

AFTERIMAGES



Jared Soares for The New York Times, NMAfA, 2021.

ON RESTITUTION, ANIMISM, AND DIASPORA

Columbia University
GSAPP | A4106-11

**Mondays &
Thursdays**
1:30 — 6:30 p.m.

Wednesdays
1:30 — 3:30 p.m.

Spring 2022
Architecture
Studio VI

Instructor:
Emanuel Admassu



Photoquest / Getty, Washington, D.C., in 1860.

"It is very important for us at the NMAfA that the Benin Bronze process be seen within a much wider context and strategy. Our process for trust-building with African and African diasporic peoples starts with decolonization—proactively evaluating the impact of unequal power relations in our sector, looking carefully and in many instances changing how we hire, document, conserve, interpret, program—and yes it may also include repatriation." —Ngaire Blankenberg¹



Benin Bronzes, 16th or 17th Century

In recent years, global debates with tremendous cultural and political consequences have been brewing over the vast collections of looted African artefacts dispersed across European and North American museums. These debates, augmented by scholarly and artistic interventions, are calling attention to critical questions: What can the museum become when it ceases to be an afterimage of coloniality? How can we use this moment of protests, strikes, and direct actions at museums, as counterpoints to the ossification of Western art institutions? In other words, what would it mean for an art space to genuinely experiment with notions of restitution, animism, and diasporic placemaking? The National Museum of African Art on the National Mall in Washington D.C. will serve as the primary site for our analysis and intervention. The site will be explored in conjunction with various sites and institutions on



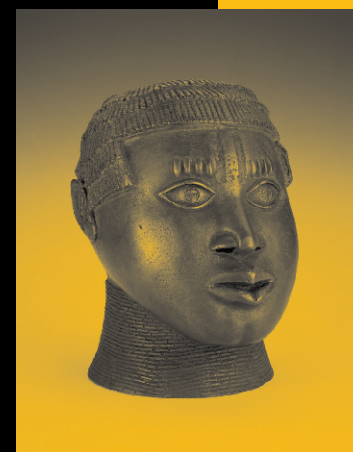
G. Cooke and W.J. Bennett, *City of Washington from beyond the Navy Yard*, 1833



Franco Stella, *Humboldt Forum*, 2020.



Eric Gyamfi, untitled from the series *Fixing Shadows*; *Julius and I*, 2019.



Benin Bronzes, 16th or 17th Century



Candida Höfer, *"Ethnologisches Museum Berlin III,"* 2003.

and off the African continent that are currently grappling with similar questions. This studio foregrounds repatriation and reparation—linking Western museums to their imperial foundations—as starting points to articulate the intersections of architecture, heritage, and migration. The aim is to experiment with the spatial implications of art spaces as transnational sites of prefiguration. This work will be done by identifying and translating anti-colonial imaging practices in contemporary African and African diasporic art that challenge the nation-state as a project; operating in contradistinction to museological traditions of taxonomizing, encapsulating, and preserving racial hierarchies. *Afterimages* reframes civic architecture in the 21st century through considerations of aesthetic and spatial inventions that propose new ways of being together.

Episode 01 Samples, Objects, & Sites

Team: Individual

Assigned: January 24, 2022

Review: February 7, 2022

Select three images: one image (10,000 x 10,000 px) of a *sample* from a contemporary visual art practice that dissolves the autonomy of the museum, one image (10,000 x 10,000 px) of a displaced *object* along with its place of origin and current location, and one emblematic image (10,000 x 10,000 px) of our *site*, the National Museum of African Art. These images will frame our collective catalog of *samples, objects, and sites* implicated in questions of restitution and reparation.

Can architecture be rescued by contemporary art?

Participants will examine imaging practices in contemporary African and African diasporic art that dissolve the autonomy of the museum.² These samples will be added to the collective catalog of the studio. By critically examining imaging concepts, we will begin to imagine the transmutation of spaces used

to produce, conserve, steward, and display art.

Is the museum a metonym for pillage?

This studio will define precise sites (both ethnological and contemporary art museums) that have been implicated in the ongoing debates around restitution. Participants will investigate the cultural, political, and spatial structures that continue to enclose and delimit the potential for artistic critique, exchange, and imagination beyond the nation-state and its colonial origins.

Are images more powerful than buildings?

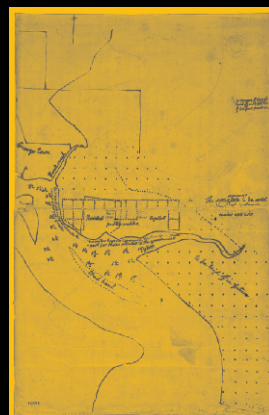
We all know the famous adage that “architects don’t make buildings we make drawings.” Nevertheless, in the 21st century, it is clear that architects no longer make drawings; we make images.³ This studio will be unapologetically committed to the critical practice of



Andreas Praefcke, An exhibit at the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2018.



Aïda Muluneh, Star shine, Moon Glow, 2018.



Thomas Jefferson, plan of the federal district, circa 1791

“Far from being a matter of abstract considerations, this is a battleground at the frontier of colonial modernity, and in the context of contemporary politics and aesthetics, it concerns the urgent question of the transformability and negotiability of ontologies, where claims to reality and the ordering of the social world are at stake... What is a museum if not a grand de-animating machine? Life—animation—is subject to permanent transformation in time, and it is precisely this transformation that the very institution of the museum is directed against.”
—Anselm Franke⁵



Otobong Nkanga, Double Plot, 2018.

analyzing and making images. The potency of images will be investigated on the site where the image of the American empire was constructed—the National Mall in Washington D.C.⁴ Studio participants will carefully select, translate, and intervene on static and moving images.

Reading 01 Arguments & Images

Team: Individual

Assigned: January 24, 2022

Review: January 31, 2022

The first assignment, Episode 01, will be accompanied by a series of readings. Each student will be responsible for completing at least three readings, producing a visual presentation, and articulating the main arguments from those readings. These readings, framing critical

questions, will serve as foundations for our discourse.

Episode 02 Select & Catalog

Team: Pairs

Assigned: February 7, 2022

Review: February 14, 2022

Each pair will inherit samples, objects and sites from Episode 01. The research, images, and arguments will be carefully sharpened in accordance with their respective cultural and sociopolitical contexts (the sites where they were produced and deployed). This process will generate a collective catalog as a reference document for the studio.

What is art beyond speculation?

Participants will examine the comorbidities of real estate and art speculation as dual forces that are inscribing violent spatial and epistemic borders in cities around the world. Dismantling the cultural, political, and economic forces that continue to commodify art and architecture requires critical engagement with the images used to do

this work.

What are the boundaries between art and space?

Working in pairs, participants will test various combinations of the fragments in the collective catalog. These combinations will supplement precise interventions on our primary site, not as isolated objects in time but as networks of thought and aesthetic influence that will lead to the dissolution of bordering practices that create separations between art and space, artefacts and localities.

Are museums obsolete?

The aim is to generate arguments and images that amplify the animism embedded in the aesthetic and relational conditions of our global present; destabilizing the certitude embedded in the relentless collection and containment of artistic production.⁶ We will establish frameworks that cultivate practices of stewardship and communality for various forms of cultural artefacts—against the hegemony of Western art institutions.

Episode 03 Arguments, Images & Models

Team: Pairs
Assigned: February 14, 2022
Review: February 24, 2022

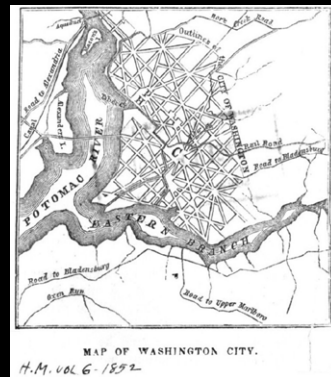
Each group will select samples, objects, and sites from the collective catalog. This triad of concepts, artefacts, and spaces will inform our collective effort of imagining an alternative future for the National Museum of African Art on the National Mall in Washington D.C.

How can we disentangle museums from nationalist projects?

Accepting architecture's sublime temporality, participants will design spatial strategies for a transnational African and African diasporic art space that is predicated



Adjaye Associates, Edo Museum of West African Art, 2020.



Map of Washington City
Harper's Magazine, 1852

"Let me invoke another example, within the "contact zone" of cultures, that of the confrontation with African and Oceanic sculptures of European artists. What this confrontation did was to transform the pictorial and plastic language of modern European painting and sculpture, hence deeply affecting its tradition. What is astonishing in this story of encounter is the degree to which the artistic challenges posed by so-called primitive art to twentieth-century European modernism have been assimilated and subordinated to modernist totalization. Therein lies the fault line between imperial and postcolonial discourse, for to admit to the paradigmatic breach produced by the encounter between African sculptures and European artists would also be to address the narrative of modern art history. We should also remember that the non-Western objects in question first must shed their utilitarian function and undergo a conversion from ritual objects of magic to reified object of art." — Okwui Enwezor⁸

"Again, it comes down to the anti-colonial aspect of it; in particular, as it foregrounds juridical and economic subjugation. So a PanAfrican imaginary would allow us to look at the global present in such a way that we can immediately grasp economic dispossession, extraction, and exploitation as it affects people of color, Indigenous populations across national, regional, and local borders. A PanAfrican imaginary allows us to speak of Black subjugation in the same breath as we speak of settler colonialism." —Denise Ferreira da Silva⁷



David Hammons, Three Spades, 1971.

on the ongoing migration of people and ideas across geographies. In other words, this studio aims to design spaces for people and objects that have experienced various forms of displacement across time and space.

Episode 04 Iterate & Study

Team: Pairs
Assigned: February 24, 2022
Review: March 24, 2022

The site will be reconstructed to reflect the various forms of cohabitation (human and more-than-human) that have been erased. This will be an iterative process,

transforming the samples, objects, and sites of each project. The aim is to unbuild the proprietary systems that undergird the National Mall and the Smithsonian Institution.⁹ It is an opportunity to imagine new ways of relating to one another and the planet at large through a series of critical cartographies.¹⁰

Episode 05 Images, Models & Presentations

Team: Pairs
Assigned: March 24, 2022
Review: April 28, 2022

The final presentation will be a non-linear accounting of the research and design decisions that generated the counterimages of the NMAfA. The tension between the history of the site, the displacement of artefacts, and transdisciplinary imaging practices, will reveal portals that transgress the limits of art and architecture.¹¹



Chris Ofili, Blue Devils, 2014.

Week 01

Monday, January 24th
Assign Reading 01
(Review on Jan. 31st)
Assign Episode 01
(Review on Feb. 7th)
Wednesday, January 26th
Office Hours
Thursday, January 27th
Desk-crits

Week 02

Monday, January 31st
Review Reading 01
Wednesday, February 2nd
Guest Speaker
Thursday, February 3rd
Desk-crits

Week 03

Monday, February 7th
Review Episode 01
Assign Episode 02
(Review on Feb. 14th)
Wednesday, February 9th
Karen Milbourne, Senior
Curator, National Museum of
African Art
Thursday, February 10th
Desk-crits

Week 04

Monday, February 14th
Review Episode 02
Assign Episode 03
(Review on Feb. 24th)
Wednesday, February 16th
Guest Speaker
Thursday, February 17th
Desk-crits



Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Nothing to Lose IX (Bodies of Experience), 1987.

Week 05

Monday, February 21st
Desk-crits
Wednesday, February 23rd
Office Hours
Thursday, February 24th
Mid-Review (Episode 03)

Week 06

Monday, February 28th
Assign Episode 04
(Review on Mar. 24th)
Wednesday, March 2nd
The Nest Collective,
Multidisciplinary Collective
from Nairobi, Kenya (TBC)
Thursday, March 3rd
Desk-crits

Week 07

March 7th - 11th
Travel to Washington D.C.

Week 08

March 14th - 18th
Spring Break



Edward Sachse, Panoramic view of Washington City from the Capitol, 1856.

"The status and power of the archive derive from this entanglement of building and documents. The archive has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension, which encompasses the physical space of the site of the building, its motifs and columns, the arrangement of rooms, the organization of 'files', the labyrinth of corridors, and the degree of discipline, half-light and austerity that gives the place something of a nature of a temple and a cemetery: a religious space because a set of rituals is constantly taking place there, rituals that [...] are of quasi-magical nature, and a cemetery in the sense that fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there, their shadows and footprints inscribed on paper and preserved like so many relics."
— Achille Mbembe¹²



Carrie Mae Weems, The Louisiana Project, 2003.



Elias Sime, Tightrope, 2009-14..

Week 09

Monday, March 21st
Desk-crits
Thursday, April 21st
Review Episode 05

Wednesday, March 23rd

Guest Speaker

Thursday, March 24th
Review Episode 04
Assign Episode 05
(Review on April 28th)

Week 15

Monday, April 25th
Desk-crits
Wednesday, April 27th
Office Hours
Thursday, April 28th
Final Review

*Dates are subject to change

Week 11

Monday, March 28th
Zoë Samudzi
Writer, editor, and art critic
Wednesday, March 30th
Office Hours
Thursday, March 31st
Desk-crits

Week 12

Monday, April 4th
Desk-crits
Wednesday, April 6th
Guest Speaker
Thursday April 7th
Desk-crits

Week 13

Monday, April 11th
Desk-crits
Wednesday, April 13th
Office Hours
Thursday, April 14th
Desk-crits

Week 14

Monday, April 18th
Desk-crits
Wednesday, April 20th
Office Hours

Notes

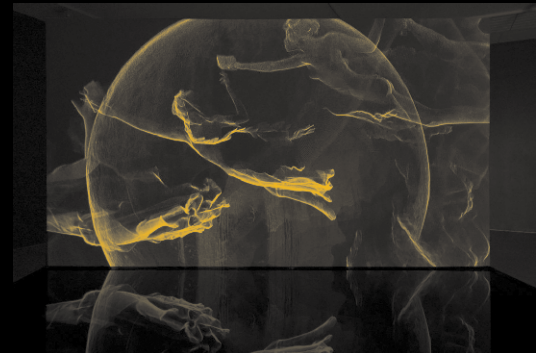
1. Taylor Dafoe, "With Promise It Is 'Committed to Repatriation,' Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art Takes Its Benin Bronzes Off View," in *Artnet*, November 5, 2021. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/2030789-2030789>; see also Nora McGreevy, "Why the Smithsonian's Museum of African Art Removed Its Benin Bronzes from View," in *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 10, 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/national-museum-of-african-art-removes-benin-bronzes-from-display-affirms-commitment-to-repatriation-180979037/>
2. Zoë Samudzi, "The Paradox of Plenty," in *Art in America*, February 16, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/otobong-nkanga-2-1234583810/>; see also TheLabSF. "The Forum // Zoë Samudzi and Nicholas Mirzoeff." *YouTube*, 1:29:14. October 22, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj1MPRjy4LU>
3. John May, "myelectric eye," and "Three Axioms X Three Storage Formats," in *Image.Signal.Architecture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) pp. 21 – 28, 31 – 56.
4. Ted Widmer, "Draining the Swamp," in *The New Yorker* (January 19, 2017). <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/draining-the-swamp>
5. Anselm Franke, "Animism: Notes on an Exhibition" in *e-flux Journal* / Issue #36 (July 2012). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/>
6. Harry Garuba, "Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society," in *Public Culture* Volume 15.2 (Duke University Press, 2003), 261 – 285.
7. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Mapping Pan-Africanism onto Blackness: The Continent, The Diaspora, and Beyond," in *The Funambulist* 32, Pan-Africanism, November-December 2020, pp. 12 – 17.
8. Okwui Enwezor, "The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition," in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 57 – 82.
9. Mabel O. Wilson, "Other Monumentalities," in *David Adjaye Form, Heft, Material*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Zoe Ryan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 265 – 284.
10. Elleza Kelley, "'Follow the Tree Flowers': Fugitive Mapping in Beloved," in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* (2020), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/anti.12679>
11. Oluremi C. Onabanjo, "Looking Good," in *SSENSE*, July 28th, 2021. <https://www.ssense.com/en-us/editorial/culture/looking-good>
12. Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, Hamilton C., Harris V., Taylor J., Pickover M., Reid G., Saleh R., Eds. Springer, Dordrecht, 2002.



Wangechi Mutu, *Yo Mama*, 2003.



American Artist, *Blue Life Seminar* (still), 2019.



The Otolith Group, *Sovereign Sisters*, 2014.



Tinsley, Jeffrey Wayne, *NMAfA and Haupt Garden*, 1987,