

URBAN AFRICA

History of Art 192M – Fall 2017

Dr. Ivy Mills



Wura-Natasha Ogunji, *Will I still carry water when I am a dead woman?* 2013. Videotaped performance.

Outside the continent, Africa is overwhelmingly imagined as a rural space, albeit one that can take different forms - a green savannah teeming with exotic animals; a dark jungle where danger lurks behind twisting vines; or an impoverished village inhabited by naked children who stand before thatched huts, their bare feet dusty and pleading eyes ringed with flies.

These images both offer a reductive account of the African countryside and obscure the rich history of urban life on the continent. For millennia, large, cosmopolitan, wealthy cities have been sites of florescence in artistic and intellectual production. Today, African cities are hubs for thriving art scenes, many of which take the city itself as their primary subject. In this seminar, we will explore urban aesthetics through a close, multidisciplinary analysis of case studies drawn primarily from a West African axis spanning from Senegal to Nigeria. We will consider the following: How do African artists engage with and represent the city? How has art been used to define the urban, and to demarcate and define specific urban spaces? How is artistic production entangled with urban economies, politics, and spiritualities? Our inquiry will lead us to an examination of a wide range of objects, including architecture, maps, fashion, murals, statues, markets, festivals, music videos, and studio art.

This course fulfills the following requirements for the History of Art major: Geographical areas (D) and Chronological period (III). Graduate students, lower division students, and non-majors may be able to enroll with permission from the instructor.