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Introduction to the Arts of Africa

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTS OF AFRICA

ART 31012 section 1AD, Spring 2018, The City College of New York
Undergraduate level, Mondays 9:00-11:50 am, CG252

Instructor: Joshua I. Cohen

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What constitutes art in Africa? In what ways are objects of aesthetic value produced, circulated, and understood, both within and beyond their societies of origin? How are canons classifying these works constructed in the art world and in the field of art history? How do such canons help clarify or obscure their objects? This course offers an introduction to the classical, popular, modern, and contemporary arts of Africa, from ancient rock art to the present.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

10% - class attendance and participation

30% - two-part writing assignment (due February 26 & April 23)

30% - midterm exam (covers first half of term; March 26)

30% - final exam (covers first half of term; May 21, 8-10:15 am)

See below for course expectations and details of assignments. Overall grades are based on intellectual achievement, effort, and participation—*regardless of whether or not English is a student's first language*. In general, grades in the “C” range indicate adequate mastery of the material and merely competent written and oral presentation. Grades in the “B” range reflect additional effort, with full understanding of the data and concepts, clear written work and regular class participation. “A” grades are reserved for students producing superior work, which includes a full comprehension of materials accompanied by well-written papers and exceptional class participation.

COURSE-LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- (1) gain familiarity with African material culture and artists, and with broad historical trajectories and major discourses in the field of African art history;
- (2) develop fluency in formally analyzing and interpreting works of African art in relation to specific historical contexts;
- (3) build skills in close reading of texts and formal analysis;
- (4) produce concise, well organized and coherent writing.

COURSE READINGS

Required readings listed under headings for each class session (see syllabus, below) are to be completed before that session and brought to class. Students are advised to carefully read and take notes on each required text. Primary-source readings are marked with an asterisk (“*”). Additional readings are recommended to students wishing to deepen their understandings of given topics. All readings are available online via Blackboard, accessible through CUNY Portal, with the exception of e-books and journal articles that are easily retrieved through the CCNY library’s online databases.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is a crucial component of the course experience. Coming in late, using cell phones, and eating in class are not acceptable forms of conduct. Two late arrivals yield an absence; late arrivals generally yield low participation grades. Department policy allows for no more than two absences per course. Students who exceed two absences without any official or medical excuse will automatically fail the course.

COMMUNICATION & OFFICE HOURS

Email is the primary means of communication for course announcements and information on readings and class discussion, etc. Students are expected to check email frequently. Any questions, issues, or concerns may be addressed via email, using appropriate greetings and subject lines. Emails opening with “hey professor” or equivalent merit no response. To meet during office hours it is best (although not necessary) to email beforehand. Phone appointments can also be arranged during office hours.

PLAGIARISM / ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person’s ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is this an exhaustive list: (1) Copying another person’s actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source. (2) Presenting another person’s ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source. (3) Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source. (4) Failing to acknowledge collaborators. (5) Internet plagiarism includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, and “cutting and pasting” from various sources without proper attribution. The City College Faculty Senate has approved a procedure for addressing violations of academic integrity.

EXAMS – FORMAT

Exams include slide identifications, image comparisons, and long essays. Details of exam format and expectations will be reviewed in class sessions prior to exams.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS – OVERVIEW

Course writing assignments include: [1] A short (2-to-3-page double-spaced) formal analysis of an object in a local collection; and [2] an additional 5-to-6-page essay building on the previous assignment, in which course readings are applied to the selected object. The two parts of this assignment will be due in class on February 26 & April 23. See below for full assignment details. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers are not accepted by email. Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances, but only if requested well in advance of the due date.

All writing is generally graded on thoughtfulness, organization, and clarity. Correct formatting (see below) is also crucial; incorrectly formatted papers may lose as much as a full letter grade. Papers must be submitted in hard copy on the due date. Late and/or emailed papers will not be accepted. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, and only if requested well in advance of the due date. The Writing Center is a resource for help with paper writing: <http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/writingcenter>.

PAPERS – FORMATTING

Papers should be double-spaced with 12-point font and standard margins, footnotes (i.e., *not* endnotes), page numbers, and a bibliography. The Art Department follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* and uses Barnet, *Writing About Art* as a guideline for developing term papers and footnote and bibliography format. Please refer to these texts for any questions concerning citation formatting. The course readings listed below serve as examples for bibliographic entries. For footnotes, cite only the page or pages quoted and/or referenced. Below are examples of footnote formats:

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Jean M. Ita, "Frobenius in West African History," *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 4 (1972): 685.

BOOK:

Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa: Being an Account of the Travels of the German Inner African Exploration Expedition in the Years 1910-1912* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1913), 84.

BOOK CHAPTER OR SECTION:

Ezio Bassani, "The Art of Western Africa in the Age of Exploration," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson (Washington; New Haven: National Gallery of Art; Yale University Press, 1991), 65-66.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT, PART 1 – due February 26

Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art (entrance on 5th Avenue and 82nd Street). Select *one* of the following works on display in the African gallery:

Female mask (*Mmuo*), Igbo, Nigeria, Accession # 1978.412.626

Figurative vessel, Mangbetu, DRC, Accession # 1979.206.246

Mask (*Mukudj*), Punu, Gabon, Accession # 2000.177

Write a short consideration of this object. Title the paper with the object label as listed above.

First provide a well-organized formal analysis. Do not assume that the reader has seen the work. Your analysis should take into account the choices made by the artist—especially through proportioning, positioning, and expressive elements, but also in terms of materials and techniques. In what ways do these choices offer insights into qualities that the artist may have sought to convey?

Next, drawing on information provided in gallery labels and on the museum's website, connect the object's form to its cultural and historical context and function. You may wish to focus on several key features of the object to draw conclusions about its larger significance.

Finally, consider how the object's placement in the museum affects your perception of it. How might your interaction with the object, framed by its display in the gallery, differ from that of the people who made and/or used it? What kind of reception does the gallery setting orchestrate or induce?

Your paper should be no shorter than two and no longer than three full double-spaced pages, 12-point font, standard margins. For this first assignment you do not need footnotes, but you should indicate where you are drawing from information provided in gallery labels or on the museum's website.

Please note: images of these works are available on the museum's website. These images may be helpful to consult as you write, but they should not stand in place of visiting the museum. Certain details of these works—and more importantly, the placement of the works in the gallery—are not visible online.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT, PART 2 – due April 23

In this second part of the writing assignment you will apply ideas from course readings to the object you analyzed in the first assignment.

First, revise part one based on comments noted on your paper and discussed in class. You may need to streamline, restructure, and/or add to your first effort.

Next, build on your formal analysis by imagining and critically responding to the ways in which each of the following authors (/ team of authors) would have approached the object:

Leo Frobenius

Paul Guillaume/Thomas Munro/Alfred Barnes

Marcel Griaule

How would each have gone about acquiring the work? More importantly, what intellectual preoccupations, assumptions, or agendas would each have brought to studying it? And perhaps most important of all: what formal attributes of the work would have been most interesting to each (team of) author(s), and what arguments might they have made based on the object's form?

At the end of your essay, draw your own conclusions as to these authors' methods and motivations. What do they have in common? What makes them distinct? What are their texts designed to accomplish for them professionally and/or in relation to ideas circulating in their respective locations at the time of publication?

Your full paper (revised part one + part two) should be no shorter than five and no longer than seven full double-spaced pages, 12-point font, standard margins. Be sure to staple and number your pages. Include your name at the top of the first page, and title the paper as you see fit.

In completing this assignment you may rely on the three required readings by these authors, as well as on the required and recommended readings by Ita, Clarke, and Clifford. All sources should be properly cited in footnotes as outlined in the above in the syllabus. It is not necessary to include a bibliography. Information gleaned from lecture can be considered general knowledge and does not require citation.

Syllabus

[1.] Monday January 29. General Introduction

[recommended:] Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Why Africa? Why Art?" In *Africa: The Art of a Continent*, ed. Tom Phillips, 21-26. London; Munich and New York: Royal Academy of Arts; Prestel, 1995.

[recommended:] Perani, Judith, and Fred T. Smith. "Approaches to the Study of African Art." In *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power, and Life Cycle Rituals*, 5-6. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998.

[2.] Monday February 5. Early Civilizations, c 25,000 BC - 1400 AD

* Frobenius, Leo. *The Voice of Africa: Being an Account of the Travels of the German Inner African Exploration Expedition in the Years 1910-1912*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1913, 84-104.

[recommended:] Ita, Jean M. "Frobenius in West African History." *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 4 (1972): 673-88.

FEBRUARY 12 – NO CLASS, SCHOOL HOLIDAY, LINCOLN’S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 19 – NO CLASS, SCHOOL HOLIDAY, PRESIDENTS’ DAY

[3.] TUESDAY February 20. Early Cross-Cultural Contact, c 1050 - 1850

Bassani, Ezio. "The Art of Western Africa in the Age of Exploration." In *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, edited by Jay A. Levenson, 63-68. Washington; New Haven: National Gallery of Art; Yale University Press, 1991.

Hochschild, Adam. "Prologue: 'The Traders Are Kidnapping Our People.'" In *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, 6-18.

[4.] Monday February 26. Colonial-Era Cross-Cultural Contact, c 1850s - 1950s FIRST PART OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS

Strother, Z. S. *Inventing Masks: Agency and History in the Art of the Central Pende*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 229-63.

[recommended:] Vansina, Jan. "Death of a Tradition." In *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, 239-48. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

[5.] Monday March 5. The European “Discovery” of African Art, c 1880 - 1930

- * Apollinaire, Guillaume. "On Museums – 1909." In *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, edited by Jack D. Flam and Miriam Deutch, 36-37. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- * Guillaume, Paul, and Thomas Munro. *Primitive Negro Sculpture*. New York: Harcourt, 1926, 1-8, 30-59.
- [recommended:] Clarke, Christa. "Defining African Art: *Primitive Negro Sculpture* and the Aesthetic Philosophy of Albert Barnes." *African Arts* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 40-51, 92-93.

[6.] Monday March 12. Research Methods, Dogon & Bamana Art, c 1920s - 40s

- * Griaule, Marcel. *Conversations with Ogotemméli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965 [1948], 1-23.
- [recommended:] Clifford, James. "Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation." In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 55-91. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

[7.] Monday March 19. Style & Aesthetics (20th century) + MIDTERM REVIEW

- Fernie, Eric. "Style." In *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*. London: Phaidon Press, 1995, 361-364.
- Doris, David T. "Symptoms and Strangeness in Yorùbá Anti-aesthetics." *African Arts* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 24-31, 92.

[8.] Monday March 26. MIDTERM EXAM

MONDAY APRIL 2 – NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

[9.] Monday April 9. Artists & Authorship (20th century)

- Sieber, Roy. "Comments." In *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, edited by Daniel P. Biebuyck, 192-203. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969.
- [recommended:] Vogel, Susan Mullin. "Known Artists but Anonymous Works: Fieldwork and Art History." *African Arts* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 40-55, 93-94.

[10.] Monday April 16. New Expressions in the Colonial Era, c 1930s-50s

Grabski, Joanna. "Pierre Lods and the Poto-Poto School." In *An Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century*, edited by N'Goné Fall and Jean-Loup Pivin, 179-81. New York; Paris: Distributed Art Publishers; Revue Noire Éditions, 2002.

Mouralis, Bernard. "Présence Africaine: Geography of an 'Ideology'." In *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987*, edited by V. Y. Mudimbe, 3-13. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

**[11.] Monday April 23. Decolonization, Image-Making, & Modernity, c 1960s-80s
SECOND PART OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS**

Enwonwu, Ben. "Problems of the [A]frican artist today." *Présence Africaine* 8-9-10 (June-November 1956): 174-78.

Enwezor, Okwui. "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994. An Introduction." In *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. idem, 10-16. Munich; New York: Prestel, 2001.

[12.] Monday April 30. Masks, Power, the State, & Modernization, c 1950s-90s

de Jong, Ferdinand. "Secrecy and the State: The Kankurang Masquerade in Senegal." *Mande Studies* 2 (2000): 153-174.

[recommended:] Straker, Jay. "The Rise of Militant Theater." In *Youth, Nationalism, and the Guinean Revolution*, 80-104. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

[13.] Monday May 7. Modern & Contemporary Art in South Africa, c 1940s-90s

Martin, Marilyn. "Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994." In *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, 37-44. Munich; New York: Prestel, 2001.

[recommended:] van Robbroeck, Lize. "'That Magnificent Generation!': Tradition and Modernity in the Lives, Art and Politics of the First Modern Black Painters." In *Visual Century: South African Art in Context. Volume 1. 1907-1948*, edited by Jillian Carman, 114-33. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2011.

[14.] Monday May 14. Contemporary Art (c 1980s-present) + FINAL REVIEW

Lamoureux, Johanne. "From Form to Platform: The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics." *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (2005): 64-73.

[recommended:] Hölzl, Ingrid. "Self-Portrait/Self-Vision: The Work of Samuel Fosso." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 24 (2009): 40-47.

Monday May 21 – FINAL EXAM – 8-10:15 am