Pulitzer, Jr. '36 Travel Award
John Harvard Scholarship
Harvard College Scholarship
Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Award

Professional
Affiliations

College Art Association
Association of Historians of American Art
Fulbright Alumni Association

Public Service

UStrive College Applications Coach, 2019-2023

College Applications Coach, Brooklyn Academy for Arts and Sciences, 2017

Learning Leaders School Volunteer, P.S. 5 Brooklyn, 2017

Ward 5 School Commissioner, Burlington, Vermont, 2005-2011