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## ***Roundtable on Pedagogy: Jules Prown***

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[Jules D. Prown, “Reflections on Teaching Art History”](#)

[Prown’s Students Reflect on Prown](#)

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Jules Prown’s approach to making and teaching art history is among the most well documented methodologies in the discipline. Look no further than his canonical “Style as Evidence” (1980) or “Mind in Matter” (1982). What he offers here, in his “Reflections on Teaching American Art History,” will enter the historical record as a complement to these earlier pieces. In this essay, we are treated to an autobiographical accounting for how Prown’s early classroom practices—so often scenes of baptism by fire—laid the foundation for a methodological revolution: his storied turn toward the object. As the essay makes clear, this revolution was born from restlessness: hunger for more liveliness in the classroom, more risk, creativity, innovation, and surprise.

As soon as we had the manuscript in our hands, the editors of *Panorama* wanted to honor Prown’s legacy of experimentation by paying tribute to it in two ways. So, in addition to Prown’s personal reflection, we offer a suite of secondary reflections: essays by three of his most eminent students—Bryan J. Wolf, Margaretta M. Lovell, and Glenn Adamson—all of whom have memories of their own to share. From there, we turn to the front lines: classrooms and laboratories where the history of American art and visual/material culture is currently being learned and written. In this selection, we offer present-tense responses to

the field’s pedagogical challenges, authored by Jessica L. Horton, Kevin R. Muller, Sarah Anne Carter, Sarah Beetham and Jason D. LaFountain. In true Prown fashion, object lessons are a recurring theme, as is the direct pragmatism of some do-it-yourself classroom tricks.

In 1966, the College Art Association issued a comprehensive study of art history’s institutional practice in the United States. Andrew Ritchie lead the effort; Prown served as his assistant. Many of the study’s findings are evergreen. In 1966, there were too few art history majors (and department chairs blamed parents); the 101-style survey was every department’s most popular class (but no one wanted to teach it); and the greatest perceived threat to scholarly advance was the American university’s obsession with committee work. The survey noted another nationally determined characteristic. Art History in the American context, the study concluded, was marked by a “cautious tone and conservative temper.” Unlike European variants, American approaches tended toward “soundness, rather than daring or brilliance.” Thus, CAA concluded: “The triumph of American art history and scholarship have been won through careful workmanship and method, rather than through fresh discovery or the formulation of new ideas.”

One can almost imagine an upstart young Jules, reading these words in the survey’s manuscript pages and taking them on as a personal challenge. Happily, the 1966 observation no longer really holds. Discovery and innovation are now much more the drivers of art historical work in the United States, even as “careful workmanship and method” endure. For this happy both/and, we have Jules Prown to thank. For its lively continuation, we look to those who carry on in his mold.