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:**

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  
Thursday, October 1

**Week 3: African Oral Tradition**
Tuesday, October 6

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 Keïta! 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)
Keïta! continued

Thursday, October 22

**Week 6: African Aesthetics**
Tuesday, October 27

Thursday, October 29
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

**Week 8: Africa’s Modernities**
Tuesday, November 10

Thursday, November 12

**Week 9: Into the Diaspora**
Tuesday, November 17

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

Wednesday, June 3
Exam Review & Class Evaluations

**Final Exam: Monday December 7, 8-10am**