

A/Hi 297a: Arts of Africa from Prehistory to Present

Fall 2015

MW 1-2:20pm in MH 138

Dr. Monique Kerman

Fine Arts rm 115, ext. 6634

Office hours: Tues/Thurs 10-11:30am

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Course description: This course is an introduction to certain key issues and themes in African art, spanning several centuries up to the present day, including the entire continent and its diaspora. Central to this course is the definition of what constitutes “African art” and debates concerning “authenticity.” We will look at some of the sculpture and masquerade traditions for which West Africa in particular are so well-known, but we will also discuss early (c.13th-16th century) brasscasting technologies, the status of cloth as a ubiquitous and potent cultural signifier, the practice of photography on the continent from the 1840s, and the international, commercial success of many contemporary artists of African descent. Through our study of these various local and global traditions, we will explore how the problems of human existence (such as gender roles or changing cultural landscapes) are communicated and problematized in ever-changing and constantly evolving African artistic expressions.

GUR Competencies addressed in this course:

- Analyze and communicate ideas effectively in oral/written/visual forms.
- Understand and evaluate assumptions, values, and beliefs in the context of diverse local, national, and global communities.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- You will become familiar with a multitude of African visual cultures from prehistory to the present day.
- You will develop an appreciation for and a deeper understanding of complex African experiences.
- You will cultivate a non-Western perspective.
- You will build visual analytical skills in art history.
- You will practice independent, critical thinking.

Grading: There will be two mid-term exams and one final exam based on the assigned readings, lectures and supplementary course materials such as videos and recommended websites. Each mid-term exam is 50 multiple-choice questions and the final is 80 questions, for a total of 180 points. The exams will be machine scored; bring #2 pencils and your WWU student ID on exam days. You will also have the opportunity to complete two extra-credit reading response papers, worth a total of 18 extra points. Final course grades will be assessed according to the following departmental scale: **A** =169-180 pts, **A-** =162-168 pts, **B+** =158-161 pts, **B** =151-157 pts, **B-** =144-150 pts, **C+** =140-143 pts, **C** =133-139 pts, **C-** =126-132 pts, **D** =108-125 pts, **F** =107 and below.

Policies: Students are expected to arrive for class on time, having completed the required reading. Each student is responsible for class lecture and discussion material as it pertains to exams and assignments. I will *not* post notes either in PowerPoint or on Canvas.

In the event of my own unavoidable absence, please check Canvas for an announcement of either an assignment or discussion pertaining to the day's reading.

Kindly refrain from cell phone use during class; students seen doing so will be asked to leave. Napping in class is likewise frowned upon. Please also avoid leaving before the end of class unless you are ill or it is an emergency. If you know you need to leave early, please inform me before the start of class.

Late papers will be penalized one letter grade for each class date past due, regardless of excuse. There will be NO make-up exams; students with a medical or family emergency, or conflict due to University-sponsored sports events, can see me to arrange a make-up assignment. For non-medical leaves of absence, the Dean of Students office (Viking Union rm 547; ext. 3775) can provide the necessary paperwork.

In the event of a grade discrepancy between the professor's records and the student, it is the student's responsibility to produce all returned quizzes, exams, and papers for verification. For concerns about grades, please see me during office hours or by appointment. *I will not respond to these inquiries via email.*

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense; it will be dealt with in accordance with the policies outlined in Appendix D (Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedure) of the WWU Bulletin.

Required text:

Willett, Frank. *African Art*. 3rd ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002. **(On reserve in Wilson Library)**

Articles available via electronic reserve on Canvas

Class schedule and required reading (due on the date listed):

Week 1: Representing Africa

Thursday, September 24

Introduction

Screening of *In and Out of Africa* (Dir. Christopher Steiner, 1992).

Week 2: Representing Africa

Tuesday, September 29

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 5: "Looking at African Sculpture." In *African Art*, pp. 130-149.

Thursday, October 1

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 2: "The Development of the Study of African Art." In *African Art*, pp. 26-41.

Week 3: African Oral Tradition

Tuesday, October 6

Reading: Lewis-Williams, J.D. "The Interpretive Approach: San Beliefs," in *Discovering Southern African Rock Art* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1990), pp. 44-54.

Thursday, October 8

Reading: Benin oral tradition

Week 4: Myths and Heroes

Tuesday, October 13

Exam 1 Bring no. 2 pencils and student ID

Thursday, October 15

Screening of *Keita! Heritage of the Griot* (Dir. Dani Kouyaté, 1994)

Week 5: Heroes, continued

Tuesday, October 20

Extra Credit Reading Response I due (John Mack, "Fetish?" available on Canvas)

Keita! continued

Thursday, October 22

Reading: McNaughton, Patrick. "Nyamakala and the Smiths' Ambiguous Status." In *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power, and Art in West Africa*, pp. 7-21.

Week 6: African Aesthetics

Tuesday, October 27

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 6: "Understanding African Sculpture" excerpt. In *African Art*, pp. 150-170.

Thursday, October 29

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 6: "Understanding African Sculpture" excerpt. In *African Art*, pp. 171-219.

Screening of *Alagba* (Dir. Jane Thorburn, 1995)

Week 7: Into the Diaspora

Tuesday, November 3

Exam 2 Bring no. 2 pencils and student ID

Thursday, November 5

Reading: Nunley, John. "Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference." In *African Arts* vol. 22 no. 3 (May 1989), pp. 68-75, 88. Available on Canvas.

Week 8: Africa's Modernities

Tuesday, November 10

Reading: Okeke, Chika. "Modern African Art." In *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*. Munich, London, and New York: Prestel, 2001), pp. 29-36. Available on Canvas.

Thursday, November 12

Reading: Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern." In *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, pp. 137-157.

Week 9: Into the Diaspora

Tuesday, November 17

Reading: Oguibe, Olu. "Heart of Darkness." In *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, pp. 320-327.

Thursday, November 19

Extra Credit Reading Response II due (John Picton, "Undressing Ethnicity," available on Canvas)

Screening of *Fold, Crumple, Crush: The Art of El Anatsui* (Dir. Susan Vogel, 2011)

Week 10: Reckoning with Race

Tuesday, November 24

Reading: DeSouza, Allan. "Name Calling." In *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, pp. 18-21.

Thursday, November, 26

Thanksgiving Holiday—no class

Week 11: Conclusion

Tuesday, December 1

Reading: Harvey, Matthea and Kara Walker, "Kara Walker." In *BOMB*, no. 100 (Summer 2007), pp. 74-82. Available on Canvas.

Wednesday, June 3

Exam Review & Class Evaluations

Final Exam: Monday December 7, 8-10am