**Guest Speaker**

Lauren van Haaften-Schick  
DLI Doctoral Fellow | Cornell Tech

**Title**

*The Artist’s Contract’ (1971) to Smart Contracts: Remedies for Inequity in the Art Market in Historical Perspective.*

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**Biography**

Lauren van Haaften-Schick is a PhD Candidate in the History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University. Lauren’s research considers historical intersections of art and law, with a focus on artists’ contracts, the history of artists’ rights laws, and artists’ interventions in the legal system and legal norms since the 1960s. Her dissertation fuses art and legal histories to trace the influences and after-effects of “The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement,” a boilerplate artist’s contract developed by curator-publisher of Conceptual art Seth Siegelaub with lawyer Robert Projansky in 1971, which remains a widely cited and controversial model of artist’s property and economic rights today. Lauren’s time as a DLI Doctoral Fellow will feed her research into emerging art sales platforms utilizing smart contracts on blockchain. A curatorial practice and collaborations with artists, lawyers, and technologists informs her research, in addition to ten years of professional experience in art prior to beginning graduate study. She has received grants and fellowships from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and Engaged Cornell, among others, and has been invited to lecture on her research and curate exhibitions in the U.S. and internationally.

**Abstract**

In 1971 Conceptual art curator-publisher Seth Siegelaub and lawyer Robert Projansky created The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement, a legal tool enabling artists to retain property and economic rights in their sold works. To Siegelaub, the “Artist’s Contract” would function as a clear statement of an artist’s desired rights, and its efficacy was ensured by the legal technology of contract and its promise of seamless and just transactions – “A perfect waffle every time!” However, the Artist’s Contract has been little-used and remains controversial, particularly for its stipulation for an artist’s resale royalty, and its demand for transparency in resales. Today however, numerous blockchain-based platforms for selling art employ smart contracts with terms similar to the Artist’s Contract. Here, resale royalties are not taboo, but are encouraged and enforced through the “promise” of smart contracts to automate a “perfect” transaction every time. But rather than rush to celebrate these technological potentials, might we pause to reconsider the value of contracts as systems of relations, rather than processes of automation, as law and society scholars have urged? These developments encourage a comparative view to historical contract technologies as we assess the unfolding implications of smart contracts and blockchain within the art market.