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John Ott Receives the 2009 Frost Essay Award

The Smithsonian American Art Museum has awarded the 2009 Patricia and Phillip Frost Essay Award to John Ott, associate professor of art history at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. He was selected by the editorial board of *American Art*, the museum's scholarly journal, for "Reform in Redface: The Taos Society of Artists Plays Indian." The article appeared in the summer 2009 issue (vol. 23, no. 2).

Ott is the sixth annual winner of the \$1,000 award, which recognizes excellent scholarship in the field of American art history by honoring an essay that advances the understanding of the history of the arts in America and demonstrates original research and fresh ideas. The award, established in 2004, is presented annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to the journal. Funding for this award is made possible by the Patricia and Phillip Frost Endowment.

"The Frost Essay Award is an important part of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's commitment to encouraging new research and fresh perspectives in the field of American art, so I am delighted that the 2009 award goes to John Ott for his important essay on the Taos Society," said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Each year, a jury consisting of three members of the journal's editorial board selects the winner from articles, interviews and commentaries published in *American Art* during the previous calendar year. The 2009 jurors were Sarah Burns, the Ruth N. Halls Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Indiana, Bloomington; Wendy Bellion, associate professor at the University of Delaware; and John Davis, associate provost and dean for academic development at Smith College.

The jurors said Ott's essay "offers a beautifully written and compelling narrative that casts the Taos Society of Artists in a new light. In Ott's analysis, the Taos artists were actors whose redface Pueblo masquerade worked to valorize and rejuvenate their own middle-class, white masculine and artistic identities. At the same time, their paintings contributed to the structural underdevelopment fostered by a cultural preservation mission that zealously guarded the purity of Pueblo traditional arts.

Particularly illuminating is Ott's delicate dissection—supported by close formal readings—of what lay

SI-126-2010

behind the Taos painters' denigration of Mexican laborers at the same time that they idealized and romanticized Indian craftsmen and farmers. Focusing on Walter Ufer's remarkable group of self-portraits in the company of his Indian doppelganger, Ott advances scholarship on art, commerce, race and gender in the Southwest into new realms of colonial identity politics, rooted here in a highly specific historical and geographical context."

Ott received a doctorate in art history from UCLA in 2002. His research centers on art patronage, museums, the art market and social class. Recently published articles include "How New York Stole the Luxury Art Market: Blockbuster Auctions and Bourgeois Identity in Gilded Age America," in *Winterthur Portfolio* (summer/autumn 2008); "Labored Stereotypes: Palmer Hayden's The Janitor Who Paints," in *American Art* (spring 2008); and "Iron Horses: Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge, and the Industrialised Eye," in the *Oxford Art Journal* (fall 2005). Ott was awarded a Smithsonian Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2009-2010. He has also received a Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Dissertation Fellowship in American Art and research grants from James Madison University, the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif., and UCLA.

The journal *American Art* is part of the museum's active publications program, which includes books and exhibition catalogs. It is produced by the museum's Research and Scholars Center, which also administers fellowships for pre- and postdoctoral scholars and offers unparalleled research databases and extensive photographic collections documenting American art and artists.

Information about subscribing, purchasing single issues or submitting articles to the journal, which is published by the University of Chicago Press, is available at journals.uchicago.edu/AmArt. A complete list of past Frost Essay Award winners and additional information about the award is online at americanart.si.edu/research/awards/frost.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 42,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Metro station: Gallery Place/Chinatown. Find the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, ArtBabble, iTunes and YouTube. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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