



## **AFRICA - Art of a Continent**

Preliminary Syllabus

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Africa continues to challenge our eyes, our minds, and our hearts. African images and ideas from the distant past to the post-modern present will challenge your imagination as we examine 'how we look at' and 'how we see' African art. We will use films, selected reading, and lecture to approach (selectively) the rich and diverse artistic heritage of this vast continent. I will combine a thematic approach, punctuated by case studies of art in context. A thematic approach allows for an exploration of ideas that cut across many cultural zones. Case studies provide a more complex view of artworks, aesthetics, their communicative and symbolic functions within specific societies—today and in the past.

### Goals

- To enhance students' awareness of the complexity and diversity of African culture through time as manifest in visual forms
- To develop a strategy for looking at and understanding African art as exhibited in Western Museums
- To enhance observational skills, research capabilities, and clear expository writing

### Texts

- Spring, Chris. African Art in Detail (Overview, thematically organized, beautifully illustrated, short essays and long captions; easy to read)
- Visona et al., A History of Art in Africa, New York: Prentice Hall, 2007 edition. (Encyclopedic, organized according to geographic region.)
- Additional reading will be assigned in books on reserve in the library, or posted on the course wiki ([www.afrart.pbworks.com](http://www.afrart.pbworks.com))

## Requirements

- 1) Attendance. Your grade is linked to it. Please be on time. How missed classes may be made up must be negotiated with professor. 10%
- 2) Email - this is how I communicate with you.
- 3) Assigned Reading: Complete before the class associated with the assignment – There might be either a prepared response or a spot quiz on an object, concept, or term. 10%
- 4) Midterm and Final (cumulative) – Slide Identification and Discussion. Questions will be posted two weeks prior to the exam; exam will be in-class, but drawn from the posted questions. 15% each
- 5) Research paper plus powerpoint summary on an assigned work of art (see wiki for choices). The paper will be a recontextualization of an uncontextualized object. Topics will be given out on a first come-first served basis. Send me several topic choices by email, in your order of preference. Guidelines for research and structuring this paper/powerpoint will be found on the wiki.
- 6) Topic selection(5%), working annotated bibliography (10%), object description (10%), cultural background (5%), object interpretation—tied to cultural background (10%), power points (5%), final paper with revisions (5%. Due dates will be posted.
- 7) Extra credit may be earned by doing a reflection paper on a museum visit: Suggestions: Visit the Fitchburg Art Museum for long term exhibitions of African sculpture and special exhibit Wrapped in Pride opening in early April; the African Gallery in Clinton, or the MFA in Boston (up to 5% per effort)

### **Week 1a: Film: Living Memory – 6 Sketches of Mali – Managing Change**

Hoffman "Portable Paradise" in Nooter (Secrecy), pp. 223-233

Visona et al. pp.104-142

### **Week 1b: Overview of Syllabus and Introduction to Africa (issues of stereotype and ethnocentrism)**

Bohannon - Shakespeare in the Bush

[http://faculty.mwsu.edu/sociology/emily.labeff/shakes\\_in\\_bush.htm](http://faculty.mwsu.edu/sociology/emily.labeff/shakes_in_bush.htm)

[http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors\\_pick/1966\\_08-09\\_pick.html](http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors_pick/1966_08-09_pick.html)

Visona: Introduction pp. 14-19

Spring: What is African Art? Pp. 8-11, Africa Around the World, pp. 122-137.

### **Week 2: The African Artist – Traditional, Modern, and Post-Modern**

Roslyn Walker, "Anonymous has a Name: Olowe of Ise" in Abiodun, Drewal & Pemberton, Yoruba Artist, pp. 91-106 (posted)

Spring: Wood and Iron, Women and Men pp. 80-93

Spring: To Hell with African Art: Contemporary Art of Africa pp. 12-25

Chika Okeke – The Quest for Nigerian Art: Or a Story of Art from Zaria and Nsukka in Oguibe and

Enwezor

Visona et al., 125-129 (20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> Century Art in Senegal)

Visona et al. pp. 500-515 (African Artists Abroad)

Suggested: Visona et al. pp. 40-43 (Contemporary Art of North Africa); 72-75 (Contemporary Artists of Sudan and Ethiopia); 192-195 (Contemporary Arts in Abidjan...); 226-227 (Artists and Academies in Ghana); 395-399 (Art in Kinshasa and Brazzaville), Reading the Contemporary, pp. 144-165. (posted)

### **Week3: African Art and “the West” – changing attitudes over 500 years**

Afro-Portuguese Ivories – 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c.

Enlightenment Attitudes – 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c.

Ethnographic Orientation – 19<sup>th</sup>– 20<sup>th</sup> c.

The lens of modern art – 20<sup>th</sup> c.

Video: Fang: An Epic Journey (8 minutes – in class)

Visona et al., A History of Art in Africa, pp.168-172

For additional Illustrations: Fagg & Bassani - African Art and the Renaissance;

Susan Vogel, Introduction to Art/Artifact (posted) and discussion on

[http://www.randafricanart.com/Fang\\_an\\_epic\\_journey.html](http://www.randafricanart.com/Fang_an_epic_journey.html)

### **Week 4: Overview of African sculptural formal techniques and materials (canonical or traditional works), Meaning and Metaphor**

Spring: Brass, Bronze and Gold: Royal Art and Kingship in West Africa, pp. 64-79; Power of the Hand: Tools, Arms and Armour, pp. 94-109. Smashing Pots: Ceramic Classics of Africa, pp. 110-121.

Arnold Rubin: "Accumulation: Power and Display in African Sculpture" in Berlo & Wilson, pp. 4-21 (posted).

### **Week5: Case study of Yoruba art and aesthetics**

Essay on Yoruba Aesthetics (posted); Visona et al. pp. 238-256.

### **Week6: Windows on the Past – focus on Nok, Djenne, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, Benin Kingdom**

Visona et al. pp. 104-108, 228-238, 274-287

### **Week 7: Midterm**

Nubia or “Black Egypt” -- Gateway to the Continent/ Great Zimbabwe and the Swahili Coast

Visona et al. pp. 44-61.

Visona et al. pp. 471-476; 430-438.

### **Week8a. Masks as symbolic structures - Mende and Yaka Case Studies**

Visona et al., pp. 179-183 (Women’s & Men’s Societies); 371-375 (Yaka & Suku)

### **Week8b. Art , Politics, Memory – Ashanti and Lega**

Visona et al., pp. 194-227 (Ashanti and related groups), 423-426 (Lega).

### **Week 9: African 2-D design – Textiles, Walls, Bodies**

Spring: Cloth, History and Culture, pp. 40-63.

Visona et al.: Body Arts, pp. 97-102 (Fulani); 457-461 (Nuba/Masai et al.) and Architecture: pp. 162-164 (Nankani), 486-487 (Nguni)

Suggested for additional information: John Picton, "Seeing and Wearing: Textiles in West Africa" in L.Gumpert (ed.) The Poetics of Cloth. NY: NYU, Grey Art Gallery. (posted) and Monni Adams, "Kuba Embroidered Cloth" in Berlo & Wilson, pp. 133-152 (posted)

For further reference, see: Visona, et al., pp.207-209 (Akan); 387-389 (Kuba) See also illustrations (Chapter & illustration #) 1-20, 3-23, 3-29, 3-34, 3-35; 4-21, 4-26, 4-26; 7-11, 7-12, 7-13, 7-40; 8-18, 8-49, 8-63, 8-64; 9-57; 11-3, 11-12, 11-52, 11-59, 11-60, 11-61; 12-36; 13-40, 14-33; 14-34; 15-15.

### **Week 10: Masquerades in social context**

Spring: The Art of Masquerade, pp. 26-39

Visona et al. (p.324), (Masquerades)

Masks and social organization

Visona et al. pp. 115 (Ntomo and Tyi Wara); 119 (Komo & Kono); 120 (Shrines and Altars); 121 (Kore, Secular Masquerades, puppetry); 130-144 (Western Sudan & Dogon), 143 (The Senufo); 144 (Poro); 148 (Masks and Masquerades); 183 (Masks & Sacred Authority: the Dan and their neighbors)

Harnessing the Spirits of the Wild

Visona et al. pp. 156-60 (Bwa Masquerades); 310-313 (Ijaw Festivals & Masks).

Masks and the Ancestors

Visona et al., pp. 252-256 (Yoruba Msq); 140-143 (Dogon Msq)

### **Week 11: Portraiture in traditional African art and photography**

### **Week 12: Student Presentations**

### **Week 13: Student Presentations**

### **Week 14 Final**