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# COLUMBIA GSAPP



Architecture A4383

Gumbo Ya-Ya

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409 Avery Hall

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## Gumbo Ya-Ya

### African American Culture as a Practice Model

Gumbo ya-ya is a creole term that means “everybody talks at once” . . . [It] is the essence of the black musical tradition where “the various voices in a piece of music may go their own ways but still be held together by their relationship to each other.”

Elsa Barkley Brown, 1989, p. 925).

### Overview

In a 2017 report, NCARB President Kristine A. Harding explained that “while several groups remain underrepresented within the profession, these trends point to growing diversity among licensure candidates, and eventually, future architects.” Yet progress inches forward at a painfully slow pace, with women now making up just 19 percent of all licensed architects and African Americans being stuck at less than 2 percent (or 37 and 17 percent of what they should be respectively).

In 2006, AIA commissioned a huge, but never released, study of 11,500 individuals at all levels of the profession—practicing architects, architecture educators, interns, students, non-licensed design professionals. It revealed damning reasons for architecture’s failure to become more diverse: a white macho culture, negative educational experiences, discriminatory employment practices, a glass-ceiling, social isolation of underrepresented individuals, and— notably—attrition even after investing years in licensure.

This seminar posits that the persistent whiteness and maleness of architecture is due to its Eurocentric, patriarchal norms of practice. Further, it posits that the field must adopt more just and inclusive norms if it is to reach its goal of creating better futures for the country and world. The seminar challenges you to move the field in new directions by re-imagining practice norms that can embrace and serve an ever more diverse and divided society. In short, it engages you as creative thinkers in an experiment in professional transformation.

## Methodology

This hands-on seminar offers two phases of collaborative learning-by-doing. It will illustrate gumbo ya-ya by involving you as an active participant in a polyrhythmic, nonlinear assembly of individual and collective talent.

The phases are as follows:

1. Cultural Studio Space. You will adopt Afrocentric and feminist habits of mind as a basis for designing an ideal studio space.
2. Practice Space. After considering prevailing practices in architecture, you will plan and develop an equitable and inclusive practice space.

Both phases will require reading, hands-on work, structured reflection, and documentation. You will work with your peers to develop specific requirements for the outcomes of each phase and will also be engaged in evaluating those outcomes.

## Learning Objectives

You will be able to:

- Use the creative processes inherent in several African American art forms to imagine inclusive city-making practices.
- Use the social process theorized in Afrocentric literature and feminist research to imagine egalitarian relationships.
- Envision a practice approach that can embrace and serve an ever more diverse and divided society.

## Required Texts and Materials

Numerous articles (see Required Readings in individual assignments), to be posted on Canvas.

Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1986, or any other edition) available at Columbia University Bookstore and online.

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993, or any other edition).

Model making materials.

## Typical Course Agenda

Discuss Readings	30–45 Minutes
Present Assignment	30–45 Minutes
Reflect on Process/Outcomes	15 Minutes
Plan New Assignment	30 Minutes

## Policies and Assignments

This seminar is about collaboration and thus requires your attendance and active participation in all class sessions. If you are not present, you will compromise the progress of your team mates and the seminar as a whole.

The seminar has three assignments: a three-dimensional model, a final project to be determined by students, and weekly reflections. Only the reflections assignment will be completed and evaluated individually; the model and the final project will be completed and evaluated in teams. The assignments are as follows:

1. Cultural Studio Space 40 Percent  
 Three-dimensional model with individual and team work  
 Assignment refined by student consensus  
 Informed by readings in African American culture and feminism  
 Five weeks • Evaluation by students and instructor
2. Practice Space 40 Percent  
 Assignment scope and format developed by student consensus  
 Informed by readings in design management, diversity, and public interest design  
 Also informed by guest practitioner presentations and their feedback  
 Five weeks • Evaluation by students and instructor
3. Reflections 20 Percent  
 Individual written reflections beginning Week Five  
 Individual self and peer evaluations of the two assignments  
 Ten weeks • Evaluation by instructor

**Schedule Revised 01.22.2018**

Reading assignments subject to change as students suggest readings.

Week	Date	Phase	Seminar Activity	Deliverable
3	29 Jan	1. Cultural Studio Space	Discuss Angelou Reading, Hughes Reading Assign Quilting Readings, Baldwin Reading	Reading Reflections
4	05 Feb		Discuss Quilting Readings, Baldwin Reading Assign Dance Readings; Plan Solo Studio Space	Reading Reflections
5	12 Feb		Discuss Dance Readings; Review Solo Studio Space Assign Afrocentric Readings; Plan Shared Studio Space	Solo Space; Documentation Reflections [Midterm]
6	19 Feb		Discuss Afrocentric Readings; Review Shared Studio Space Assign Feminism Readings; Plan GY-Y Space	Shared Space Documentation; Reflections
7	26 Feb		Discuss Feminism Readings; Assign Management Reading Review Gumbo Ya-Ya Space; Discuss Lessons Learned	Gumbo Ya-Ya Space Documentation; Reflections
8	05 Mar		NO CLASS	Kinney Trip
9	12 Mar		NO CLASS	Spring Break
10	19	2. Practice Space	Discuss Design Management Reading Brainstorm Final Project; Assign Public Interest Reading	Reflections
11	26 Mar		Discuss Public Interest Reading Begin Working on Final Project	Reflections
12	02 Apr		Presentations by Guest Practitioners Discuss In-progress Final Project with Guest Practitioners	Reflections
13	09 Apr		Presentations by Guest Practitioners Discuss In-progress Final Project with Guest Practitioners	Reflections
14	16 Apr		REVIEW of Final Project at 95 Percent	Final Project; Reflections DUE 20 Apr

**Required Readings**

Please see individual assignments.