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ACLA 2024 Horst Frenz Prize: Winner

Committee:

Chair, J. Scott Miller (Brigham Young University)
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Pavel Andrade (Texas Tech University)

Viola Bao (Northwestern University), “Diasporic Cultural Revolutions: Talks at Yan’an in the Black Arts Movement,” read at the seminar *Global Literary History and Peter J. Kalliney’s The Aesthetic Cold War* (2022).

Viola Bao’s much-nominated paper is beautifully argued and written, laying out the way the aesthetics expressed in the famous Yan’an Talks given by Mao Zedong in 1942 influenced the Black Arts Movement of the American long 1960s. It carefully delineates a suppressed leftist dimension influential in the aesthetics of decolonizing art movements in various parts of the world in the 1960s, showing how Mao’s writings map onto Ron Karenga’s 1968 manifesto Black Cultural Nationalism, with an added category that promotes unity in diversity, offering the jazz ensemble as the ideal model for collective unity with individual expression. We found the paper to be a premier example of the kind of groundbreaking, comparative cross-cultural study that showcases the way comparative literature contributes to a deeper understanding of the human condition, in this case adding a new perspective to recent developments in Global South studies, the “global sixties,” and decolonizing aesthetics.