

Moravian College Syllabus

ART 222 African Art

Spring 2013 Monday and Wednesday 1:10-2:20 pm Hill 310

Professor Kearns

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Availability: Best time for a conference is immediately before or after class. If this is inconvenient, a meeting can be scheduled in advance in my office, Monday or Wednesday. The office is in the Art Department, South Campus, and hours are 12:30 pm to 1 pm, or another time by pre-arrangement.

Course Goals

Students will gain an aesthetic and cultural understanding of the art of Africa, from prehistory to the present day. Sculpture is the primary medium studied in the course, but textiles, painting, artisan works and architecture are also included. Students will examine how religion and cultural influences affect the development of regional and national styles. The influence of the African diaspora on art and culture in Europe, Latin America and the United States will also be considered. Students will acquire the critical vocabulary required to analyze and interpret African Art, and apply it in both discussion and writing.

(This course meets LinC M5/Cultural Values and Global Issues Requirement)

Required Text for purchase or loan from the Moravian Art Department. The loan is free, the text to be returned at the end of the course. Note that the text, being the best documentation of the History of African Art yet published, is unfortunately also out of print, so it is available to you on our class Blackboard site.

Africa: The Art of a Continent. Edited by Tom Phillips, NY: Prestel Publications, 2004.

Course Requirements

1. Students must attend all classes and bring the required text as needed.
2. Students must complete two analyses, a midterm, a final project, and a final exam.
3. Students must attend the African Art Museum Field Trip as assigned.
4. Students must complete peer group sessions as assigned.

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Evaluation

Grading: 35% of your grade is determined by written work; 35% by exams, 15% by Peer Seminars, 10% by the Final Project, and 5% by attendance.

Papers: there will be Aesthetic Analyses required on two different topics. Criteria for these will be given beforehand. **Aesthetic Analysis I** is 15%, and **Field Analysis II** is worth 20%.

Peer Seminar I, II and III: each is weighted 5%. **Peer Seminar I** is a group discussion. **Peer Seminar II** and **III** are short individual student power point presentations. Criteria for each will be given beforehand.

Exams: There will be a Midterm and a Final Exam, identifying, comparing, and analyzing images from the text. The **Midterm** counts as 15%, and the **Final Exam** 20%.

Final Project: A power point presentation will show the aesthetic, cultural and historical influences of each group's choice for **Greatest Works of African Art**, 77,000 BC. to 2012 AD. The **Final Project/Greatest Works of African Art** counts for 10%.

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Week 1/ January 14 and 16

Introduction, African Aesthetics, *Weltanschauung*, Paleolithic to predynastic Egypt. Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 8-37, 179-191, 103-105, 548-552.
Ancient Egypt and Nubia. Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 41-115.

Week 2/ January 23 only

African Aesthetic and Cultural Influences in Minoan, Mycenaean, Etruscan Civilizations, Classic Nok to Meroe. Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 48-9, 107-115, 194-5, 534-43, 553-8, 478, 484, 326, 526-531.
African Aesthetic and Cultural Influences in the Greco-Roman World, Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, p 543, 536-8, 553-8.
Peer Seminar I Black Athena (hand out) Due January 1/23

Week 3/ January 28 and 30

Ancient West Africa, Coptic Christianity, Islam, 500 BC-1500 AD
Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 178, 196, 230, 240, 326-412/179, 198-99, 327, 406, 468-70, 478-83, 488-95, 576-82, 538-43, 559-61, 586-91.
Greatest Works of African Art Meeting #1 1/30
Aesthetic Analysis I Due 1/30

Week 4/ February 4 and 6

South Africa, Igbo-Ukwu to Ife in West Africa, Ife Aesthetics
Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, p 178, 182-4, 194-6, 327-45, 383-95, 404-08.
Peer Seminar II: African Art *in situ* Due 2/6

Week 5/ February 11 and 13

Nigeria Sculptural Continuity, Ife to Benin
Read **Africa: The Art of A Continent**, pp 327, 412-431.
Greatest Works of African Art Group Meeting #2 2/13

Week 6/ February 18 and 20

Ancient Djenne-Juno, Ancient Mali, Dogon
Read **Africa: The Art of A Continent**, pp 479-95.
Midterm February 20

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Week 7/ February 25 and 27

Divination

Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 231-9, 244-8,
268-9, 288-91, 427, 454, 456, 527.

Week 8/ March 4 and 6
Spring Break

Week 9/ March 11 and 13

Benin, African Art to the 18th Century

Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 337-345, 395-403.

Peer Seminar III: African American Art Due 3/13

Week 10/ March 18 and 20

African Art, European Colonialism in the 19th Century,
Diaspora of African Art to Europe

Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 231-325, 440-6,
448, 452-5, 517, 132, 150, 162, 166, 174-5.

Greatest Works of African Art Group Meeting #3 3/20

Week 11/ March 25 and 27

West African Art to the 19th Century, African Art and Modern
European: Cubism/Expressionism

Read **Africa: The Art of A Continent**, pp 327, 412-431, 337-45,
395-403, 231-325.

Week 12/ April 3 only

Easter Monday No Class April 1

Central African Art to the 19th Century, African Art and the
New York City's Harlem Renaissance

Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 145-53, 170, 346, 348, 355,
358, 363, 366-7, 372, 382, 392, 440-3, 500-2, 513, 517, 522.

**Note: Required museum field trip to the Metropolitan Museum
of Art, NYC, scheduled for Friday, April 5**

Week 13/ April 8 and 10

Early 20th Century African Art, African Diaspora in the Americas

Read **Africa: The Art of a Continent**, pp 142-3, 146-7, 153,
158-9, 204-8, 256, 260, 276-8, 280, 300, 305, 312, 357-8, 421-6,
432, 436, 447-52, 456--7, 460-3.

Field Aesthetic Analysis II Due Wednesday 4/10

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Week 14/ April 15 and 17

Contemporary African Art, 1980-2012

Read **Africa: The Art of A Continent**, pp 218-9, 372, 472,
465-6, 501, 520-2, 525, 544-6, 570-1, 573-5.

Week 15/ April 22 and 24

Greatest Works of African Art Presentations 4/22 and 4/24

Week 16/ Wednesday, May 1

Final Exam Wednesday May 1, 1:30 pm in classroom.

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African Aesthetic Elements of Sculpture

- 1. Practical Function** is *how* and *where* the sculpture is used. The practical function includes but is not limited to sculpture to be worn, i.e., masks, or sculpture to fit into an altar or sacred setting, i.e., ancestor figures. If the work is in its original setting and still being used it is identified as *in situ*, in context.
- 2. Spiritual or Cultural Function** is the religious and/or cultural use of the sculpture within and for the community as a whole. The work of sculpture *almost always* functions as an embodiment of the religious and cultural beliefs and rituals of the community. The **Spiritual Function** includes but is not limited to sculpture of humans or animals honored for the well-being or power they give to the community, i.e., Yoruba Ibedji twins.
Note: the element of function, both practical and spiritual, is **primary** for almost all traditional African sculpture, though there are exceptions.
- 3. Media** is wood, clay, stone, or melded glass or metal alloys, i.e., faience, iron, which can be carved, modeled, or fired. Included in this element is the texture, which may be rough, smooth, lined, painted, embedded with gems, etc. Wooden African sculpture is almost always created out of a single trunk or limb.
- 4. Shape** is created by the interplay of positive and negative space and is dictated by the three elements above. There are two basic categories of shape: **geometric** or **regular**, and **organic** or **biomorphic**. Note: the **element of line** may be implied or invisible here, that is, it emerges from the shape.
- 5. Space** is internal and external. **Internal space** is both negative and positive. **External space** is the optimum viewing distance and possibly movement the work requires. For example, **a sculpture in the round** asks the viewer to walk around it. **Monumentality** may refer to a work small in size but demands the viewer step back.
- 6. Mass** is the volume or weight of the work.
- 7. Proportion** is derived from the work's practical and spiritual functions.
- 8. Scale** is more than size. It is the work's relation to its setting. Categories are **human scale**, based on the size of a human being, **grand**, larger than a human, and **colossal**, the largest, in relation to mountains or the sky, i.e., The Sphinx.
- 9. Composition** is the arrangement of the above elements. The basic designs are **symmetrical**, an equal balance divided by an axis or line, **asymmetrical**, an equilibrium of corresponding parts, or **radial symmetry**, equidistant parts emerging from a center point in a circle.
- 10. Style** in African sculpture is abstract, rarely realistic, and based on the functions.
- 11. Subject Matter** is important for its symbolism, i.e., what it represents in meaning
- 12. Emotional Intensity** or **Passion** is the emotion, mood, or communication the viewer receives before the work. The feeling may be reverence, protection, wonder, etc.
- 13. Artistic Unity** is the harmonizing of the above elements into a work of visual beauty.

African Visual Aesthetic Elements

Textiles, Apparel, Painting, Graphic Art, and/or Body Adornment

- 1. Practical Function** is *how* and *where* the work is used, and often, *by whom*. The practical function may be but is not limited to textiles woven for rugs, apparel, and/or wall tapestries. If the work is in its original setting and/or is still being used it is identified as *in situ*, in context.
- 2. Spiritual or Cultural Function** is the religious and/or cultural use of the visual work within and for the community as a whole. It functions often as an embodiment and/or as a signifier or visual code of the religious and cultural beliefs and rituals of the community. An example of this is the body adornment and clothing in initiation rites. **Spiritual Function** includes its use in a practice which is religious or sacred to the community, and the visual work may, fully or in part, itself be holy. Note: function, both practical and spiritual, is **primary** for almost all traditional African visual art, though there are exceptions.
- 3. Line**, visible or invisible, is used to create directionality, compositional focus, and/or dimension. It may be **regular**, i.e., dotted, vertical, spiral, or **lines in relation to one another**, i.e. converging or parallel, or **irregular**, i.e., an uneven wave.
- 4. Color** is light at differing wave lengths. **Hue** is full or diffused light and most often refers to a change in a **primary color**, red, yellow, and blue, or the **seven principal colors** on the visible spectrum—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo (or blue-violet) and violet. Included in color is **Light Value**, comparative lightness or darkness, or the amount of light reflected on its surface. In the African visual palette there is also **Color Contrast**, the putting together of two or more colors which are vibrant or saturated.
- 5. Shape** is **regular two dimensional geometric**, i.e., an oval or triangle, or **irregular or biomorphic two dimensional**, i.e. organic. **Shape** may be **open** or **closed**, and used to represent known objects or animals or abstract forms.
- 6. Media** is any material or surface on which line, color and shape can be applied, designed and layered. The media may be dyed thread, dye, pigment, paint, ink, etc. In African art, the media may also include **aural material** to create sound or music.
- 7. Balance** or **Composition** is the overall arrangement of the above elements. **Balance** is **symmetrical**, where an axis or line divides an exact correspondence of parts on either side, or **asymmetrical**, where an equilibrium exists between each side, or has **radial symmetry**, equidistant parts of a circle emerging from a center point. In African visual art the overall composition is also created by **patterning**, or **repetition** of a design, motif, media and/or colors.
- 8. Style** in African visual art is often abstract, but can be realistic and a blend of abstractionism and realism, and based on the functions.
- 9. Subject Matter** is important for its symbolism, i.e, what it represents in meaning.
- 10. Emotional Intensity** or **Passion** is the emotion, mood or tone the viewer feels and receives directly before the work. The feeling may be joy, sorrow, wonder, etc.
- 11. Artistic Unity** is the harmonizing of the above elements to create a work of beauty.

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African Aesthetic Elements of Architecture

A building that is built on the following artistic elements is judged to be beautiful, or a work of architecture.

1. **Function** is primary, as it is built from “inside out” according to human use or purpose. Function may be domestic, religious, political, social, or commercial.
2. **Form Follows Function, exterior.** The exterior should readily and visually communicate the purpose. **Exterior Form** includes:
 - a. **Scale** can be human, grand, or colossal.
 - b. **Entranceway** includes steps or path including the door.
 - c. **Façade** or facing or front wall is media, color, and line and may include **architectural sculpture**, sculpture set in niches, or on the cornice and/or columns. Media is stone, wood, brick etc and color is the dominant or contrasting colors. Line is vertical, horizontal etc.
 - d. **Contextual environment** or *in situ* is how well the work fits or is set in relation to its environment, i.e next door buildings, landscaping.
3. **Form Follows Function, interior.** This should readily and visually show you how you are to use or function in this building, and addresses the question, what does the **Interior Form** encourage you to do?
 - a. **Interior Scale** can be human, grand, or colossal.
 - b. **Light and Shadow** is the use of light from inside or the use of natural light and shadow to support the function. The design of the flow of air is also related to light and shadow.
 - c. **Composition** is frequently based on radial symmetry, especially in traditional domestic housing.
 - d. **Interior Space** should be the same as or in harmony with **scale**.
 - e. **Media, color, line** and **architectural details** or **architectural elements** support the façade in replication or in a complimentary way.
4. **Emotional Intensity or Passion.** A work of architecture should generate a distinct emotion or emotions when you experience being inside it; what do feel when in it?
5. **Style.** The only African-related style of architecture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, is the **Egyptian Temple**.
6. **Artistic Unity:** does **Form Follow Function**? Which of the above elements are most successful or dominant in achieving **Form Follows Function**?

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African Aesthetic Analysis I

Assignment: You are to choose a work of art, preferably a sculpture, which you perceive to be beautiful, and/or a great work of art, from the text, **Africa: The Art of A Continent**, Paleolithic to Benin, 77,000 BC to 1600 AD. **African Aesthetic Analysis I** is a minimum of six pages, maximum ten pages, the use of one documented source, to be handed in on the due date at the top of the class, **Wednesday, January 30**, and follow the format below.

African Aesthetic Analysis I Format

1. Title Page, top: African Aesthetic Analysis I
Title of Work
Media
Date
Genre (If it is also a subgenre, include here.)
Culture and Region
Title Page, bottom: Your Name, Title of Course, Due Date
2. **Analysis**
 1. **Introduction.** In the first paragraph discuss the reason or reasons why you perceive this work is beautiful and/or a great work of art. The reason(s) you give are any that are genuine to you.
 2. **Analyze** each aesthetic element, following the African Aesthetic Elements page. Use one paragraph for each element, and do address each element in precise detail.
 3. **Conclusion.**
The conclusion is at least one paragraph, but can be two, which summarizes the learning or importance you received from analyzing this work. If you have had an aesthetic experience, identify the new *understanding* you received. Or, if you received new insights or perceptions on African art, aesthetics, culture, the perceptual process, or yourself, discuss these. Your insights or perceptions may be personal or aesthetic, i.e., any findings that are genuine and of value to you.
3. **Addenda.** One source citation. If the work is able to be downloaded from the internet, and some in the text are, please do, but this is not a requirement.

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Peer Group I Assignment Due top of the class, Wednesday, 1/23

Assignment: Black Athena, Vol. I, by Martin Bernal, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
Read Introduction, pp 1-17, the handout, and please type out your responses to the following questions; these will be handed in and returned to you. However, what is important about **Peer Groups** is that you participate actively by conveying your own ideas and perceptions honestly. Your written response is a minimum of two pages.

1. What is the author's main thesis?
2. Do you agree with it, or disagree with it, or are somewhere in between? Please cite one quote that illustrates your view.
3. What do you infer concerning scholarship in the fields of art history, archeology, and ancient history from this reading?
4. **Black Athena** has caused and continues to cause intellectual controversy in the academic fields of art history, archeology, and ancient history. Why do you think this is so?
5. Please state other ideas or perceptions you received or learned from the excerpt of Black Athena or the topic in general which you feel are important to your intellectual understanding but not addressed in the questions above.