

Art 365.02: The African American Image in Art and Visual Culture, 1700-2000
Rhodes College, Spring 2005
417 Clough, W 6:00-8:30 p.m.
CRN: 20129

Professor Ellen Daugherty
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And by appointment.

Office Hours:
Thursday 1:30-4:30
Friday 2:00-4:00

Description and Objectives

A topical, interdisciplinary seminar focused on the representation and misrepresentation of African Americans in art and visual culture during the past three centuries. The class will NOT be taught in a strictly chronological or linear fashion. Rather, we will back and forth between 18th/19th century and 20th century art, between art produced by black artists and visual materials depicting African Americans, between material culture and fine art. Topics for discussion will include the visual culture of slavery; blackface minstrelsy; stereotype and the power of popular advertising; Uncle Tom, Mammy, and Aunt Jemima; the display of lynching photographs and “black collectibles”; and the rise of the African American artist, including discussions of Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edmonia Lewis, Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden, Betye Saar, Fred Wilson, and Kara Walker.

Textbooks

Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Manring, M. M. *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

Patton, Sharon F. *African-American Art*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998.

All other Readings on reserve in the library.

Note on the readings: All readings should be completed by class time on the day they assigned on the lecture schedule below.

Requirements

Attendance is required. Because this class meets only once per week, absences are highly problematic. Absences will only be excused at my discretion. If you must be absent, please try to inform me beforehand! One unexcused absence is permissible. After one unexcused absences, each additional unexcused absence will drop your participation grade by a letter grade (from a B to

a B-, for example). Be aware that too many absences, excused or unexcused, may result in a failing grade.

Reading and Participation are vital components of this course. Remember this is a seminar, not a lecture. We meet only once a week--you will be assigned quite a bit of reading for each class. Please come prepared to discuss ALL the assigned readings. If you can manage it, it would be helpful for you to have photocopies of the reserve readings with you during class—or at least really good notes. You will be expected to contribute to class discussions during each class period.

E-mail Responses to one or more of the readings will be required each week. Please write a short synopsis of the author's argument, assess the validity of the author's claims, and pose questions for the class discussion. The e-mails are due to the class e-mail list (20129@rhodes.edu) by 12:00 each Wednesday. Each student should read the other responses before class. The responses will be graded.

One Short Presentation based on a specific reading is required from each student during the course of the semester. The presenting student will speak for approximately 15 minutes and then help lead the class discussion on the book.

One Research Paper between 10 and 12 pages long on a topic of the student's choosing in consultation with me. Due Monday, May 2.

One Final Presentation (with images) based on your research topic. Each presentation will be 20 minutes long with time for Q & A afterward.

Grades

Participation	30 %
E-mail Responses	20 %
Short Presentation	5 %
Research Paper	30 %
Final Presentation	15 %

Honor Issues

Plagiarism. It is unethical to copy another person's words in whole or in part EXCEPT in scholarly quotations and paraphrases used in conjunction with footnotes. It is also unethical to lift material off the web without citing it in your footnotes. Plagiarism and or failure to abide by Rhodes College Honor Codes will be sanctioned by the professor and/or the Honor Council. Ignorance is no excuse. Please use the honor pledge where appropriate

Schedule of Class Topics and Assignments

Note: Schedule subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Readings marked with * are in textbooks required for the course. All other readings are On Reserve at the library unless otherwise noted.

Readings in boldface print are those that I want you to respond to in your weekly e-mail responses.

January 12: Introduction to the course

PART 1: Africa/African American

January 19: Slave Culture and the Retention of “Africanisms” in New World African American Material Culture

In this class we will explore the idea of “Africanisms” in African American art. That is, distinct cultural (or in our case, aesthetic) values that originated in Western Africa and were then transported to the New World by slave artisans. African survivals have been spotted in hundreds of different African American cultural products by anthropologists, art and architectural historians, linguists, and so forth.

Our goals for this class:

- 1) To gain some background knowledge on the concept of Africanisms.
- 2) To learn about specific instances of Africanisms that have been traced by scholars in African American art/craft.
- 3) To interrogate whether scholars may legitimately claim that Africanisms exist in African American art.
- 4) To begin to consider the particular influence of African cultural forms on African American art.

Reading:

* Patton, Sharon. *African-American Art*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Chapters 1 and first half of 2, pp. 19-71 (top).

Thompson, Robert Farris. Chapter 2, “The Sign of the Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art and Religion in the Americas.” In *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. New York: Vintage, 1984. pp. 103-158.

Ferguson, Leland. *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. pp. xxi-xlv, 1-55, 82-107, 109-120.

Prown, Jonathan. “The Furniture of Thomas Day: A Reevaluation.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 215-229.

Presentation by _____.

January 26: African American Quilt Making—The Legacy of Africanisms?

This topic was conceived in conjunction with the exhibit *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* which will be at the Brooks Art Museum between February 13 and May 8, 2005. (We will be attending the show as a class). In this class we will consider two different kinds of 20th century African American quilt making: one situated within a “folk art” context (the Gee's Bend quilters) and the other in “fine art” (Faith Ringgold). We will:

- 1) Compare the two traditions and their products.
- 2) Ask why contemporary African American artists like Faith Ringgold have chosen the quilt format, and discuss why and how this is different from the tradition at Gee's Bend.
- 3) Consider the question of if and how Africanisms may survive in these quilts.

Reading:

Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. New York: Vintage, 1984. pp. 207-223.

The Quilts of Gee's Bend. Atlanta: Tinwood Books in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2002. Read the Introduction and three opening essays, pp. 8-19; 20-33; **34-49**; 50-60. Skim the catalogue. Note that I am asking you to respond to:

Arnett, William and Paul Arnett. “On the Map.” pp. 34-49.

Gouma-Peterson, Thalia. “Faith Ringgold's Journey: From Greek Busts to African American Dilemma Tales.” In *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. pp. 39-48. Please also look at all the color plates reproducing Ringgold's quilts.

Presentation by _____.

February 2: Jazz and the Visual Arts: Africanisms and the Problem of Essentializing Race

I arrived at this topic after I had read, for the umpteenth time, an art historian claiming that African American aesthetics (in fine art, quilt making, and other crafts) was visually equivalent to jazz music, which in turn is rooted in African cultural and musical forms, often suggesting that somehow this “jazz aesthetic” is a kind of African survival. I questioned whether this type of analogy (for example, African American quilts share similar aesthetic patterns with jazz music such as rhythm, syncopation, and improvisation) is always legitimate.

In this discussion I would like to:

- 1) Consider the similarities and differences between jazz as a musical form and a “jazz aesthetic” in African American art.
- 2) Discuss the difference between artists (both black and white) who were specifically influenced by jazz music in their art, and the claim that the art of people such as African textile weavers or the Gee's Bend quilters is culturally structured by inherent racial qualities such as rhythm and improvisation—qualities also found in jazz.

Reading:

Wilson, Olly. “‘It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing’: The Relationship Between African and African American Music.” In *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*. Edited by Sheila S. Walker. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. pp. 153-168.

Hadler, Mona. “Jazz and the Visual Arts.” *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 10 (June 1983): 91-101.

Patton, Sharon F. “Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden, 1940-1987.” In *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden, 1940-1987*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). pp. 18-70. Pay attention to the images through out the book.

Presentation by _____.

Part 2: Dialogues: 19th and 20th Century Images of Blackness

February 9: The African American Image in 19th Century White Popular Culture

This class will begin to address the issue of white constructions of blackness in the nineteenth century, especially in relation to antebellum slavery and abolitionism. Our goals:

- 1) To address how African Americans were portrayed by white artists and in white popular culture of the 19th century.
- 2) To consider the formation of stereotypes and their meaning in 19th century culture.
- 3) To use John Davis’s article, “Eastman Johnson’s *Negro Life at the South*,” as a case study of recent efforts in American art history to better understand the nuances of racial portrayal and historical meaning in 19th century art.

Reading:

* Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-82.

Lott, Eric. “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture.” **Introduction to *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy***. Edited by Annemarie Bean, et. al. Hanover, NH : Wesleyan University Press, 1996. Note, Rhodes Library owns this as an e-book.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin & American Culture. <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/sitemap.html>

Note: look especially at the link called Minstrel Shows and all of the links under the general heading “Other Media.”

David, John. “Eastman Johnson’s *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington DC.” *Art Bulletin* 80, no. 1 (March 1998): 67-73.

Presentation by _____.

February 16: The Image of Emancipation—19th/20th Century

This week I will be attending the College Art Association annual conference in Atlanta where I will be presenting the paper, “The *Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial* and the Revision of Emancipation Imagery During the Civil Rights Era.” In preparation, I will deliver my paper for the class and then we will discuss:

- 1) Historical images of emancipation in the 19th century.
- 2) Thomas Ball’s *Freedmen’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln* and John Quincy Adams Ward’s *Freedman* and the representation of the black body in 19th century American Sculpture.
- 3) The 20th century reconfiguration of the *Freedmen’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln* in Robert Berks’s *Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial*.

Reading:

Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Chapter TBA.

Presentation by _____.

Hatt, Michael. “Making a Man of Him: Masculinity and the Black Body in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture.” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no.1 (1992): 21-35.

Ellen Daugherty, *Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: The Visual Culture of African American Racial Uplift*. PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2004. Chapters 2 and 6, pp. 26-62 and 234-280.

February 23: Aunt Jemima

Aunt Jemima is a powerful racial stereotype in American culture. In this class we will:

- 1) Learn the historical origins of the Aunt Jemima image, including its relationship to blackface minstrelsy and the mammy image.
- 2) Consider the commodification of blackness as a means of selling products to white consumers.

Reading:

Manring, M. M. *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

* Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Chapter 3, pp. 83-106.

Sunday, February 27, 2:00 pm:

Ellen Daugherty, public lecture at the Brooks Museum, “Images of Racial Uplift: Charles Keck’s *Booker T. Washington Monument* at Tuskegee Institute”

Not required, but I would be pleased to see you all there.

March 2: Aunt Jemima Fights Back: 20th Century Reappropriations of the Pancake Box Stereotype

This session will address some of the ways in which black artists refigured the racist image of Aunt Jemima (as well as Mammy and Uncle Tom among others) to protest cultural acceptable white constructions of blackness. Our goals:

- 1) To consider the positive aspects and the pitfalls of appropriating racist imagery as an antidote to racism.
- 2) To discuss the form, content, and meaning in the works of contemporary African American artists Betye Saar and Kara Walker.

Reading:

* **Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Chapters 3, 6 and 7. pp. 107-124, 189-223, and 225-258.**

Carpenter, Jane C. and Betye Saar. *Betye Saar*. San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2003. Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 43-77.

Berry, Ian, Darby English, et. al., editors. *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003. Read the Essay by Darby English, "This is Not About the Past: Silhouettes in the Work of Kara Walker. pp. 140-167. Please also look at all of the images and browse among the artist's own writings in the book (the typed 3x5 cards).

Presentation by _____.

March 9: No Class, Spring Break

March 16: African American Artists Respond to White Cultural and Institutional Constructions of Black History

Like Kara Walker and Betye Saar, the African American artists Carrie Mae Weems and Fred Wilson appropriate historical images and material culture objects in their art installations. Deeply critical of the way African American history (not to mention American history in general) has been/is told, Weems and Wilson seek to criticize museums from the inside out. Goals:

- 1) To assess the purpose and methodology of Wilson's *Mining the Museum* and Weems's *Hampton Project* installations.
- 2) To consider the controversies that each exhibit engendered.

Reading:

Corrin, Lisa G., editor. *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*. Baltimore: The Contemporary, 1994. Read essay by **Lisa G. Corrin, "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves," pp. 1-22.** Leslie King Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," pp. 23-34. And, Ira Berlin, "Mining the Museum and the Rethinking of Maryland's History," pp. 35-46. Make sure to look carefully at the photos

from the installation.

Willis, Deborah, et. al. *Carrie Mae Weems: The Hampton Project*. Aperture, 2001.

Presentation by _____.

March 23: Socially Conscious Art or the Perpetuation of Racism?

This purpose of this class is to juxtapose two very different (though both deeply racist) kinds of imagery and their respective place in contemporary America: lynching photographs (and other artifacts) and “Black collectibles” (Aunt Jemima figurines, racist postcards, pickaninny images and so on). Recently, a major collection of lynching photographs was presented in an historical exhibition. Opinion was divided—should we show these images in public as a visceral reminder of the depths of American racism? Or is the exhibition of such pictures tantamount to revisiting the spectacle of a lynching, in effect recreating the racist spectacle and re-lynching the victim? Likewise, black collectibles (and their display by private collectors as well as their reuse in contemporary art) has been variously construed as either a triumphal/ironic/humorous reclaiming of racist stereotypes by African Americans, or as a perpetuation on racism. Our goals:

- 1) Consider the various interpretations of the contemporary display of historically racist artifacts.
- 2) Question when and how these artifacts should be shown.

Reading:

Allen, James, Hilton Als, et. al. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Twin Palms Publishers, 2004. Please read Congressman John Lewis’s Introduction and Leon F. Litwack’s essay, “Hellhounds,” pp. 7-37.

PLEASE NOTE: Do your best looking at the photographs. They are extremely graphic and very disturbing. If you can’t handle them, that’s understandable. But be prepared to discuss the issues I outline above.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. “Exhibition Review: Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America.” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 3 (2002): 989-994.

Valdez, Sarah. “American Object.” *Art in America* 88, no. 10 (October 2000): 88-89.

Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping*.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. Intro, pp. xiii-xxiv, and Chapter 1, pp. 1-18.

Skim the rest and look at the pictures.

Levinthal, David and Manthia Diawara. “The Blackface Stereotype.” In *Blackface*. Arena, 1999. pp. 7-17. Make sure to look at all the photos.

Presentation by _____.

Tate, Greg. “Burnished Effigies.” *Artforum* (Summer supplement 1999): 14.

Part 3: Are You Black Enough? African American Artists and the “Problem” of Subject Matter

March 30: Black Artists in the 19th Century—Art Historians Read Race

In the 19th century, many African American artists paradoxically tried to create art about race while simultaneously distancing or removing themselves and their specific racial identities from their works. We will use case studies of two important 19th century African American artists—Edmonia Lewis and Henry Ossawa Tanner—to investigate the “problem” of racial identity in 19th century art and the desire of art historians to read race back into their works. We will also look at 20th century artist Archibald Motley to consider continuing issues of color consciousness. Goals:

- 1) Learn through case studies about specific works by Lewis, Tanner, and Motley.
- 2) Assess the racialized way in which art historians feel compelled to discuss all works by black artists.

Reading:

Buick, Kirsten L. “The Ideal Works of Edmonia Lewis.” *American Art* 9, no. 2 (1995): 5-19.
Harper, Jennifer J. “The Early Religious Paintings of Henry Ossawa Tanner: A Study of the Influences of Church, Family, and Era.” *American Art* 6, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 68-85.

Presentation by _____.

* Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Chapter 5, pp. 150-187.

April 6: The Invention of African American Art: New Negro Art and the Harlem Renaissance

By the turn of the 20th century, African American artists were beginning to question exactly what a “Negro” art should look like and what its subject matter should be. Intellectuals (both black and white) encouraged Black artists to take their cues from Africa—substituting African art and aesthetics for the classical tradition of Greek and Rome that was so important to the European (read white) fine art tradition. In this class we will investigate

- 1) The desire to find a Negro aesthetic distinct from Anglo-American art.
- 2) The interest in African art and the consequent primitivism in the work of artists such as Aaron Douglas.

Reading:

* Patton, Sharon. *African-American Art*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998. Chapter 3, pp. 105-181.

The following four short readings are all found in Lewis, David Levering, editor. *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*. New York: Viking, 1994.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." pp. 91-95.

Barnes, Albert C. "Negro Art and America." pp. 128-133.

Locke, Alain. "The Negro Takes His Place in American Art." pp. 134-137.

Bearden, Romare. "The Negro Artist and Modern Art." pp. 138-141

Powell, Richard J. "Re/Birth of a Nation." In *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. pp. 16-33. Make sure you look at all the pictures in this catalogue to get a better overview of Harlem Renaissance art.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. Chapters 2 and 3 in *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. pp. 14-54.

Presentation by _____.

April 13: Postmodern Potpourri

You can't get to everything in only 15 weeks, so in this last class (before presentations) we will look at a few additional twentieth century artists and historical issues in African American art including the problem of "black art" versus "mainstream art", the critique of the exclusion of African Americans from mainstream art history, and the question of identity in recent works by Lorna Mae Simpson.

Reading:

* Patton, Sharon. *African-American Art*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998. Chapter 4, pp. 183-273.

Ann Gibson, TBA.

Jones, Kellie. "(Un)Seen & Overheard: Pictures by Lorna Simpson." In Kellie Jones, Thelma Golden, and Chrissie Iles. *Lorna Simpson*. New York: Phaidon, 2002. pp. 28-103.

April 20: Student Presentations

April 27: LAST DAY OF CLASS Student Presentations

Monday, May 2: Papers Due