

(Un)Settled Podcast Episode 5: Jacqueline Bishop Transcript

Drew Baron: The (Un)Settled Podcast is a presentation of the American South Consortium, a multi-year partnership of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Columbia Museum of Art, Mobile Museum of Art, and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts as part of the Art Bridges Cohort program. This innovative cross-regional partnership explores new ways of interpreting art and the American experience through dynamic exhibitions and an array of complementary public programs.

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Drew: Welcome back to episode four of the (Un)Settled podcast. The show where we explore the rich, complicated, and evolving topic of what the American landscape represents through the lens of American art. Produced in conjunction with the exhibition (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art, on view through February 2nd at the Mobile Museum of Art. I'm your Host and the Columbia Museum of Art's executive producer and content strategist, Drew Baron. And today on the program, we'll be speaking with the artist and environmental advocate Jacqueline Bishop, whose work After the Rain (Methane) is on view in the exhibition.

We'll catch up with her in a moment. But first, I'd like to welcome back to the program the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts' head of learning and programs, Emily Stuart Thomas. Emily, great to see you again.

Emily Stuart Thomas: Yeah. Great to see you.

Drew: So, tell me, who is Jacqueline Bishop? I know that the piece comes from your museum. So, what can you tell me about her?

Emily: Right. This work is from our permanent collection, and she's an artist working in New Orleans and really at the heart of, kind of environmental portraits and landscapes.

Drew: So, what is an environmental portrait? What does that mean?

Emily: So again, we have this beautiful, really vibrant piece. And often people come to the museum, and they are drawn to this piece. We've got these bright, vibrant pinks and reds and the detail and repetition of pattern, is maybe what catches the eye. But the longer you look, the more you explore, you really begin to see the deep undercurrents of the piece itself and, and what she's saying about the effects on the environment.

Drew: Yeah, I totally know what you mean. We have it— currently we're recording at the Columbia Museum of Art where we have an on view right now. And I was looking at it the other day. And it is one of those paintings where at first glance you're like, oh, this is just a

pretty, sort of surrealist landscape. And then you start to really dig deeper and you're like, there's some very dark themes that are being presented just like off on the outskirts of the corners of the painting. When it is hanging at your museum and I know you help out with tours and stuff there sometimes, what are the response you get from visitors?

Emily: It's one of those really beautiful pieces, the more you look, the more you see. And so you begin to see that truly the water's taking on kind of like this blood red quality. That there are fish and there are animals surrounded in an environment that is not beautiful. It is not welcoming. It is not, kind of this idyllic, beautiful space. We have a barren tree and these gnarly kind of, branches and that the birds are seeking shelter in, you know, a rose bush with thorns and all kinds of things. So, I think it's one of those, you see that switch in people's kind of observations of it.

And even young kids really respond to this. And that's what's really interesting, to see kids they immediately get it. They, "Oh, that is I do not want to go swimming there" or, "that is not that is not safe place for that deer." You know, like even young children really, kind of pick up on those tones.

Drew: Yeah. And I think the title itself, After the Rain (Methane) really speaks to the heart of what this piece says to me. You know, methane, it's this naturally occurring substance, right? But we also pump a lot of it into the environment, and I think using the roses is kind of like this metaphor for that, right? You're like smelling the roses. You're smelling the methane, right? And how it's become such a part of our environment.

I think it's just a really powerful message. and it feels really striking when you see it next to paintings like the Thomas Cole. Right? That, like, maybe, represent a very different, view of nature and the abundance of our landscape. Another one of the really fun pairings in this exhibition, which has a lot of moments like this, you know?

Well, thank you so much for stopping by today, Emily. I'm really excited to see what the folks at Mobile have to say about this piece and many others that are in the show. But I think with that, I think we're going to go ahead and transition into our interview with Jacqueline Bishop, who's joining us remotely from her studio in New Orleans.

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Drew: And we're back with Jacqueline Bishop. She's an artist based in the Gulf Coast region in the United States, with art studios located in New Orleans and Columbia, Mississippi. Through her paintings, drawings, and installations, Bishop addresses subjects including the politics behind landscape, the reality of migration and extinction, the loss of intimacy with nature, and the need for imagination to communicate this loss.

In 1975, she briefly lived in the Dominican Republic, where she witnessed and recorded the effects of deforestation. From 1992 through 2006. Bishop traveled to South and Central

America and Southeast Asia, recording both the untouched and destroyed environments of these regions. She distills her experiences and research into her work, which often presents surreal depictions of the flora and fauna of these regions with an eye towards environmental issues.

Her work *After the Rain (Methane)* is on view in *(Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art*, on view at the Mobile Museum of Art through February 2nd, 2025. Jacqueline, welcome to the show.

Jacqueline Bishop: Thank you. Thanks for having me. It's good seeing you, Drew.

Drew: We're very happy that you can take the time to just be with us here today. It's going to be a really exciting conversation. I can't wait to learn more about you and your work. Just getting started, I wanted to talk to you about early in your career.

I know you mentioned before, that you were doing graduate work at Tulane University, and that you started to encounter working with issues of climate and environment all the way back then. But the comment that you made was that it took you ten years to really realize that that was what you were doing. So how did that realization come about? Like, when did it become clear that climate and environmental issues was going to kind of be your tilt with the work that you do?

Jacqueline: Well I'm going to have to back up a few years because it probably wasn't fair to say that it took me ten years. I have to go back to undergraduate school when, as a young art student, almost every art department that I know of in the United States was using the, that gigantic book *History of Art* by H. W. Janson, where there were no women included and no people of color included in this book. It was published in 1962 with no changes. And so, this is what I knew. Of course, there was landscape painting in the classes and in the book, but the landscapes were done by men. So, there was this void that I could not articulate because there was nothing to reference. And I think of being a female artist, I kind of gravitated toward landscape with some void.

And I, then went to graduate school and I was spending a lot of time on the Gulf Coast, where it was kind of disintegrating and a lot of, dead animals and crustaceans and things all over the beach kind of had to work where it was careful so that you wouldn't step on these. And I started collecting them and putting them on the canvases and painting over them to have them included the materials from the landscape included in the paintings.

That was during graduate school. And it was just, you know, an intuitive, place to go and to reach that deep part of the imagination. But, since there was no, no discussion about environmental art or eco art or any issues in the landscape back then, there was nothing in history books really about it, and my classes, and in the contemporary art world, I mean, it wasn't a discussion. And so, I was on my own. And that's when I realized, later that— I

mean right after graduate school, I just kind of kept going in that direction. And then, I was able to articulate it with more questions.

But I was told at times not to talk about those topics because it wasn't popular, and it might affect sales. And so, I didn't really understand what that meant. Because that's what, I could see that was what the work was about. This was where I was heading, and I couldn't be something else.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, so you chose to just go forward with it and kind of buck the opinion, huh?

Jacqueline: Well, it kind of happened really through the birds too, I mean, I started painting a lot of bird imagery in the paintings. And they were symbols for many things in the paintings, and I was running out of imagery. So, I had to do research. And when I was doing the research, I found out that many of the birds I'd been painting were actually extinct. And this was kind of a strong word to describe anything. And so, I thought, wow, what does that mean? That kind of took me on to a deeper level of landscape. And then, you know, in my own backyard and then state and then other countries.

But about that time in the mid '80s, when I discovered bird extinction, it was about the same time that it was like '86. And then in '88, Chico Mendes was assassinated in Brazil. And so, all of that kind of came together. And I got really interested in birds in Brazil and the landscape issues and the politics in Brazil. And so that's, you know, when I started traveling in '91, to Brazil.

Drew: Yeah, I mean, it strikes me you just had a pretty, adventurous spirit. And I know that you did a lot of this. You did have kind of a group of folks and researchers that you were working with that you could rely on out there. But, I mean, I know that you also went out there alone quite a bit. That is not for the faint of heart. That's not something everyone would choose to do, to get in a boat and go to the Amazon. So, can you tell me kind of just like what drives you to be the person that you are to want to go out and make these kind of choices and go on these adventures.

Jacqueline: You know, curiosity and I like dealing with real issues in my imaginary landscapes. I'm not going to literally paint a landscape. It's not going to be like that. But there's just so much going on and symbolism and metaphor in the work that there's so much going on in the landscape that I can bring together. And that's, you know, really what keeps me interested in that.

And I ventured into other countries, you know, like India and Bangladesh and, Cuba and other places for different types of trips. But when I was traveling with the scientists and living in a tent for a couple of weeks, that's really the only way you can see some of these things. I mean, you know, 30,000 orchids in the world, and so many of them are there,

and a third of the bird population of the world is in Brazil, in the Amazon. And I wouldn't be able to see that in a book or on TV. It's just it's not the same. You have to hear the sounds. You have to see the insects. You have to see how it all works in the system.

And I consider the forest to be a system. And I know that a lot of people don't like that word to describe the natural world, but it is an ecosystem. It is a set system without us already. And so, you know, probably humans have learned what the system was through the natural world and not through— technology came from how that all worked together.

Drew: You know, it's funny you kind of you kind of hinted at the fact that, you know, these are kind of surreal pieces that you're creating. But you have a real scientific method of how you develop your thought process behind it. You know, when I was watching a lecture that you gave, I thought it was really fascinating you were talking about getting water samples, from different water sources and the places that you're working with. And then doing a series of watercolor works using that water.

You know, this is exactly what a scientist does, they go and they collect field sample studies, and for them, they're probably using them to actually learn something specific about, you know, what the pH level of that water is or something like that. But you're utilizing them to create a new body of work.

Jacqueline: Well, that was also an experimental thing, because I was going to— I was living in a tent for so long, and I started writing my journals at night on little carved birds that I collected from the Indians. So, I consider those books. So, I can only do so much of that, and that was at night by flashlight.

In the day, I wanted to be more constructive, and I'm collecting information from the classes that I was teaching at Loyola University and Tulane, and I wanted the information for my lectures, and wanted the information for the paintings. And so, I wanted some painting, but I can't do oil paintings in the Amazon. I mean, it just wouldn't work. And they don't dry. And with that kind of humidity and heat, it's like New Orleans. It's not going to dry so quickly. So, I went prepared with I prepared paper up, prepared collages, brought my watercolors, and I started small scale. And I didn't want to use my good water in the watercolor because I needed that to drink, you know, I didn't want to run out there.

So, I started sitting in the little boat, in the Rio Apuaú or the Rio Negro or, you know, tributaries of the Amazon River. And I just started using the river water, and it worked beautifully because it's very clean water, but there are still chemicals in it. But there are the trees and the soil and the leaves, and everything that's in the water is going to affect the river chemically. So, when I paint those, they're going to react differently than water from the Mississippi River or the Ganges River or from the Gulf of Mexico. And I've used water from all of these places or the Missouri River in Missouri.

And so, all of those waters have different kinds of urine from the animals because they have different mammals. They're going to have different chemicals from the leaves and everything else. And then any of the runoff from agriculture or whatever. So, watching the watercolor and the paper react to this water was interesting because it just changed throughout the paper. So, I started working large scale, six feet, watercolors when I got back and after collecting the water in New Orleans. So, wherever I would go, wherever there would be a river, I would start collecting water.

Drew: I love that. I mean, I just think it's really interesting. In that same lecture, I believe it was someone in the crowd asked you about scientific illustration. And you were quick to be like, "I'm not a scientific illustrator." But with that in mind, I kind of wonder, is there certain things that the arts perhaps could teach us about the environment that maybe traditional science can't? What do you think, if anything, that art can kind of tell us about our natural environment?

Jacqueline: Well, first of all, science and art both communicate many things about this. But art is going to go on a much deeper level, because it's going to hit imagination. And that's where people are— That's where it hits a chord with people, and everyone is going to walk away of using their own imagination, because they have their own histories. And that's the beauty of art. If everybody had the same idea about it, like in science, it would not be a very successful piece.

So, I think, this just like music. I mean, everybody is going to feel differently about music. They have different memories from different music. And so, it's a more personal thing, whereas science is going to be you either agree with it or you don't. In most cases it's proof, so you have to agree with it. But art is, I can take you into another deeper level into your own self about your own existence. And I think that's really important. And that's the role of art. I mean, it's not supposed to be just giving you answers. You're supposed to be asking questions too.

Drew: Yeah, and I think your work does that extremely well. It definitely poses a lot of questions. But you you aren't prescriptive, right? You're not like sitting there being—

Jacqueline: No, and I love the ambiguity. I like working with ambiguity. I like working with something that appears to be beautiful, but it's deadly.

Drew: Yeah. I actually, you know, I'm skipping ahead a bit in the conversation here. But I will tell you I was going to tell you this little anecdote.

The other day, I was taking a group of folks through the exhibition (Un)Settled, And we stopped at your piece. And their immediate reaction was, "Wow! How beautiful." And they were seeing it from a great distance, and they were just really struck by it. And then as we started to kind of creeping closer, they started to see like some of these like little moments of dissent.

Right? Like you have this like—you have this dying bird in the bottom of the frame, surrounded by wolves. And you start to realize that there's maybe more of a sinister undertone under what, like on its head, feels like a very pretty picture. And we had a really great conversation about it, and I think it sparked in them exactly what you're looking for. Right? It's these moments of ambiguity where you can appreciate the beautiful things that are in this piece, but you can also respect the fact that there might be more to it than what meets the eye. You know? So, I think in that way it was very successful.

There was a quote that you had I thought it was really interesting. You said that, "Culture comes from the landscape." What do you mean by that?

Jacqueline: Well, it depends on your definition of culture. And that could mean something different for everybody. But, when you think of all of the things that culture has shaped us into, but we have also reshaped culture for our own benefit. I mean think of our clothes and our tools and food and just about everything comes from the natural world in some way or is inspired by.

And, when that changes and when the landscape changes or when it disappears, it's going to affect culture. Because migration could set in, and that's going to affect culture because different cultures will start meeting different cultures that will erase some languages. It will erase—there's already so many languages disappearing as part of culture and they're disappearing because of the changed landscape. And so, yes, I mean, I think that culture comes from the landscape, and it's affected by it, reshaped by it.

Drew: Yeah. You know, I mentioned to you before we started recording that one of our other episodes of this podcast, we interview Dan Friday. And we talk about that specifically, and the importance of language to any culture and how it, you know—when it goes away, for all intents and purposes, that culture goes with it. So, like, I think that's actually a nice little pairing with a conversation we'd have previously.

I did want to ask you, we brought up earlier that you live in New Orleans. And you've been on the Gulf Coast for quite a while now. I know you weren't born there, but that's where you've resided for many years. And I know that you've experienced quite a few unfortunate climate related situations out there on the Gulf, between Katrina and the BP oil spill.

Can you talk a bit about just how that has changed the overall landscape in the area that you live? And are there things, whether it be for the residents in the community or the landscape itself, that you think are just like different now than they may have been, you know, 10-20 years ago?

Jacqueline: Well, Katrina and the BP oil spill certainly changed awareness about our landscape, but we were already losing landscape every single day. And we've lost over 2000 square miles, in the last decade, few decades. And it continues every day. So, yes,

there has already been a migration. People are leaving. They are going to higher ground or they're getting a second home so they can stay here. I mean, lifestyles have changed. And it's a much smaller population. And there was a brain drain after Katrina. I mean huge by all the universities. That's going to affect a lot. So, it's going to affect, the workforce, education, just about everything you can think of in a community.

I think that artists became more aware and using the topics in their work also, which was really cool because there were all different mediums and different voices coming from all different age groups, especially the younger ones. And so, it's there when it wasn't, as a conversation. And now it is, so that's important.

Drew: See, I love that. And I think that is so interesting when thinking about what you had said earlier, in regards to, how some initial reactions to your work from some of your peers was, and how they kind of tried to push you away from that because it seems like these issues and these topics have only become more relevant over the years.

Jacqueline: Yes.

Drew: You know, I think we've hinted at birds quite a bit and why they appear in your work. But I do want to get a more specific reason. Like what fascinates you specifically about birds? Because they do appear a lot in many of your pieces, including the one that's in the exhibition, but tons of other ones. I mean, you've done a whole series on birds, so like, why? Why them specifically? What really talks to you?

Jacqueline: Well, you know, birds have the most information because they travel and they're all over the world. I mean they're in every country, they're in every type of landscape. They pollinate, they plant trees, they make music. Their sounds and images are reproduced in music and art. They've been physically used in fashion. And since they travel the world, they have the most information about the world.

I view them as messengers. When they disappear, we disappear. Birds are on the cave walls, which is said to be the first form of ecology. So, I view them as messengers. I think birds are the soul of the world.

Drew: I love that, I love that, you know, and I feel like, you know, you travel the world, birds travel the world. So, it's a sort of a kindred relationship there, you know? I think that's really cool.

Jacqueline: Well, it is interesting that when I'm in Brazil, like in say June or July, I come back to New Orleans and I can see the same birds who are the migrants from Brazil and they're migrating through going to, you know— whether it's in the fall migration and they're on their way to Mexico, but they stop in Louisiana at waterholes. Unfortunately, one of the water holes in Cameron Parish was destroyed by Katrina. So, when they come in, that water hole is gone. That could be the beginning of the extinction process.

Drew: I'd like to, switch gears a little bit, if you don't mind, and talk to you about the piece that's in the show. It's titled *After the Rain (Methane)*. Methane being in parentheses. And it is a very large painting that, as I mentioned earlier in this podcast, is pretty striking. Very red painting. That has a large mass of red roses surrounded by kind of a crimson sky and water feature. And a lot of animals are kind of surrounding around this piece, and the roses are filled with birds.

I'm just trying to give people some sort of visual in their head, even though if you're watching this on video, I'll throw up a picture of it, so you don't have to listen to me. But, for our listeners at home, I will let Jacqueline describe in a moment because she'll do a better job than me.

But I want to talk a little bit about this piece, especially then title, because it's so evocative. What was kind of going through your head, when you were working on this piece and thinking through what you wanted to talk about in this piece? Did it kind of come naturally, or was this something that came as you were creating it? Well, just talk me through the process a little bit.

Jacqueline: Well, I guess it came naturally. You know, I get these images, and I start drawing in the sketchbook, but in this particular painting, it just, you know, I had wildlife and what do they depend on? And so, I chose the rose image because who doesn't stop and smell the roses when they see them? And I wanted to dominate that, so it became a rose cloud. But the rose cloud, even though it's in the shape of roses, it's a methane cloud.

And, the deer are taking advantage of the fragrance, but they don't know that it's a methane cloud. Just like none of us know that we are living in methane every day. But the deer have different things in their stomach. They are impregnated, and one deer is filled with baby rabbits. And so, there's all these abnormalities going on that are very subtle, disturbing when they're realized. And the palette is hopefully captivating, and the subject matter is hopefully captivating enough for the viewer to come into it, to study it. And then they see these disturbing things, because that's exactly what's happening in the world.

And I can't take credit for the title, but I title everything. You know? I like to title because of my years and years of creative writing. But we were having Family Reunion, which we do every year, and my husband's cousin is a composer and singer from California and New Orleans. His mother was from New Orleans. And I had him title it, which he was very pleased to do, and he asked me some questions about it. We had a long discussion in the studio about the painting, so he titled it for me after the discussion.

Drew: I mean it is definitely a title that makes you think, you know? And I think it really adds an extra layer to the piece. But the piece itself is also just so striking, whether you have any context or not. You know?

I mentioned the dominance of this red color throughout it. I believe that you mentioned to me before that was, alizarin crimson. Is that correct?

Jacqueline: Alizarin crimson. Yes, and the interesting thing about it is that color, well, it's like, the Egyptians used it 3000 years ago in their textiles and some of their murals and paintings and things, and then it kind of spread through the world. But, I just find it interesting that it's so old and it's from the landscape.

It's from the madder plant. And it's a red, but it has a blue undertone, and methane itself has no color until it hits the air. It is infrared and then becomes blue. And so I just thought that connecting these two was just a perfect metaphor, since they call me the queen of metaphor. But I just love these connections, because they're all right there. And I just want to make use of those. And that's where some of the poetry is, you know, and I just want to make use of that in the work.

Drew: Yeah, I think you did mention it a little bit earlier, but I think this really demonstrates, as much as you are a student of the environment, you're also very much a student of art history. You have a very strong background, and understanding of the lineage that you are building upon. And so, you're using these like very subtle nods to that in your work. And I think that's really amazing. This is just one example, right? But you can find a lot of other ones.

I think that paired with what you were mentioning earlier about like when you, you know, had that old art history book and it was just all kind of one note in terms of people speaking about the landscape. Really jives well with the curators' goals for this exhibition. And you really get an interesting sense looking at the pieces in the show when you have 200 years plus, of art in this space that are all kind of representing what ostensibly would be the same areas, but shown through completely different perspectives, completely different viewpoints.

With that in mind, thinking about kind of this 200 years of art history and how perspectives and viewpoints have changed. And being like a student of art history yourself. Do you think the viewpoints of artists, are evolving over time, or do you think that we're still kind of like looking at the same subjects? And maybe we've always been paying the landscape, right? We've always, like, had an interest in the natural flora and fauna, but has our relationship with why we paint those things changed?

Jacqueline: You know, the landscape is always changing, so art will change with that too. I mean, that's part of the culture too, right? So, the landscape has really been altered and so you can't really talk about some of the same things about landscape that you did 20 years ago or 100 years ago, because that landscape may not even be there. I mean, if you look at an old painting, in that landscape, an old painting from a hundred years ago. I think there's a study, there's either a Walmart there or a prison. In certain parts of this country, this country. And they were doing a study on this, and it was just, unbelievable.

So how, you know, isn't that— that's going to change art, and it's going to change the issues and the discussion. So, to paint a beautiful picture of the landscape now, isn't really saying anything because it's very unsettled.

Drew: Yeah. I think it would be ignoring a lot of things that are directly in front of our faces, right?

Jacqueline: Right. I mean and then so that's not, that's not reality. But even back during the Romantics when they were painting their landscapes, and these were beautiful landscapes, they weren't, you know, there was nothing unsettling about them. But it brought up the issue of conservation back then because of industrialization and everything. So, landscape painting was different then, and it is different now, But those kinds of paintings— It just wouldn't work now.

Drew: So, what are you working on now? What is Jacqueline Bishop concerned with and interested in for the future of your work?

Jacqueline: Well, I am working on global issues through the landscape. Surprise. But there are a lot of, different imagery in the work, and I'm trying to use one color, which is alizarin crimson. So, the whole show will be in that color, except for some surprise colors. And, because my show was canceled during Covid, and I usually show here, like, every three years in New Orleans. And then I have some other shows coming up around the country. But everything was so limited during Covid and we were all stuck in our studios or homes. Not stuck, I mean it was the artist's dream to quarantine. But I limited my palette because the world was limited. And so that was the color I chose. And it said everything I wanted to say.

With Covid, streets got cleaner, the air was cleaner, the rivers were cleaner. Everything was clean because the humans were now at their homes. And animals started coming into the city. And it was just an amazing different landscape. I mean Bourbon Street was so clean you couldn't believe it. And so I realized that we have so many options, so many considerations that when it was more simplified world and I simplified my palette and just using one color, you have to think harder about what do you want to say and what is happening to the landscape.

And so that's what I've been doing for the last almost six years working on this show. And it opens in December. And so it's a— it will all come together, and there's a lot of flowers and a lot of red. A lot of missiles. And, a lot of clouds, as in mushroom clouds. And the animal world and empty seas and things like that.

Drew: Yeah. I think about all the things that you must have seen in your time researching and all the just experiences that you've had. It kind of, you know— I feel like you are a

surprisingly optimistic person, considering how dark some of the subject matter you have to tackle is. I mean, do you feel any level of optimism for our current trajectory?

I mean, I feel like things— I wrote in my notes this whole bit about how in 1975, you were living in the Dominican Republic, and then later on you had a painting hanging in an embassy there. And how full circle is that? But, I mean, in reality, we've just kind of had this trajectory that has only gone downhill in terms of our treatment of our natural environment. So, I mean, is there anything that makes you hopeful for our future generations that are going to be inheriting kind of the mess that we're putting out there?

Jacqueline: Well, yes, because of adaptation, we're going to have to adapt to a new landscape.

Drew: That was short and sweet. I liked it. Yeah. Because I really just say it all. Because I mean we're likely beyond the point of no return for, what we had. Right? So, it's like we are just going to have to learn to live in a new environment.

Jacqueline: Yeah. That's right. So, you know that life is made up of these things. You have hope and you have hopelessness, you have fear and you have courage, you have life and you have death. So, you have choices to make and you adapt or you don't.

And that will be in some cases very different. There will be different cultures because of migration. There will be different kinds of food because of extinction. If we don't have birds and bats and insects who are creating our food and eliminating some of the ills in the neighborhood— In the neighborhood, in the landscape. Well, neighborhood— then, you know, it's going to be different. I mean, what we know is not how it was when we were born and or our parents or grandparents. It's always been changing, but more drastically, it's going to be very different.

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Drew: As we wind down another episode of the (Un)Settled podcast, I'd like to revisit a point Jacqueline made at the start of our conversation.

H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, first published in 1962, became a cornerstone in art history education. Widely used for decades. However, as Jacqueline highlighted, the book faced criticisms for its Western centric approach, overlooking the contributions of many female artists and artists of color.

So, I've invited the Wadsworth's Laura Leonard back onto the program to give us a little context. Here's what she had to say.

Laura Leonard: H. W. Janson was a Russian born, German American scholar. So, in 1962, he published a textbook that would lay the groundwork for art history survey courses across the country for decades. Janson's *History of Art* covered works from prehistoric cave paintings to then contemporary artists like Pablo Picasso. And the textbook provided readers with a foundational understanding of Western art history using very accessible language. So, its success was, really rooted in being approachable to the average reader. And particularly to those with no prior knowledge of art or art history like students.

So, as we're all aware, the Western world has a patriarchal social structure that historically diminishes or dismisses the accomplishments of women. And unfortunately, this is also true in the field of art history. So, the major issue with Janson's *History of Art* being the foundation of most art history courses in the United States is that it deliberately excluded women and artists of color. They weren't included until the third edition that was published in 1987. So, this means that for a quarter of a century, most students in the United States did not learn about the contributions of any women or any people of color to the field of art history.

And to note how recent this was in the grand scheme of things, the author of the book, H. W. Janson, told the pop artist Idelle Weber that he had no intentions of including women painters in his book. And for further context, Weber died only four years ago in 2020, and she was three years younger than her close friend, the pop culture icon Yayoi Kusama.

So, this level of discrimination in the art world has lasting effects, and it's estimated that 87% of artists represented in major museums in the United States are men, and 85% of artists represented are white. So, this isn't Janson's fault directly, but both are a result of the same social structures, and museums and scholars are aware of this. And there's no quick fix.

But as Jacqueline mentioned, eco art was also excluded, and in her own practice she was told that the subject matter was essentially too controversial. You know, if everybody had the same history and ideas about art, it would be a totally different field. There's a lot of ambiguity, and the canon of art history will continue to be rewritten. And really, the art world has a broad scope, and one book can't cover, every important movement or artist that ever existed in the Western world. And new textbooks and other scholarly works are striving towards a more inclusive history of art.

So essentially, Janson had a profound impact on the field of Western art history. And while his textbook was groundbreaking in that it made art history very accessible to the masses, it was also deeply flawed.



Drew: I'd like to thank our guests, Emily Stuart Thomas, Jacqueline Bishop and Laura Leonard, for joining us on the (Un)Settled podcast. If you'd like to learn more about Jacqueline's work, you can visit her website. www.Jacquelinebishop.com.

And don't forget to see (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art, now on view at the Mobile Museum of Art through February 2nd, 2025. See you next time.