

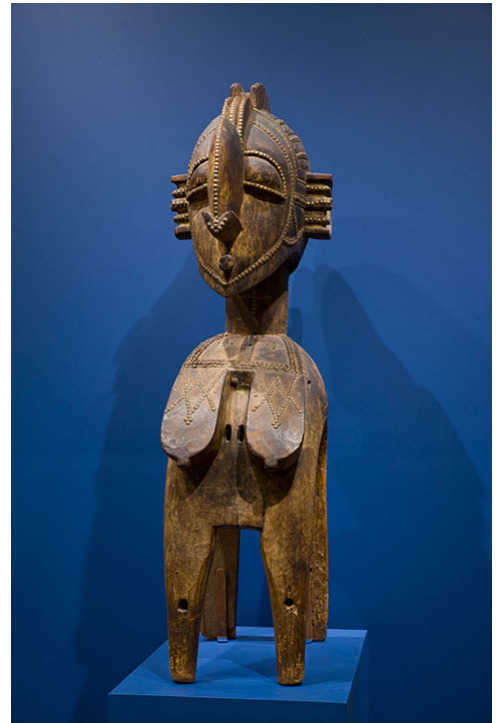
CURATORIAL SEMINAR

AS.389.420

SPRING
2019

THURSDAYS
4:00-6:30pm

Johns
Hopkins
University



Course Overview and Objectives

In this curatorial seminar we conceptualize and develop an exhibition in collaboration with a local museum partner.

Curator of African Art Kevin Tervala co-teaches this course. We will also host guests from the BMA's education team and consult with exhibition designers

and with specialists on gender in Africa. Readings include both academic scholarship related to the content of the exhibition as well as practical guides and how-to's in museum work. You should expect to learn by doing. The majority of assignments require hands-on work in museum collections: you will create an exhibition plan, develop a checklist and design concept; write and workshop museum texts; test out your interpretive ideas.

Your Instructors

Dr. Jennifer P. Kingsley
jkingsley@jhu.edu

Email is the preferred way to reach me. I will respond by end of business day.

Office: Gilman 389

Phone: 410.516.3188

*lead instructor; responsible for grading & logistics

Kevin Tervala

Curator of African Art,
Baltimore Museum of Art
ktervala@artbma.org

Phone: 443.573.1746

*curator & subject specialist

Academic Integrity

Statement from the JHU Ethics Board: *The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitation of academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the Associate Dean of Student Affairs and/or the Chairperson of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on 'Academic Ethics for Undergraduates' and the Ethics Board website (<http://ethics.jhu.edu>) for more information*

Simply put: Any work you do for this class must be your own unless part of an explicitly allowed collaboration. You must acknowledge any help you receive (from published sources, the internet, experts you interview, classmates etc.) in proper form (notes, bibliography). You also may NOT reuse work from another class to fulfill a requirement without my explicit authorization.

Course Requirements

This course involves weekly readings, their presentation and group discussion of emergent themes that might inform our exhibition. Halfway through the semester you will begin drafting related gallery texts to be workshopped in class. Research into exhibition artworks will be ongoing and largely self-directed. All the books you need for this research are at the JHU library on 2 hour reserve. You will need to consult them in person. The course is fast paced. Each class builds on the prior week's material and research findings. You will need to absorb that material and consider its significance on your own outside of class. You will need to put in steady and consistent effort throughout the whole semester. You will need to have (or learn) skills in scholarly research and public writing. You will need to stay engaged and demonstrate active learning.

Participation (20%). You should be on time and ready to participate each day. I expect class discussion and critique to be lively, respectful and substantive. Should you need to miss class on medical grounds, for religious observances, or family emergencies you will need to document the reasons

for your absence in writing. Excessive absences will be penalized and may result in failure for the course – even if all written work has been completed. If you miss class it is your responsibility to make-up the work.

Presentations (20%) Three times you will take the lead on presenting an article and preparing a handout about it. Four times you will work in pairs to research, present and prepare blurbs on your assigned artworks for the class. KT will provide bibliography and access to the artworks. Our goal is to create a resource to support our exhibition development. You will also share one exhibition and its design elements on 4/25.

Gallery Texts & Revisions (30%): Halfway through the semester you will start writing gallery texts to be workshopped in class. You will revise each of your texts in response to the workshops.

Exhibition Checklist (10%): Our goal is to identify a big idea, themes and sub-themes for the exhibition as well as select an interpretive approach. The checklist will identify which objects to include and in what groupings based on how the artworks relate to the show's thesis.

Curatorial Workshop (15%): At the end of the semester you will present the exhibition to staff at the BMA and select guests.

[See the course's blackboard website for detailed information & guidelines for each assignment.](#)

All work must be completed in order to pass.

In general, an A exceeds expectations, a B meets expectations, a C meets most expectations but may present problems in content or presentation. Within that general range, grades will be differentiated with a +/- as appropriate.

Late assignments will go down 1/2 grade per day.



John Russell Pope designed the BMA as a Roman-style temple. The building opened in 1929.

Course Outline (weekly plan & readings at end of syllabus)

Date	Topics	What's due	Who is responsible
1/31	Introduction		JPK - article presentation KT - objects presentation
2/7	Interpreting African Art: Past & Present. Meet @ BMA	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 1	Ben-Amos Adams Aronson objects
2/14	MUSEUM DAY. Meet @ BMA	for each assigned exhibition list: the big idea; up to 3 things that work; up to 3 things that don't work.	everyone
2/21	Introduction to African feminism	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 2	Adichie Bádéjo Aina objects
2/28	Maternal Power	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 3	LaGamma Lamp Oyèwùmí objects
3/7	Ancestral Power	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 4	Glaze Jordàn LaGamma objects
3/14	Sororal Power	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 5	Phillips Bledsoe Oyèwùmí objects
3/28	Political Power	10 min article presentations & handout 10 min object presentations & f.a.q. 6	Roberts Petridis Oyèwùmí objects
4/4	Exhibition Goals; What's our big idea?	draft goals (learning objectives?) / "big idea" statement	everyone
4/11	Section and Object Selection	intro panel (200 words) exhibition checklist	everyone
4/18	In-gallery interpretation. Guest Gamynne Guillotte	intro panel revision 2 section texts (100 words) & proposed "final" object choices for related section	everyone
4/25	Exhibition Design. Darienne Turner	section texts revisions. Present 3 design elements from one of the "20 most influential exhibits"	everyone
5/2	Prep curator workshop	3 object labels (75 words)	everyone

Syllabus Overview

The BMA is organizing a 2500 square foot exhibition for Spring 2020 on gender and power in African art. (Because of the time and effort involved in organizing an exhibition, it is not possible for this show to open by the end of the class). The exhibition focuses on art produced in Africa's matrilineal belt in the 19th and 20th centuries. With guidance from BMA staff students will choose the objects, determine the thematic sections, and write drafts of gallery and label texts.

The first half of this class will be an overview of African art from Africa's matrilineal belt. Important topics will include gender & artistic practice, motherhood, female ancestry, secret societies, gender & lifespan, and theories of gender in Africa – including important readings by first and second-wave African feminists. The second half focuses on exhibition production.

Submitting Assignments

Best = email JPK your handouts; blurbs; or labels by 9 am on the day it is due

Also Best = upload your assignment to Blackboard Assignments by 9am on the due date

Acceptable = turn in your assignment by lunchtime, to Blackboard or my email

My least favorite = emailing or submitting your assignment as you're walking into class

Not acceptable = anything else, like having printer or computer trouble and not bringing it to class, not uploading it before class begins, or begging me to let you turn it in later, or forgetting to do the assignments and asking to turn them in all at once at the end of the semester.

To avoid losing work, I recommend that you 1) not keep your work on only one computer or flash drive, and 2) email your work to yourself frequently so you can access them from another computer in a pinch. You can also use JHBox to store documents in the cloud for remote access.

All assignments build on each other and are necessary for pulling off curating an exhibition so quickly! Plan ahead to stay on schedule with all assignments.

ARTIST UNIDENTIFIED

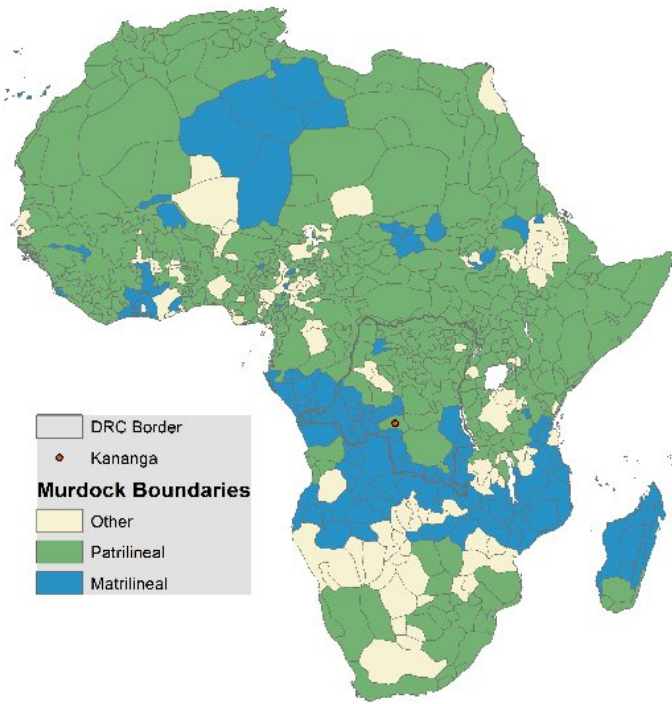
Commemorative Head of a King (Oba),

c. 1848–1897

Benin City, Nigeria

Copper alloy

In 2016 the BMA changed how they identified African artists on their labels from *anonymous* to *unidentified* to reflect that our lack of knowledge about African artists is the product of colonial collecting and not African cultural practices.



Among some African cultural groups family lineage is traced through the maternal line, forming a matrilineal belt across sub-Saharan Africa. While a logical area to locate an inquiry into gender and power in African art, there is a conceptual challenge. The artworks are made by men and for the most part, danced by men.

Learning objectives

Students will be able to....

- Identify the cultural groups of Africa's matrilineal belt and their ideas about gender in past and present
- Identify and describe African feminism and its relevance to the interpretation of African art
- Analyze the art produced by the cultural groups of Africa's matrilineal belt from a gender perspective
- Articulate key aspects of gender and power in African art for diverse public audiences

Students will have gained experience....

- Interpreting art objects from gender perspectives
- Writing gallery texts and object labels
- Curating an art exhibition

Help & Resources

If you are feeling lost or overwhelmed...

1. Speak up in class

You may not be the only person with the same concern, and we all benefit from working questions out together.

2. Make an appointment with me

Email or sign up for an appointment to meet at any time or catch me after class. Many questions & issues can be resolved this way.

3. Consult with a research librarian

Our library staff is eager to help guide your research. JHU's specialist for art history and museum studies is Donald Juedes: djuedes@jhu.edu.

4. Use the Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free resource at all stages of the writing process, from getting started to revising drafts to polishing a final essay. Make an appointment at <http://krieger.jhu.edu/writingcenter/>

5. Visit Academic Advising and Support

Academic advising offers many tutoring and mentoring services, including a study consulting program. Appointments can be made directly online from the webpage <http://advising.jhu.edu/tutoring-mentoring/>

Inclusion

The diversity that you bring to this class is a resource, strength and benefit. We are committed to creating a learning environment that serves students of all backgrounds and perspectives and which honors your identities. To help me:

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official JHU records, please let us know!
- If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with us. We want to be a resource for you.
- Inclusion is an ongoing process. The content of the exhibit means we will be digging into some difficult and challenging content. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to us about it. You can also submit anonymous feedback by dropping an unsigned note in Professor Kingsley's mailbox in Gilman 301 (which may lead to us making a general announcement to the class, if doing so is necessary to address your concerns). If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, staff from the Center for Diversity and Inclusion are an excellent resource: <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/staff>

Accommodations

Anyone needing academic accommodations should obtain a letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu. Please provide this letter to JPK as soon as possible so that I can make sure to accommodate your needs. If you believe you have a need for accommodation but have not yet met with SDS, please do so right away – they are here to help and professionally equipped to advise us on which accommodations would be most helpful.

Weekly Plan

1/31 **Week 1: Introduction**

We will get to know each other and warm up with some exhibition development "games". Kevin Tervalva introduces the exhibition project and parameters. We go over the syllabus, course plan and assignments together. Instructors will model how to present an article (JPK) and how to present objects (KT).

We will also discuss our expectations, dig into our preconceptions about women in Africa & about African art (which are likely to relate to visitors' prior knowledge and expectations coming into the exhibition). We will identify key themes of the readings, the questions they raise, and work through any "muddy" points.

Readings:

- African Art and the Matrilineage Belt summary document
- Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2005), pp. 31-41
- Laura S. Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa* (Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 54-80 *JK will present
- Wendy James, "Matrifocus on African Women," in *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), pp. 140-162
- Also Study the map of Africa

2/7 **Week 2: Interpreting African Art Past and Present**

How, historically, has African art been received by western scholars? How would you characterize the different approaches used in disciplines of anthropology and art history? How do these manifest in museum exhibitions: specifically their design, style and interpretive approaches?

Readings:

- Paula Ben-Amos, "African Visual Arts from a Social Perspective," *African Studies Review* 32.2 (1989): 1-54
- Monni Adams, "African Visual Arts from an Art Historical Perspective," *African Studies Review* 32.2 (1989): 55-103.
- Lisa Aronson, "African Women in the Visual Arts," *Signs* 16.3 (1991): 550-574.

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
object presentations & f.a.q.

2/14 **Week 3: MUSEUM DAY**

*JPK at College Art conference. Meet KT at the museum's main entrance. Guest: Gamyne Guillotte, Chief Education Officer.

How do curators communicate their ideas in exhibition form? What types of interpretive approaches do you observe at the BMA? How do exhibits combine interpretive elements? To what end? How effectively is the content presented and why? What graphic elements are evidence (size, color, font, accessibility) and how well are they working?

Readings:

- John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013), 37-63 (visitor motivations for visiting museums) & 105-129 (physical context: exhibitions) - read with an eye on getting a big picture sense of museum visitors & their experiences in museums.
- Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 2nd ed (London, 2015), 7-18 (the "big idea") & 31-48 (types of labels) - better figures are at: <https://serrellassociates.com/exhibit-labels-2-gallery>
- Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013), pp. 205-218.

Due: Our goal is to identify the qualities of strong and successful in-gallery interpretation. Please go to the BMA ahead of class and spend time in the Anti-Aesthetic exhibition (in the African galleries), the first gallery of African art ("Artist") and in the Kuba textiles exhibition (upstairs). Based on what you observe, make a list of what you perceive to be each exhibition's "big idea" (or, as Ham labels it: theme). Also **write down up to three things that work in the exhibition and up to three things that don't work & why** (be prepared to explain with in-gallery observations).

2/21 Week 4: Introduction to African feminism

What are our present notions of gender in the United States and how has feminist art history operated within those notions, challenged them or contributed to them? What are some of the problems of existing approaches that need complicating for understanding African art in particular? How do first and second wave African feminists articulate notions of gender and power in Africa?

Readings:

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, New York: Anchor Books, 2012.
- Diedre L. Bádéjò, "African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent," *Research in African Literatures* 29. 2 (1998): 94-111.
- Olabisi Aina, "African Women at the Grassroots: The Silent Partners of the Women's Movement," in *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 65-88.
- Review notes from Obioma Nnaemeka, "Mapping African Feminisms," *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2005), pp. 31-41

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
object presentations & f.a.q.

2/28 Week 5: Maternal Power

This week begins our intensive research phase into gendered aspects of power and the nature of female power across African communities, regions, and ethnic groups concentrated in the so-called matrilineal belt. How is the concept of "mother" constructed in these contexts? What is the sphere of maternal power? What kinds of objects exercise maternal power / What kinds of objects do people use in exercising maternal power? How do concepts of mother and maternal power manifest in the visual and material qualities of objects?

Readings:

- Alisa LaGamma, "Kongo Female Power," in *Kongo: Power and Majesty*, ed. Alisa LaGamma (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 161-220.

- Frederick Lamp, *Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1997), 155-182.
- Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, "Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies." *Signs* 25.4 (2000): 1093-1098

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
object presentations & f.a.q.

3/7 Week 6: Ancestral Power

Ancestor spirits play a significant role in African religions. In what ways is their power "gendered"? How does that affect their sphere of power? how individuals engage with them? their representation and presence/activation in material things?

Readings:

- Anita J. Glaze, "Women, Power, and Art in a Senufo Village," *African Arts* 8.3 (1975): 24-29+64-68+90
- Manuel Jordàn, *Chokwe! Art and Initiation among Chokwe and Related People* (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1998), [specific readings to be identified]
- Alisa LaGamma, "The Art of the Punu Mukudj Masquerade: Portrait of an Equatorial Society," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1996. [specific selection to be identified]

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
object presentations & f.a.q.

3/14 Week 7: Sororal Power

How is the concept of "sister" constructed in the societies of the matrilineal belt? What is the sphere of sororal power? What is its purpose? What kinds of objects initiate women into sister societies? How are they used? How do they represent female identity visually, materially? What norms and ideals for actual women do they establish?

Readings:

- Ruth B. Phillips, "Masking in Mende Sande Society Initiation Rituals," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 48.3 (1978): 265-277.
- Caroline Bledsoe, "The Political Use of Sande Ideology and Symbolism," *American Ethnologist* 11.3 (1984): 455-572
- Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, "Introduction: Feminism, Sisterhood, and Other Foreign Relations," in *African Women & Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 1-24.

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
10 minute object presentations & f.a.q.

3/21 Week 8: NO CLASS DUE TO SPRING BREAK

Spring break will be an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned so far and, based on that, what you think are the most crucial ideas to share in the exhibition. Please review all the class documentation (article presentations, class discussions, concept maps, and object blurbs). Start brainstorming / idea

dumping in anticipation of developing and pitching a "big idea" in week 10. Talk informally to friends/family about your ideas and pay attention to their reactions/questions.

3/28 Week 9: Political Power

Political power acts in the world. It is the authority to administer public resources and implement policies for society. When do women exercise political power? What kinds of women exercise political power? One need not be biologically female in some cases to exercise female political power - so when is political power gendered female? How does African art represent female power in the political sphere?

Readings:

- Mary Nooter Roberts, "The King is a Woman: Shaping Power in Luba Arts," *African Arts* 46.3 (2013): 68-81.
- Constantine Petridis, "Mbala, Tsaam, or Kwilu Pende? A Mother-and-Child Figure from the Kwango-Kwilu Region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art* 7 (2002): 126-141.
- Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), ix-xvii and 11-17.

Due:

10 minute article presentations with handout
10 minute object presentations & f.a.q.

4/4 Week 10: Exhibition Goals, what's the big idea?

What are our exhibition's learning goals? What kind of learning do you want to have happen? What kind of interaction are you looking for? What will people actually do in the exhibition? What will people say about their experience/what they've learned? Informed by our reading of exhibition criticism and using your drafted exhibition goals and "big idea" statement we will work together to home in on our exhibition's goals and "big idea," making decisions about content, interpretive approach and tone. We will also critique and workshop existing gallery texts as a series of "think, pair, share" exercises.

Readings:

- Review Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 2nd ed (London, 2015), 7-18 (the "big idea")
- Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013), pp. 149-171.
- Pick any two critics or newspapers and read three of their art exhibition reviews (make sure at least one is about an exhibition of African art). What do they praise? What do they critique? What lessons do you take-away? "mistakes" you want to avoid? (the below are suggestions, you can propose someone else)
 - Cara Ober, BmoreArt: <http://www.bmoreart.com/>
 - Philip Kennicott or Sebastian See *Washington Post*
 - Holland Cotter or Edward Rothstein, *New York Times*
 - for reviews aimed at a scholarly audience check out caa.org

Due:

Draft 2-4 exhibition goals - what work do you want the exhibition to do? What do you want visitors to get out of the exhibition? After you've made those decisions, draft a statement of no more than two sentences

that narrates your "big idea." Share that idea with some friends and use that exercise to define your "zone of tolerance" (Ham, pp. 167)

Advised Steps

1. Idea Dump/Brainstorming
2. Pattern identification: cluster ideas into topics and sub-topics
3. Filter based on mission and goals
4. Connect the dots: Identify one big idea; completing the sentence "I think its absolutely critical for my audience to really understand that _____"

4/11 Week 11: Section and Object selection

Content: What will be the components of our "story"? What sub-topics are important to cover and which are the objects most crucial to those themes and for telling those stories?

Writing: Why do visitors read labels? Where can friction points emerge? How do we craft clear, compelling gallery texts? We will share and workshop our intro panels.

Readings:

- Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 19–31, 86-96, 117-146
- Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013), pp. 19-51 (offers a model for theme development).
- Review your notes on Judy Rand's advice from "Adventures in Label Land" parts 1 & 2: <https://vimeo.com/21080364> & <https://vimeo.com/21108024>
- Gallery Text at the V&A: Ten Point Guide: http://www.vam.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf
- Listen to interviews with visitors at the BMA - posted on Blackboard.

Due:

- 1) Gallery texts 1: intro panel (200 words) - see guide on Blackboard
- 2) Exhibition checklist (an excel spreadsheet organized into groupings with interpretive concepts/themes related to the big idea; take into account object dimensions, materials etc.. - we will see examples in class and discuss - you may work in groups of up to 3 people on the checklist)

4/18 Week 12: In-gallery interpretation

Guest: Gamynne Guillotte. We will workshop our exhibition concepts with Chief Education Officer Gamynne Guillotte as well as hear her thoughts on our gallery texts to date. We will also discuss additional options of in-gallery interpretation beyond texts, installation & design.

Readings:

- Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, 147-160
- 2018 AAM excellence in label writing winners https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2018_Label_Writing_Competition-1.pdf
- Review your notes from Falk & Dierking and Ham (week 2)
- Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2013), pp. 53-67

Due:

Revision of intro panel

Gallery texts: Write texts for 2 sections (100 words each) & list of objects that will be in each section (with images and dimensions). Guidelines & examples posted on blackboard.

Think about & list informally what experiences and ideas you think it crucial visitors have which don't fit in the main layer of interpretation we are creating with our gallery texts and object groupings

4/28 Week 13: Exhibition Design

Imagine your visitor's journey through the exhibition. What will they do? How will they experience the space? the objects? What kind of interaction do you want to foster for visitors?

Guest: Darienne Turner

Readings:

- Abbott Miller, "From Object to Observer." In *Abbott Miller: Design and Content*, 246-253. Princeton Architectural Press, 2014.
- Behind the Scenes at the Getty Museum, exhibition design:
 - <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/designing-heaven-and-earth/>
 - <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/designing-an-exhibition-wall-by-wall/>
 - <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/creating-a-canvas-for-pacific-standard-time-crosscurrents/>
- <https://segd.org/20-most-influential-exhibit-designs-century>

Due:

Section text revisions

Select 1 of the 20 most influential exhibits from link above and choose 3 design elements that made the show memorable to share in class. How did those elements make an impact? Did they appeal to the senses or invite visitor participation? "Break" from 'standard' exhibition conventions? Tell stories that hadn't been told before through interesting pairings, vibrant color schemes, or unusual hangs? etc...

5/2 Week 14: Preparing the Curatorial Workshop

Due:

3 object labels for your assigned objects (75 words each) - see guidelines. Remember, always, the "big idea" governs all your interpretive choices, the section texts break that idea down into sub-topics/themes. The object label drills those ideas down to the level of a single work or small group of closely related works. What story are your objects telling and how does that relate to the big idea?