

HERMANN WILHELM VON HESSE

School of Art and Design
Hermann W. von Hesse, PhD.
Assistant Professor of African Art History
School of Art and Design
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
143 Art and Design Building
408 E. Peabody Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
Email: vonhesse@illinois.edu/hvonhesse@gmail.com

Office: Room #407, Architecture Building,
608 Lorado Taft Dr, Champaign, IL 61820

Mobile: +1 (267) 336-4405

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in History, University of Wisconsin Madison, May, 2021.

Dissertation: “Materiality and Real Estate: Evolving Cultural Practices of Security on the Urban Gold Coast in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.”

Committee Members: James Sweet (chair), Pernille Ipsen, Neil Kodesh, Emily Callaci, Larry Yarak.

Minor Field: Art History

MPhil in History, University of Ghana, 2012 – 2014

Dissertation: “Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians and the Evolution of Social Space in Nineteenth Century Accra.”

B.A. in History and Political Science, first class honors, University of Ghana, 2007 – 2011

Languages: English (native speaker), Gã/Dangme (native speaker/ancestral tongue), Akan (Asante Twi/Fante: speaking, reading, basic writing), Danish (reading knowledge), West African Pidgin English (fluent, speaking, writing), French (basic reading knowledge)

BOOK PROJECT/MANUSCRIPT

‘Love of Stone Houses’: Urban Merchants, Ancestral Spaces and Sacred Objects on Africa’s Gold Coast (Advance book contract, University of Chicago Press)

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-reviewed Article(s)

“‘A Modest, but Peculiar Style’: Self-Fashioning, Atlantic Commerce, and the Culture of Adornment on the Urban Gold Coast.” *The Journal of African History*, (2023), 1-23.

“A Tale of Two “Returnee” Communities in the Gold Coast and Ghana: Accra’s Tabon and Elmina’s Ex-Soldiers, 1830s to the Present.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* Volume 51, No. 2 (2018). Co-authored with Larry W. Yarak

Book Chapters

“Cosmopolitan Conundrums: Impacts of Trade Fortresses on the Gã Space, 1450–1870.” In *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa. Gold Coast and Benin, 1450 -1960*. Ed. by John K. Osei-Tutu. (Brill, 2018). Co-authored with John K. Osei-Tutu.

“Illusions of Grandeur and Protection: Perceptions and (Mis)Representations of the Defensive Efficacy of European-Built Fortifications on the Gold Coast, Seventeenth–Early Nineteenth Centuries.” In *Shadows of Empire in West Africa: New Perspectives on European Fortifications*, ed. by John K. Osei-Tutu and Victoria Ellen Smith (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017). Co-authored with John K. Osei-Tutu.

“Døde Rotter Under Christiansborg” in *Kampen om de Danske Slaver: Aktuelle Perspektiver på Kolonihistorien*. Edited by Frits Andersen and Jakob Ladegaard (Århus: Forfatterne og Århus Universitetsforlag, 2017), 47-65 [“Dead Rats Under Christiansborg” in *The Battle over Denmark’s Slaves*]. Co-authored with Pernille Ipsen.

“Gender, Flexible Systems, in Africa.” In *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*. Vol. 3 I M-Z. Edited by Howard Chiang. Gale, 2019.

“Jolof or Wolof Empire.” In *Encyclopedia of Empire*. Edited by MacKenzie and Nigel Dalziel. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

Book Reviews

“*Insignificant Things: Amulets and the Art of Survival in the Early Black Atlantic* by Matthew Francis Rarey, Duke University Press, 2023. pp. 304.” (Forthcoming, *The Journal of African History*)

Shores of Slaves: Apollonia in the Akan World, by Mariano Pavanello, Galda Verlag, 2022, ix+284. (Forthcoming, *Ghana Studies Journal*)

“Vanessa S. Oliveira. *Slave Trade and Abolition: Gender, Commerce, and Economic Transition in Luanda*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2021, xi + 165 pp.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2022.

“Chika Okeke-Agulu. *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. xix+ 357 pp.” *African Studies Review* 60, no. 2 (2017): 264-266.

Non-Peered Review Article(s)

“An Obscure Afro-Brazilian “Colony” in Ghana: Accra’s Tabon Community,” *The Metropole: Official Blog of the Urban Studies Association*, November, 2019.

EMPLOYMENT

Current employer: School of Art and Design, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Position: Assistant Professor of African Art History. Since August 16, 2022

Previous Employment: Mellon-Sawyer Postdoctoral Associate, Center for African and African American Studies and History Department, Rice University, 2021/2022.

Duties: I was the Mellon-Sawyer postdoctoral Associate at Rice University’s Center for African and African American Studies, where I started working on my book manuscript and helped organize interdisciplinary seminars in the “Diasporic Cultures of Slavery: Engaging Disciplines, Engaging Communities.” In the spring of 2022, I taught HIST 323: A History of Atlantic Africa in the Spring.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Fellow, Humanities Research Institute, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2023/24.

Critical Book Lab Grant, 2023-24 (\$4000).

Mellon Wisconsin Fellowship, 2020 (\$11,070).

Graduate School Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018 – 2019 (\$ 20,864).

History Summer Support Award, Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017 (\$ 1,500).

IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017 (\$ 1,500).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Courses Taught 2022-2023 Academic Year

Art History 491 Topics in Art History: Africa and the Museum

This course centers the important but controversial nature of museums in African art history. Firstly, we will examine how looted African and non-European artefacts shaped the institutional history of the Western Museum and perceptions about the continent as “tribal,” “traditional” and “timeless” even to the present day. While European collections of African artefacts predate the colonial conquest of the late nineteenth century, the practice became systematic under European occupation. Museums thus became spaces to showcase the cultural artefacts of empire as colonial trophies in ways that reinforced racial hierarchies and the othering of so-called subject peoples. Despite these racialist underpinnings, postcolonial African leaders appropriated museums to showcase African “cultural authenticity.”

Art History 299 Special Topics: African Arts and Architecture

This course is a multi-disciplinary survey of Africa’s diverse visual cultures and architecture. Given the continent’s diversity, this course will be organized around specific themes rather than

on chronology. We will examine the emergence of some of Africa's earliest rock arts, architectural forms, textiles/cloths, and more recent artistic expressions.

Art History 510: Material Cultures of Atlantic and Indian Ocean Africa

This course centers the important but controversial nature of museums in African art history. Firstly, we will examine how looted African and non-European artefacts shaped the institutional history of the Western museum and perceptions about the continent as “tribal,” “traditional” and “timeless” even to the present day. While European collections of African artefacts predate the colonial conquest of the late nineteenth century, the practice became systematic under European occupation. Museums thus became spaces to showcase the cultural artefacts of empire as colonial trophies in ways that reinforced racial hierarchies and the othering of so-called subject peoples. Despite these racialist underpinnings, postcolonial African leaders appropriated museums to showcase African “cultural authenticity.”

Art History 299 Special Topics: African Atlantic Histories and Visual Cultures.

This is an inter-disciplinary course on the diverse histories and cultures of Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas from fifteenth century to the present. The course will be organized around specific themes rather than on chronology. We will highlight the resilience and struggles of enslaved Africans and their descendants in (re)creating some of the main cultural staples of the Americas. While emphasizing the tragedy of the slave trade and racial capitalism and terror, we will also examine how Black returnees to Africa initiated mutual cultural influences between Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas in music, art, fashion/textiles, architecture, food and political identities from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. Finally we will discuss how Africans and people of African descent remember the slave trade and the controversies surrounding slave routes/roots or heritage tourism in West Africa.

Rice University Spring, 2022 (Postdoctoral Associate).

HIST 312: Atlantic Africa

This is an inter-disciplinary course on the diverse histories and cultures of Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas from fifteenth century to the present. The course will be organized around specific themes rather than on chronology. We will highlight the resilience and struggles of enslaved Africans and their descendants in (re)creating some of the main cultural staples of the Americas. While emphasizing the tragedy of the slave trade and racial capitalism and terror, we will also examine how Black returnees to Africa initiated mutual cultural influences between Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas in music, art, fashion/textiles, architecture, food and political identities from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. Finally we will discuss how Africans and people of African descent remember the slave trade and the controversies surrounding slave routes/roots or heritage tourism in West Africa.

RESEARCH & TEACHING INTERESTS

My research mainly focuses on the nexus between the African Atlantic world, the Black Diaspora and early modern European imperial and capitalist expansion in Africa from the fifteenth century to the

present. Other research interests include Afro-Latin American, African and African diaspora history, architecture and arts as well as socio-political movements and Black internationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Designed Courses

Commodities, Material Cultures and Social Transformations in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Africa.

This course offers comparative perspectives of the urban and commercial history of West and East Africa from c. 1000 C.E to c. 1870. We will examine artefacts, trade commodities and architectural forms and their spiritual, commercial and political values and as sources of power and social interaction and exchange. While this course emphasizes the antecedents of Atlantic and Indian Ocean commerce, we will examine how Africans negotiated debt economies and co-produced new forms of market-oriented value systems in the global economy prior to formal European colonization in the late nineteenth century.

The African Diaspora in the Era of the Slave Trade

This course centers West and West Central Africa in the Atlantic world and examine how centuries old long distance trade facilitated the emergence of Atlantic commerce and the slave trade. While the slave trade is important for this course, we will emphasize the biographies, family histories, cultures, aesthetics, medicine, spirituality, technologies and resistance against enslavement in the Americas and in Africa's Atlantic port cities.

The African Diaspora and Africa, 1791 to the Present

This course historicizes the relationship between Africa and its global diasporas in a single analytical framework. The course examines Africa's enduring cultural connections to its trans-Atlantic diasporas, through mutual cultural influences in art, music, religion and shared political and racial solidarity from the era of the slave trade to the present. Most importantly, this course emphasizes that African and African diaspora cultures were co-eval and entangled.

African Arts and Architecture: A Historical Survey

This course is a multi-disciplinary survey of Africa's diverse visual cultures and architecture. The course examines the internal and external influences in the emergence of some of Africa's earliest rock arts, architectural forms, textiles/cloths, and more recent artistic expressions. While showing external influences on Africa's art and architecture, this course also highlights the fact that the continent was not a mere receptacle of foreign influences but also an exporter of artistic ideas that contributed to the emergence of Western modernist art. Ultimately, this course emphasizes Africa's contributions to global artistic and cultural expressions.

Africa up to 1870: A Historical Survey

This course is a multi-disciplinary survey of Africa's diverse histories and cultures in places as far afield as the Nile Valley, Niger Bend, Axum, Great Zimbabwe and Mbanza Kongo (São Salvador). The course examines the ways in which Africans harnessed long distance trade, Islam and Christianity to shape local cultures and polities as diverse as Axum, Timbuktu, Gao and the Swahili city-states. Most importantly, this course highlights Africa's age-old interactions with the outside world and how this paved the way for the age of Atlantic commerce and eventually European colonization in c. 1870.

Africa since 1870: A Historical Survey

This course examines the history of Africa at the onset of colonial and postcolonial rule. The course emphasizes Africans' intellectual and military resistance and negotiation of European occupation, the colonial economy and legal systems. Most importantly, this course discusses the transformations in gender, sexuality, ethnic and political identities as well as the emergence of African nationalism in the inter war period. The course ends with African independence, the Cold War, postcolonial opportunities, economic problems and conflicts.

Race, Conflict and Industrialization in South Africa

This course examines the convergence of global capitalism, European settlement and African resistance, negotiation and accommodation of these processes. The course also examines African labor strategies, African and Afrikaner nationalism, the emergence of Apartheid and social and political movements, the Cold War and post-Apartheid era in South Africa.

SERVICE

Appointed Committees, School of Art and Design, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

- Convocation Committee

Article Manuscript Reviewer

- I review manuscript articles for the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* and the *Journal of African History*.

University Studies Abroad Consortium, January 2014-July 2015

- I was a tutor for the multidisciplinary History, Politics, and Government program.
- I served as a teaching assistant.
- I was also responsible for mentoring mainly American students in the study abroad program to understand Ghanaian history, governance/politics and culture through seminars and classes.
- I distilled the dense cultural and local content of the course readings by linking it to familiar global historical, political and economic processes.

Ghana National Service 2011-2012

- I worked as teaching assistant in the Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon.

Director of Literary Education, Debate Ghana Association, 2011-2012

- My office coordinated and taught poetry, creative writing, and forensic skills in 16 selected Junior High Schools in the Greater Accra Region.

Planning Committee of UNESCO Bio-ethics seminar, University of Ghana, October, 2009

- Member of the planning committee of the Bio-ethics seminar, organized by the United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization.
- This was a dialogue on the ethical implications of biological and medical research.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Love of Stone Houses”: Urban Merchants and Material Culture on Africa’s Gold Coast. African Studies Association, Washington DC, 17-20 November 2022.

“A Dilapidated House is Better than a Bush’: Security, Fortified Houses and Architectural Innovations on the Gold Coast in the 18th and 19th Centuries.” Rice University/Mellon-Sawyer Conference titled; Bound Away: Voyages of Enslavement in the Americas, to take place in-person at Rice University on December 3-4, 2021.

“Death, Debt and Real Estate: Nineteenth Century Gold Coast Merchant Households and Global Debt Markets in West Africa,” Ghana Studies Association and Africa is a Country Live Talk: Reconnecting Black Internationalism: New Directions in Historical Radicalism, April 9, 2021.

“*Tsu shwe hi fe koowie*” (‘A dilapidated hut is better than a bush’): Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians and the Evolving Architectural Landscape of Accra in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. African Studies Association, Washington DC, 1-3 Dec 2016.

“Coffee Silkey ... was my husband’s slave, and when he died, I took the property”: The Evolving Social Spaces of Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth Century Accra. Ghana Studies Association Conference, Cape Coast, July 6-9, 2016.

“Materiality and Real Estate: Evolving Cultural Practices of Security on the Urban Gold Coast in the 19th century.” Towards Africa’s Urban Landscape, Georgetown University, February 22 2020.

“Materiality and Real Estate: Evolving Cultural Practices of Security on the Urban Gold Coast in the 19th Century.” Colloquium: “New Perspectives on Cultural Contact & Exchange.” University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, March 29-31, 2019, Levis Faculty Center.

INVITED TALKS

“Land, Gender and Property on the Gold Coast” Indiana University African Studies Spring Colloquia series, Bloomington, 3 March 2023.

“Death, Debt and Real Estate: Nineteenth Century Gold Coast Merchant Households and Global Debt Markets in West Africa,” Department of History Seminar, University of Ghana, 2019.

“A Dilapidated House is better than a Bush: Architecture and Security on the Eighteenth Century Gold Coast.” Department of Archeology and Heritage Studies Seminar, University of Ghana, 2019.

“Tabon: The Afro-Brazilian Diaspora in Accra, Ghana.” Talk given at Ghana’s 60th independence anniversary lecture at the Madison Public Library, Madison, Wisconsin, March 6, 2017.

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

Ghana National Folklore Board

- I am the primary consultant and volunteer writer for the Ghana National Folklore Board's "Did You Know?" series since August 2018.
- The write-ups are short illustrated edutainment pieces on Ghana and Africa's history and cultural heritage disseminated on social media.
- The Folklore Board is a department of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts.

Radio and TV

- I have been interviewed on CITI FM/TV on Ghanaian, African and African diaspora history in March 2018 during Ghana's Heritage Month celebration.
- In June 2020, during the Virtual Pride March, I engaged with the Ghanaian-based activist group "LGBT + Rights Ghana" in discussions about same sex intimacies and gender equality in the history of the Gold Coast and Ghana.

UW-Madison's African Studies Outreach Program

- On April 24, 2017, I gave a presentation at UW-Madison's "Day in Africa" event on the Afro-Brazilian descended Tabon community of Accra to high school students from Wisconsin.
- The event brings together high school students from across Wisconsin to explore the languages and cultures of Africa in sessions led by UW-Madison faculty, students, and staff.

PROFESSIONAL AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

Member of the African Studies Association, 2015 till date.

Member of Ghana Studies Association, 2013 till date.

Member of Ghana Association of Madison, 2015 till date.

Professional References

James H. Sweet
Vilas-Jartz Distinguished Professor of History
jhsweet@wisc.edu
6082652523
Office: 5213 Mosse Humanities
Mailbox: 5012 Mosse Humanities

Oscar Vázquez
Professor of Art + Art History
Email: oscarv@illinois.edu
Address: [143 Art and Design Building](#)
[408 E Peabody Dr.](#)

Mauro Nobili
Associate Professor of African History
Email: Nobili@illinois.edu
Address: 446 D Greg Hall MC/466
810 S Wright Street
Urbana Illinois, 61801
217-333-1155