



POMP UP THE JAM!

Splendor, Performance, & Pageantry in Art

ADULT GALLERY GUIDE

June 12 – September 4, 2011 | 20/21 Gallery Conversation Wall

An exhibition organized by the 2010/2011 Spencer Museum of Art graduate interns.

ADULT GALLERY GUIDE: *Allusions of Grandeur*

How do objects create an illusion of grandeur? The objects discussed in this gallery guide were designed to elevate a person, community or nation through careful manipulation of scale and materials. This guide endeavors to provide some of the historical and artistic contexts that give these objects meaning beyond their decorative surfaces.

PROCESS SPACE: *Adornment & Continuity*

Unknown Ekiti or Igbomina maker
active present-day southwestern Nigeria
Epa mask, circa 1962
wood (possibly Iroko tree), pigment, carving
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer, 2007.3171



- Look closely at this mask from West Africa. How do you think it would be worn?
- What types of human or animal figures can you identify? Why do you think an artist would include these figures on a mask?
- What are some reasons a community might hold an annual masquerade or festival?

The Yoruba, a West African linguistic group, carve elaborate masks to use in a series of masquerades called Epa (“ee-pah”). Epa festivals honor important events and people in local history and are designed to promote fertility and well-being in the community. They are held either annually or once every two years. Epa masks are usually worn by young men, whose dances solicit supernatural help for the benefit of the entire community; their performances are also individual tests of strength and endurance, as Epa masks can weigh more than 30 pounds.

A typical Epa-style mask, such as the one seen here, is a helmet mask — a mask that covers the entire head. The mask’s superstructure, or top portion, is usually carved with one major and many smaller human or animal figures. The major figure in this mask is an equestrian warrior who is surrounded by his attendants.

EAST WALL:

Persona



John Clem Clarke
born 1937, Bend, Oregon
after Hyacinthe Rigaud
1659–1743
born Perpignan, France; died Paris, France
Louis XIV, 1969
from *Six New York Artists Portfolio*
color lithograph
Museum purchase, 1970.0041



Keahndra Wiley
born 1977, Los Angeles, California
Art Production Fund, producer
towel (Portrait of Andrius Stille), 2008
from *Works on Whatever 2008 Artist Towel Series*
cotton, printing
Illustrious gift of the 2010–2011 Spencer Interns: Denise Giannino,
Chassica Kirchoff, Meredith Moore, Ellen Cordero Raimond,
Sarah C. Schroeder, Natalie Svacina & Amanda Wright!, 2011.0014

- *What makes us believe that an object, or person, is powerful?*
- *Do you think this object has a purpose?*

Centuries of masculine posturing are collapsed into a single, commanding image in this unusual portrait, printed on an oversized beach towel. Artist Keahndra Wiley's model assumes a confident pose borrowed from portraits of wealthy and powerful white men painted in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although portrait conventions and power relationships have changed dramatically over time, Wiley's juxtaposition of tradition and modernity shows us that the urge for self-fashioning remains constant.

Compare Wiley's *towel (Portrait of Andrius Stille)* and John Clem Clarke's *Louis XIV*. Wiley's subject sports an oversized basketball jersey and jeans, with a conspicuously shiny watch on his daintily turned left wrist. His pose echoes that of the French monarch Louis XIV in a famous state portrait, originally painted in 1701. In Clarke's contemporary version, the dapper "Sun King" wears a lavish coronation robe, white tights, and the high-heeled shoes that were fashionable in pre-revolutionary France. In both portraits the men project a persona of masculine authority through the careful combination of dress, accessories, and attitude. The artist also plays a role in the construction of each portrait. As Keahndra Wiley explains of his experience with models in the studio,

"I look for people who possess a certain type of power in the streets. You always look for that alpha male or female character... People come in with their best on, but it's all a type of absolute fakery, this sort of constant construction upon construction."

Historically, portraits were costly artworks used to establish a person's great wealth and status. Wiley's towel serves a dual function, being both a work of art and a functional object. In 2007/2008 hundreds of these towels were given away at the pool of a luxury hotel in Florida, where the rich and famous had gathered to attend the prestigious international art fair, Art Basel Miami.



Albrecht Dürer
1471–1528
born and died Nuremberg, Holy Roman Empire (present-day Germany)
The Triumphal Car of Emperor Maximilian I, 1523
woodcut
Museum purchase, 1959.0024.a–h

- *Look at the pose of the figures in this procession. What mood do they project?*
- *Who or what does this procession appear to celebrate?*

Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I commissioned this eight-block woodcut print not to commemorate an actual event, but as a tool for celebrating his ancestry and personal achievements. Processing from left to right, Maximilian sits on a chariot pulled by 12 horses and surrounded by 22 female allegorical figures that embody the virtues of the ruler. Some of these virtues include: fortitude, clemency, truth, prudence, fidelity, intelligence, victory, and justice. Fluttering garments, swirling horsetails, and calligraphic flourishes guide the viewer's eye along the impressive length of the processional group. The grandiose aspirations and claims of the emperor are evident in the eagle on the shield he holds and the sun on the canopy above him. These symbols illustrate his personal motto — "just as the sun in the heavens, the emperor is on earth." The text above the procession reinforces the dynastic heritage and posthumous legacy of the ruler who died four years before Dürer completed the multi-part print.

WEST WALL: Gesture & Performance



Urs Graf
 circa 1485–1527
 born Solothurn, Switzerland; died Basel, Switzerland
Standard-Bearer with the Arms of Zug, 1520–1521
 woodcut
 Museum purchase: Letha Churchhill Walker Memorial Art Fund
 and Museum of Art Acquisition Fund, 1998.0689

- *What is the role or occupation of the man in this print? What clues lead you to this conclusion?*
- *How can the use of props express your identity within a group?*

In *The Standard Bearer with the Arms of Zug*, from a series of 16 woodcut prints, the artist uses a relief printing technique (wherein the white lines are created through the absence of ink) to depict a soldier of his day. A standard bearer, the infantryman responsible for displaying and guarding his army's flag from capture during battle, held an especially important role as it was his raised flag that indicated where troops should regroup when they became scattered in combat. The word "Zug" near the bottom of this print clearly identifies the standard bearer as a member of the army of Zug, a district in the Swiss confederation. The image or emblem depicted in the upper right corner of the flag is a pieta, the lifeless form of Jesus Christ embraced by his mother, Mary. Pope Julius II granted Zug alone the right to display the pieta on their banners—a visual cue that proclaims the authority of the Catholic Church, reflects regional pride, and glorifies the military strength of Zug.



flag, 1889–1911
 China, Qing dynasty, 1644–1911
 silk, screen print, hand coloring
 0000.2318

Though Chinese military groups and political entities long flew divisional banners, no official flag of state existed until relatively recent history. In the mid-19th century—as China floundered under successive military invasions, disadvantageous treaties, and colonial occupation—Qing court officials designed the first national flag. The banner seen here mimics that flag, but its delicate silk material suggests use as a personal memento.

- *Reflecting on other flags that you are familiar with, how do you think the color and symbols on this flag were chosen for their symbolic significance, not merely for their visual qualities alone?*

Widely referred to as the Yellow Dragon Flag of the Great Qing Empire (*Da Qing huanglong qi* 大清黄龙旗), the flag features a solid field of yellow against which a serpentine blue dragon plays with a red orb. The Qing claimed yellow as its dynastic color, and the five-clawed dragon traditionally symbolized the Chinese emperor. The red orb likely signified the sun and may have served as China's retort to the militaristic designs of Japan, the "Land of the Rising Sun" and an increasingly hostile neighbor.

- *How do you think this flag conveys the strength of the Qing state?*
- *Why do you think that China no longer uses this flag?*

The Yellow Dragon Flag's brief role abruptly ended with the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911. The succeeding political state, the Republic of China, viewed the Qing flag as a relic of a derelict imperial era and summarily discarded it.

medal, 1895
 Japan, Meiji period, 1868–1912
 bronze, fabric
 William Bridges Thayer Memorial, 1928.2969

- *Look closely at the images on the medals. What shapes are repeated in the three medals?*

The Meiji period saw sweeping reforms in Japan, many of which emulated policies and practices of the West. One such change was the adoption of Western-style military dress. In addition to outfitting Japanese military personnel with trousers and jackets, the state also bestowed an abundance of Western-style medals upon exemplary officers and statesmen for their service. The Meiji government hoped the new uniforms and medals—in tandem with aggressive military campaigns—would bolster the country's image abroad and thereby elevate Japan's role in international politics from impotent spectator to major player and world power.

- *Beyond commemorating an achievement, why do you think a government would want to reward a medal?*

The medals displayed here were given to Henry Willard Denison, an American advisor to the Japanese state. The smallest medal celebrates the Japanese victory over China in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895. It depicts two Rising Sun war flags of the Japanese imperial military crossed beneath the imperial chrysanthemum crest. The other two medals are a badge and breast star belonging to the "Order of the Paulownia Flowers," an elite award "conferred on persons who have distinguished merit." The Meiji government presented medals such as these in grand public displays of pomp and circumstance.

Sub vmbra & harum virtutum protectione merito Cæsareæ constituitur Sedes, vtpote quæ in terris nullo alio ornatu magisq̃ virtutibus decorari potest.

Victoriâ vero ex prisca tam Græcorum q̃ Romanorum consuetudine a tergo Cæsareæ Mactatis consistit, ac illam Corona victoriæ coronat, in cuius alis nonnullorum Regum & deuictorum populorum nomina sunt inscripta.

Currum vero ne ille vaoller, quatuor concomitantur virtutes, Securitas nempe, Fidentia, Grauitas & Perseuerantia, quia concurrentibus illis, Currus non nisi secure procedere potest.

Acrimonia & Virilitas subsequentes duos moderantur Equos, vt viriliter & cum Acrimonia currus incedere possit.

In this conversation, artworks play a central role in ceremonial rituals and propagandistic displays, and act as aids to construct identity and nationhood. The visual and material splendor of these objects exalts their patrons, performers or audiences. *Images are powerful, but is their power real or an illusion? Who creates the illusion? How is it maintained? Can it be destroyed?*

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