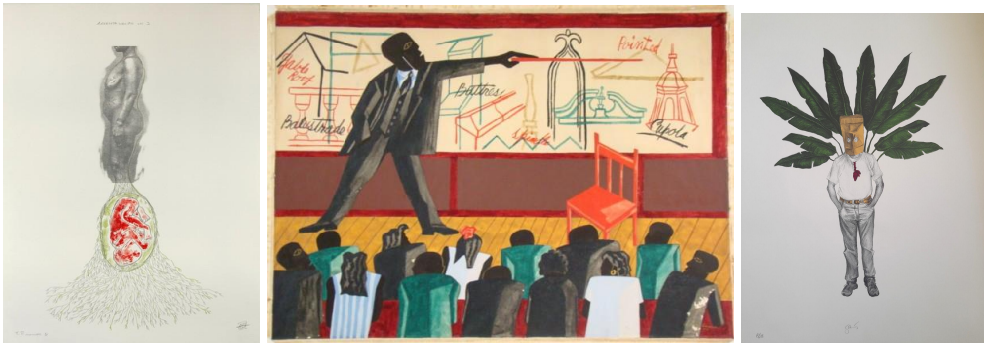


African Diasporas and the Visual Arts
EHA 5740 - Studies in the Visual Arts of the United States and its Connections



In-person classes August-November 2023 * Tuesdays 2:00-5:00pm * Auditorium
MAC USP (unless otherwise noted)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

COURSE MATERIALS

This course will be hosted on a shared Google Drive. The syllabus for the course will guide all of our activities. All readings will be available for download in PDF form on the Drive, or online through links provided on this syllabus. Please bring a copy of the readings to reference during our meetings. If you use a digital device for the readings instead of printing them out, you are asked to turn wifi off and shut down browsers and files that are not related to the class discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS

Readings and Videos: The reading and video indications for each session should be prepared ahead of each session. The Brazilian professors from MAC USP, Unifesp and Unicamp, in charge of supervising the seminar course, will ask students to hand in at least 5 reports from 5 chosen readings/videos.

Live Participation Timely attendance and thoughtful participation in our group discussions are mandatory for success in this class. Each missed class will result in a 5% deduction of your final grade. Exceptions are made for illness, sudden emergencies, religious holidays, and other special cases that you have cleared with

the instructor beforehand. I advise withdrawing from the course after two missed classes, as it will become difficult to follow the material.

Research Essay At the end of the semester, you will submit a 10-page double-spaced final paper in Word, plus endnotes, bibliography, and images. Please center your essay on one artwork by an African-American in comparison to an African-Brazilian artist. At the beginning of the seminar course, the professors of the three São Paulo universities, in charge of supervising it, will give a guideline on how to prepare the essay.

- Abstract and Bibliography You will be expected to hand in a 300-word abstract with an initial research bibliography (minimum 10 sources) outlining your proposed topic by **October 17th**, allowing time for feedback and finalization of topics in discussion with the professor. The final version of the paper will be due on **December 1st**..

GRADING

Please note that a grade of "C" designates satisfactory performance on assignments; "B" recognizes above-average work; "A" is awarded for excellent work.

Live Participation 30%

Reports for indications of readings/videos 30%

Research Essay 40%

SCHEDULE

AUGUST - Guest Professor: Anne Lafont, EHESS, Paris, France

Session 1 (August 8th) - Art and Race

This session will examine the various facets of the visualization of race, and in this case black people, over the long eighteenth century, from the publication of the first conceptualizations of human diversity on the scale of colonial empires in connection with their pictorial counterpart: The appearance of black pages in the portraits of the white European aristocracy, until the time of the Atlantic revolutions and the first abolitions of slavery, around 1800, when, in the realm of images, the violence of the slave trade and the slave system was represented to sensitize European societies to the brutal reality of the colonial process.

Reading for this session: Anne Lafont, "How Skin Color became a racial Marker? Art Historical Perspective on Race" Eighteenth-Century Studies, thematic issue on color edited by Steven Pincus, October 2017, volume 51, no. 1, pp. 89-113.

Complementary reading:

Anne Lafont, *L'art et la race. L'Africain (tout) contre l'œil des Lumières*, Paris, Presses du Réel, 2019.

Session 2 (August 15th) - The Art of the Black Atlantic

This second session responds to the first one and focuses on the ways in which enslaved Africans expressed themselves in the plastic arts around the Atlantic during the four centuries of the slave trade. The aim is to rethink the categories of art history by considering the Atlantic as a center, and by paying particular attention to the art of African societies in diaspora at the time of the first colonization, in order to allow the emergence of a black artistic production whose form and contours require to leave the framework of the picture – tableau-, the matrix of the only European fine arts.

Reading for this session: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London, verso Books, 1993.

Session 3 (August 22th) - The African Object and Art Theory in the Enlightenment

This session will provide an opportunity to understand how the first writings on African objects (travelogs, art theory, collection inventories, abolitionist writings... from the 17th and 18th centuries) described, analyzed and participated in the transformation of these ritual or magical pieces into African art. The aim is to identify the processes of appropriation at work in texts that do not assert their project of conquest but which are concretely in a dynamic of acclimatization of African objects. This process will be considered insofar as it was at the basis of the huge European collections made in Africa from the 1860s onwards.

Reading for this session: Johann-Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Los Angeles, Getty editions, 2006.

Session 4 (August 29th) - The fetish: an African theoretical object?

This session intends to evoke different paths taken by the notion of fetish from the ritual objects of the African coast, such as they were described by the Portuguese in the early days of their trade with the African continent: the fetissos. This session, more exploratory, is intended to be an interpretation of the survival of African objectality and religiosity in the conceptualizations that the fetish has known from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. This interpretation will be based on three cases: the fetish of Abbé de Brosses, the fetishism of Auguste Comte and the "defetichizing mission of art" of Georg Lukàcs.

Reading for this session:

William Pietz, *The Problem of the Fetish*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2022.

SEPTEMBER - Guest Professor: Adele Nelson, UTexas at Austin, United States

Session 5 (September 12th) - Discussion with coordinators of the seminar course from the three universities

Summary of August sessions and first round of discussions on the final assignment.

Session 6 (September 19th) - Prof. Adele Nelson: US Exhibitions of Brazilian Art: Black Artists and Curatorial Citation, Translation, and Representation

This class will examine the history of US exhibitions of Brazilian art from the mid-20th century to today, focusing on the large number of recent shows focused on Afro-descendant artists and the exhibition I co-organized at UT Austin, *Social Fabric: Art and Activism in Contemporary Brazil*. Consideration of Zanele Muholi's term "visual activism" and what Mari Carmen Ramírez calls the "identity-projecting role" of exhibitions will ground discussion of agency, extractivism, and ethics of access and attribution.

Readings for this session:

Vivian A. Crockett, "A Place to Call Home: Reflections on Transnational Translations," in *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, eds. Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo (New York: DelMonico, 2021), 52–62.

Zanele Muholi, "Faces and Phases," *Transition* 107, no. 1 (2012): 112–24.

Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Beyond 'The Fantastic': Framing Identity in US Exhibitions of Latin American Art," *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 60–68.

Also watch & look through:

Diane Lima, "Negros na piscina / Blacks in the Pool: Hypervisibility, Art, and Curatorship in Brazil," lecture, March 1, 2023, The University of Texas at Austin. Available at <link TK>. (Portuguese)

Proof of Maria Emilia Fernandez, Adele Nelson, and MacKenzie Stevens, eds., *Social Fabric: Art and Activism in Contemporary Brazil* (Austin: Visual Arts Center and Tower Books, University of Texas Press, forthcoming November 2023). (English/Portuguese)

Session 7 (September 26th) - Prof. Adele Nelson: Activist Exchanges and Interracial Solidarity: Printmaking in the Americas in the mid-20th century

Deborah Cullen has argued that print studios are vital "contact zones." We will test out this proposal by examining multivalent exchanges among leftist artists and printmakers, print workshops, and publications explicitly committed to social and, in some cases, racial justice. We will study, on one hand, African American artists

Robert Blackburn, Elizabeth Catlett, and Charles White and their contact with the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) in Mexico City and, on the other, the presence of the ideals and works of the TGP in Brazilian clubes de gravura.

Readings for this session:

Aracy Amaral, "As experiências dos Clubes de Gravura," *Arte para quê? A preocupação social na arte brasileira, 1930–1970*, 3rd ed (São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 2003), 173–225.

Deborah Cullen, "Contact Zones: Places, Spaces, and Other Test Cases / Zonas de contacto: Lugares, espacios y otros laboratorios," in *3ra Trienal Poli/gráfica de San Juan: América Latina y el Caribe: El Panal / The Hive* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2012), 20–45 (Spanish, English).

John P. Murphy, "Charles White: The Politics of Print," *Print Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (June 2019): 146–56.

Look through:

Scans of *Horizonte* (Porto Alegre), vol. 1–6 (1950–1955). Benson Latin American Collection, UTAustin <link to Box folder of scans created by UT Libraries TK>

OCTOBER - Guest Professor: Igor Simões, Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Session 8 (October 3rd) - Racialization and art in Brazil

In order to discuss Afro-Brazilian art, it is also necessary to have an understanding of the racist dimension that runs through the history of Brazil and the field of visual arts. It is not just a matter of focusing on social issues, but of understanding how these issues impact the very historiography of art in Brazil. At the same time, it is urgent to discuss which terms and marks will be used to think about the other art that is not named Afro-Brazilian. It is also urgent to discuss methodological paths for these investigations.

Readings for this session:

MORAES, Igor. Todo cubo branco tem um quê de Casa Grande: racialização, montagem e histórias da arte brasileira. *Revista PHILIA | Filosofia, Literatura & Arte*, Porto Alegre, volume 3, número 1, p. 314–329, maio de 2021. <https://www.seer.ufrgs.br/philia/article/download/113790/pdf>

AMANCIO, Kleber; PEREIRA, Bethania; OLIVEIRA, Patrícia. Kleber Amancio: Reflexões sobre raça e história da arte no Brasil. 2021. <https://revistas.pucsp.br/revph/article/download/53547/37575>

Session 9 (October 10th) - Race, Gender, and Dissidences

Issues of gender and their intersections are still a landmark to be more deeply researched and pondered for a broad understanding of the art produced by Black subjects in Brazil. Even today, publications and curatorial approaches show considerable disparity when considering the presence of women and gender dissidents. Therefore, this discussion requires detailed attention and presence in research that encompasses both critical readings of these productions and historical revisions of the role of these presences in the interpretation of art named as Afro-Brazilian.

Readings for this session:

SIMÕES, Igor. Between the Suture and the Abyss. Black Women Artists in Brazil: A Brief Introduction. Em Empowerment Art and Feminisms. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg Compilado por BEITIN, Andreas; KOCK, Katharina; RUHKAMP, Uta. 2022. p 60-65. English version:
https://www.kunstmuseum.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20220920_empowerment_publikation_en_interactive.pdf

GONZALES, Lélia. “A mulher negra na sociedade brasileira” [1979], em Lélia Gonzalez: Por um feminismo afro-latino-americano; Ensaios, intervenções e diálogos, compilado por Flávia Rios e Márcia Lima (Rio de Janeiro, 2020), pp. 58–59.
https://www.mpba.mp.br/sites/default/files/biblioteca/direitos-humanos/direitos-das-mulheres/obras-digitalizadas/teorias_explicativas_da_violencia_contra_a_mulher_por_um_feminismo_afro-latino-americano_by_levia_gonzalez_gonzalez_lelia_z-lib.org_mobi_.pdf

Session 10 (October 17th) - Collections, exhibitions, systems, and histories for the visual arts in Brazil

In a scenario marked by orchestrated attempts at silencing in the historiography of Brazilian art, exhibitions play a central role in the construction of readings that are often absent. Exhibitions such as "A Mão Afro-Brasileira" (1988) forced the rise of new categories of theoretical frameworks that could account for the political dimension of the concepts of art produced in Brazil. In the 21st century, in addition to the continuity of these curatorial practices, exhibitions are also pathways for reading collections, as well as recurrences of contemporary art systems that impact selections, choices, and acquisitions.

Reading for this session:

SIMÕES, Igor. Entre a raça e as constelações: uma abordagem curatorial sobre o acervo do MAC USP.
<https://estudosdecoloniais.mac.usp.br/painel-curatorial/igor-simoes/>

Session 11 (October 24th) - Visit to the exhibition “Dos Brasis: Arte e pensamento Negro”, SESC

The exhibition, curated by Igor Simões and Hélio Menezes, is the result of a 2-year research and studio visits to Afro-Brazilian artists all over the country - both living and historical artists. The show intends to be a comprehensive updated narrative on Afro-Brazilian visual arts.

Reading for this session:

Curatorial essay for the exhibition catalog. Exhibition and project website:

<https://www.sesc.com.br/atuacoes/cultura/artes-visuais/dos-brasis/>

Session 12 (October 31th) - Brazil and the historiography of art in the African diaspora.

The project proposed here explores the absence of Brazilian Black artists in the context of the international debate on Afro-diasporic art and art history, speculating on the US context that projects itself as occupying the forefront of this production in the Americas. The question that drives the research seeks to understand elements that contribute to this absence. It is worth noting that Brazil was the largest destination of the African diaspora and has the largest contingent of Black subjects outside the African continent. How, then, to understand the absence that has been confirmed through the analysis of publications, exhibitions, and institutional collections that are dedicated to the theme?

Readings for this session:

SIMS, Lowery; KING-HAMMOND, Leslie. The Global African Project. Prestel. 2010.

MERCER, Kobena. Travel And See: Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s. Duke University Press : London, 2016.

COPELAND, Huey; NELSON, Steven. Black Modernisms in the Transatlantic World. Yale University Press.

NOVEMBER - Guest artists and Guest Professor: artists Rosana Paulino and Fred Wilson (pending confirmation), and Prof. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, University of Pennsylvania, United States

Session 13 (November 7th) - Conversation with artists Rosana Paulino and Fred Wilson (pending confirmation)

Session 14 (November 14th) - Professor Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw: David Driskell's Two Centuries of Black American Art, 1976

In 1976, the year that the United States celebrated its 200th year of independence from Great Britain, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted a

comprehensive exhibition of art by African American makers. Curated by the late David Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* was a watershed exhibition that brought together examples of fine art and material culture to present a history of Black creativity that had been largely ignored by mainstream museums. This seminar will focus on the particularities of that exhibition and on its legacies, including the recent U. S. presentation of the Brazilian exhibition, *Afro-Atlantic Histories*. We will debate the merits of massive historical exhibitions of this kind that seek to cover multiple centuries and media and ask ourselves what curatorial and historical alternatives might be imagined.

Reading for this session:

David Driskell (ed.), exh. cat. *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. Los Angeles: Random House, 1976.

Session 15 (November 21st) - Professor Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw: The Obama Portraits and the Politics of Black Representation

In 2018 when the National Portrait Gallery, a part of the federal government's Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, unveiled the portraits that it had commissioned of former President Barack Obama, by Kehinde Wiley, and First Lady Michelle Obama, by Amy Sherald, they were greeted by an outpouring of excitement and controversy. Made by avant garde Black artists in their own unique styles, each of the portraits diverged from expectations set by earlier, more aesthetically conservative presidential portraits. This seminar will focus on the debate they generated in popular culture and the museum world; and engage the ways in which they influenced the art market's interest in paintings of Black people. We will examine exhibitions devoted to portraits of Black sitters and consider the history of Black portraiture from the 18th century to the current moment.

Reading for this session:

Taína Caragol, Dorothy Moss, Richard Powell & Kim Sajet (eds.). *The Obama Portraits*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.