

SOAN 256: TRANSFORMATIONS IN AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHY

SPRING 2012

Spring Term 2012 will be “The Spring of African Portraiture.” Carleton College will be hosting several exhibits of African portrait photography. One of those exhibits, on self-staging and staging of the self in the work of three Cameroonian portrait photographers, will be part of a one-time only exploration of visual anthropology in the Ethnography of Africa (now renamed *Transformations in African Ethnography*) course.

Transformations in African Ethnography pairs classics in Africanist anthropology with contemporary re-studies to explore changes in the types of questions anthropologists have posed about African societies as well as transformations in the societies themselves. Thus, we gain a unique and processual perspective on the role Africa has played in the development of anthropological theory.



Issues of representation and self-presentation, in written scholarly genres, have always been central to SOAN 256. By incorporating an exhibit of Cameroonian portrait photography into the course, this term we will extend the discussion of representation and self-presentation beyond the written to the visual. We will focus on two in-depth case studies: the Cameroon Grassfields, and the Nuer and their neighbors in the newly independent nation of South Sudan.

Central themes of the exhibit-linked segment of the class include local idioms of “seeing” as knowledge, seeing into other-worldly realms as a dangerous gift shared by healers and sorcerers, control of what one sees/doesn’t see/dares not describe or represent, and the relationship of photography to other modes of self-(re)presentation). They will also include the role of the visual and of visual metaphors (e.g., the lens) in epistemological and representational debates within anthropology.

T-TH 10:10 – 11:55

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