

Session at ACASA (Chicago, 7–11 Aug 24)

Chicago, Illinois, Aug 7–11, 2024

Deadline: Mar 1, 2024

Gabriella Nugent

Arts Council of the African Studies Association Symposium.

Past/Predecessors: Modern and Contemporary African Art Between Generations.

Convenors: Perrin Lathrop (Princeton Art Museum) and Gabriella Nugent (University of East Anglia).

The past has always been relevant to the study of African art, but recent interventions and events have both emphasized its significance and opened it up to question. In 2020, David Joselit proposed a framework for global contemporary art based on artists from the Global South staging their cultural heritage in the global contemporary art world. This assumption of a seamless relationship between artists and their heritage was rebuffed by Elizabeth Harney (2022) who compared it to the inaccurate alignments of “tribe” with “style” in early scholarship on African arts famously criticized by Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1984). Meanwhile, African artists have received increased attention in the wake of the global Black Lives Matter protest movement in 2020 and concomitant demands to decolonize art history and expand museum collections in Europe and North America. But this moment of celebration is plagued by a kind of forgetfulness around previous efforts to center African artists.

This panel is interested in the intergenerational relationship between modern and contemporary African artists and their predecessors. We take the idea of predecessors to loosely mean those who came before them. They include other artists, teachers, and artistic and cultural traditions, controlled and often silenced in colonial contexts. We invite papers that consider modern and contemporary artists who recover and translate these traditions in their work, but also those who deliberately distance themselves from them. For example, Uche Okeke transformed the abstract designs of uli body and mural painting into compositions that simultaneously rely on and empty them of their meaning. More recently, Nandipha Mntambo has rejected interpretations of her work in the context of the artist’s Swazi background.

Beyond these instances of recovery and rejection, we are interested in artists whose work confronts the occlusions of Western centers. Despite the promises of globalization, when African artists debut in Europe and North America, their previous efforts on the continent and original contexts of making are often erased. Many are absorbed into Western schools. We accordingly invite papers that consider artists who locate themselves in an African artistic trajectory. For example, Ibrahim Mahama’s installations and institutions pay homage to the teachings of his professors at KNUST; Michael Armitage’s paintings, exhibitions, and Nairobi-based contemporary art center hon-

or an earlier generation of East African artists; and Kemang We Lehulere's installations incorporate the work of South African modernists Ernest Mancoba and Gladys Mgudlandlu.

Please submit a proposal that does not exceed 500 words via the online submission form, <https://forms.gle/QJYyJFvUuxhZiqzs5>. The deadline for submissions is 1 March 2024.

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Reference:

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