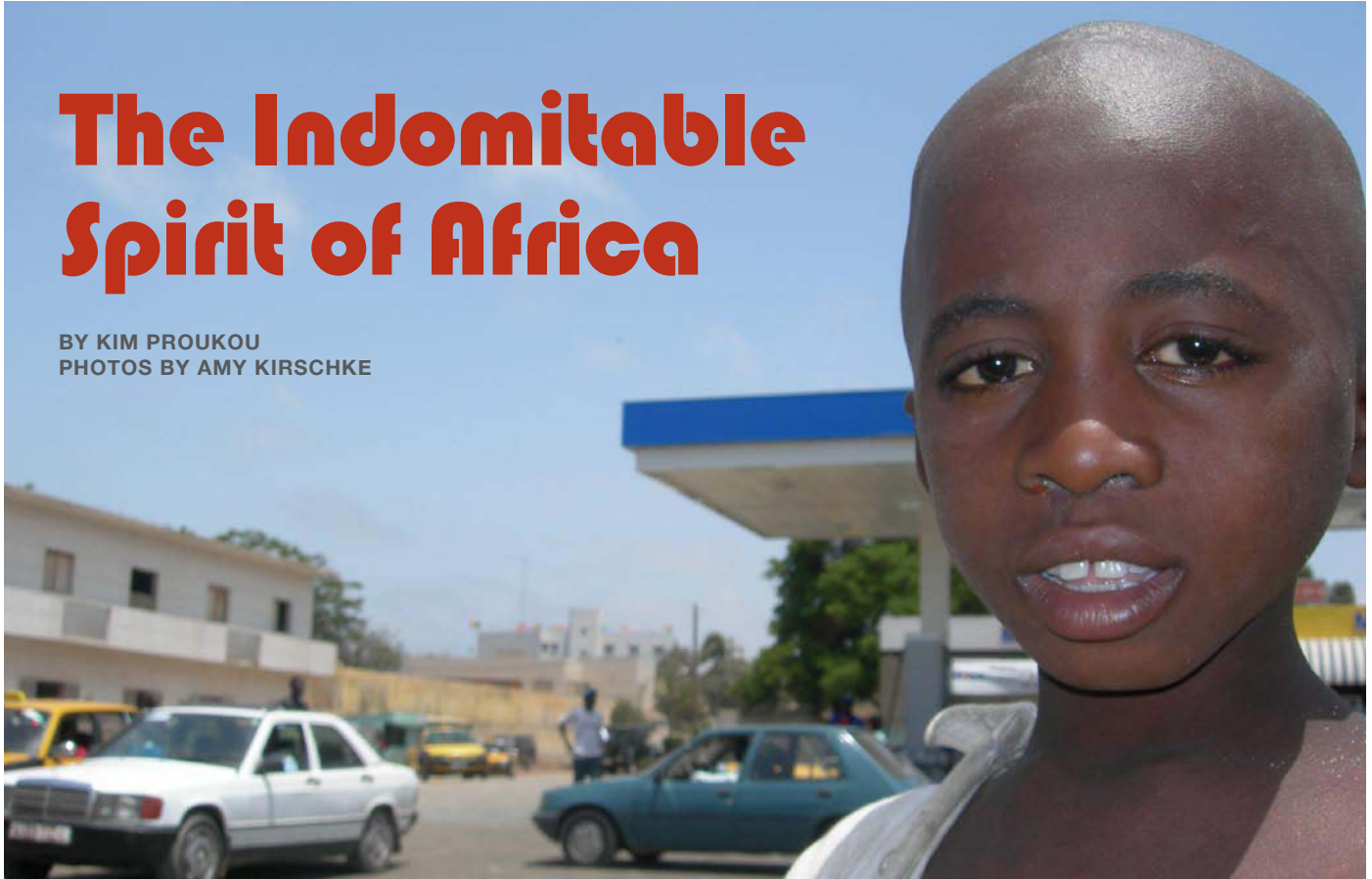


The Indomitable Spirit of Africa

BY KIM PROUKOU
PHOTOS BY AMY KIRSCHKE



“Race is at the center of all my courses,” says art historian Amy Kirschke, “the history of race relations, study of prejudice and discrimination and how artists deal with these issues. We also discuss the responsibility of the artist: for example, does an African American artist have a responsibility to create ‘racial’ art? I have found that students do not necessarily divide along racial lines in these discussions, which is in itself an important lesson for them to learn.”

Associate Professor
Amy H. Kirschke



In summer 2006, Kirschke traveled to Africa to work with graduate students at the Senegalese French-speaking Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar. “Students were anxious to learn about our students and how we see issues of race in our country. While in Senegal, I attended the African Biennial Exhibition, an exhibition of artists from all over sub-Saharan Africa. The art was compelling, much of it political in nature, addressing issues of health care needs, AIDS, political unrest and corruption.”

Kirschke also visited art exhibitions held all over Dakar. Artists exhibited in the outdoor spaces on the Island of

Gorée, where Kirschke took pictures of the slave fort, holding pens and “rooms of no return,” where captives waited to be shipped from Senegal and Gorée Island to slave markets in the Caribbean.

“So much of the art we look at is politically charged and very provocative,” says Kirschke. “Even the most shy and quiet student inevitably has something to say about the works we study.”

Teaching On and Off Campus

“Rich in resources for teaching, I utilize the City of Wilmington, teaching classes at slave-constructed architectural sites in Wilmington. The history of these sites is largely unknown to my students,” Kirschke says. “At the African American cemetery in town and at Poplar Grove Plantation, we discuss how the sites deal with a complex history that might be interpreted differently by African Americans than by whites.” Her students regularly use the Cameron Art Museum, including the 19th century collection and the African American art collection.

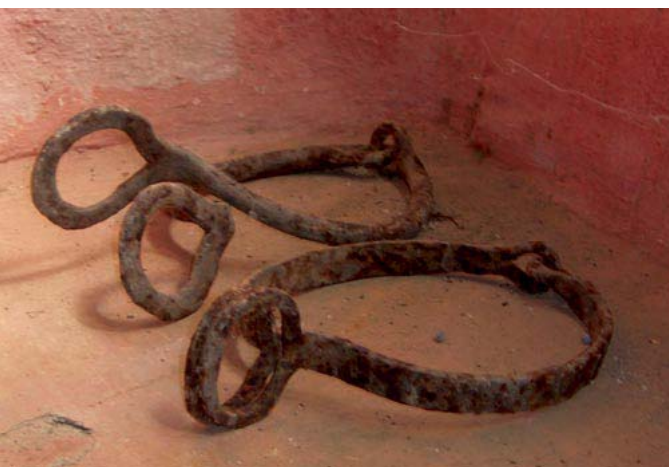
Research

Kirschke's first book, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race and the Harlem Renaissance*, was published in 1995 by University Press of Mississippi, as part of the Harlem Renaissance/African American Culture Division. Douglas, the first African American artist to turn to African imagery as a tool to teach history and racial pride, was highly educated, a gifted artist and articulate writer. Douglas' letters, discovered the year that Kirschke began her project, gave her unique insight into the racism, patronage and politics of the early 20th century as he experienced it. The hard cover edition of Kirschke's book sold out, and the soft back is in its second printing.

Her second book, *Art in CRISIS: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, was published by Indiana University Press, January 2007. Kirschke examines Du Bois' interest in the visual arts developed during his years as editor of *Crisis* magazine, beginning in 1910. The visuals include political cartoons, drawings and photographs of the horrors of lynching, about which Du Bois repeatedly wrote. "Nothing has ever been written on the visuals

used by Du Bois in *Crisis* magazine," Kirschke says. "Imagery in *Crisis* included war, racism, education, women's issues and labor. Du Bois considered the truth beautiful, immanently political and public, but he knew that words weren't enough."

Kirschke is preparing to return to Africa this summer on a Cahill Grant. Her proposal, "Ghana: The Artist and Independence," will research contemporary artists and the visual arts tradition in Ghana; how Ghanaian artists commemorate the past, visualize the present and portray the future at the time of Ghana's 50th anniversary of independence, commencing March 2007. With support from outside granting sources, Kirschke hopes to develop a research project that will permit UNCW students to travel to Ghana to conduct interviews as well as work on the project on campus. "I want to record the voices of the artists who use their art to express the realities of their lives, revealing currently undocumented contemporary art of Ghana," Kirschke says.



These iron shackles still remain in a slave castle on the island of Gorée off the coast of Senegal. There are several structures still standing where slaves were held and exported across the Atlantic. Although the area known today as Ghana was a much more active slave exportation site, Gorée, the western most point in Africa, was also used by slavers.



IRON SCULPTURE BY NDARY LO



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, BY "YAALS DIAGNE"



PAINT ON FABRIC "SENEGALESE WOMEN ARTISTS COOPERATIVE"



Art in Crisis
W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle
for African American Identity and Memory
Amy Helene Kirschke

Book Launch

Amy Kirschke was invited to present her research at the Sorbonne, University of Paris, on March 8, 2007. The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars sponsored a book launch to celebrate the publication of *Art in Crisis* on March 28, 2007, in Washington D.C. The event was co-sponsored by the National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian's African American Culture Museum, Howard University, the University of Maryland and the Wilson Center. A scholarly panel discussion followed and Kirschke was interviewed on the national TV and radio program "Dialogue." "Dialogue" is available to television stations via PBS satellite service and cable. Kirschke's program will also be broadcast to 150 public radio stations as well as abroad through National Public Radio (NPR) Worldwide. A CD of the discussion panel and interview will be made available in 42 college libraries across the country.



SCULPTURE BY SEYDI MAMADAY, SENEGAL

In summer 2006, Amy Kirschke, assistant professor of art and art history, traveled to Africa to work with graduate students at the Senegalese French-speaking Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar. “Students were anxious to learn about our students and how we see issues of race in our country. While in Senegal, I attended the African Biennial Exhibition, an exhibition of artists from all over sub-Saharan Africa. The art was compelling, much of it political in nature, addressing issues of health care needs, AIDS, political unrest and corruption.”

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