From the Outside, Looking In: Reflections on the Complex Infrastructures of African Art History

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Cover Page Footnote
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From the Outside, Looking In: Reflections on the Complex Infrastructures of African Art History

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Abstract

This essay engages with the five articles featured in this issue from the perspective of a non-specialist. Each contribution considers challenges facing scholars of African arts when confronted with incomplete and not always reliable historical evidence. The author contends that given the escalating demands for the repatriation of African objects, all art historians—not only art historians focused on African arts—should better understand the important strategies proposed by contributors to this issue. These interventions encourage the development of a more critical audience for African arts and also model ethical research, a slow critical archival practice, and sustainable provenance and digital history projects for a new generation of art historians and museum professionals to consider.

Résumé

À travers une relecture des cinq articles présentés dans ce volume, cet essai, écrit par une non-spécialiste, réfléchit sur les difficultés que rencontrent les spécialistes de l’art africain lorsqu’ils sont confrontés à des preuves historiques incomplètes et peu fiables, que ce soit sur le terrain ou dans les archives des musées. L’auteur y démontre que, compte tenu de toutes les demandes de rapatriement d’objets africains, les historiens de l’art bénéficieraient de se familiariser avec les stratégies proposées par les auteurs de ces articles, qui non seulement favorisent le développement d’une réception de l’art africain plus critique, mais modèlent aussi, pour une nouvelle génération d’historiens de l’art et de professionnels des musées, une recherche éthique, un examen lent et critique des archives, ainsi que des projets de provenance et d’histoire numérique pérennes, applicables à tous les domaines de l’histoire de l’art et de l’architecture.

Joanna Gardner-Huggett is an Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture at DePaul University, where she teaches twentieth-century art and feminist theory. Gardner-Huggett’s research focuses on the intersection between feminist collaboration and arts activism in Chicago.
This issue of the *Artl@s Bulletin* offers important case studies exploring the challenges facing scholars of African art when confronted with incomplete and not always reliable historical evidence, whether encountered through fieldwork or the museum record.\(^1\) Although I am not a scholar of African art history, the methodological questions the contributors raise regarding fieldwork, the archive, and provenance histories resonate in many ways. My research focuses on feminist art collectives in Chicago founded in the early 1970s. The women who participated in these groups were deemed amateurs and unworthy by the art market. They are not well documented nor did they always preserve their efforts in any systematic manner. Identifying our shared challenges in research while fellows at the Kress Summer Institute on Digital Mapping and Art History at Middlebury College in 2014, Susan Elizabeth Gagliardi, co-editor of this issue, and I regularly discussed the need for frank assessments of the mechanics of art historical research, starting by acknowledging that archives are frequently and incorrectly cast as authoritative and complete. In subsequent years, we attended Annual Association of Geography conferences, where we appreciated the discipline’s frequent foregrounding of method as well as the iterative and collaborative nature of research, leading us to publish a special issue on this topic in *Historical Geography* in 2017.\(^2\)

**The Black Panther Effect**

While shared interests bring Gagliardi and her collaborator Constantine Petridis in conversation with me, readers of this issue may ask why a scholar of feminist art in the United States should respond to articles addressing the evaluation of historical evidence in African art history. In my conversations with co-editors Gagliardi and Petridis in June 2022, we frequently discussed the impact of the *Black Panther* effect.\(^3\) According to Susan Dine, the 2018 film, specifically the less than five-minute-long scene where Erik Stevens aka Killmonger confronts the curator of African art in the “Museum of Great Britain,” an unsuitable reference to the British Museum, prompted the public’s keen interest “in issues of cultural heritage, colonial pasts, and ethical collecting practices.”\(^4\) The scene unfolds with Killmonger asking the curator general questions about face masks featured in a display of West African art. When they come to a mining tool, which the curator claims was produced in Benin, Killmonger agrees that British soldiers looted the object from Benin but quickly corrects the curator, explaining it is from Wakanda. He then says, “Don’t trip, I’mma take it off your hands for you,” before telling the curator he has poisoned her coffee and reclaiming the object from the museum.\(^5\)

*Black Panther* premiered in January 2018 and just two months later, the French President Emmanuel Macron appointed the economist Felwine Sarr and art historian Bénédicte Savoy to consider possible restitution of African objects held in French national collections from former French colonies.\(^6\) The Sarr-Savoy report “The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage, Toward a New Relational Aesthetics,” published in November 2018, found wide circulation in media outlets, and it also acknowledges the influence of *Black Panther* and other examples from popular culture on restitution debates.\(^7\) *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* recently devoted an entire episode to the issue of looted art objects in museums and demonstrates the continued scrutiny of this topic by mainstream media.

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\(^4\) Ibid., 21-22.

\(^5\) Ibid., 21-22.


The forty-minute-long program concluded with a parody segment hosted by comedian Kumail Nanjiani introducing the “Payback Museum,” where museums largely from the “Global South,” an area that Oliver notes “includes Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Mid East” loot beloved American, British, and European monuments in retaliation for their own objects not being returned. For instance, they punish the British Museum for not returning the Benin Bronzes by stealing one segment of the Stonehenge stone circle.8

It is imperative that all art historians, not just Africanists and museum studies specialists, understand the complexities of assessing historical evidence in African art history when our students ask why local museums and institutions are not immediately repatriating artworks from our local collections. Calls for decolonizing the museum accelerated in the wake of global #BlackLivesMatter protests against George Floyd’s murder during the summer of 2020, and museums were forced to respond.9 At DePaul University, where there is a robust Museum Studies minor program, students address these debates in a series of anthropology, art history, and history courses. At DePaul and elsewhere, questions about museum collections and ethics are no longer confined to museum studies or African art history. However, as information and museum studies scholar Hannah Turner explains, before returning any objects museums first need to determine how the provenance of each object is established because it “requires a lot of ‘paper’ work, digging into archives and museum catalogs to establish claims of ownership and ‘authenticity’.”10 Turner reminds us that while publics may be focused on restitution, the act of return involves a more complicated underside. This special issue focuses on that underside to benefit both specialists and instructors outside of African art history by modeling how museum professionals and scholars of African art can conduct provenance research with concern for ethics and transparency, as well as author histories that center African voices.

Ethics and Transparency in African Art History

Stephen A. Fọlárànmí’s article “You Cannot See It! Navigating Yorùbá Religious Artistic Materials” addresses the challenges and ethics of researching histories of religious and sacred works of art in Africa. Drawing on his own experiences conducting fieldwork while writing his doctoral thesis “Ọ̀yọ́ Palace in the History of Yorùbá Palace Art,” Fọlárànmí explains that scholars often do not gain full access or understanding of sacred works of art and religious rituals since they are generally considered outsiders to the community or the Yorùbá theological concept of ọgbèrì.

Ọgbèrì is defined as a foreigner who is seeking knowledge and is not an initiate or member of the religious institution. When Fọlárànmí initially approached the Ọ̀yọ́ community, he was denied access to specific sites, but after establishing his familial ties to the Aláàfin Lamidi Oláyiwọlá Adéyẹmí III (1938-2022), in addition to demonstrating his command of the Yorùbá language, he gained greater trust from the community and was allowed to roam Ọ̀yọ́ freely. This relationship gained Fọlárànmí introductions to families known for creating both secular and religious artworks, including carved house posts, drum hangers, figures, Ifá divination bowls, door panels, masks, and ere ìbejì, or twin statuettes. For these reasons, Fọlárànmí expanded the historical understanding of religious practices in the Ọ̀yọ́ Palace that were not available to foreign scholars who did not speak the local language nor were granted the same level of access to cultural materials.

Therefore, Fọlárànmí argues that scholars become well versed in local indigenous languages and immerse themselves in the communities they are

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studying, but he also elaborates on the concept of ọgbẹrì to examine the implications for gathering historical evidence without permission. For example, Fọlárànmí cites his former professor Adémọlá Adéjùmọ̀'s experience meeting with a notable ọgbóni society artist in Òṣogbo, Nigeria. The artist gave Adéjùmọ̀ permission to take photographs of specific images, but when the artist stepped away, Adéjùmọ̀ quickly photographed other items without permission. After completing this fieldwork, Adéjùmọ̀ developed the photographs only to find blank film. Fọlárànmí highlights this incident and several others to raise an ethical question, “How, and to what extent, would you go to collect such information?” Fọlárànmí concludes that even if a scholar moves from ọgbẹrì to a religious initiate, a contradiction arises since the initiate’s role is to protect sacred information and not reveal them to the public. This case study makes evident that most scholars of African arts often will not gain full access to the communities they are studying and are navigating differing levels of historical evidence. This reality requires that researchers be transparent, precisely defining what they were permitted to see and document, what was unavailable, and how these gaps complicate and influence our understanding of these artistic traditions.

The ethical issues associated with collecting historical evidence of African arts raised by Fọlárànmí should resonate with any scholar writing histories of living artists. Contemporary art scholars often interview artists and are granted access to personal papers and ephemera not available in public archive collections. Yet, generations of art historians working on African art and architecture or not are often trained to believe the “discovery” of specific information entitles us to document it.11 First Nations scholar Dylan Robinson counters the “western demand for complete accessibility” to histories of Indigenous arts by advocating for moments of refusal and blockade.12 Robinson writes in the introduction to his recent book Hungry Listening, Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies (2020), for example, “If you are a non-Indigenous settler, ally or xwelítem [white settler] reader, I ask that you stop reading by the end of this page” and skip to chapter 1 of the text entitled “Hungry Listening.”13 In a review of Hungry Listening, ethnomusicologist Hannah Standiford captures the tug of entitlement, “As a white settler, this instruction set off disorienting pulls of hunger and resistance to devour words not meant for me.”14 Just as Fọlárànmí warns, there needs to be trust and agreements with the artist of what should or not be shared in the public domain. As a white female art historian who often writes about minoritized artists, including members of the Black women artists’ collective Sapphire and Crystals in Chicago, I appreciate Fọlárànmí’s reminder for sensitivity and clarity about the intentions for any writing project, establishing what is permissible, and not assuming one can publish everything encountered in conversation or shared materials. Further, the conclusions I have drawn from considering Fọlárànmí’s essay as a non-specialist in African arts, and from the other four articles discussed below, underscores the possibilities that arise when we look beyond our immediate areas of inquiry.

**Decolonizing African Collection Histories**


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11 The College Art Association (CAA) provides ethical guidelines for art historians but does not address this issue explicitly. See “Standards for the Practice of Art History,” https://www.collegeart.org/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines/art-history-ethics
13 Robinson, Hungry Listening, 2, 25.
found in provenance histories of select African objects in the British Museum and Fowler Museum at UCLA, respectively.

The British Museum’s and the Fowler Museum’s provenance projects reflect larger trends. As Silvia Forni who was named director of the Fowler in September 2022, observes, museums have increasingly made their provenance histories and archival documentation available online to descendant communities, countries of origin, and the wider public since the publication of the Sarr-Savoy report. Citing the IMO DÁRA now defunct website, Forni explains that more than 240 institutions worldwide have now published their African collections online, but the provenance details vary.15

There are also large-scale online databases, such as Digital Benin, which contains information collected from 2020-2022 on objects looted from the Kingdom of Benin and held in museums around the world.16 Information and histories gleaned through databases require careful consideration. As Turner argues in her study of methods employed to catalog indigenous objects in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African History, provenance histories are the records that both indigenous communities and staff rely on when restitution requests come forward. However, Turner stresses that what users of both paper and digital archives do not see is the history of small decisions, revisions, and mistakes made by staff while documenting these objects. The inputs, which reflect certain choices or errors, acknowledged or not, can have major ramifications when users of archives review the documentation to make decisions about objects and their futures.17

The authors describing the British Museum and Fowler Museum provenance projects illustrate the complicated process of evaluating and correcting existing documentation their institutions hold before making it available to the public, as well as acknowledging the information that remains missing despite attempts to recover details.

Coulson, Hudson, and Nixon’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded project for the British Museum traces the reexamination of a group of little-known copper alloy objects categorized in the 1950s by former Keeper of Ethnography William Fagg at the British Museum as the Lower Niger Bronzes. Believed to have been created in what is now known as Southern Nigeria, Fagg used this categorization as a placeholder until the “mystery” of the objects’ origins and history could be established. The project team argues for “slow archival” and “object-focused” approaches, carefully interrogating known historical evidence from acquisition registers, correspondence, provenance histories, conservation results, and more. Importantly, the authors pay close attention to how the transfer of data from paper-based forms to computer databases results in modified documentation that may lead to curatorial reinterpretation of the data and loss of some perspectives originally shared by Fagg and others.

The authors also show how a shift from paper to digital records demands acknowledgement and reconciling of the “grey” areas of the objects’ origins and history could be established. The project team argues for “slow archival” and “object-focused” approaches, carefully interrogating known historical evidence from acquisition registers, correspondence, provenance histories, conservation results, and more. Importantly, the authors pay close attention to how the transfer of data from paper-based forms to computer databases results in modified documentation that may lead to curatorial reinterpretation of the data and loss of some perspectives originally shared by Fagg and others.

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Forbes and Jones present findings from another Mellon-funded project. In their article, the authors provide an overview of their efforts to reexamine the provenance histories of two early 20th century Asante works that the Fowler Museum received as a large gift from the Wellcome Trust in London between 1965 and 1967. The first is a carved and elephant tusk trumpet with a human skull and mandible tied to its center with leather and plant fiber straps. The second is a cranial vault attached to a goblet-shaped wooden drum. The limited records inherited from the Wellcome Trust offered measurements, formal descriptions, references to comparable objects, prior cataloging numbers and dates and location for where each was acquired. The authors trace their use of multidisciplinary methods to reassess the limited historical documentation provided by the Wellcome Trust, specifically their consultations with forensic anthropologists and ethnomusicologists in addition to input from collection managers, conservators, and curators. By working across disciplines, the team aims to build richer provenance histories and contend with colonial ideologies embedded in classification systems that influence and shape the interpretation of the existing historical evidence associated with the two objects and other African art objects in the Fowler Museum collection.

The Power of Digital Tools to Center African Voices

Despite the efforts of provenance projects, such as the case studies by the British Museum and Fowler Museum discussed above, scholars recognize that gaps and ambiguity in documentation remains. The articles “Making Absences Present: The Process of Visualizing Knowledge Production in Museum Records” by Caitlin Glosser and “The Spatial Poetics of ‘Artefacts’” by Kathryn C. S. Simpson illustrate how digital humanities tools combined with feminist and decolonial frameworks can restore African voices and makers who are often silenced in provenance histories. As digital humanist Roopika Risam argues, creating a postcolonial digital archive is not just an additive act; it needs to interrogate the structure of the original paper archive to resist mirroring colonial histories.19

In her article, Glosser traces the process of employing digital tools in combination with art historical methods to reimagine the narratives attached to Senufo objects despite the irreconcilable gaps and silences in the historical record. The author thoughtfully makes this argument by outlining the iterative procedures needed to develop data visualizations drawn from ambiguous and inconsistent historical evidence for the Mapping Senufo digital project.20 Focusing on the records of Senufo-labeled objects held by the now-closed Musée Africain de Lyon in France, Glosser conveys how important it is to reflect on the nature of data, observing that what gets left out of a dataset is as revealing as what is included, and may lead us to reassess our research questions and modes of presentation. For example, when she realized that the first Tableau data visualizations she created were not easily understood by an audience unfamiliar with African art history, Glosser created a second set of visualizations to prioritize Senufo makers’ names and distill their role in the circulation and networks for these objects. Through this process, Glosser showed that Béma Coulibaly, as well as his father and grandfather, contributed significantly to the production and acquisition of Senufo-labeled works in the collection. Once Coulibaly’s name in the documentation became more visible, Glosser sought more specific information about the individual, who is still living.

Drawing on Livingstone Online co-directors Megan Ward and Adrian S. Wisnicki’s methodology for the project, Simpson shows curators and historians how they can restore the roles of southern and central African women present in European expedition narratives.21 Simpson focuses her case study on two objects collected by the nineteenth-century British missionary David Livingstone during his second Zambezi expedition: a lip ring belonging

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21 Megan Ward and Adrian S. Wisnicki, “The Theory behind Livingstone Online,” https://livingstoneonline.org/about-this-site/the-theory-behind-livingstone-online. Kathryn C.S. Simpson is the Associate Project Scholar and UK Outreach Coordinator for Livingstone Online.
to a woman identified as Mang’anja and a bracelet from a woman in the Zambian Kafue valley. As Simpson notes, when southern and central African women appear in discussions of the expeditions, the women are generally cast as imperial signifiers without more nuanced attention to their contributions to the expeditions. By applying text mining, image searches, catalog analysis, and textual encoding to Livingstone’s manuscripts, Simpson demonstrates how digital humanities methodologies can be employed to redress the historical understanding of the objects and women who interacted with them and to generate individualized stories that may better capture the experiences of the original female wearer or creator. Simpson concludes that the women cited in Livingstone’s manuscripts, in fact, provided logistical support to his expeditions; were not hidden nor submissive; and were clearly visible in a white patriarchal space. This research can be used to revise and expand public-facing museum labels for both the lip ring and the bracelet, moving beyond factual acquisition information to contextualize the lives of these African women and resist what historian and provenance researcher Kristin Weber-Sinn and anthropologist and curator Paola Ivanov describe as the “racist dichotomy between ‘white’ powerful agents, and ‘black’ powerless victims.”

Glosser’s and Simpson’s projects have the potential to redress audience responses to the Killmonger scene in the Black Panther film. After watching the movie, the Black artist Paul Rucker asserted, “When you put Black African art in white institutions, more of an effort should be made to find someone who has a connection to these artifacts.” This demand is not new, and in the 1990s, museums regularly invited contemporary artists of color to respond to existing installations and collections. Fred Wilson’s museum interventions, for instance, employ an analogue version of many of the strategies Glosser and Simpson use to interrogate existing evidence in the archive so he can reveal the relationship of African and African American individuals to certain objects in museum collections. For Mining the Museum (1992) staged at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, Wilson spent a year as a project staff member and was granted access to all areas of the museum. He studied the museum, seeking stories of nonwhite communities generally ignored even though part of the institution’s collecting mission includes examining histories of “colonization, slavery and abolition.” In one of several rooms curated by Wilson for Mining the Museum, he used spotlights and sound to draw attention to representations of African American children found in the background of portraits of white slaveholders. His attention to the people in the background and his efforts to shift focus to their experiences finds echo in Simpson’s efforts to employ digital tools to focus on women placed in the background of expedition narratives and to consider their experiences.

While the temporary interventions made by African American, Latino/a American, Asian American, and Native American (ALAANA) artists establish connections with minoritized audiences, they do not necessarily lead to structural changes in how museum collections are presented to the public. Glosser and Simpson separately suggest that if digital humanities methods become standard practice in evaluating provenance histories, the methods can help museums take responsibility for crafting historical narratives that disrupt longstanding racist hierarchies.

Reflections on Collaboration

In their conclusion, Coulson, Hudson, and Nixon hint at the possibility of working with interested communities in Nigeria to gain their perspectives on Lower Niger Bronzes. The article does not offer a precise plan, but other museums are increasingly embracing this kind of approach in light of

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25 Ibid., 62-64.
continued public pressure as cited by the authors. In their reflections on collaborative work realized as part of provenance histories project “Tanzania/Germany: Shared Object Histories?” for the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Weber-Sinn and Ivanov focus on objects associated with the politically influential trader Machemba bin Mshame Masaninga, who worked in regions now considered part of Tanzania and who resisted the German government attempts to claim sovereignty.\(^{26}\) The authors explain that during the second phase of the project, which required additional funding, the Ethnologisches Museum established the Humboldt Lab Tanzania in Dar es Salaam with several cooperating partners from 2016-2018.\(^{27}\) The lab consisted of several spaces across the city fostering social, artistic, and academic discussions and centered conversations on Germany’s exploitation and violence during colonialism in addition to focusing provenance research on African users, owners, and producers of objects. Three curators from the National Museum of Tanzania also came to Berlin to work with museum staff.\(^{28}\)

Weber-Sinn and Ivanov offer several recommendations to avoid collaborative projects becoming empty gestures. First, they explain that the stakeholders for “Tanzania/Germany: Shared Object Histories?” were not included in the original plan for the provenance project so the Tanzanian curators and other partners did not have the opportunity to collectively design the shape of the program. Ideally, community partners should be included right from the beginning, but the authors emphasize that equitable collaboration is not possible unless western museums working with interested community partners in Africa first acknowledge the asymmetric power relations between the two groups. The museum also must be willing to challenge existing administrative structures, which reinforce neocolonial perspectives, and promote change within the institution for these collaborative projects to succeed. Weber-Sinn and Ivanov add that participants should also take care with language to resist common dichotomies that maintain European hierarchies, such as colonizers vs. colonized and essentialized geographic affiliations. Further, the authors stress that the conversations that the work generates are difficult and triggering for both sides, suggesting that time and emotional support is needed to process the violent histories of objects that may have been acquired through blackmail, theft, robbery or looting during colonial rule.\(^{29}\) Weber-Sinn and Ivanov’s findings resonate with my own research experiences on feminist art collectives, which in the most ideal circumstances entail challenging collaborations. Like encyclopedic museums, white feminist collectives founded in the early 1970s have long been critiqued for considering the participation of ALAANA female-identifying artists as an afterthought. At the Midwest Women’s Artists Conference in August 1975, for instance, members of the Washington Women’s Art Center, Feminist Studio, ARC, and Artemisia discussed the promise of women artists’ cooperatives; audience members challenged this idea, arguing that the institutional models were premised on exclusion. Several individuals asserted that applying to a collective founded by a majority white membership put ALAANA artists on the margins from the beginning of the process and made the collectives racist as commercial art galleries.\(^{30}\) Later attempts to diversify membership in women artists cooperatives in Chicago in the 1980s largely failed because members only consulted communities originally excluded about how to create a more inclusive application process and artistic community after being called out by grant funders. For Black and Latinx artists in Chicago, these efforts were too little too late.\(^{31}\) Had the collectives involved ALAANA artists in the development of their application processes


\(^{27}\) The partners included: Bookstop Sanaa: Visual Art Library & Creative Learning Space in Dar es Salaam; University of Dar es Salaam, Department of History, Department of Fine and Performing Arts, Department of Archaeology; National Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam; Antiquities Department, Dar es Salaam/Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Goethe-Institut Tanzania. Ibid., 77, n.7.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 70.


and design of their artistic communities at an earlier stage and with a sincere desire to collaborate with people who had a range of experiences, the results may have been different. The fact of bringing people together may not suffice for meaningful collaboration; rather collaboration seems to benefit from thoughtful attention to when, why, and how people are brought together.

Call for Sustainability

The case studies shared in this issue establish how Africanist art historians, curators, and institutions can make their collections and research more accessible to wider audiences, but there are concerns regarding sustainability. As a former chair of an academic department and university administrator, I am very familiar with task forces or pilot projects that are undertaken and then do not have the support or funding to be expanded and fully implemented. The Fowler Museum Mellon African Art Initiative only involves a tiny percentage of the museum’s collection of 30,000 African art objects and external funding was critical to implementation, supporting a Curatorial Fellow, Conservation Fellow, and Collections Assistant as well as graduate and undergraduate interns plus faculty from UCLA and UCSB and community stakeholders. If financial support is suspended, then the temporary positions disappear, and the case studies do not move beyond demonstrating the potential of improving provenance histories. Once a museum establishes protocols for collection documentation, how do we convince museums and their funders to understand the need to sustain the practice and to apply this work to all collections of African arts and culture so that the case studies do not remain singular events? How can the case studies fuel longer-lasting changes within and beyond a single institution?

Digital humanities projects, such as the digitally driven research by Simpson and her Livingstone Online collaborators, or Glosser and other members of the Mapping Senufo team, also face questions of sustainability given the resources and labor required to initiate and maintain any digital research and publishing work. In my own experience, the two-week Kress Summer Institute on Digital Mapping at Middlebury College provided essential introductory training in using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software and helped me develop my research project goals but achieving the goals outside of the summer institute became difficult. While there is technical support for GIS projects at my home institution, the requirement to apply regularly for research assistance on top of all the other demands of any faculty or administrative position is labor intensive. The requirement to apply created an insurmountable barrier given all the other demands on my time, and it stalled this scholarship.

Simpson’s research relies on a wide array of digital tools that require training and continued technical support at one’s home institution beyond support needed at the initial stage of the project. How can Simpson’s digital research practice be applied across African collections in Scotland, and what support exists to extend the practice? Glosser served as a graduate research assistant for Mapping Senufo, a project that over time has involved more than eighteen undergraduate and graduate research assistants as well as several digital librarians, a GIS specialist, a translator, a software engineer, a web designer, an artist, and an advisory board in addition to the project’s founders Gagliardi and Petridis. Funding from entities including the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Emory College of Arts and Sciences Digital Publishing in Humanities initiative, the Clark Art Institute, and the Camargo Foundation have made this work possible, but it is also limited.

The NEH, Mellon and MacArthur Foundations recognize the importance of sustainability, and they

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direct their funding to programs that build sustainability into their project proposals. The Mellon also requires that any data be made publicly available and advocates for continued employment for any temporary positions supported by the foundation’s startup funds.\textsuperscript{35} This attention to sustainability and accessibility will help ensure the long-term viability and reach of digital humanities projects, although we might still remain mindful of how data are presented and whether all data should be accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. This attention to sustainability and accessibility will also counter the notion that an institution or a summer institute only needs to seed a digital humanities project through an emphasis on training at the start of a project for the project to thrive, rather than ensuring the long-term support and reach of a project.\textsuperscript{36} But we must also keep in mind the inequitable distribution of resources that make sustainability and longevity easier for some individuals and institutions to realize. Consequently, emphases on sustainability and longevity could end up undercutting other important goals.

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Bringing the Conversation Back to the Classroom

After spending a week with Gagliardi and Petridis in Williamstown in June 2022 to discuss the articles included in this issue, I visited the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), where I contemplated a compelling juxtaposition of a \textit{bàtà ilèkè} (beaded shoe) created for a Yorùbá ọba or King (1800-1950) by Maker(s) not known to WCMA and Andy Warhol’s hand-colored offset lithographs depicting elegant women’s dress shoes, referencing Warhol’s previous employment as an illustrator for a shoe manufacturer.\textsuperscript{37} Part of the exhibition “Remixing the Hall,” which borrows the term “remixing” from D.J. culture, features objects from the permanent collection “that highlight multivalent correspondences between form and meaning and art.”\textsuperscript{38} At the same time, the exhibit also reflects on what it means to display works of art that entered the Williams College collection due to colonialism and missionary work, as well as being shown in a building constructed on Mohican land with the proceeds of enslaved labor. These open-ended pairings prompt the viewer to draw their own conclusions regarding the meaning and function of the objects on display, consider how they resonate with each other, and reflect on how the objects connect to the present.\textsuperscript{39}

For me, the display of the ọba’s \textit{bàtà ilèkè} next to Warhol’s illustrations crystallizes why the articles in this issue of the Artl@s Bulletin are so important. As someone who regularly teaches art historical theory and methodology to DePaul majors, the essays by Fọlárànmi and Glosser, for instance, are very useful readings for the students to consider before engaging in conversation in front of these objects. Separately and juxtaposed with each other, the two authors’ reflections help us think about how and why we know more about Warhol’s illustrations of women’s dress shoes than the ọba’s \textit{bàtà ilèkè}, and the authors’ insights allow us to consider how digital strategies might help us restore the history of this ruler and art associated with his rule. As a whole, the set of essays gathered here further reinforces the need for non-Africanist specialists who wish to engage students—or whose students insist on engaging—in broader conversations regarding the decolonization of museums and demands for repatriation of African objects to proceed with care by first understanding the complexities of how institutions have recorded, compiled, and are attempting to recover provenance histories, including histories that are difficult or impossible to retrieve, and present the information to their

\textsuperscript{37} For \textit{bàtà ilèkè} (beaded shoe), Williams College Museum of Art, see https://egallery.williams.edu/objects/20562/bata-ileke-beaded-shoe?ctx=1e720a994644c21e3013a164016e6ea0ab50a8&idx=0. For Andy Warhol’s hand-colored offset litho-
publics. Teaching the methodologies presented in these articles will contribute to the development of a wider and more critical audience for African arts. It also models ethical research, a slow critical archival practice, and sustainable provenance and digital history projects for future generations of art historians and museum professionals that can be applied to all areas of art and architectural history, and as a result, encourage art historians and museum professionals to engage beyond their silos.