

Module 3 Overview

Overview of African Art



In this module your assignment is to read "African Art", published by the famed art book publisher Taschen. You must read the entire book this week. It's very short on texts, but it's full of really wonderful images.

Even before reading the introduction or the detailed explanations of each artwork in the book, take some time to go through and contemplate these artworks as objects. What is their form? What feelings or ideas do they inspire in you? Are they beautiful? Repulsive? Which pieces affect you most directly?

Start to be able to talk about your responses to art. The introduction starts out by addressing one of the key themes that comes up over and over again this semester. What is and has been African art's impact on European art and artists? The question of Picasso will be addressed in more detail in the following weeks, but here the authors talk about the significant impact that African art made on modern art. It's also critically important to keep in mind other aspects of this history when studying African art.

We will be looking much more deeply into colonialism which was one of the most radically and violently transformative events in both African and European history. Much of modernity was built on the forced labor of Africans and the exploitation of its natural resources through colonialism. In order to understand colonialism's operative mind frame, it's important to remember the effects of Darwinism and evolutionary theory on European thinking. There were mechanisms in place to invest popular consciousness in the colonial project through media and popular culture. The writings of European philosophers, like the highly influential Frederick Hegel denied that Africa had any type of history at all which of course could not be further from the truth. These racist ideas were not part of the fringe. Rather, they represented the majority tide of popular thinking in Europe during colonialism and even after. The study of African art then became an important refutation of Africa as a continent with no history ripe only for European exploitation. If we critique the racist theories of evolutionism and instead use the theoretical framework of cultural relativism, we are able to appreciate the historical importance of art in Africa.

Over the course of this class, we will be faced with this Western notion of art for art's sake on the one hand and African functionalism on the other. Functionalism in this sense means that African art objects were not created just for aesthetic contemplation or looking at. They were made to be used in one way or another, either in a spiritual ceremony or as an embellishment of everyday objects. Later, the question of an African art object was ever used would become a criterion of authentic African art. There's also the question of a Western conception of the artist as a named individual versus the anonymous artists of Africa. Can you explain some of the reasons so many African artworks can only be attributed to anonymous artists? In the case of artworks from Africa, the names of prominent collectors or owners of pieces often carry more weight than the names of their creators. This is a testament not only to the relative difference that art played in African cultures and the way African societies were organized, but also the tremendous usurping power of European colonialism. These ideas will be the springboard for module two of this course called Colonialism and Modernity. In the meantime, spend some time with the exquisite pieces represented in this wonderful Taschen book.



Learning Objectives

Course Learning Objectives Targeted

- Evaluate the historical and global significance of African art by examining its role in shaping cultural identities, resisting colonialism, and influencing international art movements, while considering its socio-political, economic, and cultural implications.
- Compare and contrast different styles and genres of African art by analyzing visual elements, techniques, materials, and cultural contexts, and discussing how they vary among regions, ethnic groups, and historical periods

Module Learning Objectives

- Compare variations in African art across regions, ethnic groups, and historical periods.
- Evaluate the historical significance of African art in shaping cultural identities and resisting colonialism
- Evaluate how African art has influenced and been influenced by global artistic movements.



Activities and Assignments

1. Read [Eisenhofer, Stefan, "African Art", Los Angeles: Taschen Books, 2010.](https://fiu.instructure.com/courses/200285/files/31587176/download?wrap=1)
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2. Complete **Module 3 Discussion**
3. Complete **Module 3 Quiz**

The instructional material listed above will help you understand expectations related to this module's topics, achieve the learning objectives and complete the assignment(s).