Exhibiting Africa

Ways of Seeing, Knowing and Showing

Drawing upon Bryn Mawr's rich collection of African art and artifacts, this exhibition was curated by students in the Museum Studies course, "Exhibiting Africa: Art, Artifact and New Articulations," a component of the fall's 360 course cluster on the "Poetics and Politics of Race," led by Monique Scott (Museum Studies), Jody Cohen (Education) and Anne Dalke (English). Immersed in a history of how "Africa" has been variously displayed at museums, these students offer their own curatorial stories to create new ways of seeing, knowing, and showing the continent.

Africa has long been on display in museum exhibitions, but what stories do such displays tell about the continent? How do we create a story about a place still bound to a dense constellation of complex histories and politics, as well as the lingering weight of traditional nineteenth-century iconography and ideology? Despite the reality of Africa—a continent of 53 countries, more than 1000 languages, and more than 1 billion individual lives—the stories told about Africa in museums often strip the continent of its dynamism, complexity, modernity, and humanity. The colonial and anthropological imaginings of museums often objectify Africa through objects. Try to see this exhibition as more than simply a range of African artifacts. Appreciate the carefully selected objects—a wooden door, a ceremonial spoon, several figures—as much more than meets the eye. Look for the signs of hands that used, made, or held these things. Remember that these works have their own storied lives, histories, and journeys. These works have been infused with meaning as they have moved from place to place and time to time, always shifting in resonance and value before finding their current home in our care at Bryn Mawr College.

As a class, we've wrestled with ways of seeing, knowing, and showing Africa. We ask you to join us in this effort. Look closely, read carefully, think, question, learn, and feel. We hope to inspire you to learn more, especially about the collections we have here at Bryn Mawr. This story is only the beginning. We encourage you to find others.

360 Visit to the Smithsonian Museum of African-American History and Culture

Curatorial Teams

Yoruba Door
Nkechi Ampah, Rosa Nanasi Haas, Swati Shastry, Gabrielle Smith

Wakemia & Maternity Figure
Alliyah Allen, Sula Malina, Creighton Ward

Nkisi Nkondi
Olivia Porte, Abby Rose, Hannah Symonds

Ere Ibeji
Nyasa Hendrix, Franny Mestrich, Kamara Simms

Edan Ogboni
Hannah Chinn, Amaka Eze, Beatrice Greeson, Joni Jeter

BMC 360°

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