As a teenager, Christa Robbins began her college career intent on becoming a painter. But after a few years toiling in oils on canvas and earning her bachelor of fine arts degree in painting and printmaking, she realized she was more interested in studying art than in making it. So Robbins left the studio behind to become an art historian—a rare transition for someone in her shoes. “I made the conscious decision to stop making art,” she says.

Three years later, she landed at the University of Chicago, studying under art and media theorist W. J. T. Mitchell; she focused on modern abstract painting and criticism and earned her PhD in 2010. After teach-
Christa Robbins is the Mellon Caltech–Huntington Postdoctoral Instructor in Art History. Her book on midcentury American paintings and the definition of self is slated to be published in 2015.