

# A/Hi 297: Arts of Africa

Spring 2015

MW 1-2:20pm in MH 138

Dr. Monique Kerman

Fine Arts rm 234, ext. 6634

Office hours: MTW 11am-12pm

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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.13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> 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.

## Course Objectives:

- To introduce African visual culture from prehistory to the present day.
- To engender an appreciation for and a deeper understanding of complex African experiences.
- To compare and contrast images of Africa created and disseminated by Euro-Americans with those by Africans themselves.
- To assess the impact of colonialism on African history and culture, as well as modern conceptualizations of race and ethnicity.
- To build students’ visual analytical skills and writing proficiency in art history.
- To explore theories of material culture based on economic need, political authority, and changing local circumstances, with emphasis on the significance of context.
- To develop and practice independent, critical thinking skills through writing assignments and in-class discussions.

**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 exam is 50 multiple-choice questions and worth one third of your final grade. The exams will be machine scored. Bring #2 pencils and your WWU student ID to class. You will also have the opportunity to complete two extra-credit reading response papers, worth a total of 10%. Final course grades will be assessed according to the following departmental scale: A=94-100%, A- =90-93%, B+=88-89%, B=84-87%, B-=80-83%, C+=78-79%, C=74-77%, C-=70-73%, D=60-69%, F=59% 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 *documented* medical or family emergency or conflict due to University-sponsored sports events can see me for a make-up assignment. For medical leaves of absence, contact the Student Health Center (2001 Bill McDonald Parkway; ext. 3400); 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*. 3<sup>rd</sup> 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: What is African art?**

Wednesday, April 1

Introduction

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

**Week 2: Representing Africa**

Monday, April 6

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 1: "Introducing Africa." In *African Art*, pp. 8-25.

Wednesday, April 8

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

**Week 3: Prehistoric Africa**

Monday, April 13

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 3: "Towards a History of African Art." In *African Art*, pp. 42-109.

Wednesday, April 15

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 4: "African Architecture." In *African Art*, pp. 110-129.

**Week 4: Questions of Interpretation**

Monday, April 20

**Exam 1** Bring no. 2 pencils and student ID

Wednesday, April 22

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

**Week 5: Masquerade**

Monday, April 27

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

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

Wednesday, April 29

**Extra Credit Reading Response I due** (John Mack, "Fetish")

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

**Week 6: Moving Into the Diaspora**

Monday, May 4

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

Wednesday, May 6

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.

**Week 7: Africa's Modernities**

Monday, May 11

**Exam 2** Bring no. 2 pencils and student ID

Wednesday, May 13

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.

**Week 8: Into the Diaspora**

Monday, May 18

Reading: Willett, Frank. Chapter 7: "Contemporary African Art." In *African Art*, pp. 220-245.

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

Wednesday, May 20

Reading: Kasfir, Sidney. Chapter 5, "The African Artist: Shifting Identities in the Postcolonial World." In *Contemporary African Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1999, pp. 124-165.

**Week 9: Reckoning with Race**

Monday, May 25

**Memorial Day Holiday—no class**

Wednesday, May 27

**Extra Credit Reading Response II due** (John Picton, "In Vogue, or The Flavor of the Month: The New Way to Wear Black")

Reading: Picton, John. "Undressing Ethnicity." In *African Arts* vol. 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 66-73.

**Week 10: Conclusion**

Monday, June 1

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

Wednesday, June 3

Exam Review & Class Evaluations