Professor: Kim Miller, Wheaton College

Class: African Visual Cultures, 2007

Assignment: Students were asked to use the Aluka database to create and curate a “critical biography” of Africa. My idea for this assignment was inspired by the tremendous holdings of Aluka (and my own interest in Aluka), along with Okwui Enwezor’s 2001 exhibition The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994. As in Enwezor’s exhibition, my students were asked to combine documents from cultural and political realms to investigate a narrow theme within a specific historical period. Using Aluka as their primary resource, students were asked to design, curate, and write about a virtual exhibition related to “art and liberation”.

From a pedagogical perspective, this was also a good opportunity to bring technology into my art history classroom in a more direct way – something I have been wanting to do for the past few years. Not only did students utilize the Aluka database as their main source, they also created a wiki as their final project, rather than writing a traditional research paper. As a professor, this was the most challenging part of the assignment. Because this was such a complex and demanding project for the students, I provided them with a second handout, outlining my expectations of them in terms of research, writing, and the use of Aluka.

Method: There were 6 “curatorial teams” consisting of 4-6 students in each group, and the students were grouped together based on shared interests. Each group successfully utilized Aluka to tell a compelling and important story about the liberation struggle in South Africa. Their wikis combined outside research with documents and images from Aluka. Some groups also added links to resistance music, or clips from movies related to the freedom struggle.

Results: The titles/topics of the exhibitions are:

- “Resistance Art at the Height of Censorship: A Generation of Turmoil”
- “Art Censorship and Apartheid (1950 – 1994)”
- “Human Rights Violations in South Africa: Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Eras”
- “Resistance to Unjust Imprisonment and Torture under Apartheid in South Africa through a Variety of Artistic Mediums”
- “Zooming In: Documentary Photography as Defier, Informer, and Muse”

Although all of the groups got off to a slow start, I was impressed with how seriously they took the project, the creativity with which they approached their topics, and I am thrilled with the overall results. This project was so successful and meaningful that I will continue to use this assignment in future classes, and will likely use Aluka and a wiki in my other art history classes as well. I’m grateful to Aluka for providing this amazing resource, and the opportunity to use it in the classroom.

Success Factors: For the technical aspects of the project, we relied heavily on the expertise and assistance of librarians and technology staff at Wheaton College, namely Elliot Brandow, a campus librarian who was assigned to work with our class. Brandow met with our class during one class period, provided useful handouts, and taught students and me how to create a wiki, how
to attach documents and images to the wiki, and how to access Aluka remotely and successfully search the Aluka database. Outside of class, both Brandow and I fielded student’s questions about research, writing, and technology. This project could not have been possible without the technology support that I received from Brandow and Wheaton College, as a whole.
Syllabus

African Visual Cultures (ARTH 212)
Wheaton College
Fall 2007

Professor: Kim Miller
Office: Watson 142
Office Phone: 286-3579
Email: miller_kim@wheatoncollege.edu

Meeting time: T/TH 2 – 3:20
Meeting Place: Watson 122
Office Hours: T/Th 3:30 – 4:30 and by appointment

“During the worse years of repression … it was the arts that articulated the plight and the democratic aspirations of our people. This affirmation was demonstrated through… film, paintings and sculpture that defied the silence that apartheid sought to impose… We must empower our people through the vehicle of culture.”

Nelson Mandela, 2003

Course Description:
This course provides an introduction to the rich, diverse, and inspiring world of African art. We will examine the varied ways that African art has shaped and been shaped by the histories and cultural values of different African peoples, both in the past and during the present day. This course will strengthen the student’s ability to critically assess the role of art in Africa for the people who produce and use it, and will provide an understanding of the role of African art in the West for the people who collect, exhibit, view, and study it. Towards this end, we will look at diverse art forms, such as sculpture, painting, ceramics, masquerade, dance, literature, feature film, documentary film, and other forms of popular culture. We will also visit art museums and galleries in order to experience African art firsthand. Topics of study will include social political, religious, philosophical, gendered, and aesthetic practices.

Course objectives:
By the end of the semester, students should be able to:
* Recognize the style characteristics associated with arts from various regions and ethnic groups in Africa
* Comprehend the critical issues that frame an understanding of African art from an African perspective
* Identify contemporary African countries
* Understand the major historical events and periods of the continent, Africa’s relationship to world history and the political history of Africa in relation to the arts
* Analyze formal and theoretical concerns relating to African art
* Think critically about knowledge production and the shaping of knowledge in relation to both African studies and the field of art history.

Required Texts:
Readings placed on reserve at the library

**Course requirements and evaluation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Map Quiz</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to Museum Curator</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group exhibition project</td>
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Students’ grades will be determined according to their performance in the following categories:

**Participation:**

Class attendance is crucial in an art history course since there is no way to make up what you’ve missed just by reading. Visual material shown in class may not be available elsewhere. So, although missing ONE class will not directly affect your grade, you are responsible for all of the material covered in all lectures. More than one absence will affect your participation grade, and more than three absences will affect your overall course grade. In addition, all students are required to attend two evening class meetings in Boston.

When in class, students are expected to participate fully in classroom discussions. The syllabus lists readings for each class meeting, and these readings will likely serve as the basis for our discussions as well as for questions on your exams. Because understanding of the art of any place or time requires a basic understanding of history and culture, introductory lectures and readings will provide some foundation. Given this, all assigned reading must be completed prior to each class meeting. Your participation will be evaluated based on the quality and consistency of your contributions to class discussion, your daily organization and preparation, and attendance. Class participation will help your grade – feel free to make comments or ask questions at any time. Your respectful participation is welcome, encouraged, and expected in this class.

**Discussion assignments:** Each student will be responsible for preparing questions and leading class discussion for one of our readings. I will assign those readings during second week of class.

**Midterm**

The exam will consist of slide identification, short answer, and essay questions; the essays will be geared to test your ability to make meaningful links between visual material and the ideas/issues raised in the classroom. The exam will be drawn from lectures, class discussions, and required readings, and will be based on visual material, some of which will be covered **ONLY** during classroom lectures. Therefore, attendance in all classes is essential to a successful performance on the exams.

**Map Quiz**

You will be asked to identify all African countries. The map quiz will take place during the third week of classes. See the following link for an interactive map to help you study:


**Letter to museum curator (4-5 pages long)**

This writing assignment is connected to our visit to the Boston MFA in October. The “letter” is a theoretical and creative exercise which will ask you to think broadly about the exhibition of all African art at the MFA. Here, you will write a critical analysis of the ways in which African art is exhibited, in the form of a letter written to the curator of the exhibition. The assignment is designed to encourage you to think critically and deeply about the issues that we
Aluka Teaching Award Report – 2007

will study this term, such as the politics of cross-cultural representation, the ways in which cultural presuppositions affect our understanding of art, contemporary issues relevant to art history, and other practical and theoretical issues. All writing assignments must be articulate, well-argued, thoughtful, and clearly organized.

Prior to our visit, we will read a series of theoretical and practical essays presenting arguments that you will engage with in your paper. Further details will be handed out in class well in advance of the due date.

Group Project, paper, and presentation

This will be your major, and final, project for the semester. The class will be divided up into 5 or 6 curatorial teams, and you will be asked to design and curate an exhibition of African art using a fantastic new database called “Aluka”. Each team will select a theme, and a guiding research question within that theme, as an organizing principle, and you will select documents and images from the Aluka database to investigate your theme. The project will have several components, including a wiki that each team will collaboratively write, a class presentation where each team will present their exhibition to the class, and a final reflection paper that will be written by individual students. More details to be announced in class.

Week one: Course Introductions
Thursday August 30
Assignment: Read:
Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, preface and epilogue (on reserve)
Curtis Keim, Mistaking Africa Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind, “Changing our Mind about Africa” and “How we Learn” (reserve)

Week two: Introduction to African History, Art, and Culture
Tuesday September 4
Assignment: Read:
Appiah “Why Africa, why art” from *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (pp. 21 – 26) (on reserve)
HL Gates, Jr. “Europe, African Art and the Uncanny” in *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (pp. 27 – 30) (on reserve)

Thursday September 6
In-class viewing and discussion of *African Art*, directed by Aminatta Forna
Assignment: Read:
Blier, Introduction: Paradoxes of Rule (pp. 11 – 41)
Blier, Chapter 2, “Yoruba and Dahomey: Divine Authority and the Arts of Royal History” (pp. 79- 97)

Week three: Yoruba Cosmology and Art
Tuesday September 11: map quiz
Assignment: Read:
Drewal, “The Yoruba World” from *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of Art and Thought* (reserve)
Michael Oladejo Afolayan and Betty Wass, “Yoruba Headties” in Arnoldi and Kreamer, *Crowning Achievements* (pp. 139 – 146) (reserve)

Thursday September 13
Assignment: Read:
Look at and browse Apartheid museum website and Aluka website

**Week four: Art Against Apartheid**
Tuesday September 18
Assignment: Read:

Thursday September 20
Assignment: Read:
Miller, “Trauma, Testimony, and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak” in *African Arts*, Autumn 2005 (pp. 40 – 51) (on reserve)
Other readings from special issue of *African Arts* dedicated to 10 years of democracy in South Africa. Details tba.

**Week five: Art after Apartheid**
Tuesday September 25
Thursday September 27
Assignment: Read:
Drewal reading - tba
McClusky, “The Ultimate Spectacle for Powerful Mothers: Gelede Masks”, in *Art from Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back*, (pp. 227-243) (reserve)

**Week six Masquerade and Performance Art**
Tuesday October 2
Assignment: Read:
Ruth Phillips, “Representing Women” (reserve)

Thursday October 4
Assignment: Read:
Steiner, *African Art in Transit*, pages tba (reserve)

**Week seven: African Art and Authenticity**
Tuesday October 9 – Fall Break
Thursday October 11 Watch and discuss film: *In and Out of Africa*
Week eight: Exhibiting African art
Tuesday October 16 – midterm
Assignment: Read:
Articles offering theoretical perspectives on exhibiting African art (reserve)

Thursday October 18: No class because Professor Miller is attending the African Studies Association Conference in New York. But students should visit the African art exhibit at the Boston MFA sometime between now and next Tuesday’s class.

Assignment: Read:
Holland Carter, “African Art, African Voices: Showing African Works as they were Intended”, New York Times 12/10/04 (on reserve)
Diane Pelrine and Patrick McNaughton “On Viewing African Art” African Art from the Rita and John Granwold Collection (pp. 11 – 19) (reserve)

Week nine: Exhibiting issues
Tuesday October 23: Group presentations on exhibiting African art at the Boston MFA.

Thursday October 25  Letter to museum curator due. Meet at library with Elliot Brandow to discuss Aluka project
Assignment: Read:
Blier, chapter 5, “Kongo and Kuba: The Art of Rulership Display”, (pp 201-228)
McClusky, “The Fetish and the Imagination of Europe: Sacred Medicines of the Kongo”, in Art from Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back (p. 143 - 167) (reserve)

Week ten: Memory and Healing: Luba and BaKongo
Tuesday October 30
Assignment: Read:
Mary Nooter and Allen Roberts, “Introduction” in Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History (pp. 17-47) (reserve)

Thursday November 1
Assignment: Read:
Blier, Chapter 1, “The Benin Kingdom: Politics, Religion, and Natural Order” (pp. 43 – 78)

Week eleven: Art and Leadership: the Benin Kingdom
Tuesday November 6
Thursday November 8: Aluka planning day
Assignment: Read
N’gone Fall, “Providing a Space of Freedom: Women Artists from Africa” and Introduction, “Toward Transnational Feminisms” from Global Feminisms exhibition catalogue (on reserve)

Week twelve: African Feminisms
Tuesday November 13: Wellesley Field Trip
Assignment: TBA
Thursday November 15 – guest lecture, Herbert Cole, Emeriti Faculty in Art History at the University of California, Santa Barbara: “The Politics of Maternity: Mother and Child Imagery in African Arts”

Professor Kim Miller, Wheaton College
Assignment: TBA

Week thirteen: Art and AIDS
Tuesday November 20
Thursday November 22 – Thanksgiving

Week fourteen: Aluka Presentations
Tuesday November 27
Thursday November 29

Week fifteen: Aluka Presentations
Tuesday December 4
Thursday December 6 – last day of class

Final paper due: during exam week
Assignment handout

African Visual Cultures
Professor Kim Miller
Fall, 2007
Final Project and Presentation: Curating a Critical Biography of Africa

In 2001, Africanist art historian Okwui Enwezor organized a groundbreaking exhibition entitled *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945 – 1994*. In the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, Enwezor carefully selected documents from cultural and political realms to investigate periods of African history specifically related to independence and liberation movements across the continent. He combined various archival sources -- including fine arts, political posters, cloth, photography, and architecture -- with non-visual forms of expression, such as literature, manifestos, and political documents, to tell these compelling stories. Together, these form what he calls a “critical biography” of Africa.

Using Enwezor’s exhibition as a model, your major – and final – project for the semester will be to create your own critical biography of Africa. You will design, curate, and write about a virtual exhibition related to the broad topic of “art and liberation” using a new scholarly resource called Aluka. Aluka is a digital library of resources from and about Africa. It contains documents that are quite similar to those that Enwezor used in *The Short Century*. For the purposes of our project, we will focus on Aluka’s holdings related to “Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa”. The resources include a plethora of documents related to African-led liberation struggles – archival materials, periodicals, oral histories, books, photographs, posters, ephemeral arts, etc. etc.

In order to accomplish this task, the class will be divided up into 5 curatorial teams with 5-6 people on each team. Once you familiarize yourselves with the catalogue from *The Short Century* and the holdings of the Aluka visual database, your team will select a theme that relates to “art and liberation” and you will organize your exhibition around this theme. Although your theme is completely up to you, I offer some suggestions below. You can also refer to the list of topics provided on Aluka page titled “About Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa Data” ([http://www.aluka.org/page/about/strugglesData.jsp](http://www.aluka.org/page/about/strugglesData.jsp)). Your theme will serve as the organizing principle for your exhibition, and you will select documents and images from the Aluka database to explore, illustrate, and educate an imaginary audience (and the class) about your “critical biography”.

Once you have decided on your theme, you will want to craft an exhibition by selecting documents around two main conceptual components:

1. politics/ideology/ethics
2. culture: artistic and literary production

Your curatorial team will need to figure out how to pull these documents together to tell a particular story.

You will also get the chance to explain and write about this story through crafting text as one would if organizing a professional exhibition. This will also require you to do some research outside of the course readings. Your text will consist of an introduction – similar in tone and in length to the introduction of an exhibition catalogue, or the introductory text to an exhibition.
Your introduction will introduce your audience to the topic and historical moment that your story comes from. You will explain your theme and its relevance, and argue the importance of your exhibition. You should also write explanatory text that conveys the importance of the documents and images on display. After the introduction, your text should guide a reader/viewer through your “exhibition”. In your writing, you should demonstrate that you have thought critically and deeply about X. As always, your writing should be articulate, thoughtful, and well organized.

You will also need a title and bibliography.

Because this is a virtual exhibition, your final product will be presented in the form of a wiki, which is a collaborative website. The wiki will allow you to compose and present text for the exhibition interspersed with links to historical documents and visual images found on Aluka. We will devote a considerable amount of class time strategizing about your exhibitions, and learning technical skills like building the wiki, and familiarizing ourselves with Aluka.

In the last weeks of the semester, each curatorial team will present your exhibition to the class in the form of a multimedia presentation.

Project timeline:
Thursday, September 27: Read through and familiarize yourself with Aluka website and database, and *The Short Century* exhibition catalogue.
Brainstorm at least 3 possible issues to focus your exhibition on

Thursday, September 20: Form curatorial teams. Familiarize yourselves with Aluka and select a preliminary topic/theme. Begin research with your team, and work to develop an initial bibliography, a document or two from Aluka to work with, and a bit of background research for your topic

Thursday, October 18: Email a one paragraph description of your topic to Elliot Brandow, our library liaison ([brandow_elliot@wheatonma.edu](mailto:brandow_elliot@wheatonma.edu)) in preparation for next week’s meeting.

Thursday, October 25: Class meets at library for presentation by our class library liaison Elliot Brandow. Elliot will teach us how to use a wiki (and what IS a wiki!), and will help us get started. He will also provide an in depth introduction to Aluka and how we can use it.

Tuesday November 27, Thursday November 29, and Tuesday December 4: In-class presentation of topics

Possible Topics:
- Black consciousness
- Heroic individuals
- Political imagery
- Censorship
- Workers rights
- Women’s activism or women’s issues
- Cultural activism
- Prisoners
- Portraiture
- Non violence
- Arts activism
- Magazines, film (or other forms of popular culture)
- Documentary photography/photographers
- Newspapers and journalists – role in the struggle
- Anti-apartheid icons
Human rights violations
Torture
Children/youth activism or rights
Divestment and/or other forms of economic action
Multi-national corporations
**Assignment Handout II**

**African Visual Cultures**  
**Professor Kim Miller**  
**Fall, 2007**  
**Final Project and Presentation: Curating a Critical Biography of Africa**

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Prisoners
Portraiture
Non violence
Arts activism
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Newspapers and journalists – role in the struggle
Anti-apartheid icons
Human rights violations
Torture
Children/youth activism or rights
Divestment and/or other forms of economic action
Multi-national corporations