Spring 2020 Faculty Resource Guide

This document is provided to KSU faculty as an overview of exhibitions at the Zuckerman Museum of Art.

Included:
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Museum Educational Goals

In alignment with the museum’s educational mission, the exhibitions present an opportunity for broad interdisciplinary conversation and learning. The ZMA’s educational goals are:
- Provide exhibitions as vehicles to engage discourse on contemporary art objects, including to decode and comprehend signs legible in art.
- Encourage the use of the visual and performing arts in academic scholarship to foster a more interconnected learning community at KSU.
- Teach visual analysis, object-based study, and critique.
- Support analysis of how artists use their practice to explore global issues.

Academic Class Programming

The Zuckerman staff is available to customize class visits and tours in accordance with course objectives and upon faculty request. We strive to help students connect more deeply with course content through engagement with art.

Pre-Tour Preparation Notes: Prior to visiting an exhibition, we encourage instructors to hold an in-class dialogue to frame the exhibition for students.
Exhibition Tours: A class tour provides the faculty member with a constructive method by which students can experience the exhibition. The themes suggested herein can help to appropriately focus the class dialogue to match the course's subject.

Writing prompts for an after-visit exercise: Instructors may elect to provide a writing assignment after a visit to the museum. Open-ended questions associated with each theme can offer basic ideas to use as a springboard.

Looming Chaos
Mortin Gallery
Exhibition Runs: January 25 – May 10, 2020
The solo artist in the exhibition is Zipporah Camille Thompson.

Synopsis
Looming Chaos is a solo exhibition of Atlanta-based artist Zipporah Camille Thompson. The exhibition explores the artist's use of weaving to engage ideas of chaos. Thompson conceptualizes chaos as the tensions associated with personal and universal experiences of disaster and catastrophe. Her weaving practice enables her to materialize the destruction, disorder, and confusions of the world, transforming them into fantastical fiber abstractions. The deterioration of the environment, tumultuous personal histories, and the complexities of her own identity become fodder for creation.

This exhibition explores Zipporah Camille Thompson's process as a weaver. Through this craft tradition she creates contemporary fine art.

Exhibition Specific Learning Goals
Our learning goals for students viewing this exhibition are:
- Identify how the artist has expanded a traditionally functional artform, weaving, to create works with conceptual depth and breadth having primacy over function.
- Explore interpretations of the symbolism in Thompson’s art.
- Consider how these works of art beckon introspective examination of interconnection among living beings and connection with the environment.
- Recognize the craft and labor of weaving as an artistic medium.
Themes of *Looming Chaos*

**Theme 1. Transmutation**

**Questions:**
1. How does transmuting the meaning of chosen objects from utilitarian to symbolic further the impact of Thompson work?
2. Have you ever reused an item for a different purpose than the one for which it was originally intended? How did knowing the original purpose affect your reuse? Did you experience any feelings in association with the change?

**Description:**
Thompson’s weavings are created in part by incorporating nontraditional weaving materials and assemblage methods. She is a discerning collector of a wide variety of things. She chooses objects for use in her art based on their ability to serve as signifiers for the concepts she wants to impart. Her practice of evaluating the objects’ histories and utilitarian purposes to communicate ideas visually has promulgated reuse from function to art. We see this through her incorporation of barrettes, cassette tapes and photographs into “chrysalis roots” and “galaxial gathering” or through incorporation of synthetic hair, stoneware and tar paper in “negro cielo (black sky).” The chosen objects hold meaning beyond their utilitarian purposes in the world. By bringing in these materials, Thompson extends the symbolic meaning of her work – work that has direct lineage to traditional craft traditions - to connect more broadly with viewers through archetypal or transpersonal understandings.

**Theme 2. Chaos as Destruction and Creation**

**Questions:**
1. When we think of large-scale weavings, we may imagine rugs, blankets or shawls; items to protect and keep us warm. What does Thompson’s work have in common with utilitarian items for warmth or protection? What is the difference?
2. What personal experiences have you had that relate to the idea of the ouroboros?
3. How do you conceive of yourself in connection to other living things?

**Description:**
A frequent theme we see in Thompson’s work is the reckoning with the chaos of our world. She considers how within such horrible experiences as disaster, catastrophe, death and decay there is a point of transformation and rebirth or renewal. The continuous cycle of life and death, not possible to stop, is recognized. She is motivated to represent this unending cycle in
the work she does at the loom. The process of weaving, incorporating a variety of materials as she does, follows a continual shift in direction.

Expressed through the symbol of the ancient Egyptian symbol of the ouroboros, Thompson references the cyclicality of the processes of destruction and creation. The round symbol consists of a serpent eating its own tail. It is used across cultures to express the seasons, life and death, and concepts such as wholeness and eternity.

Thompson merges visual references to sentient and vulnerable bodies of humans and animals with visual references to larger environmental bodies of land, sky, water and the cosmos to create an abstract visual language. She does this in a variety of ways: 1) incorporating non-uniform imagery, like the hides of an animal or an interstellar cosmic configuration, 2) using sutures to signify ideas of tension, and 3) choosing colors and textures to mimic the colors and textures of natural and the universal bodies. In numerous instances Thompson incorporates objects directly from nature. Deer jaws, a hornets' nest, and wool are examples. This incorporation of what is naturally decaying into a process of creation demonstrates how the chaos and destruction of life is also part of the construction and creation of life.

Please visit: https://arts.kennesaw.edu/zuckerman/exhibitions/upcoming_exhibitions.php to see an introductory video of Zipporah Camille Thompson speaking about her work.

The curator of Looming Chaos, TK Smith, is available to address any questions or concerns you may have at tksmith106@gmail.com.
UNBOUND

East Galleries
Exhibition Runs: January 25 – May 10, 2020
Artists Include: Anthony Akinbola, Romare Bearden, Krista Clark, Sam Gilliam, Eric N. Mack, Joe Overstreet, and Tariku Shiferaw

Synopsis
UNBOUND brings together a multigenerational group of artists of African descent whose work takes an inventive and experimental approach to abstraction. Their works consider the essential elements of abstract painting (color, form, gesture, line, and space) through unorthodox use of materials that break the confines of a rectangular canvas and implode the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and installation. The works on view hang, stretch, tether, and dangle off the walls, breaking free from the bounds of figuration and complicating the boundaries of painting itself.

Exhibition Specific Learning Goals
Our learning goals for students viewing this exhibition are:

- Recognize and understand the art historical context for African American abstract artists working from the 1950s through the present:
  - Jazz and improvisation had great influence on artistic practice.
  - The impetus for their abstraction did not fully align with the canonically accepted definition of abstract expressionism (utilizing the formal elements of painting as an emotional or spiritual expression of the autonomous artist.)
- Compare and contrast the potential impacts on viewers of representational art versus abstract art in terms of similarities and differences in what they each are able to express.
- Analyze the use of materials as literal and abstract references to the vernacular within an African American cultural landscape.
- Distinguish the planes of the art in three-dimensional space and question what is familiar or unfamiliar about the artists’ use of space; assess how unexpected spatial interruptions affect the viewing of art.
- Explore how these artists of African descent reframe the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and installation.

Themes of UNBOUND

Theme 1. Racial Politics and Artistic Freedom
Questions:
1. How does one view abstract art differently than figurative art?
2. What does it mean to remove figures from paintings?
3. How might removing figures from a painting be a uniquely individual process, different for artists of different racial identities?
4. How might the potential impact on viewers of representational art versus the potential impact on viewers of abstract art change depending on the viewer’s racial identity or ethnic background?

Description:
The artists in this show were, and still are at times, working against pressure to express themselves in ways dictated by others. In the 1960s artists of African descent were questioned when not depicting figurative narratives to fight against invisibility. That was the widely accepted style of art in African American communities for promoting positive images of blackness in the fight for civil rights. African American artists often contended with a presumed divide between figuration and abstraction and the perceived inability of abstraction to rectify centuries of denigrating racial representation.

For nearly a decade between the mid-1950s – mid-1960s, Romare Bearden worked abstractly. He explored the formal qualities of art – the elements and principles. Yet he used abstraction without leaving behind references to the physical world. “Snow Morning” can be read as a purely abstract image but the title makes a clear reference to an observable reality. He later returned to figuration yet maintained abstract qualities in his work and persisted in his courageous practice of creating art according to his own terms.

Krista Clark, an Atlanta-based artist working today, talks about feeling this pressure in reverse during an earlier phase of her artistic practice. At that time she was holding fast to creating drawings with figures yet installation and performance art had become more popular genres. Today she has moved on from an artistic practice of drawing in which she explored her identity as an African-American to embrace a practice of installation art as a method to explore her freedom to create. The exhibition UNBOUND puts on display an evolution of abstraction by artists of African descent as a political choice for artistic freedom.

Theme 2. Abstracted Vernacular
Questions:
1. How does identifying materials in art change your understanding, appreciation, or perception of the work?
2. How is reference to the wider world through the use of specific material a key element in these artists practice?

**Description:**
Artists in this show work abstractly, yet they do not entirely leave behind references to the physical world. Anthony Akinbola, in “Camouflage #2,” employs silk durags, a hair accessory and hair-dressing tool widely used by African-Americans, in his compositions. Clark, in her site-specific installation in the gallery, uses construction materials in clear reference to the world of construction and remodeling, which in many African-American communities is the equivalent to gentrification and being pushed for economic reasons out of long lived-in neighborhoods. Tariku Shiferaw, in his piece created for the Zuckerman Museum project wall, uses wood pallets. The artists’ materials connect to the wider world and permit more than a lingering thread between abstracted and physical realities. These connections allow the artists to articulate more defined artistic statements while simultaneously leaving conversations open.

The intersections between individual identity, cultural background, and artistic production come through in the use of specialized material choices. The curator’s choice in bringing together these particular artists emphasizes how a link to the vernacular is an integral aspect of African American abstract artists' work.

**Theme 3. Literal Unbinding and an Expanded Field**
**Questions:**
1. Consider the difference in viewing a painting at eye level compared with one that is above, beside, or below you. How does a position or location in space affect you?
2. What boundaries exist in the definitions of painting, sculpture, and installation art?
3. What connections can you imagine existing between the blurring boundaries of forms of art and American life in the mid-late 20th/early 21st century?

**Description:**
The use of an expanded picture plane is seen in a number of works in this show and is the basis for its title, *UNBOUND*. Many of the works can be understood as crossing a threshold between painting, sculpture, and installation. They utilize height, width, and depth in inventive ways.

Sam Gilliam is an artist whose innovation of draping canvases rather than stretching them on a frame was a major development of late Modernism.
Had he not created work true to his own artistic vision, this development may never have occurred. Many artists of African descent have since followed in continuing this move away from a rectangle hung flatly against a wall. The exhibition displays examples of such in pieces by Joe Overstreet, a late contemporary of Gilliam, and by Eric N. Mack, both of whom tether and attach planes of color at various angles in space. Overstreet and Gilliam were early and dedicated explorers of paintings taken off the wall. Mack, a younger artist, continues to explore the use of sheer fabric “paintings” inserting themselves into the third dimension.

Viewing works that are not beheld by a rectangular format places a viewer in new relationship with artwork. As one observes the planes of Mack’s fabrics, they move and change with the movement of the viewer’s position in space. The presence of the work expands in mutable ways into one’s field of vision. Similarly, the dimensionality of Clark’s work shifts with each step one takes through the gallery. Mylar is a specific material choice for the artist Tariku Shiferaw. It has a comparable effect in the way colors reflected off of the surface ripple and change with one’s perspective. This changing experience of the art by way of one’s location is perhaps an unexpected aspect of the unbounded art encounter.

Please visit:
https://arts.kennesaw.edu/zuckerman/exhibitions/upcoming_exhibitions.php to learn more about UNBOUND.

The curator of UNBOUND, Nzinga Simmons, is available to address any questions or concerns you may have at nzingasimmons@gmail.com.

Image Courtesy of the Clark Atlanta University Museum of Art.