



**35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**  
**Sheraton Colony Square, Atlanta, Georgia, April 26-May 1**

**Workshop: They Never Taught This in Library School:  
African Art Bibliography**

**PART 2**

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A plate from the seventeenth-century travel account by Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique*. Though the text is often unreliable and the illustrations fanciful – some of them were copied wholesale and simply relabeled to represent a different view – they continue to provide us with important ethnographic data. This image of the Kingdom of Benin, for example ...

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... provides important clues to the role of art and performance in the royal court. (A small monograph on Dapper's *Description of Benin*, including a translation into English, was published in 1998 by African historian Adam Jones.)

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Far from historically insular, African artists have been influenced by the East (the Islamic world) and the West for centuries. Dapper writes that "in exchange African goods the Dutch traded (among many things) gold and silver cloth and all kinds of fine cotton, beads, red velvet, bracelets, corals, Dutch fabrics, cowries, much of which would be not only retained by also incorporated into African objects, which themselves would be offered in trade. Not all the objects exported from Africa were strictly speaking 'traditional'. The ivory salt cellar at the left was created expressly for export, as was the Central African representation of a colonial soldier on the right.

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If I may anticipate a little and take a web page from Erika's book, even the seemingly dated research materials of the nineteenth century are being revived on the web. Take this high concept and attractive site dedicated to the explorer [Savorgnan de Brazza](#), a site created as part of France's recognition prominent Frenchmen (and so far they are all men) in a series of National Celebrations.

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Many archival collections, consisting of photographs, images, and postcards from the colonial era are fully or partially available online. Here you can find examples of art in its original context, but bear in mind that sometimes you may have to dig for examples (as the people taking these photographs were often more wrapped up in capturing their own experience and influence in Africa than documenting the culture surrounding them) and be mindful of the potential slant these images may have.

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[Internet Mission Photography Archive](#) consists of historical images from Protestant and Catholic missionary collections from: Yale University Divinity School Day Missions Library, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the Norwegian Missionary Society, The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Inc., The Leipzig Mission, The Moravian Church. It also contains images from Asia and the Pacific Islands, though its coverage of Africa is decent and it is worth mentioning that it contains a large number of postcards, which are not strongly represented by other sites.

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The [Basel Mission Archive](#) contains images taken between 1850-1950 and is searchable by names, photographers/studio, geography, and theme. The territories that are now Ghana and Cameroon are most strongly represented areas of the continent and contain good examples of portraiture and images from daily life.

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The picture archive of the University of Frankfurt am Main ([Bildbestand der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft in der Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main](#)) is also not limited to Africa though it has many documentary images from the Togo, Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi (areas under German colonial rule). Expect to see more images that capture the colonial influence on Africa – architecture and dress – than representations of native traditions. The archive also is searchable in English.

A full-text version of the 1920 *Deutsche Koloniallexikon*, edited by Heinrich Schnee (one-time governor of German East Africa), is also available on the site.

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[Voyages en Afrique](#) was produced by the BNF and contains photographs and full-text books and journals, and sound recordings – all in French. The coverage is predominantly North Africa but there are some images from countries south of the Sahara.

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The [Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs](#) was acquired by the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University in 2002. At the present time only 101 samples from

this collection of over 7,000 images are available online, but an inventory of the full collection (which is being digitized at present) is available on this site. As noted on the site, images include: portraiture, rural life documented by travelers and businessmen, colonial administration, the construction of railroads, and the growth of the urban centers, and photos taken for distribution in the west. The original descriptions of the photographs, taken from the albums themselves, are reminders of the viewpoint of the photographers.

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The photographs in this archive [[G.I. Jones Photographic Archive of Southeastern Nigerian Art and Culture](#)] were taken in the 1930s by the late G. I. Jones, a colonial officer turned African scholar. The photos on this site are only a sample from the complete collection, which includes "a unique record of masks in performance and shrines in-situ in the early colonial period."

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The [Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives](#) at the National Museum of African Art (Janet Stanley described this resource in her paper as a source for contemporary images) "is a research and reference center with over 300,000 still photographic images documenting the arts, peoples and history of Africa over the past 120 years." Eliot Elisofon's collection of photographs and transparencies taken between 1947-1974 was bequeathed to the Museum; other photographers' work has since been added to the archive.

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The [NYPL Digital Gallery](#) has a decent selection of photographs, illustrations, and maps from colonial and explorer's literature in NYPL's collection. Search by keyword or browse through structured subject headings such as: Africa -- Colonization, Africa -- Discovery and exploration, Africa - Clothing and dress, etc.

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The James J. Ross Archive of African Images (RAAI) "is a comprehensive database of over 6,000 published images, an attempt to reproduce all the illustrations of figurative African objects that appeared between 1800 and 1920 in books, periodicals, catalogues, newspapers, and other publications," and also includes the original accompanying captions. "

Susan Vogel, Professor Department of Art and Archaeology Columbia University, is the Project co-author.

What you are viewing right now is the cataloging back end of the archive. The publicly accessible site (whose relation to this is unknown) will be launched in the summer of 2007 through Yale University, available to all. Users will be able to do side-by-side comparisons of images and contribute commentary.

The cataloging back end allows one to browse images, publications, advanced search (style, culture, group; object type, illustrator, etc.)

Update 5/20/07: I was able to preview a version of the publicly accessible site, which closely mirrors the cataloging side of the image archive. To compare images, one must use the assigned image number to call up the image. Still no word as to the official launch date.

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Maps are often a part of archival sites, but here are two sites devoted to historical maps of Africa. [16th--20th Century Maps of Africa](#) contains scanned images of 113 maps collected by the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies (or the Africana Library) at Northwestern University.

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Another map site is [Afriterrra](#), which has "more than 1000 maps focused on Africa published between 1478 and 1983, more than 500 ultra-high-resolution digitized images."

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Like it or not, in spite of what we've discussed above, much of what shapes our thinking about African art, and what appears in private and public collection, -- therefore what we customarily teach from --, is based on a relatively small number of 'characteristic' objects from 'recognized' ethnic groups.

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Chris Steiner provides an insightful and sometimes acidly funny analysis of the dominant role Western art marketplace has played in fashioning these ideals of African art. He continues, "Collectors have dealt a heavy hand in structuring research agendas and fashioning the content of exhibition catalogues and textbooks alike; these publications have in turn become canonical models guiding the formation of subsequent collections, and thus creating an institutional cycle for the representation of aesthetic norms and ideals." (p. 133)

In the first half of the twentieth century, absent strong public collections of African art as such, nor stewards to promote it, it fell to the art dealer community to educate the collectors, to arbitrate the public's reception toward African art, and ultimately to publish – itself an enterprise not entirely without its mercenary aspect. This is no less true today. Perhaps the crowning achievement in publication is the tasteful survey of signature pieces.

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The growth of the canonical texts. Perhaps these books have reached a practical limit of about 600 pages, at least when published in a single volume. I will leave it to a graduate student to compare the choice of selections, both individual objects and the art-producing cultures represented, across this time span. A case could be made that the bulking up of the survey text represents an ever widening inclusion of previously unknown or unrecognized art styles and periods.

Janet Stanley's *African Art: A Bibliographic Guide* (1985) devotes several pages to surveys of African art, citing 24 titles in all. In the two decades since, her selection has been matched by ever more catalogs identifying (with no clue as to the selection process) ever more objects of presumed universal probity. How then to recommend a mere handful of titles to you from that bewildering array? After all, can any one object alone be said to represent the oeuvre of a given people? How did we get to this state of affairs?

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As Christopher Steiner points out, among dealers and collectors "... 'authentic' African art is thought to have existed only before the first European presence on the African continent." (Steiner, p. 134) While it might be said that in the colonizing enterprise Europeans were striving to bring civilization to the continent, in the case of African art it was recognized that to do so would irreparably influence the pristine primeval quality they saw in the crude carvings.

As a result, "collectors who seek to mine this utopian past for desirable art have resorted to acquiring works from a fairly restricted pool of so-called authentic objects that have been in a state of nearly constant recirculation in Europe and America since they first departed Africa, riding, as it were, on the crest of a receding wave of foreign arrivals." (Steiner, p. 134)

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Steiner might be using shorthand when he cites the 'collector' alone, since this marketplace also includes the art merchant, whether Parisian art dealer or Dakar street vendor. For he adds, "... The history of African art collecting is essentially characterized by an ongoing mediation of knowledge between Africa and the West, in which objects deemed canonical by collectors have either been reproduced or re-circulated along highly developed and specialized lines of trade." (Steiner, p. 142)

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Turning to the influence African art had on Western art, the alpha and omega of writings on the influence of 'primitive' art on early Modern art are represented by the bookends of Robert Goldwater's *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (Ph. D., 1938, reissued as *Primitivism in Modern Art* in 1966) and the landmark (or doorstep) publication *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*, edited by William Rubin for the MoMA exhibition in 1984). Shelly Errington in her *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art* considers this period of time 'the golden age' of authentic primitive art: a time before 'primitive' became a forbidden term, and when many of the enduring misperceptions of African art were forged.

While Goldwater addressed the many traditions usually associated with 'primitive' art, Goldwater's own allegiances were strongest with African art -- hence his inclusion here. "... My purpose," he writes in his preface to the

revised edition, "has not been to establish a parallel [between 'primitive' and modern art], but rather the opposite: First, to show why and under what circumstances the modern artist went to the primitive for inspiration; and second, to demonstrate in some detail that however much or little primitive art has been a source for modern art, the two in fact have almost nothing in common."

*Primitivism in 20th Century Art.* (Museum of Modern Art, 1984) Again, 'primitive' as a whole taken under consideration, but a key text for the relationship between African and modern. Considered by some in the field as a step backward in our understanding of African art per se, by seeing its value primarily in its influence on modern art. Not helped by the fact that Bill Rubin feels compelled in a footnote to define 'authentic African art' as "created by the artist for his own people and used for traditional purposes." (76) Mitigated by the fact that while Bill Rubin edited it, the essays were by reputable scholars inside and outside 'primitive' art. Key article: Jean-Louis Paudrat's "From Africa" in the section "The Arrival of Tribal [sic] Objects in the West", covering the period prior to World War II.

Arthur Danto was being perhaps tongue in his cheek when he made this assessment of the reciprocal role of modern art on African art. But it's hard to refute.

The appetite for African art, however canonical, remains strong ...  
here

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The art market: for African art is growing. The African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian –the tribal – auction season is generally around May & June and November, with sales held at the major auction houses such as Sotheby's New York and Paris, Christie's Paris, a host of French auction houses, and also at Galerie Koller and Galerie Walu in Zurich, Lempertz in Cologne and Bonhams in London and soon to be in New York.

Sotheby's description of their African & Oceanic Department is pretty much the rule for the kinds of work you will find in these sales: "works made in the early 20th century or earlier for ritual or ceremonial use within the traditional cultures" of Sub-Saharan Africa. Contemporary African art auctions, as Janet mentioned, are still scarce.

Almost all of the auction houses will have an online presence where you can find information about upcoming sales, results, and press releases, etc.

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Catalogs are increasingly available for browsing online; in some instances you may be prompted to register (free) to view them. They will appear shortly before the sale, and some disappear soon afterwards (but some of Sotheby's online catalogs remain up several years past the auction date, though the images might not).

Sales results are also often posted online. Pricelists (lot numbers and price only) dating back to the mid-1990's have been posted on Christie's and Sotheby's websites, but it may vary with other houses.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, St. Louis Art Museum, and the Getty have large collections of auction sales catalog records in their catalogs, including African art. Nearly all of the Goldwater Library's catalog holdings are available via [WATSONLINE](#). It is easiest to search for the catalogs using the date of sale index.

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Proprietary auction results databases, like ArtFactPro and ArtNet do not cover African art well.

[ArtTrak](#) is a database of African, Native and pre-Colombian American auction sales worldwide since 1980. They are currently in the process of adding catalogs from the 1970s. It is searchable by tribe, category, auction house, sale, origin, date, sold amount, collection history (free text) and research data (verbatim description of this field from the help menu: "Trying to research an object then enter the object here to see if the auction record has any information that may be helpful."). It does NOT have images (due to copyright issues); however, catalogues with illustrations are noted. It is a subscription database which costs about \$300/ yr and \$50 (!) for a 24 hr trial.

We are currently testing it out at the Met. Observations so far include: no way to modify search; no independent print function (uses browser print), no way to save data (in order to preserve database sanctity?); spelling errors and very clunky search interface. However, because this kind of information is difficult to come by elsewhere, the jury is still out.

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Tribal art fairs featuring African art include: San Francisco Tribal & Textile Arts Show in February, New York International Tribal and Antiques Show in May, BRUNEAF (Brussels Non-European Art Fair) in June, Parcours de Mondes in Paris every September.

Galleries and art dealers are well represented on the web, of course. Would they ever be your first stop for art info? Probably not, but they do have value for contemporary artist research and can also be a source of images. Some sites include educational-ish information, geared toward collectors and some post online exhibitions of their pieces. It can be difficult to assess their authority and/or quality of the pieces they show.

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[Stanford's webliography](#) lists many galleries, while the [National Museum of African art's](#) is much more selective. On the screen is an example of a dealer's site: the [African Art Museum](#). It has mediocre images and brief descriptions of ethnic groups. This site's country, history, people, and

geography resources are adapted (and cited) from the University of Iowa's [Art and Life in Africa Online](#).

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Much of what was collected by travelers and merchants, anthropologists and missionaries, and tourists on the one hand, and artists, dealers and collectors on the other, over time has found its way into public collections: museums of natural history, anthropology, ethnology, history and art. In doing so these objects have acquired yet another layer of meaning. And that meaning differs across this variety of museum setting.

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The earliest venues for the display of African art as art were usually the galleries of art dealers, such as Paul Guillaume in Paris, or in exhibition spaces such as the celebrated 1914 New York show organized by De Zayas at the Photo-Secession's gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue.

There are many claimants for the first 'art'-focused *museum* exhibition of African art, both in the United States and Europe. Since prior to the middle of the last century African art was seldom collected or displayed in art museums, the Western public's experience of African art would come at chiefly ethnological museums, such as the Musée du Trocadéro in Paris, or at international expositions extolling products and peoples of the colonies. From the standpoint of the earliest published literature, African art might appear in guide and handbooks to collections, if at all: *The British Museum Handbook to Ethnological Specimens*, for example. In 1932 the Trocadéro Museum published a brief catalog of its Benin bronzes in a special number of *Cahiers d'art*.

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Among art museums Brooklyn Museum has a rightful claim with its exhibition "Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo", held in 1923. In a nod to the adage "Everything old is new again", thanks to the efforts of the Museum and of ARLIS-member Deirdre Lawrence, documents and photographs in the Brooklyn Museum's Culin Archival Collection, the Museum Library, and the Photography Studio that relate to this African art exhibition have been digitized and are [available electronically](#), including the exhibition catalog itself. This was also the subject of a paper given last year at the ARLIS Conference in Banff.

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Perhaps better known is the exhibition "African Negro Art" held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935. (It has been reprinted by Arno Press in 1966.) The original photography was by Walker Evans.

It's remarkable that as early as 1935, curator James Johnson Sweeney could write in his essay for the catalog that "fine pieces are no longer being produced due to the decadence of the natives following their exploitation by the whites ... Today save for some rare, hitherto unexploited regions, art as

we have known it in its purest expression no longer comes out of Africa." (p. 13)

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In the United States African art is now such an established portion on any public or academic museum purporting to be encyclopedic that we can only provide a highly subject brief list of American museums. My apologies if your home institution was omitted here.

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In Europe African art is far more likely to appear in museums of ethnography – an organizing concept that has never taken hold in the United States. The approach to the object and its presentation is something of a blended one, mixing the human-centered contextual approach characteristic of natural history museums with the more aesthetically-minded take of an art museum.

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It is worth remembering that African art objects may also be found in natural history and ethnological collections, as nearly all museums now have some online presence and many highlight selections from their permanent collections online (as illustrated on this slide).

The harps pictured above illustrate two issues in African art – first the discrepancy of name authorities, which Eileen will touch upon in a moment; and second, issues of display and context. The harp on the left is from the American Museum of Natural History, displayed in the galleries of the online exhibition [Congo Expedition, 1909-1915](#). The harp on the right is a part of the [National Museum of African Art](#)'s collection. Nearly identical objects, treated in different ways by their contextualization in the Museum environment.

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As Ross mentioned earlier, African art is found in all contexts – the museum that specializes in African art, along side other kinds of work in an art museum, and in museums that do not have African collections, such as the Guggenheim, as shown on this slide. This last instance is becoming more common, especially with contemporary art created by African or African Diaspora artists -- the as the International Center for Photography show Snap Judgments and the Venice Biennale, for instance.

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Online manifestations of exhibitions won't have everything the original exhibit has/had, but often they include a selection of images, links to other resources, and supplementary educational material. [Pictured on screen: [National Museum of African Art virtual exhibitions](#) and the National Museum of Natural History's online exhibition, [African Voices](#)]

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The same can be said for some museum sites. On screen is the Metropolitan Museum of Art's [Timeline of Art History](#), which is a source rich in historical and contextual information building off works of art in its collection.

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Recent exhibition catalogs, at least those which don't exist primarily to showcase a private collection or promised gift, have trended toward greater specialization. Many of these come from the same time period -- from the late 'seventies through the 'nineties -- and are still foundation texts for their respective areas. I don't know whether this reflects their intrinsic worth, the exigencies of the publishing industry, or the preferences and biases of current teaching faculties. Not coincidentally most of these are edited or written by the dozen or so leading lights in African art history. Please bear it in mind that this is a totally random selection, the titles here are meant only to illustrate their respective genres.

Regional or national surveys; surveys of specific ethnic groups;

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Art by medium or process;

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And art thematically considered.

Now that I've seen the array of representative exhibition catalogs, I really want to emphasize that quality exhibition catalogs are still being published. In some measure this represents the catalogs I've pulled off and re-shelved most frequently in the last few decades.

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As Suzy Blier writes, "The majority of African art scholars working today in the United States were trained in traditional departments of art history. Our work, however, characteristically involves texts and research contexts that have been shaped fundamentally by anthropology. Most of us in our teaching and writing have sought to accommodate both disciplines by constructing a sort of hybrid field that draws on theories and methods of both." Some of these are published in conjunction with museum exhibitions, but are far more than simply a catalog of the exhibition objects.

Among the recent issues addressed by African art scholars which reflect this sort of bridge-position of our field are the following:

The vital role art works play in the cycle of life (Roy Sieber and Roslyn Walker); Performative dimensions of art (Margaret Thompson Drewal and Robert Farris Thompson);

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The nature of artistic production (Patrick McNaughton); Issues of creativity (Zoe S. Struther);

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The role of the model in the construction of the photographic image (Christraud Geary);

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The impact of differential audiences on art viewing (Susan Vogel); The importance of art in the construction of memory (Mary Nooter Roberts and Alan F. Roberts);

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These were Blier's issues, to which I might add questions of art commodification and tourism (Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Sidney Kasfir and Christopher Steiner). (By the way, Chris Steiner has one of the more [useful and up-to-date web sites](#) of any African art teaching faculty I've encountered, including pdfs of his articles and images from his publications.)

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In addition African art has a prominent place in discussions centered on museum display techniques and the history and philosophy of museums. Perhaps African art plays a less central role discussions of other display issues such as Intellectual and Cultural Property; Cultural Identity; and Repatriation ... that is, outside of the archaeological record, where the acquisition and final disposition of African archaeological objects continues to cause quite a stir.

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As for current trends in scholarly publishing, today there is a museum-academe complex the boundaries between which are extremely permeable. "The majority of African art scholars working today in the United States were trained in traditional departments of art history." (Blier, see below) Many of these scholars are active in the [Arts Council of the African Studies Association](#) (ACASA), "to promote scholarship, communication, and collaboration among scholars, artists, museum specialists, and others interested in African and African diaspora arts."

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ACASA maintains a discussion list, [H-AfrArts](#), which "emphasizes both the study and teaching of African expressive culture, both past and present, and invites contributions from individuals engaged in the humanistic study of the entire continent. We expect informed discussions of teaching and research at all levels of interest and complexity." It also provides access to a (for the moment) modest list of book reviews posted on the list.

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As you've already heard mentioned, they sponsor a [Triennial Symposium on African Art](#), the most recent of which was held several weeks ago on the campus of the University of Florida. Many of the same scholars in ACASA are also active in the affiliated College Art Association, where ACASA-sponsored sessions are held each year.

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As you might have gathered throughout this presentation, there are particularly longstanding problems inherent in and perhaps also peculiar to African art scholarship. The print, electronic and, as we will soon discover, the visual resource realms all suffer from difficulties in nomenclature. I call this the *chiwara* problem, in honor of the difficulties my colleague encountered in finding a book with this word in the title.

The problems turn on place, time, style ... And while most of them apply to individual objects – and Erika has alluded to it and Eileen will speak to that more fully shortly – they apply as well to the printed literature as well, and ways of accessing that material.

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One of them is purely geographical. As this slide illustrates, there are no generally recognized definitions for the various art producing regions of Africa – although they do usually fall into the same geographical categories of West, Central, East and South. As I mentioned earlier, this has more to do with European ideas of administration than cultural or stylistic differences based on geography. And in truth these divisions are simply in place to subdivide the much larger concept “Africa” into bite-sized pieces. By the same token, it is hard to make a case, at least for traditional art produced before national identities, on a work of art being particularly “Nigerian” or “Cameroonian”.

The Library of Congress and by extension all those who follow their pronouncements -- and that would be us – are party to another aspect of this problem. It's easy to make of the Library of Congress Subject Headings a straw man, which it only partly deserves. Are its taxonomies idiosyncratic, its nomenclature sometimes puzzling? Defiantly so. Is it slow to change? Yes, although I must admit far faster now than when I began in libraries. Time does not permit a parsing of its pronouncements on African geography.

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Instead let's cut to the chase.

As an example, the tenuous, not to say tendentious, distinction in LCSH between the so-called fine and decorative arts, or 'crafts', did not begin with African art, but it most certainly persists there. It's worth mentioning the pitfalls inherent to the headings, if in part to suggest methods of locating materials sometimes in spite of their taxonomy.

Much but by no means all of the African art that survives is made from wood. Consider then this scope note under Wood-carving: [see slide]

Bear in mind also that "Wood-carving" was until fairly recently "Wood-carving, Primitive." The geographically qualified term "Wood sculpture, African" was created only as recently as 1999. This means you should be prepared to look in both places, where necessary with their inverted ethnographic qualifiers, to find the literature. Until this change, paired headings were required: "Sculpture, African" and "Wood-carving – Africa."

I'd love to be able to say with confidence that this will all soon be a thing of the past ... but the past seems always to be with us today.

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As far as ethnic names (and here I'm treading lightly, since Eileen will cover this in greater detail), let me pre-iterate (!) that most of what you'd want to know about nomenclature and location can be answered by these three works.

George Peter Murdock was a scholar-bibliographer with the Human Relations Area Files project out of New Haven. He analyzed the ethnographic literature of Africa in order to establish a reliable nomenclature for the ethnic groups in Africa. Based as it was entirely on the *writings*, it was subject to error, not only in determining the groupings but in selecting the key term for each group. But the book continues to be extremely valuable today, nearly fifty years later.

It wasn't until 1996 that any comparably encyclopedic work appeared, Daniel Biebuyck's *African Ethnonyms*. Biebuyck, a renowned Central African scholar in his own right, used a more typological approach to the problem, using the literature more as a secondary argument for the terms selected.

The third work, *Peoples of Africa: Ethnolinguistic Map* makes up for the shortfalls of Murdock (which had a difficult to use boundary map) and Biebuyck (which has no maps) in setting the nomenclature in a geographical matrix. Our copy of the map is thumb-tacked to the wall of the curatorial assistant's office – a crude but succinct measure of its worth

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You'll be hearing about this web site again too. You may already be familiar with this ongoing project of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. I'll only say at this point that ethnic names and languages don't match, correspond, or even necessarily overlap. Sometimes the indigenous name for a language is different from that group's name for itself. Another prime source for confusion. And to my knowledge the correlation between language and art production has not been established.

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But before I make a complete hash of it, I'd like to ask Eileen Fry to give her presentation entitled "Item Level Access to African Images: Problems and Sources."