

Ancient African Civilizations

LD 3: African Art Video Review

Introduction: With our discussion of African art as a backdrop, you are here asked to consider the media portrayal of Africa and its artistic and cultural traditions. Clearly, the American and Western media more generally is a key to understanding the ways in which the Western world interprets the traditions and cultures of Africa. Thus far, we have seen that there is a clear Eurocentric bias and a consequent negation of much of that that constitutes the pre-Colonial and sub-Saharan African tradition. In the video, African Art: An African Perspective (1995; 47 minutes), writer and director Aminatta Forna provides indigenous Africans a venue within which to interpret to the Western world those traditions of art and culture that they themselves embrace and cherish.

Questions: Please consider the following questions in your review and interpretation of what the video has to say about African art.

1. Do you believe that the video provides an objective assessment of the nature and content of African art? If so, what do you believe were the effective elements or strategies that allowed this to be so? If not, why do you believe that the video fell short?
2. In your opinion, does the inclusion of interviews with African artists add to or detract from the overall narrative and objective of the video? Do you believe that what the African artists had to say shed light on your understanding of African art?
3. What does the video imply about the cultural, social, and artistic impact of African art on the Western world? What specific examples does the narrative provide for assessing the extent of said influence?
4. Do you believe that the appraisal of African art within its own “cultural context” is an important ethnographic and interpretive strategy? Why, or why not?
5. If you could produce a sequel to this video, how would you supplement or change the video, and why?

Online Journal: Please post your responses to the online journal during the time allotted for that purpose.