AFS 4210 (formerly AFA 4301)– African Visual Arts

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This course provides a survey of African visual art from the traditional arts of Africa to the contemporary African art movements that are currently energizing global art markets and academic discourses. Students will engage history and aesthetics to comprehend the role that African art has played in both traditional and contemporary African societies. The course will also contextualize the importance of African art on a global scale. Lectures, readings, films, and images explore the breadth of African visual arts. Students will understand the role that African art has played in traditional, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary contexts, and they will understand how historical and geopolitical events have affected African visual arts.

Students will begin by interrogating their own notions of Africa and will be able to analyze the ways in which Africa has been constructed in the popular imagination. Through the study of African history and geography, students will gain a foundational knowledge of the continent and the many countries that comprise it, as well as the role and function of art in traditional African societies. Moving forward, students will study the impacts of colonialism on the African continent, reading both art historical and anthropological texts to deepen their understanding of colonialism’s effects on African art. Students will explore issues such as concepts of authenticity, the art/artifact debates, and modernism’s appropriation of African art. Particular emphasis will be placed on postcolonial realities in Africa as a result of African independence movements and their effects on African visual arts. The course then incorporates African visual arts in the diaspora, and finishes the semester examining contemporary African visual artists.

Readings available on the course site, unless listed as part of the three required texts:


COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

• Identify critical historical moments and art movements in African art.
• Compare and contrast different styles and genres of African art.
• Understand the global and historical significance of African art.
• Evaluate the importance of African art in a global context.
• Synthesize the links between history and art making.
• Critically engage art historical texts.
• Understand how processes of globalization affect African art.
• Critique African art in the context of international global art movements.
• Appreciate art from the global African Diaspora, as well as continental Africa.
• Explain their personal positions, tastes, and opinions regarding African art.

GLOBAL LEARNING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

• GLOBAL AWARENESS
Students will demonstrate their understanding of how world historical events affect African artists and how those artists, through their artistic choices, in turn, influence history.

• GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
Students will develop an analysis of the short and long term effects of British and French systems of colonialism on African society, and particularly on traditional, modern, and contemporary African visual arts.

• GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT
Students will be tasked to engage in their communities to seek out and support African and African Diaspora arts initiatives. They will define problems facing African arts and find solutions to raise awareness of the importance and impact of African visual arts.

GLOBAL LEARNING ASSESSMENTS

Students will write three Global Learning essays over the course of the semester using either MLA or Chicago style, depending on the student’s discipline.

The three essays will assess: 1) global awareness 2) global perspective 3) global engagement. Each respective essay will have a prompt provided by the instructor that highlights the three core GL requirements.

The essays will include an introduction to the topic, a brief historical contextualization of the issues they are discussing, supporting evidence from the course materials, and a personal reflection.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Lectures, readings, films, and discussions are the core components of the course.
Student engagement and participation via discussion forums is a key part of the course. The instructor will regularly post relevant articles and encourage students to also post and interact with other students in the class.

Small group dialogs and chats will also be an important component of the class. Students will learn from each other’s multivalent experiences as students from many different disciplines and walks of life.

Independent research and critical engagement with the course topics will be encouraged.

**GRADING is based on 1000 point scale.**

- 3 Global Learning Essays 300 points
- 10 Quizzes worth 50 points each 500 points
- Research paper worth 100 points
- Participation 100 points
- Extra credit opportunities to be announced.

**COMMUNICATING WITH INSTRUCTOR**

All messages should be sent through the Blackboard system. I will respond to messages quickly, so please do not hesitate to contact me. My virtual office hours are from 3pm-7pm each Monday evening, when I will be available for live chat to answer any of your questions. If you would like to meet with me in person, please send me a Blackboard message and we can arrange for this.

**VIDEO LECTURES AND COURSE CONTENTS**

Start each week by viewing the brief video lectures I have recorded summarizing the main ideas we are dealing with each week. These lectures will help to contextualize the course materials into the larger themes in the class, and will help you be successful on your weekly quizzes.

ALL OF THE READINGS AND FILMS LISTED IN THE SYLLABUS ARE MANDATORY. Do not skip or skim the contents, the class has been carefully designed to maximize learning and your understanding of the materials.

**QUIZZES**

You will have 10 short-answer quizzes worth 50 points each over the course of the semester. This will establish a routine so that you can manage your time accordingly, and it also ensures that you are keeping up with the course materials. You will have from
Thursday until the following Sunday at 11 pm to submit your quizzes online. You have four days to complete your quizzes, therefore QUIZZES WILL NOT BE REOPENED FOR ANY REASON.

Most quizzes will be composed of five questions, worth 10 points each, and should be answered as comprehensively as possible, usually within one long paragraph per question. The quizzes are taken online. **There is no final exam for this class.**

**FINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

For your final paper, each of you will select an African artist and write a 3-page report on their life and work. A list of artists will be provided for you to choose from. Combining both research and analysis, this report will tie in the class’ core concepts as well as larger discussions in the field of contemporary African art.

**PARTICIPATION**

You will need to participate in the online class discussions each week, and are welcome to post links that are related to the course material. I will introduce a discussion question each week and you all are also encouraged to have conversations amongst yourselves in these forums.

**COURSE CONTENT**

**Module 1: Traditional Arts of Africa**

**Week 1:**
1) View slideshow on African geography.

**Week 2:**
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

**Week 3:**
Required book – you must read this entire short, art-filled book this week.

GLOBAL AWARENESS ESSAY DUE
Module 2: Colonialism, Modernity, Anthropology, and ‘Authenticity’

Week 4:
2) African Slave Trade – African Holocaust slideshow
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 5:
4) Slideshow: Picasso and Matisse – African Influences.
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 6:
1) “The anthropology of African art in a transnational market” and “The quest for authenticity and the invention of African Art” by Christopher Steiner.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ESSAY DUE

Module 3: Post-Colonial African Art

Week 7:
1) Introduction to “The Short Century” by Okwui Enwezor
2) Olu Oguibe. “Into the Heart of Darkness.”
3) Lumumba – a film by Raoul Peck
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 8:
1) Intro, Chapter 1
2) Chapter 2 – Kasfir
3) Slideshow: Cheri Samba
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday
Week 9:
3) Slideshow: Seydou Keita and Malick Sidibé

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT ESSAY DUE

Module 4: Black (American) Art

Week 10:
1) Intro – Chapter 4 in required book
2) Slideshow: Barkley Hendricks
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 11: Film by Tamara Davis: Radiant Child, Jean Michel Basquait
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 12:
1) Chapter 5 – conclusion of Black Art: A Cultural History.
2) Fred Wilson profile on PBS Art 21
3) Kara Walker profile on PBS Art 21
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Module 5: Contemporary African Art

Week 13:
Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of required book Contemporary African Art Since 1980.
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 14:
Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 of required book: Contemporary African Art Since 1980.
QUIZ due by 11 PM Sunday

Week 15:
FINAL RESEARCH REPORT on one African contemporary artist.

THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM FOR THIS CLASS.