

Course Number

ART_HIST 390-0

Course Title

Undergraduate Seminar: Who is an Object: Ancestors, Gods and Intermediaries in the Museum

Quarter/Year

Spring 2022

Day/Time

W 2p-4:50p

Instructor

Risa Puleo

Distro Fulfillment

Non-Euro-American Art



Course Description

Formerly called primitive art and also known as the, Non-Western art is a geographically-expansive category connected by the histories of colonialism and imperialism that brought the art and artifacts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas into Western museums. In fact, many of the objects that comprise this canon are oftentimes not “objects” at all. Taking a decolonial approach to study the canon of Non-Western art, this course addresses the animacies and ontologies of different categories of “objects” in museum collections, including materially-embodied deities such as Katsina dolls (Hopi) and Orishas (Yoruba diaspora); ancestors that take form as seeds (Pueblo) and ceramics (Mimbres), and materials such as feathers (Aztec, Tupinamba, Hawaiian) and pipestone (Lakota, Dakota and Yankton Sioux) that mediate different realms of existence.

The class will also consider the remains of humans, plants, and animals housed in anthropology and natural history museums. The question of objecthood also applies to people conceptualized as property, sold as commodities and displayed within ethnographic and World’s Fair contexts as well as the land upon which museums are built. We will learn about some of the ways that these “objects” entered into museums as we compare the Western epistemologies by which they are organized there to the indigenous ontologies they occupy within their cultures of origin.

Required Textbooks

All readings will be provided through CANVAS.

Assessments

Attendance, Class Participation, Group Work, Paper, Final Project, Final, Readings, Research Project