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Curating Content in AP® Art History: Leading Successful Students

Saturday, 8 AM, E263/Level 2

Dana Howard will lead participants in exploring curating content and developing solid guiding questions that help students master essential art historical skills and excel in AP® Art History.

List of online resources discussed in this presentation:

- Artstor Digital Library: artstor.org
- Art & History Site Database & Search: ahdb.org
- The Art Story: theartstory.org
- Art Through Time: learner.org/courses/globalart
- Heilbrunn Timeline of the History of Art: metmuseum.org/toah
- JSTOR Register and Read: about.jstor.org/rr
- JSTOR Classroom Reading: <http://labs.jstor.org/readings/>
- Metropolitan Museum Publications: metmuseum.org/research/metpublications
- New York Times: nytimes.com
- Smarthistory: smarthistory.khanacademy.org
- Treasures of the world: pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/
- UNESCO World Heritage List: whc.unesco.org/en/list/

Tools for teaching:

- JSTOR Research Basics: <http://researchbasics.jstor.org/>
- Hemingway App: hemingwayapp.com
- Readability Score: readability-score.com

Places to make meaningful profession connections, share, and learn from others:

- Art History Teaching Resources: <http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/>
- AP® Art History Teacher Community:
<https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/web/aparthistory/home>

Creating guiding questions from the curriculum framework, an essay from the Artstor Digital Library:

Preying Mantra. Wangechi Mutu. 2006 C.E. Mixed media on Mylar.

Wangechi Mutu uses collage to repurpose images from popular culture, pornography, and the history of art in a complex response to ethnic and gender stereotypes. Emerging from the mix of these elements are compositions that both entice and repel the viewer. Evocative titles contribute meaning as the eye combs the composition for details both humorous and biting (use Artstor's zoom feature to explore the surfaces of these compositions). Even the medium of Mylar can be seen as part of the overall theme of the work: resisting and reshaping the context of ethnicity and gender in a post-colonial world.

"A close examination of Mutu's 2D pieces reveals Mylar resisting penetration from paint washes, with swirling pools of pleasing colors and curious microcosms of recognizable image fragments in unrecognizable contexts. Mutu's work is beguiling and uncanny in the ways that it simultaneously entices and repels."

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From: Nichols, Thea Liberty. "Wangechi Mutu." Art21 Magazine.
http://blog.art21.org/2011/02/25/wangechi-mutu/#.VnQhHr_ZXJs

Preying Mantra (image 1) incorporates a reclining female nude figure, a motif that resides firmly in European artistic tradition with works like Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (image 2) and Manet's *Olympia*, (image 3). (Full units on both of these canonical works are found elsewhere in AP® Art History Teaching Resources.) The figure's African body, like the odalisque, is exotic. A small green snake in the left hand of the figure, a common device used by this artist, recalls the tradition of the role of Eve in the *Fall of Man*. *Adam and Eve* by Albrecht Dürer (image 4) is one example of this tradition and is also represented in the AP® Art History Curriculum Framework.

The artist is an African woman, born in Kenya and living in New York. Her African heritage is also incorporated in her work. The figure reclines on a textile made by the Kuba people from woven palm fiber that is traditionally embroidered by women (image 5). The dark-skinned face of the figure is in the shadow of the tree branches in which it is nestled, but the ear is decidedly light-skinned with a chicken-leg earring that transforms into a lizard. The figure meets our gaze wearing a crown of shells and what looks like a galaxy of stars on her head.

The title of *Preying Mantra*, like all titles chosen by Mutu, is intentionally full of meaning. The Praying Mantis insect comes to mind (image 6), but the intentional use of the word "preying" implies hunting. A mantra is a sound repeated in the act of meditation. Is she our mantra? Is she our prey? Alternatively, are we being preyed upon by the repeatedly employed trope of the female nude?

Collage as a technique contributes to the ambiguity of Mutu's work. In perusing the diptych of image 7, *People in Glass Towers Should Not Imagine Us*, the appropriation of images of commodities like motorcycles and diamond jewelry alongside African sculpture for shoes and hats invites the viewer to ask deeper questions about the commodification of African culture and natural resources (diamonds being one of those resources). The work of Romare Bearden and his lively collages celebrating Harlem has been cited by scholars as an inspiration for Mutu (images 24).

We have chosen just a few of the many images that Wangechi Mutu and others have contributed to the Artstor Digital Library. Users may want to search for specific images not included here.

See: Harris, Shawnya. "Wangechi Mutu, Preying Mantra." Khan Academy.
<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/ap-art-history/global-contemporary/a/wangechi-mutu-preying-mantra>

See: Meier, Allison. "The Grotesque Beauty of Wangechi Mutu." Hyperallergic. 2015.
<http://hyperallergic.com/77092/the-grotesque-beauty-of-wangechi-mutu/>

See also: Caruso, Hwa Young. "Art Review: Wangechi Mutu: Solo Exhibition at Brooklyn Museum." International Journal of Multicultural Education 16, no. 1 (2014): 77-83. <http://ijme-journal.org/index.php/ijme/article/view/835>

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Some Enduring Understanding/Essential Knowledge statements that apply to this work (italics ours):

Enduring Understanding 10-1. Global contemporary art is characterized by a *transcendence of traditional conceptions* of art and is supported by technological developments and global awareness. Digital technology in particular *provides increased access to imagery* and contextual information about diverse artists and artworks throughout history and across the globe.

Essential Knowledge 10-1b. Diverse art forms are considered according to perceived similarities in form, content, and artistic intent over broad themes, which include existential investigations, *sociopolitical critiques*, as well as reflections on the natural world, *art's history, popular and traditional cultures, and technological innovation*.

Enduring Understanding 10-2. In the scholarly realm as well as mainstream media, contemporary art is now a major phenomenon experienced and understood in a global context.

Essential Knowledge 10-2c. The art world has expanded and become more inclusive since the 1960s, as artists of all nationalities, ethnicities, and sexual preferences, as well as female artists, have *challenged the traditional privileged place* of white, heterosexual men in art history. This activism has been supported by theories (e.g., deconstructionist, feminist, poststructuralist, and queer) that *critique perspectives on history and culture* that claim universality but are in fact exclusionary.

Related Guiding Question that could be developed in relation to this artist:

- Does Mutu use appropriation?
 - Follow up...
 - What other artists' work, art forms, and cultural artifacts do you see depicted in her work?
 - Why do you think they are included?

- Is her work a social critique?
 - Follow up...
 - Does she critique art history?
 - How does her work reflect art history?

- Do you think she is a feminist?

- Can you compare Mutu's message to that of other artists?
 - Follow up...
 - What are the commonalities?
 - How are they different?
 - medium
 - message
 - audience

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