Call for Papers: American Art in Dialogue with Africa and the African Diaspora
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Friday and Saturday, October 4 & 5, 2013

Since the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, Africa has played an important—albeit shifting, contested, and often unseen—role in the history of art of the United States. American artists of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds with various agendas have imagined and depicted Africa and African peoples in their work or turned to African cultures and art objects for inspiration. Anthropologists and art historians have scrutinized African American visual production in search of cultural retentions, while many modern and contemporary black and Latino artists have alternately highlighted or occluded reference to Africa or African Diasporic cultures in their work. Artists from the U.S. who have traveled to the continent or engaged firsthand with international African Diasporic communities have often found themselves and their work altered by these experiences in significant and unexpected ways. More recently, globalization and the growth of international biennial exhibitions have facilitated multi-directional exchange and brought contemporary artists from Africa and the Diaspora increasingly into contact with the mainstream U.S. art scene.

The conference organizers seek original, innovative scholarship investigating heretofore unexamined aspects of this transatlantic dialogue, from the visual culture of slavery and abolitionism to American modernism; from the Black Arts Movement to the contemporary art world. Papers engaging with a wide range of visual art media including performance art, decorative arts, folk art, and craft are welcome.

Paper proposals should be written in English and should include a 300- to 500-word abstract and a short curriculum vitae. They should be sent to Amelia Goerlitz, Fellowship and Academic Programs Coordinator, Smithsonian American Art Museum, P.O. Box 37012 MRC 970, Washington, D.C. 20013-7012, or via e-mail to AmericanArtSymposium@si.edu. Deadline for submissions: January 30, 2013.

Confirmed speakers will be required to submit the text of their 30-minute symposium presentations by September 1, 2013. The symposium will be available for viewing in a simultaneous and, later, an archived, webcast. Funds for travel and accommodations are available. Presenters from outside of the U.S. may be eligible for additional funds to support the travel of an international graduate student guest.

“American Art in Dialogue with Africa and the African Diaspora” is being organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in partnership with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Part of the Terra Symposia on American Art in a Global Context, it is supported by a generous grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art. The Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research, and educational programs. For regularly updated symposium information, please visit www.AmericanArt.si.edu/research/symposia/2013/terra/.

Loïs Mailou Jones, Les Fétiches, 1938. Oil on linen. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by Mrs. Norvin H. Green, Dr. R. Harlan, and Francis Musgrave