

EXHIBITING AFRICA

Ways of Seeing, Knowing and Showing

“Africa” has long been on display in museums. Through museum collections and exhibitions, African art, artifacts, and bodies have often been stripped of their complexity and dynamism. Despite the reality of Africa—53 countries, more than 1000 languages, and more than 1 billion individual lives—Africa often exists in museums as product of early colonial and anthropological imaginings. Africa became objectified through objects. When you see the African museum “object,” it is important recall the invisible hands that held it.

Here, we aim to recover the biographies of the African objects you will see on display, the storied histories of these African objects from Bryn Mawr’s Collections. We invite you to see more than a museum exhibition of static artifacts. Rather, recognize that these works have their own lives and histories. These works have been infused with meaning, and have traveled from place to place, moment to moment, shifting always in resonance and value. Here, you will be asked to think, question, read, learn, and feel.

This exhibition is a product of the course, “Exhibiting Africa: Art, Artifact and new Articulations” (taught by Dr. Monique Scott), a component of the 360 course cluster on the “Poetics and Politics of Race” (led by Professors Monique Scott, Jody Cohen and Anne Dalke). As a class, we’ve wrestled with ways of seeing and knowing Africa. In this exhibition, we invite you to wrestle, too. We hope that you question how you see and how you know when visiting a museum exhibition or constructing a narrative about a place through its objects. We also hope that you leave with a desire to know more about African art and artifacts, a desire you are invited to satisfy here at Bryn Mawr through the College’s rich collections from Africa and the African Diaspora. This story is only the beginning. We encourage you to find others.

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