



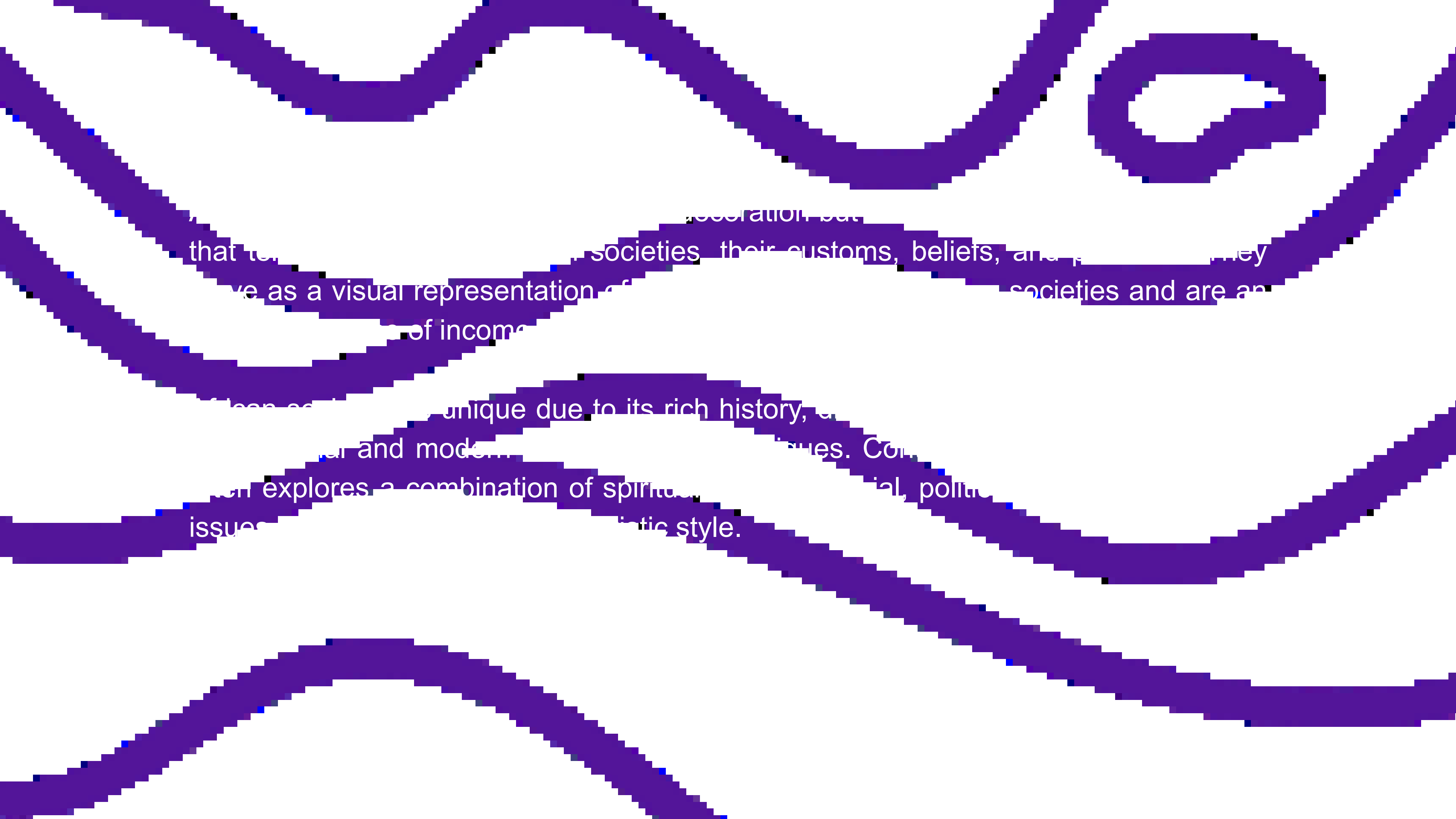
CARLOTTA RIGHINI - CAROLINA RUSSO

ACROSS CULTURE:

world art history and
the debate over the
decolonization

The image features a stylized African mask as a background. The mask is primarily purple and white, with a central vertical stripe of blue. The mask's features, including the eyes and mouth, are defined by white outlines. The overall design is symmetrical and has a traditional, tribal aesthetic.

Why is african Art
so important and unique?



...generation but
that tell us about societies, their customs, beliefs, and how they
... as a visual representation of ... societies and are an
... of income
... deep and ... unique due to its rich history, a
... and modern ... issues. Con
... explores a combination of spiritual, social, political
issues ... style.



Gemma Rodrigues' quote
from her intervention in the
text: *Global and Word Art*
in the practise of the
University Museum edited
by Jane Chin Davidson
and Sandra Esslinger.

“Although
all peoples
may have been
understood
to create art,
not all art
was created
equal”

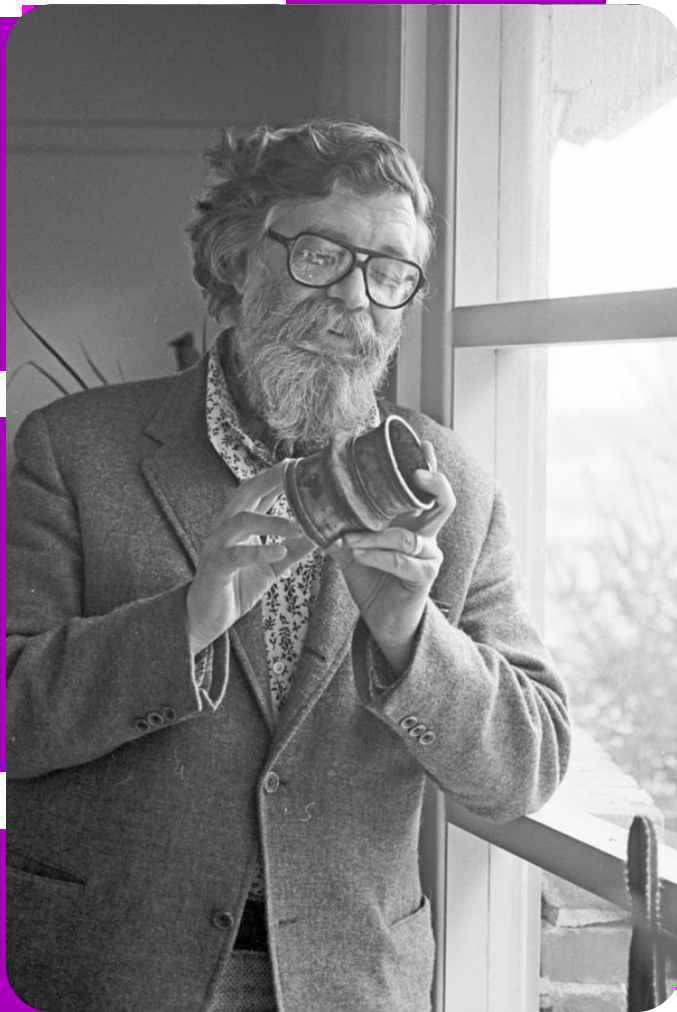


"dismantling" is "deconstructing."

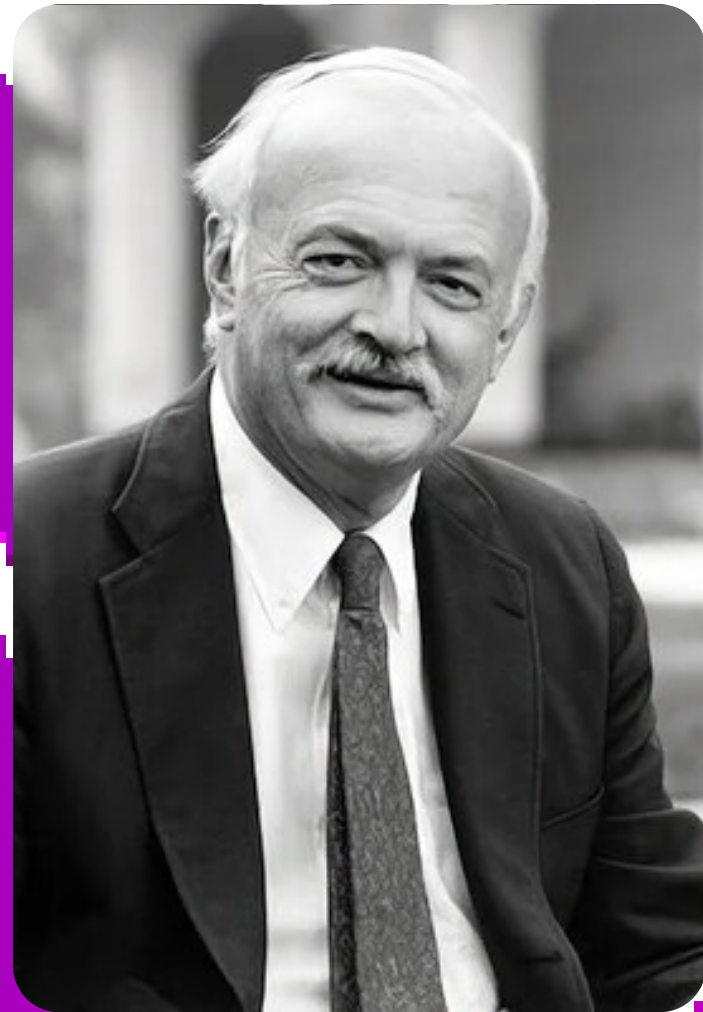
Throughout history, racism has deeply shaped the trajectory of African arts, primarily via the mechanisms of colonization, slavery, and the imposition of Western norms and stereotypes.

Both words imply the process of taking something apart, breaking it down into its constituent parts, or disassembling it. In her first chapter, Gemma Rodrigues chooses to focus on the issue of dismantling in the African art history.

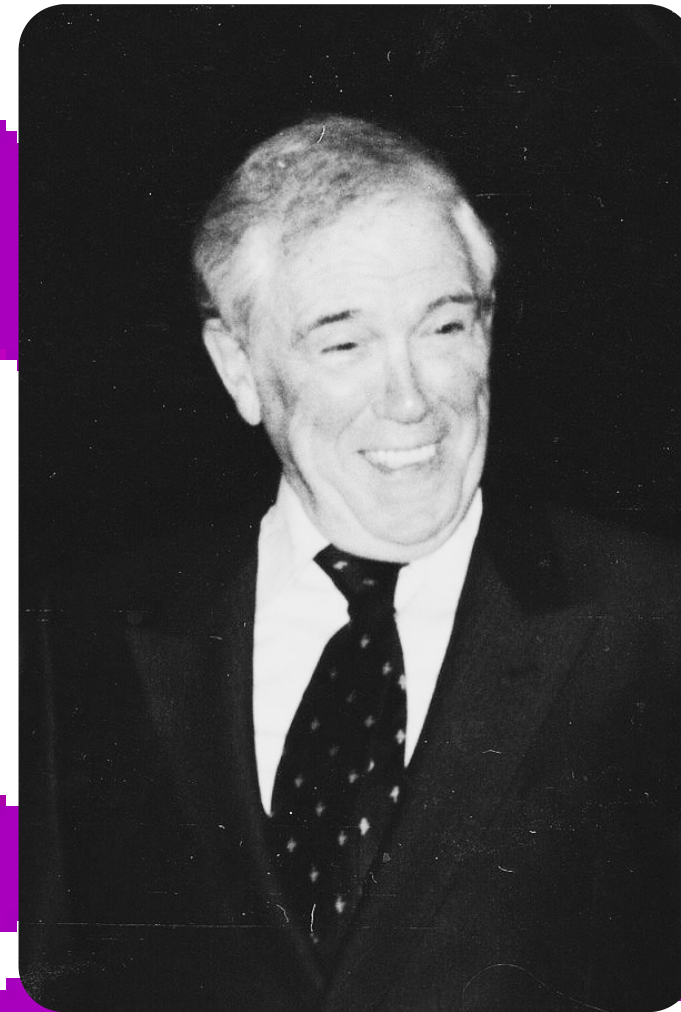
Three important figures:



ROY
SIEBER



ROBERT
FARRIS
THOMPSON



DOUGLAS
FRASER

In the 1960s, three professional art historians working at major universities each instituted influential programs of teaching and doctoral research.



African Art and University

The early days of the Fowler Museum, founded in 1963 as the Laboratory of Ethnic Arts and Technology, offer insights into how intellectual and political currents converged at UCLA, transforming art history into a more globally oriented discipline.

Key individuals like Chancellor Franklin Murphy and art dealer Ralph C. Altman played pivotal roles in shaping these developments. Altman, one of the first to teach classes in non-Western art at UCLA, curated exhibitions and became the founding Chief Curator of the Laboratory of Ethnic Arts and Technology. Murphy, with a vision of Los Angeles as a cultural hub, advocated for the expansion of UCLA's centers for Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American Studies.

The arc of African art history

The largest and most significant collection of African art on the African continent resides at the Witwatersrand Art Museum (WAM) in Johannesburg.

Until as late as the mid-1960s, no one in South Africa was collecting historical or current traditional art produced by South Africa, including in its indigenous rural communities. Although many such objects were greatly esteemed by their indigenous owners and often assumed the status of family heirlooms,

It was only during the 1970s, by which time decolonization had transformed the vast majority of the African continent, that South African art collectors turned their attention toward the historical and contemporary traditional art of home



Transnational influences, local dynamics

How and why did this gradual shift toward the reframing of local and regional indigenous artistic objects as art occur in southern Africa?

Sandra Klopper discusses how Roy Sieber influenced the way southern African everyday arts are viewed and collected, changing practices in the U.S. Similarly, Frank McEwan, despite opposition, promoted African art through pioneering initiatives in Zimbabwe, enhancing its recognition and appreciation.

Repatriation

In 1985, the embrace of local southern African art by the Wits Art Museum (WAM) signaled a significant shift, recognizing indigenous artworks not merely as artistic expressions but also as integral components of national patrimony, deeply connected to identity and heritage. Christopher Till spearheaded efforts to repatriate important collections, such as those by Jonathan Lowen, which were highlighted in pivotal exhibitions like "Art and Ambiguity."

Some problems with African art

Unequal Acquisition: Historical African artworks largely reside in Europe and North America due to histories of colonialism, missionary activity, and unequal exchanges, raising moral questions about their study and exhibition in Western museums.

Marginalization: African communities are marginalized in shaping their own art histories due to unequal resources for publishing and disseminating knowledge, perpetuating Western-centric narratives about Africa.

Critique of Global Art History: There are concerns that global art history may superficially map Eurocentric concepts onto diverse forms of art-making, erasing boundaries and commodifying art, thereby erasing its cultural and spiritual significance.

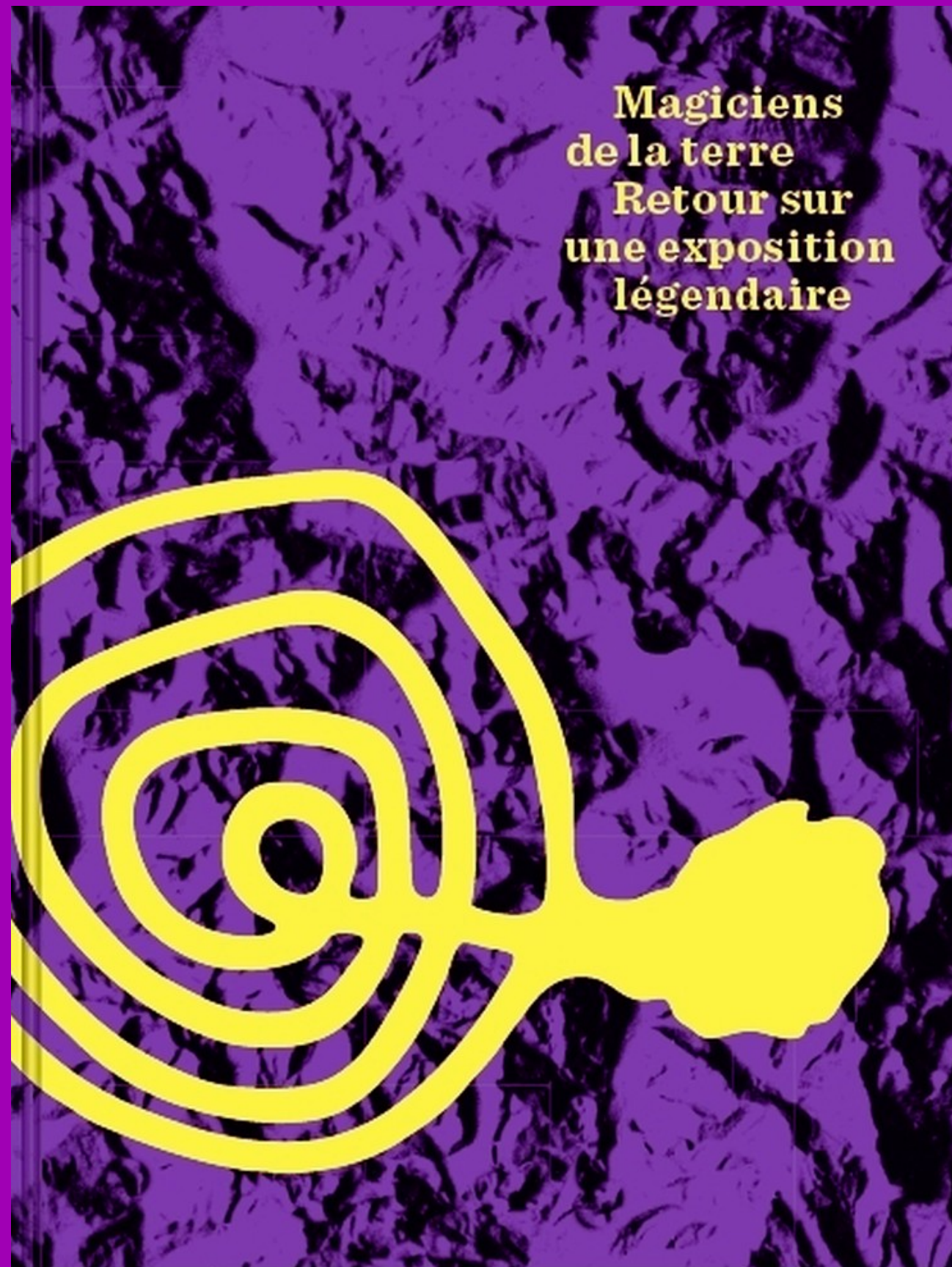
Commodification: Global art history can facilitate the commodification of artworks, divorcing them from their cultural contexts and spiritual power, and legitimizing their circulation as pure commodities in the art market.

Conclusion

African art history has evolved significantly over the past fifty years due to historical, political, and intellectual factors.

While African art history in the United States retains an activist tenor, it faces moral, political, and epistemological challenges in the synthesis of global art history; to address these challenges, a pluralistic and ecumenical approach is needed, incorporating diverse concepts and paradigms of art-making.

Recognizing the deeply unequal power relations in shaping the global art world, there's an emphasis on seeking inspiration from social and political shifts, particularly in Africa, to ensure the relevance and vitality of global art history and global contemporary art in the twenty-first century.



'Magiciens de la Terre'

was an exhibition that took place in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou, organised by director Jean-Hubert Martin.

It aimed to address the problem of cultural inclusion through a dialogue between Europe and the United States on the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution.

The concept of art is questioned as it varies from culture to culture and throughout history. The exhibition involved artists from all over the world, giving them a budget to create works and bringing together different cultural perspectives.

The title 'Magiciens' was chosen to avoid the term art and remain close to the spiritual context. The African artists were identified through a specialised working group.



How can we realise
a global exhibition
including other
cultures
that do not have
a concept of art
overlapping with
ours?

The concept of art varies across cultures and time periods, highlighting its non-static nature. The exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" was pivotal because it challenged the prevailing international understanding of art. The organization of the exhibition faced challenges, especially in sourcing artworks from regions lacking formal institutions or academic studies devoted to those arts.

This approach helped to showcase changes in key cultural elements through the artworks. The exhibition also critiques the Eurocentric approach to viewing non-European cultures, noting a tendency to stereotype African peoples based on preconceived notions, which leads to disappointment when these expectations are not met.

Dossou Amidou

His wooden masks with complex shapes are sometimes fitted with joints or various inlays (beads, mirrors) and, contrary to the Gèdèlé tradition, painted in bright industrial colours.

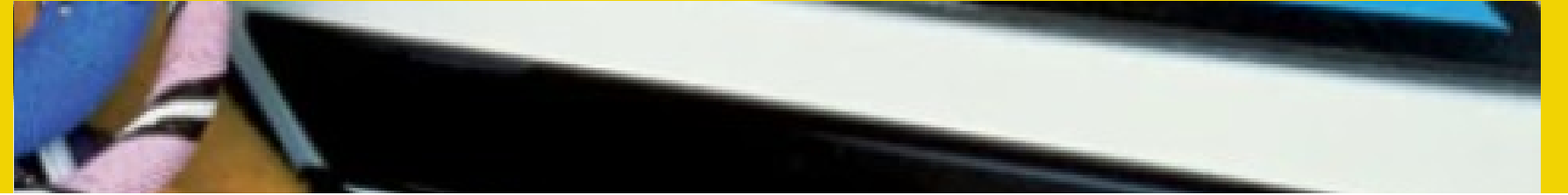


Esther Mahalangu



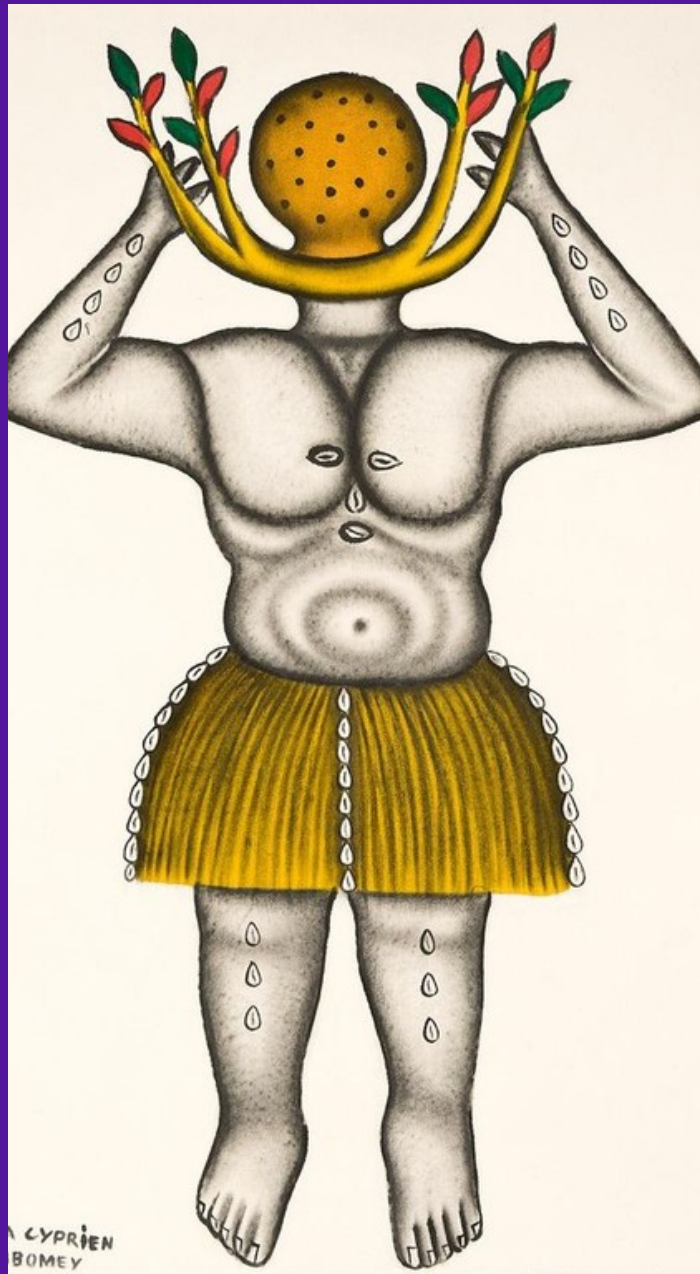
She is one of the few African artists whose art is often exhibited on the international stage.

Despite being an internationally renowned artist, Esther Mahlangu lives in her village in close contact with her own culture.



Cyprien Tokoudagba

Cyprien Tokoudagba taught himself drawing and sculpting in concrete before becoming known for his skills as a decorator. Immersed in voodoo (vodun) and the water deity Tôhossou, he was sought after by voodoo priests to adorn temples in Benin, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria. In 1987, he was appointed curator of the Abomey Museum. He was quickly discovered by André Magnin and then by the European public after exhibiting in *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) at the Centre Georges Pompidou, and eventually developed his practice in canvas painting to enter the art market.





Alfredo Jaar

“I realized that I couldn't use them. It didn't make sense to use them; people did not react to these kinds of images. Why would they react now? I was starting to think that there must be another way to talk about violence without recurring to violence ...”



Alfredo Jaar is a renowned contemporary Chilean artist known for addressing political, social and economic issues, particularly those concerning the relationship between the first world and developing nations. “Eyes of Gutete Emerita” from 1996 is probably the most distressing work of Jaar's famous Rwanda Project about the genocide in this African state and for some one of the most important works of art about war and violence that has been created in the last thirty years.

Contemporary example of African Artists



The insurrection of Black Lives Matter for a couple of years has returned to turn the spotlight on "black" cultures and identities, but it has transformed the original social and political movement into "cultural fashion" from cinema to fashion, from literature to art, "blackness mania" has increasingly taken the form of a real "cultural fashion" not destined to die out in the short term.

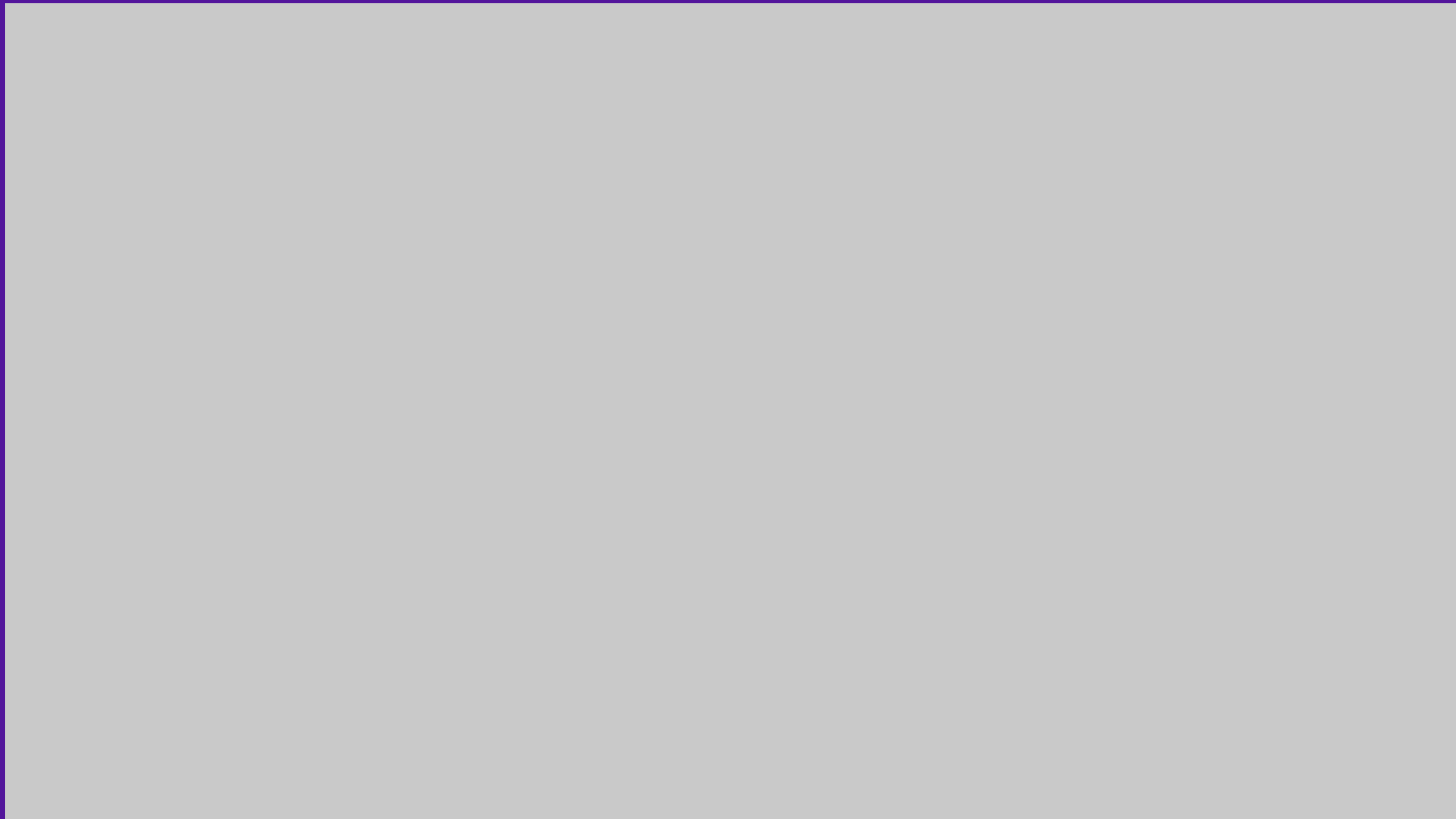
Njideka Akunyili Crosby



Born in Nigeria in 1983, she moved to Los Angeles at a very early age. Njideka Akunyili Crosby's works range from painting to photography and are a clear reference to the artist's two cultures: African and American. The subjects of his works are purely set in scenes of life that focus on social and political issues.







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Global and World Art in the Practice of the University Museum

Edited By [Jane Chin Davidson](#), [Sandra Esslinger](#)

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