

## FULLY CONSTITUTED PANELS AND ROUNDTABLES

### "The Art that Guides Our Students: Southern University at New Orleans and the Traditional African Art Collections"

Co-Chairs: Erika Witt, Director and Chief Curator of Southern University at New Orleans Museum of Art  
Haitham Eid, Director and Associate Professor of the Master of Arts in Museum Studies Program, Southern University at New Orleans

#### Panel Objectives:

##### Curricular Innovation:

- \* Explore how the Southern University at New Orleans Master of Arts in Museum Studies Program and other programs have innovatively integrated traditional African art into its curriculum.
- \* Discuss the impact of this integration on students' understanding of museum practices and cultural heritage.

##### Community Engagement:

- \* Examine the role of SUNO's programs in fostering community engagement and collaboration.
- \* Showcase successful projects and partnerships demonstrating the tangible benefits of connecting graduate students with local communities.

##### Alumni Perspectives:

- \* Provide a platform for SUNO Museum Studies program alumni to share their experiences and discuss the program's influence on their professional journeys.
- \* Reflect on the broader impact of SUNO's graduates in the arts and cultural sectors.

##### Preservation and Promotion:

- \* Investigate the challenges and successes of maintaining traditional African art collections within an academic setting.
- \* Discuss how SUNO's commitment to preserving and promoting African art contributes to cultural preservation and understanding.

##### Format:

The panel will consist of individual presentations by each panelist and a moderated discussion that encourages audience participation. The session will conclude with a Q&A segment, allowing attendees to engage directly with the panelists and share their perspectives.

##### Significance:

This panel contributes to the broader discourse on the role of historically black universities in shaping the future of museum studies, cultural preservation, and community engagement. SUNO's unique approach serves as a model for institutions seeking to integrate traditional African art into their programs, fostering a more inclusive and culturally aware generation of museum professionals.

##### Anticipated Outcomes:

Participants will gain insights into SUNO's successful strategies for integrating traditional African art into the university curriculum, departments, and programs, fostering community engagement, and preparing students for impactful careers in the arts and cultural sectors.

### **Audacious Art Histories: Intimacies and Interventions**

Co-Chairs: Ruth Simbao, Professor and NRF Research Chair, Rhodes University, South Africa  
Stephen Fóláránmí, Associate Professor, Rhodes University, South Africa

During the #RhodesMustFall movement, Achille Mbembe (2015) questioned whether universities could be salvaged, and he called for pluriversities instead of universities – that is, spaces of knowledge creation that cherish diverse epistemologies. Our current book project, *Audacious Art Histories*, questions how we can co-create art histories that are audacious; that don't behave as they "ought" to behave. How can art histories function in trickster ways at a time when institutions are often policed in a top-down manner, and when research is being increasingly quantified and classified in limiting ways? How might our diverse

methodologies and ways of knowing enable art histories of Africa to strengthen broader art historical discussions about global relevance?

In this panel, we explore the possibilities of igniting audacious art histories that offer our discipline diverse ways of creatively making meaning. Our book, *Audacious Art Histories*, brings together the work of over eighty authors, the majority of whom are based on the African continent. As art historians, artists, curators, musicologists, performers, lecturers and students, we analyze the arts of Africa in relation to five core frameworks: 1) The Audacity of Place, 2) Stories, Intimacies and Biographies, 3) Reaching Sideways, 4) Rising Souths, and 5) Interventions and Resistances.

By emphasizing the slippages, surprises and intimacies of telling our stories and creating meaning, we consider ways of intervening and resisting – at times playfully and other times sternly, even angrily. How might intimate stories and intimate ways of creating and sharing knowledge be a form of resistance? What are different forms of intervention that challenge social systems and structures?

The four papers in this panel are presented by the three co-editors of the book (Simbao, Baasch and Fólàrànmí,) and one its authors (Kakande). We will briefly share some of our core ideas in the book as a way of opening up discussion about how we might all contribute to the notion of audacious art histories. Thereafter we will present a few case studies related to the book that consider, in more depth, how intimacies and interventions have been used by creatives in specific contexts in Africa (Nigeria, Zambia, Morocco and Uganda) and the broader Global South (Palestine, Mexico and China).

### **African continuities and change in the Caribbean, through contemporary Caribbean art**

Chair: Rebecca L Skinner Green, Associate Professor and Chair, Art History  
Bowling Green State University

Black Caribbean identity is grounded in the local space and place of the West Indies, a region that has experienced a tremendous influx of peoples, cultures, and influences. It is a region whose indigenous populations included Arawak, Carib, and Taino populations that were significantly diminished by invading Western forces who literally worked them to death. It is a region where, according to Steven Mintz, “Well over 90 percent of enslaved Africans were imported into the Caribbean and South America,” with successive waves of enslaved Africans being brought to the Caribbean to replace those who had not survived the region’s slavery system. As late as “the nineteenth century, the majority of slaves in the British Caribbean and Brazil were born in Africa. In contrast, by 1850, most US slaves were third-, fourth-, or fifth-generation Americans.” The result is a layered history—one that later included indentured East Indians, along-side waves of migrating European, Latin American, and American populations and colonial empire-builders.

Although the institution of slavery has played a significant role in the roots of Caribbean history, Caribbean identity and agency do not stop at the borders of enslavement or colonialism. Post-slavery and post-colonial identities are multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic. The region boasts the largest fortress ever built in the entire Western Hemisphere, from which formerly enslaved peoples staged the first successful rebellion in the Hemisphere. It takes pride in its multiple Nobel Laureates, and a West Indies Cricket team that has dominated a game originally disseminated by the colonizing English. It delights in its steel pan, reggae, calypso, and soca music, along with its famous annual celebrations of Carnival, which are now synonymous with the Caribbean and are being globally consumed. The Caribbean has produced visual artists such as Cuban Wifredo Lam, whose work sold in June 2020 for the second highest price for a Latin American painting (trailing just behind Diego Rivera). It is a region resonating with intellectual creativity and innovation born from the agency and passion of its citizens. It is in this region’s post-colonial environment—built from enslavement, indentureship, migration, and loss, that has resulted in an on-going search for identity, yet a strong sense of belonging, accomplishment, culture, and creativity—that African continuities emerge and survive in contemporary Caribbean lives and artistic practices.

Commonalities derived from African retentions, including traditional artistic cultural expression, form the basis of core Caribbean artistic creativity whose lexiconic energies provide the sparks that animate the region’s cultural expression, which in turn communicates with, educates, and affirms the core values of the wider Caribbean community. In this panel, therefore, we explore contemporary artists’ expression, to understand their messages and their exploration of identity.

## **What is a Map? A Question Investigated through African and African Diasporic Arts and Architecture**

Co-Chairs:

Matthew Francis Rarey, Associate Professor of Art History, Oberlin College

Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi, Associate Professor of Art History, Emory University

In a sweeping transhistorical study, Matthew H. Edney provocatively argues that “there is no such thing as cartography.” Edney situates “cartography” not as the project of map-making, but rather as an idealized practice of knowledge production that scaffolds the myth of Western rationality and modernity. Through this panel, we reflect on Edney’s challenge, bringing together inter- and multi-disciplinary scholars whose study of African and African diasporic arts and architecture past and present urge us to consider how to engage with and analyze maps writ large as well as how to re-define what a map is and could be.

## **EXPLORING VISUAL CULTURE: PLURALIZING KNOWLEDGES, EXPERTISE, AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGES AND EXPERTISE**

Co-Chairs: Assako Assako Paul-Henri Souvenir, Senior lecturer and researcher, head of art history and fine art section, department of arts and archaeology, University of Yaoundé 1 & Director of the Libre Académie des Beaux-arts de Douala - Cameroon

Ruth Belinga, PhD Student, Université de Dschang; Curator, Beaux-Arts de Fouban

The study of art and culture is essential for the development and understanding of civilizations," wrote Suzanne Blier (P. Falguières, 2021, p.116). One of the major characteristics of African history is the internationalization of exchanges involving the continent, which has been continuously engaged in dialogue with more or less distant worlds. This is appreciated through the diversity of the continent, particularly in the interactions between African and external worlds (F-X. Fauvelle & I. Surum, 2019, p.7). African arts and visual culture illustrate this through their extensive presence in foreign societies and cultures. These arts are found in private collections and museums worldwide, featuring in exhibitions and significant acquisitions, and attracting notable interest in studies and dissemination.

The historical role played by African art in the artistic reform of the 20th century underscores the importance of approaching the analysis of African art and visual culture in a manner that connects it with other imaginaries. From this transcultural perspective, African art, generally defined as an endless source of knowledge, skills, and insights, exhibits characteristics of rich interactions on a phenomenological level. For instance, issues related to identity, artistic models, markets, political ideologies, global engagement, cultural promotion, and gender—analyzed by some as contradictions in contemporary African art—offer the advantage of revealing active discussion topics that reflect the socio-cultural challenges faced by Africa and shared with other societies.

One approach to diversifying knowledge related to African art involves placing the study of art and visual culture at the core of intercultural and transcultural inquiries. This questioning originates from an analytical trajectory that intersects the social imagination of Africa present in the arts and visual culture with that of other cultural universes. Our panel explores the transcultural dimensions of the mechanisms for developing and apprehending knowledge within African art and visual culture, updating interpretation methods that encourage approaching artistic images and visual culture as a pluralistic expression interface with global semantic features.

## **VISUAL LITERACY AGAINST OPPRESSION**

Chair: Djibril DRAME, Independent Scholar

In order to decrease systematic racism and/or oppression, decolonization of thoughts, governance and processes is essential for change. Understanding what literacy requires within the audience we are engaging in englobes: visual literature, sound, touch and other sensories of knowledge absorption. In other words, Africans need to empower and support their visual artists, filmmakers, architects, authors, artistic initiatives within spaces created by them, with Africans in mind as a foundation. This means extracting the installation of exterior influences or interpretations of African storytelling.

From streets and avenues baptized in foreigners’ names to considering having more stories of local philosophers, critics and thinkers in our books, to feature films and many cultures. There is a deep

need to work towards one main goal which is reappropriating the curricula and school of thought of our contemporary academics, artists and scholars.

One of the impactful ways is to use urban culture to change the narrative approach, for example, having graffiti artists create relationships and opportunities to work on street names of avenues boulevard, ways, roads such as « Boulevard General Degaulle » to Boulevard Dr Hady Ba in honor of the accomplishments and contributions to the advancement of its society that look like the local context.

Imagine nowadays tv series that show the transmission of photography and film classical school of thoughts prevalent to our current times. A show like “Maîtresse d’un Homme Marié”, a series speaking on senegalese societal relational encounters with nuances while still paying homage to elements of cinematography of our forefathers such as Djibril Diop Mambety or Ousmane Sembene.

In order to start the process of decolonization we must start rewriting our visual literacy modules to reflect the society and civilisation we live in and have marked as our blueprint rather than adopting foreign concepts constructed with realities that may not represent our societal functions.

### **Towards a dynamic and distributed future: interdisciplinary methods of engaging with African Art & Cultural Heritage Materials**

Co-Chairs: Majula Swareh, Global Programs Manager, National Museum of African Art  
Davison Chiwara, Project Coordinator, National Museum of African Art

In this proposed presentation, we will discuss specific interdisciplinary and transformative methodologies by and with diverse practitioners in the field of African Art and Cultural Heritage Studies. As the National Museum of African Art revises its provenance research and collections history, we are asking questions of what constitutes a collection, should we actually own materials, and what is the broader responsibility of a truly decolonial objective which should aim to not only rely on the knowledge from conceived communities, but actively contribute in a distributed effort which affirms and recognizes the agency and dignity of materials and their owners. How can we define a museum beyond ethnography, and how can we move beyond description and towards a distributive interpretation? What are the politics of display? How do we listen?

The National Museum of African Art is partnering with the Ditsong Museums of South Africa to revise areas of our South African collection. Here, we are doing a database comparison of our collection as the first step, and building upon connections made during the African Museology cohort visit over the summer of 2023. One of the members of the cohort, a South Africa based healer, spiritual and sacred objects specialist and PhD candidate, has worked extensively to analyze the use and meanings of beadwork in our collections and improve upon and rewrite the descriptions according to the relationships built with specific communities. This has helped to start the conversation on the intricacies of knowledge building on a fundamental level, but also the need for dynamic global institutional collaboration as necessary for transparency and the recognition of the dignity owed to cultural heritage materials.

In our presentation, we will work with diverse continent based Art and Cultural Heritage practitioners to discuss the specific case studies and ways that they have worked with their own cultural material utilizing robust and dynamic methodologies. We are distancing ourselves from the often reductive binaries of colonial/decolonial; historical/contemporary, to recognize the interdisciplinary methods often used to manage and understand art and cultural heritage material across time and space on the continent of Africa. We are deeply interested in the intimate space of connection. Can something be both of/and?

### **Reimagining Creative Ways of Speaking Truth to Power in a Time of Heightened Repression**

Chair: Danson Sylvester Kahyana; Associate Professor of Literature, Makerere University; Research Scholar, the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School

In present-day Uganda which is ruled by General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and his political party, the National Resistance Movement, human rights and good governance activists have done a lot of work to highlight the myriad ills afflicting the country, be it the kidnapping of members of political parties that are

opposed to the ruling one (for instance the National Unity Platform led by the musician, Hon. Robert Kyagulanyi, popularly known by his stage name, Bobi Wine), the sorry state of national infrastructure (for instance roads, health centers and schools), vindictive legislation (for instance the Computer Misuse Act both in its original form [2010] and in its amendment [2022]), rampant corruption, and extravagant expenditure by government officials as reflected in the huge appetite the state has for supplementary budgets. This December (2023), for instance, the Parliament of Uganda passed a hefty supplementary budget, with 311 billion Uganda Shillings (Over 82 million US Dollars) of it going to the Presidency, just 6 months into the Financial Year 2023/2024. The activists have spoken in different modes, ranging from protests (for instance the Yellow-Pigs-in-Parliament protest of 2015 and Dr Stella Nyanzi's nude one at Makerere Institute for Social Research in 2016) and publications (for instance Kakwenza Rukirabashaija's award-winning novel *The Greedy Barbarian* and Yusuf Kajura Sserunkuma's insightful commentaries published in *The Observer*) to creatively curated exhibitions (like Dr Spire Jimmy Ssentongo's online exhibitions on different ugly aspects of Uganda, thanks to the impunity of the people in power). Despite these efforts, the human rights violations and the bad governance situation in Uganda get worse every year that passes. This reality – that the human rights and governance situation in Uganda get worse the more activists of different kinds try to fight it – calls for new creative ways of making sure that activists are heard and listened to. What different forms of speech do we need to devise to ensure that the people we are addressing hear us; in other words, how differently should we engage the audiences that we address? What do we need to do to translate our radical speeches into concrete policy changes so that they do not stop at merely the discursive plane? What do we need to do to mentor the next generation of activists who will carry on the work in the country that so many activists have fled? Finally, but not the least, how do we cultivate collaborations between and among activists working in different fields, across different genres, and in different media and spaces, both physical and electronic, as well as those working in different countries on the continent and across the globe? The panelists will address these questions, and related ones, with the view to highlighting new ways we should deploy in our political activism for better human rights observance and good governance.

### **“Beautiful Space Others Make” On Care, Justice, & Creative Imagination**

Co-Chairs: Raél Jero Salley, Professor (Maryland Institute College of Art), Managing Partner (The Space for Creative Black Imagination, Inc.)

Raimi Gbadamosi, Department Chair and Professor, Howard University

Artists, designers, curators, arts writers, and historians must evolve to address the range of ongoing crises that are shared and overlapping, navigate ongoing cultural discourses, assess technologically mediated modes of communication, and creatively steward troubled organic environments.

In alignment with the impact of “Radical Listening: Human-Centered Approaches to African Arts”, and in concert with human-, community-, and artist-centered approaches to the arts, this proposal outlines a panel designed to respond to art historical, theoretical, and critical difficulties University-level Art and Art History educators face in the early 21st Century.

This panel is animated by questions and practices of care, ethics, and creative justice. In particular, we look and listen deeply to how these issues appear in art, design, and community-building contexts. Mindful of the proximity of “coloniality” to our shared histories and legacies (including the dynamics of the diaspora), each speaker considers, through a different lens, how approaches to the arts can shape new, globally relevant conceptions of “the human” and “personhood.”

This panel features a list of invited contributors—LeRonn Brooks (Getty), Raimi Gbadamosi (Howard University), Divya Kumar-Dumas (New York University), Lyssa Paluay (MassArt), Sheri Parks (University of Maryland), and Kymberly Pinder (Yale)—that are connected to art and design institutions by way of impactful administrative, creative, and designed educational pursuits relevant to African Arts.

We anticipate the next generation of artists and scholars by addressing issues of care, ethics, and justice as they appear in modalities that are social, structural, and visual. Beyond confrontation, this group takes the step of making and designing new conceptual pathways and possibilities for transformative justice using, among other tools, “radical listening.”

This panel is designed to share ideas, findings, resources, and approaches to the study of African Arts that matter to the current, chaotic, and dynamic situations in which we find ourselves—with an eye toward more empathic, ethical, and radical approaches to the field. Anyone who joins us will be interested in engaging with professional artists and scholars who make, curate, research, and teach. We anticipate our audience will enjoy brief, jargon-free, and relatable presentations.

**Power: remaking selves, archives, environments**

Co-Chairs: Patricia Hayes, NRF SARChI Chair in Visual History & Theory, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa  
Emma Minkley, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Ian Baucom (2020) speaks of the shift in scale implied when the forces of history (predominantly centred on the human) give way to the forcings of history (which imply a collapse between any pre-existing division between so-called natural history and human history). This panel seeks to hold both these particular and universal histories together. If we remain with the question of the human, in a long global history of extraction, colonialism and inequality, any shifts in the power of representation (past and present) tend to pivot around collective self-empowerment, the remaking of selves, and claims on belonging. But we also are enjoined to think about power on another and nonhuman level. This might be power that references the “natural” elements, such as water, earth, air and fire, which hold a kind of planetary archive, one that is in continual transition and flux, accumulating layers of time. To readdress the question of archive with non-human vision means to shift meaning, to “decouple” from human agency and sovereignty, to consider the “geologies” of the image.

In the last few years, the Visual History group at UWC has been engaged in what Zeynep Gursel calls a “looking together,” a kind of careful attention or radical listening to the image. Here we have been critically rethinking the relationship between photography and the Anthropocene, and engaging in practical photographic work that tries to confront questions of a shared human/non-human extinction. Photography has offered us a means of exploring timelines or timescapes of historical and climate injustice, shifting or flipping our perspectives of horizons in relation to scale and time. Amongst the revelatory experiences undertaken in the marine, animal and geological domains – “embracing imaging practices from which the human is absent – as subject, agent or addressee” (Zylinska 2017) – we have been confronted by the smallness and fragility of the human. But these practices in apparently wild places also tend to reassert older questions. For instance, Hangklip outside Cape Town carries traces of its maroon history. It was a mountain and marine sanctuary for escapees from Cape slavery, those subject to “fraudulent commodification,” restraint and violence. By escaping to Hangklip, these maroons were “beginning to craft an orientation toward a long and still unfinished politics of freedom” (Baucom). The key here is the term still unfinished, a reminder to be cautious how we decenter the human, or focus on the nonhuman, for the project of ending the dehumanisation of those beings called human is yet to be accomplished. This speaks to an apparent blur or ambivalence between object- and human-centred approaches in the field of African art. It is to look to the role that photography and the field of photographic studies together might play in imagining and remaking collective futures, afterlives, and other lives on our planet.

**#JustAndEquitableNow: Reimagining Arts and Humanities in Our Universities**

Co-Chairs: Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi, Associate Professor, Emory University  
Brett Pyper, Associate Professor, University of the Witwatersrand

For nearly two years, the #JustAndEquitableNow team has brought together seven people who come from different subject positions and who occupy different roles at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Our team has reflected on what it means to make, teach, and research the arts when communities have been and still are protesting against longstanding injustices and demanding better futures. By the time of the ACASA conference, we will have met online as well as in person in Stellenbosch and Johannesburg, South Africa; Accra, Ghana; and Atlanta, Georgia, USA. We are considering pertinent publications, visiting historical sites, and listening to different ideas and perspectives in order to inform our research-based action. Our ambition is to transform theory into actual practice. We understand that our efforts to reimagine our roles in universities entail working to share deliberately and generously; to listen actively; to play with all possibilities; to hold off limitations and logistics even if only for a while; to let embodied knowing inform what we bring and

with what we leave; to acknowledge the full range of human emotions when they happen; and to seek fulfillment in our work and in all activities. We also aim to attend with care to the joys and difficulties that come with always-in-process attempts to forge humane practices for learning and creating. During this virtual roundtable, #JustAndEquitableNow team members will share individual and collective observations and assessments.

### **The Modern in an Expanded Field?**

Chair: Joshua I. Cohen; Associate Professor, Art History, The City College of New York & CUNY Graduate Center

Some of the fastest-growing areas of African art studies include specializations in photography, modernism, and popular visual culture. To one degree or another, these interrelated areas of specialization have all been concerned with exploring subjective and creative expressions of modernity, roughly from the late 19th century onward. Yet as these areas have grown through scholarly and curatorial work, they have largely done so separately, each in deference to their own relevant mediums, practitioners, contexts, and preoccupations.

For example, some early exhibitions, despite their flaws—exhibitions such as *Œuvres africaines nouvelles* (1970), *Africa Explores* (1991), or the first Johannesburg Biennale (1995)—did not shy away from placing diverse products of modernist and popular cultures in conversation with other media and categories, including photography. Other exhibitions and publications have tended, however, to zero in on modernism (especially painting and sculpture), or photography, or other popular forms. Recently this paradigm has shown signs of changing. But there remain many unresolved questions about the shape and direction of the field.

Does the path of separate development reflect a desirable progression toward more detailed and focused research and knowledge? Or does it paradoxically reproduce notions of medium- and genre-specificity that at one point came to predominate in Western scholarship and criticism, but that never held sway in Africa in quite the same way? What might be lost to our view of the modern as a result of such (over)specialization, which seems to risk obscuring modes of production that resist categorization? If we are indeed at risk of losing sight of significant creative arenas, or of failing to make connections between them, then how might this situation be rectified?

Is “modernism” a capacious enough term to bring together photography, painting, sculpture, architecture, and other expressive forms under a comparative—although not necessarily unitary—theoretical framework that may be consistent with interests in writing “global” or “connected” histories, and that may double to displace and democratize hegemonic discourses of modernism? Alternatively, are there other concepts, historical conditions, or methodological interventions that stand to better situate modern Africa in an expanded visual field?

### **Questions of Objecthood and Value**

Co-Chairs: Peter J. Bloom, Professor, Film and Media Studies, UC-Santa Barbara;

Delinda J. Collier, Professor and Dean of Graduate Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

We address the important shift towards a multi-centered approach to African Art through a panel focused on questions of value as yet another context to consider as part of the ACASA conference theme, Radical Listening. The emphasis on human-centeredness is at the heart of the contributions we are soliciting from our five prospective speakers (Bloom, Collier, Jimga, Nwagbogu, Strother). We are interested in how questions of value have shifted in relation to critical, aesthetic, and popular understanding. A significant basis for our work has been calls for new frameworks of restitution for returning African art to their geographic sites of origin. Beginning with these narratives, our panel will extend to consider various other mediums in African art and the resistance to “objecthood” that much African art presents. Furthermore, we consider how discursive and museological strategies persist despite the “dematerialization of the art object” heralded by Lucy Lippard and the forces associated with masks, power objects, and many other 20th-21st century African art forms.

Decolonial knowledge has become an increasingly attractive starting point, and yet disavows that colonial contact is a heterogenous amalgam of histories that extends beyond the life of most existing works. The complexities of the situation can perhaps be addressed metonymically. In particular, we consider Western

histories of origin, utility, and refusals as a site of fascination in relation to the production of new worlds that displace the world of reason, and moves beyond it as Sebastian Ziedler examined in his discussion of Carl Einstein's writings. The stereotypes associated with this figure have always followed a narrative of revenge in the West as a metonymic site of pain and puppetry. By contrast, the learned origin stories about these objects seek to circumnavigate the power of the stereotype. The either/or perspective on the fetish objects has simultaneously differentiated serious studies of effigy figures that have ranged from the Fon figures (bocio, or empowered cadavers), the Kongo nail fetish dolls (known as the nkondi, minkondi), among other Yoruba sources that culminate in the Vodun power figures most often associated with Brazilian, Cuban, and Haitian cultural and religious practices.

Our panel will open up to larger questions of objects and objecthood related to the fetish and African art generally. This approach includes recent careful historicizing of early capitalism in the space between Europe and Africa, where trade with certain value propositions was replaced by new formations of capital that were guaranteed by enslaved Africans. With today's ubiquitous media and networking, the status of the object of African art is under further scrutiny; our panel will consider a philosophical and technical redefinition of the object and its value in African art.

References:

- Lippard, Lucy. 1997. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.  
Sarr, Felwine, and Bénédicte Savoy. 2018. "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics."  
Strother, Zoë S. 2013. "Looking for Africa in Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*."  
Ziedler, Sebastian. 2016. *Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein and the Ground of Modern Art*.

**Restitutions and feedback**

Co-Chairs: Didier Houénoué, Professor, Université d'Abomey-Calavi (Republic of Benin) / Technical University of Dresden (Germany)

Gaëlle Beaujean, Doctor, Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac (France)

In November 2021, after five years of negotiations, France returned to Senegal the sword of El Hadj Omar Tall and to Benin 26 objects taken from royal palaces in the wake of the colonial conquest. This required the adoption of an exceptional law authorizing the restitution of cultural property to Senegal and Benin. In December 2022, it was the turn of the Federal Republic of Germany to return some twenty Bronze objects from the sack of Benin City in 1897 to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Belgium, for its part, has handed over to the Congo a complete inventory of the country's art objects, held by the Musée de l'Afrique in Tervuren, and in the process passed a law that should facilitate the restitution of illegitimately acquired Congolese cultural heritage.

These restitutions, or plans for restitutions, finally raise in-depth questions about colonial memory and the reason for the presence of African cultural goods in Western collections. With this also comes a new relational ethic, as advocated by the Sarr-Savoy report in 2018. The restitution and return of cultural property is one of the prerogatives of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. In 2021, the United States returned to Mali 921 objects intercepted in Houston and illegally removed from Malian territory.

The momentum generated by restitution calls for new forms of cooperation between countries of the North and South, but also for new research paradigms to define a truly and necessarily participatory approach that places the populations holding the knowledge and know-how at the heart of the reflection on the return of cultural property.

This panel, in French and English, will discuss provenance research, restitutions and returns of cultural property.

Three speakers will review the provenance research, the restitution process and Beninese perceptions of Abomey court art (Pr. Didier Houénoué, Dr. Gaëlle Beaujean and PhD student Adéwolé Faladé), Benin City in Nigeria (Dr. Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhaton-Obogie),



Senegal (Abdourahmane Seck) and the return of archaeological pieces to Mali (Dr. Daouda Keïta, Director of the Musée National du Mali).

### **Gender and Human Centeredness in Southern African art**

Co-Chairs: Brenda Schmahmann; Professor and SARChI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture, University of Johannesburg

Karen von Veh; Professor Emeritus in Art History, University of Johannesburg

Presenters explore how representations made by women are informed by lived experiences of poverty, sexual violence, lack of infrastructure or decimation of natural resources. Including a focus on makers within and outside of mainstream contexts, the five presenters suggest that the analysis of images through a feminist lens can provide powerful insights into ways in which women negotiate inequalities grounded in not only gender but also often race and class.

Shonisani Netshia, Display cabinets as creative agents in Stephané Conradie's work

South African artist Stephané Conradie focuses on home décor in South African "Coloured" communities in Rehoboth, Cloetesville and Idas Valley. The presenter examines how Conradie foregrounds the layered nature of the objects in display cabinets as evidence of a building up of family structure and respectability, set against an unsettled past. Conradie's work suggests that display cabinets, and the ornaments and trinkets in them, can be considered as a survival tactic and as an act of creative agency.

Landi Raubenheimer, Gendering the lens on the Jukskei River

The Jukskei river, which runs through Johannesburg is severely polluted. Gulshan Khan and Hannelie Coetzee both photographed the river at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. It is suggested that they present complex eco-feminist views on this embattled natural resource, as they negotiate the city of Johannesburg and the practice of documentary photography, both of which have a history of excluding women. Their works are a reminder that discourses of the environment should be filtered through an intersectional lens, and that gender, race and class influence how people co-exist with natural resources like rivers.

Karen von Veh, Diane Victor's engagement with the myths of female agency

Works by Diane Victor graphically demonstrate the many ways women are manipulated, oppressed and devalued in South Africa. The presenter suggests that these reveal the persistence of both racial and gender inequalities, indicating how inappropriate but historically sanctioned social behaviour continues to undermine the agency of women, and the continuing allusiveness of gender parity in South Africa.

Brenda Schmahmann, Navigating Adversity by the Mapula Embroidery Project

In 2023, each female designer in the Mapula Embroidery Project (Selinah Makwana, Elizabeth Malete, Maria Rengane, Kalelo Maepa and Dora Hlongwani) designed a work featuring her self-portrait and, around it, indications of how she and other women (the Winterveld, near Pretoria) navigate adversity. While giving visual form to "feminist ubuntu" in their suggestion of ways in which women collectively negotiate various threats, the embroideries simultaneously challenge a historical construction of needlework as a domestic pursuit by unnamed females by celebrating each designer's personal standing as an artist.

Everjoy Magwegwe, Gender dynamics in mining communities: contested imaginaries and socio-environmental transformations

The presenter employed photo-elicitation and photovoice to enhance understanding of the complex interplay between gender, labour, and the environment in mining communities in Southern Africa. By interpreting the photographs that she collected, she explores the contested imaginaries surrounding gender norms in these communities, investigating how traditional roles intersect with the disruptions brought about by the mining industry.

### **A Ghanaian-United States Nexus in Art Pedagogy and Practice**

Co-Chairs: Rebecca M Nagy, Director Emerita, Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville

Eugene Ofori Agyei, Robert Chapman Turner Teaching Fellow, NY State College of Ceramics, Alfred University, Alfred, NY

The proposed roundtable will address numerous themes of the 2024 Triennial Conference including those concerning networking and broadening voices, community- and artist-centered approaches, pluralizing the production of knowledges and expertise, fostering the next generation of artists and scholars, developing and sustaining international partnerships, and decolonial approaches to the arts of Africa, among others. At the 2017 Triennial in Accra, Ghana, Rebecca Nagy together with Susan Cooksey and Alissa Jordan, organized a roundtable of fine arts faculty and students from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). They discussed their program's highly innovative pedagogy that had broken free from old paradigms and produced a generation of students grounded in global art history, critical theory, contemporary curatorial practice, experimentation with new and repurposed materials, and social engagement in service to local communities. Participants in the conference were deeply impressed by the diversity and quality of works by faculty, students and alumni in KNUST's sprawling year-end art exhibition "Orderly Disorderly," which was on view at the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra at the time of the conference. Subsequently, Nagy and Jordan explored the KNUST fine arts program and other aspects of the vibrant contemporary art scene in Ghana in their First Word Essay "Cutting Edge of the Contemporary: KNUST, Accra, and the Ghanaian Contemporary Art Movement" for *African Arts* (vol. 51, no. 3, autumn 2018).

In the intervening years, numerous fine arts graduates from KNUST have enrolled in MFA programs in the United States, bringing the influence of the groundbreaking teaching and practice of KNUST's faculty and students to American institutions. Their presence at colleges and universities in the US has opened productive channels for the exchange of artistic theory and practice between art academies in the two countries. This roundtable will bring together five KNUST graduates who are studying toward or recently completed MFAs in the US. Their practices include painting, fiber arts, sculpture, installation, ceramics and jewelry design. We will consider the following issues: 1) What aspects of the innovative curriculum and pedagogy of KNUST have shaped each artist's research, practice and teaching in the US? 2) In what ways are the curriculum and pedagogy of US institutions different from that of KNUST? 3) Have faculty at their US institutions been receptive to what KNUST-trained artists can offer based on their KNUST training and preparation? 4) Is there a two-way exchange between faculty and students at KNUST and the US institution? 5) What new ideas, theories, approaches to practice, and ways of promoting one's career has each artist acquired during study in the US? 6) What methods has each artist developed to take some of these insights back to KNUST? 7) What suggestions does each artist have for strengthening exchanges between KNUST and US academic institutions?

#### **African Art: Traditions, Transitions and Decolonisation**

Co-Chairs: Kéhindé Adépégba, Department of Art and Industrial Design, Lagos State University of Science and Technology

Oladoyin Labode, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta

African Art has continued to evolve. Its traditions are unique and are based on the people's economic, socio-cultural, political, and religious lifestyles. Since the late 19th century, the coming of the 'outsiders' has unsettled the sanctity and piety of the peoples' cosmos. The resultant effects of this are obvious transitions that have changed the forms, media, tools, patrons, processes, and even the purposes of the art. The effects of these colonisation-induced transitions seem to have polluted the pristine quality and state of African Art. Even though westernisation has its positives, its overwhelming counterpart known as colonisation has taken the soul out of the art. Hence, the deliberate act of decolonisation through adaptation of cultural idioms and materials, globalising local elements of our art, projecting the unity of verbal and visual art, and reinventing old forms, to mention a few, have become decolonisation instruments of reinvigorating africaness in African Art. The panelists will present papers discussing the Decolonisation dynamics of African Art and efforts of African artists in contemporary times toward decolonisation of African Art.

#### **Unveiling African Arts: Reclaiming Narratives, Fostering Dialogue, and Embracing Healing**

Co-Chairs: Pamela I. Cyril-Egware, Professor, University of Port Harcourt

Ashley Stewart, Artist/Lecturer, Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt

African Arts are rich and diverse, reflecting the vast cultural heritage of the people in various forms. However, it was a common belief that African arts were made for spiritual and magical purposes and the

common genre was primarily sculpture and wall paintings. This panel discusses African Arts as vast, vibrant and dynamic through human and artist-centered approaches, emphasizing on responding to the thoughts and ideas of African artists in various areas of specialization and communities, hence the need for a collaborative mix of artists from different areas of the Fine Arts and Design in this panel. Panelists present from the perspectives of textile design, printmaking, painting and Graphic design to explore diversifying human, community and artist-centered approaches in the field of African Arts based on Nigerian culture and environment. Compositions portraying the history and cultural heritage of the people are printed on textile fabrics and discussed for clothing and furnishing items, as documentation for cultural tourism and for researcher's references. Some works of Bruce Onobrakpeya and Nelson Edewor in printmaking and painting are analyzed as an emergence of new artistic ideas to promote social change and community wellbeing in their use of ideograms. Graphic art as sequential art, in graphic novels, comics and manga is discussed in this panel as having diversified African representations and shattered stereotypes, portraying cultural tapestry. The effect on children and caregivers in African communities is human-centered, further diversifying the need for community art, and the graphics and painting artists on the panel will discuss the various forms of art being diversified from object-centered arts as healing therapy in the medical fields to address a number of health challenges. The various papers in this panel postulate and justify the fact that diversity in African Arts have taken a new tone, to promote religious, social and economic change, community well-being and artist-centered approach in African Arts.

### **Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution Best Practices for North American Museums Holding African Objects**

Co-Chairs: Erica P. Jones, Senior Curator of African Arts and Manager of Curatorial Affairs, Fowler Museum at UCLA

Amanda Gilvin, Sonja Novak Koerner '51 Senior Curator of Collections and Assistant Director of Curatorial Affairs, Davis Museum at Wellesley College

In Part 1 of the panel, leaders of the ACASA's CCRBP Working Group will explain how a group of over seventy ACASA members on three continents drafted a new document on best practices for Collaboration, Collections, and Restitution for North American Museum Holding African Objects. After an introduction from the Steering Committee, subcommittee chairs will discuss the work of each group that has completed its work: Interlocutor Identification, Comparative Models, Criteria and Parameters, and Fundraising.

Part 2 will consist of presentations on proposed next steps to support the guidance. The Outreach Chair and Co-chairs of the subcommittee Making North American African Art Collections Visible and Accessible will point to how the best practices document can make the most impact, and how ACASA could support research on African art in North American museum collections. CCRBP members envision a central digital resource that aggregates information about African art in North American museum collections, and seek an institutional home for this project. The CCRBP co-chairs will conclude the panel by moderating a discussion with the audience about the best practices document and the proposed web-based project.

### **Ghana 1957: Collaborative Curation**

Chair: Ashley Miller, Assistant Curator of African Art, University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA)

In this panel, members of the bi-national curatorial team responsible for developing the major forthcoming exhibition, Ghana 1957: African Art After Independence, discuss the opportunities and challenges entailed in collaborative research and exhibition-making. This project is a genuine collaboration between three equal partners: the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) in Accra, Ghana; the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana; and the University of Michigan Museum of Art in Ann Arbor, MI. These institutions will act as exhibition spaces, knowledge centers, and work hubs, and will form core nodes in a collaborative network which, as inspired by practices of the artist collective blaxTARLINES, based at KNUST, will bring together a multigenerational, multinational group of scholars, artists, and educators. Importantly, this collaboration draws inspiration from the networks that were so prevalent and vibrant at the time of Ghana's independence. The resulting traveling exhibition, along with a scholarly publication, project website, and diverse schedule of programs, will explore, for audiences in the US and Africa, how the dramatic social and cultural changes of the independence era affected the landscape of Ghanaian, African, and Black creativity and how it led artists to reflect on this new era in a host of extraordinary ways. Ghana 1957 will bring together artworks from multiple locations in the US, Ghana, and Europe, to present the first comprehensive

exploration of Ghana’s independence era through the arts. It also models and deploys a new paradigm for pursuing a more equitable and ethically informed approach to research and public scholarship in and about Africa. Humanities scholars and curators in the US are experiencing a sea change in response to widespread efforts to address the paternalistic and extractive legacies of the colonial era; scholars and their institutions in the Global North seek new strategies for collaborating with colleagues in Africa as they pursue research in Africa and disseminate the new knowledge that it yields. Likewise, professionals across the African continent are engaged in new practices of collaborative artmaking, research, and exhibition development that position African institutions, artists, and curators at the vanguard of equitable and inclusive practices of audience and community engagement. Ghana 1957 presents an opportunity for its Ghana- and US-based contributors to learn from each other and develop an innovative approach to sustainable collaborative work. Presenters will reflect on their unique experiences with the dynamics of curatorial collaboration, the specific challenges they face in pursuing such work in relation to the different institutions in which they are situated, and their expectations for how Ghana 1957 will serve as a platform for applying a new “relational ethics” to exhibition practices. Please note that seven members of the curatorial team will present only four papers in pairs/groups.

**Africa & Byzantium at the Cleveland Museum of Art: an exhibition through the lenses of cultural heritage, community, and conservation**

Chair: Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, Curator of African Arts, Cleveland Museum of Art

Presenting dynamic, multi-vocal, and relevant exhibitions of historical African arts is a major concern of museums today. Yet at the same time, misinformation about how museums create exhibitions persists, including false assumptions that exhibitions reflect the sole voice of a curator who makes all decisions. In practice, museum work is always collaborative and draws from the expertise, experience, and knowledge of many.

Demonstrating this collaborative practice, this panel considers the Cleveland Museum of Art’s unique presentation of the exhibition *Africa & Byzantium*. Organized by CMA’s Department of African Arts, this reflected the institution’s long history of celebrating important African kingdoms and civilizations. Members of CMA’s curatorial, conservation, and public and academic engagement departments will present different perspectives on the exhibition’s making and implementation. The 2023–2024 exhibition *Africa & Byzantium* (co-organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art & the Cleveland Museum of Art) considered the complex artistic relationships between northern and eastern African Christian kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire from the fourth century and beyond. The show included some 160 works of secular and sacred art borrowed from African, European, and North American institutions. They were mostly made by African artists or imported onto the continent at the request of powerful rulers of pre-colonial kingdoms and empires. The arts and faiths of these historical kingdoms— including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—resonate with many worldwide today.

Curatorial: Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna and Helina Gebremedhen will present an overview of the exhibition at CMA. They will foreground how it employed an Africanist perspective and used a framework of decentralized cultural connection to consider the nuanced artistic and other relationships between polities including the Kingdom of Aksum, the Nubian Christian kingdoms of Alwa, Nobadia, and Makouria, and the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire. They will also consider the important role of community engagement in the creation and implementation of Cleveland’s presentation.

Conservation: Dean Yoder and Kyle Norris will discuss their research into the pigments of a newly acquired Ethiopian diptych painting from 1700. A rarely studied era of Ethiopian painting, their research provides insights into artistic technique and materials.

Education/Interpretation: Rachel Arzuaga and Stephanie Foster will discuss the process of bringing the vibrant perspectives of Greater Clevelanders into the exhibition through Community Voice labels. They will also discuss how they make museum texts more accessible and equitable.

By featuring museum professionals from different departments and career stages, this panel illuminates how many voices and ways of knowing—both inside and outside of the institution—combined to present a unique iteration of this exhibition. In sum, it offers a case study of how a human-centered approach offers museumgoers a more equitable story of the global place of historical African arts.

## OPEN PANELS AND ROUNDTABLES

### **Decolonization of African Art in Museums, Covid-19, and Curating Art in Digital Space**

Chair: Sule James, Dr, Wake Forest University

The field of museum representation of African art have encountered challenges with curating certain African forms since Africanists began the campaign for the repatriation of African art that were looted from different countries on the continent. That the move is aimed at decolonizing African art in Western museums is important in addressing the wrongs of colonialists. This is however redefining the changing space of curating such African art in museum collections, as efforts are made to reimagining those art as virtual objects or digital images in digital spaces. Similarly, when Covid-19 began spreading across countries globally in 2020, some institutions were forced to reconsider the digital space as suitable alternatives for artists and curators to curate exhibitions of African art. These developments have received little research contributions on how decolonization and covid-19 changed the narratives of past, present, and future of curation of African art in museum exhibitions, galleries, and institutions from physical to digital spaces. This is significant not merely because the mode of curation is being redefined but how artworks are being redefined from tangible to digital images. While these modes of disseminating art are aimed at still promoting exhibitions despite the decolonial turn and Covid-19, they highlight attempts to continually engage the public through different thematic thrusts that educate and communicate ideas beyond the physical spaces, as the digital spaces blur the borders of the immediate environment where such art are curated. To this end, the audience participating or viewing such digital exhibitions are within the global context because of access to the digital space. This panel is interested in research and papers that provide insights on the use of digital spaces in curating and disseminating African art or their digital images in museums, gallery exhibitions and other institutions.

### **Public Art, African Histories: Asserting and Subverting Colonial Power**

Chair: Victoria Rovine, Professor, Dept of Art and Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This panel will explore the histories, forms, and afterlives of colonial-era public art, both in Africa and in European centers of imperial power in Africa. We also invite papers on postcolonial public art in Africa that reassesses or subverts imperial histories. Our aim is to address public art in all its forms—from its “classical” manifestations as statues, murals, fountains, and the like, to performances, filmic projections, and virtual reality technologies. We seek to deepen appreciation for the impact of public art in empire and its aftermath, as a means of asserting power and shaping popular conceptions of histories and heritage, and as an instrument of resistance to these constructions of history and hierarchy.

Numerous Africanist art historians have offered incisive analyses of the artistry and impacts of colonial as well as postcolonial public art in Africa that engages the colonial past (notable among these: Miller and Schmahmann’s volume on public art in South Africa, Çelik on public statuary in Algiers, Arnoldi on Mali’s postcolonial monument program, and Malaquais on contemporary public arts in Cameroon and DRC). This panel aims to take a broader view that brings into dialogue case studies from Africa, African representations in European public art of the colonial era, and contemporary engagements with public art as colonial tactic. This is a prime moment for a wide view of public art and colonial empire. The past decade in the United States and Europe—and in some parts of Africa—has seen public art gain prominence as communities reject its projections of invented pasts. The explosive debates that have accompanied nearly every such rejection, every removal of a monument, reveal the tenacity of their impact, and the necessity of art historical examination of the forms that bear oppressive imperial imaginaries.

### **Sea Matters: New Art Histories from Africa’s Islands and Archipelagos**

Chair: Prita Meier, Associate Professor, Institute of Fine Arts and Department of Art History, New York University

The archipelagos and islands of the African continent are spaces of intercultural encounter and contestation, where life is shaped by long histories of transoceanic exchange, migration and empire-making. The diverse societies of Africa’s Atlantic seaboard and its Indian Ocean and Mediterranean littorals continue to cultivate overseas connections and maritime livelihoods. Africa’s port cities, including Dakar, Lomé, Luanda, Casablanca, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Benin, and Accra, are vanguard sites of globalization. Marine environments and ecosystems are not only key resources sustaining local livelihoods, but they are a

multisensorial presence that inspire artists, patrons, performers and builders in myriad ways. Many of archipelagic Africa's material cultures and built environment are crafted of oceanic materials, including sand, cowrie shells, coral stone, and mangrove poles. Further, long-coveted imported materials—which were used to make some of Africa's most iconic artworks, arrived via seaborne trade.

This panel calls for contributions that consider the significance of archipelagos and maritime environments in the arts and building cultures of Africa. Papers can focus on seaborne cultural production, mercantile spaces, maritime infrastructures, or oceanic expressive forms, among other topics. Papers with a strong analytical framework, drawing on archipelagic thinking or the oceanic humanities, are especially welcome. What would it mean to focus on seagoing vessels or “below the water line” in Africanist art history? What comes into analytic view when we think of Indian Ocean littorals or Atlantic islands as African peripheries (as opposed to continuing to focus on undoing colonialist representations of Africa as peripheral to Euro-American phenomena)? How do the arts and material cultures of archipelagos and port cities exceed prevailing definitions of Africanness? How do ideas of indigeneity work on islands where everyone is of immigrant origin or in port cities where people trace their heritage not only to Africa, but to overseas societies?

While archipelagos can be celebrated for an openness to others and transcultural connectivity, they are also shaped by violence and inequality. There is no African port city or island that is not touched by slavery, racism and colonization. What role do the arts and built environments play in these histories? What comes into analytical view if we center the fact that many vanguard art movements, including strands of Black internationalism, took shape in port cities? What role do the properties of waves, sea surfaces or sea floors play in the arts of Africa?

### **New Directions in Provenance Research**

Chair: Allison J. Martino, PhD, Laura and Raymond Wielgus Curator of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and Indigenous Art of the Americas, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University

This panel will address current and recent work among scholars and curators who are exploring new ways of pursuing provenance research on historical African arts. It is especially interested in strategies that consider the potential of research methodology to include collaboration and radical listening to strengthen understandings of ownership among communities of origin. Most often, documented ownership of African artworks in collections located in the Global North centers on European and American owners. This absence grew out of colonial-era collecting practices, in which Europeans did not usually record prior owners in Africa. How might we shift this prior emphasis and address this erasure to acknowledge the artworks' important prior ownership in the African continent?

Provenance records usually focus on what is documented through written records. This panel will consider how we could rethink approaches to provenance research that could also acknowledge the gaps of what we do not know about prior ownership. What might a human-centered approach to provenance research look like and how could it enhance our understanding of an artwork's provenance? In what ways could it inform how we assess archival records during provenance research? How could provenance researchers incorporate engagement with descendants from communities of origin alongside archival research? How can museums mentor and train the next generation of scholars in how to pursue provenance research on historical African art collections? This panel invites paper topics that consider these questions.

Provenance research is a critical topic in the field of African arts, and also the broader museum world today, especially through calls for restitution and repatriation of artworks that were previously acquired unethically during the colonial period. This panel invites proposals for presentations that could address the role of collaboration, knowledge production, transparency and ethics, listening, or mentorship in provenance research on African artworks. Scope is open to provenance research on historical arts from any time period or part of the African continent. Inviting presentations on these topics seeks to contribute to this broader discussion and new scholarship on provenance research in African arts.

This proposal grows out of my current provenance research with historical African arts. In 2022, I began a provenance research project for the Art of Africa, Oceania, and Indigenous Art of the Americas collection at the Eskenazi Museum of Art, located at Indiana University. A few graduate students have been working with me on this project, as it is important for me to mentor students in provenance research given its

increasing importance in the field today and my position at an academic art museum. Through this research, I have become especially interested in exploring new strategies for provenance record formats to recognize unidentified owners from the cultures of origin—a topic that I look forward to discussing during the panel.

### **Ìyá: Our Mothers Who Art In Exile**

Co-Chairs: Moyo Okediji, Professor of art history, Department of Art and Art History, University of Texas, Austin  
Bolaji Campbell, Professor of African and African Diaspora Art, Department of Theory and History of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

The panel explore strategies for negotiating the conditions of our Ìyá in forced exile and detention in Western captivity.

In 2010, the Nigerian artist, Tola Wewe, did a series of “magical paintings” to assist in the return of his nonagenarian mother who was abducted by kidnappers from her home in Shabome, in the creeks of southwest Nigeria. The art magic worked: her abductors were apprehended and brought to justice, and she was rescued and returned.

Wewe’s magic, however, has not worked for the return of the ancestral mothers kidnapped, bought or trafficked out of Yoruba country in the era of slavery along the Transatlantic routes, or during the colonial subjugation of Africa.

There are two types of mothers trafficked out of Africa: the human and the images. While the human mothers have fought and gained their emancipation, the imagistic mothers remain in bondage outside Africa.

How are Yoruba images mother? They are iyá.

Ìyá means mother. Ìyá, on the metaphorical level, also refers to Yoruba images. The root verb is yá, meaning create, draw, produce, craft, make, generate, fashion, build, construct, invent, and birth.

The Yoruba “objects” in Western museums and galleries are therefore the Iyá or mothers of the “contemporary” art forms by Yoruba artists such as Wewe, Agboola Folarin and Muraina Oyelami. The Yoruba Ona Art Movement and the Oshogbo schools are, therefore, the Ọmọ or children of the Ìyá.

Are these Ìyá figures happy where they are currently exiled in captivity? A museum conservator reported that one of them, Ọgọ Èṣù Èlégbára, was angrily causing chaos in the storage where she is kept. The museum reached out to some African art historians to discuss ways of making the Ìyá happy in captivity.

This panel is born out of the ongoing discussions to negotiate the happiness and wellbeing of the Ìyá figures in or out of captivity.

Discussions will explore the circumstances surrounding the trafficking of these mothers, the situations of their current dislocation, their alienation within the global art market, and their integrity as ideas beyond just “art” as perceived in the West.

Many Yoruba artists, cultural luminaries and scholars in Africa and its diasporas are worried and dismayed when they see or contemplate these mothers caged in Western holds. The panel brings some of them together to ask questions, complicate, and provide answers to various queries such as: Should we seek the “return of our mothers,” à la Wewe model? If so, how do we initiate such a venture? How do we persuade the current holders of these mothers to release them? Where do they go when they are released? What are the complexities and convolutions created by the continuous retention of these Iya figures in their situations of exile, captivity and banishment out of their original homes in Yorubaland? Discussants will present formal papers and informal notes to sòrò sókè on these matters, not so much to resolve the questions, but to provide a forum for generating further negotiations.

### **Online Visual Imaginations of the Nation**

Chair: Okechukwu Nwafor, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, USA.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1983), Edward Said suggested how images are involved in the production and contestation of national identities and how nations are not natural or fixed entities but rather historical and cultural constructions that are influenced by imperialism. This panel intends to stimulate thoughts about the role of online visual culture in the making of nations. Building on “the idea of nation” as “an imagining” and drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s (1983) notion of an “imagined community” the panel invites papers that would radically (re)conceptualize Anderson’s (1983:9) argument that a nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” In recent times, artists, photographers, online visual activists, cartoonists, AI generators, among others, have reconstituted the concept of the nation through their profound online visual engagements. Online forums seem to be the new epicenter of intense visual warfare. They are premises where a new revolutionary citizenry is constituted. We invite scholars to engage this interesting and influential aspect of everyday life. Just like Anderson’s maps act as institutions of colonial and postcolonial state formations of power, we invite scholars to reflect on how online visual culture can profoundly shape the nature of collective aspirations, especially the way in which ordinary citizens imagine their geographic, political, religious, social and cultural spaces online. We invite contributions that explore how online visual practices can facilitate the emergence of alternative modes of national belonging in a world constituted by imagined communities (Edensor, 2002:39), where the temporal and the spatial dimensions of national identity are inextricably intertwined (Cubitt, 1998:13), and where the national landscapes are imbued with ideological and affective significations (Short, 1991).

### **Periodizing the 1990s**

Chair: Álvaro Luís Lima, Assistant Professor, University of Florida

The 1990s were a defining decade for African art and art history. The popularization of African biennials, major survey exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe, and the founding of specialized journals became successful means of raising the interest of global audiences in contemporary African art and solidifying it as a field of study. Artists from across the continent came under the influence of workshops and artistic residencies—notably those organized by the Triangle Network—that encouraged the expansion of mixed techniques, the use of found materials, and the exploration of non-objective form. Performance and time-based media gained momentum alongside thematic interests such as sexual difference, memory, and the diasporic condition. The panel considers themes, movements, and figures that have characterized the 1990s in African art and art history.

Whereas the decade witnessed bustling artistic and intellectual experimentation, these developments should be critically analyzed in relation to the post-Cold War ideological framework from which they emerged. The end of socialist governments, the impacts of structural adjustment programs across the continent, the disillusionment with the shortcomings of the new South Africa, and the challenges in African democracies marked a new organization of power under neoliberalism. So caustic were the impacts of these transformations that Marxist historian John Saul described them as a process of “recolonization” of Africa. How should the developments and reception of African art and art history from the period be situated among these political and economic changes? What role did art and art history play in this new organization of power under the cultural hegemony of neoliberalism? The panel considers case studies and methods to contextualize the production and reception of 1990s African art and art history as agent and expression of the decade’s political and economic turn.

Papers might include a wide array of topics on the period:

- New and revived artistic practices
- Methodologies, theories, and concepts developed by or popular among Africanists
- Global reception of African art and visual culture
- Establishment of new institutions and private collections
- Cultural policy
- Exhibitions and biennials (i.e., *Africa Explores*, *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, *In/Sight: African Photographers*, first and second Johannesburg Biennales, *Dak’art*, and *Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie*)
- Art journals (i.e., *Revue Noire* and *Nka*)

### **Traditions and practices of profanation at Western Museums**

Chair: Murielle Sandra Tiako Djomatchoua, Princeton University



The ethical implications surrounding the classification, conservation, and exhibition of non-Western objects, particularly African arts and artifacts, give rise to critical questions regarding the nature and functions of museum practices. This panel will explore the role of the African arts museum catalog in shaping the understanding of these objects, the responsibilities of museums as “hosts”, and the methods employed in handling these artifacts. Drawing attention to the perpetuation of profanation, this panel will examine the extent to which museum traditions contribute to this phenomenon, with a focus on Western museums potentially becoming modern “shrines” for African arts.

The interconnection between conservation and profanation, particularly in Universal museums, is analyzed through four key perspectives: the cataloging and naming process, the allocation of objects within the museum's space (including storage and exhibitions), the protocols for handling objects, and the use of unethical visualization practices. Central to these issues is the influence of the (re)production of the colonial gaze within cultural institutions. This gaze manifests in the subjective and arrogant organization of collections and storage spaces, where sacred objects, items of prestige, and domestic artifacts are often amalgamated based on colonial perspectives and Western beauty criteria.

Despite ongoing debates on restitution, numerous objects housed in museums continue to endure a state of exile. This unfortunate circumstance results in a profound disconnection between museums and the source communities to which these objects belong. For these communities, these artifacts represent integral elements of spirituality and identity. This panel underscores the urgency of addressing these complex dynamics, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and respectful approaches in the curation and presentation of non-Western cultural heritage. The discussion will contribute to a thorough discussions on profanation as related to museum traditions and practices”.

### **For what is Just: Social Practice Art, Solidarity and Civic Imagination in Africa**

Chair: Nomusa Makhubu, Associate Professor, University of Cape Town

The arts are notorious for elitism, bourgeois individualism and competition. In general, art practitioners and organizations compete for dwindling resources. In many African contexts, there is a marked difference between deficient public resources and affluent privately funded institutions on which artists depend. There's a general lack of the political appetite to develop progressive policy for the arts. In this context, solidarity – civic, social, cultural, or political – among organizations and practitioners has become vital in understanding social practice art, which encompasses itinerant, collaborative, participatory and activist art that is primarily geared towards social justice. Solidarity is both cooperative and agonistic. Feminist scholar, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 7) defines it in terms of “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities”. In this way, solidarity can be understood as affiliative politics in the struggle for rights and resources. It is important, therefore, to draw attention to the shifting paradigms of “civic engagement” and “public participation”. Reflecting on art collectives, art movements and civil society organizations which focus on intra-Africa collaboration, we ask: what are the forms of solidarity, whether lacking or in practice, demanded of art organizations, institutions, and art practitioners in the current context?

Attending to social justice, social practice art casts a light on the precarity of justice and how compartmentalised political arrangements of “society” encumber civic imagination. How, in Africa's urban and peri-urban contexts, are the commons or public spaces shaped? Hannah Arendt's (1998: 199) notion of “spaces of appearance” foregrounds public appearance and visibility bear the potential for dignity, which in oppressive conditions is crucial for collective action. A space of appearance is the “creation of a common world of seeing and being seen by others” which “transcends our life-span into past and future alike; one which was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us” (Arendt 1998: 55). Drawing from Arendt, Ariella Azoulay (2012: 234) also makes a case for “civic imagination” as a “tool for reading the possible within the concrete.” The objective of the panel is to consider how social practice art potentiates equitable reformulations of the civic and the public. We also draw from Emeka Okereke's concept of trans-Africanism, focussing on grassroots artistic intervention. As Okereke puts it, “the prefix ‘Trans-‘ connotes ‘going beyond’, ‘transcending’, and in some cases implies a thorough change”. While it is about change (transformation), between (transit), conversion, passage and adaptation (transition) or temporariness (transitory), it is also about the inevitable political antagonisms in pursuit of justice. Trans-African, refers to space, time and the body, the three main loci of

colonial theft. It is transcending the new insidious forms of colonialism in the theft of bodies (exploited labour), theft of space (land dispossession) and theft of time. It situates movement and communing towards transborder solidarity.

### **Interventions in the Colonial Photographic Archive**

Chair: Aimée Bessire, Independent Scholar

As Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley have argued: “Photographs... have a great capacity to overturn unified, linear, and chronological ways of thinking and open new analytical spaces.” This panel invites papers that offer critical explorations of the interpretive and interventionist possibilities in the colonial photographic archive. Elizabeth Edwards has highlighted the “dense multidimensional fluidity of the discursive practices of photographs... linking objects between past and present, between visible and invisible and active in cross-cultural negotiation.” This notion—of the active, discursive possibilities of photographs to create cross-cultural connections across time—empowers the photograph to be “undisciplined,” to borrow Christina Sharpe’s terminology. It empowers the viewer’s understanding of the image with the potential to dismantle fixed ways of seeing and rewrite dominant narratives. What stories are told by historic photographs? How can contemporary viewing rewrite the colonial narrative?

The work of such artists as Santu Mofokeng, Sammy Baloji, and Emmanuel Iduma, among many others, offer critical perspectives giving definition to the “multidimensional fluidity” possible in the photographic archive, and perhaps most importantly, offering new ways of understanding historic visual records. In writing about his own work reenvisioning the colonial archive, Iduma has suggested, “I am looking at the remains of those who have passed into history.” Through his poetic writing in *A Stranger’s Pose*, Iduma ascribes new meanings to historic images. His reimagining offers an empowering approach to photographs—dismantling colonial frameworks and privileging personal rewritings of history.

Panel papers may focus on analyses of African artists who are reenvisioning colonial photographs through creative practice; analyses of African writers ascribing new voices to colonial images; or investigations of new methodologies for explorations of the colonial archive.

### **‘women's work as creative practice’ – 4 contemporary South African artist-women/artist-mothers**

Chair: Candice Allison; Independent Curator; University of the Western Cape (PhD researcher) / Norwich University of the Arts (East Gallery Curator)

We propose an online session that unpacks the theme of ‘women's work as creative practice’ through the creative practices of 4 contemporary South African artist-women/artist-mothers making contextually-inspired art: Zayaan Khan, Grace Cross, Dr Meghan Judge and Bev Butkow.

Videoed 20-minute creative interventions by each artist will be screened, followed by a round table discussion moderated by independent curator Candice Allison. These creative interventions are works of art themselves; they become experiential through exploring the texture, poetry, nuance and grit of each respective practice. In combination, they weave together a confident yet nuanced voice of South African artist-women proudly staking claim to their unique space in which their multiple perspectives and complex lives influence the richly multi-faceted art they make.

The four artists proposed for the ACASA panel were selected from a creative gathering held in September 2023 which served to provoke, question, and reframe how we exist in the world as individuals, in community, and in relation to all other living beings. It facilitated open disclosures around the exquisite joy and spirituality of investing deeply in a creative life, juxtaposed with many levels of complexity and vulnerability – balancing mothering and family responsibilities, financial strain, a general lack of support, stereotypically sexist attitudes and attacks, pressures on time and resources, mental health struggles etc. The gathering has become an important reference point – one devoid of shallow sentimentality – for considering the messiness of motherhood, life and creative experiences of South African artist-women/artist-mothers.

The four artists proposed for the panel are emergent artists holding post-graduate degrees; they create ‘thinking-art’ with substance derived from the depth of concept, intellect, application and time invested. They embrace a depth of life and artistic experience, and retain active control of their practices.

Zayaan Khan is a storyteller intrigued by the local urban and ecological environments and their interchangeable relationship. Through curiosity, research, experimentation and engagement, her work found a resting place in the nexus of land, seed and food as a means of understanding the world.

Artist/mother Grace Cross is a material painter who reflects the psychic and physical weight that women carry with them; raising awareness about motherhood, home, and feminist historiographies.

Artist and lecturer Dr Meghan Judge's PhD in the Oceanic Humanities for the Global South project at WiSER, Wits University, focuses on ocean-human relations and formulates an eco-social relational praxis for inquiry. Her work focusses on cross, trans and beyond-disciplinary engagements across creative and scientific communications that take up justice and temporal convergences of deep and urgent time.

Bev Butkow is a maker, carer, connector, collaborator whose make-shift constructions transgress boundaries between textile, painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation. Woven throughout her experimentation and exploratory playfulness is the presence of care – care for her tactile human-made materials, for an ailing planet, for the body, and for one another.

Moderator Candice Allison is an independent curator, academic and researcher, whose curatorial practice is concerned with contemporary art from Africa, the African diaspora, and the global South, that explores social-political issues.

### **The Promise and the Peril of Placing African artists in Global Narratives**

Chair: Monica Blackmun Visona, Ph.D.; Professor of Art History and Visual Studies; University of Kentucky

Today Americans are encountering works by African artists in new contexts - on Instagram, in international art fairs in Miami, and in Los Angeles galleries. Artists based on the African continent may thus be discussed in narratives around the Diaspora, the Black Atlantic, MENA, indigeneity, the construction of gender and notions of race. Paintings by African women of the late 20th century appear in the newsletters of AWARE alongside those of feminists of their generation from other continents, and African sculpture of the colonial era stands beside European art of various periods in art museums from New York to Berlin. Given the nature of the internet, and the brief amount of time most visitors can spend in museums, these encounters are often unmediated by frameworks that might situate the African works in their cities, nations, or regions of origin. Some critics argue that African art and artists are therefore liberated from the bonds of heritage, no longer burdened by local histories or narrow community values, and may now share the economic and intellectual benefits of globalism. Art historians may seek to de-colonize their discussions of specific cultural contexts in Africa by adopting a political discourse that applies to the global south, or by engaging with social issues they believe to be universal. However, such narratives may overwrite the work of Africa's artists with ideas and values that may be quite different from their own. In some cases, a handful of African artists are assumed to represent the views entire continent in these exchanges. This panel invites papers that examine and critique exhibitions, publications, and other scholarly projects that have incorporated artworks by both Africans and non-Africans, and which have explored both the potential benefits and the limitations of international, intercontinental approaches. What have these projects gained by folding African art into global narratives, and what problems have they encountered?

### **No Comment! Explorations along the borderline of seeing, talking, and thought.**

Chair: Till Förster, University of Basel

“Why do you want me to comment on my work? It's right here! Look!”

(Nzante Spee, painter, Bamenda, Cameroon, 2003)

Not all artists love to talk about their work. Some refuse to say anything, neither on themselves nor on their art. Banksy is a famous example, but elsewhere, artists may adopt similar attitudes as well. Besides the irritation that such refusals usually provoke among scholars who are expected to formulate their analyses in exhibition entries, articles, and books, the silence of artists points at two possible problems: first, a thorough tension between the artists and their work on the one side, and the expectations of scholars, critics, and the art world more generally at the other. Second, the epistemological problems of ekphrasis, namely the contradicting specificities of seeing and talking. The first problem often has many dimensions: a tension between the artist and the scholar or critic as individuals or as representatives of two different

institutional and life-worldly settings. The second problem may point at a general mistrust in all practices of ekphrasis because they may distort the intentions of the artist.

“The people who talk about it [i.e. a masquerade] are those who haven’t seen it.”

(Syoni Ouattara, elder of a poro lodge, Nafoun, Côte d’Ivoire, 2022)

Some artworks become discursive nodal points, attract comments and criticisms left and right. Others are seen by many and obviously have a public impact while their discursive presence is negligible. Still other artworks remain in a discursive limbo so that no coherent interpretation emerges. And finally, there are artworks that seem to silence the spectators while those who have not seen them continuously talk about them. Oftentimes, such diverging practices relate to the context in which artists and their audience live. For instance, in authoritarian regimes, artists are generally aware of the risks they run when they are recognised as authors of their work. By avoiding discursive articulations, they also avoid being tracked and persecuted for their art. Besides outright repression by those who hold power, hegemonic discursive formations may also silence artists and their works, for instance, when elders watch over an artwork that is not meant to be seen by a particular group of people.

This panel invites scholars of all disciplines and artists of all genres to reflect on their experience with the intangible borderline between seeing and talking. This panel seeks to learn more about silence as a practice and addresses the following general questions: When and why do artists prefer not to talk about their work? What expectations of ekphrasis do artists or scholars have to deal with? How do these expectations and their outcomes influence aesthetic appreciations of artworks? What happens when they are not satisfied? Why, when, and how become artists and artworks nodal points of public discourses? When and how are they exempted from public debates or eventually silenced?

### **Photography in the First-Person: The Interview as Source**

Co-Chairs:

Antawan Byrd, Assistant Professor of Art History at Northwestern University and an Associate Curator of Photography and Media at the Art Institute of Chicago

Phil Taylor, Associate Curator, Department of Photography, George Eastman Museum

Leslie Wilson, Associate Director for Academic Engagement and Research, Art Institute of Chicago

How has and does the interview as a primary source shape our understanding of African photography? How do historians of photography in Africa solicit and make legible testimony about the objects they study? When and why do photographers speak about their work, and how do they constitute their listeners?

Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, anthropologists, art historians, and curators (all primarily based in the West) acted on their growing interests in African studio photography by conducting and mobilizing interviews to frame the work of photographers across academic articles, popular publications, and through exhibitions. In many cases, the conditions governing such interviews remained opaque: the voice of photographers were sometimes misleadingly edited, paraphrased, or presented in summary form without the transparency of “Q & A” transcription. Sometimes transparency about language and translation was omitted. In other cases, misplaced records or inaccurate notations proved consequential to the attribution of photographers or resulted in distorted narratives, whether inadvertent or willful. Such instances, however, appear to pale in comparison to the body of rich, ethically-conducted, and carefully-presented knowledge generated from interviews as measured by their appearance in print scholarship and journalism, and in exhibitions through audio and film recordings or text transcribed from these formats. Several recent projects center the interview form transparently in their writing and reflexively discuss it as a methodology, reflecting greater sensitivity within the field of African photography toward how the voices of practitioners (and sometimes their photographic subjects), custodians, archivists, and other mediators register in scholarship and popular discourse.

To better account for voices that have been left out of the conversation about photography and to engage critically with the existing accounts, the field needs greater attention to the disciplinary structures, social dynamics, practical techniques, and platforms for dissemination that speak for photographs and the work of making them. This roundtable will examine the interview as source, method, performance, and practice. Discussants will consider the practical needs for conducting interviews, such as training, preparation, language proficiency, and formal and informal agreements. Other discussion topics will include issues of access, use, and a wide range of sensitivities that shape these dialogues. Through this conversation, we aim to begin the work of historicizing the role and evolution of the interview form within the field of African photography, recognizing that the foregoing dynamics continue to matter in art historical and museological

framings of photographic objects, as well as in the marketing of African photography and the careers of its practitioners.

### **Local museums and international collaborations: The “other side” of the story**

Chair: Mathias Fubah Alubafi, Human Sciences Research Council

In recent years, discussions around the restitution of African artifacts from Western museums have dominated academic dialogues within art history and anthropology. This focus has resulted in the return of significant African art pieces to their source communities. Simultaneously, Western museums have embarked on extensive digitization projects for their African collections, aiming to broaden accessibility not only in the West but also in Africa and the originating communities. However, the funding for these endeavors predominantly originates from the West or Western museums that house these African collections. This financial reliance extends to collaborative initiatives between African-based museums and their Western counterparts, where the funding source often dictates the course of these partnerships.

While this financial support is ostensibly positive, it raises critical implications for both Western museums and their African or local counterparts, particularly concerning the preservation of diverse perspectives. Paradoxically, the funding intended to empower local museums and amplify their voices in managing their collections can inadvertently stifle these very voices. The influence of the funder often ends up directing the trajectory of collaborations, potentially silencing the voices the initiatives initially sought to elevate.

This call invites scholarly contributions that examine and elucidate the numerous efforts made by African-based and Western museums to foster diverse voices, whether through restitution efforts, digitization projects, or collaborative engagements. The focus will be on illuminating instances where these endeavors, aimed at empowering local voices, paradoxically lead to their suppression. Submissions can delve into collaborative ventures between local/palace museums and Western counterparts, as well as engagements between national museums in Africa and Western institutions, or any collaborative initiatives between African-based museums and Western counterparts.

### **Artist-Centered Approaches to African Restitution**

Co-Chairs: Jennifer Bajorek, Professor of Comparative Literature and Visual Studies, Hampshire College  
Abigail E. Celis, Assistant Professor in Decolonial Art History and Museum Studies, Université de Montréal

Our open roundtable invites contributions from scholars, artists, and activists critically exploring artist-centered approaches to the restitution, repatriation, and return of African art.

In recent years, artists have engaged in the arena of restitution in ways that are remarkably creative, generative, and varied. They have intervened in museum collections, made new objects, or responded to absent ones (Noral Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles, Laura Nsengiyumva, Kader Attia, Moridja Kitenge Banza). They have explored the aesthetic and material qualities of restitutable objects, or surfaced questions about the conditions and implications of return (Sammy Baloji, Saitabao Kaiyare and Elena Schilling). Some artists have developed novel approaches to localizing objects and visualizing their histories of movement across political and other borders (Kapwani Kiwanga, the Shift and Nest Collectives). Others have used speculative methods to explore the desires of source and descendant communities, which are not fixed in the moment of dispossession (Onyeka Igwe, Jihan El-Tahri). Still others have used performance-based strategies, enacting rituals or seizures in the heart of European and North American museum galleries, thus highlighting the manifold exclusions of individuals and communities from the institutions that hold their cultural heritage (Jelili Atiku, Mwazulu Diyabanza). Others, who have situated their work in Africa, in Indigenous communities, or in institutions elsewhere in the Global South, have used performance and adjacent strategies to activate relationships between communities and objects, to invite dialogue between communities and institutions, or to strengthen ties within and among communities (Memory Biwa, George Mahashe, Mamadou Kouma Gueye).

We convene this roundtable on two premises resonant with the triennial’s core thematic focus on human-, community-, and artist-centered practice. Firstly, that artist-centered approaches to restitution constitute a significant new area of contemporary artistic practice worthy of serious historical and theoretical analysis. The material, aesthetic, and relational inquiry at the heart of artist-centered approaches offers ways to diversify epistemologies and pluralize knowledge production. Secondly, that artists’ interventions in the

arena of restitution are garnering increasing interest in the context specifically of African restitutions. Their interventions may provide tools for radical listening and capacious, empathetic thinking, as well as models (or missed opportunities) for shifting restitutions discourse and practice toward the cultivation of sustainable and ethical institutional, community, and interpersonal relationships instead of museal paradigms focused on material permanence, dis/possession and accumulation.

Our theme offers myriad other connections with, and rich cross-pollination across, the triennial's core framework, including approaches to wellness, reparations, healings; mentorships, exchanges, collaborations; tangible and intangible knowledges and scholarly approaches; transparency in museum practices; decoloniality and decolonial approaches to the arts of Africa. By arts of Africa, we name a complex and plural range of objects, practices, and archives of material and expressive cultures that take material, immaterial, natural, cultural and/or spiritual forms. We welcome contributions presenting or critically exploring artist-centered projects physically situated in Africa as well as those led by artists working in contexts created or invited by European and North American holding institutions. Contributions may take any format.

### **Reimagining Public Art: Community Engagement, Sustainability, and Urban Transformation**

Chair: Ajayi, Olayemi T.; Department of Art and Design, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria ; Member, Editorial and Advisory Boards for the International Journal of Arts and Humanities, London, United Kingdom

This panel seeks to explore the evolving landscape of public art, focusing on innovative approaches that emphasize community engagement, sustainability, and the transformative potential of art in urban spaces. Public art plays a pivotal role in shaping the identity and vibrancy of cities. This panel aims to reflect on practices that actively involve communities in the creation, interpretation, and preservation of public artworks. How can public art be a catalyst for community dialogue and empowerment? How can it address environmental sustainability and contribute to the resilience of urban spaces?

Here is an invitation for discussions on participatory public art projects that actively involve residents in the co-creation of artworks, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to the public realm. Case studies and analyses will showcase successful models of community engagement, emphasizing the importance of diverse voices in shaping public spaces.

Sustainability is a key theme, and our panel will explore how public art can contribute to environmental awareness and sustainable urban development. From eco-friendly materials to installations that address climate change, we aim to examine the intersection of art, sustainability, and ecological consciousness in the public sphere.

The transformative potential of public art in urban spaces will also be a central focus. We intend to discuss how public art can redefine and repurpose underutilized urban areas, contributing to social cohesion and economic revitalization. The role of public art in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity will be examined, with an emphasis on projects that break down barriers and amplify underrepresented voices.

Additionally, the panel will be probing the role of city officials and policymakers in supporting and integrating public art into urban planning. How can collaborations between artists, communities, and city governments lead to more inclusive and sustainable urban spaces?

Through a combination of presentations and interactive discussions, our panel seeks to inspire a reimagining of public art as a dynamic force for community engagement, sustainability, and urban transformation. By exploring innovative practices and sharing insights from diverse perspectives, we invite credible studies to contribute to a holistic understanding of the potential of public art to shape the future of our cities.

### **Digitalization, Youth Economy, and the Future of Popular Arts in Africa**

Co-Chairs: Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula; Department of Theatre Arts, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike  
Alexander von Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz.

Digitalization has created enormous entrepreneurial opportunities in Africa. Since the proliferation of digital networks at the turn of the millennium, an increasing population of internet users has employed these mediatized spaces to demonstrate their talents and express themselves. Rising unemployment rates have propelled the growing number of content creators who attain fame and affluence by framing lived experiences and commodifying them on social media platforms. These transformations are hinged on the spread of the internet and the consequent digitalization of popular arts. Despite the successes recorded so far in creating and circulating mediatized cultural products, these new mediums are plagued with uncertainties and vulnerabilities, resulting from government bans or partial restrictions of social media platforms such as Twitter in Nigeria and outright disruptions to internet access in other places in Africa. Authorities of many countries in the continent such as Mali, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Chad, Guinea, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, among others, have, between 2017 and 2021, applied URL-based blocking or throttling to limit internet access. Although users adopt Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to evade the bans, tensions arising from these disruptions widen existing populations without internet access and foreground the precariousness of digital popular arts on the continent. Incidentally, this trend has received little or no academic inquiry, since Africa has only begun recognizing Web 2.0 platforms as research sites. This panel examines the future of popular arts in these checkered spaces creating a new youth economy.

### **Raising Voices: Climate Change and Environmental Degradation**

Chair: Lynne Larsen, Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

From Diébédo Francis Kéré's sustainable architecture in Burkina Faso, to Maurice Mbikayi's wearable garments made of computer keyboards in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Berni Searle's use of burning tires and coal dust in her photography and video pieces in South Africa, contemporary African artists have engaged with issues surrounding global warming and environmental instability in provocative ways. According to the World Meteorological Organization's 2022 report, Africa emits less than 10 percent of the world's greenhouse gasses, but is less able to cope with the devastation which result from global emissions than other continents. This panel seeks to explore how African artists, architects, film makers, and designers have expressed frustration with, exposed the consequences of, raised awareness about, and/or proposed solutions to environmental and climate crises through their work. Potential paper topics may consider (but are not limited to) art, architecture, fashion design, and/or film that deal(s) with:

- Environmental Justice
- Climate activism
- The displacement of people due to environmental disaster
- The exploitation of the land and people for resources
- The consumptive practices of the Global North
- The environmental impact of colonial legacies
- Water insecurity
- Air pollution
- Wildlife protection and/or biodiversity loss
- Deforestation
- Drought, flooding, tropical storms, and other natural disasters resulting from global warming
- Agricultural decline and soil degradation
- Solutions to environmental catastrophes

This panel considers the relationship between climate injustice and Africa's colonial history. Papers may consider how global warming and other environmental devastation constitute a contemporary colonization for Africa, and how the lives lost in environmental disasters reflect Achille Mbembe's discussion of necropolitics. Authors may also consider how art, architecture, fashion, or film have made apparent the interconnection of racial inequality and climate change.

### **Fight of the Century: The Rumble in the Jungle 50 years on**

Co-Chairs: Elaine Sullivan, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Johannesburg  
Ruth Sacks, Lecturer, University of Johannesburg

In October 1974 President Mobutu Sese Seko welcomed the world to Kinshasa, capital of his recently-renamed Zaïre. In a specially-1968 constructed stadium, the Stade du 20 Mai, famed American boxers

Muhammad Ali and George Foreman met to decide the world heavyweight championship. The fight was a media savvy culture coup for Zaïre's new regime and an important Africanized cultural event. It aimed to celebrate Congolese cultural prowess through various spectacles. One month prior to the match, the same stadium was the scene of Zaire 74, a three-day music festival featuring celebrated African-American and African musicians. To mark the 50th anniversary of this transnational collaboration, we propose a panel dedicated to analyzing this event as a Pan-African cultural touchstone from a plurality of perspectives.

The event and its protagonists formed a larger-than-life Cold War drama. By 1974, Ali was a prominent member of the National of Islam and had taken a public stand against racism and the Vietnam War. The as-yet unbeaten Foreman was largely seen by the Congolese press as an apologist for America. Applying rope-a-dope tactics, Ali came off the ropes to knockout Foreman in the 8th round. Ali, considered the underdog, was embraced by Mobutu as an embodiment of a warrior in the mold of the "authentic" African traditions he was then promoting as part of the new Zaïrian nation. Mobutu would be a winner regardless of the outcome in the ring, as the fight was broadcast to millions around the globe, showcasing the host's magnanimity. Mobutu embodied the geopolitical complexity of this Cold War spectacle; while he publicly espoused an independent pro-African stance, he accepted American political and financial support (indeed, the match was produced by Don King).

On the eve of the fight's 50th anniversary, this panel explores the "Rumble in the Jungle" as iconic knowledge production regarding Africa. We invite papers on a broad variety of topics across disciplines related to these events, including but not limited to:

- Zaire 74 and the Rumble in the Jungle within the context of other Pan-African festivals of the period (e.g. FESMAN '66, FESTAC '77)
- Boxing and the image of the boxer in Congo, past and present
- Mobutu's patronage of the arts (and authenticity)
- Legacies of the fight in American and Congolese cultural memory
- Creative responses from across the arts, such as film, popular painting, and music
- Rope-a-dope as tactic

In addition to traditional academic papers, artistic and creative practice research responses by visual artists are welcome.

### **Art-Making as Rituals and Rites: Exploring the Transformative Power of Creative Expression**

Chair: May Okafor; Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Art-making and rituals/rites of passage are deeply embedded in human society and have played significant roles in personal, social, and cultural contexts throughout history. This panel aims to explore the inherent connection between art-making and rituals and rites of passage, highlighting how creative expressions can serve as transformative experiences that facilitate personal growth, foster human connections, promote healing, and mark important life transitions. In this context, art is therefore considered a performative process, with or without an end product that may serve as a relic. The panel is interested in the generative possibilities that artist-centered approaches to art-making bring to cultural, experimental, collaborative, or individualistic contexts, examining such questions as: How did distinct cultures navigate important life transitions using art as an agency? In what ways can the artist function as a shaman or the shaman as an artist? What possible connections exist between art therapy and ritualization through art-making? What roles do art-making and creative expressions play in ritual experimentation? What art-making processes possibly parallel distinct rituals or rites, and how have such processes been explored creatively? How have distinct artists negotiated their personal spaces while exploring their art processes as rituals or rites? To answer these questions, here are the scope and possible sub-themes to be addressed in this panel:

The Creative Process as a Spiritual Journey  
Art Therapy: Healing and Psychological Transformation  
Artistic Rituals for Self-Reflection and Contemplation  
Art, Creativity, and Ritual Experimentation  
Art-Making as Rites of Passage: Navigating Life Transitions  
Adolescence and Coming-of-Age Artistic Rituals  
Weddings and the Artistic Celebration of Marriage  
Mourning and Art-making as a Ritual of Grief  
The Transformative Power of Art-Making



Identity Formation and Collective Memory  
Artistic Rituals and Empowering Marginalized Voices  
Indigenous Art and Cultural Rituals: Connecting Past and Present  
Artistic Rituals as Cultural Expressions  
Art-making Rituals and the Unconscious Mind

By analyzing various historical, cultural, and contemporary examples, we will delve into the ways that art-making functions as powerful tools for self-discovery, expression, personal growth, identity formation, cultural development, and community building. The panel, therefore, hopes to offer a comprehensive analysis of the connections between art-making and rituals and rites of passage, emphasizing their transformative power in personal, social, and cultural contexts.

### **Spiritual Repair: Post-Secular Black Atlantic Arts**

Chair: Dr Ferdinand de Jong; International Fellow, New Europe College, Bucharest, Romania

In the history of European social science, the prevailing idea was that modernization will result in disenchantment, to use Max Weber's words, and lead to secularization. However, since the late twentieth century, this idea of a unilinear secularization has been criticised and rejected. As secularism does not prevail in even the most secular societies of Europe, and traditional forms of religion have given way to new spiritualities, we now speak of a post-secular present. What are the implications of this re-conceptualisation of modernity for the study of Black arts?

The arts of Africa have always been deeply entangled with spirituality. In the religions developed in the "New World", such spirituality recurred in popular religions such as Vodun and Candomblé, and in the gospel music in African American churches. In the academic study of African and African American arts such spirituality has been recognized from the start: *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* by Robert Farris Thompson (1984) speaks of spiritual aspects of African and African-American arts -- and even of spiritual renaissance.

When we look at the history of European Modernism, it becomes clear that spirituality has played a significant role in the work by early abstract painters such as Kandinsky, Mondriaan or Af Klint. In the art history of Modernism, however, the role of spirituality has long been denied. Only with the exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (1986), was the history of the spiritual in modernism properly recognized. This suggests that the spiritual has been subject to secular regimes throughout much of the twentieth century.

This panel explores how the spiritual has been transmitted in popular and modern Black art in a context defined by secularism. How have secularisms affected the production of spiritual arts in Africa, Europe, and the Americas? To what extent has spirituality been mobilized in producing transatlantic connections in the arts? Positing that coloniality was founded on secularism, to what extent can we understand the embrace of the spiritual in Black visual and material arts as a form of epistemic decolonization? Recognizing the important work of the Indian art historian Partha Mitter, to what extent should spirituality be understood as an orientation developed and circulated in the context of empire and how does the acknowledgement of global spirituality enable us de-centre European narratives of art? Situating spirituality in a post-secular Black Atlantic, this panel invites papers that address the spiritual in African and Black arts. Preferably, papers are to address how these arts have sought to decolonize secularism.

### **Past/Predecessors: Modern and Contemporary African Art Between Generations**

Co-Chairs: Perrin Lathrop, PhD, Assistant Curator of African Art, Princeton University Art Museum  
Gabriella Nugent, PhD, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, University of East Anglia

The past has always been relevant to the study of African art, but recent interventions and events have both emphasized its significance and opened it up to question. In 2020, David Joselit proposed a framework for global contemporary art based on artists from the Global South staging their cultural heritage in the global contemporary art world. This assumption of a seamless relationship between artists and their heritage was rebuffed by Elizabeth Harney (2022) who compared it to the inaccurate alignments of "tribe" with "style" in early scholarship on African arts famously criticized by Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1984). Meanwhile, African artists have received increased attention in the wake of the global Black Lives Matter protest movement in 2020 and concomitant demands to decolonize art history and expand museum collections in

Europe and North America. But this moment of celebration is plagued by a kind of forgetfulness around previous efforts to center African artists.

This panel is interested in the intergenerational relationship between modern and contemporary African artists and their predecessors. We take the idea of predecessors to loosely mean those who came before them. They include other artists, teachers, and artistic and cultural traditions, controlled and often silenced in colonial contexts. We invite papers that consider modern and contemporary artists who recover and translate these traditions in their work, but also those who deliberately distance themselves from them. For example, Uche Okeke transformed the abstract designs of uli body and mural painting into compositions that simultaneously rely on and empty them of their meaning. More recently, Nandipha Mntambo has rejected interpretations of her work in the context of the artist's Swazi background.

Beyond these instances of recovery and rejection, we are interested in artists whose work confronts the occlusions of Western centers. Despite the promises of globalization, when African artists debut in Europe and North America, their previous efforts on the continent and original contexts of making are often erased. Many are absorbed into Western schools. We accordingly invite papers that consider artists who locate themselves in an African artistic trajectory. For example, Ibrahim Mahama's installations and institutions pay homage to the teachings of his professors at KNUST; Michael Armitage's paintings, exhibitions, and Nairobi-based contemporary art center honor an earlier generation of East African artists; and Kemang We Lehulere's installations incorporate the work of South African modernists Ernest Mancoba and Gladys Mgudlandlu.

### **Museums in Africa and their Search for relevance as Source and Agent of Social Wellness**

Co-Chairs: Dr. David Mbuthia, Deputy Director, Heroes Square Museums Sites and Monuments at the National Heroes Council, Kenya

Rosalie Hans, Post-Doctoral Research Associate, Rising from the Depths

Museums the world over are faced with the challenge of achieving sustainability and relevance to the modern social-economic and environmental dynamics. Most museums in Africa trace their origins from the colonial period. They were conceived based on the western concept of cabinet-of-curiosity as well as experts' calibration of authenticity and antiquity. As such, their collections, exhibitions and programmes were geared towards satisfying the western exploration quest, while intentionally excluding or disregarding the cultures and histories of the Africans.

After more than six decades of independence, almost all museums in Africa have continued to struggle in cultivating local relevance. For most of these museums, the colonial legacy is still easily traceable in their exhibitions, which have not been adequately reviewed and adapted to tell the stories of the local communities, to sufficiently yield the social wellness that is much needed in the continent's current highly dynamic socio-economic context.

This panel will explore how museums in Africa, have continued to seek relevance to their local communities through their collections, exhibitions and programmes which include partnerships and restitution. The panel discussions will place at the center the human face imbued by the perception of the local communities as the makers, interpreters and users of their tangible and intangible forms of arts. The panel will explore the extent to which the displays, interpretations, disseminations, community engagements, engagement of the youth, restitution and indigenous perspectives have been employed to represent and offer solutions to local communities and the African continent.

### **Knowledge Creation and Co-Curation in Museums and Public Spaces: Contestations and Advances**

Co-Chairs: Bongani Ndhlovu (Executive Director, Iziko Museums of South Africa) and Silvia Forni (Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director Fowler Museum @UCLA)

Engaged criticism of conventional knowledge creation and circulation has broadened the public space as a multimodal sphere of critical engagements. Increasingly, it has seen focus on the creation of spaces that recognize the plurality of knowledges, co-curation of exhibitions, contestation of spaces and recognition of expertise and skills sets that operated outside the conventional spheres of knowledge production. In this round table discussion, we explore how this intellectual move has allowed for "new" forms of expression and how these have found articulation in exhibitions, publications and public programmes of public

institutions and non-conventional institutions. We also explore resistances and tensions in these spaces, and the new set of tensions and issues that may be generated by these new approaches.

### **Around the Object: New Directions in Museum and Curatorial Education in Africa**

Co-Chairs: Ciraj Rassool, Professor, Department of Historical Studies, University of the Western Cape  
Rory Bester, Professor, Department of Historical Studies, University of the Western Cape

More than reiterating existing senses of the ‘curatorial turn’, new and emerging curatorial programmes at universities on the African continent are questioning the nature of the ‘curatorial’ itself, not only as a radically expanded practice, but also in reimagining the role of the curatorial within both museum practices and constituted fields such as museum studies. In thinking through the ability of the curatorial to differently hold complex human-, community- and artist-centred practices, new curatorial pluralities are challenging the traditional specialisations and discursive orientations of the ‘museum’ and its objects, and instead opening other possibilities for thinking around the object, in forms that are embodied, sensory, spatial, kinetic and choreographic. In calling attention to the languages and practices around the object, the curatorial is confronted with complex questions about listening, histories, strangeness, inclusion, research, translation, argument and activism. It is being made to reach beyond the limits of ‘field’, outside of distinctions between tangible and intangible, and into the discomfort of positionality, personhood and intersectionality. In sitting with these questions, this panel is concerned with the methodological questions that underpin new ideas of the curatorial in teaching programmes offered on the African continent. As forms of pedagogy, ignorance, sharing, teaching, collaboration, learning and generosity, how do we experiment with and trouble the curatorial’s knowledge making in the museum’s present?

### **(De)Constructing Authenticity: New Methods and Case Studies**

Co-Chairs: Sarah Van Beurden, Associate Professor, Ohio State University  
Carlee S. Forbes, Curatorial Fellow, Fowler Museum at UCLA

The matter of authenticity, its construction and application, has for decades been the source of critical attention in the field of African Art Studies (and beyond). Among the many voices on the topic, Sidney Kasfir explained in 1992 that ideas of authenticity are based on flawed assumptions about “traditional society” and its artists as “bound by tradition.” Christopher Steiner’s scholarship has demonstrated how ideas about authenticity also influenced practices of making among carvers and traders in the Ivory Coast. (Steiner, 1994) Despite these critiques, authenticity continues to be a powerful category of analysis and classification, particularly in the setting of collections, museums, and art markets.

For this panel, we are interested in papers that build upon, challenge, and enrich this earlier literature. In keeping with the focus of the conference on “human-centered approaches to African Arts,” we are particularly interested in the ways in which individuals and communities both on and off the African continent blur, play into, disregard, or work outside of the analytical and theoretical lines of these categories.

In designing this panel, we have intentionally left the call open-ended. The topic of authenticity has and remains at the front of many art historical discourses. As we gather proposals, we hope to find new lines connecting each other’s methods and examples that will help to further probe this enormous discussion.

Angles we are interested in for this panel:

- Papers that pry apart the historical constructions of authenticity/ies
- Papers on object genres that undermine categories (with a specific interest in colonial craft making)
- Papers that consider examples of artists/dealers/collectors working intentionally against notions of authenticity
- Examples of artists who create works for sale that seek to conform or meet collectors’/audience’s expectations for “authentic” art
- Papers that show how objects have moved between categories as authentic and inauthentic, and the implications of these definitions
- Papers that evaluate the current impact of colonially-constructed understanding of authenticity
- Modern and contemporary arts struggling with or pushing back against these categories

### **From Belief to Heritage: Rethinking the museum.**

Co-Chairs: Dr William Rea; Senior Lecturer in African Art, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds  
Iheanyi Onwuegbucha, PhD Candidate, Department of Art and Archeology, Princeton University

John Peel's (2017) documentation of iconoclasm in Yoruba culture and his assertion that the formulation of that culture is freighted by external and diasporic concerns stands at odds with a current explosion of interest from within Nigeria in local cultural forms. The development of heritage as a mode of cultural expression is now found across Africa and in a variety of different ways. The establishment of a number of new museums – often challenging the ‘Cartesian’ principles of a European museology – that place a sense of culture at their core, to shifts within local performative demonstrations of cultural heritage suggest that, at least in West Africa, there has been a demonstrable change in the way in which local ideas of tradition are being mobilised within the contemporary state. Peel’s work points to the twentieth century denigration of local cultural forms, whether as a systematic ideology of the colonial state (and its attendant evolutionist notions of primitivism) or on the part of world religious iconoclastic movements that have until very recently regarded cultural formations as either backwards or even framed them as satanic (thereby placing them within an (often Christian) logic of thought).

Does the concept of heritage then replace a notion of belief? Are practices and traditions from (a recent) past contained and constrained by the concept, domesticated as a part of an identity but losing purchase on the everyday? Or, is the implication a renewed interest in local cultural forms that might offer a different epistemic logic? Clearly there are implications that surround the ways in which the form of heritage is constructed and represented. Here the panel aims to stimulate a dialogue between museum display and design and the representation(s) of heritage as made and documented in local contexts. At question is the prevalence of the ethnographic and what is needed to avoid the reassertion of anthropological spectatorship. What might be learnt from community practice?

This panel asks for contributions that document the ways in which the shift into heritage is taking place – whether that is at the level of large, sponsored, museum projects or at local levels wherein cultural forms such as masquerade are now engaged as markers of identity. The work asks for a consideration of the ways in which heritage is increasingly at the heart of community making and what that concept actually means for local communities. That in turn offers questions about the challenges that exist in developing the concept and how it is mobilised at both local and state levels. Does the promotion of a particular material culture (in a museum for instance) suggest a return to an outdated notion of ‘tribal’ affiliation or is there something more subtle in the modern States’ accommodation of heritage. It looks to ask questions about the development of historical consciousness in relation to past practice and the way in which that consciousness is mobilised to counteract the European trope of the ‘traditional’.

### **Women & Non-Binary South African Artists: Revisioning Histories**

Co-Chairs: Christopher Richards, Associate Professor, Brooklyn College (co-convenor)  
Elizabeth Perrill, Professor, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Many of the celebrated forms of South African visual culture, from beadwork and ceramics to contemporary photography and performance art, are the result of women and non-binary artists. Despite this rich history, these artists and related histories of making are often relegated to the margins of South African art history. This panel seeks to engage with artists, researchers and curators who are actively prioritizing the creative expressions of women and non-binary artists, with a particular interest in how identity constructions have shaped artistic practice. Associate Professor Christopher Richards will reassess the ceramic sculptures of Bonnie Ntshalintshali, demonstrating that she was able to assert her own, distinct voice through her sculptures, one that thoughtfully addressed issues of black identity and spirituality during a particularly tumultuous period of South Africa’s history. Professor Elizabeth Perrill will foregrounding the legacy of women’s art forms in pedagogical practice historically in KwaZulu-Natal and the urgency of bringing women into classrooms and arts training as Indigenous Knowledge Experts.

### **Gender and Artistic Production from the Maghrib**

Chair: Kimberly Cleveland; Associate Professor of Art History, Georgia State University

Due to the abundance of publications and exhibitions that focus on sub-Saharan art, production from North Africa, including that from the Maghrib (western and northern Africa with the exceptions of Egypt and

Sudan), has received comparatively less scholarly attention. Further, Maghrib artistic expression is frequently included in studies and shows of MENA (Middle East and North Africa) or Arab-Islamic work due to ethnic, religious, geographic, and cultural factors. Though this is one way to contextualize the production, this panel features work on and from the Maghrib in the interests of diversifying knowledge of art from the African continent. It also shines light on the intersection of gender and art, as “formal” artistic training, internationally recognized producers, and the generation of artistic knowledge from this part of the continent continue to be male dominated. As such, panelists may address “traditionally” female artistic forms of expression, including modifications in audience, material, and technique over time. Papers that investigate developments in what have historically been considered “male” art forms and what depictions of female subjects by male producers reveal about gender would also be applicable. Panelists may focus on specific artists, including the way that producers call attention to gender-related social and cultural challenges in their work. Individuals might explore how concepts of gender and art are understood within Amazigh, Arab, and European communities in the Maghrib. Participants may highlight appropriate methodologies, best research practices, and/or epistemological factors relevant to investigations of gender and art from this area of the continent. Lastly, individuals might speak on gender-related topics in relation to academic and popular publications and exhibitions. The panel Gender and Artistic Production from the Maghrib can accommodate papers from a variety of different disciplines that offer original and/or revisionist examinations of production mainly from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. It is already partially constituted with two participants.

### **Critical Inquiry in Design, Media and Material Culture of Sub-Saharan Africa**

Co-Chairs: Richard Acquaye; Dean, School of Graduate Studies, Takoradi Technical University, Takoradi - Ghana  
Rikki Wemega-Kwawu; El Anatsui Experimental Studios., Takoradi - Ghana

This panel seeks to develop a framework for critical enquiry on design and material culture to interrogate the trajectories of the same in West Africa. It is part of a broader research that encompasses critical, creative enquiry and knowledge exchange, emphasising West African design and material culture. It further seeks to critically assess and contextualise arguments and viewpoints on design and material culture in West Africa. The main underpinning of this study is that design and material culture are or can be considered as scholarship that brings art history into dialogue with interdisciplinary material culture studies. The material components of an object, that is, its medium and physicality are key to understanding its cultural significance. Material culture has stretched the boundaries of art history and emphasized new points of contact with other disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, consumer and mass culture studies. In some instances, the concept is referred to as the thing theory and materialist philosophy. There are other extensions such as material culture of art and design that encompass published studies that explore the relationship between art and material culture in all of its complexity. West Africa has a rich and great diversity regarding culture, language and ethnicity. These are reflected in the lifestyle, food clothing and textile preferences of the people. The region is home to many tribes. Some of the tribes make up a substantial part of the population of the countries they inhabit. Typically, even tribes that live in proximity to each other maintain their unmistakable social practices and dialects. The Ashanti, Yoruba, Senoufo, Fon and Bamana tribes are some of the notable ones and this gives basis to the diversity in design and material culture within the region.

The discourse quest to establish forums and resources conducive to dialogues among stakeholders and interest groups. It is anticipated that these engagements will stimulate transformative modifications, rendering design and material culture more inclusive and engaging. This engagement advocates for a resounding call to embrace creative development as a means to re-evaluate the role of design and material culture not merely in pursuit of economic gains but also in effecting meaningful change in the lives of traditional cultural custodians within the region. Design and material culture are an integral part of West Africa and are in a constant flux of transformation.

### **New Dimensions of Contemporary Art Studies and Practice in Nigeria and Ghana Since 2020**

Co-Chairs: Deborah Dike, Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies.  
Elijah Sofo, Takoradi Technical University (Ghana).

We seem to be inhabiting a constantly changing and evolving world since 2020, which has led to different critical (research) reflections on its implications on cultural, social, political, economic and other societal contexts across the globe. We find a possibility of this within the contemporary art space in Nigeria and

Ghana, and through our proposed round table, we seek to answer the question of how. We ask, “to what extent are post 2020 societal changes affecting Art practice and Art research in Nigeria and Ghana?” We seek answers to how art practitioners, critics and academics react with their works to post 2020 cultural, social, political, economic and other societal developments. We propose to bring together five to six scholars and practitioners of both material and immaterial art- ranging from sculpting/sculptors to Internet memes/graphic designers. We believe that this roundtable discussion will bring new, varying and balanced perspectives that will enrich contemporary art study and practice in and of Africa.

### **Photographic Transversals: Mobility, Intermediality, and Temporality in African Photography**

Co-Chairs: Michelle Fikrig, PhD Student, Graduate Center, City University of New York  
Kinaya Hassane, PhD Student, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

Stemming from conversations started in a seminar at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, this panel will bring together four papers exploring 20th and 21st century photography from across the African continent. Each paper explores the complexity of the photographic medium and its wide-reaching connections across time and space. These connections are oftentimes catalyzed by the medium’s shape-shifting abilities, transforming into a vast array of physical objects: from contemporary fine art photographs, to glossy ad-filled magazines, to candid snapshots.

Taking the conference’s human-centric theme as a jumping off point, this panel will trouble the relationship between humans and photographs. As such, each paper investigates photography as part of a wider network constituted by the complex interplay between humans, photographic objects, and the (urban) environment. These explorations move away from predominant discussions in Africanist art history about the agency of photographic subjects, a concern that emerges from legacies of anthropological and anthropometric photography on the continent. Rather than focusing on the sitters’ agency, or that of the consumer or audience, this panel seeks to question how photographic objects themselves move through space and exist across time to constitute new realities and enact new possibilities.

Kinaya Hassane’s paper will focus on the work of contemporary Malagasy photographer, Malala Andrialavidrazana, and the ways that her series, Echoes, radically reimagines notions of Afro-Asian solidarity that were born out of the 1955 Bandung Conference. Michelle Fikrig’s paper investigates Drum magazine’s Nigerian edition as a crucial node in a networked ecosystem of African and Diasporic press, one that often counters the perceived homogeneity of the projected African experience of the post-independence era. Juul Van Haver’s paper examines photography from colonial Kinshasa and its intersections with urban nightlife and intermedial afterlives as album covers.

The panel’s discussant, Prita Meier, is an Associate Professor of Art History at NYU. Her forthcoming book, *The Surface of Things: A History of Photography from the Swahili Coast*, broaches the themes of photographic circulation and objecthood that cut across all four papers, making her a particularly fitting interlocutor for the panelists and audience.

### **RE-ENGAGING THE GEARS OF CONSERVATION IN THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE IN MODERN BENIN**

Co-Chairs: David Oshorenoya Esizimetor, Director, The Basic School International, Benin City, Nigeria  
Esther Esosa Esizimetor, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

In the ever-evolving landscape of the modern world, the rich cultural heritage of Benin faces the challenge of preservation and transmission to future generations. As custodians of this vibrant heritage, it is imperative to re-engage the gears of conservation and discuss strategies to ensure the seamless transmission of Benin culture be it storytelling, music, language, dance, bronze-casting or architecture. This round table aims to bring together scholars, cultural enthusiasts, community leaders, artist, educators, and policymakers to evaluate current conservation practices and to seek ways to rejuvenate and sustain the cultural legacies of Benin City.

We are proposing a panel of people with different methodological approaches in series of structured discussions of aspects of Benin cultural heritage. Each panelist will talk about what they did in their study(s) – what method/methodology they chose and why, and what they learned from what they did, while focusing on methodology as well as knowledge about the phenomenon studied.

Panelist 1: David Oshorenoya Esizimotor

Conservation of Architectural Heritage in Postcolonial Benin City: The Missing Links

Every year, thousands of traditional and historic buildings in Benin City are pulled down by private, corporate and public sector developers to make way for modern structures without clear consideration for the values of architectural heritage conservation. This has led to countless and needless cultural heritage losses for Benin and the global cultural heritage space. This study investigates the current state of the architectural heritage conservation practice in Benin City while also appraising her heritage conservation values at the level of the people, experts and government in order to determine their levels of compliance to the best heritage conservation practices around the world with view to developing a suitable and holistic blueprint for modern African cultural heritage conservation.

Panelist 2: Esther Esosa Esizimotor

Title: Retelling the 'Omoosewa' Folktale Through the Radical Voices of Children

The retelling of traditional folktales serves as an intangible and dynamic conduit for cultural preservation and evolution. This study explores an innovative approach of retelling the renowned 'Omoosewa' folktale through the radical voices of children in Benin City. By focusing on inclusive storytelling, the study involves children as listeners as well as active participants contributing their perspectives in reshaping the narrative and illustrating Omoosewa's travails with images from their dynamic minds. By incorporating the diverse viewpoints of children, the story takes a dynamic turn towards thought provoking conclusions and refreshing views of life and their culture.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF VISUAL ARTS ENTERPRISE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

Co-Chairs: BOJOR ENAMHE, Professor, University of Cross River  
Umana Nnochiri, Professor, Cross Rivers University of Technology

Visual Arts constitutes a vital source of socio-economic development of any society as well as the progress of the artist. Art in Africa combines the craft of creativity with the search for values that regenerate society. There is no denying the fact that the visual arts are booming in many parts of the world (in Europe, the USA, and China for example), while some countries in West Africa are yet to experience such patronage. This roundtable will aim to develop innovative knowledge necessary to get artists started with their practice. As such, the following questions are posed for discussion: How can art enterprise be encouraged in West Africa? How can art audiences be developed and engineered for better patronage? Are linkages with foreign markets, individuals, organizations, and institutions central to art development? Contributions concerning research and/or training on how to successfully launch careers in the visual arts, auctions, art galleries, art fairs and biennials are welcome topics.

## **Queer Hybrids in Contemporary African Art**

Co-Chairs: Abigail Celis, Assistant Professor, Art History and Museum Studies, University of Montreal  
Ivy Mills, Continuing Lecturer, History of Art, University of California, Berkeley

This panel seeks to examine the role that hybrid human-plant-animal-machine-alien bodies play in contemporary visual arts of Africa and the African diaspora. Anthropomorphized figures have a long history in African oral and literary storytelling, as well as in performance and sculptural traditions. Related figures appear in contemporary art; for example, hyena-men, chicken-men, and monkey-men abound in recent Senegalese works, featuring in sculptures by Soly Cisse and Mamady Seydi; a film by Selly Raby Kane; paintings by Fode Sidibe; and mixed media works by Omar Ba. These works are informed by Wolof oral tales that use anthropomorphized animal characters to reinforce dominant norms and values while simultaneously delighting in their mischievous, boundary-crossing, and rule-breaking behavior, entertaining a disruptive queer animality that threatens to subvert established order in the human community before it is contained. Other contemporary artists have taken up African traditions in which a variety of objects and beings are understood to contain or extend personhood, sometimes mediating the transfer of personhood from one form to another or the merging of different persons into a single body. In Soñ Gweha's performance installations, for example, the safou fruit is one materialized form of a queer spirit energy that can inhabit different people and that is mobilized by the artist for healing, emancipation, and the exploration of "the interconnectivity between beings and elements."

Taking the hybrid body in other directions, artists such as Wangechi Mutu or Nandipha Mntambo use collage and digital photography to depict sexualized and monstrous female bodies in their exploration of race-sex-species relations, colonial erotics, and femininity. Maurice Mbikayi and Julie Djikey, dressing themselves in technological debris to become human-animal-machine composite bodies, interrogate the ecological, political and social legacies of extractive (neo)colonial structures. The aesthetic and epistemological sources and concerns that drive artists' engagements with queer, hybrid bodies are plural and reflect the diverse local and global positionalities from which these artists create.

Keeping this plurality in mind, the papers in this panel ask when, where and why do queer, hybrid bodies appear in African and Afro-diasporic artistic representation? In what ways do contemporary imaginaries of mutating, shape-shifting or anthropomorphized bodies draw on previous figures of hybrid bodies? What do these bodies revisit, resuscitate and resist? What is their queer potential? In line with the ACASA 2024 theme, our panel addresses questions of personhood; wellness and healing; and the relation between intangible knowledge and artistic practice.

### **Making and Representing West African Textiles and Fashions**

Co-Chairs: Dr. Ablavi Mandirann AMEGNONKA, Lecturer, Department of English Studies, University of Kara, Togo.

Dr. Adwoa Owusua BOBIE, Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana.

Dr. Malika KRAAMER, Associate Researcher, Global Textile Lab, University of Bonn/Honorary Curator, National Museum of Ghana (Ghana Museums and Monuments Board).

Textile and fashion production and usage are at the core of West African practices and discourses. The cultural, social, political, and economic implications of their production and usage, as well as their representations and appropriations, have played a significant role in global flows of textile and fashion items, often in a context of asymmetrical dependencies. Thus, reflecting the ongoing interactions between West Africa and other parts of the world.

Their histories are actively embodied and negotiated in contemporary debates. The re-engagement with and reinterpretation of this past follows multifaceted trajectories in West Africa, shaped by varied positionalities and memories of its knowledge-producers - makers, artists, designers, academics, and activists - and different epistemologies shaped by gender dynamics, inherited cultural and linguistic knowledge, and linguistic divides such as francophone versus anglophone.

Such processes have stimulated the pluralization of knowledge and expertise. However, this has also led, in some instances, to conflicting discourses that inadvertently foreground Western perspectives over local representations, underscoring the need for a more nuanced, inclusive, and decolonized understanding of West African textile and fashion histories.

In this panel, we invite speakers who focus on both past and present material knowledge production of West African clothing, textiles and fashions histories and the ways their plurality of perspectives and positionalities are negotiated. The panel is interested in decolonial approaches to questions of cultural significance, social, political, and economic values, aesthetics and creativity, production and consumption, positionality of producers and consumers and (mis)representation on local and global levels. It invites papers to critically discuss mutual sartorial influences between the peoples of different geographical areas of West Africa.

The panel's vision is to create conversations that interrogates the forms of expertise and knowledge produced on West African textiles, clothing, and fashion, deconstructing Eurocentric narratives and forging a more integral methodology and conceptualization of West African arts.

This is a collaborative panel that is opened to both Francophone and Anglophone and Francophone scholars and practitioners who work on textiles, clothing, and fashion in West Africa. On specific questions, panelists are expected to Examine issues that critique dominant Western epistemologies, as well as proffer a more inclusive and integrated approach to knowledge production. Other relevant questions are:

1. Address ways by which scholars and practitioners can work collaboratively across boundaries.



2. How to share knowledge produced by scholars and practitioners - weavers and designers to other practitioners and the general public.
3. How to give room to plural epistemologies that cut across West African borders to present a more holistic discourse on textiles and fashion in the region.

### **“Collaborating Across Continents: Developing a Contemporary Masquerade Exhibition for North American and African Audiences”**

Co-Chairs: Lisa Homann, Associate Professor of Art History, UNC Charlotte  
Jordan Fenton, Associate Professor of Art History, Miami University Ohio

This panel examines a major international traveling exhibition focused on the creations of living masquerade artists in order to make clear that masquerade is fundamentally contemporary. *New Masks Now: Artists Innovating Masquerade in Contemporary West Africa* tells the stories of four contemporary artists working with the medium of masquerade (Hervé Youmbi from Cameroon, Chief Ekpenyong Bassey Nsa from Nigeria, David Sanou from Burkina Faso, and Sheku Fofanah from Sierra Leone). The exhibition will open at the New Orleans Museum of Art in April of 2025 and travel to various venues including, but not limited to, the Museum of Black Civilization in Dakar, Senegal and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. This panel addresses curatorial concerns with the development of a partnership that spans Western and African institutions.

In order to mitigate economic and logistical challenges, the team opted to create two iterations of the same exhibition concept: one in Africa and one in North America. This panel examines just some of the collaborations between North American and African researchers, artists, and institutions required to bring the exhibition to its varied audiences. The introduction pinpoints the premise of the exhibition and clarifies the rationale for developing two versions of the show. The next presentation considers the methodology of commissioning new masquerade ensembles from contemporary artists for American and African museum collections. A joint presentation investigates the collaborations between organizers to create an exhibition that is intelligible to the different core audiences of specific American and West African museums. The final presentation analyzes the vital role of a contemporary artist engaged in conceptualizing and directing creative research in two African countries while also consulting on the exhibition’s development.

### **Nigerian Contemporary Ceramic in Retrospective View**

Co-Chairs: AFAM OKWUDILI; VISION IN CLAY (GROUP OF POTTERS AND CERAMICS ARTIST IN NIGERIA)

Chukwuebuka Okwuba, Creative Artist at Ejo Temple of Creativity

The meaning of pottery as a profession to a layperson is manual labor or craft. It is one of the oldest forms of craftsmanship and has been practiced in almost every part of the world, evolving through the ages. Nigeria is not exempt from this developmental trajectory.

While there are other ancient ceramic cultures, the earliest form of the pottery tradition in Nigeria can be traced back to Nok ceramics sculpture. Interestingly, they share similar characteristics and traditions, and this paper aims to discuss them.

Furthermore, this paper aims to explore the traditional methods employed in pottery making, emphasizing the indigenous ornaments that are unique to the history and tradition of the culture that produced them. Throughout the research, we will delve into the indigenous potters and their pottery traditions, which have transformed into what is now known as pottery centers in Nigeria. Additionally, we will examine how these centers have incorporated modern techniques into their pottery in recent times.

### **OBJECTS REFUSE TO BE CANCELLED (#babybathwater)**

Chair: Kathy Curnow; Professor of African Art History, Cleveland State University

Reports of the African object’s death or abandonment are premature. Object-centered studies distinguish our discipline from allied fields that concentrate on people’s societies (anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and behavioral economics), events (history), or interactions (social psychology, performance studies). Beginning inquiries with an object focus is not exclusive.

Explorations of humanity, community, artists, and varied perspectives are always possible, and have been among the associated paths that objects direct us toward. When art history was in its nascence, it centered on artists' biographies (Vasari), stylistic cycles (Burkhardt), and the identification of hands (Berenson). Other directions sprouted, such as iconography and iconology, and the application of various literary and social theories. Because of its close relationship with human-centered anthropology, African art history has always favored the object in context. We bear the rarely-credited responsibility for increasing that emphasis in art history generally in the last thirty or so years, while also adopting broader disciplinary directions.

Since the 1970s, few Africanist art historians have considered the object solely as an end unto itself. Research on the continent replaced the formalism and stand-alone connoisseurship of the armchair Africanist. While these tools still have a place, objects more frequently serve as an invaluable entry point that draws in specialists and non-specialists. Objects have the power to generate greater interest than an image-free article or museum panel alone, whether physical, in print, or digital.

In a visually-dominant era when Object-Based-Learning (OBL) is infiltrating diverse academic fields from early STEAM education to Ph.D. programs, why abandon this proven method of engendering curiosity and absorption in humanity? Forsaking the object can lead us Africanist art historians into worthy arenas that may be more Eurocentric than not—museums' historical collecting policies or legal issues regarding restitution of looted works are compelling topics, even to the general public, but they have little to do with the original meaning and function of individual objects and provide greater insight into Western reception and attitudes than African ones.

Works from Africa's more distant, precolonial past usually lack information about their artists and, frequently, the beliefs, patrons, and symbolic systems that produced them. Whether the object indicates temporal or geographic relationships, validates concepts, demonstrates surprising breaks with known continental directions, signifies an individual artist's anomalies, or stimulates significant, unanswerable questions and speculation, it is evidence and a document unto itself, a vital aspect of art history. This panel's speakers will begin with a single, precolonial object, and explore it within a matrix of concepts, other objects, oral history, religion, community, and additional factors. Some objects are well-known but can yield new possibilities and information, others are more obscure. The panelists consider objects far more than mere illustrations, but see them as jumping-off points for exploring possibilities. Collaboration and broader involvement in investigations of this type are highly desirable, but the object is not a roadblock to such endeavors. New Internet ventures could provide a structure for advantageous cooperation and alliance by soliciting commentary on objects or topics without extensive gatekeeping.