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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.ccny.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

BOOK:

BOOK CHAPTER OR SECTION:
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

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

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

FIRST PART OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS
[5.] Monday March 5. The European “Discovery” of African Art, c 1880 - 1930

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

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

[8.] Monday March 26. MIDTERM EXAM
MONDAY APRIL 2 – NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

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

SECOND PART OF WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS

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

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

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