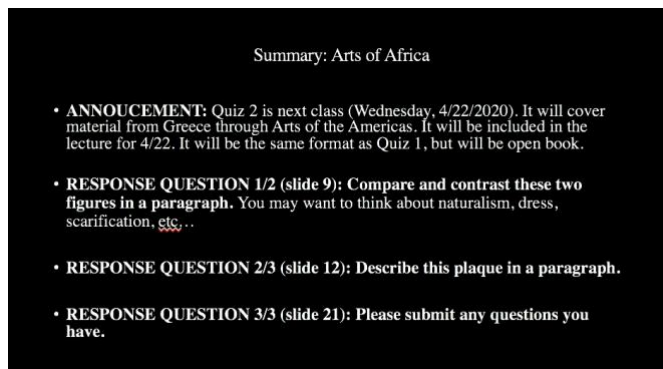


Response questions due 4.21.2020 at 9:30 AM by email (anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu)

Slide 1: Summary



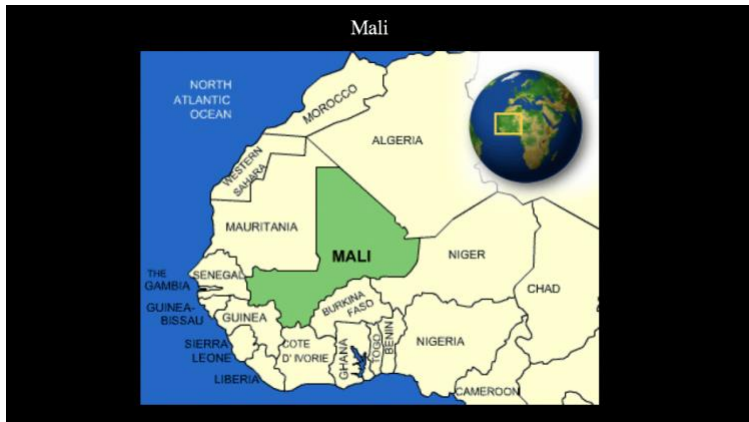
ANNOUCEMENT: Quiz 2 is next class (Wednesday, 4/22/2020). It will cover material from Greece through Arts of the Americas. It will be included in the lecture for 4/22. It will be the same format as Quiz 1, but will be open book.

RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2 (slide 9): Compare and contrast these two figures in a paragraph. You may want to think about naturalism, dress, scarification, etc...

RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3 (slide 12): Describe this plaque in a paragraph.

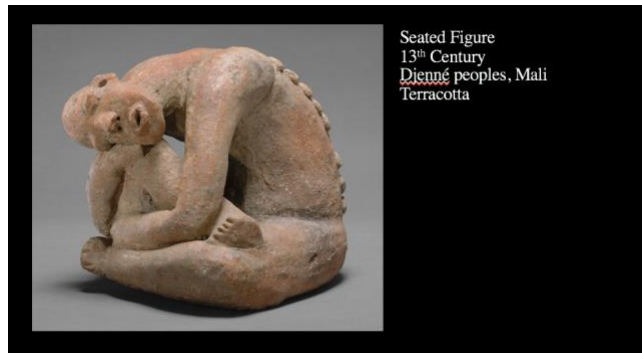
RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3 (slide 21): Please submit any questions you have.

Slide 2



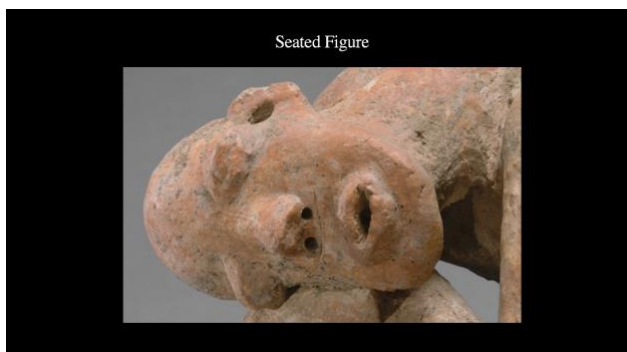
Today we're going to be looking at art from Africa. Now, of course, Africa is home to many cultures, with varying art styles. We're going to look at a small selection of works of art from a few different cultures.

Slide 3



Let's start with this figure, which is a seated figure from Djenné, which is a city in Mali, which was a very powerful and very wealthy kingdom. It's from Jenne-Jeno (or Old Jenne). Mali is a country today, but Old Jenne refers to the old city. This is one of the earliest figures known from Sub-Saharan Africa. It is made of terracotta, a type of unglazed earthenware, like clay. In the next two slides, look at details of this figure.

Slide 4



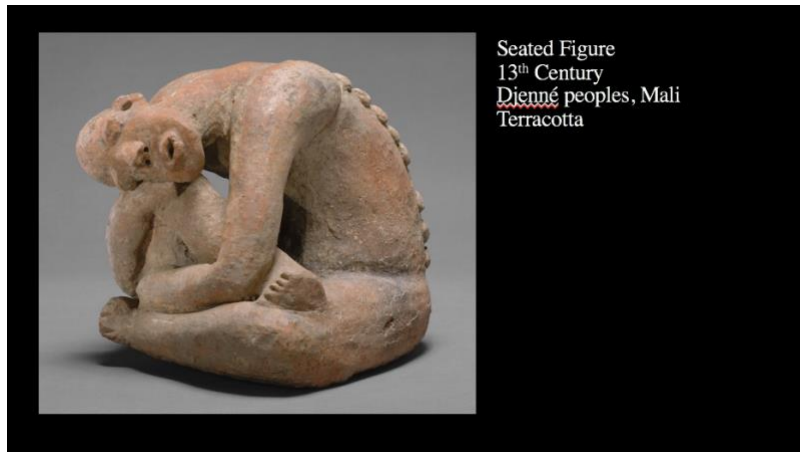
No notes.

Slide 5



The back is of great interest to scholars, who believe that this figure shows either disease, or ritual scarification. Scarification is the act of covering or transforming the body, and is an important part of cultures and religions around the world. If this is scarification, as many scholars believe, this sculpture tells us about some of the ritual practices of the people of Mali.

Slide 6



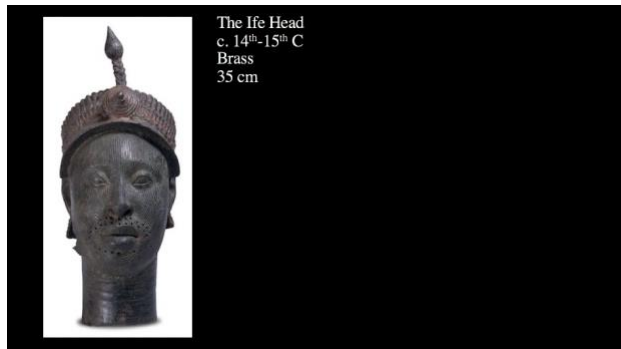
Let's also think about the pose of this figure. The body is contorted so that the head rests on the knee of one leg, which is crossed over the other leg. The figure hugs its legs. The face is turned outward, and the mouth is slightly open. Perhaps this figure is speaking, or looking at the viewer. The anatomy is slightly abstracted and there is little emphasis on exaggerated musculature. But, the body is still naturalistic in that the limbs look like limbs and the face looks like a face. The artist seems to have been more focused on the pose than on emphasizing particular anatomy. The figure is detailed, but not individualized.

Slide 7



In different cultures and places, we see different interests in art and different aesthetics value. We can look to Nigeria, where the city of Ife is home to the Yoruba people. Ife, according to Yoruba legend, is where life was first created. This was a very wealthy culture that thrived from the 12th-15th centuries, but whose religious and cultural practices are still alive today. The Yoruba produced a tremendous amount of art, and made sculpture in a variety of materials, including stone, terracotta, brass and copper. Yoruba sculpture tends to be extremely naturalistic.

Slide 8

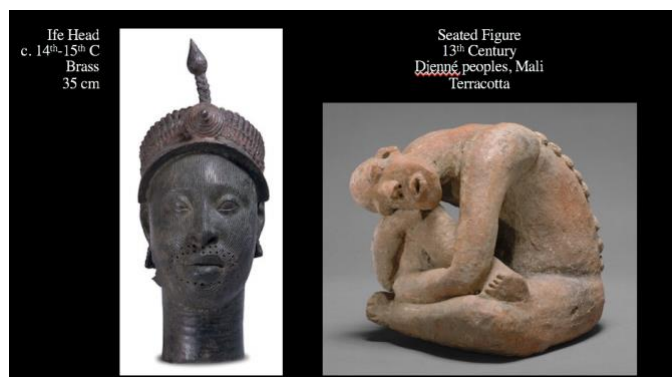


This is a Bronze Head from Ife. In 1938, 18 copper alloy sculptures were unearthed in Ife. Now, these particular sculptures were not actually bronze, but the excavators called them bronze and the name stuck. This particular sculpture is actually brass. These heads were made using the lost wax technique. Think back to ancient Greece and the Renaissance; we've seen lost wax before. It's a technique of molding bronze (or metal) sculptures using varying plaster and wax casts and melting the metal.

The scholars who originally found this sculpture assumed it was a Greek object, thinking that African artists wouldn't make such a naturalistic object. They assumed this was made by Greeks who came to Africa. But this particular object was made before European contact with Africa, so the technique was not brought to Africa by Greeks, or any Europeans, but was developed in Africa independently of contact with the Mediterranean. This is not an ancient Greek object, but a medieval sculpture made by Yoruba artists. Originally, this sculpture would have been painted.

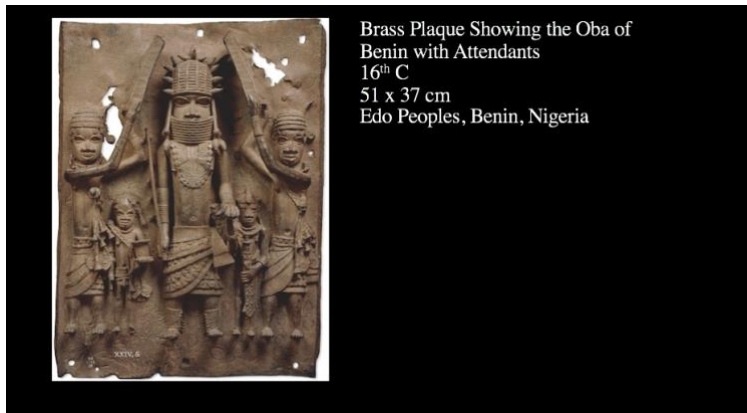
What is this sculpture? It is a portrait of a ruler, which the Yoruba called "oni." It was probably made under King Obalufon II, and it was made at a time when the Yoruba were gaining a lot of wealth through trade on the Niger River. We're not sure exactly how these were used, but there are many heads of many materials that art naturalistic and individualized. These are likely ritualistic objects that show the many oni of the Yoruba.

Slide 9



RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2: Compare and contrast these two figures in a paragraph. You may want to think about naturalism, dress, scarification, etc...

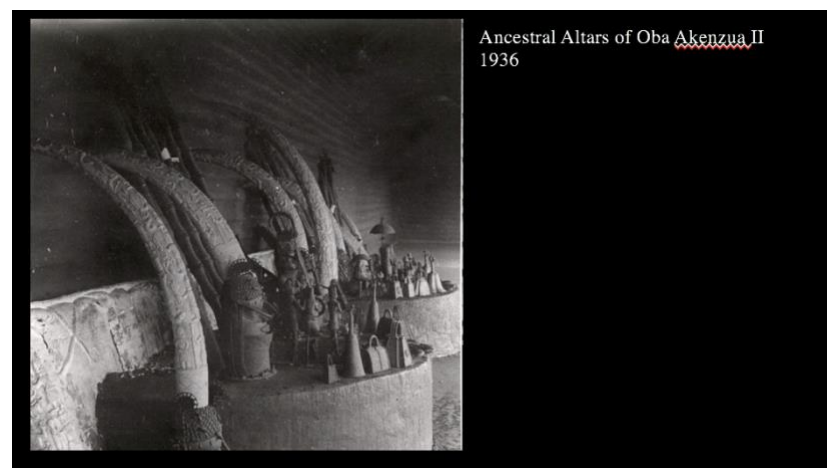
Slide 10



Nigeria was also home to the Edo Peoples, who lived in the Benin Empire in modern day Nigeria. The plaque we're looking at now is one of over 1000 metal plaques made with the lost wax method that decorated the royal palace, and were made starting in the 13th century. So we are looking at the Oba (king) and his attendants. We know it's the king in the center because he wears coral beads around his neck, and coral indicates kingship in this culture. The attendants hold shields over the king's head to protect him either from attack, or from the sun. So this is one of many plaques that would have been placed in order to show the royal lineage of the Oba.

The plaque is abstracted, with particular features, like eyes, emphasized over others. The clothing is stylized, especially the headdresses, which have horizontally stacked lines to convey weaving or metalwork. The figures are shown with hieratic scale, with the Oba central and largest, and so the most important.

Slide 11



Ancestry was extremely important in Benin culture. Every person would have an ancestral altar. But this altar was particularly important to kings because they ensured dynastic succession, meaning the ancestral altars would ensure the continuation of the dynastic line with the king and his sons. Pictured here are the ancestral altars of a specific king, Oba Akenzua II.

Slide 12



Relief plaque showing two officials with raised swords
Copper alloy
c. 1530-1570
43.2 x 31.8 cm
Edo peoples, Benin, Nigeria

Here is another one of the plaques. These plaques were NOT ancestral altars, but they do underscore the importance of ancestry and dynastic lines to the Oba because they were placed in order in the palace. They were carefully crafted and would have been highly polished to glisten and reflect light. Their general purpose is to glorify the Oba as a divine king.

RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3: Describe this plaque in a paragraph.

Slide 13



Photograph of British men in front of the palace of Benin in 1897

These plaques have a very important history. They are incredibly important to the Benin people, and were looted by the British. This story begins with Portuguese and Benin trade, which began in the late 15th century. The Portuguese traded for items like pepper and cloth, and in exchange the Benin received items like brass and coral, which was a royal symbol. The rosette designs in the background of the plaque on the previous slide are actually likely derived from Christian symbolism, and is evidence of this contact.

When the Portuguese Empire declined in the 18th century, the British began trading with the Benin Empire. This trade was not mutually beneficial and strongly favored the British. In 1897, the British seized the Oba's palace, burned the city, and killed many people. It was at this moment, now called the British Punitive Expedition of 1897, that they looted the royal court treasury and stole the plaques and other works of art.

Why did this happen? A group of British men had been visiting a Benin port city but religious ceremonies had been taking place and the British were told that they could not enter the city during the ceremonies. The British went in anyway, were ambushed, and only two British men survived. The looting and seizure of the palace was a reaction to this.

This looting was later condemned but the plaques were never returned to the Benin people. They are still held in foreign museums. The Met in New York has 163, there are 500 in Berlin and the British Museum has 700, the most plaques to be held in a single place. There are groups that are actively working for the repatriation of the plaques. **Repatriation** is the return of objects, or even people, to the country of origin. What are the arguments for not returning the work? This is a complicated question; the plaques are highly prized works of art and would be a major loss for the museums, which is one reason why they might resist returning them. There is also the argument that the plaques can be seen by more people in these large institutions and so more people can learn about Benin culture. Arguments for returning them are that, of course, they were stolen. And also that they were meant to be seen together and so should be reunited.

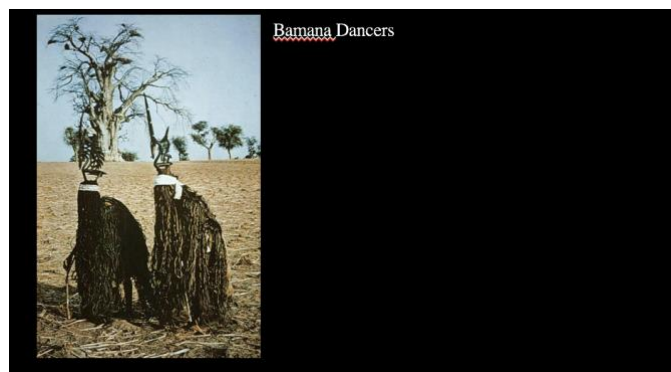
Slide 14



Let's turn now to two headdresses featuring antelopes made by the Bamana peoples. These were made by the Ci Wara Association, a men's agriculture group that has festivals to celebrate successful farmers. A pair of dancers would wear these headdresses and held sticks to paw at the ground like Ci Wara did when he taught humans to plant seeds.

Who is Ci Wara? Ci Wara is a half mortal, half god who introduced agriculture to the Bamana people. The Bamana society is very agricultural and even today the majority of the people are subsistence farmers, which means they farm to have food for their families, not to sell. After Ci Wara introduced agriculture, the Bamana became very prosperous, but eventually became very wasteful. Because of this Ci Wara buried himself in the ground. The headdresses are worn to honor Ci Wara.

Slide 15



Here are two Bamana dancers performing this ceremony. They wear the headdresses, attached to which are raffia fibers, which hang down and conceal the dancer. This makes it seem more like an antelope performing the dance, rather than a person dressed as an antelope.

Slide 16



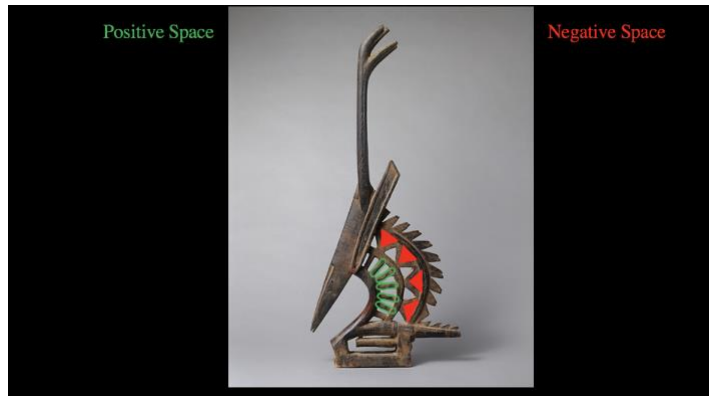
So this headdress is meant to be an antelope. The headdresses often incorporate animals that thrive in nature and help successful farming. The antelope is particularly important because the male antelope symbolizes the sun and the female antelope is associated with the earth. Together, they symbolize the unity of man and woman.

Slide 17



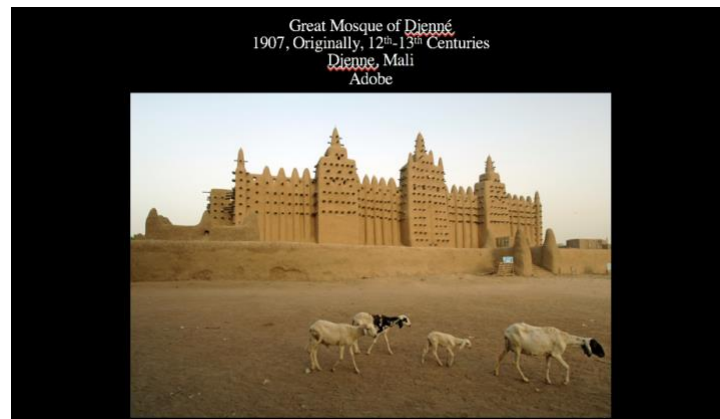
The headdresses could be any number of animals, but each animal was chosen for its symbolic value. The horns and neck of the antelope represent grace and strength. Here the female antelope carries a fawn (a baby antelope), so is also a reference to motherhood and human mothers. Aardvarks were also popular because they are good diggers.

Slide 18



The construction of this headdress makes use of positive and negative space, which is a concept that applies to all mediums but is particularly utilized in sculpture. **Positive space** is essentially subject, the work of art. In this headdress, all of the wood is positive space. I've outlined a few areas in green, but all of the brown wood of the piece is positive space. **Negative space** is the area around the subject. So all of the carved out space of the headdress, a few places of which are blocked out in red, is negative space. Here, the carved out areas form the pattern of the headdress, so are integral to the work of art, but are not physically the piece because the material has been totally carved away.

Slide 19



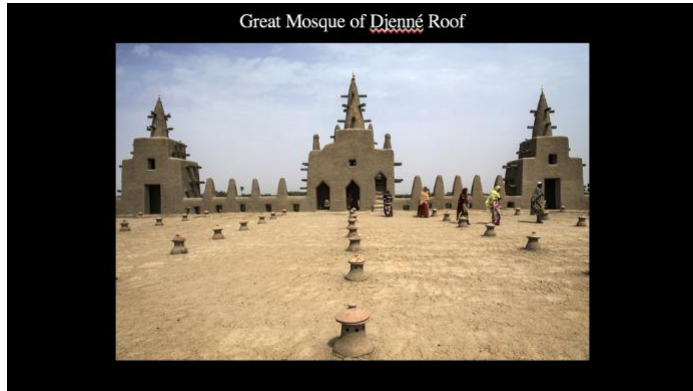
Finally we will look at the Great Mosque at Djenné, which is in Djenné in Mali, where we began today. The city was founded between 800 and 1250 CE. The mosque was originally built in the 13th or 14th century by Djenné's first Muslim king. Islam had come to Africa and was becoming more popular, but people still practiced other religions. So, the king used traditional architecture from Djenné to build the mosque for the new religion.

The structure that we see today is a replica of that original mosque. This one was built in 1906 under the French administration. This has a dark history because it was built with forced labor after the French colonized Mali.

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It is made of Adobe, or mudbrick. So, it is made of sun-baked mudbricks that are coated in plaster to make them more durable. But, because it is made of mud, the mosque is very susceptible to damage.

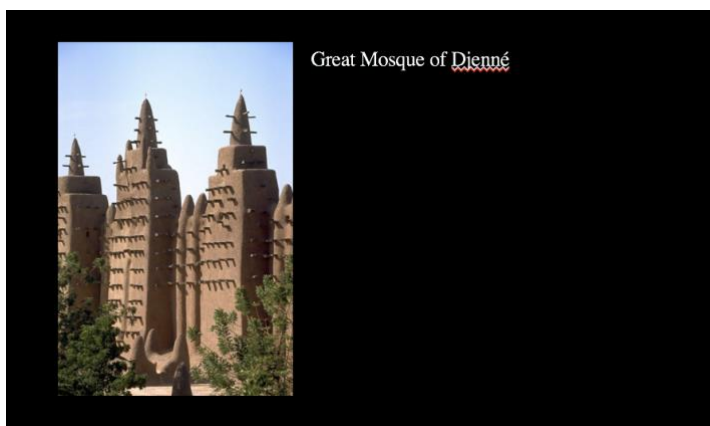
Slide 20



To help preserve the mosque, ceramic half-pipes sit on the roof and direct water away from the building. The mosque is also located on the flood plain of the Bani River, so the entire mosque is raised on a platform to protect it from flooding, which would really damage the mud.

Finally, reed bundles decorate the structure and act as scaffolding for the annual repairs, which occur every year in a large festival where the entire town participates. The men will climb up and actually repair the structure by applying plaster to the cracks that develop in the mud as a result of humidity and rain. Women and children bring the plaster to the mosque. The elderly men watch from a place of honor, having already repaired the mosque many times over the years.

Slide 21



Here we see the minarets of the mosque, which is a traditional element of mosque architecture. The mosque uses traditional styles and materials from Mali to make a structure that can function properly as a mosque. We see then, as we have seen before, the combination of techniques and cultural identities. Islam was new to Mali at the time, so by using traditional architecture, the mosque makes this new religion more familiar to the people.

RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3: Please submit any questions you have.