

-

University of Kansas
The Kress Foundation of the History of Art

Art of Central Africa
Course HA305 (28818); HA578 (28881, 28882)
AAAS320 (28723); AAAS578 (28724)

MW 11:00am -12:15pm
Spencer Museum of Art, Room 211

-

This course will investigate the indigenous artistic practices of the peoples of Central Africa. It deals with a large corpus of art objects (anything from beautifully finished wooden carvings to intentionally assembled heaps of unrecognizable stuff; from ancient remains to material collected during the colonial period and traditions that continue today). The course also deals with performance art, e.g., ritual procedures, festival arts, and masquerades. Contemporary studio practices and popular art, although these will be mentioned here and there, are not dealt with at length as there is a separate course for this.

There are multiple learning goals: The students will develop a thorough understanding of the need to contextualize the work of an “Other,” learn new methodologies, and acquire the basic knowledge of the art of the region. The artworks will be placed into the context of current debates about globalization. Of equal importance to acquisition of a knowledge base is the development of new skills. These include reading sophisticated texts, researching, writing and editing, technical know-how such as scanning images, assembling a PowerPoint presentation, web authoring, subduing one’s ego during team work, public speaking, and handling museum objects. This course is media supported (we use blackboard). Because there is a lot of material to be covered, most class periods will involve lectures. Some session, however, will solely focus on in-class projects and on discussion. The course project results in an online website, a virtual tour of a museum collection.

Logistics:

Instructor:

Dr. G. Salami

Assistant Professor

Departments of Art History and African & African American Studies

Office: 209D Spencer Museum of Art

Office hours: Tuesday, 12 to 1pm, Wednesday, 1-2 pm, or by appointment

Phone: 864-1492

I welcome student visits in my office. Please feel free to stop by during office hours, come in if my door is open (it usually is) or make an appointment. I am eager to assist you. Because I want to get to know my students however, I do not respond to emails. I will make time for you and your important questions, but only if you also make the time for me. Questions about class logistics can usually be answered by consulting blackboard. Other questions (e.g. about missed classes, lost notes) are more appropriately directed at your peers.

Required Text:

- 1) Visona. *A History of Art in Africa*.
- 2) Robert Farris Thompson: *Flash of the Spirit*
- 3) Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*
- 4) Four articles which will be made available electronically:

Sylvester Ogbegie, "The Historical Life of Objects, African Art History and the Problem of Discursive Obsolescence." *African Arts* (Winter 2005), 62-69,94. [e-journal]

Devisch, Rene. "Treating the affect by remodeling the body in a Yaka healing cult," in *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia*, eds. Micheal Lambek and Andrew Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. [e-reserve]

Ellen Corin, "Refiguring the person: the dynamics of affects and symbols in an African spirit possession cult," in *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia*, eds. Micheal Lambek and Andrew Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. [e-reserve]

Gitti Salami, excerpt from "Ordinarily Extraordinary: Yakurr Priest-Chiefs Ritual Performances and the Leboku Festival." [e-reserve]. Illustrations accompanying the text will be posted as a Power Point presentation on blackboard.

Recommended Text:

You will receive a separate list with recommended readings. These readings are drawn from African Arts journal, which is available in the Art Library (in the Spencer Museum, 1st floor) and also as an E-Journal through the Library's Information Gateway.

You are not expected to read all of these articles, but should try to read about one third of them. They are organized by ethnic group, as are the lectures.

The most important books in the art library are placed on reserve. Go to the check-out counter of the Art Library (again in the Spencer Museum, 1st floor) and request these materials. You will receive a separate list of the titles with call numbers. These books are available to you for two hours at a time. Copy machines and scanners are available. You are not expected to read all of the books--that would be impossible. You should, however, check each book out at some point and at least browse through it, read the image captions, and sections catch your interest.

Requirements

Class Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory. I will pass out a sign in sheet at the beginning of every class. You will earn up to 200 points in this course. For each missed class period I deduct two points up to ten points; (excused absences have to be verified by a doctor's note). If you miss five or more classes, your grade will automatically drop one full grade. If you miss seven or more classes, you will automatically drop two full grades; if you miss more than nine classes you fail the course, regardless of the quality of your work. **You are responsible for signing in.** If you do not sign in, the grader will mark you absent. If you leave class early after you signed in, the grader will mark you absent.

Although this is primarily a lecture course, participation in class discussion is vital. There is no such thing as a stupid question. Ask away. Questions make for a lively classroom experience. You may also initiate a discussion and feel free to respond to other students' questions or comments. Finish reading assignments prior to class; lectures are organized based on the assumption that you complied with this requirement.

Two Short Response Papers:

Students will write two short response papers (double-spaced, 12 point font, typed)

- 1) a response paper to Chinua Achebe's novel (1-2 pages max)
- 2) an abstract (very concise summary) of Mary Nooter Roberts lecture (1 page max)

Class project: Virtual Tour of the African Collection of the ARCC

In lieu of individually assigned research papers, the class as a whole will create thirteen web pages for and in cooperation with the Anthropological Research and Cultural Collections (ARCC) in Spooner Hall. The instructor and ARCC staff have pre-selected thirteen museum objects from Central Africa. Students will work in teams of five to create a webpage for one of these objects. The resulting webpages will be added to a live, KU student-created website that is already on the ARCC server. It is called "Virtual Tour of the African Collection." Students will have an opportunity to work hands on with the selected object, write a condition report and a detailed description of the object, produce professional quality photographs and assemble a three-dimensional surround image, research the cultural context in which the object functioned originally, produce a geographic map, acquire sound samples, video clips, and field photographs from an expert in the field, and design a webpage.

There will be thirteen teams of five (or so) students each. Three students from each team will attend a *Dreamweaver* session and learn to construct a website. The other two students from each team will handle the condition report, and the photography. One person in the class with computer expertise will coordinate all the websites and upload them to the server. This person

will serve as a technical assistant to all teams throughout the semester; one student will create the maps for all teams; and two students will learn the software to create the 3-d surround images for all the teams.

Because this entails a live website, students will be held to the highest standards. Detailed instructions with due dates of various components will be provided in a separate handout.

Art History Graduate Students Only:

Graduate students in art history may opt to write a fifteen page research paper on an approved topic, preferably a topic related to one of the websites or a theme that serves a role in preparation for the student's masters or doctoral thesis. It is not required. Grad students can work on the website. If the research paper option is taken, grad students will also write the two response papers and take the exams.

Examinations and Evaluation:

Map Quiz 5% (10 points)

10 questions about the map of Central Africa
(know the location of the equator, name of the ocean,
coasts, islands, rivers, topography, countries, cities,
ethnic groups), 1 point for each correct answer

Two Short Response Papers 10% (20 points)
Quality of the writing and effort 50% (5%, 10 points)
Quality of the content 50% per paper)

Short Pre-Midterm Test 5% (10 points)
2 quick slide identifications (2 points)
1 long slide identification (3 points)
1 very brief essay question (5 points)

*This test allows you to familiarize yourself with my testing method before too much is at stake.
We will take no more than 20 minutes for it; bring a blue book*

Five unannounced pop quizzes about the assigned readings 5% (10 points)
Each will consist of two questions, 1 point each

Midterm Exam 15% (30 points)
10 quick slide identifications (10 points)
2 longer slide identifications (10 points)
1 essay question (10 points)

You will have the entire class period; bring a blue book

Final Exam 20% (40 points)

10 quick slide identifications (10 points)

2 longer slide identifications (10 points)

1 essay question (20 points)

We will take one hour for the exam. The rest of the final period will involve student presentations of the website.

Website 40% (40 points)

Overall website (20 points)

Your personal effort (20 points)

The overall website grade will be the same for each team member; the team effort grade will be a combination of my assessment of your contribution and your team members' evaluation of your work.

I do not grade on a curve. For an "A" you need to earn 90%, i.e., 180 points or above; For a "B" 80% or 160 points or above; for a "C" 70% or 140 points or above, for a "D" 60 percent or 120 points; for an "F" below 60% or below 120 points. I do not give grades. You earn your grade.

Extra Credit:

No extra credit, you have enough to do as it is.

Code of Conduct:

University Policy: Academic misconduct by a student shall include, but not be limited to, disruption of classes; threatening an instructor or fellow student in an academic setting; giving or receiving of unauthorized aid on examinations or in the preparation of notebooks, themes, reports or other assignments; knowingly misrepresenting the source of any academic work; unauthorized changing of grades; unauthorized use of University approvals or forging of signatures; falsification of research results; plagiarizing of another's work; violation of regulations or ethical codes for the treatment of human and animal subjects; or otherwise acting dishonestly in research.

Instructor's Policy:

The instructor will not tolerate private conversations in class, not with fellow students or on cell phones. Please, **disable your cell phones** before entering the classroom. Do not bring newspapers to class, do not work on puzzles, do not play games on your laptop, do not read or study for another classes during our class time. If you have better things to do, please, do it somewhere else.

Excessive commotion in the classroom—coming and going, arriving late, leaving early—also

will not be tolerated. It is greatly disruptive. Please be on time.

Plagiarism of any sort—copying material from books or articles, cutting and pasting sections of text from the internet, using other people’s ideas without giving them credit—will not be tolerated. All written work should be solely your own. If you use other people’s ideas or you quote them, you need to **provide proper citation**.

Two words of caution:

This course is about culture; it is not about race.

Course material is the intellectual property of the instructor and copyrighted. You may audiotape lectures, but you may not use the tapes for any commercial or other public purpose. Power point presentations or any other material posted on blackboard is not published material. It is copyrighted and may not be used for any commercial or other public purpose.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements will be accommodated. Please talk to me during office hours as soon as possible.

Class Schedule:

The class schedule is tentative as dates for *Dreamweaver* training and a visit to ARCC in Spooner Hall are still up in the air. We will roughly follow this outline. Complete the readings listed here before class and adjust your reading schedule according to shifts in the class schedule. Such shifts are announced in class and posted on blackboard.

Date: Lectures:

Mon 8-21 Introductions; 8minute long movie: Fang, An Epic Journey by Susan Vogel and discussion; Syllabus and class website project

Textbook: Introduction, 14-23;

Robert Farris Thompson: Introduction

Wed 8-23 Igbo-Ukwu

Textbook: Igbo-Ukwu, 274-278;

Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart

Mon 8-28 Igbo

Textbook: Igbo, 278-303;

Ogbechie, Sylvester. "The Historical Life of Objects: African Art History and the Problem of Discursive Obsolescence." African Arts 38:4 (Winter 2005), 62-69, 84.

Wed 8-30 meeting at Spooner Hall

Mon 9-4 Labor Day, no classes

Wed 9-6 Igbo Mbari Houses—class project—this requires your preparation

Read the power point presentation on Mbari houses on blackboard. Then read Sylvester Ogbechie's critique of the scholarship on Mbari. We will discuss the readings and "fix" the power point lecture based on Ogbechie's argument.

Sylvester Ogbechie, "The Historical Life of Objects, African Art History and the Problem of Discursive Obsolescence." African Arts 38:4 (Winter 2005), 62-69,94. [e-journal]

Mon 9-11 tentative dream weaver session

Wed 9-13 Map Test; Bakor; Ejagham

Textbook: Cross River, 330-338

Robert Farris Thompson: Section on Ejagham culture (Nsibid)

Mon 9-18 Pre-Midterm Test

Abakua (Cuba)

Wed 9-20 Yakurr

Read an excerpt from my dissertation (e-reserve). We will watch video footage from my fieldwork in class and you will write an analysis of Yakurr aesthetic based on your acquired knowledge of Yakurr culture.

Mon 9-25 Cameroon Grasslands

Textbook: Bangwa, Bamum, Kom, 338-354(including Duala)

Wed 9-27 Fang, Kota, Mahongwe;

Textbook: Gabon, 355-365

Mon 10-2 Kwele, Mitsugo, Punu, Kuyu, Woyo

Wed 10-4 Luba

Textbook: Luba, Hemba, Tabwa, 412-420

Mon 10-9 Luba; Hemba

Wed 10-11 Tabwa

Textbook: Tabwa, 420-22

Mon 10-16 Midterm Exam

Wed 10-18 Songye

Textbook: Songye, 422-23

Mon 10-23 Guest Lecture by Mary Nooter Roberts (Chief Curater, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History) 5pm. Attendance mandatory

Wed 10-25 Lega

Textbook: Mbole, Lega, 423-429

Mon 10-30 Azande/Mangbetu

Textbook: Azande, Mangbetu, 429-434

Wed 11-1 Mbuti

Textbook: Mbuti and Contemporary, 434-437

Mon 11-6 Kongo

Textbook: Kongo, 366-377

Robert Farris Thompson: Section on the Kongo;

Ellen Corin, "Refiguring the person: the dynamics of affects and symbols in an African spirit possession cult," in Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia, eds. Micheal Lambek and Andrew Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Wed 11-8 Kongo, Teke

Textbook: Teke, 378-379 (including sphere of Lunda empire)

Mon 11-13 Loango

Wed 11-15 Pende *pending instructor's decision on ASA conference*

*Textbook: Pende, 391-394 **participation; if class is canceled students***

will work on their website in their teams or see a movie

Mon 11-20 Chokwe

Textbook: Chokwe, 380-385

Wed 11-22 Thanksgiving break, no classes

Mon 11-27 Suku/Yaka

Textbook: Yaku/Suku 385-390

Ellen Corin, "Refiguring the person: the dynamics of affects and symbols in an African spirit possession cult," in Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia, eds. Micheal Lambek and Andrew

Strathern. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

The lecture will be brief. You will be shown a number of objects. Based on your understanding of Suku/Yaka culture, you will create museum labels and a wall text for these objects during the class period.

Wed 11-29 Sala Mpasu

Textbook: Sala Mpasu, 394-06

Mon 12-4 Kuba, Lulua

Textbook: 396-406, Textbook: Lulua 406-08

Wed 12-6 Website presentations (half), the rest will be presented during finals, immediately following the exam

Final Exam Week 12-11 to 12-15, Final time will be announced; Attendance is mandatory

For a more detailed description of the class, see:

<http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=97175623473875&mode=admin>

You will have to create an account to be able to view this site.