

Ancient African Civilizations

LD 9: African Art Identifications (The Card Trick)

Introduction: You were asked to select two cards at random from the African Art playing card series. The cards, which include illustrations of art from throughout Africa, also include that minimal information necessary for beginning a study of the specific art objects that you have chosen for this specific lab deliverable. Because African art, like so much of the World's art, is imbued with meanings, symbols, cultural associations, and in turn, identified with either secular or ceremonial contexts, it provides a unique forum for the study of art and its interpretive value for understanding culture itself. In this exercise, you will seek to interpret the meanings and associations inherent in the art works that you have selected, and then move to examine actual specimens of art from West Africa brought into class by Professor Mendoza.

Instructions: Having selected two cards from the card deck, record all information (including the card number and name) associated with the two specific pieces of art illustrated on your particular cards. Having done this, you are now to use any number of resources – including the Internet, African Art CD-ROM, textbooks, etc. -- for interpreting and analyzing the following items of information pertaining to the pieces that you selected:

Part 1: Interpretation

1. Cultural associations of the artworks in question
2. Religious and ceremonial associations
3. Symbolic meanings inherent in artworks selected
4. Functions of the artworks and the contexts within which they are used
5. Craftsmanship and materials employed in the production of the piece(s)

Part 2: Interpreting the Masks of Burkina Faso

Your professor has come to class equipped with two masks from the African nation of Burkina Faso, West Africa. Having had an opportunity to handle, examine, and study the two artworks before you, please respond to the following questions – or instructions -- about the two masks by way of an Internet study of the culture that produced the masks in question:

1. What was your initial impression of each of the two masks? What aspects or details most impressed you about the masks?
2. What do you believe the masks were actually used for within the society in question?
3. What do the masks symbolize and how does this symbolism serve to validate said society?
4. Of what value was the Internet or African Art CD-ROM in assisting you with your research into the masks used for study this day?