AHAA Symposium 2021
Chairs: Mindy N. Besaw and Ashley Holland (Cherokee Nation)
Discussants: Wanda Nanibush (Anishinaabe-kwe) and Georgiana Uhlyarik
“A Land Acknowledgement is Not Enough: Why Indigenous Art Must Guide a New American Art”

Panel of short presentations followed by live roundtable discussion and Q&A

Abstract:

Native American art has been traditionally collected and displayed within natural history settings and many scholars in the Native American art field come from anthropology backgrounds rather than art history. In art museums, Native American art is often categorized as “non-western” (grouped with African and Oceanic art). In addition, the contentious relationship of European settlers to the continent’s Indigenous peoples creates a complex backdrop for creating a new relationship that is respectful of sovereignty and agency while also challenging and invigorating to American art.

How can we go beyond inclusion, to have Indigenous art guide a new American art? This panel will serve as a moment of reflection and a platform for paving the way to cultural understanding. The panelists will present shortcomings and successes in studying and presenting Indigenous and America/Canadian art and culture in conversation. This is not about diversity, but rather a call for American art curators and scholars to take a step back and allow Native peoples to hold the position of knowledge and power. Ultimately, we are advocating for empowering Indigenous voices in museum spaces and the academy.

Guiding questions to address practices, assumptions, and responsibilities will include: How does the permanent nature of an institutional appointment versus a guest curator/visiting professor affect decision making and planning? How do curators balance artist and community expectations with those of the museum audience, including patrons and/or funders? What are your responsibilities as a non-Native curator/professor and as a Native curator/professor? How are curatorial roles changing?