

Curatorial Seminar (Spring 2019)
Guidelines for Article Presentations & Handout

General and Getting Started

Goals of the Presentation

- To give the audience a concise summary of the content. This includes a relevant description of the topic as well as its overall perspective, argument, or purpose.
- Second, and more importantly, to offer an assessment of the content. This involves your reactions to the article: what strikes you as noteworthy, whether or not it was effective or persuasive, and how it enhanced your understanding of gender and power in African art.

Questions to focus your thinking

1. What is the thesis—or main argument—of the article? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the article, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the article accomplished?
2. What exactly is the subject or topic of the article? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the topic in a balanced fashion? What is the approach to the subject (topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive)?
3. How does the author support her argument? What evidence does she use to prove her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information (or conclusions) conflict with other articles/books you've read, courses you've taken or just previous assumptions you had of the subject?
4. How does the author structure her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense? Does it persuade you? Why or why not?
5. How has this article helped you understand the subject?

Beyond the internal workings of the article, you should also **consider some information about the author and the circumstances of the text's production:**

Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. For instance, is the author principally a practitioner or an academic? Does experience with or lack of awareness of public audiences shape her perspective? Out of what field does the article emerge? To the best of your knowledge does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its discipline? (if you don't know, that's ok!)

Structuring the Presentation

Beginning

There are many ways to start an article presentation. Since these are to be brief presentations (no more than 10 mn per article), you can start with a quip or anecdote that succinctly delivers your argument – or you can begin directly with some information about the author. Overall, the beginning **should include**:

- The name of the author and the article title and the main theme.
- Relevant details about who the author is and where he/she stands in the genre or field of inquiry. You could also link the title to the subject to show how the title explains the subject matter.
- The context of the article
- The thesis of the article.
- Your thesis about the article

Summary of Content:

This should be brief, as analysis takes priority. In the course of making your presentation, you'll hopefully be backing up your assertions with concrete evidence from the article, so some summary will be dispersed throughout the presentation

Analysis of the article

- Your analysis should be organized around the main aspects of your argument
- You do not necessarily want to work chronologically through the article as you discuss it. Given the argument you want to make, you can organize more usefully by themes, methods, or other elements of the book.
 - If you find it useful to include comparisons to other publications, keep these brief so that the article in question remains in the spotlight.
 - **Avoid excessive quotation** and give a specific page reference when you do quote. Remember that you can state many of the author's points in your own words
- your analysis should articulate the relevance/significance of the article for our exhibition topic

Other

DON'T PLAN ON USING PPT - but if you think a short video, diagram or other visual aid will help enhance your explanation you may use it.

Evaluation

- Quality of your engagement with the article (are you really digging into the concepts? looking up unfamiliar vocabulary? situating the concepts in relation to what we've done or discussed already? trying to articulate its significance to the topic at hand)
- focus & clarity of your presentation (structure & language)

- accuracy of your presentation (**if you are worried about whether or not you're "getting" the article, please plan to meet with me ahead of time to discuss)

The Handout FORMAT

Goals of the Handout:

- to serve as a reference for when we start curating the exhibition, choosing the big idea, the objects & themes, and writing labels
1. Bibliographic reference in proper Chicago Manual of Style format. Examples:

Berger, Arthur Asa. *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture*. Walnut Creek, Cal.: Left Coast Press, 2009. **[BOOK, SINGLE AUTHOR]**

Ingold, Tim et al, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14 (2007): 1-38. **[ARTICLE IN A JOURNAL]**

MacDonald, Kerri, "Swept away by a Love for Dust (Klaus Pichler)." *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2015: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/29/swept-away-by-a-love-for-dust/? r=2> (accessed Sept. 10, 2015). **[WEBSITE]**

Prown, Jules, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 133-38. **[ARTICLE IN AN EDITED VOLUME]**

2. The HEMI - a paragraph of 250 words or less that, in a few sentences, capture the importance of an argument (named for Hemingway - who wrote wonderful one-paragraph prose compositions).

Address each of the following topics, in this order:

- what the author argues against
- the author's thesis (what the author argues)
- how the author backs up that thesis (type of data used, path of argumentation)
- potential significance for our exhibition

3. Objects. List up to 5 objects or object types directly mentioned in the article and annotate the details the author argues are significant. If no objects are mentioned, list objects we have already encountered that you think might be relevant and explain why (imagery? ethnic affiliation of makers/users? function?)

Article Presentation Handout 1 (Instructor Model)

Grillo, Laura S. *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa*. Durham, NC: Durham University Press, 2018.

Grillo argues against the common misconception that African women live in subjugation to men, which has distorted public accounts and biased scholarship. On the contrary, Grillo argues, in West African communities, female power is foundational. Grillo introduces two concepts: *Female Genital Power* and *matrifocal morality*. The latter revises Wendy James' concept of *matrifocality*, and both ideas should be understood as distinct from western concepts of matriarchy. Grillo defines *matrifocal morality* as an uncontested ethical demand socially rooted in the mother-child bond (although not dependent on a woman actually being a mother). It operates principally in sacred and moral spheres, but manifests politically when needed to maintain or restore social order (a kind of check and balance to political authority that is gendered male).

Female Genital Power (FGP) is an emblem of *matrifocal morality* as well as its tool. Public invocations of *FGP* are akin to civil disobedience with great power to rebuke the polity and effect action. Rituals invoking *FGP* involve nudity and behavior appealing to the female sex that western colonial viewers perceived as lewd, hence the notable absence of *FGP* in present written political history - although Grillo finds an abundance of written and oral primary source material that document women using *FGP* in political protest.

Grillo did fieldwork on *FGP* in Côte d'Ivoire, and in this chapter especially calls on myths & models of rulership from across West Africa like "queen mothers" "women kings" (who can be biologically male or female) and on the fact that in dual-sexed collectively governed systems (examples: *Sande* and *Porro*) the ultimate authority is the female leader.

Some thoughts on relevance for exhibition

Grillo's ideas suggest a possible solution to two big conceptual challenges when it comes to considering female-gendered power in African art: 1) men made all the artworks on our checklist and excepting for the *Sande* masks, performed all of them ie: invoked their power; 2) the continued western perception that women's rights in Africa today leave a lot to be desired (in areas of political participation, control of fertility, rights in marriage including property and custodianship of children, protection against HIV infection etc..). In Grillo's model it seems that moral authority is gendered female with a responsibility to maintain social order, irrespective of the political, social or biologically sexed position of individual men and women. (*n.b. KT pointed that many African countries have more women in legislative positions than the U.S. & that urban citizens, who will dominate the continent in the next 15 years, face different circumstances than women in rural areas; also c.f. both James and Nnaemeka from this week's readings)

Objects /Visual culture mentioned or possible:

1. Sande society masks (function but also visual details include evocations of female genitalia)
2. Regalia (Ondo-Yoruba king parade in female clothing and womanly braids) - among other *performative engendering practices
3. Great Mother Headdress (D'mba), late 19th, early 20th century. Baga. Buluñits

Guidelines for Object Presentations & Reports

Goal: to familiarize the team with your object, its visual characteristics, function and connections to course concepts so that we have a baseline for evaluating its inclusion in our exhibition

*remember that we won't have seen the work before or know anything about it

Presentation ~ should take approximately 10 minutes

- Show us the artwork and point out what we should pay attention to when we look at it - including anything that struck *you* / surprised *you* when you first saw it.
- What have you learned about the way it was used and the meaning it had in the time and place where it was made? How would it have been experienced in its original context (i.e. seen from below? in motion? with other types or other similar objects? occasionally? hidden? not seen? displayed somewhere? accessible? etc... etc....)
- Describe the types of power expressed in the object (its ok to speculate as long as you are clear that you are speculating). How is that power invoked, activated?
- Talk about the object from a gender perspective - do you see links to any of the readings or concepts that have come up in discussion?

Formatting the Object Report

1. Tombstone Label
2. Form
 - a. Aim for around 150 words
 - b. Share what are the most significant characteristics of the artworks' form (can range from composition ie: the arrangement of parts of or in the work to color, line, texture, scale, proportion, balance, contrast, and rhythm) -
 - i. you don't need to record everything! focus on what is most important to understand the object / the artist's intention / gender aspects
 - ii. its ok to share inferences/conclusions/interpretations (such as KT's comment about D'mba being a confident representation of an elderly woman that contrasts with western representations)
 - c. describe also any features that may relate to function
3. Function
 - a. again, aim for 150 words or so
 - b. Share the most significant aspects of the object's original context and use as it relates to gender and/or power
4. Connoisseurship
 - a. with the help of Kevin Tervalá, the scholarship, the curatorial file, share an assessment of the object's quality, aesthetic appeal, authenticity
5. Relevant Societal/Historical Background (draw on scholarship)

- a. the who (made it), where (was it made/used), when (made/used), why (historical or cultural significance)
6. Relevance to Exhibition
 - a. this may be speculative and that's ok!
 - b. consider the concepts we are covering this week and have covered to date
 - c. consider any interpretive challenges/difficulties (controversial? / potential friction points for visitors? / hard to understand for any reason including our own biases)
7. Bibliography
 - a. Use Chicago Manual of Style

Here a few brief models of the most common citation types in Chicago Style. Bibliographies should be alphabetized by author last name, and are typically formatted as below, with a left overhang. See the Chicago Manual of style or me for specific questions.

Berger, Arthur Asa. *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture*. Walnut Creek, Cal.: Left Coast Press, 2009. **[BOOK, SINGLE AUTHOR]**

Ingold, Tim et al, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14 (2007): 1-38. **[ARTICLE IN A JOURNAL]**

MacDonald, Kerri, "Swept away by a Love for Dust (Klaus Pichler)." *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 2015: http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/29/swept-away-by-a-love-for-dust/?_r=2 (accessed Sept. 10, 2015). **[WEBSITE]**

Prown, Jules, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 133-38. **[ARTICLE IN AN EDITED VOLUME]**

Evaluation/Assessment

- Accuracy of sections: form, function & relevant background
- Rigor of engagement with course concepts in relevance to exhibition
- Clarity of language
- Concision

OBJECT REPORT [Instructor model]

1957.97

Artist: Unidentified

Object Name: Great Mother Headdress (*D'mba*)

Ethnic Group: Baga (Buluñits sub-group)

Date: Pre-1938

Materials: Wood, copper alloy tacks, iron tacks

Dimensions: 48 5/8 x 13 3/8 x 28 3/8 inches // 83 pounds

Credit Line: Gift of Alan Wurtzburger

Form

The Baga peoples of the Guinea coast call this monumental, four-foot-tall headdress *D'mba*. *D'mba* takes the form of an elderly woman with flat, pendant breasts that show she has nursed many children. Unlike many Western representations of the elderly (or of motherhood), the *D'mba* is confident, almost regal. She is at the zenith of her beauty and power. Her hair is elaborately plaited; her gaze is direct and intense. Brass tacks define and embellish her elaborate hairstyle and exaggerated facial and bodily features. These mark her as a woman of significant means.

During performances a male dancer places *D'mba* over his head, with the four undecorated "legs" acting as supports that sit over his shoulders. A cotton indigo shawl wraps around the neck of the headdress and encircle its breasts, while a hooped skirt made of raffia hangs below, effectively concealing the dancer. (Perhaps we should manufacture some for the show?). As a result, the headdress appears less naturalistic in the gallery space than it would in a performance context.

Function

In the past, each Baga village would own a *D'mba*. She would be danced at least twice a year before the rainy seasons and would also appear at major festivities like weddings, funerals, and the arrival of special guests. Hers is a slow-moving masquerade only performed in the daytime. The dancer moves slowly into and around the performance space, swaying ever-so-slightly from left to right – a dignified and feminine movement. This is a kind of masquerade in which you can see and internalize all the details of the sculpture. Close looking is not only encouraged, it is built into the performance of the piece.

Unlike many African masks, the *D'mba* represents an idea: motherhood (as Frederick Lamp notes). She is danced for entertainment, but also to inspire and instruct men and women. Her facial features—the large eyes and ears and the small, closed mouth—represent an idealized femininity, one grounded in heightened perception as well as motherhood. She is engaged, an individual who knows what is occurring in the community of which she is a part.

Connoisseurship

Scholars widely acknowledge the *D'mba* in the BMA's care to be one of the finest examples of its type. It has been extensively published and shows ample signs of use (e.g. indigenous repairs; slightly darkened wood in the areas that would be covered by the shawl). Most of its formerly-blackened surface has faded away but its authenticity is unquestioned. What makes

OBJECT REPORT [Instructor model]

1957.97

this piece truly special, however, is the elegance and refinement of the carving and decoration. *D'mba* in other museums often have eyes and cheeks that seem bulbous, almost bulging, even cartoon-like. The artist here uses angled, or beveled, lines and small, closely spaced brass tacks, which both define and draw attention to the face, elaborate hairstyle, and breasts.

Relevant Societal/Historical Background

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Baga ethnic group lived along the marshy coastline of Guinea in West Africa. They actually include three separate linguistic groups, Baga, Buluñits, and Pukur, whom outsiders call Baga. They arrived in Guinea several centuries earlier, after fleeing the Fouta Djallon highlands in central Guinea. This past is reflected in the *D'mba's* hairstyle, which is not Baga, but rather, Fulbe (an ethnic group that lives in Fouta Djallon). The Baga sphere was not defined by large nation-state-like governance structures. Rather, each village or group of villages operated as autonomous units, governing themselves. The Baga are matrilineal and are agriculturalists.

Relevance to Exhibition

This work shows a matrilineal society valuing motherhood—both the act and the idea—above all else. As Frederick Lamp notes, *D'mba* is “the universal mother who was to be honored because she had borne many children, and had nursed them to productive adulthood. She was the vision of woman at her zenith of power, beauty, and affective presence...” (Lamp 1996: 158). Both in form and function she exemplifies maternal power and Grillo’s concept of “matrifocal morality.”

Bibliography

Curtis, Marie-Yvonne. *Baga: Visions of Africa*. Milan: 5 Continents Press, 2018.

Curtis, Marie-Yvonne and Ramon Sarro. “The ‘Nimba’ Headdress: Art, Ritual, and History of the Baga and Nalu Peoples of Guinea.” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 23. 2 (1997): 120-133+196-197

Lamp, Frederick. *The Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention*. New York: Museum for African Art, 1998. [Chapter 8 in particular]

-----See *the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking African Art at the Baltimore Museum of Art*. New York: Prestel, 2004. [particularly pp. 222-225]