

# ART427-01: Art of the African Diaspora

Spring 2010; TR 11 - 12:15, 208 PO

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HRS: M W 11-3; other times by appt

*This class may be used to fill an art history/museum studies elective requirement.*

## Course description:

Although our focus in this class will be the artists and art of artists who have emigrated from Africa to other countries, the implicit question we will be asking is whether the phrase “African diaspora” tells us something about the art, as opposed to something about the artist. We will need to devote some time to the question of what is meant by African art before we can answer the question of the relationship between the artworks of the contemporary artists we will look at and something that might be called “traditional” African art. Related to this and just as relevant is the question of what to call or how to describe the work of contemporary artists who are living in Africa. They are not diasporan if they’ve remained in their homeland, but there may be few differences between their art and the art of diasporan contemporaries. Should we redefine the term “diaspora” or just get rid of it completely?

## Course format:

*lecture-seminar*: This is a new class and although the topic sounds specialized, it is actually quite broad. My role in this class will be that of a facilitator: I may have a better idea about how to answer some of the questions we will raise and I can help you find the answers, but I don’t have all the answers myself.

## Readings:

*required texts*:

Richard J. Powell. *Black Art: A Cultural Legacy*. (Thames and Hudson, 2003).

Celeste-Marie Bernier. *African American Visual Arts*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

*Recommended*:

Laurie Ann Farrell and Valentijn Byvanck. *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*. (Museum of African Art, 2003).

Susan Vogel. *Africa Explores: 20<sup>th</sup> Century African Art*. (Museum of African Art, 1991). [this will be on reserve in McConnell library – see course mediography).

## Requirements

- You must attend every class. Each class missed will lower your grade by half a letter grade; seven classes result in an F.
- Do all readings, participate in discussions, and take two exams.
- Prepare topic papers for class discussion. These will not be graded but will enable you to participate meaningfully.
- Develop, report on, and implement term project.

# Topics

*[approximately one topic each week, with time at the end of the semester for individual class presentations]*

## *I. Introduction to course and to the context of African art*

- What is traditional art? What is extinct art? Are there new forms of traditional art?
- Relevant themes: icons, art and religions, divination rituals, healing arts
- case studies: bocie arts, Ethiopian healing scrolls

## *II. Traditional art*

- defining tradition
- examples of continuity and discontinuity
- defining the artist in traditional art

*topic paper: what is meant by authenticity and tradition and why are these issues in a discussion of African art forms*

## *III. New Traditions or new functional arts?*

- Syncretic art forms
- funerary arts and altars
- case studies: mbari shrines; Haitian vodou

*topic paper: the nature and role of the artist in funerary and healing rituals*

## *IV. The arts of contemporary Africa*

- Urban and international art forms
- private art versus communal art
- the influence of new media
- the influence of “low art” imagery
- anti-traditional art versus art with an African identity

EXAM ON THE ARTS OF AFRICA: FEB. 18

## *V. The Diaspora in America*

- what is the diaspora and what is black culture?
- Representations of black culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- slavery, abolition and representations of black culture from “outside’ and “inside”
- case studies: representations of slavery

## *VI. The Harlem Renaissance and the “New Negro”*

- Aaron Douglas, James van der Zee, Doris Ullman, Josephine Baker, Archibald Motley
- from the New Negro to the New Deal: Augusta Savage, Lois Maillou-Jones

*topic paper: some aspect of the Harlem Renaissance which interests you*

## *VII. Major transformations in the world*

- the impact of WWII
- the impact of the civil rights movement

- changes in representations by insiders and outsiders
  - Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold
- topic paper: blues, jazz and the visual arts*

### *IX. Culture as Currency? An international diaspora?*

- Postmodernism, conceptualism and the body: black culture in the 80s and 90s
- case studies: Pindell, Weems, Simpson, Puryear, Basquiat, “Body Politics: Alison Saar and the Female Image”

movie: Julie Dash: *Daughters of the Dust*

*topic paper: hip-hop and the visual arts*

### *X. The African Diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

*IN-CLASS Presentations: LAST THREE WEEKS OF APRIL*

*Written versions of final project due on Final Exam day, before 5 pm*

### **Important Dates:**

Feb. 11: I will be in Chicago; there will be a special workshop on paraphrasing

Feb 12: last day to submit entries to the Juried Student Show

Feb. 18: mid-semester exam

Mar 7 - Mar 14: spring break

Mar 19: last day to drop and receive a W

May 3: 8 am: Final Exam

May 3: 5 pm: hand in completed, revised and perfected final projects

### **Term Project**

Choose a diasporan artist of your choice. It may be someone included in the class outline or textbooks or someone else.

1: Develop an image gallery of the works of this artist. The image gallery should be uploaded into Artstor. You should be able to provide a general discussion of the gallery along with specific discussion of some of the images.

2: Analyze this artist’s body of work in terms of diasporan, global, and contemporary issues

3: Be prepared to present weekly progress reports and/or questions raised by your research in class discussion.

4: Prepare a formal presentation of your work to the class. Use feedback from the presentation to revise and enhance your final project.

### **Grading:**

100 points for class participation

100 points for midterm exam

150 points for final exam

150 points for term project

500 points total: A = 440, B = 390, C = 340, D = 310

## Mediography on African Art [books in bold are on reserve in the library]

- Blier, Suzanne Preston. *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Blier, Suzanne Preston. *The Royal Arts of Africa*. NY: Abrams, 1998.
- Boone, Sylvia Ardyn. *Radiance from the Waters. Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Mende Art*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986.
- Cole, Herbert M. *Mbari: Art and Life among the Owerri Igbo*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982.
- Cosentino, Donald J., ed. *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995.
- Fall, N'Goné and Jean Loup Pivin. *An Anthology of African Art: the Twentieth Century*. NY: D.A.P., 2002.
- Farrington, Lisa E. *Creating Their Own Image: the History of African-American Women Artists*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hackett, Rosalind I. J. *Art and Religion in Africa*. London: Cassell, 1996.
- Kerchache, Jacques, Jean-Louis Paudrat, and Lucien Stephan. *Art of Africa*. Trans. Marjolijn de Jager. NY: Abrams, 1993.
- Mercier, Jacques. *Art That Heals. The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia*. NY: Museum for African Art and Prestel Press, 1997
- Nooter, Mary H. *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals*. NY: Museum for African Art, 1993.
- Olmos, Margarite Fernandez and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997.
- Prussin, Labelle. *African Nomadic Architecture. Space, Place, and Gender*. Washington and London: Smithsonian and National Mus. of African Art, 1995.
- Ravenhill, Philip L. *Dreams and Reverie*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. *The Face of the Gods. Art and Altars of Africa and African Americans*. NY: Museum for African Art and Prestel Press, 1984.
- Visonà, Monica Blackmun. *A History of Art in Africa*. NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001. [includes one chapter on the diaspora]
- Vogel, Susan. *Africa Explores*. NY: Museum of African Art, 1991. [focuses on 20<sup>th</sup> century African arts]
- Wyk, Gary N. van. *African Painted Houses: Basotho Dwellings of Southern Africa*. NY: Abrams, 1998.

web sites: *Art and Life in Africa Project* (extensive project, includes history and art):

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/>

Museum for African Art:

<http://www.africanart.org/index.php>

Metropolitan Museum of Art (has a superb permanent collection of African art; highlights can be examined online): <http://metmuseum.org>

**class web site:**

<http://www.radford.edu/~rbarris/>

find the link for ART427 to reach the course home page.

**Artstor:**

<http://www.artstor.org/index.shtml>

after you register for Artstor (if you're a new user), sign up for the folder called: ART427:  
African and Diasporan Art; the password is: *art427diaspora*