



Gee's Bend Quilt Mississippi (20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	West African Strip Cloth (20 <sup>th</sup> c.),	Willie Cole (2002) Bicycle ChiWara	Bamana (Mali-(20 <sup>th</sup> c.) Chiwara Headdress	King Tut (c.1345 BC)	Aaron Douglas (1944) More Stately Mansions
---	--	---------------------------------------	---	-------------------------	---

**Topics: DISCOVER AFRICAN ART IN AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS (subject to change)**

Dr. Jean M. Borgatti

Email: [jborgatti@gmail.com](mailto:jborgatti@gmail.com) Website: [www.clarku.edu/~jborgatt](http://www.clarku.edu/~jborgatt)

The vast continent of Africa continues to challenge our eyes, our minds, and our hearts. This semester we will take advantage of collections at the Fitchburg Art Museum and a special exhibit on Kente, the cloth of kings from Ghana, as well as films, selected reading, lecture, and discussion to explore the rich and diverse artistic heritage of Africa. At the same time, we will investigate how Africa has been a part of African American art at different times during the last two hundred years, from the quilts of Gees Bend in Mississippi to the work of distinguished mainstream artists like Edward Bannister, a "Hudson River School" landscape painter as well as the 'Blackstream' artists of the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Post-Modern Movement. We will use a case study approach, focusing on art and artists in context.

**Course Goals:**

- To enhance students' awareness of the complexity and diversity of African culture through time and its geographical reach in the Americas as manifest in visual forms
- To enhance observational skills, research capabilities, and clear expository writing
- To encourage students to develop critical thinking about works of art and the use of art as a vehicle to communicate ideas about history and culture

**Course Content:** Course consists of a series of slide lectures, films, and discussion with weekly blog reviews (2 with assigned topics, one focusing on a specific artwork), 4 slide checks based on posted works, and a themed visual essay on a topic (e.g. recycled materials, power figures, femininity, masculinity, with text, presented as a powerpoint or poster.

**Course Outcomes:**

- 1) A basic visual vocabulary associated with African and African-American arts assessed through slide identification and brief discussion of objects in a test format
- 2) Greater understanding and empathy for art's relation to history and culture
- 3) Improved critical thinking and presentation skills in relation to art
- 4) Poster projects or powerpoint presentations incorporating art work from different time periods and places.



Power Figure Kongo (late 19 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Wilfredo Lam: Warrior Cuba (1947)	Power Figure Haiti (20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Power figure Fon (Benin - 20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Bird Staff Brazil (20 <sup>th</sup> c.)	Bird Staff ( Yoruba (Nigeria-20 <sup>th</sup> c.)
--	--------------------------------------	---	---	--	--

## TEXTBOOKS

Sharon Patton: African American Art

Robert F. Thompson: Flash of the Spirit

### **Suggested reference books (On Reserve)**

Nell Painter, Creating Black Americans. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Richard Powell: Black Art - A Cultural History. Thames & Hundson, 1997 & 2002.

Monica Visona and others: A History of Art in Africa

Michael Harris: Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation (UNC Press, 2003)

Lisa Farrington: Creating Their Own Image: The History of African American Women Artists (Oxford University Press, 2004)

## EXPECTATIONS

Class attendance and participation (Valid proof of excuse necessary). Class will start promptly. (10%)

Reading should be done prior to the class

Class Assignments

(1) reaction paper/blog for Bamboozled (stereotypes) (5%)

(2) reaction paper/blog to a work by an African or Diaspora artist in a local museum—in 2 parts (10%)

(3) weekly blog commentary on objects/issues referenced in class, response to reading, films (20%) Comments should be posted by the Monday following Thursday evening class.

(4) 4 slide checks based on posted objects (3@5% each; 1@10%) 25%

(5) Themed Visual essay -- powerpoint or poster on topic 35% (broken down by section – topic (5%), preliminary bibliography (5%) and selection of images (5%) to discuss (see description at the end of the syllabus), updated bibliography (5%), first draft in powerpoint with text embedded in the notes field (5%), 2<sup>nd</sup> draft if necessary, final with final (10%) powerpoint/poster and presentation —pithy captions on the slides and text embedded in the notes fields. If a poster presentation, a short paper should accompany the poster.

**WIKI: Class information, Images, some reading assignments, guidelines, will be posted on the wiki. Blog program to be used will be selected by professor. We will all use the same blog software/location.**

## RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Check Reserve List for this course.

Check on-line catalogue for works on specific artists.

Check other libraries on-line to get references which you can then try and locate.

Amazon.com will give you good references that you can then find in the library.

However, you are more likely to find articles than books on many artists. To locate articles in periodicals -- check library electronic resources as well as the internet. Google - but don't rely only on public on-line sources, though they are particularly useful for contemporary artists who have their own websites.

## WEEK1 Syllabus Overview

**Film - Bamboozled** Watch with the idea you will be writing a reflection paper that will focus on “stereotypes” - race, gender, identity. (Reading: Harris 13-38 – the visual construction of race) – will post on the wiki

## WEEK2/3: AFRICAN ORIGINS/AFRICAN ARTISTS

Yoruba Culture (Reading: Flash, pp. 3-97; Suggested: A History of Art in Africa 239-259)

Ejagham Culture (Reading: Flash, pp. 227-266; Suggested: A History of Art in Africa 331-337)

Fon Culture (Reading: Flash, pp. 161-192; Suggested: A History of Art in Africa 259-266)

Kongo (Reading: Flash , pp.101-160; Suggested: A History of Art in Africa 366-377)

Reaction to work of art blog and topic selection

## WEEKS4-5-6 African origins continued

### **Creole Traditions: African Cultures in the Americas**

#### **North America/Cuba/Haiti/Brazil/Surinam**

FILM: Quilts of Gees Bend (28 minute Video)

Surinam /Maroon Arts (Art & Aesthetics in Sally Price and Richard Price, Maroon Arts, pp 37-52).

Haiti /Vodoun (Reading: Flash, pp. 161-192)

Cuba/Santeria & Abakua (Reading: Flash, pp.3-97; 227-266)

Brazil/Candomble (Reading: Flash, pp.3-97)

USA/Plantation Culture and Artisanry (Reading: Flash:101-160;Patton:19-70)

First Slide Check – African Art - Week4: ‘Take home’ posted on the wiki to give you experience with the testing mode.

**Week7: Visual Construction of Race in America/Neutralizing Negative Images**

(Reading: Harris 13-38) Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Minstrels, Little Black Sambo

2<sup>nd</sup> Slide Check: Creole Art Forms

Discussion of Bamboozled (All About Men?)

**FILM: TBA**

**WEEK8: Swimming with the Mainstream**

Harlem Renaissance: Black Agenda 1 - WEB DuBois & the New Negro (Reading:Patton, pp. 105-149)

**FILM: Against the odds: the artists of the Harlem Renaissance**

**WEEK9: Civil Rights and Feminist Agendas**

**Images of Protest/ Images of Black Women**

(Reading: Patton, pp. 71-105; 147-181; 220-233.)

**WEEKS 10/11:**

**African Art/African American Artists & Black Narrative**

Reading: Patton, pp. 183-219

**Case study: Willie Cole**

3<sup>rd</sup> Slide Check: African-American Art (1800-1950)

**WEEK12: Black Agenda 3 - PostModern Pluralism**

(Reading: Patton, pp. 232-273)

**Fred Wilson on line.**

**Discussion Recontextualized Art Works focused on in ReflectionPaper2—completed paper due 4 pages max.**

**WEEK13: 4<sup>th</sup> Slide Check**

**African American Artists Speak Film Festival (as time allows)**

**WEEK 14: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**SLIDE CHECK** will be based on posted images or ones like those posted. Identification will include Artist's name, a reference to the title (words don't have to be exact), approximate date, and the point of the work (i.e. allusion to slavery and plantation culture, the civil rights movement, the feminist agenda, etc.) (5% each; final cumulative check 10%)

**FINAL PROJECT: VISUAL ESSAY (POWERPOINT)** will be based on a theme chosen by the student in consultation with the professor (e.g. music, portraits, political resistance, images of women, hair, hats and headdresses, Africa in African-American art, etc.) and must include 10-12 works drawn from the work of multiple artists and different African and Diaspora (creole) cultures and at least three different time frames or art movements. A model will be provided.

**Critical Dates:**

Week 2: Bamboozled Reflection Paper/Blog commentary due

Week 3: Art object topics selected from works on wiki or from museum websites

Week 4: Reflection Paper on work in museum (part1) due – description and reaction; no research  
Take Home Slide Check

Week 5: Themed Essay Topic identified

Week 6: Preliminary Bibliography/image ideas

Week 7: Slide Check 2

Week 8:

Week 9: 1<sup>st</sup> Draft of presentation

Week 10: Slide Check 3

Week 11: Possible 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of presentation

Week 12 Discussion Recontextualized Art Works focused on in ReflectionPaper2 [completed  
paper due-4 pages max]

Week 13: 4<sup>th</sup> Slide Check

Week 14: Visual Essays presented to class