Mobility, Change & Exchange in African Art

8:30 A.M.
REGISTRATION

9 A.M.
WELCOME
Kaywin Feldman, Director and President, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

INTRODUCTION
Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, PhD, Head of the Department of Arts of Africa and the Americas and Curator of African Art

MORNING SESSION
10 A.M.
The ‘In-betweenness’ of Things: Materialising Movement and Cultural Interaction in the Sierra Leonean Object Diaspora
Drawing on theories emerging from the study of human diasporas, I consider the implications for rethinking the diasporas of objects that fill the stores and galleries of the global museumscape. Using objects from the Sierra Leonean ‘object diaspora’ as examples, I examine how material culture can challenge dominant ideas about the static isomorphism between people, culture and place, and instead manifest a kind of ‘double-consciousness’ in a space ‘in-between’ peoples, cultures and places. The paper is conceived as a ‘spoken-word exhibition’ in which I discuss an assemblage of Sierra Leonean objects which ‘speak’ to the themes of inter-cultural interaction, the colonial contexts of collection and removal, and the creolisation of form. I then go on to explore other aspects of diaspora studies in relation to the material world of collections: considering, for example, ideas of return and the value of economic or symbolic remittances.

PAUL BASU | Paul Basu, MSc, PhD, is reader in material culture and museum studies at University College London. For a decade, he has worked in Sierra Leone and is now writing a monograph, Palimpsest Memoryscapes: Cultural Heritage and National Consciousness in Sierra Leone. He has long collaborated with the British Museum’s Africa program.
10:30 A.M.  

**Trade in African Antiquities: What Is Happening on the East African Scene These Days?**

The general appreciation of African pre-colonial and early colonial art by western connoisseurs has had a serious downside: the systematic plundering of the continent’s heritage by traders and collectors, both local and international. The paper will address this issue, especially in East Africa, an area that is part of the globalized Indian Ocean World. To what extent does the expropriation of art from its cultural context affect its meaning and potency? And conversely, what impact does this expropriation have on local communities – on their humanity, social well-being, and political values?

**CHAPURUKHA “CHAP” KUSIMBA |** Chapurukha “Chap” Kusimba, PhD, is the curator of African anthropology at the Field Museum and professor of anthropology at University of Illinois, Chicago. His research investigates trade, travel, and urbanization in East Africa.

11 A.M.  

**The Dance of Art | The Art of Dance: Presentation, Engagement, Reception, and Contemporary Works by Kehinde Wiley, Wangechi Mutu and Yinka Shonibare**

Exploring the exhibition of works by Kehinde Wiley, Wangechi Mutu, Yinka Shonibare, and others through the eyes of a curator, this talk will look at the ways in which the presentation of contemporary art can urge a certain kind of viewing experience that is both visual and physical.

**ISOLDE BRIELMAIER |** Isolde Brielmaier, PhD, is the chief curator of exhibitions at Savannah College of Art and Design. Her recent projects focus on contemporary artists, including Angel Otero, Bharti Kher, Richard Mosse, and Zander Blom.

11:30 A.M.  

**QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

NOON BREAK

AFTERNOON SESSION

1:30 P.M.  

**The Art of Conversion in the Early Modern Kingdom of Kongo**

From their king’s decision to embrace Catholicism at the turn of the sixteenth century to the advent of imperial colonialism in the late eighteen hundreds, the men and women of the central African kingdom of Kongo creatively mixed, merged, and redefined local and foreign visual forms, religious thought, and political concepts into the novel, coherent, but also constantly evolving worldview of Kongo Christianity. Placing Kongo objects from the Minneapolis Museum of Art in the context of the kingdom’s larger visual and material culture, I will discuss the artful conversion of the realm.

**CÉCILE FROMONT |** Cécile Fromont, PhD, is assistant professor of art history at the University of Chicago. Her work focuses on art and religion in Africa as evidenced by her African Arts essay (2011), “Dance, Image, Myth, and Conversion in the Kingdom of Kongo: 1500–1800.”
2 P.M.

**Intercontinental Trading Networks Between Europe and West Africa (1500–1625)**

From the sixteenth century through the first quarter of the seventeenth century, extensive and varied commercial networks connected the Maghreb in North Africa to Western Europe and, across the Sahara, to the Sahel. Complementary sea-borne trade connected the West African coast (Upper Guinea) to Lisbon and Amsterdam. The merchants in these interrelated networks included Portuguese Catholics, Protestants from Amsterdam, Moroccan Muslims, both Muslims and followers of local religion in Senegambia, and Sephardic merchants originally from Portugal. Among the goods produced for import into West Africa were blade weapons from Lisbon and from Marrakesh, made by Christian (and some Jewish) artisans. Among the luxury items produced for export from West Africa were carved ivory vessels, called saltcellars, made by African artisans. Some of these ivories depict blade weapons of the very type produced in Marrakesh and Lisbon. The ivories constitute a visual commentary on this complex inter-continental trading network.

**PETER MARK** | Peter Mark, PhD, is professor of African art history at Wesleyan University. His research interests include cross-cultural exchange and migration, a topic explored in his most recent publication, *The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Creation of the Atlantic World* (2011).

---

2:30 P.M.

**The Arts of Post-Millennial Haiti**

Since the turn of this century, Haiti has become enveloped in an accelerating series of social, political, and natural catastrophes, culminating in the monstrous earthquake of January 12, 2010, which killed hundreds of thousands, and leveled much of the material culture of the world’s first Black Republic. None of these post-millennial miseries has escaped the consideration of Haitian artists who continue to represent and re-interpret the nation’s unfolding disasters with unflinching vision and imagination. As things have grown worse, their art has grown richer, bolder, stranger. Not surprising really, since Haitian art is locked in a *danse macabre* with its own history. For more than a half-century this equation has remained constant: the worse the circumstances, the more astonishing the art. Now both are ‘In Extremis.’

**DONALD J. COSENTINO** | Donald J. Cosentino, PhD, is professor emeritus of culture and performance at University of California, Los Angeles. *In Extremis: Death and Life in Twenty-First Century Haitian Art* (2012) is his most recent publication about the arts of Africa and the African diaspora.

---

3 P.M.

**QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

4 P.M.

**AFRICAN GALLERY VISIT**

5 P.M.

**MUSEUM CLOSES**